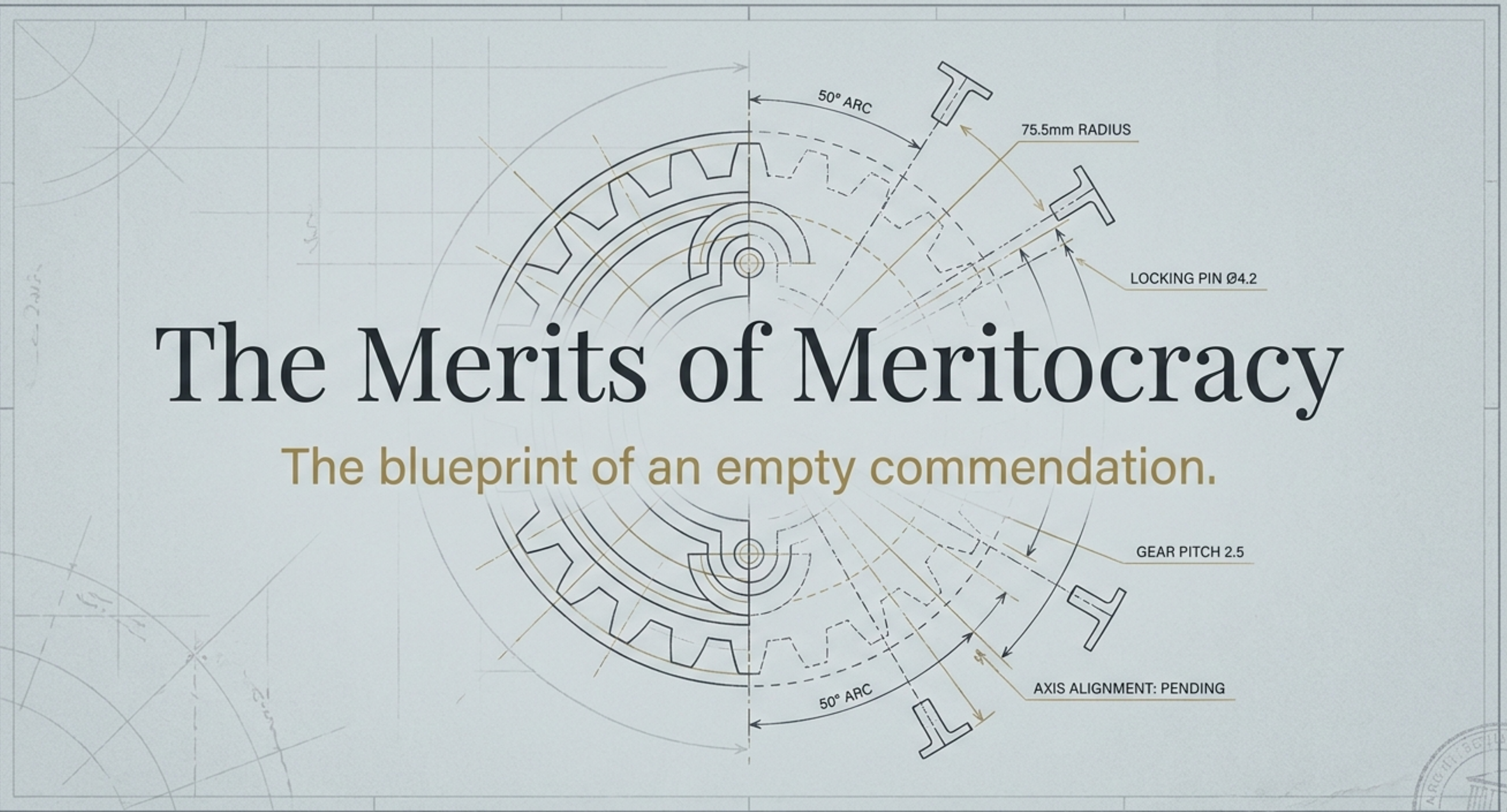
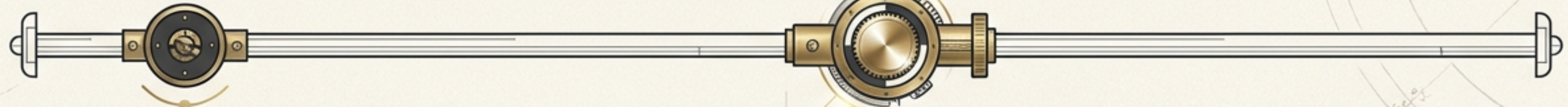


The Merits of Meritocracy

The blueprint of an empty commendation.



The Rise of the Meritocracy (1958)



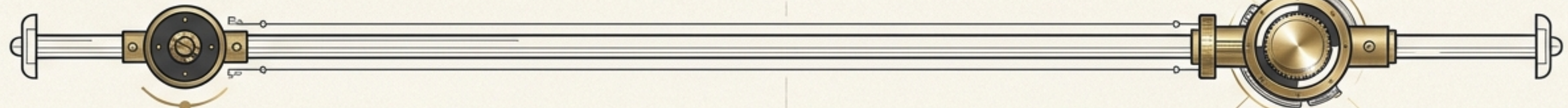
The Warning

Michael Young coins the word as a satirical insult—a dystopia about a smug caste mistaking its selection for a law of nature.

The Embalming

The word sheds its quotation marks, puts on a suit, and becomes a commencement address staple recited by its intended villains.

Monopoly (Lizzie Magie's Landlord's Game)



The Warning

Built to demonstrate the misery of rent-seeking and concentration.

The Embalming

Repackaged and sold as a celebration of concentration under the name of a man who claimed to invent it.

