

INSPIRE YOUTH JOURNAL



The 25th Edition

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CAFFEINE: A POWERFUL TOOL FOR ALERTNESS OR A HIDDEN HEALTH RISK?

My Đặng Trà

Caffeine, $C_8H_{10}N_4O_2$, is a white, bitter crystalline purine and an alkaloid, theophylline, which is known as a central nervous system (CNS) stimulant and stands as the most widely consumed psychoactive substance in the world. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, and cacao. It is easy to realize that an increasing number of people, especially the younger generation, consume a significant amount of caffeine (mainly from coffee, tea, and chocolate). Research shows that 75% of the world's population uses a caffeinated product daily. According to the USDA FAS research from September 2025, the world production was 178.7 million 60-kg bags of coffee, while consumption was 180.2 million 60-kg bags, as reported in the ICO Coffee Market Report in July 2025.

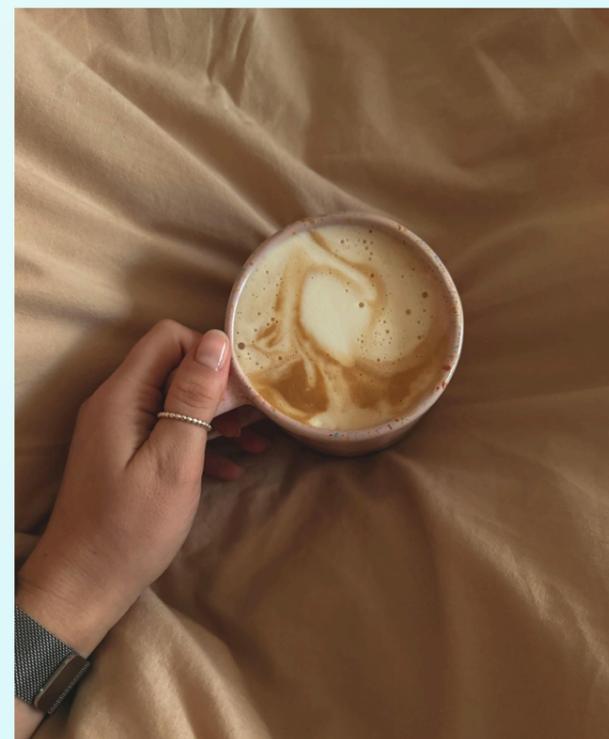
When the body is physically active or overexerted, adenosine, a neurotransmitter that accumulates in the brain, binds to its corresponding receptors to create the tired feeling and send signals to the brain for rest. Caffeine has the same composition as adenosine, so it binds to the receptor without triggering it, keeping you alert. This enhances euphoria and sharpens cognitive reflexes.

People who need to work or think for a long time drink coffee, tea, and eat chocolate to stay active.

Caffeine plays an important role in the modern lifestyle. Not only does it help to increase wakefulness, improve cognition, but it also supports physical performance by utilizing fat as the energy source instead of glycogen in the muscle. Moreover, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) has noted that research on cells and animals shows that caffeine, a kind of phytochemical, helps to control the development of cells and cancer. Besides, caffeine helps to reduce the risk of Parkinson. According to a report from the National Library of Medicine, people who use caffeine regularly have a lower risk of developing Parkinson's disease. For the patient who already has it, caffeine helps to slow the disease process.

It is undeniable that caffeine brings numerous benefits. However, it also offers other adverse effects. Using caffeine to bypass the body's natural need for sleep can cause insomnia, irritability, and chronic anxiety. In some situations, users also experience hand tremors and a rapid heart rate. We can use a small amount of caffeine with almost all different drug interactions without facing any danger. However, if you are using ephedrine, you should not use caffeine because it may cause high blood pressure, a heart attack, or even worse, a stroke.

Ultimately, given the evidence presented, it is obvious that caffeine is a stimulant that brings advantages, but it is also linked to latent risks. Using caffeine as a tool to stay alert is a good idea, but users may struggle with heart problems. So let's learn to use caffeine intelligently to achieve the desired boost in performance while protecting your body from the dangers.



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My Đặng Trà

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SHOULD SOCIETY INVEST MORE IN ART OR IN SCIENCE?

Gia Phong Nguyễn Vũ

The first time I truly saw science, it was as a burst of gold flame in the chemistry lab: a verifiable result from sodium, a fleeting masterpiece. The moment showed me that the beauty of art and the logic of science are not separate realms, but society often portrays them as rivals locked in a zero-sum battle for funding and relevance. Art and science are not rival siblings but rather complementary languages for understanding human experience, and a developing society thrives by reaching fluency and flexibility in both.

Science provides an indispensable language for diagnosing and solving humanity's most pressing existential threats. This was never clearer than in the rapid development of mRNA vaccines during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the pandemic was a global crisis, the scientific language of genetics and immunology had been in development for decades. According to researchers at Johns Hopkins, the fundamental research behind mRNA technology was a painstaking process that was many years in the making, beginning in the 1990s, long before the virus spread. This proves that investment in the basic 'language' of science, even without an immediate application, ultimately arms us to overcome our greatest future challenges. By the same token, science is important because without this 'language,' we would be helpless against things like pandemics and climate change; we would therefore be trying to fight a battle without any weapons. Yet survival alone is not a life worth living — a truth an individual discovers through the second language.

While science may tell us how to solve problems, art explores the reasons why those problems should be solved and gives meaning to our progress. During the same COVID-19 pandemic, this was acutely clear. Science gave us the vaccine, but while immunologists were creating a serum for the body, artists created a balm for the human spirit. A study by University College London, published by the UK Arts Council, confirmed this when it found that people turned to activities like music, reading, and crafts during lockdowns to "manage their emotions," "reduce loneliness," and "make sense of a traumatic experience" (excerpt from the University College London, 2022). Where science protects our body from sources of infection, such as viruses and bacteria, art preserves the mental and emotional health of our collective psyche, proof that both are non-negotiable components of public health. The synergy between the serum and the balm, between data and emotion, is the clearest proof that art and science are not separate fields but the two essential dialects in the language of human survival and flourishing.

The most profound human achievements do not occur when art and science speak in isolation but when their languages merge into a new, more powerful dialect. This synthesis is vividly clear in contemporary architecture, wherein the artistic version is inextricable from engineering science. As discussed in cultural discourse, modern buildings are not just shelters but artistic statements; these were only possible through precise calculations regarding physics and the science of materials. Even our conception of art itself is being reshaped by science. For instance, the latest research in the pages of journals such as Nature Communications Biology employs the tools of neuroscience to scan the brain's creative process, literally mapping the biological underpinnings of aesthetic experience. In both cases, the old boundaries dissolve. Architecture becomes an applied art through scientific means, while the appreciation of art becomes a subject for scientific inquiry. Such synergy proves that the two are not just parallel paths but have become increasingly intertwined on the path of understanding and shaping our world.

That first sodium flame I looked at was data and it was beauty; it was a signal, it was a symphony. A silent lesson in the fact that the most fundamental progress has never been about art versus science, but about learning to walk both paths at once. We've seen that science is the indispensable language for our survival, while art gives meaning to that progress, and their fusion creates the most powerful tool we have to understand. And so, if a society is truly to flourish, it must cultivate not just those who can write the formula but those who can tell its story—and above all, those who know that both are necessary in the writing of the next chapter of our human story.

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ARSENIC: THE "INHERITANCE POWDER" OF THE VICTORIANS

Khánh An Trương

Nineteenth-century Britain was an odd place for arsenic. It was vital to domestic work and industry, yet infamous as the era's most well-known poison. This article explores Victorian arsenic assassinations as social rather than purely technical, events—conditioned by commerce, domestic life, medical uncertainty, and human despair. Through uncovering where arsenic circulated, why it was made a poison of choice, and how its use remade law, medicine, and moral imagination, we uncover a history in which violence lay hidden in plain sight.

1. Arsenic in Everyday Life

In Victorian Britain, Arsenic was not exotic; it was ordinary. Primarily produced from mineral ores as byproducts of metals like copper, arsenic compounds entered daily life through rat poisons, insecticides, pigments, glassmaking, and even some medicinal concoctions. Chemists stocked it openly. Shopkeepers sold it by weight. Families relied on it to exterminate vermin that menaced food supplies and health.

This ubiquity mattered. A substance that lived in kitchens and pantries could pass unnoticed from utility to weapon. The same powder that guaranteed cleanliness and protection from pests could be slipped unnoticeably into a cup of tea. The threat of arsenic lay not only in its toxicity, but in its familiarity. It did not arouse suspicion because it belonged.

2. Why Arsenic Became the Victorian Poison

A number of factors made arsenic particularly well suited for covert killing in the 19th century:

- Sensory subtlety. Many compounds of arsenic could be mixed into food or drink with colorless, odorless and flavorless results. Violence could disguise itself as care.
- Medical ambiguity. The early symptoms—vomiting, diarrhea and stomach pain—were similar to those of routine illnesses like cholera or food poisoning. At a time which lacked advanced diagnostics, death could be attributed to bad luck.
- Delayed certainty. Victims often lingered for days. The slow deterioration blurred distinctions between natural illness and deliberate harm.
- Accessibility. Unlike weapons that required strength or confrontation, arsenic could be administered quietly, repeatedly, and at a distance.

3. The Domestic Sphere and Gendered Violence

But beneath these practical reasons lay a deeper truth: arsenic fit the emotional geography of Victorian life. It thrived in enclosed domestic spaces where power, dependency, and resentment coexisted.

Arsenic assassinations were disproportionately linked to family homes. This was particularly significant for lots of women who were limited by legal, economic, and social constraints. With restricted property rights and limited avenues for independence, some turned to poison as a twisted form of self-empowerment and gaining inheritance.

Acknowledging this context does not romanticize the crimes, but highlights how systemic gender inequality influences violent actions and desperate means. For women caught in abusive relationships or dire financial situations, arsenic provided an escape that society denied them. The tragedy lies in the fact that lives were lost, and for some, murder seemed like the only plausible solution.

Men also used arsenic, often for reasons like inheritance, convenience, or control. Yet the widespread cultural panic surrounding female poisoners reveals Victorian anxieties about invisible rebellion within the home.



ARSENIC: THE "INHERITANCE POWDER" OF THE VICTORIANS

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4. Medicine, Detection, the Law, and the Birth of Forensic Science

The rate of mysterious deaths continued to skyrocket. Doctors and chemists began to develop more reliable methods of detection. These advances are not just a breakthrough in science, but also an insurance to justice and for morals. The ability to prove poisoning in bodily tissues has led to the birth of modern forensic science.

Most notably, many talented individuals worked towards this transformation working in medicine, law and chemistry:

- Mathieu Orfila, often called the father of toxicology, argued that poisons must be studied with proofs and logic, instead of human intuition. His writings help legitimize chemical evidence in legal settings and set the foundation for logic and science to intertwine with the law itself.
- James Marsh, a talented chemist, specifically refined a set of tests that are reliable in revealing small quantities of the sinister poison. Its reliability remained influential in various courts.

Yet even here, the story is human. Families faced exhumations of loved ones. Communities wrestled with the possibility that care had been counterfeit. Justice came at the cost of peace.

Conclusion

Arsenic assassinations in Victorian Britain weren't just crimes of immoral use of chemicals; they were also proof of a social phenomena born from social insecurity, accessibility, gender inequality, and human despair. The seemingly innocent white powder tells the story of an era full of broken trust, care, and the fragile boundaries between help and harm. To study these deaths is to prevent such phenomena as well as various societal issues from happening in the present and the future ahead.

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NARRATIVE ECONOMICS: DO HOME PRICES ALWAYS RISE?

Yen Thy Duong

Why rent when you can own?" "No income? No job? No assets? No problem." These sayings have two similarities: simplicity and contagion. These quotes were heard during the housing bubble, which resulted in the financial crash of 2008: a major event of unemployment, default, misinformation, and leverage.

The question is: can quantitative research reveal the driving factor? No, not well enough. "Narrative economics" is also involved.

Introduction to narrative economics:

Narrative economics, coined by Professor Robert J. Shiller at Yale University, examines the effect of stories as a pivotal driver of events. Shiller describes his phenomenon in his book. Stories are transmissible in a wide variety of forms: songs, word of mouth, or movies. Major economic events like the great depression or the financial crisis are not solely provoked by poor policies or interest rates, but also due to the public discussions that predispose individuals to make decisions accordingly.

The spread of narratives can be depicted by a bell-shaped epidemic curve, which peaks as it gains public attention and then declines when the topic becomes less exciting. Successful narratives will efficiently convey complex ideas into simple language that allows comprehensibility and sparks human interest.

Let's look at narrative economics at play. The story of the Laffer curve exemplifies the spread of the application of tax cuts to incentivize higher production. Although the original core idea was derived from Adam Smith's philosophy in the eighteenth century, it only went viral when Arthur Laffer visualized it by drawing the curve on a napkin. Such clear-cut illustrations are persuasive for audiences unfamiliar with economics, thus gaining contagion, shaping public opinion, and influencing tax policy.

With this framework, it is now possible to examine how narratives shaped the United States housing bubble before 2008.

The 2000-2007 U.S housing bubble

In the early 2000s, investment banks created "packages" of mortgage loans and sold them to investors. To gain huge profits, credit agencies issued all the AAA ratings, which refer to low-risk investments, instead of honest evaluations of the true level of risk.

At the same time, lending standards loosened in the financial system. Regardless of borrowers' creditworthiness, home loans were offered to practically anyone. This pushed the number of mortgages lent higher and reinforced speculative behaviour -- the act of buying houses not to live in but to resell quickly at higher prices to gain profit.

Adjustable-rate mortgages, which initially offer lower interest rates before adjusting back to higher rates, began to reset. At the same time, overconstruction of houses put downward pressure on home prices. Borrowers experienced negative equity, meaning they owed more on mortgages than their homes were worth, and thus were unable to refinance debts and stepped into default; unemployment rose; investment banks lost profits. This gave rise to a salient economic downturn in 2008.

Was the rise of speculation purely profit-driven? This economic fluctuation can also be understood from a psychological perspective - the epidemics of narratives that fueled decisions.

"Home prices always rise."



NARRATIVE ECONOMICS: DO HOME PRICES ALWAYS RISE?

Yen Thy Duong

Today, home prices are still expected to rise. As explained by Shiller in *Narrative Economics* (2019), stories about rising property prices sparked public interest during the early days of media development. Although the speculative trend was predominantly visible in congested inner cities, individuals in rural areas also assumed similar movements. This generated expectations that eventually widely boosted home prices.

The narrative contagion also soared due to the rise of home price indexes for existing properties to readers. In 1974, newspapers started publishing the National Association of Realtors' median price of existing homes. Regular announcements of notable movements in the housing market further built up public interest, making these stories more contagious than ever.

