The Value of Floods

Private Protection and Differential Survivability

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Abstract

Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor's *End Times Fascism and the Fight for the Living World* (2026) argues that the contemporary far right is not a recurrence of twentieth-century fascism but a development of its logic under conditions of planetary-scale crisis. This essay reconstructs the book's argument in structural terms. The central claim is that a declared catastrophe does not determine a politics; a politics supplies the mapping from catastrophe to the set of lives, claims, and futures that remain admissible. On this reading, the coalition Klein and Taylor describe is held together not by shared doctrine but by a shared operator: the contraction of the continuation set toward a protected subset. The essay introduces *differential survivability* as a property of the distribution of continuation sets across a population, one that can be materially instantiated without anyone declaring who deserves to survive. Its central mechanism is an asymmetry: the relative value of private protection rises as common conditions deteriorate, and when those who hold exit options also shape investment in common systems, the asymmetry can become a reinforcing loop. The point at which continuation shifts from being supplied by common systems to being purchased privately marks what the essay calls the expensive future. The book's own diagnosis, that end times fascism is a crisis of impunity born of concentrated power, is read as naming the precondition of the mechanism: impunity is the insensitivity of one's own survivability to the condition of the common world. Their positive concept of remaining, or "hereness," is then legible as a refusal to let contraction become a principle for sorting human worth. A formal sketch distinguishes forced from selected contraction, separates insulation from preference for deterioration, and gives evidentiary tests for claims that exclusion was imposed by constraint.

1 Catastrophe Does Not Choose Its Politics

A forecast of disaster, however accurate, underdetermines what follows from it. The same projection of sea level, temperature, or conflict can license adaptation, redistribution, retreat, fortification, or indifference. What converts a forecast into a program is an interpretation: a judgment about which obligations survive the forecast and which are cancelled by it.

Klein and Taylor's book is organized around this gap between prediction and interpretation. Its target is not people who believe the world faces severe danger. That belief is shared, in varying degrees, by climate scientists, insurers, defense planners, and the authors themselves. Its target is a political formation that receives the danger as confirmation, and in some cases as opportunity: a sign that history is unfolding correctly, that a purification is coming, and that the relevant task is to be among those who reach the other side.

The distinction the book draws is therefore not between optimism and pessimism. A person can be deeply pessimistic about emissions trajectories and still hold that every resident of a flood plain is owed the same claim on rescue. Another person can be cheerfully optimistic about technological transcendence while regarding most of the present population as ballast. The operative axis runs between *repair* and *selection*, and the rest of the essay refers to it as the repair/selection axis. Confronted with deteriorating conditions, one politics asks how a shared world can remain habitable. The other asks who deserves protection, admission, or escape. Section 8 gives the two poles formal definitions as contraction under constraint and contraction by selection.

2 A Sequel, Not a Rerun

The book frames its subject as an evolution rather than a recurrence. Its introduction says plainly that the story is not one of return: an ominous evolution is under way on the networked hard right, tied to humanity's entry into an era of global-scale existential crises. Rather than address those crises, the new right in the authors' account has made peace with permanent shocks and is fighting a supremacist war over who will survive the future. In public discussion around the book's September 2026 release, Klein described the present as something closer to a sequel than a repetition: the older logics of dehumanization, hierarchy, and racial supremacy, now operating inside an environment of existential crisis that twentieth-century fascists did not inhabit. Mussolini and Hitler predated both the atomic bomb and any public understanding that fossil combustion was warming the planet. The fascism the authors describe has, in their account, made its peace with collapse. The book also takes care to anchor the word: it opens its definition with Robert Paxton's account of fascism as political behavior organized around decline, humiliation, and victimhood, compensated by cults of unity and purity and pursued through redemptive violence, and then argues that the present formation keeps these traits while changing their horizon.

This matters for the structure of the argument. Classical fascism was typically expansionary and futural. It promised a renewed nation, a thousand-year order, a conquered living space. Whatever its brutality, it assumed a world that would continue and could be dominated. The formation Klein and Taylor describe assumes instead that the shared world is ending, or can be allowed to end, and reorganizes its promises around survival of the chosen through that ending. Permanent shock becomes the expected environment rather than an interruption of it. The political good on offer is no longer primarily expansion but *differential survivability*: a guarantee that the losses of a deteriorating world will fall elsewhere.

3 The Bundle

The book's organizing architecture is a coalition of three constituencies, which the authors call religious end timers, tech end timers, and ethno-nationalist end timers. The first reads war and disaster through messianic expectation, as signs preceding redemption. The second pursues artificial general intelligence, off-world settlement, or digital continuation, often while accelerating the energy consumption that worsens terrestrial conditions. The third organizes around narratives of civilizational erasure and demographic "replacement," treating migration as the primary existential threat.

The authors are explicit that these groups disagree with one another, frequently and substantively. A Christian Zionist eschatology and a transhumanist upload fantasy make incompatible claims about what a person is and what salvation means. An ethno-nationalist bunker and a Mars colony imply opposite attitudes toward the territory of the nation. The book's claim is not that these are one ideology in three costumes. It is that they are *combinable*.

