What I Believe: A Manifesto

by winterSmith

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Part I: Where I Started, How I Got Here

I'm occasionally asked what I believe politically, and answering is always frustrating. Conservatives think I'm a Liberal. Democrats assume I'm one of them, although they don't understand why I can't be more realistic.

Too many people want an easy label, a bumper sticker, a three-word answer to a million-library question. I can't give them what they're looking for, and wouldn't even if I could.

The best I can do is write it all down.

I grew up in the working-class South of the 1960s and '70s. The word for Black people began with "*n*," and it was as normal as "dog" or "bicycle." Women were second-class citizens because the Bible said so. We'd heard of Mexicans, but nobody had actually seen one. Homosexuals were mocked...if they were lucky. And transgender—that didn't even exist.

So I started life *very* conservative. It was the only language spoken.

I voted for Reagan twice and for Bush the Elder once. As I awakened (a little, not a lot), I convinced myself that Bill Clinton represented something new and morally better. It took me a few years to realize that his Third Way was the Second Way with slicker marketing.

I began life captive to ideology, but the chains chafed. As I lived and grew, I noticed how people were actually treated (and which people were doing the treating). I learned firsthand about the gap between America's mythology and its machinery. I reflected deeply on the contradictions in what I'd been taught (because I was raised in an environment that oscillated wildly between banal hatred and [heartbreaking kindness](#)). And I studied the systems that shape our culture.

I worked. I made mistakes. I got lots of book learning. I moved around and met new people from different places and listened to their perspectives. I thought. I wrote. I made more mistakes. Lather, rinse, repeat.

At every turn, new and challenging ideas confronted me, and *I argued with every single one of them*. I lost most of those arguments, although sometimes it took me years, even decades, to realize it. At some point along the way, I realized most of what I knew resulted from losing arguments.

I never stopped watching. I never stopped questioning.

I never stepped off the road, and here I am, still walking. It goes on forever, but truthfully, I don't know how many miles I have left. So I thought I'd pause for a second to write some things down so they won't be lost.

Part II: Principles, Ethics, Imperatives

Three core values inform everything I believe:

- fairness
- empathy
- an absolute intolerance for abuse

These shape my thinking on every corner of life, and they're non-negotiable.

1. Individual Rights & Human Autonomy

Each person has a series of basic freedoms—of mind, body, expression, and self-direction—that cannot be bargained away for convenience, ideology, or political gain.

Civil & Personal Liberties (Intangible Rights)

- Bodily autonomy is absolute and non-negotiable.
- Freedom of expression includes the right to challenge, provoke, or discomfort, but stops at language that dehumanizes, incites violence, or targets individuals for harm.
- Every person has the right to digital access as a basic necessity—reliable, affordable, high-quality connectivity and communication tools sufficient for full participation in modern life.
- Every person has the right to privacy: freedom from surveillance, data exploitation, and intrusive policing.
- Every person has the right to equal access to opportunity, without discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, disability, age, nationality, language, family status, or economic background.

- Every person has the right to economic security—predictable income, fair wages, and protection from destitution.
- Every person has the right to adequate housing: safe, stable shelter with access to sanitation, clean water, and basic utilities.
- Every person has the right to food security: consistent access to nutritious, affordable food without dependence on exploitative systems.
- Every person has the right to healthcare: preventive, emergency, and long-term care without financial coercion.
- Fundamental human needs, like food, shelter, healthcare, and education, must never be subordinated to corporate or institutional profit motives.

2. Social Justice

A just society ensures that every person can truly exercise their rights by building the legal, economic, and social structures that make equality of opportunity real rather than theoretical. Inequality is tolerable only when it genuinely benefits those with the least power.

- Compassion, empathy, and reason must guide social action and public policy.
- Justice is more important than institutions that obstruct it; organizations are legitimate only when they serve the public interest.
- *(Public interest refers to the collective well-being of people and communities, defined by equity, democratic participation, and shared prosperity. It prioritizes human needs like health, safety, education, environmental protection, and economic security over private profit, concentrated power, or market goals.)*
- Structures that criminalize poverty, economic systems built on exploitation, and cultural norms that enforce hierarchy must be dismantled and replaced with institutions grounded in justice, accountability, and shared prosperity.
- Conflicts should be resolved peacefully whenever possible, but the pursuit of justice is always more important than "order."
- Every person has the right to public space—movement, rest, and access—without harassment or exclusion.
- Every person has the right to participate politically: voting, assembly, representation, and due process.
- Every person has the right to fair treatment in housing, free from discrimination, exclusion, predatory practices, or policies that criminalize poverty or homelessness. Housing status must never determine access to rights, services, or public space.

