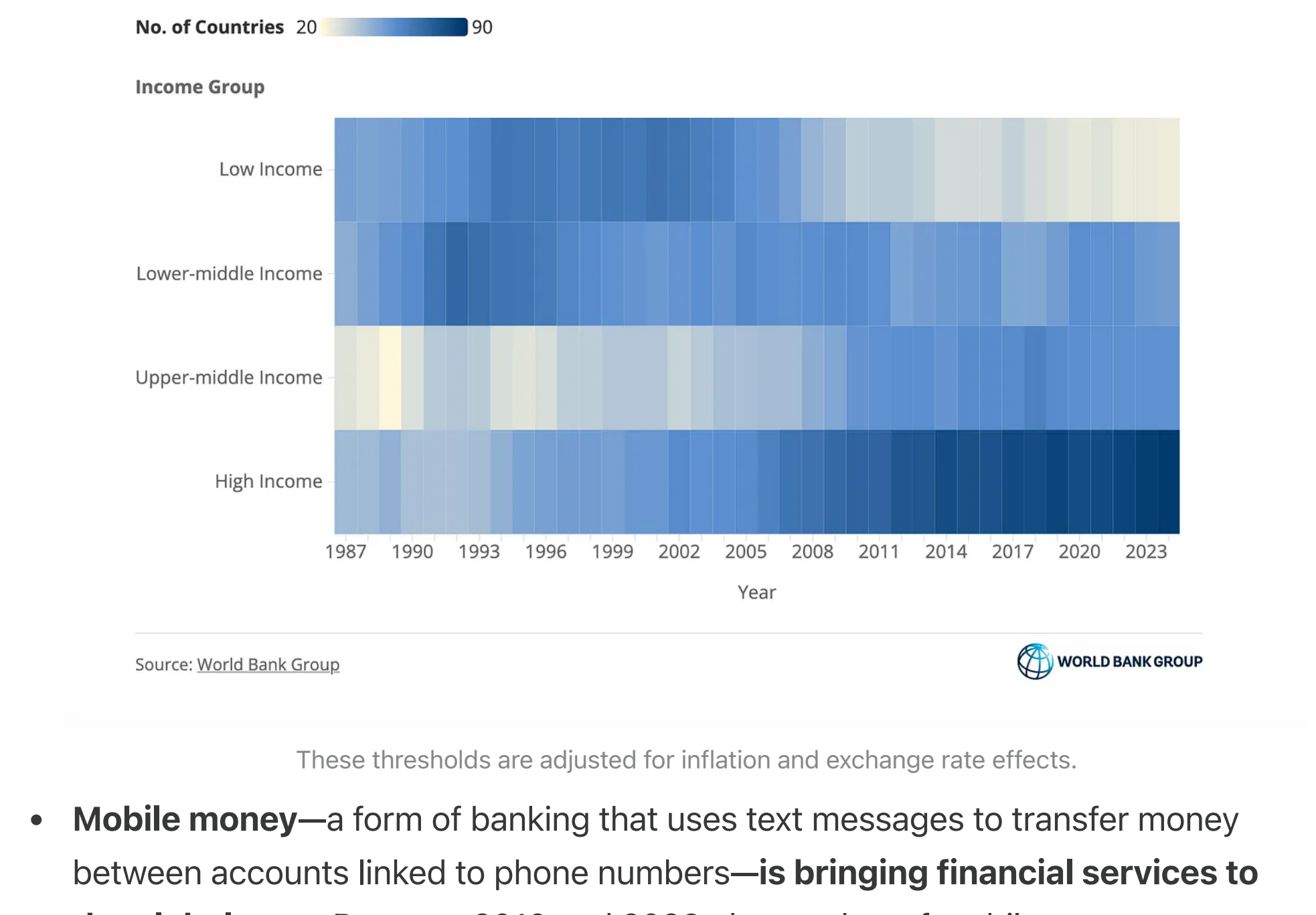


Economics & Development

- World Bank country income classifications reflect **tremendous global economic growth**. In 1987, the organization classified 30 percent of countries as low-income and 25 percent as high-income. In 2024, only 12 percent of countries were low-income, while 40 percent were in the high-income group.



- Mobile money**—a form of banking that uses text messages to transfer money between accounts linked to phone numbers—is **bringing financial services to the global poor**. Between 2010 and 2023, the number of mobile money accounts **grew from 13 million to 640 million worldwide**, including 330 million in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- According to a **recent Sustainable Development Goals report**, **92 percent of the world had access to electricity in 2023**, up from 87 percent in 2010.

