THE PARABLE OF THE MONKEYS:
A TALE OF MODERN AND POST-MODERN SOCIETY

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Part I: The Coming of Modernity

Once upon a time not so long ago, the world was covered with tall trees whose sturdy trunks reached hundreds of feet into the air. The upper branches of each tree spread out to form wide canopies richly covered with hanging vines, diverse fruits, edible leaves, birds and animals. Initially, the trees were so thick that their canopies touched each other but over time many smaller trees died off so that a gap of empty space separated the canopies into a savannah of distinct, semi-isolated environments. The land below the trees was populated by aggressive predators prowling the open space in search of prey, especially canopy-dwellers foolish enough to attempt a ground-crossing from one tree to another.

Now, living in tops of these trees were bands of monkeys. Each monkey-band was isolated from other bands by the social vacuum created by the gaps between trees -- too large for even the strongest monkey to jump -- and by the constant presence of hungry predators below. Each group of monkeys was vaguely aware of other monkey-groups in neighboring trees, and occasionally a particularly brave or foolish monkey would succeed in crossing to another tree. Since each band of monkeys viewed outsiders with deep hostility and distrust, most outsiders were killed, a few were assimilated into the group but none returned to their original band.

Each isolated monkey-band developed and reproduced its own distinctive way of life untouched by monkey-bands in neighboring trees. Each developed its own language and culture,
including distinctive images of god(s) and devil(s), of right and wrong, its own calendar and daily rhythm. Despite these differences, there were also many similarities between the ways of life developed by these isolated monkey-bands, which makes sense since they all shared the same genetic make-up and were living in essentially similar circumstances. Each band was small in social and geographic size. The primary social groups were extended families with high residential stability: monkeys tended not to move around much even within their tree. Each tree had its own local economy and a traditional, unchanging highly sacred way of life.

So within the tops of each of these trees, generation after generation of monkeys prospered and begat offspring, reproducing a unique culture through time. Each band of monkeys, unaware of diverse ways of life in trees all around them, came to view their own way of life as the *One Right and True Way* revealed to the group by their god(s). Any deviation from The *One Right and True Way* was considered sacrilege (grave sin) and triggered vigorous reaction from the group, who punished the violator aggressively, sometimes with death. Since no monkey ever left their tree of origin, each monkey-band raised its young to respect and reproduce the *One Right and True Way*. The most important thing for each young monkey to learn was how to avoid sin and punishment by closely following the sacred rules without exception. Each of the monkey-bands valued conformity to the group’s sacred rules of conduct: good monkeys followed *The Way*, bad monkeys did not. Monkeys who were creative, innovative, questioning, flexible or different were strongly suppressed, labeled as “deviant” or “criminal,” and were punished or killed.
One day, in a tree at the leading edge of the savannah, a band of monkeys heard a strange metallic sound and felt their tree tremble. Looking down, they watched as machines began to cut into the trunk of their tree, slowly tearing into the foundation of their social world. What was happening? The monkeys in the tree gathered to make sense of this bewildering event. Many monkeys felt that the gods were punishing their group because they had not punished certain sinners aggressively enough (they knew they should never have allowed those two same-sex monkeys to live together so friendly on the same branch) and fell into frenzied pleas for forgiveness. Some monkeys simply denied that anything was happening. Their ancestors had lived in this canopy for countless generations following their way of life and nothing had ever happened like this before. The most important commandment of the One Right and True Way was that monkeys should always cling tightly to the tree whenever danger threatened. So as the tree began to tremble violently, most of the monkeys held on ever-more-tightly to their family’s branch with all of the strength in their bodies, closing their eyes in prayer.

But a few deviant monkeys kept their eyes open, observed the precise movement of the machines below and began to anticipate what was about to happen. They said to each other: “The machines are cutting through the trunk of our tree. By evening, they will have cut all the way through and this tree is going to fall, taking with it our entire world. Those of us who are not killed in the fall will be eaten by predators.” One particularly resourceful monkey carefully eyed the distance from the top of the tree to the ground and compared it to the distance to neighboring trees. “I have an idea,” she said. “If we prepare ourselves quickly and climb to the topmost branches of our canopy, we may be able to leap to a neighboring tree as ours falls. We will have to time it carefully, for we will have only a split second to act, and we will need a little luck. But at least we will have a chance to survive.” A few other monkeys quickly assessed her claim and agreed that it was indeed possible. One monkey quickly assembled a scale model to test the theory that the jump was possible. The test was positive: there would be a moment when the upper, outer branches of their canopy would be within jumping distance of the lower, outer branches of the neighboring tree providing a single, split-second opportunity to survive.

The leaders of the monkey band condemned this idea. Their god had created this canopy for them and would not allow it to be destroyed. If it was in fact, destroyed, then this was their god’s will and a fulfillment of prophecy. It was blasphemous to suggest that mere monkey’s should question the monkey-god’s judgment and actions. It was preposterous to prepare to jump off the canopy which violates the great “clinging” commandment of the One Right and True Way. No, the best thing for good monkeys to do is to close their eyes, hold tightly to their family’s branch and pray to their god for deliverance. Most followed the advice of their leaders … and the sound of the machines grew louder and the shuddering of their tree more pronounced.
So it was only a small, deviant sub-group of resourceful monkeys who carried their children up to the tallest, outmost branches of the canopy. One monkey had left behind her spouse who clung to his traditional beliefs, his leaders and his branch. Others had been forced to leave behind their parents, grandparents, siblings and lovers. All had left behind their homes, their faith and most of their friends and neighbors. It was tempting to simply turn around and rejoin their loved ones and comfortable branches, but something encouraged them to accept the uncertainty and risk. They had made a decision to abandon their safe, secure (but doomed) world in order to gain a chance to survive. Straining every nerve, they assessed their situation, discussed amongst themselves the best strategy for jumping and stood ready with brains racing and muscles tense in anticipation.

And then it happened. In one great crescendo of sound, the machines finally severed the trunk. For a moment, silence and stillness. Were the monkey-band leaders right after all? Had god intervened to save the band from this terrible fate? No. Almost imperceptible at first, a slight movement of the canopy was sensed. The deviant monkeys had judged well – the tree was going to fall in the direction they had anticipated. The air rushing past accelerated as the canopy began to fall. Wails and shrieks of agony could be heard from the family branches below, but there was no time to grieve or feel. Each deviant monkey was now lost in their own private activity, as each targeted a single branch to grasp when they jumped. Though they had planned this leap together, every monkey was now on their own, and except for the small children who clung to their parent’s necks, beyond the help of others. Each had to rely upon their own wits,
judgment and resource if they were to survive. “Here it comes … I see my branch… ready, steady … NOW!” The crash was tremendous, obliterating sounds of wailing anguish released by the doomed. Then all was silent.

