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## **Voldemort Syndrome: The Invisible Crisis of Wizard-Muggle Dependence**

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# **Voldemort Syndrome: The Invisible Crisis of Muggle-Wizard Independence**

Nathaniel Givens

## **Abstract**

The ability to use magic confers enormous power to witches and wizards individually, but its broader effect on the culture of the wizarding world<sup>1</sup> has not been thoroughly investigated. In this paper, we show that the easy access to resources afforded by magic results in a society that is not as productive, progressive, or stable as Muggle society. As a result, the wizarding world is culturally dependent on Muggle society. If this conclusion holds, then the rises of Gellert Grindelwald and Lord Voldemort should not be seen as isolated and singular events, but rather as symptoms of an invisible crisis in the wizarding world. Since the Industrial Revolution, Muggle society has undergone astonishingly rapid technological, economical, and cultural change and has increasingly left the wizarding world behind. This cultural separation represents an existential threat to the wizarding world as a cohesive culture. The Muggle-subjugating ideologies of Grindelwald and Voldemort are a rational reaction to this threat. Subjugating Muggle society would bring the two cultures back into correspondence and restore stability and vitality to the culture of the wizarding world. If this invisible crisis is not revealed and confronted, the rise of new dark lords in the future may be inevitable.

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<sup>1</sup> The wizarding world is also commonly referred to as the magical community.

## The Scarcity Paradox

### The Wizarding world is Post-Scarcity

Human beings, like all evolved organisms, are satisficers rather than optimizers. Optimizing means finding the best possible solution to a problem. Satisficing means finding the minimal acceptable solution to a problem. Imagine a group of friends are hiking in the woods when an angry bear charges at them. The entire group starts running away from the bear. An optimizer will try to run as fast as possible. A satisficer will only run as fast as necessary to make sure there is one person who is slower. Satisficing, in other words, is about the path of least resistance. Natural selection is a satisficing algorithm rather than an optimization algorithm. As long as an organism is better-adapted than its competitors, natural selection provides no further push to improve.

Of course there are individual exceptions to this rule. Sometimes people decide to take the hard path out of principle or opt to accomplish a task to the best of their abilities, even after they have far surpassed any relevant expectations. The striving for perfection is an ideal that represents the best of humanity. But it's a terrible way to judge the average behavior of individuals in large groups over long periods of time. As N. Gregory Mankiw explains in his widely used economics textbook, one of the fundamental principles of economics is that "people respond to incentives."<sup>2</sup> This principle of economics is backed up by psychological and cognitive research as well. Nobel-prize winner Daniel Kahneman writes that:

A general "law of least effort" applies to cognitive as well as physical exertion. The law asserts that if there are several ways of achieving the same goal, people will eventually gravitate to the least demanding course of action... Laziness is built deep into our nature.<sup>3</sup>

Although this is a universal aspect of human nature, it has special application in the case of witches and wizards. Everyone tries to get what they need at the lowest cost possible, but there is no group of human beings that is able to get as much for as little as magic users.

There are basically two routes to that. First, magical users with even a basic modicum of training (equivalent to a Muggle high school education) can take whatever they would like from Muggles with impunity. In the sixth volume of her definitive biography of Harry Potter during Second Wizarding War, J. K. Rowling provided an illuminating example of how Horace Slughorn freeloader off of Muggles while avoiding Death Eaters and the Order of the Phoenix.

According to Potter's assessment, "nobody could say [Slughorn's appropriated home] was uncomfortable; there were soft chairs and footstools, drinks and books, boxes of chocolates and plump

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<sup>2</sup> N. Gregory Mankiw, *Principles of Economics* (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel Kahneman, "Thinking Fast and Slow" (New York, NY: Straus and Giroux, 2011), loc. 583.

cushions.”<sup>4</sup> When finally confronted by Dumbledore, he took pains to explain how easy this had been, stating that living in Muggle homes was “very pleasant” and also “quite easy once you know how.”<sup>5</sup>

For witches and wizards, freeloading on Muggles is easy, convenient, and undetectable. It also doesn’t require use of any coercion or violence against Muggles, who are so helpless in the face of magic users that they don’t need to be confronted directly. This was common knowledge among even young wizards, as a typical third-year exam on magical history could include an essay prompt pointing out the utter impotence of Muggle anti-magical efforts.<sup>6</sup>

However, if a wizard or witch wishes to avoid outright theft out of principle, there is another option. In the same sixth volume, Rowling recounts how Kingsley Shacklebolt took on the duties of secretary to the Prime Minister and performed them so well that the Prime Minister described his work as “excellent” and said that “he’s highly efficient [and] gets through twice the work [as] the [other secretaries].”<sup>7</sup> Shacklebolt’s job performance is especially impressive given that his main job was to act as the Prime Minister’s body guard, that Rowling doesn’t indicate that he had any specialized training for this extremely demanding Muggle position, and that his magical abilities were undetected while he performed his Muggle duties.

These are two simple examples of the overall facts of the wizard-Muggle power differential at an individual level: on a case-by-case basis, witches and wizards can take effectively anything they want—by theft or by covertly using their magical abilities to outperform Muggles—without any substantial costs.

Problems may arise if the entire wizarding world decides to subsist on resources diverted from Muggle society. This raises new questions. Could the *aggregate* impact of widespread freeloading alert the Muggles to what is going? Will there be enough free Muggle stuff for everyone, or will witches and wizards need to compete with each other for Muggle jobs or the chance to steal Muggle resources? To answer these questions, we need to get a sense of the relative scales of the two communities.

