



FAKE ID

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PROLOGUE AND CHAPTER 1

Exclusive for Launch Team Members

FAKE ID

How AI and Identity Ideology
Are Collapsing Reality—

and What to Do About It

ABDU MURRAY



Prologue

BETWEEN REALITY AND COLLAPSE

We stand at a precipice of history—not because our technologies have brought us to the brink of destruction nor because our social developments threaten civilization itself. Rather, the precariousness stems from how two powerful cultural tsunamis are crashing against our shared understanding of reality.

The first tsunami, which I call *Bioclasm*, pushes us to subordinate biological (e.g., gender) reality to subjective feelings about identity. The second, which I term *AI-Mania*, pulls us toward uncritical reliance on artificial intelligence, where deepfakes and humanesque abilities have the potential to erode our ability to understand what makes us uniquely human.

This book is not meant to be a “doomer” diatribe. Nor am I offering a wholesale rejection of technological advancement. I am something of a technophile myself, appreciating the genuine benefits that artificial intelligence brings to health care, research, accessibility, and countless other fields. And I must be clear that my criticisms of identity ideologies are not aimed at those who suffer with genuinely diagnosable gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is a painful psychological condition in which a person’s mental impression of their gender doesn’t match their biological sex. I have tried to approach the issue from science and logic and informed by truths of the Christian faith. People who experience genuine gender dysphoria deserve compassion, dignity, and respect—not derision.

A friend encapsulated two ways people with opposing views approach caring for those with gender dysphoria. Those who affirm transgenderism focus their care on changing a person’s body to match the mind (by means of surgery, hormone replacement, etc.). Those who do not affirm transgenderism care by focusing on changing the suffering individual’s mind to match the body. There are those on both sides of this issue who sincerely care about the well-being of those who suffer. While I strongly believe that changing the body and blurring the essential distinctions between the two biological sexes are dangerously wrong, I’m trying not to criticize anyone’s sincerity. But sincerity uncoupled from truth won’t help anyone.

What I am critiquing are ideologies, not individuals, especially ideologies that pretend to care for the well-being of others while they actually use people to advance an agenda. These ideologies, when taken to extremes, cause us to lose sight of what is real and what matters.

The phrase *reality collapse* first caught my attention during a discussion between AI researchers Tristan Harris and Aza Raskin.¹ Though they mentioned it only briefly, the concept lingered in my mind, eventually crystallizing my concerns about our post-truth cultural moment. In such a moment, when preferences matter more than facts and truth, we are particularly susceptible to reality collapse—the inability to discern the authentic from the artificial.

Bioclasm—the ideology that elevates subjective feelings over biological reality and demands universal affirmation of those feelings—collapses reality through social coercion. “Identity contains the good and ill of all ‘isms,” Jonathan Pageau notes, “and it is bound up in all positions of authority and social functions at different scales in a social body, or even authority within our own minds.”² Bioclasm doesn’t merely allow people to identify differently—it demands that everyone affirm those identities, even when they contradict observable reality. It isn’t just a cultural shift; it’s a revolution in how we define personhood itself, and it carries with it the power to silence dissent, punish truth-telling, and collapse shared reality.

This is distinct from acknowledging genuine gender dysphoria and having compassion for those who suffer through it. Bioclasm is its own form of fundamentalism. According to Jens Zimmermann, “Fundamentalism,” whether religious or secular, “hates complexity, is impatient with ambiguity, remains blind to the historical development of its own position and likes to create totalizing views of reality. Fundamentalism refuses to grant legitimacy to dimensions of human experience that challenge its own worldview.”³ Compassion, to be genuine, sometimes has to risk upsetting fundamentalists because neither society writ large nor individuals can afford comforting fictions.

In contrast, AI-Mania collapses reality through seduction rather than coercion. The more we rely on artificial intelligence to curate our information, create our content, and even simulate our relationships, the more we risk diminishing our own agency and creativity. When algorithms predict our preferences so accurately that we no longer need to discover them for ourselves, when algorithms stoke the flames of radicalization, when AI can generate essays, images, and music that we claim as our own, something essential about human creativity, compassion, and authenticity begins to fade.