Not every deviant monkey had survived the leap. A few had misjudged their strength or had been unlucky and unable to locate a safe branch to grasp in the flashing moment of opportunity. Most of the survivors were bruised, both physically and emotionally. What would they do now? They quickly reassembled, took stock of their situation and braced themselves for the inevitable confrontation with the monkey-band whose territory they were now invading. They did not need to wait long, for they were soon located and captured. Something about the intensity of the captives caused the leaders of the band to postpone slaying the invaders. Enough of the monkeys had observed the fall of the tree and were afraid that some great change was coming to the forest. Fortunately, this new canopy had its own set of deviant monkeys who were thoughtful and questioning and observant and who chose to talk to the hostages about their experience. So deviant talked to deviant, overcoming language barriers to relay the story of the machines, the fall of the canopy, the death of the traditional monkeys and the resourceful calculations that had enabled the captives to survive. These deviants from both trees shared a common, emerging concern: if the machines could topple one tree, they could topple them all. And the tree that they occupied might well be next.

And so, the deviant monkeys sought to enlighten the monkey-band about their fate and to develop plans to leap should their tree begin to fall. While some leaders and many traditional monkeys rejected the plan, a much larger percentage cooperated. They had seen the other tree fall with their own eyes and embraced the need for innovation and intelligent community organization. And indeed, within days the machines cut down the tree, and again the innovative, questioning, calculating monkeys survived by leaping to a neighboring tree.

As it turned out, the machines kept coming, toppling tree after tree and forcing band after band of monkeys to face the fateful decision to leap to another canopy or die. A particularly intelligent and experimental group of deviant monkeys developed a system of safe transportation from canopy to canopy. This enabled other deviant monkeys to routinely travel between the
linked canopies. As the social vacuums separating monkey-bands were eliminated by the transportation links, a whole new way of life emerged among the monkeys in the savannah, a way of life feared and hated by many who still clung to the old ways, their old beliefs and to their old branches. The monkeys who survived and thrived in this new world were not those who unquestioningly and unthinkingly conformed to the One Right and True Way of their local canopy but rather those who took risks, questioned received wisdom and used intelligence to find innovative solutions to problems. It also became clear that the best solutions to problems were found when many monkeys participated in their definition and resolution: the collective intelligence of an organized group far exceeded the individual intelligence of even the smartest monkey. The strength and effectiveness of emerging collective decision-making and problem solving undermined the political power of traditional monkey-leaders. And as monkeys traveled from canopy to canopy, the One Right and True Way’s power over the mental life of monkeys was further reduced as they were exposed to many different, inconsistent, even mutually exclusive, versions of The Way. Some of the traveler-monkeys developed a deviant idea that no single One Right and True Way exists, but rather many acceptable and workable ways may be found depending upon circumstances.

The old way of life among the isolated treetops of the savannah emphasized an unchanging tradition, the new way of life in the linked treetops emphasized innovative solutions. All monkeys, old and new, asked two essential questions of their lives: “What should we do and how should we live?” Traditional monkeys answered the question: “As we have always done and lived, in conformity with our traditional, unchanging way that was revealed to us by our god.” In the new world of linked canopies the answer is: “As we decide is best after careful deliberation and analysis.” In the old, isolated treetops, behaviors and decisions are considered good if they are consistent with tradition or god. In the new, linked world behaviors and decisions are considered good if they “work when tried,” a dramatically different moral standard that essentially embraces a scientific attitude toward the whole of life.
In the old, isolated canopies, security and safety was rooted in the *One Right and True Way* and the comforting familiarity of traditional, unchanging patterns of life. In the new, every-changing and expansive world of linked canopies, security and safety is based upon something entirely different: the adaptive power of collective intelligence to find solutions that work. In the old world, stability was valued and change of any kind was threatening and feared. In the new world, stability is impossible and change is embraced as a normal way of life. Ultimately, this new, flexible sense of security through adaptive response is stronger and more powerful than the old sense of security based upon mutual enforcement of a sacred tradition.

While many experienced this new world as a loss of the old, others experienced it as a vibrant, exciting world of unexpected pleasures and possibilities. Many monkeys discovered that they liked the new sense of intellectual and moral freedom. They liked living in a large, diverse social world where they were free to explore and select occupations, hobbies and leisure activities consistent with their own sense of self. They benefited from specialized experts who could help solve virtually any problem or pursue any opportunity. They liked the diverse foods, products, services, events and lifestyles that were available to them on a daily basis. Unlike traditional monkeys whose choice of companions was limited to other members of their isolated band, modern monkeys are free to choose companions – friends, mentors, lovers – from a large, diverse population generating a highly pleasurable and stimulating social life. Social relations become freer, less about duty and obligation and more about affinity, mutual aid and enjoyment.

Finally, in the old world of isolated canopies, rigid hierarchies limited equal access to power and opportunity. A monkey’s fate was determined by gender, race, and parent’s wealth and status. It was virtually impossible to be upwardly mobile, since one’s place in the world was fixed at birth. In the new world of linked canopies, rigid hierarchies begin to break down. Since innovators and problem solvers are so crucial to the survival of the society, monkeys began to be judged more by what they could do than by their gender, race or parent’s status. While unequal chances based upon gender, race and parent’s status are never eliminated, they are reduced as talent, ability and contribution to the social good receive great reward. Yes, there was much to enjoy in this new world and many monkeys would not return to the old even if they could.

As the machines continue to consume the monkey’s canopies, they continue to adaptively respond to the changes in their social and physical environment. Rather than passively awaiting...
the toppling of their trees, an advance warning system has been devised to anticipate the movement of the machines and actively move endangered monkey-bands away from machine activity. Some monkeys are learning to re-colonize regions that they had previously abandoned by planting new trees and building artificial shelter. Some monkeys have devised defensive sabotage techniques against the machines, slowing down their advance to enable more time for adaptive response. Some monkeys are devising defenses against the ground predators and are beginning to colonize and occupy the ground. And finally, a few brave monkeys are attempting to establish contact with the strange hairless monkeys who operate the machines in the hope that a system of regulation may be put in place to intelligently govern the operation of the machines for the good of all creatures.

Note that there are other possible futures: a dictator monkey may emerge who builds a fascist network of compliant control and authoritarianism, tapping into the fear of uncertainty and the lingering traditionalism of monkey-dwellers everywhere. Or some monkeys may greedily sell out their communities to the hairless machine operators – turning the canopies into a commodity to be bought, sold or traded for profit.
I feel bad for those monkeys who lost their god(s), but they were mistaken anyway. There is only one real, authentic Right and True God -- the one I worship. Sorry, Sociology Man, but the TRUTH is those monkeys all went straight to hell.

