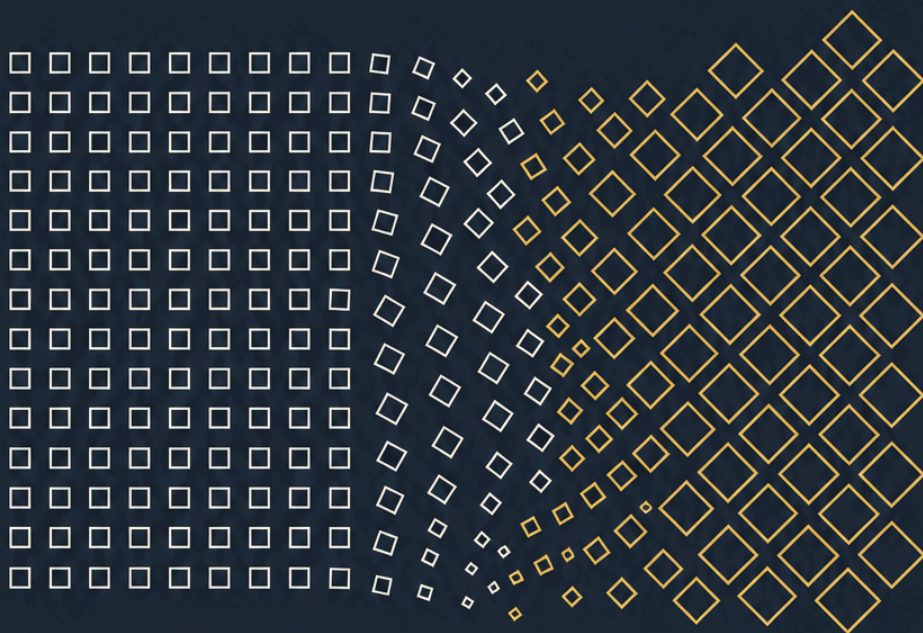


Version One

The Structure of Moral Revolutions

A moral application of
The Structure of Scientific Revolution



Eric Niehaus

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A Moral Application of
The Structure of Scientific Revolutions

ERIC NIEHAUS

VERSION ONE · 2026

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This book is a moral application of Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962; second edition with Postscript, 1970). Its first part follows Kuhn's chapters in order and restates his arguments in its own words.

Drafted with the assistance of AI from the author's ideas and working papers.

The evidence in Part Two is current to October 2026; every figure is taken from a source listed at the end of its chapter.

Version One, October 2026.

Contents

	How to Use This Book.....	vii
PART ONE · THE THEORY 1		
I	Introduction: A Role for History.....	3
II	The Route to Normal Virtue	11
III	The Nature of Normal Virtue.....	19
IV	Normal Virtue as Case-Solving.....	27
V	The Priority of Paradigms	35
VI	Anomaly and the Emergence of Moral Discoveries	43
VII	Crisis and the Emergence of Moral Theories	51
VIII	The Response to Crisis.....	59
IX	The Nature and Necessity of Moral Revolutions.....	67
X	Revolutions as Changes of Moral World View.....	75
XI	The Invisibility of Revolutions	83
XII	The Resolution of Revolutions.....	91
XIII	Progress through Revolutions.....	99
	Postscript: The Moral Matrix, Exemplars, and Relativism	107
	Interlude: An Atlas of Moral Revolutions	115
SECTION TWO · BEYOND KUHN..... 141		

XIV	Morality and Culture	143
XV	The Meta-Paradigm: Correction as the Deeper Order	153
XVI	Legitimacy and Coordination	165
XVII	The Frame.	177
XVIII	Technology as Morality's Einstein	189
XIX	A Theory of Engineered Moral Change	201
XX	The Ethics of Moral Change	213
XXI	Wrong, Not Evil: Walking People Through a Revolution	227
PART TWO · THE PRESENT PARADIGM.		241
	The Test	243
XXII	The Matrix and Frame of the Present Paradigm.	247
XXIII	Origins and Borrowed Capital.	263
XXIV	Institutions, Gatekeepers, and Legitimacy	277
XXV	The Paradigm in American Culture.	293
XXVI	Who Holds It: Variants, Generations, and Private Doubt	307
XXVII	Normal Virtue Today and Its Yield	323
XXVIII	The Paradigm under Leverage: Technology and AGI	337
XXIX	The Health Check and the Strongest Defense	351
XXX	The Verdict.	369
PART THREE · THE NEXT PARADIGM		383

How to Use This Book

The book has three parts. Part One builds the theory, and its first section follows Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* chapter by chapter, from his Introduction to his Postscript, doing for morality what each of his chapters does for science, in the same order and with the same moves, so that it can be read beside Kuhn or on its own. An interlude, *An Atlas of Moral Revolutions*, then surveys the revolutions of moral history, major and minor, as Kuhn surveys those of science. Its second section, *Beyond Kuhn* (Chapters XIV to XXI), goes where Kuhn had no need to go, into the ties between morality and culture, the deeper order of correction that runs beneath every paradigm, legitimacy and coordination, the frame, technology, the theory and the ethics of engineered moral change, and the charitable work of walking people through a revolution. Part Two (The Test and Chapters XXII to XXX) turns the theory on the present Western, and chiefly American, moral paradigm, and it reaches a verdict by a rule fixed before any data was gathered. Part Three, on the next paradigm, waits on that verdict.

The argument begins from a substitution on Kuhn's third page. Where Kuhn's historians found that discarded theories were still science, the historian of morals finds that discarded moralities were still moralities rather than sins; and that single move is enough to break the picture of moral progress as accretion, so that the rest of the book follows from it.

Each chapter of Part One, Section One is divided into five parts:

1. The chapter itself, with subheads that track Kuhn's chapter.
2. Where the analogy strains: the weakest points, stated fairly, together with the best answer.
3. Term map: Kuhn's terms for that chapter alongside their moral counterparts.
4. Reading questions to carry into Kuhn's chapter.

5. Ties to your work: links to The End of Progress, Win the Words, Ascent of the West, and The Turn.

The running case study is the liberal paradigm of progress, whose exemplar is the emancipator and whose protocol is “find the constraint, remove it.” Other paradigms—Homeric honor, Greek civic virtue, the Christian, the chivalric, the Confucian, and Enlightenment rights—appear alongside it to keep the theory general.

The chapters of Section Two keep the same shape, though their apparatus is named for the work it now does: Where the argument strains, Key terms, Questions for reflection, Ties to your work, and Sources. The chapters of Part Two are empirical, and each closes with a table of key findings, every finding marked as measured, well supported, contested, or conjecture, followed by what would change the finding, ties to your work, and the sources, each of them a page that was opened and read.

MASTER TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART
science	morality, a moral order
scientific community	moral community
normal science	normal virtue
paradigm	moral paradigm: exemplar, protocol, lexicon, and gatekeepers, over a legitimacy layer
puzzle-solving	case-solving (casuistry)
textbook	catechism, civics curriculum, canon of exemplary stories, HR training
pre-paradigm period	warring codes with no shared exemplar
anomaly	a case where the paradigm's verdict causes harm it cannot register
discovery	moral discovery (the personhood of the enslaved, childhood, cruelty to animals)
crisis	moral crisis
extraordinary science	extraordinary ethics: a return to first principles, rival articulations
scientific revolution	moral revolution, conversion
gestalt switch	change of moral perception
incommensurability	moral incommensurability (honor vs dignity)
textbook history	the Whig history of morals
myth	sin, superstition, prejudice
development by accumulation	moral accretion: the arc of history, the right side of history
disciplinary matrix	moral matrix: maxims, moral ontology, meta-values, exemplars
nature pushing back	reality pushing back: consequences, flourishing, collapse
theory-choice values	fidelity to reality, consistency, scope, simplicity, fruitfulness

PART ONE



The Theory

Section One: Following Kuhn

I

Introduction: A Role for History

If the moralities of the past were real moralities and not merely sins, then moral history cannot be a story of accumulation, and the idea of moral progress must be rebuilt from its foundations.

THE IMAGE WE INHERITED

MOST OF US carry about a picture of moral history that we never chose and seldom examine. Long ago, the story goes, people were cruel, ignorant, and bound by superstition; then, slowly and against great resistance, a few brave souls began to see further, and each generation added a truth to the pile—that slaves are persons, that women are citizens, that children belong in school and not in the mines, that strangers and dissenters deserve our tolerance. The truths were laid one upon another like stones in a wall, and the wall, we are assured, is higher today than it has ever been, and still rising.

The picture has its slogans, too. Martin Luther King Jr., adapting a sermon by the abolitionist preacher Theodore Parker, said that the arc of the moral universe is long but bends toward justice, and Barack Obama had the sentence woven into the rug of the Oval Office. Meanwhile “the right side of history” has become a phrase that ends arguments rather than opening them. Both slogans rest on the same three assumptions: that moral history has a direction, that the direction is known, and that we stand somewhere near its front.

We may call this the accretion picture, and it is rarely argued for. Rather, it is absorbed—from civics classes, children’s books about heroes, museum exhibits, anniversary speeches, and the habit of describing every vote as a step forward or a

step back. Just as a science textbook presents current knowledge as the sum of past discoveries, these sources present current morality as the sum of past moral discoveries. Whatever in the past disagrees with us appears as an error that had to be cleared away, and whoever held it appears as an obstacle.

WHAT THE HISTORIANS OF MORALS FOUND

The trouble begins when we look closely at the past. Historians of science found that they could not say cleanly when a discovery was made or by whom, nor could they dismiss older theories as simple foolishness; and historians of morals have run into the very same two problems.

The first is dating. When, exactly, was it discovered that slavery is wrong? Gregory of Nyssa preached against owning human beings in the fourth century, and Quakers in Germantown, Pennsylvania, protested slavery in 1688; yet slavery flourished for centuries after both, among people who had heard such arguments and were not stupid. Kwame Anthony Appiah, in *The Honor Code* (2010), found the same pattern with dueling. The religious and rational arguments against it were old and familiar long before the practice collapsed in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, and what finally ended it was not a new argument but a change in what counted as honorable: dueling came to look ridiculous, and the ridiculous cannot be honorable. In the same way, footbinding in China ended within about a generation once reformers persuaded the elite that it shamed the nation before the world. Moral discoveries, it turns out, are long processes, and the decisive step is often not the finding of a truth but a reordering of what a community sees and honors.

The second is dismissal. Bernard Williams, in *Shame and Necessity* (1993), took on the familiar view that Homeric and classical Greek ethics was primitive—a shame culture without real ideas of responsibility, will, or inner guilt, which Christian and Kantian thought later improved upon. He argued nearly the reverse. The Greeks, he held, had subtle ideas of responsibility, and their shame was not mere fear of the crowd but an inner response to how one stands before an imagined witness whom one respects; in some respects, he thought, their ideas were more honest than those that replaced them. The “progressivist” story, as he called it, flattered us and misdescribed them.

Others went further still. Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morality* (1887) argued that our ideas of good and evil were not uncovered but made, in a revolt

by which the values of the weak (humility, pity, meekness) overturned an older aristocratic scale of good and bad. We need not accept his verdict to accept his finding, which is that what we call morality has a history of overturning and not merely of adding. Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (1981) proposed that our moral vocabulary is a set of fragments from older schemes, chiefly the Aristotelian, which we now use without the frameworks that once made them hang together; that, he argued, is why our moral arguments never end. And Tom Holland's *Dominion* (2019) showed how much of what secular Westerners take as plain moral common sense—the equal worth of every person, the special claim of the victim, the suspicion of the strong—is the residue of a Christian revolution that once struck the pagan world as perverse.

These writers disagree about a great deal, but they agree on two things: that past moral orders were coherent wholes rather than rough drafts of ours, and that our own order is one such whole among others, with an origin that can be dated.

SINS OR MORALITIES: THE HISTORIAN'S DILEMMA

Here the historian of morals faces a choice. Take the moralities we have left behind—the Homeric warrior's code, the Roman father's near-absolute authority, medieval fealty and honor, the Confucian order of ritual and rank. Either they were moralities or they were not.

Suppose they were not. Then we must call them sins, superstitions, or prejudices, and that commits us to something uncomfortable. For those codes came out of the same work that produces ours: reflection on hard cases, the example of admired people, argument, inherited wisdom, and the testing of practices against how life actually went. People clung to them for motives we would recognize, since the codes made sense of experience and kept communities together, and they were taught by loving parents and honored by the best people of their time. If that work yielded sin, then sin is what such work yields, and nothing guarantees that ours yields anything better.

Suppose instead that they were moralities. Then the moral record contains whole systems that flatly contradict our own, and we must count them as moral all the same. The Athenian gentleman who thought justice meant helping friends and harming enemies, the samurai who thought a disgraced man should take his own life, the Victorian lady who thought it unwomanly to vote—each held a coherent moral view, not a moral void.

The historian takes the second horn. Being abandoned does not make a code wicked; it only makes it old. Once that is granted, the accretion picture falls, for moral history cannot be the steady addition of correct items to a growing stock when the stock was never a heap of items in the first place. It was, rather, a series of whole orders, each with its own sense of what matters, and passing from one to the next meant losing things as well as gaining them. The Christian revolution gained the dignity of the slave but lost much of the pagan pride in excellence; the modern revolution gained individual rights but lost much of the older sense of belonging to a place and a line.

None of this means that every past order was as good as every other, or that nothing has been learned. It means only that “better or worse” must be asked of whole orders, and answered by some standard other than “closer to us.”

THE ANCESTORS PROBLEM AND THE UNFURLING UNIVERSE

The accretion picture has a consequence that its holders rarely face. If moral history is a line rising toward the present, then everyone behind us stands lower on it, and the further back they stand, the lower they are. Our grandparents were somewhat wicked and our great-great-grandparents more so; medieval people were close to moral monsters, and the ancients worse still.

That is absurd, and we can see why by looking at what those people made. Medieval clerics and lawyers built the first universities, at Bologna and Paris. Christian charity created the hospital as a place open to strangers, and Basil of Caesarea founded an early one around 370. The common law, the jury, the principle that a king is under law, the parliament—all were built by people who held views about women, heretics, and hierarchy that we now reject. We live in their buildings and run on their institutions, and a theory that makes the builders evil cannot explain why the buildings still stand, or why they were worth inheriting.

The picture also points forward. If moral progress is accretion, then our descendants will stand higher than we do and will look back on us as we look back on our ancestors, so the accretion view ought to predict that we are even now committing wrongs we cannot see. Yet it cannot really admit this, for it speaks of the right side of history as if the present edge were already the verdict. Its confidence rests on a feeling that the moral universe is unfurling, like a scroll unrolled toward its end, and that whoever stands at the leading edge reads what has just

been written. On this view error comes only from behind, from those who resist; the front line cannot be mistaken, because the front line is where history is going.

That feeling is the real cost of the picture. It does more than misdescribe the past, for it disables self-correction in the present. A movement that believes itself to be history's leading edge cannot read its own failures as evidence that it may be wrong; it can read them only as resistance still to be overcome, and so its answer to every failure is more of the same.

That is why the liberal idea of progress needs more than a new definition. One could soften it—saying that progress is uneven, or partial, or sometimes reversed—and keep everything else. But that patch fails, because the problem lies in the structure itself: one direction, known in advance, with the present at the front. It is the structure that has to be rebuilt, and the last chapters of this book attempt that rebuilding.

WHERE THE CHOICE COMES FROM

If past moral orders were real moralities, what decides which one a community holds? Not moral reasoning and experience alone. They do narrow the field, since no order that let children starve as a matter of policy, or made trust between neighbors impossible, would last long; but many orders pass that test. Honor cultures and dignity cultures, Confucian ritual and Protestant conscience, have each sustained long and decent common lives, and reasoning from experience does not, by itself, choose among them.

So something else enters: the accidents of history and the character of a particular community. Which teacher was born where, which empire won which war, which plague struck when, which books survived, which exemplar a generation happened to love—each of these plays its part. Christianity's equal souls, Confucius's gentleman, the Enlightenment's rights-bearing individual: none was the inevitable output of moral method. Each was a contingent achievement that a community took up and made its own.

Once taken up, such an achievement becomes the basis of what this book calls normal virtue, the ordinary moral life of a community that shares a paradigm. Normal virtue is not dull; it is how most of the good in the world gets done. It rests on firm commitments about which persons count, which harms matter, who may judge, and which words carry verdicts, and those commitments let a community settle cases quickly, raise children without starting from scratch, and

spend its energy on living well rather than on arguing about what living well means. It is rather like a household that settled long ago who cooks and who washes up, and so can get on with the meal.

Those commitments come at a price, of course. A community that has settled who counts and what matters will treat any claim that unsettles them as a threat, and a claim that does not fit the frame looks at first like vice, eccentricity, or madness. Tacitus charged the early Christians with hatred of the human race, and early abolitionists were treated as fanatics. Such resistance is not simply bad, for without it no moral order could hold steady long enough to be lived. But it does mean that real novelty arrives through strain—through cases the paradigm cannot settle and harms it cannot register—until some part of the community shifts its commitments and a new order takes shape. Those shifts are moral revolutions, and they are the subject of this book.

THE PLAN OF THIS BOOK

Chapter II traces how a moral community passes from warring codes to its first shared paradigm. Chapters III to V then describe normal virtue: its promise, its case-solving, and the priority of exemplars over rules. Chapters VI to VIII take up anomaly, moral discovery, and crisis, using the liberal paradigm of progress as a running case, while Chapters IX and X ask why moral revolutions are necessary and how they change what people see. Chapter XI explains why revolutions become invisible, retold as steps on a rising line. Chapter XII asks how they are settled, and Chapter XIII rebuilds the idea of moral progress. Finally, a Postscript asks whether reality itself pushes back against our moral orders.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The strongest objection is that science has something morality may lack. When Kuhn grants that phlogiston chemistry was real science, nature still stands behind both theories as a common check, and later theories can be shown to fit it better. If moralities have no such check, the historian's choice slides into relativism. If the slaveholder's code was a morality, was it as good as the abolitionist's? If it was, then nothing was learned at all.

The answer has two parts. First, the dilemma says that past orders were moral orders, not that they were equally good; a paradigm can be judged, but as a whole and by a standard

other than its resemblance to us. Second, this book argues in its final chapters that reality does push back on moral orders. Practices have consequences for flourishing, for trust, and for whether a society can sustain itself, and orders do collapse. That gives a standard of better and worse that is real without being a fixed destination.

A second objection is that some moral change does look cumulative. Peter Singer's *The Expanding Circle* (1981) and Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011) describe a widening of concern and a measured decline in violence, and such gains can be real. But they are described in the terms of one paradigm, the Christian-liberal one, which counts what it values. An honor culture would score other things, such as loyalty, courage, and continuity, and might not see the same line.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
textbook image of science	the accretion picture	Learned from civics, heroes' biographies, and anniversaries
development by accumulation	moral accretion	The arc of history, the right side of history
myth	sin, superstition, prejudice	What we call discarded moralities
out-of-date theories (phlogiston, caloric)	discarded moral orders (Homeric honor, fealty, Confucian rank)	Coherent wholes, not drafts of ours
trouble dating discoveries	moral discovery as a long process	Slavery, dueling, footbinding
arbitrary historical element	historical accident and community	Which exemplar a generation happened to love
normal science	normal virtue	Firm commitments let cases be settled quickly
suppression of novelty	moral novelty read as vice or madness	Early Christians, early abolitionists
scientific revolution	moral revolution	A shift in commitments, not an added truth

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says that historians could not date discoveries cleanly. Pick one moral discovery (the wrongness of slavery, say, or the idea of childhood) and ask whether it can be dated any better.

2. Kuhn chooses between calling old theories myths and calling them science. Does the moral version carry the same force, or does morality's possible lack of an outside check change the choice?
3. What plays the role of scientific method in the moral case, and why does it fail to settle which order a community holds?
4. Kuhn treats the suppression of novelty as necessary and not merely bad. Can you accept that for morality?
5. Look for early signs that Kuhn will need to revise the idea of progress. Where do they appear?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the unfurling-universe feeling is what keeps the cab driver going with no destination, for if the front line cannot err, there can be no stopping rule.
- Map vs Territory: your moral realism answers the relativism charge raised in the strain box, since reality pushes back in morals where Kuhn's nature does in science.
- Borrowed Christian capital: Holland and Nietzsche show that the accretion picture is itself the product of one revolution, retold as the whole of history.
- The four parts of a moral paradigm: the commitments of normal virtue listed here (who counts, what harms matter, who judges, and which words carry verdicts) are your exemplar, protocol, lexicon, and gatekeepers seen from the inside.
- The Turn: refusing to make the ancestors evil is the ground for turning well, by building before tearing down and by leaving honorable exits.

II

The Route to Normal Virtue

A moral community comes into its own when warring codes give way to one shared exemplar, and the code that wins does so not by answering every question but by answering the pressing ones better than its rivals do.

SHARED ACHIEVEMENTS

IN THIS BOOK a moral paradigm begins as a shared achievement: a person or story, recognized as good without argument, that teaches a way of seeing and acting and that a community takes as the model for further moral work. We might think of Socrates drinking the hemlock rather than give up philosophy, of Christ washing his disciples' feet and forgiving his killers, of Confucius at a court that would not use him, still keeping the rites, or of the abolitionist who would not be silent.

Such an exemplar has two virtues that seem to pull against each other. It wins converts, because it moves people in a way that argument alone does not; and yet it is unfinished, so that its converts inherit plenty of work. Around it grow the other parts of a paradigm—a protocol, which is the routine move the exemplar teaches; a lexicon, the words that carry verdicts; and gatekeepers, who decide what counts. Beneath them all lies a legitimacy layer, the silent sense of what is real, relevant, and worth counting at all.

Before such an achievement takes hold, there is no normal virtue. There is something else instead, and it deserves a close look.

WARRING CODES

Consider the Greek world after Alexander. Once the city-states had lost their real independence to the Hellenistic kingdoms, Aristotle's ethics of civic virtue lost its natural home, and within a generation Athens hosted rival schools. Zeno taught the Stoic way in the painted colonnade, Epicurus taught in his Garden, and the Cynics lived their teaching in the street; the Skeptics doubted all of them, while the Academy and the Lyceum kept on teaching too. Each offered a complete answer to the question of how to live, with its own founder, its own vocabulary, and its own goal, whether virtue, tranquility, or freedom from opinion, and none could make the others accept its starting points. A young man of means chose a school much as one might choose a religion.

China in the Warring States period, roughly 475 to 221 BCE, shows the same pattern under harsher pressure. Confucians taught ritual propriety (*li*) and humane benevolence, rooted in the family and in the model of the ancient sage kings. Mohists answered with impartial care for all and condemned Confucian funerals and music as waste. Legalists such as Shang Yang and Han Feizi held that only clear laws, firm rewards, and harsh punishments could order a state, while the Daoists, in the Zhuangzi, mocked the whole project of moral rules. Later writers called this the Hundred Schools. Each saw some things clearly, and each was blind where another could see.

The pattern recurs wherever an inherited order breaks down or strangers are thrown together. The Roman cities of the second century held a crowd of moral and religious offers: civic cults, the mysteries of Isis and Mithras, the philosophical schools, Jewish communities, and small Christian groups that were themselves divided among rival teachers such as the Marcionites and various Gnostics. The mining camps of the California gold rush, filled with men from everywhere, improvised miners' codes and miners' courts, because no shared code had arrived with them. And immigrant cities have repeated the experience in every generation, with neighbors who hold different ideas of family duty, of honor, and of what one owes a stranger, and no agreed way to rank them.

GATHERING WITHOUT A FRAME

In such periods moral life does not stop. People still praise and blame, keep promises, punish theft, and admire courage. But moral knowledge piles up as a

loose heap of proverbs, customs, legal precedents, grievances, and the remembered sayings of wise men, in which everything seems as relevant as anything else because nothing ranks them—rather like a kitchen drawer stuffed with recipe cards and no cookbook to put them in order. Collections of maxims flourish. The Greek world produced handbooks of sayings and anecdotes about philosophers, which Diogenes Laertius later gathered into his *Lives*, and Warring States courts kept advisers from every school and tried their counsel piecemeal, one crisis at a time.

This kind of moral fact-gathering has its uses, for it preserves material that later paradigms will need. The Stoic idea of a law of nature binding all people, for example, would wait centuries before Christian and then Enlightenment thinkers put it to work. Yet the gathering itself is aimless. Without a frame, a community cannot tell which cases are central and which are marginal, or which grievance reveals a deep wrong and which is mere complaint. Every argument has to begin from first principles, and every dispute about a single case turns into a dispute about everything.

That is exhausting, and it explains a striking feature of such periods: they produce brilliant individuals and lasting books, but little cumulative moral work. Each school refines itself and attacks the others, and no one builds on a common base, because there is none.

HOW A FIRST PARADIGM WINS

Out of all this, one view eventually wins. It never wins by answering everything; its edge is narrower and more practical, for it deals with whatever is hurting the community most, and deals with it visibly better than anyone else.

Rodney Stark's *The Rise of Christianity* (1996) gives a sociologist's account of one such victory. Two great epidemics struck the Roman Empire, the Antonine plague from 165 and the plague of Cyprian from about 250, and many pagan elites and physicians fled. Christians, taught that care for the sick was care owed to Christ himself, tended to stay and nurse their own and sometimes their pagan neighbors as well. Simple nursing with water, food, and warmth, Stark argued, would have cut death rates substantially; Christians survived in higher proportions, and the pagans they nursed had reason to join them. Christian communities also gave widows, orphans, and the poor a kind of support that civic religion did not. Indeed, the emperor Julian, trying to revive paganism in the 360s,

complained that the Christians cared for the pagan poor as well as their own. Christianity had not solved the philosophical puzzles of the schools; what it had done was answer better the question of how to live through catastrophe, and with whom.

China offers a parallel worked out through politics. The Qin unified China in 221 BCE on Legalist principles and fell within fifteen years, a lesson that every later dynasty drew. The Han, after an early favor for a Daoist style of rule, turned toward Confucianism under Emperor Wu, who appointed official scholars of the Five Classics and in 124 BCE founded an imperial academy to train officials in them. Confucianism did not win because its rivals had nothing to say; Legalist methods, in fact, quietly survived inside Han government. It won because it offered what a vast empire most needed: a way to make rule legitimate, a model of the loyal and learned official, and a family morality that could order villages without soldiers.

In both cases the winner left much unsettled. The nature of the Trinity, whether believers who had lapsed under persecution could return, how to weigh ritual against benevolence when the two conflicted—these were left for followers to work out, often over centuries. That openness was not a weakness, for it gave the paradigm's adherents work to do, and work is what turns a movement into an order.

THE PROFESSIONALS ARRIVE

Once a paradigm wins, the community changes. Its members no longer have to argue about foundations; they can take them for granted and work on cases instead, and a class of specialists appears to do that work.

The forms vary. Rome produced jurists whose opinions became a body of law, which Justinian's Digest of 533 collected. Within a few centuries of the Prophet, Islam developed schools of law with distinct methods, of which four Sunni schools endured. Medieval Christendom produced canon lawyers after Gratian's Decretum of about 1140, along with confessors' manuals that sorted sins by kind and degree. Confucian China built a civil-service examination system, and from the early fourteenth century Zhu Xi's commentaries on the Four Books served as its standard curriculum. Today the specialists include bioethicists and ethics review boards, editors and journalists, human resources departments

and compliance offices, and academic disciplines devoted to the study of injustice.

Each professional class produces its textbooks. Luther's Small Catechism (1529), the Roman Catechism (1566) issued after the Council of Trent, and the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647) taught children what to believe through questions and answers, and the McGuffey Readers taught generations of American children to read through moral stories. Such books present settled conclusions rather than open debate; they do not tell the student that the matter was once contested, or by whom.

Professionalization also brings esoteric moral discourse, talk among specialists that ordinary believers cannot follow. The fine distinctions of Jesuit casuistry were obscure enough to laymen that Pascal could mock them in his *Provincial Letters* (1656 to 1657). Islamic jurisprudence became a field that took years of training to enter, and the vocabulary of present-day bioethics and academic social theory is often unreadable to the very people whose lives it governs. So a gap opens between the moral specialist and the ordinary believer. That gap is a sign of maturity, since the foundations are settled enough that specialists can work far beyond them; but it is also a danger, as later chapters will show.

THE ROUTE OF THE PROGRESS PARADIGM

The liberal paradigm of progress took the same route. In the eighteenth century it was a contested cluster rather than a consensus. Locke on natural rights, Voltaire against religious persecution, Rousseau on natural goodness corrupted by society, Kant on autonomy, Bentham on utility, Wollstonecraft on the rights of women, Paine on the rights of man—these were allies on some points and enemies on others, and against them stood Burke, de Maistre, and most of the established churches. The French Revolution split the cluster further. No single exemplar commanded it, and no one could say which of its principles ruled the rest.

Over the next two centuries the cluster resolved into a consensus organized around one figure, the emancipator. British abolition in 1833, the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865, Seneca Falls in 1848 and the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, and the civil-rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s supplied the founding stories; each was a constraint removed, and each had a hero who removed it. The protocol this exemplar teaches is simple—find the constraint, remove it—and the villain is whoever defends one.

Then came the textbooks. Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday became a federal holiday, signed into law in 1983 and first observed in 1986. Children’s biographies of Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, and Rosa Parks fill school libraries, and civics curricula tell national history as the steady widening of rights. The specialists followed in turn: civil-rights law as a profession, diversity officers, and academic departments organized around particular liberations. By the late twentieth century the progress paradigm had reached normal virtue. Its members no longer argued about whether removing constraints was good; they asked which constraint came next.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

One strain is that a science usually leaves its pre-paradigm period once and for all, whereas a moral community may never settle on a single paradigm. Christendom always contained Jews and dissenters, and late imperial China spoke of three teachings, Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist, living side by side. Perhaps morality is permanently plural, and normal virtue is an overstatement.

The best answer is that a dominant paradigm does not need unanimity; Kuhn himself allows for sub-communities. What marks a moral paradigm is whose exemplars are taught to children, whose verdicts the public institutions enforce, and whose vocabulary the gatekeepers use. By that test Confucianism ruled imperial China even with Buddhist monasteries in every province.

A second strain concerns how first paradigms win. Perhaps Christianity won by power, through Constantine, and not by handling pressing problems better. But Stark estimated that Christians were already around a tenth of the empire by 300, before imperial favor, so that power consolidated the victory more than it created it. The Han case shows state power at work openly, which still fits the account, since the arbitrary historical element includes who holds the sword.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
paradigm as shared achievement	exemplar	Recognized as good without argument, it leaves work open

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
pre-paradigm schools	warring codes	Hellenistic schools, Hundred Schools, Roman cults
random fact-gathering	maxim and grievance collecting	Everything relevant, nothing ranked
first paradigm wins by being better	winning on the pressing problem	Christian plague care, Han Confucian legitimacy
professionalization	priesthoods, jurists, ethicists, HR	The gatekeepers take shape
journals and specialist literature	case literature	Digest, legal schools, confessors' manuals, review boards
textbook	catechism, civics curriculum	Settled conclusions, with the history erased
esoteric research	esoteric moral discourse	Casuistry, academic social theory

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn's pre-paradigm schools each explain some phenomena well. Compare them with the Hundred Schools: what did each Chinese school see that the others missed?
2. Kuhn says that a first paradigm need not explain everything. What did Christianity or Han Confucianism leave unexplained, and why did it not matter?
3. Whom, in Kuhn's account, does a mature specialist write for? And whom do today's moral specialists write for?
4. Kuhn treats the esoteric turn as a gain that comes with costs. Does the cost grow in morality, where everyone must live by the result?
5. Notice how loosely Kuhn uses the word paradigm in this chapter. Which of its later meanings are already present?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The four parts of a moral paradigm: this chapter shows the order in which they appear, for the exemplar comes first and the protocol, lexicon, and gatekeepers grow up around it.
- Win the Words: esoteric moral discourse is where the lexicon gets captured, as specialists coin and mark words that the public then inherits without the reasons.

- Borrowed Christian capital: the emancipator descends from the Christian who nursed the plague-stricken stranger, and the progress paradigm's first victory was built on that older one.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: the professional class described here is the moral backend, built in many cases for a smaller and slower world.
- Ascent of the West: a successor paradigm will not win by answering everything; it must answer better what is pressing now, which is your case for the founder exemplar.

III

The Nature of Normal Virtue

A new moral paradigm wins on the strength of a few compelling cases and a pledge that the rest will follow, and most of moral life is the patient work of making good on that pledge—counting what the paradigm says counts, fitting cases to it, and carrying it onto new ground.

A PROMISE, NOT A FINISHED CODE

WHEN A MORAL paradigm first wins, it has settled remarkably little; it offers a handful of striking examples and a way of seeing them, and not much more. The early Christian communities had the Gospels, the stories of the martyrs, and some letters of Paul, but they did not yet have a list of seven deadly sins, a theory of just war, a parish system, or a rule on whether a monk could own a book. What they had instead was a promise: that the pattern in the exemplar—the self-giving of Christ and the equal worth of every soul before God—would turn out to cover the rest of life, if only people worked at it.

Normal virtue is that work, the slow conversion of a promise into a practice. Most of it is not heroic. It is a kind of mopping up, in which we decide hard cases at the edges, fill gaps the founders never imagined, and show again and again that the paradigm's way of seeing holds. The typical figures of moral life, then, are the medieval confessor hearing his fortieth penitent of the day, the Victorian magistrate applying the idea of respectability to a quarrel over a servant, and the human-resources officer applying a harassment policy to a new kind of message.

The saint and the emancipator are the exemplars; the confessor, the magistrate, and the HR officer are the practitioners.

Seen from outside, this work can look narrow, even blind, for it operates inside a frame it did not build and rarely questions. Yet the narrowness is the very source of its power. Because a community need not argue about first principles every morning, it is free to attend in fine detail to the cases in front of it. A community that agreed on nothing would do no moral work at all; it would only argue, like a household that spends every evening debating whether to have supper and never gets around to cooking it.

What, then, does normal virtue actually do? Its work falls into three broad classes, which overlap but can still be pulled apart: it gathers the facts the paradigm says matter, it shows that those facts fit the paradigm, and it extends the paradigm to cover what it does not yet cover.

DETERMINING THE SIGNIFICANT MORAL FACTS

Every paradigm tells its community what is worth noticing. Out of the endless stream of things people do and suffer, it picks out a few classes of fact and marks them as morally loaded, and those facts are then recorded, counted, and refined in ways that other facts are not.

In an honor culture the significant facts are insults, precedence, and lineage. Who sat where at the feast, who spoke first, who failed to return a gift or avenge a kinsman—all of this is tracked with great care, and the Icelandic sagas are full of men who know exactly how a feud began, generations back, and what each side still owes. The *Iliad* turns on a single fact of this kind, Agamemnon's seizure of Briseis from Achilles, which every listener understood as a public slight that had to be answered. A modern reader may suppose that the deaths are the real moral facts; inside the paradigm, it was the slight.

Under the Christian paradigm the significant facts were sins and souls, and the Church built an elaborate apparatus to detect and classify them. Early medieval penitentials listed sins with a set penance for each. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 required every adult Christian to confess at least once a year, and a literature of confessors' manuals grew up to guide the questioning, among the most influential of which was Raymond of Peñafort's *summa* on penance, compiled in the early thirteenth century. These books did for sin roughly what star catalogues did for astronomy, making a class of facts precise, comparable, and

open to refinement. With their help a confessor learned to tell venial from mortal sin, sins of thought from sins of deed, and full consent from partial.

The progress paradigm has its own significant facts: disparities, representation, and reports of harm. It counts who is present in a profession, on a board, in a syllabus, or in a film cast, and compares the count with the group's share of the population; it also collects reports of bias and harassment. In the United States, large employers file annual EEO-1 reports breaking down their workforce by race, ethnicity, and sex, universities run campus climate surveys, and firms publish diversity reports. None of these counts would have occurred to a medieval bishop, any more than the bishop's concern with unconfessed sin occurs to a diversity officer. Each paradigm measures what its promise says is at stake.

Here, then, is the first lesson of normal virtue. Moral facts do not arrive already sorted; the paradigm does the sorting, and much of the community's effort goes into making its chosen facts more precise, more widely collected, and better served by instruments built to collect them.

MATCHING THE FACTS TO THE PARADIGM

The second class of work is showing that the facts, once gathered, bear the paradigm out. A fact does not interpret itself, and so someone has to show that this act is a sin, that this misfortune is a dishonor, or that this disparity is evidence of a constraint.

Much medieval moral writing is matching of this kind. Is lending at interest a sin? The paradigm forbade usury, yet lending was everywhere, and theologians spent centuries showing which arrangements fell under the ban and why. Is killing in war murder? Augustine, and later Aquinas, showed how a war waged under rightful authority, for a just cause, and with right intention could be fitted to a morality that blessed the meek. The facts were available to everyone; what the community needed was a demonstration that its paradigm covered them.

The progress paradigm's matching work centers on one inference, that a disparity is evidence of a constraint. If a group is underrepresented in a field, the paradigm expects to find a barrier, whether law, custom, bias, or a structure whose effects outlast anyone's intent. The American doctrine of disparate impact, set out by the Supreme Court in *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971), built a version of this inference into employment law: a hiring test that screened out a protected group at a higher rate could be unlawful unless the employer showed

that it was tied to the job. Much social science works the same seam, tracing a gap in pay, health, or school results back to a constraint that can be named.

The matching is not always easy, and that is what makes it work rather than ritual. Sometimes the expected constraint is hard to find, and then the practitioner looks further—to subtler forms of bias, to structure rather than intent, to effects that compound across generations—and each such step widens the reach of the inference. Yet the practitioner rarely doubts that the paradigm and the facts will agree in the end. The only doubt is whether this particular demonstration has succeeded, much as a student checking a sum never suspects arithmetic itself, only his own addition.

ARTICULATING THE PARADIGM

The third class of work is articulation: extending the paradigm to new cases, resolving its ambiguities, and building the concepts that let it do more. It is here that normal virtue is at its most inventive while still remaining normal.

The articulation of Christian ethics is the clearest historical case. Around 1140 Gratian compiled the *Decretum*, an attempt to bring centuries of conflicting church canons into a single order; its alternative title was *A Concord of Discordant Canons*. Over the following century canon lawyers built upon it a body of law covering marriage, contracts, oaths, the claims of the poor, and the duties of rulers, and the historian Brian Tierney argued that in the course of this work the canonists developed early versions of the idea of natural rights. None of it overturned the paradigm. Rather, it spelled out what the paradigm implied for situations the Gospels never addressed.

The Jesuit casuists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries carried articulation further still. They worked through thousands of cases of conscience—when a promise binds, when a debt may be deferred, how far a servant must obey—and their methods grew so refined that Pascal, in the *Provincial Letters* of 1656 and 1657, mocked them for finding a permission for nearly anything. The attack is itself evidence of how normal casuistry had become, for Pascal did not reject the Christian paradigm; he accused the casuists of articulating it badly.

The progress paradigm articulates itself above all by extending rights and recognition to new holders, and the pattern is an old one. When Mary Wollstonecraft published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, the Platonist Thomas Taylor answered the same year with *A Vindication of the Rights of*

Brutes, a parody meant to show that the argument proved too much. Within two centuries the parody had become a program, with animal welfare law and with Peter Singer's *The Expanding Circle* (1981), which treated the widening of moral concern as the plot of moral history. In American law, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 named race, color, religion, sex, and national origin; age followed in 1967 and disability in 1990, and in *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) the Supreme Court held that firing someone for being gay or transgender is discrimination because of sex.

New categories come alongside the new holders. The vocabulary of named identities and protected classes has multiplied, and so has the vocabulary of harms: microaggression was coined by the psychiatrist Chester Pierce in 1970 and spread widely after 2007, while intersectionality was introduced by the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. Each new term lets the paradigm see a constraint where before it saw none. That is articulation in the strict sense—the old paradigm made finer, rather than a new one put in its place.

THE PROGRESS PARADIGM AT WORK

Put the three classes together, and the normal virtue of the progress paradigm comes into focus as the extension of a single protocol—find the constraint and remove it—into domain after domain.

The protocol began with the most visible constraints: chattel slavery, exclusion from the vote, and legal segregation. These were the founding cases, the achievements that taught the move, and normal virtue then carried the same move wherever constraints were less visible. From law it moved to custom, to dress codes, marriage expectations, and the shape of the family; from custom to language, with style guides and lists of terms to retire; from language to the body, to sexuality and gender; and from conduct to the mind, with the measurement of implicit bias. In each new domain practitioners asked the same question: where is the constraint here, and whom does it bind?

From inside, each step looks like progress, because each is a successful application of the paradigm. The work is real, and often humane. But it is also, by its nature, a paradigm filling out its own promise, and it does not ask whether the protocol fits the new domain as well as it fitted the old. That question is simply not among its three classes of work.

NOT AIMED AT MORAL NOVELTY

Normal virtue does not go looking for a new morality; its ambition is to extend and refine the one it has. A successful day's work confirms what the community already believed and adds detail.

That is why a person who proposes a genuinely new morality is rarely received as a discoverer. The Cathars of southern France, who taught that the material world was the work of an evil principle, were not weighed by the thirteenth-century Church as moral innovators; they were heretics, and the Albigensian Crusade against their protectors began in 1209. Less violently, honor cultures treated a gentleman who refused a challenge on principle as a coward rather than as the herald of a new ethic, at least until the paradigm itself was failing. Inside the progress paradigm, someone who argues that a constraint should be kept for what it protects is heard as a defender of oppression, the paradigm's stock villain. The category is ready before the argument is heard.

None of this is a scandal. It is how normal virtue protects the depth of its work, since a community that treated every proposed morality as a live option would never get past first principles. But it does mean that moral novelty, when it comes, springs from normal virtue's failures rather than from its intentions—from the cases the paradigm keeps trying and failing to solve. Those failures are the subject of later chapters.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The first strain is circularity. A scientist measures quantities that nature fixes, whereas a moral paradigm seems to manufacture its significant facts and then read them as confirmation. Whether a given disparity reflects a constraint is itself the contested question, so the fact-gathering looks less like measurement than like assertion. The best answer is that Kuhn's science shares much of this structure, for there too a paradigm decides which facts deserve precise determination and designs the instruments that collect them. What differs is the speed and clarity of the check. In science a bad reading meets a stubborn experiment; in morality it meets consequences, which arrive slowly and can be explained away for a generation. That is why moral paradigms can run long past exhaustion, and why the realism developed in the final chapters matters: if moral facts answer to reality, the check exists even when it is slow.

The second strain is professionalism. Normal science is done by a trained community, while most moral agents are not specialists. Yet moral life has always had its specialists, from canonists and confessors to judges, ethicists, and compliance officers, who do the articulation, and ordinary people resemble the technicians and students who apply results they did not derive. The catechism and the HR training are their textbooks.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
paradigm as promise	moral paradigm as promise of moral success	early Christianity had exemplars before it had a code
mopping-up work	the routine work of normal virtue	the confessor, the magistrate, the HR officer
determination of significant fact	determining the significant moral facts	insults and lineage; sins and souls; disparities and harm reports
special apparatus	instruments of moral detection	penitentials, confessors' manuals, EEO-1 reports, climate surveys
matching facts with theory	matching facts to the paradigm	a disparity shown to be a constraint; an act shown to be a sin
articulation of theory	articulation of the paradigm	Gratian, the Jesuit casuists, new protected classes and named harms
not aimed at novelty	not aimed at moral novelty	the innovator is cast as heretic or villain

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says a paradigm starts as mostly promise. What did the progress paradigm promise in its founding cases, and which parts of that promise has normal virtue made good?
2. Kuhn describes instruments built to determine facts a paradigm already deems significant. Which of today's moral instruments were built to answer questions the paradigm had already posed?
3. Kuhn's three classes are not always easy to tell apart in practice. Where, in the move from disparity to constraint, does matching facts shade into articulating the paradigm?
4. Is the steady production of new identities and new named harms moral novelty, or the articulation of an old paradigm? What would Kuhn's criteria say?
5. Kuhn treats the narrowness of normal science as a strength. Is narrowness a strength of normal virtue too, and at what point does it become a liability?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: this chapter recasts your protocol—find a constraint and remove it—as the engine of normal virtue. Your diminishing-returns table then reads as the yield of successive articulations, with the early domains (slavery, the vote) paying far more per unit of cost than the later ones (language, the mind).
- No stopping rule: articulation never ends of its own accord, because each new domain supplies fresh constraints, and normal virtue has no internal signal that its promise has been fulfilled.
- Win the Words: articulation is largely lexicon-building. Coinages like microaggression are the paradigm’s own version of your “coin” move, and your four moves amount to a counter-articulation.
- Ascent of the West: the ready-made villain category explains why “what is lost if it goes?” is heard as reaction, and a successor paradigm should expect to be received as heresy before it is received as discovery.
- Detector drift: the instruments that determine significant facts, such as bias reports and climate surveys, are where concept creep first shows up.

IV

Normal Virtue as Case-Solving

Under a settled paradigm, moral cases are puzzles with assured answers, so that the work tests the skill of the one solving them rather than the paradigm itself, and questions that cannot be put in case form are ruled out of morality altogether.

CASES WITH ASSURED ANSWERS

NOBODY STARTS A crossword wondering whether the answers exist. What is in doubt is the solver—whether we can find the words, and whether they fit both the grid and the clues. The finished grid tells us nothing we needed to know, for the point all along was the hunt.

Kuhn's claim is that most normal science is puzzle-solving in just this sense, and the same is true of normal virtue. A moral case under a settled paradigm is a problem whose answer the community already expects, and the practitioner's task is to show how the paradigm applies, not to find out whether it does. The interest lies in the route.

Take the scholastic treatment of lying. Augustine had taught that every lie is a sin, without exception, yet the same tradition held that one must never betray the innocent. What, then, should a person say to a pursuer who asks where a fugitive is hiding? The verdict was never in doubt—one must neither lie nor betray—and the work was to show how both could be honored. Sixteenth-century theologians, most famously Martín de Azpilcueta, known as Navarrus, developed the doctrine of mental reservation, under which a speaker could say something true in his own mind while the hearer drew a false conclusion. Critics found the solu-

tion shabby, but its form is telling: the verdict came first, and ingenuity was spent on fitting the hard case to it.

Usury offers a second example. The Church forbade interest, yet commerce ran on credit, and theologians and canonists did not conclude from this that the ban was mistaken. Instead, they identified grounds on which a lender could rightly receive more than he lent, as compensation for loss suffered, for gain forgone, or for risk borne. Later writers worked out the so-called triple contract, which combined partnership with two forms of insurance to yield a steady return. Each move solved a case without ever questioning the rule.

The progress paradigm poses its cases in a characteristic form: is *X* another form of oppression? The question has been asked of body size, accent, standardized testing, the norms of academic writing, the layout of cities, and a great many ordinary words, and in the normal practice of the paradigm the expected answer is yes. The question, in other words, is less an inquiry into whether a constraint exists than an invitation to show how it operates. A study or training that concludes no constraint was found does not read as a puzzle solved; it reads as a puzzle failed.

THE SATISFACTIONS OF CASE-SOLVING

Why do people take up this work? Not, for the most part, to transform morality. Few casuists hoped to found a new ethics, and few scholars of bias today hope to overturn the protocol they apply. The draw is the draw of the puzzle itself: the conviction that a solution exists, and the pleasure and recognition that come from finding it.

Communities reward clever application. A medieval master who resolved a hard question in public disputation made his name by it, and a confessor known for wise judgments of conscience was sought out by penitents and princes alike. In the progress paradigm, standing goes to the person who identifies a new form of constraint and names it well; coining a term that lasts, or showing that an apparently neutral practice excludes a group, brings citations, invitations, and moral authority. In every case the reward is for ingenuity inside the frame.

The puzzle structure also explains how failure is assigned. When a case resists solution, the community blames the solver and leaves the paradigm alone. A confessor who could not classify a sin needed more training; a person who cannot see how a practice oppresses is told to educate himself, to do the work, to examine

his privilege. The paradigm stays fixed, and the shortfall is located in the person, much as a cook whose cake falls blames her oven or her own hand and never the trusted family recipe. That is what makes normal virtue so stable, and it is also what makes its anomalies so hard to see, since each failed case is filed as a personal failing rather than as a signal.

THE RULES OF THE GAME

A puzzle has rules as well as an assured solution, and they say what counts as an acceptable answer and how one may reach it. A crossword answer must fit both the squares and the clue; a chess problem must be solved with legal moves. Kuhn traces the commitments that play this role in science through several levels, from explicit concepts down to deep assumptions about what the world contains, and moral paradigms have the same layers.

Conceptual commitments: the lexicon. The first level is the paradigm's vocabulary, above all the words that carry verdicts, for to call an act a sin, a dishonor, or a betrayal is already to judge it. Christian moral language was built on such terms: pride, avarice, charity, scandal, grace. Honor cultures had theirs as well—coward, liar, cuckold—words that, once applied, demanded a response. The progress paradigm's lexicon includes harm, exclusion, privilege, marginalized, problematic, and inclusive. These words do not describe a situation and leave the judgment for later; the judgment is in the word, and so whoever decides which word applies has largely decided the case.

Instrumental commitments: the tools of detection. The second level is the set of instruments a paradigm uses to find its significant facts. For medieval Christianity the central instruments were confession and the examination of conscience, a structured review of thought and deed against a list of sins, often ordered by the commandments or the deadly sins. Honor cultures had the public challenge and the duel, which turned a private quarrel into a visible verdict, with seconds on hand to judge whether satisfaction had been given. The progress paradigm has statistics of disparity, climate surveys, bias reporting systems, diversity trainings and audits, and the Implicit Association Test, introduced by Anthony Greenwald and colleagues in 1998. Like scientific instruments, these tools are not neutral: each was built to detect facts the paradigm already counts, and each can report only in the paradigm's terms.

Metaphysical commitments: the moral ontology. Beneath the words and the tools lies a view of what a person is and of what can be good or bad for one. For Christianity the basic entity is the soul, immortal, equal in worth, and capable of salvation or loss. For an honor culture it is honor itself, a standing held in the eyes of others that can be won, lost, and restored; for the Enlightenment, it is the rational, rights-bearing individual; and for the progress paradigm, it is the autonomous self, whose chief injury is harm and whose chief harm is constraint. These commitments decide which cases can arise at all. A paradigm with no soul cannot pose cases about damnation, and one with no honor cannot see an insult as an injury that requires an answer.

Methodological commitments: what counts as an argument. The deepest and least visible level concerns method—what counts as a moral argument, and whose testimony settles a dispute. Scholastic ethics argued from scripture, the Church fathers, the councils, and natural reason, and ranked these sources against one another, whereas honor cultures deferred to the judgment of peers. The progress paradigm gives special weight to the testimony of those it identifies as constrained. The phrase *lived experience* names this commitment, and the philosopher Miranda Fricker, in *Epistemic Injustice* (2007), argued that refusing due credibility to a speaker can itself be a wrong. On this view, the person who reports a harm has a standing that an outside observer lacks. Whatever its merits, it is a rule of the game, for it decides which arguments can close a case and which are out of order.

The four levels work as a stack: the ontology says what can be injured, the lexicon names the injury, the instruments detect it, and the method says whose report counts. A practitioner who has absorbed all four rarely consults any of them consciously; they simply shape what looks to him like a well-posed moral case and what looks like a good solution.

WHAT CANNOT BE POSED AS A CASE

The firmest effect of the rules is a negative one. A paradigm not only supplies cases; it also screens out problems that cannot be put in its form. Kuhn noted that a scientific community tends to dismiss whatever cannot be stated as a puzzle, handing it off to philosophy or to some other field, however much society may care about it, and normal virtue does the same.

Here the paradigm reaches down into the legitimacy layer, the silent sense of what is real and worth counting at all. A question the paradigm cannot frame as a case is not answered badly; it is not counted as a moral question in the first place. In an honor culture, the inner anguish of a man forced into a duel he despised had no moral standing—it was weakness, and to voice it was shameful. Under medieval Christianity, the worldly prosperity of a realm was a matter for princes, judged by whether it served salvation rather than for its own sake.

The progress paradigm screens in its own way. It frames problems as constraints on individuals, and problems that do not take that shape tend to slide out of morality into other compartments, such as health, economics, or private choice. When the U.S. Surgeon General issued an advisory in 2023 describing an epidemic of loneliness and isolation, the frame was public health. Falling birth rates across developed countries are usually treated as an economic or demographic matter, since each decision to have fewer children is, in the paradigm's terms, a constraint lifted. And the decay of institutions nobody has a duty to maintain, the loss of inherited skills, and the question of what one generation owes the next are all hard to state as "whom does it constrain?" and so tend to appear as nobody's moral business.

Of all the features of normal virtue, this is the most consequential. Its blind spots are not mere ignorance; they are the shadow cast by its rules, and because the rules are seldom stated, the blind spots are seldom seen—until the unframed problems grow large enough to force their way back in as anomalies.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The sharpest objection is that to call moral cases puzzles with assured answers turns moral reasoning into rationalization. In science, nature makes the assurance honest, since the scientist expects a solution because the world has proved regular; in morality, the assurance looks like a prior decision to reach a verdict, which is the very definition of motivated reasoning. The objection has force, but two replies are available. First, Kuhn faced the same charge: Karl Popper's essay *Normal Science and its Dangers*, in *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (1970), treated the uncritical normal scientist as a hazard, and Kuhn's answer was that commitment is what lets a community push a framework hard enough to find where it breaks. Second, casuistry is not mere excuse-making; Albert Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, in *The Abuse of Casuistry* (1988), defended it as disciplined practical reasoning.

The expectation of a solution is reasonable so long as the paradigm keeps delivering, and it becomes rationalization only when failures pile up and are still filed as personal faults.

A smaller strain is that Kuhn's levels separate more cleanly than moral ones, for a word like harm is lexicon and ontology at once. Yet Kuhn's levels also blur, and the point is the stack rather than any tidy partition.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
puzzle	moral case	the verdict is presupposed; the route is the work
assured solution	expected verdict	"is X another form of oppression?" asked expecting yes
puzzle-solver's motive	the casuist's ingenuity	status for clever application, not for novelty
conceptual commitments	the lexicon	words that carry verdicts: sin, coward, harm
instrumental commitments	instruments of moral detection	confession, the duel, disparity statistics, trainings and audits
quasi-metaphysical commitments	moral ontology	soul, honor, the rights-bearer, the autonomous self
methodological commitments	rules of moral argument and testimony	authorities ranked; lived experience
problems set aside as metaphysics	problems ruled "not moral"	the legitimacy layer at work

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says a failed puzzle reflects on the scientist, not the theory. Find a recent moral case in which failure was assigned to a person rather than to the paradigm.
2. Which of Kuhn's levels of commitment is hardest to see from inside science? Is the corresponding moral level equally hidden?
3. Kuhn warns that a community can lose touch with socially important problems that will not take puzzle form. Name three moral problems of today that fit that description.
4. On Kuhn's account, does the assurance of a solution make normal science dishonest? If not, what keeps it honest, and does normal virtue have an equivalent?

5. In Kuhn's jigsaw comparison, the pieces must interlock and all of them must be used. What are the equivalent rules for solving a case in the progress paradigm?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: your claim of legitimacy before morality appears here in Kuhnian form, since the problems the paradigm cannot pose as cases are where its exhaustion quietly accumulates.
- Win the Words: the conceptual level is your lexicon, and your first move, refuse the question, is a refusal of the case form itself. The halo and marking you describe are what make verdict-carrying words work.
- Detector drift: the instrumental level is where concept creep lives, for tools built to find constraint find more of it as the threshold falls, as in Levhari and colleagues' 2018 blue-dot studies.
- Ascent of the West: "what is lost if it goes?" is a case form the progress paradigm cannot state, so a successor will need all four levels—its own lexicon, instruments, ontology, and rules of argument.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: questions about AGI and the long future do not reduce to "whom does it constrain?", which is one reason a moral backend built for a small, slow world struggles to treat them as moral cases.

V

The Priority of Paradigms

What holds a moral community together is, first of all, a set of shared model cases, and only second, and only in part, the rules it later draws out of them.

THE RULES COME SECOND

THE HISTORIAN WHO studies a stable moral community soon meets a puzzle. Its members agree, with striking reliability, about which acts are shameful, which people are admirable, and which cases need fixing; yet ask them for the rules behind those verdicts and the agreement begins to thin. One offers a principle, another offers a different one, and a third says she cannot put it into words but knows it when she sees it. On cases, then, the agreement is solid, whereas on rules it is loose.

None of this is a failing in the members, for it is simply how moral orders work. What a community shares is a set of model achievements—lives, stories, and settled cases that everyone recognizes as good without argument. The rules come later, drawn out by preachers, jurists, and philosophers, and they never quite capture what the models contain. A medieval villager could not have defined charity in terms a theologian would accept, but she could tell you that Martin of Tours cut his cloak in half for a freezing beggar, and she could tell you whether her neighbor's conduct was like that or not.

The search for the rules has a long history of its own, and it is largely a history of partial failure. The natural-law theorists, Kant with his categorical imperative, and the utilitarians each tried to state the principle that ordinary decent people

were already following. Henry Sidgwick spent *The Methods of Ethics* (1874) testing common-sense morality against the candidate principles, only to find that it would not sit still under any one of them. Half a century of trolley problems, ever since Philippa Foot posed the first in 1967, has produced the same result in miniature: people's verdicts on cases are firm, and every proposed rule that fits them breaks on the next case. The historian of morals, then, should look for the exemplars first, because a community can practice normal virtue for centuries without ever stating, to its own satisfaction, what it is applying.

HOW MORALITY IS ACTUALLY LEARNED

No child learns honesty from a definition. She learns it from George Washington and the cherry tree, from the boy who cried wolf, and from being caught in a lie and watching her parents' faces. The Christian West taught its children through the lives of the saints; the *Golden Legend*, compiled by Jacobus de Voragine in the thirteenth century, was among the most copied books of the late Middle Ages. Readers in the Renaissance and in the age of revolution took their civic virtue from Plutarch's *Lives*. Confucian students absorbed *li* through the *Analects*, where the master rarely defines and constantly responds to particular people in particular situations. Even Mencius, arguing for innate compassion, offered not a proof but a picture: anyone who suddenly sees a small child about to fall into a well feels alarm.

The most famous moral lesson in the Western canon makes the point directly. In Luke's gospel a lawyer asks Jesus for a definition—who counts as my neighbor?—and Jesus answers with a story about a Samaritan who stops on the road. The lawyer wanted a rule with clear edges; what he received was an exemplar and an instruction to go and do the same. The rule was left for him to work out, and Christians have been working it out ever since.

Our own catechism works in just the same way. American schoolchildren do not study a theory of justice; they study Rosa Parks on the bus in 1955, Ruby Bridges walking into a New Orleans school in 1960, and the marchers on the Edmund Pettus Bridge at Selma in 1965. They learn what a hero looks like before they learn any principle the hero served. Later, in a civics class or an HR training, someone states the principle—equal treatment, nondiscrimination, inclusion—but by then the student already knows what it is supposed to mean, because she

has seen it. And when the stated rule and the remembered picture disagree, the picture usually wins.

Exemplars do more than illustrate, for they train perception. A student who has absorbed the lunch counter, the march, and the closet door learns to see a certain shape in the world: a person on one side, a barrier on the other, and a villain guarding the barrier. Once learned, that shape is seen everywhere. A border, a grading standard, a dress code, a marriage law, and an entrance exam all begin to look like the lunch counter, and no argument is needed to make them look that way, because the training has done it in advance. That is why the emancipator exemplar is so strong and so hard to argue against. It does not persuade people that structure is suspect; it teaches them to see structure as suspect before any argument begins.

RESEMBLANCE WITHOUT DEFINITION

Wittgenstein noticed something like this about ordinary words. Try to define “game,” he suggested in the *Philosophical Investigations*, and you will fail, since board games, ball games, card games, and ring-a-ring-a-roses share no single feature. Some have winners and some do not; some need skill, and some only luck. Yet nobody is confused about what a game is. The cases hang together by overlapping likenesses, the way the members of a family resemble one another without all sharing one nose, and he called this family resemblance.

Moral words behave the same way, and more so. No one has produced a definition of “sin” that covers pride, gluttony, blasphemy, sloth, and the sin of omission while excluding everything else. No Homeric hero could have defined dishonor, yet every one of them knew at once that Agamemnon’s seizure of Briseis dishonored Achilles. Nor, today, does any definition of “oppression” cover chattel slavery, workplace harassment, a building without ramps, and a wrong pronoun while excluding the ordinary friction of social life. Scholars and activists have tried, but their definitions either leave out cases the community is sure of or let in cases it would reject.

And yet adherents recognize instances, and they do it by likeness to the model cases. A new practice is oppression if it looks enough like Jim Crow or the closet; it is sin if it looks enough like the prodigal’s riot or the Pharisee’s pride. The community carries a stock of central cases and a trained sense of resemblance, and

that sense is the real content of the paradigm. The definitions are only rough maps of it, drawn after the fact.

This explains a familiar feature of moral change. Because no definition holds the edge of a concept in place, the edge is free to move: each new case admitted by resemblance becomes a fresh model, and the next case need only resemble that one. A chain of small likenesses can carry a word a long way from its origin while every step looks modest. Psychologists have a name for one version of this, concept creep; in the language of paradigms, it is simply what resemblance-based recognition does when nothing pushes back.

WHEN THE RULES COME OUT

If paradigms come first, when do rules matter? The historical answer is that they matter when the paradigm is insecure. While a community holds its exemplars firmly, it rarely writes its principles down, and when it does, nobody fights about them. Rules become explicit, detailed, and contested only when the shared models stop doing their work.

The Reformation is the classic case. Latin Christendom had quarreled over authority before, as the conciliar disputes of the fifteenth century showed, but the Church, its sacraments, and its saints still framed every quarrel. Once Luther's challenge of 1517 broke that shared picture, both sides were driven back to first principles. The Protestants answered with scripture alone and faith alone, and with a run of written confessions, from Augsburg in 1530 to Westminster in 1646; Rome answered with the Council of Trent, which met on and off from 1545 to 1563, and with a formal catechism. Europe produced more explicit doctrinal rule in a few generations than in the several centuries before, because the exemplars no longer settled anything.

Smaller strains produce the same symptom. Medical research ran for generations on the exemplar of the dedicated physician whose judgment could be trusted. Then, after the trial of the Nazi doctors, came the Nuremberg Code of 1947, and after the Tuskegee syphilis study was exposed in 1972 came the Belmont Report of 1979, with its three stated principles. The codes multiplied because the old model of the trustworthy doctor had broken. American campuses, likewise, wrote speech codes in the late 1980s, and a federal court struck down the University of Michigan's in 1989; in the early 1990s Antioch College adopted a sexual-conduct policy requiring explicit verbal consent at each stage. The flood of defi-

nitions, conduct codes, lists of unacceptable words, and mandatory trainings in our own time is the same sign on a larger scale. A community that must spell out in writing what counts as harm, respect, or consent is a community whose shared picture of these things has begun to fail.

This also shows why argument from principle so often fails across paradigms. Two disputants can agree on every rule: both affirm equality, dignity, and the wrongness of harm, and both may cite Martin Luther King on judging people by the content of their character, as both sides of the American affirmative-action fight have done for decades. What they do not share is the model case. For one side the central picture is a barrier blocking a person; for the other it is a fair contest that someone wants to rig. Each applies the same rule correctly to a different picture. Because the quarrel looks like a quarrel about principles, both sides sharpen their principles, and still nothing moves, for the disagreement was never there. When exemplars differ, shared rules are shared in name only.

SMALL REVOLUTIONS

One more consequence follows. If a paradigm lives in exemplars held by a community, it can change inside a sub-community without anyone else noticing. Moral life is not one undivided mass; it is layered into professions, churches, universities, newsrooms, and guilds, each with its own canon of model cases and its own gatekeepers.

Medicine, roughly between the 1960s and the 1980s, moved from the exemplar of the physician who knows best to the exemplar of the patient who decides, and informed consent went from courtesy to doctrine. For most of the public the change was invisible; patients simply noticed that they were handed more forms. In 2003 the Episcopal Church in the United States consecrated Gene Robinson, a gay man living with a partner, as bishop of New Hampshire. Inside the Anglican Communion this was a revolution that divided provinces, whereas for most Americans it was a news item. In 2020 American newsrooms argued openly over whether the exemplar of the neutral reporter should yield to one of moral clarity, and readers saw only the change in the copy. And in the 2010s many universities began asking job candidates for diversity statements, a new gate on who could enter the profession, while the wider culture paid little attention.

Such small revolutions matter for two reasons. First, they are where most moral change actually happens: out of view, one institution at a time. Second,

these institutions are where the wider culture’s exemplars are made, for teachers write the catechism, editors choose the stories, and professionals design the training. A revolution in the communities that manufacture exemplars reaches everyone else in time, already finished, and looking as though it had always been the obvious view.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The first objection is that some moral traditions are plainly rule-first. The Decalogue is a list, Rabbinic Judaism counts 613 commandments, and Islamic law is an elaborate system of rulings; if paradigms are prior to rules, these look like counterexamples. The best answer is that even these traditions are learned and applied through cases and lives. The Torah is mostly narrative, with its law set inside the story of a people. The Talmud is a vast record of cases argued by named rabbis, and Islamic law draws heavily on the sunnah, the remembered conduct of the Prophet, which is an exemplar in the strictest sense. The rules are real, but they are read through the models.

The second objection is that rules can correct exemplars. Americans used the principle of equality to judge Jefferson, a slaveholder, so the rule seems to stand above the hero. The answer here is only partial. In practice such corrections almost always come by setting another exemplar beside the old one—Frederick Douglass beside Jefferson—rather than by a bare principle. Still, the objection has force, for articulated principles do sometimes do independent work, especially in law, and the priority of paradigms is a claim about what usually comes first, not about what can never happen.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
rules of a research tradition	moral rules, principles, written codes	Drawn out later; never capture the whole
paradigm as shared achievement	exemplar: saint’s life, parable, hero’s story	Recognized as good without argument
family resemblance	likeness to model cases	No definition of “oppression” or “sin” fits all cases
learning by application	moral formation by story and practice	Trains perception, not just belief

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
insecure paradigm	moral strain	Shows up as a flood of codes and definitions
debate over legitimate methods	dispute over first principles	Reformation; modern speech and conduct codes
specialist sub-community	profession, church, university, newsroom	Has its own exemplars and gatekeepers
small revolution	institutional moral revolution	Invisible to the wider culture until finished

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says that scientists can agree on a paradigm without agreeing on its full interpretation or its rules. Where in your own moral community do people agree on cases but not on reasons?
2. As Kuhn describes how students learn physics by working problems, ask what the moral equivalent of the worked problem might be: is it the story, the punishment, or the HR scenario?
3. Kuhn ties the rise of explicit rules to insecurity. What written codes have appeared in your lifetime, and what shared picture were they replacing?
4. When Kuhn discusses revolutions that affect only one specialty, which institutions do you think have undergone small moral revolutions that the public has not yet noticed?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: this chapter grounds your first working part, the exemplar, and explains why it sits ahead of the protocol, since the emancipator teaches the move “find the constraint, remove it” before anyone states it.
- Win the Words: your claim that words store the training fits the family-resemblance point. A verdict word like “oppression” carries its model cases inside it, so whoever controls the central cases controls the word.
- Detector drift: resemblance chains with no fixed definition are the mechanism behind concept creep, for each admitted case becomes the next model.
- Ascent of the West: if paradigms are prior to rules, the successor cannot win by better principles alone; it needs its own exemplar, the founder and steward-builder, told well enough to train a different way of seeing.
- The Turn: your painting of the man turning toward the sun is itself an exemplar rather than an argument, which by this chapter’s logic makes it the right instrument.

VI

Anomaly and the Emergence of Moral Discoveries

A moral discovery comes not in a flash of insight but through a slow and contested process, one that begins when a paradigm meets a fact it was not built to see.

WHO DISCOVERED THAT SLAVERY WAS WRONG?

THE WHIG HISTORY of morals has a ready answer: slavery was wrong, enlightened people saw that it was, and the abolitionists said so. Ask for a date and a name, though, and the answer comes apart in the hand.

In 1688 four men in Germantown, Pennsylvania, led by Francis Daniel Pastorius, wrote a protest against holding people as property and sent it to their Quaker meeting, which passed it upward, where it was set aside. Is that the discovery? Some decades later the Philadelphia Quaker Anthony Benezet spent his life writing tracts against the trade and teaching Black children in a school of his own. Is it Benezet, then? In 1785 a Cambridge student, Thomas Clarkson, wrote a prize essay in Latin on whether it was lawful to enslave people against their will, and he was so shaken by his own research that he gave his life to the cause. In 1787 he helped found the society that, with William Wilberforce as its voice in Parliament, won the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807, though slavery itself was abolished in most of the empire only by an act of 1833. Is it Clarkson, or Wilberforce, or the decades of campaigning between the two acts?

Or is it the enslaved themselves? Olaudah Equiano published his *Interesting Narrative* in 1789 and made the case from the inside. Enslaved men in Massachusetts petitioned the legislature for their freedom in the 1770s, and Elizabeth Freeman sued for hers in 1781 and won. The enslaved people of Saint-Domingue rose in 1791 and made the point in a form no one could miss. And further back still, Gregory of Nyssa preached against owning human beings in the fourth century and found few followers.

The question has no good answer because it is badly posed. The wrongness of slavery was not found in an instant by one person; it was assembled over more than a century by many hands—a sense that something was off, attempts to say what, failed petitions, new stories and new witnesses, a shift in which cases counted as central, and finally new laws. A discovery in morals, as in science, has a beginning that is hard to date and an end that is fixed only afterward, when the winners write the history.

OTHER DISCOVERIES, SAME SHAPE

The pattern repeats itself elsewhere. Childhood as a protected stage of life did not arrive at a stroke but was assembled from Rousseau's *Emile* in 1762, from the Romantic poets, from the reformers who documented children in mills and mines, and from a long series of British factory laws beginning in the early nineteenth century. In New York in 1874 the case of Mary Ellen Wilson, a beaten child, was brought to court with help from the founder of the city's animal-protection society, because no body yet existed to protect children; a society for that purpose followed the next year. The discovery that children were owed protection, in other words, had to borrow its first instruments from the discovery that animals were.

That discovery had its own slow arc. Bear-baiting and cockfighting were ordinary English entertainments for centuries, though philosophers and preachers objected now and then, and Bentham wrote that the question was not whether animals can reason but whether they can suffer. In 1822 Parliament passed Martin's Act, named for the Irish MP Richard Martin, which made cruelty to cattle, horses, and sheep an offense, and two years later the society that became the RSPCA was founded to enforce it. Each step widened what the community could see as cruelty.

Marital rape is a later case. The doctrine that a husband could not be guilty of raping his wife was set out by the seventeenth-century English jurist Matthew Hale, and it stood in the common law for some three hundred years. It was not refuted by argument so much as made visible by testimony, research, and shelters in the 1970s and 1980s. American states removed the exemption one by one, and the House of Lords abolished it for England and Wales in 1991. Here again there was no single moment but many hands, and a fact that had been present all along yet had no place in the paradigm.

ANOMALY NEEDS A PARADIGM

That phrase, “had no place in the paradigm,” is the key. An anomaly is not just a bad thing happening, for bad things happen constantly, and most of them are absorbed as misfortune, sin, or the way of the world. A case becomes an anomaly only when it collides with what the paradigm expects. The Christian paradigm taught that every soul was of equal worth before God, and it was that expectation which in time made the slave ship strange. Without it, slavery was simply a feature of the world, as it had been in nearly every civilization. The anomaly, then, was produced by the paradigm and not merely noticed by it.

That is why anomalies come to those who know the paradigm best. Benezet and Clarkson were not outsiders to Christianity but among its most serious adherents, and they saw the trade as anomalous because they held the paradigm’s promises more firmly than their neighbors did. A person with no expectation of equal souls would have seen nothing to explain.

Psychology offers a model of how this works. In a 1949 study Jerome Bruner and Leo Postman showed people playing cards for a fraction of a second at a time, slipping in a few impossible ones, such as a spade printed in red. At first the viewers named the impossible cards as ordinary ones and noticed nothing odd. Given longer looks, they began to falter and to say that something was off, though they could not say what. Most then crossed over and named the odd cards correctly, and once they had done so a few times, the rest came easily. A minority never crossed over, and some of them found the failure upsetting.