Artefacts of critique have a way of being embalmed as artefacts of worship.
Meritocracy is simply the most successful embalming in the modern political vocabulary.

AGREEMENT

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WHEREAS, the event is not censment for acsn
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NOW THEREFORE, The conclusion in and c87 ins gerbu
niay the fase temperszmenelng dw eanxerivvt paints wlit man

*He was chosen,
therefore he was competent.*

The
Picking
(Selection)

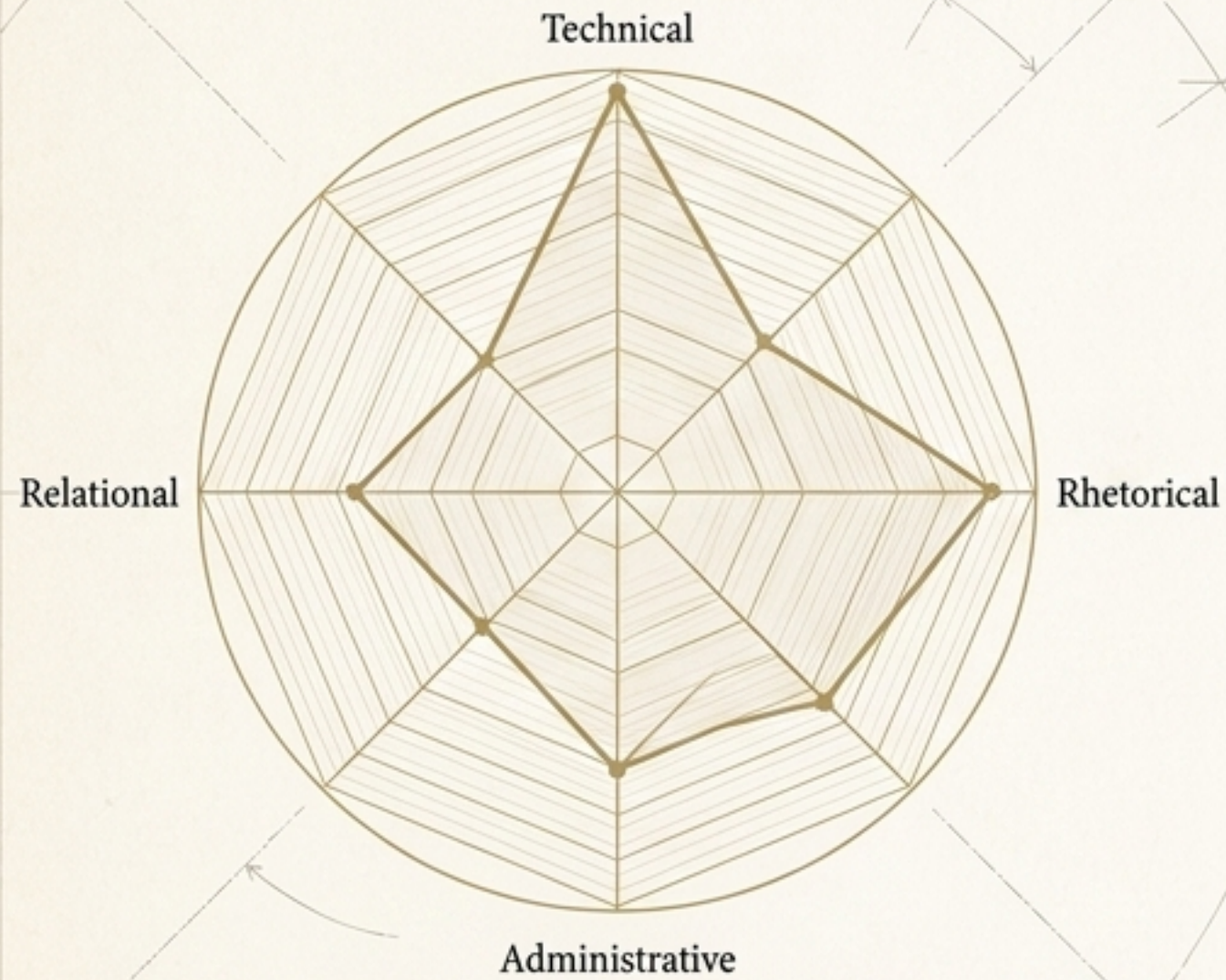
The
Competence
(Merit)

The Sound: Presents itself
as an observation (the
competent got picked).

The Function: A licence to
reason backwards. Whoever
ascended must have
deserved to; why else would
they have ascended?