3. Reason, Evidence, and Self-Correction

Morality must be accountable to facts and remain open to challenge, revision, and growth.

- Decisions should be grounded in evidence and research, not superstition or ideological preconception.
- Church and state must remain separate—not symbolically, but absolutely.
- Fairness demands testing one's own beliefs with impartial reasoning.
- When harm is caused or mistakes are made, repair is mandatory: acknowledge, apologize, atone.
- When principles collide, compassion and justice take precedence over rigidity.

4. Education & Knowledge as Public Goods

A just society must guarantee universal access to education as a foundation of autonomy, opportunity, and democratic participation.

- Every person has the right to free, accessible education, from early childhood through advanced study, without discrimination or financial coercion.
- Public education must be fully funded, equitably resourced, and shielded from partisan manipulation.
- Teachers, scholars, and researchers must be treated as professionals with fair compensation, strong protections, and meaningful autonomy.
- Learning must cultivate critical thought, curiosity, empathy, and civic competence rather than obedience or economic sorting.
- Academic freedom is essential; research and teaching require full independence from partisan pressure, censorship, commercial interference, or any form of religious influence or control.
- Public institutions must uphold transparent governance, rigorous academic standards, and robust protections against discrimination and harassment, ensuring that curricula, funding, and decision-making remain secular, professionally grounded, and accountable to the public.
- Every community has the right to culturally responsive education that respects identity, language, and history.
- Research produced with public support must serve the public good; knowledge essential to civic life must not be locked behind paywalls or proprietary barriers.
- Lifelong learning must be accessible to all through public libraries, community programs, vocational retraining, and continuing-education pathways.
- Educational opportunities and outcomes must not be determined by wealth, geography, race, disability, or family background; governments have a duty to eliminate structural inequities.

5. Ecological Responsibility & Collective Survival

A just society must operate within the planet's ecological boundaries and protect the integrity of the natural world.

- Environmental stability is a human right, and ecological limits define the boundaries within which all political and economic systems must operate.
- Every generation owes the next a planet capable of sustaining life, not a damaged inheritance they did not choose; each generation should drive to leave the world better than they found it.
- Environmental policy must be grounded in scientific evidence, not ideology, profit pressure, or political convenience.
- Communities have the right to clean air, clean water, healthy soil, and protection from toxic exposure.
- Technological development must reduce harm, preserve biodiversity, and support long-term planetary stability.
- Resource use must follow ecological ethics of reciprocity, restraint, regeneration, and interdependence, drawing from indigenous stewardship principles while adapting them to contemporary realities.

6. Democratic Institutions & Public Accountability

Institutions derive legitimacy only from serving the public good. Systems that obstruct justice or concentrate power must be redesigned.

- Democratic participation must be universal, accessible, and protected from manipulation or suppression.
- Political power must be transparent: open records, public audits, independent oversight, and meaningful checks on authority.

- Courts must defend rights, not shield elites from accountability.
- Constitutional and electoral systems must be reformed when they entrench minority rule or economic dominance.
- Public institutions must operate with procedural fairness, due process, and accountability to the communities they affect.

7. Corporate Power & Economic Democracy

Corporate actors wield immense influence over labor, resources, technology, and political decision-making. A just society must constrain this power.

- No corporation should control the basic conditions of life—housing, healthcare, water, energy, information, or medicine.
- Workers must have real power in the institutions they sustain.
- Essential industries must be democratically governed or publicly owned when private control threatens public welfare.
- Corporate purpose must extend beyond shareholder value, including enforceable public-benefit obligations.
- Wealth concentration is destabilizing; progressive taxation and anti-monopoly enforcement are necessary.
- Extreme wealth concentration undermines democratic equality; no individual should control more than a minute fraction of collective resources. Wealth exceeding a defined cap—whether a fixed share of total national wealth or a multiple of the lowest decile's holdings—should be redistributed for public benefit.
- Inheritance must not reproduce structural domination. No individual should be permitted to inherit wealth on a scale that entrenches class power; inheritances should be capped at a democratically defined threshold.
- Executive compensation must be constrained relative to worker pay.

8. Media & Information Integrity

A healthy society requires truth, transparency, and independent journalism capable of holding power accountable.

