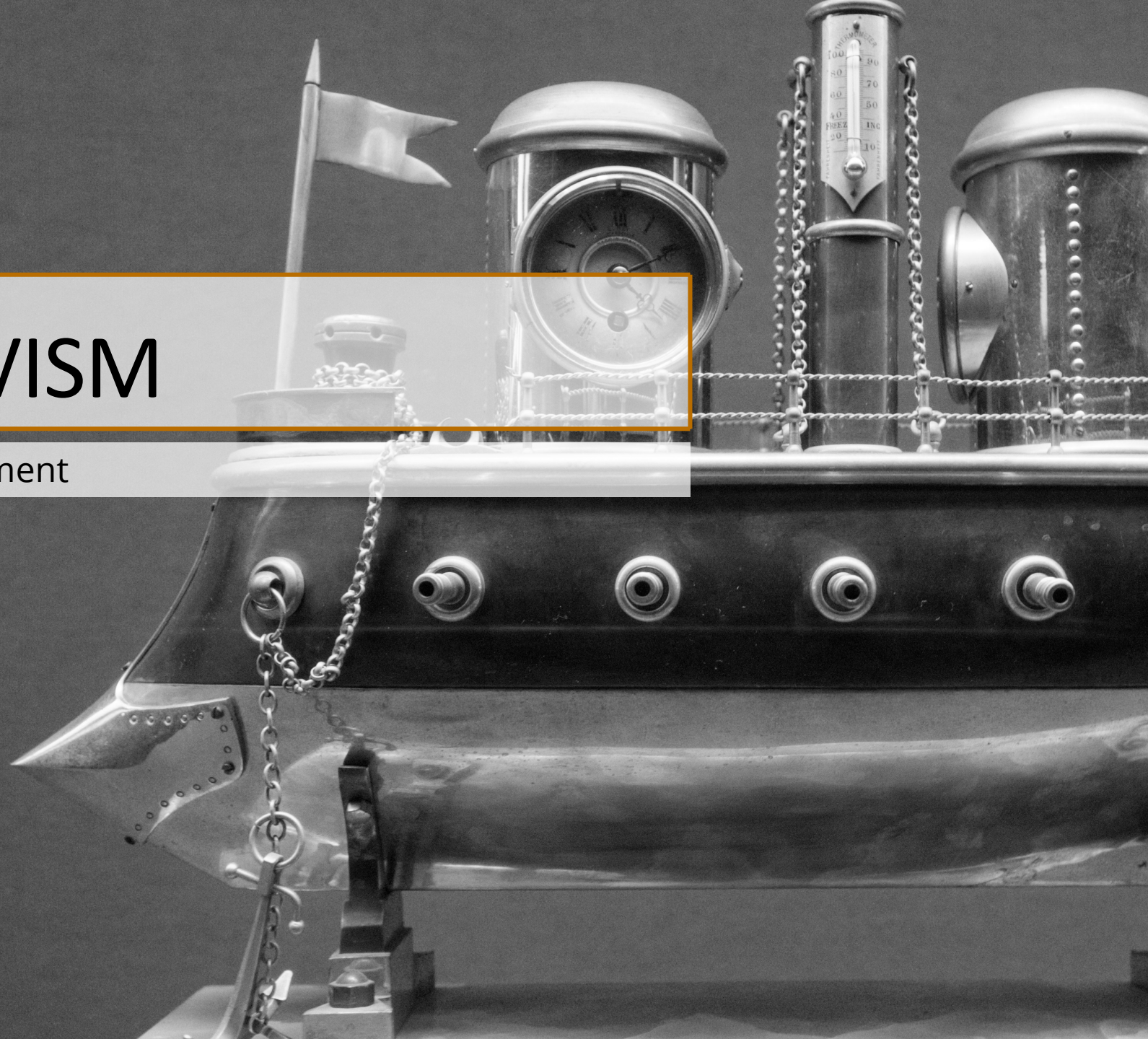


PROGRESSIVISM

& Ethical Christian Engagement

Russ White, Ph.D.
2023

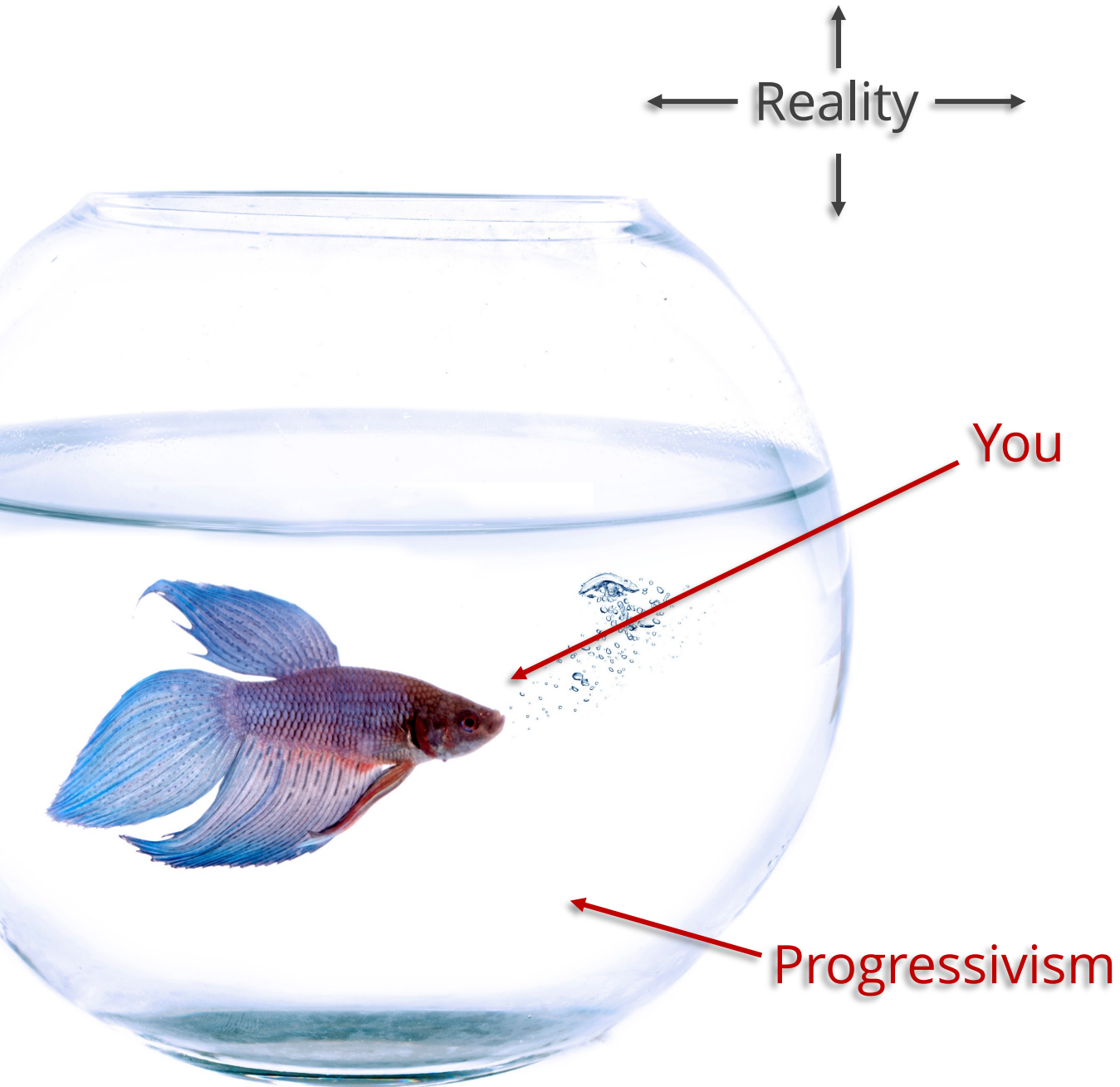




<https://sharedpublic.s3.amazonaws.com/s360-progressivism-presentation.pdf>



<https://sharedpublic.s3.amazonaws.com/s360-progressivism-notes.pdf>



Progressivism
impacts everything

We have a hard time
seeing it from the
“outside”

How should we
evaluate and engage
progressivism?

PROGRESSIVISM



ROOTS & BRANCHES

DISCONTENTS

ENGAGEMENT

AGENDA



TAXONOMY



Science can discover how nature works

Engineering can discover how to control nature

Humans are part of nature

Therefore, humans can be improved through scientific discovery and engineering

The same methodology that enabled steel to be manufactured to previously unattainable degrees of hardness could solve ethnic tensions or alleviate poverty.

