



Epsilon Theory

Being Human in a LARPing World

June 8, 2022



That's a painting of Alexander the Great "untying" the Gordian Knot. You remember the story, right? While he was out conquering Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), Alexander entered a city where a knot of surpassing complexity had been tied in front of a temple. The prophecy, of course, was that whoever untied the knot would rule the world. But the knot was so complex, so dense, so self-reinforcing, that it was impossible to untie the knot *on its own terms*. So Alexander created new terms, external to the game that he had been *told* to play. He cut it with his sword.

That's exactly how you get out of a bad equilibrium in game theory. You change the terms of the game by creating a larger game, a metagame. You add a new dimension to the game so that players *choose* to cooperate for a better payoff and a new equilibrium within the metagame.

That's exactly how you solve the electoral polarization problem in political theory. You introduce a new, cross-cutting issue space that has a single-peaked distribution of political preferences. You add a new dimension to the game so that voters *choose* to cooperate for a better policy outcome within the larger issue space.

Or we can just keep LARPing our way from one human disaster to another, playing the game exactly as we are told.



LARP is an acronym for Live Action Role Play.

It's what Civil War reenactors do when they dress up in Union and Confederate garb to fight a pretend battle, or what Dungeons & Dragons aficionados do when they dress up as wizards or paladins to fight a pretend monster. It's also what the Uvalde police does when they dress up in tactical gear to be a pretend SWAT Team.

But, hey, they keep their index fingers straight and not on the trigger! That's so cool.

The hardest part of writing this note was getting past the anger.

Anger at the deranged, violence-fantast teenager who murdered children with a military-cartoonified rifle.

Anger at the LARPing, violence-fantast adults who dressed up as a police SWAT team with military-cartoonified rifles and then hunkered down in a school hallway while children were being murdered.

And I'm not there yet - past the anger, I mean - but I want to talk now about what the Uvalde massacre is and what it isn't, before this, too, gets autotuned into the memory hole oblivion of red vs. blue and the yakkety-yak-yak of *Gun Reform!*[™] and *Police Reform!*[™].

Uvalde is not a symbol of anything.

Uvalde is not a catalyst of anything.

Uvalde IS.

Uvalde IS our American society, where gun culture and police culture have metastasized into a chronic, disabling illness. I don't mean that the spread of gun culture and police culture is *like* a disease. I mean that our society is literally infected with the ideas of gun culture and police culture that live virus-like in the metaverse. I know that sounds weird, to say that ideas and narratives are as alive in their invisible world as viruses and bacteria are alive in theirs. But just ... [consider it, okay?](#) Because once you see that the ideas and narratives of gun culture and police culture are as real and powerful (more so!) than guns and police themselves, I think you'll more easily see the challenge before us.

And that challenge is this:

Uvalde IS an incredibly stable equilibrium of ideas and narratives where it is distinctively advantageous to the two dominant political parties and the two most powerful social institutions of the modern American age - public safety and public education - to *preserve* the conditions which made this massacre possible.

No one wants a Uvalde massacre. That is not what I am saying.

What I am saying is that the set of ideas and narratives that *allow* a Uvalde massacre are beneficial to the political interests of the Republican party AND the Democratic party, the public safety apparatus AND the public education apparatus. The ideas and narratives that *allow* a Uvalde massacre provide each of these institutions with an eternal, amorphous enemy, with a readymade set of rallying cries in the metaverse, with an inexhaustible set of LARPing opportunities for political and bureaucratic entrepreneurs. Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.



To be clear, I am all for policy reform around both guns and police. Here's the article I wrote about all that two years ago: [The Anti-Anarchist Cookbook](#). Defund the police? No. Demilitarize and deunionize the police? Oh my god yes. As for guns, *of course* I think we should prevent teenagers, criminals and mentally ill violence-fantasists from buying any firearm, much less ridiculous cartoon rifles like AR-15s that are specifically designed and marketed to appeal to violence-fantasists.

But I also know this: policy reform, of whatever degree and whatever type, is not enough.

It will never - *by design* - be enough.