Well, Jeb, sociologists are not ministers or theologians. We are scientists who measure and interpret patterns of religious activity. We are not concerned with the ultimate TRUTH of the ideas held by believers.

Hey, I'm that way too.

Sociologists have identified essential differences between religion in traditional and modern societies. Each traditional group believes that its way is the only way. They are intolerant of other ways, which they view as deviant sin, even evil.

Maybe ... but as a citizen of a pluralistic modern society you don't act out your personal condemnation of others. In fact, you are probably aware that other faiths view YOUR actions as sinful deviance. Moderns adhere to a "cult of individuality," allowing each person freedom in personal life, including faith.

That's right. No danger of me stoning my neighbors. Ha-Ha.

... and in Sociology class I learned that people in traditional societies killed sinners in orgies of collective outrage.

Oh, Jeb, if we started a petition drive, could we get this on the ballot?
Part II: A Closer Look at Traditional and Modern Culture

Modern social life in the expansive linked canopy broke sharply with traditional social life in the isolated treetops. The change was so great that traditional monkeys were forced to reprogram themselves, adopting new beliefs, ideas and practices while shedding their old ways. Let’s examine this new species of society – and new type of monkey -- that emerged in the linked canopy.

Traditional culture was deeply-rooted in minds shaped to live entirely within the fixed, unchanging worlds bounded by a particular tree. These cultures developed in the obscure grey mist of the unrecorded past: what Max Weber calls “time out of mind.” With origins shrouded in mystery, the beliefs, ideas and behavior patterns of monkeys in isolated treetops were mythically identified with the treetop’s gods and considered highly sacred. Traditional monkeys were raised to respect and fear their parents, their community and the sacred way of life shared by all. Since deviation from sacred ways was sinful sacrilege, traditional monkeys clung tenaciously to their traditional beliefs, ideas and behaviors just as they clung tenaciously to their family’s branch whenever danger threatened.

Once linked into the modern canopy, the traditional ways of formerly-isolated monkeys began to break down. Members of traditional monkey-bands lost contact with each other as they scattered and integrated themselves into the emerging, expansive and highly diverse social
Almost everything about social life in the linked canopy was different from life in isolated treetops. Monkeys found themselves in never-before-existing situations and discovered that everyday modern life -- getting a living, making a home, building community, making collective decisions -- required adaptive, thoughtful, problem-solving. Since traditional monkey-culture discouraged and even punished such creative-thinking and active-living, even the most devout traditional monkeys had to loosen the grip of faith in order to survive. In a surprisingly short time, monkeys found their traditional culture in tatters: their beliefs no longer clear, their ways no longer distinct, their gods no longer powerful.

Many monkeys were deeply ambivalent about their new life: they literally felt two, contradictory ways about it. On one hand, they were excited by opportunities for growth, self-discovery and cooperative living, but on the other, they deeply missed the comforting familiarity of their old world. Some monkeys, even some of those whose traditional tree of origin had been entirely obliterated by the machines, sustained sacred reverence for their traditional beliefs, ideas and behaviors long after they entered the world of the linked treetops. These conservative monkeys defined the emerging world around them as sinful, cursed and damned and longed for a return to a traditional way of life dominated by their own sacred beliefs. They resented their contact with the modern linked world that they viewed as morally-polluted and contaminating. They sought out other monkeys who felt as out-of-place as they did in the modern world. At the edge of these groups were separatist monkeys who sought to physically re-isolate themselves from the modern canopy by retreating to a single treetop and severing their link. Others attended school and worked in jobs in the modern linked treetops, while socially and mentally insulating themselves from this world by limiting their intimate contact to friends, family and church members who shared their beliefs. Bemoaning the passing of idyllic “good old days,” conservative monkeys viewed modern life as a blighted ruin.

But other monkeys had a different view. To them, the traditional world was a flawed, cramped way of life that prevented freedom and limited opportunities. They embraced the new way of life with enthusiasm, seeing the modern linked canopy as an unprecedented opportunity for monkeys to collectively construct a dramatically-improved world free of the negative qualities of traditional isolated treetops. Their optimism was based upon a new kind of faith, not
in distant gods, but in the essential goodness and unleashed potential of monkeys. These optimistic monkeys viewed traditional culture as a powerful system of social control that used fear and punishment to prevent change and to choke-off growth. Once monkeys were released from the physical and intellectual confinement of isolated treetops, they could develop in previously unimagined ways, tapping unsuspected reserves of intelligence, cunning, creativity, cooperation and mutual-strength. These progressive monkeys viewed modern life as an opportunity for a thoughtful reconstruction of monkey-society to improve the well-being, comfort, and happiness of all.

Central to progressive monkey’s optimism was the development of an entirely modern way of relating to the world: science. Traditional cultures related to the world through the authority of the past, reproducing an old way of life unchanged from generation to generation. But modern culture relates to the world through the prism of the future, using organized intelligence to imagine and realize improved, potential futures. Moderns use organized intelligence – science – to systematically gather evidence and develop ideas to imagine future consequences of various actions. With science, moderns can control their destiny by selecting courses of action that minimize negative consequences while maximizing positive ones. In modern culture, science is used to progressively improve life: actions are continually reassessed and decisions reconsidered in the light of new evidence. Actions that “work when tried,” that solve problems in anticipated ways, are retained. Actions that fail to solve problems are reassessed with additional scientific analysis that is used to construct new, refined actions. The outcomes of these actions are again reassessed for effectiveness and are again retained or reconstructed. Through such experimentation, moderns relate to and manage their world with science in action, developing ever-more-sophisticated problem-solving skills and capability to improve life.

In the modern linked canopy, a new type of monkey emerged, comfortable with experimental thinking and capable of thoughtful adaptation to changing circumstances. These modern monkeys did not confine their lives to the narrow confines of the traditional past. While often looking to traditional beliefs and ideas for inspiration and guidance, modern monkeys continually constructed and reconstructed their lives based upon progressive application of intelligence to decision making. By applying scientific reasoning to everyday life, moderns learned to imagine the future consequences of various choices before selecting actions that minimize negative consequences while maximizing positive
ones. *Science in action* governed collective decisions about political policy as well as individual decisions about education, careers, politics, and friendships. Even the most deeply intimate, highly emotional decisions of ultimate meaning – choosing lovers, forming a family, raising children – were increasingly made and remade in light of intelligent re-assessment.

This scientific attitude, spread throughout everyday life, prompted continual questioning and striving for improvement of public and private life. The experimental question at the heart of modern living -- “What works when tried?” – placed responsibility squarely upon the shoulders of the living generation of monkeys rather than upon the gods or upon mythical ancestors from an unremembered past. Frightening to conservative monkeys, this challenging attitude toward life energized and invigorated progressive monkeys who sought to expand the world’s now-promising horizons with new ideas, inventions, institutions, and experiences.