First-class ratings acted as an input to the narrative of a potential economy filled with low-risk investments; the elevated confidence led to continuous expectations of rising home prices. Additionally, successful investment performances incentivised investors to join speculative markets, thus pushing home prices higher. Shiller contended that investors were less calculating and more drawn to narratives of recent successes.

The role of media and the American Dream

The "American Dream", an idea that has historically promoted homeownership, has also shaped the behaviour of citizens. In 1931, President Herbert Hoover expressed that homeownership "goes to the roots of family life, public morals and standards of living." This deep-rooted mindset has been passed on transgenerationally. A home was fundamental to the American way of life and identity. This indicator of success fueled the surge in demand for homeownership.

In 2012, the Wall Street Journal launched a section called "Mansion". The articles depict the picture of inequality: wealthy homeowners and luxurious lifestyles. The immense anger of the public afterward underscored the narrative that home is one's identity. The media has supported this narrative even after the crisis, which continues to influence decisions in upcoming events. Notably, 2012 saw the first sharp rise in home prices after the financial crash.

This dynamic is salient for us during the era of digital media and algorithms. Social media platforms continuously increase our exposure to narratives of homeownership and extravagant living by transmitting and repeating the narratives at a faster rate, with minimal costs, and to a mass audience. Accordingly, a surge in anxiety and time pressure due to social comparison fuels young individuals to attempt to secure homeownership, gain financial stability, and be as extravagant as their online models. This mindset can generate speculative trends for home prices and expectations.

What should we do next?

It is of paramount importance that we understand the essential impact of narrative economics in driving events. Although challenges are involved in studying stories of the public, it remains a fundamental indicator for analysis. As this field develops, more effective methods can be found to analyze and control the narrative contagion rate (coordinating the media, for instance).

In the contemporary AI bubble, where technology acts as a tool to accelerate the contagion rate of narratives, we are affected by these epidemics the most. Stories do not disappear. They mutate. Thus, understanding narrative economics is no longer optional. As a form of financial self-defense, be the first to take action: acknowledge the impact of narratives and predict the upcoming events based on the current trends on social media.

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TADAO ANDO: THE CULTURAL TRANSLATOR

Kelly Goh

Stepping into the Church of Light in Osaka, visitors experience more than a thick concrete wall bearing a luminous cross; they experience the dialogue between light and space, spoken in the language of architecture. Such conversation evokes introspection and transcendence without ever having to use words. It is this ability to communicate in a striking way that defines Tadao Ando as not just an architect but a translator of Japanese cultural values into a global architectural language. His work bridges the East and the West by reinterpreting and incorporating Japanese philosophies of minimalism and tranquility while adopting Western principles of functionality to create serene environments.

Ando's architectural roots lie deeply within his own cultural heritage. He draws upon Zen philosophy, focusing on silence, impermanence, and contemplation. The Church of Light is left unadorned, using only the most fundamental components such as concrete boxes and intersecting planes. In the same vein, his Koshino House encapsulates Zen principles through its simplicity and harmonious integration with nature. These elements are inherently derived from local cultural values, yet they are broken down into abstract forms — raw concrete walls, sharp geometry, and carefully choreographed light — that can be appreciated by a global audience, even by viewers with no prior knowledge of Japan's aesthetic heritage.

This ability to translate tradition into a universal idiom becomes even more evident in Ando's international projects. The Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth employs water and concrete to create an atmosphere of serenity uncommon in metropolitan America. Through expansive glazing, Ando blurs the boundaries between inside and outside, between urbanism and nature. At Punta della Dogana in Venice, he demonstrates a delicate balance between historic Italian architecture and the striking minimalism that he is known for. To show such respect for the original design while integrating a signature style is not an easy feat. In both projects, Ando carries forward principles rooted in his culture, yet he presents them in ways that foreign audiences can grasp and inhabit. In this way, his buildings act as links to different cultural landscapes.

Ando's role as a translator extends beyond culture into the environmental realm as well. His use of existing natural elements such as light and water is not merely aesthetic but ecological. His designs fostered sustainability long before it became an architectural buzzword. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Naoshima, where his installations and museums transformed a declining island town into a global hub for art and ecological reflection. Here, Ando demonstrates that architecture is able to redefine both cultural and environmental identity, infusing local tradition into a building that attracts worldwide attention and rejuvenation.

Tadao Ando's work reveals how space can at once be cultural memory and universal conversation. Through the disciplined use of concrete, water, and light, he transposes Zen principles of silence, impermanence, and meditation into a common language comprehensible across borders. His global projects affirm that architecture can be a mediator between two contrasting histories, and his project on Naoshima shows its ability to revitalize environment and community. In this way, Ando positions architecture as an act of translation: a practice that preserves identity while reshaping it for new contexts, ensuring its resonance within an interconnected world.

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DRIVING WITHOUT DRIVERS: THE RISE OF SELF-DRIVING CARS

Ha Do

As the signal shifts to red, the car slows down on its own. No hands on the wheel. No eyes on the road. No foot on the pedal. Yet the vehicle moves smoothly forward when the light turns green.

Such scenes are becoming increasingly omnipresent on modern streets. Traditional drivers, shaped by years of experience and human judgement, are gradually decreasing as autonomous technologies take on primary control. What once belonged solely to science fiction - autonomous vehicles had been confined to the screen - has now moved into real-world deployment.

From human drivers to intelligent systems:

An autonomous vehicle is a type of automobile designed to operate with minimal or no human involvement. It performs the same fundamental functions of a conventional car and additionally takes on tasks like sensing the environment, analyzing data, controlling the movements, and navigating from the start to the destination.

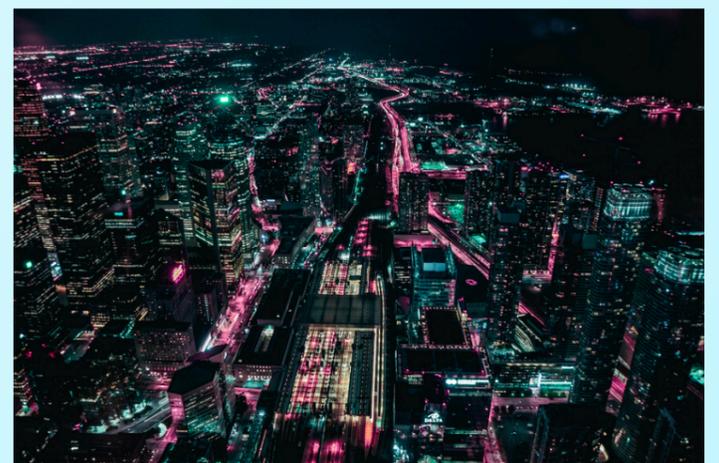
In this day and age, self-driving cars are deemed to be a revolutionary milestone in contemporary transportation, which contributes to redefine human mobility today.

This means of transportation has globally gained substantial interest from the communities. The growth of driverless cars occurs as autonomous driving technology is still being tested and improved, resulting in the rising public acceptance and long-term/future potential of autonomous transportation.

How self-driving cars see and decide:

Overall, the primary difference between conventional vehicles and autonomous cars lies in the technology. Self-driving transportation is equipped with a combination of sophisticated sensors, prebuilt maps, navigation and communication systems, and artificial intelligence algorithms that help them perceive their surroundings and make immediate decisions in all situations. The first stage in this process is observation, in which the sensors and cameras are indispensable. The two cardinal factors include LIDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) and integrated photonics. In detail, LIDAR works by sending out light beams to determine the distance and shape of the objects. Concurrently, integrated photonics controls these beams on compact optical chips, improving image resolution while eliminating bulky mechanical parts. Subsequently, the collected data is transmitted to the processing unit so as to plot the safe driving route.

The Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) has established a classification standard comprising six levels of automation, ranging from manual to automatic operation. For level 0, the driver is fully responsible for control of all aspects of the vehicles. As the levels increase, vehicles incorporate progressively more advanced automation. Eventually, at level 5 - full driving automation - the vehicle doesn't rely on humans to operate the controls. This is the only level at which a vehicle is considered fully autonomous under every circumstance. Nonetheless, to date, no vehicle has achieved this level.



DRIVING WITHOUT DRIVERS: THE RISE OF SELF-DRIVING CARS

Ha Do

Promise and price of autonomy:

Self-driving cars offer an array of indisputable advantages. One of the most outstanding benefits is their accessibility. Autonomous vehicles enable elderly individuals and passengers with disabilities to travel easily without any external assistance. What is more, driverless cars are anticipated to, eventually, be safer. According to research from Michigan University, 42,795 people lost their lives in vehicle crashes in 2022, with 94% attributed to human error. By removing this factor, autonomous vehicles can significantly reduce, if not eliminate, fatalities. Evidently, Waymo, a popular car brand, also reported that autonomous vehicles resulted in 88% fewer serious injury crashes and 93% fewer crashes involving pedestrians. Smooth ride experiences and interactions with other autonomous vehicles using vehicle-to-vehicle (V2V) features are also known to have positive effects. With cutting-edge situational awareness and real-time data processing, autonomous vehicles can identify dangers in close proximity, respond to the change of conditions, and adhere to safety protocols. Self-driving vehicles also make a vehicle time-efficient. Self-driving capabilities mitigate delays caused by poor driving practice or suboptimal route planning. The optimization of patterns and flow can shorten commuting time, reduce tardiness, and alleviate congestion in metropolitan areas. At last, carbon emissions can be reduced due to the skillful driving behaviors and the types of energy used to power these vehicles.

Driverless vehicles, on the other hand, do have several formidable challenges. Due to the fast pace of technological advancement, it is evident that there are still many issues that can be addressed. In fact, driverless systems can still be vulnerable to malfunctions, software bugs, and system crashes where even the slightest mistakes can hinder safety. According to the Guardian news report, the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has recorded instances where Tesla cars drove through red traffic lights and moved in the wrong direction when performing a lane change. This shows the existing limitations of present self-driving technology. Another valid concern is safety and accountability. If there is an accident happening, who should be held responsible? The manufacturer or the vehicle owner? Liability in the event of an accident remains unclear, and has potential to spark widespread social controversy. Another point is that the growth of driverless cars may disrupt the labor market. Job displacement happens in driving-related sectors such as fuel sales, transportation services, and car insurance, thereby increasing the risk of economic instability. Plus, the cost of a self-driving car has to be very high because of its top-notch technologies.

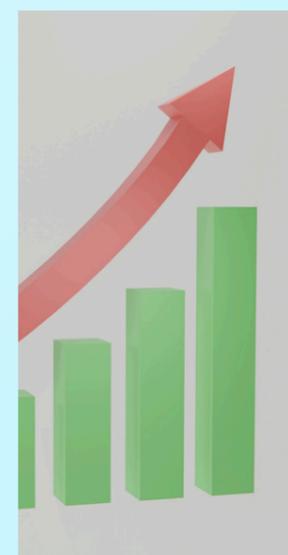
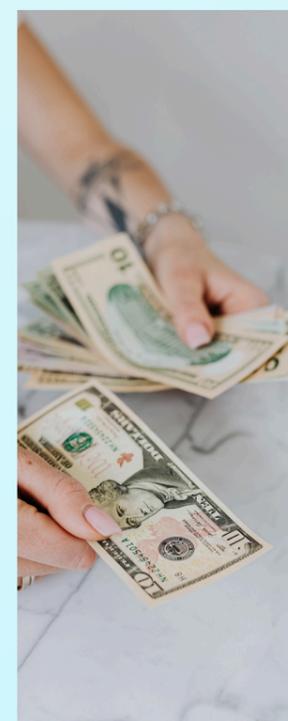
Driving Into an Uncertain Future:

In the future, autonomous vehicles will have a prominent role in the transportation infrastructure. According to a University of Michigan report, the U.S. autonomous vehicle market is projected to grow by \$75 billion by 2030, an increase of 350% from 2023. This is a result of the surge in public interest. Technology is improving everyday, but laws and public trust have yet to catch up. The future of technology not only depends on the speed of development, but also, crucially, its acceptance by humans.

To conclude, driverless cars are a promising yet uncertain innovation of the future. Thus, society should not rush to jump on the bandwagon without careful consideration. We must ask: Is society racing towards convenience and overlooking the responsibilities of consequences?

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TIKTOK AND VIETNAMESE GEN Z: A CREATIVE PLATFORM SHAPING IDENTITY AND CULTURAL WAVES

Hoàng Linh

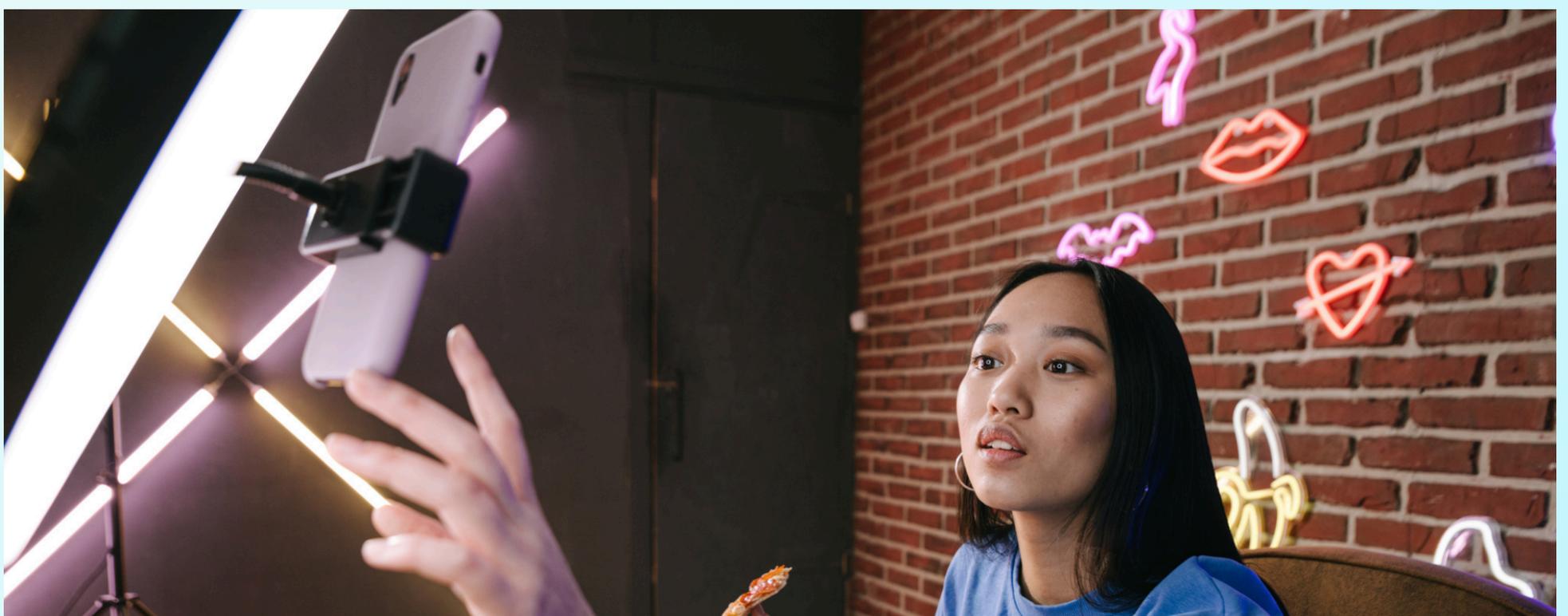
In the era of rapidly advancing 4.0 technology, social media has spread widely, and TikTok has emerged as an undeniable phenomenon. This short-video app has appeared in every online nook and cranny, gradually becoming an essential part of daily life for teenagers in Vietnam, shaping their ways of thinking, communicating, and entertaining themselves. This story of TikTok, however, is not entirely a rosy picture; besides providing numerous creative and logical opportunities for showing off their own stories, it also brings about a great number of considerable negative implications.