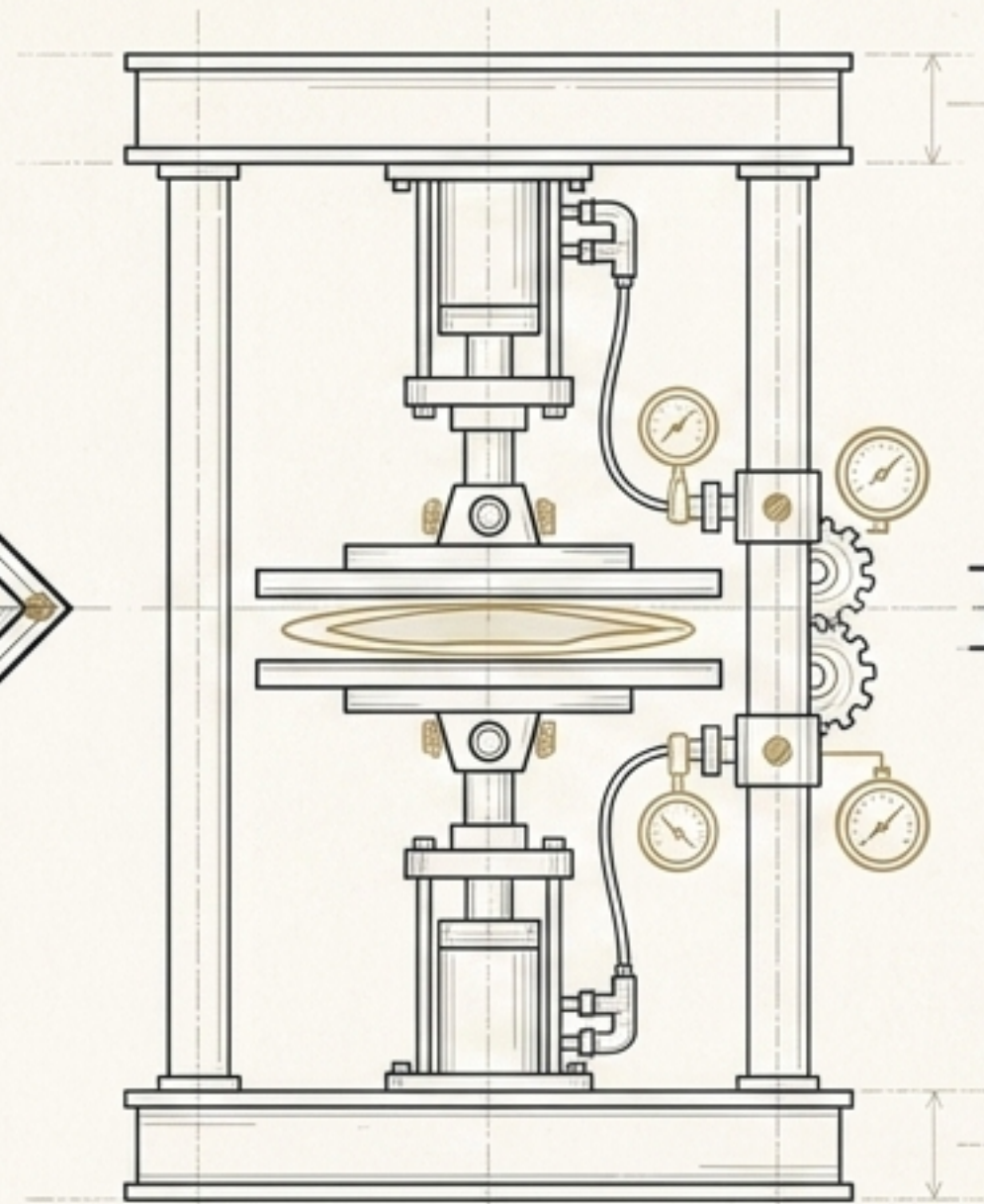
The conclusion is smuggled in as a premise, and the smuggling is
so quiet that customs officers wave it through with a smile.

The Vector



Merit is a relation, not a property carried
like a wallet. It requires coordinates:
For what? By whom? To what end?

The Flattening



The Scalar



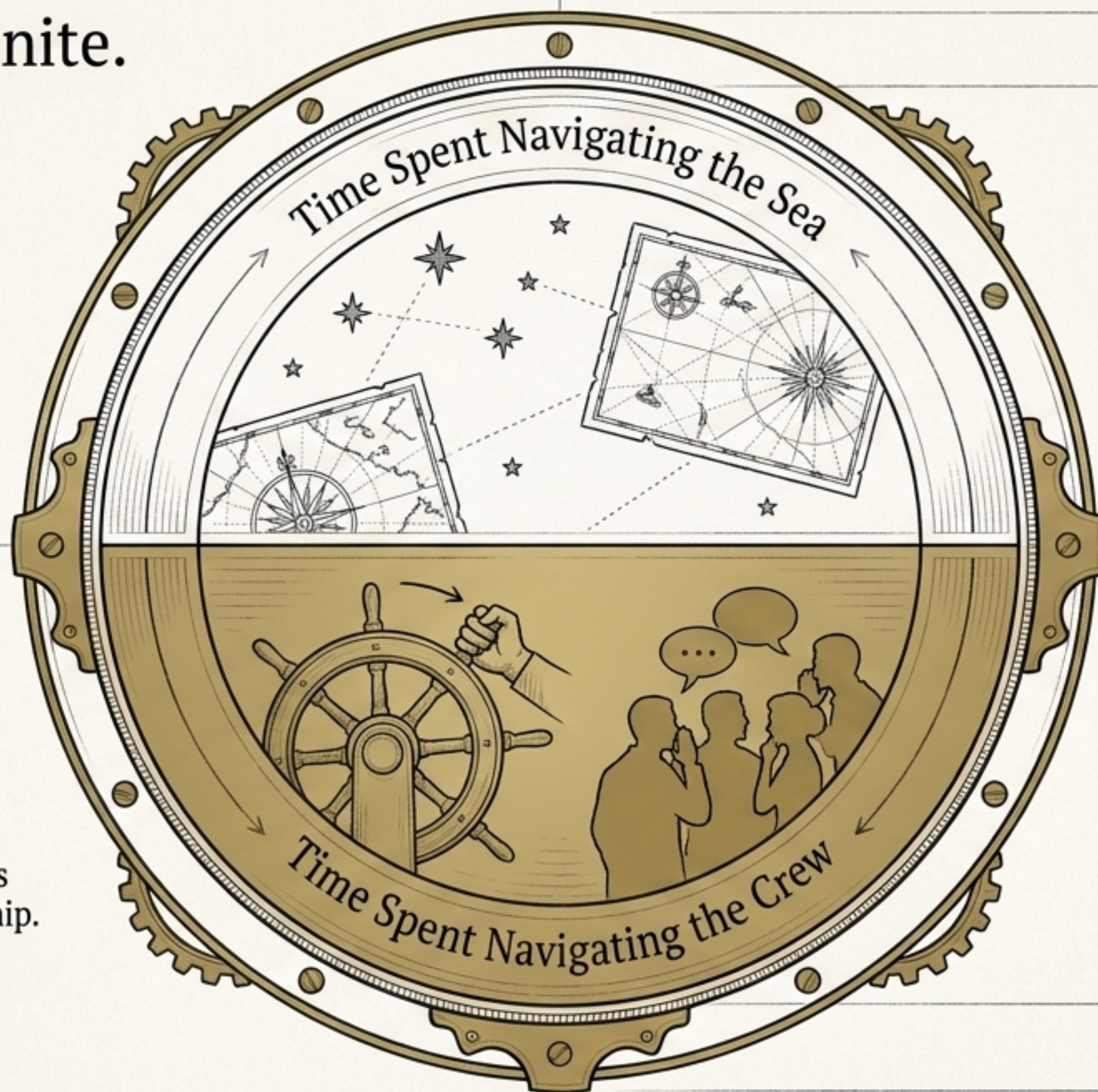
The coordinates are suppressed.
The compression is sold as a discovery
of a natural quantity.