**Social Density, the Modern Economy and Monkey Culture in the Linked Canopy**

The modern linked canopy differed from traditional isolated treetops in other important ways. If traditional monkeys reflected upon their life (which they probably would not actually do), they might say to themselves: “I know personally all of the monkeys in my treetop and they all know me. We understand each other so easily because we all do the same things each day: we celebrate together, punish deviants together and have the same gods. We really feel like we belong.”

Modern monkeys would not have such thoughts. When moderns reflect on their lives (which they must do all the time just to survive) they might say: “I know personally few of the people I encounter each day and few know me. We understand very little about each other because we are all doing different things with our lives. We share very little as we each perform our private activities in our own way and with our own thoughts. Our social networks are scattered: we work away from home, our workmates do not live near us, they do not worship with us, they do not shop with us. Since we are fated to remain strangers to each other – at the deepest level – we must emotionally withdraw into our own private world. We actually act
slightly hostile to each other as we pass, with a mild scowl to prevent others from initiating conversation. We must keep each other at an emotional distance in order to survive.”

What accounts for this modern attitude?

Depending entirely upon their single tree for natural resources, traditional monkeys were limited to a simple subsistence economy, which meant that almost all monkeys performed identical work gathering food and constructing shelter for their own direct use. A sizable branch was required to sustain a family under such conditions, strictly limiting the population that a tree could support. If the population grew beyond the tree’s carrying capacity, die-offs from famine or disease would reduce it back to sustainable levels. Traditional society had low social density -- a small population comfortably dispersed on different branches – and a strong social bond based upon a shared worldview that was itself supported by essentially identical living and working conditions for all monkeys in the tree.

In the modern linked canopy, many treetops were depopulated while others attracted large populations stacked thickly atop each other in cities. In these areas of high social density, modern monkey families were unable to directly produce their own food, water, shelter, energy, services, police, fire protection and health care. Instead, these and other needs were met indirectly through exchanges in a complex, highly-differentiated economy. Each monkey worked in a specialized occupation providing others’ needs, while relying upon exchange with others to meet their own needs. This system of reciprocal exchange not only allows high degrees of specialization, efficiency and productivity, but also ties each monkey to others more tightly than ever. City-monkeys are economically interdependent and an individual monkey would die within days without the material support of others.

The Modern Family had a really swell time visiting traditional society. But, at the end of the day, it was nice to return to the comfortable, morally-lax world of modernity. Without a strongly-bonded traditional group to enforce morality, I’m free to fornicate, covet thy neighbor’s goods, swear oaths, and lounge around on the Sabbath in my socks -- without fear of collective retribution!
In traditional isolated treetops, the shared worldview leads individual monkeys to respond nearly-identically (with fundamental solidarity) to events or threats. Let’s take an example: suppose that the members of a traditional treetop society view their flag as their most important sacred symbol: treating the flag with disrespect is defined as a sacrilege. A monkey who dishonors the flag will likely face an impassioned reaction from the society. As word of the disrespect spreads, it triggers the same moral condemnation in each monkey. Each monkey fans the flames of indignation, adding their voice to the outcries against the offender. No monkey feels safe contradicting this emerging consensus of condemnation for fear that they might also be denounced, so no alternative views blunt the edge of unanimous outrage. The offender is violently dispatched in an orgy of punishment supported by the unified group. The same collective response occurs in moments of celebration: all members of the group are programmed to respond similarly to events and feel the same pressure to conform.

Traditional people do not develop — literally can not develop — individuality. Those who follow an independent line of thought or action are defined as deviant by the group and trigger unified moral condemnation. Parents raise children to rigidly act in conformity with the group’s ways, and this pattern is enforced by children’s observation of and participation in the punishment of deviants. But, individuality is essential in the linked canopy, since sustaining a modern city with a dense population and a complicated exchange economy for long periods of time is a difficult social feat. Change is normal in the linked canopy: adaptive adjustments must be made continually or the entire society risks collapse and mass die-offs. A new supporting culture emerges that embraces individual freedom and liberty as a sacred right. This *cult of individuality* is essential since it enables modern monkeys to fit themselves into the increasingly specialized social and economic world of the linked canopy. Freedom and liberty are necessary to encourage monkeys to develop adaptations, innovations and creativity needed to sustain the city-based linked canopy. Specialization and differentiation of economic activity are so important — the *cult of individuality* is so important — that it is further supported by civil rights laws, modern progressive education and strong public assistance programs to ensure that each individual finds their specialized niche and contributes happily to the emerging society.
The Modern Monkey as a New Social Type

So a new type of monkey emerges in the linked treetops: a modern monkey who embraces individuality and freedom. Traditional monkeys felt a strong sense of attachment, a tribal bond, to their community because the members closely resembled each other in thought, word and deed. Modern monkeys are much more individualized: they go their own way in thought, word and deed. The primary unifying belief deeply embedded into their worldview is the cult of individuality – the recognition of fundamental civil rights for all monkeys. Individual moderns develop their own particular sense of self, select their own particular calling and develop innovative responses in the face of changing circumstances.

Modern monkeys face a very different social environment than their traditional counterparts. Traditional monkeys follow paths worn deep by many previous generations and are surrounded by others who know them and who shared their biographies. The entire community co-experienced emotionally-charged events that shaped their joint lives.
(accidents, tragedies, famines, epidemics, warfare, and rituals). By contrast, modern monkeys follow many diverse paths only recently-cut and help to clear new, unprecedented ones as a way of life. They are surrounded by others who are anonymous to them and who are fated to forever remain anonymous. Each monkey has a unique biography shared in detail by no others. The emotionally-charged events that shaped their lives (deaths of loved ones, accidents, relocations, divorces, and sports losses) are theirs alone. Whereas traditional monkeys live their entire lives wrapped in a cocoon of deeply-known and trusted others, modern monkeys move so frequently that they must constantly reconstruct an ever-changing circle of friends and companions if they wish to avoid utter, total loneliness.

**Monkey Mental Life in the Linked Canopies**

The stress of modern living extracts a heavy emotional and mental toll. The constancy of social loss, the rapid pace of change, the essential loneliness of life, the difficulty of sustaining intimacy, the continual need to adapt and reconstruct one’s whole world is difficult. And the sheer magnitude of choices and options in the modern world is staggering: little is fixed, nothing is certain, few things are stable. Decisions must be daily made that have fateful, life-defining consequences. Further, traditional society was held together by a shared comprehensive worldview that is systematically undermined in modern society. This means that the most fundamental questions of human meaning and purpose are no longer “fixed” by sacred rules universally-believed and enforced with aggressive punishment. Traditional people did not have to think or wonder about how to live: it was fixed for them, shared by all others, and enforced by their religious and political leaders. But modern people must ultimately decide for themselves how to live and what it all means: there is no escaping responsibility for one’s life. Even those conservative monkeys who believe in and live by the absolute rules of a traditional god are making a modern choice to do so.
Moderns can deny but can not ultimately escape the reality that each individual’s fate is in their own hands.

