Why there 'must' be a viable strategy for overcoming climate change and other existential threats

A proper understanding of the processes that govern the evolution of life in our universe demonstrates that when life on a planet reaches the stage humanity has, and faces existential threats such as climate change, life is highly likely to find a way to reorganize itself to overcome those threats.

Organising 'The One Percent'

My article titled "<u>How 'The One Percent' can be Organized to Fix Climate Change</u>" sets out to identify a viable strategy for overcoming catastrophic climate change. It demonstrates that:

- the mega-powerful and wealthy can be organized in such a way that their pursuit of individual self-interest will drive them to use their power to fix climate change;
- this strategy will enable human civilization to survive this century.

However, for many, such a strategy seems absurd. Reasons for this include:

- the wealthy and powerful are currently playing a key role in driving the processes that are producing catastrophic climate change:
- they are funding and profiting from economic activities that are producing environmental destruction;
- many of them are using their wealth and power to co-opt governments and the media to resist and undermine attempts by climate activists to force governments to mitigate climate change; and
- top-down strategies involve the use of centralised power, and concentrated power tends to be corrupted and misused, as history demonstrates abundantly.

The wealthy and powerful are seen as a significant part of the problem, not the solution.

My article demonstrates in detail how the one percent can be organised to overcome these impediments:

• it identifies how the wealthy and powerful can be embedded in a form of organization that ensures it is in their individual interests to use their power to fix climate change.

I will not be reiterating the justification for this strategy in detail here.

Instead, in this article I will show how an understanding of the evolutionary processes that govern life throughout the universe suggests that:

- there must be a viable strategy for overcoming the existential threats that emerge when life evolves to the stage reached by humanity on Earth; and
- an approach that involves organizing the wealthy and powerful to overcome the threats is a central component of such a viable strategy.

There are good reasons for pessimism about existential threats

Until recently, I was very pessimistic about the prospects of human civilization surviving catastrophic climate change. I could not see a viable way through, given that:

- our current economic systems are driving and incentivizing environmental destruction;
- even if a corporation is run by people who are pro-environment, competitive markets ensure that the corporation will be able to survive and remain competitive only if it externalizes costs at the expense of the environment; and
- our systems of government cannot restrain the destructive behaviour of corporations because governments are corrupted and manipulated by the wealthy and powerful.
- For more about how our existing social and economic systems currently self-organise environmental destruction, see **Reference 3** below.

Strategies that rely on bottom-up approaches alone are not the answer: while they are consistent with democratic ideals and other values that are supported widely, they have been ineffective in the face of catastrophic climate change and will continue to be so:

- mass movements that attempt to force governments to protect the environment are continually undermined by the mass media that are largely owned and controlled by the wealthy and powerful; and
- all bottom-up activism faces debilitating 'collective action traps' that are exacerbated by media propaganda.
- Collective action traps impede the emergence of cooperation and collective action, and operate amongst entities of all kinds at all levels of organisation within a trap, it is against the interests of individual entities to cooperate for the common good, no matter how beneficial it might be to the collective as a whole.
- For more about collective action traps, see <u>my initial article</u> and **References 1 and 3** below.

Furthermore, the spread of 'higher consciousness' will not overcome these challenges in time:

- the emergence of higher cognitive capacities and consciousness is occurring very slowly;
- current varieties of 'higher consciousness' are not proving very effective at all in understanding or combatting the systemic forces that are driving catastrophic climate change; and
- these forms of 'higher consciousness' do not seem to produce higher intelligence or the ability to design and implement actions that can deal effectively with complex challenges.

In short, if our political and economic systems continue to operate as they do now, human civilization will not survive this century.

• Furthermore, technological civilization will not rebound after it collapses because we have used up most of the easily-accessible fossil fuels and mineral resources that would be needed to relaunch industrial civilization.

I could not see a way through these serious impediments.

• Those who are more optimistic seem to be relying on copious amounts of wishful thinking and 'hopium'.

But an evolutionary understanding suggests there is a way through

However, this pessimism seemed to be contradicted by an understanding of the large-scale evolutionary processes that have shaped the evolution of life on Earth and that will determine the future of life here and elsewhere in the universe.

- Evolution science is increasingly demonstrating that we live in a universe in which life is common there are likely to be billions of planets on which life emerges.
- Furthermore, when life emerges on a planet, it tends to evolve along a particular trajectory that is inconsistent with succumbing to existential risks.