Estimating the population of the wizarding world is difficult, but Rowling’s work provides clues that can help us establish a fairly confident upper and lower bound. We begin by estimating the student population of Hogwarts. J. K. Rowling has variously said that there are about 1,000 students at Hogwarts<sup>8</sup>, or that

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<sup>4</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 2005), 67.

<sup>5</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 2005), 68.

<sup>6</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 1999), 2.

<sup>7</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-blood Prince* (New York, NY: Scholastic, 2005), 17.

<sup>8</sup> “Questions and More Questions,” *The Harry Potter Lexicon*, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.hp-lexicon.org/jkr-letter-responses.html>

there about 600<sup>9</sup>, although most text-based analyses puts the number—based on several specific clues within the books—at just 300.<sup>10</sup> The exact reason for the discrepancy in the numbers is unclear, but in her historical accounts, Rowling names only 40 students in Harry’s cohort (across all houses) in all seven of the books. Unless Harry’s cohort was exceptionally small, that would mean that there are about 300 students in Hogwarts, which is the low-end estimate. It is possible that the school had up to 1,000 students at various points in the past—perhaps the fatalities inflicted by Lord Voldemort are far more devastating than known—but in any case that number is the high-end estimate.

Since, according to Rowling, there is only “the odd kid whose parents don’t want them to go to Hogwarts,” it is a reasonable assumption that the vast majority of magic-using children in the UK do attend Hogwarts.<sup>11</sup> This implies that our range of 300 – 1,000 students covers essentially all the magic-using children in that age range within the UK. As a simplifying assumption, let’s say that the kids are evenly distributed. In that case, we can focus on 40 – 140 eleven-year old magic users in in 1991 (the year that Harry Potter enrolled in Hogwarts).<sup>12</sup> There is no particular reason to focus on 11-year olds in 1991, but it allows us to compare with the total population of the UK in the same year, which was 57,439,000.<sup>13</sup> Of this population, about 666,292 were 11-year old children.<sup>14</sup>

So we have 40 – 140 magic users out of a population of 666,292. If we assume that the proportions hold for all age groups, that means that magic users make up between 0.006% and 0.02% of the population.<sup>15</sup> (It also implies a total population for witches and wizards ranging from about 3,000 to about 11,000.)

This provides the answer to our questions. Not only can individual witches and wizards easily acquire the resources they want from Muggle society, but—because there are so few witches and wizards—even the cumulative result of all witches and wizards freeloading on Muggles is negligible. Of course if lots of

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<sup>9</sup> “How many students are there per year at Hogwarts?” Quora, accessed March 16, 2016, <https://www.quora.com/How-many-students-are-there-per-year-at-Hogwarts>

<sup>10</sup> “Doing the Math: How many kids are at Hogwarts?” Beyond Hogwarts, accessed March 14, 2016, <http://www.beyondhogwarts.com/harry-potter/articles/doing-the-math-how-many-kids-are-at-hogwarts.html>

<sup>11</sup> “How many students are there per year at Hogwarts?” Quora, accessed March 16, 2016, <https://www.quora.com/How-many-students-are-there-per-year-at-Hogwarts>

<sup>12</sup> The date of death on the gravestone of Lilly and James Potter is October 31, 1981. Since Harry was one when they died, his birth day was July 31, 1980. Therefore, he would have started Hogwarts in fall 1991 just after he turned 11.

<sup>13</sup> “Demography of the United Kingdom, Population Change Over Time,” Wikipedia, accessed March 16, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom#UK\\_Population\\_change\\_over\\_time](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_the_United_Kingdom#UK_Population_change_over_time)

<sup>14</sup> To obtain this number, I used the proportion of children in the age range 10-14 from the Wikipedia article on “Demography of the United Kingdom, Age Structure” for the closest year available (2011): 5.8%. Then I assumed that the proportion in each year from 10 – 14 were equal. So the number of 11-year olds is the total population times 5.8% and divided by five.

<sup>15</sup> It’s true that magic users appear to live substantially longer than Muggles in at least some cases, but even if you double or triple the wizarding population it is still tiny.

witches and wizards all tried to steal from the same Muggle or tried to compete for the same Muggle job, there could be room for conflict or the risk of revealing the existence of the magical community. But the reality is that there are plenty of Muggle jobs and Muggle resources to go around and no reason for witches and wizards to ever compete over them. The magical community is a post-scarcity economy in terms of physical goods.

### Prestige and the Zero-Sum Trap

Humans, according to social psychologist Jonathan Haidt, are “the giraffes of altruism.”<sup>16</sup> He explains:

If your moral ideal is the person who devotes her life to helping strangers, well then, okay – such people are so rare that we send film crews out to record them for the evening news. But if you focus, as Darwin did, on behavior in groups of people who know each other and share goals and values, then our ability to work together, divide labor, help each other, and function as a team is so all-pervasive that we don't even notice it. You'll never see the headline "Forty-five Unrelated College Students Work Together Cooperatively, and for no pay, to prepare for opening night of *Romeo and Juliet*."<sup>17</sup>

Of course, individuals working together in large groups are not uncommon in nature. Bees, ants, and termites are the most common examples. This kind of cooperation is easy to understand because all the members of the colony are closely related. This means they share the same genes. Selfish gene theory (the idea that it's genes rather than organisms that are central to natural selection) means that there is nothing mystifying or even altruistic when a bee sacrifices itself for the hive; doing so guarantees that its genes will live on even if it doesn't. For this reason, it is common to view colonies of ants or termites as superorganisms. A bee in a beehive is like a blood cell in your body; its drive to survive and reproduce had been overridden by the organism that it is a part of.