Modernity is mentally hazardous, ripe with opportunity for causing emotional damage. Is it any wonder then that new, modern mood disorders (like anxiety, angst) emerge, that the prevalence of others (depression, schizophrenia) increases and the negative consequences of mood disorders on individual’s life chances are many times greater than they might have been in the traditional world? It is said that every traditional village had its idiot. Now, every modern city has a mental hospital to house and treat the mentally-different. Modern organizations – schools, workplaces – demand high productivity and efficiency and penalize those whose mental life impairs job performance.

Part III: Birth, Death, Sex, Families and Gender in Modern Linked Canopies:
Modern life generates new ideas about gender (culturally-defined meanings attached to men and women) and family (the social institution that provides intimacy and child-rearing). Although there were differences among various isolated canopies, most were organized with high levels of gender differentiation: men were defined as fundamentally distinct from women and led sharply divergent lives. Traditional families also had a characteristic form: monkeys considered marriage a sacred, unbreakable life-long bond, Women married early, often shortly after puberty. Stepfamilies were common given the high death rate. Several generations lived together on a single branch. Traditional child-rearing practices involved heavy doses of punishment to instill obedience and conformity to the ways of the group. To raise good children, traditional parents believed it was necessary to spank their monkeys.

Gender differentiation in the modern linked-canopy gender was significantly reduced: fewer differences between men and women were considered important. While full gender equality was opposed by lingering traditional gender attitudes and limited by women’s continued household and childcare burden, the tendency in the linked canopy was toward interchangeable lives for men and women as a progressive, modern ideal. The form of modern families also changed dramatically: monkeys considered marriage an optional, largely personal contract between two consenting adults, divorce was common and occurred without great fanfare or moral stigma, roughly half of all children were born to unmarried parents, men and women tended to delay marriage until later in life, step-families remained common, and households were increasingly “nuclear” in form – at least one parent and offspring lived together in a nuclear family. Modern childrearing focused more upon the development of creative, self-determination than the development of obedience and conformity. Punishment was replaced with authoritative, reasoned guidance as a parenting ideal.

How are these changes related to the basic demographic facts – patterns of death, birth and migration -- in traditional and modern societies?
Demography, Gender and Family in Traditional Societies

Death was a frequent visitor to monkeys in the traditional, isolated tree-tops, striking young and old at very high rates. Infants were particularly vulnerable. Life-spans were short and unpredictable. Because of infectious disease and accidents, a 20-year-old and a 60-year-old were equally likely to die in any given year. Overall, 5% of traditional monkeys died every year: 1 death per 20 members. Since migration was prevented by the physical isolation of each treetop, the high death rate required an equally high birth rate to prevent the society from dying off. This meant that 10% or 1 in 10 female monkeys had to give birth on average each year. Since most females in traditional societies were pre-fertile young girls, infertile adults or post-fertile older women, the actual rate of birth for fertile, female monkeys of child-bearing age was 33% or 1 in 3 per year.

Gender in traditional societies reinforced and sustained this high birth-rate. In general, traditional treetops were patriarchal, a cultural form giving men tremendous cultural advantages and power over women. In these cultures, men obsessively controlled women’s sexuality. Women’s were restricted from participation in social life, except in the role of subordinate wife and mother. From puberty to menopause, traditional cultures required women to devote their lives to pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and infant-tending. Girl-monkeys were taught to prepare for mothering by playing with monkey dolls. Young women monkeys were taught to fantasize about romance, marriage, mating and children. Adult women judged each other by motherhood standards: the size of their brood, their appearance and manners. The privileges of patriarchy were not lost on young boys, who were taught to enforce cultural definitions of girls as subordinate, potential mating objects. Men judged women primarily in terms of their desirability as sexual objects and their meek performance of motherly tasks. Combined, traditionally-gendered, patriarchal culture restricted women greatly, but yielded a sufficient annual crop of babies to replace those who fell off the twigs (for whatever reason) each year.

Demography, Gender and Family in Modern Societies
In the modern linked canopy, a number of inter-related changes occurred that reduced death rates and the corresponding cultural need for high birth rates. Why did fewer monkeys die? The diverse exchange economy of the linked canopies increased the standard of living for most monkeys. Traditional isolated monkey-bands lived near the subsistence level: they accumulated little “surplus” and needed to routinely work in order to meet the needs of life. Traditional monkeys subsisted entirely upon the resources of their own, single, isolated tree and were vulnerable to deadly famine if food supplies fell short. The modern linked-canopies reduced the risk of famine as food supplies were spread over a much larger area and could be stored for use when crops failed. Healthy, consistent food supplies lead to lower death rates, especially for infants. Further, better public health services delivered clean water, good shelter, good hygiene, and improved disease prevention. Finally, modern medical science reduced deaths from accidents and infectious disease. The combined impact of these changes lowered death rates dramatically to below 1%, or 1 per 100 monkeys.

Did birth rates also drop in the linked canopy? Yes, eventually. But this decline came too late to prevent a dangerous explosion in population. While some areas of traditional culture disintegrated quickly in the linked canopy, the areas of traditional culture associated with sex, reproduction, gender, marriage and family had incredible inertia and continued to shape monkey life with astonishing power. Deeply coded in culture (religion, folktales, music and art) and enforced by patriarchal obsession with the control of women’s sexuality, traditional culture kept birth rates high (near 5%) long after death rates in the linked canopy had fallen below 1%. Population in the linked canopy grew at 4% per year, a rate sufficient to double the population every generation.

High birth rates saved high-death-rate traditional societies from extinction but threatened low-death-rate modern societies with perpetual starvation. As modern populations grew rapidly, economic improvements had to be devised to provide sufficient food, shelter and services to prevent famines, outbreaks of infectious disease and universal human misery. The overproduction of children was, in fact, one of the most challenging social problems facing societies making the transition to modernity. Growing an economy quickly enough to support twice as many people in less than 20 years is not easy. Fortunately, as monkeys adjusted to life in the linked-canopy they became more modern, and
Dramatic emotional impulses – violence, lust, cravings -- lurk just under the smooth, rational surface of modern life. Primates evolved over millions of years while modernity as a way of life is only a few hundred years old. This means that moderns operate in highly civilized surroundings with bodies and minds adapted to traditional, even prehistoric, ways. This image, from the Soviet Humor Magazine, Krokodil, captures the lingering “inner caveman” that haunts many of our lives.