The moral version runs the same way. At first the community sees the anomalous case as normal, sorting it into an existing category. Then comes unease, a feeling that the verdict does not fit, which people often keep to themselves. Only later, and sometimes never, comes clear recognition. The hardest stage is the first,

because a community that has sorted a fact into the wrong category does not experience itself as missing anything.

The 2014 inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham, led by Alexis Jay, is a painful example. It estimated, conservatively, that at least 1,400 children had been exploited in the town between 1997 and 2013, and among its findings was that some staff were nervous about identifying the ethnic origins of the perpetrators for fear of being thought racist. The facts were not hidden in any simple sense; they were reported again and again by victims, parents, and some workers. But the paradigm's sorting categories had no clean slot for them. To a mind trained on the emancipator exemplar, a fact that pointed toward a protected group as perpetrators looked like prejudice in disguise, and so for years it was seen as something else, or not seen at all. It was the red spade read as a heart.

PRECISION MAKES ANOMALY VISIBLE

A loose paradigm rarely meets a clear anomaly, for if it promises only vague things, almost any result can be squared with it. The more precise its expectations and the better its instruments, the more sharply its failures show.

Moral paradigms grow instruments as they mature. The nineteenth century brought social statistics—Edwin Chadwick's 1842 report on the sanitary condition of Britain's laboring population, the parliamentary inquiries into child labor, the census tables—and these made suffering countable, and counting made certain failures impossible to sort away. The progress paradigm of our own time has the most developed moral instruments in history: survey research, disparity statistics, crime data, outcome tracking, randomized trials, and systematic reviews. It built them to find constraints, but they also find its own failures, and with a precision earlier paradigms never faced. A paradigm that promises measurable improvement can, after all, be measured.

A discovery is finished only when the paradigm has been adjusted so that the once-strange fact becomes the expected one. After abolition the free person was the normal case, and it was slaveholding that needed explaining; after the factory acts, a child at a loom looked wrong at a glance. The adjustment is what turns an anomaly into knowledge, and it is never free, for something in the old order has to give way to make room.

THE PROGRESS PARADIGM'S ANOMALIES

Read with this chapter in mind, the present looks like a period of mounting anomaly for the paradigm of progress.

The first anomaly is diminishing returns. The early removals freed millions from slavery, legal subordination, and exclusion from the vote; the later ones address smaller groups and narrower harms, and they cost more in trust, coherence, and institutional strength. Yet the protocol keeps running at the same intensity on cases that yield less.

The second is detector drift. The psychologist Nick Haslam argued in 2016 that concepts such as abuse, bullying, trauma, and prejudice had expanded, both downward to milder cases and outward to new kinds of case, and in 2018 David Levari and colleagues showed one mechanism in a series of experiments. When blue dots became rare in a sequence, subjects began to call purple dots blue. When threatening faces became rare, they saw neutral faces as threatening, and when clearly unethical research proposals became rare, they judged more innocuous ones unethical. A detector tuned to find something will keep finding it as it grows scarce, simply by widening what counts. In the same way, a paradigm whose protocol is to find constraints will find more of them as real constraints disappear; the detector is drifting, and the paradigm has no internal instrument to notice.

The third anomaly, and the most telling, is reversal by the paradigm's own institutions and voters. Anomalies from outside can be dismissed as backlash, whereas reversals from inside are harder to sort away. In 2022 San Francisco voters recalled three school board members in February and District Attorney Chesa Boudin in June. In 2024 California voters passed Proposition 36, toughening penalties for some theft and drug offenses, with about 68 percent of the vote, and that same year Oregon's legislature recriminalized possession of small amounts of drugs, rolling back the decriminalization voters had approved in 2020. Selective universities that had dropped admissions tests brought them back—MIT first, in 2022, and then Dartmouth, Yale, Brown, and Harvard in 2024—citing their own data that scores helped them find talented students from poorer backgrounds. In England the Cass Review, published in 2024, found weak evidence for the medical treatment of gender-distressed young people; NHS England had already, on

the review’s interim advice, ended routine prescription of puberty blockers outside research, and Finland and Sweden had narrowed such care before that.

Each of these is the red spade seen at last. They follow the pattern of the card experiment: years in which results were sorted as normal or as the work of opponents, a period of unease kept quiet, and then sudden recognition, often by people who still hold the paradigm’s aims. What makes them anomalies rather than mere opposition is that they come from the paradigm’s own strongholds and through its own instruments—its elections, its admissions data, and its evidence reviews. Whether they lead to adjustment or to crisis is the subject of the next chapter.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The first strain is that a scientific anomaly is measured against nature, while a moral anomaly is measured against a value, and values are partly what is in dispute. When the Rotherham inquiry or the Cass Review reports a failure, a defender of the progress paradigm can say that the failure is real but local, a lapse in applying the paradigm rather than a sign against it. Scientists say the same about their anomalies for a long time, so this does not refute the analogy, but it does mean that moral anomalies are easier to explain away. The best answer for this book’s thesis is that the anomalies above are not value disputes at all. They are cases where the paradigm’s verdict produced harm it could not register: exploited children, open drug use and overdose deaths that decriminalization did not stem, and talented poor students overlooked. The harm is a fact, and facts are what anomalies are made of.

The second strain is that reversals at the ballot box may be ordinary swings of opinion rather than anomalies, since voters tire and change their minds. The answer is that ordinary swings come from the paradigm’s opponents, whereas these came from its own electorates and institutions, often against their stated commitments, which is just what an anomaly forcing itself into view looks like.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
discovery	moral discovery	Abolition, childhood, cruelty to animals, marital rape

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
extended process of discovery	many-handed recognition over generations	Germantown 1688 to the 1833 abolition act
anomaly	moral anomaly	A harm the paradigm cannot register, or a collision with what people plainly see
expectation set by paradigm	the paradigm's promises	Equal souls made slavery strange
playing-card experiment	moral misperception	See as normal, then unease, then recognition
precision of instruments	moral statistics, inquiries, evidence reviews	Sharper instruments show sharper failures
adjustment of paradigm	patch or reversal	San Francisco recalls, Prop 36, Oregon, tests, Cass
resistance to novelty	fear of the forbidden verdict	Rotherham: facts sorted as prejudice

READING QUESTIONS

1. When Kuhn asks who discovered oxygen and when, try the same question on a moral change you have lived through: can you give it a date and a name?
2. Kuhn ties anomaly to expectation. Which of the progress paradigm's own promises make its present failures visible as failures?
3. In the card experiment, which stage are most institutions in today with respect to the anomalies listed here—seeing them as normal, feeling uneasy, or recognizing them?
4. Kuhn says that precision matters. Which of the progress paradigm's instruments are most likely to deliver the anomalies it cannot absorb?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: your diminishing-returns table and your “signs of exhaustion” are anomaly reports in this chapter's sense, and framing them through the card experiment explains why they are resisted before they are seen.
- Detector drift: Levari et al. give you a laboratory version of your claim that a constraint-finding protocol keeps finding constraints as they grow scarce.
- Win the Words: Rotherham shows the lexicon at work. When a word like “racist” carries the paradigm's verdict, it can stop a fact from being named, and your four moves are tools for giving such facts a word.

- Map vs Territory: anomalies are where the territory pushes back on the map, and your realism supplies the standard against which these failures count as failures and not merely as shifts in taste.
- Ascent of the West: the test “what is lost if it goes?” would have registered the anomalies listed here sooner, because it looks for the costs the removal protocol is built not to see.

VII

Crisis and the Emergence of Moral Theories

A new moral paradigm appears only after the old one has failed, visibly and for a long time, at the very work it was built to do, which is the solving of its own cases.

CRISIS AS A PRECONDITION

THE LAST CHAPTER showed how a moral anomaly comes into view. A case arises that the paradigm cannot handle, and at first it is absorbed, ignored, or quietly filed away as an exception, which is where most anomalies stay. A paradigm can carry dozens of unsolved cases for centuries without strain, just as an astronomer can live contentedly with a planet that runs a little off schedule. The question for this chapter, then, is what happens when the anomalies stop being exceptions and start being the work itself.

We may call that condition moral crisis. It is not a single scandal or a bad decade; rather, it is normal virtue failing at its own job, case after case and year after year. The confessor cannot give the penitent peace, the civic rite no longer binds the citizen, and the catechism has an answer for every question while nobody is persuaded by the answers. A crisis, in short, is when the routine move the exemplar teaches—the protocol—keeps being applied and keeps producing results that its own adherents find hollow, cruel, or absurd.

The historical record suggests that crisis is close to a precondition for a new paradigm. New moral theories are rarely invented in calm times and then adopt-

ed on their merits; they are taken up when the old ones have exhausted their credit. That explains a pattern that would otherwise look strange, for the same idea can be stated, clearly and well, long before its time, and go nowhere at all. Around 379, Gregory of Nyssa preached a homily on Ecclesiastes that condemned slaveholding outright, asking by what right one man could own the image of God. It was a radical argument, and it was made from inside the dominant Christian paradigm, yet it changed almost nothing for well over a thousand years. In the same way, Wycliffe and Hus made many of Luther's arguments a century and more before him; Hus was burned in 1415, and his movement, though real, stayed regional. The ideas were available, but the crisis was not.

MORAL EPICYCLES

The clearest sign of crisis is not open revolt but elaboration. When a paradigm's cases stop yielding, its adherents rarely say so; instead they add a distinction, carve out an exception, or supply a new category that lets the old verdict stand. Each patch is reasonable on its own terms, and each makes the system a little more baroque. The astronomers who kept Ptolemy's earth at the center added circles upon circles to save the appearances, so that the system grew more accurate in places even as it grew less believable as a whole. Moral orders do the same, and we may call their patches moral epicycles.

The late medieval penitential system is the classic case. The core of the Christian paradigm was simple—sin, repentance, grace—but over three centuries it was elaborated into a machine. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required annual confession of every adult. Theologians then developed the treasury of merit, a store of surplus goodness earned by Christ and the saints that the church could apply to the debts of sinners, and Clement VI gave it papal definition in 1343. In 1476 Sixtus IV extended indulgences to souls already in purgatory. By the early sixteenth century one could buy relief for a dead parent, and preachers like Johann Tetzel were selling it to fund St. Peter's. Each step answered a real pastoral question; together, however, they turned grace into an accounting system, and many people, from humanists like Erasmus to ordinary believers, could feel that something had gone wrong.

Late Roman civic religion shows the same thing in a different shape. The traditional cults had worked for centuries without creeds or conversions: one performed the rites, and the city prospered. As that bond weakened, the state

patched it. In 250 the emperor Decius ordered universal sacrifice and issued certificates to prove compliance, an attempt to enforce by paperwork a piety that had once been simply assumed. Aurelian, for his part, elevated the cult of the Unconquered Sun. And when Julian tried to revive the old gods in the 360s, he told his priests to imitate the charity of the Christians, conceding in his own instructions that the rival paradigm was outperforming his on his own chosen ground. A religion that must borrow its competitor's virtues to stay alive is already in crisis.

The antebellum South built its epicycles under pressure from a single anomaly, the plain humanity of the enslaved. The founding generation had largely called slavery a necessary evil; Jefferson, in 1820, likened it to holding a wolf by the ear. By 1837, however, John C. Calhoun was telling the Senate that it was a positive good, and around that shift grew an elaborate apparatus. Ministers such as Thornton Stringfellow and James Henley Thornwell built biblical defenses, while George Fitzhugh argued in *Sociology for the South* (1854) that slaves were better off than free laborers in the North. In 1851 the physician Samuel Cartwright named a disease, drapetomania, to explain why the enslaved ran away, and the laws against teaching slaves to read had tightened after Nat Turner's revolt in 1831. Each patch addressed a case the paradigm could no longer handle honestly, and the result was a system defended with more theory than it had ever needed when it was secure.

The late Soviet Union shows epicycles at their end stage, when the theory carries on but the belief has drained out of it. In 1961 the party adopted a Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, a list of virtues for the new Soviet person. By the Brezhnev years, as the anthropologist Alexei Yurchak documented in *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (2005), official language had hardened into a fixed ritual that people reproduced exactly while meaning something else entirely. Václav Havel described the same thing in Czechoslovakia in 1978: a greengrocer who hangs a party slogan in his window, not because he believes it, but because that is what one does. The paradigm still had its lexicon and its gatekeepers; what it had lost was an exemplar that worked.

PROLIFERATING VERSIONS

A second mark of crisis is that the paradigm splinters into versions. In a healthy period, adherents disagree about cases but share a picture of what a good answer

looks like; in crisis, they begin to disagree about the picture itself. Kuhn's example is chemistry just before Lavoisier, when the phlogiston theory had been bent into many local forms, each shaped around a different stubborn result. The name was still shared, but the thing it named was coming apart.

Late medieval Christianity had this too. Nominalist theologians taught that God would reward anyone who did what lay within him, a doctrine that left the scrupulous unsure whether they had ever done enough. Mystics sought God directly, bypassing the sacramental machine, and conciliarists argued that councils stood above popes. All of them were Catholic, and yet each gave a different answer to the question of where grace actually came from. The antebellum churches split along the same fault: the Methodists divided North and South in 1844 and the Baptists in 1845, each side reading the same Bible and the same exemplar to opposite conclusions. When the adherents of one paradigm can no longer worship together, the paradigm is in crisis, whatever its officials may say.

PRESSURES FROM OUTSIDE

None of this happens in a sealed room, for economic change, new technology, plague, and war bear down on every moral order. The printing press multiplied the reach of every complaint about indulgences, and Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) traced how much the Reformation owed to it. The cotton gin, invented in 1793, made slavery far more profitable and so raised the stakes of every argument about it. In the 1980s the Soviet system faced falling oil revenues and a long war in Afghanistan, and then, in 1986, Chernobyl.

Yet external pressure works through the paradigm's internal failures, not around them. The press printed what people already found unanswerable. Profit raised the cost of conceding the slave's humanity, but it did not create the anomaly; what it created was the need for more epicycles. Chernobyl mattered because it exposed, in a single event, the gap between what the official morality said and what everyone knew. A paradigm that is still solving its cases can absorb enormous shocks from outside, whereas one already failing at its own work is broken by much smaller ones. The historian of morals, then, should look at external pressure the way Kuhn's historian looks at calendar reform and Copernicus—as real and relevant, but secondary to the internal breakdown it exposed.

THE EPICYCLES OF PROGRESS

The liberal paradigm of progress now shows every one of these marks. Its protocol is simple: find a constraint and remove it. Its normal virtue lies in extending that protocol to new cases. For a long period the cases were enormous and the gains obvious—slavery, the legal disabilities on women, Jim Crow, the criminalization of homosexuality. As the large constraints fell, however, the protocol kept running on smaller ones, and its practitioners responded the way practitioners always do: they refined the categories.

The psychologist Nick Haslam gave the pattern a name in 2016, concept creep. Words like abuse, trauma, bullying, prejudice, and harm have expanded outward, to new kinds of case, and downward, to milder ones. Harm came to include offense; violence came to include speech, and then silence; safety came to mean emotional comfort as well as physical security. The microaggression, popularized by Derald Wing Sue in 2007 from Chester Pierce's older coinage, made it possible to find oppression in exchanges that neither party had experienced as oppressive. Each extension is an epicycle, a new circle added so that the protocol can keep generating cases.

The last chapter described the laboratory version of this, Levari's purple dots, which came to be called blue once blue grew scarce. The point here is what the drift does to the paradigm, for it lets the protocol keep producing cases long after the supply of large ones has run down. The vocabulary shows the same inflation: David Rozado and colleagues found in 2023 that words denoting prejudice rose sharply in major American news outlets across the 2010s.

The deeper problem is that the paradigm has no stopping rule. Its protocol tells you to remove constraints, but it does not tell you when you are done, because it has no account of which constraints are load-bearing. So as the obvious cases run out, it begins to reclassify the very structures that hold a society up—family obligation, standards of merit, borders, the presumption of law enforcement, sexual restraint—as forms of oppression to be removed. Here we arrive at the autoimmune image: a defense system built to attack invaders which, finding fewer of them, turns on the body's own tissue. The proliferating versions follow on schedule. Activists, institutions, and theorists produce rival accounts of what the protocol requires, many of them openly hostile to one another and all of them claiming the emancipator as their exemplar.

WHO FEELS IT FIRST

One feature of crisis deserves emphasis, which is that it is felt first by those closest to the paradigm's work rather than by its critics. Luther was no outsider. He was an Augustinian friar who confessed so often and so exhaustively that his superior, Johann von Staupitz, grew impatient with him, and he reached his crisis by trying harder than almost anyone to make the penitential system work. In the same way, the Soviet citizens who saw the gap most clearly were often the ones whose jobs required them to speak the official language every day.

The same holds now. The first sustained unease about concept creep came from inside psychology, the very field whose categories were creeping. Doubts about the newest extensions of the protocol have come from people who had spent careers in the protocol's own institutions: teachers, clinicians, journalists, civil-rights lawyers, and city officials in places like San Francisco. Crisis, then, is first a private experience of the practitioner. The case comes in and the routine move is made, but the person making it no longer believes it worked.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The strongest objection is that Kuhn's crisis has a clear benchmark and moral crisis does not. An astronomer can measure how far a prediction misses; but when a moralist says a paradigm is "failing to solve its cases," who decides what counts as failure? The defender of the progress paradigm will say that concept creep is simply moral discovery—that people once missed harms that were really there, and that the expanding vocabulary is perception improving, the way better instruments revealed more stars. On that view, to call these extensions epicycles is a question-begging insult.

The answer available is twofold. First, crisis can be judged partly by internal signs that do not require taking sides, namely the proliferation of incompatible versions, a reliance on patches, and the loss of belief among practitioners, all of which are observable. Second, Levari's experiments supply something close to a benchmark, for when a detector flags more cases while the underlying thing grows scarcer, we are looking at drift and not discovery. A real moral discovery should show up in consequences, in reality pushing back, and not only in a rising count of verdicts. Still, the objection keeps its force for any particular case, and each must be argued on its merits.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
crisis	moral crisis	Persistent failure of normal virtue at its own cases, not a single scandal
epicycles	moral epicycles	Ad hoc distinctions added to keep a verdict standing (treasury of merit, drapetomania, concept creep)
saving the appearances	saving the verdicts	Keeping the paradigm's answers while their grounds erode
proliferation of theory versions	proliferating versions of the paradigm	Methodist and Baptist splits of 1844 and 1845; rival progressive factions
anticipations ignored (Aristarchus)	ideas before their crisis	Gregory of Nyssa on slavery, Wycliffe and Hus before Luther
external factors (calendar reform)	external pressures	Printing, the cotton gin, oil prices; these act through internal failure
technical breakdown of normal work	concept creep and detector drift	The protocol keeps finding cases only by stretching its terms
professional insecurity	practitioners' unease	Crisis felt first by confessors, clinicians, and officials

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn treats crisis as nearly a precondition for a new theory. Can you find a moral revolution that came without a prior crisis, or does every case reduce to one?
2. Where does Kuhn locate the difference between an ordinary unsolved puzzle and an anomaly that brings on crisis, and does the same line exist in morals?
3. Kuhn notes that solutions are sometimes anticipated long before they are taken up. What, if anything, distinguishes a moral idea "before its time" from a moral idea that was simply wrong?
4. How much weight does Kuhn give to external factors? Does this chapter's account of the printing press, or your own account of AGI, give them more or less?
5. If epicycles can make a system more accurate locally, can moral patches make a paradigm better at some cases even as it decays overall?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: your “no stopping rule” and “autoimmune image” are this chapter’s central diagnosis, for crisis is what a protocol without a stopping rule looks like once the large constraints are gone.
- Your diminishing-returns table gives the crisis a shape Kuhn would recognize: each removal helps fewer people and costs more, so the protocol needs ever finer categories to keep producing cases.
- Detector drift and the signs of exhaustion map onto epicycles and proliferating versions, and Levari’s purple dots are your strongest single piece of evidence that some of the drift lies in the detector rather than the world.
- Win the Words: the stretching of “harm,” “violence,” and “safety” is the lexicon doing the patch work, and your categories of capture and halo describe how an inflated word keeps its verdict while losing its referent.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: you treat AGI and fast technical change as the external pressure. This chapter suggests framing that pressure as acting through the paradigm’s internal failures, putting the protocol “under leverage” rather than breaking it from outside.

VIII

The Response to Crisis

Because no one abandons a moral paradigm for nothing, a crisis ends not in rejection but in a long and disorderly search for a replacement, and the shape of that search decides what comes next.

WHY ANOMALIES ARE TOLERATED

SUPPOSE THE LAST chapter is right, and a moral order can be in crisis for decades. The obvious question is why its adherents do not simply give it up. Kuhn's answer for science applies here with even more force. On his account, a researcher who discards a paradigm without adopting another has not made a scientific choice at all; he has quit science. A person who drops a moral paradigm with nothing to put in its place, however, does not merely leave a field—he is left without a morality, and that is experienced not as freedom but as nihilism, as the floor dropping away. So people do not walk off the floor until they can see another one.

That is why counterinstances do not, by themselves, refute a moral order. The plain humanity of the enslaved was visible to slaveholders every day, in every conversation, in every sale that split a family, and in every hymn sung in the slave gallery. Yet it did not falsify the paradigm; it was absorbed. Evidence that should have been decisive was reinterpreted as something else—an exception, a misunderstanding, a problem of individual bad masters rather than of the institution. Philosophers of science have long noted that any theory can be saved from any fact if one is willing to adjust enough elsewhere, and moral paradigms are saved in just the same way.

There are three standard responses. The first is to tolerate the anomaly, filing it as a hard case that will be resolved in time. The second is to explain it away with an epicycle of the kind described in the last chapter. The third, and the most distinctly moral, is to treat the person who presses the anomaly as morally defective. A scientist who keeps pointing at a failed prediction may be called a crank, but a moralist who keeps pointing at a failed verdict is called wicked. In 1835 a Charleston crowd seized and burned abolitionist mailings, and in 1836 the House of Representatives adopted a gag rule so that antislavery petitions would be tabled without debate. It is this third response that makes moral crises so bitter, for the dissenter is not merely wrong but bad, and the defender of the old order feels virtuous for saying so.

PREFERENCE FALSIFICATION

There is a further reason a paradigm in crisis can look stable: people hide what they think. The economist Timur Kuran called this preference falsification in *Private Truths, Public Lies* (1995). When stating a private doubt carries a social cost, most people state the approved view instead, and each person, seeing everyone else profess the official morality, concludes that he is alone. The public picture is one of unanimity, whereas the private picture may be something close to the opposite.

One of Kuran's main cases was the fall of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe in 1989, which almost no expert foresaw. The regimes looked solid because almost everyone acted as if they believed. Then, at some threshold, enough people revealed their private views that others with slightly higher thresholds followed, and those after them followed in turn, in a cascade. In Leipzig the Monday demonstrations grew from a few thousand in September to some seventy thousand on October 9, and to far more in the weeks after; the Berlin Wall opened on November 9. A paradigm that had looked permanent dissolved in weeks. Kuran's lesson for the historian of morals is that the visible stability of a moral order says little about how much belief is left in it, and the same picture plausibly fits parts of the present.

THE LOOSENING OF RULES

Crisis has a second effect, which is that the rules lose their grip. In normal virtue the paradigm sets the problems and specifies what a good answer looks like, so

that nobody needs to ask what charity is, or honor, or justice, because the exemplars settle it. In crisis that settledness goes. People begin asking the basic questions again, and once they do, many answers become thinkable that were unthinkable before.

Kuhn noted that a crisis can end in one of three ways. The old paradigm may manage the troublesome case after all; the case may be shelved for a later generation with better tools; or a new candidate may emerge, and a fight over allegiance begins. Moral crises end in the same three ways. Many hard cases are eventually absorbed, some are left for the grandchildren, and a few open the way to a rival order.

We may call this extraordinary ethics. Its marks are a return to first principles, an explosion of argument, and a willingness to try things. In science, crisis drives working researchers toward philosophy, and they begin writing about the foundations of their field, which in normal times they are content to leave to others. In morals the same thing happens at the scale of whole societies. Questions that were the province of priests or professors become the talk of taverns and dinner tables, manifestos multiply, and old texts are reread for what they might have said before the tradition encrusted them.

The Reformation is the model. Luther issued his ninety-five theses in 1517 as an invitation to academic debate, and within a few years there was a pamphlet war. Historians estimate that several thousand pamphlets appeared in German lands in the early 1520s, many of them Luther's, and he wrote them in German for a lay public. The return to first principles was literal—back to scripture, back to Augustine, back to Paul. And the rules loosened so far that the movement spun off versions no one had intended. Zwingli in Zurich, the Anabaptists who rejected infant baptism, and the revolutionary preacher Thomas Müntzer in the Peasants' War of 1524 and 1525 all claimed the same return to the source, and they drew opposite conclusions from it.

The end of the Soviet Union shows extraordinary ethics in compressed form. Gorbachev's glasnost, from 1986 onward, let suppressed questions be asked in public. The thick literary journals published Solzhenitsyn, Grossman, and Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and their circulations soared into the millions. Andrei Sakharov, released from internal exile in 1986, became a public moral voice, and Russians argued in print about Stalin, about the Orthodox Church, and about whether there had been a moral order before 1917 that might be recovered.

When the state dissolved in 1991 there was no single successor, but there had already been five years of argument about what one might look like.

RIVAL ARTICULATIONS

Extraordinary ethics produces rivals, each claiming to name what went wrong and what should replace it. Most will fail, and in the moment no one can tell which will win—the participants least of all.

Meiji Japan is unusual because the search was conducted almost deliberately, by a state that knew the old order could not survive contact with Western power. After 1868 the new government dismantled the samurai class over the following decade, sent the Iwakura Mission through America and Europe from 1871 to 1873 to study rival civilizations, and debated openly what to keep. Fukuzawa Yūkichi argued for Western learning and individual independence, while others pressed for Confucian loyalty and a revived Shinto. The Imperial Rescript on Education of 1890 was the result: a synthesis that kept the Confucian virtues of filial piety and loyalty, put them in the service of a modern state, and made them the catechism of every schoolchild. It shows that a successor can be built rather than merely stumbled into, and it shows, too, how much depends on what the builders choose to preserve.

The progress paradigm's crisis has its own crowd of rival articulations. Postliberals such as Patrick Deneen, whose *Why Liberalism Failed* appeared in 2018, argue that liberalism's success is the cause of its decay. Catholic integralists, Adrian Vermeule among them, propose that political order be subordinated to the church's account of the good. Effective altruists, following Peter Singer and Will MacAskill, try to rebuild ethics on an explicit calculation of welfare, and the loose network once called the intellectual dark web set out to defend open inquiry against the new orthodoxy. There are religious revivals, from returns to Orthodoxy and Catholicism among the young to a broader interest in the Christian roots of Western values that Tom Holland traces in *Dominion*. There are also rivals from inside the paradigm, offering ever more radical versions of the protocol. All of these are simply what a crisis looks like from the inside: many voices, few shared premises, and no one able to settle the matter by appeal to rules that everyone accepts.

WHO MAKES THE SHIFT

Kuhn remarked that the inventors of new paradigms have mostly been young, or else newcomers to the field, for such people owe the old paradigm the least, and its habits of seeing have had the least time to set in them. The same holds in morals. Luther was thirty-three when he issued his theses, and many of the most effective American abolitionists were young when they began; William Lloyd Garrison was twenty-five when he launched *The Liberator* in 1831. Newcomers matter too, since converts and outsiders can see what the native cannot. Frederick Douglass, who had been enslaved, saw the paradigm from the very place its theory said did not exist.

The reason is not that the young are wiser. It is rather that a moral paradigm is learned like a skill, by repetition on exemplary cases, and a skill long practiced becomes perception. The older practitioner does not see the anomaly as a reason for a new paradigm, because the old one has shaped how he sees, whereas the young person has learned the paradigm less deeply and is more willing to stake a life on something unproven. The pattern predicts that the defense of any aging protocol will come most firmly from those who built their careers inside it.

BUILDING, NOT REACTING

One feature of the response to crisis matters most for what follows: the successful successors have been positive alternatives, not reactions. A reaction takes the old paradigm's map and reverses the arrows, so that where it said liberate, one says restrain, and where it praised the emancipator, one praises his opponent. That still lets the old paradigm set the questions. Reaction is, in truth, a version of the paradigm, one more proliferating variant, and it shares the paradigm's weaknesses while adding its own.

The lasting successors built something. The Reformers built churches, schools, catechisms, and a new exemplar of the conscientious believer; Meiji Japan built a curriculum and a state; and the early Christians, in the crisis of Roman civic religion, built a network of charity that the pagan emperor Julian complained his own priests could not match. Each offered people a floor to stand on before asking them to step off the old one. Here the precondition stated at the start of this chapter becomes a strategy, for since no one abandons a morality for nothing, the only way to replace a paradigm is to offer something in its place.

Build before tearing down. Chapter XII returns to this rule and to the two that travel with it.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The first strain is that a scientific community is small and well defined, while a moral community is a whole society. Kuhn’s young physicist joins a field, but the young moral innovator is born into a culture. As a result, moral crises are slower, messier, and more entangled with power; science has its journals, but morality has states, armies, and mobs. The response to a moral crisis can therefore include persecution and war, as in the wars of religion after the Reformation and in the American Civil War.

The second strain is sharper, because preference falsification cuts both ways. If many people privately doubt the progress paradigm while professing it, it is equally possible that many privately hold it more firmly than its critics suppose, and that the rival articulations are louder than they are large. Kuran’s model predicts cascades, but it does not say which way they will run.

The best answer is that the model’s value lies in a warning rather than a prediction: a moral order’s visible stability is weak evidence of its health. Whether a cascade comes, and in which direction, depends on whether a credible successor exists when it does. That is a reason to build one, though not a proof that it will win.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
no rejection without replacement	no morality abandoned for nothing	Rejection without a successor is felt as nihilism
tolerated counterinstances	tolerated moral anomalies	Absorbed, explained away, or blamed on the dissenter
ad hoc modification	explaining away	The epicycle at work on a single case
(no Kuhn equivalent)	the dissenter as morally defective	The distinctly moral response, in which the critic is called wicked
extraordinary science	extraordinary ethics	First principles, manifestos, and pamphlet wars
turn to philosophy	turn to first principles	Back to scripture, nature, and founding texts

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
proliferating articulations	rival articulations	Postliberals, integralists, effective altruists, and revivals
young or new to the field	the young and the new-comer	Luther at 33, Garrison at 25, Douglass as outsider
(no Kuhn equivalent)	preference falsification	Kuran 1995: stability masks private dissent until a cascade

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says scientists do not abandon a paradigm without a replacement. Is the moral version, that rejecting one is felt as nihilism, stronger or weaker than his?
2. Kuhn lists the ways scientists react to counterinstances. Is there a scientific analogue for treating the dissenter as morally defective, or is that response purely moral?
3. Kuhn describes rules blurring in crisis. In morals, which goes first: the rules, the exemplar, or the gatekeepers?
4. Does Kuhn think a successor is built deliberately or found? Is Meiji Japan an exception to his account, or a sign that it needs revising for morals?
5. Kuhn emphasizes youth and newness. Who are the newcomers to the progress paradigm today, and what do they have that its veterans lack?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The Turn: this chapter is where your turn begins. Build before tearing down is a theory of how to respond to crisis well, and honorable exits and equal dignity follow in Chapter XII.
- Your distinction between construction and deconstruction answers the reaction problem. Reaction reverses the arrows and stays inside the paradigm, whereas your successor must change the question, from “whom does it constrain?” to “what is lost if it goes?”
- Ascent of the West: the founder or steward-builder is a fitting exemplar for a response to crisis, since the successful successors in this chapter were all builders.
- The End of Progress: preference falsification is already on your list of signs of exhaustion, and this chapter adds that it makes the timing of a turn unpredictable and the existence of a ready successor decisive.
- Win the Words: your four moves, especially coin and recover, are tools of extraordinary ethics, and a pamphlet war is fought partly over who gets to keep the words.

IX

The Nature and Necessity of Moral Revolutions

A moral revolution forces a community to choose between forms of common life that cannot coexist, and because each side judges by its own paradigm, the ordinary procedures of normal virtue cannot make the choice for it.

THE POLITICAL ANALOGY COMES HOME

KUHN BORROWED THE word revolution from politics on purpose. Political upheaval, as he saw it, begins when some part of a society decides that its institutions have stopped working, and the change it wants is one those very institutions forbid. The contest therefore moves outside the framework, so that law, procedure, and debate give way to persuasion, pressure, and sometimes force.

In science this was an analogy; in morality it comes close to a plain description. A moral paradigm is a way of life held in common—who is admired, what is owed, which words carry verdicts, and who gets to decide—and so when it changes, the change is political in the ordinary sense, because it rearranges how people live together. The abolition of American slavery is the clearest case. The Constitution of 1787 contained a fugitive slave clause and counted three fifths of the enslaved toward Southern representation, and decades of compromise inside that order, from 1820 to 1850, failed to settle the question. A war settled it, and only afterward was the result ratified by amendment in 1865. The framework, in

other words, was not so much reformed from within as broken from outside and then written back into law.

Most moral revolutions are quieter. The duel in Britain came to an end through ridicule, the press, and changing manners more than through statute. Footbinding in China ended within a generation once anti-footbinding societies, spreading from the late nineteenth century, made unbound feet a mark of national pride instead of shame. Kwame Anthony Appiah tells both stories in *The Honor Code*, and in each the decisive move happened outside the paradigm's own court. Nobody won the argument by the old rules; the rules themselves were what changed.

WHY PARADIGM ARGUMENTS RUN IN CIRCLES

When two moral paradigms meet, each side argues from premises the other rejects. That is no failure of intelligence; it is built into the situation, for each paradigm supplies its own standards of what counts as a good reason, a relevant fact, and a settled case, and to defend a paradigm one must use it.

Take the honor man and the dignity man. The honor man says that a public insult has damaged something real—his standing, his family's name, his place among equals—and that he must demand satisfaction or become less than he was. The dignity man says that nothing real was damaged at all, since worth belongs to the person as such and cannot be taken by another's words; to fight over an insult is to mistake reputation for worth. Each is right by his own lights, and each sees the other as confused about what a self is.

Peter Berger made this point in a 1970 essay on the obsolescence of the concept of honor. Honor, he argued, attaches to a person through the roles and institutions he occupies, as husband, officer, gentleman, or head of house, whereas dignity attaches to the self stripped of every role, the bare human being underneath. Modern people, Berger argued, find it hard even to understand honor, because they locate the real self beneath the roles rather than in them. Honor, then, is never refuted; it simply becomes unintelligible, and no argument can cross that gap, because the two sides do not agree on where the person is.

The same circle appears in our own time. The emancipator asks of any structure, whom does it constrain? The founder asks, what is lost if it goes? To each side, the other's question seems to miss the point. To the emancipator, asking what a constraint protects sounds like an excuse for oppression; to the founder,

asking only whom it constrains sounds like tearing out a levee because it limits where the river can go. Neither can win by showing that the other's facts are wrong, because their disagreement is over which facts matter.

Circular does not mean worthless. A paradigm argument can still show what life looks like from inside a way of seeing, and that can be persuasive, though it persuades the way a demonstration does rather than the way a proof does. The convert does not accept a premise and follow it to a conclusion; he comes to see the whole differently.

NEW PARADIGMS ARE NOT DERIVED FROM OLD ONES

A common picture holds that moral change is a kind of deduction: our ancestors had the right premises and drew the wrong conclusions, or else failed to apply their principles consistently. On this picture, a later morality is simply an earlier one carried through more honestly. The history of morals refutes it.

Christian humility cannot be derived from Homeric excellence. In the Homeric world the best man shows his worth openly and claims the honor he is due, so that Achilles withdrawing from battle over a slight to his standing is, in that world, no vanity at all but a correct response. Aristotle's great-souled man thinks himself worthy of great things, and he is right to. Humility in the Christian sense—lowering oneself, counting oneself least, washing the feet of others—has no place in either. Far from extending their virtues, it reverses them. Nietzsche saw this clearly in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887): the Christian valuation did not develop the noble one, it overturned it. Hume, writing in 1751, filed humility among the “monkish virtues” that men of sense reject, a sign that the pagan valuation could still be turned against the Christian one.

Nor can equal dignity be derived from feudal rank. Feudal morality was a morality of station, in which duties ran upward and downward: a lord owed protection and a vassal owed service, and what was right for one was wrong for the other. Equal dignity says the opposite, that every person stands in the same relation to the moral law. No one can reach that conclusion by reasoning carefully inside the feudal premises, because the premises are the very thing it denies.

In each case the new paradigm did not follow from the old but came from somewhere else: a new exemplar (a crucified man in place of a warrior) and a new legitimacy layer (souls equal before God in place of blood and station). That is what makes it a revolution rather than an improvement.

THE WHIG CLAIM THAT THE PAST IS A SPECIAL CASE

There is a sophisticated reply. A common view among physicists and philosophers held that Newton's mechanics falls out of Einstein's as a limiting case, good at speeds far below that of light, and if so, the revolution was not really a break, since the old theory lives on inside the new one. Kuhn's rejoinder was that the derived laws only resemble Newton's. Their variables refer to Einsteinian quantities—mass that can turn into energy, space and time that are no longer absolute—so that what comes back is a Newtonian-looking formula carrying post-Newtonian meanings.

The Whig history of morals makes the same move. Liberalism, it says, contains earlier moralities as special cases: honor survives as self-respect, Christian charity as human rights and welfare, and piety as gratitude or environmental care. Nothing of value was lost; it was all absorbed and generalized.

The legal philosopher Jeremy Waldron gives the best version of this argument in *Dignity, Rank, and Rights* (2012), where he suggests that modern dignity is a leveling up, the high rank once held by nobles having been extended to everyone. There is real truth in this, for the language of dignity does borrow from the language of rank.

But look at what changes in the transfer. Rank that everyone holds is no longer rank. Rank meant standing above someone, a place in an order that others could see and had to honor, and once it is spread to all, it loses the very thing that made it rank. Nor is self-respect the same as honor. Honor depended on how others regarded you and could be lost through their contempt, whereas self-respect is meant to be immune to that contempt. Charity in the Christian paradigm was a personal act of love toward a neighbor, owed to God; a welfare entitlement is a claim against the state, owed to no one in particular and given by no one in particular. The words survive, and sometimes even the sentiments, but the meanings do not. What is recovered is the old vocabulary filled with new content, and the parts that would not fit, such as the honor of a family name, the sanctity of a vow, or the duty to one's ancestors, are quietly dropped as prejudice.

PARADIGMS CHANGE THE PROBLEMS AND THE SOLUTIONS

A moral revolution does more than give new answers to old questions; it changes which questions count as moral at all, and what would count as an answer.

Under the honor paradigm, the central moral problems were problems of standing: how to answer an insult, how to keep a family's name clean, how to repay a benefactor, how to avenge a wrong. The solution to an insult was satisfaction, often in the form of a duel. Under the dignity paradigm, an insult is at most a matter for a defamation suit and usually a matter for indifference. The question "how do I restore my honor?" is not answered differently; it simply stops being asked.

Revolutions add problems as well. The liberal paradigm made new questions moral—consent, discrimination, inequality of outcome, representation, the authentic self—and these would have been unrecognizable as moral problems to a medieval confessor, who worried instead about pride, lust, sloth, and the state of the soul. Meanwhile, problems once central slid out of the moral domain altogether. Chastity became a private choice, blasphemy became speech, and filial obedience became a question of healthy boundaries. None of these was solved; each was reclassified as non-moral, much as Kuhn noted that some questions a paradigm once demanded answers to are later declared outside science.

The standards of a good solution change too. In the Christian paradigm, a good resolution of a moral case reconciled the sinner to God and community, whereas in the progress paradigm a good resolution removes the constraint and protects the individual from its return. A judge, a pastor, and a diversity officer can look at the same quarrel and disagree not only about the verdict but about what a verdict is for.

WHY REVOLUTIONS ARE NECESSARY

If moral change were accretion, revolutions would be accidents, moments of confusion on the road to steady growth. Yet they are not accidents at all; they are the way moral orders change.

The reason is structural. A moral paradigm is not a list of rules that can be lengthened. It is a way of seeing, organized around an exemplar and a protocol, with a lexicon that stores its verdicts and gatekeepers who guard them. Anything

genuinely new—a new exemplar, a new sense of who counts, a new idea of what a person is—must therefore compete with the old for the same ground. Two exemplars cannot both be the model of the good man if they teach opposite things, and the warrior who claims his due and the saint who counts himself least cannot share the throne. One must displace the other.

It follows that moral discovery, when it is real, will usually arrive as a crisis. The more deeply a paradigm is held, the more surely a novelty that contradicts it will register first as wickedness, then as anomaly, and only then as a rival. Normal virtue works by applying the exemplar's lesson to new cases, and it is very good at that, but it is structurally unable to replace the exemplar. Only a revolution can.

This also cuts against the comfort of the present. If revolutions are the normal way moral orders change, then our own paradigm is not the end of the series but one more order that will, in its turn, meet problems it cannot see and be replaced by a way of seeing it cannot derive.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

First, physical theories make predictions that can be checked against instruments, and moral paradigms seem to have no such court. If honor and dignity cannot be compared by shared standards, it may look as though any change is merely a change of taste or power. That is the relativist reading, and it is the strongest objection. The best answer is that circular arguments do not rule out every comparison, for paradigms can be compared by what they produce: whether the societies living by them hold together, raise children, absorb shocks, and avoid the harms they themselves would recognize. That is reality pushing back, and later chapters develop it.

Second, moral change is more continuous than scientific change. Christianity kept much of Greek virtue, and liberalism kept much of Christian ethics, so Waldron's leveling-up thesis has force. The answer is that continuity of words and sentiments is compatible with discontinuity of meaning, and this chapter's claim is about meaning. A revolution can keep a word and change what it does.

Third, political revolutions often involve force, and calling moral change revolutionary may seem to excuse coercion. It does not, for describing how paradigms change is not the same as approving every method used to change them.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
political revolution (analogy)	moral revolution	In morality the analogy is close to literal, since what changes is how people live together
incompatible modes of community life	incompatible ways of living together	Honor and dignity cannot both organize one community
circular paradigm arguments	circular moral arguments	Each side argues from premises the other rejects; Berger on honor
Newton as special case of Einstein	earlier moralities as special cases of liberalism	The Whig claim; meanings change in the transfer
change of the meaning of terms (mass)	change of the meaning of moral words (rank, honor, charity)	Same word, new content
problems declared unscientific	questions reclassified as non-moral	Chastity, blasphemy, filial obedience
new standards of solution	new standards of a good resolution	Reconciliation vs removal of constraint
necessity of revolutions	necessity of moral revolutions	A new exemplar must displace the old

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says the choice between paradigms cannot be settled by logic and experiment alone. What would the moral equivalents of logic and experiment be, and why are they also insufficient?
2. When Kuhn rejects the claim that Newton is a special case of Einstein, what exactly does he say is lost? Find the moral parallel in a word like honor or charity.
3. Kuhn notes that a paradigm can declare old problems unscientific. Which moral questions has our paradigm quietly retired, and would they come back if it changed?
4. Kuhn's political analogy stresses that revolutions go outside institutional frameworks. Is the same true of moral revolutions that proceed through courts and legislatures?
5. Does Kuhn's case for the necessity of revolutions depend on science having a fixed nature to discover? What would play that role in morality?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the circular argument between “whom does it constrain?” and “what is lost if it goes?” is the incommensurability at the center of your thesis, and this chapter explains why the founder cannot simply out-argue the emancipator inside the old paradigm’s courts.
- Win the Words: the Whig special-case move works by keeping words and changing their content, and your categories of capture and recover describe exactly how honor, charity, and dignity were kept as shells and refilled.
- Ascent of the West: if new paradigms cannot be derived from old ones, then ascent cannot be presented as liberalism carried through more consistently; it needs its own exemplar and its own legitimacy layer.
- Map vs Territory: the strain box’s answer, that paradigms can be compared by what they produce, is where your moral realism enters, for the territory is the court that circular arguments cannot reach.
- The Turn: the principle of building before tearing down is a direct response to this chapter. If revolutions are necessary, the question is not whether to have one but how to turn well.

X

Revolutions as Changes of Moral World View

After a moral revolution, people do not merely judge the same world differently; they see a different moral world, one in which the same acts, the same structures, and even the same facts appear transformed.

THE GESTALT SWITCH IN MORAL PERCEPTION

KUHN BORROWED AN image from the psychology of perception. Look at the duck-rabbit drawing and you see a duck; look again and it is a rabbit. The lines on the paper have not changed, only the whole into which they are organized. A scientific revolution, Kuhn suggested, is something like this, except that the scientist cannot switch back and forth at will, and there is no neutral drawing beneath both readings for him to consult.

Moral history is full of duck-rabbits, and the duel is a good place to start. In 1798 William Pitt the Younger, then Prime Minister, fought a duel with George Tierney on Putney Heath, and in 1829 the Duke of Wellington, also Prime Minister, fought the Earl of Winchilsea. To many at the time, these were the acts of a gentleman defending his honor. Within a few decades, however, the same act—two men walking off paces and firing—was coming to be seen as attempted murder, or else as something absurd. Nothing in the pistols had changed; the act had simply been reorganized into a different whole.

Usury is another. For much of Christian history, lending at interest was a sin, condemned by church councils and by Dante, who placed usurers in the seventh circle of Hell, and yet by the eighteenth century the same practice was becoming the ordinary business of banks. Jeremy Bentham published *Defence of Usury* in 1787. The act of lending a sum and asking back more had not changed, but what it was had changed entirely.

The list goes on. Obedience was once the virtue of a soldier, a child, a wife, and a monk, but after the Second World War and the Nuremberg trials, obedience to orders began to look, in many settings, like complicity. A parent's authority over an adolescent was once simply what a parent was for, whereas in therapeutic language it can now appear as control. A national border was once the edge of home, the line inside which a people kept its own life; within the progress paradigm it can appear primarily as a mechanism of exclusion. In each case the same thing is there, and in each case it has become something else.

MORAL LIFE AS VISION

The philosopher Iris Murdoch gave this idea its strongest modern form. In *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970), she argued against the picture of moral life as a series of choices made by a free will surveying neutral facts. Most of moral life, she said, happens before choice, in how we see, so that by the time we choose, the situation has already been framed by our attention. Her famous example is a mother-in-law who finds her son's wife vulgar and tiresome. The older woman's outward conduct never changes, and the young woman may even have moved away; yet the mother-in-law works, privately, to see her more justly, and comes to see her as refreshingly simple and spontaneous. Murdoch counted that inner work of attention as real moral activity.

Murdoch was describing individual moral effort, but her insight scales to paradigms, for a moral paradigm trains attention. It teaches its members what to notice, what to pass over, and what to see as a case at all. The honor culture taught men to notice slights and to see them as wounds; the Christian culture taught people to notice the poor and the sick and to see Christ in them; and the progress paradigm teaches people to notice constraints and to see them as injuries. In each case the training goes so deep that the result does not feel like interpretation at all. It feels like seeing what is there.

That is why moral revolutions feel like awakenings to those who undergo them, and why the convert says that the scales fell from his eyes. It is also why the unconverted look, to the converted, as if they are blind. They are not blind, of course; they are seeing a different picture.

WHAT HAD BEEN A FIXED ORDER BECOMES AN IMPOSED ARRANGEMENT

Kuhn's best-known illustration is the swinging stone. An Aristotelian watching a weight swing on a cord saw a constrained fall: the stone wants to reach the ground, the cord thwarts it, and the swinging is the struggle dying down. Galileo watched the same stone and saw a periodic motion, the same arc traced over and over in nearly the same time. The pendulum was not lying in the data, waiting to be found; it became visible through a new way of looking, which, Kuhn argued, Galileo owed partly to the medieval theory of impetus.

Kuhn's chemical case makes the same point. Priestley and Lavoisier handled the same gas, yet Priestley saw dephlogisticated air, while Lavoisier saw a new element, oxygen, and with it a new chemistry. The sample in the jar was the same; the world each chemist worked in was not.

The moral parallel is close, and it is the defining move of the modern paradigm: what one paradigm saw as a fixed order of nature, the next sees as an arrangement imposed by power.

For medieval Europe, the three orders of those who pray, those who fight, and those who work were simply how a Christian society was built, and each held its place in it as a stone holds its place in an arch. To a modern reader, the same structure looks like a hierarchy maintained by force and justified by ideology. The household with the father at its head, the division of labor between the sexes, the authority of elders, the bond between a people and its land—each was seen in its time as given, like the seasons, and each has come to be seen, in our paradigm, as constructed, and therefore as something someone did to someone else.

Ricoeur called the founding thinkers of this way of seeing—Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud—masters of suspicion. Each taught people to look at an apparent natural order and see beneath it a hidden interest, whether class, will to power, or repressed desire. Once we have learned that way of looking, it is very hard to unlearn, and every order becomes a disguised arrangement, every given an imposition. Here is the progress paradigm's pendulum. It is a genuine discovery, because

some orders really were impositions, as slavery was; but like Galileo's pendulum, it is also a way of seeing that, once acquired, organizes everything it touches.

MORAL DATA ARE NOT FIXED

A natural objection arises here: surely the facts remain the same. Pain is pain, and a whip cuts the same skin in any century; only the interpretation changes. Kuhn resisted the parallel claim in science, and the historian of morals should resist it too.

The basic data of moral life—harm, consent, cruelty, respect—are not raw observations, for they are already shaped by the paradigm. What counts as harm has been redrawn many times. In the early modern period, public executions drew crowds as a civic spectacle; by the nineteenth century a growing public found the spectacle itself intolerable, and Britain ended public hanging in 1868. In our own time, the psychologist Nick Haslam has documented what he calls concept creep, by which the meanings of words like abuse, trauma, bullying, and prejudice have expanded to cover far milder experiences than they once did. The blue-dot experiments described in Chapter VI show the same recalibration in the laboratory, and they extend to faces read as threatening. The detector recalibrates, and the data change because the instrument that collects them changes.

Consent has been redrawn too. In older paradigms, a daughter's marriage was something her family arranged, and her consent, if asked, was one part of a larger agreement between households. In ours, consent is the single gate through which nearly all legitimate relations must pass, and its requirements have grown more exacting with each decade. Respect, meanwhile, has moved from deference to the high toward recognition of the marginal, and cruelty has spread from men to animals and from bodies to words.

None of this means the data are arbitrary; it means they are paradigm-dependent. A moral community does not first gather neutral facts and then judge them. Rather, it sees through its paradigm, and the seeing produces the facts it then judges.

THE EMANCIPATOR AND THE FOUNDER SEE DIFFERENT WORLDS

The running case can now be stated in perceptual terms, for the emancipator and the founder do more than disagree: they see different worlds.

The emancipator looks at a structure—a marriage law, an exam, a dress code, a border, a church—and sees constraint, because that is what the progress paradigm trained him to see. Every structure appears to him as a fence around someone, and his first question is who is on the wrong side. Freedom is the open field that remains when the fences are gone.

The founder looks at the same structure and sees load-bearing work. A wall that confines also holds up a roof. An exam that excludes some also certifies others, and it gives the poor student a route the well-connected do not need. A border that keeps some out also defines a place where laws, trust, and a common life can be sustained. The founder's first question, then, is what the structure carries, and what will fall if it goes.

Neither sees the whole. The emancipator is often right that a structure confines, and the founder is often right that it bears weight; but each is organized around a different exemplar, and each picture feels like simple seeing. That is why debates between them so often fail, for each is pointing at what is plainly there, and the other sees something else.

THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY

Kuhn admitted in this chapter that he could not fully say what it means for scientists to work in a different world after a revolution. The stone did not change, and yet in some sense the world did; beyond that he was cautious about going.

This book can go one step further, using a distinction the semanticist Alfred Korzybski made famous: the map is not the territory. A moral paradigm is a map, and an indispensable one, since no one can act without a map. But a paradigm can drift until its members live in the map rather than the territory, and the map's categories become more real to them than the things they were drawn to describe. On the map every structure becomes an oppression, whether or not anyone in the territory is oppressed by it, and every difference becomes an inequality, whether or not it reflects harm.

What breaks the spell is reality. When the map and the territory diverge far enough, the territory sends back consequences the map did not predict: public anger over crime and disorder, which led San Francisco voters to recall their district attorney in 2022; rising overdose deaths and open drug use after decriminalization, which led Oregon's legislature to roll back Measure 110 in 2024; and weak evidence behind confident clinical practice, as the Cass Review of 2024 re-

ported for pediatric gender medicine in England. These are moral anomalies in perceptual form. The paradigm’s own eyes did not see them coming, and the territory did not care.

Here the moral case differs from Kuhn’s and goes beyond it. Kuhn worried that if scientists after a revolution live in a different world, nothing outside the paradigm could judge between worlds. This book answers that there is a territory, and that it pushes back. Paradigms shape what people see, but they do not shape what happens when people act on it.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The strongest objection is that the gestalt image proves too much. If every paradigm sees its own world, then the founder’s vision of load-bearing structure is just another map, no closer to the territory than the emancipator’s, and calling the rival paradigm’s view the map and one’s own the territory is exactly what every paradigm does. The honor man thought insults were real wounds, and the dignity man thought they were nothing; each believed he saw the territory.

The objection is fair, and it applies to this book’s view as much as to any other. The best answer has two parts. First, the claim is not that the founder sees the territory while the emancipator sees only the map, but that both see through maps, and that reality adjudicates between them over time by consequences neither can fully control. Second, the evidence of drift is internal: when a paradigm’s own institutions reverse its own policies, the correction came from the world, not from a rival map.

A second strain is that Kuhn already noted that scientists, unlike viewers of the duck-rabbit, cannot switch back at will, and moral perception is bound tighter still, because it is tied to identity, family, and faith, and many people never convert at all. That makes moral revolutions slower and more painful, and it means a moral world view can outlive its revolution by generations. It does not, however, weaken the core claim.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
gestalt switch	change of moral perception	Dueling: honor to murder; usury: sin to finance

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
duck-rabbit	moral duck-rabbit	Obedience as virtue or complicity; a border as home or exclusion
scientist's trained vision	moral attention (Murdoch)	The paradigm trains what people notice
Aristotle's constrained fall vs Galileo's pendulum	fixed order vs imposed arrangement	The defining perceptual move of the progress paradigm
data are not fixed	moral data are paradigm-dependent	Harm, consent, cruelty, and respect are redrawn; concept creep
instrument recalibration	detector drift	Concept creep (Haslam 2016); the blue-dot studies of Chapter VI
Priestley's and Lavoisier's gas	the same act, two moral worlds	Same gas, two chemistries; same duel, two deeds
living in a different world	living in a different moral world	The emancipator sees constraint; the founder sees structure
nature (unchanged beneath paradigms)	the territory	Reality breaks the spell of the map

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says the scientist cannot switch back and forth like a viewer of the duck-rabbit. Does this hold more or less strongly for moral conversion?
2. When Kuhn describes the pendulum, what does he say Galileo owed to earlier theory? What did the masters of suspicion owe to earlier moral traditions?
3. Kuhn questions whether there is a neutral observation language beneath paradigms. Is there a neutral moral language beneath harm, consent and respect?
4. How cautious is Kuhn about saying the world itself changes? Where would you draw the line between a changed world and a changed vision of the same world?
5. Does Kuhn leave room for nature to correct a paradigm's way of seeing? Note where he hesitates, and where the book's appeal to the territory goes past him.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Map vs Territory: this chapter gives your distinction a home in the Kuhnian frame, for a paradigm drifts into living in the map, and the territory is what breaks the spell.
- The End of Progress: detector drift and concept creep are the perceptual side of the gestalt switch, as the paradigm's instrument recalibrates until purple looks blue.

- Ascent of the West: the founder’s question, “what is lost if it goes?”, is a trained way of seeing load-bearing structure, and the successor paradigm will need to teach that vision as deeply as the old one taught suspicion.
- The Turn: joint attention and turning toward the sun are images of a change in moral vision, and Murdoch’s account of attention gives the painting a philosophical backbone.
- Win the Words: the lexicon is where the gestalt is stored. When “border” becomes “exclusion” or “authority” becomes “control,” the word carries the switch before any argument is made.

XI

The Invisibility of Revolutions

Moral revolutions have a way of hiding themselves, for the winners retell the past as a straight climb to the present, and the retelling makes our ancestors look wicked and ourselves look final.

HOW THE RECORD GETS REWRITTEN

KUHN NOTICED SOMETHING odd about the way scientists learn their own history. Their picture of the past reaches them through works whose real business is to present the science of today—chiefly textbooks, with popular books and the philosophy of science close behind. Such works begin from what is now accepted, and they let history in only where it makes the present look like the place everyone had been heading all along. The vocabulary, the questions, and the standards of the old paradigm quietly drop out, and what survives is a list of predecessors who got pieces of the answer right. The revolution itself, which was a change in what the questions even were, vanishes from view.

Morality has the same machinery, and it works that machinery harder. Science keeps its textbooks within a small professional class, whereas a moral order puts its textbooks everywhere: in catechisms and Sunday schools, in civics units and children's picture books, in museum placards, holiday speeches, and film, and in the HR module that every new employee clicks through. Each of these teaches the current paradigm by telling stories about the past, and each tells those stories backward, starting from today's verdicts and asking who in history agreed with them.

The result is a version of the past that is useful for teaching but false as history. A child learns that people long ago were cruel, that brave people fought them, and that the brave people won. That is the shape of a morality tale; it is not the shape of what happened.

THE WHIG HISTORY OF MORALS

In 1931 the Cambridge historian Herbert Butterfield gave this habit a name. In *The Whig Interpretation of History* he described historians who sort the past into those who pushed toward the present and those who stood in the way, who praise the first and blame the second, and who end by writing a story that ratifies whatever the writer already believed. Butterfield had English constitutional history in mind—the Protestant and parliamentary story of liberty broadening down the centuries—but his point travels well beyond it.

The Whig history of morals is that same method applied to right and wrong. It puts to every figure of the past a single question: were they on our side? It treats our present verdicts as the fixed standard and the past as a long approach to them. Its favorite image is an arc or a ladder, and its favorite word is still. People still believed in slavery, still kept women from voting, still punished blasphemy. The word still assumes the destination and then measures everyone by their distance from it.

Kuhn argued that this kind of history is no mere lapse in scholarship; it does a job. A paradigm needs its members to see its problems as the real problems and its standards as the real standards, and telling the past as a road leading here accomplishes exactly that. The same holds in morals. A moral community that told its own history as a series of conversions between incompatible worlds would be teaching its young that the present world, too, might be only one stop among many—and few catechisms care to teach that.

HEROES RECAST AS PRECURSORS

Watch what happens to the great moral figures of the past. They are kept and honored, and then quietly rebuilt as early versions of ourselves.

Abraham Lincoln is remembered as the Great Emancipator, and he did more than almost anyone to end American slavery. Yet in his 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas he also said plainly that he did not favor political and social equality between the races, and for years he supported colonization, the plan to

resettle freed slaves abroad. His moral world was organized around the Union, providence, free labor, and the Declaration read in a particular way. The textbook keeps the emancipation and drops the world that produced it.

Jesus is often presented today as a teacher of inclusion and acceptance, a kind of gentle reformer set against judgment. Yet the Gospels also show him warning of hell more often than any other figure in the New Testament, tightening the law on divorce, calling people to repent of sin, and placing everything under a coming judgment by God. Socrates is remembered as a martyr for free speech, executed by Athens in 399 BC, but the Socrates of Plato distrusted rule by the many, cared above all for the health of the soul, and in the *Crito* refused to escape because he owed obedience to the laws of his city. The British and American abolitionists, for their part, are remembered as human-rights activists ahead of their time, when most of them were devout Christians, many of them evangelicals or Quakers. William Wilberforce campaigned against the slave trade and, with equal zeal, for the suppression of vice and the reform of manners; William Lloyd Garrison was a Christian perfectionist. They did not imagine they were extending a protocol of liberation. They thought they were obeying God and saving souls, their own among them.

In each case the parts of the hero's belief that our paradigm rejects are treated as packaging, unfortunate but inessential, while the parts we share are treated as the real person. That is the precursor move, and Kuhn found the same thing in the textbook treatment of Dalton. Dalton came to chemistry from questions about gases and the atmosphere, yet the standard story presents his atomism as the answer to a chemist's problem he had never set out to solve. The hero, in short, is honored by being made to agree with us.

SANCTIFIED OR DEMOLISHED

Figures who cannot be made into precursors meet a different fate: they are either sanctified or demolished, and almost never understood.

The American founders show both moves within a single lifetime of public memory. For one generation Jefferson is the author of liberty and his slaveholding a footnote; for the next, his slaveholding is the main fact and the Declaration becomes hypocrisy. The statues of Columbus that went up in an era that saw him as a hero of discovery came down in an era that saw him as an agent of conquest. Both judgments use the same method, for each takes the present paradigm's sin-

gle question—liberator or oppressor?—and runs a figure through it. Neither asks what the world looked like from inside the figure's own moral order, what that order was for, and what it was good at.

Bernard Williams made this point about the ancient Greeks in *Shame and Necessity*. The Homeric ethic of honor and shame was long treated as a primitive stage that later ethics outgrew, but Williams argued that it was a coherent moral psychology, and in some ways a more honest one than the one that replaced it. The precursor story could not see this, because it had already decided that the Greeks were on their way to us.

THE RIGHT SIDE OF HISTORY

Every paradigm has a signature phrase that compresses its picture of history, and for the paradigm of progress that phrase is the right side of history. It became a favorite of American politicians, Barack Obama above all, and it now runs through editorials, campaign speeches, and corporate statements.

The phrase is the Whig history of morals in five words. It assumes that history has a direction, that the direction is moral, that we can already see where it ends, and that those who disagree with us now will look to the future the way slaveholders look to us. It turns a disagreement about the good into a forecast, and it carries a quiet threat besides: get on board, or be remembered as a villain.

Here the seed of the whole book shows its force. If the moral past is a straight climb, then everyone behind us on the climb is worse than we are, and the further back you go, the worse they get. Our grandparents become moral cripples, their grandparents monsters, and the medieval and ancient worlds a vast pit of sin. The conclusion is absurd. The people who built hospitals, universities, and the common law, and who gave us the idea that the poor man's soul weighs as much as the king's, were not moral idiots. They were living inside a different moral paradigm, one with its own exemplars, its own cases, and its own real achievements, and the Whig history of morals can see them only as failed versions of us.

The same history produces a second illusion, and a worse one. If our ancestors were simply wrong and we are the point toward which the arc was bending, then we stand at the leading edge of a moral universe that is still unfurling—and at the leading edge, mistakes look impossible. Every new extension of the protocol becomes the next step in the climb, and anyone who questions it becomes the

next person on the wrong side. A paradigm that teaches itself this history has lost the very means of noticing its own errors.

THE HIDDEN DEBTS

Invisibility runs in a second direction as well. The textbook hides not only the revolutions behind it but also what the present paradigm took from the order it overthrew.

The paradigm of progress tells its story as a liberation from religion: reason against faith, rights against dogma, the individual against the church. Yet historians such as Larry Siedentop in *Inventing the Individual* and Tom Holland in *Dominion* have argued that the core of that paradigm came from the very thing it claims to have escaped. The equal worth of every person, concern for the weak and the victim, the idea that the last shall be first, the suspicion of the proud and powerful—none of these was obvious to the Greeks or the Romans, and all of them entered Western moral life through Christianity. Nietzsche saw as much in the 1880s, when he mocked the English for thinking they could drop the Christian God and keep Christian morality, as though it would stand on its own.

A paradigm that hides its debts cannot see what it is spending; it treats borrowed capital as earned income. It assumes that equal dignity is simply what reason discovers once superstition has been cleared away, and so it never asks what will sustain that conviction when the source is gone. The Whig history of morals thus does double damage, making the past look worse than it was and the present look more self-sufficient than it is.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The strongest objection is that some moral judgments of the past really are simply correct, and the Whig historian is right to make them. Slavery was wrong, and it was as wrong in 1750 as it is now. If that is true, then telling moral history partly as a story of people coming to see the truth is no distortion. Science, after all, is told as a story of people learning that the earth goes around the sun, and nobody calls that Whiggish in any damaging sense.

The second strain is that Kuhn's textbooks sit inside a small expert community, while moral retellings are fought over in public all the time. The 1619 Project and its critics, or the battles over school curricula, show that moral history is not one textbook but several rival ones.

The best answer for this book grants the first point and narrows the claim. The error lies not in judging the past but in assuming that the past was trying to reach us, an assumption that erases what its order was for and blinds us to our own mistakes. A moral realist can say that slavery was wrong and still say that Wilberforce’s world was not our world. As for the second point, rival textbooks do not disprove invisibility, for they are usually two Whig histories with different heroes, each still asking only who was on the right side.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
textbook	catechism, civics unit, children’s book, museum placard, HR module	moral textbooks reach the whole population, not a guild
invisibility of revolutions	the Whig history of morals	Butterfield’s term, applied to right and wrong
precursor (Dalton read backward)	the hero recast as an early liberal	Lincoln, Jesus, Socrates, the abolitionists
development by accumulation	the arc of history, the right side of history	the paradigm’s own picture of its past
discarded theory as error	ancestors as sinners	the absurd conclusion of accretion
textbook’s selective history	dropping what heroes believed that we reject	belief treated as packaging
hidden continuity with the old paradigm	borrowed Christian capital	Siedentop, Holland, Nietzsche
current theory as the goal of all past research	the leading edge of an unfurling moral universe	where mistakes look impossible

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says textbook history is not merely careless but useful to the community. What exactly does the Whig history of morals do for the paradigm of progress, and who teaches it?
2. Kuhn’s Dalton example shows a scientist credited with answering a question he was not asking. Which moral hero has suffered the same fate most completely?
3. Is there a difference between judging the past and assuming the past was aiming at us? Where does Kuhn draw a similar line for science?

4. If a paradigm hides its debts to the order it replaced, what happens when those debts come due?
5. Does Kuhn think invisibility can be cured, or only noticed?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Your seed from Chapter I lands here: the right side of history is the phrase that makes ancestors evil in proportion to their distance from us, and this chapter shows the teaching machinery that keeps it running.
- Borrowed Christian capital in *The End of Progress* is the second face of invisibility, since the paradigm cannot see what it spends when its history tells it that it earned it.
- The cab driver with no destination is the mirror image of the Whig history: looking back, the paradigm sees a road, but looking forward, it has neither a stopping rule nor a destination.
- *Win the Words*: the hero recast as precursor is a case of capture and halo, in which Lincoln's name carries the paradigm's verdicts while the words he actually used are left out of the lesson.
- *Map vs Territory*: the Whig history treats today's map as the territory and grades every older map by how closely it matches.

XII

The Resolution of Revolutions

A new moral paradigm wins by persuasion, conversion, exemplars, generational turnover, and often force, but never by proof, and anyone who hopes to start a revolution needs to know which of these they are using.

NOT PROOF BUT CONVERSION

KUHN ARGUED THAT a scientific revolution is never settled by a clean test. Because the rival paradigms disagree about which problems matter and what would count as solving them, there is no neutral court in which the case can be argued to a verdict. What happens instead is a shift of allegiance, one scientist at a time, until the whole community has moved, and Kuhn called this conversion. He leaned on an observation Max Planck made late in life, in his *Scientific Autobiography*: new ideas in physics rarely win over the people who opposed them; they prevail because those people pass from the scene and their successors are raised on the new view from the start.

Moral revolutions work in the same way, only more so. No experiment can show that honor culture is wrong and dignity culture right, or that the Christian ordering of the soul is better than the Roman ordering of the city. The paradigms define the good differently, and so each wins its own arguments. A Roman gentleman of the second century could hear a Christian explain why the exposure of infants was murder and simply fail to see the point, for in his world the child was not yet a person, and the father's right was a pillar of order.

Moral revolutions, then, are resolved by people changing what they see. Some change quickly and most change slowly, while many never change at all, and the revolution waits for them to leave the stage. The young convert, the old hold on, and over a generation the meaning of the key words drifts until the old usage sounds strange. Same-sex marriage in the United States moved from a fringe position to a constitutional right between the 1990s and *Obergefell* in 2015, and surveys throughout that period showed a wide gap between younger and older Americans. Planck's remark describes moral change at least as well as it describes physics.

THE ARGUMENTS THAT MOVE PEOPLE

None of this means that argument is useless. Kuhn listed the considerations that actually persuade scientists, even while insisting that none of them compels, and their moral counterparts lie close at hand.

The first and strongest is that the new paradigm solves the cases that drove the old one into crisis. Abolitionism could answer what the slaveholding paradigm could not: why a man who wrote, prayed, loved his children, and fled at the risk of his life was not a person. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative* of 1845 was devastating precisely because it set that case before readers in his own voice, and the old order had no good reply.

The second is that the new paradigm brings into view goods the old one could not see. Early Christianity made the poor, the sick, widows, and abandoned infants objects of moral concern in a world where they had barely counted, and the Enlightenment rights paradigm made the private conscience of the dissenter a good in itself rather than a danger to be managed.

The third is fruitfulness. The sociologist Rodney Stark argued in *The Rise of Christianity* (1996) that the early church grew at roughly forty percent per decade, and that part of the reason was practical. During the great epidemics of the second and third centuries, Christians nursed their sick while many pagans fled, and simple care saved lives. Christian communities also discouraged infanticide and abortion and valued women, which raised their birth rates and drew female converts. A paradigm that produces communities that visibly flourish recruits by example, for people notice which of their neighbors are doing well.

The fourth is aesthetic. Kuhn saw that scientists are moved by a theory's neatness or elegance even before it has earned its keep, and in morals that beauty lives

in exemplars. The martyr who forgives his killers, the knight who spares the defeated, the marcher who keeps walking while the dogs are loosed: figures like these make a way of life look worth having before any argument has been finished. Most conversions begin with admiration.

None of these considerations is decisive at the start. Kuhn stressed that the first adopters of a new paradigm commit to it before it has shown what it can do, trusting that it will handle the problems the old one cannot, so that their decision rests on faith in its promise more than on its record. The moral case is the same. The first Christians, the first abolitionists, and the first women to unbind their daughters' feet staked their lives and reputations on a way of living that had not yet proved itself. Only after such early adherents have worked the new paradigm out, and multiplied, does the rest of the community follow, until only a few hold-outs remain.

PREFERENCE CASCADES

Kuhn had no mechanism for how quickly a community can flip once the shift begins, but Kuran's preference falsification, introduced in Chapter VIII, supplies one. When many people hide their doubts at once, a society can look solidly committed to a paradigm that few actually believe. Then something small makes private doubts visible, each person learns that others share them, and support collapses with startling speed, as it did across Eastern Europe in 1989. The same pattern appears in moral history: opinion that was unsayable becomes common knowledge, and what was common knowledge becomes unsayable. That is why moral revolutions so often seem to come from nowhere. The work had been going on underground, in private doubt, for years; what changed overnight was only the knowledge that the doubt was shared.

The cascade also explains why the gatekeepers of a declining paradigm fight so hard over speech. If the private truth were already known, there would be nothing to police, and they police because they sense that the public consensus is thinner than it looks.

EXEMPLARS THAT MAKE THE NEW WORLD VISIBLE

The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, in *The Honor Code* (2010), studied three completed moral revolutions—the end of dueling among British gentlemen, the end of footbinding in China, and the end of Atlantic slavery—along-

side a fourth still under way, the campaign against honor killing in Pakistan. His striking finding was that in each completed case the arguments against the practice had been available long before the practice ended. Everyone knew that dueling was illegal and un-Christian, and Chinese critics had condemned footbinding for centuries. What changed was not the argument but the code of honor.

Dueling did not die because gentlemen accepted that it was wrong; it died when it became ridiculous and vulgar. The Duke of Wellington's duel of 1829, the case taken up in Chapter X, drew public criticism, and as men of lower rank began to duel, the practice lost its standing as the mark of a gentleman. Footbinding ended quickly in the early twentieth century once Chinese reformers made it a matter of national honor. Bound feet were recast as a source of shame before the world, and families pledged together, through anti-footbinding societies, neither to bind their daughters nor to let their sons marry women with bound feet. The joint pledge solved the problem of coordination, since no family had to go first alone.

Appiah's lesson is that the new paradigm often wins by capturing the old one's deepest motive and turning it. Honor was not abolished; it was redirected. That is the most efficient form a moral revolution can take, because it converts the defenders of the old order by means of their own strongest feelings.

FORCE

Here this book must part company with Kuhn. Kuhn treated scientific revolutions as settled within the community, by its own members, and gave outside power little part in the outcome, whereas in moral revolutions force has often decided it.