The book's own formulation of the common denominator is precise enough to anchor the argument that follows. What unites the movement, the authors write, is a conviction that the common world is ending, so that the chosen, whether selected by wealth, by faith, or by ancestral claims to particular land, must usher in what comes next. The three selection criteria map directly onto the three constituencies, and they will matter again in Section 8: faith and ancestry are declared criteria, while wealth selects without anyone having to declare anything.

What makes them combinable is a shared set of motifs: apocalypse as expected, hierarchy as natural, separation as protective, and a privileged group entitled to survive. The coalition does not need agreement about the content of the saved future. It needs agreement about the form of the transition: that the transition will be selective, and that selectivity is acceptable.

This is a more defensible coalition thesis than doctrinal convergence, because it predicts both the alliance and its instability. Groups that agree only on the form of selection will cooperate while the selected set is under construction and compete once its boundaries must be drawn. The book identifies exactly this vulnerability. Its figures of the national bunker are so immersed in a hypercompetitive attention economy, and so eager to profit from conflict, that they cannot agree even on who should be allowed inside the bunker and who should be cast out. What binds the three visions despite their contradictions is, in the authors' phrase, their common abandonment of the very possibility of a stable future.

4 Building the Ark and Conjuring the Flood

Taylor's phrase for the worldview, from the authors' conversation with Adam Conover, is compact enough to serve as a definition: building the ark and conjuring the flood. The book puts the same image in its introduction, describing an oligarch class that, having claimed godlike powers, is not content to build arks and appears to be doing its best to cause the flood. In the conversation Taylor spells out the three arks: upload to the cloud, rapture to heaven, safety behind the fortress borders of the nation, with everyone else left outside. The ark is the set of escape mechanisms. Bunkers, private islands, rockets, fortified borders, gated jurisdictions, and technological transcendence are its instances. The flood is the deterioration of the surrounding world, whether through climate, war, labor displacement, or the degradation of shared information.

The phrase is sharper than it first appears because it links the two as mutually reinforcing rather than merely coincident. An ark has value in proportion to the flood. A world in which conditions remain broadly livable is a world in which private escape confers little advantage. The more the common world deteriorates, the greater the relative value of exclusive protection. An actor who owns arks therefore loses, at the margin, one of the ordinary reasons to prevent floods. Whether that actor goes further and acquires a positive interest in them depends on additional conditions, which Section 8 states separately.

The idea has a lineage in Klein's own earlier work. *The Shock Doctrine* described disaster capitalism, the use of crises to push through transfers of public goods to private hands while populations were disoriented. The present argument concerns a slower and more structural version of the same relation: not the exploitation of a single shock, but the steady appreciation

of private protection as shocks become the expected environment.

The title of this essay is meant in that sense. Floods have value, not universally, but to the holders of arks: as shared conditions worsen, assets that protect against them become relatively more valuable, and the political economy of deterioration acquires beneficiaries. This yields the essay's first formal claim, stated informally here and developed in Section 8: the political object is not catastrophe as such but the *spread* of survivability across a population. Two futures with the same average hardship can differ enormously in how that hardship is distributed. A politics of repair works to keep that spread from being imposed by allocation. A politics of selection permits and amplifies it, and ensures that its own members sit at the favorable end.

5 Empathy as Coupling

The book's attention to rhetoric against empathy is structurally necessary rather than incidental. If worsening conditions will not be prevented, then concern for everyone becomes an obstacle to deciding who receives security. Empathy couples the welfare of the protected to the welfare of the excluded. It makes the suffering outside the ark costly to those inside it.

A politics of selection therefore has a functional need to weaken this coupling. The book traces anti-empathy rhetoric across all three constituencies. It cites Elon Musk's description of empathy as the fundamental weakness of Western civilization and Christian Nationalist commentators who call empathy toxic, suicidal, or sinful. The authors name the underlying stance emotional austerity: the claim that love and care, like shrinking welfare benefits, are finite resources that must be rationed and reserved for people like oneself. Whatever the local vocabulary, the effect is the same. Decoupling lowers the internal cost of widening the survivability spread.

The most sophisticated version the book examines does not abolish the coupling but grades it. JD Vance's appeal to the medieval concept of *ordo amoris*, an order of love in which compassion belongs first to family, then neighbors, then community, then fellow citizens, concedes that concern is owed while arranging it by distance. Formally, this replaces a single coupling coefficient with a schedule $\lambda_{ij} = \lambda(d_{ij})$, decreasing in the social distance d_{ij} between i and j. A gently sloping schedule is an ordinary feature of human moral life. The political content lies in its steepness and in where the boundary falls. Under crisis, a schedule that drops to zero at the national border does the same work as outright decoupling for everyone beyond it, while preserving the language of love for everyone within it.

The authors' counterclaim is empirical as much as moral. Taylor's version in conversation is that people have a better chance of surviving when they take care of each other and prepare together. If that is right, a high λ is not a luxury purchased at the cost of survival but one of its instruments, because mutual aid enlarges Γ^{common} in exactly the conditions where private arks are least reliable.