American politics IS an equilibrium, where *all* of our social ideas and narratives - not just those around guns and policing - are intentionally constructed and molded to support an extremely stable *system*, such that LARPing and play-acting at *all* of our social practices - not just those around guns and policing - have become the path of least resistance and the best way to get a pat on the head from the Nudging Oligarchy and the Nudging State. *Hey, I got retweeted by Don Jr/ AOC / Elon! I am part of an important social movement!*

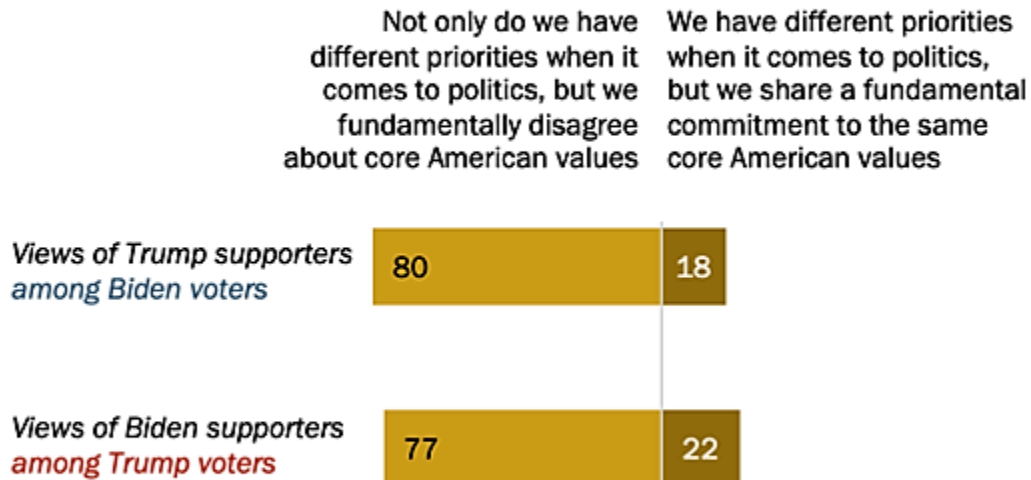
American politics IS a race to the metaversal bottom between Trumpism, Wall Streetism and Wokism, with one horrible anti-human idea after another presented with greater and greater narrative sophistication and [narrative weaponization](#). All three are just modalities of [The Long Now](#), what Orwell described as "an endless present where the Party is always right", manifesting in an American context of constant economic stimulus and equally constant political fear to maintain a profoundly anti-human and profoundly self-stabilizing status quo.

What do I mean by a self-stabilizing status quo? I mean that in exactly the same way that our reform ideas surrounding money have been coopted by Wall Street and Washington ([Bitcoin becomes Bitcoin!™](#)), so have our reform ideas surrounding politics been coopted to the same effect. The Long Now pulls forward the economic future through credit and leverage to make a present of constant economic stimulus, so that *Bitcoin!™* becomes just another game in the Wall Street casino. *Step right up and place your bets!* The Long Now pulls forward the political future through narrative and social media to make a present of constant political fear, so that *Reform!™* becomes just another battlefield in the red vs. blue war. *Stay alert for the enemy!*

I mean, look at this:

Only about one-in-five Trump and Biden supporters say they share the same core American values and goals

% of registered voters who say ...



Notes: Based on registered voters. No response answers not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 30-Oct. 5, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

This is the [result of a poll](#) taken by the Pew Research Center about one month before the 2020 election. Only 22% of Trump voters believed that Biden voters share the same basic American values as they have. The flip side was even worse. Only 18% of Biden voters believed that Trump voters are "good Americans" like they are.

The American political equilibrium is a forever war. The other side, whatever that other side might be, is not just mistaken on this particular issue (say, gun control), they are Bad People. They cannot be trusted. There is no common ground. They are not true citizens of this country. The only "reform" that can be contemplated is the complete rout of the other side, and any sort of "compromise" is a temporary deal with the devil, to be abrogated whenever the pendulum of power swings your way.

This is intentional.

