Dr. Easton: I do want to say at the outset of this talk that this is a new departure for me. What I'm going to present to you today is a sketch of an idea I have for a book, and it's a book that would be very speculative, very wide ranging, to cover many centuries. So it's a bit of a mess, and you might want to help me in writing this book. If you have advice to give me, I have my email address up there. If you have a book that I should look at or a topic that I should investigate or some query that you might have about the subject, I really would love to hear from you because it is fairly raw. And you'll know when I get to the sketchy parts of my argument because I will suddenly talk very fast, or when I'm really skating on thin ice, I will lapse into German. So if you hear the word, grundschttemum (phonetic spelling), you should pick up your ears and know that I really don't know what I'm talking about.
I will, however, give you an outline of the talk because I think this relieves the anxiety. There will be three main topics, the culture of biological roots of adventure. Then the main part will be my short history of the concept of adventure in the West, and then I'll conclude with what I call the three empires.
And in the section in the middle, there will be these topics: Story of the Knights, the Merchant Adventurers, the Discovery of the New World, the Apogee of Adventure in the Nineteenth Century, and then the First World War and After.
So let's begin with the first topic, the cultural and biological roots of adventure. My thesis is that there is some special affinity between adventure and Western culture. That's the argument I want to present today, and I'm going to raise the bar by presenting all the reasons why that is not perhaps the case at the very out start. Because when I started to investigate the role that adventure played in other cultures, looking at the ethnographic literature and the anthropological literature, I discovered actually that almost all cultures, travel societies of any kind, other cultures, esteem adventure, want to or are interested in things like foreign travelers, knowledge that comes from beyond their borders. Every culture, it turns out, is fascinated by adventure to a certain degree. And there are many tribes, for example, in Africa and South America, that pride themselves on the fact that the chieftains married into some foreign family, a foreign princess of some kind, bringing her knowledge of outside worlds to them. So it's not true that these societies are closed off against outsiders and that they're suspicious of them. In fact, travel and adventure are esteemed throughout the world. So that's the first blow to my thesis.

The second blow comes from psychology. The adventurous type of personality – psychologists have figured this person out pretty well. They call it the “sensation seeking” personality. They have a very good and detailed clinical description of this individual. They are people who are quicker to be aroused by an exciting stimulus and also quicker to adapt to it and be primed for the next thrill. You know, perhaps you know some people like that, or perhaps you are those kind of people, or perhaps you are that person now and then. So there's a fairly good description of this personality, and the personality, furthermore, is linked to the neurotransmitter dopamine, which is the neuro-currency of all pleasant things.
The thing about dopamine that they’ve discovered recently is that it sometimes responds to rewards or not, but it always, always responds to cues that predict rewards, predict new sensations, and so forth.

We all... personality types range across this gamut from one extreme, neophobia, the person who is instinctively cautious, fearful of the new, to the neophiliac, who is besotted by it in a way, and, of course, our own personalities — we probably have bits of both in us. I just want to say at the outset of this talk that I am no way saying neophiliacs are somehow better than neophobes. There's plenty of reasons to be cautious about things. Neophiliacs die like fleas. [Laughter] So be aware of that.

Furthermore, it's been discovered that dopamine levels, the sensation seeking personality, are connected to a allele, a variation of a gene called the R7 gene. It's sometimes called the migration gene because it apparently emerged about 50,000 years ago when we left Africa, our species, and started to migrate across the world. And this presence of this gene is tightly connected to the adventure seeking, sensation seeking personality.

So here I presented two sets of arguments that suggest that every culture esteems adventure and that it may even be biologically or genetically rooted in our personality. In the rest of the talk I will try to nevertheless support the thesis that the West is particularly connected to the idea of adventure, and I will at the very end of this talk, I promise you, I will bring up some startling biological evidence to confirm my thesis. Okay? So pay attention to that.
Now let's begin the second part, the whole story of the West and adventure. And I want to begin with a myth, the myth of Ulysses, also known as Odysseus, of his last voyage. Now we all know Odysseus from Homer's epic poem. After the Trojan Wars, he tries to get back to his home in Ithaca, to his doting wife, Penelope. Takes him 20 years, all kinds of adventures he encounters along the way, and then he comes back finally home to Penelope and to Ithaca. There is, however, a story which the only... the first origin we have of it is actually the medieval poet, Dante. We don't have any example from antiquity of this story.