A distinction is required here. There is a serious, non-authoritarian argument against empathy, associated most clearly with Paul Bloom, which holds that empathy is parochial, innumerate, and biased toward the vivid and the near, and that moral judgment should rely instead on reasoned compassion. That argument aims to *extend* concern past the reach of empathy's spotlight. The rhetoric Klein and Taylor describe aims to *contract* concern. The two share a target word and have opposite effects on the coupling term, which is why the word alone cannot settle which is in play.

6 Artificial Intelligence as Accelerant

The book and its accompanying interviews give artificial intelligence a prominent role, and a compressed summary can make that role sound more causally decisive than the argument requires. Klein's specific claim is that the extraordinary energy demands of large-scale AI helped forge an alliance among parts of Silicon Valley, the Trump administration, and fossil-fuel interests, with AI serving as a potential life raft for an industry facing long-term decline. In the conversation with Conover she dates the turn to fundraising dinners in San Francisco, convened by David Sacks and Marc Andreessen, at which Trump, previously indifferent to AI, learned how much energy it would consume.

The authors then broaden the explanation considerably. They cite the competitive stakes of the race for advanced systems, monopoly ambitions, accumulated wealth seeking political protection, resistance to regulation, pre-existing libertarian and far-right currents within the technology industry, and anticipated public opposition to labor displacement. Read in full, the thesis is not that AI caused a political realignment. It is that AI supplied a large, concentrated material interest that made an already available coalition cheaper to assemble and more valuable to maintain.

The book's chapter on xAI's Colossus supercomputer in Memphis shows what the alliance looks like on the ground, and it is the clearest instance in the book of differential survivability produced without any declaration. To power the first facility quickly, the company ran dozens of methane gas turbines, portable generators of a kind normally used as emergency backup, in what a Southern Environmental Law Center attorney described as an unpermitted power plant emitting formaldehyde and nitrogen oxides. Its extent was confirmed only by volunteer pilots flying thermal-imaging surveys. The site sits beside Boxtown, a working-class, majority-Black neighborhood with double the city's poverty rate, in a county that leads Tennessee in childhood asthma emergencies, where cancer rates run several times the national average. No one needed to decide that Boxtown's residents mattered less. The cost of the ark was simply deposited in the common conditions of the people with the least private protection. The machine, the book notes, was named after a 1960s fictional supercomputer that turns on humanity.

The distinction between cause and accelerant is not pedantic. A causal thesis is refuted by showing that the alliance predates AI's energy demands or would have formed without them. An accelerant thesis survives that finding and makes a different prediction: that the coalition's cohesion should track the material stakes, strengthening as compute and energy demands rise and weakening if those demands fall or decouple from fossil supply.

7 Remaining

The book's structure makes its argument visible at the level of the table of contents. It is divided into four parts, "Messianic Dreams," "Escape to the Cloud," "Prepper Nation," and "Let's Stay." The first three describe three modes of exit: exit upward into heaven, exit outward into computation or space, exit inward into the fortified nation. The fourth refuses exit. Its two chapters are titled "Hereness" and "The Leavers vs. the Stayers," and the latter frames the contest as one between those faithful to here and those perennially hatching escape plans, whom the authors call traitors to creation.

The concept of hereness has a specific source. The authors take it from the Jewish Labor Bund, the secular, socialist, and diasporist workers' movement that was for a time the most

influential Jewish political force in Eastern Europe, which developed the Yiddish idea of *doikayt*, hereness, in opposition both to the exclusionary nationalisms targeting Jews in Europe and to the Zionist answer of an ethno-state elsewhere. Drawing on Molly Crabapple's history of the Bund, they describe it as a commitment to place and community not based on bloodlines: the right to fight for freedom and safety where one lives, alongside people of other faiths and origins. Membership was expressed through action rather than ancestry. The question was whether one would work with others to make a place fairer and freer, and a yes was enough. Hereness in this sense is not a general localism. It arose as a specific answer, from inside a persecuted minority, to the question of whether safety lay in a homeland elsewhere or in solidarity where one already lived, and Klein and Taylor are consciously adapting it to a planetary version of the same question.

The authors are careful about the risk in any place-based politics. They note the Romanian Iron Guard's pouches of homeland soil, a spectrum of exclusion running from housing restrictions to eco-fascism, and JD Vance's 2024 claim that American belonging is a matter of blood and family graves, which they identify, following Michel Winock, as mortuary nationalism. Hereness is distinguished from all of these on two grounds. It admits by action rather than descent, and it is portable: because people have always moved in search of safety, here may change, and the right to a safe home must be guaranteed without granting anyone the right to displace others.

These two features are what separate remaining from the national bunker, which is also a politics of place. In the terms of Section 8, the bunker defines membership designatively, by ancestry, and contracts the continuation set to those so designated. Hereness defines membership by participation in sustaining Γ^{common} where one is, and admits anyone who takes part. Both are attached to territory. They differ in what earns a place inside it.

What is notable about this alternative is what it does not claim. It does not deny that conditions are worsening. It does not promise that the boundary of livable futures will stop contracting. Its claim is narrower and more demanding: that contraction of the livable must not be converted into a principle for ranking whose life counts. Remaining is the commitment to absorb loss collectively rather than to export it.

