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Authoritarians and the Ideology of Love

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Why do so many authoritarians on Twitter have anime girl avatars?

The rapid emergence of authoritarian ideologies online — both right wing and left-wing — is perhaps the biggest story of the last five years and one that has caught existing activist communities off foot. For decades radical politics was almost exclusively the domain of anarchists and other explicit anti-authoritarians. Sure there were neonazi gangs on the streets of many cities and the occasional Trotskyist or Maoist on the edges of the activist scene, but anti-authoritarianism was for all intents and purposes hegemonic.

The internet eventually helped shatter this hegemony, it gave authoritarians the spaces to recruit that they weren't capable of holding in meatspace. Movements recruit through social reinforcement, when we enter rooms where everyone is on the same page those norms are reinforced in our cheap monkey brains. The perception of having a tribe or community is a powerful one, merely knowing twelve disparate individuals with the same politics as you is far less pernicious

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than having all twelve of those individuals in the same space. Suddenly your ideology is not merely an idea up for discussion but rather a law, a flag, a compact, a binding sense of identity.

Authoritarian ideologies have always appealed to the most vulgar of our psychological needs. The twists and turns of their arguments are often ludicrous on the face because they're not actually about intellectual persuasion, but emotional promises. The subtext is the point: We offer you community. We offer you power.

Less examined is how these authoritarian cults often promise *love*. Or, to be more specific, the way they tap into an existing ideology of love.

Lots of hetero boys grow up to idealize and long for an ideal of human empathy, kindness, softness and connection denied us under patriarchy — wrapping it up into a distant prize or fantasy to be longed for or strived for.

Patriarchy shoves young boys into a kind of brutal competition and the reward it promises at the end of the tunnel is the thing it takes away: empathy, connection, and kindness. We are told that if we can harden ourselves, learn to wall ourselves off further, we might one day stand on the top of a pile of corpses in some gladiatorial arena and be presented with love. Another human being who has been sealed off from the viciousness of the world in cryogenic storage, a crystallized remnant of everything that was snatched from us in childhood. We are then to use our great hulking bulk of scar tissue to enclose around them, to protect their small flower as though a replacement heart. In the most ideal fantasy we are thus made whole, returned to our youth to uncertainly re-start our lives as complete human beings. The picture tends to terminate here in a kind of “Happily Ever After” event horizon, because to even visualize ourselves beyond patriarchy, beyond the broken, twisted pain, isolation, and silent frantic need that has become as integral to our lives as breathing air taxes our imaginations beyond their capacity. We may daydream about particulars —

softest boys become the hungriest for the currencies we are told might buy back what the world has stolen from us.

If we deviate even the slightest from the path, we will fall behind in the contest, fail forever.

The lunkheads, the privileged brutes who can barely remember what was stolen from them, rarely rise as high as the true ideologues of love. The fratboy is not a true believer, the nerdy girly boy is. The fratboy will pillage, but the nerdy girly boy will kill millions in service to his religion. Every moment carrying the raw tension that this might be the last chance to win.

The fratboy chortles with delight at anything that gets things back to the simplistic formula he knows, that removes the obstacles of those feminists and weird kids. He wears his MAGA cap like a party hat. But the nerdy girly boy wears it like a talisman, a crucifix, a holy pact.

And just as this ideology of love closes us off from real relationships it epistemically closes us off from alternative paths.

Notice what it does not allow for: It does not include the harder path of trying to build positive non-romantic relationships that can satiate some of our ever growing needs. It does not include the harder path of working on yourself to repair some of the damage. It is hard for many to even to speak of much less think of such paths. And with such shrunken aspirations it's almost impossible to rise to the challenge of meeting another human being honestly, sincerely exploring the fullness of their being and collaboratively creating together. Deep connection — the empathy and solidarity of actual love — is, of course, an immeasurable fountain of strength. But it requires audacity and work.

Atrophied and raised on a diet of utopian ambrosia, albeit a limited one, the hungrier we get the less appealing these bitter vegetables look. And as we die of starvation our vision narrows to focus on the golden promise alone.

white picket fence, names of children, etc — but it functions akin to dressing up a D&D character. There's a whole absurd, magical, fantastical leap we're distracting ourselves from with such particulars.