The story goes that, having come back home and having ruled Ithaca for many years, Ulysses got bored. Got bored of Ithaca, got bored of being the king, and perhaps got bored of Penelope, and gathered his last mariners, his survivors, his comrades, and they got on their ship, and they went sailing out through the Gates of Hercules – that is, of course, Gibraltar, where, according to Dante, they did spy a vast new land before they were lost, all of them, in a great storm.

And Dante presents Ulysses in one of the circles of hell. Virgil, the guide through hell, encounters him in hell because he has, at one level, committed the sin of pride. He has desired to go beyond the borders of the known world and discover things out there. That is the sin of pride, the sin of arrogance, and therefore he's punished in hell for that. But anybody who reads the Cantos, I think there are 24 or 26, actually comes away with an admiration for Ulysses. The admiration for Ulysses subverts the ostensible message of Dante. We admire him precisely for those things – his daring, his courage, his desire to find out new things. And so I think this is a good way to begin a story about adventure in the West.
But it really begins in the Middle Ages with the knights and the knightly class. I would say if you wanted to date it precisely, you could say that the history of adventure in the West begins in the eleventh century. This is when a certain form of literature emerges, the literature of the knights – the Song of Rollins, the stories of King Arthur, all of that knightly chivalrous literature. That is the first literature to use the word “adventure” extensively, which comes from the Latin *ad veniri*, which means “to come upon,” and has the connotation of coming upon something unknown.

Now who was reading this literature? It was the knightly class that emerged in feudal Europe, particularly in France. They read it. They admired themselves. Here you see on the right many of these quests that they undertook that are described in this literature were quests taken on behalf of a beautiful woman, whom they never expected to actually bed. But they would take this quest and in her honor, and they would expect to encounter all kinds of adventures, all kinds of life-risking events in the course of this quest. Now it turns out, and my colleague Tim Sistrunk, who is actually a medievalist, might object to this – but in my understanding there is a real, real basis for this quest literature. It wasn’t simply romance or fantasy. In the eleventh century if you were a lord and you had several sons, you wanted to keep the family fortunes, the family lands intact. And so whether you had the custom of primogenitor or not, that all the property would go to the eldest son, in effect the younger sons were left on their own. They had to go out and seek their fortune. So their questing has a real world basis. They need to go out and find an estate, perhaps take it from someone else, find a lady who has an estate perhaps, or barring that and failing that, go on a crusade of some kind.
And so here we have already forged the beginning of the eleventh century, this nexus that I want to assert between adventure, love, actually. This is also the age that sees the introduction of romantic love into Europe, but also plunder, wealth, okay? And that connection will be very important for my argument.
I think it's worth stopping here for a minute and making a comparison between the medieval elites in Europe and the elites at the same time in China, and so here we have, on the left, we have the medieval knights on their quests. Their literature that they read is a literature that exalts feats of daring do, of courage, of exploration of the unknown. They are a military caste, okay, a warring military caste in a decentralized, politically decentralized part of the Eurasian continent.
And here on the right we have the elites in China, the so-called scholar gentry. These are people who are enormously gifted at taking examinations, especially examinations in the humanities, in the Confucian classics. When I lecture on this topic in my class on world history, I tell my students, "Imagine a world that was run by the HFA." [Laughter] And what do the Confucian classics... what do they teach us? They teach us above all [foreign word], duty of the children to their parents and their central goal, the main overarching goal. is harmony. They seek harmony. And so if you think of these two worlds – and by the way, of course, China in the Middle Ages was infinitely larger, wealthier, and more technologically advanced than Europe – if you think of these two cultures, it's pretty evident which is going to be more propitious to the cultivation of adventure.
Okay, we get now to the end of the Middle Ages, the late Middle Ages. Cities and trade have revived. They've grown in stature. There emerges in cities a group of people called the middle class. When we talk about the upper middle class, they are merchants who engage in long-distance trade, and they organize themselves, not just in England, but also in France and elsewhere, into Societies of Merchant Adventurers, they called themselves. And I think it's interesting that this class, which is below the knightly class in prestige and status, seizes the word “adventure” because it has now an aura to it. It bespeaks a kind of class to be an adventurer, and they use it to describe themselves. In effect what they're saying is, "We, too, go on voyages that are dangerous and perilous. We, too, we middle class people, go out in search of the unknown. We can gain perhaps great wealth, but we can also go down with the ship." And these were, they tended to be the upper strata of the middle class, and so they are the ones that begin to organize the system of long-distance trade, and they adopt this idea of being an adventurer, too. It has prestige.
And just as they're flourishing, what should take place next but the discovery of the New World, which is the single greatest reason, of course, for Europe's rise to power, the single greatest stimulus to the development of capitalism. And who did this? Who discovered the major sea routes? Who discovered these two amazing continents, the Americas? What group of people? What social class? Well, who were they? They were the Conquistadors, okay? Who are they?