Energy & Environment

Conservation and biodiversity

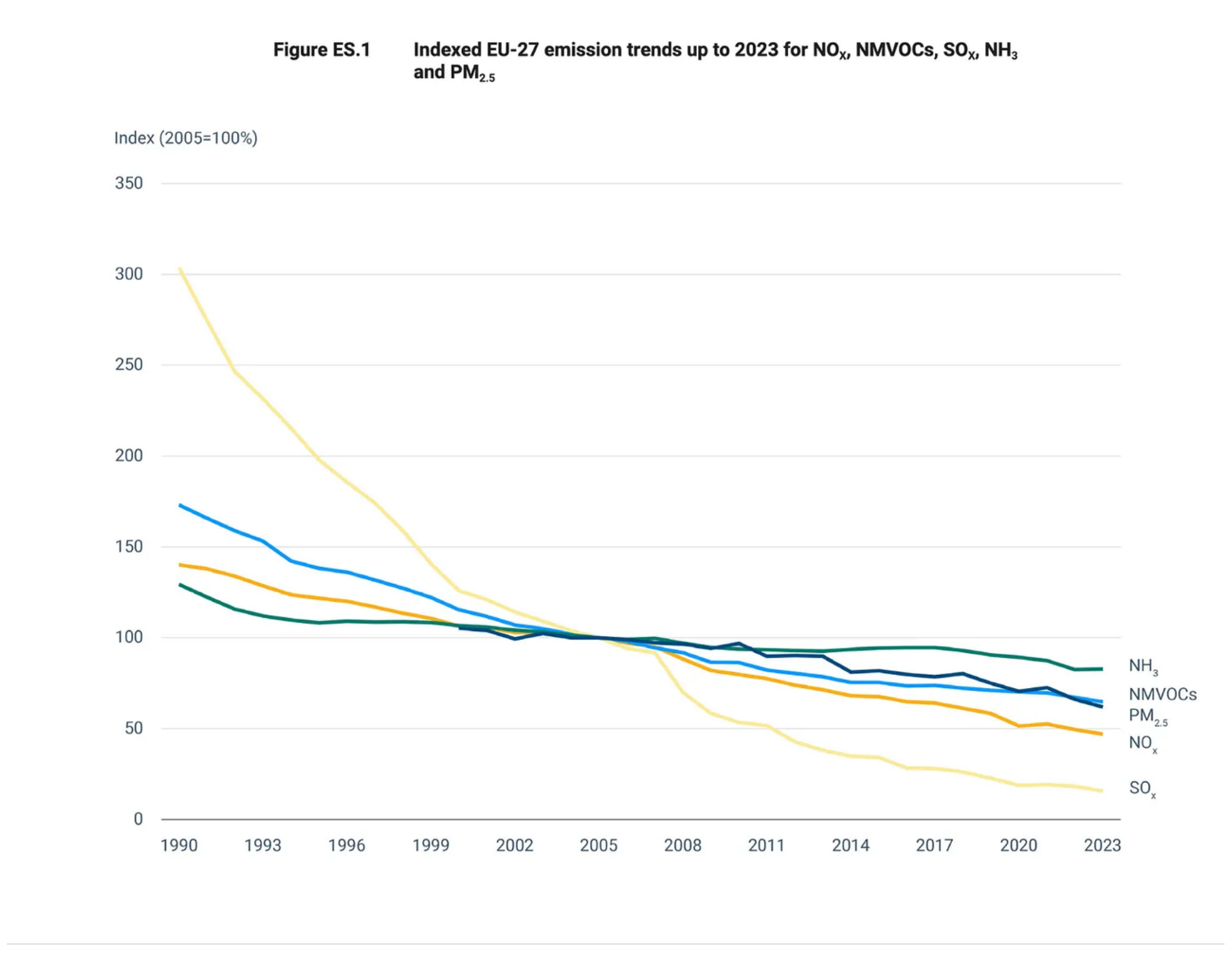
- Conservationists are **releasing *Wolbachia*-infected mosquitoes** in Hawaii to **control the spread of avian malaria**, which has devastated local bird populations.
- Scientists have developed a *rabies* vaccine for vampire bats that spreads naturally through grooming**. The vaccine is delivered via a gel applied to one bat’s fur. When others groom it, they ingest the gel and gain immunity. Laboratory studies show this method could effectively protect entire colonies.
- Colossal Biosciences**, the biotech company aiming to bring back extinct species, **has set its sights on the Moa**: a giant flightless bird from New Zealand devoured by Maori hunters 600 years ago.