The crucial questions are: What impacts is the TikTok platform currently having on the culture of Vietnamese teenagers, and is this practice a deviation from traditional norms or a necessary evolutionary step?

TikTok is more than just a 15-60 second entertainment application; it is a powerful global cultural platform where a diverse community creates and spreads new trends and experiences. Based on statistics, the application has reached 500 million users worldwide, with the Vietnamese market being a significant contributor. Recent market research shows that most TikTok users in Vietnam are aged between 16 and 30, with the highest percentage being in the 18 to 24 group. This highlights that TikTok is a cultural laboratory where young people are forging their personal identities and generating massive influence.

The core characteristics of TikTok present both advantages and risks. The Short Video format offers easy accessibility but carries the danger of shallow, fragmented content, making it difficult to convey complete information. The Personalization Algorithm optimizes the user experience but is likely to cause the "Information Bubble" phenomenon, limiting informational diversity. The "Trend" and "Challenge" culture fosters community participation but risks mass imitation and the spread of harmful content. Despite these challenges, Vietnamese youth are actively mastering these tools.

TikTok has profoundly reshaped the culture of Vietnamese teenagers toward openness, speed, and creativity. The platform is regarded as a public stage for young people to display their talents, share opinions, and build a strong personal identity, allowing them to find their voice and gain validation from a wider community. Concurrently, TikTok promotes a new communication style that is concise, visual, and highly infectious. This is evidenced by the emergence of "TikTok-speak" and viral memes, creating a dynamic shared language for Generation Z.



TIKTOK AND VIETNAMESE GEN Z: A CREATIVE PLATFORM SHAPING IDENTITY AND CULTURAL WAVES

Hoàng Linh

The most valuable contribution lies in the role of young people in the recreation and modernization of traditional culture. Vietnamese teenagers are not merely copying global trends; they are actively using TikTok to honor and revitalize local culture. For instance, the Áo Dài (Vietnamese long dress) and other ethnic garments frequently appear in transition or fashion challenge videos, making traditional attire feel accessible and contemporary, while spreading its beauty internationally. Traditional music, such as folk songs or *cải lương*, is remixed or used as background audio, serving as the most effective way for this generation to promote and renew national musical heritage. Vlogging about local cuisine and scenic spots has also become a powerful tool for cultural marketing, fostering national pride.

The cultural practice of Vietnamese teenagers on TikTok is neither a regression nor merely a negative influence. Instead, it represents a generational shift and an inevitable evolutionary step in the digital age. The platform has shifted the cultural norm from discretion and familial priority to open self-expression and peer connection. This is how Vietnamese youth are mastering technology to pursue unlimited creativity, redefine Vietnamese identity in a global context, and enrich their cultural heritage by translating it into accessible digital content. The greatest challenge is not the platform itself, but ensuring young people are equipped with critical thinking skills to navigate the "information bubble" and utilize TikTok's powerful reach for healthy, constructive, and cultural purposes. TikTok is a reflection of the outstanding dynamism and adaptability of Vietnamese youth in the age of AI and age of AI and innovation.

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL DRAWBACKS OF SPACE TOURISM

Harshitha J

Space tourism has seen a major increase in popularity in 2025. From the public spectacle of Katy Perry going to space at the start of the year to its close with the first-ever wheelchair user reaching space, the industry has demonstrated its rapid global rise. However, this growth has been met with immense ethical backlash. Untrained civilians suiting up to reach the stars is no longer a far-off idea, but where do the moral boundaries of space tourism lie?

Can humanity's pursuit of exploration be balanced with the principles of sustainability?

Environmental impacts:

The vast majority of the global population will never come close to participating in space tourism, yet they will still bear its environmental consequences.

The emissions associated with human spaceflight are immense. A single hour of space travel can result in over 1,500 kilograms of CO₂ emissions. To put this into perspective: this is 650 times greater than that of conventional human activity, raising concerns about the sustainability of space tourism.

The carbon footprint of a single spaceflight can dwarf that of traditional air travel, with emissions reaching the stratosphere. In addition, space tourism also generates space debris, which places operational space satellites at risk of collision. Sustainable practices are crucial to mitigate the risk of further damage to the environment, ensuring the long-term viability of space exploration and satellite infrastructure.

Social Implications:

Social equity is the central concern surrounding space tourism. Positioned between luxury consumption and the pursuit of scientific ambition, space tourism risks potentially diverting attention and resources away from crucial scientific endeavors and educational initiatives. The amount needed for a single trip to space could fund multiple educational space exploration and learning opportunities, rather than simply serving as a luxury experience. This transition towards profit-driven trips could stunt scientific progress and shift priorities away from scientific discovery.

Mitigating the environmental impacts and social implications:

Environmental strategies:

Mitigation begins with minimizing launches, adopting sustainable technologies, and most importantly, aligning with the national and international guidelines that prioritize environmental safety.

Focusing on developing more efficient engines and using renewable energy sources could work towards mitigating the environmental impacts. Moving toward green propellants could reduce carbon emissions, and active space debris removal technologies help us preserve the environment.

Social strategies:

The social implications of space tourism can be mitigated by achieving a balance between commercialization and scientific research priorities. Educative initiatives can help this alongside promoting public awareness of the drawbacks of space tourism. Including communities in developing innovative solutions, alongside implementing international policies that prioritize scientific goals over short-term benefits, may eventually make space tourism a practice that supports global development and a shared sense of responsibility.

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A GENERATION WITHOUT PEACE: CHILDREN RAISED IN PERMANENT CONFLICT

Olivia Nguyen

Introduction

Fatima (character's name has been changed) woke up in Palestine, and she had breakfast then went to school. Her day seemed to be normal like every child in the world's but it wasn't. When she was in the playground, talking during break time - a bomb exploding sound went off. This sound had become familiar with all children here, yet Fatima still felt really scared. She is one of the children who lives in the war time. Her whole childhood, she had not known or experienced peace. Day by day living in war, Fatima has some unusual symptoms in her psychology. Her story leads us to think about a question:

What does peace mean to a generation that has never experienced it?

Defining "Permanent conflict"

Beyond Active War

In 1953, the Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann wrote, "War is no longer declared, only continued," but she might well have written these words today. Beyond the active war, there's permanent conflict, a lasting state of war with no end in sight. These wars are usually situations of ongoing tension that may escalate at any moment, similar to the Cold War.

However, "permanent conflict" (continuous conflict), on the other hand, cannot be identified with "endless fighting." Conflict is described as a state of tension that exists at several different levels, namely political, economic, cultural, and so on, which can be latent, that is, not necessarily manifested as fighting. Endless fighting, on the other hand, is actual fighting, using armed activity.

Academic Framework

To academically assess the situation, we can use Johan Galtung's negative peace vs. positive peace. Galtung had some ideas about peace that were different from others. He said that peace is not just the absence of war, but also the absence of violence and injustice. Negative peace versus positive peace. With negative peace, he described the state of peace as the absence of war. He also said that social justice is what positive peace is about. This provided an analytical tool to criticize societies that did not wage war. This method showed that some societies that seemed peaceful also had some hidden or low-level violence. However, choosing a broad concept of peace was not without problems. The sentence said that peace could mean the same thing as a good life, and that would make it hard to understand. Galtung's last work was about peace. He said that peace is not just the absence of war, but also the presence of four things: helping people who have been hurt by violence, making people who have fought with each other forgive and cooperate, making sure that everyone has the same rights and opportunities, and respecting and celebrating the differences and similarities among people.



A GENERATION WITHOUT PEACE: CHILDREN RAISED IN PERMANENT CONFLICT

Olivia Nguyen

The generation that hasn't known what peace is.

This is an interview between with a fifteen-year-old Gazan Miar conducted by journalist Mohammed Alshurafa:

Interviewer: "How was your experience during the war?"

Miar: "It was the most difficult experience in my life. I was expecting to die at any moment. I was worried about my friends too."

Interviewer: "Do you have sisters and brothers?"

Miar: "Yes, I have four sisters, three younger than me and one older."

Interviewer: "Were they scared too?"

Miar: "They were crying all the time; they never witnessed a war like this one"

Interviewer: "How many wars have you witnessed?"

Miar: "All the wars, but I am very aware of the 2014 war and this one (referring to the May 2021 war). I was very young in the past."

Interviewer: "How did you feel after the war ended?"

Miar: "I wish this war never happened. Many people I knew are dead. All the streets are destroyed. It is very sad. The library was also destroyed. I used to go there every once in a while and buy novels and other things."

Interviewer: "Are you scared now?"

Miar: "Not really, not as during the war. But after the war, every loud sound I hear, I think it's an airstrike. My sister once dropped something on the floor, and I thought it was an explosion."

In areas like the Gaza Strip where children start witnessing violence at early ages, the consequences are deeper and more lasting. During the eleven days of escalated hostilities in May 2021, 66 children were killed, 470 were injured, 5,400 children lost their homes, 72,000 were displaced to UNRWA schools or relatives homes, and 400,000 had limited access to clean water due to the damage of wells, groundwater, desalination plants and sewage treatment plants. Evidence from a Child Protection Rapid Assessment conducted after the 2014 war points to significant behavior changes because of conflict-related psychosocial distress. All forms of violence—whether direct or structural—have significant consequences on early childhood development, ranging from reduced earning potential to limited psychosocial development and harmful beliefs about the use of violence to resolve conflict. Writers from Cure Violence Global stated: "The sooner the violence in Gaza ends (both structural and direct), the sooner the healing process can begin and the greater the chances are that the children will grow up healthier and more resilient."

Redefining peace for the next generation

Peace can be reframed for the next generation with the aim of moving the focus from the mere absence of conflict to a paradigm that promotes inclusivity and responsibility in the areas of equity, human rights, cyber responsibility, and grassroots activism. By these means, youth can be leaders through education and technology as they make decisions and take actions in their daily lives. Peacebuilding is no longer confined to negotiation rooms; it's in classrooms, code, labs, policy hubs, and day-to-day life. The youth of today aren't asking for permission to lead. They're already leading, and the question is, are we ready to innovate with them, or do we risk being left behind?



A GENERATION WITHOUT PEACE: CHILDREN RAISED IN PERMANENT CONFLICT

Olivia Nguyen

Conclusion

After the incident, Fatima comes home as usual. The road, the walls, the sounds—remains the same. There is no point in the day that suggests this is not an ordinary day. Most people would say she is barely surviving.. For her, this is what living is.

Peace, when talked about, is an abstraction. It resides in speeches and talks, far away from the place where children sleep, calculated by the number of ceasefires, not by the number of nights without listening or days without danger. The question isn't whether this generation deserves peace. It's whether the world is ready for the kind of peace they will demand.

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#FREESCHLEP: HOW SCHLEP BECAME ROBLOX'S MOST HATED PLAYER OVERNIGHT

Ngọc Bình An Nguyễn

Roblox, a massive online platform with over millions of games for users to play games and participate in engaging experiences, is forever going to be in the community's hearts. Roblox shaped the childhood of over thousands of kids who grew up playing iconic games like Natural Disaster Survival, Adopt Me or Work at a Pizza Place, all within the platform. Just looking at these games sends waves of nostalgic feelings to over 79.5 million daily active users, all of whom love the game and the community.

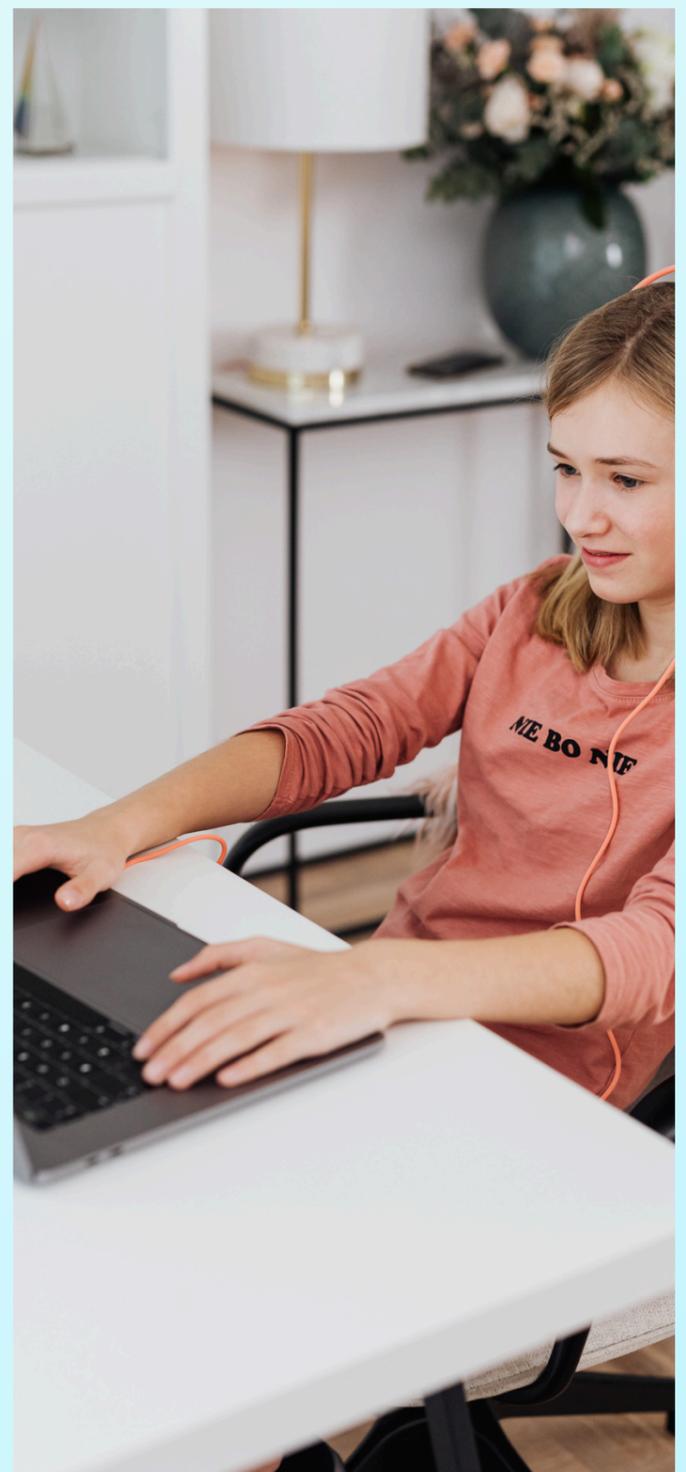
However, Roblox is not all rainbows and sunshine.