I understand the allure of both these forces. As someone of Arab descent and a former Muslim and now a Christian, I recognize how tempting it is to build my identity primarily around ethnic or religious markers. When Middle Eastern conflicts flare, I feel the tug of ethnic solidarity. When religious differences arise, I feel the pull of old allegiances. Those markers are incredibly important, of course. But they are not definitional. If I remain fixed on these aspects of my identity, I risk collapsing under the weight of my biases the complex reality of what's actually happening in the world. Similarly, as someone who values efficiency and innovation, I'm drawn to technologies that promise to make life easier, more productive, and more connected. Yet I've also experienced moments of disorientation when AI generates content that seems eerily humanlike.

The consequences of reality collapse are not merely philosophical. When we lose our shared commitment to truth, we lose our ability to collaborate, to build consensus, and to solve problems. When identity becomes the primary lens through which we view the world, we fragment into increasingly isolated tribes. When we outsource our

thinking and creating to machines, we risk atrophying the very faculties that make us human.

We need compassionate truth-telling. When reality collapses, human flourishing suffers. To discuss these issues rightly, we need a way that neither demonizes those with whom we disagree nor abandons our commitment to truth. This middle path—one that refuses the false choice between harsh judgment and uncritical affirmation—is what I hope to chart in the pages that follow. To the extent that I veer from that path, I ask forgiveness and hope to be corrected.

Yet this book isn't merely a warning; it's an invitation to rediscover what it means to be human while we stand on the precipice of reality collapse. It's an appeal to find meaning not in the malleable clay of our self-created identities but in the givenness of our embodied essences. It's a call to use technology as a tool rather than allowing it to use us. My goal is neither alarmism nor resignation but a clear-eyed assessment of our cultural moment and a hopeful vision for navigating it with wisdom and grace.

Throughout these pages, I'll argue that the antidote to reality collapse isn't found in rejecting technological progress or in dismissing the complexity of human identity. Rather, it's found in recovering a vision of humanity grounded in truth, in seeing ourselves as neither mere machines nor gods of our own making but as bearers of the divine image with both limits and transcendent potential.

As we navigate the tsunamis of Bioclasm and AI-Mania, we need a sextant—a navigational tool to help us find our bearings when landmarks disappear. My contention is that such a sextant exists in the timeless wisdom that informs us about what it means to be human:

beings created in God's image yet bounded by the realities of our physical existence.

As we begin this exploration together, I invite you to approach these pages not with defensiveness but with openness, not looking for confirmation of what you already believe but for insight into our shared human condition. For it is only by understanding the forces that threaten to collapse reality that we can hope to strengthen it.

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Chapter One

REALITY COLLAPSE

There Are Four Lights

“There! Are! Four! Lights!”

Captain Jean-Luc Picard pushed these words through tortured vocal cords, his voice barely rising above a hoarse whisper. In an iconic episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Picard has been captured and tortured for weeks by a man bent on breaking his spirit. Picard’s enemy has implanted a device in his body capable of delivering unimaginable pain at the push of a button. The torturer turns on a set of four lights that hover behind him. All Picard needs to do to end the coming cycle of pain, the man tells him, is to say that he sees five lights, not four. Of course, Picard is resolute. He is the hero, after all.

But as the torture and humiliation drag on, Picard is reduced to rags, barefoot, unshaven, and with a grayish complexion. Yet he has held on. Every time his torturer turns on the lights, Picard sees

only four and refuses to say that he sees five. And each time, another shock is delivered. Finally, the torturer tells Picard that his ship is destroyed and his friends are dead, so no one will be coming for him. But in reality, a rescue effort has been mounted and—unbeknownst to Picard—he is about to be set free. The torturer knows this, so he lies to Picard, hoping to break him before that happens. He tells Picard that he has but two options: He can have a life of never-ending misery and pain, or he can have a life of ease and comfort. With hope fading, Picard's adherence to reality weakens. "What must I do?" he mumbles. The torturer's response is unsurprising. "Nothing, really," he begins. "Tell me how many lights you see."

Picard stares at the four lights for some time as his body shakes. For the first time during his captivity, he considers his answer. The word "five" tempts his lips. Just before Picard opens his mouth, the rescuers come in and spoil the torturer's lies. As they approach to take Picard to safety, his defiance reemerges. "There! Are! Four! Lights!" He tries to shout the words, though his energy is so sapped that they emerge as a whisper.