Natural resources

- Atmospheric water harvesters**—devices that collect liquid water from humidity—are **becoming somewhat more practical** thanks to advancements in materials like **hydrogels** and **metal-organic frameworks**. One research team from UC Berkeley is **now exploring** using the devices to collect water using heat generated by data centers.
- The Japanese government plans to start testing deep-sea mining for rare-earth minerals** in January.

Pollution

- The city of Paris has determined that **the Seine is now clean enough for public swimming**, ending a century-long ban.
- A **recent report** on **European air pollution** found that all main pollutants (nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, sulfur oxides, ammonia, and fine-particle pollution) **fell substantially between 1990 and 2023**.



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Health & Demographics

- A Johns Hopkins–designed robot has learned to **autonomously perform gallbladder removal surgery**, completing a series of trials on pig tissue with perfect accuracy.
- Swiss regulators have approved **the first malaria treatment specifically designed for small babies**. The medicine could make it easier to treat the disease in infants without causing an overdose.
- Burundi has eliminated trachoma** as a public health problem, bringing prevalence of the blindness-causing disease below 0.2 percent in adults.
- A new gene therapy has **restored hearing** in patients with a rare form of **congenital deafness**. In the trial, all 10 patients improved after a single treatment and experienced no serious side effects.
- A **psychedelic compound found in the venom of the Colorado River toad** is **showing promise as a faster, simpler treatment for depression**. In a trial of 193 patients, a single dose eased symptoms for at least eight weeks with no serious side effects. Most patients were ready to go home after just 90 minutes—a big improvement over other psychedelics that can require all-day supervision.

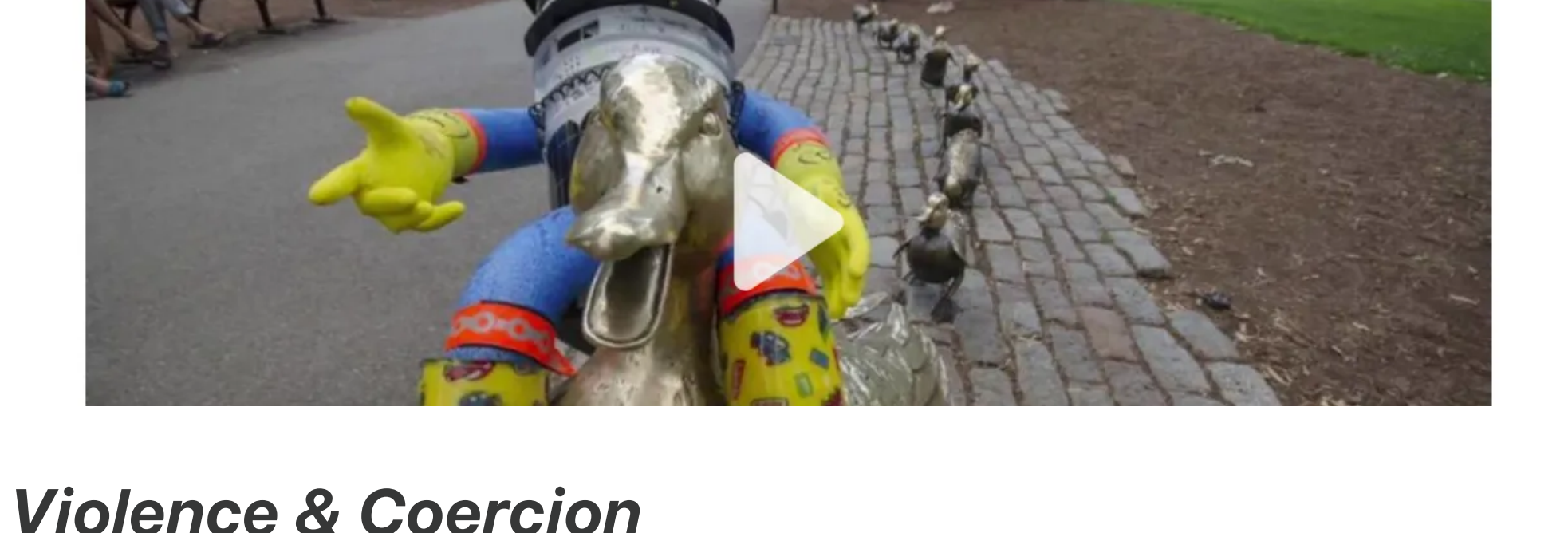
Science & Technology

- Microsoft, OpenAI, and Anthropic have partnered with the American Federation of Teachers to launch a “**National Academy for AI Instruction**” in New York City. The initiative aims to train 400,000 K–12 educators to effectively integrate AI tools into the classroom.
- Waymo has **begun testing** in Philadelphia in preparation for a possible expansion of its robotaxi service. A bold choice—it’s a **dangerous city** for robots.