I don't begrudge anyone's efforts to "make a difference" by engaging directly with the anti-human status quo of the Long Now, whether that's crypto true-believers engaging with the financial system or reformist true-believers engaging with the political system. I support your goals (most of them, anyway) and I wish you all the luck in the world.

My personal view, though, is that so long as these engagements are embedded within the forever war (and phony war!) of Libtards versus Magats, then there is no authentic engagement to be had.

There is only LARPing.

So that brings me to the second hardest part of writing this note - what can I say about Uvalde that is constructive? What can I say about Uvalde other than express my rage, other than point out that it's all LARPing, all the way down, including earnest attempts at reform?

The answer, as always, **can be found in an Old Story**. In this case, I believe that the answer to our intractable, unsolvable problem of American politics is found in the story of Alexander and the Gordian Knot.

Just like Alexander, we will cut through the knot by creating a new set of terms, external to the game we have been *told* to play, and in so doing we will solve the unsolvable-on-its-own-terms Forever War + Phony War of modern American politics.

Not with a sword, but with a shared spirit of human autonomy and dignity.

The cure for the cancer of gun culture and police culture is not to be found in reform laws around guns and police, but in reform *ideas* around culture, ideas that create a new dimension of American society that rejects LARPing and LARPers alike.

What are these ideas? The ideas of being human.
The ideas of Make / Protect / Teach.

What does it mean to Make?

It means you are an inventor. A manufacturer. An artist. A craftsman. A kid at a Maker Fair. A farmer. An engineer. A home builder. A coder. It's the creation of something (doesn't have to be a 'thing', though!) through the application of some creative IDEA.

What does it mean to Protect?

It means you are a soldier. A policeman. A fireman. An EMT. A nurse. A doctor. It's a Neighborhood Watch. It's a mechanic fixing a car. It's also a unionization drive. It's also a fiduciary managing a portfolio. It's anything where you are prioritizing the safety and security of others.

What does it mean to Teach?

It means you are a teacher, of course. Or a writer. Or a researcher. Or a priest. Or a home-schooling mom. Or a little league coach. It can be an older person sharing experiences about the world-as-it-is

with a younger person. And vice versa. It means you've got something to say to your Pack, and you've got the guts to say it.

And yes, I realize that the vast majority of people reading this note would not be practitioners of Make / Protect / Teach, at least not in their day job.

But it doesn't have to be your day job. It just has to be your identity, how you *choose* to carry yourself in the world, how you *choose* to assign your attention and your inherent human autonomy regardless of your day job. Your day job is what you do. Make / Protect / Teach is who you are.

Being Human is the first principle of what it means to make or to protect or to teach, the first principle of what it means to have an identity based on human autonomy and dignity.

Being Human is a choice.

Being Human is where we stand our ground. Not on some national political scale where we are used as fodder and feed by the Grand LARPer. But on the personal scale. On the scale of our families and our communities. A scale where we can recognize *ourselves* once again, not as a mini-LARPer means to some Statist or Oligarchic end, but as fully human members of a clear-eyed and full-hearted Pack.

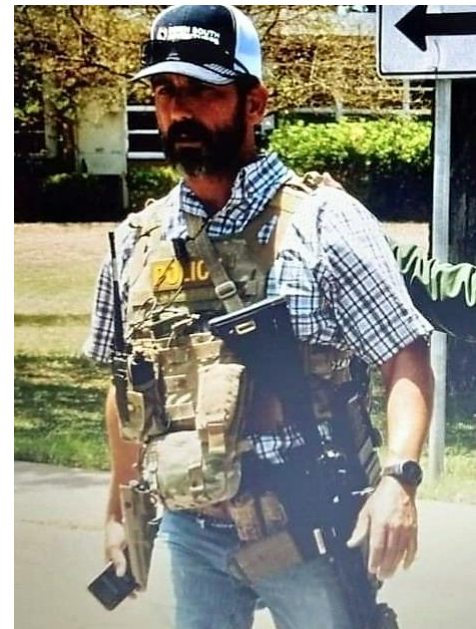
Here are three examples of what I mean by Being Human, one each for Make / Protect / Teach.

I'll start with Protect, because it brings us full circle back to Uvalde.