The direction of evolution

The trajectory of evolution is towards increasing cooperation and integration amongst living processes. On Earth:

- self-replicating molecular processes were organized into the first simple cells, communities of simple cells formed the more complex eukaryote cell, organizations of these cells formed multi-cellular organisms, and organisms became organized into cooperative societies; and
- in human evolution, the trajectory has been from family groups, to bands, to tribes, to agricultural communities and city states, to empires, to nations and so on.

Key aspects of the trajectory are:

- each step integrates self-interested competitors into cooperatives. This is achieved by the emergence of management/regulation/governance that rewards cooperation and suppresses free-riders;
- the entities formed at one level team up to form the cooperatives at the next level, producing a step-wise increase in the scale of integration and cooperation;
- repetition of this process leads to the emergence of cooperative organizations of ever-increasing scale and evolvability (evolvability is the capacity to discover new and innovative adaptations);
- three thousand million years ago, cooperation extended only between molecular processes that were separated by about a millionth of a meter, the scale of early cells. Now, cooperation extends between human organisms that are separated by up to 12 million meters, the scale of the planet;
- since life began on Earth, the scale of cooperation between living processes has increased over a million, billion times.

The trajectory is driven by the potential of cooperative organizations to be far more competitive than isolated individuals.

• Effective cooperation is favored by evolution.

Furthermore, the processes that drive the trajectory can be expected to be operative on any planet on which life emerges.

• As a consequence, a trajectory that is broadly similar in outline can be expected to emerge on other planets, although the details will differ.

The emergence of a unified planetary society

The culmination of this evolutionary trajectory is the emergence of a highly evolvable cooperative organization on the scale of the planet.

- As was the case with cooperative organisations that emerged at lower levels, this emergent planetary entity will tend to develop into an organism that adapts and evolves as a coherent whole.
- The evolution of life on Earth will have hatched a global superorganism.
- For more details of the peer-reviewed science that substantiates the existence of this trajectory and the evolutionary processes that drive it, see **Reference 1** below.

On Earth, this trajectory has progressed to the stage where cooperative organisations have emerged that are on the scale of continents (e.g. some Nation States).

• Organisations that are even larger in scale are emerging in the form of multi-national corporations and economic systems.

On Earth, we seem to be on the verge of completing the trajectory by hatching a global superorganism - a cooperative organisation on the scale of the planet.

However, competition between Nations States and corporations is currently driving the emergence of existential risks such as climate change and the threat of nuclear war.

• These large-scale cooperatives have the power and evolvability to destroy themselves and their environment, ending human civilization.

The same large-scale evolutionary forces that have produced these existential risks on Earth will tend to drive similar risks on any planet on which life emerges.

• These risks will need to be overcome successfully if planets are to reliably hatch a global superorganism.

Taking a broad evolutionary perspective, humanity has emerged on Earth as part of a developmental process that, in an important sense, seems to be 'destined' to hatch a global superorganism.

- It is 'destined' in the same sense that a fertilised chicken egg is destined to eventually hatch a chicken.
- Within this broad evolutionary context, the belief that the developmental process on a planet typically destroys itself before it hatches a global cooperative seems absurd and ignorant.
- It is like believing that chicken eggs are likely to self-destruct before hatching.
- Such a belief might seem reasonable from the perspective of cells within a developing chicken embryo who seem to face oblivion once the non-renewable yolk is exhausted.
- But it is not reasonable from a broader perspective that understands the larger-scale evolutionary forces and processes that have brought eggs into existence and shaped their functioning.

• For peer-reviewed science about the possibility that our universe has been brought into existence and shaped by larger-scale evolutionary forces that are conducive to the successful development and evolution of life within it (including the hatching of planetary superorganisms), see **Reference 2**.

This wider evolutionary perspective strongly suggests that there must be a way to overcome the destructive competition that is driving existential risks on Earth.

But what is this feasible strategy for overcoming existential risks?

- What typically happens on a planet when life gets to the self-destructive phase that we are experiencing currently on Earth?
- And how could it possibly involve the equivalent of the mega-wealthy and powerful?