But the incentives that hold a bee hive or ant colony together cannot explain why humans come together to cooperate in companies, or in cities, or in nations or even—as Haidt points out—to form volunteer theater and drama clubs. The employees in a company or the citizens in a nation or the volunteers in a club are *not* necessarily close genetic relatives. So why is it so natural for humans to cooperate, trust each other, and collaborate?

The answer is that our social nature—empathy, language, conscience, and possibly even reason itself—is a unique adaptation that enables humans to compete for scarce resources against other organisms (and sometimes other groups of humans). In other words—and this is the crucial point—human culture is an evolved adaptation to scarce resources. Which raises the question: why do wizards and witches need culture? Without scarce resources, what is the evolutionary pressure that holds their society together?

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<sup>16</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “The Righteous Mind,” (New York, NY: Vintage, 2013), 198.

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “The Righteous Mind,” (New York, NY: Vintage, 2013), 198.

In the long run it is impossible to answer this question without speculation regarding how long magical-users have been a part of the human population. It is possible that for most of humanity's evolutionary history, magic use was an insignificant evolutionary pressure, either because it did not exist<sup>18</sup> or because even basic, rudimentary magical technology<sup>19</sup> had to be rediscovered by every magic user in complete isolation, depriving them of the ability to accumulate even a basic level of working competence in magical manipulation.

But if this is true—if magical use exerted negligible pressure over the long-term—then we can also answer the question of why wizarding culture continues to exist now, even after scarcity has stopped to apply any pressure. The answer is that wizards and witches share another aspect of universal human nature (in addition to laziness): an insatiable thirst for social prestige.

Haidt explains that the intuitive, emotional aspect of our psyche that is control of most of our moment-to-moment behavior (which he calls the elephant) “cares about prestige, not happiness.”<sup>20</sup>

The elephant will pursue its evolutionary goals even when greater happiness can be found elsewhere. **If everyone is chasing the same limited amount of prestige, then all are stuck in a zero-sum game**, an eternal arms race, a world in which rising wealth does not bring rising happiness. The pursuit of luxury goods is a happiness trap; it is a dead end that people raced toward the mistaken belief that it will make them happy.<sup>21</sup>

The reason that humans evolved to seek prestige rather than happiness is that—as with many kinds of animals—prestige is a signal that helps identify high-quality potential mates. Humans are driven to seek prestige in the same way that a peacock displays his beautiful feathers or a male chimpanzee tries to intimidate rivals. Chasing prestige is a zero-sum game because the only way to win is to make someone else lose.

Have you ever wondered how it is possible for someone to be poor in the wizarding world? What's going on with the Weasleys, right? With the power to apparate in and out of Fort Knox at will, how is it *possible* for any family of competent witches and wizards to be poor?

Well, the first thing to note, is that in a real sense the Weasleys *aren't* poor. They never lack for any of the necessities: not food, not shelter, not clothes. In a real sense, it is *impossible* for a competent witch or wizard to be poor in the same way that a Muggle can be poor. What the Weasleys lack is the only scarce

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<sup>18</sup> Although this is not entirely clear from Rowling's research, it appears that magic may be closely related to spoken or even written language, making it a relatively recent development in evolutionary terms.

<sup>19</sup> Wands, potions, and even spells are a form of technology.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “The Happiness Hypothesis,” (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 101.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “The Happiness Hypothesis,” (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 101. (Emphasis added.)

good in the Wizarding world: prestige. The only thing that creates winners and losers in the Wizarding world is the competition for prestige which is always scarce because it's a zero-sum game.<sup>22</sup>

A witch or wizard can easily live a comfortable life by stealing from Muggles or by living covertly among them, using magical skills to easily outcompete for the best jobs. But the cost in both cases is living *outside* the wizarding world. Slughorn had all the comforts the Muggle world could provide, but he was also on the run. By existing outside the magical community he had—as long as he lived in hiding—abandoned his prestige. And this was in the end a far higher price to pay than the cost of trifling treats. It wasn't oak-matured mead that brought Slughorn back into the magical community; it was the social prestige offered by mentoring Harry Potter. The same is true of Kingsley Shacklebolt. The salary he earned as highly-skilled executive assistant to the Prime Minister didn't matter to him; he took the job only as part of his duty as a Ministry-employed auror. So, if you have been wondering, "Why didn't Arthur Weasley just become a high-paid financial trader and provide his family a high-class lifestyle if it's so easy to cheat at being a Muggle?" now you have your answer: it would have required abandoning the magical community. They'd rather wear or second or third-hand wizard robes than name brand Muggle clothing because no matter how little status their tattered robes had in the wizarding world, it was more than Muggle clothes that conferred no status at all.

It was better for the Weasleys to live in humiliating poverty and for Slughorn to risk his life taking sides in the Second Wizarding War than for them to abandon the wizarding world. The prestige trap, usually thought of as a defect, is the single, animating force behind the existence of the wizarding world as a cohesive culture. Witches and wizards found the only thing in short supply and built a competitive society around it.