8 A Formal Sketch

The correspondence between the book's argument and the admissibility vocabulary is not one Klein and Taylor draw, but it is unusually direct. This section states it. A division of labor should be clear from the start. The framework defines an operator; it does not identify which political formation applies it. It specifies the structure that would constitute contraction by selection, and Klein and Taylor's book supplies the empirical claim that the coalition they describe increasingly exhibits that structure. Disagreement with their attribution therefore does not by itself refute the formalism, and accepting the formalism does not commit a reader to every attribution in the book.

Definition 1 (Continuation set)**.** *Let P be a population and Ω a space of joint future trajectories. For a trajectory $\omega \in \Omega$ and individual $i \in P$, let $s_i(\omega) \in [0,1]$ denote the probability that i retains a livable continuation under ω. The* continuation set *of a policy regime R is*

$$\mathcal{C}_R = \{\, i \in P : \mathbb{E}_{\omega \sim R}[s_i(\omega)] \geq \theta \,\},$$

for a threshold θ of minimal livability.

A crisis is modeled as a shift in the trajectory distribution that lowers expected survivability for some or all of P. The crisis alone does not fix $\mathcal{C}$; the regime's response does.

Survivability is not an attribute a person carries alone. It depends on what that person can reach: savings, insurance, mobility, private infrastructure, political access, escape technology, and the common systems (water, power, hospitals, levees, public order) on which everyone else depends.

Definition 2 (Reachable continuations)**.** *For each $i \in P$ let Γ_i be the set of futures i can reach, decomposed as*

$$\Gamma_i = \Gamma^{\text{common}} \cup \Gamma_i^{\text{priv}},$$

where Γ^{common} is the set of continuations supplied by shared systems and available to all, and Γ_i^{priv} is the set reachable only through capacities i holds privately. Survivability s_i is increasing in Γ_i.

Definition 3 (Differential survivability)**.** *A population exhibits* differential survivability *under a crisis when its members' continuation sets are unequal in a way that determines who retains livable futures as conditions worsen: there exist groups $A, B \subset P$ with*

$$\Gamma_a \supsetneq \Gamma_b \quad \text{for } a \in A,\ b \in B,$$

and the difference $\Gamma_a \setminus \Gamma_b$ consists of continuations that remain available when Γ^{common} contracts.

The definition describes a property of the state space, not an intention. Nobody has to announce that a deserves survival and b does not. If one group has bunkers, capital, mobility, and private infrastructure while another depends on deteriorating common systems, the sorting is already materially instantiated before any doctrine names it. This is why differential survivability is a more useful term than sorting or selection: it can be measured without imputing a motive to whoever produced it.

Definition 4 (Contraction under constraint and by selection)**.** *Suppose a crisis lowers the total resource B available to sustain continuations. A response* contracts under constraint *if every exclusion from $\mathcal{C}$ is forced by B, in the sense that no feasible allocation of B would have avoided it, and the exclusion rule is invariant to the identity of the excluded. A response* contracts by selection *if exclusions track something other than what B forces. Selection is* designative *when it runs through declared membership in a subset $G \subset P$, and* structural *when it runs through unequal Γ_i^{priv} with no declaration at all.*

Invariance has a testable meaning. Swap the identities of two individuals while holding fixed their constraint-relevant circumstances (medical need, exposure to the hazard, physical location, the resources the crisis actually requires), and the rule should exclude the same people. The qualification matters. If purchasing power is admitted among the circumstances held fixed, structural selection passes the test trivially, since a rule that rescues whoever can pay is invariant to everything except the ability to pay. The invariance condition therefore has to be stated over the features a crisis genuinely constrains, and private capacity is not one of them.

The distinction matters for reading the book. Eschatological and national selection are designative: the saved are named by faith or by belonging. Technological selection is largely structural: the saved are whoever can afford the island, the rocket, or the upload. Structural selection is the harder form to contest, because there is no stated principle to refute, only a distribution of capacities.

A further distinction keeps the concept from collapsing into inequality in general. Differential survivability as defined above is a *descriptive* property: any society with unequal savings, insurance, or mobility exhibits some of it. It becomes a *politically salient* property when those with the larger continuation sets also hold asymmetric capacity to set the rules that govern Γ^{common}: its funding, its siting, its standards, its exceptions. Without that asymmetry, unequal private capacity is a problem of distribution that ordinary politics can in principle address. With it, the people least exposed to common conditions are also the people deciding how much those conditions are maintained, and the exit feedback below becomes possible. Compactly, salience requires both

$$e_i \to 0 \qquad \text{and} \qquad \frac{\partial \Gamma^{\text{common}}}{\partial a_i} \text{ large},$$

where a_i stands for i's actions on the rules, budgets, and siting of common systems: an actor becomes simultaneously less dependent on the commons and more able to determine its condition. The book's subject is the second case, and the framework's concern with concentrated power enters here rather than being assumed throughout.