HitchBOT, the hitchhiking robot, gets beheaded in Philadelphia

By [Todd Leopold](#), CNN

🕒 4 minute read · Updated 1:23 AM EDT, Tue August 4, 2015



Violence & Coercion

- Vietnam has ended the death penalty for eight crimes**, including embezzlement, drug trafficking, and various crimes against the state.
- The government of **Tajikistan has promised to stop arresting people for interacting with dissident content** on social media.

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OPINION

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By Richard J. Sexton

July 8, 2025 4:33 pm ET

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The Kids Need Optimism, Not Doom and Degrowth

Not only is the embrace of degrowth misguided, but research suggests that this doomsday mindset is causing widespread anxiety in young people.

CHELSEA OLIVIA FOLLETT
JUL 11, 2025

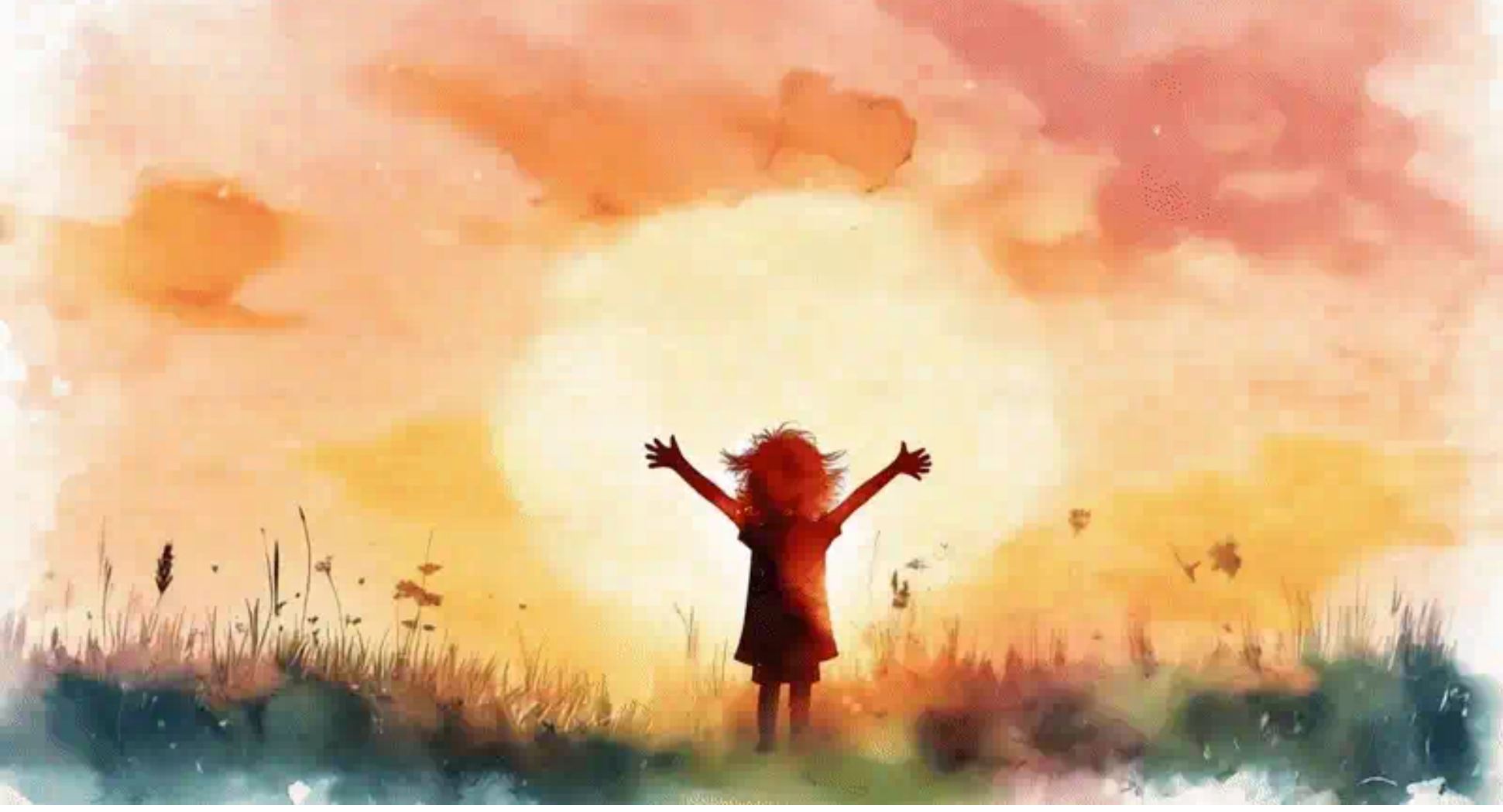
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My kids love nature and we go camping as a family frequently, but as a parent, I’m concerned about some of the messaging they receive on conservation. My husband and I talk about environmental stewardship with our children by emphasizing the eco-modernist approach: Human beings have the unique ability to innovate their way out of problems, creating technological solutions that benefit both people and the planet. Unfortunately, children today are often bombarded with messages of an impending apocalypse that can only be ward off by lowering living standards and embracing “degrowth.”

