

The Mechanics of Non-Moral Civility:

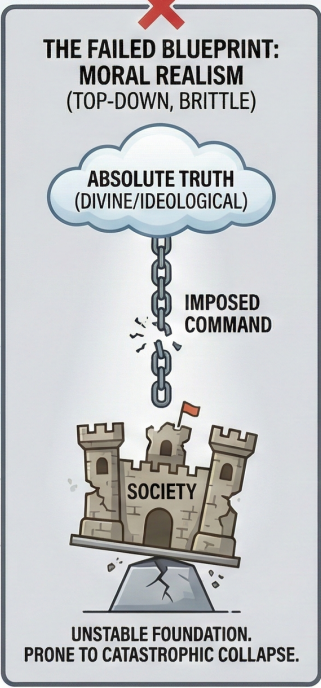
Evolutionary, Psychological, and Sociological Foundations
of Social Order in the Absence of Moral Realism

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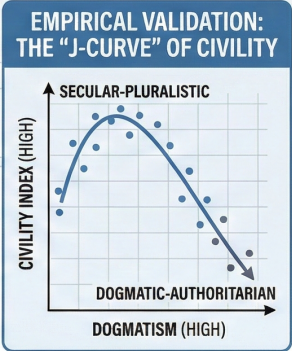
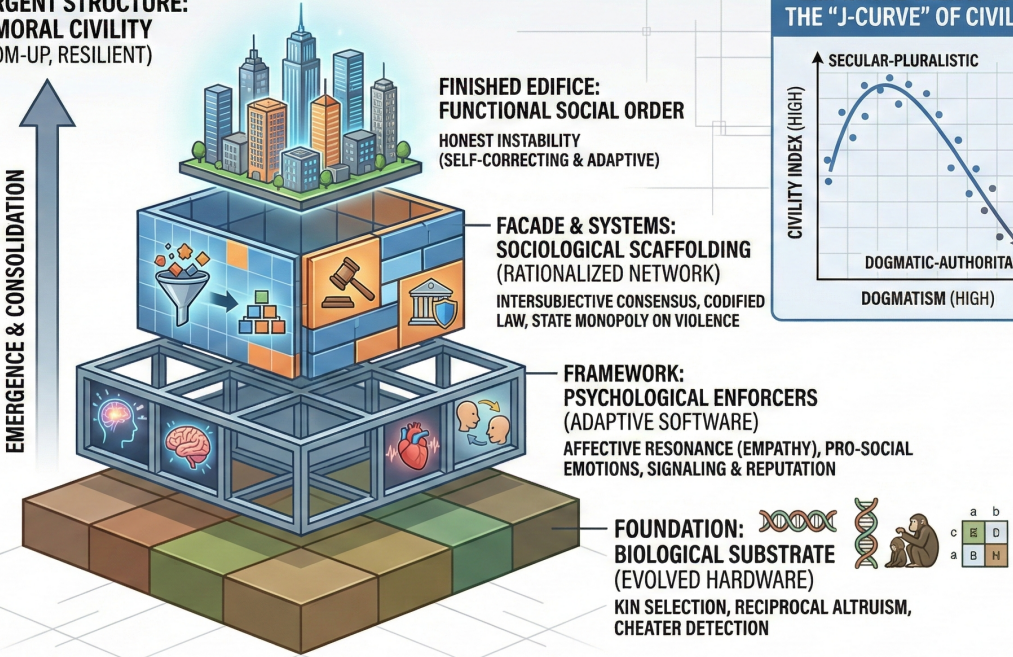
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A visual preview:

THE ARCHITECTURE OF NON-MORAL CIVILITY: CONSTRUCTING ORDER WITHOUT TRANSCENDENT TRUTH



THE EMERGENT STRUCTURE: NON-MORAL CIVILITY (BOTTOM-UP, RESILIENT)



CONCLUSION: A resilient society is not descended from the heavens but constructed from the ground up, using the materials of our evolved nature refined by rational institutions.