How evolution organises cooperatives – power and management

Fortunately, a proper understanding of the evolutionary process that has produced cooperatives of increasing scale on Earth shows us the way forward:

- this is because at each step in the trajectory, evolution has found a way to organise selfish entities that compete destructively into larger-scale cooperatives; and
- once we understand how evolution has repeatedly accomplished this, we can begin to see how destructively-competing Nations States, corporations and individuals can be organised successfully into a global society that is cooperative, sustainable, and evolvable.

Evolution organises cooperatives by using sources of power to promote cooperation and deter freeriding within the organisation.

- Within an unorganised group of competing entities, co-operators tend to be out-competed by selfish entities. This is because it is costly to cooperate, and selfish individuals can take benefits produced by cooperation without incurring this cost.
- This dynamic that disadvantages co-operators underlies collective action traps, cooperation barriers, the tragedy of the commons, prisoner's dilemmas, and so on.
- However, an appropriate source of power can organise a group in such a way that co-operators can outcompete selfish entities.
- The source of power can achieve this by punishing free-riders that would otherwise undermine cooperation and by using resources available to the group to reward co-operators.
- In this way, power is used to overcome the cooperation barrier that arises due to collective action traps and other impediments to cooperation.
- Once this has been achieved, it will be in the individual self-interest of members of the group to cooperate.
- It will pay to cooperate, and it will no longer pay to free ride, cheat or thieve.

The end result will be a group in which entities that are motivated only by their own individual selfinterest will now cooperate in the interests of the group as whole, • thereby eliminating destructive competition within the group.

A source of power that is able to organises cooperatives in this way is referred to as a Manager:

• examples at various levels of organisation are the RNA that managed cooperatives of selfproducing molecular processes to form the first cells, the DNA that managed cooperatives of simple cells to produce complex cells, the King that managed a society of humans, the Board of Directors of a corporation, and the government of a Nation State.

The Manager can be external to the entities that are being managed (as in the examples above), or it can be internal to the entities and distributed across them. Examples of Internal Distributed Management include:

- the genetic constraints that are internal to the members of an ant colony and are reproduced in each member due to kinship; and
- the cultural constraints that are internal to each member of a human tribe and are reproduced in each member due to socialization and enculturation.
- For more details about Evolutionary Management Theory, see **References 1 and 3**.

Management and power at the global level

This evolutionary understanding identifies what is needed at a global level to suppress the destructive competition that is currently threatening human civilization.

- What is required is a source of sufficient power that can reach across the globe to deter destructive competition (including free riding, theft, cheating, war and environmental damage).
- In other words, an appropriate form of global governance is needed if human civilization is to survive, and if the evolutionary process on Earth is to hatch a global superorganism that can contribute successfully to the future evolution of life in the universe.

But recognising the need for such a global source of power only gets us part of the way. The next critical issue that arises is:

• How is a global manager that implements appropriate global governance going to arise? What will drive its emergence? How do we get from here to there?

One possibility is that the Nations of the world will agree to institute appropriate global governance.

• Once Nations become aware of the evolutionary imperative to move to a global society underpinned by global governance, surely they will negotiate a viable agreement for achieving this?

Barriers to the establishment of global governance by international agreement

Unfortunately, it is not in the interests of the most powerful Nations to agree to effective global governance in the current circumstances:

• powerful Nations often use their supremacy to advance their own interests (including the interests of their most wealthy and powerful citizens) at the expense of the interests of other Nations and their citizens;

- effective global governance would restrain these powerful Nations from continuing to profit at the expense of lesser Nations;
- it is therefore against the individual interests of the most powerful Nations to agree to subjugate themselves to a higher power that can prevent them using their power to exploit other Nations; and
- it is therefore also against the individual self-interest of the wealthy and powerful in dominant Nations to allow the governments they control to agree to global governance.

These misalignments of interest have undermined attempts to establish effective forms of global governance in the past:

- it was the most powerful Nations such as the US and Russia that thwarted attempts to establish effective forms of global governance after each of the World Wars; and
- they also ensured that the League of Nations and the United Nations were inadequate and ineffective.

The barriers to achieving global governance by agreement is also evidenced by the ineffectiveness and fraudulent nature of recent attempts to establish sets of global rules that are intended to mitigate climate change:

• United Nations climate change conferences have failed to establish the enforcement processes that would be essential to convert their targets from fantasy into reality.