Define the *survivability spread* $\sigma_R = \text{Var}_{i \in P}\left(\mathbb{E}_R[s_i]\right)$. The three bunkers of the book correspond to three mechanisms for raising σ while holding G near the top of the distribution: eschatological (the saved are designated by faith), technological (the saved are selected, largely without designation, by access to escape infrastructure), and national (the saved are designated by territorial and ethnic belonging).

The spread σ_R measures dispersion in expected survivability, and it can miss the composition of the underlying continuation sets. Two people can have the same $\mathbb{E}_R[s_i]$ while one reaches it through common provision and the other through private capacity, and they will fare very differently when common conditions move. A second statistic captures this. Define each person's *exposure* to common conditions as $e_i = \partial\, \mathbb{E}[s_i]/\partial Q$ and the *exposure spread* as $\sigma^e = \text{Var}_{i \in P}(e_i)$. High σ_R says that some have better prospects than others. High σ^e says that some have prospects that no longer depend on the common world at all. The political claim of the book, that some expect to survive what others will not, concerns the second statistic at least as much as the first, and the definition of impunity in Section 9 is the limiting case $e_a \approx 0$.

The pair (σ_R, σ^e) distinguishes four situations. Low on both: prospects are similar and everyone depends on the commons in similar ways. High σ_R with low σ^e: prospects are unequal, but the fortunate and the unfortunate still rise and fall with the same common conditions. High on both: unequal prospects combined with insulation of the protected. The remaining case, low σ_R with high σ^e, is the most deceptive. Outcomes look similar because common conditions are currently good, while the infrastructures producing those outcomes are radically different, and an ordinary inequality statistic will report a healthy society until Q falls. Exposure carries information that present outcomes do not.

This case is especially hard to see politically because present outcomes give no warning. Common systems may still function well enough to equalize survivability after a protected subset has stopped depending on them, so renewal can weaken, or simply cease, without any visible outcome differential to provoke a response; the people most able to notice and object are the ones who have already moved off the commons. The sequence is

$$\sigma^e_t \uparrow \quad \text{while} \quad \sigma_{R,t} \approx \text{const.}, \qquad \text{then} \qquad Q_{t+1} \downarrow \Rightarrow \ \sigma_{R,t+1} \uparrow .$$

Exposure spread is therefore a leading structural indicator and outcome spread a lagging one. By the time falling Q makes the divergence visible in σ_R, the asymmetry in exposure that permits the exit feedback below has already been established.

Let Q denote the quality of common conditions, so that Γ^{common} grows with Q.

Proposition 1 (The value of floods)**.** *Let an actor in A hold a private protection a whose relative value is $V_{\text{ark}}(Q) = \mathbb{E}[s_A \mid a, Q] - \mathbb{E}[s_B \mid Q]$. If a holds $\mathbb{E}[s_A]$ approximately fixed as Q varies, while $\mathbb{E}[s_B]$ increases with Q, then*

$$\frac{\partial V_{\text{ark}}}{\partial Q} < 0.$$

The proof is immediate from the definition. The proposition identifies an asymmetry, not a motive: actors with strong enough exit options hold assets whose relative value rises as shared conditions deteriorate. What an actor does with that asymmetry depends on what the actor values, which requires a separate statement. Write the actor's objective as

$$U_A(Q) = \mathbb{E}[s_A \mid a, Q] + \alpha\, V_{\text{ark}}(Q) + \beta\, Q, \qquad \alpha, \beta \geq 0,$$

where α weights relative advantage (status, scarcity rents, asset appreciation, political leverage) and β weights concern for common conditions as such. Then

$$\frac{\partial U_A}{\partial Q} = \underbrace{\frac{\partial\, \mathbb{E}[s_A \mid a, Q]}{\partial Q}}_{\text{own exposure}} + \underbrace{\alpha\, \frac{\partial V_{\text{ark}}}{\partial Q}}_{\text{relative advantage} < 0} + \underbrace{\beta}_{\text{common concern}}.$$

Strong private protection drives the first term toward zero. The second is negative whenever $\alpha > 0$. The third is positive whenever $\beta > 0$. Three cases need to be kept apart:

- *Insulation*: the first term is near zero. The actor has lost the self-interested reason to maintain common conditions but may still hold the others.
- *Indifference*: insulation together with $\alpha \approx 0$ and $\beta \approx 0$, so that $\partial U_A/\partial Q \approx 0$. The actor neither maintains nor degrades the common world; it simply ceases to be a concern.
- *Preference for deterioration*: $\alpha\,|\partial V_{\text{ark}}/\partial Q|$ exceeds the sum of the other two terms, so that $\partial U_A/\partial Q < 0$.

The ark by itself produces only insulation. It removes one ordinary reason to maintain the floodplain; it does not establish a preference for flooding it. A positive interest in deterioration arises only under additional conditions that make α large: protection that is scarce and priced against outside conditions, status that is relative, assets that appreciate as alternatives fail, or political advantage that grows with public fear. The book's strongest claims concern actors for whom these conditions appear to hold. The framework does not assume they hold for everyone who owns a generator.