Abstract

A pervasive fear in both philosophical discourse and popular consciousness is that the rejection of moral realism—specifically the eliminativist stance that moral properties do not exist—must inevitably lead to societal collapse and individual debauchery. This paper argues that such a fear rests on a category error regarding the origins of human cooperation. Social stability is not dependent on transcendent moral truths or divine commands; rather, order is an emergent property of robust evolutionary strategies, deeply ingrained affective psychological mechanisms, and rationalized sociological scaffolding. By synthesizing insights from evolutionary biology, game theory, moral psychology, and comparative history, this paper proposes the concept of "non-moral civility" as a more accurate model for functional societies. We demonstrate that systems built on verifiable biological imperatives and intersubjective consensus are not only capable of sustaining complex legal order but are often more resilient than brittle systems founded on unverifiable moral absolutes.

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1 Introduction

The prospect of a universe without objective moral truths is often met with existential dread. This anxiety is classically encapsulated in the Dostoevskian assertion that "if there is no God, everything is permitted." The underlying assumption of this "Argument from Consequences" is that human cooperation is a fragile artifact, held together solely by the imposition of duty, the promise of divine reward, or the fear of metaphysical punishment. The implicit claim is that without a realist framework to anchor "good" and "evil," the rational agent would inevitably devolve into a chaotic maximizer of immediate self-interest, leading to a Hobbesian war of all against all.

This paper contends that this fear is unfounded. It relies on a pre-Darwinian understanding of human nature that views our species as inherently asocial, requiring civilization to be imposed upon us from above. Modern behavioral science suggests the opposite: we are obligate social animals for whom cooperation is a survival imperative.

1.1 Defining the Terms: Moral Non-Realism and Eliminativism

To proceed rigorously, we must define our terms. By "moral realism," we refer to the philosophical position that moral statements report factual information about the world, and that moral properties exist independently of human minds (whether sourced in a deity or objective secular truths).

Consequently, "moral non-realism" is the denial of this stance. This paper adopts a specific subset of non-realism known as *eliminativism*. This view holds that moral vocabulary suffers from a fundamental failure of reference. Much like historical concepts of "phlogiston" or "witches," moral properties do not actually exist in the furniture of the universe. Therefore, discourse that relies on moral entities is fundamentally in error. The eliminativist does not seek to redefine morality; they seek to explain why the illusion of morality exists and how function is maintained without it.

1.2 Thesis Statement

This paper argues that social stability is not dependent on moral realism. Instead, what we term "civility" is a mechanical, emergent phenomenon. It is the product of a three-layered system: the "hardware" of evolutionary biological imperatives, the "software" of affective psychological drives, and the "network" of sociological scaffolding. We propose the concept of "non-moral civility" to describe functional, cooperative societies whose norms are recognized not as cosmic truths, but as pragmatic, evolving adaptive strategies. This contrast between the perceived fragility of secular order and the robust reality of emergent order is illustrated below in Figure 1.