Eventually many of us stop being able to sustain the dream. The goal — the promise — such as it still enters our life does so as a source of mitigation. A stalling tactic in a long doomed retreat. The furthest our imaginations can stretch is clinging to the faint hope of such a prize until one finally drains it and dies alone. A true return to childhood wholeness is finally conceded as impossible, we simply want to sip some nostalgia of what life was like before we became boys, before we became men, one last time before dying.

Love — for many, but particularly for heterosexual boys — functions as a utopia. The last conceivable one.

It's no longer possible for most to imagine a world not riven with callous competition. And so one's aspirations shrink to just prying away one single relationship not characterized by cruelty and fear. This concept of love is the widest spread and most powerful radical ideology in the world today. It is also one of the most silent, since its adherents have given up on trusting anyone beyond this eschaton-like figure of the lover. Men do not speak about love to other men. What would be the point? As in so many other instances the most important parts of our lives are by necessity never shared.

And with the girls and women we date we are circumspect. The reward we are promised is one of innocence of what the world has done to us. By such assumption it cannot be aware of its own role. And we cannot speak what drives us.

There exists, in every eschatology of this promised utopia, every ideology or narrative that wraps around it, a breaking moment. A “???” step where the chains of context that have wrapped around us disappear and we are suddenly pushed by an outside force, by the hand of god, by narrative power, by *The Way It Works!*, into utopia.

Such a revolutionary or millenarian ideology of love has widely flourished in the last few hundred years in the west. Modern romantic love, “true love” and similar narratives are so clearly pressure valves for revolutionary instincts. A comfortingly human-scale place to channel the hunger and frustrated aspirations of simultaneously seeing the world as it is and might instead be. Lots of people subscribe to it to varying degrees. I subscribe to it. Or at least some variant. Some days fighting for a better world is too much to ask. Some days the most you can bring yourself to imagine is a single relationship that isn’t shit. You think “If I could have a single tiny burning ember of utopia I’d be fine, I could live once again from its warmth.” Idealistic aspirations in romance and love are not the problem, and they are obviously not in any sense exclusive to geeky hetero boys. We all need warmth in our lives. We all need some kind of relief from the war of all against all. We all need to start somewhere.

But what is relatively unique about hetero boys is the way their socialization and the narratives of patriarchy often frame and channel this.

Many of the most virulent reactionaries online were clearly once sensitive children. The 4chan nazi who spews hate on women and calls for the establishment of an absurd Reich where women are forced into abject slavery, or indoctrinated into service as Good Aryan Women peppers his internet presence with compulsive anime waifus. Childlike enormous eyes plaintively look out from soft and comforting frills. This representation is abstracted away from any resemblance to a real breathing human, turned into a totem, a constantly invested in and revisited symbol. The internet nazi with a love for anime and other infantilized representations of girls is more than a cliché, it’s a near-constant.

If we can just get through these armies of our enemies then magic will happen and everyone will get a waifu. The state will force someone to love me. Without the monsters of feminism

to delude and mislead women they will return to their natural state of waifus ready to love me. If only women would be enlightened to how their shortsighted approaches are leaving them unrewarded like they would be if they gave me a chance. If only women would see that *fairness* means everyone should get a waifu.

And finally, fuck it, maybe none of those things will work, maybe none of those arguments ring true. But then where’s any redeeming value in life? Where’s any hope? Goddamn it, maybe if you just blindly rage, if you just seize enough power, maybe somewhere in there you’ll find a path to utopia that would actually work. It’s better than just giving into hopelessness.

Conservative and authoritarian ideological structures make a lot more sense when you recognize them as mechanisms to validate one’s own hardening — *this wasn’t a mistake! This is the only way! I can have my cake and eat it too!* ...Either lying about the terms of the relationships they actually have, or actual the paths ahead to other possible relationships.

The racism of young white men in the west often takes the form of projecting all the uncontrollable fearful rage and pain you feel, all the brutality and nihilism, onto an animalized other. Self-recognition deferred. The middle class white boys in basements howling for the heads of feminists, posting guides for getting away with rape, and shooting up churches? This tornado of raw scar tissue is not not primal. It’s not some kind of genetic destiny that rules us like puppets. It’s ideological. A worldview beaten into us. Sure there’s sexual frustration, but mostly it’s emotional-mutilation alongside a model of How Things Work that carries such stakes we can never risk breaking from it. The more society hurts young boys and the more we hurt ourselves the more we desperately hunger for what it promises, following its instructions and hurting ourselves all the more. Success, power, toughness, the