Proposition 2 (Exit feedback)**.** *Let $I = I^{\text{broad}} + I^{\text{cap}}$ be investment in common systems, divided between broad investment whose benefits reach the whole population and captured investment whose benefits flow disproportionately to those who already hold large Γ^{priv}, and suppose (i) Q increases with I^{broad}, (ii) the value of exit V_{exit} rises as Q falls, by the previous proposition, and (iii) holders of exit options exercise disproportionate influence over I, and their support for I^{broad} falls as V_{exit} rises. Insulation alone is enough for (iii) if β is small, since support for I^{broad} then tracks own exposure; a preference for deterioration strengthens it but is not required. Then*

$$Q \downarrow \Rightarrow\ V_{\text{exit}} \uparrow \Rightarrow\ I^{\text{broad}} \downarrow \Rightarrow\ Q \downarrow,$$

and the loop is self-reinforcing.

Each condition is empirical, and the loop runs only when all three hold. The division of I matters because the loop is compatible with rising total investment. Elites may fund a levee that protects their own district, a police force concentrated where they live, or a grid upgrade serving their facilities, while broad provision declines. Captured investment of this kind can raise I and still leave the loop running through I^{broad}. Condition (iii) carries the political weight. It is related to Albert Hirschman's observation that when the members best able to exercise voice can exit instead, an institution loses the pressure that would have forced it to repair itself. The analogy is not exact. Hirschman's members exit a firm or organization and take their custom elsewhere; here, those with exit options typically remain citizens and taxpayers of the jurisdiction whose common systems they cease to use, which gives them continued influence over those systems without continued dependence on them. That combination, which can be called *retained voice with withdrawn dependence*, makes the present case, if anything, worse than Hirschman's. Private schools, private security, gated water supplies, and backup generators each withdraw from the common system the people with the most resources to demand that it work.

Write the share of i's continuations supplied in common as $\rho_i = \mu(\Gamma^{\text{common}})/\mu(\Gamma_i)$. Because $\Gamma_i = \Gamma^{\text{common}} \cup \Gamma_i^{\text{priv}}$, a fall in ρ_i can happen in two ways:

$$\rho_i \downarrow \quad \begin{cases} \text{through contraction of } \Gamma^{\text{common}}: & \text{privatization by loss,} \\ \text{through expansion of } \Gamma_i^{\text{priv}}: & \text{privatization by addition.} \end{cases}$$

Only the first is a shift away from common provision. A society in which everyone keeps excellent public hospitals while the wealthy also buy private medicine has a lower ρ_i for the wealthy, but no one's future has been moved out of the commons.

Definition 5 (The expensive future)**.** *The* expensive future *is the regime of privatization by loss. At the level of the regime, common continuation contracts,*

$$\mu\big(\Gamma_{t+1}^{\text{common}}\big) < \mu\big(\Gamma_t^{\text{common}}\big).$$

The affected population then divides by capacity to replace what was lost. For $i \in P_{\text{replace}}$, private acquisition substitutes for the lost commons and the private share of what remains rises,

$$\frac{\mu\big(\Gamma_{i,t+1}^{\text{priv}}\big)}{\mu\big(\Gamma_{i,t+1}\big)} > \frac{\mu\big(\Gamma_{i,t}^{\text{priv}}\big)}{\mu\big(\Gamma_{i,t}\big)}.$$

For $i \in P_{\text{loss}}$, there is nothing to substitute with, and total reachable continuation simply contracts,

$$\mu\big(\Gamma_{i,t+1}\big) < \mu\big(\Gamma_{i,t}\big).$$

In both cases continuation that was supplied in common is replaced by continuation that must be acquired, or is not replaced at all, rather than merely supplemented.

The partition is where the inequality of the expensive future lies. It is not a difference in expenditure but a difference in the capacity to replace lost commons. For a household with no savings and no vehicle, the private share was near zero before the flood and remains near zero after it; that household belongs to P_{loss}, and the expensive future reaches it only as the disappearance of what the commons once supplied.

In that regime inequality changes character. It is no longer only inequality in present consumption, which can be large without deciding who has a future. It becomes inequality in reachable futures. The flood is where that transition becomes visible, because it is the moment at which Γ^{common} contracts and only Γ^{priv} remains.

Remark 1 (Empathy as coupling)**.** *Write the welfare of a member of G as $W_G = u(s_G) - \lambda\,\Delta$, where Δ measures the survivability gap to $P \setminus G$ and $\lambda \geq 0$ is a coupling coefficient. Empathy, solidarity, and shared institutions raise λ. At $\lambda = 0$ the gap is costless to those inside it and selection is free. Anti-empathy rhetoric in the sense of Section 5 acts on λ directly; Bloom's reasoned compassion attempts to hold λ high while correcting its biases. The single coefficient here is a summary of the distance schedule $\lambda(d_{ij})$ introduced with the* ordo amoris *discussion in Section 5: with $\lambda_{ij} = \lambda(d_{ij})$, the coupling of G to the excluded is $\lambda = \sum_{j \notin G} w_j\,\lambda(d_{Gj})$, a weighted average over those outside, so a constant schedule recovers the scalar case and a schedule that drops to zero at a boundary drives the average toward zero for everyone beyond it.*

The two regimes of the book can then be written as competing operators on the same space:

$$\mathcal{C} \xrightarrow{\text{crisis}} \begin{cases} \Gamma_{\text{few}}: & \text{contraction by selection, } \lambda \downarrow \quad \text{(bunker, border, rapture, upload)} \\ \Gamma_{\text{shared}}: & \text{contraction under constraint only, } \lambda \uparrow \quad \text{(repair, solidarity, remaining)} \end{cases}$$

The diagram characterizes operators, not observed distributions. Selection permits and typically amplifies dispersion in σ_R and σ^e, but neither spread defines it. Contraction under constraint does not guarantee that outcome spread falls, since even a perfectly invariant allocation applied to people who begin with different exposures, needs, and locations can leave them further apart than before.