Jordan, John M. Machine-Age Ideology: Social Engineering and American Liberalism, 1911–1939. Kindle ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010.

Information technologies . . . empower the individual, enhance personal freedom, and radically reduce the power of the nation-state. Existing social, political and legal power structures will wither away to be replaced by unfettered interactions between autonomous individuals and their software.

Barbrook, Richard, and Andy Cameron. "The Californian Ideology." Mute, September 1995.
<http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/californian-ideology>.

The paternalistic aspect lies in the claim that it is legitimate for choice architects to try to influence people's behavior in order to make their lives longer, healthier, and better. In other words, we argue for self-conscious efforts, by institutions in the private sector and also by government, to steer people's choices in directions that will improve their lives.

Thaler, Richard H., and Cass R. Sunstein. Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 2009.

Constantinian Synthesis
*first great
progressive era*



Ecclesiology



Holy Roman
Empire
Establish the Kingdom
of God on Earth
(i.e. *Crusades*)

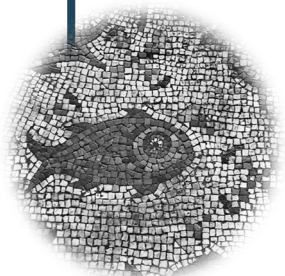
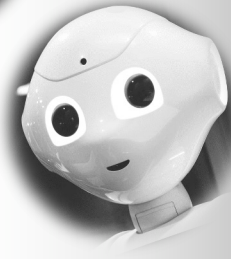
Collapse of the Holy
Roman Empire
(church/state
separation, defeat of
Crusader states)



Machine Age
*second great
progressive era*



Computer Age
*third great
progressive era*



Early Church

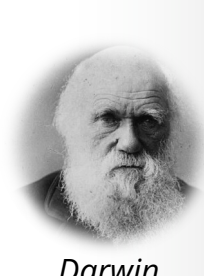


Fall of Eastern
Roman Empire



Reformation and
Splintering

*Turn of the
Century (1800)*



Darwin



World Wars

PROGRESSIVE AGES

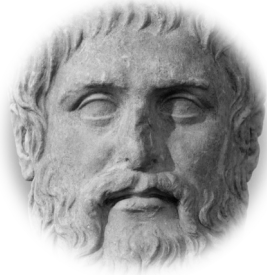
Man is ...

Infinitely malleable
(or almost so)

Essentially good
(or at least not *essentially* evil)

Perfectible
(or improvable)

A creature of
environment rather
than *nature*



...knowledge is a noble and commanding thing, which cannot be overcome, and will not allow a man, if he only knows the difference of good and evil, to do anything which is contrary to knowledge...

Plato, The Dialogues of Plato, ed. B. Jowett, Third Edition, vol. 1 (New York; London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), 176.



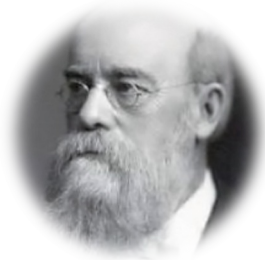
If my true self is the group-self, then my only rights are those which membership in a group gives me. The old idea of natural rights postulated the particularist individual; we know now that no such person exists.

Mary Parker Follett, The New State, Group Organization the Solution of Popular Government (New York [etc.] Longmans, Green and Co., 1918), 137



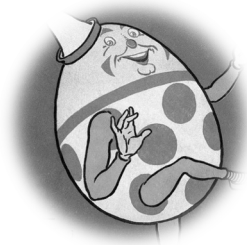
All that progressives ask or desire is permission—in an era when "development," "evolution," is the scientific word—to interpret the Constitution according to the Darwinian principle...

Woodrow Wilson, "What Is Progress?," in The U.S. Constitution: A Reader, ed. Hillsdale College Politics Faculty (Hillsdale College Press, 2012), 640



Is it to be supposed that the Providence which suffers whole books to be lost by men would infallibly guarantee those that remain against errors in the copies, and other imperfections? As a matter of fact, we know that He has not so protected any of them.

Washington Gladden, Who Wrote the Bible? A Book for the People (Boston, New York, Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1891), 15.