After a movie at her school about garbage in the oceans left her in tears as a teenager, Greta Thunberg came to believe that “technological solutions” and nondestructive economic growth are “fairytale.” But in the years following that formative experience, scientists have invented cleanup ships that consume ocean plastic as fuel and developed a type of plastic that harmlessly dissolves. Since the 1960s, global carbon dioxide emissions per dollar of gross domestic product have steadily declined, as technologies become greener and businesses cut energy costs. Yet Thunberg’s mindset still mirrors the messages she received growing up.

In the United States, many public elementary schools now devote one day during Earth Week to “zero waste” through the reduction of consumption. But it’s also possible to reduce waste through dematerialization: doing more with less via technology. Just think of all the devices a single smartphone replaces.

Even popular culture sometimes promotes this apocalyptic degrowth mindset to children. In a recent animated Disney movie called *Strange World*, the characters must give up electricity and drink cold coffee to protect a giant turtle-like creature and save their planet. In reality, protecting wildlife and rising living standards go hand in hand: Beloved species such as the loggerhead turtle are rebounding in wealthy parts of the world, which have far more resources to devote to environmental protection than poor areas. Richer countries usually score higher on Yale’s Environmental Performance Index.

Not only is the embrace of degrowth misguided, but research suggests that this doomsday mindset is causing widespread anxiety in young people. More than half of US youths aged 15–29 report experiencing “eco-anxiety,” a level of psychological distress that affects daily life, according to a 2024 poll. Another 2024 poll found that American middle and high school students’ most commonly reported emotional reactions to the thought of climate change were sadness, discouragement, helplessness, and uneasiness. A peer-reviewed paper explains how “climate anxiety can lead to symptoms such as panic attacks, loss of appetite, irritability, weakness and sleeplessness.” And that anxiety is international: A study from 2021, surveying 10,000 children and young people aged 16–25 in 10 countries, found that 59 percent of respondents were very or extremely worried about climate change, and more than 45 percent of respondents said those feelings negatively affected daily life and basic functioning.

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On Earth Day, my kindergartner came home from school having been told a familiar message: Riding a bike is better for the planet than driving a car. Her preschool had emphasized the same idea the year before. Many people love bicycles, but as the economist Tyler Cowen has pointed out, outside of poor countries, most people prefer cars to biking—and for good reason. For instance, without our minivan, it would be nearly impossible for my family to get around with three young kids, along with their snacks, spare clothes, and everything else.

Rather than romanticizing bicycling, what if we focused more on technological solutions that make driving cleaner or reduce commutes? That could mean greater freedom to innovate in fuel efficiency, easing regulations that limit electric cars’ potential to compete with traditional cars in the market, or removing outdated government barriers to remote work—such as telemedicine restrictions—to cut commutes. Zoning reform allowing more housing near workplaces could also reduce commutes and the associated pollution.

Instead of rushing to solutions that require lowering living standards via coercive government mandates or expensive taxpayer-funded subsidies, we should focus on the freedom to make technological advances that raise our standard of living while also mitigating environmental harm. An advantage of that approach is that it may also improve the mental health of young people—which would set this mom’s mind at ease.

This article was originally [published](#) in the summer 2025 issue of FreeSociety.

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The Ancient Roots of Western Self-Criticism

The West's enduring success is rooted in its awareness of its own faults and constant striving to be better.