Schlep, a Roblox adult user, was a victim of grooming on the platform as a child and actually attempted to commit suicide. In the hospital, as he said in a video, his mother had contacted Roblox about the grooming. Roblox had brushed her off, and the predator went on to groom more minors before he got banned years later. Schlep wanted to help make Roblox a safer platform for children. Creating a team that faked being minors to "rage-bait" predators, Schlep managed to cooperate with law enforcement, leading to at least six felony arrests of online predators. Schlep continuously says how Roblox fails to protect the minors on their platform by claiming that their games are safe, while they are actually not.

Instead of thanking Schlep for his efforts, Roblox permanently terminated Schlep's account on August 9th, 2025 and sent the creator a Cease and Desist letter saying that the platform would pursue legal action if he ever played the game again. The platform also released statements arguing that "vigilante" actions violate their Terms of Service, interfering with official investigations and creating an unsafe environment.

The ban caused the entire internet to spiral. The hashtag #FreeSchlep was trending and Roblox lost over 12 million dollars. The media criticized Roblox's "Child Safety Policies", highlighting the unsafeness of the platform. Many people released posts painting Schlep as the hero and Roblox as the villain. On August 15th, Schlep announced his intentions to sue the game and that he had hired a legal team to fight the accusations that the platform put out against him. Popular youtuber Kreekcraft and 5 other youtubers, all who have a channel associated with Roblox, announced that they were leaving the official Roblox Star Program in August 2025. Even the popular youtuber Law By Mike, with over 16 million subscribers on his main Youtube channel, announced his partnership with the legal team representing Schlep on September 1 to sue Roblox. Qatar, Louisiana, Kentucky, Texas, Iowa, and Tennessee have all sued the online gaming platform.

On November 18th, 2025, Roblox added a new feature that required players to submit a selfie or ID of themselves, which would be reviewed by AI to estimate the player's age. Many people submitted a photo of their faces, because the alternative was losing their Roblox account, the account that contained their entire childhood on one screen. Roblox stated that on January 1st, 2026, this verification would be mandatory for every single player.



#FREESCHLEP: HOW SCHLEP BECAME ROBLOX'S MOST HATED PLAYER OVERNIGHT

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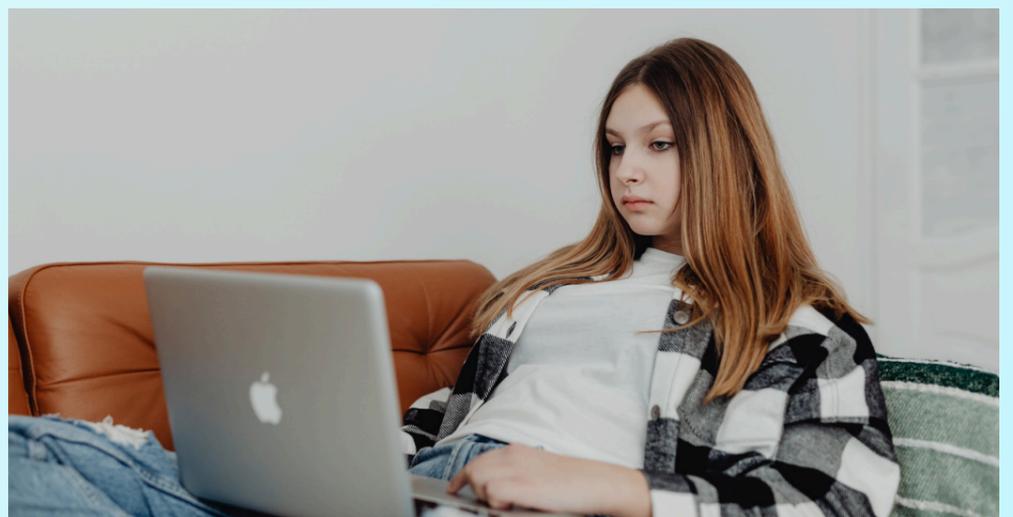
At once, the narrative shifted for the media. Lots of people, mostly kids, start criticizing and getting angry at Schlep, blaming him for the possible termination of their favorite game. Schlep received many death threats because of the accusations. Schlep had to repeat his point many times. He had been against the update from the very moment it was released.

Schlep stated how AI usually gets the age wrong. This was evident when many players reported about getting put into the wrong age group. Also, many predators could just buy an account below 17 or get their younger relatives to scan for them, and they would be able to access the younger groups much more easily. Still, many blamed Schlep.

Currently, both the media and the legal battle for Child Safety Policies on the gaming platform Roblox have two sides. One side wants to protect their memories and to return Roblox to its original state. The other side wants to sue Roblox, and to protect Schlep and minors on the platform from online predators. The choice is hard, but the safety of minors hangs in the balance.

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CAN DEMOCRACY SURVIVE ALGORITHMIC POWER?

Ingrid Tang

In late 2025, liberal democracies accelerated the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into governance. As a result, predictive policing tools, algorithmic risk scoring in immigration, AI content moderation, and automated assessments became institutionalized instead of experimental like they had been previously. In December 2025, the U.S. federal government issued an Executive Order titled “Ensuring a National Policy Framework for Artificial Intelligence,” aiming to centralize and constrain state-level AI regulatory efforts in the name of national competitiveness. This signals a federal effort to shape AI policy. Thus, a question is raised: can democratic governance remain legitimate when AI is operationally embedded?

Democratic theory traditionally assumes that political authority is exercised through transparent rules and contestable decisions. Citizens may disagree with outcomes, but legitimacy rests on the belief that decisions are explainable and revisable. However, algorithmic governance challenges this assumption, as AI systems often do not just execute policy but also classify and anticipate the behavior of associated parties. When visibility in public discourse is influenced heavily by predictive models, power may operate before citizens act, rather than after and in response to their actions.

This shift marks a departure from classical conceptions of political authority as reactive, meaning that political authority intervenes preemptively before rule-breaking or any claims-making. When categorizing politics, risk is likely to replace responsibility in what is considered central. This undermines the liberal idea of the autonomous citizen, one who is judged according to actions taken under known rules. Instead, we observe a risk of individuals being governed as aggregates of correlations and historical data. Not only does this infringe on individual independence, but it also may reinforce existing biases embedded within past data, reproducing inequalities for particular groups of people.

Michel Foucault famously argued that modern power operates not primarily through law or violence, but through surveillance and normalization. Though Foucault spoke intensively about prisons and schools, his insights extend beyond these spheres. AI systems help establish norms, as in what counts as “suspicious,” “high risk,” “dangerous,” and “superior,” which shapes behavioral norms, quietly pressuring populations to conform to them. Crucially—and also aligning with Foucault’s beliefs—this form of power doesn’t announce itself as political because it appears technical and objective, distanced from potentially inflammatory views. This insulation makes algorithmic power difficult to resist because it presents itself as neutral or even beneficial. These recent events expose how easily democratic states adopt such systems without democratic deliberation. Many AI governance frameworks have been introduced through regulatory bodies rather than legislatures, so public debate lags behind implementation. This raises a problem of legitimacy: even if algorithmic tools improve efficiency, they may do so at the cost of political agency. Citizens can contest laws, but how does one contest a risk score?

Defenders of algorithmic governance argue that democracy must adapt to complexity. Human decision-making, they claim, is biased, slow, and inconsistent. AI promises fairness through standardization. Yet, many political theorists strive to remind us that fairness does not equate to accuracy. A system can be statistically efficient whilst being politically unjust, especially if the governed cannot understand or influence its operation. In aggregate, democratic legitimacy requires more than good outcomes because it also requires participation and accountability.

The deeper danger here is normalization. Once predictive governance becomes completely routine, it reshapes our expectations of what government is for. Politics may shift from collective decision-making to a technocratic management of risk. This may hollow out democracy, not necessarily through brute authoritarian takeover, but by displacing the initial purpose quietly. Power may still be labelled as formally democratic but actually substantively insulated from public control.



CAN DEMOCRACY SURVIVE ALGORITHMIC POWER?

Ingrid Tang

These issues have led to contemporary responses. In the United States, states such as California passed laws like the Transparency in Frontier Artificial Intelligence Act in 2025 (taking effect in January 2026), requiring major AI developers to publish risk assessments and documentation on AI safety, while federal-level executive directives sought to preempt state authority over AI rules. This act establishes whistleblower protections and applies to companies with significant computational footprints and revenue, including major AI firms, imposing civil penalties for non-compliance.

Additionally, Texas enacted the Texas Responsible Artificial Intelligence Governance Act, establishing a state advisory council to monitor AI use within state agencies and recommending legislative updates. It also prohibits the use of AI to discriminate against protected classes or facilitate violence or self-harm. However, these regulations have been placed in doubt by the aforementioned executive order signed by President Trump on December 11, 2025.

Ultimately, the question isn't whether AI can be used in governance but who governs when the governance itself becomes automated through the use of AI.

The transition from 2025 to 2026 may be remembered for revolutionary developments in global politics, but it may also be remembered as a threshold moment when democracies began to trade deliberation for predication. Reclaiming democratic agency becomes far harder than surrendering it after this trade is made.

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MASS AND NEW: HOW NEW MEDIA ERODES THE OLD MEDIA'S POWER

Lan Dao

Mass Media's One-Way Communication and Structural Power

Mass media has long functioned as the primary means of communicating with large and mostly anonymous audiences. Nowadays, it holds digital convergence by integrating various digital technologies and platforms, including television, newspapers, radio, magazine, and online news, into a unified media ecosystem. However, the fundamental dynamic remains largely unchanged: audiences only engage in "the activities of listening and watching".

Mass media's enduring structural dominance shapes public discourse through ownership, agenda-setting, and integration with digital spaces. The media industry's structure and globalization shows a foundational snapshot of mass media's power and strategies. Big companies own most media, like Disney or News Corp, which control TV channels, papers, and even apps, leading to fewer voices and a stronger focus on making money.

Agenda-Setting and Cultivation Effects of Mass Media

Mass media's one-way communication sets a clear distinction between producers and audiences, limiting opportunities for critical participation. According to the cultivation theory, repeated and long-term exposure to the media portrays audiences' perceptions of reality. Over time, this becomes normalised as truth.

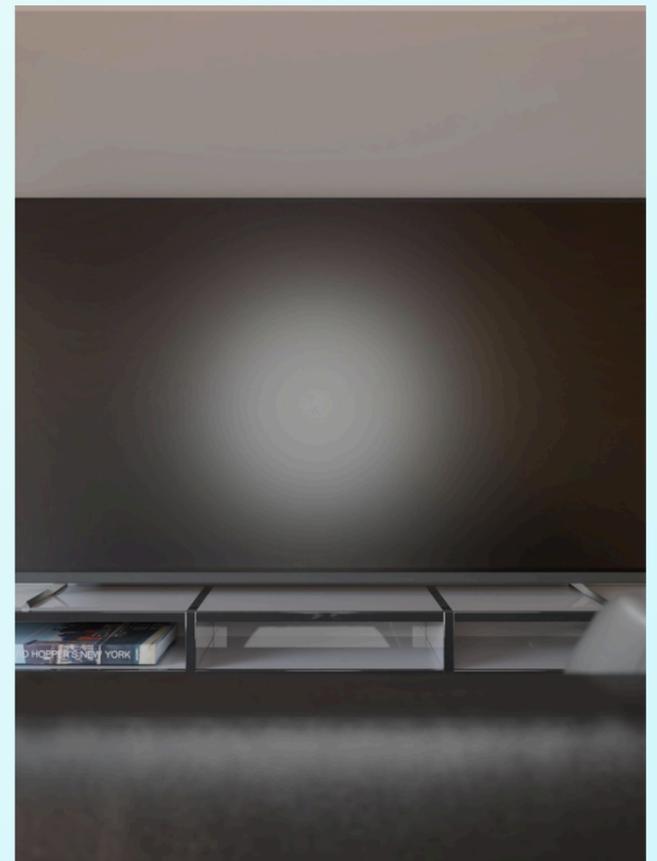
The British film industry between 2006 and 2016 is a perfect example of this. Records show that only 0.5% of around 45,000 roles were played by Black British actors. When Black characters did appear, there were many recurring racialized tropes, most of which can be traced back to colonialism, historic anti-blackness, and the legacy of slavery. Research indicates that 64% of UK crime films have featured roles for Black actors. Stereotypes proliferated across genres with the intention of dehumanizing and erasing black people. The "jezebel" trope in *Harlem Nights*, the "angry sassy black woman" in *Norbit*, the "angry black man" in *Four Brothers*, and "the gangster" archetype in *The American*.

The agenda-setting theory argues that the media determines what we talk about and whose voice gets heard. Public estimates of Black criminality, for instance, are inflated by 20% compared to actual statistics. At a time when mass media enjoyed unchallenged dominance, the British film industry exploited its agenda-setting and cultivation power to recycle centuries-old anti-Black tropes, deliberately worsening existing racial inequality.

With its one-way content, mass media shapes the collective perception, which can sometimes lead to the amplification of inequality, stereotyping, and cultural homogenization.

The Rise of New Media and the Active User

New media refers to a digital form of communication that relies on computer technology for creation, distribution, and interaction. Unlike mass media's largely passive audiences, new media fosters active users—individuals that make choices about how they use the media, actively interpret media content, and what content they consume.



MASS AND NEW: HOW NEW MEDIA ERODES THE OLD MEDIA'S POWER

Lan Dao

In the late 1900s, after the Cold War, as society craved personal freedom and global links, demand grew for customized content that reflected diverse identities. This shift gave rise to the “prosumer” and “produser” idea: individuals who both consume and create media. Audiences no longer watch; they participate. This empowers active users to challenge mass media, letting anyone craft the story, contributing to media convergence.

Media theory traditionally examines three main parts together: production, content, and audiences. Mass communication studies treat these parts as a straight-line chain: messages get produced, turned into content, and sent to passive audiences in a one-way flow. However, cultural and critical approaches stress the interrelations of these elements in the (re)production of cultural meanings. This framework laid the groundwork for understanding new media, which connects these parts together, empowering active audiences to tell their own story and shape their own identity. While mass media’s monopoly has not disappeared, it has been destabilised.