The possibility that the opposition to global governance could be reversed any time soon through democratic processes within powerful nations is highly unlikely:

- for example, in the US the overwhelming majority of citizens are strongly opposed to global governance;
- this opposition has been fuelled by the interests of the wealthy and powerful through their control of the media and other processes that shape the beliefs of the citizens of the US.

Any strategy for overcoming climate change, nuclear war and other existential risks is doomed if it requires the key players to act against their own immediate individual interests.

• Relying on dominant Nations and the wealthy and powerful who control them to willingly cede power to a form of global governance fails this fundamental test.

What can be learnt from how power and governance evolved previously at lower levels of organisation?

Fortunately, the search for a viable strategy can be assisted greatly by an understanding of how powerful management/governance emerged during the past evolution of life,

• including an understanding of how this management evolved the capacity to organise cooperative groups and societies.

Key steps in the evolutionary sequence that produces cooperatives organised by powerful managers are:

- the sequence begins with the emergence of powerful entities that use their power to exploit less-powerful ones;
- eventually some powerful entities discover how they can use their power to control a group on an on-going basis and extract an on-going stream of benefits from the group;
- some of these proto-managers discover how they can significantly boost the stream of benefits they can harvest from their group by using their power to promote cooperation and suppress free-riding within their group; and
- competition between managed groups then drives selection that aligns the interests of managers more closely with the interests of the group.
- This competition and selection means that the only way managers can advance their own interests is by advancing the interests of the managed organisation as a whole.
- In this way, a coincidence of interests emerges between the manager and the society it controls.

It is important to recognise that at every step in this sequence, it is in the immediate evolutionary interests of managers to take that next step.

• At no point do they have to act altruistically or to engage in self-sacrifice in order to organise cooperatives.

A paradigmatic example of this evolutionary sequence at the human level was the emergence and evolution of the Mongol Empire during the 13th and 14th centuries:

- initially, Genghis Khan's tribes raped and pillaged other tribes and societies, often destroying them, and then moved on to repeat the process with other societies, and so on;
- eventually however, Mongol leaders such as Kublai Khan emerged who conquered other societies and then governed them on an on-going basis, extracting a continuing stream of benefits from the societies, rather than just pillaging them once and moving on;
- the Mongol leaders who were able to govern a society most effectively (e.g. by promoting cooperation) could harvest more resources for their own benefit, and produce a society that could outcompete other societies militarily and economically.
- In this way, Mongol Managers developed a coincidence of interests with the societies they managed.

This understanding of the evolution of cooperative societies points to a possible way in which management of a global human society might plausibly emerge.

If a country or empire became sufficiently powerful, it could take control of all human societies across the planet

• initially at least, it would manage/govern other societies in its own immediate interests.

This is a strategy that was followed up to a point by, for example, the Roman and Mongol Empires and more recently, by the Empires of the British and now the United States.

But none completed their expansion by taking control and managing at the planetary level.

• None have been propelled by an understanding of the trajectory of evolution and by awareness of the evolutionary imperative to re-organise humanity into a global superorganism.

Significantly, however, the proliferation of nuclear weapons amongst Nation States now seems to have closed down this possible pathway towards a global society.

• Under current circumstances, 'Mutually Assured Destruction' stands in the way of a single Nation expanding its power to eventually dominate and control all other Nations.

New possibilities that arise with the emergence of intelligent organisms

Fortunately, new possibilities arise in the evolution of life on a planet when intelligent organisms emerge and develop to the stage reached by humanity on Earth:

First, the intelligent organisms are likely to develop the cognitive capacity to understand the nature of the evolutionary processes that have produced them and that will shape their future.

- Eventually, this capacity will enable the organisms to see what they need to do to overcome the existential challenges that threaten their future.
- They will become aware of how and why their societies need to be re-organised on a global level, and understand the collective action traps that initially stand in the way of this and how they can be overcome.

Second, collective action traps that previously undermined coordinated action at the global level will tend to weaken as the pervasiveness of the effects of collapse becomes evident.

- There is nothing that individuals or groups can do alone to escape the impact of existential threats that are truly global.
- Everyone is in the same boat, and the continued existence of the boat is threatened.
- This is most easily seen in the case of concrete threats such as an alien invasion, or an asteroid on a collision course with the planet.
- As the impacts of existential threats such as global environmental destruction become more concrete, the intelligent organisms on a planet will eventually realize that they have a collective interest in joining coordinated action directed at overcoming the threats.
- As global damage escalates, the individual interests of the organisms of a planet will increasingly be aligned with their collective interest, incentivizing the coordinated action needed to mitigate the threats.