"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass

Minimum

Words do not describe *real things*, only our mental idea of them

We do not have access to reality through our senses

Maximum

Any new reality described by words can be created

Nature can be fully controlled

Evolutionary theory permeates our culture with a sense of progress

Even if evolution is “guided by god” or panpsychism, it can still serve this purpose



ROOTS/EVOLUTION

Instead of formal doctrinal creeds, the Social Gospel stressed ethical social behavior. Instead of a threat, it saw in evolution a great opportunity for moving the church to a mission of Christian social action. This is not to suggest that the Social Gospel swallowed evolution whole; like the Reform Darwinism of Lester Frank Ward, it rejected the harsh, laissez-faire, survival-of-the-fittest, social Darwinism of figures such as Yale sociologist William Graham Sumner. From evolutionary thinking, the Social Gospel drew not a harsh determinism, but rather a divine plan for human liberation and advancement. In this respect, its evolutionary foundations were of the historicist variety, which saw in human history not just random adaptation to endless change, but social development through the force of history that would ultimately culminate in a perfected social order.

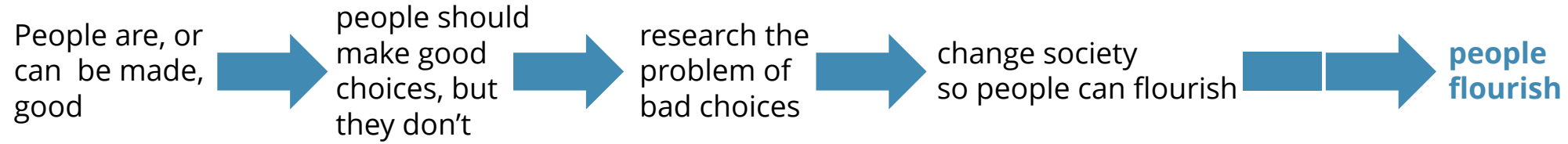
Bradley C. S. Watson, ed., Progressive Challenges to the American Constitution: A New Republic (Cambridge University Press, 2017).



ROOTS & BRANCHES
DISCONTENTS
ENGAGEMENT

AGENDA

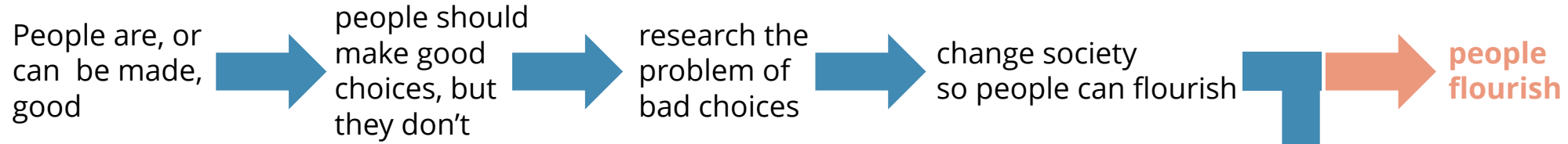
This is what progressivism is supposed to look like ...



But this never seems to happen ...

Why?

WHAT REALLY HAPPENS



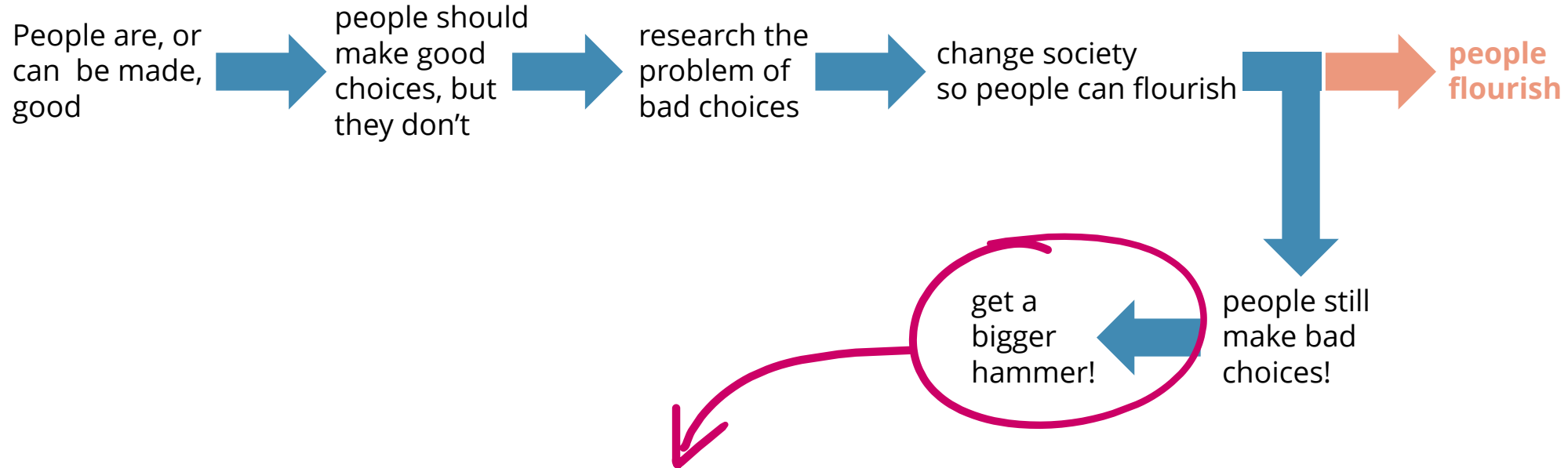
But this never seems to happen ...