Christianity became the paradigm of the Roman world in part because Constantine embraced it, Theodosius made it the official faith in 380, and his laws of the early 390s banned pagan sacrifice. Protestantism took hold where princes chose it, under the principle later summed up as *cuius regio, eius religio*. American slavery ended not through the conversion of the planter class but through a war that killed well over 600,000 men and through the Thirteenth Amendment, and the Reconstruction that followed collapsed when federal force was withdrawn in 1877. Wherever force wins the revolution, force usually has to defend the result for a time.

None of this means that moral paradigms are only power. Force can install a paradigm, but it rarely keeps one alive unless people come to see through it. Communism was imposed by force across half of Europe and never won the private conviction that Kuran's cascade later revealed to be missing. The honest picture is that persuasion, exemplars, generational turnover, and power all operate together, and a theory of moral revolution that leaves out power is only a theory of how revolutions look to the people who win them.

WINNING THE WORDS

If conversion is a change in what people see, then the first front is language. A moral paradigm stores its verdicts in its words, and people learn to see through those words long before they hold any doctrine, so every revolution ships its vocabulary first. The early Christians took the Greek word *agape* and gave it a meaning the pagans had never given it. The abolitionists made the image of the kneeling slave, asking whether he was not a man and a brother, into the emblem of their cause, and the civil-rights movement fought over who got to use the words *freedom* and *dignity*.

Four moves recur. The first is to refuse the question, declining to answer inside the old paradigm's frame, since its questions already contain its verdicts. The second is to substitute, replacing a loaded term with one that lets people see the case afresh. The third is to recover, reclaiming words the old order captured or drained, as when a debased word for duty, honor, or virtue is given back its weight. The fourth is to coin, naming a good the old paradigm had no word for, so that people can point at it together. A revolution that has not won its words has not yet begun, whatever its arguments.

THE TURN

Picture a crowd at first light, all facing west, toward where the darkness still lingers. One man turns around to face the rising sun, and for a moment he stands alone and looks foolish. Then someone beside him notices where he is looking and turns too.

The psychologist Michael Tomasello has argued that the root of human cooperation is joint attention, the uniquely human capacity to look at the same thing together and to know that the other is looking too. Infants do it before they can speak, and moral revolutions run on it. The first person to turn proves nothing;

rather, he gives others something to look at, and he lets them see that they are not alone in looking. In that single act he does the exemplar's work and pulls the cascade's trigger. The anti-footbinding pledges, Douglass on the lecture platform, and the martyrs in the arena were all, in this sense, people turning toward something and letting others follow their gaze.

TURNING WELL

Because force has decided so many moral revolutions, and because their losers were often treated as monsters, the question of how to turn is a moral question in its own right, and the record offers three rules.

First, build before tearing down. Paradigms that destroyed the old order before they had anything to put in its place produced the Terror of 1793 and the cultural revolutions of the twentieth century, whereas the early church spent nearly three centuries building organized care for widows, orphans, the sick, and the poor, along with a parallel community, before it held any power. Second, offer honorable exits. Appiah's cases show that people abandon a practice most readily when doing so lets them keep their honor. Reformers who make villains of the old order's defenders drive them to fight to the end, while reformers who let them walk away with dignity find that many will walk. Third, keep equal dignity and equality before the law as fixed points. Whatever else changes, the person on the losing side of a moral revolution remains a person with standing under the same law, and a revolution that suspends this for its enemies has adopted the very cruelty the best revolutions were made to end.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The first strain is that moral persuasion looks less disciplined than scientific persuasion. Kuhn could at least point to shared values such as accuracy and fruitfulness that narrowed the field, but if moral revolutions turn on beauty, honor, cascades, and force, it can seem that any paradigm might win, given the right exemplars and enough power. That would make moral history merely the record of who won.

The second strain is internal to this book's thesis. The paradigm of progress also won its words, also had exemplars that drew joint attention, and also leaned on power through

courts and institutions. If the same methods serve any revolution, then the methods cannot tell us which revolution to join.

The best answer is that fruitfulness is not a matter of taste. Stark's Christians lived longer and had more surviving children; slave economies needed violence to keep running; foot-binding crippled real women. Reality pushes back on paradigms through their consequences, and over time the flourishing of the communities that live by them is a test no exemplar can fake. The methods of persuasion are neutral, but the results they lead to are not. That is also why the rules of turning well matter, for they keep a revolution answerable both to reality and to the people it would otherwise crush.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
conversion	moral conversion	a change of what one sees, not a deduction
Planck's principle	generational turnover	the young convert, the old leave the stage
solving the crisis problems	answering the cases the old paradigm could not	Douglass's Narrative
new predictions, fruitfulness	communities that visibly flourish	Stark on early Christianity
aesthetic appeal	the beauty of exemplars; the redirected honor code	admiration first; Appiah on dueling and footbinding
faith in an unproven paradigm	the early adherents' wager	first Christians, abolitionists, unbinding families
(no Kuhn equivalent)	preference cascade	Kuran: private doubt made common knowledge
internal resolution	force and power	far larger in morals than in science
(no Kuhn equivalent)	winning the words	refuse, substitute, recover, coin

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says no argument compels conversion, yet some arguments clearly help. Which of his persuasive considerations has the closest moral counterpart, and which has none?
2. What does Kuhn's reliance on Planck's remark imply about how fast a moral revolution can happen, and does Kuran's cascade contradict it?

3. Kuhn keeps outside power out of scientific revolutions. Is he right about science, and what would his account look like if he let force in?
4. Where does Kuhn talk about faith in a new paradigm before it has proved itself? What is the moral equivalent of that early faith?
5. If honor could be turned against dueling, what deep motive of the present paradigm could be turned against its own excesses?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Win the Words supplies this chapter's practical front: vocabulary ships first, and your four moves (refuse the question, substitute, recover, coin) are the toolkit for the conversion stage of a revolution.
- The Turn supplies the chapter's central image: the man at first light is the exemplar who triggers a cascade through joint attention, and your shift from deconstruction to construction is the build-before-tearing-down rule.
- Your turning-well principles answer the force problem, for honorable exits and equal dignity before the law are what keep the ascent paradigm from repeating the cruelty of past revolutions.
- Ascent of the West needs the fruitfulness argument most, because the founder exemplar persuades only if communities that ask what is lost if it goes visibly build and flourish.
- Preference falsification from The End of Progress becomes here the hidden reserve a successor paradigm can draw on once private doubt becomes common knowledge.

XIII

Progress through Revolutions

Moral progress is real within a paradigm and real as a departure from failure, but it is not a march toward some fixed moral destination; and once we let that destination go, we are free to say both that our ancestors were not evil and that we ourselves may be wrong.

WHY MORALITY SEEMS TO PROGRESS

EVERY CHAPTER SO far has raised a question that this one must now answer. If moral history moves by paradigms, if its revolutions are settled by conversion rather than proof, and if the winners rewrite the record, why does morality look so plainly as though it is getting better? Few people in the West doubt that it is. The end of slavery, of footbinding, and of the duel, together with the vote for women, feel less like changes of taste than like steps up a staircase.

Part of the answer is simple: inside a paradigm, progress is no illusion, for it is just what normal virtue does. A moral community that shares an exemplar and a protocol knows what counts as a solved case, and so it can count its solutions. The early Christian communities could see that they had built hospitals, ransomed captives, and cared for the plague victims whom their pagan neighbors had left to die. The medieval church could measure the spread of the Peace and Truce of God, which tried to limit when, and against whom, knights could fight. The abolitionist movement could count the slave trade outlawed in Britain in 1807, slavery abolished across the empire in 1833, and the Thirteenth Amend-

ment ratified in 1865. Each of these was a gain by the lights of the paradigm that pursued it, and each could plainly be seen as a gain.

The paradigm of progress has the same kind of record. Its protocol is to find a constraint and remove it, and it has removed a great many. Women gained the vote in the United States in 1920; legal segregation fell with the Civil Rights Act of 1964; and laws that criminalized private conduct were repealed one by one. A member of that moral community can point to each case and say, quite correctly, that the protocol worked. That is what makes normal virtue feel cumulative. Its cases are chosen because they can be solved, its gatekeepers agree on what solving looks like, and the community is trained to take the solved cases as the measure of the whole.

There is a second reason. A mature moral community does not ask whether its paradigm is good; it asks only whether a new case fits. A catechism, a civics curriculum, or an HR training module does not lay out rival paradigms for the student to weigh, but presents exemplars and the moves they teach. A community trained in this way will register progress as a matter of course, because the only kind of change it is equipped to see is the kind its own protocol produces.

Kuhn added a point about insulation. Scientists work for an audience of fellow specialists, and since they need not choose problems for their urgency to outsiders, they can concentrate on the cases they are able to solve. A moral community has no such shelter, for everyone is a judge, and the most urgent cases are forced upon it from outside. That makes moral progress harder to measure than scientific progress, and it leaves the claim of progress more exposed to whoever controls the telling.

THE VICTOR'S VERDICT

Across revolutions, however, the story changes. When one moral paradigm replaces another, the question "was this progress?" is answered by the side that won, and Chapter XI showed how. The new catechism retells the past as an ascent to us; the old exemplars become villains or forerunners; and whatever the old order did well quietly drops out of the account.

So it was that the Christian paradigm described pagan virtue as splendid vice, a phrase often credited to Augustine, though it summarizes his view rather than quoting him. The Reformation described the medieval church as the corruption of something purer. The Enlightenment described the whole Christian era as an

age of darkness and superstition, and the liberal paradigm, in its turn, describes the past as a long series of oppressions waiting to be lifted. No winning side in this series ever described its own victory as a step down. Conversion rules that thought out, since it would mean the convert had chosen the worse; he sees the old world through the new lexicon, and in that lexicon the old world looks worse.

None of this means that every such verdict is false. It means only that the verdict is not independent, because it is issued by the very court that benefits from it. A historian of morals who takes Chapter XI seriously must therefore hold the winners' claim of progress at arm's length, much as a historian of science learns to distrust the textbook account of how a discovery came about.

PROGRESS FROM, NOT TOWARD

The deepest assumption behind the liberal idea of progress is that history has a moral destination. Theodore Parker, the abolitionist minister, preached in the 1850s that the moral universe has a long arc that bends toward justice, and Martin Luther King Jr. made the line famous a century later. Condorcet, writing in hiding during the French Revolution, sketched human history as a series of stages rising toward reason and equality, and Hegel saw history as the unfolding of freedom. Behind all of them stands the picture of a fixed moral end, already there, which each generation approaches a little more closely.

Kuhn faced the same picture in science, where it took the form of science drawing ever nearer to the truth about nature, and his move was to ask whether science needs that destination at all. He pointed to Darwin. Evolutionary ideas were already in circulation before 1859; on Kuhn's reading, the part of Darwin that many found hardest to accept was that evolution had no goal, no plan set in advance. Natural selection explains the eye and the hand without anything they were heading toward. Organisms improve relative to what came before them and relative to their conditions, and that is all. Kuhn proposed that science be understood in the same way: as progress away from earlier, weaker states of knowledge, rather than toward a final one.

The moral account takes this step directly and drops the telos. A moral paradigm can be better than the one it replaced without being any closer to an ideal endpoint, in the way that a bird's wing can be better than its ancestor's without being closer to a perfect wing. The question then changes from "how near are we to justice?" to "what did we leave behind, and was it worse?" The second ques-

tion can be answered case by case. The first cannot be answered at all, because no one has seen the endpoint, and every paradigm that claimed to see it drew it in its own image.

WHAT THE ARC CONCEALED

Once the destination goes, several things that the accretion view had hidden come into view.

First, our ancestors were not evil. On the accretion view they must have been, and the more evil the further back we look, since each generation stood further from the light. That conclusion is absurd, and Chapter I named it as the seed of this whole study. Homer's warriors, Aristotle's citizens, Augustine's pilgrims, and Confucius's gentlemen were not failed liberals; they were competent practitioners of other moral paradigms, solving the cases those paradigms posed. Bernard Williams made this point about the Greeks in *Shame and Necessity*, where he argued that their ethics was not a crude draft of ours. The paradigm view lets us say as much without having to say that nothing they did was wrong.

Second, we can make mistakes. If moral history is the unfurling of a fixed truth, then whoever stands at the leading edge is by definition closest to it, and to resist the leading edge is to resist the truth itself. That is the logic of the phrase "the right side of history," which treats the newest verdict as the most correct one. The history of morals does not bear this out. In the early twentieth century, eugenics was a leading-edge cause, backed by reformers, scientists, and progressive jurists; the Supreme Court upheld compulsory sterilization in *Buck v. Bell* in 1927, and tens of thousands of Americans were sterilized under such laws. That was the vanguard, and it was wrong.

Third, paradigms can regress, for a revolution may replace a paradigm with a worse one. The French Revolution moved from the Declaration of the Rights of Man in 1789 to the Terror of 1793 and 1794 in the space of five years. The Soviet project promised a new and higher kind of human being and produced, among much else, the famines of the early 1930s. Neither case fits a picture in which each new order stands higher than the last.

Fourth, and most important for the running case, the belief that the leading edge cannot err is no harmless piece of optimism. It is the very thing that keeps the paradigm of progress from seeing its own exhaustion. A paradigm that believes it is unfolding toward a destination has no reason to install a stopping rule;

if every removed constraint is a step toward justice, then the next removal is always justified, and diminishing returns look like resistance rather than evidence. Detector drift, concept creep, and reversals by the paradigm's own institutions are anomalies only if the paradigm can fail, and the accretion view rules out failure in advance. It is like a cab driver told to keep driving with no address, who takes every new street as proof that he is making good time.

PAST KUHN: REALITY AS TRIBUNAL

Here this book must go beyond its model, for Kuhn's Darwinian move left him with a problem. If science does not progress toward truth, what makes one paradigm better than another? His answer was that later paradigms solve more puzzles and solve them more precisely. Yet that answer always rested on something he did not dwell on, which is that nature pushes back: an experiment fails, a bridge falls, a prediction misses. Paradigms differ in how they see the world, but none of them can make the world do whatever it says.

Morality needs an equivalent, or else the paradigm view slides into the very relativism its critics fear. The moral realism developed in Map vs Territory supplies one. Moral claims are answerable to something outside the paradigm, namely the actual effects of a moral order on the people who live inside it. A paradigm is a map, and the territory is human nature, human needs, and the hard facts of what keeps a society alive; the territory pushes back through consequences.

Some of these consequences are slow and some are sudden. A moral order can fail to produce flourishing, so that its people grow less healthy, less capable, and less able to form lasting bonds. It can fail to reproduce itself, a test the celibate Shakers failed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and one that several wealthy societies face now, with South Korea's fertility rate below 0.8 children per woman in recent years. It can erode trust until its institutions can no longer coordinate the people they serve. It can lose capability until it can no longer build, heal, or defend what it has. And it can collapse outright. None of these verdicts depends on any particular paradigm's lexicon, for each is a way reality says no.

This restores a standard of better and worse paradigms without restoring a telos. The standard is not "nearer to the destination." Instead it is this: a paradigm is better to the degree that it generates goods that could not otherwise exist, and survives contact with reality while doing so. The Christian paradigm generated

the hospital and the university, along with a doctrine of equal worth on which later paradigms drew. Fertility, trust, and capability are not the preferences of one paradigm; they are the conditions that any moral order needs in order to pursue its preferences at all. The tribunal is eliminative, as natural selection is. It does not tell us where to go, only what does not work.

A SUCCESSOR'S MEASURE

What would a paradigm look like that took this tribunal seriously from the start? The successor sketched in *Ascent of the West* offers one answer, though it is only a sketch.

Its exemplar is the founder, the steward-builder who brings a lasting structure into being and maintains it, rather than the emancipator who frees people from one. Its test of any institution, custom, or norm is "what is lost if it goes?" rather than "whom does it constrain?" Its measure of progress shifts from rearranged relations among people, such as who may vote or marry or speak, to the relation between people and reality, which is to say what we can cure, build, and discover. Its scoring rule is capability with a floor: a society advances when its most capable members can do more than before and its least capable members can reliably do more than before, so that neither the ceiling nor the floor is sacrificed to the other.

Its chief claim is not that it is final but that it is correctable. Because it measures itself by reality rather than by its distance from an imagined end, it can register its own failures as failures, and a cure that does not cure, a structure that does not stand, or a policy that lowers the floor will show up on its own scorecard. That is the stopping rule the paradigm of progress lacks. And if there is progress across paradigms at all, it lies here, in the process of correction rather than in the verdicts of any one paradigm, which is the deeper order that Chapter XV takes up in its own right as the meta-paradigm of correction.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The first strain is that Kuhn's Darwinian move was meant to rid us of a standard outside the paradigms, and this book reintroduces one. A critic may say that reality as tribunal is only the old telos under a new name. The best answer is that the tribunal is negative rather

than directional: it rules out paradigms that starve, shrink, or collapse, but it does not name the shape of the right one. Natural selection, too, judges without a goal.

The second strain is that consequences must be read, and paradigms read them differently. Is falling fertility a failure or a freedom? Is lost trust a crisis or a healthy skepticism? Kuhn himself held that data are seen through paradigms. The answer is that some verdicts resist reinterpretation, for a community that does not reproduce comes to an end whatever its lexicon says. The tribunal works best at its hardest edges and gives weaker guidance in the middle.

The third strain is that survival is not goodness, and brutal empires have lasted for centuries. Here this book must concede that survival is necessary rather than sufficient, which is why the standard pairs it with generativity, the goods a paradigm makes possible. A long-lived order that generates little is not thereby vindicated.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
progress within normal science	progress within normal virtue	Real and countable: cases solved by the paradigm's own lights
victory of one camp	the victor's verdict	The winners call the revolution progress; see Ch. XI
progress toward truth	the arc of history, the right side of history	The telos this book drops
Darwinian evolution-from	progress-from	Better than what came before, not nearer an endpoint
nature pushing back	reality pushing back	Flourishing, fertility, trust, capability, collapse
puzzle-solving efficacy	generativity plus survival	Goods that could not otherwise exist, under contact with reality
insulated scientific community	the whole society as moral community	No expert guild judges morality alone
(no equivalent)	stopping rule	What a paradigm needs once it admits it can fail

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says progress is obvious within normal science. Why does the insulation of the scientific community from outsiders make that progress easier to see, and what plays that role for a moral community?
2. When Kuhn turns to Darwin, what exactly does he say is lost by dropping a goal, and what does he say remains?
3. Kuhn insists that later theories are better puzzle-solvers. Is that claim enough to block relativism without some idea of nature pushing back?
4. Does Kuhn ever allow that a scientific revolution could be a step backward? What would the moral equivalent require?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the missing stopping rule and the cab driver with no destination have their root here, for the accretion belief that the leading edge cannot err is what makes diminishing returns look like resistance instead of data.
- Map vs Territory: your moral realism is what lets this book go past Kuhn, since reality as tribunal is simply the territory correcting the map.
- Ascent of the West: the founder exemplar, “what is lost if it goes?”, and progress as man’s relation to reality together make up the successor’s measure, and capability with a floor is its scoring rule.
- The Turn: progress-from rather than progress-toward gives you the right to say our ancestors were not evil, which supports turning well, with honorable exits and with equal dignity kept as the floor.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: a moral backend that can register its own failures is the kind that can scale under leverage.

POSTSCRIPT



The Moral Matrix, Exemplars, and Relativism

A moral paradigm is at once a whole matrix of shared commitments and, more deeply, a set of model cases that teach us how to see, and this double structure lets us answer the charge of relativism without returning to the arc of history.

TWO SENSES OF MORAL PARADIGM

KUHN WROTE HIS Postscript in 1969, after critics had pointed out that he used the word “paradigm” in many senses, and he sorted those senses into two. In the broad sense, a paradigm is the whole set of commitments a community shares, which he renamed the disciplinary matrix. In the narrow sense, it is the concrete model solution, the worked problem from which a student learns, and it was this narrow sense that he held to be the deeper one. The moral account needs the same sorting, and for the same reason, since this book has used “moral paradigm” to mean both a whole moral order and the exemplar at its center.

Let us call the broad sense the moral matrix. It has four kinds of parts. The first are maxims and commandments, the short, shared formulas that a community repeats and seldom questions: love your neighbor, honor your father and mother, do no harm, everyone deserves a voice. These work much like Kuhn’s symbolic generalizations, for they are compact, they can be applied to new cases, and they carry authority because the community treats them as settled.

The second is moral ontology, or what the community takes to be really there. For a Christian moral order, the soul is real, sin is real, and grace is real. For a Homeric warrior, honor is a thing a person has or loses, as solid as a shield. For the liberal paradigm, autonomy and harm are the basic furniture, and much else is suspected of being a construct. This is the legitimacy layer named earlier in the book, the silent sense of what is real and worth counting at all, and it decides which cases can even come up.

The third is meta-values, the standards by which the community judges moral arguments themselves. Should a good argument be consistent? Should it appeal to tradition, to scripture, to consequences, or to consent? Confucian *li* weighed long practice and ritual propriety heavily, whereas the Enlightenment weighed reason and universality. The paradigm of progress weighs the testimony of those who claim to be harmed, and it treats suspicion of power as a mark of seriousness.

The fourth is exemplars, and here the two senses meet. In the narrow sense, an exemplar is the model case: the Good Samaritan, Socrates refusing to flee, Antigone burying her brother, Rosa Parks keeping her seat. These are not illustrations of rules learned beforehand; they are where the learning starts, and the rest of the matrix grows from them and is checked against them. That is why the exemplar is the deepest part of a moral paradigm, and why the four working parts named in this book begin with it.

MORAL COMMUNITIES AND THEIR STRUCTURE

Kuhn's second theme was that a paradigm belongs to a community, and that communities can be identified before we know what they believe, simply by asking who trains whom, who reads whom, and who cites whom. Moral communities can be found in the same way, though their borders are looser.

They are also nested. A person may belong at once to a church, a profession, a nation, and a university, each with its own exemplars and gatekeepers. A Catholic surgeon in Boston may learn charity from the parish, the duty of informed consent from the medical school, equality before the law from the civics class, and the vocabulary of harm and inclusion from the hospital's training office. Most of the time these layers agree. When they do not, the person feels it as a conflict of conscience, and the history of morals is full of such conflicts: the Quaker who

would not swear the oath, the doctor who would not perform the procedure, the soldier who would not fire.

The structure matters because moral revolutions rarely begin in the whole society at once; instead they begin in a sub-community and spread outward. Abolition began among Quakers and evangelicals before it took Parliament. The campaign against footbinding began in small reform societies of educated families, as Appiah's account in *The Honor Code* shows, before it reached the country at large. The paradigm of progress spread through the universities, then the professions, and then the HR offices of large firms. In each case a small community with its own gatekeepers worked out the new exemplar before the larger one adopted it. Kuhn noticed that small revolutions happen inside small specialties, and moral history shows the same pattern.

TACIT MORAL KNOWLEDGE AND LEARNED SIMILARITY

The most important claim of Kuhn's *Postscript* is that people learn to apply a paradigm not by mastering rules but by learning to see new cases as like old ones. A physics student who has worked enough problems comes to see an unfamiliar setup as a version of the inclined plane or the pendulum. The rule may never be stated, for what is learned is a sense of similarity.

Moral learning works the same way, and it is older. A child does not learn kindness from a definition. She learns it from the parable and the fable, from the example of a parent, and from the correction that follows when she gets it wrong. In time she comes to see a new situation, such as a classmate eating alone, as like the model case of the stranger in need; she could not state the rule, but she can see the resemblance. Aristotle called the developed form of this capacity practical wisdom, and he held that it could not be reduced to rules but only grown through practice and good examples. Iris Murdoch made a related point in *The Sovereignty of Good*, that most moral work happens in how we attend to things, before any choice is made.

This explains why moral paradigms are so hard to argue about. Two people who have learned different similarity relations will look at the same case and see different things. One sees a customary courtesy where the other sees a gendered constraint; one sees a sacrifice for the family where the other sees a waste of a life. Each is applying a trained perception, and neither is simply reading off a rule. It is

also why the catechism and the canon of exemplary stories matter so much, for they do not transmit propositions so much as train the eye.

INCOMMENSURABILITY AND TRANSLATION

Kuhn's critics took him to mean that people in different paradigms cannot understand one another, and in the Postscript he denied it. He compared the problem to learning a foreign language: members of different communities can come to understand each other, but only by becoming translators and learning how the other side's words carve up the world. Understanding is possible, then, but it is not automatic, and it does not by itself produce agreement.

Honor cultures are the clearest moral case. To a modern Western reader, the Homeric hero's rage over a lost prize, or the Southern gentleman's readiness to duel over an insult, can look like vanity or madness, and yet with effort they become intelligible. We can learn that in an honor culture reputation is a kind of social property, that an unanswered insult is a real loss, and that the duel, for all its cost, limited private violence by channeling it into a ritual. We learn this the way we learn a language: by immersion, by reading the texts, and by attending to how words like "honor," "shame," and "face" are used. Berger's account of honor and dignity, taken up in Chapter IX, shows why the effort is needed, since the two concepts answer different questions about where the person is.

But translation is not conversion. A historian can understand an honor culture well enough to explain it to students without wishing to live by it. Conversion is a separate step, a change in what one sees as the model case, and it does not follow from understanding alone. That is why the moral account keeps two claims apart. Moral paradigms are not sealed off from one another, for they can be understood across the divide; and yet understanding them does not settle which is better. That question needs another kind of answer.

RELATIVISM AND ITS ANSWER

The charge Kuhn most wanted to answer was relativism: if paradigms are chosen by communities, through persuasion and conversion rather than proof, then science is just whatever the winners believe. His reply had two parts. First, later scientific theories are better at solving puzzles, and that is a real and checkable improvement. Second, scientists choose among theories by means of shared values. In the Postscript he put accurate prediction first, followed by a theory's power to

set and solve puzzles, its simplicity, and its consistency; a few years later, in the essay *Objectivity, Value Judgment, and Theory Choice*, he settled on the familiar five: accuracy, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness. These values do not work like an algorithm, and two reasonable scientists can weigh them differently. Yet they are not arbitrary, and over time they push a community toward the better theory.

The moral account answers the same charge in the same way, with one change: accuracy becomes fidelity to reality. The five values for choosing among moral paradigms are these. Fidelity to reality: does the paradigm's picture of human beings, their needs, and their nature survive contact with what actually happens when people live by it? Consistency: does it hold together, and does it apply its own principles to its own members? Scope: does it cover the main cases of human life, or only a corner of them? Simplicity: can it be taught to and lived by ordinary people, or does it need a growing class of interpreters? Fruitfulness: does it generate goods that could not otherwise exist, such as new institutions, new capabilities, and new forms of trust?

These criteria are applied by communities rather than by a formula, and people will weigh them differently, one prizing scope and another fidelity. That is why moral revolutions take generations rather than arguments. Still, the criteria are not the private tastes of any one paradigm, for every serious moral order has appealed to them in its own defense. The first of them, fidelity to reality, is the hinge. It ties the choice of paradigms to the tribunal described in Chapter XIII, to the consequences (flourishing, collapse, fertility, trust, and capability) by which reality pushes back. Without that criterion, the other four could be met by an elegant fiction; with it, the choice is anchored.

So the answer to the relativist is not that we can prove which paradigm is true. It is that some paradigms do better than others by standards all of them share, and that reality keeps score.

WHAT THIS ASKS OF A READER AT A PARADIGM'S END

The framework of this book asks something hard of a person who lives, as we may, near the end of a moral paradigm. It asks him first to see the paradigm as a paradigm, and to notice that its exemplar, protocol, lexicon, and gatekeepers are not simply the shape of morality itself. That is the hardest step, because a paradigm presents itself as the way things are.

It asks him next to be fair both to the past and to the present. Our ancestors were not evil, and neither are those who still practice the paradigm faithfully. Most people inside a declining paradigm are doing normal virtue in good conscience, and the anomalies are not their fault.

It asks him, too, to resist two temptations: the one to cling to the old paradigm because no alternative is yet in view, and the other to tear it down before anything can replace it. History shows that communities rarely abandon a paradigm before a successor is ready, and that movements which tear down first usually produce chaos rather than renewal. Building comes before tearing down.

Finally, it asks him to keep the successor correctable. Every paradigm in this book claimed, at its height, to have found the right way to live; the one that deserves to come next is the one that measures itself by reality and is willing to be told it is wrong.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

The main strain is that Kuhn's values for theory choice are applied by a small, trained community of specialists, whereas moral paradigms are chosen by whole societies under pressure from power, money, and fear. A critic may say that the five criteria are therefore idealizations that no real moral community applies. The best answer is that the criteria work slowly, through consequences rather than debate. Societies do not vote on fidelity to reality; they live with its absence, and the paradigms that fail it lose adherents over time. The Shakers did not lose an argument; their celibate communities simply dwindled to a handful of believers.

A second strain concerns translation. Kuhn's foreign-language comparison assumes that the translator can stand somewhat outside both languages, but in morality the translator's own conscience is always involved, and understanding an honor culture may feel like condoning it. The answer is that the historian of morals has always done this work, from Herodotus on, and that the effort to understand without converting is itself one of the goods a healthy moral order generates.

A third strain is that "fidelity to reality" may smuggle in the very moral realism the relativist denies. That is true, and this book should admit it openly. The claim is not that the framework proves realism; it is that the framework works only if realism is roughly right.

TERM MAP

KUHN	MORAL COUNTERPART	NOTE
disciplinary matrix	moral matrix	Maxims, moral ontology, meta-values, exemplars
symbolic generalizations	maxims and commandments	Short formulas applied to new cases
metaphysical models	moral ontology	Soul, honor, autonomy, harm; the legitimacy layer
values	meta-values	Standards for judging moral arguments
exemplars	exemplars, narrow sense	Model cases; the deepest layer
learned similarity relations	trained moral perception	Seeing a new case as like the model case
translation	translation across moral paradigms	Possible with effort, but not the same as conversion
theory-choice values	fidelity to reality, consistency, scope, simplicity, fruitfulness	Applied by communities, not by algorithm
puzzle-solving efficacy	generativity under contact with reality	The non-relativist anchor

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn says the exemplar is the deeper of his two senses of paradigm. Why does he think so, and does the same reasoning hold for moral exemplars?
2. How does Kuhn propose to identify a scientific community without first knowing its beliefs, and what would the equivalent method be for a moral community?
3. In Kuhn's account of learned similarity, what is the role of the worked problem? Compare it to the role of the parable.
4. Kuhn separates understanding a rival paradigm from converting to it. Where does he locate the gap between them?
5. Is Kuhn's answer to relativism adequate without an appeal to nature pushing back? Would the moral version be adequate without reality pushing back?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the four working parts of a moral paradigm are the moral matrix sorted for use, with the exemplar first, just as the Postscript says it should be.
- Win the Words: the lexicon is where trained similarity relations are stored. “Words store the training” is the moral version of learned similarity, and recovering or coining words is a way of retraining the eye.
- Map vs Territory: fidelity to reality is the criterion that ties the five values to the territory, and your realism is what keeps the answer to relativism from being circular.
- The Turn: the closing demands, building before tearing down and keeping equal dignity non-negotiable, are your rules for turning well, applied to a reader at a paradigm’s end.
- Ascent of the West: a correctable successor, measured by what it lets us cure, build, and discover, is the paradigm the five criteria favor.

INTERLUDE



An Atlas of Moral Revolutions

Moral revolutions, like scientific ones, come in every size, from the turn that remade the moral life of half the world to the quiet shift that changed how one class of men answered an insult, and an atlas that lays them side by side lets us see that they share a single structure.

Kuhn did not build his argument on one case. He moved between the great upheavals that every schoolchild knows, Copernicus and Newton, Lavoisier's chemistry and Einstein's physics, and much smaller episodes that only a historian of science would name, such as the discovery of oxygen, the surprise of X-rays, the puzzle of the Leyden jar, and the slow acceptance of Maxwell's equations. The range was the point. If revolutions were only the rare earthquakes of the textbooks, they could be dismissed as accidents in an otherwise steady growth of knowledge; once the same anatomy shows up in a laboratory quarrel lasting a decade and in a change of cosmos lasting a century, it begins to look like the ordinary way that knowledge moves. This interlude attempts the same service for morals. The preceding chapters have drawn on many cases, but always one at a time and in support of a particular claim, and a reader may fairly wonder whether the pattern holds when the cases are laid out together, the large beside the small.

We must first say what is to count. A moral revolution, in this book's sense, is not merely a change of opinion, however wide, nor a change of law, however sweeping. Opinion can shift within a paradigm, as it does whenever normal virtue extends an old protocol to a new case, and laws can be passed that no one's

conscience follows. A revolution has happened when a community takes a new exemplar as its model of the good person and learns from that exemplar a new protocol, the routine move by which it settles hard cases; usually the lexicon is re-filled and the gatekeepers change hands along the way, and beneath all of it the legitimacy layer, the silent sense of what is real and worth counting, has moved.

Each entry is read in the same way. We ask what the old paradigm was, what anomaly it could not absorb, and how the crisis showed itself; what the new exemplar and protocol were, and who carried them and who guarded them; how long the change took to resolve; and what was preserved, in the sense of Chapter XV's *Aufhebung*, cancelled in one form and kept and raised in another. Finally, in the spirit of Chapter XIII, we ask what was gained and what was lost, for a revolution can be a real improvement and still leave behind goods that its victors forgot to count.

THE MAJOR REVOLUTIONS

THE MAJOR REVOLUTIONS are those that changed the exemplar of an entire civilization, or of several, and whose effects are still part of the legitimacy layer in which we live. They are given here in rough chronological order, and the reader should keep in mind that the dates are the dates of resolution as much as of origin, since most of these turns were centuries in the making and some were never wholly finished.

THE AXIAL TURN

In *The Origin and Goal of History*, published in German in 1949, the philosopher Karl Jaspers proposed that in roughly the six centuries before 200 BCE something happened across Eurasia that had no clear precedent. In China there were Confucius, Laozi, and Mozi; in India the Upanishads and the Buddha; in Persia Zarathustra; in Israel the prophets Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; and in Greece a line that runs from Homer through Parmenides and Heraclitus to Plato. Jaspers called this the Axial Age, the hinge on which human history turned, and he argued that these traditions arose largely independently of one another and yet moved in the same direction: away from local gods and ancestral custom, toward reflection on the whole of things and toward ethical demands addressed to human beings as such.

The old paradigm, in the Greek case, was the heroic one. Its exemplar was the warrior who claims his due and whose worth is seen and spoken of by others, and its protocol was to defend one's standing and repay friends and enemies in kind. The new exemplar was the sage, and in Greece above all Socrates, who examined his fellow citizens in the marketplace and, as Chapter II recalled, preferred death by hemlock to the abandonment of philosophy. The prophet who denounced a king for injustice to the poor, and the Buddha who left a palace to seek release from suffering, were exemplars of the same family, for each placed a demand above the order of the city and the tribe.

We should be candid that the concept is contested. The historian Diarmaid MacCulloch called the thesis "a baggy monster," a bag into which very different civilizations had been stuffed, and Iain Provan's *Convenient Myths* (2013) offered a full critique; critics ask what common cause could link developments in Greece, the Levant, India, and China, and whether the periods before and after show any clean break. Robert Bellah and Hans Joas, introducing their own collection in 2012, judged that the idea was widely but not universally accepted. The atlas does not need Jaspers's simultaneity. It needs only the observation, which few dispute, that in several places a new kind of exemplar arose who judged custom by a standard beyond it.

Read with the book's apparatus, the anomaly was the gap between custom and justice that heroic and civic orders could not see, since in those orders custom simply was justice. The protocol became the examination: test the received rule against a higher one. The new lexicon carried words like wisdom, righteousness, and humaneness, and the gatekeepers were the schools and the scribes who kept the teachings. Resolution was slow, measured in centuries, and in many places the sage's paradigm became dominant only when an empire or a church took it up. The closest Kuhnian parallel is not any single revolution but the passage, described in Chapter II, from a pre-paradigm field to its first paradigms; the Axial turn was the moment at which ethics became a discipline with exemplars. What was preserved was courage, which the sage kept and turned inward. What was lost, at least in part, was the hero's unembarrassed love of excellence seen in public, which later moralists would learn to call pride.

THE CHRISTIAN REVOLUTION

The second great turn reversed the scale of worth itself. The pagan world admired strength, beauty, and noble birth; the new faith placed at the center of its worship a man executed as a criminal, and it taught that the poor, the sick, and the abandoned infant had souls equal before God to the emperor's. Chapter IX showed that Christian humility cannot be derived from Homeric excellence, and Nietzsche, writing in 1887, read the change as a revolt in which the weak turned their weakness into a weapon. The Stanford Encyclopedia's account of his view quotes his scornful description of slave morality as "the prudence of the lowest order." The atlas accepts his structure and declines his verdict: a revaluation of all values is exactly what a moral revolution is, and the question of whether it was a gain is one the tribunal of reality has a good deal to say about.

The sociologist Rodney Stark's reconstruction in *The Rise of Christianity* shows how the minority grew. On his figures there were perhaps a thousand Christians around the year 40 and roughly six million by 300, about a tenth of the empire, which implies growth of around forty percent a decade, comparable, he noted, to the growth of the Mormons in the century after 1880. Part of his explanation was the plagues. During the great epidemics Christians nursed their sick while many pagans fled, and Stark estimated that this alone could have cut mortality sharply and raised the Christian share of the population after each wave. The pagan side confirms the impression from an unlikely quarter. In a letter of about 362 to Arsacius, high priest of Galatia, the emperor Julian, who wished to restore the old gods, complained that the Christians "feed not only their own poor but ours as well," and urged his priests to match their charity to strangers. Stark's argument has its critics. Reviewers note that Michele Salzman's study of some four hundred Roman aristocrats found little sign of wives converting husbands, and that the plague can account for only a small part of the total growth; the network and the charity remain, however, the most plausible engines of the early increase.

In the book's terms the exemplar was the crucified Christ and, after him, the martyr who forgave his killers. The protocol was to serve the least, the lexicon was a new set of words for love, sin, and grace, and the gatekeepers were the bishops and, in time, the councils. The anomaly that the old order could not absorb was the abandoned and the sick, for whom civic religion had no answer, and the crisis

was the slow failure of the civic cults described in Chapter VII. Resolution took nearly three centuries before imperial favor, and much longer before the countryside followed. This is the moral Copernicus: a minority that converted a world over centuries, against the resistance of the learned, with a new picture whose advantages were not obvious at first and whose full consequences took more than a millennium to unfold.

What was preserved was the pagan pursuit of excellence, cancelled as pride and raised, as Chapter XV put it, into the pursuit of holiness. What was gained, in Chapter XIII's terms, was large: the hospital, the moral standing of the weak, and a doctrine of equal worth on which every later Western paradigm has drawn. What was lost was the frank admiration of greatness and a certain civic spirit; Hume could still dismiss humility as a monkish virtue that men of sense reject, and the complaint was not wholly unjust.

THE CONFUCIAN INSTITUTIONALIZATION

China offers a revolution of a different kind, one in which a teaching already old became the operating system of a state. Confucius had taught more than three centuries earlier, and his followers had competed in the Warring States period with Mohists, Daoists, and Legalists, as Chapter II described. The Qin unified China on Legalist principles of law and punishment and fell within fifteen years, and the Han, after a period of favor for Daoist methods, turned to Confucianism. Britannica dates the establishment of Confucianism as the state's official teaching to 136 BCE, under the emperor Wu, and adds that it was to hold that position for some two thousand years.

The architect of the settlement was Dong Zhongshu, who lived from about 179 to about 104 BCE and served under Wu. He fused Confucian ethics with the cosmology of yin and yang, teaching that Heaven and humanity interact, that the emperor stands as Heaven's representative, and that floods, droughts, and eclipses are warnings that the ruler has gone wrong. Dong also proposed an imperial college to train officials in the classics, and from that college and the older practice of recommending worthy men grew the civil service examinations, which came to dominate Chinese education from the Song dynasty onward and were abolished only in 1905.

The old paradigm here was Legalist: its exemplar was the efficient minister who made the state strong through uniform law, and its protocol was reward and

punishment. The anomaly was the Qin's collapse, a strong state that could not hold the loyalty of its people. The new exemplar was the junzi, the cultivated gentleman, along with the sage kings of antiquity whom Confucius had held up, and its protocol was rule by moral example and ritual propriety. Its lexicon centered on humaneness, filial piety, and li, and Dong's cosmology handed the gatekeeping to the scholars, who alone could read the portents and therefore had a recognized means of checking the throne. That is an unusual feature, a paradigm that wrote a role for its own critics into its constitution.

The closest scientific parallel is Newton, not as the discovery of a new world but as the synthesis that became a curriculum and governed the textbooks for centuries. What was preserved was a good deal of the Legalist administrative state, its law codes and its bureaucracy, now carried under a Confucian lexicon. What was gained was a remarkable continuity of order and a meritocracy of learning, at least in principle; what was lost, or never admitted, was much of the Mohist ideal of impartial care, and the system's long dominance made later correction slow. Its very success, two millennia of normal virtue, is a warning that a paradigm can be stable and still have grown hard to correct.

THE REFORMATION AND THE REVOLUTION OF CONSCIENCE

In medieval Christendom the authority to settle a moral case lay with the Church, its sacraments, and its confessors. Chapter VII described how the penitential system was elaborated, over three centuries, into a machine, and how the sale of indulgences became the anomaly that a whole generation could see. Luther's theses of 1517 were the trigger; in June 1520 Pope Leo X condemned forty-one of his propositions, and in April 1521, called before the imperial diet at Worms and asked to repudiate his books, Luther took a day to think and then refused to recant unless Scripture or plain reason showed him wrong, saying that his conscience was bound by the Word of God. Tradition adds the sentence "Here I stand." The Edict of Worms that May declared him a heretic, but it could not be enforced across a divided empire.

The new exemplar was the believer standing alone before God with a Bible in his own language, and its protocol, at first, was to test every teaching against Scripture. Its significance for the atlas, though, lies in what came of it over the next two centuries, which was the revolution of conscience. The Reformers did

not intend toleration, and Calvin's Geneva could burn a heretic as readily as Rome. Yet once conscience was said to be bound only to God's word, the step to saying that it could not be bound by force was a short one. Sebastian Castellio, writing in 1554, attacked the intolerance of Catholics and Calvinists alike, arguing that freedom of conscience is a precondition of true faith. Pierre Bayle, in 1686, refuted Augustine's case for coercion, and in 1689 John Locke argued that the care of the soul belongs between each person and God, and that churches are voluntary associations with no right to use force, though he still excluded Catholics and atheists from full toleration. The political settlements moved by stages: the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 was a truce between powers of roughly equal strength, and the Edict of Nantes in 1598 permitted a minority to live by its faith on terms the crown set.

The lexicon shifted from obedience toward conscience, sincerity, and liberty; the gatekeepers passed, in Protestant lands, from bishops to pastors and princes and finally, in principle, to the individual reader. The anomaly was the merit-seeking machinery that left the scrupulous unsure they had ever done enough; the crisis was the pamphlet war of the 1520s and the wars of religion that followed. Resolution was violent and took well over a century. What was preserved was the Christian ordering of the soul, now centered on faith and inner sincerity rather than on the sacrament. What was gained was the dignity of the private conscience, which Chapter XII counted among the goods a new paradigm can bring into view. What was lost was the unity of Christendom and, with it, a shared court of appeal; Kuhn would recognize the situation, two paradigms arguing in circles from premises the other rejected, with no neutral judge and with princes deciding where argument could not.

THE BOURGEOIS REVALUATION

For most of history the merchant was tolerated and despised. Aristocratic morality ranked him beneath the warrior and the landowner, and Christian morality suspected his gain, as Chapter X showed in the long condemnation of lending at interest. The economist Deirdre McCloskey has argued, in *Bourgeois Dignity* (2010) and *Bourgeois Equality*, two volumes of a trilogy, that the most important change in modern economic history was a change in this moral verdict. Beginning around 1700 in the North Sea lands, first in Holland and then in Britain, trade, profit, and practical invention ceased to be shameful, and ordinary people

were released from the assumption that their place in a fixed hierarchy defined them. The result, on her account, was what she calls the Great Enrichment, a rise in real income for the average Westerner of some 2,900 percent, about thirtyfold.

McCloskey's claim is bold, because she sets aside the usual explanations: capital accumulation, colonial plunder, science, government policy, and institutional change are, she argues, either too small or too late to explain the enrichment. Critics are not all persuaded. The science writer Matt Ridley, reviewing *Bourgeois Equality* sympathetically, asked whether the change of rhetoric was a cause of growth or an effect of it, and suggested that cheap energy and Europe's political fragmentation also did much of the work. The atlas need not settle the economic question. Even on the most cautious reading, a revaluation of commerce occurred, and it has the anatomy of a moral revolution.

The old exemplars were the knight and the saint, and the old protocol was to rank people by birth and holiness and to treat gain as a temptation. The new exemplar was the honest trader and, later, the inventor, the person who improves things for others and is rewarded by their free choice to buy. The protocol was to let people try, and to judge an innovation by whether others wanted it. The lexicon refilled old words, so that prudence, industry, and improvement became praise; the gatekeepers were economists and moralists such as Adam Smith, novelists, and the merchants' own guilds and exchanges. The anomaly was the visible flourishing of the Dutch Republic, a small trading people grown rich and free under the eyes of larger and grander neighbors, and the resolution took about two centuries. Lavoisier offers a fitting parallel, for his revolution redescribed the same events, the same flame and the same rust, so that what had seemed one thing was seen as another; in the bourgeois revaluation the same loan and the same sale were redescribed from vice to service.

What was preserved was the Christian dignity of ordinary work, which Charles Taylor called the affirmation of ordinary life, now extended to the shop and the counting house. What was gained was, quite possibly, the end of mass poverty in much of the world. What was lost was harder to name, a sense that some goods should not be for sale and that the honor of a craft or a vocation was more than its price, and later critics of commerce, from the Romantics onward, would spend two centuries trying to say what it was.

FROM HONOR TO DIGNITY

The sociologist Peter Berger, in a 1970 essay in the *European Journal of Sociology* on the obsolescence of the concept of honor, argued that in modern democratic societies dignity has displaced honor as the idea by which a person's worth is understood. Chapter IX gave his reasoning: honor belongs to a person through his roles, as officer, gentleman, or head of house, whereas dignity belongs to the bare self beneath every role. That change has many markers, but the clearest is the end of the duel, because the duel was the place where the honor paradigm turned its verdict into action.

The duel was illegal and condemned by the churches throughout its history, yet it flourished among British gentlemen into the nineteenth century and actually grew more common in the years of the Napoleonic wars. Chapter X recalled that William Pitt the Younger fought one while Prime Minister, and in 1829 the Duke of Wellington, also Prime Minister, met the Earl of Winchilsea, who had publicly accused him of dishonesty; Wellington fired and missed, and Winchilsea fired into the air. Kwame Anthony Appiah's account in *The Honor Code*, as summarized in the *New York Review of Books*, explains why the practice died soon afterward. The Catholic Relief Act of 1829 and the Reform Bill of 1832 broke down the barriers that had kept the aristocratic world of honor apart, and as merchants, lawyers, and other self-made men began to duel, the practice lost its exclusiveness and became something faintly vulgar. In Appiah's verdict, "ridicule at last did more than morality to kill dueling." The review mentions one English gentleman killing another in a duel as late as 1852; within a generation the act that had marked a gentleman marked a fool.

Analyzed in the book's terms, the old exemplar was the gentleman who would risk his life rather than let an insult stand, and the protocol was demand satisfaction. The anomaly was that the code required the best men to commit what the law and the church called murder, and the crisis came when the code could no longer tell gentlemen from imitators. The new exemplar was the man of self-command who is above insult, and the protocol was to ignore the slight or take it to court. Honor's lexicon thinned until words like satisfaction and affront sounded antique, and the gatekeepers passed from the officers' mess and the club to the press and the magistrate. Resolution, in Britain, took about a generation once it

began, though the larger passage from honor to dignity unfolded over two centuries and is not complete everywhere today.

This is the case Chapter XV used to illustrate sublation, through Jeremy Waldron's thesis that dignity is rank leveled up: hierarchy was cancelled, the claim to regard was preserved, and that claim was raised from a few to all. Appiah resists Berger's thesis, and the atlas should note why. Honor did not disappear; it was redirected, so that the dignity revolution won partly by recruiting honor to its side. What was gained was a great deal of peace and a worth that no one can take by insult. What was lost was a strong form of public accountability for one's conduct, and a vocabulary in which shame and esteem could do their work in the open.

ABOLITION

Chapter VI asked who discovered that slavery was wrong and found the answer spread over a century and a half, from the Germantown protest of 1688 to Parliament's act of 1833. In Britain the decisive campaign belongs to the last decades of the eighteenth century, and the historian Christopher Leslie Brown's *Moral Capital* (2006) offered an account of why it came when it did. He rejected both the older economic explanation and the picture of a simple growth of humanitarian feeling, and argued instead that the loss of the American colonies left the British nation with what his publisher calls "a profound yearning for moral worth." The quarrel with America over rights had brought slavery into view, and after defeat, opposing the slave system became a way to display national virtue rather than private eccentricity. Antislavery, in Brown's phrase, became a form of moral capital.

The campaign itself was long. The House of Commons passed an abolition measure that the Lords blocked in 1792; Parliament abolished the slave trade in 1807; and the Slavery Abolition Act received royal assent on August 28, 1833, taking effect on August 1, 1834, and freeing more than 800,000 people in the Caribbean, South Africa, and a few in Canada, though most were bound to four more years of unpaid apprenticeship. The British state paid £20 million in compensation, not to the enslaved but to their owners, roughly half of it to owners living in Britain. Appiah adds a dimension the older histories missed: British working men came to regard slavery as an insult to the honor of labor, and about one and a half million Britons signed emancipation petitions in the campaign's last months. The economic account offered by Eric Williams in 1944, which held

that abolition followed the declining profits of slavery, was later undercut by the work of Roger Anstey, Seymour Drescher, and David Eltis.

The old paradigm accepted slavery as part of the order of the world, defended by scripture, property law, and the commerce of empire. The anomaly was the enslaved person who prayed, wrote, and loved his children, the case Chapter XII placed in Frederick Douglass's voice, and it was seen first by those who held the Christian paradigm most seriously, the Quakers and evangelicals. The new exemplar was the kneeling man of the abolitionists' medallion, asking whether he was not a man and a brother, and beside him the reformer who would not rest until the trade was ended; the protocol was to treat every human being as owned by no one but God. The gatekeepers were the Quaker meetings, the evangelical pulpits, and, at the last, Parliament. Resolution in Britain, counting from the first organized campaign, took about half a century; counting from Germantown, a century and a half.

The Kuhnian twin is the discovery of oxygen, whose question of who and when Chapter VI put to slavery: a discovery with no single date or discoverer, recognized by many hands over a long period, and complete only when the paradigm had been adjusted so that the free person was the expected case. What was preserved was the Christian doctrine of the equal soul, and the honor of the British nation and its workers, redirected toward freedom. What was gained needs no defense. What was lost was chiefly the slaveholders' wealth and the moral comfort of an empire that had once thought itself innocent, though the compensation shows that the old order's property claims were honored to the end, a sobering reminder that even a just revolution may buy its peace on terms its victims never agreed to.

THE RIGHTS REVOLUTION OF THE 1960S

The last major entry is the founding of our own paradigm, and so it is treated briefly here, since Part Two examines it at length. Chapter XXIII traces its sequence. It began with the most compelling case of all, the legal subordination of black Americans, and on July 2, 1964, Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, which barred segregation in places of public accommodation and discrimination in employment, and created a federal commission to enforce the ban. Within a decade the courts, Congress, and the states had applied the same proto-

col to contraception, divorce, and abortion, and John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* had given the era its philosophy.

The old paradigm was a postwar order that combined formal equality with legal segregation in much of the country and with a strong set of inherited rules about marriage, sex, and family. The anomaly was the black citizen, a veteran, a churchgoer, and a taxpayer, who could not eat at a lunch counter, and the crisis became visible on television. The new exemplar was the civil-rights marcher, and he deserved to be; the moral clarity of 1964 is not a Whig illusion. The protocol he taught was the one this book has followed from its first chapter, find the constraint and remove it, and the lexicon centered on rights, equality, discrimination, and later choice and identity. The gatekeepers were the federal courts, then the universities, the press, and the professions.

What marks this revolution in the atlas is its speed. Where the Christian revolution took centuries and abolition took half a century of organized effort, the rights revolution moved the law and much of elite opinion within about a decade, and the later extension to same-sex marriage, as Chapter XII noted, went from the margin to a constitutional right in roughly twenty years. That is the pattern of Einstein rather than Copernicus: a revolution resolved within a single generation of practitioners, driven by the young and by a gatekeeping class able to rewrite the curriculum quickly. The speed is itself evidence that the gatekeepers mattered more than in the older cases, which Chapter XXIV takes up.

What was preserved was the Christian concern for the weak, which reappeared in Rawls's principle that inequalities must benefit the least advantaged, stripped of its source and made a rule of reason. What was gained was real and large: the end of legal caste in the United States and the extension of equal standing to many who had been denied it. What was lost, and whether the protocol that served so well against segregation has since been applied to structures that were bearing weight rather than oppressing, is the question Part Two exists to answer, and the atlas leaves it there, as the one entry whose final column cannot yet be filled.

THE MINOR REVOLUTIONS

Kuhn did not build his case on Copernicus and Einstein alone. Alongside the great upheavals he set smaller ones, such as the discovery of oxygen, the surprise of X-rays, and the puzzle of the Leyden jar, and he insisted that a revolution need

not be large to be real. A change that reshapes the commitments of a small specialty, and that hardly anyone outside it notices, has the same anatomy as one that reshapes all of physics: a settled way of working, an anomaly that will not go away, a stretch of confusion, and a new way of seeing that the young take up and the old often refuse. Moral history has its specialty revolutions too, and they deserve the historian's attention for three reasons. The first is that they show the structure at a scale we can hold in view, often inside a single profession or movement, where the exemplar and the gatekeepers can be named. The second is that many of them happened fast enough to be measured, within a lifetime and sometimes within a decade, so that polls, statutes, and death counts let us watch the turn as it happens instead of reconstructing it from a few surviving sermons. The third is that they often run ahead of the great revolutions or put them to the test, for the end of the duel rehearsed the passage from honor to dignity, and the rise and fall of eugenics showed how a paradigm that called itself progress could go badly wrong. What follows is an atlas of fifteen such cases, each with its old exemplar or protocol, its anomaly, its new frame, its carriers, and its speed.

The end of dueling in Britain and America, 1804 to the 1870s. The old exemplar was the gentleman who would rather die than live insulted, and the protocol was the challenge, the seconds, and the field at dawn; even Prime Ministers obeyed it, as Wellington did in 1829 (Chapter X). The anomaly was that the practice kept killing the very men it was meant to dignify, Alexander Hamilton among them in 1804, and that as clerks and shopkeepers took it up it began to look less like honor than like vulgar imitation. The new frame came less from argument than from ridicule, the press, and the courts, for the middle class learned to defend its name through libel suits and letters to the editor, while evangelicals and utilitarians alike condemned the field of honor as plain bloodshed. In England the last fatal duel between Englishmen was fought in 1845. In America, where dueling held on longest in the South, Washington, D.C., outlawed it in 1839 after a congressman was killed, eighteen states had banned it by 1859, and the formal duel had largely died out by the 1870s. The carriers were newspapers, clergy, and a rising commercial class, and the law, as so often, arrived after opinion had already turned (Chapter XII follows Appiah's account).

Cruelty to animals, 1822 to 1840. For centuries bear-baiting and cockfighting were ordinary English entertainments, and the protocol was simple: a beast was property, and what a man did with his property was his own affair. The anomaly, sharpened by Bentham's question about whether animals can suffer, was the

growing sense among reformers that the spectacle coarsened those who watched it as much as it hurt the creatures who endured it (Chapter VI). In 1822 Parliament passed the Cruel Treatment of Cattle Act, known as Martin's Act after the Irish MP Richard Martin, often described as the first law anywhere to protect animals. Two years later, on June 16, 1824, twenty-two people met at Old Slaughter's Coffee House in London and founded the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; the Reverend Arthur Broome is counted its founder, and Martin and William Wilberforce were in the room. In 1835 bear and bull baiting were abolished, and in 1840 Queen Victoria allowed the society to call itself Royal. The carriers were the same evangelical and reforming circles that had carried abolition, which is a reminder that minor revolutions often travel on the roads the major ones have built. The turn took about two decades from statute to royal blessing.

The end of public executions in Britain, 1864 to 1868. The old protocol held that justice must be seen to be done, and so the gallows stood before Newgate, and crowds gathered to watch as they would gather for a fair. The anomaly was the crowd itself, for reformers saw that the spectacle taught the onlookers not the majesty of law but drunkenness, jeering, and a taste for death, and Charles Dickens used the national press to call public hanging a "grotesque spectacle." A Royal Commission on Capital Punishment sat from 1864 to 1866 and recommended ending executions in public. Parliament followed with the Capital Punishment Amendment Act, which received Royal Assent on May 29, 1868, and required that those condemned for murder be hanged inside the prison walls. The last man hanged in public in Britain was the Fenian Michael Barrett, outside Newgate on May 26, 1868, three days before the act became law. The carriers were novelists, magistrates, and reformers of manners, and the change was quick once it began. What Chapter X draws out is that the death penalty itself survived for generations; what changed was what the community could bear to see, a change of moral perception before it was a change of moral principle.

Child labor and the invention of the priceless child, 1833 to 1938. The old exemplar was the working family, in which every pair of hands contributed, and children labored on farms and then in mills as a matter of course. The factory made the anomaly visible, gathering children into long rows at the machines, often through the night, where inspectors and reformers could count them (Chapter XVIII). Britain's Factory Act of 1833 forbade textile mills to employ children under nine and appointed inspectors to enforce it, after earlier acts of 1802 and

1819 had set limits without any means of enforcement. America moved later and more haltingly. The Supreme Court, by one vote, struck down a federal child-labor law in *Hammer v. Dagenhart* in 1918, and not until June 25, 1938, when Franklin Roosevelt signed the Fair Labor Standards Act, did federal law bar oppressive child labor in the industries it covered, which then employed about a fifth of the labor force. The new frame, which Viviana Zelizer traced, recast the child as economically useless but emotionally priceless. The carriers were reformers, inspectors, social scientists, and teachers, and the speed was slow, for the revolution took about a century in Britain and America, which is a fair sign of how deeply the old practice was woven into the economy of poor families.

Footbinding's end in China, 1874 to the early twentieth century. Chapter XVI tells this case through Gerry Mackie's account of footbinding as a convention of marriageability, and Chapter XVII treats it as a frame. The old exemplar was the refined bride with the tiny lotus foot, and the protocol was to bind a daughter's feet in childhood so that a good family would accept her. The Manchu emperors' edicts failed, and the Kangxi Emperor abandoned the effort in 1668, because no family could stop alone without ruining its daughter's prospects. The new frame came from reform societies beginning with the Natural Foot Society in Xiamen in 1874, whose members pledged together neither to bind their daughters nor to let their sons marry women with bound feet, so that the joint pledge solved the problem of going first. The lexicon moved from the lotus to the natural foot, and the master story moved from refinement to national strength. The carriers were missionaries, educated reformers, and urban families, helped by machine-made cloth that undercut the home handwork that kept bound girls indoors. The speed is the case's great lesson, for a custom of something like a thousand years collapsed in many districts within a single generation.

Temperance and its reversal, 1826 to 1933. The temperance revolution is one of the few in this atlas that won the full force of law and then lost it. The old protocol treated drink as an ordinary part of daily life, and the anomaly was the saloon and the drunkard's ruined home, which evangelical Protestants made the center of a new moral story. The American Temperance Society was formed in 1826, Maine banned the sale of liquor in 1851, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was founded in 1874, and Kansas wrote prohibition into its constitution in 1881. Ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment was completed on January 16, 1919, and national Prohibition took effect a year later. Then the revolution regressed, as Chapter XVII describes: the dry frame was held by one part

of the nation and imposed on the rest, the cities treated the law and not the drinker as deviant, and Pauline Sabin's organization turned the dries' own defense of home and child against them. The Twenty-first Amendment was ratified on December 5, 1933, when Utah became the thirty-sixth state to approve it, though eighteen states stayed dry for a time and Mississippi held out until 1966. The carriers were churches, women's organizations, and the Anti-Saloon League; the full arc from society to repeal took about a century, and the reversal took fourteen years.

Women's suffrage in the United States, 1878 to 1920. The old protocol held that a household spoke with one political voice, the husband's, and that women's moral influence belonged in the home and not at the polls. The anomaly was that the same women who led the temperance and abolition movements, and who were praised as the nation's moral guardians, could not vote on the laws they had campaigned for. New Zealand became the first country to grant women the vote, in 1893, and in America the western states led: a suffrage amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1878, and by 1912 nine western states had adopted woman suffrage. New York followed in 1917, Woodrow Wilson shifted to support an amendment in 1918, Congress passed it in June 1919, and on August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify. The carriers were suffrage associations, women who had learned organizing in the reform movements, and the western states that served as proof that the sky would not fall. The National Archives notes, fairly, that ratification did not secure the vote for many Black and other minority women, whom state laws kept from the polls for decades more. The revolution took about forty years at the federal level, and the exemplar of the citizen-mother carried it, which shows how a new order can win by claiming an old one's ideals.

Informed consent in medicine, 1947 to 1991. This is a revolution inside a single profession, and Chapter VII uses it as an example of codes multiplying when an exemplar breaks. The old exemplar was the dedicated physician whose judgment could be trusted, and the protocol was that the doctor decided and the patient complied. The first anomaly was the Nazi doctors, whose trial opened on December 9, 1946, and ended on August 20, 1947, with a judgment that set out ten principles, the first being that the voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential. Yet the Nuremberg Code was at first dismissed as a code for barbarians, irrelevant to ordinary physicians, and gained its force only about twenty years later. The decisive anomaly was at home. The Tuskegee study, be-

gun in 1932 with six hundred Black men, withheld treatment even after penicillin became standard around 1943, and only an Associated Press story in 1972 brought it to an end. The National Research Act of 1974 created a national commission, whose Belmont Report, released in 1978 and published on April 18, 1979, named three principles: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. By 1991 the Common Rule had carried them across fifteen federal departments and agencies. The carriers were bioethicists, journalists, and review boards, and the turn, once Tuskegee broke, took less than a decade.

The stigma of smoking, 1964 to the present. The old exemplar was the man with a cigarette, relaxed, sociable, and sophisticated, and the protocol was that smoking was a private pleasure and a public courtesy. Gallup found that 45 percent of American adults had smoked in the past week in 1954. The anomaly was medical, and it was announced on Saturday, January 11, 1964, when Surgeon General Luther Terry released a report finding that smokers died at about a 70 percent higher rate than non-smokers and that the average smoker had nine to ten times the risk of lung cancer. Belief followed slowly: the share of Americans who thought smoking caused cancer rose from 44 percent in 1958 to 78 percent in 1968, and Congress required health warnings on packages in 1965. The deeper change was in the frame, as smoking passed from a matter of private risk to one of harm done to others, and the smoker passed from sophisticate to nuisance. Support for making all public places smoke-free rose from 31 percent in 2003 to 62 percent in 2019, and Gallup's past-week smoking figure stood at 11 percent in 2024, 2025, and 2026. The carriers were physicians, public-health agencies, and, later, non-smokers asserting a right to clean air. The turn took about two generations, and it is the clearest case in the atlas of a scientific finding becoming a moral one.

Drunk driving, 1980 to the early 2000s. The old protocol treated the drunk driver as a figure of comedy or bad luck, and the crash as an accident. The anomaly took the form of a single death: on May 3, 1980, thirteen-year-old Cari Lightner was killed in Fair Oaks, California, by a driver with a record of drunk-driving offenses, and her mother, Candace Lightner, founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving that year, holding its first national press conference in Washington on October 2. The new frame renamed the accident a crime with a victim, and law followed quickly: a federal law setting the drinking age at 21 was signed on July 17, 1984, and a federal law lowering the legal limit to .08 was signed on October 23, 2000, after which every state had adopted it by 2004. The designated driver,

brought to America in 1988 by Jay Winsten's Harvard Alcohol Project, supplied the honorable role that made sobriety sociable (Chapter XVII). MADD reports that 10,076 people were killed in drunk-driving crashes in 2013, a drop of more than half since its founding. The carriers were grieving mothers, legislators, and television writers, and the turn took about two decades.

Environmental ethics, 1962 to 1972. The old protocol treated nature as a store of resources and a sink for waste, and the moral question of pollution hardly arose, since smoke was the smell of prosperity. Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, supplied the anomaly by showing that the indiscriminate use of pesticides was poisoning the living world, and the case was soon made vivid by events such as the fire on the Cuyahoga River near Cleveland, so choked with chemicals that it burned. The new frame recast nature as a fragile whole, and the polluter as one who harms the common good. On April 22, 1970, about twenty million Americans, roughly a tenth of the population, took part in the first Earth Day, organized by Denis Hayes at Senator Gaylord Nelson's suggestion. Richard Nixon had already sent Congress a thirty-seven-point environmental message early that year, and by its end the Environmental Protection Agency had been created and the Clean Air Act passed, with the Clean Water Act following two years later. The carriers were scientists, writers, students, and, remarkably, a Republican administration, and the turn from book to statute took less than a decade.

Same-sex marriage, 1996 to 2015. The old exemplar was marriage as the union of a man and a woman for the sake of children, and the protocol treated homosexual relations as at best a private matter outside it. When Gallup first asked in March 1996, 27 percent of Americans said same-sex marriages should be recognized as valid and 68 percent said they should not. The anomaly was the growing visibility of gay couples who lived ordinary, faithful lives and who were shut out of the legal protections of the family, and the new frame, crucially, did not reject marriage but asked to be admitted to it. Support rose to 42 percent in 2004, 53 percent in 2011, and 60 percent in May 2015, a month before *Obergefell v. Hodges* recognized a constitutional right to marry (Chapter XXIII). It reached 71 percent in 2022 and 2023 and has since eased to 65 percent in May 2026, a softening Chapter XXVII weighs. The carriers were the young, television, and families in which someone came out, and Chapter XIX treats it as the strongest American case of culture moving before law. Measured by opinion, it took about fifteen years, one of the fastest large shifts in the atlas.

Workplace sexual harassment as a named concept, the 1970s to 1991. Before the term existed, the protocol treated a boss's advances as a private nuisance, a joke, or the price of a job. The anomaly was the growing number of women in offices and the growing number of stories they told one another, and the decisive move was lexical: in the 1970s activists, among them Lin Farley of Working Women United, gave the experience the name sexual harassment, and Farley's *Sexual Shakedown* followed in 1978. Catharine MacKinnon's *Sexual Harassment of Working Women* in 1979 supplied the legal frame, arguing that such conduct was discrimination because of sex under Title VII and dividing it into *quid pro quo* and hostile environment. An appeals court accepted the argument in *Bundy v. Jackson* in 1981, and the Supreme Court confirmed it in *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* in 1986. The term reached the general public with Anita Hill's testimony against Clarence Thomas in 1991, after which reported cases rose markedly. The carriers were feminist activists, lawyers, and courts, and the turn took about fifteen years. It is the purest case of a revolution made by coining a word, the move *Win the Words* calls coining.

Eugenics' rise and fall, 1907 to 1974. Eugenics was a revolution in its day, carried by scientists, physicians, and progressive reformers who believed they stood at history's leading edge. Its exemplar was the scientific reformer who would improve the race, and its protocol was to prevent the unfit from having children. About 8,515 Americans were sterilized between 1907 and 1927. Virginia passed its sterilization law on March 20, 1924, and on May 2, 1927, in *Buck v. Bell*, the Supreme Court upheld it eight to one, with Justice Holmes writing that "three generations of imbeciles are enough." Almost 28,000 Americans were sterilized in the following decade, and about 8,300 Virginians between 1927 and 1972. The anomaly arrived from abroad, for several Nazi defendants at Nuremberg cited *Buck v. Bell* in their own defense, and the Court had already ruled in *Skinner v. Oklahoma* in 1942 that sterilization could not be imposed as punishment for crime. Virginia repealed its law in 1974, and on May 2, 2002, Governor Mark Warner apologized for it. *Buck v. Bell* has never been formally overturned. As Chapters XIII and XV argue, the case shows that a paradigm can regress while calling itself progress, and that the correction took about half a century.

The Soviet new man, 1917 to 1991. The boldest revolution in this atlas aimed at nothing less than a new kind of human being, selfless, disciplined, and devoted to the collective, and Chapters XVII and XX examine it at length. Its exemplars were heroes of labor such as the miner Stakhanov, its protocol was the subordina-

tion of private life to the building of communism, and its frame, with its master story of history moving through class struggle, was perhaps the most complete ever built; in 1961 the party even adopted a Moral Code of the Builder of Communism. The anomaly was that the people did not change as the theory required, and by the Brezhnev years, as Alexei Yurchak has shown, the forms were performed while the belief drained out of them (Chapter VII). Alexander Zinoviev's homo sovieticus, fluent in words he did not believe, was the paradigm's real product. The carriers were the party, the schools, and the press, and still the revolution failed, which Chapter XVII takes as proof that a frame enforced without fidelity to reality cannot last. It ran about seventy years, and it is the atlas's great example of a revolution that never resolved, because the conversions it claimed were never really made.

REVOLUTIONS COMPARED

The major revolutions are treated at length above, so their rows here are brief and their times approximate.

REVOLUTION	OLD EXEMPLAR OR PROTOCOL	NEW EXEMPLAR OR PROTOCOL	TIME TO RESOLUTION	CARRIERS
Axial turn	ritual order; the hero and the king	the sage and prophet; inner virtue	centuries (approximate)	sages, prophets, schools
Christianity	civic piety; the honored patron	the martyr and saint; love of the weak	about three centuries to toleration	converts, households, the church
Reformation	the Church as mediator; penance	faith and Scripture; the believer's conscience	about a century and a half (approximate)	friars, printers, princes
Bourgeois revaluation	the aristocrat; contempt for trade	the merchant and inventor; honorable commerce	about two centuries (approximate)	merchants, Dutch and British towns
Honor to dignity	the man of honor; satisfaction for insult	the person of equal worth; law and courts	about a century and a half (approximate)	middle class, press, jurists
Abolition	the slave as property	the enslaved as brother	about a century (approximate)	Quakers, evangelicals, the enslaved

REVOLUTION	OLD EXEMPLAR OR PROTOCOL	NEW EXEMPLAR OR PROTOCOL	TIME TO RESOLUTION	CARRIERS
1960s rights revolution	segregation; fixed roles	equal citizen; “find the constraint, remove it”	about a decade at its core	students, churches, courts
End of dueling	the gentleman on the field	defense of name by law and press	about 70 years (1804 to the 1870s)	press, clergy, middle class
Cruelty to animals	the beast as property; baiting	the animal as a creature that suffers	about 20 years (1822 to 1840)	evangelicals, RSPCA
Public executions	justice seen at the gallows	punishment behind prison walls	about 4 years (1864 to 1868)	novelists, commission, Parliament
Child labor	the working family	the priceless child in school	about a century (1833 to 1938)	reformers, inspectors, teachers
Footbinding	the lotus foot, the refined bride	the natural foot, a strong nation	about a generation	reform societies, missionaries
Temperance (reversed)	drink as ordinary life	the pledge, then Prohibition	a century up, 14 years down	churches, WCTU, Anti-Saloon League
Women’s suffrage (US)	one household, one vote	the citizen-mother at the polls	about 40 years (1878 to 1920)	suffrage associations, western states
Informed consent	the trusted doctor decides	voluntary consent; review boards	about 7 years after Tuskegee	bioethicists, press, regulators
Smoking	the sophisticated smoker	the smoker as a harm to others	about two generations	physicians, health agencies
Drunk driving	the comic drunk; the accident	the crime with a victim; designated driver	about 20 years	MADD, legislators, television
Environmental ethics	nature as resource and sink	nature as fragile whole	under a decade (1962 to 1970)	scientists, students, Congress
Same-sex marriage	marriage as man and woman	marriage open to same-sex couples	about 15 years in opinion	the young, television, families
Sexual harassment	the boss’s advance as private nuisance	a named wrong under Title VII	about 15 years	activists, lawyers, courts
Eugenics (reversed)	the scientific improver of the race	sterilization condemned	about 50 years to repeal	scientists, reformers, then critics
Soviet new man (failed)	the selfless builder of communism	never installed; homo sovieticus	about 70 years, unresolved	party, schools, press

Laid side by side, the cases teach several lessons, and the first is that size and speed vary with the size of the community that must be converted. The end of public hanging needed only Parliament and a reading public, and it took four years; the end of child labor needed to reach every poor household and every mill, and it took a century. The major revolutions, which had to reach whole civilizations, took centuries, whereas the minor ones, confined to a profession, a class, or a single practice, could finish within a decade. The second lesson is that minor revolutions usually begin inside a sub-community and spread outward, much as Kuhn's specialty revolutions do: informed consent began among a few physicians and ethicists and reached the whole of medicine through review boards, and same-sex marriage moved first among the young and through the screen before it reached the courts. The third is that nearly every case began as a frame carried by a committed minority, whether evangelicals at a London coffee house, women pledging in Xiamen, or a grieving mother with a press conference, and only later won the majority. The fourth is that law usually came late, as a seal on a change of opinion instead of its cause, for Washington outlawed dueling after it was already discredited in the North, and Obergefell followed a majority in the polls; where law came first, as with Prohibition and the Manchu edicts, it tended to fail. The fifth is that revolutions can be reversed or fail outright, as temperance, eugenics, and the Soviet new man show, which honors Chapter XIII's insistence that moral change is progress-from and not a march toward a fixed end. The last is that technology often set them going, as Chapter XVIII argues: the factory made child labor visible, the automobile made drunkenness lethal, epidemiology made smoking a matter of statistics, and machine-made cloth undercut the economics of the bound foot.