MARIAN L TUPY
JUL 10, 2025

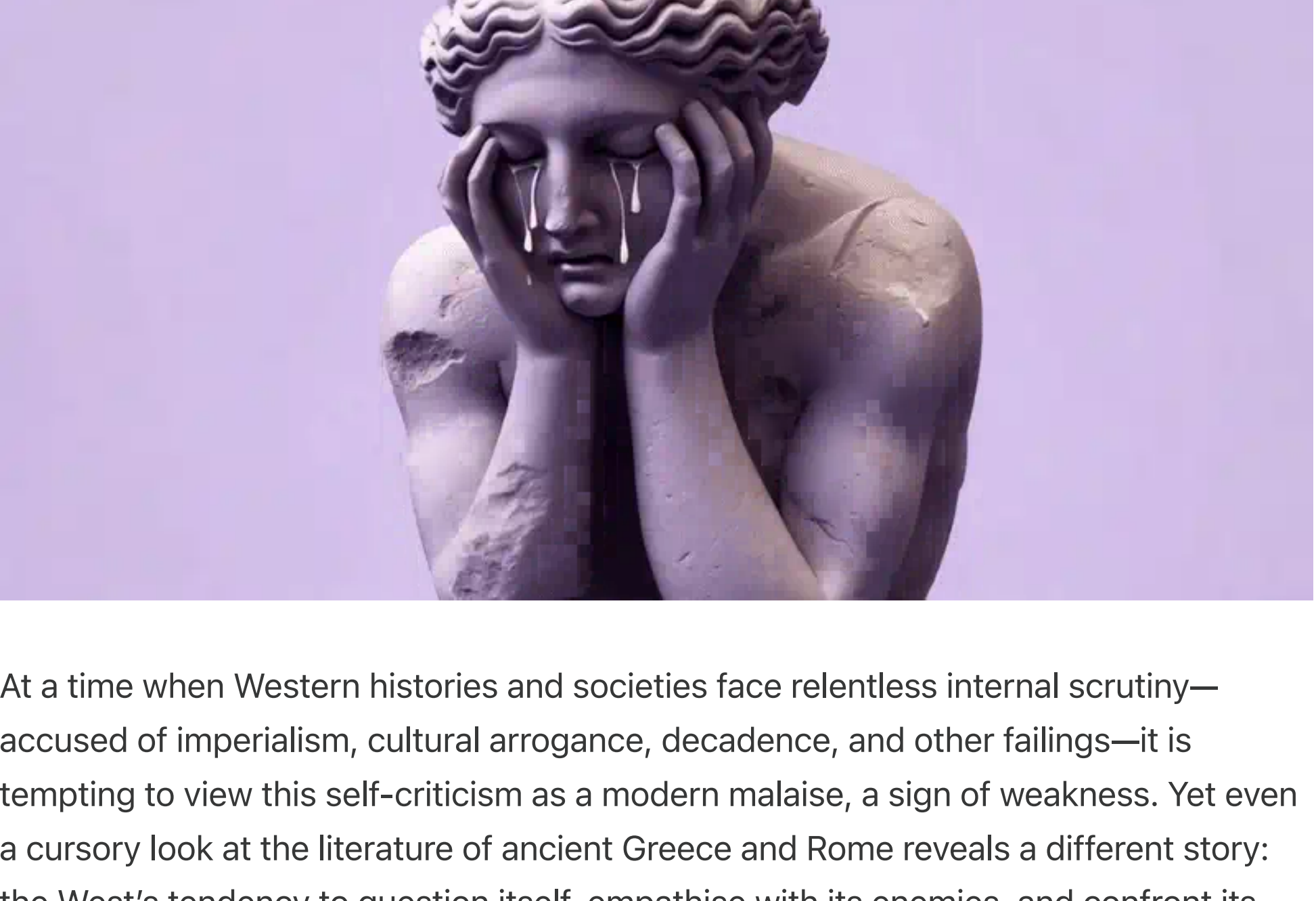
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At a time when Western histories and societies face relentless internal scrutiny—accused of imperialism, cultural arrogance, decadence, and other failings—it is tempting to view this self-criticism as a modern malaise, a sign of weakness. Yet even a cursory look at the literature of ancient Greece and Rome reveals a different story: the West's tendency to question itself, empathise with its enemies, and confront its own imperfections is not a recent phenomenon. It is age-old and unique. It may even be one of the main sources of Western strength. Far from undermining Western civilisation, this introspective tradition—evident in the works of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Virgil, Tacitus, and others—has catalysed its resilience and moral progress. By holding a mirror to their own flaws and extending sympathy to adversaries, the ancients laid the groundwork for a culture built on self-correction and the pursuit of betterment—traits that continue to define the West's success.