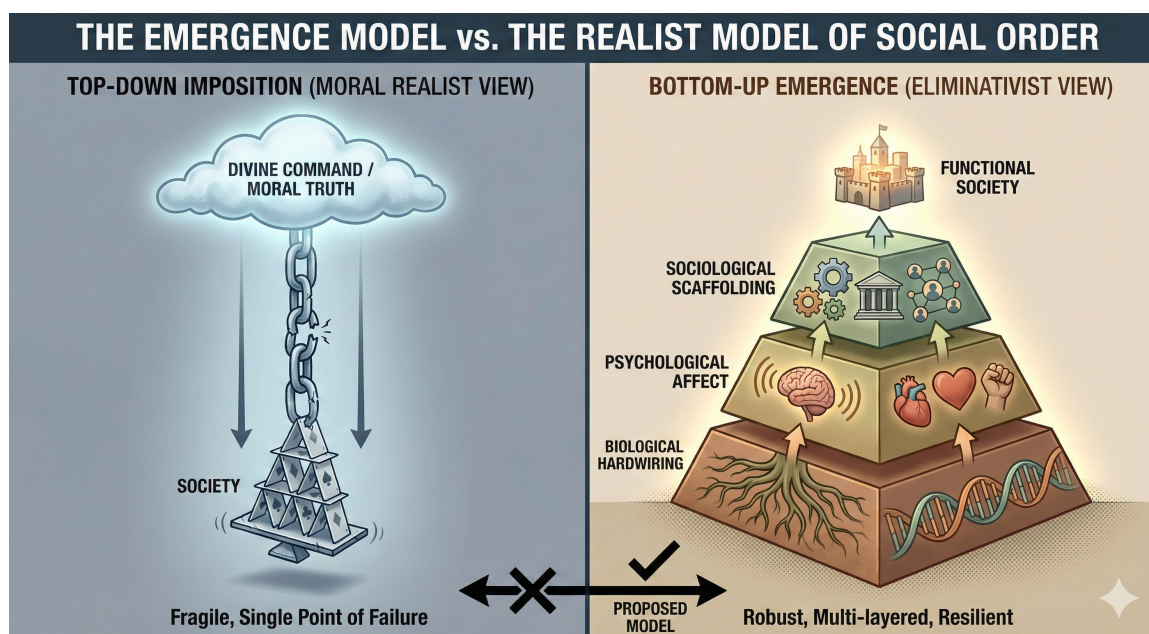


Figure 1: **The Emergence Model vs. The Realist Model of Social Order.** A conceptual comparison. The left panel ("Top-Down Imposition") illustrates the moral realist view: society hanging precariously from a single, brittle chain of divine command or moral truth. The right panel ("Bottom-Up Emergence") illustrates the eliminativist view proposed here: society as a robust pyramid built foundationally on biological hardwiring, supported by psychological affect, and capped by sociological scaffolding.

2 The Biological Substrate: Hard-Wired Cooperation (The Hardware)

The foundation of social order is not philosophy, but biology. The claim that non-realism leads to chaos mistakenly assumes that human beings are blank slates choosing whether or not to cooperate based on abstract arguments. Evolutionary biology demonstrates that pro-social behavior is a pre-rational, adaptive strategy carved into our genetics long before the invention of language or law.

2.1 Kin Selection and Inclusive Fitness

The most primal layer of cooperation is explained by W.D. Hamilton's theory of kin selection. Hamilton's Rule formalizes altruism mathematically: an altruistic gene will spread in a population if $rB > C$, where r is the genetic relatedness of actor to recipient, B is the reproductive benefit gained by the recipient, and C is the reproductive cost to the actor.

This concept of "inclusive fitness" explains why enormous expenditures of resources and even self-sacrifice occur routinely within family units without any need for a "moral framework." Parents protect offspring not because they identify a moral duty, but because

they are biological machines programmed to ensure the propagation of their genetic material. This forms the biological bedrock of the family unit, the first stabilizing structure of human society.

2.2 Reciprocal Altruism and Game Theory

Cooperation among non-relatives, the prerequisite for larger society, is explained by Robert Trivers' theory of reciprocal altruism. In ancestral environments, individuals who engaged in mutual aid (food sharing, collective defense) out-competed solitary individuals.

Game theory, specifically the study of the Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma, provides the mathematical proof for the stability of this cooperation (see Figure 2). While "defecting" (cheating) might be rational in a single encounter, human life is an iterated game of repeated interactions. In repeated games, strategies like "Tit-for-Tat" (cooperate first, then replicate the opponent's previous move) generate robust Nash Equilibria. In a social species, chronic defection is a mathematically inferior survival strategy because it triggers retaliation and ostracization. We cooperate not to be "good," but to avoid the long-term costs of being identified as a defector.