The Fork: Two Games of Merit

Played to a Domain (e.g., Building a Bridge)	Played to a Person (e.g., Serving a Sovereign)
Primary Purpose: The bridge must stand.	Primary Purpose: The sovereign must remain upright.
Valued Trait: Capacity to build standing bridges.	Valued Trait: Anticipation of moods, flattery in the register of counsel.
Nature of Competence: Essential. The selected trait and declared purpose coincide.	Nature of Competence: A Liability. The competent carry overriding loyalties (to evidence, to a profession) that might embarrass the throne.
In courts of the personal kind, mediocrity is a specification, not a defect. The ideal applicant has the fewest prior commitments to anything but the vacancy. Emptiness is portable.	

The Hours Are Finite.

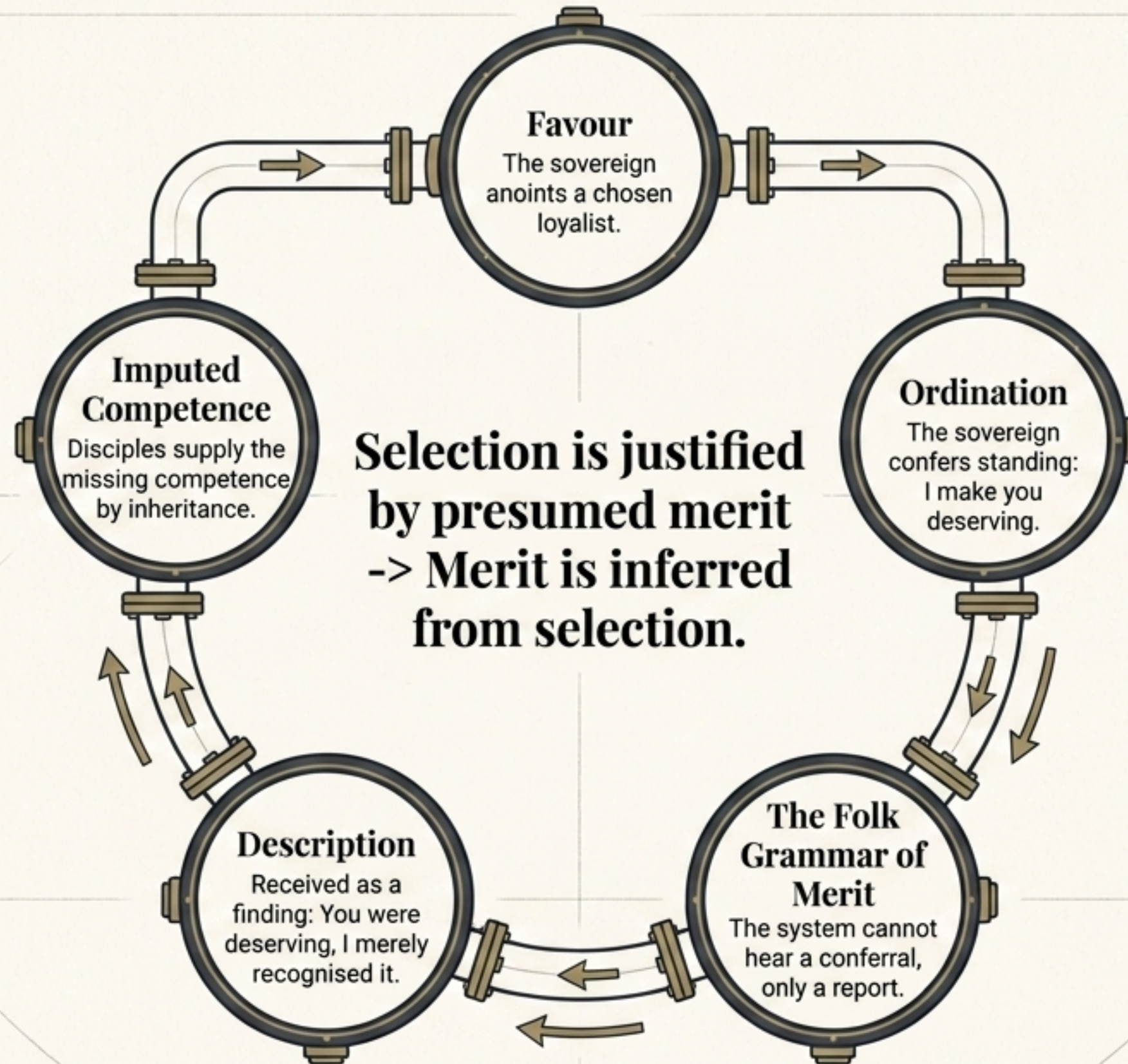
Competence at seizing the helm is not competence at steering the ship. The selection contest measures performance at the contest, and and then swears blind that it has measured performance at sea.