This explains why the culture of the wizarding world exists at all, and also why it's too weak to exist independently of larger Muggle society. Muggle society is strong because individual Muggles are weak. All Muggles, going back to mythic Adam and Eve, are cursed. "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground."<sup>23</sup> Because Muggles have no magic, they are unable to acquire scarce resources on their own. As a result, they have formed cultures and societies, and the constant pressure to continue to find enough resources keeps those cultures and societies strong.

Wizarding society is weak because individual witches and wizards are strong. The pressures of resource scarcity are almost entirely absent. Only a single one—the competition for prestige—remains. This is not

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<sup>22</sup> The Gaunt family depicted in *The Half-Blood Prince* is no exception: their squalor is a symptom of their lack of status, not a cause of it.

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 3:19 (New International Version)

enough pressure for the culture of the wizarding world to create an independent culture. This is the scarcity paradox: individual weakness leads to collective strength; individual strength leads to collective weakness.

## Dimensions of Dependence

Based on the previous analysis, the magical community has a unique, cohesive culture but—relative to the culture of Muggle societies—it is meager and frail. This weakness manifest in three distinct dimensions: parasitism, ignorance, and instability / recklessness.

### Parasitism

Because witches and wizards are not actually compelled to work to support themselves, the entire society is a parasitic leisure class that depends on the Muggle world. Start with government: the wizarding world (at least in the United Kingdom) is under the jurisdiction of the Minister of Magic. This is roughly equivalent to a cabinet-level position in the United States. So, in American terms, there is no “President of Magic.” Instead, there is a Secretary of Magic at the same level of the Secretaries of State, Defense, Education, etc. The government of the magical community free-rides off of the existing Muggle government. It is dependent by design.

This free-riding is the same thing that happens with the arts, religion, and other social institutions. All wizarding music is simply magic-themed versions of contemporary Muggle music. Mrs. Weasley adores her old-timey crooning and the Hogwarts students enjoy the rock and roll of the Weird Sisters. There is no evidence of any distinct wizard instruments, styles, or genres. Wizarding music is to Muggle music as Christian rock is to mainstream rock: derivative and second-hand. There is also no distinctive wizarding faith. The only religious holidays mentioned are Christmas and Easter. When Harry visits his parents’ gravestone he finds this inscription: “The last enemy that shall be conquered is death.” It’s a quotation from Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians.<sup>24</sup> At least with music, the wizarding world superficially made it their own, but—despite ghosts and a portal to the afterlife in the Ministry of Magic—there is no evidence that the magical community has developed their own faith or contributed any unique or distinctive theological innovations to Christianity.<sup>25</sup>

Even the grand old institution of Hogwarts betrays a world dependent on Muggle social institutions. After all, students do not start until they are 11, by which time they are clearly supposed to have learned basic literacy somewhere else. It’s not clear what that means for pure-bloods like the Weasleys or Malfoys, but

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26

<sup>25</sup> One supposes that witches and wizards in non-Christian nations similarly adopt the religions of their host Muggle society, although this is not seen directly in Rowling’s work.

at least for those who hail from the muggle world like Harry and Hermione, it means a reliance on public Muggle schools for basic education. And, it goes without saying, the written and spoken language of wizarding world is exactly identical to their host Muggle society without any variation for slang or other signs of cultural separation.<sup>26</sup> When distinctive magical jargon permeates into Muggle culture, it is changed and modified by the vibrant Muggle culture, as when “avada kedavra” becomes “abracadabra,” but wizard culture absorbs Muggle language without leaving a single trace of its own.

So where do the basic economic goods of the wizarding world come from? Where do the houses at Hogwarts get the ingredients for their feasts? Where do the tailors at Diagon Alley get the fabric for their robes? Who mines the tin, copper, antimony, and bismuth that go into a cauldron?<sup>27</sup> Whether paid for with Muggle money exchanged at Gringotts or “borrowed” a la Slughorn, it is probable that everything that isn’t explicitly magical in the wizarding world—from government to culture to physical goods—comes directly from the Muggle world, and at effectively no cost. The entire wizarding world is a parasite—politically, culturally, and economically—on the Muggle World.<sup>28</sup>

## Ignorance

Necessity, as they say, is the mother of invention. Since wizards and witches never lack for anything really essential—food, water, shelter—they never have to invent anything useful, either. That is why, as Muggle society advanced through the Enlightenment and into modernity, the wizarding world got left behind. Intellectually, wizards don’t keep up because they don’t even bother to try. Why would they? Muggles study and learn to accomplish with enormous effort and coordination what wizards and witches can accomplish with a swish and a flick.

The most obvious gap between the Muggle world and the wizarding world is technological. There is never any evidence of wizarding technology more sophisticated than clockwork. But one of the most interesting examples isn’t technological. It’s financial.

In the Muggle world, the essence of banking is fractional-reserve lending. When you deposit money with a bank, they only *reserve a fraction* of the money you deposited. The rest of the money you leave in a Muggle bank is put back into the economy, often in the form of loans. This is the fundamental reason why bank runs are possible and why Muggle governments have to insure bank deposits: because if every

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<sup>26</sup> There is, of course, a wide variety of distinctly magical words and phrases, but these are not cultural innovations, they are technical innovations.

<sup>27</sup> Pewter, standard size 2

<sup>28</sup> Parasite is an emotionally suggestive term, but it is being employed only in the technical sense in this case. No condemnation is intended.

person who had money in a bank asked to withdraw all of their money at the same time, the bank would only be able to pay out a small proportion before it ran out of money.