It's a powerful scene. But the episode's true depth isn't revealed until later. As he speaks about his trauma with his counselor, Picard explains how he never said there were five lights. But, he admits, "I was going to. I would have told him anything, anything at all. But more than that ... *I believed that I could see five lights.*" And with that, the episode ends.¹

The pain, the torture, and the need to be free of them, had warped Picard's sense of what was real.

Prolonged pain and discomfort have a way of influencing how we see reality. They don't change reality, just the way we perceive it. We

might say or admit something we know to be false if it will make the pain stop. If the pain and discomfort get bad enough for long enough, we will believe to be real that which we once knew to be unreal.

That's one reason torture doesn't work as a way to obtain the truth. The torture subject will say anything, even believe anything, if he or she thinks relief will follow. We imagine ourselves to be the person who would never betray our deeply held convictions no matter the pressure. But studies on the effects of authority and torture tell us the disheartening truth that statistically speaking, everyone will declare a falsehood or even believe untruths once a breaking point has been reached.

Captain Picard was the model of strength: intelligent, courageous, principled, and optimistic. He had the makings of an indomitable spirit. And yet his spirit was dominated, so much so that he actually saw five lights when there were only four.

Put another way, his reality collapsed.

That episode is reminiscent of George Orwell's famous book, *1984*—a book so many have considered prescient of our cultural moment. In the dystopian setting of *1984*, the totalitarian regime called the Party brainwashes, gaslights, and tortures its citizens into submission, even to the point of convincing people to believe that which is obviously untrue. A character named O'Brien, a Party agent, delights in playing with the mind of another character, Winston. Employing physical and psychological pain, O'Brien wants to convince Winston that two plus two equals anything other than four.

“You are a slow learner, Winston,” said O'Brien gently.

“How can I help it?” he blubbered. “How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four.”

“Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane.”²

O’Brien’s last sentence holds the scene’s power. He’s trying to convince Winston that believing things that aren’t true is not just what the Party wants but should be something that Winston wants. Winston wants to be sane, doesn’t he? O’Brien’s definition of sanity, not for himself but for Winston, is believing falsehoods, sometimes different falsehoods about the same fact. O’Brien knows that torture can easily warp someone’s view of reality. But if he can convince Winston to *want* to believe that two plus two equals anything other than four, if he can convince him that such a belief is *sane*—if he can get Winston’s reality to collapse—that would be quite the achievement.

In the novel, the Party’s efforts were not directed at only Winston: The Party was collapsing reality for an entire nation. What can happen to us individually can happen to us culturally. In fact, it has already happened to varying degrees over the course of human history. We have seen it in totalitarian regimes like Maoist China, North Korea, Nazi Germany, and Stalinist Russia. But what we’re witnessing in recent decades is a global phenomenon in which people across countries, languages, and even religious spectra are being convinced to distrust their

own eyes, their common sense and intuition, and established scientific data.

And this convincing is being done without the need for totalitarian governments, secret police, or bodily torture. In fact, we're actually paying others to collapse our sense of reality. We pay to attend prestigious universities at which we are taught that men can menstruate, that men should compete against women in athletic contests (even if it could result in severe injuries to women), and that all of this is somehow fair, somehow sane. We pay for technologies that allow us to create deepfake videos of real people doing and saying things they never did or said, to create "paintings" that look like a human painted them when no one painted anything, and to cheat on our exams.

Yes, there has been resistance to some of these efforts to collapse reality. Some of us, like Winston, are slow learners. But the cultural influencers persistently apply their pressure, determined to educate us no matter how uncomfortable it will be for those who resist.

After all, it is not easy to become sane.

Bioclasm

What I'm addressing throughout this book is not transgender people per se but an ideological movement that not only prevents gender dysphorics from finding the healing they need but also coerces the culture's mind to ignore reality. Gender identity claims have evolved from being the result of the mental disorder formerly diagnosed as gender identity disorder—which psychiatrists and psychologists later relabeled as gender dysphoria—to being a form of individual self-expression, and now to a socially enforced ideology.

Though words are social conventions, they are also linguistic tools to describe objective reality. In today's socially enforced identity ideology, however, words don't merely describe reality, they define it. But they don't define it objectively. Rather, they define it personally.

For example, the word *woman* has a meaning that describes reality. A woman is an adult female human who is born with a uterus, usually has two X chromosomes, and produces large gametes called ova. But should a biological male who produces small gametes called sperm, with a Y chromosome and male genitalia, identify as a woman, our culture says that his subjective feelings define reality not only for him but also for everyone else. While that definition is not actually objective, we are required to act as if it is.

