



Epsilon Theory

# The Long Now, Pt. 1

August 1, 2019



Last year I wrote a series of notes called *Things Fall Apart*, focused on the transformation of our most important social institutions – small-l liberal institutions like free markets and free elections – from cooperation-allowing games to competition-requiring games. That sounds bloodless and small, but it’s not. It’s literally how society self-destructs in a widening gyre of mistrust and defection.

Today I’m starting a new series of notes called *The Long Now*, focused on *the further transformation of our social institutions into political utilities* ... into smiley-face Panopticons of self-censorship where our marrow of autonomy and free will is sucked dry by the Nudging State and the Nudging Oligarchy.

Our money, too. Yes, this will be “actionable”, just maybe not in the way you’re used to.

**The Long Now is everything we pull into the present from our future selves and our children.**

**The Long Now is the constant *stimulus* that Management applies to our economy and the constant *fear* that Management applies to our politics.**

*The Long Now is the **Fiat World** of reality by declaration, where we are TOLD that inflation does not exist, where we are TOLD that wealth inequality and meager productivity and negative savings rates just*

“happen”, where we are TOLD we must vote for ridiculous candidates to be a good Republican or a good Democrat, where we are TOLD that we must buy ridiculous securities to be a good investor, where we are TOLD we must borrow ridiculous sums to be a good parent or a good spouse or a good child.

It’s all happened before. Here’s a SJW journalist who saw it clearly in the 1930s and 1940s.



*History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.*

– George Orwell, “1984” (1949)

What Orwell called the Party, I call the Nudging State and the Nudging Oligarchy. I call it Management. Why? Because the future is not – as Orwell had it – a boot stomping on the face of humanity forever. Please. So messy. So ... inefficient.

No, the future is a smiley-face authoritarianism, an authoritarianism that is not imposed on us, but an authoritarianism that we *embrace*.

It’s not “Yay, Big Brother!”.

It’s “Yay, Capitalism!”, “Yay, Military!”, “Yay, Diversity!”, “Yay, College!” and “Yay, Stock Market!”.

You’re not, ummm, against any of things, are you? Because that would be ... unfortunate. I mean, you helping the terrorists and all.

*Things Fall Apart* started with the political and ended with the personal. Let’s flip that on its head with *The Long Now*. Let’s flip it ALL on its head. **Because I know a few things about Time.**



*Tick-tock.*

Tyler Durden, meet [Neb Tnuh](#).



*When did the future switch from being a promise to being a threat?*

*– Chuck Palahniuk, “Invisible Monsters” (1999)*

*I remember exactly when MY future switched from being a promise to being a threat.*

It was when my father died suddenly of heart failure in the summer of 1996. He was 62 and I was 32.

There’s something about the dynamic of your father dying suddenly that changes your relationship with the future and with time. Or at least it did for me. Now I was on a trapeze without a net. Now it was All. On. Me. With a baby on the way. Now, to use Palahniuk’s words, the future seemed like a threat, not a promise, *where MY death was next in line*.

For the first time in my life, I felt the pressure of time and mortality, not as some philosophical musing, but for what it IS – an omnipresent pang, a *constant* bzzt-bzzt-bzzt of that feeling where you wake up with a start and you’re sure that the alarm clock is about to ring but it’s only 3am so you go back to sleep but you wake up again with a start and it’s 3:45 am.



*Death inspires me like a dog inspires a rabbit.*

*– Twenty One Pilots, “Heavydirtysoul” (2015)*

So right.

*See, the threat of the future isn’t a bad thing.*

The threat of the future INSPIRES me. The threat of the future DRIVES me.

I’m not moping around waiting to die. I’m not lazing around eating bonbons. The present is for DOING. The present is FLEETING. I’ve got something to SAY before I go. I’ve got a future to SECURE for my children, *because in them I can still see future’s promise and not just future’s threat.*



*This is your life and it’s ending one moment at a time.*

**Warning:** *If you are reading this then this warning is for you. Every word you read of this useless fine print is another second off your life. Don't you have other things to do? Is your life so empty that you honestly can't think of a better way to spend these moments? Or are you so impressed with authority that you give respect and credence to all that claim it? Do you read everything you're supposed to read? Do you think everything you're supposed to think? Buy what you're told to want? Get out of your apartment. Meet a member of the opposite sex. Stop the excessive shopping and masturbation. Quit your job. Start a fight. Prove you're alive. If you don't claim your humanity you will become a statistic. You have been warned.*

– **Chuck Palahniuk, “Fight Club” (1996)**

The threat of the future revealed itself to me in 1996 with the death of my father and the birth of my child. One day the threat of the future will reveal itself to you, if it hasn't already. When it does, you will be CONSUMED by thoughts of the future. You will FEEL the pressure of time more keenly than the younger you could ever imagine.