Why?

Because ... sin

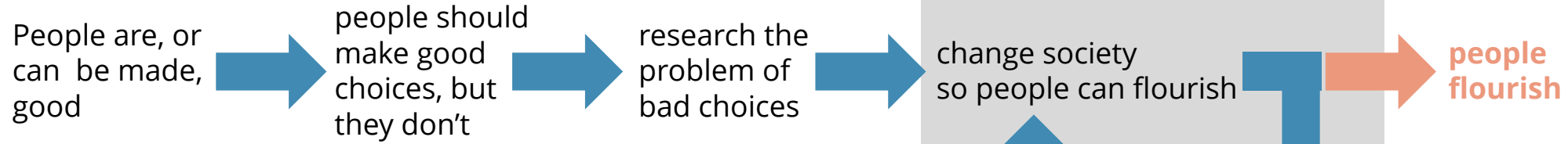
*But sin is never a reason in
the progressive view
Instead ...*

WHAT REALLY HAPPENS

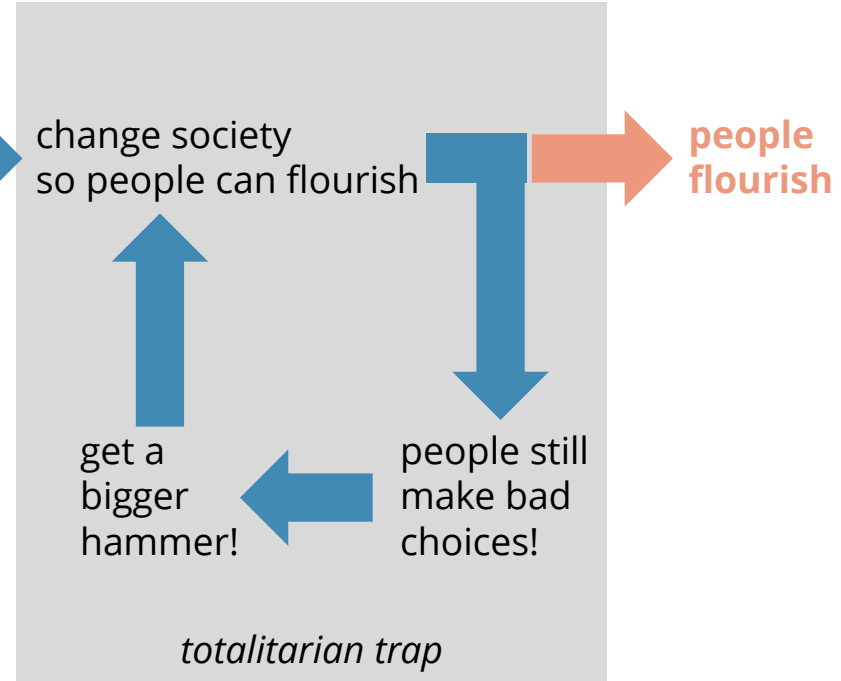


We aren't trying/caring enough, or there is something wrong with these people ...

Let's try harder!



Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.
C.S. Lewis



WHAT REALLY HAPPENS



What kinds of hammers do we have?