The identity ideology surrounding gender takes a person's subjective feelings and imposes an obligation on everyone else to validate that subjective feeling as if it were objective truth. Contemporary use of language has taken on a possessive tone, with people declaring things like, "My pronouns are ..." That wording communicates social dominance, declaring that the person owns the pronouns and thus owns the conversation.

When someone refuses to refer to a biological female adult as a man or as "him" or "they," culture visits on the refusing party a prolonged discomfort that can become too much to bear. Biologically female athletes lose chances for medals or scholarships because they are forced to compete against biological males. When they protest, they are met with scorn, cancellation, and even physical threats. Although obviously not under the threat of torture, we might, like Picard, be tempted to yield and use another's preferred pronouns just to ease the pain of resisting.

On the other hand, we may accommodate a person's appropriation of pronouns not to avoid our own discomfort, but to ease that person's emotions and make them feel accepted. In either case, many people are now beginning to believe that someone born with male genitalia, XY chromosomes, and the SRY gene that makes someone male, is actually a woman. They are coming to believe that men can get pregnant.³ They are beginning to advocate for the right of biological men convicted of rape to identify as women and serve their sentences in women's prisons.⁴ To do otherwise courts social (and possibly even legal) punishment. They are beginning to see five lights. They are finally becoming sane.

Yet the anxiety that comes from denying reality persists, no matter how strong the social pressure and no matter how much we might capitulate to it. We are, as a society, much more like the Party's O'Brien or Captain Picard's captor than erudite educators offering alternative views on identity. When someone dares to say that she sees only four lights, or that two and two only ever make four, or that men cannot be women, her protests will be met with pain. An adult will be thrown off the school board, suspended without pay, kicked off the team, vilified on social media, and called unspeakable obscenities. If she's famous, she'll be canceled and threatened with violence.⁵ Even our seemingly genteel teachers aren't so genteel. Children—yes, *children*—will be expelled from nursery schools if they don't call someone by their preferred pronouns or if they question why a boy in their class is wearing a dress.⁶ Children are not off-limits from being disciplined.

Much like iconoclasm sought to destroy sacred images, this brand of social enforcement and engineering seeks to tear down the once-sacred

assumptions about what it means to be male or female, human or machine, embodied or constructed. This tsunami I call *Bioclasm*.⁷

If there really were five lights, it shouldn't require this much negative reinforcement to get us to see them.

AI-Mania

The mass deployment of artificial intelligence—and our voracious consumption of it—has the potential to warp our perceptions of reality. Unlike *Bioclasm*, however, our AI-Mania does not pressure us through negative reinforcement to embrace AI and the virtual fakery that comes with it. Rather AI-Mania entices us, even seduces us, into relying on its power and promise more than might be warranted.

Despite its popular use, most researchers in the field consider the term “artificial intelligence” to be unhelpful, even misleading, because it covers a broad range of technologies with differing capabilities. Most software we commonly refer to as AI have narrow capabilities. Think Siri on your iPhone or Alexa on your Echo Dot. Other narrow applications of machine learning are image generative software tools like Midjourney or DALL-E, or large language model (LLM) chatbots like ChatGPT and Gemini. Despite the term's lack of clarity, for the sake of simplicity I'll use the terms artificial intelligence and AI to cover this broad range of software and generative tools.

To be clear, I believe the various forms of AI hold the potential for some astonishing benefits. Using AI's pattern recognition and predictive capabilities, researchers are pioneering treatments for autism, using hearing aids and specialized glasses to enable those afflicted to pick up social cues they normally miss. AI-powered computers can more quickly and accurately diagnose illnesses and predict treatment

successes. LLMs can make our research and writing more efficient. Indeed, the potential (and actual) positive applications are legion.⁸

Using AI for such benefits is not the problem, of course. The problem sprouts from students using AI to cheat on homework and exams, from pornographers creating AI deepfake sex tapes without a person's permission, and even from clergy using AI to write their sermons. Such seductions, so willingly indulged and so infrequently resisted, are the essence of AI-Mania.

It's natural, even advisable, to use and trust emerging technologies that improve and extend our lives and provide us with new capabilities. It's one thing, however, to trust and rely on cars and planes for transportation or on MRIs to give us pictures of what's happening in the body; it's quite another thing to blindly trust data-driven technology that isn't always accurate or unbiased.