The officers who finally breached the locked classrooms with a janitor's key were not a formal tactical unit, according to a person briefed on the response. The officers, including specially trained Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents and a sheriff's deputy, formed an ad hoc group on their own and gathered in the hallway outside the classroom, a tense space where they said there appeared to be no chain of command.

They were done waiting for permission, one of them said, according to the person, before they moved toward the classroom where the gunman waited. They continued even after one of them heard a command crackling in his ear piece: Do not breach.

[No Radio, Old Tactics: How the Police Response in Uvalde Broke Down](#)



The Human hero is on the right. This is the guy who actually went through the door, took a bullet across his scalp, and shot the murdering psychopath dead. Notice what the Human hero is not doing. He is not peacocking with a cartoon rifle. He is not wearing cartoon tactical gear. Hell, he's wearing a baseball cap and jeans. An hour ago he was forty miles away, sitting down with his dad to eat lunch. And then he heard the call.

"They were done waiting for permission"

Being Human means that you do not wait for Incident Command to give the order to protect children from being murdered.

Being Human means that you do not wait for *permission* from the Nudging State or the Nudging Oligarchy to act constructively in the world.

"They continued even after one of them heard a command crackling in his earpiece"

This is the hardest part about Being Human: **we all have commands crackling in our earpieces.**

My examples for Make and Teach are not nearly so dramatic, and intentionally so.

Why? Because you don't have to be a hero to be a Human. You don't have to breach a door with an active shooter on the other side waiting to blow your head off. You just have to act where you see an urgent need. You just have to be brave enough to ignore those social commands crackling in your earpiece.

They're also personal examples, because I'm anything but a hero.

My Make example is **Frontline Heroes**, a project that Rusty and I started in March 2020 with friends and family to source, purchase and distribute PPE – particularly N95 and equivalent masks – to the emergency responders and healthcare workers who were on the frontlines of the Covid war with nothing to protect themselves. Over the following year, we distributed more than 250,000 N95 and equivalent masks in packets of 100 to 200 at a time to more than 1,700 individual nurses and EMTs and docs and firefighters and cops in all 50 states, who in turn distributed them to their teams. We **made** a distribution network that got PPE directly into the hands of the human beings who in turn risked their lives for us every day as the pandemic raged.

A quick story about Frontline Heroes to demonstrate the power of Make / Protect / Teach ...

In the early months, it wasn't just that US supply chains for PPE were completely bollixed up, so were "normal" supply chains from China. There were no shipments or containers of N95s or equivalent masks to be had, period. I had half a dozen deals with Chinese suppliers go bad, always at

the last moment. So working with a friend at Intel, we connected with individual Chinese citizens who – spending their own money and on their own time – would buy as many high quality masks as they could under the Chinese government’s personal allowance, and then *mail* them to my home. Ultimately we were able to reimburse them, but making that happen was another set of crazy stories. Why did these Chinese citizens, with zero connection to the US other than working for a US company, sacrifice so much and take such risks for Americans they did not know and would never meet? Because they are Humans. I often think of this when our LARPing political leaders and their LARPing political leaders tell us that China and the US are enemies.

When you engage with the real world on a project of urgent need ... you are *never* alone. You will find other Humans from all over the world, and they will support you.

My Teach example is even more personal and even more mundane. It’s our decision to homeschool our kids.

From [Clever Hans](#) ...

I don’t talk about this very much in public, because most people assume that homeschoolers are either religious zealots or antisocial freaks, and we’re definitely not the former. Maybe a bit antisocial, but I wouldn’t call it “freakish” per se. We just don’t like seeing neighbors’ houses. Or neighbors. People, really ... okay, maybe a little freakish after all. But that’s not why we homeschool.

We homeschool because we want to be more active participants in our children’s education. That’s not a knock on our local public schools, which are as good as they come. That’s not a knock on private schools in the area, many of which are world-renowned. We homeschool because most of the practices and structures of the modern school, public or private, exist for the benefit of the institution, not the child. There’s nothing evil or bad about this, it’s just inherent in the logistics and organization required for any effective institution responsible for hundreds or thousands of people. But it’s not just logistics. It’s not just the bus schedule. It’s also the curriculum. It’s also the homework and the testing. It’s also the social structures and social behaviors that are embedded in the modern school.