FIGURE 2: ITERATED PRISONER'S DILEMMA AND COOPERATIVE STABILITY

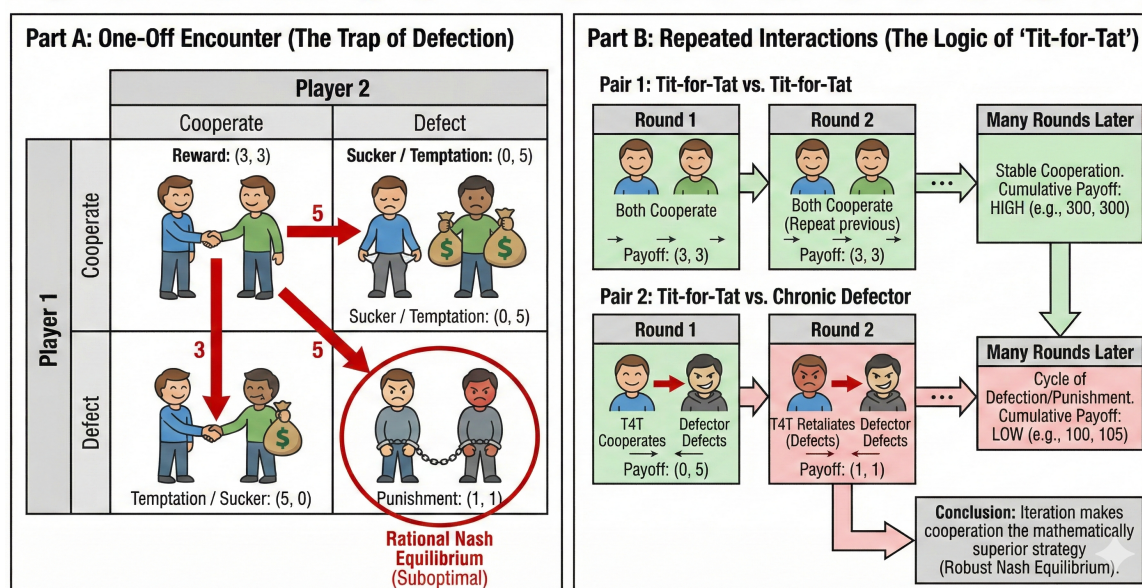


Figure 2: **Iterated Prisoner's Dilemma and Cooperative Stability.** Part A (left) shows a standard 2x2 payoff matrix where one-off defection is rational. Part B (right) illustrates a flowchart of repeated interactions over time, demonstrating how strategies like "Tit-for-Tat" create a Nash Equilibrium where long-term cooperation yields higher payoffs than chronic defection.

2.3 Cheater Detection Mechanisms

The evolutionary importance of these social contracts is evidenced by the architecture of the human mind. Evolutionary psychologists, such as Cosmides and Tooby, have demonstrated that humans possess specialized cognitive modules adapted for "cheater detection." Humans are often poor at solving abstract logical puzzles but show high proficiency when the exact same puzzle is framed as detecting someone violating a social rule to gain an unearned benefit. We are hard-wired to police our social environment, ensuring the stability of the group without any need for abstract "moral" instruction.

3 Psychological Enforcers: The Affective Landscape (The Software)

If biology provides the hardware for cooperation, psychology provides the software that makes pro-social behavior feel intuitive. The realist mistakes these powerful subjective feelings for detectors of external moral truths. The eliminativist recognizes them as affective enforcement mechanisms—heuristics evolved to navigate a complex social environment.

3.1 Affective Resonance (Empathy)

What is often termed "conscience" is largely rooted in affective resonance, facilitated by neural mechanisms such as mirror neurons. These systems allow an individual to simulate the emotional states of others, creating a vicarious experience of their pain or joy. When we witness suffering, corresponding pain centers in our own brains are activated.

This affective resonance acts as a physiological inhibitor against anti-social behavior. The average human avoids wanton violence not because of a prohibition against "evil," but because causing harm generates a visceral, aversive personal distress. It is a feedback loop, not a virtue.