As we'll soon see, stories abound of AI providing faulty information in response to simple search queries, making up entire books as source material, and displaying biased images and information. Yet we continue to uncritically trust such technologies. Indeed, sometimes we prefer AI resources to human ones.

A close friend shared a conversation he and his son had while driving to school. "Dad, do all dogs shed?" his son asked him. My friend was quite confident he knew the answer and provided a ready response. His son's reaction was interesting. "I don't believe you. Let's ask Siri." Are we so different from that young boy? How many of us ask our phones for answers to bits of trivia that come up at gatherings and uncritically announce to everyone the answer Siri suggests?

Having such easy access to information—accurate or not—is rewarding, is it not? Where Bioclasm warps our sense of reality

through social enforcement, AI-Mania lures us with the promises of pleasure and power. In just the past few years, we've gone from wading through multiple pages of search engine results to having AI cull and curate those pages for us. AI will not only do the research for us, but it also can write the final essays and reports. We can accomplish in minutes (even seconds) what otherwise would take hours or days. And watching a movie or video that Netflix's and YouTube's algorithms recommend unburdens us from having to make decisions.

The manic feelings that flow from such reliance on technology can fool us into believing non-realities. Using image generative AI to create artistic wonders just by typing a description into a machine is great fun. Perhaps one might even become proud of his or her "accomplishment." The AI-generated image's beauty makes us proud of the artists we've become, when we are nothing of the kind. We only type and tweak prompts that result in images that AI cobbles together for us. We aren't creating by means of anything that resembles inspiration or perspiration.

The ease of agreeing to watch the movie that Netflix's algorithm suggests fools us into thinking we made the decision when in fact we just responded to a prompt. The irony there is quite interesting. We prompt an AI to generate images or content for us, only to respond to an AI-generated prompt to watch the next video. Determining whether a human or an AI is the user is becoming increasingly difficult. AI companions and chatbots are increasingly popular, but they leave us lonelier and isolated, even—as we'll soon see—suicidal.

Yes, we've been warning ourselves about the risks of over-relying on machines, but the pleasure and promise of AI-Mania sometimes

overwhelms our alarms. Unlike Bioclasts, AI-Mania's technocrats and utopianists entice us to accept unrealities not with an Orwellian stick but with a progressive carrot.

Reality Collapse

As I mentioned, I first learned the term *reality collapse* from a March 9, 2023, video entitled “The A.I. Dilemma” featuring AI researchers Tristan Harris and Aza Raskin. In their presentation, Harris and Raskin speak of AI's benefits but strongly caution against rushing headlong into its mass dissemination. One of the dangers of irresponsible dissemination is what they call reality collapse—a decreasing ability for humans to distinguish what's genuine from what's artificial.⁹

For example, currently available free of charge is software that can sample a short video of a person saying or doing something real, from which it can create a video of that person doing and saying things they didn't do or say. It's becoming increasingly difficult to spot the fake video, hence the name “deepfake.” If the free version is this convincing, the paid versions (and those not available to the general public) border on the undetectable. Chatbots will develop more humanlike responses and tones. And the algorithms that power social media, streaming video services, and our text communications will get better and better at predicting our preferences and choices, creating and deciding for us so many things that we may not realize we've stopped creating and deciding for ourselves.

As I watched “The A.I. Dilemma,” it dawned on me that not only would our ability to discern fake from authentic atrophy, but so would our desire to do so.

Harris and Raskin mentioned the term reality collapse for little more than one second in a sixty-seven-minute video. Yet the term struck and stuck. More than that—it was haunting.

✧The One-Two Combo

AI-Mania is not going to lead to reality collapse on its own. Bioclasm's complementarity will be a contributing force. In 2023, one of America's leading medical centers, Johns Hopkins University, in its LGBTQ glossary defined a gay man as, "A man who is emotionally, romantically, sexually, affectionately, or relationally attracted to other men, or who identifies as a member of the gay community."¹⁰ That same glossary defined a lesbian as "a non-man attracted to non-men." Johns Hopkins explained that it had replaced "woman" with "non-man" in defining a lesbian to include "non-binary people who may also identify with the label." Reality had so collapsed that, according to Johns Hopkins, *woman* no longer existed as a genuine, ontological category of humanity. Johns Hopkins' ironically labeled "*updated definition*" (emphasis mine) regressively demoted women to derivative constructs whose humanity is determined only in relation to men.