Modern education is a perfect example of [the Industrially Necessary Egg](#) — spotlessly clean and cool to the touch, not because that makes for a better tasting egg, but because the protein factories that supply mass society with mass quantities of eggs require chemical washes and refrigeration to turn a profit. That’s fine. I get it. We live in a big world where lots of people want eggs, and the protein factories satisfy that desire pretty effectively.

But what’s not fine is that we have all been nudged into believing that the Industrially Necessary Egg is the Best Egg, that a fresh egg, which isn’t scrubbed clean and never sees a

refrigerator, is an Inferior Egg. We have all been nudged into believing that *of course* 13-year-olds should be grouped with other 13-year-olds during most waking hours, that *of course* there should be a clear delineation between home life and school life, that *of course* the school day should mirror the adult work day, that *of course* classroom lectures are the most effective pedagogy, that *of course* children can only be socialized by letting them roam free in a big flock from one semi-shepherded environment to another.

So yeah, we want to be active participants in our children's lives, and that's why we homeschool. Not to shield them or isolate them from reality, but to be there *for* them as counselors and teachers as they confront reality. And not just to be there for them when mass society *allows* us, when it's *our turn* during the work week to take responsibility for our own kids, but to embrace that responsibility *all* of the time. Because it *IS* our responsibility all of the time, no matter how much mass society facilitates and nudges us into partially abdicating that responsibility so that we can work longer and longer hours in service to the Nudging State and the Nudging Oligarchy.

Nudges are the commands crackling in our earpieces.

I know that homeschooling isn't for everyone. I know that homeschooling is impossible for most. I know that when I say "we homeschool" it is entirely a royal we, where my wife shoulders 99% of the burden. But I also know that you don't have to homeschool outright to be a truly active and engaged participant in your child's education. You don't have to homeschool to show up every day for your child. You don't have to homeschool to trust your gut – your human gut – about what is best for your child. You don't have to homeschool to stop waiting for permission to engage actively with your child's education. You don't have to homeschool to stop listening to the commands crackling in your earpiece, telling you what's 'best' for you and your family. **Every Human can do *that*.**

And that's the point.

Being Human isn't about a specific outcome, like "homeschool your kids". It's about making a choice to live a life of autonomy and active participation in the real world of the real people who mean the most to you. It's not a chore! It's about play. It's about exploration. It's about empathy. It's about *being* a human.

I promise you this. Everything you give, you will receive ten-fold in return. Because that's how *being* a human works. It doesn't diminish in the spending. It *grows*.

The solution to the Long Now is not a political movement from the top down, but a social movement from the bottom up.

And that's what Make / Protect / Teach is ... a *personal* social movement that requires only the *personal* choice to act constructively and courageously in your everyday life.

It's a personal social movement based on resistance and refusal. A refusal to vote for ridiculous candidates. A refusal to buy ridiculous securities. A refusal to take on ridiculous debts. A refusal to abdicate your identity and autonomy of mind.

It's also a personal social movement based on more than refusal, more than turning the other cheek. There is also the action of *being* human, action in service to your Pack and your self-realization as a Human, not action in service to the Grand LARPers and their begrudging pats on your head.

Make / Protect / Teach and Being Human are revolutions. Not the revolutions that get televised and autotuned, but revolutions of the Human heart ... which are the only revolutions that ever made a damn bit of difference anyway.

Everyone reading this note can adopt the principles of Make / Protect / Teach in whatever way works for them. It's like homeschooling – there is no “right way” to do this, there is only the honest, human effort to BE a maker or a protector or a teacher. I have no idea what will come out of this call, no idea where you will go with this, but I can't wait to find out. You can lurk. You can dabble. You can dive in. You can change your mind.

But if you can't escape the nagging feeling that this LARPing world of political forever war is a false world, if you feel your humanity being sucked out of you one angry social media engagement at a time, if you want to find other actual human beings to explore ideas and projects of actual human meaning, know this:

You are not alone.

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