

Zoo Utopia

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by Dante

As an artist, I am free, and the world is both my canvas and my playground. However, the world is slowly feeling more like a prison or a cage, in a city where people live like zoo animals.

Industrial World

Office buildings have emerged and been implemented in the city of Philadelphia since the mid-19th century. As people moved from the rural countryside to cities, the urbanization of modern life—living in apartments, condos, and smaller-scale homes within larger buildings—has become the norm. With people living in cities, we saw an increase in production, such as manufacturing within factories. There's a lot of labor involved in building a city, constructing the offices, and maintaining the streets.

With the implementation of the automobile, people can now live outside of the city and commute to work each and every day through highways and the city streets, without having to deal with the smell of poop from their horse. With these new systems in place, formal education and training became necessary, and many people spend years attending universities, acquiring degrees, to fulfill the needs within the offices and factories.

As technology advances, we see more and more tall and looming skyscrapers, such as the Comcast tower that was built in 2008. Within these modern offices, there are cubicles filled with computers. Now, as of 2024, I'd estimate around 75% of work we currently do is done within the digital world, utilizing computer technology, indoors, in office buildings.

Digital World

Given that about 75% of jobs within a city require the worker to operate a computer, sitting down for eight hours per day, in an office, in a box, within another box, a cubicle, working within the four corners of a box—a computer—I'd say that we are quite comfortable boxing ourselves in.

We have become domesticated, like zoo animals, finding comfort under the fluorescent lights and air-conditioning. Zoo creatures live in closed, air-conditioned systems, similar to the way an office worker lives their daily life. Wild animals live in an open system, forcing them to evolve to an open environment, which is much more challenging. Zoo creatures adapt to a closed environment, and because of this, their behavior changes drastically. They do not compete with each other like animals do in the wild. They become more comfortable, more complacent, accepting the luxury of indoor life.

Artificial Closed Systems

Think of a modern human in these conditions. *It is inevitable* that you will sit down for the majority of the day, watch Netflix, consume junk, and become more docile. This is similar to the way that animals are fed by the zookeepers as they are given perfect shelter, comfortable settings, and food. In these conditions, it is inevitable that both humans and animals will become more fragile.

The human adaptation to a closed environment is becoming **300 pounds overweight, sitting in a chair, watching TV**. In a zoo, animals become toothless with pretty feathers—domesticated creatures. In an open environment, however, there are no fat predators.

“The human adaptation to a closed environment is becoming 300 pounds overweight, sitting in a chair, watching TV.”

The Irony of Running to Burn Calories

I see joggers on the trail every morning, rattling their bones, chasing calories. It's like we've all subconsciously agreed that running ourselves into the ground is "healthy." But when you think about our ancestors, they weren't sprinting after prey; they were marching, observing, standing tall to scout the landscape. Running in circles just to burn calories is a strange human behavior we picked up since becoming domesticated, like zoo animals chasing their own tails.

I laugh every time I see a runner with a shirt that says, "I run to eat." When I ran a half marathon in college, they handed out beer and burgers at the finish line. We run ourselves ragged, only to celebrate by filling ourselves with junk. It's ironic—the very thing we're supposed to be escaping catches up with us by the end of the race.

You Can't Tame Me

When I was in public school for high school, I recognized right away how useless the information they teach you is. Not only that, but it felt like prison. You had to go through a metal detector, the doors were locked, you weren't allowed outside for lunch, and there were security guards lurking around the halls. I would memorize things, take the test, and pass with high grades very easily. I didn't even have to try, and that's not to flex or anything; it's just the truth of how broken public education is.

"It almost felt like we were being programmed for the industrial society that cities have become."

You hardly learn anything other than how to sit down for eight hours and take orders. You wait for the bell, go to the next class, memorize, take the test, and repeat. It almost felt like we were being programmed for the industrial society that cities have become. Listening to the bell, similar to that of the bell in a factory? Because I realized how useless public education was, I often would skip class, finding a door to open, and go out into the park nearby.