- The press must function as a public good, not a corporate commodity or political instrument.
- Every person has the right to reliable, independently verifiable information, protected from state, corporate, algorithmic, or partisan manipulation—and the press has a duty to uphold that standard.
- Journalism must prioritize accuracy, context, and harm reduction.
- No media entity should ever attain broad control over the information ecosystem; structural safeguards must prevent concentration or dominance.

- Information systems must support democratic understanding and public reason, not manipulation or distortion.

9. Community Safety & Nonviolence

Public safety means freedom from harm—not punishment, fear, or domination—and must protect rights, reduce violence, and strengthen community well-being.

- The mission of public safety is harm reduction: preventing violence, resolving conflict, and protecting the dignity and rights of every person.
- Enforcement culture must shift from "warrior" to "guardian": policing is a service, not a battlefield; militarization has no place in an enlightened society.
- Authority must be narrowly defined and responsibly deployed; police should not be primary responders to crises better handled by mental-health professionals, social workers, medical teams, or community-based services.
- Recruitment must reflect the gravity of the role: departments should select for judgment, emotional maturity, restraint, and community commitment, not aggression or unconditional obedience.
- Training must prioritize de-escalation, mediation, psychological skill, and recognition of bias; force is an absolute last resort.
- Public safety must be governed by independent, community-led oversight bodies with investigative authority, subpoena power, transparent findings, and binding decision-making; no agency may police itself.
- Equal protection is mandatory: policing must not reproduce racial hierarchy, economic discrimination, political repression, or differential treatment based on identity or class.
- A legitimate public-safety system strengthens communities rather than destabilizing them: its purpose is to reduce harm, uphold rights, and protect the conditions under which people can live freely, safely, and without fear.

10. Culture & Collective Well-Being

Culture shapes how societies treat vulnerability, dignity, and one another; ethical cultures make ethical systems possible.

- Cultural norms must reject dehumanization, cruelty, and exploitation as entertainment.
- Every community deserves access to public spaces, libraries, museums, and environments that encourage human flourishing.
- Cultural diversity is a collective strength; no tradition or identity should be suppressed or commodified.

11. Technology, Privacy & Digital Autonomy

Technology must expand human dignity, not erode it. Tools should empower people, not monitor, monetize, or manipulate them.

- Individuals own their data; consent must be explicit, revocable, and meaningful.
- Surveillance capitalism is incompatible with autonomy and must be dismantled.
- AI and automation must be transparent, accountable, and aligned with human rights and social needs.
- Algorithms shaping discourse must be transparent and auditable.
- Technological development must reduce suffering, preserve autonomy, and strengthen the public good.

12. Global Responsibility & Interdependence

Ethics cannot end at national borders; justice requires acknowledging global interdependence and shared responsibility.

- All nations share a duty to protect the planet's ecological systems, reduce global environmental harm, and cooperate to preserve the conditions necessary for human and nonhuman life.
- Wealthy nations must address the harms they have caused—colonial, economic, and ecological—through restitution and support.
- Migration is a human right; people must be free to move for safety, opportunity, and climate survival.
- Global cooperation must prioritize planetary stability, human rights, and equitable development.
- Militarism and imperial domination are incompatible with a just global order.

Part III: The Roadmap

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on technological utopia, and in the process I learned that all utopias rest on assumptions that are pure fantasy. They imagine people as harmonized and/or consistent and/or rational, for example. They assume endless goodwill. They imagine the system will somehow smooth over our infinite inconsistencies.

In other words, they depend on humanity being nothing like humanity.

I have no interest in utopias. I don't believe in perfect. But I do believe in better.

Nothing in the Ethics, Principles, and Imperatives section above is an attempt to engineer a flawless society. Instead, it sketches a moral horizon grounded in the species we actually have: conflicted, emotional, inconsistent, capable of generosity and cruelty, confronted and contorted at every moment by structures, technologies, and power. It's also grounded in realistic capabilities: nearly every structural, economic, and technological tool needed already exists.

Feasibility isn't a barrier. The only barriers are human behavior, entrenched power, and the systems that protect the status quo.

A horizon doesn't ask for perfection. But it does ask for commitment to a direction everyone involved knows they'll never fully reach.

How completely human...

Station One: Social Democracy—The Floor

The future is a trajectory, and there are definable stations along the way. Benchmarks, mileposts, markers of moral progress.

It's a long journey. Given the resistance this movement faces, each station represents a few decades of struggle. At least.