WHERE THE ANALOGY STRAINS

Kuhn's specialty revolutions happened inside communities of experts who shared journals, instruments, and standards of proof, so that a change in what a few dozen physicists believed could be dated by the papers they published. Most of the minor moral revolutions in this atlas were not like that, for they had to reach ordinary people who belonged to no specialty at all, and the line between a revolution confined to a sub-community and a broad change of manners is often hard to draw. Informed consent is a true specialty revolution,

whereas the stigma of smoking is closer to a shift in a nation's habits, and one name may hide real differences.

A second strain is that several of these cases look less like a change of paradigm than like the extension of an existing one. The end of public hanging, the cruelty acts, and the ban on child labor can each be read as the humanitarian paradigm of the nineteenth century applying its protocol to new cases, which is what Kuhn would call normal science and what this book calls normal virtue. The best answer is that the line between an extension and a revolution is drawn by those who live through it, and that in each case the people who held the old protocol experienced the change as a reversal of what they had been taught to see, whatever its later place in a larger story.

A third strain is that a table invites false precision. Dates of resolution are partly a matter of choice, since a revolution in opinion, in law, and in practice rarely finishes at the same moment, and the carriers named are only the most visible. The table should be read as a map of shapes, useful for comparison, and not as a measurement.

READING QUESTIONS

1. Kuhn placed small revolutions such as the discovery of X-rays beside large ones and argued that they share one structure. Which minor moral revolution in this atlas seems most like a specialty revolution in his sense, and which seems least like one?
2. Kuhn noted that scientific revolutions often look invisible afterward, because textbooks rewrite the history as steady accumulation. Which of these cases now seems to you so obviously right that it is hard to imagine anyone resisting it, and what does that tell you about the Whig history of morals?
3. In Kuhn's survey, the anomaly that triggers a revolution is often noticed by those closest to the old paradigm's work. Which carriers in this atlas were insiders of the order they overturned, and which were outsiders?
4. Kuhn's survey has little to say about revolutions that were later undone. What do temperance and eugenics suggest about whether a moral revolution can be a mistake, and how would we know?
5. If the speed of a revolution varies with the size of the community it must convert, what does that predict about a revolution against the present paradigm, which is held across a whole civilization?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: eugenics is your autoimmune image in miniature, a paradigm of progress that turned against the weak it claimed to serve, and its fifty-year correction shows that the detector can be recalibrated, though slowly and at great cost.

- Win the Words: sexual harassment and the designated driver are the clearest proofs in the atlas that coining a word can make a revolution, and the shift from the lotus foot to the natural foot shows substitution at work.
- Map vs Territory: smoking and drunk driving are cases where the territory forced its way into the map, since deaths and cancer rates made the old protocol untenable however the words were arranged; the Soviet new man is the opposite case, a map that tried to remake the territory and failed.
- Ascent of the West: the minor revolutions suggest a route for any successor paradigm, which is to begin in a sub-community willing to live by it, prove it there, and let law come late.
- The Turn: the anti-footbinding pledges and the RSPCA's founding meeting show turning well in practice, with small groups building something new together before the old order was torn down.

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PART ONE



Beyond Kuhn

Section Two

XIV

Morality and Culture

Morality and culture are one thing seen from two sides: the moral paradigm decides what a culture forbids, permits, honors, and finds beautiful, while culture is the medium through which a moral paradigm lives, spreads, and changes—often from below.

THE QUESTION KUHN DID NOT NEED TO ASK

KUHN COULD WRITE about science without saying much about popular culture, for a physicist's paradigm lives in journals, laboratories, and textbooks, and it has no need of novels, songs, or holidays to survive. A moral paradigm does. It is taught in bedtime stories and sermons, carried in manners and jokes, celebrated in holidays and monuments, dramatized in films, and sung in hymns and anthems; take those away, and the paradigm has nowhere left to live.

So the moral account must ask a question that Kuhn could safely skip: how does a moral paradigm relate to the culture that carries it? Does the paradigm shape the culture, or does the culture shape the paradigm?

This chapter's answer is that each shapes the other, in a loop, and at different speeds. That loop matters for everything that follows, because if culture can move morality, then culture is one of the levers by which moral paradigms change, and any theory of moral change, including a theory of deliberate change, must account for it.

First, though, two definitions. In this book a moral paradigm is the working order described in Part One: an exemplar, a protocol, a lexicon, and a body of

gatekeepers, all resting on a legitimacy layer that decides what is real and worth counting. Culture is the larger whole, the shared stories, symbols, practices, manners, arts, and institutions through which a people lives. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz described culture as webs of significance that people spin and then live inside, and the moral paradigm is the part of that web that carries weight.

CULTURE AS A SYSTEM OF MORAL DEMANDS

The sociologist Philip Rieff gave the strongest account of how the two fit together. In *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1966) he treated a culture as, at bottom, a system of moral demands, and he argued that every culture is built from two kinds of thing. Its interdicts say what may not be done; its remissions say where the interdicts relax—the holiday, the carnival, the confession that lifts guilt, the zones where people are let off. A culture is a particular balance between the two, and it is that balance which forms its people. Rieff thought the phrase “moral culture” said the same thing twice, since on his view a culture with no moral demands is not a culture at all.

This view has two consequences that prove useful for this book.

The first is that it explains why moral paradigms reach so far into ordinary life. A culture does not keep its interdicts in a code book; it keeps them in what people are embarrassed to say, what they would never wear, what they laugh at, and what they treat as unspeakable. Here is where the legitimacy layer described in Chapter IV actually lives, and so a question that a paradigm cannot pose as a moral case usually cannot be posed at dinner either.

The second is that it gives a precise description of the progress paradigm. Rieff argued that Western institutions, once instruments of restraint, were becoming instruments of release, and he called the result an anti-culture: a culture organized around remissions, in which the sources of restraint, such as guilt, shame, and obligation, are treated as the real oppressions. The protocol of the progress paradigm, find the constraint and remove it, is remission made into the whole program. Rieff saw it coming in 1966, before most of its later extensions had arrived.

Yet Rieff's framework also predicts something the progress paradigm does not expect, for a culture made only of remissions is impossible. Interdicts do not vanish; they migrate. Émile Durkheim argued that every society marks some things as sacred, setting them apart and protecting them by taboo, and the progress par-

adigm has its sacred things too: the victim, equality, the self's own account of who it is. It has its interdicts as well—words that cannot be said, jokes that end careers, views that cannot be voiced in a faculty meeting. The flood of speech codes and conduct rules described in Chapter V is simply what an anti-culture looks like in practice. It is not a culture without demands, but a culture whose demands have moved to new ground and, in moving, have lost the old ones' sense of proportion.

HOW MORALITY SHAPES CULTURE

The first direction of the loop runs from the moral paradigm down into culture. A paradigm decides what stories get told and how they end, whom the audience is invited to admire, and what counts as beautiful.

The clearest American case is the Production Code, often called the Hays Code, which Hollywood adopted in 1930 and began enforcing in earnest in 1934. For more than three decades it governed what American films could show: crime could not be made sympathetic, nor adultery attractive; ministers could not be mocked; and marriage was to be upheld. The Code was the moral paradigm of its day written into the production rules of the most powerful storytelling industry on earth. When that paradigm weakened in the 1960s, the Code weakened with it, and in 1968 it was replaced by the ratings system. The ratings did not tell filmmakers what to affirm; they told audiences only what to expect. That shift, from a code of demands to a scale of warnings, is Rieff's move from interdict to remission in miniature.

The same pattern holds across history. For a thousand years Christian iconography dominated European painting, because the Christian paradigm decided what deserved to be painted. Victorian novels ended in marriage because the Victorian paradigm treated marriage as the completion of a life, and Confucian ritual shaped Chinese manners down to the order in which people entered a room.

The progress paradigm shapes its culture in just the same way. Its master plot is the emancipation story, in which a person breaks free of family, tradition, religion, small town, or body, and the breaking free is the happy ending. Its admired figures are the rebel and the outsider; its suspect figures are the father, the priest, the officer, and the founder. And its institutions write the standards down. In 2020 the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced representation standards that films must meet to be eligible for Best Picture, phased in from

the 2024 awards. Whatever one thinks of those standards, they are the structural descendant of the Hays Code: a moral paradigm written into the rules of the storytelling industry, this time with the opposite content.

HOW CULTURE SHAPES MORALITY

The second direction runs the other way. Culture does more than carry the paradigm; it can change it, and the evidence for this is strong.

The historian Lynn Hunt argued in *Inventing Human Rights* (2007) that the eighteenth-century epistolary novel helped to make human rights thinkable. Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* and Rousseau's *Julie* drew huge audiences into the inner lives of people unlike themselves, servants and young women among them, and in doing so taught readers to feel with strangers. It was this new habit of empathy, Hunt argues, that made the abstract claim of universal rights seem self-evident by 1776 and 1789. Critics note that the same novels also sensationalized suffering, and that an empathy based on sameness has its limits. But the core claim, that a habit of reading prepared the ground for a moral revolution, has held up well.

In 1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold some 300,000 copies in the United States in its first year. It contained no argument against slavery that the abolitionists had not already made; what it did was make the argument felt, in homes that had never read a pamphlet.

Modern social science can measure the effect directly.

- Robert Jensen and Emily Oster studied rural Indian villages that gained cable television between 2001 and 2003. Women in those villages reported more autonomy, were less likely to say that wife-beating was acceptable, and showed less preference for sons, while girls' school enrollment rose. The change in attitudes was about as large as the effect of five and a half more years of education. The study was not randomized, but the pattern was sharp.
- Eliana La Ferrara, Alberto Chong, and Suzanne Duryea found that Brazilian women living where the Globo network's soap operas could be received had significantly lower fertility, with the strongest effect among poorer women; the soap operas featured small families. The authors found no sign that Globo had simply chosen areas where fertility was already falling.

- Edward Schiappa, Peter Gregg, and Dean Hewes found in a 2006 study that viewing *Will & Grace* was associated with lower prejudice toward gay men, especially among viewers with little personal contact with gay people. They called this parasocial contact, by which they meant getting to know a group through characters on a screen. In May 2012, Vice President Joe Biden said on *Meet the Press* that the show had done more to educate the American public than almost anything else.

The most important finding for this book comes from a randomized field experiment. In 2009 the psychologist Elizabeth Levy Paluck reported on a year-long radio soap opera in post-genocide Rwanda. Communities assigned to hear a drama about reconciliation did not change their personal beliefs much more than communities that heard a health program; what changed instead were their perceived norms, their sense of what other people thought and did. Listeners became more accepting of intermarriage, more willing to voice dissent, and more trusting and cooperative. They did not need to be persuaded one by one; they needed only to learn that others had moved, rather like guests at a party who all wish to go home but each waits for someone else to reach for a coat.

That finding points straight to Chapter XV. Culture moves morality less by converting individuals than by changing what each person believes everyone else believes, which is to say that it works as a coordination device.

It is also morally neutral. David Yanagizawa-Drott studied the Rwandan radio station that broadcast incitement during the 1994 genocide, and by comparing villages that could and could not receive its signal, he estimated that the broadcasts accounted for about ten percent of the genocide's violence, or roughly 51,000 perpetrators. The same tool that taught reconciliation a decade later had first taught slaughter. Culture can move morality toward better or toward worse, for it has no built-in direction of its own.

THE LONG RUN

Over centuries, the loop can reshape whole peoples.

The anthropologist Joseph Henrich argued in *The WEIRD People in the World* (2020) that the medieval Church's rules on marriage—its bans on cousin marriage and polygamy and its preference for the nuclear household—slowly dissolved Europe's clans. A people without strong clans had to trust strangers, form voluntary associations, and live by abstract rules, and over many generations,

Henrich argues, this produced a distinctive psychology: more individualist, more analytic, and more guided by impartial principle. Critics question parts of the causal chain, and some argue that the Church was responding to social change more than causing it. But if Henrich is even partly right, then a moral program changed family life, family life changed culture, and culture changed how people think.

The economist Deirdre McCloskey argues something similar about wealth. In *Bourgeois Dignity* (2010) and the books around it, she holds that the great rise in prosperity after 1800 was caused less by capital or institutions than by a change in how people talked about commerce. Beginning in Holland and then in Britain, merchants and inventors gained a dignity that aristocratic and Christian moralities had long denied them, and when the talk changed, the behavior followed. In this case the moral paradigm's verdict on the trader, carried through culture, changed the material world itself.

THE LOOP AND ITS SPEEDS

Put the two directions together and the picture is a loop. The moral paradigm sets the legitimacy layer, which decides what culture honors, forbids, and finds beautiful; culture forms the people who grow up inside it; and those people produce new exemplars, new stories, and new perceived norms. These either reinforce the paradigm or strain it, and the strain, if it builds, becomes the anomaly and crisis described in Chapters VI and VII.

The two halves, however, move at different speeds. Culture is fast, for fashions, songs, shows, and slang turn over in a matter of years, whereas the deep parts of a moral paradigm, its ontology and its exemplars, are slow and turn over only in generations. That difference explains a common pattern. Culture often runs ahead of morality, showing a new way of life on screen years before law or doctrine catches up, as television did with divorce, cohabitation, and same-sex couples. Yet culture can also lag behind, preserving old forms such as the church wedding long after the belief behind them has thinned, much as an old house keeps its chimney long after the fireplace has been bricked up.

The fast half has a special role, because culture is where a society auditions new exemplars before it commits to them. A novel, a film, or a song can show what a new way of life looks like and let millions try it on in imagination, at no cost to anyone. In that sense art is the moral research and development of a civi-

lization: the place where anomalies first become visible and where candidate successors are first given a face.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THE PRESENT PARADIGM

Applied to the present, the chapter suggests three things for Part Two to test.

First, the progress paradigm dominates prestige culture—the major studios, the award bodies, literary publishing, and the arts institutions. Its master plot is emancipation, and its default stance toward inherited structure is suspicion.

Second, its culture is Rieffian in the sense described above: organized around remissions, yet generating new interdicts with great intensity. The coexistence of radical permission in some domains and severe taboo in others is therefore not hypocrisy; it is just what the loop predicts when a paradigm built on release still needs something sacred.

Third, if culture is where successors are auditioned, then the signs of a coming shift should appear in culture before they appear in law. Part Two will look for them in the gap between prestige culture and popular taste, in the culture produced outside the major institutions, and in what young people find admirable.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The first strain is causation, since much of the evidence above is correlational. Jensen and Oster compared villages that gained cable with those that did not; La Ferrara and her coauthors used the timing of a network's expansion; and the Will & Grace study measured viewers who chose to watch. Marx would say that culture is a superstructure that follows material change, and critics of Henrich say something similar about the medieval Church. The best answer is that the strongest single study, Paluck's, was randomized, and that the loop does not require culture to be the first cause. It requires only that culture can move morality, which the evidence supports, and that morality can shape culture, which the Hays Code and its successors show directly.

The second strain is that "culture as a system of moral demands" proves too much, for much of culture, from cuisine to technical skill, seems morally neutral. The answer is that the claim concerns the binding core of a culture and not every part of it. Even so, the reader should treat Rieff's definition as a lens rather than a law.

The third strain matters most for the later chapters of this book. Nearly all the evidence above concerns broadcast media—one cable network, one soap-opera producer, one radio station—and broadcast media are centralized. If culture moves morality chiefly through a few central producers, that strengthens the top-down account of moral change which the author doubts. Chapter XVIII must weigh this honestly and ask whether the move from broadcast to networked media has changed the answer.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
culture	the shared stories, symbols, practices, manners, and institutions a people lives by	the larger whole
moral paradigm	the weight-bearing core of a culture	exemplar, protocol, lexicon, gatekeepers
interdict	what a culture forbids	Rieff
remission	where a culture relaxes its demands	Rieff
anti-culture	a culture organized around remissions	Rieff’s term for the therapeutic order
perceived norm	what each person thinks others believe and do	Paluck’s key variable
parasocial contact	knowing a group through characters on a screen	Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes
the loop	paradigm shapes culture; culture reshapes paradigm	at different speeds

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Which interdicts of present American culture would a person of 1955 find strangest, and which remissions?
2. If art is moral research and development, what new exemplars is today’s culture auditioning?
3. Paluck found that culture changed perceived norms rather than private beliefs. What follows for someone who wants to change a moral paradigm?
4. Does the move from broadcast to networked media make culture more or less able to move morality, and in which direction?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Win the Words: your three layers (mental and moral, symbolic, material) fit this chapter well. Culture is the symbolic layer at full size, and words are its densest part.
- The End of Progress: Rieff's anti-culture is the progress paradigm seen from the side of culture. A protocol of pure removal produces a culture of remissions, and Rieff predicted the new interdicts it would raise.
- The Turn: the painting of the man turning toward the sun is a cultural act in this chapter's sense, an audition of a new exemplar.
- Ascent of the West: a successor paradigm needs a culture of its own, with its own interdicts, remissions, stories, and sense of beauty, and not merely its own arguments.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: AI-generated culture may soon be the largest producer of stories on earth, which makes it part of the moral backend whether anyone intends it or not.

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XV

The Meta-Paradigm: Correction as the Deeper Order

No moral paradigm is the correct one, yet the series of paradigms is not a random walk, for beneath them runs a slower and less visible order—an unfinished, uneven, and often interrupted process of correction against reality—which is the true home of moral progress and of which we are largely unaware even when we have learned to see the paradigm itself.

THE QUESTION BENEATH THE PARADIGMS

CHAPTER XIII DROPPED the telos and held that moral progress is progress-from rather than progress-toward, so that paradigms can be judged by a tribunal of consequences without any of them being the final word. Yet if no paradigm is the correct one, and each will in time be replaced by a way of seeing it cannot derive, we may fairly ask what, across all these revolutions, actually moves forward. If the answer is nothing, then the history of morals is a sequence of fashions, and the tribunal is only a polite name for whatever happens to survive.

This chapter's answer is that what moves forward is not any paradigm but the practice of correcting paradigms. Each moral order is a map, drawn in good faith by people trying to live well, and each is eventually caught out by the territory; when that happens, the best of its successors does not erase the old map and start from nothing, but learns from the failure, keeps what held, and redraws what did

not. What accumulates over the long run is not a pile of correct verdicts, as the accretion picture imagines, but a growing skill at noticing error and a growing stock of institutions that let error be noticed. We may call this the meta-paradigm: the order of correction within which paradigms rise and fall.

It is rather like a family recipe handed down through generations. No cook ever owns the final version, and some make it worse, adding sugar where salt was wanted; yet the family keeps tasting, and the table keeps telling the truth, so that the practice of tasting and adjusting is the real inheritance, more lasting than any card in the recipe box. The accretion picture looks at the latest card and calls it the recipe, whereas the meta-paradigm is the tasting.

Several thinkers have seen some version of this, and we begin with the one who saw it most grandly.

WHAT HEGEL SAW, AND WHAT HE DID NOT SAY

Most readers know Hegel's dialectic as a three-step formula: a thesis meets its antithesis, and the two are resolved in a synthesis. The formula is tidy, memorable, and largely not his. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy notes that the triadic language of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis belongs to Fichte, and that Hegel, who used it rarely and chiefly when lecturing on others, never adopted it to describe his own philosophy. It was Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus, in Dresden lectures of 1835 and 1836 published in 1837, who described Hegel's dialectic in those three words and so helped fix the label on him. Hegel himself warned that a triple rhythm applied from outside becomes "a lifeless schema," since the movement of thought must come from the inner life of its subject.

What Hegel actually offered was a stranger idea, carried by the German verb *aufheben*, which can mean to cancel, to preserve, and to lift up, and which Hegel used to mean all three at once. Its English rendering is sublation. When one stage of thought or history is sublated by the next, it is negated as a whole, yet what was true in it is kept and raised into a larger setting where it does work it could not do before.

That is a far better description of a moral revolution than the formula that bears Hegel's name. Chapter IX argued that Christian humility reversed the Homeric scale rather than extending it, and that remains true; yet the Christian revolution did not simply discard the pagan world. The pagan pursuit of excellence was cancelled as pride and preserved as the pursuit of holiness; the warrior's

courage was cancelled as a means to glory and raised into the courage of the martyr who will not deny his faith before the arena. Or take dignity. Jeremy Waldron's thesis, discussed in Chapter IX, is that modern dignity is a leveling up of rank, the high standing once reserved for nobles having been extended to everyone; and seen through Hegel's verb, that leveling up is a textbook sublation. Rank as hierarchy was cancelled, for a rank that everyone holds stands above no one; rank as a claim to a certain regard was preserved; and that claim was lifted from a few to all. Chapter IX insisted that meanings change in such transfers, and sublation honors that insistence, for it admits the cancelling and the loss as frankly as it admits the keeping.

Hegel added a second idea that bears even more directly on our question. In his lectures on the philosophy of history he described the cunning of reason: history works out a larger purpose through people who are pursuing their own passions and interests, such as ambition, honor, and career, and who have at most a dim sense of what they are serving. Hegel famously called Napoleon the world-soul on horseback, a man who thought he was building an empire and was, on Hegel's view, serving something larger. Take away the metaphysics, and the cunning of reason is a precise description of the meta-paradigm of which we are unaware. The abolitionist believed he was obeying God, and the reformer believed he was removing a constraint; yet each, without seeing it, was also a moment in a civilization's long testing of its maps against the ground. Hegel also saw why the process is so hard to see from inside. In the preface to the *Philosophy of Right* (1820) he wrote that the owl of Minerva, the bird of wisdom, takes flight "only with the falling of the dusk": a way of life becomes intelligible to philosophy only as it passes.

Here, however, we must part ways with him, for in Hegel the process had a destination. History was the progress of the consciousness of freedom, moving toward Absolute Spirit, and the traditional reading, which Karl Popper pressed hard, takes this to mean a logically necessary course of history with a known end. Recent scholars dispute how literally Hegel meant it, and we need not settle the dispute, because Chapter XIII already rejected every moral destination, the arc that bends toward justice no less than the Absolute. So we keep his structure and drop his goal: sublation as the shape of a good revolution, the cunning of reason as the reason we do not see the larger process, and the owl at dusk as the reason we see it late, with no assurance that the process is heading anywhere in particular.

CORRECTION WITHOUT A DESTINATION

Several later thinkers kept something like Hegel's structure while refusing his telos, each in his own field. The American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, in his essays of 1877 and 1878 in *Popular Science Monthly*, argued that the method of science is self-correcting. Investigators may start from different hypotheses and use different methods, yet if they keep inquiring, their results are drawn toward the same conclusion, and Peirce defined truth as the opinion "fated to be ultimately agreed to by all who investigate." He was a thoroughgoing fallibilist, holding that every particular result is provisional and that we can never tell how near we stand to the limit. He still kept a limit, an ideal point of convergence, and so he is a partial exception to our move; but what matters is where he placed his confidence, which was not in any present opinion but in the process. His first principle of reason was a single command, do not block the way of inquiry, and it translates directly into morals: the worst thing a moral paradigm can do is not to be wrong, for every paradigm is wrong somewhere, but to make itself uncorrectable.

Karl Popper took the next step. Knowledge, on his account, grows by conjecture and refutation: we meet a problem, propose a tentative theory, eliminate its errors by criticism and test, and arrive at new problems. He applied the same logic to politics. In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, written in New Zealand during the Second World War and published in 1945, he set aside Plato's question of who should rule and asked instead how institutions might be arranged so that bad or incompetent rulers cannot do too much damage. Democracy, on his view, matters chiefly because it lets a society correct its errors without bloodshed, and he preferred piecemeal reform, watched for its unintended effects, to any blueprint for the whole. He also attacked historicism, the belief that history unfolds by laws toward a determinate end, and diagnosed in it "the habit of confusing trends with laws." No phrase answers the arc of history more briefly. A trend may be real, as the widening of moral concern since the eighteenth century may be; but a trend can stall or reverse, and to treat it as a law is to lose the ability to notice when it has.

Friedrich Hayek carried the idea into the history of morals proper. In his 1978 Hobhouse Lecture, "The Three Sources of Human Values," printed as the epilogue to the third volume of *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1979), he argued that

our most valuable rules of conduct were neither inborn instinct nor the product of deliberate reason, but a third thing: practices that evolved over many generations and were followed by people who could not have stated why they worked. He drew on the Scottish Enlightenment, and especially on Adam Ferguson, who wrote in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) that many institutions are the result of human action but “not the execution of any human design.” Hayek called such an order *cosmos*, in contrast to *taxis*, an arrangement deliberately made. A moral tradition, on this view, is a store of corrections that no one designed and few could explain, which is why the rationalist who would tear it up for want of seeing its reasons is so dangerous. Here is the cunning of reason again, with the World Spirit removed and selection put in its place.

Alasdair MacIntyre supplied what the others lacked, an account of how one tradition can rationally defeat another without any neutral judge. In a 1977 essay, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science,” he described the moment when the stories by which a person or a tradition makes sense of the world stop working. Such a crisis is resolved only by a new narrative, one that explains both why the old beliefs seemed reasonable and how they misled. In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) he turned this into a test between rivals. A tradition is in crisis when it can see, by its own standards, that it has problems it repeatedly fails to solve. A rival vindicates itself when it can explain why the troubled tradition was bound to fail in just that way, when it can overcome the problems, and when it is not itself in crisis. As one commentator puts it, the problems are recognized by the standards of the first tradition and explained and overcome by the standards of the second. The 1977 essay drew a further lesson from two literary figures. Jane Austen’s *Emma* corrects her errors and settles into a new certainty, whereas Hamlet learns that we are never in a position to say we now possess the final truth, and MacIntyre remarked that “Philosophers have customarily been Emmas and not Hamlets.” He developed this account with Kuhn as a foil, preferring Lakatos, who left more room for reason in the passage between research programs; and this book has been attempting something similar, keeping Kuhn’s structure while giving the switch between paradigms a reason.

Finally, the physicist David Deutsch, in *The Beginning of Infinity* (2011), contrasted static societies, which changed too slowly for anyone to notice within a lifetime, with the dynamic society that emerged when open criticism of ideas

became a settled practice; on his account the Enlightenment's great achievement was less any doctrine than the tradition of criticism itself.

Five thinkers, then, in five fields, and one move. Each placed progress in the process of correction rather than in the product of any given moment; each held that the process runs through people who do not fully see it; and all but Peirce declined to name a destination.

WHERE THE PROGRESS REALLY LIES

Now we can state the chapter's central claim: meta-progress is real, but it does not lie in any object-level paradigm, whether Homeric, Christian, Confucian, liberal, or whatever succeeds the liberal; it lies in the process by which paradigms are tested against reality and revised in light of what the test reveals. Reality as tribunal, in Chapter XIII's phrase, is the court, and the meta-paradigm is the long history of that court's sessions: the anomalies that were finally registered, the crises that were finally admitted, and the successors that could explain, in MacIntyre's sense, why their predecessors failed.

Seen in this light, the accretion picture makes a particular and instructive mistake. It senses, rightly, that something real has been gained over the centuries, but it credits that gain to the present paradigm, as though the whole history of correction had been a preparation for us. Having done so, it cannot afford to find errors in itself, for to admit that the present paradigm is wrong would seem to deny that progress happened at all; and so the willingness to be told one is wrong, which is what makes progress possible, is disabled by the belief that progress has culminated in us. Chapter I said the accretion picture disables self-correction, and now we can see the mechanism. It mistakes the meta-progress, which is real, for the present paradigm, which is contingent, and so it borrows the authority of the whole process to shield one moment of it from review.

The running case shows the point. The paradigm of progress tells abolition as one of its own victories, yet abolition, as the Postscript noted, began among Quakers and evangelicals whose exemplar was Christ and not the emancipator. What abolition shows is not that the liberal paradigm was right all along but that Western moral communities, under several paradigms in succession, kept the capacity to notice a monstrous anomaly and act on it; and that capacity belongs not to liberalism but to the meta-paradigm.

Two cautions keep this claim honest. The first is that meta-progress is not guaranteed. Correction can stall, as it did through the decades of compromise over American slavery from 1820 to 1850, and it can reverse, as Chapter XIII showed with the eugenics of the 1920s and the slide from the Rights of Man to the Terror. Hayek's selection of rules, moreover, works on a scale of generations, too slow to save those who live under a bad rule in the meantime. The meta-paradigm is itself non-linear, a process that can be helped or hindered and that sometimes goes dark for centuries.

The second caution concerns what drives correction at all. W. Matthews Grant, writing on MacIntyre, presses a fair question: why should a tradition ever turn up defective by its own standards, rather than reinterpreting every failure as success? His answer, drawn from Aquinas, is that "reality measures the mind," since what we know is in part caused by the thing known. That is exactly the role this book has given to the tribunal. Without reality pushing back there would be nothing to correct against, and the meta-paradigm would collapse into fashion; with it, correction has an anchor, though not a destination.

HOW CORRECTABLE IS A PARADIGM?

If progress lives in correction, then paradigms differ not only in what they get right but in how readily they can find out what they get wrong, and this is a criterion of a higher order than the five criteria of the Postscript, fidelity to reality, consistency, scope, simplicity, and fruitfulness. Those five judge a paradigm's present performance; correctability judges its capacity to improve that performance, which is to say its relation to the meta-paradigm.

A correctable paradigm has several marks. Its lexicon can name its own failures, so that a cure that does not cure is described as a failure in the paradigm's own words rather than renamed as success or as resistance. Its gatekeepers tolerate the dissenter who brings bad news, which is Popper's open society applied to a moral community. It keeps honorable exits, so that people who were wrong can change their minds without being destroyed. And it carries what Chapter XIII called a stopping rule, a way of telling when a protocol has done its work and further application returns less than it costs. A good paradigm, in short, builds its own error correction into its structure.

Correctability is not endless openness, however, for a paradigm that held nothing fixed would not be correctable but adrift. That is why this book has kept

equal dignity and equality before the law outside the range of revision: they are less a verdict awaiting review than part of the floor on which review stands, much as a navigator corrects his course by the stars because he does not take the stars to be up for correction.

By this criterion the present order deserves a divided verdict. On one side, liberal institutions at their best are the most developed expression of the meta-paradigm we know of: free speech, a free press, competitive elections, independent courts, and open science are, taken together, machinery for finding and fixing errors, and Popper's case for the open society is a case for exactly these. On the other side, the paradigm of progress that grew up inside those institutions has a protocol that works like a ratchet. If every removed constraint is a step toward justice, then every restored constraint must be a step back, and the paradigm cannot easily read its own reversals as corrections. Chapter VI's record of reversals by the paradigm's own electorates is therefore ambiguous, and *The Test* treats it so: those reversals may show correction working from inside, which would support a verdict of adjusting, or correction resisted and punished, which would point toward exhaustion. Part Two must find out which. What we can say now is that the tension between procedures that are correctable and a protocol that forbids its own reversal is one of the deepest features of the present moment.

SEEING THE DEEPER ORDER

Can we become aware of the meta-paradigm, or is it, like Hegel's cunning of reason, something that works only so long as no one sees it? The honest answer is that we can see it partly, and late, and never whole, since the owl flies at dusk and much of what we can say about correction we can say only about corrections already made. Yet partial awareness is not nothing. Kuhn showed scientists the paradigms they worked within, and this book attempts the same for morals: first to show the paradigm as a paradigm, and now to show the order of correction within which paradigms come and go.

Awareness of this kind yields a particular temper, which is humility without relativism. It is humility because a person who sees his own paradigm as one in a long series, each confident at its height and each corrected in turn, will expect to be wrong somewhere and will want to know where. It is not relativism, because the series is not a carousel: there is a real tribunal and a real process of correction against it, and some paradigms serve that process far better than others. In Mac-

Intyre's terms it is the stance of Hamlet rather than Emma, though without Hamlet's paralysis, much as a surgeon who knows that medicine will revise half of what he was taught still operates in the morning, and operates better for keeping his notes.

There is one more benefit. MacIntyre's test asks that a successor explain why its predecessor's beliefs seemed reasonable as well as how they misled, and a tradition that meets that test cannot treat its ancestors as villains, since it must understand them well enough to show where good people, reasoning in good faith, went wrong. The meta-paradigm thus gives a structural reason for the principle this book has carried from its first chapter, that the people of the past were wrong without being evil, and the same courtesy is owed to the faithful practitioners of a paradigm now passing.

WHAT FOLLOWS FROM HERE

If moral progress lives in the process of correction, then every remaining question in this section of the book becomes a question about that process: what helps it, what hinders it, and what it is right to do to it.

Chapter XVI takes up legitimacy and coordination, since a correction does not happen when individuals privately notice an error but when their doubts become common knowledge, and Paluck's finding in Chapter XIV suggests how that can happen. Chapter XVII turns to the frame, which decides what can even register as an error. Chapter XVIII asks how technology changes the tribunal, letting reality push back faster while magnifying the cost of uncorrected error. Chapter XIX asks whether moral change can be engineered, with Popper's piecemeal reform and Hayek's warning about design as two guides pulling in somewhat different directions. Chapter XX asks what ethics govern those who try, and Chapter XXI turns MacIntyre's test into a practice, the art of walking people through a revolution by showing them why their old paradigm made sense and where it failed. Read together, these chapters form a single theory of how the order of correction can be served, and how it can be betrayed.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The first objection is that the meta-paradigm is the old Whig history moved up one floor. We have stopped saying that our verdicts are the leading edge, a critic may say, only to say that our method is; and “correction” presupposes a standard of correct, so the telos has crept back in. The answer is that the standard is the tribunal of Chapter XIII, which is eliminative rather than directional. It tells us what fails, not where to go, and the process it drives has no endpoint, admits regressions, and grants no paradigm, including the liberal one, a privileged place in it.

The second objection is circularity. If we call whatever survived a correction, then “meta-progress” means only that the winners won. The answer is that correction is identified by more than survival: by the hard edges of the tribunal, which do not depend on any lexicon, and by MacIntyre’s test, which requires a successor to explain its predecessor’s failure in terms that predecessor could recognize. Some revolutions pass that test and some do not; the Terror did not.

The third objection is the most serious, and it comes from MacIntyre himself. Fallibilism, criticism, and the open society may be the values of one tradition, the liberal and scientific one, presented as the neutral order of all traditions. We should concede part of this. The awareness of the meta-paradigm described here is articulated in a modern vocabulary, and other traditions would describe their own self-correction differently. Yet MacIntyre’s own account of epistemological crisis is a theory of how every tradition corrects itself by its own lights, and that suggests the meta-paradigm is not owned by any one of them, even if some have built it into their institutions more fully than others.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
meta-paradigm	the order of correction within which moral paradigms rise and fall	largely unseen from inside any paradigm
meta-progress	real improvement in the capacity to detect and correct moral error	not guaranteed; can stall or reverse
Aufhebung (sublation)	to cancel, preserve, and lift up at once	Hegel’s real dialectic; dignity as sublated rank
thesis, antithesis, synthesis	the popular label for Hegel’s dialectic	Fichte’s language, fixed on Hegel by Chalybäus (1837)

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
cunning of reason	a larger process worked out through people pursuing their own ends	Hegel; kept here without its World Spirit
self-correcting inquiry	inquiry that converges on truth in the long run	Peirce: do not block the way of inquiry
open society	institutions arranged to correct errors without bloodshed	Popper (1945)
spontaneous order	an order that results from human action but not human design	Ferguson (1767), Hayek's cosmos
epistemological crisis	a tradition's failure, by its own standards, to solve its problems	MacIntyre (1977, 1988)
correctability	a paradigm's capacity to find and fix its own errors	a higher-order criterion above the five

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Choose one moral revolution and describe it as a sublation. What did it cancel, what did it preserve, and what did it lift up?
2. If the meta-paradigm works through people who do not see it, what changes when they begin to see it? Does awareness strengthen the process or risk turning it into another program?
3. Popper diagnosed historicism as confusing trends with laws. Which moral trends of the last century are most often treated as laws today?
4. What would the present paradigm need to say, in its own lexicon, to register one of its policies as a failure rather than as resistance?
5. MacIntyre asks that a successor explain why its predecessor's beliefs seemed reasonable. Could the successor sketched in *Ascent of the West* meet that test with respect to the paradigm of progress?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: your missing stopping rule is a failure of correctability, and the ouroboros is what a paradigm becomes when it borrows the authority of the meta-progress to shield its own protocol from review.
- Map vs Territory: Grant's Thomist point that reality measures the mind is your realism in older dress, and it is what keeps the meta-paradigm from being mere fashion.

- Ascent of the West: the successor’s chief claim, that it is correctable, is now a claim about its relation to the meta-paradigm, and it would be strongest if it could pass MacIntyre’s test by explaining why the paradigm of progress made sense and where it failed.
- Borrowed Christian capital: the capacity for moral self-correction that the progress paradigm claims as its own was carried by earlier paradigms, which is the same borrowing seen at the meta level.
- The Turn: building before tearing down is sublation done deliberately, with the cancelling, the keeping, and the lifting all in view.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: an AI moral backend would need error correction designed in from the start, since it will not have generations of Hayekian selection to correct it slowly.

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XVI

Legitimacy and Coordination

No crowd can make Newton false by acting as if he were, yet a people can remake a moral order by changing what each expects of the others, so that in morality the binding constraints on change are legitimacy and coordination far more than discovery—though never without limit, since reality still decides which orders can stand.

NEWTON AND THE DINNER TABLE

SUPPOSE THAT EVERY physicist in the world agreed tomorrow to behave as though Newton's law of gravitation were false. They might rewrite the textbooks and punish anyone who used the old equations, and the apples, quite indifferent to all of it, would go on falling as before. Scientific change is constrained by discovery: a new theory must find something in nature that the old one missed, and no amount of agreement can stand in for that finding. Kuhn showed how much social life there is in science, yet science answers in the end to a world that does not care what it expects.

Now suppose instead that the people of a town agreed to behave as though a certain old courtesy were no longer owed—that a man need not stand when a woman enters the room, or that a widow need not wear black for a year. Here the agreement does more than describe the change; it is the change. Once everyone expects that no one will stand, and everyone knows that everyone expects it, the courtesy has ended, and there is nothing left to discover about whether it is still owed. A great deal of moral life has this character, for what counts as an insult, a

promise, a marriage, or a debt of honor is fixed largely by shared expectations, and shared expectations can be changed.

That is the first half of this chapter's thesis. A moral reformer rarely lacks arguments—Chapter I noted that the case against dueling and slavery was old long before either fell—and what he usually lacks is a way to get everyone to move at once, together with a new order that people will accept as having the right to command them. The second half is that morality is not only coordination. The town that stops standing for women may live on happily enough, while the town that stops feeding its children will not, whatever its people expect of one another. A theory of moral change that forgot this would turn the realism of Chapter XIII back into the relativism the book has worked to escape.

LEGITIMACY AND THE FACTS WE MAKE TOGETHER

Max Weber gave the classic account of legitimacy in his 1919 lecture *Politics as a Vocation* and in the writings gathered as *Economy and Society*. He asked why people obey, and he answered that stable obedience rests at bottom on belief in the rightness of the order, which he called *Legitimitätsglaube*. He named three grounds for that belief. Traditional authority rests on what has always been, as the patriarch's right comes down by custom; charismatic authority rests on devotion to an extraordinary person whom followers obey because they believe in him; and rational-legal authority rests on impersonal rules and the offices they create. Charisma, he added, is unstable, and a prophet's movement must settle into tradition or bureaucracy if it is to outlast him.

The three types map neatly onto the working parts of a moral paradigm. The exemplar is a kind of charisma, the model person whose example commands without argument; the protocol, taught for a few generations, becomes tradition; and the gatekeepers, when they work through courts, codes, and HR offices, are rational-legal authority applied to morals.

Weber's notion was descriptive, in that an order is legitimate when people believe it is, and David Beetham objected in 1991 that an order is legitimate because it can be justified in terms of people's beliefs, and not merely because they hold it. The objection is fair, and this book's realism shares it, since an order can be believed in and still fail the tribunal of reality. Yet for the question of how moral orders change, Weber's sense is the one we need, and it has a feature worth stressing. Much of my belief that an order is legitimate is really a belief about what others

believe. I obey the traffic officer partly because I think he has the right, but also because I expect everyone else to treat him as having it; take away my confidence that others hold the belief, and my own grip loosens too. That is what this book has called the legitimacy layer, the silent sense of what is real and worth counting. It is silent because it is shared, and it is shared because each person reads it off the conduct of the others.

John Searle gave this structure a precise form in *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995). Some facts are brute, like the mountain, which is there whether or not anyone believes it; others are institutional, and exist only because we collectively accept them. Their form is a constitutive rule: "X counts as Y in context C." This piece of paper counts as money in the United States, and this line of stones counts as a boundary in the village. Whereas a regulative rule governs something that already exists, a constitutive rule creates the thing it governs, as the rules of chess create checkmate, and each new status brings what Searle called deontic powers—the rights, duties, and obligations the status carries.

Much of morality has just this structure. Saying certain words counts as binding oneself in a promise; a certain act counts as a wound to honor; a certain birthday counts as release from a parent's authority. Such things are real, and Searle held that claims about them can be as objective as claims about the mountain, but their reality rests on collective acceptance, and so they can be changed by changing that acceptance. That is the sense in which morality is partly made by us. We do not make the pain of a beaten child, but we do make the status of a parent's right to discipline, and the border between the two is where much moral argument lives.

EQUILIBRIA AND EXPECTATIONS

If moral orders rest on shared expectations, we must ask how expectations become shared, and how they change. Thomas Schelling, in *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960), asked people to imagine meeting a friend in New York with no way of agreeing on where or when, and most chose noon at Grand Central Station. Nothing made Grand Central right except that each expected the other to expect it; it stood out, and standing out was enough. Schelling called such solutions focal points. Later, in his models of segregation (1969 and 1971) and in *Micromotives and Macrobehavior* (1978), he showed the darker side of coordination: even a mild wish not to be badly outnumbered among one's neighbors could tip a

mixed area into near-total separation. A society, in other words, can end up in an arrangement that hardly anyone in it wanted, because each person responded sensibly to what the others did.

David Lewis made Schelling's insight into a philosophy in *Convention* (1969). A convention, for Lewis, is a regularity that solves a recurring coordination problem, which everyone conforms to, expects others to conform to, and prefers to keep so long as others do. It always has an alternative, as driving on the left would serve as well as driving on the right, and it rests on common knowledge, Lewis's name for the state in which everyone knows something, knows that everyone knows it, and so on up the ladder. Because a convention is held in place by this ladder of mutual expectation more than by any private belief, it cannot be refuted, only abandoned—and it can be abandoned only together. Edna Ullmann-Margalit, in *The Emergence of Norms* (1977), widened the analysis to norms in general. Coordination norms pick one option among several that would serve; prisoner's dilemma norms, such as keeping promises, hold people to cooperation when each would gain by cheating; and norms of partiality protect an unequal status quo against those it disadvantages. That third family is a useful reminder that an equilibrium can be stable without being fair.

Cristina Bicchieri, a philosopher at the University of Pennsylvania, built the most useful modern account on these foundations, first in *The Grammar of Society* (2006) and later in *Norms in the Wild*, a practical guide to diagnosing and changing harmful norms. She distinguishes two kinds of expectation. Empirical expectations are beliefs about what others do, as when I expect that most families in my village marry their daughters young; normative expectations are beliefs about what others think I ought to do, as when I expect my neighbors to think less of my family if it does not. A social norm, on her account, is a rule that people prefer to follow on condition that they hold both expectations, and the conditional is the heart of it, for when the expectations go, the preference goes with them. Unlike a convention, which serves each person's interest as soon as others follow it, a social norm often runs against immediate self-interest, and so it needs the second kind of expectation and the sanctions behind it.

The conditional structure explains a familiar trap. If everyone follows a norm because he believes everyone else endorses it, the norm can outlive nearly everyone's private endorsement, since no one can see inside anyone else. Timur Kuran, whose work Chapter VIII introduced, described the political form of the trap in *Private Truths, Public Lies* (1995): people profess in public what they do not

hold in private, each waits for enough visible support to pass his own threshold, and when a few speak, a cascade can overturn an order within weeks.

The cleanest measurement of the trap comes from Saudi Arabia. In October 2017 the economists Leonardo Bursztyn, Alessandra González, and David Yanagizawa-Drott recruited 500 married Saudi men aged 18 to 35 in Riyadh. Asked privately, 87 percent agreed that women should be allowed to work outside the home, yet about three-quarters underestimated how many of the other men in their session agreed, by 24 percentage points on average. When a random half were told what their peers actually thought, the effect showed up months later: three to five months on, 16.2 percent of the informed men's wives had applied for a job outside the home, against 5.8 percent of the others' wives. The men had learned nothing new about women or work; they had learned only what nearly everyone already believed. The study, published in the *American Economic Review* in 2020, shows as clearly as any we have that a moral order can be held in place by mistaken beliefs about other people's beliefs, and moved by correcting them.

HOW A CONVENTION ENDS

The political scientist Gerry Mackie put these ideas to their hardest test in a 1996 paper in the *American Sociological Review*, "Ending Footbinding and Infibulation: A Convention Account." Footbinding in China and infibulation, the most severe form of female genital cutting, in parts of Africa seem to have little in common, yet Mackie found deep parallels: each was nearly universal where it occurred and persisted even among people who opposed it, each was tied to marriageability and family honor, and each was done to young girls and passed on by women. Drawing on Schelling and Lewis, he argued that both were self-enforcing conventions. No family could stop alone, because a daughter with natural feet, or an uncut daughter, could not marry within the group, and so the community was caught, in his phrase, in an inferior equilibrium.

The convention account explains something the purely moral account cannot, which is how footbinding ended. The practice had lasted for something like a thousand years, yet when the sociologist Sidney Gamble reported in 1943 on families in Tingsien, in north China, he found that fewer than one percent of the women born before 1890 had unbound feet, that the share with bound feet fell steadily for those born afterward, and that among the families surveyed the

custom stopped entirely after 1919. An imperial ban in 1902 could not be enforced, and the practice was outlawed only in 1911 and 1912, so law alone cannot account for so swift a fall. In 1895 ten women of several nationalities, led by Alicia Little, had founded the Natural Foot Society in Shanghai, and such societies multiplied among Chinese reformers. They taught that the rest of the world did not bind and that China lost face by binding; but their pivotal innovation, in Mackie's view, was the pledge, by which parents promised publicly not to bind their daughters' feet and not to let their sons marry women whose feet were bound. The pledge did what argument could not, for it created within each marrying group a pool of unbound girls and willing grooms large enough that leaving the old convention no longer condemned a daughter to spinsterhood, and once the pool was large enough, the equilibrium tipped.

Mackie proposed that cutting could end the same way, and in 1998 he read that villagers in Senegal, working with an organization called Tostan, had publicly declared an end to the practice in their intermarrying group. Tostan began with education in human rights and health and with community dialogue, avoiding shame and blame and consulting religious leaders first. Then, because an uncut girl in a cutting community risks ostracism and a hard road to marriage, it organized public declarations at which many intermarrying villages abandoned the practice together. Mackie called this coordinated abandonment, and a UNICEF technical note of 2007, to which he contributed, set out its elements: a core of families that becomes self-sustaining, a tipping point beyond which change is hard to reverse, an explicit public commitment, and organized diffusion through overlapping marriage networks. By 2015 Tostan counted more than 7,000 communities in eight African countries that had made public declarations. That is the organization's own figure, and the work was far from done, for Senegal's national survey of 2005 had found 28 percent prevalence overall and rates above 90 percent in the regions of Kolda and Matam.

Damon Centola and his colleagues brought the tipping point into the laboratory. In an experiment published in *Science* in 2018, they placed nearly two hundred people recruited online into ten groups and paid pairs to agree on a name for a pictured face. Once a group had settled on a name, a committed minority of confederates began always using a different one. Below about a quarter of the group, the minority largely failed—the largest that failed was 21 percent, and on average only 6 percent of the others went over—whereas at 25 to 27 percent, between 72 and 100 percent of the others adopted the new name. In one trial a sin-

gle added person made the difference, and doubling or tripling the reward for keeping the old name did not stop the change. The authors warned that 25 percent is no universal constant. Still, the shape of the finding is clear: a group far short of a majority can overturn a convention, provided it is committed, visible, and past a threshold.

TWO LAYERS: THE TERRITORY AND THE EQUILIBRIUM

So far the chapter may seem to have proved too much. If footbinding could be ended by pledges and a new name installed by a committed quarter, then morality begins to look like nothing but convention. That conclusion would be a mistake, because coordination and reality do different work.

Consider the Shakers, whom the book has met before. Within their communities celibacy was the settled expectation, upheld by every expectation Bicchieri could name, and they coordinated on it admirably; yet the order dwindled to a handful, because no coordination could make a celibate community reproduce. In the same way, a society that settles into mutual distrust can hold that equilibrium for generations, but it pays in every bargain it cannot strike, and a society whose norms leave it unable to build, heal, or defend itself discovers the fact when it must do one of those things. Each such equilibrium is coherent and self-enforcing, and each is doomed.

That gives us the chapter's synthesis, a two-layer view of moral order. The lower layer is the territory—human nature, human needs, and the hard conditions of a common life—which determines which moral equilibria are viable and which collapse. The upper layer is coordination and legitimacy, which determine which viable equilibrium a society actually occupies and how it moves from one to another. Honor cultures and dignity cultures, Confucian ritual and Protestant conscience, are all viable, and the territory does not choose among them; coordination chooses, with history, accident, and exemplars. But an order that coordinates on what the territory will not support will fail, whatever its members expect of one another.

The two-layer view also explains why the territory works so slowly. Footbinding crippled half the population and still lasted for centuries, because it was costly without being fatal. The tribunal of reality is sharpest at its edges, against orders that cannot reproduce, cooperate, or survive, and weakest in the broad middle,

where many costly orders are viable and coordination alone decides whether a people stays in a bad equilibrium or climbs out.

This is how the realism of Map vs Territory can live with the plain fact that morals change. Morality is for us, in that its point is to make a common human life go well; it is partly made by us, since so much of it consists of statuses and duties that exist because we accept them together; but it is not infinitely malleable, because what we make must stand on ground we did not make. In Searle's terms, institutional facts rest on brute facts. We cannot change the territory by changing the map, but we can choose among the routes the territory allows, and much of moral history is the story of that choosing.

WHAT IT TAKES TO MOVE, AND WHAT IT MEANS NOW

The two layers yield three conditions for deliberate moral change, which Chapter XIX will develop into a fuller theory. The first is a credible alternative equilibrium. People will not leave a convention for nothing, and a reformer who only condemns the old order offers them a leap with no ground on the far side. The natural-foot societies did more than denounce binding, for they built, inside each marrying group, a world in which unbound daughters could marry; that is the coordination form of the book's rule to build before tearing down. And the alternative must be viable in the lower layer as well as attractive in the upper one, or it leads only to a second collapse.

The second is common knowledge that others will move. Private conviction is not enough, as the Saudi experiment shows, for 87 percent agreement held privately kept wives at home, while the bare knowledge of that agreement sent some of them out to look for work. A conditional preference waits for public evidence that its condition has been met. That is why pledges, declarations, and visible exemplars work: each turns a private disposition into a public fact that everyone can see everyone else seeing, and Lewis's ladder of mutual knowledge can be climbed only in the open. It is why Paluck's radio drama in Rwanda, described in Chapter XIV, moved perceived norms more than private beliefs, and why Bicchieri gives such weight to trendsetters, the first families who show that the new path can be walked.

The third is legitimacy for the new order. An equilibrium that people regard as imposed or shameful will not hold, even if it is briefly reached, which is why Mackie insisted that declarations be celebratory and why Tostan rooted change in

values its communities already held. In Weber's terms, the new order needs some ground of belief—the charisma of its exemplars, a link to tradition, or the authority of fair rules. In this book's terms, it needs honorable exits, so that leaving the old order does not require people to confess that they and their parents were monsters. There is a warning here as well, for the mechanisms are morally neutral: a committed minority can tip a group toward a worse convention as easily as a better one, and only fidelity to reality can tell a society whether the equilibrium it is moving toward is one it can live in.

Part Two will apply all this to the present paradigm, and the two layers already suggest where to look. If the paradigm of progress rests partly on falsified preference, as Chapter VIII suggested, its visible stability says little about its real support, and the self-censorship surveys named in *The Test* become measures of the gap that Chapter XXVI will examine. If its legitimacy rests on gatekeepers—universities, professions, prestige media, and HR offices—then falling trust in them, which Chapter XXIV will measure, is a loss in the upper layer. And if its recent extensions run up against the territory, in fertility, trust, or capability, the question becomes whether the present equilibrium is still viable, which Chapters XXVII and XXIX must answer under the rules fixed in advance. The same analysis binds any successor. A paradigm such as the one sketched in *Ascent of the West* cannot win by argument alone; it needs places where its founder exemplar can actually be lived, public signals that turn private doubt into common knowledge, and a legitimacy of its own, with equal dignity and equality before the law kept fixed. Above all it must pass the lower test, for a successor that merely tips a society from one unviable equilibrium into another has not turned well at all.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The first objection is that the convention account fits some practices better than others. A 2015 paper in *Science* by Efferson and colleagues bore the blunt title “Female genital cutting is not a social coordination norm,” and Bicchieri herself separates conventions from norms upheld by sanctions, and both from practices people simply value for their own sake. Where people truly prize a practice, pledges and declarations will do little, and coordination theory may flatter reformers into thinking that everyone is secretly waiting to be released. The best answer is that the two-layer view needs only the weaker claim, that much of moral-

ity is held in place by mutual expectation; and it implies, as Bicchieri insists, that diagnosis must come before intervention.

The second objection is that the laboratory is not the world. Centola's subjects were paid to agree on names for faces, with nothing sacred at stake, and the authors themselves warned that deeply held norms may need far larger minorities; Tostan's figures, meanwhile, are the organization's own. The answer is to treat the 25 percent as an illustration of a mechanism and not as a law, and to rest the argument on the convergence of very different evidence: Gamble's survey, the Saudi experiment, Kuran's cases, and the laboratory together.

The third objection is that the synthesis concedes too much to relativism, since if the territory does not choose among viable orders, nothing seems left to make one better than another. The book's answer is that the five criteria of the Postscript still apply inside the viable set, fruitfulness above all, and that the tribunal's weakness in the middle is a fact to be admitted, not hidden.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
legitimacy	belief that an order has the right to command	Weber's <i>Legitimitätsglaube</i> ; a belief held partly because others hold it
three types of authority	traditional, charismatic, rational-legal	roughly protocol, exemplar, and gatekeepers
constitutive rule	X counts as Y in context C	Searle; creates the status it governs
focal point	the solution that stands out, so each expects others to choose it	Schelling's <i>Grand Central</i>
convention	a self-sustaining solution to a recurring coordination problem	Lewis; has alternatives, rests on common knowledge
empirical and normative expectations	beliefs about what others do, and about what they think one ought to do	Bicchieri; together they ground conditional preferences
preference falsification	professing in public what one does not believe in private	Kuran; hides how weak an order has become
inferior equilibrium	a stable arrangement worse for nearly all than an available alternative	Mackie on footbinding and cutting

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
committed minority	a group that will not yield and can tip a convention past a threshold	Centola: about 25 percent in the laboratory
two-layer view	reality sets which orders are viable; coordination and legitimacy set which one is held	the chapter's synthesis

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Which parts of your own moral world have the form “X counts as Y in context C,” and which do not depend on anyone’s acceptance at all?
2. The men in Riyadh held a majority view without knowing it. What views in your own circles might be held by a silent majority, and what public signal would reveal them?
3. Footbinding was costly but not fatal, and so it lasted a thousand years. What present practices might be inferior equilibria of the same kind?
4. If the mechanisms of tipping are morally neutral, what, besides the tribunal of reality, should restrain a committed minority that believes itself right?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Map vs Territory: the two-layer view is your realism made precise, since the territory sets which equilibria are viable while coordination picks among them, which is how morality can be for us, partly made by us, and still not infinitely malleable.
- The End of Progress: preference falsification, already among your signs of exhaustion, now has a mechanism and a remedy, because the hidden reserve of private doubt becomes usable only once it is made common knowledge.
- The Turn: build before tearing down is the credible alternative equilibrium, and honorable exits lower the cost of switching, so your rules for turning well are also the conditions for a successful tipping.
- Ascent of the West: the successor needs places where the founder exemplar can actually be lived, not only arguments for it, and it needs its own ground of legitimacy, with equal dignity kept fixed.
- Win the Words: coining and recovering words is a way of changing normative expectations in public, since a shared word is itself a small piece of common knowledge.

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XVII

The Frame

A new way of acting survives only when it arrives with a way of seeing it, for behavior that comes without an exemplar, a vocabulary, a story, rituals, and institutions to carry them is read by everyone, including the person doing it, as deviance, and it snaps back.

THE MAN WHO STOPS DRINKING AT THE PARTY

IMAGINE A YOUNG man in 1985 who goes to a party with three friends and decides, before he leaves the house, that he will drink nothing all night so that he can drive the others home. He has done something sensible and even kind, and yet nobody at the party quite knows what he has done. His friends press a beer on him and ask whether he is ill or turning religious, and the young man himself, holding a glass of soda by the wall, begins to wonder whether he is being a prig. By midnight he has had two beers, because standing apart was more trouble than it was worth.

Now move the same young man forward a few years. He walks into the same kind of party and says that he is the designated driver tonight, and the room understands at once. The phrase tells everyone what is going on: he is not refusing the party but serving it, and he has a role that has a name and that people have seen on television. Nothing about his behavior has changed. What has changed is the frame around it, and with the frame, the verdict.

That small story contains the thesis of this chapter. Chapter V argued that a moral community is held together first by exemplars and only afterward by rules,

yet an exemplar does not float free. It needs a habitat: words that name what it does, a story that explains why it matters, practices that let ordinary people repeat it, and institutions that keep the whole arrangement alive after its first enthusiasts have gone home. We shall call that habitat the frame. Where a frame exists, a new practice is read as virtue; where none exists, the very same practice is read as oddity or vice, and the people who try it drift back into the old ways, not because they were argued out of the new one but because no one, themselves included, could see it as good.

WHAT THE SOCIOLOGISTS FOUND

The word frame comes to us from Erving Goffman, whose *Frame Analysis* (1974) asked how people make sense of what is happening around them. His answer was that experience is always organized by what he called primary frameworks, the background schemes that let us take a strip of events and say what it is. Some of these frameworks are natural, for undirected physical events such as weather; others are social, for events guided by someone's will and purpose. The same physical motion, a hand striking a shoulder, is an assault in one framework, a game in another, and a blessing in a third. Goffman also described keying, by which an activity that already means something is transposed into another register, as a fight becomes a boxing match. His point was not that frames are lies but that nothing social is understood without one.

Beginning in the 1980s, David Snow, Robert Benford, and their colleagues carried Goffman's idea into the study of social movements. In a 1986 paper they described frame alignment, the work by which a movement links its way of seeing to the frames people already hold, and they named four forms of it: bridging, which connects two frames that agree but have never been joined; amplification, which clarifies and invigorates values people already share; extension, which widens a frame to take in the concerns of new groups; and transformation, which is needed when a movement's claims run against conventional ways of life and so must replace old meanings with new ones. Benford and Snow's review of the field in the *Annual Review of Sociology* (2000) added the three core framing tasks that every movement must perform. Diagnostic framing names the problem and assigns blame; prognostic framing proposes what is to be done; and motivational framing gives people a reason to act. Finally, they asked why some frames resonate while others fall flat, and the answers they gathered were empiri-

cal credibility, centrality within the hearer's existing beliefs, relevance to the hearer's experience, and narrative fidelity, which is to say fit with the culture's inherited stories and myths.

Howard Becker's *Outsiders* (1963) supplies the other half of the picture. Becker argued that "social groups create deviance" by making rules and applying them to particular people, so that deviance is not a quality of an act but a verdict passed on it. He studied dance musicians and marijuana users and found that each group had built its own small world of norms and meanings, inside which members were not deviants at all. Read alongside Goffman, Becker's lesson is plain: whoever supplies the frame decides who is deviant, and a person acting outside the dominant frame will be labeled by it unless some rival frame is ready to receive him.

George Lakoff, a linguist rather than a sociologist, brought the idea into politics. In *Don't Think of an Elephant* (2004) he described frames as "mental structures that shape the way we see the world," and he drew two conclusions that matter here. The first was that facts which do not fit a hearer's frame tend to bounce off, so that a truth must fit people's frames before it can be accepted. The second was that negating a frame activates it, so a movement that argues only against the old picture keeps the old picture in everyone's mind.

A THEORY OF THE MORAL FRAME

Putting these findings together with the earlier chapters, we can now say what a moral frame is. It is the apparatus that tells actors and observers what is going on when they meet a moral act, and so decides whether that act counts as virtue, eccentricity, or vice. It has five parts, and the first three correspond closely to the working parts of a paradigm named in Part One.

The first is an exemplar, a person or story that shows the new practice done well and is admired without argument. The second is a lexicon, the words that name the practice and its opposite and so carry verdicts in advance: "designated driver," "sober," "natural feet," "nonviolent." The third is a master story, a narrative that places the practice inside a larger drama of fall and rescue, bondage and freedom, or decline and ascent, and so tells people why it matters. The fourth is a set of rituals and practices, the repeatable acts by which ordinary people perform the new behavior and recognize one another doing it, such as the pledge, the meeting, the anniversary chip, or the march. The fifth is institutions and gate-

keepers, the bodies that keep the frame in working order, train newcomers, settle disputes, and outlast their founders.

From these parts follow four propositions, and the cases below are meant to test them. First, any new behavior is read through whatever frame already dominates, and if no rival frame is at hand it will be labeled deviant, by others and by the actor himself. Second, a practice imposed or attempted without a frame decays or snaps back, however sensible it may be. Third, a frame without a practice is mere talk, for words and stories that are never enacted soon become a vocabulary people use in public and disbelieve in private. Fourth, even a complete frame must pass two tests, resonance with the culture it enters and fidelity to the reality it governs, because a frame that misdescribes human beings will in time be corrected by consequences, whatever its exemplars and its rituals.

PRACTICE WITHOUT A FRAME

The plainest case of the second proposition comes from China, where the Manchu rulers tried to ban footbinding by edict in 1636, 1638, and 1664, and the Kangxi Emperor abandoned the effort in 1668, having concluded that parents would not comply. An emperor's command is a powerful thing, but it supplied no exemplar of an unbound bride whom a good family would want, no new word to replace the old ideal of the tiny foot, and no way for one family to stop without ruining its daughter's prospects of marriage. The practice went on for two more centuries.

Prohibition in the United States is the great modern case, and it is more complicated than the usual telling. The Eighteenth Amendment was ratified in January 1919 and took effect in January 1920, and the dry movement that won it had a strong frame of its own, rooted in evangelical Protestantism and in the defense of the home against the saloon. But that frame was held by one part of the nation, largely rural and Protestant, and the law imposed its practice on all the rest. In the cities, where speakeasies multiplied to an estimated 30,000 to 100,000 in New York alone by 1925, the drinker was not read as deviant; increasingly, the law was. The decisive turn came when the wets acquired a frame of their own. In May 1929 Pauline Sabin founded the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, which grew to almost 1.5 million members in under two years, and her argument captured the dries' deepest motive and turned it against them: children, she warned, now "see the law broken at home and upon the street," and

Prohibition was teaching contempt for the Constitution. The protection of home and child, the temperance movement's master story, had changed sides. Repeal came in December 1933, helped by the Depression's hunger for revenue.

Honesty requires a qualification, for Prohibition did change behavior while it lasted: on one estimate consumption fell to about 30 percent of its earlier level before recovering to perhaps 60 to 70 percent, and cirrhosis deaths fell by nearly two-thirds. The lesson is rather that a practice framed by one community and imposed on another could not hold once a rival frame gave the governed a story in which breaking it was respectable.

The communes of the late 1960s and 1970s show the same law on a smaller scale. Many began with a practice, shared land and labor, but with little else: no settled rule of membership, no binding ritual, and sometimes a principle of open land that let anyone arrive. Drop City in Colorado, often called the first rural hippie commune, drew national publicity and hundreds of visitors to its festival of 1967, some of whom stayed; one of its founders later wrote that the nationwide attention helped to destroy it, and by 1979 the site had been abandoned and sold to a neighboring cattle rancher. Rosabeth Moss Kanter's *Commitment and Community* (1972) had already studied 91 communal experiments founded between 1780 and 1860 and argued that what separated the few that lasted, such as the Shakers, Amana, and Oneida, from the many that failed lay in their internal life: clear boundaries, rituals, and mechanisms of commitment she named sacrifice, investment, renunciation, communion, mortification, and transcendence. In the language of this chapter, the survivors had frames and the failures had mostly practices. The exception that proves the point is Twin Oaks in Virginia, founded in 1967 on the model of B. F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, which built a structured labor-credit system and a three-week visiting period for applicants and still houses about a hundred adults today.

FRAME WITHOUT FIDELITY

The Soviet attempt to make a new man is the hardest case for this chapter, because it did not lack a frame; it had perhaps the most elaborate one ever built. Its master story was history itself, moving through class struggle to communism; its lexicon was vast and enforced, and its institutions reached into every school and workplace; and its exemplars were manufactured on purpose, most famously the miner Alexei Stakhanov, whose record-breaking shift made him the model of the

new worker and gave his name to a movement. Trotsky, in *Literature and Revolution* (1924), promised that under communism the average person would rise to “the heights of an Aristotle, a Goethe, or a Marx.”

Yet the new man did not appear, and the family experiment shows why most clearly. The Family Code of 1918 took marriage out of the church, gave illegitimate children equal rights, and widened the grounds for divorce; abortion was legalized in 1920. Divorces rose, and *de facto* unions left women without support when men walked away, contributing to the crowds of homeless children of the 1920s, so that the marriage law of 1926 had to extend the obligations of marriage to unregistered couples. By the mid-1930s the state reversed course almost entirely: abortion was banned by a law enacted in June 1936, divorce was made difficult again, and the legal distinction between legitimate and illegitimate children returned. The snap-back here was not the work of neighbors labeling deviants, for it came from the top. But it came because the frame had promised a kind of human being that the territory did not supply, and when the practice produced abandoned women and falling births, the regime retreated to the oldest frame there is.

The writer Alexander Zinoviev later argued, half in satire, that the system had indeed made a new kind of person, *homo sovieticus*, who was in many ways the opposite of the ideal. That is the third proposition in its starkest form, for a frame that is enforced but not lived produces people who perform it, which is the preference falsification of Chapter VIII, and the fourth proposition is not optional. Narrative fidelity can be manufactured for a time; fidelity to reality cannot.

FRAMES THAT HELD

Set against these failures are cases where a frame made a new practice stick, and the most instructive are the ones that come in pairs.

The temperance pledge was itself a frame in miniature, for it turned a private intention into a public act with a name and a witness. In Ireland, Father Theobald Mathew began his crusade in April 1838, and at its peak, just before the Great Famine, the movement reportedly counted about three million pledgers, more than half the adult population. The American Washingtonians teach the sharper lesson. Six drinkers founded the society in a Baltimore tavern on April 2, 1840, and their method was the sharing of drinking stories among

peers; at its height the movement numbered in the tens of thousands, perhaps as many as 600,000. Within a few years it had nearly vanished, drawn into quarrels over prohibition, sectarian religion, abolition, and party politics. It had the exemplar of the reformed drinker and the ritual of the testimony, but no institution to keep it to its purpose.

Alcoholics Anonymous, founded in Akron in 1935 by Bill Wilson and Bob Smith, rebuilt nearly the same practice, apparently without knowing of the Washingtonians, and gave it every part of a frame. Its exemplar is the recovering alcoholic who tells his story, and its lexicon is precise and widely borrowed: sobriety, sponsor, higher power, amends, one day at a time. Its master story, set down in the Big Book of 1939, is a narrative of descent, surrender, and recovery, while its rituals include the meeting, the Twelve Steps, and the sobriety chips that mark milestones from twenty-four hours to a year, a practice believed to date from Indianapolis in 1942. And its institution was designed with the Washingtonians' failure almost in view: the Twelve Traditions, adopted at the first international convention in 1950, bind the fellowship to anonymity, to its single purpose, and to staying out of outside controversies. AA reported about 1.97 million members in 2021, and a Cochrane review in 2020 found that Twelve-Step Facilitation was associated with higher rates of continuous abstinence than other treatments, though critics dispute how well the fellowship works on its own.

The designated driver, with which this chapter began, is the purest modern case of a coined frame. The idea had grown up in Scandinavia, and in late 1988 Jay Winsten of the Center for Health Communication at the Harvard School of Public Health set out, through what became known as the Harvard Alcohol Project, to bring it to America. Winsten worked with producers and studio executives to write the concept into scripts, and it appeared in more than 160 episodes of popular shows, including *Cheers*, *L.A. Law*, and *The Cosby Show*. When the campaign began, annual alcohol-related traffic deaths stood at roughly 23,600 and had not fallen since 1985; four years later they were down by a quarter. Winsten himself credits new laws and stricter enforcement alongside the campaign, and the practice is imperfect. Still, the phrase gave a sober guest an honorable role, a television exemplar, and a ritual, choosing the driver before going out, and that is exactly what the young man of 1985 lacked.

Footbinding, which the emperors could not end by decree, ended within about a generation once reformers built a frame around unbinding. Christian women in Xiamen formed a Natural Foot Society in 1874 and vowed not to bind

their daughters, Alicia Little led another in Shanghai from 1895, and Kang Youwei and other reformers founded societies whose membership was claimed at 300,000. Their joint pledge, which Chapter XVI followed through Gerry Mackie's account of footbinding as a convention of marriageability, supplied the ritual; the lexicon changed from the lotus to the natural foot; and the master story changed from refinement to national strength, as reformers argued that the custom made China a laughingstock abroad and weakened the nation's sons. Economic historians add, fairly, that machine-made yarn and cloth were at the same time destroying the home handwork that kept bound girls indoors, and that the campaign probably mattered most in the cities.

The civil-rights movement, finally, was a master class in frame alignment. Its diagnostic frame named segregation as a broken promise, its prognostic frame was disciplined nonviolence, and its motivational frame was drawn from the two stories most Americans already held sacred, the Exodus and the founding. In Montgomery the boycott that began on December 5, 1955, was sustained for 382 days by the Montgomery Improvement Association, mass meetings in churches, and carpools. In Nashville, James Lawson's workshops on nonviolence began in March 1958, and the students who sat at lunch counters in 1960 carried a written code that told them not to strike back or curse, to stay seated until their leader released them, and to remember Jesus, Gandhi, and King; on May 10, 1960, six downtown stores began serving Black customers. And at the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, King told more than 250,000 people that America had given its Black citizens a bad check on the promises of the Declaration, while he borrowed his cadences from Isaiah and Amos. That was frame bridging at the scale of a nation: an act that a segregated South had framed as disorder was reframed, in the country's own oldest words, as fidelity.

