

FREE-MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

• PARALLEL SOCIETY •

We have it in our power to begin the world over again.

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work



*Everybody knows that the dice are loaded.
Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed.
Everybody knows that the game is over.
Everybody knows that the good guys lost.*
-- Leonard Cohen, *Everybody Knows*

Cohen's lyric is a good description of our world's present condition, and yes, everybody knows. (Though some would rather fight than admit it.)

What most people don't know is that alternatives exist. Nonetheless, they do, and we call those alternatives *parallel societies*.

A parallel society is any group of people incorporating and passing-on ideas about life that are outside of, and separate from, the ideas of an *enforced* culture.

Parallel societies, then, are voluntary. You must choose to join and remain, and since they so often run concurrently with enforced societies (as they do now)... and since enforced societies are jealous overlords... courage is required.

The term parallel society was coined by Vaclav Benda, a Czech activist in the 1970s, when Eastern Europe was under Soviet domination. (In the original Czech it was *paralelní polis*.) The parallel polis of Benda and others was an independent society; a society based on its own values.

The purpose of this primer is to show you that there is an alternative to the enforced society, but more than that, to show you that you're already familiar with parallel societies; that you already use them and find meaning in them. And, finally, to illustrate that you have the ability to live in a parallel way right now. You have only to decide and to act.

Read on, please...

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

We're Already Familiar

The good news is that we're already deeply familiar with parallel societies, or at least most of us are. Here's why: All reasonably healthy families are small, parallel societies. I've always loved this line, the very first line, from Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*:

All happy families resemble one another, each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.

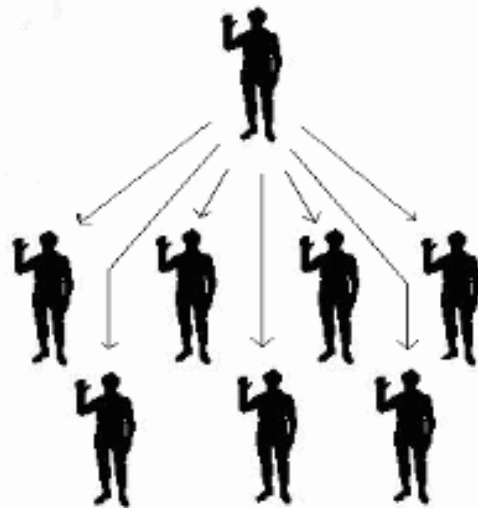
All happy families are alike because they're all parallel societies. In a healthy family, we cooperate continuously, we consider each other's personal characteristics, we treat the use of force as either a last resort or as a dirty thing. Everyone who has grown up in a reasonably healthy family knows this... not just by description, but by feel. Even if your family was only healthy on and off, you've still had enough experience with the good parts to internalize them and to know them by feel.

One level larger than the family we find the joint activities that give us pleasure and warmth, sharing the same model: Neighbors working together to help the old couple at the end of the street, organizing the neighborhood Little League, convening a reading circle, joining a homeschooling co-op, training with friends at the martial arts club, putting together a church picnic and so on, at great length. We gain warmth, connection and self-worth from these relationships, precisely because they are unforced: We are doing good things and cooperating with good people *because we want to*. That generates actual and earned self-respect.

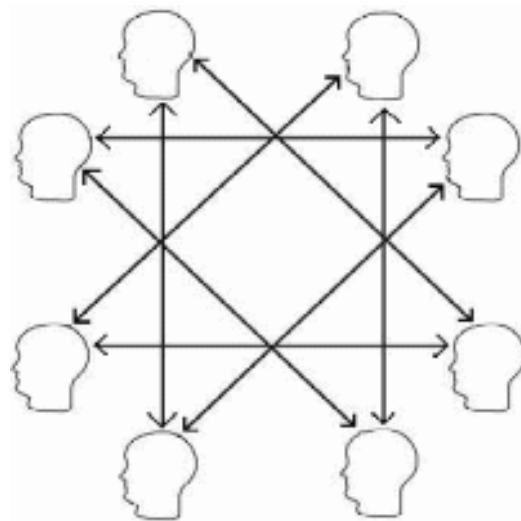
As we go on, we'll examine still larger parallel societies, but before we do, I'd like you to understand the structure of these societies. Structure, after all,

defines fundamental and persistent operations.

Here's what the enforced society looks like, with a tiny group of powerful people at the top, telling everyone below what to do and inflicting punishments upon those who don't. It's a hierarchical model, maintained with rules and negative incentives (that is, punishments):



Here's the model of a parallel society, where each member is unrestricted, where each can participate or not, and where each is directly connected to each other and to the real world:



This is the model of *chosen* societies, and it's the one that makes us feel good.