The ancient Greeks, whose city-states birthed and gave name to democracy, logic, ethics, geography, biology, aesthetics, economics, mathematics, astronomy, physics, history, politics, and philosophy, were no strangers to self-examination, even in times of war. Homer's *Iliad*—a foundational text of the Western literary canon, composed in the late eighth century BC—is a masterclass in humanising the enemy. While celebrating Greek heroism, Homer does not vilify the Trojans. Instead, he paints Hector, Troy's greatest but ultimately doomed warrior, as a devoted husband and father whose heartbreaking farewell to his wife, Andromache, moves readers nearly 3,000 years later. Later, Achilles, the Greek champion, shares a moment of profound empathy with Priam, the Trojan king, as they weep together over their respective losses. This is not mere storytelling; it is a moral stance, urging Greeks to see their enemies as mirrors of themselves, subject to the same cruel fate. Such understanding reflects a culture unafraid to question the glorification of conquest and to seek understanding across battle lines.

This introspective spirit shines even brighter in Greek tragedy. Its best-known playwrights—Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides—are generally rated, along with Shakespeare, as the greatest tragedians of all time; they used the stage to probe their society's values. In fifth-century BC Athens, tragedies were performed before a mass audience in an open-air theatre at the annual festival of Dionysus, god of wine and fertility. When people today think of plays, they imagine small theatres with audiences whose average level of education and intelligence is much higher than that of the general population. Given the composition of Greek audiences, therefore, the adversarial nature of Attic tragedies—built around the *agōn*, a formal clash of characters and ideals that let spectators see moral and political questions tested through direct confrontation—is even more remarkable. Let us look at a few examples.

In 472 BC, just eight years after the Greeks repulsed the Persian invasion at Salamis, Aeschylus, reportedly a veteran of the Battle of Marathon, presided over the performance of his play *The Persians*. It is an extraordinary example of cultural humility. Rather than gloating over a defeated foe, Aeschylus sets his drama in the Persian court, giving voice to Queen Atossa's grief and Xerxes' humiliation. The chorus of Persian elders laments the loss of their youth—a universal cry that would resonate with any Athenian who had lost a son in battle. Aeschylus could have written a jingoistic paean to Greek superiority; instead, he penned a tragedy that invited his audience to mourn with their enemies, acknowledging the hubris that threatens all nations.

Sophocles, too, contributes to this tradition in *Antigone* (c. 441 BC), where the adolescent heroine's defiance of King Creon's edict to leave her brother Polynices unburied pits individual conscience against state authority. Polynices, branded a traitor, is the “enemy,” yet Antigone's loyalty to him is portrayed as noble, and Creon's eventual regret reveals the folly of his rigid rule. The play's sympathy for those who challenge the state reflects a Greek willingness to question authority and empathise with outcasts—a precursor to modern debates about justice and dissent.

Finally, we come to the truly remarkable case of Euripides. In *Hecuba* (424 BC), *Trojan Women* (415 BC), and *Andromache* (date disputed), the playwright portrays the savage cruelty inflicted by victorious Greeks on the Trojan women they enslaved. In front of a mass audience—a significant share of which consisted of highly patriarchal Greek men—Euripides bemoans the horrific fate of enemy slave women at the hands of Greek men. By giving voice to the defeated, he challenges the moral certainty of conquest, urging his audience to see their enemies as victims of the same forces that could one day destroy Athens. These plays are not just art; they are acts of cultural self-criticism, exposing the flaws of Greek society—xenophobia, misogyny, hubris, cruelty—while affirming the humanity of those it deemed enemies. How modern.

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The Romans were great innovators in jurisprudence, administration, engineering, logistics, urban planning, and politics, bequeathing to the world such words as *republic*, *liberty*, and *legal*—concepts they valued highly. Culturally, however, they were greatly beholden to the Greeks. Virgil's *Aeneid* (19 BC) is both a national epic and, by consensus, the greatest work of Latin literature. It narrates how, after the Trojan War, the Trojan prince Aeneas led the remnants of his people to Latium, where they intermarried with the native Italians to become the ancestors of the Romans. The epic's high point is Aeneas' interaction with Dido, queen of Rome's archenemy Carthage. They have an affair, he leaves, and she commits suicide. Her curse on the departing Aeneas foreshadows Carthage's enmity, yet Virgil portrays her as a noble, broken figure—not a villain. In fact, Virgil focused readers' attention on Dido so completely that she became the heroine of the *Aeneid*. In the early fifth century AD, Macrobius, a Roman provincial author, observed, “The story of Dido in love ... flies through the attention of everyone to such an extent that painters, sculptors, and embroiderers use this subject as if there were no other ... that she committed suicide in order not to endure dishonour.” Virgil's Carthaginian queen remained the heroine of poetry (Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*), tragedy (Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*), and opera (Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*).