Convince

Manage

Improve

Eliminate

TOTALITARIAN TRAP

Convince those who do not seem willing to *progress*

The first cycle of the totalitarian trap



The world has a habit of leaving those behind who won't go with it. The world has always neglected stand-patters. And, therefore, the stand-patter does not excite my indignation; he excites my sympathy. He is going to be so lonely before it is all over. And we are good fellows, we are good company; why doesn't he come along? We are not going to do him any harm. We are going to show him a good time. We are going to climb the slow road until it reaches some upland where the air is fresher, where the whole talk of mere politicians is stilled, where men can look in each other's faces and see that there is nothing to conceal, that all they have to talk about they are willing to talk about in the open and talk about with each other; and whence, looking back over the road, we shall see at last that we have fulfilled our promise to mankind.

Woodrow Wilson, "What Is Progress?," in The U.S. Constitution: A Reader, ed. Hillsdale College Politics Faculty (Hillsdale College Press, 2012), 640

CONVINCE



A problem of foremost importance at the present time is the management of labor to secure efficient work and satisfied men. It is probable that the direction of more than 90 per cent of the skilled labor is in the hands of engineers. Most emphatically is this a case where engineers owe a great duty to society. It is, therefore, an especial pleasure to recognize that some of our own members have played a foremost part in the best work that has been done in devising plans for compensating labor which will stimulate the men to their best efforts and reward them adequately. The names of Halsey, Taylor, Gantt, and Emerson will at once occur to you.

*George W. Melville, "The Engineer's Duty as a Citizen," Transactions of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers 32 (1910): 529.
(U.S. Navy, Chief of the Bureau of Steam Engineering)*

Those who want to
be "stand-patters"
can be managed so
they fit into society if
they cannot be
convinced to progress

Making it a part of
their job will make
progress
unavoidable

*The second cycle of the
totalitarian trap*

MANAGE

There must be some
moral or
educational
deficiency in those
who refuse to
progress

They need to be fixed

*The third cycle of the
totalitarian trap*



We have more than once contrasted the view that progress is to be secured mainly by the deliberate elimination of the "unfit," with the more humane, or in what is perhaps a more descriptive phrase, the economic view, that progress is to come mainly through the rescue of the "unfit" and their transformation into fit and desirable citizens.

Edward T. Devine, "Protection vs. Elimination," Survey, October 4, 1913.



All that society has accomplished for itself is put, through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self. Here individualism and socialism are at one.

John Dewey, The School and Society (University of Chicago Press, 1899).

If all these [hereditary criminals] could be marshalled into one great camp and with a mill stone around each of their necks, cast into the midst of the sea the people would be relieved of their weightiest burden and the pathways of coming generations brightened with hope as never before.

As quoted by Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Sterlization: A Progressive Measure?," The Wisconsin Magazine of History 43, no. 3 (Spring 1960): 190.



The laws of heredity indicate, that, if these deaf children should marry congenitally deaf husbands or wives, an increased proportion of deaf offspring will appear in the next generation; and that the continuous intermarriage of congenital deaf-mutes from generation to generation may ultimately result in the formation of a deaf variety of the human race.

Alexander Graham Bell, "Census of the Defective Classes," Science 13, no. 311 (January 1889): 39.

Almost (but not) all
progressive
programs eventually
end up concluding
that making progress
means eliminating
people who *will not*
progress