Thankfully, due to responses from conservatives and liberals alike, not the least of whom was author J. K. Rowling, Johns Hopkins removed its nonsensical redefinition of lesbian and its insulting omission of women. The fact remains, however, that one of the most prestigious universities in the world attempted to define women out of existence through the Bioclastic version of a deepfake.

Like Bioclasm, AI-Mania can cause us to redefine ideas we once thought established, like the humanness of art. In 2022, Jason Allen won first prize in the digital art category of an art contest in

Colorado. Even after judges later discovered he had used an image generative software called Midjourney to create his winning submission entitled *Théâtre d'Opéra Spatial*, they let him keep the first-prize title. The judges reasoned that since Allen had typed in the prompts that generated the image, he was being artistic, at least in some form. Unsurprisingly, many of the artists—those who actually made efforts to translate the artistic images in their heads onto digital canvases using handheld implements—took issue with the judges' elastic use of the term artistic.¹¹ For them, calling the image an expression of human artistry stretched reality to the point of tearing it.

A more recent story out of the art world highlights just how willing to collapse reality we've become. The 1839 Awards (a photography contest begun in 2020) established a contest with an AI-generated category, the aim of which was to separate human-created photos from increasingly impressive AI-generated photo-like images. At least one artist chose to challenge the absurdity that machines could be truly artistic. To make the point that "human-made content has not lost its relevance, that Mother Nature and her human interpreters can still beat the machine, and that creativity and emotion are more than just a string of digits," Miles Astray (a clever pen-name) submitted an actual photo that he had taken with a camera, entitled *FLAMINGONE*, under the pretense that it was AI-generated. His submission won third prize in the juried contest. He even won the People's Choice category. But Astray was stripped of his award for being deceptive.¹² Astray agreed with the decision (he had violated the rules, after all) but was satisfied that he had proved his point.

How's that for reality-collapsing irony? Astray created a genuine piece of photographic art, submitted it into a pool of AI-generated

“photos,” and was accused of being a faker. But in the Colorado digital art contest, Jason Allen was allowed to keep his first-prize award even though he submitted a Midjourney-generated image when he was supposed to have created it himself. What could be more reality confused than allowing a human to beat other humans by using AI while disqualifying a human for beating AI fakers with his genuine artistry?

▶ We Don't Know What We Don't Know

Not long ago, I had the fortune of sitting on an airplane next to an executive employed by a well-known software company. We exchanged pleasantries and I asked her what she did for a living. When she told me where she worked, I mentioned that I was writing an article on AI and would love to get her insights. “What excites you about AI?” I asked her. She went on for quite some time listing the coming benefits, which were inspiring, to be sure. I had a follow-up question, however: “Does anything scare you about AI?”

She paused a moment and responded in a serious tone. “I worry that we don't know what it will do to us. We knew that social media would be a huge social disruptor, but we thought it would be largely positive. We didn't anticipate how it would polarize us and make our kids so anxious.” She paused as she chose her next words. “AI will soon become a disruptor infinitely more impactful than social media or anything else in history. We just don't know what it will do to us. But we better start thinking about it.”

I couldn't agree more. With social media's arrival, we didn't have a history of globally disseminated and immediately accessible social disruptors from which to project future problems. But now, more than

two decades into the global social media experiment, we have ample precedent from which to consider what a powerful social disruptor can do. Some of the disruption from AI will be enormously positive, just as it has been with social media. Some of that disruption will be catastrophic. We have social media precedent for that too.

When AI and social media are combined, the collapse of reality results in more than confusion—it results in trauma. It doesn't take big budget studios or well-funded scam artists to create hyper-realistic but false videos. High school students equipped with nothing more than a laptop and an internet connection have produced deepfake videos of their peers with devastating effect. In 2023, students in New Jersey used AI software to create sexually explicit images of their female classmates.¹³ The BBC reported that in 2021 a Pennsylvania mother allegedly created AI images of high school girls naked and drinking at parties and sent those images to the cheerleading coach in an effort to eliminate her daughter's rivals.¹⁴ “It is this combination of massive potential disruption together with fundamental uncertainty,” Martin Ford writes, “that makes it imperative that we begin to engage in a meaningful and inclusive conversation about the future of artificial intelligence and what it may mean for our way of life.”¹⁵

Will the Real Reality Please Stand Up?