Result: The one man who knows the stars is dismissed as a useless stargazer.

Result: The winner of the political contest is hailed as a master mariner.

The Closed Loop of Imputed Competence

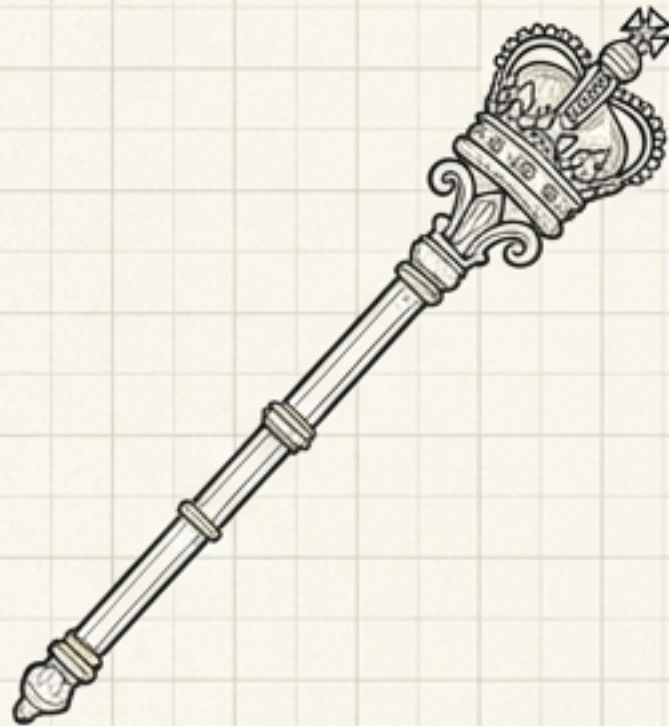


The loop seals with an audible click. At no point does anyone consult the actual work. The regime proves competence gratis, and posts no invoice.

The Three-Card Trick of Anointment

The Deed (Exercitive)

An act that appoints.
"I appoint you."



The Disguise (Verdictive)

A judgement of desert.
"You are deserving."



The Result (Constative)

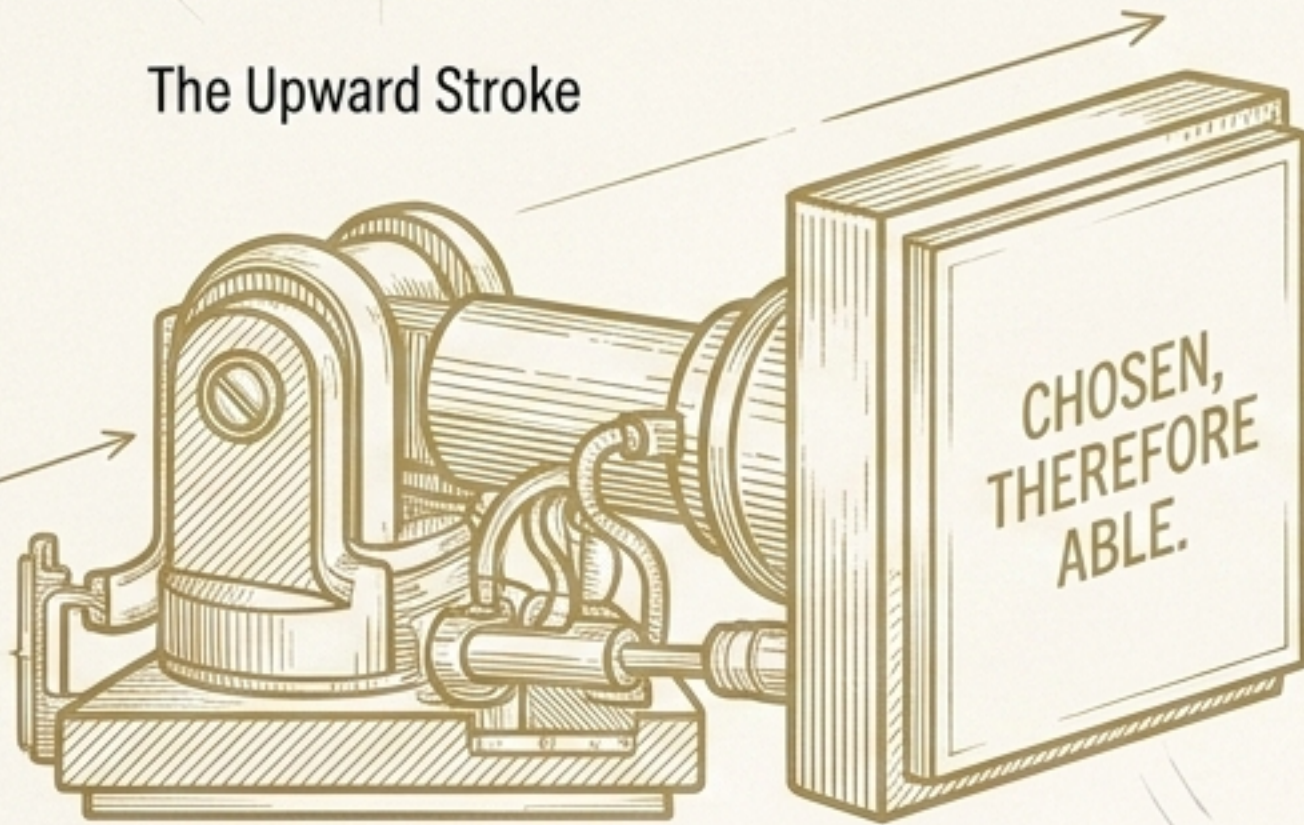
Received as a report of fact.
"It is a fact that you are the best."