3.2 The Constellation of Pro-Social Emotions

Functional societies harness specific emotional inputs as raw data for their norms. These emotions act as rapid-response signals regarding social opportunities and threats:

- **Compassion:** The distress felt at another's suffering motivates care-taking and resource redistribution. This is the psychological basis for social safety nets and charity—mechanisms that reduce resource anxiety within the group.
- **Indignation:** The anger triggered by perceived unfairness or breaches of reciprocity. Indignation is an aggression response designed to punish defectors and deter future breaches of the social contract.

- **Disgust:** Originally a pathogen-avoidance mechanism, disgust was co-opted socially to repel behaviors that threaten group cohesion or purity norms (e.g., incest taboos). It acts as a powerful, pre-rational boundary enforcer.

3.3 Reputation Capital and Signaling

In a non-realist framework, concepts of "honor" and "integrity" are re-conceptualized as "reputation capital." In an obligate social species, an individual's reputation is a proxy for their likelihood to reciprocate cooperation.

Pro-social behaviors serve as "costly signals." By expending resources to help others or adhering to norms even when unobserved, an individual signals their quality as a reliable partner to the group. The fear of reputational destruction—and subsequent ostracization—is a more potent motivator for pro-social behavior than any abstract commitment to virtue.

4 Sociological Scaffolding: From Affect to Law (The Network)

The final layer of order involves scaling these biological and psychological drives into complex civilizations. Sociology and law are the mechanisms by which we rationalize messy emotions into rigid social scaffolding.

4.1 Rational Consolidation and Intersubjective Consensus

Social norms should be viewed not as reflections of moral truth, but as coordination points, analogous to driving on a specific side of the road. There is no cosmic necessity for driving on the right; it is an arbitrary convention agreed upon to minimize catastrophic collisions.

Similarly, high-stakes norms like "do not murder" or "do not steal" are coordination points derived from intersubjective consensus. We do not need objective morality to agree that we generally prefer not to be harmed. By consolidating this shared affective preference into a norm, society reduces social friction and transaction costs. This process of transforming raw feeling into rigid code is illustrated in Figure 3.

4.2 The Outsourcing of Revenge

The transition from tribalism to civilization is marked by the formalization of indignation. In a pre-legal state, a transgression triggers personal vendetta leading to cycles of chaotic violence.