In the late 1990s, *The Matrix* captured the imagination of a generation. The film's premise is that in the future, humanity created AI but then lost a war to its artificially intelligent offspring. The machines enslaved humans and plugged their bodies into a power grid to feed off the energy their bodies created. To keep humans unaware of their plight, the machines created the Matrix, a computer simulation of the

real world so convincing that only a handful of humans could sense the ruse.

The film was acclaimed not only for its groundbreaking special effects but also for its philosophical handling of questions like the nature of reality, causation, and meaning. In a pivotal scene, the enigmatic character Morpheus awakens Neo, the main character, to his enslavement in the Matrix while both are plugged into a computer simulation. “What is real?” Morpheus asks Neo. “If real is what you can see or taste or touch, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain.”¹⁶ But of course the movie’s plot is based on the idea that there is a real world that humanity is fighting to reclaim and the Matrix is a false reality that enslaves humanity.

More than a quarter century since *The Matrix*’s release, our ability to discern between simulation and reality is waning because Bioclasm and AI-Mania are obliterating the distinction. Consider what social media is doing to our understanding of the world. Social media’s algorithms are engineered to keep users on the various platforms for as long as possible. The algorithms do this by predicting patterns in the way a person uses them. If we dwell on a video with a particular subject matter, we’re likely to get more of that kind of video. If we interact with posts by people of a particular political persuasion, the algorithms will recognize the pattern, predict that we will readily interact with similar content, and give us more of what we like.

Users increasingly get enclosed in a bubble where like-minded people post content that fits with their preferences and worldviews. Soon, users begin to feel that most of the world likes what they like and thinks the way they think. When exposed to other ideas—especially contrary ideas—users get the false impression that those ideas are held by fringe

people well outside the norm. The internet affords everyone the opportunity to join online groups that are highly tailored to our hobbies, viewing habits, politics, and religion. Encapsulating ourselves in tailor-made social bubbles, however, leads to conflict with those outside the bubble. As Tara Isabella Burton notes, “[T]he Internet provides highly specialized alternative communities, allowing people to find friends or partners who aren’t merely like-minded, but almost identically minded. It disincentivizes compromise and conformity, even as it promises the bespoke ideal: people who think and feel and act just like you.”¹⁷

The machine learning or deep learning algorithms are, as Columbia University business psychology professor Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic puts it, “prediction machines.”¹⁸ The algorithms recognize patterns in our behavior and reinforce those patterns with content and suggestions similar to what we’ve already selected. What could be more robotic (and less human) than clicking on a thumbs-up icon just because a machine suggests you should? What could be more automaton-like than clicking “watch now” when Netflix says, “Because you liked X, you’ll probably like Y”?

This is not theoretical but historical. In 2024, a deepfake of Taylor Swift emerged in which her digital doppelgänger appeared to support Donald Trump for president. Swiftly, the singer disavowed the deepfake and posted her support for then-candidate Kamala Harris. “The problem,” Meghan O’Gieblyn writes, “is not merely that public opinion is being shaped by robots. It’s that it has become impossible to decipher between ideas that represent a legitimate political will and those that are being mindlessly propagated by machines.”¹⁹

It is little wonder, then, that social reality is collapsing. Social media presents a fake reality. Filters on Instagram and TikTok make

us prettier and younger than we really are. Young people, especially girls, are pressured to post images living their best life. Why? Because everyone else is posting only those pictures.

Switching from AI to gender identity issues, Bioclasm also flourishes with the power of the algorithm. It floods social media with messages in favor of its ideology and punishes those who dissent. That pressure emerged in the political and legal sphere with the Senate confirmation hearing of United States Supreme Court Justice nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson. On the second day of the hearing, Senator Marsha Blackburn asked Judge Jackson what would seem like a straightforward question. She asked her to define the word “woman.” Judge Jackson’s response was fascinating. “Can I provide a definition? No, I can’t.” Follow-up questions and back-and-forth wrangling ensued. Ultimately, Judge Jackson (who was confirmed and is now Justice Jackson) answered, “I’m not a biologist.”²⁰

Justice Jackson is very intelligent and accomplished, so I have to wonder how she could address a dispute about whether a policy or a practice unconstitutionally discriminates against women. More fundamentally, I wonder how she would answer this question: “Are *you* a woman?” If one needs to be a biologist to answer, then how can she ever answer without first getting a biology degree? And if that were the case, then how can a child be trusted to tell anyone, even herself, what sex she is? It might be too snarky to suggest that Justice Jackson could have taken her cue from Johns Hopkins University and answered that a woman is a non-man.