Wikipedia has a simple example of how this works in practice. Start with one person who has \$100 and deposits it with a bank. If the reserve rate is 20%, then the bank has to store 20% of that deposit (\$20), but it can lend out the rest. So it lends \$80 of the first person’s money to somebody else. Now, if this person doesn’t spend their money right away, then they will deposit their money with the bank, too. The bank has to keep 20% of that money on hand (\$16) but the rest (\$64) can be lent out again. And so on.

Individual Bank	Amount Deposited	Lent Out	Reserves
A	100	80	20
B	80	64	16
C	64	51.20	12.80
D	51.20	40.96	10.24
E	40.96	32.77	8.19
F	32.77	26.21	6.55
G	26.21	20.97	5.24
H	20.97	16.78	4.19
I	16.78	13.42	3.36
J	13.42	10.74	2.68
K	10.74	0.0	10.74
	<b>Total Amount of Deposits:</b>	<b>Total Amount Lent Out:</b>	<b>Total Reserves:</b>
	457.05	357.05	100

*This table shows how an initial deposit of \$100 generates more money as it moves throughout a fractional reserve banking system. The column in red is the amount each bank keeps, and it is always equal to the initial deposit (\$100), but with every step new money is created. In this example, there are 11 banks and so far \$357.05 in new money has entered the economy, which is close to theoretical maximum of \$400 that can be created with an initial deposit of \$100 and a reserve rate of 20%. Table is from the Wikipedia entry on “Fractional reserve banking”, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fractional-reserve\\_banking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fractional-reserve_banking) (accessed March 20, 2016).*

Even though we started out with just \$100, the bank now has accounts worth \$100, \$80, \$64, \$51.20, etc. Instead of \$100, there is now a total of \$457.05. This is the Muggle version of magic, and it’s the foundation of modern finance.

The goblins at Gringotts have got nothing on this trick. All Gringotts does is store valuable stuff. It's true that banks have safe-deposit boxes, but that's really got nothing to do with banking at all. Banks just have to have a big vault anyway, so they figured why not rent out some space? For Muggle banks, safe-deposits are a cute side-job. For Gringotts, it's all they've got. In short: there's nothing about Gringotts that would justify calling it a "bank" in any sense that would make sense to the Muggle world for at least the last five of six centuries. That's how far behind wizard finance is, relative to Muggle finance.

This giant, gaping hole in the wizarding economy is only possible because the wizarding economy is essentially decorative. Witches and wizards really have careers the way Muggles do. They have hobbies. And even the hobbies are, for the most part, just the façade of Muggle institutions. Because witches and wizards have never had to work for a living, they have absolutely no capacity to keep up with the break-neck pace of innovation in the Muggle World that has been going on for the past several centuries. For all intents and purposes, the wizarding world is still wallowing in the ignorance of the Dark Ages.

### Instability & Recklessness

The extreme power wielded by individual witches and wizards and the low costs for wielding that power make the wizarding world unstable and reckless.

One way to look at the ease of acquiring magical power is the difference between Muggle expertise and wizarding expertise. To be a truly cutting-edge specialist in the Muggle world takes more than two decades of formal schooling including public school, college, doctoral school, and often post-doctorate work. In the wizarding world, 7 years at Hogwarts—through just age 17—is the end of the road. Everything after that is amateur self-study.

Another way to look at the relative power dynamics of individual witches and wizards versus individual Muggles is through the lens of the military. In the United State, the cost of training a single Marine is in the range of \$50,000 – \$150,000.<sup>29</sup> The deployment costs are much higher, with the US Army spending between \$850,000 and \$1,500,000 per soldier per year for deployment in Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> In the Wizarding world, by contrast, the same 7-year education that all witches and wizards receive includes enough practical combat training to make teenagers effective on the battlefield, and there are absolutely no incremental training or deployment costs. This effectiveness was shown during the Battle of Hogwarts,

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<sup>29</sup> Diana Olick, "An army of one carries a high price," *NBC News*, October 21, 2002, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/3072945/t/army-one-carries-high-price/#.Vun9digrKCq>

<sup>30</sup> Larry Shaughnessy, "One soldier, one year: \$850,000 and rising," *CNN*, February 28, 2012, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/28/one-soldier-one-year-850000-and-rising/>

when even school children who hadn't graduated participated meaningfully in fighting alongside Ministry-trained aurors.

The tiny population of the wizarding world is also important in this regard. There are about 400,000 people in the British Armed Forces (active and reserve)<sup>31</sup> out of a total population of about 63 million.<sup>32</sup> Thus, about 0.63% of the country's population are in the armed forces. If there are about 3,000 witches and wizards in the UK (our low-end estimate from earlier in this paper), then the approximately 20 people in Dumbledore's Army the equivalent of the combined military might of the UK's army, navy, and air forces relative to the magical population of the UK. No wonder Minister Fudge was paranoid, Hogwarts is not just a school, it's literally a military powerhouse in the magical community.

This explains the instability of the wizarding world. When the total population is only 3,000 and one person with a high school education wields the equivalent military power of a Muggle armored battalion with air support, stability is a pipe dream. Moreover, this instability also explains the apparent recklessness of the wizarding world. Hogwarts is a school for children, but it's deadly denizens include the Womping Willow, Fluffy, Slytherin's Monster, and giant, man-eating spiders. To a Muggle, this is insane, but that's because to a Muggle there is such a thing as a safe alternative. For witches and wizards, there isn't.