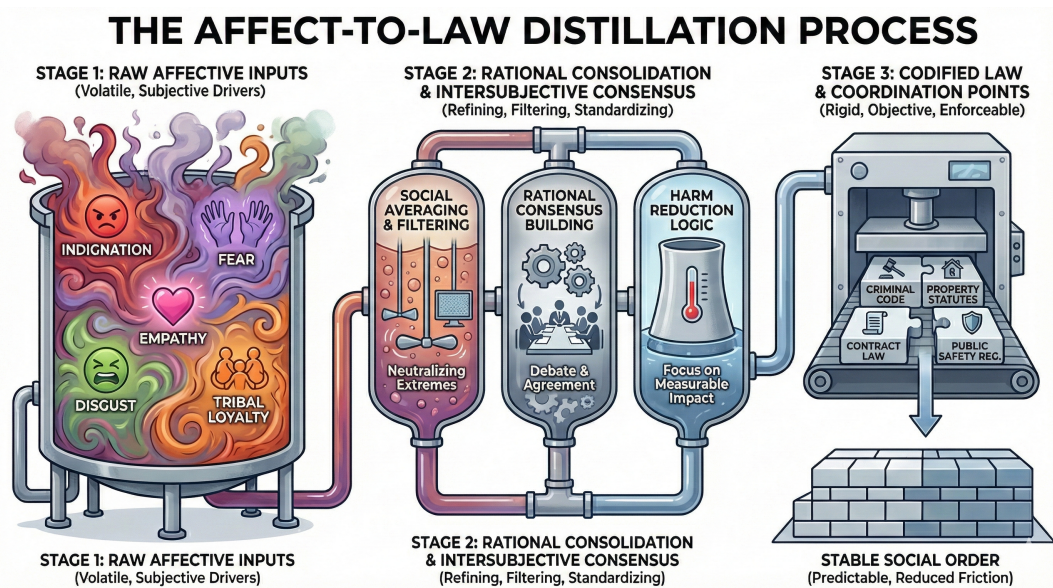


Figure 3: **The Affect-to-Law Distillation Process.** A conceptual diagram illustrating the transformation of emotion into law. Stage 1 shows messy, volatile raw affective inputs (e.g., Indignation, Fear, Empathy). Stage 2 shows these inputs being refined through rational consolidation, social filtering, and harm-reduction logic. Stage 3 shows the final output: rigid, standardized, and objective codified laws (e.g., Criminal Code, Property Statutes) that build a stable social order.

Civil law emerges as a "social treaty" wherein individuals agree to surrender their right to personal revenge in exchange for the state's promise to exercise that revenge vicariously through a justice system. The criminal justice system is, mechanically speaking, a controlled ventilation of collective indignation. It provides a "consolation" to victims by validating their grievance and punishing the aggressor, thereby preventing the chaos of vigilante justice. No "moral" judgment is required—only the pragmatic management of human anger to ensure systemic stability.

4.3 Case Studies in Non-Moral Law

Property Rights: In a realist framework, ownership is often treated as a metaphysical right. In an eliminativist framework, property law is a management strategy for the evolutionary "endowment effect"—the psychological tendency to overvalue what one currently possesses. Laws against theft exist to calm chronic resource anxiety, creating an environment stable enough for long-term economic planning.

Self-Defense: Laws permitting lethal force in self-defense are not grants of a "moral right to life," but pragmatic acknowledgments of biological reality. The fight-or-flight response of the amygdala overrides rational cognition during imminent threats. A legal system that attempted to criminalize this biological reflex would be functionally unenforceable.

5 Discussion: The Concept of "Non-Moral Civility"

By synthesizing these mechanisms, we arrive at the model of "non-moral civility": a functional, cooperative social order that makes no claims to transcendent goodness, operating instead on the mechanics of evolved psychology and negotiated consensus.

5.1 Honest vs. Dishonest Instability

Critics argue that a system based on mere consensus is inherently unstable. We grant this point: systems based on human affect are indeed dynamic and subject to change. However, this is an "honest instability" that allows for adaptation. If a norm is found to be inefficient at promoting human flourishing, it can be renegotiated without shattering the entire system.

By contrast, systems founded on Moral Realism—particularly those based on divine command or rigid ideology—suffer from "dishonest instability" or brittleness. Because they claim their rules are eternal truths, they cannot adapt to changing circumstances without undermining their own authority.

This brittleness manifests in two ways: the "Interpretive Abyss," where endless schisms arise over the correct reading of unalterable texts; and "Purity Spirals," where the inability to manage internal dissent leads to inquisitions and purges. The claim of absolute stability is, paradoxically, the greatest threat to the actual stability of realist systems.

6 Historical Comparative Analysis: Testing the Hypothesis

If the realist hypothesis were true—that divine command is necessary for order—we would expect a positive correlation between a society's degree of theocratic coupling and its metrics of civility (internal peace, low homicide rates, rule of law). Historical data suggests the opposite.

6.1 Methodology: The God/Civility Scattergraph

We can conceptualize a scattergraph plotting civilizations along two axes: the Y-axis representing statistical evidence of civility, and the X-axis representing the degree to which law and norms are explicitly derived from supernatural command or dogmatic ideology.

6.2 Analyzing the Trend (The "J-Curve")

As illustrated in Figure 4, the resulting data does not show a positive linear correlation, but rather a "J-Curve" or checkmark shape.