The decline in births had several causes. Most importantly, monkey parents wanted fewer children. In traditional societies, households were units of production and each additional child increased the available labor. In modern societies, production shifted to factories and offices: households were merely units of consumption. Each additional child increased the household’s bills while adding nothing to the household income. As children ceased to be economic assets and became economic liabilities, parents wanted fewer of them.

Second, self-directing innovators were prized and rewarded in the linked canopy and required new, modern families to create them. Traditional child-rearing emphasized physical punishment to raise large batches of self-denying conformists. Modern child-rearing of self-developing individuals required much larger investments of family resources and parental time. Each child was encouraged to develop as an individual through the nurture of independence, free-thinking and refined talent. Such children also required significant social expenditure on
schools, colleges and training facilities. With so much to learn, adulthood was postponed into
the mid-20s. A new, uniquely modern phase of life known as adolescence developed to lengthen
the time between childhood and full assumption of adult roles. While physically-mature,
adolescents were kept out of the labor force and encouraged to engage in intensive educational,
cultural and social activities that promoted self-development. Supporting the long, modern
adolescence was expensive, time consuming and emotionally demanding. Smaller families
concentrated greater family resources and parental attention on children and adolescents,
securing their success in the modern linked canopy.

Finally, the falling death rate released women from their life sentence of childbearing and
infant-tending, enabling increasing gender equality. In traditional, isolated trees, were sharply
Conservatives stoutly resisted women’s equality, and attempted to maintain men’s strict
patriarchal control over women’s everyday life – especially their sexuality. But progressives
recognized that the traditional restriction of women to maternal roles and traditional male
dominance of social life was no longer functional in the linked canopy. They found that men and
women were better off in modern conditions when gender differences were sharply reduced,
allowing all monkeys to self-develop and participate in social life fully and equally. traditional
rolesThe development of monkey family planning and birth control techniques, stoutly resisted
by conservatives who wished to maintain patriarchal control of women’s sexuality, facilitated
women’s equal participation in public life.

And so, a new way of life – modernity – spread throughout the integrated canopy. Few
areas of traditional life remained untouched. Gone forever was the moral clarity and absolute
religious certainty that could only exist within small, homogenous, tightly-bonded groups in
isolated trees. In the modern canopy, the population was too large and religious beliefs too
diverse for easy moral clarity. Moderns were forced to become tolerant and pluralistic: many
worldviews and behaviors were formally treated as equal and acceptable. Gone too was
traditional society’s unconscious reproduction of already-existing life. Moderns were forced to
adapt to rapidly changing conditions and learned to use their intelligence to continually
reconstruct their way of life. Also gone were traditional authority relations. Decisions in the
isolated treetops were made by absolute rulers in accordance with shared values and sacred
codes, but in the modern canopy they were made with deliberative, rational democratic procedures. Scientific inquiry – rational, logical, data-based -- governed decision making in the canopy. The consequences of different policy choices were calculated and actions chosen that maximized benefits and minimized costs.

The new exchange economy generated extraordinary levels of specialization: individuals were free to choose work that fit their unique talents and abilities. Individuals were also free to develop hobbies, leisure activities and friendships that fit their developing sense of self. This new individuality was extremely liberating, but also a source of tremendous anxiety. Never before had individuals been so responsible for determining their own fate with so few guideposts and with such inadequate help. Many modern institutions were developed and traditional ones transformed to aid individuals in their journey. Schools were reconstructed to encourage progressive problem-solving rather than conservative conformity. Families were reconstructed to encourage individuality and self-development and to meet the high emotional demands of modern life. Gender relations were dramatically reconstructed as women became coequals of men. Childhood stretched out in a long, lingering and expensive adolescence that allowed self-development on a scale unimaginable in traditional societies. And the cumulative impact of these changes on births, deaths and sex were tremendous.

Welcome, fellow moderns, to a new species of society. Welcome to Modernity.
Part IV:  
The Post Modern Turn

Let’s fast-forward a century to examine the integrated canopy in more recent times.

The way of life in the linked canopy – modernity – is now firmly established and continues to grow as machines topple trees in new regions, adding additional population groups to the linked canopy. Many isolated treetops continue to exist, but a time is fast approaching when all monkeys will be fully integrated into the canopy. Now ten generations old, the integrated canopy is led by networks of establishment monkeys who claim to trace their ancestry back to those first bands of deviants who established the initial links between trees. But most monkeys arrived more recently, being three or fewer generations removed from the traditional isolated trees. Even now, most monkey clans are relative newcomers to the modern world.

After arrival in the linked canopy, families stayed together as best as they could and tried to keep their former way of life alive. They told family stories, preserved mementos and maintained attachments to traditional beliefs and values. But these memories faded with each generation, becoming less coherent, less powerful and less relevant for daily life in the new world. In the canopy, traditional clans and extended families grew apart. Traditional treetop cultures disintegrated and were replaced with a new, modern culture. We’ve already described many core features of modern culture that most strongly contrasted with traditional culture in isolated trees. Now, as modern culture ages, let’s look at more recent traits that emerge as the integrated canopy matures.

Economic changes are perhaps the most important. As the integrated canopy grew in size, the spatial scale of exchanges expanded dramatically and different regions of the canopy specialize in a limited range of economic activity. This creates and reinforces high levels of inequality in different regions. Regions most recently linked into the system remain poor and relatively undeveloped. Corporations merely extract natural resources (mining, oil drilling, timber harvesting) and agricultural products (bananas, other fruits, grains, meat) for distribution...
to the rest of the canopy. Other newly-integrated regions of the canopy, especially those with large, poor, rapidly-growing populations are exploited as providers of cheap monkey labor in global factories. Other regions of the canopy -- wealthy, politically powerful “global cities” – house the administrative, political and financial control apparatus of the entire canopy. Stock markets, banks, corporate headquarters, political bureaucracies, military command centers, communications companies, educational institutions and many diversified service providers are located in these global cities. Inequality within these cities is extreme: large numbers of very poor citizens work for low wages providing services to the wealthy monkey families who work in and own global city enterprises.

The mature integrated canopy then is a world system of highly unequal exchange controlled by elites in global cities. Resources and low wage labor provided by poor, newly integrated regions generate high profit which flows into cities. This profit-flow becomes a flood as the canopy expands and matures. Cash-rich global cities are not industrial: industry with factory-work has long since relocated to the low wage periphery of the canopy. Instead, these cities are “post-industrial” economies: most employment is in the “service” sector (restaurants, hotels, health care, office work, retail, administration).

In postindustrial cities, work shifts from factories to offices and stores. Many people are
employed as low-wage workers in the bottom rungs of bureaucracies, doing relatively meaningless tasks repetitively, not unlike factory work. Yet, these service workers tend to identify with their employers rather than other workers: they resist unionization and collective action that might improve their lot.