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

It's also open to human growth, allowing anyone to work with any else, or choose not to. Everyone gets credit for the good things they do. Everyone directly considers everyone else's abilities, needs and circumstances. Everyone feels needed and *is* needed.

These two models produce fundamentally different structures. The enforced model is mechanical, with every individual's actions restricted by edicts that are external to the individual. They are very machine-like. The voluntary, *ad hoc* model is organic, forever self-balancing and self-evolving. Even its goals can morph without any application of force.

And so we can describe enforced societies as machines, and parallel societies as organisms. And please note these basic differences:

- In a machine, every part operates according to the demands of the machine. In an organism, each part operates according to it's nature.
- Machines require a single set of rules, organisms require goals that they reach toward.
- Machines subdue and regiment personal will, organisms liberate it and enthrone it.
- Machine life excludes individual thought and action, organic life thrives upon it.

Larger Parallel Societies

The Jews have always constituted a parallel society. Christianity was very definitely a parallel society over its first few centuries (one of their favorite sayings was, "We are not of this world"), and parts of it still are. Seldom, over all their runs, was either a centralized, enforced society.

Judaism has now continued for more

than 4,000 years and Christianity for almost 2,000. During that span, the Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Greeks, Romans, and a hundred others have all come and gone. And yet these parallel societies have remained.

Another parallel society of great scope and endurance was that of the Phoenicians (including the Carthaginians). Although they've disappeared from most history books, their parallel society lasted for 2,000 years, blessing the world in far more ways than people know. The first alphabet was Phoenician, as were the first democracies, republics, and even the first Greek philosopher, Thales. The Phoenicians may have invented glass (they were certainly the first to produce in volume) and they operated a tremendous commercial civilization. Here's a general description from historian George Rawlinson:

The Phoenicians were certainly among the most industrious and persevering of mankind. The accounts which we have of them... attest their unceasing and untiring activity through almost the whole period of their existence... Always labouring in their workshops at home in mechanical and aesthetic arts, they were at the same time constantly seeking employment abroad, ransacking the earth for useful or beautiful commodities, building cities, constructing harbours, founding colonies, introducing the arts of life among wild nations, mining and establishing fisheries, organising lines of land traffic, perpetually moving from place to place, and leaving wherever they went abundant proofs of their diligence and capacity for hard work.

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

Ancient Greece was also a parallel society. True, it didn't have to compete with an entrenched society like we do, but it was massively decentralized. And even though a few Greek city-states tried to centralize in their later years, Greece provides an important lesson about the parallel

model.

Consider the two maps shown below. The first is of ancient Egypt, one of the most centralized and stratified civilizations in human history. The second is ancient Greece, one of the most dispersed civilizations in human history.



On the map of Egypt we see green, fertile areas at the edge of the Nile river and almost nowhere else. That made centralized rule easy: As long as the Pharaoh controlled the river, he controlled everyone.

Contrast that with Greece, which wasn't a single country, but 1,000 well-separated city-states, all fiercely independent. These people didn't call themselves "Greeks." Rather, they said, "I am a Corinthian," "I am an Argon," "I am an Ephesian," and so on.

What we see is this:

- Egypt was a highly centralized and powerfully enforced civilization.
- Greece was a highly decentralized and massively parallel civilization.

The result of this was that ancient Egypt

left us elite monuments and curiosities like mummies. The Greek city-states, on the other hand, gifted mankind with philosophy, geometry, science, drama, fine arts, comedy, and much more.

So, it's clear that the parallel model carries benefits. And while I won't explain in this primer, nearly all important human developments found their roots in some type of decentralized, parallel arrangement.

Just to establish that principle, here are three passages from Albert Einstein:

The really valuable thing in the pageant of human life seems to me not the State but the creative, sentient individual, the personality; it alone creates the noble and the sublime.

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom.

Small is the number of them that see with their own eyes and feel with their own hearts.

Enforced societies are confining, limiting forward progress to only those avenues that serve "our society," which really means the people at the top of the hierarchy. Most of us know that innovators are treated poorly, and sometimes very badly. That's why they are driven to the edges of enforced society: it's where they're less restrained.

Outside – separated from the enforced culture – is where creativity finds room to develop. Human creativity simply does not function by obedience and compulsion, no matter how many rulers wish it were otherwise. But where and when productive humans are unrestrained, creativity surges, as do motivation, happiness, and the accumulation of wealth.

For these reasons, living in parallel produces more authentic satisfaction than lives of compliance, in which fear of enforcement stands as a central reference. This is why we've continued to see parallel societies and parallel development over the centuries.

In its first couple of centuries, America was very clearly a parallel society.

Beginning in the late 1980s, we've seen the rise of Cypherpunk culture (adamantly parallel, separate and voluntary), which in turn spawned Bitcoin: software specifically written to empower parallel societies.