*The fourth and final cycle of
the totalitarian trap*

ELIMINATE

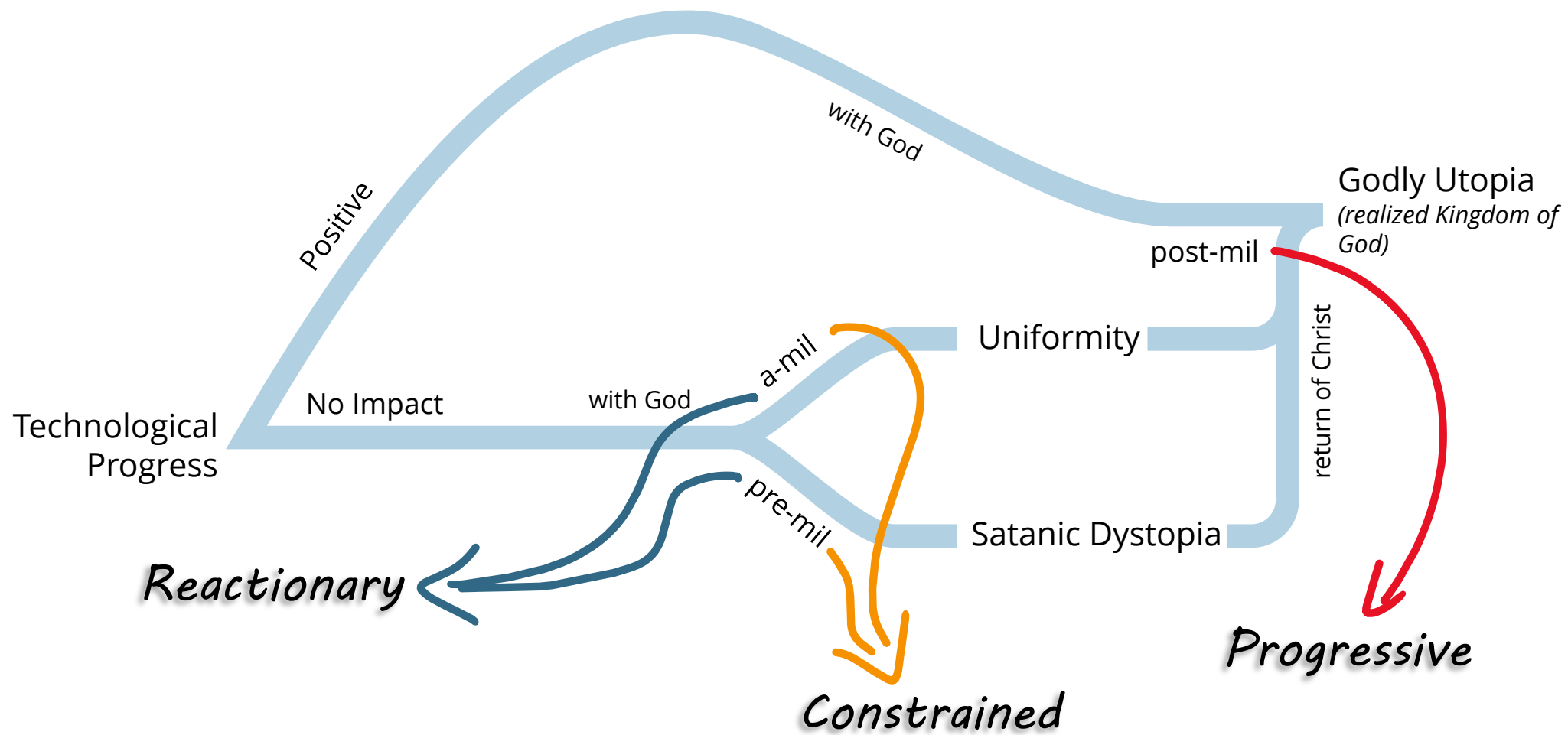


ROOTS & BRANCHES

DISCONTENTS

ENGAGEMENT

AGENDA





Because of sin ...

Technological progress
(beyond a certain
point) is against God's
will

Culture cannot
"progress"

*We adhere to the minimal
use of technology, and
encourage members to do
the same*

*We intend to bring people
out of the technology-driven
mainstream culture*

REACTIONARY EXAMPLE

Technical progress is possible

Cultural progress will be short-lived or is ephemeral

Because of sin ...

We use technology to aid in applicable areas of church practice and outreach

Even though technology can ameliorate the impact of sin in our fallen universe, it cannot change the nature of man



CONSTRAINED EXAMPLE



Technical and social progress can be used to shape the culture, building the Kingdom of God

We use technology to reach the world

Technical and social progress can bring the world closer to God's ideal kingdom in the here and now

Human dignity

Two different definitions

Doing what helps others fulfill their **desires**

Doing what helps others fulfill their **design**

Which one really makes people happy over the long run?

What does history say?

What does history say about how people who will not “go along” are treated?

What does this say about human dignity in progressivism?

Historical Evolution

Does history really show human culture improving?

What is different about this grand progressive age?

Technology has always been the answer—yet it hasn't ever made a real difference in the nature of humans

Truth

Can you really live in a world where words have “whatever meaning gives me power?”

Both foundationalism and nominalism fail; the only other options are found in religious thought

And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

Genesis 3:21

Make yourself an ark of gopher wood. Make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.

Genesis 6:14

*Technology can be
used for good*

Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.