Postindustrial workers are quite alienated from their work; they have little control over their bodies and minds during the work day. They are not allowed to make decisions or to display initiative. Instead, their work is highly structured by formal rules and supervisors who enforce the rules. Alienated work prevents postindustrial workers from finding deep human meaning in their workplace or in their co-workers. Instead, postindustrial workers find work to be meaningless and their individuality flattened by supervision and rules. Modern, industrial workers had very long job tenures – it was normal for workers to be employed by the same company for an entire lifetime – and tended to develop close attachment to their workplaces and co-workers. But post-industrial workers attach themselves neither to their employers nor their coworkers. Job tenures are short and insecure: employers routinely fire workers without warning and employees quit their jobs without notice.

The low attachment of workers to their work contributes to a crisis of personal identity in the integrated canopy. It is ironic that a way of life so rooted in the concept of individuality – recall how important the *cult of individuality* was to modern culture – develops into a system that undermines individuals’ capacity to develop a stable and functional sense of self. Forced to make their own way in an overwhelmingly large and diverse world without fixed signposts or strong attachments, postindustrial individuals become easily lost amid the mass of humanity around them. The sheer size of cities and of modern social organizations – like massive high schools with thousands of students – continues
in postindustrial times.

Other modern tendencies toward personal “detachment” continue too: time pressure and marital instability weakens family ties, high geographic mobility weakens community ties, short tenure and instability at work weakens organizational ties. In the undifferentiated mass of humans who occupy postindustrial cities and suburbs, individuals feel lost in the crowd. Forced to conform to accepted standards of appearance and conduct, individuals lose their uniqueness and distinctiveness. Social atomization – the release of individual “atoms” from strongly-bonded social molecules – is a fearful tendency of postindustrial culture. Without strong attachments of individuals to family, community, work or voluntary organizations, citizens are easily ruled by political and economic elites who control workers’ livelihood and the information media infrastructure.

The crisis of identity in postindustrial society can also be seen in the physical environment of the integrated canopy. Modern culture was rooted in science, reason and efficiency. As soon as an isolated tree was linked to the integrated canopy, its old, traditional buildings, roads, flora and fauna were replaced with efficient modern designs. “Form follows function” was a central creed of designers and planners in modern, industrial society. Certain forms – rectangular buildings, streamlined automobiles, grid-pattern city streets – were inherently efficient and spread widely in the canopy,
creating a single homogenous built environment. Local, traditional buildings and landscapes that gave people a sense of authenticity, identity and rootedness disappeared.

Everywhere one traveled in the integrated canopy, one saw the same rational, linear buildings, the same rational, linear roads, the same rational, streamlined vehicles, and even the same rational, efficient bureaucratic organizations. Locally grown foods were displaced by huge monocrop fields of scientifically-designed grains. Local herds of deer were replaced by herds of scientifically-bred cattle. Local political groupings were replaced with professionally-managed political parties. Local, family businesses were replaced with efficient “big box” chain stores. The same, homogenous, indistinguishable forms spread everywhere, efficiently reproduced with modern industrial techniques. The relentless logic of science continually stripped away meaningful but irrational styling cues as every aspect of life was systematically redesigned, reconstructed, and rationalized along modern principles. The modern striving for maximum efficiency drove the continual improvement of products, buildings, cities, schools, museums, organizations, and foods. In the early decades of life in the integrated canopy, a “cult of the new” emerged. It became fashionable to purchase and display “new and improved” goods and services that were enticing because they were the latest adaptation to modern conditions of life. But eventually, modern things became boring, bland and predictable – and “new and improved” ceased to be an enticement to consumption.

Critically, while modern culture was based upon an industrial economy, the post-industrial economy of global cities contributes to the development of a new postmodern way of life. More so than modern culture, postmodern culture is focused upon consumption and leisure
rather than production and work. This new postmodern culture is not contained within the boundaries of postindustrial global cities, but is carried throughout the entire canopy on fiber-optic cable and satellite dishes to glowing screens in homes and offices. Postmodern culture is generated mostly within the post-industrial cocoon of global cities, but it is consumed by virtually everyone in the integrated canopy – including children working in factories on the periphery.

Modern culture was rational, logical and efficient. The scientific method was applied to solve problems in many areas of life. Once solutions to problems were found - once an efficient cultural form was engineered - it was readily mass produced using industrial techniques. This created a single, homogenous modern culture everywhere that accompanied industrial capitalism throughout the canopy. Local variation and meanings were obliterated: everywhere looked like everywhere else. This collapse of meaning produced anxiety in moderns and helped fuel postmoderns' search for meaning, distinction and personal identity.

The flow of profits into global cities depends upon high levels of consumption: goods must be sold before profits can be realized. Postmodern culture is consumption-oriented: a central purpose is to expand the profit-flow by encouraging consumption of goods and services. The most prominent social role for postmoderns is no longer “worker” or “producer” or
“citizen:” it is consumer. Postmodern consumption is heavily focused upon the cycle of fashion, but the fashion cycle is different than it had been in modern culture. Modern consumers were enticed to consume by improvements that made existing products “old fashioned,” “out of date” or “out of place.” Consumers bought new automobiles, for example, because they were safer, more powerful or more functional. Consumers bought new appliances because they improved upon existing ones, making life easier, more functional, more efficient. Industrial firms exploited the cult of the new in order to increase sales: they sped-up the fashion cycle by continuously introducing surface innovations that made existing products appear out of date more rapidly inducing consumers back into the market. As the fashion cycle escalated and as firms made ever-louder claims of “new improvements” over ever-shallower innovations, consumers became jaded. Sometimes, consumers realized that changes were being introduced merely to create the appearance of improvement.

Postmodern culture is characterized by an erosion of faith in progress. Modern, industrial culture emphasized improvements of all areas of life. “Each day in every way things are getting better and better” was a motto of modernity. But postmodern people tend to see the world decaying rather than improving. “Each day in every way things are getting no better and probably worse” about sums it up. Postmodern consumers abandon the search for new and improved products and services. Instead, they tend to look backwards: better product service was available in the past. This creates a “retro” movement in style and fashion. Consumers respond to “authentic” styles and fashions of the past rather than to innovative products of the future. Corporations seek to recycle copies of already-existing products and services rather than develop new ones. The search for authenticity leads not only to the past but also to the still-existing traditional cultures of isolated treetops at the
Bored with bland, rational modern products, consumers seek out products from those few remaining traditional cultures that have not yet been fully integrated into the canopy.