Let's begin.

A humane society begins by guaranteeing:

- Universal healthcare—The ability to survive illness shouldn't depend on wealth. A society that ties life to employment isn't free.
- Universal housing—Shelter isn't a luxury; it's the literal precondition for stability, safety, and participation in public life.
- Childcare and family support—Raising children is social labor, not a private burden to be shouldered alone.
- Accessible education at every level—Autonomy requires literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to navigate an increasingly complex world. Further, intelligence and cognitive ability benefit the entire society; nurturing them is an investment in the common weal.
- Worker protections and collective bargaining—Without countervailing worker power, "employment" becomes a polite word for coercion.
- Public pensions and social insurance—Aging shouldn't be a descent into economic insecurity, and misfortune shouldn't be a life (or death) sentence.
- Reliable economic security—Through robust unemployment insurance, minimum income floors, strong safety nets, and public services that reduce dependence on exploitative markets.

These aren't luxuries. They're the minimum prerequisites for autonomy.

Freedom isn't the absence of government; it's the [presence of conditions that make self-determination possible](#). People drowning in debt, untreated illness, unstable housing, or economic fear aren't free to think, speak, dissent, dream, or participate. They're free only in the way a bird with a broken wing is free.

This is the fundamental dishonesty of American ideology: it mistakes the right to act for the *ability* to act. It celebrates speech while [denying the material conditions that make speech consequential](#). It worships "opportunity" while refusing to create the stability that allows opportunity to be pursued.

Social democracy doesn't abolish markets. It doesn't abolish private enterprise. It doesn't require ideological purity. What it does is prevent markets from cannibalizing the conditions required for human flourishing.

Station One is where justice begins, not where it ends.

Station Two: Democratic Socialism—Toward a Fuller Democracy

> *Democracy becomes real only when people have a say in the systems that govern their daily existence.*

Democratic socialism extends democratic accountability into areas where market actors currently operate with limited public oversight:

- Workplace governance—Most workplaces function as strict hierarchies. Democratic approaches aim to give employees a structured voice in decisions that influence their safety, compensation, and working conditions—not to eliminate management, but to broaden participation in how work is organized.
- Cooperative and shared ownership models—In sectors where it's viable, ownership can be tied to those who contribute labor or rely on the enterprise. The goal is to align incentives and reduce value extraction by absentee owners, not to replace all private investment.
- Public stewardship of essential infrastructure—Water, power, hospitals, broadband, transit, and similar systems carry high public-dependency risk and natural-monopoly dynamics. Democratic-socialist policy argues these should be governed through public or quasi-public institutions to ensure reliability, affordability, and universal access rather than profit maximization.
- Guaranteed baseline services—Healthcare, education, transit, housing assistance, and digital access are treated as foundational inputs to economic participation. The emphasis is on de-risking basic life conditions so that people can make choices without coercive economic pressure.
- Participatory budgeting mechanisms—Municipalities can allocate a portion of their budgets to direct resident input, creating a structured, accountable process rather than relying solely on representative intermediaries.
- Community autonomy—Local communities, especially those historically marginalized, should have greater control over land use, cultural institutions, and development decisions to prevent displacement and extractive investment patterns.

The philosophical claim is modest: market choice doesn't constitute freedom if individuals lack meaningful influence over the institutions that govern their work and essential services. Democratic socialism defines freedom in terms of distributed decision-making power and reduced structural precarity, not the elimination of markets.

Station Three: Post-Scarcity Transition—Technology for Human Good

Technology—governed democratically and built for liberation—can shrink suffering, reduce required labor, expand knowledge, stabilize communities, and turn scarcity into a managed condition instead of a weapon.

The transition to post-scarcity involves:

- Automation that eliminates drudgery—Machines should do what humans shouldn't have to. Productivity gains should shorten labor, not intensify exploitation or concentrate wealth.
- Abundant renewable energy—Energy independence reduces geopolitical coercion, fossil tyranny, and ecological collapse. Renewable abundance is the backbone of humane modernity.
- Universal basic services—Guaranteed healthcare, housing, nutrition, transit, communication, and education. Not as charity. As infrastructure.
- Open access to publicly funded knowledge—Research, data, and scholarship produced with public money belong to the public. Paywalls that restrict access to publicly financed work impede scientific progress, education, and democratic participation.
- (Protection for individual creative work—Artists, writers, scholars, and independent thinkers have the right to control, license, and be compensated for their creations. Copyright, fair contracts, and enforceable ownership are essential to prevent exploitation, sustain creative labor, and ensure that cultural production remains viable.)
- Free or near-free essential goods—Mass efficiency lets us provide healthcare, housing, transit, and digital communication at negligible marginal cost—if we choose to design for dignity rather than profit.