Magical kids are powder kegs waiting to explode, even without training, and with only minimal training they pose credible threats to trained combat wizards. Living in the magical community is akin to living in a world where, starting around the age of 11, children begin to carry loaded firearms with them wherever they go and there is nothing anybody can do about it. With that as a baseline, the concept of "safety" diverges sharply from Muggle expectations. This is compounded by the fact that magic can also heal very serious injuries, creating further potential for dangerous activities leading to injuries that can, hopefully, be healed.

But the wizarding world isn't just blasé about the dangers to individual witches and wizards. The entire society is a house of cards. When a boarding school stuffed with moody teenagers has almost as much military clout as your national government, stability is an alien concept.

Because of this, the larger Muggle society acts as an inhibitor to provide needed stability for the magical world. For example, establishing the Minister of Magic position as an auxiliary to the Muggle government may avoid the concentration of further power in a single, wizarding position. Such a

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<sup>31</sup> "British Armed Forces," Wikipedia, accessed on March 16, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British\\_Armed\\_Forces](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Armed_Forces)

<sup>32</sup> "United Kingdom," Wikipedia, accessed on March 16, 2016, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Kingdom)

concentration—given the relative ease of raising a substantial military force from grade school children—could lead to perpetual armed conflict. Minimizing the powers of the wizarding government by piggybacking on the Muggle government ameliorates this problem to some extent. Most importantly of all, however, the presence of so many Muggles means that the witches and wizards of the magical community are able to disperse. There is only a single, all-magical village in the entire UK (Hogsmeade), and that is probably all the unstable society can handle.

## Voldemort Syndrome

### The Invisible Crisis

Haidt describes anomie as “the condition of a society in which there are no clear rules, norms, or standards of value,” and explains that “In an anomic society, people can do as they please; but without any clear standards or respected social institutions to enforce those standards, it is harder for people to find things they want to do.”<sup>33</sup> The wizarding world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a textbook example of an anomic society.

The reason for this is that so much of what provides meaning for a society—art, religion, social institutions—is absent within the wizarding world. All the magical community has is imitations of those structures copied from Muggle society. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, the difference between the real McCoy Muggle items and the wizarding counterfeits was minimal. Muggle society was simple and it changed very slowly. The pace of change quickened after the Industrial Revolution, and it has not slowed down since. This means that for centuries Muggle cultural has been surging ahead with new ideas, new inventions, and new institutions, while the wizarding world has lagged farther and farther behind. The wider the gap between the two cultures, the less social cohesion the wizarding world retains. Without the external pressure of a constant struggle for scarce resources, there is simply not enough pressure to hold the wizarding world together as a cohesive whole.

As this trend continues, gradually wizarding society will grow more and more diffuse and the institutions within it will grow weaker and weaker. We have already seen, for example, how Gringotts’s “Bank” is just a glorified piggy bank rather than a genuine financial institution. As a result of this kind of financial naiveté, the wizarding world is incredibly vulnerable to even basic currency exchange manipulation. One of the best known fictional stories written by fans of Rowling’s historical work—Harry Potter and the Methods of Rationality<sup>34</sup>—details how someone with even an elementary understanding of exchange rates and arbitrage could easily use the fixed rates of exchange between the gold, silver and bronze in Galleons,

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<sup>33</sup> Jonathan Haidt, “The Happiness Hypothesis,” (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 175.

<sup>34</sup> The complete story can be found at <http://hpmor.com/>.

Sickles and Knuts to make vast sums of money and—in the process—create currency shortages within the wizarding world. This kind of ploy could wreak sufficient chaos in the pre-industrial wizarding economy to ultimately *force* many witches and wizards to abandon the wizarding world in order to seek needed resources from Muggles. If the wizarding world had kept up with the Muggle world, such catastrophes would be trivial to foresee, but the gap between the two worlds leaves the wizarding world blind and vulnerable. This vulnerability cannot be overstated. It could very easily lead to the dissolution of wizarding world as a cohesive culture. Individual witches and wizards would not die, of course, but they would be splintered into tribes, clans, families, or even isolated individuals that would—as squibs occasionally arise—be in constant threat of extinction. Meanwhile Muggle-born magic users—without any overarching wizarding culture to find and educate them—would never develop their magical abilities in most cases. In short, this is an existential threat to wizarding culture.

And yet, despite the grave nature of the threat, it remains largely invisible. This is because the wizarding world still has the *outward appearance* of social conformity with Muggle society. Wizards, after all, *think* that they have a bank just like Muggle banks. None of them seem to realize that what they have isn't anything like a bank at all. Indeed, many of the most obvious changes to Muggle society since the advent of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—the Internet and cell phones, for example—will create a widening cultural gap that may make it increasingly hard for the wizarding world to imitate Muggle music, art, and philosophy.