What specific new possibilities will be opened up by these developments?

• In particular, what pathways might they enable that can produce a global source of power that can reach across the planet to suppress destructive competition and reward cooperation?

The continuing limitations of bottom-up approaches

Will these new possibilities enable a new source of global power to emerge from the bottom-up?

• Or does the most feasible path necessitate the global coordination and centralization of existing sources of power?

• Or is some combination of these approaches likely to be necessary?

In principle, enough bottom-up coordination amongst the citizens of the world could provide sufficient global power.

• In principle, globally-coordinated mass movements of sufficient size could develop the power and intelligence to co-opt governments to take the global action needed to overcome existential threats.

But the organisation of bottom-up coordination of sufficient scope and intelligence does not appear to be feasible in the short time-frame available to overcome existential threats:

- it would require a significant proportion of citizens across the planet to understand the large-scale processes that drive existential risks and how they can be brought under control, including by an appropriate re-organisation of societies; and
- this complex understanding would need to spread widely. But the wealthy and powerful can seriously undermine this spread through their control over many of the sources of information and authority that shape the beliefs and values of citizens.

Furthermore, attempts to organise mass movements are beset by collective action traps:

- the difficulty of overcoming these traps increases rapidly as the numbers of citizens that need to be coordinated in order to achieve the requisite power also increases;
- the traps undermine the ability of mass movements to acquire a capacity for intelligent agency that is essential for complex strategic action; and
- overcoming these traps will also be undermined continually by the ability of existing sources of power to influence citizens through their control of media, governments and so on.

These impediments to bottom-up approaches are evidenced by the manifest failure to date of attempts to organise powerful bottom-up movements against nuclear weapons, climate change and other existential threats.

• Bottom-up activism alone seems highly unlikely to be able to mitigate global existential risks in the limited time available.

Achieving global management through the global coordination of existing sources of power

An alternative path to global management would require the coordination across the planet of existing sources of power. This has key advantages over strategies that involve only bottom-up approaches:

- the smaller the number of agents that need to be coordinated, the easier it becomes to overcome collective action traps;
- on average, the wealthy and powerful are likely to have a greater potential to understand what is necessary to mitigate existential threats than does the average citizen;
- the mega-wealthy already have the power to impose the required forms of coordination amongst themselves and then across the planet more broadly.

My article "<u>How 'The One Percent' can be Organised to Fix Climate Change</u>" demonstrates how it is feasible to organise existing sources of power to overcome existential threats:

- the mega-wealthy and powerful have the capacity to organise themselves across the globe so that collectively they will have the power to co-opt governments to do what is necessary to overcome existential threats;
- they can intentionally embed themselves in a form of organisation that will overcome the collective action traps that currently prevent them from acting collectively;
- significantly, this strategy will be effective even where individual self-interest continues to be the predominant motivation amongst the mega-wealthy and powerful; and
- engaging in collective action is the only way that the wealthy and powerful can protect their legacies, the interests of their families, and their other sources of self-esteem.

Bottom-up activism can assist this strategy in a number of ways, leading to a combined approach. For example, it can be directed at:

- pressuring members of the one percent to join the coalition of the wealthy and powerful and to support the coalition's strategies for overcoming existential threats;
- encouraging governments to adopt and implement the globally coordinated actions necessary to fix climate change and other existential threats;
- promoting a full understanding of the nature of the large-scale forces that are driving destructive climate change and other existential risks, including the relevant collective action traps and how they can be overcome; and
- spreading an evolutionary worldview that provides an understanding of the evolutionary imperative for humanity to re-organise itself into a unified, sustainable and evolvable planetary society.

A strategy that combines both approaches seems the most likely to work.

- However, it is essential to recognise that unless the wealthy and powerful organise themselves collectively, bottom-up activism alone is extremely unlikely to succeed.
- In contrast, a sufficient coalition of the mega-wealthy and powerful can succeed alone.

On any planet on which intelligent life emerges, this is a feasible path to surviving existential threats and to birthing a global superorganism.