Unintentionally, Justice Jackson’s answer proved more than she anticipated, because she strongly implied that biology, not personal feelings, dictates sex and gender. This, of course, is curiously confused

given that Bioclasts argue that gender is a nonbiological social construct and a woman is anyone who claims to be one. Biology shouldn't play a role in the matter, they say, and to suggest otherwise is, well, transphobic.

➤ Collapse by Concealment

Changing what we see and blurring the lines aren't the only ways someone can cause reality to collapse. Reality can be collapsed only when visual and auditory manipulation are paired with concealment. Consider the following example. In June 2024, *The Economist* reported that research, which revealed that puberty blockers do not improve the mental health of young people with gender dysphoria, had been suppressed.²¹ I discovered this on October 2, 2024, when I read an article with the headline “Lead Psychologist at Tavistock, Former Home to World’s Most Controversial Gender Clinic, Pleads Guilty to Pedophile Charge (But Avoids Jail).”²²

The source was related to a satirical site called *The Babylon Bee*. But this particular article was published in the non-satirical arm of *The Babylon Bee* called *Not the Bee*. While *Not the Bee* is trustworthy, I thought it prudent to search for corroborating news sources. It was remarkable that, twenty-three hours after the story broke, there was only one so-called mainstream news source reporting on it: *Daily Mail*.²³ In fact, entering the malefactor's name into Google revealed no additional stories. I had to add the word *Tavistock* to find anything on this story.

Ignoring information is another form of reality collapse—and it's not novel. It's long been the case that media companies will sometimes bury stories that are inconvenient to a popular (often media-driven)

narrative. But this example goes beyond burying a story amidst other headlines. Here, the media was acting as if the story hadn't happened. Bioclasm, it seems, collapses reality not only by coercing us to disbelieve our eyes, but also by cooperating with Big Data (corporations like Google and Meta) to hide reality from our eyes so we don't have to disbelieve something at all.

3 The Coming Tsunamis

The following demonstrate what it means to stand on the dam of reality as the tsunamis of Bioclasm and AI-Mania rush to overwhelm it. We are told that an Olympic boxer born with an XY chromosome pair and SRY genes for maleness is a woman because he's always competed as a woman and his passport says he's a woman. What is real? Is real what you can read or believe? Then real womanhood is just a social construct being interpreted by your brain. We see a video of Taylor Swift seemingly endorsing Donald Trump for president, yet she said that the video was a deepfake. Maybe her denunciation of the alleged deepfake was itself a deepfake, just a better one. What is real? If real is what you can see and hear, then a real video of Taylor Swift is merely electrical signals interpreted by your brain.

And in a post-truth world where feelings and preferences matter more than facts and truth, what's real "for you" is whatever you prefer your electrical impulses to interpret. If you want to believe Swift endorsed Trump and that her denial was a deepfake, your post-truth autonomy interprets the electrical signals to support that conclusion. That seems liberating, even godlike.

The caution signs are in plain sight. As for AI-Mania, a 2022 poll conducted by Oxford University's Machine Intelligence Research

Institute revealed that approximately 50 percent of AI researchers believe there is at least a 10 percent chance that AI developing human-level intelligence will be catastrophic.²⁴ Yet we are not just developing AI; we are manically disseminating it.

We see overwhelming evidence that placing biological men in women's prisons leads to female inmates being raped and brutalized. Yet some voices not only champion men in these spaces but also cancel those who raise concerns for the women.

Why do we rush headlong into the dangers of denying reality? The answer is not found in new technologies or in emerging cultural trends. The answer, it turns out, is an ancient one that we will uncover in the pages to come.

As social phenomena, gender-identity ideology and artificial intelligence may seem miles apart. Indeed, I have received quizzical looks from those to whom I've suggested their connection. *Really?* their expressions ask. *What could possibly connect them?*

The advent of the post-truth culture—a culture that imbues every person's preferences with unchallengeable authority—is the seaquake from which the two tsunamis of Bioclasm and AI-Mania have emanated. They are joined because they share a common origin. To fortify reality's dam against the coming tsunamis, we need to understand the strength and breadth of the seaquake from which they originate.