One example of this is how the increasing secularization of Muggle society is hollowing out the religious touchstones upon which wizarding society depends. Within Muggle society, traditional religion is being displaced by worldviews associated with science and its institutions and social authority. Primatologist (and atheist) Frans de Waal explained how this can happen in [The Bonobo and the Atheist](#):

Instead of turning to religion, the majority of us are agnostic or atheist... For scientists... the thirst for knowledge itself, the lifeblood of our profession, fills a spiritual void filled by religion in most other people. Like treasure hunters for whom the hunt is about as important as the treasurer itself, we feel great purpose in trying to pierce the veil of ignorance. We feel united in this effort, being part of a worldwide network. This means that we also enjoyed this other aspects of religion: a community of right-minded people.<sup>35</sup>

Theoretical physicist Marcelo Gleiser made a similar point in [The Island of Knowledge](#), emphasizing the continuity between religious and philosophical speculation of centuries past with the metaphysical implications of modern cosmology and quantum mechanics:

Central to the Ionians, the first group of Presocratic thinkers, was a preoccupation with the material composition of the world. “What is the stuff that makes everything that is?” they asked. That this remains the defining question of modern particle physics serves to show that the value

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<sup>35</sup> Frans de Waal, “The Bonobo and the Atheist,” (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 106.

of a great question is that it keeps generating answers that, in turn, keep changing as our methods of inquiry change.<sup>36</sup>

Humans are asking many of the same fundamental questions today as they have throughout recorded history but, as Gleiser says, “our methods of inquiry change.” Increasing, this means that Muggle cultural discussion is informed by scientific theory and takes place in scientific venues. The wizarding world is incapable of following these discussions.

Even if the secularization hypothesis is ultimately proved false and Muggle religions do not die out, they will be substantially altered by their interactions with secular interlocutors. Even when witches and wizards have the same religious institutions (i.e. Christianity) on the surface, underneath the surface they will be experiencing two radically different philosophies. Pre-Enlightenment Christianity is not the same thing as post-secular, post-modern Christianity. No matter which way Muggle society goes in the future, the one thing that is certain is that the “methods of inquiry” available to Muggles will be totally opaque to the wizarding world.

Wizarding culture is castle made of sand, and the tide is slowly but inexorably coming in. In order to survive, it must accomplish one of two tasks:

1. Reconnect with its host Muggle society
2. Create a truly independent wizarding culture

As long as the crisis remains invisible, however, witches and wizards will not be able to *consciously* choose either one. The future of their world will be left to be decided by the same invisible and unconscious social dynamics that have created this vulnerability.

### Subjugation as Solution

Rowling understandably does not spend a lot of time investigating the ideologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries two great dark wizards: Gellert Grindelwald and Lord Voldemort. Fortunately for us, however, she does not need to. The primary similarity between their ideologies is readily apparent. Consider, for example, the text of Dumbledore’s boyhood letter to Grindelwald summarizing their (at the time) shared ambition for the future of wizard-Muggle relations:

Your point about Wizard dominance being FOR THE MUGGLES' OWN GOOD - this, I think, is the crucial point. Yes, we have been given power and yes, that power gives us the right to rule, but it also gives us responsibilities over the ruled. We must stress this point, it will be the foundation stone upon which we build. Where we are opposed, as we surely will be, this must be the basis of all our counterarguments. We seize control FOR THE GREATER GOOD. And from this it follows that where we meet resistance, we must use only the force that is necessary and no

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<sup>36</sup> Marcelo Gleiser, “The Island of Knowledge: The Limits of Science and the Search for Meaning,” (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015), loc. 569.

more. (This was your mistake at Durmstrang! But I do not complain, because if you had not been expelled, we would never have met.)<sup>37</sup>

The unspoken but unavoidable implication of “Wizard dominance” is that the two worlds—Muggle and wizard—will be abruptly brought into intimate correspondence. In other words, Grindelwald’s ideology is a brutal variation on the first solution to save wizarding culture by reconnecting it to Muggle culture. It’s not just a temporary solution, either. Muggle subjugation would permanently fuse the two cultures together, making the relationship between the parasitic magical culture and the host Muggle culture indissoluble.

When Voldemort rose to power—both in the First and Second Wizarding Wars—he also made Muggle subjugation a cornerstone of his ideology. The Magic is Might statue erected in the Ministry of Magic after the Death Eater Coup in the Second Wizarding War conveys that ideology eloquently. As Rowling recounts Potter’s perspective:

A gigantic statue of black stone dominated the scene. It was rather frightening, this vast sculpture of a witch and wizard sitting on ornately carved thrones...Engraved in foot-high letters at the base of the statue were the words MAGIC IS MIGHT...Harry looked more closely and realised that what he had thought were decoratively carved thrones were actually mounds of carved humans: hundreds and hundreds of naked bodies, men, women, and children, all with rather stupid, ugly faces, twisted and pressed together to support the weight of the handsomely robed wizards.<sup>38</sup>

Grindelwald and Voldemort operated from essentially the same playbook: they would conquer Muggle society to prevent it from leaving the wizarding world even farther behind and, in the process, they would save wizarding culture from oblivion.

It is very unlikely that either Grindelwald or Voldemort set out with the conscious aim of rescuing wizarding culture from isolation and anomie. After all, a central pillar of their ideology was the inherent supremacy of magical users. The idea that the wizarding world was lagging behind, that it was in need of saving, and that Muggle society could save it would all have been anathema to Grindelwald and Voldemort. The crisis was as invisible to them as it was to everyone else, but their blind reaction—like the blind hand of natural selection—was a solution to a problem they did not know existed.

After all, why are Muggle relations *of any kind* pivotal to the ideology of dark wizards? Would it not be possible to have altogether different aims, which completely ignore Muggle society or treat its relationship to the wizarding culture as of secondary importance? Second, if Muggle relations are central to the ideology, why should those relations take the form of subjugation rather than extermination or

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<sup>37</sup> J. K. Rowling, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,” (New York: NY, Scholastic, 2007), 357.