They are the descendants of the knights in Spain, a crusading, militarized, restless, and thoroughly ruthless – indeed almost criminal – military class. They suddenly have nothing to do with themselves and with their time because they have finally ejected the Moors from Grenada. And, lo and behold, a whole field opens up for their adventures. And so it's this group of people – and long ago the great pioneer of world history, William H. McNeill, who taught in Chicago for years back in the early 60's, published a seminal book called "The Rise of the West." And he pointed out the importance that this kind of militarized, adventuresome, risk-taking group of people had in the eventual ascension to power of Europe.
There is a nice contrast as well with China. You may or may not know that just prior to the European voyages discovery, the eunuch Admiral Cheng-ho led these vast armadas of Chinese boats down the South China Sea through the Straits of Malaysia into the Indian Ocean. They visited India. They visited the Middle East. They visited the east coast of Africa. These were vast armadas, and you can see on the right what a typical ship looked like in comparison to Columbus's ship. They were technologically sophisticated. It was quite an amazing expedition. He led a couple of these, but what happened to him?

Well, for reasons we don't fully understand, the Ming emperor decided that this was a waste of time and that he was going to shut it down, that there was maybe an agricultural crisis going on. They wanted to dedicate their resources to that rather than these expeditions, and they closed down the expeditions. They even forbade Chinese merchants from building ships with more than two masts, and you see the this has many more. So they simply closed it down. That's what you could do in a centralized empire. You could just issue the edict, and it stops. And 50 years after the last ships leave the Indian Ocean around the other end, around the Cape of Good Hope from Africa, come the Portuguese. This is deeply symbolic.

I now want to just take a little digression from this narrative and talk a little bit about capitalism because capitalism is a part of my subject here. Capitalism is the economic system just getting started now that requires risk and adventure. It requires new markets, new products. It is the economic expression of neophilia. It requires these
things. It requires the other with a capital "O," but it also turns it into the same with a capital "S." It's the fate of capitalism to turn the exciting and exotic into the boring and the familiar. One day you're planting a flag in the tropical islands, and the next day you're building a Starbucks. And this is what Marx and Engels said about capitalism famously in a very prophetic phrase in “The Communist Manifesto”: “The bourgeoisie makes the world over in its own image.”
And this gets to a second digression, a little digression on the history of boredom, which is always a hazardous thing to talk about, but there is... One of my topics is the tension between adventure and boredom. And it's my contention, which I don't have time to prove here, I've spoken about it elsewhere, that the modern sense of boredom, the way we use it today, emerges in the late seventeenth century. And where does it emerge first? Who are the first people to discourse on boredom, to feel terribly bored, to see it as a problem of their lives? It's the aristocrats, the French nobility who live at the court of Versailles under the Sun King, Louis XIV, and compelled to live there by him. They're the ones that begin to talk about boredom and make it a topic of discussion. And that makes sense because who are these people? They're the descendants of the knightly class from the Middle Ages. Now they've been shorn of their prestige, shorn of many of their military functions, forced to reside in this great, gilded palace, Versailles, and engage in the humiliating rituals of life there under the eye of their watchful king. They're the ones that invent boredom, begin to talk about it, and elsewhere in Europe, the word "to bore," for example, in England, it comes from aristocratic slang. It's first used in 1764, *langeweile*. It's two different worlds that come together at the end of the seventeenth century. It's always aristocrats who do this. They're the ones that have the leisure time to be bored and the wealth.