Challenging Dominant Narratives

With new media, people from all walks of life get a real chance to speak up, sharing stories that giant companies often skip. For example, Vietnamese audiences have raised their voice to protect costumes and culture of the Red Dao ethnic group. When the television series *Walking in the Middle of the Brilliant Sky* imposed an image of a backward Dao society, where men always drink alcohol and hit women and emphasized practices such as bride kidnapping and child marriage, audiences mobilized online. Vietnam is home to 54 distinct ethnic groups, with the Kinh majority comprising approximately 85-88% of the population. Because the film industry is managed mostly by the Kinh ethnic group, the films often misrepresent and sometimes underrepresent other minority groups.

One week after the series was released, viewers flooded into social media platforms and comment sections, to challenge the distortions in film constructed about the Dao people. With new media, people were able to counter the misrepresentation of marginalized people in real time.

In a world where huge broadcasts chase high ratings over nuance, free media has allowed viewers to comment, fact-check, educate, and demand accountability. The audience, once silent, don't just watch—they now speak back.

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THE \$188 BILLION PIVOT: AN ECONOMIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL OVERHAUL BY EVS AND HYBRIDS

S M Safwan Sanzari

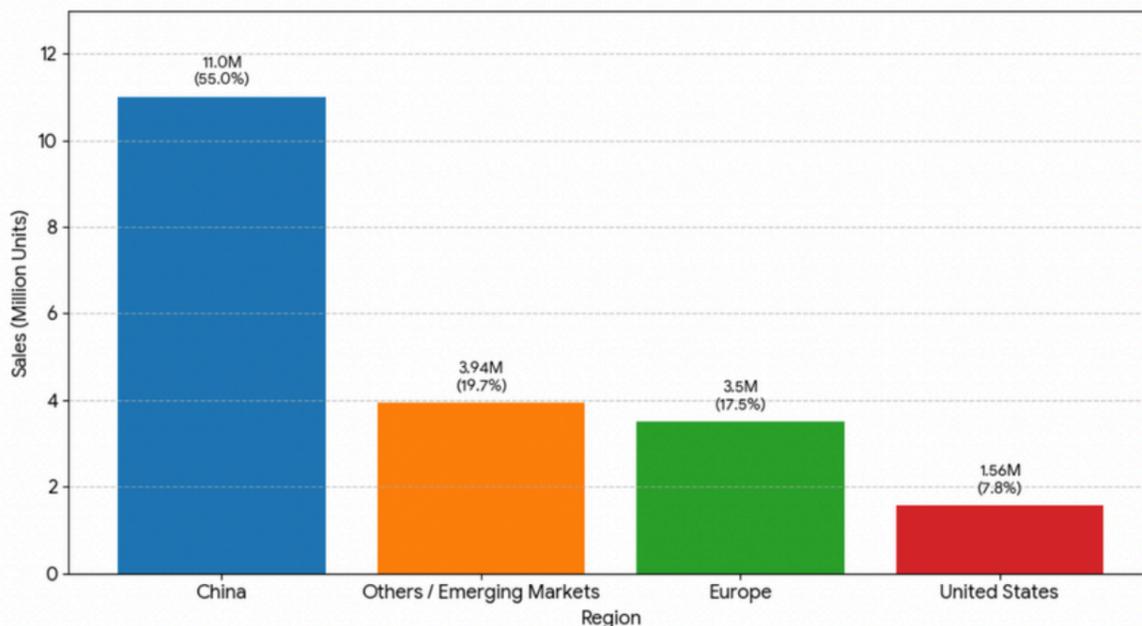
The transition to electric vehicles (EVs) and hybrids represents an economic paradigm shift, generating wealth, creating employment, and reducing environmental damage. There were more than 20 million electric vehicles on the world's roads last year, with EV sales gathering enough pace to represent more than one in every four new vehicles sold. This revolution also extends well beyond what rolls off assembly lines; it is remaking power grids and labor markets worldwide. Yet the transition is unfolding at different speeds in different countries, posing urgent questions of who will take charge and who risks being left behind in the new electric era.

How Policy Fuels Progress

Let us consider the United States. Companies announced nearly \$188 billion in investment for electric vehicle and battery manufacturing in response to the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act. That spending has already directly created almost 200,000 jobs here, with many more in supporting industries. States such as Georgia and Michigan have become focal points, attracting billions of dollars into their economies. The automobile industry's contribution to U.S. GDP was \$110 billion in 2024, and another \$150 billion is expected by 2030 as electric vehicles account for an estimated 40% of production.

Bill Gates captured the spirit of the shift: "Electric cars are part of how we solve climate change."

Global EV Sales by Region (2024)



China, meanwhile, is not only on pace; it is leading the way. The nation sold over 14 million electric cars in 2025, more than the rest of the world combined in 2023. Battery prices in China fell by about 30% in 2024, a much steeper descent than that in Europe or the U.S. And Europe's narrative is mixed: electric vehicles make up 17.5% of new sales, but growth has slowed as government incentives trail off. By 2030, European countries could see a \$40 billion shortage in fuel tax revenue that would require a total rethinking of policy and technology.

Converting Clean Air Into Economic Value

Research from the University of Michigan shows that battery-operated electric cars have far less emissions over their lifetime than any other type of car, today in all regions of the country. For instance, an electric sedan emits roughly 81 grams of CO₂ per mile, about one-fifth as much as a gasoline-powered pickup. A switch from a gas truck to an electric model reduces emissions by the equivalent of 75%.



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In 2024, electric vehicles worldwide displaced the equivalent of 1.3 million barrels of oil each day, about what Japan's entire transport sector consumes. By 2030, that number could rise to 5 million barrels a day. If half of all new cars sold by 2030 are electric, greenhouse gas emissions from light-duty vehicles could fall 25% below 2005 levels. Combine that with a cleaner electric grid, and emissions could fall close to 45% by 2035.

"The auto industry cannot be successful without successful suppliers; that's even more true when it comes to clean energy solutions," said Mary Barra, the chief executive of General Motors. GM's pledge to stop selling gasoline vehicles by 2035 reflects rising confidence that electric models will be on an equal price footing with conventional ones in the near future.

The Chasm That Leaves Some Nations Behind

As wealthier nations hammer out higher market share and subsidies, people in much of the developing world face struggles. In Bangladesh, where the average annual income is roughly \$2,620, electric vehicles are largely unaffordable. Unreliable electrical grids struggle to provide the needed support for charging networks, and frequent power outages take away from the attractiveness of going electric. Countries including Cambodia, Myanmar, and the Philippines confront high upfront costs, shifting policies, and cultural unease related to EVs. Systems in place for recycling used batteries are nearly non-existent.

However, some are forging their own paths. Thailand requires automakers to produce two electric vehicles for every car they import locally. Mercedes-Benz announced that it was opening its first factory for electric vehicles outside Germany, where it will both assemble vehicles and produce batteries. Vietnam and Brazil experienced 50% and 125% growth in sales of electric vehicles in 2024, but most were imported from China.

Obstacles in Affluent Nations

Even with better batteries, many drivers are still fretting about how far they can go in a single charge. The public charging network, meanwhile, has not expanded rapidly enough; in several target countries, the ratio of chargers to electric vehicles actually worsened over 2024. Cost remains another hurdle. In the U.S., around 75% of electric models available in 2024 were priced above \$50,000. Fewer than ten models cost less than \$40,000, even after applying the federal tax credit.

Supply chains introduce further complexity. Electric vehicle production relies heavily on minerals like lithium, cobalt, and nickel that are often mined in politically unstable parts of the world. The production of batteries is heavily concentrated in China, prompting concerns in much of the rest of the world. Satisfying worldwide charging demand would require a huge investment: capacity for public charging needs to increase almost ninefold by 2030 to match the expected demand.

A Story Still Being Written

The electric vehicle revolution is speeding up, unevenly but inexorably. Rich nations are refining their own policies and incentives. The challenge for developing countries is more foundational, around infrastructure and cost. But momentum is building as battery costs plummet, power grids grow cleaner, and production scales up.

All countries face essentially the same challenge: to guide this transition in a manner that ensures its broadest possible benefits, protects workers and communities, and transforms technological progress into shared prosperity. The electric vehicle is only one component of a much broader effort to attain sustainability. But this story we are telling now... it is not fictional. The stakes could hardly be higher; there are trillions of dollars and billions of tons of carbon in the balance.



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WHAT IT MEANS TO BE MORAL, ACCORDING TO CONFUCIUS

Chau Do Minh

Confucius, one of China's most influential philosophers, believed that achieving junzi (君子—jūnzǐ) was the foundation of moral life. According to his teachings, five central virtues were later identified as essential to moral cultivation.

Though written over 2,000 years ago, these principles continue to shape modern ideas of ethics, leadership, and social responsibility.

The Concept of Jūnzǐ and Xiǎorén

Junzi is a combination of two words. Jun (君) meant a ruler, noble, or gentleman, while zi (子) meant a person, son, or master, used as an honorific. Therefore, junzi can be explained as 'an ethically cultivated individual with moral authority', not just a person with high social status. Junzi describes a person who acts with righteousness, compassion, propriety, and integrity.

The concept of junzi runs through all the Analects (book of the Sayings of Confucius). In Legge's translation of the sacred documents, specifically in "Xue Er", it is stated that "he who aims to be a man of complete virtue in his food does not seek to gratify his appetite, nor in his dwelling place does he seek the appliances of ease." To summarize, to be a junzi is not to seek material wealth, but to seek wealth of virtue.

However, junzi and xiaoren are not antonyms. As seen in the quote "[Junzi] is always at ease with himself. [Xiaoren] is always anxious", taken from A. C. Muller's translation of the Analects, Xiaoren does not refer to morally corrupt people but rather those who prioritize immediate gain over moral cultivation. It is the comparison between Xiaoren (an ordinary, 'small' man who lacks notable achievements) and junzi (a noble-hearted man with righteous conduct) that underscores the qualities of the junzi.



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE MORAL, ACCORDING TO CONFUCIUS

Chau Do Minh

The Five Virtues Model

1- 仁 (rén)

Rén is made up of two Chinese components: the character for 'two' (二) and 'person' (人). From there, rén can be understood as 'humaneness', 'compassion', and 'benevolence', or as 'an inward moral concern for others'. According to Salomon, it was essential to be "obedient and loving toward their parents and superiors, who, in turn, should be kind and nurturing."

2- 礼 (lǐ)

Lǐ is closely related to rén, manifesting as an outward expression of moral concern through ethical conduct shaped by social roles, rituals, and obligations. To Confucius, both rén and lǐ were necessary to become a junzi. Rén without lǐ is goodness without structure, while the latter without the former leads to empty, purposeless routines.

3- 义 (yì)

Yì is commonly translated as 'righteousness', but may more accurately mean 'moral rightness'—doing what is ethically appropriate, even if it involves personal sacrifice. This rounds back quite nicely to Confucius' contrast between junzi and xiaoren: one acts upon moral integrity, while the other acts on immediate, personal benefit.

To compare, rén is the emotion, yì is the choice, and lǐ is the structure. To speak up in the midst of injustice, even when it is socially unacceptable, is yì overriding lǐ. To witness injustice but stay silent due to conventions of politeness is lǐ without yì.

4- 智 (zhì)

Zhì is not raw intelligence. It is moral discernment, the ability to use yì, lǐ, and rén appropriately, and the ability to judge situations correctly. Since love of learning is a key component of Confucianism, it is no wonder that zhì is a Confucian virtue. One learns first ideas, then skills, then reflective understanding, slowly turning the ideas into usable knowledge. According to Timothy Havens, "an accumulation of this knowledge with practical application becomes a specialized form of wisdom, practical wisdom."

5- 信 (xìn)

Xìn refers to 'trustworthiness', the consistency between one's words and their actions that makes social order and moral relationships possible. It doesn't just mean 'honesty' or 'faith', but moral integrity.

In Confucianism, xìn manifests as a practical and relational concept. Rén without xìn is care without trust, meaning that although you care about others, your care cannot be relied on. Yì without xìn is deciding what should be done but not following through with moral commitments. Lǐ without xìn is empty performance—one may display proper social conduct, but with no credibility behind it.

Confucius ranks trust as higher than arms or food in a society. This is evident in the last line of the Analects 12.7: "The people without trust cannot stand."



WHAT IT MEANS TO BE MORAL, ACCORDING TO CONFUCIUS

Chau Do Minh

3. From Virtue to Character

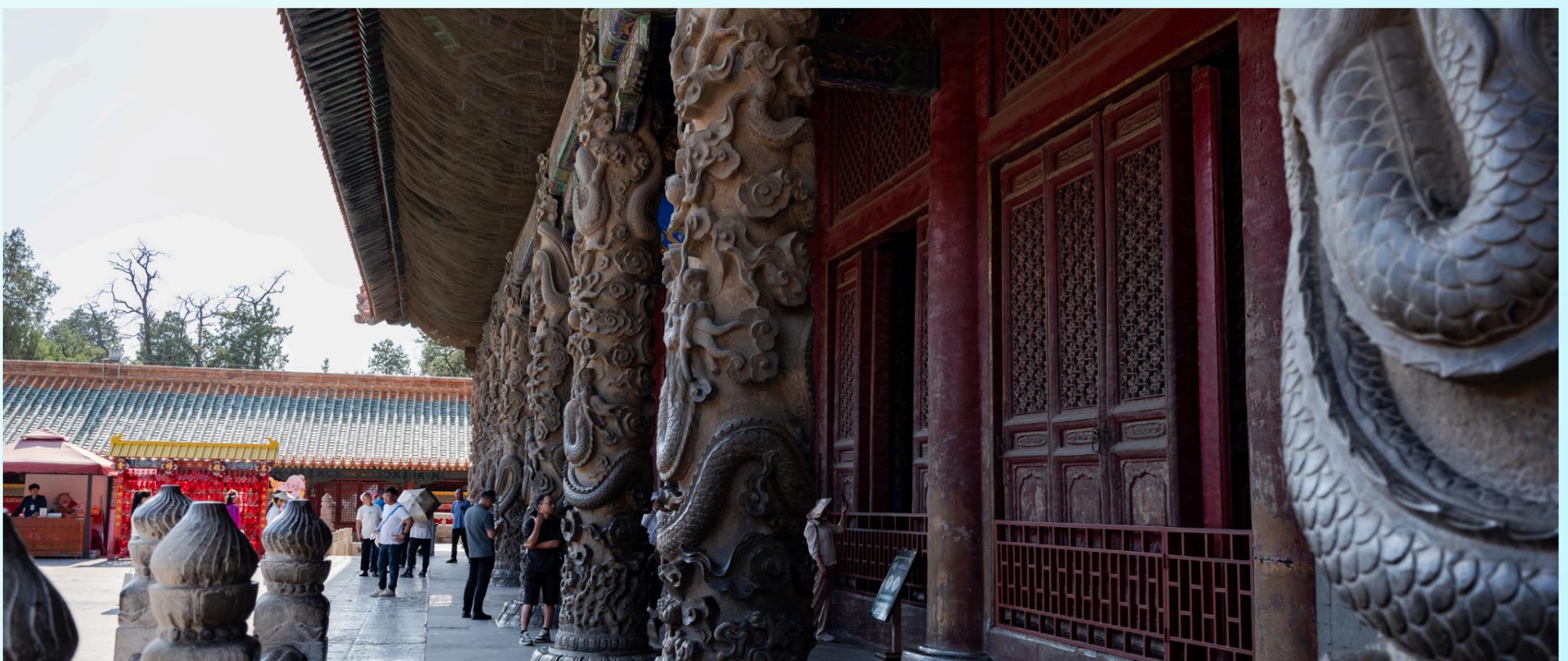
The five virtues are interdependent, and to be a junzi is to be consistent in moral alignment. To achieve moral nobility is not difficult: Confucianism emphasizes daily practice over moral perfection, and implies that ethical character can develop gradually through repeated alignment between intention and action. Therefore, it can be said that moral excellence is achieved through learning, reflection, and habit, not moral instinct.