I've heard countless cases of children that were medicated simply because they didn't want to sit still in class, which is an *extremely* unnatural place to be in the first place. It's not uncommon to hear such cases, where disobedient students were prescribed pills, such as Adderall, to help with focus and attention. I cannot imagine the effect that this drug will have on the future of humanity.

Closed Spaces are Unnatural

Think of your DNA as a collective survival strategy. Over years of adaptation, we have developed physical traits and attributes that make us who we are. A human being is bipedal, stands upright, with a tall spine, as we were once hunter-gatherers. Our bodies have two hands, two feet, and the ability to craft tools through ingenuity and consciousness.

Considering the nature of a human being in the wild, what will occur to our DNA if we live this way in modernity, medicated, in closed systems, for too long? I think the outcome could potentially be jarring, devastating, and lead to the decline of the physical body. *Sitting down is bad for you.* If somebody commands you to sit down and take orders, why not just say no? You know you have the ability to say no, right? However, we've become so tamed, so docile, and so comfortable with these closed systems that it is inevitable that we will never bite the hand that feeds us.

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Why is it that we sacrifice our physical health for the pursuit of wealth and material goods?

And no, it is not because you have to work just because "everyone else does it." If everyone else was taking medication, doing drugs, and drinking alcohol, would you do it too? I'm not advocating for a complete stop in work itself, but notions of what productivity mean have gotten out of hand. Working within the digital world, sending emails, doing Zoom calls, is not very productive. Nothing actually manifests in reality through the things that we "produce" in offices. I would say that more

than half of the jobs in offices are just to fill a space, for somebody to do a tedious task and print paper out. **Being an accountant is not fun**, and there's no denying this.

"It feels as though everyone has collectively agreed to modern-day slavery, the denial of the body, through hedonistic pleasure, in honor of our new God, bureaucracy."

We have become slaves to the computers, but why not just make the computers our slaves?

I propose a simple solution: *automation of these closed systems.*

Return to the Natural

During my recent trip to Miami, I noticed a trend towards the ugly, the unnatural. Also, what makes something beautiful and what makes something ugly? *Perhaps true beauty is natural.*

As I walked through the Aventura Mall, I was shocked by how many women inject their lips and face with Botox, and the amount of plastic surgery done to enhance the size of their butts and breasts. It is quite jarring to look at, unflattering, and ugly. The same goes for men, as they walk around in their tank tops, looking extremely grotesque—it's so obvious that they inject themselves with steroids.

Water, the Commodity

Reflecting on my time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia, I remember how precious water was. In the village, water came from a well, and every drop was carefully collected, boiled, and filtered. Now, back in Philly, I see people buying flavored water with "minerals added for taste." The commodity of our most basic need—water—has become a marketing scheme. People buy water flavored with "natural" ingredients that hardly even make sense.

"In the village, water was life itself. Here, it's just another product, pumped full of flavors and sold for four bucks a bottle."

Isn't it strange that we're paying more for something we used to get for free?

Humans Love Poison?

Consider your average 9-to-5 office worker. They work about 40 hours per week and get around 14 days free out of the 365 days of their year. They wake up, get in the car, get stuck in traffic for 30 minutes, work, go to lunch, buy some gross salad in a plastic box, go back to their box, and then get back in the car for another 30 minutes of traffic. They sit down on the couch, most likely eat some sort of junk, while watching TV, drinking sugary soda, such as Coca-Cola. Not to mention, the media on the television is now poison, with nothing but doom and gloom, fear porn, and political boneheads.

"When Friday rolls around, it's as if Moses came down from Mount Sinai, and freed the Israelites."

Everyone rushes straight to the bars, the clubs, and the dark caves. I often hear people bickering and complaining over the beer they drink about some person at work that is giving them a hard time, bossing them around because of their seniority. But now that the weekend is here, they can all disappear into the darkness, indulging with any poison that they can find. Distractions, such as watching sports, gambling, and beer, fill the streets every weekend.