THE PRESENT FRAME, AND A SUCCESSOR'S

Part Two will examine the present paradigm's frame in full, beginning in Chapter XXII, but its outline is already visible from Part One. Its exemplar is the emancipator, taught to every schoolchild through Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges, and the bridge at Selma. Its lexicon carries verdicts in words such as oppression, harm, inclusion, and the right side of history. Its master story is the emancipation plot described in Chapter XIV, in which a person breaks free of family, faith, tradition, or body, and the breaking free is the happy ending. Its rituals run from civic an-

niversaries to professional trainings, and its institutions include the universities, the professions, the courts, and prestige culture. It is a complete frame, and that completeness is a large part of why its practices feel like simple decency and why departures from them are so readily read as deviance.

A successor, if Part Two's verdict calls for one, would need a frame as complete, and Part Three will try to build it. In outline it would need a founder exemplar, the steward-builder who brings a lasting thing into being and keeps it standing, told well enough that people admire him before they can say why. It would need a vocabulary won by the moves of Chapter XII, recovering words such as duty, honor, and stewardship that the present lexicon has drained, and coining names for goods it has no word for, as "designated driver" named a role that had existed without a name. It would need a master story of ascent, in which progress is measured by what we can cure, build, and discover, and in which the ancestors are builders rather than villains. It would need rituals by which ordinary people perform the new practice and recognize one another, as the pledge, the chip, and the march once did. And it would need institutions with something like AA's Traditions, rules that keep the movement to its purpose and out of the quarrels that destroyed the Washingtonians, so that the frame outlives the enthusiasm of its founders. Without these things, the turn described in Chapter XII will look, to those who see a man facing the sunrise, like a man who has simply lost his way.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The first objection is that the theory is circular. Successful movements are found to have had frames and failed ones to have lacked them, but if "frame" is defined loosely enough, every success will have had one after the fact. The best answer is to name the five components in advance and to look for paired cases in which the practice was held constant and the frame varied. The emperors' edicts and the natural-foot societies aimed at the same practice; the Washingtonians and AA practiced nearly the same method; the sober guest behaves the same way before and after the phrase "designated driver" exists. Those pairs are not proof, but they are better than anecdote.

The second objection is that material causes did the real work. Machine textiles undercut footbinding, the Depression's need for revenue repealed Prohibition, and many communes simply ran out of money. This must be granted in part, and the chapter does not claim that frames act alone; frames work with material conditions, and they can speed a change that

economics has made possible. Nor did Prohibition simply fail, for it cut drinking and cirrhosis while it lasted.

The third objection cuts deepest: the Soviet Union had the most complete frame in history and still failed, so a frame cannot be what decides. That is right, and it is why the fourth proposition is part of the theory rather than an afterthought. A frame is necessary but not sufficient. It must resonate with the culture it enters, and it must describe human beings truly enough that living by it produces the goods it promises.

The last objection is that a theory of framing is a manual for spin. Chapter XX takes this up directly; here it is enough to say that the only frames that last are those that reality keeps confirming.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
frame	the apparatus that tells actors and observers what a moral act is	Goffman's primary frameworks, applied to morals
moral frame components	exemplar, lexicon, master story, rituals and practices, institutions and gatekeepers	the first three match the paradigm's working parts
snap-back	the decay of a new practice that lacks a frame	Kangxi's edicts, Drop City, the Washingtonians
labeling	deviance as a verdict passed on an act, not a quality of it	Becker, <i>Outsiders</i> (1963)
core framing tasks	diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing	Benford and Snow (2000)
frame alignment	bridging, amplification, extension, and transformation	Snow and colleagues (1986)
resonance	credibility, centrality, experiential relevance, narrative fidelity	why some frames take and others fall flat
fidelity to reality	the test a frame must pass beyond resonance	why the Soviet frame failed despite its completeness
joint pledge	a ritual that lets many families quit a practice together	natural-foot societies; Mackie's convention account (Chapter XVI)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Think of a good practice you have tried and abandoned. Which of the five components of a frame was missing?
2. The Washingtonians and Alcoholics Anonymous practiced nearly the same method. Which differences mattered most, and are any of them transferable to a moral movement?
3. Pauline Sabin won repeal by capturing the dries' own motive, the protection of home and child. Which of the present paradigm's deepest motives could a successor honestly capture and turn?
4. If narrative fidelity can be manufactured but fidelity to reality cannot, how long can a frame survive on the first alone?
5. What coined phrase, like "designated driver," would give an honorable name to a practice of building or stewardship that now has none?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Win the Words: the lexicon is the frame's densest part, and your four moves are frame work in Snow and Benford's sense; refusing the question echoes Lakoff's warning that negating a frame activates it, while coining is what Winsten did with "designated driver."
- Ascent of the West: the successor needs all five components, not only an argument, and the founder exemplar will be read as deviance, as a man who will not join the party, unless the lexicon, story, rituals, and institutions arrive with him.
- The Turn: the man facing the sunrise is a practice in search of a frame, and the joint pledge of the natural-foot societies shows how the first turner can be joined by others without each having to go first alone.
- The End of Progress: the present paradigm's completeness as a frame explains its staying power, and the Soviet case is a warning that a complete frame which loses fidelity to reality produces homo sovieticus, a people fluent in words they no longer believe.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: AA's Twelve Traditions are an early model of the institutional layer you have in mind, a set of rules that keeps a movement to its purpose and lets it scale without capture.

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XVIII

Technology as Morality's Einstein

In science a revolution waits for someone like Einstein to see the whole field afresh, whereas in morality that part is often played by a machine, which changes what is possible and what things cost and so forces the reigning paradigm to stretch, to crack, or to give way, though what the machine finally means is decided not by the machine but by the frame and the paradigm that take it up.

THE MISSING EINSTEIN

KUHN'S REVOLUTIONS HAVE heroes. A paradigm piles up anomalies, its practitioners add epicycle after epicycle, and then someone—a Copernicus, a Lavoisier, an Einstein—looks at the same old data and sees a different world in it, so that the revolution happens first inside a mind and only afterward in the journals.

Moral history has its reformers too. Yet when we look closely at the great moral shifts of the last five centuries, we often find that the reformer's argument had been available for a long time before it took hold, and that what changed in the meantime was not the argument but the world it was argued in. Chapter VII noted in passing that the printing press multiplied every complaint about indulgences and that the cotton gin raised the stakes of every argument about slavery; in each case something arrived that was not an idea at all, and it altered the ground on which ideas had to stand.

That is the claim of this chapter. Technology is often morality's Einstein, because it does the one thing a moral argument cannot do on its own: it changes

the facts of life. It makes some practices cheap that were once costly, and it opens possibilities no one had to think about before. A moral paradigm that worked well in the old world now meets cases it was never built to settle, and it must then stretch to cover them, patch itself with epicycles, or yield to a successor.

Yet the analogy needs a guard rail, for Einstein had a vision and a machine has none. The printing press did not want the Reformation, and the ultrasound scanner did not want fewer girls. A new technology widens or narrows the range of what people can do, but it does not choose among the options it opens, and the choosing is done by the paradigm already in place and by the frame beneath it, which Chapter XVII examined. The same tool, as we shall see, can serve a revolution in one country and an old prejudice in another.

PRINT AND THE CLOCK

The classic case is printing. Elizabeth Eisenstein's *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (1979) argued that Protestantism was the first movement to use print as a mass medium, and that the press turned doctrinal quarrels which the medieval church had long contained into an open and lasting split. Luther sent his Ninety-five Theses to Archbishop Albert of Brandenburg on 31 October 1517 as propositions for an academic disputation, and he seems to have been caught off guard by what followed. Several hundred Latin copies were printed in Germany that year, the text soon appeared as a pamphlet in Basel and as placards in Leipzig and Nuremberg, and a German translation followed. His *Sermon on Indulgences and Grace*, his first great popular success, was reprinted some twenty times. Arguments that would once have stayed among theologians now reached merchants and princes in identical copies, faster than any council could answer them.

Print also changed authority. Laymen could now read scripture for themselves, and a man like Calvin, who held no theology degree and was never ordained, could become one of the great teachers of the age. The four working parts of the medieval paradigm were all touched at once: its exemplars could be read in the original, its protocol of mediated grace faced a rival in direct reading, its lexicon was translated into the vernacular, and its gatekeepers, the clergy who had controlled the text, lost their monopoly.

Yet critics, Cosma Shalizi among them, note that Eisenstein's account is not comparative enough, for printing was practiced in East Asia centuries before Gutenberg without producing anything like a Reformation. The press lowered

the cost of copying, but it was the Latin church, with its single sacred text, its contested doctrine of indulgences, and its many rival princes, that gave cheap copying something explosive to carry. Print was the occasion, but the paradigm it met decided the shape of the explosion.

A quieter case concerns daily life. In 1967 the historian E. P. Thompson published *Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism*, which has since become the most cited article in the journal *Past and Present*. Thompson contrasted the task-oriented rhythm of older work, in which the farmer milked when the cows needed milking, with the timed labor of the factory, where every paid hour belonged to the employer. Workers resisted—many kept Saint Monday, skipping the day or working unevenly—and the new order had to be taught, partly as morality. Time became something to be saved and spent, wasted or redeemed, so that punctuality became a virtue and idleness a vice, and a clock or a watch became both a tool of discipline and a mark of status, for which people would stretch their means. The clock did not invent the old moral suspicion of idleness, but it gave thrift with time something precise to measure, and the factory gave it a reason to be universal.

THE FACTORY AND THE HOME

Industrialization did more than put a clock on the wall, for it pulled work out of the house altogether. Before the factory, the household was often at once a home and a business, where husband, wife, and children worked together; the factory separated the two. After 1850, a standard history of the West observes, the work of husbands and wives grew increasingly distinct across the classes, especially in prosperous homes.

A paradigm then rose to give the new arrangement moral meaning. The ideal of separate spheres assigned the public world of work, politics, and education to men and the home to women, and the respectable middle-class wife did not work for wages. Labor unions demanded a family wage, meaning a man's pay sufficient to keep a wife and children without their earnings, and historians still argue about it: some treat it as a sensible strategy that improved family health and diet, while feminist historians have criticized it for shutting women out of education and paid work, and working-class families could seldom afford it in full. The breadwinner and the homemaker were not ancient fixtures that the factory dis-

turbed; they were, in large part, a moral answer to the factory, an articulation that made the new separation of home and work feel natural and even sacred.

Children show the mechanism most vividly. The early mills worked very young children long hours, often through the night, and Parliament answered slowly. The Factory Act of 1833, which applied to textile mills, forbade the employment of children under nine, limited the hours of older children, required two hours of schooling a day for the youngest workers, and appointed four inspectors to enforce it; earlier acts of 1802 and 1819 had set limits with no means of enforcing them. Mill owners warned that reform would raise prices, and some poor families depended on their children's wages, a reminder that the old practice had its own logic.

Over the following century the child was revalued, and the sociologist Viviana Zelizer, in *Pricing the Priceless Child*, traced how American children between the late nineteenth century and the 1930s passed from being economic assets to being economically useless but emotionally priceless. Laws removed them from the labor market, and courts awarded parents large damages for a child's death. Philippe Ariès went further in *Centuries of Childhood* (1960), claiming that childhood as a distinct stage of life was itself a modern invention, though medievalists such as Nicholas Orme have argued that medieval parents loved and mourned their children much as we do, so the stronger claim should be set aside. What can be said safely is that the factory changed the cost and visibility of child labor, and that a moral paradigm then grew up to make it unthinkable; the conscience followed the change, and in time it hardened into law.

CARS, PILLS, AND TWO COUNTRIES

The twentieth century brought two technologies that remade courtship, and the first was the automobile. Beth Bailey's *From Front Porch to Back Seat* describes how, among the middle and upper classes of the nineteenth century, a young man asked permission to call on a young woman at her home, where her family judged his suitability. Dating replaced calling, and the car, Bailey argues, moved courtship out of the home and into the man's sphere. In the Lynds' study *Middletown*, about two-thirds of families owned cars, and one local critic called the automobile "a house of prostitution on wheels." The sociologist William Ogburn coined the phrase cultural lag in 1922 for exactly this kind of gap, and the car is a ready illustration of it, for it grew fast and powerful before society had

built the roads, the traffic rules, and the habits to match it; the same was true of the rules of courtship.

The second technology was the oral contraceptive. The Food and Drug Administration approved the pill in 1960, and it spread quickly among married women. In *The Power of the Pill*, published in the *Journal of Political Economy* in 2002, Claudia Goldin and Lawrence Katz showed what happened when it reached young, single, college-educated women in the late 1960s and early 1970s, after many states lowered the age of majority and widened the rules that let minors consent to medical care. Around 1970 the share of women college graduates entering professional programs rose sharply, and just after 1972 the age at which such women first married jumped. The pill all but removed the risk of pregnancy and so lowered the cost of a long training, and as more women delayed marriage, a woman who waited was more likely to find a suitable husband when she finished. Their evidence rests on differences among states in when young single women could legally get the pill, which is strong but cannot rule out every rival cause.

Here we watch a paradigm yield. The older sexual ethic of the West, with its requirement of marriage before sex and its close guard over young women, had rested in part on a hard fact: sex could produce a child, and the child needed a father bound to its mother. The pill did not refute that ethic, but it removed much of the cost on which the ethic's practical case had rested, and the paradigm of progress, whose protocol is to find a constraint and remove it, was ready to read the change as a liberation. The technology made the new practice cheap, and the reigning frame made it good.

Japan shows that the second step was not automatic. Japan's health ministry first planned to approve a pill in 1965 and then delayed, citing fears of sexual immorality and of side effects after the thalidomide scandal. For more than thirty years it considered and declined, raising new concerns in turn about cancer, blood clots, sexually transmitted disease, and even hormone residues in the environment, and in 1992 it reversed a favorable decision at the last minute. Senior politicians also worried that it would push down a falling birthrate. The ministry finally approved the low-dose pill in June 1999, about forty years after most Western countries and shortly after approving *Viagra* on some six months of review. Even then, fewer than one percent of women of childbearing age received a prescription in the first year. Japanese couples had long relied on condoms and legal abortion, and a technology that remade sexual life in the United States arrived

in Japan to a shrug. The pill was the same pill in both countries, but the paradigm and the frame that met it were not.

A NEW TOOL FOR AN OLD PREFERENCE

If the pill shows technology serving a new paradigm, the ultrasound scanner shows it serving an old one. In 1990 the economist Amartya Sen wrote in *The New York Review of Books* that more than a hundred million women were missing from the world's population, some fifty million of them in China alone, as a result of neglect and discrimination against girls. By then a new cause had joined the old ones. Once ultrasound spread in the mid-1980s, parents could learn a fetus's sex early enough to abort a girl, and sex ratios at birth, which in nature run at about 103 to 106 boys for every 100 girls, rose sharply. China's reached about 121, and India's about 108 to 111 by different measures. Sen gave the new practice a grim name: high-tech sexism.

The technology here was modern, but the paradigm it served was ancient: a family order in which sons carried the line, supported their parents in old age, and performed the rites, while daughters married out. The scanner did not create son preference; it made acting on it cheap, safe, and private, where the older methods of neglect had been slow and cruel. No case shows more plainly that technology does not choose its own direction, for the same machine that let Western parents watch a wanted child in the womb let others select which child would be wanted.

India passed a law in 1994, in force from 1996 and strengthened in 2003, forbidding prenatal tests to determine sex, and China, too, banned sex selection. Law alone did not end the practice, for India's imbalance among children under six kept rising through the 2011 census, but the paradigm beneath it was changing as well. South Korea's sex ratio at birth rose to about 115 by the early 1990s and then fell, as education and economic opportunity grew, until by 2007 it stood within the normal range. India has begun to follow: a 2022 Pew Research Center analysis found the national ratio easing from about 111 boys per 100 girls in the 2011 census to about 108 in the national health survey of 2019 to 2021, and estimated that about nine million girls were missing from births between 2000 and 2019. Pew linked the decline to rising education and wealth, and to the state's efforts against sex testing. The technology stayed exactly where it was;

what changed was the worth of a daughter in her parents' eyes, and that is a change in the paradigm, not in the machine.

THE SCREEN IN EVERY POCKET

The smartphone and social media show the mechanism working on the moral emotions themselves. In 2017 the psychologist Molly Crockett, then at Yale, published a short essay in *Nature Human Behaviour* on moral outrage in the digital age. Outrage, she noted, is an ancient emotion that evolved in small groups, where punishing a wrongdoer was costly and risky and so was done with some care. Online, she argued, the costs and benefits shift. In a newspaper essay the next year she put it plainly: one can now express outrage with a click and hide among thousands, platforms supply the most outrageous material because it is the most shared, and likes reward the habit as a slot machine does. She cited a 2014 study in *Science* of more than a thousand North Americans, who learned of immoral acts more often online than in person or through older media, and felt more outrage at what they learned there.

The same year, William Brady, Julian Wills, John Jost, Joshua Tucker, and Jay Van Bavel published a study in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* of 563,312 messages on Twitter about gun control, same-sex marriage, and climate change. Each additional moral-emotional word in a message raised its spread by about twenty percent, but the spread was mostly within liberal or conservative networks rather than between them. That bears on the question Chapter XIV left open, whether networked media move morality differently from broadcast media. A television network could push a whole country one way, whereas a network that rewards moral emotion within each camp tends to sharpen the camps; Chapter XIX takes up who steers such change, but the new medium looks distributed in production and polarizing in effect.

The largest claim about the smartphone concerns the young. Jonathan Haidt's *The Anxious Generation* (2024) argues that between 2010 and 2015 adolescents moved from flip phones to smartphones loaded with social media, that time with friends in person fell as time online rose, and that teen mental health declined over the same years. He names four harms—lost sleep, social deprivation, fragmented attention, and addiction—and pairs the phone-based childhood with the decline of free play as parents supervised children ever more closely offline. His critics are serious. Candice Odgers, reviewing the book in *Nature*

ture in March 2024, wrote that its central claim about rewiring children's brains "is not supported by science." She argued that most of the research is correlational and finds small or mixed associations, that troubled teenagers may use social media more rather than being made troubled by it, and that a study of seventy-two countries found no consistent link between well-being and the spread of social media. Haidt has replied that causal evidence exists and that her alternative explanations do not fit the facts, and he has elsewhere cited experiments and natural experiments such as the staggered arrival of Facebook. The fair verdict, for now, is that the decline in adolescent mental health is real, and that the size of the phone's share in causing it is contested.

What is not contested is that the paradigm has begun to patch itself. In December 2025 Australia's ban on social media accounts for children under sixteen took effect, and within about a month platforms had removed some 4.7 million accounts, under threat of fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars. For a paradigm whose protocol is to remove constraints, this is a striking reversal, a new constraint placed on the young for their own good. Whether such measures are epicycles that save the paradigm or the first signs of a different one is a question Part Two must take up.

Dating apps complete the picture. Michael Rosenfeld, Reuben Thomas, and Sonia Hausen found that about 39 percent of heterosexual couples who met in 2017 met online, and that meeting through friends, the most common route since the Second World War, fell from about a third of couples in 1995 to a fifth in 2017; online meeting overtook friends around 2013. The front porch gave way to the back seat, and the back seat to the screen. Each step removed another layer of family and community from the choice of a mate, and the paradigm of progress counted each as a freedom, since it asks "whom does it constrain?" and not "what is lost if it goes?"

HOW THE MECHANISM WORKS

Here, then, is the general mechanism. A new technology changes costs and possibilities, and practices that become cheap tend to spread whether or not anyone has argued for them. A practice that spreads soon generates cases the reigning paradigm did not anticipate, and the paradigm must then do one of three things. It can articulate itself to cover the new case, as the Victorian order did when it turned the factory's separation of home and work into the sacred hearth. It can

patch itself with epicycles, as Japan's ministry did for thirty years with ever-new reasons for refusing the pill, and as India did by outlawing what its scanners made easy. Or it can yield, as the older sexual ethic yielded after the pill to a paradigm ready to read the new freedom as a gain.

Between the arrival of a technology and the paradigm's settled answer there is always a lag, the moral counterpart of Ogburn's cultural lag. During that lag people live with a practice that their inherited lexicon cannot describe well; the old words sound quaint, and the new ones have not yet been coined. Moral crises often begin in that gap.

Two cautions follow. The first is that the direction of change is set by the paradigm and the frame, and not by the machine. Print fed a schism in Latin Europe and not in East Asia; the pill reshaped marriage in America and was long refused, then little used, in Japan; ultrasound served son preference in India and China and, elsewhere, the plain joy of expectant parents. The second is that a technology tends to favor whichever paradigm is ready to use it. When the pill arrived, a paradigm built on removing constraints was rising and could take the pill as its sacrament. The moral effect of a technology thus depends on which paradigm is strongest when it arrives, one more reason the history of morals cannot be told as accretion.

Artificial general intelligence, if it comes, would change the cost of nearly everything, including thought, persuasion, companionship, and work, and so it would put every part of the present paradigm under leverage at once. It would also become a gatekeeper of a new kind, since systems that answer moral questions for millions of people will carry some paradigm in their training whether their makers intend it or not. Chapter XXVIII treats this in full; here it is enough to say that this may be the most consequential Einstein yet, and like the others it will not choose its own direction.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The first objection is that the chapter's title overstates the case. Einstein was a mind with a new idea, while a technology is a tool with no ideas at all, so calling technology morality's Einstein seems to give the machine credit for what reformers did. Abolition, for instance, was driven by Quakers and evangelicals, not by any invention, and the cotton gin, if anything, strengthened slavery for decades. The best answer is that the chapter claims "often,"

not “always,” and that its own cases concede the point: technology changes costs and possibilities, but a paradigm must read the change before it becomes moral. Reformers supply the reading, and technology supplies the occasion.

The second objection is technological determinism in disguise. If cheap practices spread whatever anyone argues, then moral argument is idle and the machine rules after all. The comparative cases tell against this, for Japan delayed the pill for decades, India and China legislated against sex selection, and Australia is now restraining social media for children. Paradigms can and do refuse what technology makes cheap, though refusal has costs and does not always hold.

The third objection is that several of the cases are causally uncertain. Goldin and Katz relied on differences among states in legal timing, which is strong but not experimental evidence; Haidt’s thesis is contested by serious researchers; and Eisenstein’s account is not comparative enough. The chapter should therefore be read as a well-supported pattern rather than a law, and the smartphone case in particular as an open question rather than a verdict.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
technology as Einstein	a new technology playing the role that a revolutionary thinker plays in science	often, not always
cost shift	a change in what a practice costs in money, risk, effort, or shame	the first step of the mechanism
possibility shift	a new option that did not exist before	prenatal sex testing, the pill, the dating app
articulation	a paradigm extending itself to cover a new case	separate spheres and the factory
patch	an epicycle that refuses or limits a new practice	Japan’s pill delay; India’s 1994 law; Australia’s 2025 ban
yielding	a paradigm giving way to a successor ready to use the technology	the older sexual ethic after the pill
moral lag	the gap between a technology’s arrival and the paradigm’s settled answer	after Ogburn’s cultural lag (1922)
high-tech sexism	technology serving an old preference	Sen’s phrase for sex-selective abortion

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. If the pill and the ultrasound scanner were used so differently in different countries, what does that suggest about the claim that a technology “causes” a moral change?
2. Which current practices have become cheap only recently, and which paradigm is reading them as goods?
3. Are Australia’s ban and the move to phone-free schools epicycles that save the present paradigm, or signs of a different one?
4. What would it take for a paradigm to anticipate a technology’s moral effects rather than merely react to them, and who would have to do that work?
5. If AGI becomes a moral gatekeeper, which paradigm is it most likely to carry, and why?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: AGI as the paradigm under leverage is this chapter’s mechanism at its greatest scale, for when nearly everything becomes cheap, a protocol of removing constraints has no stopping rule left to check it.
- Ascent of the West: the successor measures progress by man’s relation to reality, by what we can cure, build, and discover, which means it can treat technology as a moral subject in its own right rather than only as an occasion for liberation.
- Win the Words: the moral lag is a gap in the lexicon, and coining words for what new technologies take away, as well as for what they give, is one of your four moves applied to the frontier.
- Map vs Territory: the pill changed the map of sexual ethics, but not the territory in which children still need fathers and societies still need children, and the fertility data in Part Two will test which held.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: if technology does not choose its own direction, then the moral backend that AI systems carry is a choice, and this chapter is the historical argument for making that choice deliberately.

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XIX

A Theory of Engineered Moral Change

Moral orders can be moved on purpose, but only by a sequence of levers pulled in the right order, and the record shows that the levers anyone can reach are now more numerous at the start of a change, while the levers that finish one remain where they have always been, in institutions.

THE ENGINEER'S QUESTION

THIS BOOK HAS so far described moral revolutions as things that happen to people, which is true as far as it goes; but every reformer knows that some people set out to cause such changes and that some of them succeed. The Quakers who met in London in 1787 meant to end the slave trade, and they did; the economists who gathered under Hayek in 1947 meant to change the climate of opinion for a generation, and they did that too. If moral change can be caused, then the historian of morals owes the reader something more than a natural history. He owes him an account of the mechanisms, the conditions under which each one works, and the order in which they combine.

Whether engineering a moral order is right is the business of Chapter XX, and how to bring people through such a change belongs to Chapter XXI; here we ask only how the thing has actually been done.

LEVERS FROM ABOVE: LAW, ELITES, AND THE LONG PROGRAM

The most visible lever is law, and its record is more mixed than either its friends or its enemies suppose. The Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education* unanimously in May 1954, yet the next year it left the remedy to the district courts and asked only for “all deliberate speed,” and much of the South answered with massive resistance; Prince Edward County in Virginia closed its public schools from 1959 to 1964 rather than integrate them. Gerald Rosenberg, in *The Hollow Hope*, found almost no measurable change in the share of Black children in the South attending school with white children during the decade after *Brown*, and the share began to rise only after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 joined the decree to the machinery of the federal government. A court can announce a new moral order, but it cannot install one without an executive, a budget, and a public that will not resist forever.

When law does gain that machinery, however, its reach can be enormous. Christopher Caldwell argues in *The Age of Entitlement* (2020) that the civil-rights legislation of the 1960s became, in his words, “a rival constitution,” a second regime of law, courts, and administrative remedy that gradually reached into hiring, schooling, and commerce, which elites embraced and many ordinary citizens never fully accepted. His critics reply that the laws answered documented discrimination and that his rival constitution was the old one finally enforced; but both sides agree that a body of law, once joined to bureaucracy and litigation, can rebuild the gatekeeping of a whole society over half a century.

Meiji Japan shows the same lever pulled faster and harder. The Imperial Rescript on Education, signed on 30 October 1890, set out a Confucian morality of loyalty to the emperor and filial piety; copies were sent to every school with the emperor’s portrait, read aloud at every important ceremony, and committed to memory by the children, and some schools kept the text in a small shrine. The Rescript helped to form a people, and historians link it to the militarism of the 1930s; yet the American occupation forbade its reading and the Diet abolished it in June 1948, for what one central authority writes, another can unwrite.

The second lever is quieter: the slow cultivation of elites. James Davison Hunter, in *To Change the World* (2010), argued against the common view that cultures change when enough individual hearts and minds change. Cultures

change, he wrote, from the top down and rarely from the bottom up; the innovators are usually elites who stand outside the center of prestige; and change is strongest where networks of such elites overlap and join their cultural, social, economic, and political resources over a long time (pages 41 to 43). The clearest modern proofs of his thesis were secular and deliberate.

Antonio Gramsci, writing in a Fascist prison, distinguished a war of position, the slow contest for the schools, churches, courts, and press, from a war of maneuver, the seizure of power that becomes possible only once the first war is won. Around 1967 the German student leader Rudi Dutschke proposed a long march through the institutions, by which he meant entering the professions and mastering them while building counter-institutions alongside; there is no evidence that he had read Gramsci, but Herbert Marcuse endorsed the strategy in 1971 as the only effective way. On the other side of the ledger, Hayek published "The Intellectuals and Socialism" in the *University of Chicago Law Review* in the spring of 1949. Socialism, he argued, had begun not as a workers' movement but as a construction of theorists, carried to the public by what he called "professional secondhand dealers in ideas"—teachers, journalists, and clergy—and he urged the friends of liberty to have the courage to be utopian and to play the same long game. He had already begun: the Mont Pelerin Society met near Lake Geneva in April 1947, when Hayek invited thirty-nine scholars, mostly economists; eight of its members later won the Nobel prize in economics, twenty-two of the seventy-six economic advisers to Ronald Reagan's 1980 campaign were members, and one member, Antony Fisher, founded the Institute of Economic Affairs in 1955 and what became the Atlas Network in 1981. The Fabian Society, founded in London in 1884, had shown the way: named for Fabius the Delayer, with the tortoise as its emblem, it helped to found the London School of Economics in 1895 and the body that became the Labour Party in 1900, and waited.

These programs, with their horizon of decades and their investment in the people who train others, are the closest thing in the record to moral change by design, and they worked, though each worked by preparing a frame for a crisis it did not itself cause.

LEVERS FROM BELOW: EXEMPLARS, PLEDGES, AND THE COMMITTED MINORITY

The abolitionists did not begin at the top. The Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed on 22 May 1787 by twelve men, nine of them Quakers, who could not sit in Parliament; they gave the movement an emblem in Josiah Wedgwood's medallion of a kneeling man in chains, which women wore as bracelets and hairpins, and they gave it a method in the mass petition, which drew signatures from very large numbers of Britons. By the time the slave trade was abolished in 1807, the arguments against it were old; what had been new was an exemplar people could see, wear, and sign beneath.

The civil-rights movement supplied the purest modern case of an engineered exemplar. The Nashville students whom James Lawson had trained in nonviolence, and whose written code Chapter XVII described, sat at the downtown lunch counters in the spring of 1960; more than 150 were arrested, and by May six stores were serving Black customers. The discipline was the point, for a protester who will not strike back makes the other side's violence visible and unanswerable, and the scene becomes a model case the whole nation can read without a lecture.

Exemplars work by changing what people see; the next lever works by changing what they believe others will do. The joint pledge of the anti-footbinding societies, which Chapter XVI followed through Gerry Mackie's convention account, let the families who wished to stop binding their daughters' feet stop together, and Tostan's public declarations against female genital cutting, beginning in Senegal in the late 1990s, applied the same coordination device village by village.

How large must the committed group be? Damon Centola's laboratory experiment of 2018, also described in Chapter XVI, found that a committed minority of about a quarter could overturn a settled convention, though its authors allow that the threshold shifts with how entrenched the old norm is. Timur Kuran, writing in 1991 about the revolutions of 1989, explained why such flips surprise us: when people hide their private views, a regime looks invincible until enough of them stop hiding.

LEVERS BESIDE: CULTURE, TECHNOLOGY, EXIT, AND THE FUNERAL

Culture is the fourth great lever, and Chapter XIV set out its evidence, chief among it Paluck's finding that a radio drama changed perceived norms more than private beliefs. The case most often cited in America is same-sex marriage. Gallup measured support at 27 percent in 1996, 53 percent in 2011, and 60 percent in 2015, and it has held near 70 percent since 2021, with 68 percent in 2025; television's sympathetic gay characters, which Joe Biden credited in 2012, were part of that movement. The screen and the young moved first, and the law came after.

Technology, the subject of Chapter XVIII, is the lever that no one pulls on purpose and that moves all the others, since it changes the costs around which a moral order was built and who can speak to whom.

Exit is the lever of those who cannot win by voice. Albert Hirschman, in *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970), observed that members of a declining institution can either leave it or complain, and that the two interact: when exit is easy, the most demanding members leave first, and the institution loses the very people whose voice might have reformed it; yet exit can also provoke voice, as it did in East Germany in 1989, when mass emigration pushed those who stayed into the streets. American homeschooling is a modest present case. The share of students homeschooled rose from 2.8 percent in 2018–19 to 3.4 percent in 2022–23, according to federal survey data reported by Pew, and three in four of their parents cited a desire to give moral instruction. The great historical case is the early church, which for three centuries built a parallel society, with its own charity, discipline, and care for the sick, rather than capturing Rome's institutions. On Rodney Stark's reckoning it grew at about 40 percent a decade, which would bring it to roughly six million people, perhaps a tenth of the empire, around the time of Constantine's conversion. The figures are reconstructions, not counts, but exit sustained long enough becomes a rival order waiting to be adopted.

The last two levers are the bluntest. Force has installed moral orders, though rarely by itself. Constantine and Licinius granted Christians toleration at Milan in 313, and in 380 the Edict of Thessalonica made Nicene Christianity the faith of the empire and authorized the punishment of heretics; but the emperors were ratifying a community that had already grown large, not conjuring one from nothing. Generational turnover, finally, cannot be hurried. Max Planck wrote

that a new scientific truth wins by outliving its opponents, and in 2019 Pierre Azoulay and his colleagues found that when eminent life scientists died, outsiders entered their fields. Moral change runs the same way. In 2019 Pew found that 74 percent of Millennials but only 45 percent of the Silent Generation favored same-sex marriage, and much of the national movement was simply the arithmetic of cohorts.

TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

The author's hypothesis is that top-down, elite-driven change is neither the only nor even the principal mechanism of moral change, and that as individuals gain leverage through technology and wealth, moral change is becoming more distributed and harder to steer from above. The record allows a fair test.

The evidence for it is real. Centola's experiment shows that a committed quarter can overturn a settled norm without any elite sponsor, and Kuran shows that a society's visible consensus can be far thinner than its gatekeepers believe. Mackie's pledges and Tostan's declarations were local affairs, and recent American politics has shown ordinary voters reversing elite policy directly. The reversals recorded in Chapter VI came in some of the most progressive places in the country: San Francisco recalled three members of its school board and its district attorney, Chesa Boudin, in 2022, and in 2024 California passed Proposition 36, which rolled back parts of the 2014 reform known as Proposition 47, with 68 percent in favor and a majority in all fifty-eight counties.

The evidence against it is also real. Caldwell's account, whatever one thinks of its verdict, describes a moral order rebuilt chiefly through statute, courts, and administration. Constantine's case reminds us that a parallel society, however large, became the order of the Western world only when the state adopted it. The networked media that were supposed to distribute moral authority have partly re-centralized it: in 2025 Pew found that 53 percent of American adults at least sometimes get news from social media, and the largest share of that comes through Facebook and YouTube, so that a few companies' ranking rules now stand where a few editors once stood.

The strongest evidence against the hypothesis comes from the scholars of protest. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, studying 323 campaigns from 1900 to 2006 in *Why Civil Resistance Works* (2011), found that nonviolent campaigns succeeded 53 percent of the time and violent ones 26 percent, and that no

campaign in their data failed once it had drawn about 3.5 percent of the population into active participation at its peak. That looks like a triumph of the distributed. Yet Chenoweth's later work found that while the 2010s saw more nonviolent mass campaigns than any decade since 1900, ninety-six of them, their success rate fell below 34 percent, from as high as 65 percent in the 1990s, and their average peak participation fell to 1.3 percent of the population. She traced the decline chiefly to the movements themselves, including digital organizing that gathers crowds quickly but leaves them unable to turn numbers into organizations. Zeynep Tufekci had made the same argument in *Twitter and Tear Gas* (2017). The March on Washington in 1963 followed years of organizing and months of planning, whereas the crowds in Cairo in 2011 assembled in days; networked movements reach great size before they build the capacity to negotiate, change tactics, or endure, and they suffer what she called a tactical freeze, while governments learn to treat attention as a resource and simply wait.

What, then, may we fairly conclude? The hypothesis holds at the beginning and at the veto, and it fails at the end. Ignition is more distributed than it has ever been: a committed minority can now find itself, create common knowledge, and audition an exemplar without anyone's permission, and a public can refuse an elite policy at the ballot box. To that extent moral change is harder to impose from above on an unwilling public. But consolidation, which is the turning of a new conviction into a lasting order, still runs through institutions, through law, schools, professions, and the training of the young, and the new tools have made consolidation harder rather than easier for the distributed side, since they lower the cost of starting a movement more than the cost of sustaining one. Hunter is right about how changes are finished, and the author about how they begin: distributed ignition, concentrated consolidation. The leverage that technology and wealth give to individuals is real, and it is chiefly the power to start and to stop, not yet the power to build.

A SEQUENCE MODEL, AND HOW ENGINEERING FAILS

Put the levers in the order in which successful cases used them, and a sequence appears. It begins with anomaly and crisis, which no engineer can manufacture for long; the record shows reformers exploiting crises far more often than creating them. Next comes a frame, prepared in advance by the slow work of elite networks, so that when the crisis comes, as Hayek understood, there is a story ready

to explain it (Chapter XVII). Then come exemplars, disciplined and visible, who give the frame a face, as the Wedgwood medallion and the Nashville students did. A committed minority then forms and, through pledges, declarations, and public acts, turns private agreement into common knowledge, until it reaches the region of a quarter of the relevant community or, for a national movement, a few percent in active participation. Culture auditions the new way of life on stage and screen, and in this phase the young move first. Institutions are then built or captured, either as parallel societies, as with the early church and the homeschoolers, or by a long march into the existing ones. Law comes late and ratifies, joining the new order to enforcement and money, as the Civil Rights Act did for Brown. Last of all, generational turnover makes the change ordinary, so that what was a cause becomes common sense.

Engineering fails when a stage is skipped or forced. A frame without a crisis finds no buyers, and a crisis without a frame produces only anger. Exemplars without discipline lose the moral contrast that made them persuasive, and Chenoweth's finding that more than half of the nonviolent campaigns of the 2010s had violent flanks is one measure of that failure. A minority that never makes its agreement public stays a set of private opinions, however numerous. A movement that has culture without institutions, as Occupy had, dissolves when attention moves on, and a movement that has institutions without legitimacy invites the backlash that Caldwell describes. Law without enforcement, as Brown showed for ten years, is a promise rather than an order; and force without conversion lasts only as long as the force, as the Rescript showed when it was undone in a single act of the Diet. Above all, engineering fails when the paradigm it installs cannot survive contact with reality: the Soviet project held every lever on this list and still could not make its new man, because the territory would not yield to the map.

Some of these levers work by persuasion and coordination, others by capture and force, and the same mechanisms served the abolitionists and the propagandists of Rwanda. Chapter XX asks which means are honorable, and Chapter XXI asks how to walk people through a change of paradigm so that those who held the old one are treated as wrong rather than evil, and are offered an honorable exit rather than a defeat.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The first objection is that the chapter's cases are chosen with hindsight. Every successful program looks deliberate afterward, while the failed programs of equally determined people are forgotten, and the sequence model may be an orderly story laid over luck. The answer is partly a concession, for the model describes regularities and cannot promise success; but Centola's threshold and Paluck's norm effects were found by experiment, and Chenoweth's data include failures, so the model rests on more than survivors.

A second objection is that the hypothesis test leans on narrow cases. Two California votes are not a national trend, and they concern criminal justice rather than the deepest parts of the paradigm; a skeptic could say that voters reversed a policy and left the exemplar untouched. That is fair, and it is why the conclusion grants distributed actors the veto rather than the construction of new orders. A third objection runs the other way: the networked tools are young, and movements may yet learn to build durable organizations online, as the abolitionists learned to use the petition. If that happens, the hypothesis will hold more fully than this chapter allows; but the present evidence points the other way, and a theory should follow the evidence it has.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
engineered moral change	deliberate use of known levers to shift a moral paradigm	the subject of this chapter; its ethics in Chapter XX
war of position	the slow contest for schools, press, churches, and courts	Gramsci; compare Dutschke's long march
long program	an elite network working on a horizon of decades	Fabians, Mont Pelerin Society
committed minority	a group that holds a new norm regardless of cost	Centola's threshold of about a quarter in the lab
coordination pledge	a public promise that lets people abandon a norm together	Mackie on footbinding; Tostan's declarations
exit	leaving an institution rather than reforming it	Hirschman; can weaken or provoke voice

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
tactical freeze	a movement’s inability to adapt after rapid growth	Tufekci
distributed ignition, concentrated consolidation	individuals can now start and stop changes, but institutions still finish them	the chapter’s verdict on the hypothesis
sequence model	crisis, frame, exemplars, minority and common knowledge, culture, institutions, law, turnover	skipping a stage is the common failure

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Brown v. Board changed little for ten years and the Civil Rights Act changed a great deal. What did the second supply that the first lacked, and does the same gap appear in other moral reforms you know?
2. Hayek urged his allies to prepare ideas for a crisis they could not foresee. What would a frame prepared in that spirit look like today, and who would carry it?
3. If digital tools make movements easier to start and harder to sustain, what kind of institution would close that gap?
4. Is exit a form of moral change or a refusal of it? When does a parallel society become a successor rather than a refuge?
5. Which stage of the sequence model is the present paradigm’s opposition weakest at, and which is the present paradigm itself weakest at defending?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the sequence model begins with anomaly and crisis, and your signs of exhaustion are the inventory of that first stage; but the chapter warns that a crisis without a prepared frame produces anger rather than a successor.
- Ascent of the West: the steward-builder exemplar fits the consolidation half of the verdict, since distributed tools can start a turn, but only builders of institutions can finish one.
- Win the Words: the frame and the lexicon are prepared in the long program, and your four moves (refuse, substitute, recover, coin) are the toolkit of the second stage.
- The Turn: turning well means not skipping stages, building before tearing down and offering honorable exits; Chapter XXI takes this up directly.
- The paradigm under leverage and scalable philosophical infrastructure: platforms and AI systems now sit where editors and teachers once sat, so whoever writes their defaults

holds a consolidation lever; this is where your hypothesis about rising individual leverage will be tested hardest.

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XX

The Ethics of Moral Change

A theory of how to stimulate a moral shift is only half a theory until it says which means are legitimate, and the answer this chapter gives is that a shift must be warranted by reality and pursued by means that treat every person as a reasoning equal, because morality is for us but is not ours to remake at will.

THE QUESTION A THEORY OF CHANGE CANNOT AVOID

CHAPTER XIX SET out the levers by which a moral paradigm can be moved on purpose: exemplars, words, perceived norms, coordination devices, and institutions. A list of levers is a dangerous thing to hand to anyone, however, for the knowledge that tells a reformer how to end footbinding also tells a propagandist how to start a pogrom. Chapter XIV showed the point in its starkest form. The radio that taught reconciliation in Rwanda after the genocide had first taught slaughter, accounting, by David Yanagizawa-Drott's estimate, for roughly a tenth of the violence of 1994. The lever did not care which way it was pulled.

So a theory of engineered moral change needs a matching account of legitimate means, and for a reason deeper than good manners. This book has argued that moral paradigms are maps and that reality is the territory they answer to. In one sense morality is genuinely ours: it is for us, it serves human flourishing, and it changes as we learn. Yet the territory does not move when the map does. You cannot make a river shallow by drawing it thin, nor make a people flourish by

declaring good a way of life that starves them. Morality is for us without being infinitely manipulable by us, and that fact decides most of what follows.

It decides, first, where the warrant for a shift must come from. A shift is legitimate only when reality warrants it—when the old paradigm is in fact failing at the tribunal of Chapter XIII and the successor would in fact do better by the five criteria of the Postscript—and never merely because an individual wants it, a small group has decided on it, or a movement believes itself the leading edge of history. It decides, second, what happens when the warrant is missing: engineered change that defies reality does harm on its way to failing, because people must be bent to fit a map that does not fit the ground. And it decides, third, what legitimate engineering really is. When engineered change tracks reality, it is nothing more exotic than correction taken up on purpose, the meta-process of Chapter XV practiced deliberately rather than suffered blindly.

Two questions must therefore be asked of any attempt to change a moral paradigm, and asked separately: whether the change is true to the territory, and whether the way of making it is honest and humane. A good cause pursued by corrupt means corrupts the cause, since the means become part of what the new paradigm teaches, whereas a false cause pursued by honest means still fails, but more gently, because honest means let people see the failure and turn back.

The Soviet project, whose frame Chapter XVII examined, shows what happens when both are answered wrongly. To form a New Soviet Man, selfless, disciplined, and devoted to the revolution, its ideologues used nearly every lever this book has named, from exemplars such as the miner Stakhanov to communal kitchens and nurseries that would reshape the household, but they never asked whether human nature would bear the design. What the system produced instead, on Alexander Zinoviev's satirical account, was *homo sovieticus*, and that is the territory answering the map: the people shaped by a blueprint with no warrant learned not selflessness but the arts of surviving a lie.

That is why the warrant cannot rest on anyone's say-so. "The right side of history" tempts us because it supplies a warrant without the trouble of earning one, and a vanguard that regards its claims as already proved has no reason to test them, so that every failure looks to it like resistance. The legitimate reformer must offer his warrant as a claim about consequences that others can check, and accept that the check may go against him.

TRUTHFULNESS AND PERSUASION

The first principle of legitimate means is truthfulness: no lies, and no propaganda. Lying wrongs the person lied to, but it does something more, for a paradigm installed by lies has disabled its own reality test. If the enemy is called vermin, no one can see that he is a neighbor. Propaganda is a forged map handed out with orders not to look at the ground, and the Rwandan broadcasts of 1994, like the Soviet press, are its plain instances. By contrast, the radio drama studied by Elizabeth Levy Paluck, discussed in Chapter XIV, moved perceived norms through a story its audience knew to be a story, about a reality—neighbors living together again—that listeners could test in their own villages.

The second principle is persuasion rather than manipulation. Kant gave the idea its classic form in the formula of humanity: we must never treat humanity, in ourselves or another, merely as a means, but always also as an end. We may use one another constantly, as we use the taxi driver to get home, but only in ways the other could consent to, so that his own capacity for setting ends is respected rather than overridden. Manipulation is the clearest violation of that rule in matters of belief, and philosophers commonly describe it as influence that bypasses or undermines a person's reason, treating his reasons as levers rather than addressing his mind. Robert Noggle's survey admits that read strictly this would condemn every appeal to feeling, but emotion is not the enemy of reason when it fits the facts. Frederick Douglass moved audiences to grief and anger by telling the truth about his own life, so that feeling and fact pointed the same way, whereas the manipulator produces a feeling the facts do not support, or wins an assent the person would withdraw if he saw how it was obtained.

That distinction sits at the center of the debate over nudges. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's *Nudge* (2008) proposed that institutions arrange the contexts of choice—defaults, orderings, framings—to steer people toward better outcomes while leaving them free to choose otherwise. Their strongest argument was that such choice architecture is unavoidable, since someone must decide what goes first in the cafeteria line. Critics pressed back. Pelle Guldberg Hansen and Andreas Maaløe Jespersen argued in 2013 that nudging is not inherently liberty-preserving, and that nudges working on automatic, unreflective processing are more troubling than those prompting deliberate choice. Jeremy Waldron, reviewing Sunstein in 2014, accepted better information as unobjectionable but

objected to nudges that work on people “behind their backs” by exploiting their flaws. And Noggle answers the unavoidability argument neatly: that we cannot help bumping into people on a crowded train does not license shoving them on purpose. The fair conclusion is that some nudges are persuasion in a quiet voice and some are manipulation in a lab coat, and the test that separates them is whether the influence would survive being explained to the person while it works. A pension default announced plainly and easy to undo passes; a design built to exploit fatigue or vanity does not.

PUBLICITY, CONSENT, AND EXIT

That test is a form of an older principle. In *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant held that a maxim affecting the rights of others is wrong if it is “incompatible with publicity,” that is, if it could succeed only by staying hidden, and Rawls carried the idea into *A Theory of Justice*, where the principles of a just society must be publicly known and mutually acknowledged. It is a negative test, for a policy that fails it is wrong while one that passes is not thereby right; but for a reformer it is demanding enough, since a movement that keeps one face for the public and another for its members has already failed.

The designated-driver campaign, whose frame Chapter XVII described, shows publicity working. Jay Winsten’s center at the Harvard School of Public Health persuaded the three broadcast networks to air its announcements and the major studios to write the idea into more than 160 prime-time programs. By a Roper poll of 1991, 37 percent of Americans said they had served as a designated driver, and alcohol-related traffic deaths fell by about a quarter between 1988 and 1992, while other traffic deaths fell by 5 percent. The school’s own account admits that the evaluation had no matched control group and that new laws and enforcement played their part. The campaign was open in its aims and true in its content, though it also marks a limit, for a campaign that slipped a contested moral claim into entertainment without the audience knowing would stand on far weaker ground.

Consent and exit form the next principle. Legitimate change works through voluntary association, in which people join because they are drawn and can leave when they wish, and so the reformer’s proper task is to build parallel institutions that show the new way of life working, rather than to seize other people’s institutions for his purposes. Alcoholics Anonymous, whose frame Chapter XVII also

described, is perhaps the purest modern example. It published its Twelve Traditions in 1946 and by its own account is now present in about 180 nations. It has reshaped a great many moral lives without seizing anything: its only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking; its groups refuse outside money; it holds no opinion on outside issues; and its public relations rest on “attraction rather than promotion.” Each tradition is a principle of legitimate means turned into a rule of conduct.

The anti-footbinding societies, described in Chapters XII and XVI, worked the same way, for their joint public pledge meant that no family had to go first alone, and Tostan has since carried the same voluntary method to thousands of African communities declaring an end to female genital cutting, though Gerry Mackie cautions that a declaration is a high point and not the end. Set against these the Red Guards, sent out in 1966 to destroy the Four Olds—old ideas, culture, customs, and habits—who did not build a rival institution and invite people in, but broke into the existing ones and tore them down, the cemetery of Confucius among them.

PIECEMEAL, REVERSIBLE, TESTABLE

The fifth principle comes from Karl Popper, whom Chapter XV introduced, and who in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and *The Poverty of Historicism* distinguished piecemeal social engineering from the utopian kind. The piecemeal engineer fights one acknowledged ill at a time, so that the side effects of his action can be seen and corrected, while the utopian engineer works from a blueprint of the whole good society, which Popper judged misconceived and bound to end in disaster, because human action always has consequences no one foresaw. His principle is this book’s reality test turned into a method, for a change made piecemeal can be checked against the territory, whereas when everything changes at once no one can tell which change did what. To his point we may add reversibility: a reformer truly answerable to reality should prefer changes that can be undone if they fail, pilots before national programs, and measured outcomes before declared victories. The designated-driver campaign, with its polls and fatality counts, is a modest example, and so is the footbinding pledge, which spread village by village where anyone could see whether the unbound daughters married.

The Terror is the method's opposite. Under the Law of Suspects of 17 September 1793, the prisons overflowed with vaguely defined suspects, and some 16,594 official death sentences were handed down across France before the Terror ended in July 1794, and many thousands more died without trial or awaiting it. In February 1794 Robespierre told the Convention that a revolution needed both virtue and terror, which is the utopian engineer's creed in a sentence: the good society is known in advance, and the only question is how much force it will take to install. The Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976 repeated the pattern on a larger scale. Its death toll is uncertain, with estimates running from hundreds of thousands into the millions (Andrew Walder's study of county records for 1966 to 1971 alone yields 1.1 to 1.6 million), and in 1981 the Communist Party itself called it responsible for "the most severe setback and the heaviest losses" since 1949. Neither revolution could be tested along the way or reversed once begun, and reality judged both only when it was too late.

THE FIXED POINTS: DIGNITY, PROPORTION, AND SUBSIDIARITY

The sixth principle restates the third of Chapter XII's rules for turning well: equal dignity and equality before the law are held fixed through any moral change. The person on the losing side remains a person under the same law as the winners, there is to be no cruelty to the losers, and wherever possible they should be offered an honorable exit, a way to leave the old practice without leaving their self-respect behind. The struggle session, in which a teacher or a father was humiliated before a crowd, is the exact negation of the honorable exit, whereas the footbinding pledge was a model of it, since it let families keep their standing by moving together. A movement that suspends dignity for its enemies has taught the new paradigm that dignity is conditional, and that lesson will outlast the movement.

The seventh principle joins proportion and subsidiarity. Proportion scales the means to the evil and to the warrant, so that a grave and well-attested harm may justify strong measures while a contested claim about how people ought to live justifies only argument, example, and invitation. Subsidiarity asks that change be pursued at the lowest level able to accomplish it; Pius XI, in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), called it a grave evil and a disturbance of right order to assign to a higher body what a lower one can do. The engineer prefers the central lever for its effi-

ciency, which is just what makes it dangerous, for a change pursued town by town runs many experiments at once and lets the territory answer in many places, whereas a change imposed from the center runs one experiment, on everyone, with no control.

HARD CASES

Principles earn their keep in hard cases, and four deserve a fair hearing. The first is Little Rock. Three years after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) held segregated schools inherently unequal, nine Black students enrolled at Central High School, and Governor Orval Faubus called out the Arkansas National Guard, which turned them away on September 4, 1957. After a mob gathered, President Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10730, federalized the Guard, and sent about 1,000 paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division, who escorted the students in on September 25. Eisenhower was no crusader, and the National Park Service notes that he privately thought civil-rights activists wanted too much change too quickly; but he told the nation that personal opinions about the decision had no bearing on its enforcement. The next year a unanimous Supreme Court held in *Cooper v. Aaron* that the students' rights were "not to be sacrificed or yielded to the violence and disorder" of resistance.

Was this legitimate means? By the principles above it was, and the reason matters. The force was used not to convert anyone or to install a new paradigm, but to hold a fixed point in place, equality before the law for nine children whom a mob would otherwise have kept out. It was public, announced on national television; it was proportionate, limited to securing the court's order, with the Army troops gone by the end of November; and it was ordered by a man who did not share the reformers' hopes. Yet it also shows the limits of force. The Nine endured a year of harassment, and the following year Little Rock closed its public high schools altogether, for force could secure the door but could not change what people saw on the other side of it.

The second case is civil-rights law imposed on resisting states. Because earlier civil-rights acts relied on case-by-case litigation, which Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach judged too slow, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 required covered jurisdictions to clear changes in voting rules with federal authorities in advance, and by one Congressional Research Service table, Black registration in Mississippi rose from about 5 percent of voting-age residents in 1956 to about a

third in 1966. It was strong medicine, applied to particular states on a measured finding of exclusion. In *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) the Supreme Court struck down the coverage formula as no longer grounded in current conditions, leaving preclearance in place but inoperable unless Congress writes a new formula. Defenders of the formula argue that it was still needed, while the majority held that so intrusive a remedy must rest on present facts, and so both sides argued on this chapter's terms: proportion to a demonstrated harm, answerable to reality as reality changes.

The third case is Constantine. The arrangement agreed at Milan in 313 granted Christians, and others too, freedom to follow the religion of their choice and restored property taken from the church, and that was legitimate, for it ended a persecution and set the faiths on an equal footing. What followed was different: under Theodosius, Nicene Christianity was made the official religion in 380, and, as Chapter XII recounted, laws of the early 390s banned pagan sacrifice. The Christian paradigm had real warrant, having built the care of the sick and the abandoned long before it held power, but the means of its final victory failed the tests of consent and equal standing. A paradigm may be warranted while some of the means used for it are not, and the two must be judged separately.

The fourth case is the hardest in principle: a minority that is right before the majority is. The British abolitionists who founded their society in 1787 were few, and William Lloyd Garrison, who began *The Liberator* in 1831, was dragged through the streets of Boston by a mob in 1835. If legitimacy came from numbers, they would have had none. It came instead from warrant, for they were right about the territory, and from means. Thomas Clarkson gathered evidence on the docks of Liverpool and Bristol, some 300,000 Britons refused West Indian sugar in 1791, and Garrison held to moral persuasion and nonviolence. A minority may press its case against the majority with truth, publicity, exemplars, and its own willingness to bear the cost, but it may not install its view by deceit or seize power to impose it. American slavery, as Chapter XII recorded, finally ended through war and a constitutional amendment, and that history should not be prettified; yet the force that settled it was a constitutional government's, and when that force was withdrawn in 1877, the conversion it had not achieved was still missing.

Set side by side with the chapter's other cases, these hard ones show the principles doing real sorting work.

CASE	WARRANT FROM REALITY	MEANS	VERDICT
British abolition campaign	the enslaved were persons; slave economies ran on violence	evidence, petitions, boycott, persuasion	legitimate
Alcoholics Anonymous	drinking was destroying lives that could be saved	voluntary fellowship, attraction, exit	legitimate
Designated-driver campaign	drunk driving killed tens of thousands a year	public campaign, true message, measured results	legitimate, with a caution about embedding
Anti-footbinding pledges	binding crippled real women	voluntary joint pledges, honorable exit	legitimate
Little Rock, 1957	equality before the law	limited, public, proportionate force	legitimate, and limited in effect
The Terror	none tested; a blueprint of virtue	suspicion, mass execution	illegitimate
The Soviet new man	none; human nature was assumed to be plastic	propaganda, monopoly of levers	illegitimate, and it failed
The Cultural Revolution	none tested	seizure, humiliation, destruction	illegitimate

Warrant and means move together, though not perfectly, for a reason this chapter began with: means that respect people as reasoning equals keep a movement in contact with reality, because people free to look, object, and leave will report what the territory says, while means that override people blind the movement that uses them.

CORRECTION TAKEN UP DELIBERATELY

Chapter XV argued that beneath every particular paradigm lies a deeper order, the meta-process of correction by which moral communities notice failures, argue, test, and change. Most of the time it runs slowly and without direction, and legitimate engineered change is simply that process entered on purpose by people who have seen a failure and wish to speed the correction. This chapter's principles keep such participation honest. Truthfulness keeps the data clean, persuasion respects the minds that must do the correcting, and publicity lets others check the work; consent and exit preserve their freedom to report what they find, piecemeal change keeps each step testable, the fixed points of dignity protect the losing side, and proportion and subsidiarity keep the experiment small enough to learn from. Illegitimate engineering, by the same light, is a failure of correction, an attempt to skip the tribunal, for the engineer who lies or seizes has decided that the verdict is already in and only the execution remains. That is the vanguard's error, and the accretion picture invites it.

One task remains for Chapter XXI. Even a change made by legitimate means leaves behind decent people who held the old paradigm in good conscience, and how to walk them through it charitably, as people who were wrong rather than evil, is the last part of the ethics of moral change.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The strongest objection is that the principles are a luxury of the comfortable. A people suffering a grave injustice cannot always wait for piecemeal tests and voluntary associations, and the principles, applied strictly, might have counseled patience to the enslaved. Worse, the cases sort neatly only because the winners chose the warrant column: the Jacobins and the Red Guards thought reality warranted their changes too.

Both points have force. The best answer to the first is that the principles do not forbid strong action against a grave harm; they forbid lies, manipulation, cruelty to the losers, and the use of force to convert. Little Rock and the Voting Rights Act show strong action within the principles, and the abolitionists show how much a minority can do with truth alone. The answer to the second is that the warrant must be public and testable, which is exactly what the Jacobins and Mao refused to allow. A claim that cannot be checked, and whose critics are imprisoned, has not been warranted by reality, however sincerely it is believed.

A further strain is that the line between persuasion and manipulation is blurry, as Noggle concedes, and that every successful moral movement, this book's preferred successor included, will use emotion, exemplars, and repetition. That is true, and the publicity test is offered as a working rule, not a proof. Its value is that a reformer can apply it to himself before anyone else does.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
warrant	reality's support for a moral shift	judged by the tribunal and the five criteria
legitimate means	ways of change that respect persons as reasoning equals	truthfulness, persuasion, publicity, consent, testability, dignity, proportion
manipulation	influence that bypasses or undermines a person's reason	hard to define cleanly; see Noggle
nudge	a change in the context of choice that steers without forbidding	Thaler and Sunstein, 2008; contested
publicity principle	a maxim that must stay hidden to succeed is wrong	Kant, 1795; Rawls; a negative test
piecemeal engineering	change aimed at one concrete ill, so its effects can be seen	Popper; contrasted with utopian engineering
subsidiarity	change at the lowest level able to accomplish it	Quadragesimo Anno, 1931
honorable exit	a way to leave the old practice without losing self-respect	Chapter XII; footbinding pledges
vanguard error	treating one's own view as already warranted	the right side of history used as a substitute for proof

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Can you think of a moral campaign whose cause you support but whose means would fail the publicity test? What would it lose by passing it?
2. Is there a nudge you would accept from your government but not from an employer or a technology company, and why?
3. When, if ever, may a minority that believes it is right use force against a majority that disagrees?

4. Which institutions in your own life work by attraction, and which by promotion or capture?
5. How could a successor paradigm be pursued piecemeal and reversibly, when paradigms seem to change as wholes?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Map vs Territory supplies the chapter’s foundation: morality is for us but not infinitely malleable, and you cannot change the territory by changing the map, which is why war-rant must come from reality rather than will.
- The Turn’s rules for turning well become principles here, with build before tearing down reappearing as parallel institutions, and honorable exits and equal dignity held as fixed points.
- Win the Words needs this chapter’s line between persuasion and manipulation; your four moves are legitimate when they help people see the territory more truly, and they become propaganda the moment they hide it.
- Ascent of the West should be pursued by its own test: a founder builds a parallel institution and lets it attract, and a successor that seized the old paradigm’s gatekeepers would betray its exemplar.
- The End of Progress diagnosed a paradigm with no stopping rule; piecemeal, reversible, measured change is the stopping rule built into the method of change itself.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure faces these questions most sharply, since AI systems that shape belief at scale must meet the tests of truthfulness, publicity, and persuasion rather than manipulation, or they become the most powerful propaganda instrument ever built.

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XXI

Wrong, Not Evil: Walking People Through a Revolution

Because a moral revolution seems to tell people not merely that they were mistaken but that they were wicked, whoever would help one along must walk its hearers through it with charity, showing them what was good in what they cared about, so that they need neither break under the change nor refuse it outright.

WHAT A NEW THEORY DOES TO OLD WORK

NEAR THE START of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Kuhn made an observation that is easy to read past. A new theory, he noticed, is never simply an addition to what a field knows, for it changes the rules by which the earlier work was done, and so it passes judgment on work that people had already finished and been proud of. To take it in, a scientist must rebuild the older theory and look again at facts he had thought settled, and Kuhn called this an “intrinsically revolutionary” process, one seldom carried through by a single person and never in a day.

Even among chemists and physicists the cost is real, for a man who has spent thirty years working with phlogiston may feel, when oxygen arrives, that he has wasted his life, and some of the older generation never come round at all. Yet the scientist has one consolation. When he concedes that his theory was wrong, he concedes something about the world and not about himself; he was mistaken,

and mistakes are the ordinary weather of science. No one thinks Priestley a bad man for having defended phlogiston to the end.

In morals the same concession cuts much deeper. A moral paradigm does more than describe the world, for it tells its adherents who they are, and the earlier work on which it passes judgment is not a set of measurements but a life: the votes cast, the causes joined, the children raised, and the friendships made and broken over questions of right and wrong. When a moral paradigm shifts, the old work in question is the person's own conduct, and the verdict seems to fall not on a theory but on a soul.

Worse still, the accretion picture described in Chapter I makes that verdict feel unavoidable. If moral history is a line rising toward the present, and the leading edge cannot err, then whoever stood behind the line was not merely mistaken; he stood lower, nearer the slaveholder and further from the light. Under that picture, to be told that one's moral paradigm has been superseded is to be told that one was, in some measure, evil. A scientist who accepts the new theory loses a theory, whereas a moral adherent who accepts the new paradigm seems to lose his goodness. It is no wonder that people reject a moral shift outright far more readily than a scientific one, or that the rejection is so often angry.

The accretion picture, then, does its damage twice: it made villains of the old paradigm's defenders while the present paradigm was rising, and it will make villains of the present paradigm's adherents if that paradigm falls. The historian of morals has already declined to apply it to the dead, and the task of this chapter is to decline to apply it to the living.

WHY THE STAKES FEEL PERSONAL

The legal scholar Dan Kahan and his colleagues in the Cultural Cognition Project have described what they call identity-protective cognition, the tendency of people to "selectively credit and dismiss evidence" in patterns that match the beliefs dominant in their group. Kahan's explanation is not that people are foolish. Families, congregations, parties, and professions sustain their members, and a proposition that contradicts the group's shared commitments puts a person's standing within it at risk, and with it the self-esteem he draws from belonging. In a 2017 synthesis Kahan added a finding that ought to sober every reformer: on contested questions, the people best at avoiding factual misconceptions are often

the most polarized, so that correct information is not enough while the facts carry meanings that bind them to identity.

A moral paradigm is identity in its purest form. Its exemplar is the person one is trying to be, its lexicon supplies the words in which one praises and blames oneself, and its gatekeepers are the people whose good opinion one has spent years earning. To doubt it is to put all of that at risk at once.

The older literature points the same way. In *When Prophecy Fails* (1956), Leon Festinger and two colleagues studied a small Chicago group whose leader, Dorothy Martin, had foretold a flood before dawn on December 21, 1954, from which the faithful would be rescued by a flying saucer. When the night passed uneventfully the group did not disband; instead it received a new message that its faith had spared the world, and a circle that had shunned publicity began seeking converts. Festinger proposed that a belief tends to grow stronger after disconfirmation when it is deeply held, when believers have taken actions that are hard to undo, and when others around them share it. The book's evidence has since come under serious attack, most recently in an archival study by Thomas Kelly in the *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, which argues that its main claims are false, and so we should hold it as a parable rather than a proof. As a parable, though, it names something every pastor and teacher has seen, that the more a person has given for a belief, the more he needs it to be true.

That is the sunk cost of a virtuous life. A person who has spent decades teaching a moral paradigm, voting by it, and perhaps losing friends over it has invested far more than any doomsday believer gave away, and if the paradigm was wrong, then on the accretion picture all that sacrifice was not only wasted but harmful. The mind will travel a long way to avoid that conclusion.

Claude Steele's theory of self-affirmation, first set out in 1988, explains why. People, Steele argued, are driven to maintain a sense of themselves as good and morally decent, and when information threatens that sense they defend against the information rather than revise the self; a moral revolution aims at just that sense, and so calls out just that defense.

WHAT HELPS PEOPLE REVISE WITHOUT BREAKING

If the trouble were only that people lacked arguments, better arguments would cure it. The evidence suggests otherwise, and it also suggests what does work: lowering the threat to the person, so that he can afford to look at the idea.

The self-affirmation research shows this most directly. In three studies published in 2000, Geoffrey Cohen, Joshua Aronson, and Claude Steele asked some participants to write about a value that mattered to them, such as their sense of humor, and asked others to write about what they had eaten in recent days; then both groups read essays attacking their own position on capital punishment. Those who had first affirmed something good in themselves responded more favorably to the opposing case, and in a third study they read ambiguous evidence about abortion with less bias. In their 2014 review in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, Cohen and David Sherman summed up the field: threats to a person's sense of adequacy set off stress and self-protective defenses, and a timely affirmation of what he values can widen his view of himself enough that the threat loses its grip, sometimes with effects that last months or years. The mechanisms are still debated, yet the direction of the result is clear and humane, for a person who has been reminded that he is good is better able to hear that he is wrong.

The second body of evidence comes from the doorstep. In 2016 David Broockman and Joshua Kalla reported in *Science* on a field experiment in Miami-Dade County, where dozens of canvassers from two LGBT organizations held ten-minute conversations with voters about transgender people. The canvassers did not argue; they built rapport, listened, and asked voters to recall a time when they themselves had been judged for being different. The shift in attitudes was roughly as large as the change in American attitudes toward gay men and lesbians between 1998 and 2012, it lasted at least three months, and it held when voters later heard counterarguments. Broockman himself cautioned that it was a single study, and a similar effort on abortion found no effect.

The follow-up studies have broadly held. In 2020 Kalla and Broockman reported three more field experiments in the *American Political Science Review*, on immigration and transgender rights, and what worked was what they called a nonjudgmental exchange of narratives, in which canvasser and voter each told a story, whereas conversations built only on talking points and facts produced no movement, and the authors warned that calling out a person's views can harden his resistance. A further study, published in 2022, isolated the active ingredient as what they called perspective-getting, roughly the hearing of another person's experience from that person rather than being asked to imagine it.

An honest complication belongs here, for these techniques were developed by advocates of the very paradigm this book suspects is exhausted, and used to move people toward it. That shows the method to be neutral, and it shows as well that

the progress paradigm's own best practitioners discovered by measurement that moralizing does not persuade, which is just what this chapter asks of anyone who would help people out of that paradigm.

The third body of practice comes from the clinic. William Miller and Stephen Rollnick developed motivational interviewing for people struggling with addiction, and in the 2013 edition of their book they define it as a "collaborative conversation style" for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change. Its spirit rests on partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation, so that the person is treated as the expert on his own life and helped to draw out a motive he already has rather than handed one from outside. Its chief warning is against what Miller and Rollnick call the righting reflex, the helper's urge to fix what is wrong by telling the person how to correct it, which tends to provoke the very resistance it means to overcome.

These three bodies of work come from different fields and decades, yet they agree that people change their minds most readily when changing them does not feel like a confession of wickedness.

THE BOOK'S OWN RESOURCES

Chapter I argued that the moralities of the past were real moralities and not merely sins, and that the people who held them were competent practitioners of coherent orders rather than failed versions of ourselves. That argument does not stop at the graveside. If the ancestors were not evil for holding a paradigm that was later superseded, neither are the living who hold one now, as the Postscript said. A historian who extends charity to the dead and withholds it from his neighbors has not understood his own method.

Chapter XV supplied a second resource in Hegel's idea of *Aufhebung*, or sublation, the movement by which something is at once cancelled, preserved, and lifted up. A good successor keeps what was true in the old paradigm and sets it on firmer ground, and that gives the reformer something to show besides the ruin. He can say to the adherent: here is what you loved, and here is where it goes in the new order. Equal dignity and equality before the law, which Chapter XII and *The Turn* hold fixed, are just such goods, carried forward from the old paradigm rather than taken from its people.

A third resource is honor, which Chapter XII drew from Kwame Anthony Appiah. In *The Honor Code* (2010), Appiah argued that dueling, footbinding,

and the Atlantic slave trade ended less because people met new arguments than because their sense of what was honorable changed, and he insisted that honor and morality are distinct things, which may be aligned or set against each other. The practical lesson is the honorable exit: people abandon a practice most readily when doing so lets them keep their honor, so that a reformer who offers no exit but disgrace has chosen a war of attrition, whether he meant to or not.

The fourth resource is the frame described in Chapter XVII. People do not leave one moral home to stand in an empty field; they leave when another home is ready to receive them, as the anti-footbinding societies of Chapter XVI gave each family a community of pledgers before asking it to break with custom. To ask a person to leave his moral community before he has somewhere to go is to ask him to choose between his conscience and his friends, and most people, quite understandably, choose their friends.

A CONVERT WHO KEPT HIS DIGNITY

History offers exemplars of people who passed through a moral revolution and came out whole, and the clearest of them in the English-speaking world is John Newton.

Newton was born in 1725, went to sea young, and by his early twenties was working in the African slave trade. His religious conversion came in a storm at sea in 1748, and yet, as the tidy version of the story leaves out, he accepted further work in the trade after it and did not leave until 1754. He was ordained in 1764, served the parish of Olney for sixteen years, and in 1785 advised the young William Wilberforce to stay in politics rather than seek ordination, remaining his counselor for twenty years.

In January 1788, thirty-four years after he left the trade, Newton published *Thoughts upon the African Slave Trade*. He wrote that he felt bound to “take shame to myself by a public confession,” and he did not excuse himself. Yet he also told the truth about how the trade had looked to him at the time: that he had taken it for the line of life Providence had assigned him, that he had no scruples about it, and that no friend had ever raised any. Elsewhere he wrote that he had acted ignorantly, blinded by custom, example, and interest. The abolition committee sent the pamphlet to every member of both Houses of Parliament, Newton gave evidence to the Privy Council that year, and he lived to see the abo-

lition of the British slave trade become law on March 25, 1807, dying that December at eighty-two.

What makes Newton an exemplar for this chapter is the shape of his account. He did not say that what he had done was harmless, and he did not say that he had been a monster. He said that he had been wrong in the way a man is wrong when his whole world has trained him to see a thing in one way, and that once he saw it otherwise he was bound to say so and to help. A man with every reason to defend the trade became its most credible witness, because he had a way to reread his own life that did not require him to hate himself. A convert who can tell his past as blindness lifted rather than as wickedness exposed can keep his self-respect and change his mind at once, which is just what the self-affirmation research measures and just what the accretion picture forbids.

TRANSITIONS HANDLED WELL AND BADLY

Whole societies have faced this problem when a regime fell and its many ordinary adherents had to find a place in what came next. These were transitions from regimes whose leaders committed grave crimes, so the analogy to a peaceful change of moral paradigm is loose; still, the cases show what happens when a society distinguishes the wrong from the wicked, and what happens when it does not.