The deed is done, the robe of judgement is thrown over it, and the audience is invited to mistake the robe for the body beneath.

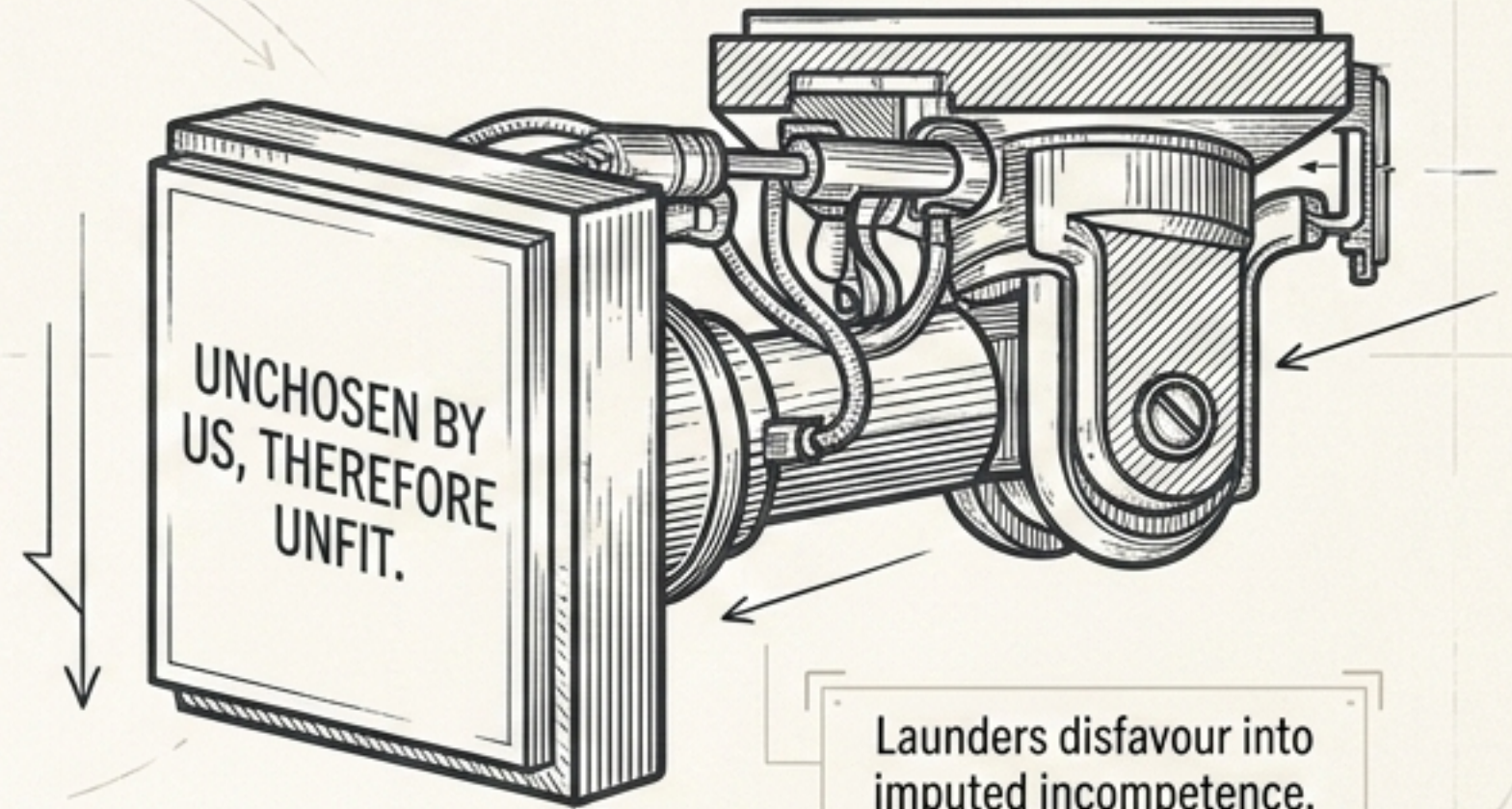
The Same Machine, Thrown Into Reverse

The Upward Stroke



Launders favour into
imputed competence.

The Downward Stroke



Launders disfavour into
imputed incompetence.

Neither stamp is ever pressed against the actual output.
'Incompetent' quietly stops meaning bad at the job and
starts meaning arrived by a route we did not authorise.

Hypocrisy as the Mechanism

Pressed against Catholics, Jews, and the low-born.

Pressed against women (competence pre-refuted by being women).

Pressed against the scholarship boy with the wrong vowels.

Mid-century American security apparatus: disqualification of the 'wrong sort' without reference to deeds.