Under genuine degradation some loss of continuation is unavoidable, so the evaluative question is never simply whether $|\Gamma_{t+1}| < |\Gamma_t|$. It is how the lost region divides:

$$\Gamma_{\text{lost}} = \Gamma_{\text{forced}} \sqcup \Gamma_{\text{selected}} \sqcup \Gamma_{\text{underdetermined}},$$

between futures that became physically unavailable, futures that were socially withdrawn, and futures whose loss the available evidence cannot assign to either. The third set is not a concession but a requirement of the method. The tests below are evidentiary, and evidence can fail to decide; a framework that forced every lost continuation into one of two bins would have to manufacture certainty it does not have. Many real losses will also be mixed, forced in part by a genuine shortfall and shaped in part by how the shortfall was distributed, and until the tests separate the two components such losses belong in the underdetermined set. The framework is an instrument for moving losses out of that set, and its operating rule is

constraint must be demonstrated; selection must not pass as constraint.

The rule assigns a burden of proof, and the definitions supply the tests that would discharge it. A claimed constraint should pass three. The *invariance test*: the exclusions are unchanged when identities are swapped among people with the same constraint-relevant circumstances. The *counterfactual test*: no feasible alternative allocation of the same resources is known that excludes less. Writing $\mathcal{F}(B)$ for the allocations feasible under the genuine constraint B and A for the allocation observed, the test asks whether

$$\exists\, A' \in \mathcal{F}(B):\ \mu\big(\Gamma_{\text{excl}}(A')\big) < \mu\big(\Gamma_{\text{excl}}(A)\big).$$

It does not require identifying the best allocation, which is rarely possible; a single feasible allocation that preserves more continuation is enough to defeat the claim that the observed exclusion was forced by B. The *procedural test*: the rule and its criteria are stated in advance, open to audit by those it affects, and not revised after the fact to fit the result. The counterfactual

test is asymmetric and the most exposed to motivated reasoning. It can falsify a strong constraint claim by exhibiting a dominating feasible allocation, but failing to find one does not prove that none exists:

$$\text{counterexample found} \Rightarrow \text{not purely forced}, \qquad \text{counterexample not found} \not\Rightarrow \text{purely forced}.$$

Feasibility itself is contestable, and two parties can disagree about $\mathcal{F}(B)$ without disagreeing about any measured fact. Proposed counterfactuals should therefore be stated before outcomes are known where possible and assessed independently of the actors who benefit from the allocation under review. The procedural test helps here but does not settle it, since a clean procedure can still be supplied with a counterfactual chosen to yield the desired result.

Failure of any one test does not prove selection, but it shifts the burden back onto whoever claims the loss was forced. The asymmetry is deliberate:

$$\boxed{\text{not demonstrated as constraint} \neq \text{demonstrated as selection.}}$$

A loss that fails the tests moves into $\Gamma_{\text{underdetermined}}$ with the burden reassigned, not into Γ_{selected} by default. Passing all three moves it into Γ_{forced}; positive evidence that the allocation rule tracked designated identity or private capacity moves it into Γ_{selected}.

The reason the burden falls where it does can be put in one line:

$$\boxed{\text{Necessity is a counterfactual claim.}}$$

To say that a loss was necessary is to say that no feasible alternative would have preserved it, $\nexists\, A' \in \mathcal{F}(B)$ with $\Gamma_{\text{excl}}(A') \subsetneq \Gamma_{\text{excl}}(A)$. That is a strong claim over the whole feasible space, not a report of the resource state, and the party making it typically knows and controls more about why the excluded region contracted than the people inside it. The framework addresses this epistemic asymmetry as much as the material one, which is why it assigns the burden to the claimant.

The underdetermined region is not a neutral residue either. Its size depends on what evidence exists, on how feasible counterfactuals are specified, and on whether any institution has both the authority and the incentive to run the tests. Actors who benefit from an allocation may benefit from keeping its losses underdetermined, since uncertainty can be allocated as well as resolved; part of that region is genuinely epistemic, and part may be strategically opaque. The burden-of-proof rule prevents uncertainty from being counted as demonstrated constraint, but it does not by itself supply the institutions required to resolve that uncertainty.

The decisive variable is not whether a society recognizes catastrophe but which transformations become admissible once catastrophe has been declared. Γ_{shared} does not deny contraction. It treats the boundary as a physical fact to be pushed outward by repair, rather than a social fact to be drawn inward by designation.