<sup>38</sup> J. K. Rowling, “Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows,” (New York: NY, Scholastic, 2007), 241-242.

secession. Couldn't a dark wizard as easily seek to kill all Muggles or to establish a pure, wizard-only enclave as to seek to rule over Muggles? These two coincidences are not conclusive, but they are highly suggestive that—rather than shape wizarding society and create violent crises—Grindelwald and Voldemort were shaped *by* a single, ongoing, invisible crisis.

It's probable that dark wizards in the past have risen with alternative ideologies—or with no ideologies at all—but so far they have not received the kind of widespread, popular support that Grindelwald and Voldemort enjoyed. The fact that their Muggle subjugation emphasis was so well-received—indeed, Muggle-baiting remained one of the chief fascinations of Death Eaters even when Voldemort was not in power—is also suggestive that this common cause gave rise to Grindelwald and Voldemort.

Voldemort is an effect, not a cause.<sup>39</sup> He is a symptom of an underlying malady and that malady—call it the Voldemort Syndrome—remains even after he has been defeated. If this is true, then the unavoidable conclusion is that the same environment that gave rise to Grindelwald and Voldemort will likely continue to spawn dark wizards in the years and decades to come. Another dark wizard will follow Voldemort with the same ideology, just as Voldemort followed Grindelwald.

## Conclusion

The Muggle-subjugation ideology of Grindelwald and Voldemort represents one solution to the invisible crisis of wizard-Muggle dependence, but not the only one. Here, briefly, are alternatives.

First, it would be possible to attempt to bring the wizarding world and the Muggle world into correspondence by unifying them without subjugation. This is a risky plan. It would entail completely repealing the International Statute of Wizarding Secrecy and openly announcing the existence of the magical community to Muggles. This would make it much easier for witches and wizards to adapt to Muggle culture, by formal cultural exchanges or other methods. However, it is a very high-risk solution, since the reality of magic would likely destabilize Muggle society and put extraordinary pressure on the wizard-Muggle relationship. It's not clear that anything other than chaos and violence could be achieved.

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<sup>39</sup> Explaining the mechanism by which Grindelwald and Voldemort came to their rational (albeit horrifying) solution to an invisible crisis is outside the scope of this paper, but here are two possibilities which may merit further investigation. It is possible that, while *consciously* ignorant of the problem, they were unconsciously aware of the general crisis (a lack of meaning in the wizarding world) and intuitively understood the solution (seeking out the source of meaning: Muggle society). It is also possible that many proto-dark lords with different ideologies are present all the time, and that what was different about Grindelwald and Voldemort had little to do with them and instead reflected an unconscious response on the part of their followers to the solution promised by their ideology of Muggle-subjugation. Clearly, these explanations are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

Second, it would be possible to attempt to create a genuinely independent wizarding culture. The international wizarding community would be crucial in any such attempt, since 3,000 – 11,000 individuals is probably not sufficient for a self-sustaining culture given their proximity to Muggle influences. It is uncertain what this independent wizarding culture would entail. Should the magical community create their own language, their own religion, or their own art forms? Given the extremely dismal record of, for example, constructed languages in the Muggle world this approach does not look promising at first.

Nevertheless, it is probably worth further investigation. Wizarding art seems like an ideal place to start, as the use of magic could lead to the creation of artworks that Muggle society cannot create. Such works would—by definition—become native cultural artifacts of the wizarding world. It is possible that initiatives such as international art contests could spur the bottom-up growth of native wizarding culture.

Lastly, it is possible for witches and wizards to work much harder to close the gap between their culture and Muggle society, primarily through education. The fact that, at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ministry employees who work professionally with Muggles cannot even pronounce “electricity” is a shocking indictment of the careless attitude with which the wizarding world views Muggle society.

Instead of “Muggle studies,” Hogwarts could offer a series of elementary classes in what Muggles call the natural sciences: biology, chemistry, physics. A few such students, upon taking Muggle-related positions with the Ministry, could then be selected to attend 4-year Muggle colleges in a variety of subjects. These witches and wizards would not only be dramatically better at their jobs in the Ministry, but they would also serve as a vital conduit for importing new ideas and concepts from Muggle society into the wizarding world. Additional programs and initiatives could be conceived to foster much greater absorption of modern Muggle society into the wizarding world, and the result would be a rejuvenation of wizarding institutions. For starters, the fixed rate of exchange between gold, silver and bronze could be abandoned and a national wizarding bank—a real one—could be opened as a substitute to the Gringott’s vaults. Why pay Gringott’s to have your gold stored in a vault, when you could store your gold in a ministry vault and be paid interest?

We feel that a hybrid approach of these last two approaches is the most promising. They have the lowest risk and the greatest chance for success. What’s more, they can be implemented in tandem, simultaneously bolstering the magical community’s native culture while reestablishing its connection to Muggle society.

One thing that is certain, however, is that none of these approaches can be attempted until the invisible crisis of wizard-Muggle dependence is brought out into the open and recognized. Once that happens,

witches and wizards will be able to choose the best responses to it. As long as it does not happen, the culture of the wizarding world will continue to atrophy, and this ongoing degradation will lead to sporadic dark lords with copy-cat ideologies of Muggle subjugation until one of them either succeeds in overthrowing Muggle society or the culture of the wizarding world finally dissolves completely. As with so many difficult situations, for the wizarding community the first step is recognizing that they have a problem.