*Tick-tock.*



*Time is the fire in which we burn.*

– **Delmore Schwartz, “Calmly We Walk through This April’s Day” (1938)**

You’ve never heard of Delmore Schwartz. In 1938 he set the New York literary scene on fire at the ripe old age of 25 with the publication of *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, a brilliant collection of short stories and poems about his parents’ marriage and divorce, and Delmore’s estrangement from them. From their “death”, so to speak. His work is imbued with the failure of the American dream for his generation, with the way in which the Team Elite of prior generations sucked the economic marrow out of the Gilded Age and dominated politics with false narratives. Sound familiar?

Delmore Schwartz wrestled with the threat of the future alone and unloved, and he succumbed to alcoholism and madness. He died in 1966 at the Chelsea Hotel – penniless, childless, friendless – dead for two days before a cleaning lady found his body. He was 52. Time is the fire in which we burn. Or rot.

The threat of the future washed over Delmore Schwartz in 1938 as surely as it washed over me in 1996. As surely as one day it will wash over you. But he never found his Pack.

**If you would wrestle with future’s threat ... if you would stare back at the abyss, as Nietzsche would have it, or if you would yell at the clouds, as The Simpsons would have it ... find your Pack.**

But see, that’s only one of the things I know about Time.

*Tick-tock.*

As Paul Harvey used to say, here’s the rest of the story.

It was the summer of 1996, early June, and I was teaching a course at Simmons College in Boston to make some extra dough. Jennifer was clerking for a lawfirm down in Dallas, pregnant with our first child. My dad called. He and my mom were in London, where they had rented a small flat for a month. Did I want to come over and stay for a few days? As it happened, I had five days free, perfect for a long weekend trip. I walked down to a cheapo travel agency on Boylston (yes, a physical travel agency), and found a ticket for \$600 or thereabouts. Seemed like a lot. I could have afforded it, by which I mean there was room on my credit card to buy it, not that I could really afford it. \$600 was a lot of money to me. That said, I hadn’t seen my parents since Christmas, and my dad sounded so ... *happy*. This was a special trip for them, a chance to LIVE in a city that my father LOVED, and this was my chance to share it with them. But \$600. I dunno. I called my father and told him that I just couldn’t swing it. He understood. He was a very practical guy. The call lasted all of 20 seconds. You know, international long distance being so expensive and all.

I never saw my father again. He died a few weeks after he and my mother got home.

*Tick-tock.*

**Yeah, I know a few things about Time.**

I know that the moving finger writes, and having writ, moves on.

I know that I would give anything to go back to that week in June 1996 and buy that stupid ticket that I couldn’t “afford” but really I could afford and spend five more days with my father and not do anything special but just BE with him and share a beer at that pub that he mentioned on the phone but that I just can’t remember the name of no matter how hard I try and it’s weird but that’s what bugs me most of all.

Tick-tock.

### **What do I know about Time?**

#### **I know that there is no Long Now.**

*The Now is short. That is exactly what makes it precious beyond price.  
The Now is for LIVING.*

#### **I know that there is no Safe Future.**

*The Future is risky. That is exactly what makes it precious beyond price.  
The Future is for INVESTING.*

Yet instead of *living* in the Now and *investing* for the Future, we are nudged into “investing” for the Now and “living” in the Future.

### **HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?**

#### **Economic stimulus**

*The threat of the economic future is removed by fiat and narrative,  
replaced by the Long Now of constant economic stimulus.*

#### **Political fear**

*The promise of the political future is removed by fiat and narrative,  
replaced by the Long Now of constant political fear.*

We are told that the economic stimulus and the political fear of the Long Now are costless, when in fact they cost us ... everything.

The Nudging State and Nudging Oligarchy will tell you “TINA!”. They will tell you that There Is No Alternative.

I tell you this is a Lie.

I tell you this is **Sheep Logic**, the intentional training of human intelligences to pursue myopic, other-regarding behaviors even unto death, through the vehicle of the Long Now.

***What is the alternative to the Long Now?***

**Personal courage**

*Leaders who act as stewards of the future, not managers of the now.*

**Professional courage**

*Investors who take more risk with what's Real, and less with what's not.*

**Social courage**

*Citizens who take back their vote, and who refuse to play the fool.*

*Tick-tock.*



---

## DISCLOSURES

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

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

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

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

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