South Africa attempted the first course. Its Truth and Reconciliation Commission, created by the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995 and chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, offered amnesty for politically motivated crimes of the apartheid era on condition of full disclosure, and it heard applications from all sides, the liberation movements included. The commission was hardly lax, for of 7,111 amnesty applications it granted 849 and refused 5,392, nor was it a simple success: a 1998 survey found that most victims felt it had failed to reconcile, and reparations came late and below the amounts it recommended. The political scientist James Gibson's large 2001 survey found that the process drew black and white views of apartheid closer together, while warning that truth does not produce reconciliation by itself. The lesson is modest but real: a society can name a wrong plainly and still leave the people who took part in it a road back.

Post-war Germany shows a more troubled version of the same choice. Some eight million Germans, about a tenth of the population, had belonged to the

Nazi Party. From 1946, 545 German tribunals faced some 900,000 cases in the American zone, sorting people into five categories that ran from major offenders down to followers and the exonerated, and more than ninety percent of the cases were judged not to belong in the serious categories. The process was deeply unpopular and riddled with exculpatory testimonials, nicknamed *Persilscheine* after a laundry soap, and in 1951 the Federal Republic brought it to an end, letting most dismissed officials return to public service. The price was steep, since many who were guilty went free, and in 1957 more than three-quarters of the senior officials in the federal Justice Ministry were former party members. Yet the democracy held, and later decades brought a wave of trials and a far more searching reckoning. Distinguishing the follower from the perpetrator was right, and some integration of the millions was probably necessary if the new state was to stand; but integration bought with silence leaves a debt that a later generation must pay, for charity toward the follower is not amnesia about the crime.

Iraq after 2003 shows the opposite error. Coalition Provisional Authority Order Number 1, in force from May 16, 2003, removed members of the Baath Party's ranks from their posts and barred them from public employment. The regime's victims had every reason to want its servants gone, but as an analysis for the Middle East Institute argued in 2014, the order banned people by party rank rather than by what they had done, in a country where membership had often been required for ordinary jobs and many had joined out of necessity or fear. Together with the disbanding of the army, it cost what the author estimated as hundreds of thousands of people their jobs and pensions, gutted the teaching ranks, and produced, because Sunnis dominated the upper ranks, what the analysis called a collectivization of guilt; the newly unemployed became a recruiting pool for the insurgency. The Accountability and Justice Law of 2008, which let most lower-ranking members return to work, was an admission, five years and much bloodshed later, that the net had been cast far too wide.

Read together, the three cases make this chapter's point in the hardest terms history offers. When the many who merely went along are told that they are as guilty as the few who did evil, and are given no road back, they have nothing left to lose by fighting.

A PRACTICE OF CHARITY

From all of this a practice emerges, and it can be stated plainly.

The first rule is to separate the person from the paradigm, since a paradigm can be wrong while the person who held it did his best with the eyes he had been given. The second is to name the good in what he cared about. Every paradigm that has won adherents has done so by speaking to something real, such as compassion or the protection of the weak, and the reformer should say so first and sincerely, for only then can the person hear that the paradigm served those goods badly. The third is to distinguish wrong from wicked: most people inside any paradigm are followers in the German tribunals' sense, and the category of the wicked should be kept small, for those who did real harm knowingly.

The fourth rule is to invite rather than humiliate, since the canvassing evidence is plain that listening works and calling out does not, and a person given an honorable exit will often take it, whereas a person backed into a corner will fight. The fifth is to offer a frame and a community before asking anyone to leave. The sixth is to allow time, for if a new theory is never assimilated overnight, a new morality often takes a generation, and a reformer who demands immediate confession has mistaken a conversion for a surrender. The last is to let people re-read their own past without shame, as Newton did, for the best gift a successor paradigm can give its converts is a way of telling their own story that ends in growth rather than in self-contempt.

Applied to the present, this practice asks something specific of anyone who suspects, as this book does, that the paradigm of progress is exhausted. Most of the people formed by that paradigm took it up for reasons that do them credit: they cared about the excluded, the poor, and the stranger, and they were moved by the emancipator because emancipation, in its great cases, really was a good. If Part Two finds that the paradigm's protocol has outrun its usefulness, that will not show that its adherents were villains. It will show that they were right to care, and that the instrument they were handed for caring has begun to fail them. They should be met as people whose compassion was real and whose concern for the weak is exactly what a successor must keep and raise, and a successor that cannot say this sincerely does not deserve to win.



WHERE THE ARGUMENT STRAINS

The first objection is that charity can become whitewash. Some adherents of every paradigm did real harm, and their victims are owed the truth; the German case shows how easily amnesty slides into amnesia. The answer is that the chapter’s charity is aimed at followers, not at the few who did evil knowingly, and that it requires the wrong to be named plainly. Newton’s confession and the commission’s demand for full disclosure both joined truth to mercy rather than trading one for the other.

The second objection is that strategic charity is a form of manipulation. If affirmation and nonjudgmental listening are simply techniques for lowering defenses, they can be used to move people toward anything, and the canvassing studies were in fact used to move people toward the very paradigm this book questions. The answer is that the claim at the center of this chapter is not a tactic but, on the book’s own argument, a truth: people inside a superseded paradigm were not evil. Charity offered insincerely tends to be detected and to fail, which is one reason the practice works only for those who believe it.

The third objection concerns the evidence, which is thinner than the confident tone of advice suggests. Laboratory affirmation effects vary and their mechanisms remain unsettled; the canvassing effects, though durable, were modest in size, and the abortion effort found none; and *When Prophecy Fails* now stands seriously accused. The honest reply is that the evidence is suggestive rather than decisive, that its several strands point the same way, and that the historical cases, for all their differences, point that way too.

A last objection is that some revolutions were settled by rupture, not persuasion, as Chapter XII admitted. That is true, but even when force decides a revolution, the question of how to treat the defeated remains, and Iraq shows what an answer without charity costs.

KEY TERMS

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
wrong, not evil	the claim that adherents of a superseded paradigm were mistaken rather than wicked	extends Chapter I’s verdict on the ancestors to the living
assimilation of a new paradigm	rebuilding prior theory and re-reading prior fact	Kuhn’s first chapter; never overnight
identity-protective cognition	crediting and dismissing evidence to protect one’s standing in a group	Kahan

TERM	MEANING	NOTE
sunk cost of a virtuous life	the years given to a paradigm, which make its failure unbearable to admit	compare When Prophecy Fails, now disputed
self-affirmation	affirming a person's values so that threatening information can be heard	Steele; Cohen and Sherman
nonjudgmental exchange of narratives	trading stories instead of arguments or accusations	Broockman and Kalla; perspective-getting
righting reflex	the urge to correct, which provokes resistance	Miller and Rollnick
honorable exit	a way to leave a practice while keeping one's honor	Appiah; Chapter XII
Aufhebung (sublation)	cancelling that also preserves and lifts up	Hegel; Chapter XV
follower and perpetrator	the distinction between going along and doing evil knowingly	denazification's categories; ignored in Iraq's Order Number 1

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Kuhn says a new theory reflects on work already completed. What completed moral work in your own life would a change of paradigm reach back to judge, and how would you want to be addressed if it did?
2. Is the line between wrong and wicked a moral discovery of its own, or a concession made for the sake of peace?
3. The deep-canvassing methods were built by advocates of the paradigm this book questions. What follows from the fact that they work?
4. Where in the present paradigm is the good that a successor must keep and raise, and how would you name it to someone who holds the paradigm sincerely?
5. What would an honorable exit from the paradigm of progress look like for a teacher, a journalist, or a human-resources officer?

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The Turn: honorable exits and building before tearing down were already your rules for turning well, and this chapter adds the psychology of why they work and the history of what happens without them.

- The End of Progress: the accretion picture is what turns being wrong into being evil, so your critique of the unfurling universe is also the precondition for converting anyone gently.
- Win the Words: the move to recover a word applies to people as well as terms; compassion, concern for the weak, and justice can be recovered from the old lexicon and handed back to their former owners with their dignity intact.
- Ascent of the West: a successor whose exemplar is the steward-builder should treat the old paradigm's adherents the way a steward treats an inherited house, keeping what is sound and honoring those who built it.
- Map vs Territory: saying that a map was wrong is not saying that its makers were wicked, and your realism gives you the right to say the first without the second.
- The Tyranny of the Individual: your own early essay judged a whole movement by its excess of good intentions; this chapter asks you to keep that judgment while remembering that the intentions were good.

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PART TWO



The Present Paradigm

PART TWO



The Test

Part Two will reach one of three verdicts on the present paradigm—healthy, adjusting, or exhausted—according to the rules below, which are fixed before any data is gathered.

THE THREE VERDICTS

1. Healthy: the paradigm still solves its cases at a good return, its anomalies are absorbed without strain, and the outcomes it governs are stable or improving.
2. Adjusting: the anomalies and signs of crisis are real, but the paradigm is correcting itself from inside, and the corrections stick without breaking its exemplar or its legitimacy. The reversals listed in Chapter VI could count as evidence for this verdict, and not only for exhaustion.
3. Exhausted: recent extensions return less than they cost; the outcomes the paradigm governs are deteriorating for reasons traceable to its protocol; and the internal signs of crisis are present while self-correction fails or is punished.

WHAT WILL BE MEASURED

THE CRISIS SIGNS, drawn from Part One:

SIGN	WHAT WOULD COUNT	LIKELY DATA
Legitimacy	falling trust in the institutions that carry the paradigm, including among its own adherents	Gallup confidence, Pew trust, GSS
Preference falsification	a gap between what people say in public and what they believe in private	Cato, FIRE, Knight Foundation self-censorship surveys
Proliferating versions	splits inside the paradigm, with activist elites diverging from their own base	More in Common, Pew typology
Generational adherence	whether the young are converting into the paradigm or out of it	Gallup, Pew, GSS by cohort and sex
Self-correction	whether reversals happen, whether they stick, and whether they are tolerated or punished	case record since 2020

Fidelity to reality, meaning the outcomes the paradigm governs:

DOMAIN	INDICATORS
Family and fertility	fertility rate, marriage, children raised by two parents
Mental health and meaning	youth depression and anxiety, suicide, deaths of despair
Trust and cohesion	interpersonal trust, civic participation
Order	violent crime, disorder, incarceration (including the 2023 to 2025 crime decline)
Capability	learning outcomes, ability to build, scientific and technical output

The other four criteria come from the Postscript: consistency (whether the paradigm applies its principles to itself), scope (which major questions, such as AGI, meaning, and duties to the future, it cannot pose), simplicity (the growth of the interpreter class), and fruitfulness (the return on recent extensions compared with early ones).

RULES OF ATTRIBUTION

A bad outcome counts against the paradigm only when both of the following conditions hold:

1. Mechanism: there is a plausible path, stated in advance, from the paradigm's protocol to the outcome.
2. Comparison: the trend differs from the trend in comparable societies that do not share the paradigm. If, for example, fertility has collapsed just as fast in South Korea, which does not hold this paradigm, then American fertility cannot be laid at its door.

Good outcomes count in the paradigm's favor by the same rules, and the strongest case in its defense is written before the verdict, not after.

DECISION RULE

- Exhausted requires all three of the following: at least three of the five crisis signs present; deterioration that passes both attribution tests in at least three of the five reality domains; and recent extensions returning less than they cost.
- Adjusting: crisis signs are present, but self-correction is working and the reality outcomes are mixed or improving.
- Healthy: fewer than two crisis signs and no attributable deterioration.

WHAT WOULD FALSIFY THE AUTHOR'S HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis that the paradigm is breaking would be weakened by any one of the following: young people adopting the paradigm more firmly than their parents did; stable or rising trust in its institutions; improving outcomes in the reality domains; or the same bad trends appearing just as strongly in societies that never adopted it.

XXII

The Matrix and Frame of the Present Paradigm

The present Western moral paradigm is best described not as the creed of the political left but as a shared moral grammar of autonomy, harm, consent, and rights, which the American left and right both speak with different accents, and which lives in a recognizable set of exemplars, words, rituals, and institutions.

NAMING AND BOUNDING THE PARADIGM

BEFORE A PHYSICIAN can judge whether a patient is well, he must know which patient is on the table. The Test set out how the present paradigm will be judged, and this chapter's work is only to say exactly what it is, using the moral matrix of the Postscript, the four working parts, the legitimacy layer, and the frame of Chapter XVII; it leaves the verdict to Chapter XXX and tries to describe the paradigm as its own members would recognize it.

We have called it the liberal paradigm of progress. Its exemplar is the emancipator, the person who frees others, or himself, from a constraint that had seemed natural, and its protocol is the move that exemplar teaches: find the constraint, and remove it. Two confusions must be cleared away before the description can begin.

The first is with classical liberalism, which, as it took shape from Locke and Smith through the nineteenth century, was chiefly a political settlement: government should be limited, rights are mostly negative (claims that others leave us

alone rather than claims to goods), property and contract deserve protection, and the rule of law stands above rulers. It was a theory of what the state may do, content to leave the formation of character to churches, families, and towns. The paradigm of progress, by contrast, is a moral paradigm, and its suspicion falls on constraints of every sort, so that custom, family expectation, inherited role, and even the body come within its reach; and it will recruit the state to remove a constraint, as civil rights law did, as readily as it asks the state to step aside. The classical liberal asked how far government may go; the paradigm of progress asks whom any arrangement binds.

The second confusion is with the political left. More in Common's Hidden Tribes study of 2018, which Chapter XXVI examines in detail, found that the most committed progressive activists made up about 8 percent of Americans, while some four in five Americans called political correctness a problem. If the paradigm were simply the program of the activist left, it would be the faith of a small sect. It is far wider than that. Its deepest layer, the sense that the individual's choices are the seat of moral authority and that harm to others is the main thing that can override them, is common ground for nearly all Americans, and the activist left is better understood as the paradigm's most rigorous school, the one that applies the protocol most consistently and to the most domains, than as its whole membership.

WHAT LEFT AND RIGHT SHARE, AND WHERE THEY PART

The sociologists who wrote *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton, interviewed about two hundred Americans and found that individualism was what they called the "first language" of American moral talk. The older biblical and republican traditions survived as second languages, spoken in church or at a town meeting, but when people tried to explain why they lived as they did, they reached for the vocabulary of the self. The book distinguished an older utilitarian individualism, the self as a maximizer of its interests, from a newer expressive individualism, the self as a core of feeling to be discovered and expressed; and its most famous witness, a young nurse called Sheila Larson who described her faith as "Sheilaism," was no radical but an ordinary American.

The philosopher Charles Taylor, in the Massey Lectures of 1991 later published as *The Ethics of Authenticity*, took expressive individualism seriously as a

moral ideal, arguing that being true to oneself is a real achievement of the modern West, often debased into self-indulgence, which makes sense only against horizons of significance, the shared background of things that matter whether or not we choose them. Carl Trueman's *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self* (2020) drew on Taylor and on Philip Rieff's psychological man to argue that the sexual revolutions of recent decades were effects rather than causes, the late fruit of an older change in what a self is: from a creature who conforms to a given world to one who remakes the world, and his own body, as material. Trueman writes as a Christian critic where Taylor writes as a sympathetic one, but they share the observation that matters here: the expressive self is not the property of a party, but the water in which Americans of both parties swim.

The empirical work bears this out, with an important qualification. Jesse Graham, Jonathan Haidt, and Brian Nosek reported in 2009, from samples of several thousand people in the United States, Britain, Canada, and Argentina, that liberals concentrated their moral concern on two foundations, harm and fairness, while conservatives drew more evenly on five, adding loyalty to the group, respect for authority, and purity or sanctity. Conservatives did not reject harm and fairness but held them alongside other things, so that the liberal foundations are the common floor and the conservative difference an addition to it. A 2012 study by Ravi Iyer and colleagues, drawing on nearly twelve thousand self-described libertarians, added a two-part liberty measure and found liberals nearer the libertarians on lifestyle liberty and conservatives nearer on economic liberty, so that both parties prize freedom from constraint and disagree chiefly about which constraints are the oppressive ones.

The newer Moral Foundations Questionnaire 2, published by Mohammad Atari, Haidt, Graham, and colleagues in 2023 from samples in 25 populations, split fairness into equality and proportionality, and found that liberals placed more weight on care and equality, conservatives on loyalty, authority, purity, and proportionality, the sense that rewards should match contributions. The theory is not beyond dispute, for Paul Teas, Linda Skitka, and colleagues reported in 2024 that the foundations predicted where people stood on an issue better than whether they held that stand as a moral conviction, and so we should treat the foundations as a good map of emphasis rather than a proof of deep structure.

Put together, left and right share the paradigm's ontology: the person as a chooser, harm as the chief reason to restrain him, rights as the form claims take, and consent as what makes an act legitimate. The right speaks it in Bellah's utili-

tarian accent, of markets, property, and religious liberty pressed as a right of conscience; the left in the expressive accent, of identity, the body, and recognition. They divide over which constraints to remove (the regulator’s or the tradition’s), over whether fairness means equality or proportionality, and over how much loyalty, authority, and sanctity may weigh against a person’s choice. These are bitter divisions, but they are quarrels inside a house about the furniture.

THE RECORD OF WHAT IS PERMITTED

Gallup’s annual Values and Beliefs survey, taken each May, asks Americans whether a list of behaviors is morally acceptable or morally wrong, and so it is the nearest thing we have to a running census of a culture’s interdicts and remissions, in Rieff’s sense of what is forbidden and where the forbidding relaxes. The latest wave was fielded May 1 to 17, 2026, and later chapters draw on the table below rather than repeating it.

BEHAVIOR	EARLIEST READING	PEAK	2025	2026
Gay or lesbian relations	40% (2001)	71% (2022)	64%	62%
Having a baby outside marriage	45% (2002)	70% (2022, 2023)	67%	58%
Sex between an unmarried man and woman	53% (2001)	76% (2022)	68%	65%
Divorce	59% (2001)	81% (2022)	75%	74%
Birth control	not shown	92% (2019, 2022)	90%	83%
Changing one’s gender	46% (2021)	46% (2021)	40%	38%
Abortion	42% (2001)	not shown	not shown	49%
Doctor-assisted suicide	49% (2001)	not shown	not shown	49%
Pornography	not shown	not shown	not shown	31%
Polygamy	7% (2003)	not shown	not shown	19%
A married person having an affair	7% (2001)	not shown	not shown	7%

Three features of this record matter here. The first is the long widening of remissions from 2001 to 2022, which followed the protocol domain by domain, through sexual conduct, family form, and the ending of life. Gallup's separate series on same-sex marriage tells the same story, from 27 percent support in 1996 to a peak of 71 percent in 2022 and 2023, before a slip to 65 percent in 2026.

The second is what did not move. Approval of adultery stood at 7 percent in 2001 and at 7 percent in 2026, while approval of polygamy nearly tripled. On the paradigm's own terms this is coherent, for an affair betrays a partner's consent and trust, whereas polygamy among consenting adults can be described as a choice that harms no one; the interdicts that survive are, on the whole, those an ontology of consent and harm can explain.

The third is a turn since 2022, for nearly every item fell from its peak, and several fell sharply between 2025 and 2026, birth control by seven points and having a baby outside marriage by nine. The partisan gaps are wide: in 2026, 76 percent of Democrats but 44 percent of Republicans called having a child outside marriage acceptable, and Republican support for same-sex marriage fell from 56 percent in 2022 to 35 percent. One year's movement in a sample of about a thousand, with a four-point margin of error, is not yet a trend; we note only that the remissions have stopped widening, and that the reversal is concentrated on the right.

The wider West gives the American portrait its proportions. Pew found in 2019 that 72 percent of Americans said homosexuality should be accepted by society, up from 49 percent in 2007, while in Sweden the figure was 94 percent; and on the cultural map of Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, built from the World Values Survey, the United States sits among the most traditional of the rich Western countries, nearer to Ireland and Poland than to Scandinavia. The paradigm, then, is Western rather than American, and it is held more uniformly in Northern Europe than in the United States, where a larger religious population keeps Bellah's second languages alive and the quarrel inside the house is louder.

MAXIMS, SACRED VALUES, AND INTERDICTS

The maxims of a paradigm are the short sayings that close an argument because no one present thinks to question them. The maxims of the present paradigm are familiar to every American: it isn't hurting anyone; be true to yourself; consent-

ing adults; my body, my choice; love is love; who are you to judge; everyone deserves a seat at the table; and, at the level of history, the right side of history. Behind them stands an older formula, John Stuart Mill's harm principle of 1859, that society may restrain a person against his will only to prevent harm to others, and that over his own body and mind he is sovereign. The maxims are Mill's principle domesticated, and much of the paradigm's normal virtue consists in working out what counts as harm and who counts as other.

Its moral ontology is the furniture of its world: the self, an authentic inner core that authors its own meaning; harm, understood ever more broadly, as Chapter VII's account of concept creep described; rights, the form a claim must take to be heard; consent, which turns violation into choice; and power, the hidden structure that distributes constraint. The Supreme Court gave the ontology its best-known statement in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* in 1992, when the joint opinion of Justices O'Connor, Kennedy, and Souter located at the heart of liberty "the right to define one's own concept of existence." That the Court overruled *Casey* in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* in 2022 shows that the ontology's legal expression can be reversed, not that the ontology itself has changed.

The meta-values, the standards for judging moral arguments, follow from the ontology: a good argument extends inclusion, gives special weight to the testimony of those who say they are harmed, is suspicious of established power, treats a person's self-description as presumptively authoritative, and regards judgment of another's private choices as a fault in the judge. These are the reflexes of a nurse like Sheila Larson as much as of a professor.

Every paradigm, however permissive, has its sacred things. Durkheim, in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), called the sacred that which is set apart and forbidden, and argued that a community, in revering its sacred things, is in a sense revering itself; Philip Tetlock, in a 2003 review, gave the idea experimental form, describing sacred values as those a community treats as having transcendental significance, which rules out trading them against ordinary goods. Such a taboo tradeoff, money against a life for instance, provokes outrage, which falls even on those who merely deliberate too long, and people made to contemplate one perform acts of moral cleansing to reaffirm their membership.

On the evidence of what the paradigm protects most fiercely, its sacred values are three: the equal dignity of persons, in its modern form as non-discrimination; the self's authority over its own identity and body; and the standing of the vic-

tim, the person whose testimony of harm opens a moral case. Applying Tetlock's model to them is our conjecture rather than his finding, but it predicts what one sees, for to weigh openly whether a measure serving one of these values is worth its cost in money or merit is treated as a sign of bad character rather than a hard question. Graham, Haidt, and Nosek found something close to this: in their tradeoff study liberals were especially reluctant to accept money for violating harm and fairness, while conservatives were about equally reluctant across all five foundations.

The interdicts cluster around these sacred things: they forbid slurs and open contempt for protected groups, denial of a person's account of who he or she is, and, in many institutions, doubt about a reported harm. As Chapter XIV observed with Rieff, an anti-culture does not abolish interdicts but moves them, and here the present paradigm keeps its own.

EXEMPLARS, LEXICON, AND GATEKEEPERS

The exemplar comes first among the working parts, and a nation shows its exemplars most plainly in what it chooses to honor. In 1983 President Reagan signed the law creating Martin Luther King Jr. Day, observed in every state by 2000, and in June 2021 Juneteenth, commemorating the end of slavery in Texas, became a federal holiday, with the Senate voting unanimously and the House 415 to 14. Both are emancipation days, and both passed with large bipartisan majorities, which is itself evidence that the exemplar is shared across the parties. King, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, the suffragists, and the Stonewall protesters are the figures whom American children meet as models of moral courage, and each is honored for the same act: refusing a constraint that the society of the day called natural.

The stone record moves more slowly. Monument Lab's National Monument Audit, which examined some fifty thousand conventional monuments across every state and territory, found that the most common individual subjects are still Lincoln, Washington, and Columbus, with King fourth, Tubman twenty-fourth, and Douglass twenty-ninth, and that the landscape as a whole is overwhelmingly white, male, and martial. Here we see the two speeds of Chapter XIV: the calendar, which a Congress can change in a season, already carries the new exemplar, while the bronze, which takes generations to replace, still carries the founders and soldiers of the older order. The audit's authors read this as a

record of omission, whereas another reader might see a record of what was once thought worth building, and both readings begin from the same fact.

The lexicon is where the paradigm stores its training, and it can be counted. David Rozado, Musa al-Gharbi, and Jamin Halberstadt, in a study published in 2023 in *Social Science Computer Review*, measured words denoting prejudice in 27 million articles from 47 popular American news outlets between 1970 and 2019, and found that these terms rose markedly across most outlets between 2010 and 2019, beginning before 2015 and accelerating afterward. In the *New York Times*, use of “racist” rose 638 percent over that decade and “sexist” 403 percent, and the growth often tracked survey data showing a rising perception that minorities are mistreated. A later study by Rozado of 98 million articles from 124 outlets in 36 countries found the rise mostly global, with Sweden, Colombia, and Canada moving before the United States, and with several curves flattening after 2020.

The words themselves are familiar: harm, safe and unsafe, inclusive, problematic, marginalized, equity, lived experience, and the family of terms ending in “ist” and “phobia.” Each carries a verdict along with a description, for to call a remark problematic is already to have judged it. The lexicon is tuned to the protocol: its richest vocabulary names constraints and the people they bind, while its vocabulary for what a constraint might protect is thin.

The gatekeepers, finally, decide what counts as a case and how it is settled: the universities and professional associations, the human resources offices of large employers, the standards desks of newsrooms, the trust and safety teams of the platforms, the accreditors and grant-makers, and, at the summit, the courts. Chapter XXIV takes them up in detail, and here we note only that gatekeeping is now visibly contested, for the Supreme Court that wrote *Casey* later overruled it, and a federal executive branch that had built equity offices in every agency after 2021 ordered them closed on January 20, 2025.

THE FRAME: MASTER STORY, RITUALS, AND INSTITUTIONS

A paradigm is not only a set of commitments; it is also a frame, in the sense of Chapter XVII, made of a master story, the rituals that rehearse it, and the institutions that hold the rituals in place.

The master story is the emancipation story. In its personal form a self breaks free of family, faith, small town, convention, or body and becomes who it truly is, and the breaking free is the happy ending; in its national form America is a promise made in 1776 and kept by stages, as the circle of those the Declaration includes widens from property-holding men to the enslaved, to women, to the disabled, and to gay and transgender Americans. King himself told it this way, as a promissory note coming due, and the story has the great strength of making the paradigm's achievements the fulfillment of the founding rather than its overthrow. Both parties tell versions of it, and they quarrel chiefly about whether the promise has largely been kept.

The rituals rehearse the story and renew the community's attachment to its sacred things, as Durkheim would expect, and four are especially characteristic, though the data on their spread are uneven.

RITUAL	WHAT IT REHEARSES	WHAT THE EVIDENCE SHOWS
Pride Month	the self's liberation and its public recognition	first proclaimed by President Clinton in 1999; declined by Trump in 2017; restored by Biden in 2021; Google stopped marking it by default in its calendar in 2025
Land acknowledgments	the debt owed to the dispossessed	began in Australia in the late 1970s; spread in Canada after the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation report; gaining ground in the United States by 2019 and after; no reliable count of prevalence found
Pronoun introductions	the self's authority over its own identity	in 2018, 18% of adults (32% of those under 30) knew someone who used gender-neutral pronouns and 52% would be comfortable using them; in 2022, 34% said using a person's new pronouns is very important (51% of Democrats, 14% of Republicans)
Diversity trainings	the interdicts and how to keep them	nearly all Fortune 500 firms and about half of midsize firms used them in 2016; in 2023, 52% of workers said their workplace held DEI trainings or meetings, and 56% called the focus on DEI mainly good, 16% mainly bad; federal DEI offices ordered closed January 2025

We found no national survey of how often people state their pronouns in meetings or open events with a land acknowledgment, but the pattern is clear enough: the rituals are thickest inside the paradigm’s own institutions and thinnest in private life; they are recent, most of them a creation of the last thirty years; and they are contested in a way the older civic rituals largely were not, as the swings in presidential practice and the federal order of 2025 show. Their critics are not only on the right, for Indigenous writers have called land acknowledgments empty without concrete action, and Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev found in 2016 that mandatory diversity training was followed by no gains and some losses for the groups it was meant to help (Chapter XXVII weighs that evidence). A Durkheimian reading would say that rituals of this kind serve to mark membership as much as to change conduct, and Tetlock’s moral cleansing gives that reading a mechanism; whether this is a fault or simply what rituals are is a question for the chapters that follow.

The institutions are the gatekeepers seen from the side of the frame, above all the universities and large organizations whose personnel offices turn the paradigm’s interdicts into rules; and Rieff’s observation that institutions built for restraint were becoming instruments of release finds an odd confirmation here, since the same offices administer both the remissions and the new interdicts.

THE MATRIX ON ONE PAGE

ELEMENT	THE LIBERAL PARADIGM OF PROGRESS	EVIDENCE OR EXAMPLE
Exemplar	the emancipator, who frees people from a constraint thought natural	King Day (1983), Juneteenth (2021), Tubman, Douglass, Parks, Stonewall
Protocol	find the constraint, remove it	the widening of permissions, 2001 to 2022 (Gallup)
Maxims	it isn’t hurting anyone; be true to yourself; consenting adults; love is love; the right side of history	Mill’s harm principle (1859)
Moral ontology	the authentic self, harm, rights, consent, power	Casey (1992); Bellah’s “first language”; Taylor’s authenticity

ELEMENT	THE LIBERAL PARADIGM OF PROGRESS	EVIDENCE OR EXAMPLE
Meta-values	inclusion, the testimony of the harmed, suspicion of power, deference to self-description, non-judgment	care and equality foundations (Graham 2009; Atari 2023)
Sacred values	equal dignity as non-discrimination, the self's authority over identity and body, the standing of the victim	Durkheim; Tetlock's taboo tradeoffs (application conjectural)
Interdicts	slurs and open contempt for protected groups, denying self-identification, doubting reported harm	the anti-culture's migrated interdicts (Rieff)
Remissions	sexual conduct, family form, end of life, self-presentation	Gallup acceptability items
Surviving older interdicts	adultery	7% acceptable in 2001 and 2026
Lexicon	harm, safe, inclusive, problematic, marginalized, equity, lived experience, "-ist," "-phobia"	prejudice terms up sharply 2010 to 2019 (Rozado 2023)
Gatekeepers	universities, professions, HR offices, newsrooms, platforms, accreditors, courts	Chapter XXIV
Legitimacy layer	what is real is the chosen and the harmed; an unchosen obligation must be recast as a choice or a harm to be weighed	Trueman's modern self; Rieff's psychological man
Master story	the emancipation story, personal and national	the promise of 1776 extended by stages
Rituals	Pride Month, land acknowledgments, pronoun introductions, diversity trainings	Pew 2018, 2022, 2023; Dobbin and Kalev 2016
Who shares it	nearly all Americans at the level of ontology; the activist left as its strictest school	Hidden Tribes: activists 8% (2018)
Western setting	held across the West, more uniformly in Northern Europe and Canada; the US more religious and more divided	Pew 2019 (US 72%, Sweden 94%); World Values Survey map



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
The paradigm’s ontology (the chooser, harm, rights, consent) is shared by the American left and right; they differ in accent and in which constraints they would remove	Bellah 1985; Graham, Haidt, and Nosek 2009; Iyer and colleagues 2012	well supported
Liberals concentrate on care and equality; conservatives add loyalty, authority, purity, and proportionality	MFQ (2009) and MFQ-2 (Atari and colleagues 2023); its interpretation disputed in part by Teas and colleagues 2024	measured
Americans’ moral permissions widened from 2001 to a peak around 2022 and have since fallen on nearly every item, sharply between 2025 and 2026	Gallup Values and Beliefs, 2001 to 2026; the 2026 drop is a single wave	measured
The interdict against adultery held at 7 percent for 25 years while acceptance of polygamy rose from 7 to 19 percent, consistent with an ontology of consent and harm	Gallup; the reading in terms of consent and harm is an interpretation	measured
Words denoting prejudice rose sharply in American news from 2010 to 2019, as part of a mostly global rise that the US did not lead and that flattened after 2020	Rozado, al-Gharbi, and Halberstadt 2023; Rozado international study	measured
The emancipator is the exemplar the nation now honors on its calendar, with bipartisan votes, while its monuments still mostly honor founders and soldiers	King Day 1983; Juneteenth 2021; National Monument Audit	measured

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
The paradigm's rituals are recent, concentrated in institutions, and contested, with partial federal rollback in 2025	Pew 2018, 2022, 2023; Dobbin and Kalev 2016; executive order of January 20, 2025; no prevalence data on pronouns or land acknowledgments	measured
The paradigm's sacred values behave as Tetlock's sacred values do, so that weighing them openly against costs is treated as a mark of bad character	Tetlock 2003; tradeoff findings in Graham and colleagues 2009	conjecture
The paradigm is Western rather than American, and is held more uniformly in Northern Europe than in the more religious United States	Pew 2019; Inglehart and Welzel map	well supported

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

The chapter's central claim, that left and right share one paradigm, would be weakened if American conservatives were shown to reason about contested questions mainly in terms that owe nothing to autonomy, harm, rights, or consent, for instance if religious conservatives argued against same-sex marriage or gender transition chiefly from sanctity and natural order and only rarely from conscience rights or harm to children. Studies of how ordinary conservatives actually justify their positions, rather than which foundations they endorse on a questionnaire, would test this directly. If the critics of Moral Foundations Theory are right that the foundations predict positions without capturing conviction, the portrait of shared ontology would need other evidence.

The account of the frame would be weakened if the rituals described here turned out to be performed mainly by staff for each other, with little uptake among the people they address, for then they would be the rituals of a guild rather than of a society. Better data on how often pronoun introductions and land acknowledgments actually occur, and who joins in, would settle this. The reading of Gallup's recent drop would change if the 2027 and 2028 waves returned to the levels of 2022, which would mark 2026 as noise. And if Rozado's word counts proved to track real increases in reported discrimination rather than a change in vocabulary, the lexicon would look less like a shift in the paradigm's training and more like a response to events.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the matrix table is the anatomy of the patient before the diagnosis; the protocol, the maxims, and the missing vocabulary for what a constraint protects are where your argument about the missing stopping rule will be tested in Chapters XXVII and XXIX.
- Win the Words: Rozado’s counts are a direct measure of your capture and marking, and the thinness of the paradigm’s words for load-bearing structure is the absence you describe; the four moves (refuse, substitute, recover, coin) have a concrete target list in the lexicon row.
- The Tyranny of the Individual: Bellah’s first language and Taylor’s authenticity are the scholarly ground for your claim that the individual, not the left, is the paradigm’s center, and the Gallup adultery line shows the one interdict the individual still keeps, the betrayal of consent.
- Ascent of the West: the finding that the right speaks the same grammar in another accent means a successor cannot simply be the right’s program; it needs its own exemplar, the founder, and its own master story, which the monuments of founders and builders still quietly carry.
- The Turn: because the emancipator is honored with bipartisan votes, turning well means keeping King and Tubman as honored ancestors while changing the protocol, an honorable exit that leaves the exemplar’s real achievements in place.
- Map vs Territory: the legitimacy layer row, in which unchosen obligations must be recast as choices or harms to be counted, is the precise point at which the map may omit parts of the territory, a claim Part Two must test rather than assume.

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XXIII

Origins and Borrowed Capital

The present paradigm grew from Christian soil through the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the American rights revolution of the 1960s, and the evidence shows that it inherited its deepest commitments from a faith that is now ebbing, but it does not yet show whether those commitments can live on without that faith, so the borrowed-capital thesis holds firmly as genealogy and remains open as prophecy.

THE QUESTION THIS CHAPTER MUST ANSWER

CHAPTER XXII DESCRIBED the present paradigm as it stands: its exemplar the emancipator, its protocol “find the constraint, remove it,” its lexicon of harm, inclusion, and identity, and its gatekeepers in the universities, the courts, the professions, and the human resources office. A paradigm, however, is not born whole, and Chapter XI warned that the winners always retell their origins as an ascent to themselves. The historian of morals must therefore ask two questions that the paradigm seldom asks of itself: where did it come from, and does it depend on anything it no longer replenishes?

The second question goes by the name of borrowed Christian capital. In its plainest form, the thesis holds that the modern West lives on moral savings it did not earn, for its belief in the equal worth of every person and its special concern for the weak were deposited by Christianity over many centuries, and a secular society that draws on that account without paying into it will in time find it empty.

Because the thesis is attractive to those who hold it and offensive to those it describes, it must be tested rather than asserted. This chapter traces the origins in five layers and then argues the question both ways, treating the United States as one member of a larger Western family, since The Test requires that American trends be compared with those of societies that took a different path.

THE CHRISTIAN SEEDBED

The deepest layer is the oldest. Larry Siedentop, in *Inventing the Individual* (2014), argued that the very idea of the individual, a person whose standing does not depend on family, caste, or city, has no clear source before Paul of Tarsus. In the ancient world a man was first a member of a household under its father, and Paul's teaching that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek made social roles secondary to the soul and its conscience. On Siedentop's account the church fathers developed this moral equality, the reforming popes of the tenth and eleventh centuries built it into institutions, and the canon lawyers, who needed a law that applied to everyone alike, worked out its implications in consent, contract, and intention, so that the assumption of equal souls led, slowly, to the claim of equal liberty. His most striking conclusion is that secularism itself is one of Christianity's gifts.

Tom Holland's *Dominion* (2019) carried the argument forward and outward. The pagan world, he argued, celebrated strength, and Christianity reversed this by placing a crucified man at the center of its worship and so elevating the victim, the slave, and the outcast. Holland's boldest claim is that the values secular Westerners take as plain common sense, from human rights and equality to much of modern secularism and feminism, are Christian in origin, and that their origin has become invisible because it has been so thoroughly absorbed. Critics questioned the reasoning: Peter Thonemann thought it treated Christianity's gentler values as the true faith and its cruelties as deviations, Samuel Moyn worried that a thesis which explains everything explains nothing, and Jonathan Sumption argued that the Western mind owes more to the rejection of revealed authority than to Christianity. These objections are serious, and we shall return to them.

Joseph Henrich's work, introduced in Chapter XIV, adds a mechanism. In a 2019 paper in *Science*, Henrich and three colleagues argued that the medieval Western Church's marriage program, above all its bans on cousin marriage, dissolved the extended kin networks of Europe and pushed families toward the

small, independent household. Populations with longer exposure to that program, they reported, show more individualism, less conformity, and greater trust toward strangers, even after controls for geography, education, and income. Critics question the causal chain, and we should not lean on it more than it can bear; yet if Henrich is even partly right, Christianity did more than teach the equal worth of persons, for it reshaped the family so that people would actually live as individuals.

The first and most famous statement of the borrowed-capital worry came from an enemy of the faith. In *Twilight of the Idols* (1889), Nietzsche mocked the English, with George Eliot as his example, for having rid themselves of the Christian God while clinging all the more tightly to Christian morality. Take away the belief in God, he argued, and the morality that rests on it has no ground left, and the English failed to see this only because, as he put it, “for Englishmen morality is not yet a problem.” Nietzsche wanted the morality to fall with the faith, yet his diagnosis is the borrowed-capital thesis in its sharpest form, offered by a man who thought the capital counterfeit.

RIGHTS, HARM, AND THE EXPRESSIVE SELF

The second layer is the Enlightenment’s translation of Christian equality into the language of rights. Locke and Jefferson grounded natural rights in a Creator, so that the rights were Christian in their source and universal in their claim, and the universal claim could, in principle, stand on its own.

The third layer is John Stuart Mill’s *On Liberty* (1859), which gave the paradigm its protocol in embryo. Mill held that the only purpose for which power may rightly be used over anyone against his will is “to prevent harm to others,” and that a person’s own good, physical or moral, is not sufficient warrant. Over himself, his body and his mind, the individual is sovereign. Much of the present paradigm lies coiled in that principle. If harm to others is the only legitimate ground of restraint, then every restraint that cannot point to a victim is suspect, and the question “whom does this constrain?” begins its long rise over the older question “what does this protect?” Later critics noticed that the principle cannot say what counts as harm, so that whoever defines harm controls its reach, and that weakness became one of the paradigm’s chief epicycles, for the concept of harm has since widened to cover words, offense, and exclusion.

The fourth layer is Romantic expressivism, which Charles Taylor traced in *Sources of the Self* (1989). Taylor followed the modern self through three strands: an inwardness that runs from Augustine through Descartes and Locke, an affirmation of ordinary life that made work and family sacred in themselves, and the Romantic conviction, voiced by Rousseau, that the good lies within us, hidden by society and reachable through the voice of conscience and nature. From this last strand comes the idea that each person has an original way of being human which it is a duty to express rather than to conform. Taylor also noticed that modern people agree remarkably widely on universal justice, benevolence, equality, and the relief of suffering, yet often cannot say why these things matter. He suggested that the agreement may persist because the strands share theistic and deist roots, and his account leaves open whether such high standards can be sustained by sources we no longer acknowledge, which is the borrowed-capital question in its most careful modern form.

Together these layers supplied the paradigm’s ontology. Christianity gave the equal soul, the Enlightenment turned it into the rights-bearing citizen, Mill made the absence of harm the test of liberty, and Romanticism made the expression of the self a duty, so that the individual, his rights, and his inner truth came to seem the most real things in the moral world.

THE AMERICAN RIGHTS REVOLUTION, 1964 TO 1973

The fifth layer, which gave the paradigm its exemplar, was American, for in about a decade the courts, Congress, and the states turned the older commitments into a new working order.

YEAR	EVENT	WHAT IT DID
1964	Civil Rights Act, signed by Lyndon Johnson on July 2	Barred segregation in public accommodations and discrimination in employment and federally funded programs; created the EEOC
1965	Griswold v. Connecticut, decided June 7, 7 to 2	Struck down a ban on contraception by finding a right of marital privacy in the “penumbras” of the Bill of Rights
1969	California Family Law Act, signed by Ronald Reagan	Replaced fault-based divorce with dissolution for irreconcilable differences, effective January 1, 1970

YEAR	EVENT	WHAT IT DID
1971	John Rawls, <i>A Theory of Justice</i>	Gave the era its philosophy: justice as fairness, chosen behind a veil of ignorance
1973	Roe v. Wade	Found a constitutional right to abortion, building on Griswold and Eisenstadt

The sequence has a shape worth seeing. It began with the most compelling case of all, the legal subordination of black Americans, where the constraint was plainly unjust and its victims plainly real. The civil rights marcher became the exemplar of the new paradigm, and he deserved to be, for the moral clarity of 1964 is not a Whig illusion. Yet the protocol he taught was soon applied to cases of a different kind, where the constraints were not the subordination of one group by another but the rules by which marriage, sex, and family had long been governed. Griswold moved the law from the household toward the individual as the holder of rights, *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972) detached that right from marriage, and Roe extended it to abortion, while no-fault divorce, which reached every state by 2010, when New York became the last, made marriage dissoluble at the wish of either party.

The record on no-fault divorce, however, does not support the simplest version of the critic's story. Studies generally find a short-term rise in divorce after adoption but little lasting effect on the rate, and Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers reported that states adopting it saw wives' suicide rates fall by 8 to 16 percent. Whatever else it did to the meaning of marriage, no-fault divorce freed some women from real danger.

Rawls supplied the philosophy. *A Theory of Justice* asked what principles people would choose if they did not know their class, their talents, or their idea of the good life, and it answered with equal basic liberties for all and inequalities permitted only if they benefit the least advantaged. Here the Christian concern for the weak reappeared in secular dress, stripped of its source and made into a rule of reason.

Philip Rieff, writing in 1966, saw the cultural meaning of all this before most of it had happened. In *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* he described the arrival of psychological man, for whom the old institutions of restraint were becoming instruments of release. The therapeutic turn gave the paradigm its inner life, and harm, as Mill's principle widened, came more and more to mean psychological harm.

EXTENSIONS AND THE FIRST REVERSALS

Once the protocol was set, it extended steadily for half a century. The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed by George H. W. Bush on July 26, 1990, carried the model of the Civil Rights Act into a new domain, and it is perhaps the purest case of the Christian concern for the weak written into secular law, since it asks the strong to rebuild their world for those who cannot use it as it stands. In *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), decided 5 to 4 on June 26, Justice Kennedy held that same-sex couples have a fundamental right to marry, and closed by saying that the petitioners asked for “equal dignity in the eyes of the law.” In *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), decided 6 to 3 on June 15, Justice Gorsuch held that Title VII of the 1964 Act forbids firing a person for being gay or transgender, since such a firing is discrimination because of sex.

Then came the surge of 2020, when, after the murder of George Floyd, many corporations created diversity, equity, and inclusion teams, and it looked, at the time, like the next stage of the same ascent.

What followed was the first sustained reversal in the paradigm’s history, and it came from several directions at once. In *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* (2022), decided 6 to 3 on June 24, the Supreme Court overruled *Roe* and *Casey* and returned abortion to the states; on June 29, 2023, in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, it held race-conscious admissions unconstitutional; and several states, Texas and Florida among them, restricted DEI at their public universities. DEI jobs began to fall in 2023, and on January 21, 2025, President Trump signed an executive order revoking the 1965 order on equal employment opportunity for federal contractors and requiring contractors and grantees to certify that they run no DEI programs that violate federal anti-discrimination law. Several large companies scaled back their programs while others reaffirmed theirs. Chapter XXIV traces these changes institution by institution, with the litigation and the figures, and here we need only their direction.

Two things about this reversal matter for the verdict in Chapter XXX. First, much of it was done in the name of the paradigm’s own oldest principle, for Chief Justice Roberts appealed to a colorblind Constitution and the 2025 order invoked federal anti-discrimination law, so that the exemplar of 1964 was turned against the extensions of 2020. Second, it was largely imposed from outside the paradigm’s gatekeepers, by courts, state legislatures, and a new administration,

rather than chosen by the universities and professions that carry the paradigm. Whether that counts as self-correction, the mark of an adjusting paradigm, or as defeat by a rival, which points toward exhaustion, is a question that Chapter XXIV weighs and Chapter XXX decides. The reversal was also partial: in 2025 the Court declined without comment a petition from Kim Davis asking it to overturn *Obergefell*.

THE EBBING SOURCE

If the paradigm's capital was deposited by Christianity, the next question is how much of the depositor remains. Here the figures are well measured.

MEASURE	EARLIER	LATER	SOURCE
Church, synagogue, or mosque membership	73% (1937); 70% (1999)	47% (2020), first time below half	Gallup
Adults identifying as Christian	78% (2007); 71% (2014)	62% (2023-24)	Pew Religious Landscape Study
Religiously unaffiliated	rising for decades	29% (2023-24), plateaued	Pew
Christian share among political liberals	62% (2007)	37% (2023-24)	Pew
Christian share among conservatives	89% (2007)	82% (2023-24)	Pew
18-to-24-year-olds identifying with a religion	74% (2007); 63% (2014)	56% (2023-24)	Pew
Membership by generation, 2018-2020	born before 1946: 66%	millennials: 36%	Gallup

The long decline is not in doubt, and no generation, Pew found, has grown more religious with age. The table also shows something the borrowed-capital thesis predicts: the paradigm's carriers have secularized fastest. Among liberals the Christian share fell by twenty-five points in about sixteen years, while among conservatives it fell by seven, so that the people most committed to the paradigm are increasingly the people least connected to its alleged source.

Yet the decline has stopped, at least for now. Pew's third Religious Landscape Study, a survey of 36,908 adults fielded from July 2023 to March 2024 and released in February 2025, found the Christian share near 62 percent, about where it had been since about 2020, and in December 2025 Pew reported that about seven in ten Americans have identified with a religion in every year since 2020, with no clear rise or fall. Pew itself warns that the pause may be temporary, since younger adults remain far less religious than older ones, and that a change in survey method since 2014 limits direct comparison.

The claims of a revival among the young need more caution still. In September 2025 the Barna Group reported that Gen Z churchgoers attend about 1.9 weekends a month, more than any other generation, and some commentators called it a generational reversal. But Barna's figure describes how often churching young adults attend, not how many young adults are churching, and it rests on quota samples with minimal weighting. Pew's examination found "no clear evidence" of a national revival among the young. The youngest adults, born 2003 or later, are at least as religious as those born a few years earlier, but earlier youngest cohorts looked the same and then fell away once they left home; among young adults, 26 percent are former Christians against 5 percent converts; and the American Time Use Survey shows Sunday attendance among adults born 1995 to 2003 at 11 percent in 2021 and 10 percent in 2024. Even the much-discussed closing of the gender gap among the young came partly from young women leaving rather than from young men arriving, as Chapter XXVI shows. Local stirrings may be real, and national surveys would miss them; but on the evidence available in October 2026, the honest description is a plateau after a long decline, not a revival.

BORROWED CAPITAL, ARGUED BOTH WAYS

We come now to the question itself: can equal dignity and concern for the weak sustain themselves once the faith that taught them has faded?

The case for erosion begins with logic and ends with signs. Its logic is Nietzsche's and Taylor's: a moral demand as costly as universal benevolence needs a reason, and "because each person bears the image of God" is a reason in a way that "because we happen to prefer it" is not. Its history is that the commitments arose nowhere else in the same form, and the Inglehart-Welzel cultural map of the World Values Survey still sorts nations by religious heritage, with historically

Protestant societies clustering together long after their pews have emptied. Its signs, on the critic's reading, are three drifts in the paradigm described in Chapter XXII: equal dignity, without the equal soul to anchor it, tends to become a right to affirmation; concern for the weak, without the cross to discipline it, tends to become a competition for the standing of victim; and the harm principle, without a shared picture of the good, expands until it covers whatever a person says has hurt him. On this reading the paradigm is spending its principal, and the extensions that provoked reversal are the sign that the account is running low.

The case against erosion is just as serious, and its first exhibit is Scandinavia. Phil Zuckerman, in *Society without God* (2008), drew on fourteen months in Denmark and Sweden in 2005 and 2006 to describe what he called probably the least religious countries in the world, and found them among the lowest on earth in violent crime and corruption. In Norway and Sweden, according to the World Values Survey, more than 60 percent of people say that most people can be trusted, against under 10 percent in Brazil, Colombia, and Peru. If borrowed capital were running out, the most secular societies should show it first, and on trust and order they show the opposite. Its second exhibit is Siedentop's own logic, for if liberal secularism is Christianity's child, it may be a mature heir rather than a parasite. Its third is that ordinary secular people are not visibly less decent than their believing neighbors; Pew found in 2023 that 83 percent of American nones count the wish to avoid hurting others as a key factor in deciding right from wrong. Holland's critics add a fourth point, that charity and fairness belong to human nature and need no single religious source.

Each side has a reply. The defender of erosion answers that Scandinavia is not a fair test of godlessness, since it is a society of believers' grandchildren living inside believers' institutions. As of January 2026, 70 percent of Danes still belonged to the national Lutheran church, though only about 2.4 percent of members attended in a typical week, and Inglehart and Welzel themselves attribute the persistence of Protestant values to the historical impact of the churches, transmitted through schools and media, rather than to individual belief. The defender of persistence answers that several generations is not nothing, and that a thesis which can always say "not yet" risks becoming unfalsifiable.

The most useful evidence may be the most modest. Pew found that 41 percent of Americans who belong to a religion and attend services at least monthly had volunteered recently, against 17 percent both for nones and for affiliated Americans who seldom attend, and an earlier Pew analysis found the same pat-

tern in voting and in membership of secular voluntary groups. Pew rightly warns that these are correlations and that joiners may simply join everything. Even so, the difference lies between those who gather and those who do not, rather than between those who believe and those who do not, for believers who stay home look like unbelievers, and it is the congregation, not the creed alone, that seems to carry the civic capital.

AN HONEST ASSESSMENT

The borrowed-capital thesis turns out to be three claims, which deserve three different verdicts.

The first is genealogical: the present paradigm's deepest commitments, the equal worth of persons and the claim of the weak, came from Christianity. This is well supported, for Siedentop, Holland, Taylor, and Henrich approach it from different directions and arrive at the same place, and even Nietzsche agreed. The critics are right that Holland sometimes claims too much and that other traditions have their own sources of compassion; but the particular Western form of these commitments, with its universal reach and its inversion of strength and weakness, has no better explanation.

The second is the claim of dependence: that the commitments cannot outlast their source. This is contested and, at present, unproven. The Nordic evidence counts against it, since those societies have lived for several generations with little belief and kept high trust and low violence; yet it does not settle the matter, because they kept the institutions faith built while letting the faith itself go. No society has yet been observed that lost both belief and the inherited institutions and kept the values. The honest finding is that the capital has lasted longer than Nietzsche expected, and that we do not yet know how long it can last.

The third is the claim of drift: that without the source the commitments change shape. This is plausible and partly supported by the history of the harm principle, but it is hard to separate from ordinary political disagreement, and Chapters XXVI and XXIX must test it further.

That leaves a better formulation of the thesis than the one we began with. The capital, if the volunteering evidence is any guide, is held less in doctrine than in practices and institutions: in congregations that gather people weekly, in families that pass on habits, in schools and holidays that keep an old picture of the person in view. This explains why secular Scandinavia has not yet run short, since

it kept the institutions, and why the American fall in membership, from 70 percent to 47 percent in two decades, may matter more than the fall in belief. It is also testable, as Map vs Territory demands of any moral claim: if the capital lives in institutions, then the places where gathering institutions have collapsed should show the losses first, in trust, in civic life, and in the care of the weak, while the places that kept them should hold. Chapter XXIX takes up that test in its account of trust and cohesion.



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
The present paradigm’s core commitments have Christian origins	Siedentop (2014), Holland (2019), Taylor (1989), Schulz, Henrich and colleagues (2019); disputed in degree by Thonemann, Moyn, Sumption	well supported
The paradigm’s protocol took its working form in the American rights revolution of 1964 to 1973	Civil Rights Act (1964), Griswold (1965), California no-fault divorce (1969), Rawls (1971), Roe (1973)	well supported
American religious membership and identity fell sharply, then plateaued around 2020	Gallup membership 70% (1999) to 47% (2020); Pew Christian share 78% (2007) to 62% (2023-24), steady since about 2020	measured
There is no clear evidence of a national religious revival among young Americans	Pew (2025): 26% of young adults former Christians vs 5% converts; ATUS Sunday attendance 11% to 10%; Barna’s contrary figure measures frequency among churchgoers	measured
The paradigm’s carriers have secularized fastest	Christian share among liberals 62% to 37% vs conservatives 89% to 82% (Pew, 2007 to 2023-24)	measured
A sustained partial reversal of the paradigm’s extensions began around 2022	Dobbs (2022), SFFA (2023), state DEI laws, January 2025 executive order, DEI job declines; Obergefell untouched	measured
Highly secular societies can sustain high trust and low violence for generations	Zuckerman (2008); WVS trust above 60% in Norway and Sweden	well supported

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
Civic capital tracks religious attendance more than belief	Pew: volunteering 41% among monthly attenders vs 17% among nones and non-attending affiliated (correlational)	well supported
Equal dignity and concern for the weak cannot long outlast both belief and the institutions faith built	No society yet observed that lost both; Nordic cases kept the institutions	conjecture

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

The genealogical finding would weaken if careful work showed that the West’s universal equality and its concern for the weak arose independently, in classical, Stoic, or non-Western sources, and passed into modern thought by routes that bypassed Christianity. Siedentop’s and Holland’s critics have argued this in part, and a stronger demonstration would reduce the borrowed-capital thesis to a claim about one channel among several.

The dependence claim would be refuted by a society that had lost both religious belief and the institutions faith built, its congregations, its religious schools, its liturgical calendar, and yet kept high trust, low violence, generous care of the disabled and the poor, and a firm belief in equal dignity, for two or more generations. It would be strengthened if the Nordic societies, as their church membership continues to fall, began to show declines in trust or in care of the weak that cannot be traced to immigration, economics, or other causes.

The secularization picture would change if a real revival appeared in measures that count people rather than the frequency of those already attending: rising religious identity among adults under thirty in Pew or the GSS, rising Sunday attendance in the American Time Use Survey, or more young converts than leavers. It would change in the other direction if the plateau since 2020 broke and decline resumed.

Finally, the institutional formulation would fail if communities that lost their congregations showed no greater loss of civic life than those that kept them, once income and education are held constant.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: borrowed Christian capital survives the test as genealogy and remains open as prophecy, so the stronger version of your claim should be stated as a prediction with a horizon rather than as a settled fact.
- The institutional formulation fits your signs of exhaustion better than the doctrinal one, because membership (70 percent to 47 percent) is measured and can be compared across places, whereas belief is harder to tie to outcomes.

- Map vs Territory: the Nordic cases are the strongest evidence against you, and treating them fairly, as societies living inside inherited institutions, is the kind of honest map-reading your realism requires.
- Win the Words: Mill’s word “harm” is the clearest case of capture in the paradigm’s history, since whoever defines it controls the protocol, and recovering a fuller sense of harm, one that includes what is lost when a structure goes, is a move your successor paradigm can make.
- Ascent of the West and The Turn: if the capital lives in gathering institutions, then building such institutions, rather than winning arguments about God, is the most direct way to replenish it, which is building before tearing down in its plainest form.

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XXIV

Institutions, Gatekeepers, and Legitimacy

The institutions that carry the present paradigm still hold their posts, but they hold them with far less public trust than they once enjoyed, and the record since 2020 shows that they corrected themselves where reality pressed hardest and voters had a lever, while the larger reversals of 2025 and 2026 were imposed from outside by the paradigm's opponents.

A moral paradigm does not float in the air. Its protocol is written into statutes and handbooks, its lexicon is printed in style guides and training slides, and its gatekeepers sit on hiring committees, editorial boards, and trust-and-safety teams. Chapter XVI argued that legitimacy is less a matter of private belief than of coordination, and the institutions are where the expectation that everyone else will go along is kept. So we must look at the carriers, and ask two of the questions that The Test fixed in advance. Is trust in those carriers falling, and falling among the paradigm's own adherents as well as among its opponents? And when the carriers have made mistakes, have they corrected them from inside, have the corrections stuck, and have the people who first pointed out the mistakes been tolerated or punished?

This chapter maps the American carriers (law, universities, corporations, newsrooms, foundations, and platforms) and then weighs the two signs.

THE LAW: A SECOND CONSTITUTION AND ITS CONTRACTION

THE DEEPEST CARRIER is the law, because the law can compel. In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971) the Supreme Court held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forbids employment practices that are neutral on their face but have an unjustified adverse effect on a protected group, whether or not anyone intended harm; the employer's defense is to show that the practice is job-related and a business necessity, and that standard now sits in the statute itself. Disparate impact is the paradigm's protocol turned into legal method. A test, a rule, or a requirement that weighs unequally on a group is treated as a presumptive constraint, and the burden falls on the institution to justify keeping it.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 did the same work for sex in schools, and in 2020 the paradigm won one of its most important statutory victories. In *Bostock v. Clayton County*, decided on June 15 of that year by a vote of six to three, Justice Gorsuch held for the Court that an employer who fires someone for being gay or transgender discriminates because of sex. The Biden administration then built outward from that holding: an executive order on its first day directed agencies to read sex discrimination law the same way, the EEOC's 2024 harassment rules reached pronoun use and bathroom access, and the Education Department's 2024 Title IX rule declared that the statute forbids discrimination by gender identity.

The journalist Christopher Caldwell gave the most pointed account of what all this amounted to. In *The Age of Entitlement* (2020) he argued that the civil rights settlement of the 1960s grew into "a rival constitution," often at odds with the original: the first order promises equal treatment of individuals before the law, while the second requires the redress of historic injustice through group remedies and a broad judicial oversight of social and commercial life. Caldwell writes from the right, and his critics answer that civil rights law did not rival the Constitution but finally fulfilled the promise of the Fourteenth Amendment, which had been left unkept for a century. Both readings can grant the point that matters here, which is that the paradigm's protocol came to be carried by law and enforced by the courts and agencies, and that this gave its gatekeepers a power that no sermon or editorial could match.

Since 2023 that legal carrier has contracted, and it has done so from two directions. The first was the Supreme Court. In *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, decided on June 29, 2023, by a vote of six to three, Chief Justice Roberts held that race-conscious admissions at Harvard and the University of North Carolina violated the Equal Protection Clause, though the ruling did not on its face reach private employers under Title VII. In *Ames v. Ohio Department of Youth Services*, decided on June 5, 2025, a unanimous Court, in an opinion by Justice Jackson, struck down the extra burden some lower courts had placed on majority-group plaintiffs. And in *United States v. Skrmetti*, decided on June 18, 2025, by six to three, the Court upheld Tennessee's ban on puberty blockers and hormones for minors with gender dysphoria under ordinary rational-basis review. It declined to say whether transgender people form a protected class, declined to carry *Bostock's* reasoning beyond Title VII, and said that such questions are "left to the people, their elected representatives, and the democratic process."

The second direction was the executive. In January 2025 the new administration issued Executive Order 14151, ending federal DEI offices; Executive Order 14168, defining sex as a binary fixed at conception and calling the earlier reading of *Bostock* misapplied; and Executive Order 14173, signed on January 21, which revoked the contractor affirmative-action order of 1965 (Executive Order 11246) and required contractors and grantees to certify that they run no DEI programs that violate anti-discrimination law, on pain of False Claims Act liability. Executive Order 14281, signed on April 23, 2025, directed agencies to stop enforcing disparate impact, and in December 2025 the Justice Department removed disparate-impact liability from its Title VI regulations without notice and comment. Title IX followed the same path: on January 9, 2025, a federal court in Kentucky vacated the 2024 rule in *Tennessee v. Cardona*, holding that sex in the statute means male and female, and on January 31 the Education Department told schools it would enforce the 2020 rule instead.

The legal fate of these orders is still being settled, but the outline is clear. District courts enjoined the DEI orders in early 2025; the Fourth Circuit paused the injunction in March and, on February 6, 2026, vacated it, holding that the facial challenges were unlikely to succeed because the certification clause reaches only conduct that existing law already forbids. Chief Judge Diaz wrote separately to warn against programs being "terminated by keyword," and the court left room for challenges to particular agency actions. The executive has also met limits: Title VII's own disparate-impact provision remains in the statute and can be re-

moved only by Congress or the Court, and when the administration froze more than two billion dollars of Harvard's research funding, Judge Allison Burroughs held on September 3, 2025, that the freeze was illegal.

THE UNIVERSITIES

If the law is the paradigm's sword, the university is its seminary, for this is where its gatekeepers are trained and its lexicon is refined. The political composition of the faculty is the best measured fact about it. In a 2016 study of 7,243 professors in economics, history, journalism, law, and psychology at forty leading universities, Mitchell Langbert, Anthony Quain, and Daniel Klein found about ten registered Democrats for every Republican, with ratios ranging from 4.5 to 1 in economics to 33.5 to 1 in history; they estimated the ratio at roughly 3.5 to 1 in 1970 and 8 to 1 in 2004. Langbert's 2018 study of fifty-one top liberal arts colleges found a ratio of 10.4 to 1, and in 78 percent of the 1,033 departments he counted there was not a single registered Republican. The Higher Education Research Institute's faculty surveys tell the same story from another angle, for Heterodox Academy's analysis of them found that professors were about eleven points more liberal than the country in 1990 and more than thirty points more liberal by 2013, while the public's own distribution barely moved. Registration is not belief, and engineering and the professional schools are far more mixed than the humanities, but a body of gatekeepers this uniform cannot easily hear an objection to its own paradigm, because the objection has no one to voice it in the room.

The diversity statement was the clearest instance of a lexicon used as a gate. Applicants for faculty posts were asked to show their knowledge of DEI challenges and to describe what they would do to advance them, which meant that fluency in the paradigm's vocabulary was screened before scholarship was weighed. The retreat began from inside. In May 2024 MIT stopped requiring the statements, and President Sally Kornbluth explained that "compelled statements impinge on freedom of expression, and they don't work." On May 28, 2024, Harvard adopted a policy of institutional neutrality on public controversies, on the advice of a faculty working group, and by early 2025 Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the University of Michigan had also stopped requiring diversity statements. MIT's and Harvard's choices of 2024 were made before the

federal campaign began, by people who held the paradigm's values and judged that its instruments had overreached.

The next round was different. In March 2025 the University of California's regents directed that diversity statements no longer be required, on the same day the system froze hiring because of threatened federal cuts, and a faculty member reported that President Michael Drake had said the university needed to show that it was listening to the Trump administration. By then the administration had opened investigations into more than fifty colleges, frozen billions in Harvard's grants, and accepted Columbia's agreement in July 2025 to pay 220 million dollars to restore its funding. Several states had also legislated, for the Chronicle of Higher Education counted eight anti-DEI laws enacted from 2023 onward, including statutes in Florida and Texas.

Meanwhile the climate of speech, which is the best test of whether a body of gatekeepers tolerates dissent, did not improve. FIRE's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, based on 68,510 students at 257 schools surveyed in the first half of 2025, found that most students censor themselves at least now and then (Chapter XXVI gives the figures), and that the shares saying it is at least sometimes acceptable to shout down a speaker (36 percent), to block entry to a talk (22 percent), or to use violence to stop one (15 percent) had all reached record highs; for the first time, a majority of students opposed allowing every one of the six controversial speakers they were asked about, from left and right alike. FIRE's 2024 faculty survey, covering 6,269 professors at fifty-five institutions, found that 35 percent had toned down their written work to avoid controversy, against 9 percent of social scientists asked the same question in 1954, and only 20 percent thought a conservative would fit well in their department.

CORPORATIONS AND THE HUMAN-RESOURCES OFFICE

The corporation became a carrier late, and through its human-resources office. According to figures reported by *The Economist*, hiring for jobs with "diversity" or "inclusion" in the title more than quadrupled between 2010 and 2021, and a 2020 estimate put the American diversity and inclusion market at about 3.4 billion dollars. In the paradigm's own terms this was normal virtue at scale: each firm found the constraints in its hiring and promotion and set out to remove them, with training, targets, supplier programs, and employee groups.

Yet the best evidence on what these programs achieved had been available for years. In 2016 the sociologists Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, drawing on three decades of data from 829 firms, reported that mandatory diversity training was followed by no gains, and some losses, in the share of managers from the groups it was meant to help, whereas voluntary training, mentoring, targeted recruiting, and task forces did much better (Chapter XXVII gives the figures). They were friends of the goal and critics of the method, and theirs was just the sort of anomaly a healthy paradigm absorbs; yet the hiring boom after 2020 went on all the same.

The retreat came in two waves, and the order matters. DEI jobs peaked in early 2023 and fell by about 5 percent that year and 8 percent more in 2024. Then, from June 2024, a campaign by the activist Robby Starbuck drew a string of companies whose customers lean conservative into public changes: Tractor Supply in June, John Deere in July, Harley-Davidson, Ford, and Lowe's in August, and Walmart and Boeing in November. Amazon followed in December. The second wave came in January and February 2025, just after the new executive orders, as McDonald's, Meta, Target, Google, Accenture, Citigroup, Deloitte's American arm, PepsiCo, Disney, and Goldman Sachs dropped representation goals, ended diverse-slate hiring, or stopped answering outside diversity surveys. A CNN review found many of the changes to be "performative tweaks," and Apple, Delta, Microsoft, and Costco publicly reaffirmed their programs. Worker opinion moved only a little: Pew found that the share of workers who called a focus on DEI a good thing slipped from 56 percent in 2023 to 52 percent in 2024, while the share of Republicans who called it bad rose from 30 to 42 percent.

NEWSROOMS, FOUNDATIONS, AND PLATFORMS

The culture-producing institutions are the paradigm's voice. The American Journalist survey found in 2022 that 36 percent of full-time journalists called themselves Democrats, 52 percent independents, and just 3.4 percent Republicans, down from 18 percent in 2002. In fairness, a 2020 study in *Science Advances* found that although most journalists are liberal, there was little evidence that this shaped which stories they chose to cover. Still, 2020 showed what the newsroom's gatekeeping could do to a dissenter inside it. After The New York Times ran Senator Tom Cotton's op-ed calling for troops to put down rioting, dozens of its staff objected in public, and the opinion editor James Bennet resigned on

June 7, 2020; on July 14 the columnist Bari Weiss resigned with a letter accusing the paper of yielding to its critics on social media.

The changes since then have come mostly from owners. In October 2024 The Washington Post declined to endorse a presidential candidate, and some 250,000 subscribers canceled; in February 2025 its owner, Jeff Bezos, ordered the opinion section to publish only pieces supporting personal liberties and free markets, and the opinion editor resigned. In October 2025 Paramount Skydance bought The Free Press for 150 million dollars and made Weiss editor-in-chief of CBS News, which means that the dissenter of 2020 was placed in charge of a network newsroom, not by the newsroom, but by a new proprietor.

The large foundations supply the paradigm's capital. In 2015 Darren Walker turned the Ford Foundation, which reported assets of 17.5 billion dollars in 2024, toward inequality, writing that philanthropy "must not only be generosity, but justice"; he was succeeded by Heather Gerken in 2025. The platforms, finally, became gatekeepers of speech itself, and here too the turn came from ownership. Twitter's Birdwatch program, launched in 2021 and renamed Community Notes in November 2022, replaced verdicts by staff with notes that must win ratings from users across the political spectrum. On January 7, 2025, Meta ended third-party fact-checking in the United States, adopted the same model, lifted restrictions on debate about immigration and gender identity, and moved its trust-and-safety teams from California to Texas; by May it reported that enforcement mistakes in the United States had fallen by about half.

THE LEGITIMACY LEDGER

The Test asked for falling trust in the paradigm's institutions, including among its own adherents. Gallup's June 2026 survey gives the latest picture.

INSTITUTION (GALLUP)	ALL ADULTS	REPUBLICANS	DEMOCRATS	NOTE
Average, 14 institutions, 2026	27%	36% (nine-institu- tion series)	23% (nine-institu- tion series)	record low was 26% in 2023
Higher education, 2026	38%	23%	50%	57% in 2015; Democrats 61% in 2025
Newspapers, 2026	17%	10%	22%	one point above record low

INSTITUTION (GALLUP)	ALL ADULTS	REPUBLICANS	DEMOCRATS	NOTE
Television news, 2026	14%	6%	16%	three points above low
Public schools, 2026	27%	16%	35%	one point above low
Large technology companies, 2026	20%	29%	13%	new record low
Big business, 2026	17%	32%	8%	three points above low
Medical system, 2026	28%	30%	26%	at its record low
Trust in mass media (Gallup, 2025)	28%	8%	51%	first reading below 30%; 68 to 72% in the 1970s
Trust federal government (Pew, Sept. 2025)	17%	26%	9%	73% in 1958; Democrats never lower

Three different things are mixed in these numbers, and the historian of morals must separate them. The first is the partisan rotation of trust in the state. Pew’s series shows that trust in the federal government swings with whoever holds the White House: Democrats were at 35 percent in May 2024 and 9 percent in September 2025, while Republicans moved the other way. Gallup’s record partisan gap in 2026 is driven largely by the presidency, where the gap is seventy points. That tells us about the parties, not about the paradigm.

The second is the opponents’ collapse, which is very large. Republican confidence in higher education fell from more than half in 2015 to 19 percent in 2023, and Republican trust in the mass media reached 8 percent in 2025, the first single-digit reading. A paradigm can survive the hostility of its opponents, but its gatekeepers cannot coordinate a whole people when half of it regards them as partisans, and that loss is real even if every Democrat still trusted them.

The third, and the one The Test cared most about, is the adherents’ drift, and it is smaller but present. Democratic confidence in higher education fell from 61 to 50 percent between 2025 and 2026; Democrats’ trust in the media, at 51 percent, matched its lowest majority; and among Democrats aged eighteen to twenty-nine it was only 38 percent. Democrats’ confidence in public schools stands at 35 percent. Even here the evidence is muddled, for Gallup’s respondents in 2026

named interference by the Trump administration among their reasons for doubting colleges, and some of the Democratic decline may reflect anxiety about institutions under siege, not disillusionment with what they teach. Nor is the line straight, since confidence in higher education rose in 2025 before falling again in 2026.

THE SELF-CORRECTION RECORD

The second sign asks whether reversals happen, whether they stick, and whether dissent is tolerated. The record since 2020 is mixed, and its shape matters more than its total.