Walking anywhere in a modern city, such as Philadelphia, it seems like everybody vapes now. *We are deliberately injecting poison into our lungs, weakening our physical bodies, but why?*

Using social media is the equivalent of having a debilitating vaping addiction. It reminds me of why we invented the automobile, and how we no longer have to deal with horse poop. However, when we wake up in the morning, we immediately check our phones, our social medias. This action is the equivalent of waking up, wiping your butts, and just smearing the poop everywhere on your face. **Do you want poop all over your face?** No, just delete your Instagram.

Death of Religion

When I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Zambia, Africa, the thing that stood out to me the most was how every family had around 10 children per household. It amazed me, the daily routine of a tribe. The women come home with babies on their backs and firewood on their heads. The men are building churches and homes. The boys are creating bricks with sand and mud. The girls are sweeping the floors and preparing food for the day. *Everybody has a role to play within a village.*

What I have realized is that there is a hierarchy needed for a thriving and functioning society: **God, tribe, and land.**

In the center of the village, there is a church. At the center of the church, there is an altar, where a sacrifice is made, and the entire community recalls the story of Jesus, an archetype, a hero, somebody to aspire to be like. This gives the community a blueprint, something to aspire towards, something transcendental, that gives life a deeper meaning.

“I believe that this is missing in modernity. It does not matter whether the religion is Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or even Buddhism.”

The archetypes and heroes—such as Achilles, Hercules, and biblical stories of David in the battle against Goliath—give man something to strive towards, something beyond themselves.

Anyways, when you consider the death of religion, the death of God, in modern life, this will have severe consequences on the future of humanity.

How are families forming with 10 children per household in the Zambian villages with little technological advancement, but in the West, in cities full of abundance, our population is certainly on decline?

Families are not being formed anymore, and it is obvious when walking around Philadelphia that single people would rather have a dog, or go to the club, vape, and pursue other hedonistic things instead of raising a family or making children.

We have lost touch with what it means to be human, to be a creator. For we are the ultimate creators on this earth, and we no longer consider this as our ultimate aim. We would rather medicate ourselves, distract ourselves, and box ourselves into closed systems. So, the zoo creatures eventually become barbaric, uncivilized. However, family incentivizes people to become civilized.

You Are Bigger Than a Cog in the Machine

As the ants carry the grain on their back into the colony, one by one, we must also remember that ants, collectively, become bigger than just cogs in the machine. While each person's actions may be seemingly small, as a collective, they build the future.

Ants use pheromones to create trails that other ants use to guide themselves back to the colony. The issue with our digital world now is that most work and communities form online, and no pheromones are ever in the air. Communication becomes very artificial and transactional, both at work and outside of work.

The rat race is real, and we've all agreed upon it. We love running on the wheel like a hamster leading us to nowhere. The unfortunate reality is that nothing is truly happening in a city anymore. Sure, we have tourism, construction, janitors, police officers, firefighters, etc. However, if 75% of the work is being done in an office building, then it is my belief that 75% of the human beings in a city are spending their time squandered.

My critique of the mayor's recent demand to have everyone return to the office is that it feels like the equivalent of getting the slaves back in order. We should at least have every office filled with standing desks? That way, they're at least standing upright. I guess standing desks are much more humane, considering humans are designed to be standing? I just think that we can move on from these old systems at this point. Even using a mouse and keyboard feels extremely unnatural to me, and archaic. We now have iPads, AirPods, and the ability to communicate while outside, standing upright, and moving your physical body. You no longer have to type on a keyboard. We are now in a new world, a digital world.

Maybe it's best that we start utilizing this new technology in a way that doesn't deny our physiology. As we go into the future, let us remember to evolve our physical bodies, as much as we consume ourselves in these digital worlds.

*We must remember that we are bigger than just a cog in a machine, an animal in a zoo, or an ant in a colony. **We are the universe.***