Tacitus, the greatest Roman historian, was also a senator, praetor, suffect consul, and proconsular governor of the province of Asia. In other words, he was at the very centre of the imperial establishment. Tacitus wrote *Agricola* (c. AD 98) to honour his eponymous father-in-law by recounting how the latter solidified Roman control over what is now England and Wales. Nevertheless, Tacitus attributes to Agricola's enemy, the British chieftain Calgacus, a powerful denunciation of the Roman Empire: “Plunder, slaughter, rapine they call by the false name of empire, and where they make a desert, they call it peace.” With that almost certainly invented statement, Tacitus undermined the proudest Roman boast—that empire brought peace (see *Aeneid* 6.852–53; the Pax Romana; and the Emperor Augustus' Altar of Peace). Similarly, in *Germania* (c. AD 98), Tacitus idealises the Germanic tribes' simplicity and courage, contrasting them with Rome's supposed decadence. By praising Rome's enemies, he holds a mirror to what he sees as his own society's moral decline.

Finally, Lucan's *Pharsalia* (c. AD 61–65), an epic of Rome's civil war, mourns Pompey Magnus, Caesar's rival, as a tragic figure fighting for the Republic's lost ideals. His murder in Egypt, lamented by Lucan, evokes sympathy for a defeated enemy whose loss marks Rome's slide into autocracy. Writing under Emperor Nero, Lucan uses Pompey's fate to critique tyranny, showing how sympathy for an enemy can serve as a veiled rebuke of one's own rulers.

The ancient Greeks and Romans waged wars, built empires, and committed atrocities. Yet their literature reveals a unique capacity to question those actions, to see the humanity in their adversaries, and to strive for moral improvement. This mindset formed a cornerstone of Western resilience—a culture that thrives on self-criticism, not self-congratulation, a culture that is alert to its faults and resolute in correcting them. To quote Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Disuniting of America*: “No doubt Europe has done terrible things, not least to itself. But what culture has not? ... There remains a crucial difference between the Western tradition and the others. The crimes of the West have produced their own antibodies. They have provoked great movements to end slavery, to raise the status of women, to abolish torture, to combat racism, to defend freedom of inquiry.”

Western self-criticism, then, is not new. What is new is the apparent imbalance between recognising Western shortcomings on the one hand and appreciating the West's magnificent bequests to humanity on the other. That should not be surprising, given that the commanding heights of Western culture—universities, museums, galleries, and theatres—have become dominated by a motley crew of Marxists, Frankfurt-schoolers, post-structuralists, deconstructionists, postcolonialists, de-colonialists and critical race theorists. Despondency over the future of the West, however, would be an over-reaction.

In 184 BC, amidst worry about Rome's decline, Cato the Elder won the election as Censor on a platform of a “great purification,” in which he aimed to “cut and sear ... the hydra-like luxury and effeminacy of the time.” At that point, Rome controlled Italy, Corsica, southern Spain, and small parts of the Dalmatian Coast. Yet, Rome proceeded to grow and would not reach its maximum territorial extent as well as the period of its greatest prosperity and tranquility until three centuries later, under the Nerva-Antonine Dynasty. It would take another three and a half centuries before the Western Empire disintegrated in AD 476.

Its eastern half survived under the leadership of rulers whose title was “Basileus ton Romaion” (King of the Romans) until the sack of Constantinople by the Ottomans in 1453—some 1,600 years after Cato expressed his concern over Rome's future. Paying homage to the Byzantine custom, Sultan Mehmed II declared himself “Kayser-i Rum” (Caesar of the Romans). By that time, Western Europe was on the mend. The Renaissance was in full swing, and in 1492, Columbus sailed for the New World. The stage was set for the Scientific Revolution, followed by the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and a half-millennium-long Western preeminence that transformed the globe—largely for the better. The revolutions that originated in Europe brought to all the peoples of the world greater knowledge, prosperity, and control over nature than anyone could previously have imagined possible. Let us, by all means, continue the tradition of self-doubt and self-criticism that have characterised Western civilisation from its beginning. However, now that the West has come under sustained and vitriolic attack from without and within, perhaps we should balance that self-criticism with recognition of Western civilisation's unmatched contributions to human wellbeing and progress.

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