The virtues work together to help one reach moral nobility, each one forming an aspect of morality and ethics. Rén provides moral motivation, lǐ provides moral structure, yì provides moral judgment, zhì provides moral discernment and xìn provides credibility.

Confucius' account of morality emphasizes character over compliance and integrity over advantage. By linking empathy (rén), moral judgment (yì), social conduct (lǐ), wisdom (zhì), and trust (xìn), his framework describes how ethical life is sustained in everyday relationships. Though articulated in an ancient context, this model of moral cultivation remains relevant wherever trust, leadership, and responsibility are at stake, helping shape laws, social customs, and more in both the Eastern and Western societies.

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THE ICE AGE OF GLOBAL FINANCE

Ishan Sharma

Imagine waking up one day to find the world's money map quietly redrawn under your feet. It's already happening. Experts warn that a splintering global financial system could shave as much as \$5.7 trillion off global GDP and add more than 5% to inflation. An IMF study estimates that full-scale decoupling could erase roughly 2.3% of global output, even before second-order effects reach households. This "quiet quake" isn't triggered by shouting headlines, but by creeping policy shifts.

"Goeconomic fragmentation" may sound like jargon, but it simply refers to governments deliberately unwiring parts of what was once a tightly connected world economy. Tariffs, sanctions, and regulations are now reversing decades of integration. The IMF defines goeconomic fragmentation as a policy-driven reversal of economic integration. In practice, it looks like rival blocs are forming with their own trade systems, capital rules, and even digital payment networks.

So how does this fissure form?

The first fault line is policy-driven decoupling. Governments increasingly use tariffs, trade bans, and industrial subsidies to protect "national champions," often at the expense of foreign suppliers. For example, sweeping new tariffs in major economies have already slowed global growth—Trump-era policies alone are estimated to cut 2025 growth to 2.3%. The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) warns that such barriers shrink supply flexibility and push inflation higher worldwide.

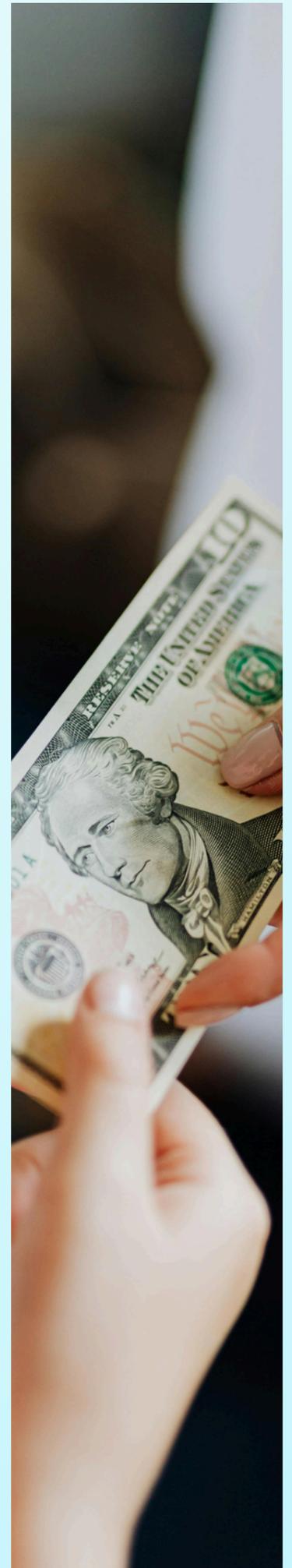
Capital flows form the next fault line. Investors are no longer certain that money moved across borders will remain secure. Governments in advanced economies are encouraging "home bias," nudging capital to stay within national borders. Big banks even frame this as a business opportunity. JPMorgan's recent \$1.5 trillion "America First" lending plan signals a bet that U.S. savers can finance domestic industry, compensating for any pullback in foreign investment. Breakingviews columnist Mike Dolan points out that investors are now treating globalization's rollback as the new normal.

The upshot is risk: tighter pools of capital mean higher borrowing costs. Highly indebted countries are already feeling the strain. By late 2025, "bond vigilantes" were pushing up yields in nations with heavy debt burdens. Put simply, governments and businesses must now pay more interest just to borrow money, squeezing public budgets and projects.

A third fault line lies in the rise of currencies and payment systems. If the US dollar has long functioned as the highway of world finance, new toll roads and backroads are being built. BRICS nations have floated the idea of a common currency or payment system to bypass dollar wiring. Brazil is actively pushing local-currency trade and blockchain payments to reduce dependence on the dollar.

Even gold is having a moment: central banks bought over 1,000 tonnes of gold in 2024, doubling their typical haul and lifting gold to 20% of official reserves while the dollar's share fell. These trends show countries hedging against a dollar-centric world. The result is a fractured financial landscape where moving money becomes slower and costlier.

This is not an abstract office discussion. It affects people's everyday lives. Employers report that goeconomic rifts will reshape one-third of business models in the next five years, often through relocating factories or offices. In several countries, unemployment is already rising: Britain's youth unemployment is "causing political alarm". In a fragmented economy, firms may offshore less but also invest less, leaving many graduates competing for narrower prospects at home.



THE ICE AGE OF GLOBAL FINANCE

Ishan Sharma

Imagine a tech startup in Nairobi or Berlin. Raising cash from Silicon Valley or Shenzhen is now trickier. Capital controls or new regulatory hoops mean investors move slowly or demand higher returns. Weaker access to global pools of capital implies higher funding costs and tougher terms, or simply less venture money reaching hungry ideas.

Remittances feel the strain too. If sending money to another country involves more intermediaries or currency risk, migrants might send less back home or pay steeper fees. That extra cost makes everyday essentials pricier for those dependents. Even savings and mortgages are affected. BIS analysis notes that in a fragmented world, reduced competition in banking tends to push loans and insurance prices up for consumers.

Public debt adds another layer of vulnerability. Emerging markets are already carrying record debt loads. With global growth sagging and interest payments rising, sovereign finances can become fragile. As BIS cautions, many governments have both high debt and little room to cushion shocks. A credit-market jolt could force spending cuts on jobs programs or education, exactly when young people need support the most. In short, everyday costs could climb while opportunities shrink.

Of course, there is uncertainty. No model can perfectly predict how new trade wars or green-tech alliances will evolve. But here's one truth that's already clear: this is already going to redefine the financial world that our generation is inheriting.

"The rules of the game are going to keep on changing, and the choices that are made in the next few years will have an impact for decades to come."

Geoeconomic fragmentation, the splintering of the global economy into competing geopolitical blocs, can seem like an off-radar phenomenon or an abstraction that has little bearing on you or your plans, but its ripple effects could end up influencing everything—from college tuition payments to the IT industry.

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IMPOSTOR SYNDROME AND PERFECTIONISM: A THREAT TO MENTAL HEALTH

Quang Hưng Nguyễn

A well-known singer rejects the Grammy Award after an out-of-this-world year in the music industry. A dedicated employee continually denies a promising promotion in the workplace, fearing they may be undeserving of it. A gifted student attributes his academic success solely to luck and fortune, dismissing years of hard work.

What do these people have in common?

Their experiences can be explained by Impostor Syndrome, an increasingly prevalent phenomenon that over 70% of adults have experienced at least once in their lifetime. Coined by psychologists Pauline Rode Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978, Impostor Syndrome describes the persistent pattern of self-doubting one's abilities, in which people believe they are incompetent and undeserving of their achievements. Rather than internalizing success, they attribute it to external circumstances, such as luck and perfect timing. Ironically, those affected often fixate on the success of others while failing to acknowledge their own capabilities. In recent research, Impostor Syndrome has been associated with perfectionism. In an attempt to conceal perceived incompetence, people strive for flawlessness, which can trap them into over-preparation and overworking.

Since perfectionism and Impostor Syndrome share many similarities, such as a pursuit of excellence and a desire to be the best, the two become interconnected. Initially, people attribute their accomplishments to external factors, such as luck and deception, which generates anxiety and a sense of unworthiness despite clear evidence of competence. Perfectionism then emerges as a protective mechanism in response to this anxiety and depression, encouraging people to achieve flawless outcomes.

Perfectionists often believe that when their work is error-free and exceptional, their abilities will no longer be questioned. However, this mindset demands significant cognitive and emotional resources to achieve those impossible self-imposed benchmarks. The result is escalating workloads and sacrificed interests. More detrimentally, perfectionists now consider mental reprieve, and even healthy procrastination, to be failure-adjacent and inadequate to their goals. Individuals justify this for a falsely perceived "greater good". Yet even when perfection is achieved, they still attribute it to external factors rather than hard work and preparation. This demonstrates the link between perfectionism and Impostor Syndrome, which perpetuates over-preparation and overworking.

Considering that Impostor Syndrome and perfectionism have trapped people in work-life imbalance, perfectionists are now concerned with detrimental health issues. In pursuit of "perfection", perfectionists sacrifice their healthy routine, and their enduring boundaries erode. Sleeping gets sacrificed, mental breaks become few and far between, and this system escalates with so much intensity that it becomes impossible to keep up with. This results in inevitable exhaustion, burnout, and malfunction in people's bodies. When malfunctions start to appear, blundering mistakes intensify, performance gradually deteriorates, and perfectionism now becomes impossible again. This creates an endless cycle where Impostor Syndrome and perfectionism amplify one another, illustrating how interconnected Impostor Syndrome, perfectionism, and mental well-being are.

In conclusion, as American organizational psychologist Adam Grant once stated, "If you doubt yourself, shouldn't you also doubt your low opinion of yourself?" Impostor Syndrome challenges individuals to confront distorted self-perceptions and narratives they construct about their worth. Regardless of the expectations set by yourself and other external factors, people with the courage to acknowledge their capabilities and accept success as deserved are the ones who become better and well-rounded.

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CRYING – FROM A DEFENSIVE MECHANISM TO A MENTAL HELPER

Ngoc Minh Le

Each year, humans shed an estimated 15 to 30 gallons of tears, which may sound astonishing but is entirely reasonable. Tears are well known for their defensive mechanism in the animal world, meaning that animals, including humans, produce tears unintentionally every day. More remarkably, humans are the only kind whose tears compose another special mechanism: emotional flush. While social norms consider crying emotionally to be “weak”, this special function strengthens mental well-being far more than we might expect.

The main types of tears in the animal kingdom

There are two main types of tears in the animal kingdom: basal tears and reflex tears.

Basal tears consist of 3 layers: mucus, aqueous, and lipid layers. The mucus layer helps the tear stick to the iris, while the aqueous and lipid layers cleanse and protect it, ensuring clear vision. Basal tears lubricate the eyes, wash away debris, and prevent dryness.

Reflex tears, on the other hand, are an automatic response to smoke, dust, onion fumes, or other chemical and physical stimuli. These irritants activate the peripheral sensory system, sending signals to the brain. In turn, the brain, upon receiving information from the system, triggers tear production containing antibiotics and water to flush out the irritants and relieve the pain. This explains why we tear up when chopping onions in the kitchen or walking through polluted air. Nearly every animal can produce reflex tears, though amphibians and snakes generally cannot due to differences in their peripheral sensory systems.

Tears of emotion - a special response

Besides basal and reflex tears, humans have evolved a third type: emotional, or psychogenic, tears. This type of tear is produced when one experiences overwhelming emotions such as sadness, anger, and even happiness. Scientists have proposed many explanations for emotional tears, and the two most plausible ones are:

Psychogenic tears are a survival instinct, where we cry to arouse attention from the public.

From an evolutionary perspective, crying may function as a signal for help and connection. Babies cry when they are distressed or in danger, when they cannot express their thoughts verbally. This behavior increases their chances of receiving care and protection. One research study revealed a higher concentration of protein in emotional tears, causing them to move more slowly down their face, making them more visible and more likely to capture attention. A study conducted by two researchers at the University of Queensland found that participants gazed less at the eyes of faces when tears were present compared to absent, suggesting that psychogenic tears influence how we perceive others' emotional states. In this way, emotional tears can prompt social support or help when it is most needed. Similarly, tears of joy may serve a communicative function, inviting others to share in joyful experiences.

Emotional tears reduce stress and promote better mental health.

Scientists differentiate types of tears based on multiple factors, including chemical makeup. Besides water-like basal or reflex tears, emotional tears also contain a high level of ACTH, a hormone that is responsible for triggering stress response in our brains, and leucine-enkephalin, a neuropeptide related to endorphins. From research findings, scientists believe that the flush of ACTH hormones is one of the ways we relieve sadness, stress, and anxiety, and leucine-enkephalin is used as a painkiller afterwards to help us feel better. This could explain why individuals often feel lighter or calmer after crying.

The following hypotheses require further rigorous research to reach definitive conclusions, but they point towards the idea that emotional crying may be biologically and psychologically restorative.