• It is the universally-applicable strategy for overcoming global existential threats that we would expect to find in a universe that is conducive to the successful evolution of life.

Will the global coalition of the mega-wealthy and powerful abuse its power?

A remaining central issue is whether, after existential threats are overcome, the coalition of the powerful will govern and exploit the global society for the material benefit of the members of the coalition, rather than for the benefit of all humanity.

- Will it not be in their individual and collective interests to use their power to extract resources from the global society for the benefit of themselves and their families?
- Will the solution to existential threats create a monster?

The answer to these critically important questions depends on the nature of the motivations that drive the individuals that comprise the coalition of the mega-wealthy and powerful:

• if their predominant motivation is to maximize their possession of material goods and services, they will tend to use their power to exploit.

However, their material needs will easily be satiated, and their motivations are then likely to turn to non-material needs – as is recognised by Maslow's hierarchy-of-needs.

As is evidenced by the actions of a number of the mega-wealthy and powerful already, their principal motivation is likely to turn to leaving a positive legacy

• and to achieving the social and historical recognition that will come with the building of such a legacy.

The evolutionary worldview identifies the only kinds of legacies that can be both positive and enduring:

- it identifies how humanity must organise ourselves and evolve if we are to survive and thrive indefinitely into the future,
- and if we are to make a positive contribution to the future evolution of life in the universe.
- For details about the power of an evolutionary worldview to provide meaning and purpose for human existence, including the one percent, see **Reference 4**.

In particular, the immediate evolutionary task facing humanity is to build a cooperative and highly evolvable global superorganism:

- this global entity will need to develop the capacity to adapt and evolve as a coordinated and coherent whole;
- and to link up with other planetary superorganisms in order to pursue whatever goals are appropriate to life at that scale.

A centrally-controlled, exploitative global society will not satisfy these requirements:

- in order to be highly evolvable, a global society will need to maximize the evolvability and creativity of its members; and
- it will need to use its resources to realize the highest potentials of its members.
- For details of how such a highly evolvable society can be organised, see **Reference 3**.

Members of the coalition of the mega-wealthy and powerful who come to understand the evolutionary worldview will see that the only legacy worth leaving is one that advances the evolutionary process successfully.

• Actions that undermine the evolutionary advancement of humanity will not only be on the wrong side of history, they will be on the wrong side of evolution.

Individuals who ensure that the coalition embraces the evolutionary worldview and proceeds to organise an evolvable global society will become significant figures in the evolution of life on Earth, not just in human history.

- They will be recognised forever as the Founders of a unified global society on Earth.
- The leaders of the coalition will have the opportunity to leave the ultimate legacy.

Once the coalition of the mega-wealthy and powerful embraces such a worldview, it will set up a global society that is organised in such a way that it will thereafter produce governance that serves the interests of the society as a whole.

- This form of organisation will constrain the processes that establish and adapt governance in such a way that the interests of the processes are forever aligned with the common interest.
- Such a dynamical and evolving form of organisation will ensure that power and governance will not be able to be used for exploitation.
- Again, see **Reference 3** for details of how this can be achieved.

The central role of the evolutionary worldview in birthing a healthy global superorganism underlines the importance of the role of bottom-up activism in the promotion and spread of the worldview.

Conclusion

The evolutionary worldview suggests that there must be a feasible way to escape the existential risks that threaten civilizations when they get to the stage reached by humans on Earth.

• It is as if our universe has been set up so that the evolution of living processes will eventually produce a universe that is infused with and organised by intelligent life.

The identification of this feasible path can be facilitated by an understanding of the evolutionary processes that have taken life on Earth to its current position and that will shape its future evolution.

• The path requires the organisation of a global coalition of the powerful to do what is necessary to overcome the existential risks that arise at this stage in planetary evolution.

This path to the emergence of a highly-evolvable global society is capable of ensuring the survival and thrival of intelligent organisms on any planet on which they evolve.

However, planets will differ in relation to how quickly their civilizations identify and adopt this path. A central issue therefore faces all civilizations who reach this critical stage in evolution:

How far will civilization have to collapse and how much misery will have to be suffered before the necessary global coalition of the powerful is organised?

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An easy-to-print and easy-to-circulate PDF version of my original article about organising the one percent is on my website at <u>http://www.evolutionarymanifesto.com/theonepercent.pdf</u>

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