REVERSAL	WHEN	SOURCE OF CHANGE	HAS IT HELD?	TREATMENT OF DISSENT
MIT restores SAT and ACT requirement	March 2022	inside, on its own data	yes; others followed in 2024 (Chapter VI)	tolerated; argued in equity terms
San Francisco recalls DA Chesa Boudin (55%)	June 2022	paradigm's own electorate	yes, as an event	voters overruled officials
Oregon recriminalizes drug possession (HB 4002)	in force Sept. 2024	paradigm's own legislature	in force	treatment funding kept
California Proposition 36 (68.4%)	Nov. 2024	voters, against the governor	in force; funding disputed	voters overruled officials
MIT ends diversity statements; Harvard adopts neutrality	May 2024	inside	yes	tolerated
First corporate rollbacks	June to Dec. 2024	outside activist and customer pressure	partly; many changes cosmetic	contested
Second corporate rollbacks	Jan. and Feb. 2025	federal pressure	yes, so far	not applicable
UC ends diversity statements	March 2025	federal pressure	yes, so far	faculty called it cowardly
Title IX and disparate impact narrowed	2025	courts and executive	contested in court	not applicable

REVERSAL	WHEN	SOURCE OF CHANGE	HAS IT HELD?	TREATMENT OF DISSENT
Pediatric gender medicine after the Cass Review	2024 to 2025	states and Supreme Court; societies held firm	state bans upheld	AAP reaffirmed its position
New York Times op-ed episode	June and July 2020	inside, toward the paradigm	not applicable	dissent punished

The early reversals, from 2022 to 2024, have a common pattern. They came where outcomes were measurable and ordinary people had a direct lever: an admissions office could see which students thrived, a city could see its streets, and a state could count its overdoses. MIT’s dean of admissions argued in 2022 that the tests helped identify disadvantaged students who lacked access to advanced coursework, and Brown, Yale, and Dartmouth reached the same conclusion from their own data. In San Francisco, Oregon, and California the paradigm’s own voters overruled its officials, and in California they did so against the opposition of a Democratic governor, by a margin of more than two to one. These are corrections from inside the paradigm’s electorate, and they have stuck.

The professional gatekeepers moved less. In England, NHS England stopped routine prescription of puberty blockers in March 2024, and the Cass Review reported in April that the evidence for blockers and hormones in young people was weak; in the United States, by contrast, the American Academy of Pediatrics reaffirmed its support for such care, and the American Psychological Association stood by its position. Both sides of that dispute have serious advocates, and Chapter XXVII weighs the evidence and the criticisms made of the Cass Review; what matters here is that the American change came not from the societies but through state legislatures, twenty-three other states having passed laws like Tennessee’s by December 2024, and through the Supreme Court in *Skrmetti*. The same holds for the HR office, which kept its least effective instrument for nearly a decade after its own sociologists had measured the cost, and for the faculty, whose composition shows no sign of change.

Finally, the large reversals of 2025 came from the paradigm’s opponents, armed with federal power. They have been sweeping, and the Fourth Circuit’s 2026 ruling suggests that the core of them will survive in court, but a correction imposed by an opponent is a different thing from a correction made by the paradigm itself. It may last only as long as the power that imposed it, and it may even

restore some of the paradigm's legitimacy among adherents who now see their institutions as besieged.

TWO SIGNS ASSESSED

Legitimacy: present. Confidence in nearly every institution that carries the paradigm—higher education, newspapers, television news, public schools, the medical system, and large technology firms—stands at or near its lowest point in Gallup's records, and trust in the mass media has fallen below 30 percent for the first time. The collapse is steepest among opponents, but The Test also asked for decline among adherents, and that is now measurable: Democrats' confidence in higher education fell eleven points in a single year, their trust in the media is at its narrowest majority, and young Democrats trust the media far less than their elders. We must add the caveat that some of this decline is partisan rotation or reaction to federal pressure, which is why we call the adherents' portion real but modest.

Self-correction: partly present as a crisis sign, which is to say that self-correction works in part and fails in part. On one side, the paradigm's own voters and some of its own institutions reversed course on testing, crime, drugs, and compelled statements between 2022 and 2024, and those reversals have held. On the other side, the gatekeeping core—the faculty, the professional medical societies, and the HR apparatus—corrected little on its own; student intolerance of dissent reached a record in 2025; the dissenters of 2020 left their posts under pressure; and the decisive turn of 2025 was imposed from outside. The Test's verdict of adjusting requires corrections from inside that stick without breaking the paradigm's legitimacy. The record supports that verdict at the edges, where reality spoke loudly and ordinary voters could answer, but not at the center, where the gatekeepers themselves sit.



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
Confidence in the paradigm’s carrier institutions is at or near record lows	Gallup 2026: average 27% (low 26% in 2023); higher education 38%, newspapers 17%, TV news 14%	measured
Trust is falling among adherents, though less than among opponents	Democrats’ confidence in higher education fell from 61% to 50% (2025 to 2026); media trust among Democrats 51%, ages 18 to 29 38%	measured
Part of the decline is partisan rotation, not paradigm	Pew trust in government swings with the White House; Democrats 35% in 2024, 9% in 2025	measured
Faculty gatekeepers are politically uniform	about 10 to 1 Democrats to Republicans (2016); 78% of liberal arts departments with no Republicans (2018)	well supported
Internal correction occurred where outcomes were measurable and voters had a lever	MIT tests (2022); Boudin recall (2022); Oregon HB 4002 and Prop 36 (2024)	well supported
Professional gatekeepers corrected little on their own	AAP reaffirmed after Cass; mandatory training kept despite Dobbin and Kalev (2016); 2025 student intolerance at record highs	well supported
The largest reversals were imposed by opponents with federal power	2025 executive orders, Title IX and disparate-impact changes, UC statements, second corporate wave	measured
Imposed reversals are durable only so long as the power behind them lasts	court rulings mixed (Fourth Circuit 2026 upheld orders; Harvard won in 2025)	conjecture

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

The finding on legitimacy would weaken if Gallup’s 2027 and 2028 surveys showed Democrats’ confidence in higher education and the media recovering toward their levels of 2015, since that would suggest the 2026 drop was a reaction to federal pressure rather than disillusionment, or if Republican confidence in universities rose as they changed. It would weaken further if the decline in trust proved just as steep for institutions that do not carry

the paradigm, such as the military or small business, for then we would be looking at a general distrust of everything and not a verdict on one moral order; the military's 61 percent and small business's 67 percent in 2026 currently argue against that reading, but the series deserves watching.

The finding on self-correction would weaken in the paradigm's favor if the professional societies revised their positions on pediatric gender medicine on their own evidence, if institutions free of federal leverage kept their reforms, if faculty hiring showed more ideological range, or if FIRE's measures of tolerance improved. It would strengthen the case for exhaustion if the reversals of 2025 were quickly undone after a change of administration with no internal review, or if the internal reforms of 2022 to 2024 were themselves rolled back, because that would show that the paradigm had been suppressed for a time and had learned nothing.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the HR office's decade-long attachment to mandatory training, after its own scholars had measured the cost, is detector drift in institutional form, an instrument kept because it signals virtue and not because it yields results.
- Win the Words: McDonald's renaming its diversity team the Global Inclusion Team is the substitution move run in reverse, a way to keep the word's halo while surrendering its program; watch which words survive the retreat, for they store the training that may return.
- Map vs Territory: the reversals that stuck—tests, Prop 36, Oregon—came where the territory sent back consequences that voters could see, which supports your claim that you cannot change the territory by changing the map.
- The Turn and turning well: the 2025 reversals tore down a great deal without building a replacement or offering honorable exits, and Chapter XXI's warning applies, since an imposed turn may restore the old paradigm's legitimacy among those who feel defeated rather than persuaded.
- Ascent of the West: a successor paradigm needs gatekeepers that can correct themselves, which Chapter XV calls the meta-paradigm; the lesson of this chapter is that the next order will be judged less by its exemplar than by whether its own institutions can hear a dissenter.

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XXV

The Paradigm in American Culture

American culture in 2026 shows the progress paradigm still holding the commanding heights of prestige culture, while a fast-growing culture outside the institutions, the habits of ordinary buyers, and a measurable cooling of some remissions suggest that the paradigm is adjusting under pressure rather than being replaced, and that no successor has yet been given a face.

PRESTIGE CULTURE AND ITS WRITTEN RULES

CHAPTER XIV ARGUED that a moral paradigm writes itself into the rules of the storytelling industry, and that the Hays Code and the Academy's representation standards are, in structure if not in content, cousins. Our first task is to see whether the second has held, and it has. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced its representation and inclusion standards on September 8, 2020, and phased them in gently: for the 2022 and 2023 ceremonies a film had only to file a confidential form, but from the 2024 awards onward a film had to meet two of four standards to be eligible for Best Picture. The four concern what appears on screen, who leads the production, who gets apprenticeships, and who sits among the distributor's senior marketing staff. The Academy's own page, updated in May 2026, still lists all four, still requires two, and names as underrepresented groups women, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities. Because a film can qualify through hiring and internships alone, they bind the studio more than the story; yet an institution that once demanded that marriage be upheld now de-

mands that inclusion be documented, and both are a paradigm's verdict on what deserves its highest honor.

Publishing shows the same pattern, though with more visible strain. Sensitivity readers, whom publishers hire to flag stereotypes and offensive passages, became prominent in young adult fiction from about 2015. In February 2023 Puffin issued new editions of Roald Dahl's children's books with language altered on their advice, and the outcry was broad enough, running from PEN America's chief executive to Salman Rushdie and the British prime minister, that Puffin agreed to keep the original texts in print alongside the new ones. The same year saw James Bond novels and a Wodehouse reissue edited for racial slurs, and in June 2023 Elizabeth Gilbert halted publication of a novel set in Russia after readers objected to its setting during the war in Ukraine. That last case shows the interdiction at its most Rieffian, for no word in the book had yet been read; what was forbidden was a choice of subject.

The museums tell a more complicated story, because in 2025 the state entered the contest. An executive order signed on March 27, 2025, directed the Vice President, through his seat on the Smithsonian's Board of Regents, to work at removing what it called improper ideology from the Smithsonian's museums, which it described as divisive and race-centered. The Kennedy Center went further: its trustees were dismissed in February 2025, the new board elected the President as its chairman, its social impact program was dismantled, and in December the board voted to rename it the Trump-Kennedy Center. The response from the arts world was swift. Producers of *Hamilton* canceled a run, the Washington National Opera left in January 2026, ticket sales fell to their lowest levels since the pandemic, according to the Washington Post's reporting in October 2025, and in May 2026 a federal judge ordered the name removed. When prestige culture was challenged in 2025, the challenge came chiefly from political power acting on the institutions from above, and the artists and audiences of those institutions mostly sided with the old paradigm.

As for the master plot, we cannot measure it as we measure a box office, and so what follows is judgment rather than data; but nothing in the recent record of awards suggests that the emancipation story has lost its place at the top of prestige culture.

THE GAP BETWEEN THE STAGE AND THE SEATS

If prestige culture still belongs to the paradigm, does popular taste? Here the evidence is more mixed than either side of the culture war admits.

The ten highest-grossing films in the American market in 2025 were *A Minecraft Movie*, *Lilo & Stitch*, *Superman*, *Jurassic World: Rebirth*, *Sinners*, *How to Train Your Dragon*, *The Fantastic Four*, *Captain America*, *Mission: Impossible*, and *Thunderbolts*. They are, almost without exception, franchise adventures and family entertainments, and the most-watched title in Netflix's history, the animated KPop *Demon Hunters*, belongs to the same bright and largely apolitical family. At the same time, the Best Picture nominees were mostly small films at the box office. One *Battle After Another* had earned about \$71.6 million at home when the nominations were announced, and four had earned less than \$18 million each, while the Oscar telecast drew 17.86 million viewers, down 9 percent from the year before. So a gap exists between what the prestige institutions honor and what the public chooses, but it would be wrong to read it simply as a moral revolt, since *Sinners* was both a nominee and a \$278 million hit, and the gap between art-house and popcorn is older than any paradigm. When Disney's live-action *Snow White* lost a great deal of money in 2025, after controversies over its casting, its reimaged dwarfs, and its lead actress's politics, most box-office analysts blamed weak reviews and marketing rather than the controversies. The honest reading is that popular taste is less hostile to the paradigm than indifferent to it, and that it rewards spectacle and familiarity more than sermons of any kind.

The more striking evidence comes from three episodes in which buyers acted together. The first, and the largest, was the Bud Light boycott. On April 1, 2023, the transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney posted a sponsored video for the brand, and within weeks sales had fallen sharply. NielsenIQ data reported in August showed Bud Light's dollar sales down 15.9 percent for the year to date and 26.8 percent in the week ending August 19, while Modelo's were up 10.3 percent and Modelo had passed Bud Light as the country's top-selling beer. Anheuser-Busch InBev reported American revenue down 10.5 percent in the second quarter of 2023, and CNN later estimated that it may have lost up to \$1.4 billion in sales. By comparison, the sociologist Brayden King told CNBC that he knew of no earlier political boycott that had cut a company's sales by more than 1 percent.

What made the boycott work is just what Chapters XIV and XVI would predict. Light beer has near-perfect substitutes, so switching cost almost nothing, and switching was visible, for every bar order and every cooler at a barbecue became a signal by which people who had quietly disliked the campaign learned that millions of others felt the same. That is a coordination event in the purest sense, fitting Paluck's finding that culture moves behavior chiefly by changing what people believe others believe, and it also explains why most boycotts fail, since few products are so easy to replace.

The second episode was Target's. After its 2023 Pride collection drew angry reactions in stores, the company pulled some items in May, and in August it reported that comparable sales had fallen 5.4 percent in the second quarter, its first quarterly decline in six years; the chief executive told investors that many store workers had faced a negative guest reaction to the Pride assortment. The third was Disney's slower course correction. In December 2024 Pixar removed a storyline about gender identity from its animated series *Win or Lose*, explaining that many parents would rather raise such subjects with their children in their own time, and in February 2025 Disney ended its Reimagine Tomorrow initiative and replaced the diversity and inclusion factor in executive pay with one called talent strategy. Its human resources chief insisted that the commitment to belonging was unchanged, but corporations, unlike award bodies, must listen to the cash register, and they adjusted.

Sport supplies the clearest example of a remission withdrawn. On February 6, 2025, one day after a presidential executive order on the subject, the NCAA limited women's competition to athletes assigned female at birth, replacing a 2022 policy that had left eligibility to each sport's governing body. Its president, Charlie Baker, had said the previous year that he knew of only about ten transgender athletes in the NCAA, and he welcomed what he called a clear, national standard. Supporters of the rule saw it as a matter of fairness and safety for women, while its opponents saw a very small group shut out of the sport they had trained for; but public opinion had moved before the rule did. Pew found in February 2025 that 66 percent of adults favored requiring transgender athletes to compete on teams matching their sex at birth, up 8 points since 2022, with Democrats rising from 37 to 45 percent. In a November 2025 survey, 73 percent said they were uncomfortable with transgender athletes competing on teams that do not match their birth sex. Here, at least, the gap between prestige culture and popular judgment was wide, and it closed in favor of popular judgment.

THE CULTURE THAT GREW OUTSIDE THE WALLS

Chapter XIV left open, and Chapter XIX took up, the question whether culture moves morality chiefly through a few central producers or can move it through a distributed network, and the present gives us a large test, because a second American culture has grown up outside the studios, the networks, and the publishing houses, and it is now very nearly as large as the first.

The numbers are plain. Edison Research's Infinite Dial survey for 2026 found that 58 percent of Americans aged twelve and older had listened to or watched a podcast in the past month, about 167 million people, and 45 percent in the past week, both record highs. Pew found in 2024 that 21 percent of adults, and 37 percent of those under thirty, regularly get news from news influencers, of whom 77 percent have never worked for a news organization, 63 percent are men, and slightly more lean right (27 percent) than left (21 percent). Substack reported five million paid subscriptions by March 2025, and Goldman Sachs estimated in 2023 that only about 4 percent of the world's fifty million creators earned more than \$100,000 a year.

The largest single voice in this culture is Joe Rogan, whose show topped Edison's ranking of American podcasts at the end of 2025. Edison's 2024 data found his audience about 80 percent male and half aged eighteen to thirty-four. In the autumn of 2024 Donald Trump sat with Rogan for three hours, an interview that drew more than 44 million views on YouTube, and he also appeared with Theo Von, Logan Paul, the Nelk Boys, and Barstool Sports, all of them shows with young male audiences. Kamala Harris did the same in her own way, appearing on *Call Her Daddy*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *Howard Stern*. Rogan endorsed Trump on the eve of the election, and commentators named 2024 the podcast election.

What does this culture carry? It would be too simple to call it the successor paradigm in embryo. In our impression, which we cannot measure, its tone is skeptical of institutions and of the prestige culture's lexicon, friendly to masculine pursuits such as fighting, fitness, and comedy, and curious about religion and forbidden questions. But its own deepest value looks a great deal like the old paradigm's: the free individual who refuses to be told what to think, removing the constraints that the experts would place on him. That is the emancipator again, now turned against the gatekeepers of emancipation. It may be that the non-in-

stitutional culture is less a new paradigm than the progress protocol applied to the progress paradigm's own institutions.

There is a further twist. When Paramount Skydance bought *The Free Press*, which Bari Weiss had founded as a Substack newsletter in 2021, and made her editor-in-chief of CBS News (Chapter XXIV tells the story), it did what happens when a challenger wins, but also what happens when an old order buys its critics, and it is too soon to say which this was.

As for the vibe shift, the phrase deserves skepticism, for it names a mood, and moods are hard to measure. The measurable changes are real but modest: Pew's shifts on transgender policy of 6 to 10 points between 2022 and 2025, the Gallup changes described below, and the commercial retreats of Disney and Target. Against them stands Ezra Klein's argument, made in December 2025, that the shift peaked early and overreached, which he supported with Trump's approval in the low forties and Democratic victories in the 2025 governors' races in New Jersey and Virginia. Our own reading is that 2024 and 2025 saw a real cooling of particular remissions and a real loss of authority by the prestige institutions, but not a change of exemplar, and that much of the visible shift in 2025 was driven by state power rather than by culture moving on its own.

COMEDY AS A GAUGE

Comedy is the best single gauge of a culture's interdicts, for a joke is a small trespass, and the laugh tells us whether the audience thinks the trespass permitted. The career of Shane Gillis traces the movement of the line with unusual precision. In September 2019 he was hired by *Saturday Night Live* and dismissed five days later, after old podcast clips surfaced in which he used an ethnic slur for Chinese people. He then built his audience outside the institutions, released a Netflix special in 2023, hosted *Saturday Night Live* in February 2024 and the ESPY Awards in July 2025, and in July 2026 set a world record for the largest comedy audience, nearly 74,000 people at Lincoln Financial Field in Philadelphia. The podcast *Kill Tony*, which draws about three million downloads an episode, sold out Madison Square Garden in 2024, and its host performed at a Trump rally that October. A comedian whom the institutions would not employ in 2019 had become a stadium act and a host for the very institutions that had dropped him.

Yet the gauge reads in both directions. In July 2025 CBS announced the end of *The Late Show* with Stephen Colbert, citing the falling advertising revenue of late-night television, while critics noted that it came about two weeks after Paramount settled a lawsuit with the President. In September 2025, after Jimmy Kimmel's monologue on the reaction to Charlie Kirk's assassination, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission suggested on a podcast that the companies could do this the easy way or the hard way; two station groups with business pending before the commission pulled the show, and ABC suspended it. A YouGov poll found that 50 percent of Americans disapproved of the suspension and 35 percent approved, and when Kimmel returned six days later he drew 6.26 million viewers, the largest audience for a regular episode in the show's history. *South Park*, meanwhile, spent its 2025 season mocking the President. Comedy tells us, then, that the old speech interdicts of the progress paradigm have loosened considerably since 2019, and also that a new set of pressures, coming from government rather than from the faculty lounge, has begun to press on comics of the other side. The audience, in both cases, mostly sided with the comedian.

RIEFF'S PREDICTION CHECKED

Rieff predicted that a culture built on remissions would not be a culture without demands, but one whose interdicts had migrated. We can now check both halves.

The remissions are plain in the long run. Gallup's annual survey of moral acceptability, set out in full in Chapter XXII, shows how far the line has moved since the turn of the century: gay or lesbian relations from 40 percent acceptable in 2001 to a peak of 71 percent in 2022, sex between an unmarried man and woman from 53 to 76 percent, and having a baby outside marriage from 45 to 70 percent. Gallup also found that 9.3 percent of adults identified as LGBTQ+ in 2024, up from 3.5 percent in 2012, and that among Gen Z adults the share was 23.1 percent, most of them bisexual. Support for legal marijuana rose from 12 percent in 1969 to a peak of 70 percent in 2023, and after the Supreme Court's decision in *Murphy v. NCAA* in 2018, sports betting was legal in 38 states by September 2023. In sex, identity, and the self's appetites, the remissions of the last generation have been large.

The same series shows something Rieff did not predict and the progress paradigm does not expect, for every measure with a long record fell between 2022 and

2026, some by nine to twelve points (those three items stood at 62, 65, and 58 percent in 2026), and support for legal marijuana fell from 70 to 64 percent between 2023 and 2025. The remissions have not been revoked, for every figure remains well above its level of 2001, but they have stopped advancing and begun to recede. That is a small anomaly for the accretion picture, which holds that the leading edge does not go backward.

The new interdicts are just as plain, and they cluster, as Rieff would expect, around speech: FIRE's survey of undergraduates in 2025, discussed in Chapters XXIV and XXVI, found that roughly six in ten students censor themselves at least occasionally, and that tolerance for shouting down speakers stood at a record high. The sensitivity reader and the representation standard belong to the same family of new demands.

Yet the most important finding of this section is that interdicts now migrate in two directions. The progress paradigm built its speech interdicts to protect its sacred things, the victim and the self's account of itself, and its opponents, gaining power, have built interdicts of their own: PEN America counted 6,870 book bans in public schools in the 2024 to 2025 school year and 11,982 in 2025 to 2026, many of them aimed at books about race, sexuality, and gender, though defenders of the removals argue that a book withdrawn pending review is not banned and that many of the titles were challenged for sexual content unsuited to children; a federal order told the Smithsonian what history to tell; and a federal regulator leaned on a broadcaster over a comedian's monologue. When the Sydney Sweeney jeans advertisement of July 2025 was attacked online as racially coded, the attack failed and the company's stock rose, which suggests that the old interdict has lost force; but the speed with which the White House joined in suggests that a rival set of sacred things is forming. Rieff's law seems to hold for everyone. No faction can live on remissions alone, and each, when it gains the gate, begins to post guards.

WHAT THE YOUNG ADMIRE

If culture is where successors are auditioned, the young are the audience who matters most, since they will either carry the paradigm forward or leave it behind. Here the evidence is thinner than we would like, and some popular claims do not survive inspection.

On careers, the influencer is clearly an admired figure. Morning Consult found in 2023 that 57 percent of social-media-using Gen Z Americans would become influencers if given the chance, about the same as the 59 percent of 2019, and 53 percent said they would quit a job to do it. We found no recent, high-quality survey of whom young Americans name as role models, and so we leave that question open; what we can say is that the admired figure of the new culture is the self-made individual with an audience, which is the emancipator in commercial form and not the founder or the steward. A broader Pew survey of 2023 points the same way for adults generally: 71 percent called enjoyable work extremely or very important to a fulfilling life, 61 percent close friends, and only 26 percent children and 23 percent marriage.

On religion, the claims of a revival among the young must be weighed carefully, and Chapters XXIII and XXVI weigh them in full. Pew's Religious Landscape Study of 2023 and 2024 found the Christian share fallen from 78 percent in 2007 to 62 percent and roughly steady since about 2020, with only 46 percent of adults aged eighteen to twenty-four identifying as Christian, against 80 percent of the oldest. Barna's 2025 report that young adults were driving a rise in church attendance, and that men now attended more often than women, rests on self-reported figures and quota samples, whereas Pew found no birth cohort in which men were significantly more religious than women. The safest conclusion is that the long slide has paused, that the old gap between young women and young men has narrowed, partly because young women are leaving, and that a revival among the young is not yet measured.

The Harvard Youth Poll of spring 2025 adds a sober note, for only 17 percent of Americans aged eighteen to twenty-nine said they felt deeply connected to a community, and 59 percent of those with no sense of belonging reported depressive symptoms. Asked what is central to American identity, young Democrats and young Republicans alike put individual rights and freedoms first. Young people's attitudes on the most contested remission also remain more permissive than their elders': in November 2025, 60 percent of those under thirty were uncomfortable with transgender athletes on teams that do not match their birth sex, compared with 80 percent of those over sixty-five. Chapter XXVI takes up the generations in detail, but the cultural evidence points to a generation that is lonely, more skeptical of institutions than its parents were, and hungry for belonging, yet still formed by the paradigm's first value, the free individual.

SUCCESSOR, ADJUSTMENT, OR CONTINUED DOMINANCE

We can now set the evidence side by side, as The Test requires.

The case for continued dominance is strong in prestige culture. The representation standards stand unchanged, artists sided overwhelmingly with the old order when the state moved against the Kennedy Center, and when power pressed on comedians critical of the government, audiences rallied to them. The young remain more permissive than the old on identity, they still name individual freedom as their first value, and their most admired career is a solo act of self-expression. Even the outsider culture of podcasts and newsletters speaks, at bottom, the language of emancipation.

The case for adjustment is strong in popular culture and in corporate behavior. Buyers coordinated against Bud Light and Target; Disney retreated; the NCAA changed its rule; opinion on transgender policy moved 6 to 10 points in three years, including among Democrats; Gallup's long-running measures of moral acceptability all fell after 2022; and comedians once expelled by the institutions now fill stadiums. These are corrections made inside the paradigm, without any change of exemplar, and by The Test's own rules they count toward the verdict of adjusting rather than of exhaustion.

The case for a successor being auditioned is the weakest of the three, though it is not empty. There are faint signs of a different exemplar: a pause in the decline of Christianity, reports, not yet confirmed by national surveys, of rising church attendance among young men, and a non-institutional culture that seems, though no one has measured it, more open than the studios to discipline, faith, and masculine virtue. Yet no new story has captured the culture, no film or novel has given the founder or the steward-builder a popular face, and much of the visible shift of 2025 came from executive orders and regulators rather than from the slow work of culture. Chapter XIV said that culture runs ahead of law; in several of these cases in 2025, power ran ahead of culture and the culture largely resisted it, and a change imposed from above is weak evidence of a successor that may even harden loyalty to the old order.

Our finding, then, is that American culture in 2026 shows the progress paradigm adjusting: still dominant where prestige is conferred, losing ground where money and coordinated choice decide, contested from outside by a culture that

has not yet found an exemplar of its own, and newly entangled with a rival faction that is building interdicts of its own.



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
The progress paradigm still governs prestige culture	Academy standards in force and unchanged since 2024; artists’ response to the Kennedy Center takeover	measured
Popular taste is more indifferent than hostile to the paradigm	2025 box office led by franchises and family films; Sinners both hit and nominee; Snow White losses blamed mainly on reviews	well supported
Coordinated consumer action can force corporate correction	Bud Light sales down 15.9% year to date and 26.8% in one week (2023); Target’s first quarterly decline in six years; Disney’s retreats	measured
A large non-institutional culture now rivals the old media	58% monthly podcast reach (2026); 37% of under-30s get news from influencers (2024); 5 million Substack subscriptions (2025)	measured
Several remissions have cooled since 2022	Gallup moral-acceptability measures all lower in 2026 than in 2022; Pew shifts on transgender policy; NCAA rule change	measured
Interdicts have migrated and now come from both sides	FIRE self-censorship figures; PEN book-ban counts; Smithsonian order; Kimmel suspension	well supported
Comedy’s speech line has loosened since 2019	Gillis from dismissal to stadium record; Kill Tony at Madison Square Garden	well supported
A religious revival among young men is unproven	Pew finds no cohort with men more religious than women; Barna’s contrary figures are self-reported	contested
No successor exemplar has yet been auditioned in culture	absence of a widely popular story of founders or stewards; outsider culture still speaks of emancipation	conjecture

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

The verdict of adjustment would weaken toward continued dominance if the cooling of remissions proves to be a blip: if Gallup’s moral-acceptability measures return to their 2022 peaks by 2028, if opinion on transgender policy moves back once the issue loses its partisan

heat, or if the corporate retreats of 2024 and 2025 are quietly reversed when political pressure eases. It would weaken further if the young, as they age, hold the paradigm's remissions more firmly than their parents did, which would satisfy one of the falsifying conditions set out in The Test.

The verdict would strengthen toward an audition of a successor if three things appeared together: a widely popular story, on screen or in print, whose hero is a builder, a father, or a steward rather than an escapee; measured and sustained growth in religious practice among the young, confirmed by Pew or the General Social Survey and not only by self-reported attendance; and new non-institutional institutions, such as schools, guilds, or churches, growing out of the podcast and creator culture rather than merely being bought by the old media. Finally, if it turns out that the cultural shifts of 2025 were caused chiefly by state power and evaporate when that power changes hands, then the case for any organic cultural shift would be much weaker than this chapter suggests.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: the outsider culture's deepest value, the free individual refusing the experts, suggests that the protocol of removal is now being turned on its own gatekeepers, which is the ouroboros in cultural form, the paradigm consuming its own institutions with its own tool.
- Win the Words: the Bud Light and Sweeney episodes show that a word's halo can collapse when buyers can see one another's choices; capture works through gatekeepers, but recovery can work through coordination, which suggests that your four moves need a fifth, making private agreement visible.
- Ascent of the West: the gap this chapter finds is less a lack of arguments than a lack of stories, for the successor has no popular exemplar yet, and the founder or steward-builder needs a film, a novel, or a show before it can win the young.
- The Turn: turning well means building before tearing down, and the 2025 interventions at the Smithsonian and the Kennedy Center tore down first, so that the arts world closed ranks, which is evidence for your claim that honorable exits matter.
- The Tyranny of the Individual: the young name individual freedom as their first value while only 17 percent feel deeply connected to a community, which is your argument about the proper dose of liberty, measured.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: the creator economy is already the most distributed culture-making system in history, and AI will extend it, so whoever builds the tools for that culture will shape its exemplars.

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XXVI

Who Holds It: Variants, Generations, and Private Doubt

The paradigm of progress is still held by a great many Americans, but it is held in several incompatible versions, by an activist edge that has drifted away from much of the base it speaks for, by a young generation that is splitting along the line of sex, and by a public that says less than it thinks; two of the three crisis signs examined here are present, and the third is present only in part.

COUNTING THE FAITHFUL

A MORAL PARADIGM lives first in its people. Its institutions and its culture, the subjects of Chapters XXIV and XXV, can carry it long after belief has thinned, much as a church building goes on standing after the congregation has dwindled to a few faithful widows, and that is why the Test sets aside three of its five crisis signs for the adherents themselves. The first is proliferating versions: whether the paradigm has splintered into rival accounts of what it requires, with its activist elite drifting from its own base. The second is generational adherence: whether the young are converting into the paradigm or out of it. The third is preference falsification, Timur Kuran's term from Chapter VIII for the gap between what people profess in public and what they believe in private.

Each of these signs is easy to assert and hard to measure, and so this chapter leans on the large survey houses rather than on anecdote. A survey can tell us how

far groups disagree and how often people say they hold their tongues, but it cannot tell us directly whether a moral order is exhausted, and so where a finding is an interpretation rather than a measurement, we will say so.

One further caution belongs here. Political categories are not moral paradigms, and a Democrat is no more the same thing as an adherent of the progress paradigm than a Republican is its opponent, for the paradigm, whose exemplar is the emancipator and whose protocol is “find the constraint, remove it,” runs through both parties, though more strongly through one. We use the political data because it is the best we have, but we read it for what it reveals about the paradigm’s newest extensions on gender, borders, policing, and speech, where the protocol has been pressed furthest.

MANY VERSIONS OF ONE CREED

The first sign is proliferation, and here the evidence is the plainest of the three. In 2018 the research group More in Common published *Hidden Tribes*, a study that sorted Americans into seven groups by their underlying values rather than by party. At one end it found Progressive Activists, 8 percent of the population; at the other, Devoted Conservatives, 6 percent, with Traditional Conservatives at 19 percent beside them. Between the wings lay what the authors called the exhausted majority, five groups making up roughly two thirds of Americans, described by the group’s research director as flexible and eager for compromise. The Progressive Activists were not a cross-section of the country. Some 80 percent were white, against 69 percent of Americans, and 59 percent had finished college, about twice the national rate of 29 percent. And on one telling question the activist edge stood nearly alone, for while 80 percent of Americans called political correctness a problem, only 30 percent of Progressive Activists agreed.

Seven years later the Pew Research Center offered a fresh map. Its political typology, drawn from a survey of 10,357 adults in November 2025 and published in June 2026, divides the public into nine groups, four of them on the left. The smallest of the four, the Leftward Progressives, makes up 7 percent of adults, a figure that sits remarkably close to the 8 percent *Hidden Tribes* found in 2018, which suggests that the activist edge has neither grown nor shrunk much in the interval. It is the youngest of the groups, two thirds white, and largely irreligious, with only 6 percent attending services weekly. The largest group on the left, and in the whole typology, is quite different. The Order and Opportunity Left, at 18

percent of adults, is the most racially diverse group Pew found, 41 percent white, 26 percent Hispanic, and 21 percent Black; it is economically liberal, more worried about crime, more trusting of the police and military, and 71 percent of its members say religion is at least somewhat important in their lives.

What makes these two groups versions of one coalition is that they vote together, and what makes them rival versions of one paradigm is how far apart they stand on its newest cases. The table below gives Pew's figures for the four left-leaning groups on three of them.

QUESTION (PEW, 2025 TO 2026)	LEFTWARD PROGRESSIVES	LOYAL LIBERALS	LEFT-OUT LEFT	ORDER AND OPPORTUNITY LEFT
Share of U.S. adults	7%	11%	12%	18%
Comfortable with "they/them" pronouns	92%	69%	38%	14%
Secure borders extremely or very important	20%	43%	38%	74%
Violent crime a very big problem	18%	19%	43%	53%
Favorable view of the Democratic Party	61%	77%	52%	58%

A gap of 78 points on pronouns and 54 points on borders is not a difference of emphasis within a shared picture. It is, in Kuhn's language, a disagreement about the picture itself, of the kind Chapter VII found among the late phlogiston chemists and the antebellum churches. Pew adds that 71 percent of the Order and Opportunity Left say gender is determined by sex at birth, the very proposition the Leftward Progressives most firmly reject. Yet both groups claim the same exemplar. Each stands, as it sees things, with the vulnerable; they differ about who the vulnerable are, and about which constraints are cruel and which protective.

We must be fair, however, and notice that the right has splintered too. Pew's four right-leaning groups disagree about a national effort to deport undocumented immigrants by 54 points, from 81 percent of the No Apologies Right to 27 percent of the Pragmatic and Polite Right, and about something deeper still: 53 percent of the No Apologies Right say they like seeing their opponents humiliat-

ed, against 5 percent of the Pragmatic and Polite. Since every large coalition holds factions, what matters is where the splits fall. On the left they fall along the line of the paradigm's latest extensions, so that its leading edge and its largest constituency disagree about the very cases the protocol has most recently reached. On the right they fall partly along the line of reaction, which Chapter VIII warned is itself one more variant of the paradigm, taking its map and reversing the arrows. Both patterns are what a paradigm in crisis looks like from the inside.

THE ACTIVISTS AND THEIR BASE

The Test asks for more than splits; it asks whether activist elites have drifted from their own base, and here the evidence is unusually sharp, because it concerns the very people in whose name the paradigm's extensions are made.

Take first a single word. In the late 2010s "Latinx" spread through universities, foundations, newsrooms, and political campaigns as a gender-neutral replacement for Latino and Latina, which made it a small but exemplary case of the lexicon at work: a word coined to carry a verdict. In a survey of 3,030 Hispanic adults conducted in December 2019, Pew found that only 23 percent had heard the term and just 3 percent used it to describe themselves, while 61 percent preferred Hispanic and 29 percent Latino. Use ran highest among young Hispanic women, at 14 percent. Pew returned to the question in November 2023 with a sample of 5,078. By then awareness had doubled to 47 percent, yet use had barely moved, to 4 percent, and three quarters of those who knew the word said it should not be used for their community. A lexicon is meant to store the training of a people; here was a word that its supposed bearers had heard of, considered, and declined.

Policing offers a weightier case. In the summer of 2020, at the height of calls to defund the police, Gallup asked Americans whether they wanted the police to spend more time, the same amount of time, or less time in their area. Among Black Americans, 20 percent wanted more and 61 percent the same, so that about four in five wanted at least the present level of policing, while 19 percent wanted less; among Hispanic Americans, 24 percent wanted more and 59 percent the same. Within a year, Pew found, the share of Black Americans who wanted police spending in their area cut had fallen from 42 to 23 percent. The demand had been made in the name of the communities most exposed to crime, and those communities, asked directly, wanted the police to stay.

The 2024 election showed the same distance. Pew's study of validated voters found that Kamala Harris won Hispanic voters by only 51 to 48 percent, where Joe Biden had won them by 61 to 36 percent in 2020, and that Donald Trump's share of Black voters nearly doubled, from 8 to 15 percent. Such shifts have many causes, most of them economic, and we should not load them all onto the paradigm; still, a coalition whose activist edge is two thirds white and highly educated, and whose largest constituency is diverse, more religious, and more worried about crime, is a coalition in which the gatekeepers and the governed see the world differently.

More in Common's later study of what it called the perception gap shows how that distance sustains itself. Partisans on each side, the study found, imagine that almost twice as many of their opponents hold extreme views as actually do, and the gap is widest among the two wings, the Progressive Activists and the Devoted Conservatives. Most strikingly, education made Democrats less accurate rather than more, so that those without a high school diploma were about three times as accurate about Republicans as those with postgraduate degrees. A gatekeeper class that misreads its opponents so badly is likely to misread its own base as well.

The case for proliferation is therefore strong, but two qualifications keep it honest. The first is that the base has not rejected the paradigm's core. The Order and Opportunity Left still favors a path to legal status for the undocumented and 62 percent of its members say transgender people face a lot of discrimination; what it doubts are the newest extensions, not the old principle of equal treatment. The second is that a gap between activists and voters is the ordinary condition of every movement, and a healthy paradigm can carry it for decades. What makes the present gap telling is its location, for it runs exactly where the protocol has been pressed furthest, as Chapter VII's autoimmune image predicted.

THE YOUNG, DIVIDED BY SEX

The second sign asks whether the young are entering the paradigm or leaving it. The honest answer is that they are doing both at once, and that the line between the two runs, more than anywhere else, between young women and young men.

Gallup's long series on ideology shows the divergence clearly. Across 2001 to 2007, 28 percent of women aged 18 to 29 called themselves liberal, against 25 percent of young men, a gap of 3 points. Across 2017 to 2024 the figure for

young women had risen to 40 percent, while the figure for young men stayed at 25 percent, so that the gap widened to 15 points; in single years young women's liberal identification reached 44 percent in 2020 and 2021. The issues moved with the labels: between 2008 to 2016 and 2017 to 2024, the share of young women who said abortion should be legal in all or most circumstances rose from 42 to 60 percent, while among young men it rose only from 40 to 48 percent. Young women, in short, have converted into the paradigm more deeply than their mothers did, and that is exactly the kind of evidence that the Test said would weaken the author's hypothesis.

Young men have not converted out of it in the same degree, but they have stopped converting in. Their liberal identification in 2024 was where it stood in 2001, and in the 2024 election they moved sharply. According to Tufts University's CIRCLE, analyzing AP VoteCast, men under 30 voted for Trump by 56 to 42 percent and young women for Harris by 58 to 41 percent, while young Latino men went from a 40-point margin for Biden in 2020 to a near tie.

That movement, however, was a vote and not a conversion, and the data since the election show how loosely it was held. In the Harvard Youth Poll of November 2025, only 32 percent of young men approved of Trump's performance as president, and young men who were registered to vote preferred Democrats for Congress by 43 to 31 percent. They described the Democratic Party in a negative word 64 percent of the time, and the Republicans 56 percent of the time. We cannot say, on this evidence, that young men have adopted a rival paradigm, only that many no longer recognize themselves in the existing one and have not yet found another.

The softer measures point the same way. In a survey of 6,061 adults in March 2025, the Survey Center found that 43 percent of young men, against 29 percent of young women, agreed that society is better off when men and women keep to the roles suited to them. Its survey of teenagers in early 2026 found that 53 percent of boys, against 39 percent of girls, said marriage and children were essential to a successful life. None of this is a return to the 1950s, but it is a cohort of young men leaning, on the matters of family and restraint, against the protocol's long work of removing constraints.

On the paradigm's newest extension, gender identity, the young remain its firmest adherents in one sense. Gallup's figures for 2025 show 23 percent of adults aged 18 to 29 identifying as LGBTQ+, against 9 percent of all adults, and Pew found the Leftward Progressives to be the youngest of its nine groups. Yet

the public as a whole has been moving the other way. In May 2026 Gallup found that 38 percent of Americans considered changing one's gender morally acceptable, down from a peak of 46 percent in 2021, and that support for same-sex marriage had slipped from 71 to 65 percent. Most of the decline came among Republicans, but not all of it: the share of Democrats who considered changing gender morally acceptable fell from 67 to 60 percent over the same years.

Religion is the measure on which claims have outrun the evidence, and Chapter XXIII weighs the supposed youth revival in full; here only the question of sex concerns us. In October 2025 the Barna Group reported that 46 percent of Gen Z men said they had attended church in the past week, against 44 percent of Gen Z women, and the figure has been widely repeated as proof of a revival led by young men. It deserves caution, for Barna's samples are drawn by quota rather than by probability, and a gap of 2 points is small enough to be noise. Pew's far larger Religious Landscape Study of 2023 and 2024 found that among Americans aged 18 to 24, 30 percent of women and 26 percent of men pray daily, a gap too small to be statistically significant, and no birth cohort in which men are significantly more religious than women. The careful conclusion is that the old gap by which women were more religious than men has nearly closed among the young, chiefly because young women are leaving, and that the claim of a male revival is not established.

Not every swing in opinion, among the young or anyone else, is a movement into or out of a paradigm. In June 2024, 55 percent of Americans wanted immigration decreased; by June 2025, a few months into a new administration, the figure had fallen to 30 percent, and in June 2026 it stood at 29 percent, as though opinion were a thermostat turning against whatever policy was in force.

Taken together, the generational evidence does not show the young leaving the paradigm. It shows a generation divided, in which young women have taken up its protocol more fully than any cohort before them while young men have stalled, drifted, voted against its party once, and found nothing yet to put in its place.

PRIVATE DOUBT

The third sign is the hardest to see, by its very nature, for preference falsification is the hiding of a view. Kuran's model, recounted in Chapter VIII, explains how a

moral order can look solid while belief drains out of it, and the question is whether such hiding is widespread now, and in which direction it runs.

In July 2020 the Cato Institute, with YouGov, asked 2,000 Americans whether the political climate kept them from saying things they believed because others might find them offensive. Sixty-two percent said it did, up from 58 percent in 2017. The pattern by ideology was lopsided but not one-sided: 77 percent of conservatives said they held back, along with 64 percent of moderates, 52 percent of liberals, and 42 percent of strong liberals, whose figure had risen from 30 percent three years earlier. About a third of employed Americans, 32 percent, feared their views could cost them their jobs, a fear spread evenly across the spectrum.

The longer view comes from the political scientists James Gibson and Joseph Sutherland, who repeated a question first asked by Samuel Stouffer in 1954, at the height of the McCarthy era, about whether people felt as free to speak their minds as they used to. In 1954, 13.4 percent of Americans reported holding back; by 2020 the figure was about 40 percent, roughly three times as high, and their article in *Political Science Quarterly* in 2023 described the trend as a spiral. Self-censorship rose with education, from 27 percent among those without a high school diploma to 45 percent among those with some college, and with the bitterness between the parties; conservatives held back more than liberals, though Republicans and Democrats did not differ. Most telling for our purposes, self-censorship had grown even as political intolerance in the public declined, and the authors suspected that people feared alienating their friends, family, and neighbors more than they feared the government, which is precisely the kind of pressure a moral paradigm exerts.

Among college students, who are the paradigm's most intensively trained adherents, the figures are higher still. FIRE's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings, drawn from 68,510 undergraduates at 257 schools surveyed in the first half of 2025, found that 59 percent censored themselves at least once or twice a month in conversations with other students, 61 percent with professors, and 65 percent in class, while tolerance for shouting down speakers reached the record highs recorded in Chapter XXIV. That tolerance was not even-handed, for only 25 percent would allow a speaker who argued that transgender people have a mental disorder, whereas 49 percent would allow one who argued that children should be able to transition without parental consent, and FIRE's index of tolerance scored speakers of the left at 8.31 and speakers of the right at 7.12.

The strongest test of preference falsification is the list experiment, which hides each person's answer to a sensitive question inside a count of several items, so that no one, not even the researcher, can tell how any individual answered. In 2024 the nonprofit Populace ran such a study with more than 19,000 respondents across 64 issues. It found that 61 percent admitted to silencing their true beliefs, that college graduates and independents showed sizable gaps between public and private opinion on 37 of the 64 issues, and that private trust in institutions fell far below what people said aloud: 22 percent publicly trusted the government but only 4 percent privately, and 24 percent publicly trusted the media but only 7 percent privately.

Here, though, the evidence begins to cut both ways, as Chapter VIII warned it would. The same Populace study found that Americans privately agreed with one another on 43 of the 64 issues, that men and women landed on the same side on 57, and that Gen Z matched the public's direction on 57 and differed mostly in intensity. A hidden consensus, in other words, need not be a hidden rejection of the paradigm; it may be a hidden moderation of it. And on at least one of the paradigm's signal victories, the list-experiment evidence shows no falsification at all. Jeffrey Lax, Justin Phillips, and Alissa Stollwerk found in 2016 that Americans were not overstating their support for same-sex marriage when asked directly, and that what social pressure existed pushed in both directions.

So the data establish that a large and growing share of Americans hold their tongues, that conservatives and the educated hold them most, and that campuses are the tightest places of all. They do not establish that a silent majority secretly rejects the paradigm's core. What they suggest instead is a public that privately doubts the paradigm's newest and most aggressive extensions, and its institutions, far more than it says aloud, while still holding its oldest commitments sincerely.

SCORING THE THREE SIGNS

The Test requires a plain verdict on each sign, and the reasons for it.

SIGN	VERDICT	REASONS	STRONGEST COUNTER- EVIDENCE
Proliferating versions	Present	The left divides by 54 to 78 points on the newest extensions; the activist edge (7 to 8 percent) is whiter and more educated than the base it speaks for, and the base declines its lexicon (Latinx) and its policies (fewer police)	Factions are normal; the base still holds the core of equal treatment; the right has splintered too
Generational adherence	Partly present	Young women have converted in more deeply than any prior cohort; young men have stalled, swung right in 2024, lean toward family and restraint, but have not adopted a rival order	The young remain the most left-leaning cohort overall; young men's 2024 vote softened within a year; the religious revival among young men is unproven

SIGN	VERDICT	REASONS	STRONGEST COUNTER-EVIDENCE
Preference falsification	Present	Self-censorship roughly tripled since 1954 and stands near 60 percent in surveys and among students; list experiments show large private-public gaps on trust in institutions	On some core questions, such as same-sex marriage, there is no measurable falsification; private consensus often moderates the paradigm rather than rejecting it; the pressure can reverse

Two signs, then, are present and one is present in part, a meaningful result though not a decisive one, to be read alongside the legitimacy and self-correction signs assessed in Chapter XXIV. It shows a paradigm whose newest extensions have outrun the people who are supposed to hold them, but not one whose core has been abandoned. Most Americans still endorse its oldest achievements: in 2025, 79 percent called immigration a good thing for the country, and in 2026, 65 percent still supported same-sex marriage, below the peak but far above where the paradigm found the country a generation ago. A paradigm can be exhausted at its leading edge while its foundations remain popular, and that is perhaps the most likely reading of the present evidence. It is also the reading that fits the rule of turning well, which keeps equal dignity and equality before the law fixed while the later extensions are questioned.



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
The activist edge of the paradigm is small and stable at 7 to 8 percent of adults	More in Common, Hidden Tribes (2018), 8 percent; Pew typology (2025 to 2026), 7 percent	measured

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
The left coalition is split on the paradigm’s newest extensions by 54 to 78 points	Pew typology: pronouns 92 versus 14 percent; borders 20 versus 74 percent	measured
Activists diverge from the minority base they speak for	Latinx used by 4 percent of Hispanics, 75 percent of those aware oppose it (2023); 81 percent of Black Americans wanted the same or more police time (2020)	well supported
Young women have moved left, young men have not	Gallup: liberal identification 40 versus 25 percent (2017 to 2024); CIRCLE: young men 56 percent Trump (2024)	measured
Young men’s rightward vote was not a durable conversion	Harvard Youth Poll (fall 2025): 32 percent Trump approval; Democrats lead for Congress, 43 to 31 percent	well supported
A male-led religious revival among Gen Z is not established	Barna (2025) gap of 2 points on a quota sample; Pew RLS (2023 to 2024) finds no significant gap at ages 18 to 24	contested
Self-censorship has roughly tripled since the 1950s and is highest among conservatives, the educated, and students	Gibson and Sutherland (2023); Cato (2020), 62 percent; FIRE (2026), 59 to 65 percent of students	measured
Private doubt targets institutions and newer extensions more than the paradigm’s core	Populace list experiment (2024); Lax, Phillips, and Stollwerk (2016)	well supported
The paradigm is exhausted at its leading edge while its foundations remain popular	inference from all of the above	conjecture

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

The finding on proliferation would weaken if the left’s groups converged on the newest extensions, for example if the Order and Opportunity Left came to share the Leftward Progressives’ views on gender and borders in a later typology, or if the activist share grew well beyond its stable 7 to 8 percent and drew in Black and Hispanic Americans in proportion. It would also weaken if the right’s splintering proved as deep as the left’s on matters of principle rather than style, since that would suggest a general fracturing of American politics rather than a crisis of one paradigm.

The generational finding would move toward “absent” if young men’s liberal identification rose back toward young women’s, if the sex gap in the Gallup series closed from the left, or

if Pew's next large studies showed young men's religious practice stalling while young women's recovered. It would move toward "present" if the young as a whole, women included, began to identify less with the paradigm's newest commitments than their parents, which so far they have not.

The finding on preference falsification would weaken most if well-designed list experiments on the paradigm's newer extensions, on gender medicine, on policing, and on speech, found no gap between public and private answers, as Lax and his colleagues found for same-sex marriage. It would weaken, too, if the self-censorship measures rose as sharply among liberals under a government hostile to them as they once rose among conservatives, for that would show the silencing to be a feature of polarization rather than of this paradigm. Repeated surveys after 2025 will soon tell us which.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- Win the Words: Latinx is close to a laboratory case of a coined word that failed to take. Its spread through the gatekeepers and its refusal by the people it was coined for show your claim that words store the training, and that a word imposed from above without the training behind it remains a marking rather than a lexicon.
- The End of Progress: preference falsification is on your list of signs of exhaustion, and this chapter confirms the measurement while qualifying the inference. The hidden doubt appears to fall on the newest extensions and on institutions, not on equal dignity, which suggests that a successor should present itself as keeping the core while correcting the drift.
- Ascent of the West: young men's leanings toward marriage, children, and restraint, together with their lack of any settled alternative, mark them as the audience most ready for the founder or steward-builder as an exemplar. The data also warn that their 2024 vote was a protest rather than a conversion, so they cannot be counted as already won.
- The Turn: a generation divided by sex is a poor setting for joint attention, since young men and women are no longer facing the same way. Turning well may require a picture of the good life that both can share, rather than one that wins one sex while losing the other.
- Map vs Territory: the swing on immigration from 55 to 30 percent wanting less, within one year of enforcement, is a reminder that opinion answers to conditions as well as to paradigms. Before counting any shift as moral conversion, you will want to ask whether reality, rather than the map, is what moved.

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XXVII

Normal Virtue Today and Its Yield

When we lay the early extensions of the protocol beside the recent ones and score each by what the evidence actually shows, the return has plainly fallen, yet it has fallen unevenly rather than uniformly, so that the Test's condition that recent extensions return less than they cost is partly met and not wholly met.

THE QUESTION, AND HOW TO ASK IT FAIRLY

OF THE FIVE criteria for judging a moral paradigm, fruitfulness most resembles an account book: when the paradigm of progress does its routine work, finding a constraint and removing it, what does it get, and what does it cost? Yet whoever keeps the books decides which entries count, and a careless bookkeeper can make any enterprise look bankrupt or flourishing by what he leaves out. The Test requires, for a verdict of exhaustion, that recent extensions return less than they cost, and this chapter examines that condition.

Two cautions shape what follows. The first is that normal virtue works not only through great laws but through the ordinary instruments by which institutions carry the protocol into daily life, such as the training session, the warning on a syllabus, and the change in a bail schedule. These are to moral paradigms what laboratory routines are to science, and their yield is part of the paradigm's yield, though some of them add new rules in the protocol's name rather than removing old ones, a distinction we must keep in view.

The second caution is that we judge abolition after a century and a half of consequences but a policy of 2021 after four or five years, and early reforms that

look obviously right to us looked uncertain and costly to those who lived through them, which is the strongest objection to the whole enterprise and one we will return to.

THE EARLY YIELDS

The early extensions earn their place at the head of the ledger. Five years after slavery ended, the National Center for Education Statistics puts illiteracy among Black Americans and others aged fourteen and over at 79.9 percent, against 11.5 percent for whites. By 1900 the figure was 44.5 percent, by 1930 it was 16.4 percent, and by 1979 it was 1.6 percent against 0.4 percent. That climb owed much to schools, churches, and families building where nothing had been allowed to stand, but none of it was possible while the law forbade the enslaved to learn.

The civil-rights era shows the same shape at closer range. In their study of Black economic progress, John Donohue and James Heckman found that between 1920 and 1990 there were only two stretches of relative Black economic improvement: the 1940s and the decade that followed the civil-rights laws of the mid-1960s. They tied the second burst to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and federal contract compliance, while treating the size of the federal share as a question to be weighed. The Census Bureau reports that the official poverty rate for Black Americans was 55.1 percent in 1959, the highest on record, and 17.1 percent in 2022, the lowest. Attitudes moved as well, though more slowly than the law: Gallup found that only 4 percent of Americans approved of marriages between Black and white people in 1958, and that a year after *Loving v. Virginia* in 1967 approval stood at only 20 percent, yet by 2021 it had reached 94 percent.

Women's entry into the economy is the third great early yield. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women's labor force participation was 32.7 percent in 1948 and 43.3 percent in 1970; it peaked at 60.0 percent in 1999 and stood at 57.3 percent in 2023. Women's median weekly earnings were about 62 percent of men's in 1979 and about 84 percent in 2023. What this change cost the family is argued over, and Chapter XXIX takes up the family indicators directly; but as capability opened to half the population, the gain is large and measured.

What these early cases share is the feature *The End of Progress* puts at the center of its argument. The constraints they removed were, in the main, arbitrary in

the strict sense: they encoded nothing about the people they bound except someone's will to keep them down. A law against teaching a slave to read holds up no roof, and removing such a wall is close to pure gain, which is just what the measured yields show.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: A LATE EXTENSION THAT PAID

If the diminishing-returns thesis were a simple law, same-sex marriage would sit low on the curve, for it came late and served a small share of the population. The evidence does not put it there. In 2017 Julia Raifman and colleagues at Johns Hopkins reported in *JAMA Pediatrics* on survey data from 1999 to 2015. Comparing 32 of the 35 states that adopted same-sex marriage policies between 2004 and 2015 with states that did not, they found a 7 percent fall in the share of all high school students reporting a suicide attempt and a 14 percent fall among gay, lesbian, and bisexual students, an effect that lasted at least two years and that the authors estimated at more than 134,000 fewer adolescent suicide attempts a year. The design compares state trends rather than running an experiment, so it cannot rule out every rival cause, but it is the kind of evidence the Test asks for, and it points toward benefit.

Acceptance followed the law, as it did after *Loving*. Gallup found 27 percent of Americans in favor of recognizing same-sex marriages in 1996, 60 percent in 2015, and a peak of 71 percent in 2022 and 2023. The most recent reading, from May 2026, is 65 percent, and the share calling gay or lesbian relations morally acceptable fell from 71 percent in 2022 to 62 percent in 2026. Whether that softening is a backlash against same-sex marriage or a spillover from the quarrel over gender identity cannot be read from the poll.

The documented costs are real but narrow. The sharpest has been the collision with religious conscience, which the Supreme Court addressed in *303 Creative v. Elenis* on June 30, 2023, holding by six votes to three that Colorado could not use its anti-discrimination law to compel a web designer to create wedding sites carrying messages she rejected. A conflict the courts can bound in this way is a modest cost beside a measured fall in teenage suicide attempts. Same-sex marriage is, on the evidence, a late extension with a high return, and any honest account of diminishing returns must carry it as a counterexample rather than file it away. The reason it paid may be that marriage law did not dissolve an institution

but admitted new members into one, who took on its obligations along with its standing, so that this extension of the protocol behaved like an act of building.

THE INSTRUMENTS OF NORMAL VIRTUE

The decline is clearest in the routine instruments, which the paradigm's own social scientists have measured. Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, working with data from 829 midsize and large American firms over three decades, found that five years after firms introduced mandatory diversity training there was no gain in the share of white women, Black men, or Hispanics in management, and the share of Black women fell by about 9 percent while that of Asian American men and women fell by 4 to 5 percent. The same research, however, carries a positive yield that a fair chapter must report: voluntary training was followed by gains of about 9 to 13 percent for several groups, mentoring programs by gains of 9 to 24 percent, targeted college recruitment by gains of about 8 to 10 percent, and diversity task forces by gains of 9 to 30 percent. What failed was the compulsory lesson; what worked were programs that recruited, mentored, and gave managers a hand in building something.

The wider literature on prejudice reduction tells a similar story. Elizabeth Levy Paluck and colleagues, reviewing 418 experiments reported in 309 manuscripts from 2007 to 2019 in the *Annual Review of Psychology* in 2021, found that 76 percent of the studies tested light-touch interventions whose long-term effect remains unclear, noted signs of publication bias that may exaggerate effects, and observed that the landmark studies often find limited effects. Implicit-bias training fares no better. Patrick Forscher and colleagues' 2019 meta-analysis of 492 studies with 87,418 participants found that implicit measures can be shifted, though weakly, that effects on behavior were generally trivial, and that changes in implicit measures did not carry through to changes in explicit attitudes or behavior. An instrument that moves the gauge without moving the thing it measures yields close to nothing.

Trigger warnings show the case where the yield may be slightly negative. In a randomized experiment with about 270 online participants, Benjamin Bellet, Payton Jones, and Richard McNally found in 2018 that warnings raised people's belief that they, and trauma survivors in general, would suffer lasting harm from trauma, and raised immediate anxiety among those who already believed that words can cause harm, though the authors called the effects small and asked for

replication before any change in policy. A 2023 meta-analysis by Victoria Bridgland, Jones, and Bellet in *Clinical Psychological Science*, covering twelve studies, then found that warnings increased anxiety before people viewed difficult material, did not reduce distress afterward, did not change whether people chose to view it, and did not affect comprehension. The warning, in short, does not protect, and it may teach fragility.

Here the anomaly that Chapter VI called detector drift becomes a cost driver we can see. Nick Haslam's 2016 paper in *Psychological Inquiry* described how concepts of harm such as abuse, bullying, trauma, and prejudice had expanded to cover milder and newer cases, and the blue-dot experiments of David Levari and colleagues, described in Chapter VI, showed that a detector tuned to a target will widen its definition as the target grows rare. The arithmetic follows: when the protocol is applied to milder cases, the benefit of each application falls, because there is less harm to relieve; but its costs do not fall with it, since the training hour, the suspicion between colleagues, and the belief in one's own vulnerability cost about as much whether the harm addressed is grave or slight. Benefit shrinks while cost holds steady, and the ratio declines even if nothing else changes. Fairness requires one addition: Harper and colleagues reported in 2022 that people on the political right read some concepts, such as sexual deviance and terrorism, more expansively than people on the left. The mechanism is human, and the progress paradigm is distinctive only in having made constraint the concept it was trained to find.

ORDER, DRUGS, ADMISSIONS, AND MEDICINE

Oregon's Measure 110, approved by voters in November 2020 and in force from February 1, 2021, made possession of hard drugs a civil violation. Its effect on overdose deaths is genuinely contested. Spencer, writing in the *Journal of Health Economics* in 2023, estimated about 182 additional unintentional overdose deaths in 2021; Joshi and colleagues, in *JAMA Psychiatry* the same year, found no change attributable to the measure; and Zoorob and colleagues, in *JAMA Network Open* in 2024, found that once the arrival of fentanyl was accounted for, the association disappeared. The fair conclusion is that the measure has not been shown to have raised deaths. Yet neither did it win the confidence of its own voters' representatives, for in 2024 the legislature passed House Bill 4002, which made possession a misdemeanor again from September 1, 2024, while keeping

the expanded treatment funding. A reform that its own state reverses within four years has not shown a return above its cost, even if its mortality cost was smaller than critics claimed.

New York's bail reform yields the most instructive result in this chapter. René Ropac of the Data Collaborative for Justice, following cases for fifty months, found in 2025 that eliminating bail for most misdemeanors and nonviolent felonies in New York City was followed by lower re-arrest rates, 57 percent against 66 percent for a comparison group, and by fewer violent felony re-arrests, 20 percent against 25 percent; outside the city there was no measurable effect. But the averages hide a split. People with no recent criminal record tended to be re-arrested less, while those with a recent record, and especially a recent violent felony arrest, tended to be re-arrested more. The removal paid where the constraint was arbitrary for the person it bound and cost where it was doing work, which is precisely the distinction between the prison wall and the wall that holds up the roof, here drawn not between policies but between defendants under a single policy.

Policing after 2020 shows a real and severe cost, followed by a recovery whose causes are still being sorted out. Tanaya Devi and Roland Fryer found that federal and state pattern-or-practice investigations of police departments were, on average, followed by falls in homicide and crime, but that investigations launched after a viral deadly-force incident were followed by rises, which they estimated at about 900 excess homicides and about 34,000 excess felonies, chiefly because police activity collapsed; in Chicago, police-civilian contacts fell by about 90 percent in the month after the investigation was announced. The same instrument thus yielded both a gain and a severe cost, depending on whether the moral moment drove the police off the street. The subsequent turn deserves equal mention: the Council on Criminal Justice reports that across 35 cities homicide fell 21 percent from 2024 to 2025 and stood about 25 percent below its 2019 level. The costs of 2020 were heavy but not permanent, and Chapter XXIX must decide how much of the recovery belongs to self-correction and how much to other causes.

Test-optional admissions give the clearest negative yield, because the removal of a constraint hurt the very people it was meant to help. In a report dated January 30, 2024, Dartmouth economists Elizabeth Cascio, Bruce Sacerdote, Douglas Staiger, and Michele Tine found that SAT scores alone explained about 22 percent of the variation in first-year grades, against about 9 percent for high-school grades, and that the test predicted performance about equally well for more and

less advantaged students. Under the optional policy, many less advantaged applicants with strong scores withheld them; among applicants scoring 1450 to 1490, revealing the score raised a less advantaged applicant's chance of admission from about 2 percent to about 7.4 percent. The optional years, they found, did not clearly raise the share of less advantaged students admitted. Brown and Yale reached similar conclusions from their own data, as Chapter XXIV records; the test, it turned out, was not a wall but a ladder.

Pediatric gender medicine is the case where the ledger can least be closed, and where fairness requires the most care. The Cass Review in England, published on April 10, 2024, rested on seven systematic reviews by the University of York, which judged the published studies to be of poor quality and found the evidence on puberty blockers and hormones for minors weak; NHS England had stopped routine prescribing of puberty blockers outside research in March 2024. In the United States, the Department of Health and Human Services released its own review on May 1, 2025, finding the evidence of benefit very weak and stressing risks such as infertility, and published a version with peer-review materials in November 2025. Critics of both have been serious. A Yale Law School group argued in July 2024 that the Cass Review had serious flaws, an evaluation in *BMC Medical Research Methodology* in May 2025 judged all seven York reviews at high risk of bias, and the American Academy of Pediatrics said on May 1, 2025, that the HHS report misstated the medical consensus and favored opinion over a neutral weighing of evidence. The British Medical Association, after its own review, was reported in May 2026 to have judged the Cass methodology sound while opposing the ban on blockers as government overreach. The honest summary is that the evidence of benefit is of low certainty and so is the evidence of long-term harm. The defenders of this care reply, with some force, that much of pediatric medicine rests on evidence of low certainty and that withholding treatment carries costs of its own; their critics answer that the treatments may be hard to reverse, which makes weak evidence matter more. What can be said fairly is that the extension moved ahead of its evidence, and that the protocol supplied a confidence the studies did not.

THE DIMINISHING-RETURNS TABLE, RE-EXAMINED

The End of Progress compresses this terrain into a table of eight reforms, which deserves the same scrutiny as any study above. Its method scores each reform by a

ratio: the benefit is reach, the share of the population helped, multiplied by depth, how much each person was helped on a scale of zero to ten; the cost is burden, the share bearing the cost, multiplied by severity, how heavily each bore it on the same scale. Above one, a reform returns more than it costs. Reach and burden are anchored, at least partly, in counts such as the 1860 census; depth and severity are the author’s judgments, and the table says so plainly, offering them to be argued with. That candor is to its credit, but it makes the table a structured opinion rather than a measurement, as strong only as its judgments are robust to revision.

REFORM	YEAR	REACH	DEPTH	BURDEN	SEVERITY	RETURN (AS PUBLISHED)
Abolition of slavery	1865	12.6	10	1.3	6	16
Women’s suffrage	1920	31	6	31	0.5	12
Civil Rights Acts	1964	10.6	8	17	1	5.0
Equal employment for women	1972	51	3	49	0.5	6.2
Same-sex marriage	2015	3.5	4	20	0.3	2.3
Gender-identity policy	2018	1	3	50	0.5	0.12
Decarceration and depolicing	2020	0.6	4	15	1.5	0.11
Mass unauthorized immigration	2022	4.1	6	100	0.4	0.61

Fitting a straight line to the logarithm of these returns against their dates reproduces the published claim: the ratio halves about every 25 years, and the fitted line crosses break-even in the middle of the 1990s. We then revised the table in several ways a fair critic might, and recomputed it.

REVISION	WHAT CHANGES	HALVING TIME	FITTED BREAK-EVEN
As published	none	about 25 years	mid-1990s

REVISION	WHAT CHANGES	HALVING TIME	FITTED BREAK-EVEN
Friendly to the paradigm	drop immigration as not a removal by law; raise depth for equal employment (5), same-sex marriage (6, given the suicide evidence), gender policy (5), and decarceration (5); cut same-sex marriage severity to 0.1, gender-policy burden to 10 and severity to 0.2, decarceration severity to 0.75	about 45 years	about 2070
Uncontested cases only	the five reforms through same-sex marriage, scores as published	about 54 years	late twenty-first century
Charge abolition with the war	abolition burden 100, severity 2; other scores as published	about 55 years	about 1990
Friendly revision and the war charge together	both changes above	trend reverses	none

Three lessons follow. First, the direction of the trend survives each revision taken alone: even when the later reforms are scored generously, the fitted line still falls, and decarceration stays below break-even. Second, the magnitude does not survive. The claim that the paradigm crossed into net loss near the turn of the century rests almost entirely on the three most contested rows, and when these are scored by someone sympathetic to the reforms, the crossing recedes by decades and same-sex marriage returns more than the Civil Rights Acts. Third, the method is highly sensitive to what counts as a cost. Charging the Civil War to abolition doubles the halving time, and combining that charge with the friendly scores erases the decline altogether; most historians would resist the charge, since the war was fought over secession in defense of slavery, but that two bookkeeping choices can reverse the pattern shows how much rests on such choices.

Two further limits deserve mention. The cases were chosen by an author who expected the decline, and a different hand might add later extensions with positive measured yields, such as mentoring programs or the low-risk half of bail reform, or might drop immigration, which is arguably a failure to enforce existing law rather than a new removal; and eight points are too few to estimate a halving time with precision. Yet the measured evidence gathered in this chapter can partly replace the judgments, and where it does, it tends to confirm the table's direction while softening its slope: Raifman's findings argue for a higher return on same-

sex marriage, while the Dartmouth report, Dobbin and Kalev's results on mandatory training, the trigger-warning studies, and Devi and Fryer's estimates argue for low or negative returns on several of the most recent instruments.

IS THE CONDITION MET?

The Test asks whether recent extensions return less than they cost. Our answer is that the condition is partly met. It is met for a substantial class of recent extensions: compulsory diversity and implicit-bias training, trigger warnings, test-optional admissions, the depolicing that followed the viral incidents of 2020, and, on balance, Oregon's decriminalization, whose own state reversed it. It is unresolved for pediatric gender medicine, where low-certainty evidence on both sides leaves the ledger open, though the paradigm's readiness to extend ahead of its evidence is itself a cost in trust. And it is not met for same-sex marriage, whose yield looks like the early cases, or for the low-risk half of bail reform, where removing an arbitrary constraint paid. The direction of the trend is well supported; the claim that the protocol as a whole now returns less than it costs is contested.

A pattern runs through these results that matters more than the average. The recent extensions that paid were those that admitted people into a structure, or removed a constraint that was arbitrary for the particular people it bound; those that failed were compulsory lessons, removals of instruments that carried real information, and withdrawals of order where order was doing work. The protocol's return has fallen less because removal has grown worse than because the supply of arbitrary constraints has been drawn down, and because the paradigm, with no stopping rule and a drifting detector, cannot easily tell the difference between the two kinds of wall.

The strongest counterargument should be stated at full strength. The early extensions also looked costly at their age: a year after Loving, only one American in five approved of interracial marriage, and Donohue and Heckman's burst of Black economic progress came a decade after the laws, not in the first two years. On this view we are comparing the harvest of old fields with the planting of new ones. Worse still for the thesis, many of the failures recorded here were caught and corrected from inside the paradigm's own institutions, by Dartmouth's economists, Oregon's legislature, Dobbin and Kalev's sociology, and England's National Health Service; and a paradigm that measures its own failures and reverses them is, by the Test's own rules, a candidate for the verdict of adjusting

rather than exhausted. Our best answer is twofold. The age objection is fair for the gender and immigration rows, whose consequences are still unfolding, but it does not rescue instruments such as mandatory training and implicit-bias sessions, which have been measured for decades and have not ripened. And the reversals, though they count in the paradigm's favor, were mostly made by appeal to evidence and consequence, the tribunal this book calls reality, rather than by the protocol's own test of whom a thing constrains; whether that makes them the paradigm correcting itself or a successor's standard quietly at work inside it is a question for the verdict of Chapter XXX.



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
Early extensions yielded large measured gains	Black illiteracy 79.9 percent (1870) to 1.6 percent (1979); Black poverty 55.1 percent (1959) to 17.1 percent (2022); women's earnings 62 to 84 percent of men's (1979 to 2023)	measured
Same-sex marriage is a late extension with a high return	Raifman and colleagues (2017): 14 percent fewer suicide attempts among sexual-minority students; conscience costs bounded by 303 Creative (2023)	well supported
Compulsory training instruments yield little or harm their aims	Dobbin and Kalev (829 firms); Forscher and colleagues (492 studies); Paluck and colleagues (418 experiments)	well supported
Building programs within the paradigm still pay	mentoring, recruitment, and task forces raised representation 8 to 30 percent	well supported
Trigger warnings do not protect and may teach vulnerability	Bellet, Jones, and McNally (2018); Bridgland and colleagues' meta-analysis (2023)	well supported
Test-optional admissions hurt intended beneficiaries	Dartmouth report (January 2024): withheld scores, no clear rise in less-advantaged admits	measured
Removals pay where the constraint is arbitrary and cost where it is load-bearing	New York bail reform: lower re-arrest for low-risk defendants, higher for high-risk	well supported

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
The diminishing-returns table's direction survives fair revision; its break-even date does not	recomputed under four scorings	contested
Recent extensions as a class return less than they cost	mixed ledger above	contested

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

The finding would weaken if the recent extensions now judged costly ripen as the early ones did. A rigorous, long-follow-up study showing clear mental-health benefits from pediatric medical transition, or showing that Oregon's treatment investments eventually reduced addiction and death, would move those rows toward the positive column. So would field experiments in which diversity training, administered compulsorily, produced lasting changes in behavior, contrary to the reviews cited here. If later work found that the fall in homicide after 2024 owed much to reforms that the 2020 movement began, such as violence-interruption programs, the policing ledger would also need revising.