Genesis 11:4

*Technology can be
used for evil*

So on the day of the battle there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people with Saul and Jonathan, but Saul and Jonathan his son had them.

1 Samuel 13:22

And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude.

1 Samuel 13:5

*Technology is not
the overwhelming
advantage we like
to believe*

Constantinian Synthesis
*first great
progressive era*



Ecclesiology



Holy Roman
Empire
Establish the Kingdom
of God on Earth
(i.e. *Crusades*)

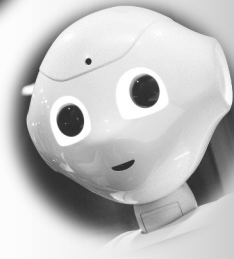
Collapse of the Holy
Roman Empire
(church/state
separation, defeat of
Crusader states)



Machine Age
*second great
progressive era*



Computer Age
*third great
progressive era*



premil

postmil

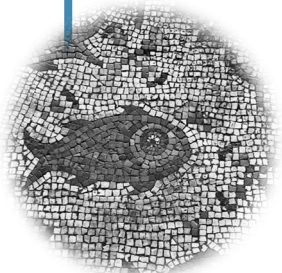
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Early Church

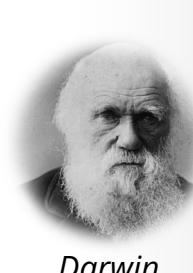


Fall of Eastern
Roman Empire



Reformation and
Splintering

*Turn of the
Century (1800)*



Darwin

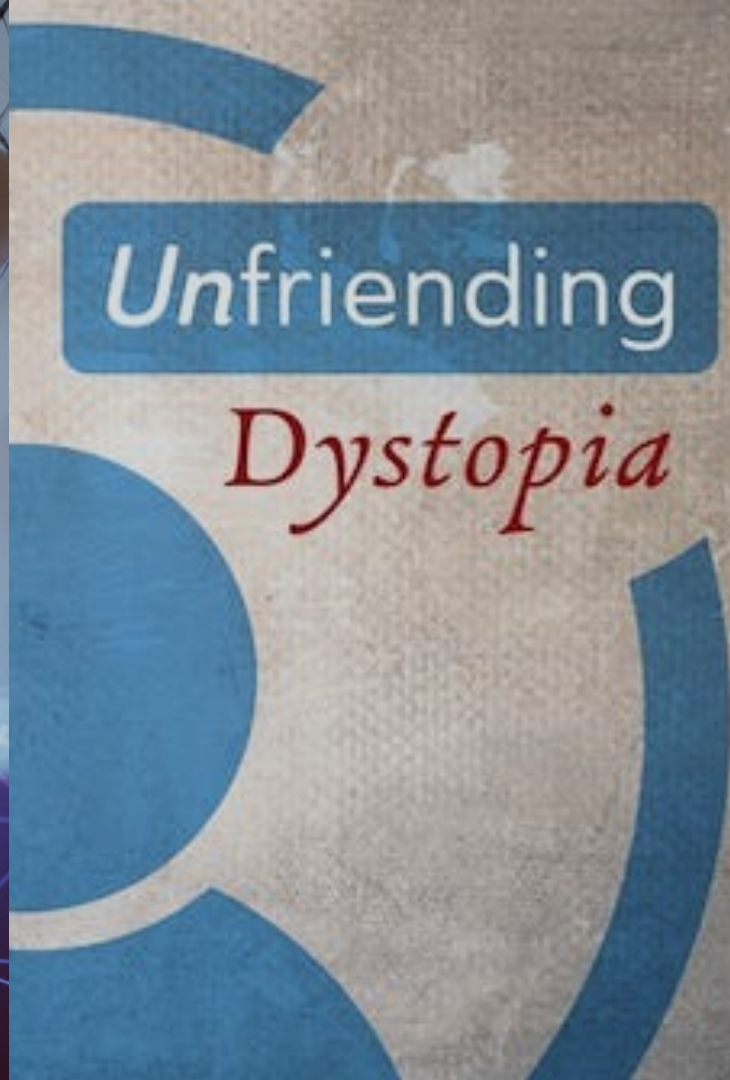


World Wars

PROGRESSIVISM/THEOLOGY



unintended DYSTOPIA



Unfriending

Dystopia

*Get in touch if you have
questions or comments
russ@riw.us*