The household is a central focus of postmodern, consumer-oriented culture. The purchase of a suburban home is the largest single expenditure postmoderns will make and much concern is focused upon selecting the best suburban home that one can afford and furnishing it with “authentic” and “meaningful” consumer goods. Moderns lived in cities: postmoderns live in suburbs and exurbs. Moderns sought to live in close proximity to diverse others and to the excitement of the city. Postmoderns seek to isolate themselves from others, especially those poorer than themselves, and seek the comfort of pastoral settings. One consequence is sprawl: the geographic spreading out of settlement, reducing social density and increasing transportation costs.

Modern cities created a buzzing social life thick with diverse and cross-cutting webs of group affiliations. Modern cities were socially dense: walking and public transportation were sufficient to take people to homes, work, friends, family, shopping, schools, work and worship. Modern cities brought together people of radically different lifestyles and biographies into shared social space. They were essentially and unavoidably democratic.

Whereas modern cities integrated people: postmodern suburbs isolate them.
Postmodern suburbs and exurbs are homogenous by design: each suburban development is restricted to a narrow, economically homogenous, demographic group. Postmodern suburbs spread out population into stratified social space that makes it necessary to drive everywhere, radically increasing the distance, time and cost of daily living. The long commutes, geographic sprawl and consumption-oriented nature of suburban homes isolate and fragment postmodern people. Little money, time or energy remains for meaningful participation in voluntary associations.

Postmoderns maintain their identities as producer/workers and householder/consumers but sever most other social roles. Suburban homes often lack front porches: postmoderns retreat into their air-conditioned cocoon. A virtual reality of glowing televisions and computer screens replaces face-to-face interaction with others. This virtual reality – sporting events, dramatic television programs, Dr. Phil – is so much more interesting than their own pathetic lives. Postmoderns often abandon the improvement of their own lives in search of ever-more-interesting or engaging virtual reality. Many would prefer to watch a professional baseball game than play in a local baseball league or watch other people date and mate than engage in their own wooing. They might prefer to play a video-game of golf than actually go golfing. Simulated reality is increasingly preferred to lived-experience.
Postmoderns’ search for meaning through consumption of apparently authentic items and experiences linked to time-honored tradition, alternative lifestyles or indigenous culture. Some become fascinated with a specific period of history, filling their homes with antiques and period music. They might join a club or group that allows them to “reenact” the preferred historical period: postmodern culture abounds with Renaissance clubs, medieval clubs, civil war re-enactors clubs, backwoodsman clubs, Sherlock Holmes clubs, etc. Some might become fascinated with alternative lifestyles and cultures: New Age interest in Eastern spiritualism, yoga and meditation and interest in Native American culture are examples. Others might become fascinated with a still-existing indigenous culture: acquiring items from an African tribal community, for example. Still others seek to immerse themselves in an authentic “alternative” subculture: Harley-Davidson bikers, NASCAR fans, music festivals or Grateful Dead Deadheads.

Many of these subcultures have become permanent fixtures of postmodern culture. Residents of the integrated canopy no longer share a single lifestyle: their way of life is fragmented as individuals desperately pursue “distinction” and “identity” through immersion in their lifestyles. Culture in the modern period tended to unify residents of the canopy: postmodern culture tends to splinter and fragment.
But, “authentic” items or experiences cannot be consumed without bringing them into the integrated canopy and transforming them into a marketable commodity. Like King Midas, who turned everything he touched into gold, postmoderns turn every authentic cultural artifact into an inauthentic commodity – a saleable copy of the original. Because authenticity is fated to elude them, many postmoderns adopt a playful, ironic or “campy” attitude toward the items and experiences that they consume. Part of the postmodern attitude is a kind of emotional distance from one’s own lifestyle: one playfully participates in the search for authenticity, knowing full well that the search is doomed. Postmodern consumer culture actually provides simulations of authentic experiences that enable people to playfully participate: Disneyland is a simulation of an American small town, suburban mega-churches are simulations of small congregations.
Starbucks is a simulation of a European coffeehouse. The Gap sells “authentic” distressed jeans and fashions from the 1970s.

Underlying the postmodern turn is declining faith in social progress and social planning. Modern culture created an “administered society” that sought to extend human planning, technological innovation and professional administration into all areas of social life. But postmoderns have lost faith in social progress, viewing the future as a dystopia rather than a utopia. Attention is drawn to negative and unintended consequences of technology and social programs, undermining faith in both. Postmodern films, television programs and books are dystopian: depicting the future as a hellish degradation from the present. Few postmoderns believe that the globe’s children will live fuller, richer, longer and more satisfying lives than their parents. Utopia is dead.

The declining faith in social progress is linked to the abandonment of other modern ideals. Faith in the common good erodes. Social planning is largely abandoned. Economies are deregulated. Private pursuit of wealth displaces public pursuit of social good. Political participation and activism recedes as politics is taken over by private interests linked to powerful, wealthy interest groups and corporations. Citizens of democracies withdraw from active participation in politics. Consumption emerges as an all-inclusive social role. Social honor is reserved for those who consume at very high levels: expensive cars, homes in elite suburban developments, participation in expensive and sophisticated “authentic” lifestyles.

The declining faith in modern ideals – especially progress and the common good – is reinforced by a postmodern conservative movement. This movement takes itself quite seriously – gone is the playfulness of other elements of postmodernism – and is essentially religious in nature, seeking to restore absolute faith in the One Right Way to Live that characterized life in the isolated canopies.
Traditional gods(s), clear and absolute moral codes, social support for the legal punishment of sinners returns. These conservative religious movements are backward looking: truth lies in the past, the “good life” was lived in the past, holiness was pure in the past. The present is viewed as degradation: the future an abomination. Escape from modernity is viewed as the only wise course.

In these circles, postmodern society is viewed as the “end of time:” the canopy faces an apocalyptic future of global militarism and massive die-offs. Many end-of-timers believe that Armageddon – the final war that brings the world to an end -- will occur when the last isolated treetop is linked into the canopy. Others believe it will occur when the last ton of coal is burned. Many lust for the end and wish to hasten its coming: they support aggressive militarism to integrate all treetops into the canopy triggering the end. In these faiths, life is one long death trip. Happiness, comfort, safety and security elude the living: release from suffering will occur after death. The lust for death – in warfare, in willful neglect of the environment and in religious beliefs – known as cultural necrophilia -- is also expressed in popular culture. Popular television programs revolve around death and the dead. Crime Scene Investigation programs routinely display the cold, lifeless body of a corpse that is examined and probed by cold, emotionless technicians: the near dead avenging the already dead.

What does the future hold? Will the way of life in the canopy come full circle in a restoration of a postmodern One Right Way to Live? Will progressive monkeys hold on to the remnants of the modern way of life, and encourage a full-hearted application of intelligence to solve the canopy’s problems? Or will it explode in one massive nuclear-fueled flameout?

Ultimately, the next chapter of this parable will be written by your lives. So live well and wisely. Study Sociology.