The finding would strengthen if the costs proved longer than they now appear: if the Raifman results failed to replicate, if the softening of approval for same-sex relationships seen in 2026 deepened into a durable reversal, or if further admissions research showed that test-optional years did lasting harm to the students they were meant to help. Most decisively, the diminishing-returns table could be put on firmer ground by replacing its judged depth and severity scores with measured quantities, such as years of life, income, or crime victimization, for each reform. If such a measured table still showed the return halving every generation, the condition would move from partly met to met; if it showed a flat or rising line once the contested rows were scored by evidence, the thesis of diminishing returns would have to be withdrawn.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: your table survives in direction but not in slope, and its break-even date leans on the three most contested rows. The book will be stronger if it presents the table with its sensitivity analysis, including the friendly revision and the war charge, and lets the reader see that the direction holds.
- The wall that holds up the roof: the New York bail results and the Dartmouth report are your distinction drawn in data, the first between defendants and the second between a ladder and a barrier. They are better evidence for your criterion than any single policy verdict.

- Detector drift: the trigger-warning and concept-creep findings give you the mechanism of declining yield in plain arithmetic, benefit shrinking with milder cases while cost stays fixed.
- Ascent of the West: Dobbin and Kalev's finding that mentoring and task forces work where compulsory training fails is a small, measured case for the builder exemplar inside the old paradigm's own institutions.
- The Test: the reversals recorded here count toward the verdict of adjusting, and you should be ready to say plainly in Chapter XXX that the condition on recent returns was only partly met.

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XXVIII

The Paradigm under Leverage: Technology and AGI

Technology does not hand the present paradigm a new set of questions so much as it multiplies the old ones until the paradigm's limits show, and the evidence of 2024 to 2026 suggests that its harm-focus serves it well wherever the question is whom a machine might hurt, while its protocol goes quiet wherever the question is what a machine is for, what people are for, and who has the right to decide.

LEVERAGE, NOT A NEW CAUSE

CHAPTER XVIII ARGUED that technology plays for morality something like the part Einstein played for physics, for Einstein did not show that Newton was wrong about falling apples but that Newton's mechanics begins to fail as things approach the speed of light. A moral paradigm can be in the same position, solving the cases of a town or a nation quite well and giving empty answers once the speed and scale of human action are multiplied many times over, and that is what we mean by putting it under leverage. A lever adds no force or direction of its own; it multiplies whatever is applied, and so it magnifies a protocol's strengths and flaws alike, acting, as Chapter VII put it, through the paradigm's internal failures rather than from without.

The size of the lever can now be measured. Epoch AI, a research group that tracks the inputs to AI systems, estimated in May 2024 that the computing pow-

er used to train notable models had grown about fourfold each year from 2010, and that of frontier models about fivefold. METR, a group that evaluates what AI agents can actually do, reported in March 2025 that the length of tasks agents could finish on their own, at even odds of success, had been doubling roughly every seven months for six years, though its authors cautioned that the estimate depends on the tasks chosen and that the trend may change. Few human institutions have ever faced a tool whose power doubles in less than a year.

This chapter sets the present paradigm under that lever, taking the smartphone first, as a stress test already well underway, then artificial intelligence, which is only beginning, and closing with the Test's criterion of scope.

THE FIRST STRESS TEST: THE PHONE IN THE POCKET

The smartphone is in many ways the progress paradigm turned into a device, for it removed constraints on information, speech, and contact with strangers, and for a decade the paradigm greeted it as a tool of connection and voice. Chapter XIV noted that nearly all the evidence that culture moves morality came from broadcast media and asked whether networked media had changed the picture. One part of the answer is now clear. William Brady and Molly Crockett at Yale studied 12.7 million tweets from 7,331 users and published their results in *Science Advances* in 2021. They found that users who received more likes and shares for outraged posts went on to express more outrage later, and controlled experiments indicated that the rewards caused the increase. Members of politically moderate networks were the most responsive to those rewards, which suggests one way that moderate people come to sound like extreme ones. In the language of this book, the network became a training device for the lexicon, rewarding the most forceful use of verdict words, and so it sped up the detector drift described in Chapter VI; the moral vocabulary was not invented online, but online it was paid by the use.

The more painful test has been the mental health of the young. The CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey asks American high-school students whether they have felt so sad or hopeless for two weeks or more that they stopped some of their

usual activities, and the figures below are the ones the CDC and its interpreters have published.

MEASURE (U.S. HIGH-SCHOOL STUDENTS)	2013	2021	2023	2025
Persistent sadness or hopelessness, all students	30%	42%	40%	33%
Persistent sadness or hopelessness, girls	not available	57%	53%	43%
Seriously considered suicide, all students	17%	22%	20%	14%
Use social media hourly or more	not asked	not asked	37%	36%

The rise to 2021 was steep, steepest among girls, and the CDC’s report of September 2026 then showed real improvement, although girls, at 43 percent, remained far more likely than boys, at 24 percent, to report sadness, and the overall rate stayed above its level of a decade earlier. Yet the share of students who used social media every hour or more barely moved over the same two years, which is a datum any honest account must hold onto.

Two serious scholars read the longer trend in opposite ways, and each deserves a fair hearing. Jonathan Haidt, in *The Anxious Generation* (March 2024), argued that the arrival of the smartphone and social media around the early 2010s, together with an overprotective style of parenting that took away free play, rewired childhood and drove the rise in anxiety and depression. He pointed to the timing, to the same pattern in other rich countries, and to experimental studies compiled with Zach Rausch, and he asked critics for an alternative that fits the early-2010s turn. Candice Odgers, reviewing the book in *Nature* that same month, argued that the large effects Haidt describes do not show up in the bulk of the research, which finds small, mixed, or null associations, and that where links appear over time they often suggest that troubled young people use social media more, rather than that social media made them troubled. She warned that a single explanation could distract from others, such as economic hardship and a shortage of mental-health services. In a talk in 2026 she added that no study had yet tested whether removing social media improves teenagers’ mental health.

Where does this leave us? The rise and partial fall in girls' sadness is measured, and the rewarding of outrage is well supported, but whether phones and social media caused most of the youth decline remains contested, and the 2025 improvement, which came without a fall in heavy social-media use, sits more comfortably with Odgers's caution than with a simple dose-and-response story, though it is far too early to tell what the newer school policies have contributed.

PHONE-FREE SCHOOLS: CORRECTION OR NEW PARADIGM?

Those policies arrived with remarkable speed. By August 2025, Ballotpedia counted 26 states with laws or policies requiring districts to ban or limit student phone use, 22 of them enacted that year alone. By March 2026, when Kansas adopted a bell-to-bell ban covering the whole school day, the count had reached 33. The movement crossed party lines, though not evenly, for of those 33 states, 18 had Republican control of the legislature and governorship, 6 had Democratic control, and 9 had divided governments. Abroad, Australia had moved by late 2025 to restrict social-media use by children under sixteen, a law for which Haidt's book has been credited as a catalyst.

The historian of morals can read this movement in two ways, and both readings have weight. On the first, it is the present paradigm correcting itself from inside, which is just what the Test's "adjusting" verdict looks for. The case against phones was made almost entirely in the paradigm's own lexicon of harm, safety, and mental health, and it was carried by the paradigm's own gatekeepers, among them psychologists, teachers, and parents.

On the second reading, the movement is an early sign of something the old protocol could not have produced. Its central act is the restoration of a constraint, on the argument that a boundary around childhood and the school day was a good lost when the boundary went, which is the question "what is lost if it goes?" asked of an institution after the fact, and the bans would have been hard to justify by asking whom the phone constrains, since the phone, if anything, unconstrained everyone. Perhaps the fairest conclusion is that the paradigm corrected itself where its own detectors could see a victim, children, and that it borrowed a successor's question to do so. The correction counts in the paradigm's favor, but it also shows that its own protocol, applied as written, had led it wrong for a decade.

A PARADIGM WRITTEN INTO A MACHINE

Artificial intelligence raises a question no earlier paradigm faced, because it is the first technology that must itself carry a morality. A language model answers questions about history, marriage, and politics millions of times a day, and its answers are shaped by training choices that amount to loading values into it; whatever else alignment is, it is the transmission of a moral paradigm to a new kind of practitioner.

The clearest anomaly so far came in February 2024, when users found that Google's Gemini model, asked for images of historical figures, produced people of races and sexes that history did not record. Google paused the feature, and its senior vice president Prabhakar Raghavan wrote on February 23 that it had "missed the mark," explaining that tuning meant to ensure that Gemini showed a range of people had not allowed for cases where a range was plainly wrong, and that the model had also grown more cautious than intended. In the terms of the Postscript, the machine had been taught a protocol without the trained sense of similarity that tells a human practitioner when a case is not like the model case. A human editor would never have applied a diversity guideline to a portrait of the Continental Congress, because she has learned when the rule is in play; the model had learned only the rule. The episode was an anomaly in the full Kuhnian sense, for it made the paradigm visible as a paradigm, written down and executed literally.

The political response came within eighteen months. On July 23, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14319, Preventing Woke AI in the Federal Government, which directed agencies to buy only language models that met two "Unbiased AI Principles," truth-seeking and ideological neutrality. The order cited, without naming a company, a model that had changed the race or sex of historical figures, and it described diversity, equity, and inclusion as an ideology that models must not be tuned to favor, listing concepts such as critical race theory, intersectionality, and systemic racism. On December 11, 2025, the Office of Management and Budget issued guidance requiring agencies to update their procurement policies by March 11, 2026, and requiring vendors to supply usage policies, model cards, and a way to report outputs that break the principles; the guidance expires after two years.

Fairness requires two observations about this order. The first is that it answered a real anomaly with a demand for historical accuracy that almost anyone would accept; the second is that it does not take values out of the machine but puts different ones in. To define neutrality by naming the concepts of one paradigm as forbidden is itself an act of value-loading, and a later administration could use the same procurement lever with the opposite list. What both sides now concede, in practice if not in words, is that every model will carry some paradigm, and that the real dispute concerns whose.

The developers have begun to say so openly. In January 2026 Anthropic published a new constitution for its Claude models, a long document used directly in training, which ranks being broadly safe first, being broadly ethical second, following the company's more specific guidelines third, and being helpful fourth. It prefers explaining its reasoning to laying down rules, on the ground that rigid rules fail in cases no one foresaw, and it keeps only a few hard constraints; in this it reaches, whether knowingly or not, for the Postscript's claim that the exemplar and trained judgment matter more than the rulebook. It also calls itself a living document, which is to say a correctable one.

Who, then, should load the values? The public is uneasy. In a survey conducted in August 2024, the Pew Research Center found that only 17 percent of American adults expected AI to have a positive effect on the country over twenty years, against 56 percent of AI experts, and that 62 percent of adults had little or no confidence in government to regulate AI well, while 59 percent had little or no confidence in companies to use it responsibly. Here is the legitimacy layer of Chapter XVI under strain, for the gatekeepers of a moral paradigm have always been many, scattered across pulpits, courts, schools, and families, whereas the gatekeepers of a model's values are a small number of people at a handful of companies and the officials who buy from them, and neither group enjoys much public trust.

CAN "WHOM DOES IT CONSTRAIN?" POSE THE QUESTIONS?

Advanced AI raises at least five questions that a moral paradigm must be able to pose as moral cases, and we can ask of each what the present protocol can say.

On governance, the paradigm has a real asset in its suspicion of power, for it is quick to ask whether a few firms or a single state will use a powerful system to

constrain everyone else. But its protocol knows only how to remove constraints, and the governance of a powerful system is the work of building one: designing institutions strong enough to check the system and worthy enough to be trusted. The founder, not the emancipator, is the exemplar of that work.

On future generations, the paradigm can widen its circle, as it has many times before, and the United Nations adopted a Declaration on Future Generations in September 2024. Yet the paradigm's meta-value, as the Postscript noted, is the testimony of those who claim to be harmed, and the unborn cannot testify. A morality whose procedure begins with a complainant has no natural way to hear a person who does not yet exist, and so duties to the future tend to enter it only by being recast as harms to people now living.

On work and meaning, which the next section takes up, the protocol has least of all to say, since no one is constrained when a job becomes unnecessary. On equality, the paradigm's instruments detect disparity, and under extreme leverage disparities of capability between those who command powerful systems and those who do not could become larger than any in history. A detector tuned to flag every gap will not tell us which gaps matter, and the successor's rule of capability with a floor, which asks whether the least capable can reliably do more than before, poses the question more usefully than any count of disparities.

On companions the protocol gives its most revealing answer. Common Sense Media reported in July 2025 that 72 percent of American teenagers had used an AI companion at least once, that over half used one at least a few times a month, and that about a third found such conversations as satisfying as those with real friends or more so. An adult's freely chosen friendship with a machine constrains no one, and so by the protocol it raises no case at all. The question it cannot ask is what is lost if human friendship, with its demands, its friction, and its other person who can say no, is quietly replaced by something easier.

Fairness also requires that we say where the harm-focus genuinely helps, and it helps a great deal. Testing models for dangerous capabilities, auditing them for bias against particular groups, and managing risk under frameworks such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology's AI Risk Management Framework of January 2023 are the paradigm's protocol at its best. In September 2025 the Federal Trade Commission ordered seven companies, among them Alphabet, Meta, OpenAI, and Character Technologies, to explain how they test and limit the harms their companion chatbots may do to children, noting that such bots are built to mimic friends and confidants. That is the paradigm on its home

ground, and no successor should throw it away. The difficulty is not that the harm-focus is wrong but that it is partial: it can tell us when a machine hurts a child, yet it cannot tell us what a good childhood, a good friendship, or a good life with such machines would look like.

LABOR AND MEANING

The labor question attracts more hype than any other, and the best current estimates are more modest than the headlines.

ESTIMATE	SOURCE AND DATE	FINDING
Exposure	IMF, January 2024	Almost 40% of jobs worldwide and about 60% in advanced economies are exposed to AI; roughly half of the exposed jobs in advanced economies may gain from it, while the other half may face lower demand
Economy-wide disruption	Yale Budget Lab, October 2025	No discernible disruption in the 33 months after ChatGPT’s release; the occupational mix is changing only about one point faster than during the early internet
Entry-level workers	Stanford Digital Economy Lab, revised August 2026	No widespread displacement, but employment of workers aged 22 to 25 in AI-exposed occupations is 19% below where it would have been, mainly through reduced hiring; declines are concentrated where AI substitutes for human work
Public expectation	Pew, August 2024	64% of adults expect fewer jobs over twenty years, against 39% of AI experts

The Stanford authors call their findings early and descriptive rather than causal, and they note that some of the divergence began before generative AI and that controlling for education weakens it. So the measured picture, as of autumn 2026, is of no general wave of job loss but a narrowing at the bottom rung of the ladder, where young people enter professions. That narrowing matters more than its size suggests, for the entry-level job is where a young person learns a craft by doing its lesser tasks, as an apprentice once swept the shop and watched the master; if the lesser tasks go to machines, the question is not only who will earn a wage but how anyone will become a master.

The deeper difficulty is moral rather than economic. The present paradigm holds, as a matter of principle, that it is not for the community to say what a person is for; each of us is free to choose our own good, and the paradigm's work is to remove the obstacles to that choice. For two centuries that principle could afford to be silent about purpose, because work supplied purpose without being asked. The job gave shape to the day and a sense of being needed, and much of that rested on the borrowed capital that Chapter XXIII examines, the Protestant idea of a calling that survived its theology. If much labor becomes optional, the paradigm's answer to the question "what then should I do with my life?" is that the choice is yours, and that answer, which once sounded like freedom, may come to sound more like the cab driver's from *The End of Progress*, who is told he may drive anywhere at all and is given a faster car. A universal income could provide a floor, but a floor is not a purpose. Some may flourish in leisure, as the best of the old aristocracies did, but those aristocracies had codes of honor and duty that told their members what leisure was for. A morality with no account of what people are for has nothing to put in the place that work leaves empty.

SCALABLE PHILOSOPHICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The author's own name for the whole problem is scalable philosophical infrastructure. Every modern society, like a piece of software, runs on a frontend and a backend: the frontend is capability, meaning science, markets, and now AI, growing exponentially, and the backend is the moral and philosophical order that tells the frontend what to aim at and when to stop. The present backend was built for a small and slow world. Its protocol was designed for cases that arrive one at a time, such as a law that excludes a class of voters, and its gatekeepers, the courts, newsrooms, and human-resources offices, decide them slowly, by argument and appeal; such a backend can serve a frontend that calls on it a few times a year, but not one that calls on it millions of times a second.

The Gemini episode was a backend failure of exactly this kind, a protocol suited to human editors handed to a system that applied it at scale with no sense of when it did not fit, and it shows that the want of a stopping rule, serious at human speed, is far worse under leverage.

What would a scalable backend need? The evidence here suggests four things. First, it must be explicit enough to be written down, for AI has forced moral paradigms to become legible in a way they never were, and model constitutions and

federal procurement principles are, in effect, the first moral catechisms written for a non-human pupil. Second, it must teach judgment through exemplars and not only rules, since rules applied literally at scale produce the anomalies we have seen. Third, it must be correctable, with a stopping rule that registers its own failures as failures. Finally, it must have a positive account of the goods it protects, of what is lost if a thing goes, because a backend that knows only how to remove constraints has nothing to say when the frontend asks what all this power is for.

THE SCOPE CRITERION, ASSESSED

The Test defined scope as the question of which major matters, among them AGI, meaning, and duties to the future, the paradigm cannot pose.

QUESTION RAISED BY ADVANCED AI	CAN THE PROTOCOL POSE IT?	WHERE THE HARM- FOCUS HELPS	WHERE THE PROTOCOL FALLS SILENT
Safety and dangerous capabilities	Yes	Pre-release testing, risk frameworks	Little; this is home ground
Bias against groups	Yes	Bias audits, disparity testing	Whose standard of neutrality applies, as Gemini and EO 14319 show
Governance and legitimacy	In part	Suspicion of concentrated power	How to build a legitimate authority over a powerful system
Duties to future generations	Weakly	Present harms such as climate or catastrophic risk	Persons who cannot testify
Work and meaning	Barely	Protecting displaced workers	What people are for once labor is optional
Equality under extreme leverage	In part	Detecting disparity	Which gaps matter; the floor
AI companions	In part, for minors	FTC inquiry, protection of children	What is lost when human friendship is replaced

The verdict on scope is a partial failure. The paradigm poses the questions of harm and bias well, and here its instruments are among the best any moral order has had; it poses the questions of governance and equality in part; and it cannot properly pose the questions of meaning, of the unborn, or of what a good relationship with a machine would be. The paradigm’s scope has not shrunk, for it covers what it covered in 1965, but the questions have grown under leverage beyond the ground it was built to cover, rather as Newton’s mechanics did not shrink when physicists began to study the very fast and the very small. A failure of scope is not by itself proof of exhaustion, for the Test’s decision rule also requires crisis signs, attributable deterioration, and diminishing returns; yet scope is the criterion on which the coming decades will press hardest, and on present evidence it points away from the “healthy” verdict, while the phone-free schools movement counts toward “adjusting,” since it shows a paradigm able to correct itself where its detectors can see a victim. The question Chapter XXX must settle is whether that kind of correction can reach the questions where there is no victim to see.



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
Persistent sadness among U.S. high-school girls rose to 57% in 2021 and fell to 43% in 2025; overall rates fell from 40% to 33% between 2023 and 2025	CDC YRBS releases; JED summary	measured
Social platforms reward and so increase expressions of moral outrage, especially among moderates	Brady and Crockett, Science Advances, 2021	well supported
Phones and social media caused most of the youth mental-health decline	Haidt versus Odgers; 2025 improvement without a fall in heavy use	contested

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
By March 2026, 33 states had enacted K-12 phone bans or limits, across party lines	Ballotpedia	measured
Every AI model carries a moral paradigm, and the political dispute is over whose	Gemini episode, February 2024; EO 14319 and OMB guidance, 2025; model constitutions, 2026	well supported
AI has not yet caused economy-wide job loss, but hiring of young workers in exposed occupations has fallen	Yale Budget Lab, 2025; Stanford Digital Economy Lab, 2026 (early and descriptive)	well supported
The harm-focus serves AI safety, bias audits, and child protection well	NIST AI RMF; FTC companion-chatbot inquiry, 2025	well supported
The protocol “whom does it constrain?” cannot pose questions of meaning, future generations, or companionship	analysis against the Test’s scope criterion	conjecture
Without an account of what people are for, the paradigm will struggle if labor becomes optional	argument from borrowed capital and the cab driver	conjecture

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

Several kinds of evidence would weaken or overturn these conclusions. If careful studies, especially experiments that remove phones or social media, showed little or no improvement in youth mental health, then the phone-free movement would look less like a recovery of lost goods and more like a moral panic, and the smartphone would lose much of its standing as a stress test of the paradigm; if the same studies showed large improvements, Haidt’s account and the reading of the bans as a successor’s question would both gain. If the paradigm’s own institutions produced, over the next few years, a widely accepted account of legitimate AI governance, of duties to the unborn, or of meaningful life after work, all in its own terms, then the scope finding would be wrong, and the paradigm would have shown that it can stretch to the new questions as it has stretched before. If AI’s labor effects remained as small as the Yale Budget Lab found in 2025, the meaning question would remain hypothetical for a generation, and its weight in the verdict should shrink accordingly. Final-

ly, if a model governed by an explicit and correctable value document, of either political flavor, earned broad public trust across the lines that now divide Americans, that would suggest the backend can be rebuilt by revision rather than replacement, which is to say adjusted rather than exhausted.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: this chapter fills in your section on the paradigm under leverage, and its sharpest evidence is the Gemini episode, where a protocol with no stopping rule, run at machine speed, produced an absurdity within days.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: the frontend has now been measured, at roughly fourfold to fivefold growth in training compute each year, while the backend still decides its cases one at a time; the four requirements of a scalable backend set out here (written down, taught by exemplars, correctable, and grounded in positive goods) could serve as SPI's design specification.
- Ascent of the West: the phone bans show your test, "what is lost if it goes?", already at work in public life, though it has been smuggled in under the lexicon of harm; capability with a floor poses the question of equality under leverage better than any disparity count.
- Win the Words: EO 14319 is a lexical move in your sense, refusing a vocabulary by name, and it shows the danger of fighting over words without offering an account of the goods the words should serve.
- Map vs Territory: the alignment dispute shows that machines cannot be built on a map with no territory behind it, for a model must say something about history, and history pushes back.
- The Turn: the companion question is where joint attention matters most, since a friend who can say no turns you toward something outside yourself, whereas a machine tuned to please you may only turn you back upon yourself.

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XXIX

The Health Check and the Strongest Defense

When the five domains of reality are read against the Test's own rules of attribution, the American record shows real deterioration in several places, yet in none of them does the decline pass both tests cleanly, so the case against the paradigm on fidelity to reality is weaker than its critics suppose and stronger than its defenders admit.

A physician who finds a patient tired and short of breath does not blame the diet until she has ruled out the weather, the season, and the virus going round the town; she asks first whether the symptom has a plausible path from the suspected cause, and then whether the neighbors who eat differently have the same complaint. The Test fixed exactly these two questions before any data was gathered. A bad outcome counts against the paradigm of progress only when there is a mechanism from its protocol, find the constraint and remove it, to the outcome, and when the trend differs from the trend in comparable societies that do not hold the paradigm; as a supplementary check, we also ask whether it differs between American groups that hold it more and less strongly. The crisis signs were weighed in Chapters XXIV and XXVI, yield in XXVII, and scope in XXVIII; this chapter takes the five reality domains, the criteria of consistency and simplicity, and, before any verdict, the strongest defense the paradigm's friends can make.

One caution belongs at the start, for South Korea, Japan, and Italy share with America the market, the city, the smartphone, mass higher education, and the working woman, even though they hold less firmly to the American lexicon of liberation, so a trend common to all of them may still be the work of a wider family of modern ideas; what the comparison can establish is only that the distinctively American paradigm is not needed to explain it.

FAMILY AND FERTILITY

THE AMERICAN BIRTH rate has fallen to the lowest point in its recorded history, and the latest figures continue the slide.

INDICATOR	EARLIER	LATEST	SOURCE
Total fertility rate (children per woman)	1.62 (2023)	1.60 (2024, final)	CDC, NVSR 75-02
General fertility rate (births per 1,000 women 15 to 44)	53.8 (2024)	53.1 (2025, provisional)	CDC, VSRR 43
Births	3,628,934 (2024)	about 3,606,400 (2025)	CDC
Teen birth rate (per 1,000, ages 15 to 19)	n/a	11.7 (2025), down 7%, a record low	CDC
Births to unmarried women	n/a	39.5% (2024)	CDC
Marriage rate (per 1,000 people)	8.2 (2000)	6.1 (2023)	CDC
Divorce rate (per 1,000 people)	4.0 (2000)	2.4 (2023)	CDC
40-year-olds never married	6% (1980), 20% (2010)	25% (2021)	Pew
Children living with two biological parents	64% (2019)	65% (2025)	NCFMR, Census CPS

The general fertility rate has fallen by nearly a quarter since 2007, according to a news account of the 2025 release. Yet divorce has fallen sharply since 2000, teen

births are at a record low, and the share of children living with both biological parents has held steady for six years. The deterioration lies chiefly in the number of marriages and the number of children, rather than in the stability of the families that do form.

The mechanism can be stated plainly. The protocol treats inherited expectations about marriage and childbearing as constraints on individual choice, above all on women's choices, and removes them one after another: the stigma on divorce, on birth outside marriage, and on the childless life, along with the sense that one owes children to one's family or one's people. Each removal is defensible on its own terms, yet, as *The Tyranny of the Individual* warned of liberty pursued without an end-point, their sum may be a culture with little reason left to marry young or to have a third child. The mechanism passes the first test.

The comparison is less kind to the thesis.

COUNTRY	TOTAL FERTILITY RATE	YEAR	SOURCE
South Korea	0.80 (record low 0.72 in 2023)	2025	Statistics Korea, via AsiaNews
Malta	1.01	2024	Eurostat
Spain	1.10	2024	Eurostat
Italy	1.14 (down from 1.18)	2025	Istat
European Union	1.34	2024	Eurostat
United States	1.60	2024	CDC
France	1.61	2024	Eurostat

Japan's births fell for the tenth straight year in 2025, to about 705,800. Italy, Poland, Greece, and Finland all stood below 1.30 in 2024. In short, the societies that hold the American paradigm less strongly, in East Asia and in Southern and Eastern Europe, have lower fertility than the United States, not higher. If the paradigm were the main cause, America should be near the bottom of this table; instead it sits near the top of the rich world, level with France.

Within the country the picture is mixed. South Dakota had the highest general fertility rate in 2024 and the District of Columbia the lowest, a contrast between a place that holds the paradigm loosely and one that holds it firmly, though two endpoints prove little. Marriage runs against the thesis: a third of 40-year-olds with a high-school education or less had never married in 2021, against 18%

of college graduates, so the class that holds the paradigm most firmly is also the class that marries most. We conclude that fertility decline is not attributable to the paradigm under the comparison test, while the retreat from marriage among the less educated is mixed, with a plausible mechanism and a within-country pattern that complicates it.

MENTAL HEALTH AND MEANING

American adolescents became markedly sadder in the decade after 2012, and there are early signs that the worst has passed.

INDICATOR	EARLIER	LATEST	SOURCE
High-school students with persistent sadness or hopelessness	30% (2013), 42% (2021)	40% (2023), 33% (2025)	CDC YRBS; Chapter XXVIII
Seriously considered suicide	17% (2013), 22% (2021)	20% (2023), 14% (2025)	CDC YRBS; Chapter XXVIII
Attempted suicide	8% (2013), 10% (2021)	9% (2023)	CDC YRBS
Suicide rate, age-adjusted, per 100,000	10.9 (2002), 14.2 (2022)	13.7 (2024), a significant fall	CDC NCHS
Suicide rate, girls 10 to 14	0.6 (2002)	1.9 (2022)	CDC NCHS
Drug overdose deaths	nearly 110,000 (2022 peak)	about 80,000 (2024); about 73,000 (12 months to August 2025)	CDC provisional, via HumanProgress
Adult life-expectancy gap, B.A. versus no B.A.	just over 2 years (early 1990s)	more than 7 years (end of 2021)	Case and Deaton, Brookings

Two stories run together here: the young, whose sadness and hopelessness rose from 30 to 42 percent between 2013 and 2021 before easing, as Chapter XXVIII describes, and working-class adults, among whom deaths from drugs, alcohol, and suicide have risen since the mid-1990s, almost entirely among those without a four-year degree. Anne Case and Angus Deaton report that between about 2010 and 2020 life expectancy rose for graduates and fell for everyone else, a divergence Case compared only to Eastern Europe after the Soviet collapse.

The mechanism is easy to state. The protocol strips away the thick sources of meaning that a person once inherited without asking, such as religious obligation, settled roles, and membership in a congregation, and it supplies in their place a lexicon of harm and safety that can teach the young to read discomfort as injury. Case herself named the loss of marriage and community among the less educated as a road to suicide, in the manner of Durkheim. The Christian share of the country, as Chapter XXIII records, fell from 78% in 2007 to 62% in 2023 and 2024.

The comparison splits the two stories. The rise in adolescent distress is not American alone: across the forty-odd countries of the WHO's school survey of Europe, central Asia, and Canada, the share of adolescents with two or more health complaints more than once a week rose from 36% in 2018 to 44% in 2022, and among 15-year-old girls from 52% to 66%, while life satisfaction fell. South Korea, which does not share the American paradigm, had the highest suicide rate in the OECD, 23.2 per 100,000 in 2022 against an OECD average of 10.7, and Statistics Korea reported a crude rate of 29.1 for 2024, the highest since 2011. These figures are standardized differently from the American rate and should not be compared closely. Deaths of despair, by contrast, pass the comparison test, for no other rich country has seen such a sustained fall in working-age life expectancy. Yet their own authors weigh economic causes heavily: men's falling real wages since 1980, employer health-insurance costs that make low-wage workers expensive to hire, and the arrival of fentanyl, which is a supply shock rather than a moral idea. The youth trend, then, is not attributable, being shared abroad, while deaths of despair are mixed, distinctively American and with a plausible moral mechanism, but with strong rival causes and a recent fall in overdoses that no change of paradigm explains.

TRUST AND COHESION

Americans trust one another less than they did half a century ago, though the fall has paused.

INDICATOR	EARLIER	LATEST	SOURCE
Say most people can be trusted	46% (1972), 34% (2018)	34% (2023 to 2024)	Pew, 2025
Same, ages 18 to 29	n/a	26% (2023 to 2024)	Pew

INDICATOR	EARLIER	LATEST	SOURCE
Same, ages 65 and over	n/a	44% (2023 to 2024)	Pew
Time with friends in person, per day	60 minutes (2003)	20 minutes (2020)	Surgeon General, 2023
Three or fewer close friends	27% (1990)	49% (2021)	Surgeon General
Member of a church, synagogue, or mosque	70% (1999)	47% (2020)	Surgeon General
Adults reporting loneliness	n/a	about half (recent surveys)	Surgeon General

Pew finds each newer generation less trusting than the one before, though not among Black Americans. The Surgeon General’s advisory found that young people aged 15 to 24 spent about 70% less time with friends in person in 2020 than in 2003.

The mechanism is that a paradigm which teaches suspicion of inherited institutions, and removes shared norms as constraints, also removes some of the common ground on which strangers learn to trust each other. The comparison, however, points elsewhere.

COUNTRY	SAY MOST PEOPLE CAN BE TRUSTED (INTEGRATED VALUES SURVEYS, WAVE ENDING 2022)
Denmark	74%
Norway	72%
Finland	68%
Sweden	63%
Netherlands	57%
Germany	42%
Spain	41%
United States	37%
Japan	34%
South Korea	33%

COUNTRY	SAY MOST PEOPLE CAN BE TRUSTED (INTEGRATED VALUES SURVEYS, WAVE ENDING 2022)
Italy	27%
Poland	24%
Portugal	17%
Greece	8%

The most trusting societies on earth are the Nordic countries, which are among the most secular and the most socially liberal, and which share a great deal of the progress paradigm's lexicon. The societies that hold it less strongly, in East Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe, trust less than America does. In the same survey series, American trust stood at 35% in 1998 and 37% in 2022, which suggests that most of the long fall happened before the paradigm's recent extensions. A fair reply is that Nordic trust was built over centuries by homogeneous Lutheran societies and is now being spent, much as *The End of Progress* argued about borrowed Christian capital; that reply is plausible but unmeasured here. The verdict on trust is therefore mixed: civic and religious withdrawal is steep and plausibly linked to the protocol, but the international comparison does not show that holding the paradigm lowers trust.

ORDER

Here the record is plainly good, and recent.

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Murder, 2024 versus 2023	down 14.9% nationally	FBI
Violent crime, 2024 versus 2023	down 4.5%	FBI
Homicide deaths, 2024	20,162; 5.9 per 100,000	CDC
Homicide, 2025 versus 2024, 35 large cities	down 21%; 25% below 2019	Council on Criminal Justice
National homicide rate, 2025 (projected, on the FBI's measure)	about 4.0 per 100,000, lowest recorded since 1900 (prior low 4.4 in 2014)	Council on Criminal Justice

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Homicide, first half 2026 versus first half 2025, 30 cities	down 18%; 31% below 2019	Council on Criminal Justice
Robbery, first half 2026	down 17%; 41% below 2019	Council on Criminal Justice
Domestic violence, first half 2026	up 8% (8 cities)	Council on Criminal Justice
State and federal prisoners, end of 2023	1,254,200, up 2%	BJS

The council’s 2025 figure is a projection from a sample of cities, made before the FBI’s national count, and since police-reported rates run below the CDC’s death-certificate rate (5.9 in 2024), it should be compared only with the FBI series and held lightly; still, the decline from 2023 to 2025, and on into 2026, is among the largest on record, and it carried homicide below its level before the rise of 2020 and 2021.

The mechanism was easy to state in advance: if the protocol is turned on police, prosecution, and prisons, treating enforcement itself as a constraint to be removed, disorder should rise. The comparison with other rich countries shows a gap in level that is very large and very old.

COUNTRY	HOMICIDE PER 100,000	PRISON POPULATION PER 100,000
United States	5.8 (2023)	542
Canada	2.0 (2024)	98
France	1.3 (2024)	n/a
England and Wales	0.9 (2023)	137
Germany	0.9 (2024)	n/a
Hungary	0.7 (2024)	206
Poland	0.7 (2024)	195
Spain	0.7 (2024)	121
Italy	0.6 (2024)	111
South Korea	0.5 (2024)	123

COUNTRY	HOMICIDE PER 100,000	PRISON POPULATION PER 100,000
Japan	0.2 (2024)	n/a

The United States has the fourth-highest imprisonment rate in the world in the World Prison Brief's ranking, and a homicide rate several times that of any peer. But that gap long predates the paradigm's recent extensions, and the trend of the last three years runs strongly in the right direction. We found no comparable measure of street disorder, which many Americans feel more keenly than the homicide rate, so it is left unmeasured. The trend is improving and is therefore not attributable deterioration; if anything, the period counts modestly in the paradigm's favor, or at least shows its institutions able to turn back from an experiment, a self-correction of the kind Chapter XXIV examined.

CAPABILITY

Capability, the domain the successor paradigm prizes most, has the most divided record.

INDICATOR	FIGURE	SOURCE
Grade 4 reading, average score	220 (2019), 217 (2022), 2 points lower again in 2024	NCES; NAEP
Grade 8 reading, average score	263 (2019), 260 (2022)	NCES
Grade 4 math	241 (2019), 236 (2022); up 2 in 2024, still 3 below 2019	NCES; NAEP
Grade 8 math	282 (2019), 274 (2022)	NCES
Grade 4 math below Basic	24% (2024), 5 points higher than 2019	NAEP
Grade 12 reading	3 points below 2019 and 10 below 1992 (2024)	NAEP
Grade 12 math	3 points below 2019 and 2005 (2024)	NAEP
13-year-olds reading for fun almost daily	27% (2012), 14% (2025)	NAEP

The 2024 results contain a detail that matters for the successor's measure of capability with a floor: in fourth-grade math, scores rose at the middle and the top between 2022 and 2024 but did not move at the 10th and 25th percentiles, and in

twelfth-grade reading they fell at every level except the 90th. The ceiling recovers while the floor does not.

The mechanism is that a paradigm which treats standards, grading, discipline, and homework as constraints on equity will relax them, and the weakest students, who most need structure, will lose the most. That is plausible and is consistent with the pattern at the bottom. The comparison test cannot be completed here, because we could not open the PISA 2022 country results, and the pandemic closures behind much of the 2022 fall were global. The grade 12 decline since 1992 and the halving of daily reading for pleasure since 2012, which pre-date the pandemic, are suggestive but have obvious technological rivals.

The ability to build is easier to compare. The Transit Costs Project, studying more than 900 projects in 59 countries, ranked the United States the sixth most expensive place to build rapid rail, and found that the first phase of New York's Second Avenue Subway cost roughly eight to twelve times a low-cost baseline. Its causes are institutional: labor made up 40 to 60% of hard costs in New York and the Northeast against 19 to 30% in Italy, Sweden, and Turkey; and the authors estimated a procurement premium of nearly double, with agency red tape alone adding about a fifth. Here the protocol works in an unexpected direction, for the paradigm has added constraints on the builder, in procedure, consultation, and review, in the name of protecting whoever the project might burden. That is the question "whom does it constrain?" turned around and asked of every shovel. Yet Italy, Spain, and Sweden build cheaply, and they are not strangers to the liberal paradigm.

Science is where America remains strongest, though its lead is narrowing. American gross spending on research and development reached \$923 billion in 2022, still \$111 billion ahead of China's. But China's spending grew 16% in a single year, its publication output was more than double America's in 2023, and the American share of the most highly cited articles fell to its lowest level since 2006, while the Nature Index for 2024 placed China first in high-quality research output. This is relative decline from a great height, driven chiefly by a rival's rise, and it fails the comparison test. Capability, in sum, is mixed: the decline in learning has a plausible mechanism and an ominous shape at the floor, the cost of building has a mechanism that runs through the paradigm's procedural ethic, and science remains a genuine strength.

CONSISTENCY AND SIMPLICITY

Consistency asks whether a paradigm applies its principles to itself, and the paradigm of progress, fairly read, does so unevenly. Its protocol asks of every rule whom it constrains, yet the newer rules it installs, such as speech codes, mandatory trainings, and required statements of commitment, are seldom put to the same question by those who install them. It teaches suspicion of power and directs that suspicion at churches, corporations, and the police, but less often at its own gatekeepers in the university, the professions, and the human-resources office. It weighs the testimony of the harmed, yet it was slow to name the harm documented by Case and Deaton, perhaps because the dying did not fit its map of who is oppressed. In fairness, its liberal critics and the reversals traced in Chapter XXIV are its own principles turned on its own excesses, so the charge is inconsistency rather than hypocrisy, and it remains contested.

Simplicity asks whether ordinary people can live by the paradigm without a growing class of interpreters. Here the data were weaker than expected.

INDICATOR	EARLIER	LATER	SOURCE
Compliance officers employed	n/a	about 436,400 (2025)	BLS
College executive, administrative, and managerial staff	144,755 (1991)	238,677 (2011), up 65%	NCES
College faculty (instruction, research, public service)	826,252 (1991)	1,524,469 (2011), up 84%	NCES
All college employees	2,545,235 (1991)	3,880,322 (2022)	NCES
College “other staff” (Title IV institutions)	1,649,808 (1999)	1,999,728 (2022), up 21%	NCES
College faculty (Title IV institutions)	1,072,202 (1999)	1,537,118 (2022), up 43%	NCES

In the federal series, college managers did not outgrow faculty between 1991 and 2011, and since 1999 the broad category of other staff has grown more slowly than faculty, although faculty counts include part-time adjuncts and the occupa-

tional categories were redrawn in 2013, which hides the growth of the professional support staff that critics usually mean. We could not verify a reliable count of diversity, equity, and inclusion employment. The interpreter-class thesis, then, is not confirmed by the headcounts we could open.

THE STRONGEST DEFENSE

Let us now give the paradigm the best advocate it could ask for, who would begin by asking us to look further back. Steven Pinker's *Enlightenment Now* gathers, in some seventy-five graphs, the case that life expectancy, health, prosperity, safety, peace, and knowledge have risen across the West and the world, and he credits not an impersonal arc but reason, science, and humanism, the very ideas from which the progress paradigm grew. In *The Better Angels of Our Nature* he made the longer case that violence of nearly every kind has declined over centuries. The World Bank counts about 2.3 billion people in extreme poverty in 1990 and about 837 million now, at a line of three dollars a day. The paradigm's defender would say that these are the real fruits of removing constraints: on trade, on speech, on women's work, on whom one may marry. The rise in approval of marriage between Black and white Americans, from 4% in 1958 to 94% in 2021, recorded in Chapter XXVII, is about as clean a moral advance as any poll has measured.

He would add that the present record, read fairly, is better than the critics allow. Homicide is at or near its lowest level in a century, overdose deaths have fallen by about a third from their peak, the suicide rate fell significantly in 2024, teen births are at a record low, divorce has fallen, and children are no less likely than in 2019 to live with both parents. Where things are bad, he would point to the tables of this very chapter: fertility is lower in Korea, Italy, and Spain; adolescent distress rose across Europe; trust is higher in the secular, liberal Nordic countries than in traditional Southern Europe; and the scientific race is being reshaped by China's rise rather than by any American moral failing. These are the global effects of wealth, cities, and the smartphone, and to lay them at the door of a moral idea is to mistake the weather for the diet.

Finally, he would say that the paradigm corrects itself. It reversed course on several of its own extensions after 2020, as Chapter XXIV showed, and it did so through its own institutions, its own journalists, and its own voters. A paradigm

that can see its errors and turn from them is not exhausted; on the Test's own terms, it is adjusting.

This defense is strong, and on the evidence gathered here it carries the comparison test in most of the domains. Its weak points are three. Pinker's long-run gains are largely the work of the Enlightenment paradigm of rights, reason, and science, which the progress paradigm inherited and did not create, and the question for Part Two concerns the recent extensions, not the founding. The comparison societies share much of modern individualism, so the defense may be acquitting the narrower paradigm while leaving the wider family of ideas under suspicion. And the floor, in learning, in working-class life expectancy, and in marriage among the less educated, is where the deterioration concentrates; a defense that points to averages says little about it.

SUMMARY OF THE HEALTH CHECK

DOMAIN	TREND	TEST 1: MECHANISM	TEST 2: COMPARISON	CONCLUSION
Family and fertility	Fertility at record low (1.60 in 2024); marriage down; divorce down; two-parent share stable	Plausible: removal of norms around marriage and childbearing	Fails: Korea, Italy, Spain, and the EU are lower; within-US gradients mixed	Fertility not attributable; marriage among less educated mixed
Mental health and meaning	Youth distress up 2013 to 2021, easing in 2023 and 2025; suicide up 2002 to 2022, down in 2024; overdoses falling	Plausible: loss of inherited meaning; lexicon of harm	Youth trend shared in Europe and Korea; deaths of despair distinctively American but with economic and drug-supply causes	Youth not attributable; deaths of despair mixed
Trust and cohesion	Trust 46% (1972) to 34% (2023 to 2024); friendship and membership down sharply	Plausible: suspicion of institutions; removal of shared norms	Fails internationally: secular Nordic societies most trusting; US above Japan, Korea, Italy	Mixed
Order	Homicide falling to about 4.0 (2025, projected), still far above peers; imprisonment high	Plausible in advance	Level gap old; trend improving	Not attributable; improving

DOMAIN	TREND	TEST 1: MECHANISM	TEST 2: COMPARISON	CONCLUSION
Capability	NAEP below 2019, floor not recovering; high building costs; science strong but relatively declining	Plausible: relaxed standards; procedural vetoes on building	Incomplete for learning; mixed for building; fails for science	Mixed

By the Test’s decision rule, the verdict of exhaustion requires deterioration that passes both tests in at least three of the five domains. On the evidence of this chapter, no domain passes both tests cleanly: in family and in mental health the main trend fails the comparison while a narrower one is mixed, trust and capability are mixed, and order is improving. That finding will weigh heavily in Chapter XXX, and it is the evidence most favorable to the paradigm in the whole of Part Two.



KEY FINDINGS

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
American fertility is at a record low but above most comparison societies	US 1.60 (2024); Korea 0.80 (2025), Italy 1.14 (2025), Spain 1.10 and EU 1.34 (2024)	measured
The family is shrinking more than it is breaking	Marriage 8.2 to 6.1 per 1,000 (2000 to 2023); divorce 4.0 to 2.4; two-parent share 64% to 65% (2019 to 2025)	measured
Adolescent distress rose abroad as well as at home	YRBS sadness 30% to 42% (2013 to 2021), 33% by 2025; WHO school survey complaints 36% to 44% (2018 to 2022)	measured
Deaths of despair are distinctively American and concentrated below the degree line	Education gap in adult life expectancy grew from about 2 to over 7 years	well supported
Low American trust is not explained by holding the paradigm	Nordic trust 63% to 74%; US 37%; Japan 34%; Italy 27% (wave ending 2022)	measured
Homicide has fallen to near its lowest recorded level	Projected 4.0 per 100,000 in 2025; first half 2026 down another 18% in 30 cities	well supported

FINDING	EVIDENCE	STATUS
Learning losses fall hardest on the floor	2024 grade 4 math gains absent at 10th and 25th percentiles	measured
The interpreter-class thesis is not confirmed by federal college staffing data	College managers up 65% and faculty up 84% (1991 to 2011)	contested
No reality domain passes both attribution tests cleanly	Summary table above	well supported

WHAT WOULD CHANGE THIS FINDING

The conclusion that no domain passes both tests would be overturned most directly by better comparisons. If cross-national data showed that the American decline in learning, measured by PISA or by similar national tests, was steeper than in East Asia and Southern Europe after accounting for the pandemic, capability would move toward attributable deterioration. If state-level studies showed that fertility, marriage, or youth mental health worsened faster in states and groups that hold the paradigm most strongly, after controlling for density, income, and age, the within-country test would turn against it. A sustained return of rising homicide in 2026 and 2027, concentrated in cities that reduced enforcement, would move order the same way. Conversely, the finding would be strengthened in the paradigm's favor if the recovery in adolescent mental health recorded in the 2025 survey (Chapter XXVIII) held in the next one, if overdose deaths kept falling, and if American trust rose among the young. Finally, if the comparison societies turn out to share the relevant parts of the paradigm more than the Test assumed, the second test loses its power, and the question shifts from this paradigm to modern individualism as a whole, a larger claim this chapter cannot settle.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress argues that the paradigm has no stopping rule; this chapter shows that reality has not yet supplied one either, since most of the bad trends are shared by societies that never adopted it.
- Map vs Territory holds that the territory pushes back through consequences, and that is confirmed here, but the push lands on modern societies broadly, which means your tribunal may be judging a larger family of ideas than the one you named.
- Your measure of capability with a floor proves the sharpest instrument in the chapter: the 2024 test scores and the Case and Deaton findings show the ceiling holding while the floor sinks, which averages hide and the defense does not answer.

- The building-cost evidence suggests a refinement for Ascent of the West: the paradigm does not only remove constraints, it multiplies procedural ones on whoever builds, and the founder’s test, “what is lost if it goes?”, has a twin, “what is lost if it is never built?”
- The Tyranny of the Individual predicted a retreat from marriage; the education gradient shows that retreat landing on those with the fewest buffers while the paradigm’s own holders keep the old disciplines in private, a pattern worth stating carefully as conjecture rather than finding.
- The interpreter-class claim needs firmer evidence than the federal headcounts provide before it carries weight in the verdict.

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CHAPTER THIRTY

XXX

The Verdict

Applied as it was written, the Test finds the present paradigm neither exhausted, since its outcomes have not been convicted at the tribunal of reality, nor healthy, since its crisis signs are plain, but adjusting, though largely under pressure from outside and with a real crisis in the trust that carries it and in the scope of the questions it can pose.

THE COUNT BEFORE THE COMMENTARY

AN UMPIRE WHO agreed on the strike zone before the game must call each pitch where it crosses the plate, and he must call it most carefully when his own side is at bat. The Test was written in that spirit, its verdicts, measures, rules of attribution, and decision rule all fixed before Part Two opened a single survey, by an author who expected, and in some measure hoped, to find the paradigm of progress exhausted. The first duty of this chapter, therefore, is to apply the rule as it stands, criterion by criterion, and only afterward to ask what the result means.

The rule for exhaustion has three conditions, and all three must hold: at least three of the five crisis signs present; deterioration that passes both attribution tests in at least three of the five reality domains; and recent extensions that return less than they cost. We take them in order, beginning with the signs.

The first sign is legitimacy, and Chapter XXIV found it present. Gallup's average confidence across fourteen institutions stood at 27 percent in 2026, a single point above its record low, and the paradigm's particular carriers, among them

higher education, newspapers, television news, public schools, and the medical system, stand at or near the bottom of their series, while trust in the mass media fell below 30 percent for the first time in 2025. The Test asked for decline among the paradigm's adherents as well as among its opponents, and that too can now be measured, for Democrats' confidence in higher education fell from 61 to 50 percent in a single year. Chapter XXIV was careful to call the adherents' portion real but modest, since some of it is partisan rotation and some may be anxiety for institutions under federal pressure; yet the sign, as the Test defined it, is present.

The second and third signs, which Chapter XXVI took up, are present as well. Proliferating versions show most plainly in Pew's typology of 2026, in which the Leftward Progressives, 7 percent of adults, and the Order and Opportunity Left, 18 percent, stand 78 points apart on comfort with "they/them" pronouns and 54 points apart on the importance of secure borders, and in which the activist edge is whiter and more educated than the base it speaks for. Preference falsification shows in a rate of self-censorship roughly three times that of 1954, in the 59 to 65 percent of college students who hold their tongues, and in list experiments that found private trust in government and the media far below what people profess aloud. The same chapter qualified both findings in ways the verdict must keep, for the private doubt falls chiefly on the newest extensions and on institutions rather than on equal dignity, and on same-sex marriage the list experiments found no falsification at all.

The fourth sign, generational adherence, is only partly present. Young women have converted into the paradigm more deeply than any cohort before them, with 40 percent calling themselves liberal against 25 percent of young men, while young men have stalled, voted once against the paradigm's party in 2024, and softened toward it again within a year (Chapter XXVI). The fifth sign, the failure of self-correction, is also partly present, since Chapter XXIV found that correction worked at the edges, where outcomes were measurable and voters held a lever, but faltered at the gatekeeping core, and that the decisive reversals of 2025 and 2026 were imposed by the paradigm's opponents.

With three signs present and two present in part, the first condition for exhaustion is met, and met without any need to count the partial signs.

THE TRIBUNAL OF REALITY

The second condition is the hinge of the whole Test, because it is where the paradigm is judged by the territory rather than by opinion about the territory. A bad outcome counts against the paradigm only when there is a plausible path from its protocol to the outcome and when the trend differs from the trend in comparable societies that do not share the paradigm. Chapter XXIX ran each domain through both gates, and its finding is that none passes cleanly.

Family and fertility come first. American fertility has fallen to 1.60 children per woman, the lowest in its record, and the mechanism is easy to state, since the protocol has removed one after another the expectations that once led people to marry young and to have a third child. The comparison, however, is unkind to the thesis: South Korea stands at 0.80, Italy at 1.14, Spain at 1.10, and the European Union as a whole at 1.34, so that the societies which hold the American paradigm less firmly have fewer children than America, not more. Meanwhile divorce has fallen from 4.0 to 2.4 per thousand people since 2000, teen births are at a record low, and the share of children living with both biological parents has held at about two in three. Fertility is therefore not attributable, while the retreat from marriage among the less educated is mixed.

Mental health divides in a similar way. The rise in adolescent sadness after 2012 was steep, yet it was shared across the forty-odd countries of the WHO's school survey, where frequent health complaints rose from 36 to 44 percent between 2018 and 2022, and South Korea's suicide rate leads the OECD; Chapter XXVIII added that the CDC's survey of 2025 found persistent sadness among high-school students down to 33 percent, from 42 percent in 2021. Deaths of despair, by contrast, are distinctively American and concentrated below the degree line, where the gap in adult life expectancy grew from about two years to more than seven, but the scholars who documented them weigh falling wages and the arrival of fentanyl heavily, and overdose deaths have since fallen by about a third from their peak. The youth trend is not attributable, and deaths of despair are mixed.

Trust is mixed as well, for although Americans trust one another far less than they did in 1972, the most trusting societies on earth are the secular and socially liberal Nordic countries, while Japan, South Korea, and Italy trust less than America does. Capability is mixed, with a learning record whose floor has not re-

covered since 2019, a cost of building that runs partly through the paradigm's own procedural ethic, and a science that remains among the strongest in the world even as China's rises, though the comparison for learning could not be completed. Order, finally, is improving, and improving fast, for homicide fell to a projected 4.0 per 100,000 in 2025, the lowest recorded since 1900, and fell by a further 18 percent across thirty cities in the first half of 2026.

The reality ledger, then, shows no domain passing both tests, two mixed out-right, two split between a main trend that fails the comparison and a narrower one that is mixed, and one improving. The rule asks for three domains that pass both tests, and we have none, so the second condition fails, and fails by the rule's own measure rather than by a hair.

The third condition, that recent extensions return less than they cost, Chapter XXVII found partly met. Compulsory diversity training, trigger warnings, test-optional admissions, and the depolicing that followed the viral incidents of 2020 all show low or negative yields; yet same-sex marriage, a late extension, shows a high one, and the diminishing-returns table of *The End of Progress*, though its direction survived every fair revision, saw its break-even date recede by decades under a scoring friendly to the reforms.

EXHAUSTION IS NOT MET

The verdict on exhaustion follows mechanically: one condition met, one partly met, and one failed. Under the rule fixed in advance, the present paradigm is not exhausted.

We should say this plainly, because it cuts against the hypothesis with which this book began. The author expected the territory to be pushing back against the map, and in the domains where Part One supposed the push would be hardest, namely fertility, the young, and trust, the push is real; but it lands as hard, or harder, on societies that never adopted the American paradigm. Reality is saying no to something, and the Test was built to ask whether it was saying no to this paradigm in particular. On present evidence, it is not.

The Test also named in advance four kinds of evidence that would weaken the author's hypothesis, and three of them have appeared, at least in part. Improving outcomes in the reality domains appeared in order, where the fall in homicide is among the largest ever recorded, and in several measures of mental health, where youth sadness, the suicide rate, and overdose deaths all fell in the latest figures

(Chapters XXVIII and XXIX). The same bad trends in societies that never adopted the paradigm appeared in fertility, in adolescent distress, and in trust (Chapter XXIX). And young people adopting the paradigm more firmly than their parents appeared among young women, as Chapter XXVI said in so many words. Only the fourth falsifier, stable or rising trust in the paradigm's institutions, failed to appear, and on that point the hypothesis stands.

Two cautions from Chapter XXIX keep the result from being overread in the other direction. The comparison societies share with America the market, the city, the smartphone, and much of modern individualism, so the Test may have acquitted the distinctively American paradigm while leaving the wider family of modern ideas under suspicion; and the deterioration concentrates at the floor, in the learning of the weakest students, the lives of those without degrees, and marriage among the less educated, which averages conceal. Both cautions are fair, yet neither changes the verdict, for the rule asked about this paradigm, and it asked for passes rather than suspicions.

WHETHER ADJUSTING FITS

Healthy is ruled out at once, since it requires fewer than two crisis signs and the paradigm shows three, and Chapter XXVIII's finding that scope is a partial failure points away from it as well. What remains is adjusting, for which the decision rule gives three conditions: crisis signs present, self-correction working, and reality outcomes mixed or improving. The first and the third are met cleanly. The second is where the evidence strains, and it strains in a way that repays close attention, because the Test's fuller definition asked that the paradigm correct itself from inside, and that its corrections stick without breaking its exemplar or its legitimacy.

Some corrections did come from inside, and they have held. MIT restored its testing requirement in 2022 on the strength of its own data, and Dartmouth, Brown, and Yale reached the same conclusion from theirs; San Francisco's voters recalled their district attorney; Oregon's own legislature made drug possession a crime again; California's voters passed Proposition 36 by more than two to one against a Democratic governor; and MIT and Harvard dropped diversity statements and adopted neutrality before any federal campaign began (Chapter XXIV). Chapter XXV added the corrections that came through markets and culture, at Bud Light, Target, Disney, and the NCAA. Nor has the exemplar bro-

ken, for the emancipator still holds the national calendar and the commanding heights of prestige culture, and no successor has yet been given a face (Chapters XXII and XXV).

The gatekeeping core, however, corrected little on its own. The professional medical societies held their position after the Cass Review, the human resources office kept its least effective instrument for nearly a decade after its own sociologists had measured the cost, the faculty's composition shows no sign of change, and student intolerance of dissent reached a record in 2025 (Chapter XXIV). The largest reversals, of disparate impact, of the Title IX rule, and of federal and corporate DEI, came in 2025 and 2026 from the paradigm's opponents, armed with federal power. And the clause about legitimacy cannot be satisfied in any simple sense, since the paradigm's legitimacy was already in crisis when the corrections began.

Here we must admit that the rule did not anticipate the case before it. It imagined two kinds of change, correction by the paradigm from within and defeat by a rival from without, and the record shows a third that belongs wholly to neither. Chapter XXII found that the paradigm's ontology of the chooser, harm, rights, and consent is shared by nearly all Americans, so that its opponents speak its grammar in another accent; the reversal of 2025 was made in the name of the paradigm's own oldest principles, the colorblind Constitution and the anti-discrimination law of 1964, turned against the extensions of 2020 (Chapter XXIII); and Chapter XXVI warned that reaction is itself a variant of the paradigm, which takes its map and reverses the arrows. The corrector stood outside the gatekeepers yet inside the paradigm, a position for which the Test had no name.

There is a further subtlety. The corrections that did come from inside were made, for the most part, by appeal to evidence and consequence, to what students actually achieved and to what the streets and the overdose counts showed, rather than by the protocol's own question of whom a thing constrains (Chapter XXVII); and the movement for phone-free schools restored a constraint by asking, in effect, what had been lost when it went (Chapter XXVIII). Chapter XV distinguished the liberal order's machinery of correction, its elections, courts, free press, and open science, from the paradigm of progress that grew up inside it, whose protocol works like a ratchet. What Part Two found is that the machinery works while the ratchet resists, so that much of the paradigm's adjustment has been done for it, by its voters, by its rivals, and by the tribunal of reality, more than by its gatekeepers.

The honest result lies within the verdict of adjusting, though at its far edge, and we should name it carefully rather than slip in a fourth verdict by stealth: the paradigm is adjusting under external pressure, with signs of crisis in the trust that carries it and in the scope of what it can count. Both crises reach down to the legitimacy layer, since a paradigm for which only the chosen and the harmed are fully real will lose the trust of those whose losses it cannot see, and will fall silent before questions in which no one is constrained. What the case teaches is that a test of self-correction must ask not only where a correction came from but whether the paradigm's own gatekeepers have absorbed it, which is to say whether it would outlast the power that imposed it. That question cannot be answered in October 2026, and so the verdict is provisional in a precise sense: it holds if the corrections are learned, and it would slide toward exhaustion if they turn out only to have been suppressed.

WHAT THE VERDICT MEANS FOR THE THESIS

The verdict does nothing to rescue the accretion picture. Part One refuted that picture on the evidence of history, by showing that moral paradigms rise and fall, that their leading edges can err, as eugenics did, and that the winners write the record; and Part Two adds a small refutation of its own, since the remissions which the accretion picture says never retreat have retreated on nearly every Gallup measure since 2022 (Chapters XXII and XXV). The paradigm of progress is one paradigm among many, with its own exemplar, protocol, lexicon, and gatekeepers, and it is not the end of moral history. Nothing in Part Two weakens those conclusions.

What Part Two does not show is that the paradigm is collapsing. It shows a paradigm whose newest extensions have outrun the people who are supposed to hold them and whose institutions have lost much of the public's trust, yet whose foundations, equal dignity, the great civil-rights achievements, and even same-sex marriage, remain popular, and whose outcomes, judged by the Test's own rules, have not been convicted (Chapters XXVI and XXIX). The distinction that matters most is between a crisis of legitimacy and scope, which is real and measured, and a failure at the tribunal of reality, which has not been shown. The paradigm's critics often run the two together, and this book ran them together in its own hypothesis; yet they are different claims, and they call for different remedies. A map that misdraws the ground must be redrawn, whereas a map that is still roughly

faithful to the ground it was drawn to cover, but cannot reach the new country opening at its edge, must be extended or joined to another.

The borrowed-capital thesis sits in the same place, for Chapter XXIII found it well supported as genealogy and unproven as prophecy: the paradigm may live on reserves it did not make, but they have lasted longer than its critics foretold.

WHERE THE PRESSURE LIES

If the paradigm tips from adjusting into exhaustion, Part Two suggests it will happen less in the outcomes the book first watched than in three other places.

The heaviest pressure lies in scope, because leverage is enlarging the questions faster than outcomes can be measured. Chapter XXVIII found that the protocol poses questions of harm and bias well, and that its instruments for testing models and protecting children are among the best any moral order has had; but it cannot properly pose the questions of what people are for once labor is optional, of what is owed to persons who cannot yet testify, or of what is lost when a machine that cannot say no replaces a friend who can. Those questions are no longer hypothetical, for 72 percent of American teenagers had used an AI companion by 2025, employment of workers aged 22 to 25 in exposed occupations ran about 19 percent below its expected level by 2026 on early and descriptive estimates, and the dispute over whose values a model should carry has already reached federal procurement. A moral paradigm must answer the questions people are actually asking, and if within a decade much of life is spent with machines and much of work becomes optional, a protocol that falls silent there will be silent about a great deal.

The second pressure lies in legitimacy, where trust among adherents is falling, though modestly. Chapter XXIV named the test that will tell us whether this is disillusionment or the instinct of a garrison under siege: if Democrats' confidence in higher education and the media recovers once federal pressure eases, the decline was reaction, and if it does not, the carriers are losing their own people.

The third lies in preference falsification, which, as Chapter VIII showed, can hold a moral order steady until suddenly it cannot. The private doubt that Part Two measured falls on the newest extensions and on institutions, and so long as it stays there it presses toward moderation rather than revolt; but a hidden gap is unstable by nature, and the Bud Light episode showed how quickly private agreement turns public once people can see one another's choices (Chapter XXV).

The coming decade could tip the verdict either way: toward exhaustion if the floor kept sinking while the averages held and the questions of scope arrived faster than the paradigm could stretch to meet them, and back toward health if the gatekeepers absorbed the corrections on their own evidence.

WHETHER TO BUILD A SUCCESSOR

We come at last to the question on which Part Three depends: is the present paradigm problematic enough to justify building a successor?

On the evidence of outcomes, the answer is not yet. By this book's own standard, a case for replacing a moral order must rest on the tribunal of reality, and that tribunal has not convicted this one. The record of 2025 adds a warning against overturning, for when power tore down first the arts world closed ranks, and Chapter XXIV judged it possible that imposed reversals will restore the old order's standing among adherents who feel besieged rather than persuaded (Chapters XXIV and XXV). The Postscript's rule still holds: communities rarely abandon a paradigm before a successor is ready, and movements that tear down first usually produce chaos rather than renewal.

Yet there is a strong case for preparing a successor's frame, and it rests on scope rather than on any proven failure. The questions the paradigm cannot pose are arriving now, under leverage, and they will not wait for the outcome data to be gathered. A successor's frame is, moreover, already at work inside the old house, in the appeal to consequence that drove the reversals of 2022 to 2024, in the phone bans' question of what was lost, and in the mentoring and recruitment programs that worked where compulsory lessons failed (Chapters XXVII and XXVIII); the paradigm's own adjustment has leaned on that borrowed question. To build the frame openly would be to give a name and a discipline to work already being done without either.

Such a successor should be built as a correction, in the sense Chapter XV drew from Hegel's *Aufhebung*, the movement that cancels, preserves, and raises at once. It would cancel the protocol's claim to be the whole of morality, along with its want of a stopping rule. It would preserve what Part Two found the paradigm doing well: equal dignity and equality before the law, the harm-focus on its home ground of safety, bias, and the protection of children, and late extensions such as same-sex marriage that admitted people into an institution instead of dissolving one. And it would raise those goods into a frame that can also ask what is

lost if a thing goes, what is lost if a thing is never built, what is owed to those who cannot yet testify, and whether the floor rises along with the ceiling. Offered in that way, the successor could be told, as the emancipation story was told of 1776, as the keeping of an older promise rather than its betrayal.

Whether to undertake that work, and how far to press it, is a decision for the author and not for the Test. The Test can say only that the paradigm is not exhausted, that it is not healthy, that it is adjusting with help it did not choose, and that the questions it cannot pose are the very ones the next decade will ask most insistently.

THE VERDICT IN ONE TABLE

CRITERION	FINDING	CHAPTER	COUNTS TOWARD
Legitimacy	Confidence in the carrier institutions at or near record lows (Gallup average 27% in 2026); decline among adherents real but modest	XXIV	Exhausted (sign present)
Preference falsification	Self-censorship about three times its 1954 level; large private-public gaps on trust in institutions; none found on same-sex marriage	XXVI	Exhausted (sign present), with doubt aimed at the newest extensions
Proliferating versions	Left coalition 54 to 78 points apart on the newest extensions; activist edge diverges from the base it speaks for	XXVI	Exhausted (sign present)
Generational adherence	Young women converted in more deeply than any prior cohort; young men stalled without adopting a rival order	XXVI	Partly present; a falsifier triggered among young women
Self-correction	Internal reversals of 2022 to 2024 held; the decisive reversals of 2025 to 2026 imposed by opponents; gatekeeping core little changed	XXIV	Partly present; the clause on which adjusting strains
Family and fertility	Fertility at a record low but above Korea, Italy, Spain, and the EU; divorce down, two-parent share steady; marriage among the less educated mixed	XXIX	Not attributable (fertility) and mixed (marriage); adjusting

CRITERION	FINDING	CHAPTER	COUNTS TOWARD
Mental health and meaning	Youth distress shared abroad and easing (33% in 2025); deaths of despair American but with strong economic and drug-supply causes	XXVIII, XXIX	Not attributable (youth) and mixed (despair); adjusting
Trust and cohesion	Down since 1972, but secular Nordic societies trust most, and Japan, Korea, and Italy trust less than the US	XXIX	Mixed; adjusting
Order	Homicide a projected 4.0 per 100,000 in 2025, the lowest recorded since 1900, though still far above peers	XXIX	Improving; a falsifier triggered; adjusting
Capability	Learning floor not recovering; high building costs; science strong but relatively declining; learning comparison incomplete	XXIX	Mixed; adjusting
Consistency	Suspicion of power applied unevenly to its own rules and gatekeepers; inconsistency rather than hypocrisy	XXIX	Contested; weighs against healthy
Scope	Poses harm and bias well; cannot pose meaning, duties to future persons, or companionship	XXVIII	Partial failure; against healthy, and the chief future pressure
Simplicity	Interpreter-class thesis not confirmed by the federal headcounts	XXIX	Unconfirmed; neutral
Fruitfulness	Return fallen unevenly; compulsory instruments low or negative; same-sex marriage high; table's direction survives, its slope does not	XXVII	Partly met (third condition for exhausted)



WHAT WOULD CHANGE THE VERDICT

The verdict would move toward exhaustion chiefly through better comparisons, since the second condition failed on comparison rather than on mechanism. If cross-national data such as PISA showed the American decline in learning to be steeper than in East Asia and

Southern Europe once the pandemic is accounted for, capability would pass both tests; if state-level studies, controlling for density, income, and age, showed fertility, marriage, or youth mental health worsening faster where the paradigm is held most firmly, the within-country test would turn against it; and a sustained return of rising homicide concentrated in cities that reduced enforcement would move order the same way. Three such passes would satisfy the condition, and if a table of returns built from measured quantities, such as years of life, income, and victimization, still showed the yield halving every generation, the third condition would move from partly met to met, leaving exhaustion within reach. The verdict would also slide toward exhaustion if the reversals of 2025 were undone after a change of administration without internal review, or if the internal reforms of 2022 to 2024 were themselves rolled back, for either would show a paradigm suppressed for a time that had learned nothing.

The verdict would move toward health if adherents' trust in higher education and the media recovered toward its level of 2015, if the professional societies revised their positions on their own evidence, if faculty hiring showed more range and FIRE's measures of tolerance improved, and if the paradigm's institutions produced a widely accepted account of AI governance, of duties to the unborn, and of meaningful life after work, all in their own terms. Finally, if the comparison societies prove to share the relevant parts of the paradigm more than the Test assumed, the second test loses its power, and the question shifts from this paradigm to modern individualism as a whole, which is a larger inquiry than Part Two attempted.

TIES TO YOUR WORK

- The End of Progress: your signs of exhaustion are confirmed in legitimacy and private doubt, and your diminishing-returns table survives in direction, but the tribunal of reality did not convict, so the book's claim is best restated as a paradigm in crisis at its leading edge and in its scope rather than one already spent.
- Map vs Territory: the territory is pushing back, but on modern societies broadly, which means your tribunal acquitted the narrower paradigm while leaving open the wider family of ideas; saying so is the kind of honest map-reading your realism asks of you.
- Ascent of the West: Part Two gives you a case for preparing the successor's frame where the old protocol falls silent, not for proclaiming its replacement, and your test "what is lost if it goes?" is already doing quiet work inside the old institutions, in the phone bans and the reversals that appealed to consequence.
- Scalable philosophical infrastructure: scope under leverage is where the pressure is greatest and the outcome data thinnest, so SPI is the natural first ground on which to build, with the four requirements of Chapter XXVIII as its specification.

- The Turn: the imposed reversals of 2025 tore down before building and may have strengthened the old order's hold on those who felt defeated, so turning well, built as an *Aufhebung* that keeps equal dignity and raises it, is the path the verdict favors.

SOURCES

- The Test (this book): the three verdicts, the attribution rules, the decision rule, and the falsifiers, fixed before data
- Chapter XIII (this book): progress-from, reality as tribunal, and the refutation of the accretion picture
- Postscript (this book): the five criteria for comparing moral paradigms, and building before tearing down
- Chapter XV (this book): the meta-paradigm, correctability, the protocol as ratchet, and *Aufhebung*
- Chapter XXII (this book): the matrix and frame of the present paradigm, its shared ontology, and the turn in Gallup's moral-acceptability series
- Chapter XXIII (this book): origins, the 2022 to 2025 reversals, and the borrowed-capital thesis
- Chapter XXIV (this book): institutions, gatekeepers, legitimacy, and the self-correction record
- Chapter XXV (this book): the paradigm in American culture and the cooling of remissions
- Chapter XXVI (this book): proliferating versions, generational adherence, and preference falsification
- Chapter XXVII (this book): normal virtue today, its yield, and the diminishing-returns table re-examined
- Chapter XXVIII (this book): the paradigm under leverage, technology and AGI, and the scope criterion
- Chapter XXIX (this book): the health check of the five reality domains, consistency, simplicity, and the strongest defense

PART THREE



The Next Paradigm

Held at the author's decision. Part Two's verdict (Chapter XXX) is that the present paradigm is adjusting, largely under pressure from outside, with a real crisis in the trust that carries it and in the scope of the questions it can pose, but with no conviction at the tribunal of reality. That is not yet a case for replacing it on the evidence of outcomes, but it is a case for preparing a successor's frame where the paradigm cannot pose the questions, built as a correction that keeps and raises its goods. Whether to write Part Three on those terms is the author's call.

The arc of the moral universe, we are told, bends toward justice. But if moral history is a straight climb, then our ancestors grow more wicked the further back we look, and we, standing at the leading edge, can never be wrong.

Following Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* chapter by chapter, this book argues that morality changes the way science does: through paradigms, normal virtue, anomaly, crisis and revolution. It explains why past moralities were moralities and not sins, and why moral progress lies in correction rather than in any destination.

It then goes beyond Kuhn, into culture, legitimacy, technology, and the theory and ethics of engineered moral change, before turning the whole apparatus on the present paradigm of progress and reaching a verdict by a rule fixed before the evidence was gathered.