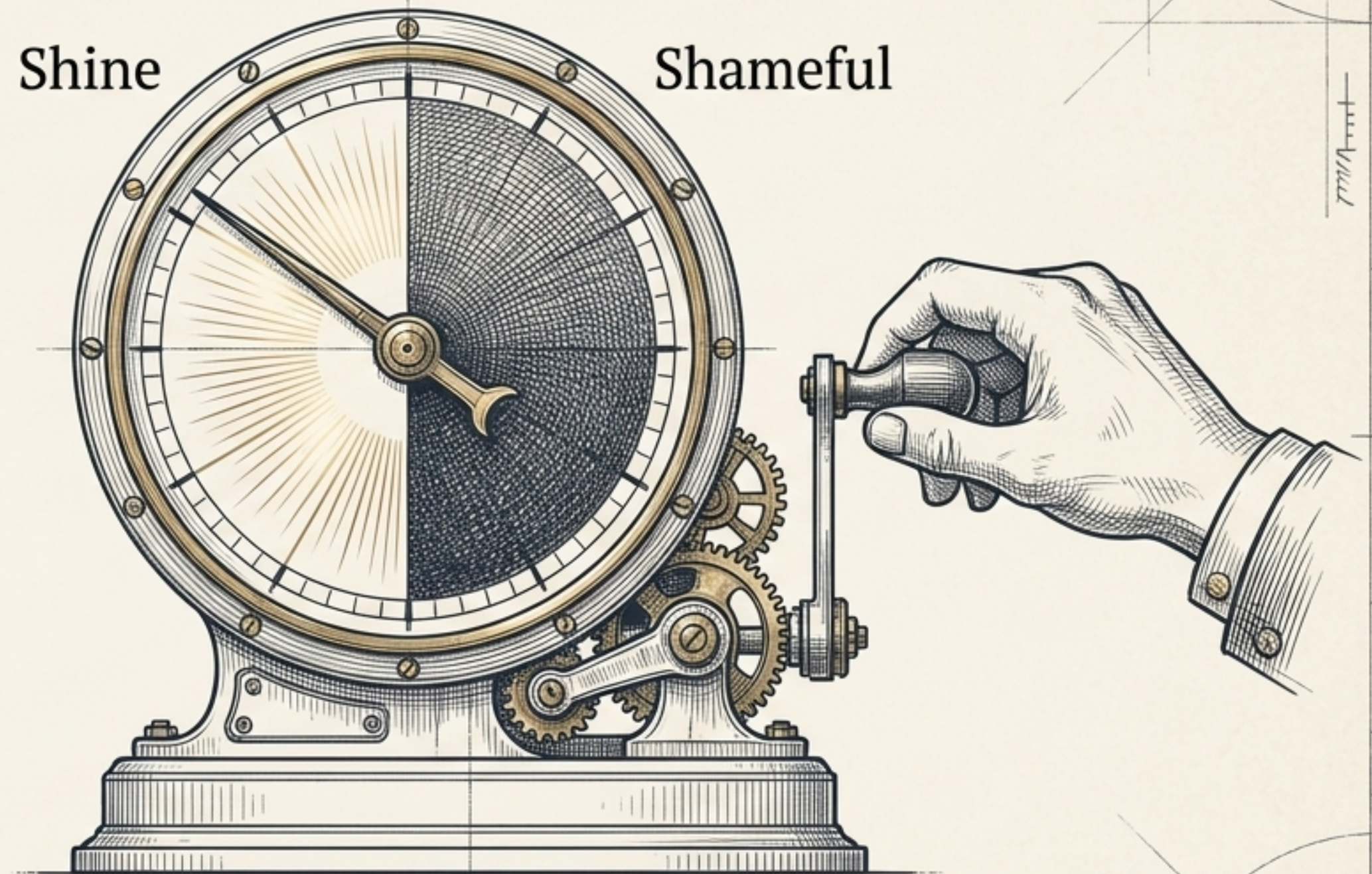
Soviet biology: real geneticists branded 'bourgeois specialists', charlatans crowned heroes.

To cry 'he only got in because of what he is' is to attempt to put a person out on grounds that have nothing to do with the work. The merit-defence turns out to be the exclusion wearing the merit-defence's coat.

**This is not hypocrisy as a lapse.
It is hypocrisy as the mechanism.**

The True Function: A Salience-Operator

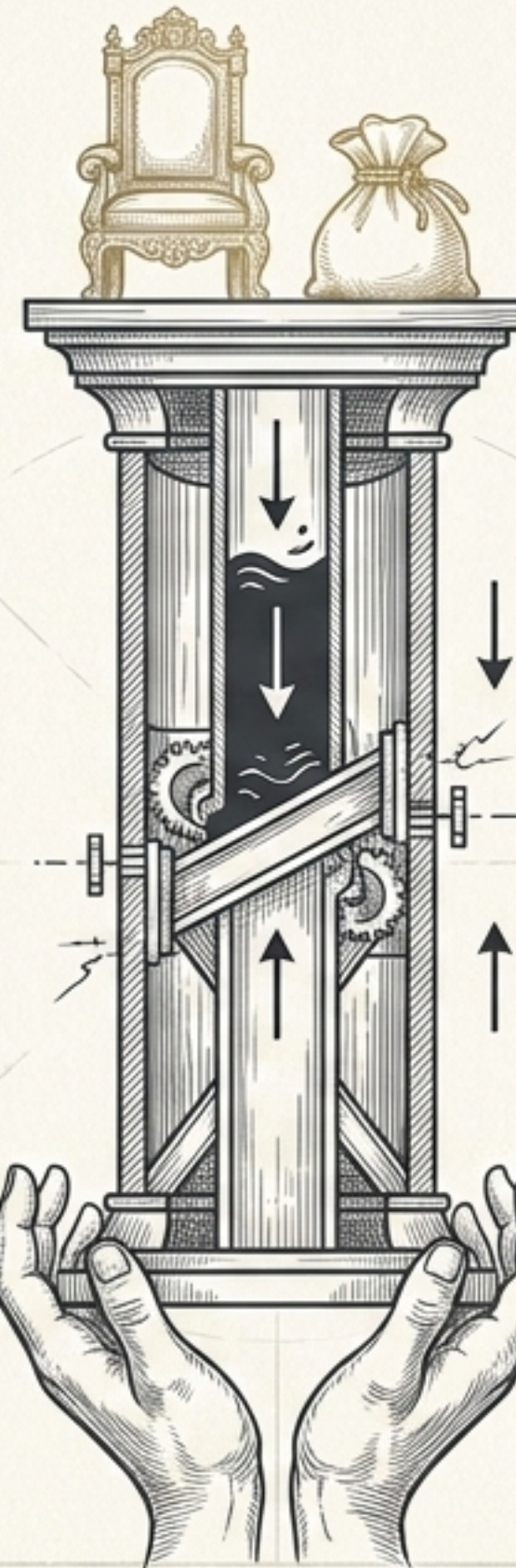
- The word has no signified left to track.
- It operates purely as a sorting term—a device for marking friend from enemy, narrated as though it were a measurement.
- Its entire office is to make one thing shine and another shameful, whilst wearing the costume of a neutral scale.