The truth is that human progress comes from the outside. And so, enforced cultures will always be challenged by parallel societies, until people decide that

fear and compliance were a mistake in the first place.

As Michael Crichton used to say: *Life will find a way.*

Places of Passion

Parallel societies are places where passion, real passion, is free to grow and does grow.

Truly passionate people, as a first example, make things sacred to themselves; "This is *mine*," they say, "and no one else is permitted, unless I invite them."

For further examples, I'll give you several passages from G. K. Chesterton, followed (in italics) by my own annotation:

"I do not believe in a fate that falls on men however they act; but I do believe in a fate that falls on them unless they act."

Passionate people do more than complain, they act. They accept risks because they value their own lives more than the threats and punishments of enforcing societies.

"No man's really any good until he knows how bad he is, or might be."

The passionate person has the courage to face their mistakes. He or she accepts and addresses their weaknesses, learning a great deal and improving themselves.

"Vigorous organisms talk not about their processes, but about their aims. There cannot be any better proof of the physical efficiency of a man than that he talks cheerfully of a trip to the end of the world."

Again, passion acts. More than that, passion generates excitement about challenging goals and accomplishes difficult things.

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

“The great gap in modern ethics is the absence of vivid pictures of purity and spiritual triumph.”

Passion seeks to transcend the mundane, the base and the boring, not to endlessly accommodate it. It summons and engages its strengths, changing the world with them.

Enforced cultures are very much otherwise. What passes for passion in the enforced society is that of the beer commercial.

How They Operate

Parallel societies operate, as St. Paul put it, “by that which every joint supplieth.”

I think St. Paul was quite right, and that it forms a powerful model (it certainly did for Christianity). Additionally it means that we get full credit for all the good things we do, which produces authentic self-regard.

Overall, parallel societies organize themselves according to market principles, and for good reason: Markets are the most inclusive and tolerant arrangements we have for human interaction. This has been true for more or less every parallel society, from the obsidian traders of the late neolithic to the Lollards of early Reformation to the Bitcoiners of our time.

Parallel societies are strongly family and community centered. They have also tended to be religious.

Here are some additional features of parallel living:

Mating, Weddings, Funerals

Parallel societies always develop their own “major life event” habits, quite separate from those of the enforced cultures. And it’s important that these are new models, springing out of actual

necessities, not the requirements of dominating societies.

And so nearly every parallel society will develop group events (the camp meetings of Methodists and Pentecostals are good examples) that help young people meet and find mates. This is done within the context of their own society and apart from the mating norms of enforced society.

Weddings also tend to develop in parallel, sometimes more and sometimes less. Likewise death and burial rituals vary from those of enforced societies, as we still see in Jewish burial and grieving rituals.

Networks of Trust

Enforced societies monopolize trust, to the point where the state is a partner to more or less everything. The state secures debts, divides the assets of the deceased, presides over the ends of marriages, arrogates to itself the right to remove children from parents they deem unfit, and so on. In a decentralized, parallel society there is no place for an unchosen partner, and so trust is created in other ways.

Since the most basic parallel society is the family, decentralized networks of trust grow from that ground. At a very basic level, I know I can trust you because you’re married to my sister, because we’re cousins, and so on. And that network can expand broadly.

At the next level, I can trust you if we’re both adherents of the same religion and share a great many connections through our religion. If you openly cheat me, you will suffer a tremendous loss of reputation and even ostracism. (The power of ostracism being far greater than most of us have understood.)

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

At just this level, a network of trust can be immense. The Jews, the early Christians and the Phoenicians operated over continents and centuries with no more than this.

Given our modern technologies we can extend and reinforce these networks of trust, even into pseudonymous cyberspace. Still, personal-level trust will probably always remain. We are organisms, after all, not machines.

Meaning

Parallel societies produce multiple paths to meaning: *chosen* social arrangements, all of them spontaneous and adaptive. Connection and meaning grow from micro-societies like independent disaster response teams, neighborhood clubs, choral groups, local sports leagues and film nights.

Meaning forms itself in such groups. Anything that is small enough for self-organization (people pitching in) becomes a parallel channel for meaning. And it's interesting to see that just such things pop up where a mainline culture isn't overwhelming. Here's what Alexis de Tocqueville wrote of America in the 1830s:

Americans of all ages, all stations of life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations.

Older American cities used to be built of neighborhoods, each of them having an independent and distinct character. Whatever difficulties were sometimes associated with this (the Irish versus the Italians and so on), each neighborhood provided opportunities for people to find meaning. People were known in each neighborhood as being "our" grocer, "our" repairman, and the like. Because they were "ours," there was a great deal of meaning

attached.