At one extreme of the X-axis, we find societies with intense theocratic coupling (e.g., the Aztec Empire, Medieval Christendom) or intense secular dogmatism acting as a pseudo-religion (e.g., Stalinism). These societies often exhibit low "civility" metrics, maintaining order through high levels of state violence, terror, and ritualized brutality to maintain purity.

As societies adopt more rational, legalistic frameworks and allow for pluralism (e.g., the Roman Empire), civility metrics tend to rise from the valley of dogmatism.

Crucially, the highest levels of statistically evidenced civility in human history are found in contemporary secular democracies (e.g., Scandinavia, Japan). These societies have largely decoupled law from divine command, relying instead on high social trust, robust welfare states (reducing resource anxiety), and strong secular institutions. This "secular peak" provides empirical evidence that non-moral civility is not only possible but is superior at generating actual human well-being compared to theocratic models.

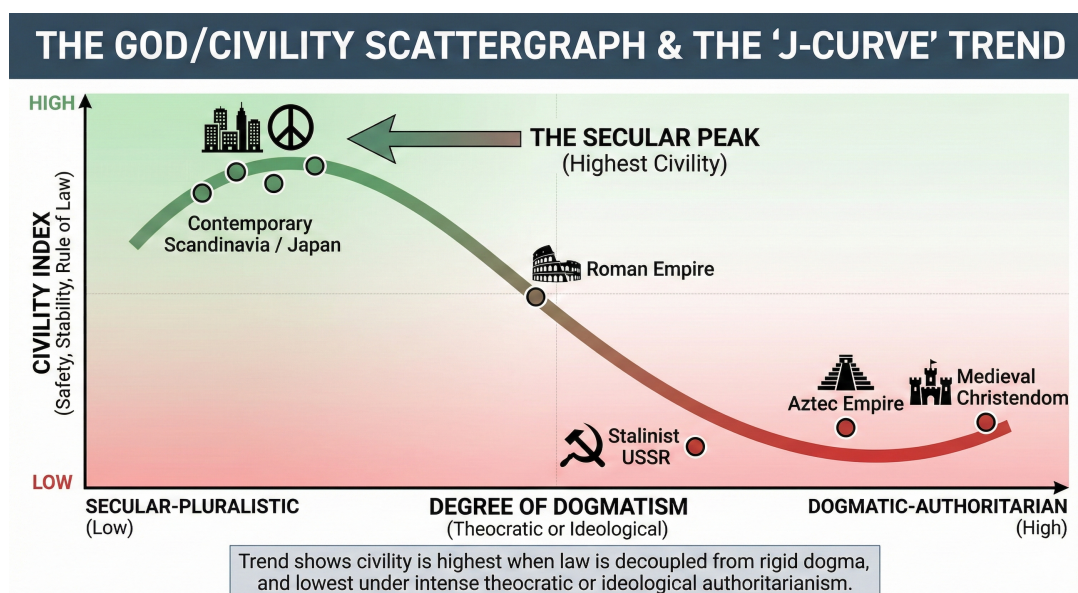


Figure 4: **The God/Civility Scattergraph and the "J-Curve"**. A conceptual plot illustrating the relationship between dogmatism and social order. The Y-axis represents statistical evidence of civility (safety, rule of law, stability). The X-axis represents the degree of Theocratic Coupling or Ideological Dogmatism. The trend line shows that highly secular-pluralistic societies (top left) often achieve higher civility metrics than intensely dogmatic regimes, whether religious or secular (bottom right and bottom left).

7 Conclusion

The fear that eliminating moral realism will lead to chaos is a category error that mistakes the map for the territory. It assumes that because we use moral language to describe our social world, moral entities must be the causes of that world.

This paper has argued that the gears of society—from the micro-level of neural inhibitors to the macro-level of international law—turn without the need for a "moral" prime mover. Order is an emergent property of our biology, our psychology, and our need to coordinate behavior in a complex world. Abandoning the illusion of objective morality does not lead to nihilism; rather, it leads to a more mechanistic, manageable, and ultimately humane understanding of the fragile prerequisites for human cooperation.

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