- Reduced working hours—When technology multiplies capacity, leisure becomes a right, not a managerial concession. Time is the most fundamental form of wealth.
- Human activity chosen, not coerced—Work becomes meaningful contribution instead of survival under threat.

All of this depends on a crucial understanding: **Post-scarcity doesn't equal infinite consumption.** It's intelligent abundance that respects planetary thresholds.

The point of post-scarcity isn't to produce everything imaginable. It's to reduce suffering, expand autonomy, and give people the time and security to build meaningful lives.

Ecology is the real boundary. *Technology must serve life, not overwhelm it.*

Post-scarcity isn't about doing more. It's about doing better, with less harm.

Station Four: Federated Humanism[*]—A Sustainable Society

> *"People are no longer obsessed with the accumulation of things. We've eliminated hunger, want, the need for possessions..."*

> *"The acquisition of wealth is no longer the driving force in our lives. We work to better ourselves and the rest of humanity." ~ Jean-Luc Picard (because I'm a popular culturalist)*

Remember, I said I wasn't interested in utopias?

We hope that people will have evolved through the first three stations, but we haven't lost sight of the fact that they're *people*. Greed still exists. Power still exists. Everybody doesn't love everybody else. Anthropologically speaking, it wasn't that long ago that we lived in trees, and we're still trying to get the hang of enlightenment.

Station Four may seem a bit utopia-ish from the perspective of 2025, but again, the goal isn't *perfect*, it's *better*.

The horizon looks like this:

- Basic needs are universally met—not through charity or contingency, but as a non-negotiable feature of civilization.
- Coercive hierarchies disappear—because their preconditions (scarcity, desperation, privatized power, manufactured inequality) have been dismantled.
- Work becomes voluntary and meaningful—chosen because it contributes, expresses, creates, or helps—not because starvation is the alternative.
- Science and creativity flourish—free from ideological interference or corporate gatekeeping. Knowledge becomes a shared inheritance, not a market product.

- Exploration becomes a shared ethic—scientific, artistic, philosophical, interplanetary. Curiosity stops being a privilege of the few.
- Culture fosters empathy—recognizing vulnerability as the universal condition, not a defect to exploit or shame.
- Technology amplifies dignity—not surveillance, not coercion, not monetization. Tools built to support autonomy and well-being.

This isn't a prediction. But it's a direction, and it's better than the one we have now. I don't know where we wind up if we steer toward this horizon, but I'll take my chances.

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* We don't have an actual name for this phase yet. As we get closer, someone will come up with the label. In the meantime, call it Federated Humanism or Distributed Democracy or come up with your own term. In the future, the label won't matter anymore than it does today.

Notes

1: AI

I have Spinocerebellar Ataxia ([Type 6](#), to be specific), which makes typing extremely difficult. It's also eroding my ability to speak clearly, which means my facility with dictation software gets worse by the day.

To compensate, I made ample use of AI in developing this series.

- It served me as a research assistant—an uber-Google, if you will—and I used it to fetch specific content.
- I used it to compile, summarize, and organize.
- I asked it to construct preliminary drafts.
- Once I had done *extensive* revision and rewriting, I used it to smooth and ensure consistency in how section two was written. (It should be easy to detect the difference in tone between it and sections one and three.)
- I employed its thesaurus capabilities in a couple of places.
- Also, proofreading...
- ...and image development.
- Specifically, I used ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and MidJourney.

2: Sources

I'm not really doing anything new here—I've drawn bits and pieces from a wide variety of political thinking. I also owe a great debt of thanks to all of my friends and colleagues throughout the years whose insight and goodwill have pointed me toward where I am today. This includes my good friends at the Rogues Pub and my professors and fellow students at Wake Forest University, Iowa State University, and especially in the communication doctoral program at the University of Colorado.

I talk in part I about all the arguments I've lost. This is them.

3: More Sources

When I shared a draft of this document with some friends, one colleague who currently lives in France offered a comment that amounted to [yawn], "yeah, so what?" In many ways, he observed, what I have written mirrors the [European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights](#), which has been around since 2000.

If Part II looks like science fiction to you, perhaps that alone is worth reflecting on...