Redemption

Human societies, if they are to be healthy, must include paths to redemption... pathways to the recovery of reputation. This isn't optional. Even if they have to take a questionable form like the cult of the saints in the wake of Rome, they must form, or else the parallel society will fail. This makes parallel societies terribly appealing: We give everyone, even those who have messed-up, an opportunity to start over and do better.

Considering that we've all screwed up at some point, that's a very big thing indeed.

Along with redemption come appreciation and gratitude. Enforced society tends to displace these things because enforcement doesn't recognize them. Under enforcement, either you obey the edict (and are momentarily exempt from punishment) or else you are a law-breaker and need to be punished. Positive credit is excluded.

The parallel society, on the other hand, allows for positive credit. That, in turn generates multiple positive experiences, beginning with expressions of appreciation and gratitude and continuing into wonder, awe, and other upward swellings of the heart.

A Comprehensible, Heroic World

There's much more to say about all of this (and we've examined these things in multiple issues of our newsletters), but I'll conclude by explaining that parallel societies create comprehensible worlds for us; worlds that are geared for heroism.

Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

A major characteristic of people in parallel societies is that they tend to be significantly more confident, primarily because their world becomes comprehensible.

When we do things only because they make sense, we drop a great number of artificial complications. We become far less distracted from our self-generated goals. Leaving fear and forced compliance behind, our world becomes understandable, or at least mainly so.

There are critical differences between people who see the world as comprehensible and those who do not:

- Understanding the world, we tend to make plans to accomplish our goals and then pursue them, confident that we can (or at least are likely to) reach them.
- Feeling overcome by a world we cannot understand or rely upon, we hunker down in place. Not knowing what may or may not work, we pull

back our horizons, hold on to whatever we do have and refuse to let go, even if letting go is required to get something better.

To illustrate comprehensibility, here is a quote from a Dutch Bitcoiner:

Bitcoin is the only real thing that I have ever done in my life. It's the only thing I've done where I know why I'm doing it.

That's a very powerful statement; it explains why so many Bitcoiners are so passionately devoted, and why parallel societies foster exceptional growth and satisfaction.

When we can comprehend our world, we're unafraid to insert our will into it. Then, once we see that we can improve the world... that what we do matters... an impulse toward heroism arises in us.

The first issue of Bitcoin magazine had a wonderful image of this:



Parallel Societies: What They Are And How They Work

Take a good look at this young person's sign:

The corrupt fear us.

The honest support us.

The heroic join us.

Think about the commitments behind those words. Young people like this are claiming righteousness and honesty and heroism. What better ideals could we want for our children and grandchildren?

This is what parallel societies produce.

What really stand against the parallel society are violence, fear and confusion; which are not things to build a future upon. And so, please consider these final two points:

- Enforced society thrives upon our weaknesses, and couldn't survive without them.
- Parallel society thrives upon our virtues, and couldn't survive without them.

Enforced society *requires* frightened, pliable and compliant subjects. And so, that is what they've cultivated. Parallel societies require will, action, passion and endurance. And so, that's what they've cultivated.

It falls to us to decide which of these environments are preferable for ourselves and our children. I think the better choice is obvious, and perhaps you do too.



If You Want More

If you'd like to know more about this... if you'd like to know why these things are so and precisely how to implement them, we produce a monthly newsletter (actually two bimonthly newsletters) dedicated to them.

Our *Free-Man's Perspective* newsletter has been running since 2011, and is dedicated to subjects that are interesting, important, and have never been written about before. Yes, that's a wildly high standard, but we work hard to meet it. Perhaps you'll agree.

Our *Parallel Society* newsletter has been running since 2018. Every month it answers the perennial question, *Yes, but what can I do?* If you'd like to know, you can find out in these issues.

Free-Man's Perspective and *Parallel Society* alternate months. We deliver six issues of each per year. We also issue Interim Reports when conditions warrant, as they have three times during 2020 and 2021.

Please take a look through [our list of back issues](#). There is a wealth of ideas in them, on a wide variety of subjects. Every subscriber receives access to them.

And, of course, we have a free, public web site at freemansperspective.com We post short articles and podcasts there every week, and often more than once per week.

Our world is full of people complaining about what's wrong. Some of that is necessary, of course, but while there's some value in recognizing what's wrong, it's far more important to know how we can make things go right... and very few people address that.

Our world is starving for images of a better and more satisfying way of life. Most of us, when we try to imagine such a thing, come up dry. Maybe we can imagine a pile of money and a few more external things, but we don't know how a better level of being would feel or how to reach it.

But the truth is that we've already experienced better levels of being, at moments and in parts; what we need is to recognize them, identify their causes, and put them together.

That's where we go each month. [I hope you can join us.](#)

-- Paul Rosenberg

Come across something awesome?

Send a note about it to parallelsociety@cryptogroup.net. (Please forgive us if we don't respond.)

WE are the real world. Politics, TV, and Facebook are the illusion.