CRYING – FROM A DEFENSIVE MECHANISM TO A MENTAL HELPER

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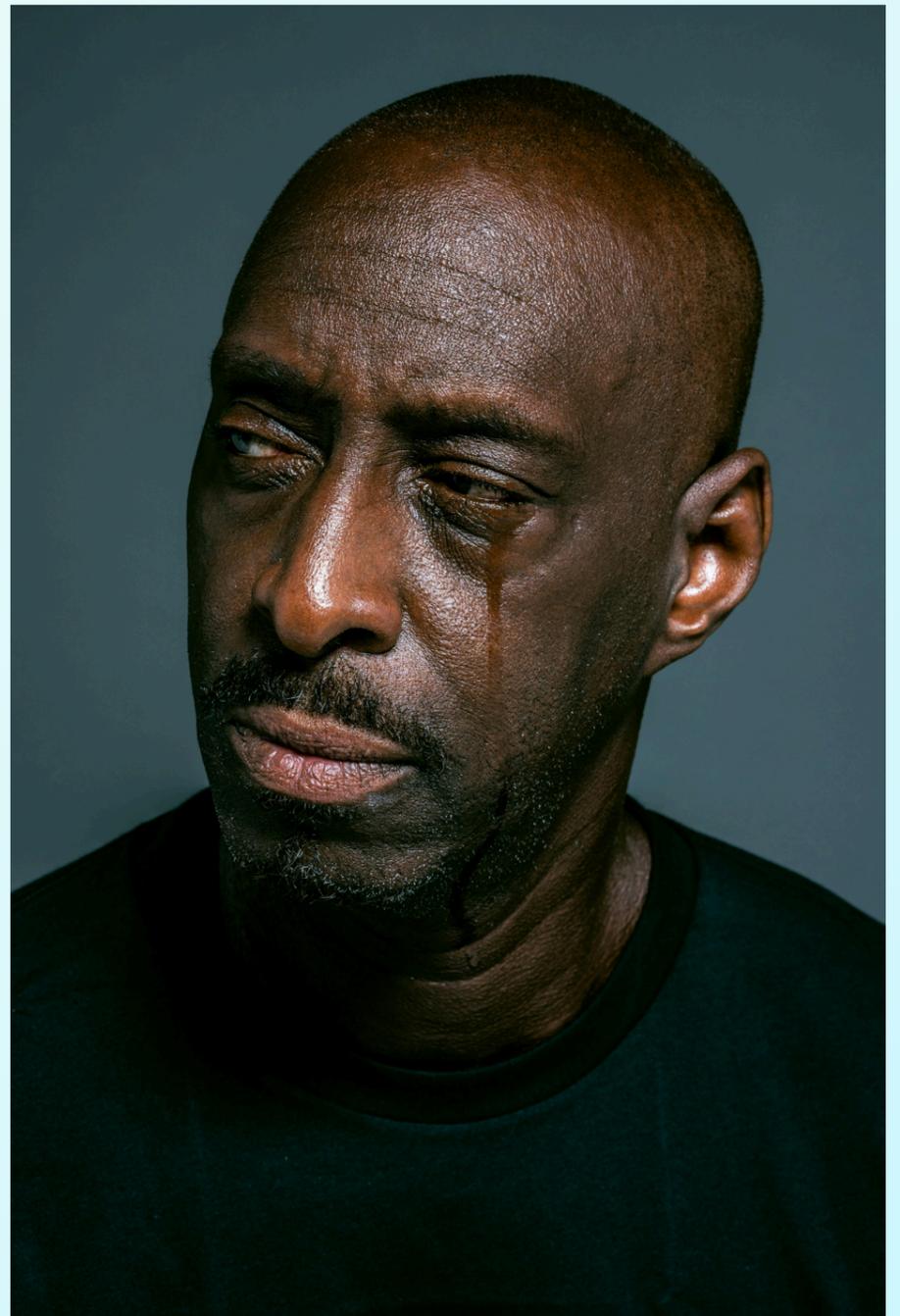
Emotional crying is not weakness - it is resilience

In a hustling and bustling society, sometimes we forget the need to cry, suppressing overwhelming feelings within ourselves. We are taught that crying signals weakness. We strive for efficiency, while our emotional needs slowly retreat. Unfortunately, this trend is one of the factors responsible for the escalating rates of mental disorders and depression in younger generations. Chronic inhibition of crying can contribute to emotional numbness or even an “inability to cry”, which is considered a marker of severe psychological distress in psychiatry.

It is time to realize that crying is not bad - it is necessary for human well-being and development. Crying should not be perceived as weakness, but rather as courage to confront what we feel. We should face our emotions, identify them, and allow ourselves to cry and pour our hearts out to our loved ones. At first, the experience may be overwhelming. We may feel exposed. We may pity ourselves. We may cry out louder than we expected. But through crying, and with the emotional support of reliable relationships, clarity often follows. The emotional weight lightens. The mind feels refreshed. And once again, we gather ourselves and move forward, ready to thrive in this life that is ours.

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UNDERSTANDING NARCISSISM: ONE OF THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD PERSONALITY TRAITS

Teu-Khanh Phuong

Amplified by various social networking sites, the term "narcissism" has captured humans' curiosity since the early 2000s. This concept is typically associated with clinical psychology and psychiatry, fascinating medical experts and the public due to its complex nature regarding humans' behavioral patterns. Despite this personality trait being one of the growing concerns in the medical field, humans' understanding of narcissism and its impacts remains severely limited, with inaccurate interpretation of its nature in some cases. To the public, narcissism appeared as a buzzword, pejoratively used to describe individuals with entitlement, self-centered and arrogant demeanor, consistently seeking for sources of validation and admiration from others, which completely overlooks the complicated spectrum of this disorder. To correctly understand narcissism and the varying types of personality traits deeply rooted within it, one needs to evaluate the nuances of individuals' behaviors and navigate the intricacy of multiple narcissistic traits.

Narcissism originated from the Greek myth about Narcissus, a young man who was obsessed with his reflection on the surface of a lake, unable to tear away, and died consequently of starvation and dehydration. Evidently, narcissism, a personality trait characterised by self-importance and a lack of empathy, reflects a tendency to manipulate others for personal gains. Though it now has a common definition in psychology, the term has undergone significant changes over time, resulting in various disagreements on whether or not it should be considered a mental disorder. During the early 20th century, narcissism was being viewed as a psychological phenomenon by psychoanalysts; however, its initial perception only revolved around attention-seeking behaviors and self-love, which led to oversimplification of the matter and brushed aside narcissism's tortuous nature. It wasn't until the 1980s when the American Psychiatric Association (APA) recognized Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) as a fundamentally mental illness, representing a remarkable perspective change in how the mental health community perceived and categorized narcissistic traits. Moreover, the recognition of NPD prompted further research and debates relating to narcissism, opening doors to deeper understanding of the multiple sides of the disorder.

To begin with, narcissism should be viewed as a multifaceted personality trait, existing on a spectrum, with levels of the severity of behavior patterns dependent on each individual. It is crucial for individuals to distinguish between mild self-admiration or self-esteem and excessive narcissism, as these behaviors can be easily misinterpreted on different media platforms or through word of mouth. While a certain level of attention seeking and self-esteem is vital for normal psychological functioning, narcissists rarely take into account the physical and mental well-being of others, prioritizing a transactional approach to social relationships. Generally known for their effective communication and persuasion in achieving their goals, they typically appear as confident with a charming demeanor but are secretly trapped inside their own glorified image, unable to cultivate meaningful connection with others. That's why their primary goals can be summed up with 3 words, according to Psychology Today: "control, power and success."

Although there are numerous kinds of narcissism, the disorder can be classified into two major forms: grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. The most prevalent attribute is a grandiose sense of self-importance, meaning that narcissists believe that they are superior to others and deserve special attention. Depending on the situation, whether through overt or covert narcissism, this self-inflation can be clearly reflected through their constant need for recognition and admiration. Moreover, this type of personality trait is evident in the workplace, where leaders may be overtly aggressive towards their colleagues, manipulating them for financial and personal gains. In addition to grandiose narcissism there exists a more subtle and introverted case: vulnerable narcissism. Despite their confidence and charisma, vulnerable narcissists exhibit signs of a fragile self-esteem, which is easily triggered by slight failures or a lack of attention from others. These individuals may use their sensitivity to their own advantage, gradually gaining sympathy and approbation. Once their self-confidence is threatened, these self-absorbed individuals react with passive-aggressive behavior while continually seeking reassurance to maintain their ego.



UNDERSTANDING NARCISSISM: ONE OF THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD PERSONALITY TRAITS

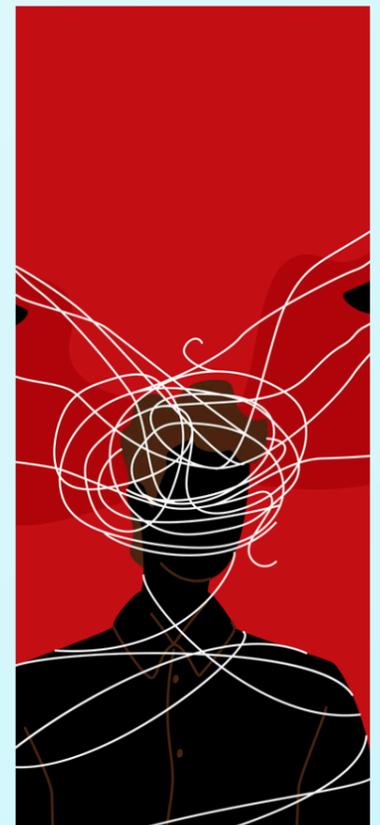
Teu-Khanh Phuong

According to Careers In Psychology, “narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) is a severe psychological disorder; people with NPD typically have a lack of empathy and consideration for other people, coupled with an excessive need for affirmation, admiration, or acknowledgment.”

Unlike normal narcissistic traits, which are behavioral patterns that anyone can be exposed to, NPD is a severe psychological disease in which patients are being hospitalized with real medications. This type of disease is often known for its persistent and long-term issues, occurring alongside other conditions, such as depression, bipolar disorder, borderline personality, or antisocial personality disorder.

On a related note, there seems to be a strong correlation between mental health illnesses and narcissistic behaviors. Anxiety is usually involved in relationships with narcissists, in which the confusion or manipulation can exacerbate anxiety symptoms in these people. In the beginning, people with vulnerable narcissism start with the similar low self-esteem and unstable mental health as people experiencing anxiety. Moreover, as relationships progress, “gaslighting” and “love-bombing” leave individuals more susceptible to self-doubt and questioning their self-worth. Slowly, feelings of anger and jealousy start to appear, taking a toll on relationships with loved ones and close friends. Not only do narcissists experience difficulty in forming long-term relationships, but the emotional burden that victims who live with these people endure is equally devastating. People with narcissism might appear confident on the outside but vulnerable and apathetic on the inside, making their relationships fractured and superficial. Victims of living with narcissists endure constant manipulation and threats and encounter setbacks in getting out of such relationships.

The impacts of this personality trait can be devastating, leading to further risks of acquiring self-destructive actions and reckless decision-making. In particular, further research on NPD by the National Library of Medicine in 2020 emphasized a link between narcissistic traits and social media addiction, highlighting people’s dependency on social media during times of vulnerability. This study shows that NPD should be viewed and diagnosed more seriously in this fast-paced society, given its complexity and misconceptions. People with NPD are those with higher risks of addiction. Therefore, individuals with narcissistic traits should be highly encouraged to seek professional help from licensed doctors and approved clinics.



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IF ECONOMICS WERE MATHS, ECONOMISTS WOULDN'T ARGUE SO MUCH

Yunshu Yang

In the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis, economists debated the best course of action for governments in face of this; some viewing austerity as the best approach whilst others argued for stimulus. Economists from both sides held contrasting views on mitigating the crisis, despite using the same indicators to support their arguments. Yet, if economics were just applied maths, one may question why such a high level of disagreement exists amongst economists who use the same indicators to prove different solutions. Economics isn't merely shaped by graphs and numbers - but human values, assumptions, and fear - distinguishing it from mathematics which it is so often conflated with.

Economics and maths share similarities in that they both use calculations, both use graphs, and both use formulae to calculate values. Many universities around the world prefer that applicants to their economics courses are highly proficient in maths. Providing a useful background for economics, maths helps develop problem-solving skills and simplify complex systems; predicting trends and comparing outcomes. The issue here isn't maths itself - but the assumption that economics is maths. Arguably, the two are intertwined with one another, yet what sets them apart is a clear distinction: economics exists in an imperfect world full of human error and irrationality, whilst maths prefers to dwell in a fantasy land where rationality is the norm.

It is evident that institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund rely on economic models to advise governments on debt, spending and growth, but when these models meet real people, with fear, insecurity and inequality, the certainty begins to break down, leading us to form this distinction.

A notable example of this phenomenon is the 2008 Financial Crisis, triggered by falling house prices since 2006 when loose lending standards and historically low interest rates prevailed, resulting in a housing bubble in the US that spread worldwide. When the bubble burst, institutions that bought sold low-quality loans were left with trillions of dollars of worthless mortgages - plunging countries into national debt, rising unemployment and falling growth - forcing governments to put into place new economic policies to prevent a similar recession from occurring again. 2008 sparked debates on austerity vs stimulus, at which point economists split. The International Monetary Fund initially supported austerity, arguing that a cut on government spending would reduce deficits and restore public trust in institutions when taxpayer money was not used to save individual businesses from bankruptcy. Austerity, according to the IMF, would encourage private investment, reviving the economy. The IMF's assumption was that both people and markets responded calmly and rationally to government cuts, using models to show that reduced spending eventually led to long term stability.

However, Keynesian economists disagreed, arguing that the cutting of government spending during recessions reduced demand, believing that to revive an economy, fiscal stimulus was required as to boost aggregate demand. During the recession, Keynesian economists advocated for bailouts and monetary policy, their approach resting on the assumption that fear causes people to save rather than spend - humans reacting emotionally to uncertainty. The resolution for the 2008 Financial Crisis ended up involving massive government intervention, such as the US's Troubled Asset Relief Program, which aimed to stabilize the financial system by purchasing toxic assets and restoring credit markets, whilst long term reform involved Ring-Fencing in the UK, and the US's Dodd-Frank Act - both aimed at limiting systematic risk in finance and banking. However, the long-term effects of 2008 remain to this day, with recovery in several parts of the world being slower than expected, and unemployment rates remaining high. It was later acknowledged by the IMF that the negative effects of austerity had not been accounted for and that models did not fully capture human behaviour. This remains an example of the unpredictability of economics in a real-world context: the mathematical data wasn't flawed; it was incomplete. Austerity versus stimulus was not a disagreement about arithmetic, but about how humans behave under pressure when entire systems are at stake.



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2008 is one of the many examples of economists disagreeing far more than mathematicians, and often it is for one of the three main reasons: assumptions about human behaviour, values and morals, and politics and power. Whilst maths describes what is, economics debates what should be done: when economists argue, they reveal the values behind the numbers. This disagreement does not mean economics is useless but rather reflects the complexity of humans and the difference between practice and theory, highlighting the danger of approaching economics with the same attitude that we approach maths – pretending it is neutral or unquestionable, when it is far from. In conclusion, whilst economics uses maths, it is not maths. If economics were maths, economists wouldn't argue as much, and the market would be more predictable by far. It is economic certainty that we should be sceptical of, not economic debate, because after all, economic debate reminds us that it is not numbers that make decisions – but people.