9 Impunity as Decoupling from the Common

The book's conclusion supplies a diagnosis that fits the formal sketch closely. End times fascism, the authors argue, is at its core a crisis of impunity born of concentrated power and wealth: too much money, information technology, and weaponry concentrated in too few hands, deranging those who hold them into risks that endanger whole societies. The remedy they propose is a new disarmament movement, one that would diffuse and dismantle these pools of concentrated power.

They introduce it through a reading of *Dr. Strangelove*, in which the war room is advised to retreat to mine-shaft bunkers, with top officials guaranteed places and the remaining survivors chosen by a computer programmed for youth, fertility, intelligence, and useful skills.

Impunity can be given a precise sense here. An actor a enjoys impunity with respect to common conditions when

$$\frac{\partial \mathbb{E}[s_a]}{\partial Q} \approx 0,$$

that is, when the actor's own survivability no longer depends on the quality of the shared world. This is exactly the premise of the value-of-floods proposition and the definition of insulation. Impunity is not a separate grievance alongside differential survivability; it is the condition under which the relative value of arks rises as common conditions fall, and under which the exit feedback can run. It is also, importantly, weaker than a desire for collapse. It says that the powerful can become insulated from the marginal consequences of common deterioration, which is enough to weaken repair; whether they come to prefer deterioration depends on the further conditions that make α large. Concentrated wealth purchases Γ^{priv} large enough to make the derivative vanish.

Read this way, disarmament in the authors' sense is the restoration of dependence. Diffusing concentrated power re-couples the survivability of the powerful to the condition of the common world, so that the derivative is no longer zero and repair becomes, again, in everyone's interest. The Strangelove bunker also marks the limit case of designative selection: selection handed to a machine, with its criteria written down in advance. The more common danger in the present, the essay has argued, is the structural case, in which no list is ever drawn up because private capacity has already done the sorting.

10 Limits of the Framework

Six limits deserve statement.

Symmetric applicability. The framework identifies an operator, not an actor. Nothing in it guarantees that selection is practiced only by the coalition the book describes. Green politics has its own history of population alarmism, and lifeboat reasoning of the kind Garrett Hardin advanced in 1974 was presented as ecological realism. Technocratic climate adaptation can quietly designate which regions are worth defending. If the distinction between constraint and selection is sound, it must be applied to every regime, including those that describe themselves as repair. A reader sympathetic to the book can reply that power is what makes the operator dangerous, and the framework agrees: the distinction between descriptive and politically salient differential survivability in Section 8 locates the danger in asymmetric control over common systems. That relocates the book's concern with concentrated power rather than dissolving it, and it applies to any regime, whatever its self-description, in which the least exposed set the terms of common provision.

The loop has counterforces. Private protection can also finance repair. Insurers who price flood risk create incentives for mitigation; wealthy residents who cannot fully exit a city may fund its levees; firms whose supply chains depend on common infrastructure have reasons to defend it. The exit-feedback proposition is conditional for this reason. Whether it runs in a given place depends on how complete the exit options are and on who controls investment in common systems.

Genuine triage. Some contractions are forced. Emergency medicine, evacuation under time limits, and allocation of scarce organs involve real exclusion. The definitions above do not

condemn triage; they require that its rules be invariant to designated identity and that the constraint be real rather than manufactured. That second condition is where most political argument will occur, since actors who benefit from selection have every reason to present it as constraint.

Coalition cohesion is empirical. Whether the three constituencies function as a durable bloc, a temporary alignment, or a journalistic construct is a question for evidence over time. The accelerant reading of the AI claim makes that question testable, which is a strength, but it also means the thesis may weaken as material conditions change.

The measurement apparatus is itself contested. The framework assumes a well-defined population P and a well-defined livability threshold θ. Both are political. Who counts as a member of the population whose continuation is being assessed, and what counts as a livable future, are questions that selection regimes often try to settle in advance, by defining some people out of P or some conditions into θ. An analysis that takes P and θ as given can therefore certify as constraint what was decided at the level of definitions. The tests above should be applied to the choice of P and θ as well as to the allocation within them.

The label. Critics across the spectrum contest whether "fascism," with or without a qualifier, is the right category, and whether it clarifies or forecloses analysis. The structural argument here does not depend on the label. Differential survivability, the value of floods to those who hold arks, the exit feedback, and the decoupling of concern can each be assessed whether or not one accepts the name the authors chose.

11 Conclusion

Reduced to slogans, the book is easy to misread as a contest between doomers and hopers. Its actual dispute is sharper. When the future becomes expensive, some institutions will sort. The question Klein and Taylor press is whether the sorting principle will be the shared constraint that a deteriorating world imposes on everyone, or a designation of who was always meant to reach the other side.

Put in the essay's terms, the expensive future is the one in which continuation must increasingly be bought, and differential survivability is the shape that future takes when it is. The ark does not cause the flood. But a world organized around arks loses its reasons to stop one, and a politics that has learned to regard the surrounding population as expendable has already decided who remains inside the future. The alternative the book proposes is not a promise that the waters will recede. It is a refusal to let the height of the water become a measure of human worth.

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