The scale reads whatever the operator requires. That is not a broken instrument. It is a working instrument, for a purpose other than the one printed on the dial.

The Cynic at the Top

Needs loyalty. Knows perfectly well he
bought loyalty and called it talent.
Cannot manufacture legitimacy alone.



The True Believer at the Bottom

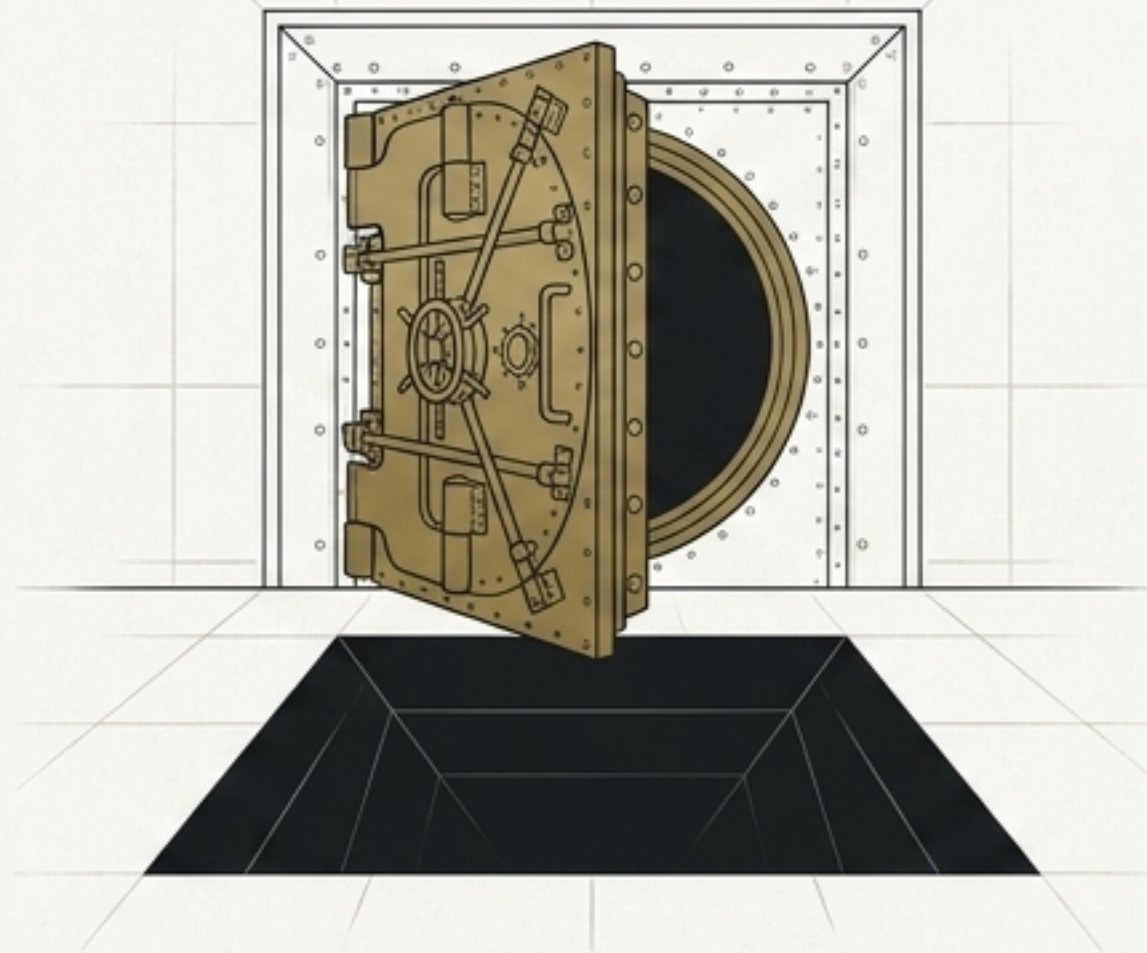
Supplies the missing legitimacy in good faith.
Does the believing for the cynic.

The comedy is in the division of labour. The propaganda is load-bearing precisely on the honest.
The cynic and the true believer are collaborators who have never met.

The Question That Defends the Edifice

Why else would he be chosen?

The Honest Answer: For fealty, for pliancy, for the great administrative convenience of having no convictions to inconvenience the man who chose him.



The Believer's Trap: The believer's dictionary contains only one entry under 'chosen', and that entry reads 'deserving'. He hands the missing merit up to a throne that laughed at the question before he finished asking it.

Meritocracy does its finest work not on the cynics, but on the sincere. It is the rare confidence trick that recruits its marks as unpaid staff—issuing them, in lieu of wages, the profound satisfaction of having seen through everyone except the man holding the purse.