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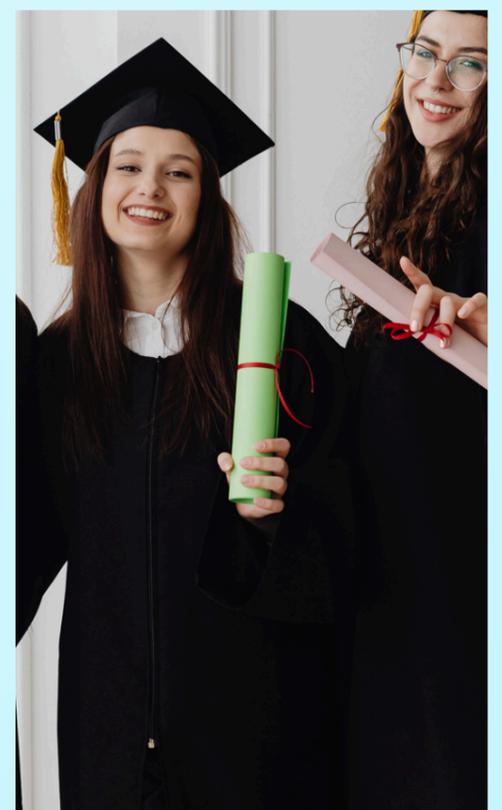


HOW ELITE ASPIRATIONS INFLUENCE TEEN IDENTITY AND WELL-BEING

Ngan Le

Imagine a high-achieving young student, who initially enjoys science and writing, narrowing their focus toward fields perceived as more prestigious, such as medicine or law. This scenario exemplifies how, over time, decisions are guided less by curiosity and more by external validation, leaving little space for exploration during a critical stage of identity formation. This pattern reflects broader trends in adolescent development. A study carried out by the University of Houston suggests that while individuals shift priorities as they transition from adolescence into adulthood, strong aspirations toward education and prestige can play a role in long-term success.

These elite aspirations rarely appear out of the blue. For example, many teenagers develop elite aspirations through early exposure to university rankings, scholarship programs, and online narratives celebrating “top school” acceptances. A student who repeatedly sees classmates praised for entering specialized programs or Ivy-adjacent tracks may begin to associate academic prestige with personal value, even before fully understanding their own interests. They then enter teen life, which encompasses personal exploration, identity formation, and the desire for success. Teenagers usually “dream big” because they’re in a stage of life where they can imagine long-term possibilities and test who they want to become. During this period, goal-setting plays a crucial role in shaping motivation and direction. Psychological research indicates that having clear academic and career goals can increase persistence and engagement, particularly when adolescents consider those goals as meaningful rather than imposed. Ambitions and goals interact closely during adolescent development since aspirations act as sources of inspiration, while concrete goals help translate those ideas into daily decisions and sustained effort. Support from parents and educators can further influence this process by helping teenagers reflect on their interests and set realistic pathways forward, rather than allowing their aspirations to become unhealthy. When guided effectively, goal-setting can reinforce a sense of self-efficacy instead of pressure. More importantly, the value of goals doesn’t lie solely in their consequences. For teenagers, setting their sights on goals contributes to resilience, personal growth and self-understanding. Through various attempts, setbacks, and adjustment, adolescents learn how to cope with expectations and instill confidence, which are skills that remain relevant regardless of whether elite ambitions are ultimately accomplished. The impact of elite dreams can be profound, affecting teenagers’ mental health, academic performance and overall well-being. While such aspirations may promote discipline and persistence, they can also create sustained pressure when success is intimately associated with self-worth. In practice, this pressure often manifests in daily routines. A teenager aiming for an elite university may feel compelled to overload on advanced courses, extracurricular leadership roles, and competitions, sacrificing sleep and leisure to remain competitive. When test scores or rankings fall short, the disappointment can feel disproportionately personal, reinforcing the belief that failure reflects inadequacy rather than growth. In terms of academic performances, elite aspirations may increase motivation while also intensifying fear of failure. This mindset may discourage risk-taking and curiosity, which are necessary for genuine learning. Additionally, elite ambitions can also have an effect on career prospects and social behaviors. Teenagers may feel compelled to pursue paths that align with prestige rather than personal interest, making decisions before their identity has fully developed. Socially, the pressure to appear successful can lead to self-censorship, comparison or withdrawal, especially when individuals fear falling behind their peers.



HOW ELITE ASPIRATIONS INFLUENCE TEEN IDENTITY AND WELL-BEING

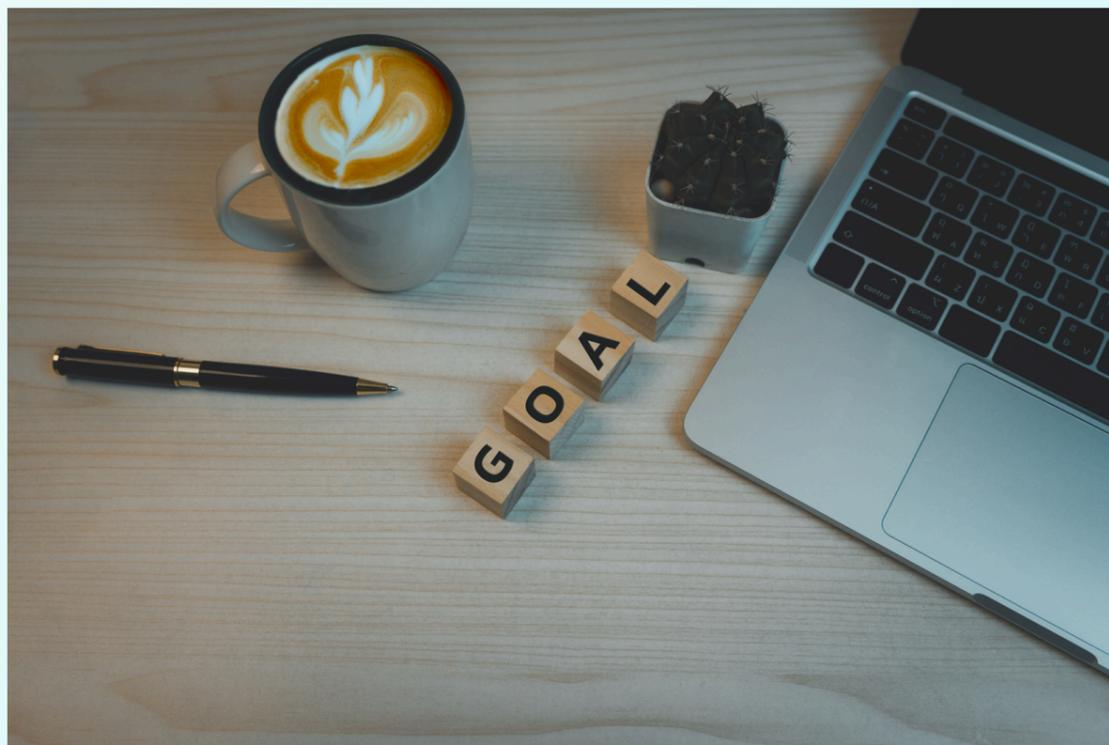
Ngan Le

Despite these challenges, elite aspirations aren't always harmful. Longitudinal research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* shows that teenagers who place greater importance on education and prestige-related goals often attain higher levels of education achievement and occupational complexity later when they become adults. This indicates that aspiring toward elite outcomes can cultivate discipline, persistence and long-term motivation. However, the benefits of such aspirations rely largely upon how they are internalized. When elite goals function as sources of direction, they are more likely to foster healthy development.

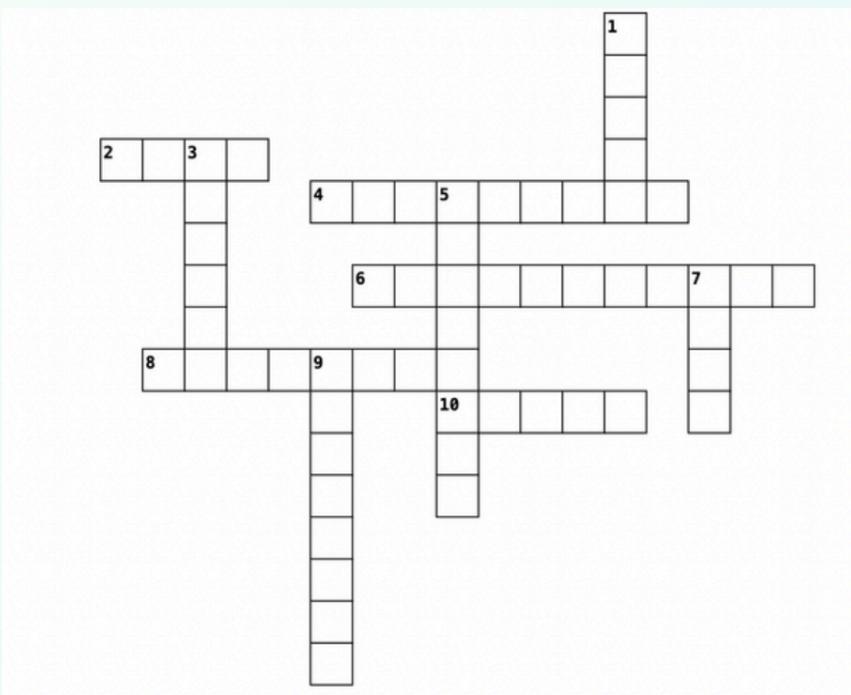
Elite dreams play a valuable role in shaping how teenagers grasp success, identity, and self-worth. Aspirations toward prestigious achievements can motivate discipline and long-term development, but also introduce pressure when achievement becomes the primary measure of personal value. To conclude, ambition is most useful when it coexists with self-reflection, flexibility and support. For teenagers, learning who they truly are should matter just as much as where they hope to go.

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Crossword: Love in the Air



Across

- 2. A paper note used to express Valentine messages
- 4. A sweet treat commonly exchanged on Valentine's Day
- 6. Sugary Valentine candies printed with short messages
- 8. A paper container for delivering Valentine cards
- 10. A stuffed toy often given as a Valentine's gift

Down

- 1. A symbol commonly associated with love and affection
- 3. A decorative tie used on Valentine gifts
- 5. Small decorative pieces used in Valentine celebrations
- 7. A flower traditionally symbolizing romantic affection
- 9. A colorful candy often included in Valentine treats

Word Search: Shades of Pink



Word Bank:

- Blush
- Rose
- Coral
- Fuschia
- Magenta
- Salmon
- Bubblegum
- Strawberry
- Cerise
- Quartz

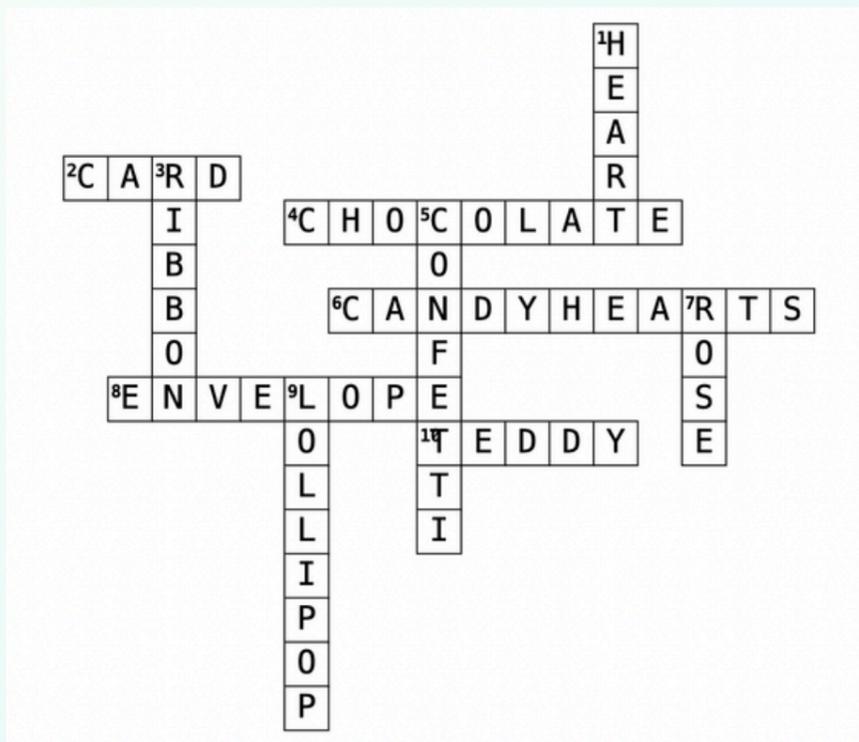
Crypto-Quote: Presidential Wisdom

WUXWK ZLOO XOWLPDWHOB
 SUHYDLO ZKHUH WKHUH LV
 SDLQV WR EULQJ LW WR
 OLJKW - JHRUJH ZDVKLQJWRQ

Instructions:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFRLP = SYNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.

Crossword: Love in the Air



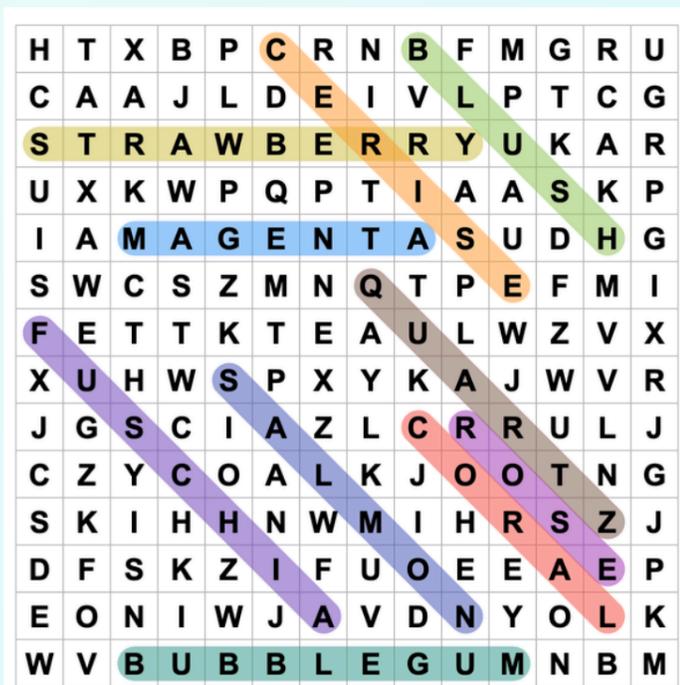
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Crypto-Quote: Presidential Wisdom

TRUTH WILL ULTIMATELY
PREVAIL WHERE THERE IS
PAINS TO BRING IT TO LIGHT -
GEORGE WASHINGTON

Instructions:

Figure out the quote from one of these articles by figuring out a simple code. In this code one letter will replace another, (it will be the same letter throughout the puzzle). Example: KLFRLF = SYNONYM. Solution is found through trial and error.