But over time the concept of boredom, the discussion about boredom, percolates down from the aristocracy into the other classes, social classes, as they acquire wealth and leisure time, too. And they're acquiring wealth and leisure time because of capitalism.
Now at this point you might ask me, "Professor Easton, is it boredom or a desire to get rich that motivates adventure? What are you talking about? You mentioned two of these motives." And my answer to you would be there are many motives to go on an adventure. One of the ones I haven't even mentioned, which I think is extremely interesting, is wonder... wonder. It's an extremely interesting emotion. It's the only, if you think about it, the only perfectly selfless emotion there is, and that certainly motivates adventurous. So there are many motives to go on an adventure, but over time because of the discovery of the Americas, the prospect of great wealth, maybe not the reality, but the hope of it acquires ever more importance in the European and American imagination. I have a note here to look thoughtful. [Laughter]. Yeah, I think that’s right.
Okay, those two digressions over, we go on to our story, and we talk about the apogee of adventure, the high point of adventure, which is the “long nineteenth century” – and the long nineteenth century just means it begins in the eighteenth century and extends to the First World War. This is when adventure as an ideology reaches its height, and this is also, not coincidently, the high point of imperialism. And one marker of this, one sign of this, is the rise of this genre of literature called the “adventure novel,” which is said traditionally to have begun with the publication of "Robinson Crusoe" (there he is) in 1719 by Daniel Defoe. And that was an immediate success. Now if you read this you know that throughout the book or periodically through the book, Defoe in the voice of Crusoe says, "Oh, do not go on adventures. Look at me. Look at all the terrible things that happened to me. I have sinned. I sinned against my family, my father, against God." And so there's this heavy duty moralizing on in "Robinson Crusoe," but that's not the way people read it any more than they read the [inaudible] tales about Ulysses in Dante. It is, in fact, a great song of praise for adventure, and it begins this tradition of the adventure novel, about which I... if I had more time, I could say more things.

But just think of the people who write adventure novels in the nineteenth century – James Fennimore Cooper, Sir Walter Scott, H. Rider Haggard, Jules Verne, Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling. And then you have to add to that list the biographies and memoirs of famous people of adventure like Lord Byron, Napoleon, Sir Richard Burton, Robert Scott, Kit Carson, you name it. This literature saturates Europe and America, and it's the Anglo Americans who dominate
this because the two greatest archetypes of adventures in the nineteenth century are the sailor, dominated by England, of course, and the cowboy, dominated by the American writers.

Now, I don't wish – this is a caveat – I don't wish to gloss over the ugly side of the cult of adventure of the nineteenth century. Let's face it – the reality that they're often describing is the same reality that animated the medieval knights – rapine, pillage, plunder. I mean the history of imperialism is the history of Europeans taking land and wealth from other people because they had a temporary technological advantage. But actually adventure spills over into other peoples as well. We just learned, and I just put this in the lecture because I just saw Django from QuentinTarantino, that one of the greatest novelists of adventure in the nineteenth century was Alexander Dumas, who wrote the "Count of Monte Cristo" and "Three Musketeers," and, of course, he was one-quarter African ancestry. And in fact, very recently there's been a book called "The Black Count" about his father, his amazing father, which looks pretty good.
And also when I'm on the subject, I should talk about women and adventure, and, again, if I had more time, I would in greater length, but in my book, if I do write it, I'll have a chapter called, "How Women Appropriated Adventure." Because women, after all, especially middle class women, are the gender to whom nothing adventurous should ever happen. And when you read the lives of women in the nineteenth century, they exude, I mean, many of them, of course there are many exceptions, but they exude, at least for me, an unbearable atmosphere of boredom. I picture these people sitting in a parlor listening to the clock go tick, tock, tick, tock. To be an adventuress in the nineteenth century for a middle class woman was to be, you know, no more than a harlot or a Jezebel of some kind, and yet... and yet, this perhaps will come as no surprise to maybe about a half of the audience here, women want adventure, too.

Women are neophilliacs, and the way I would begin my chapter on women and adventure is by talking about love, romantic love, as an exit strategy from boredom, as a form of adventure. And this is what the great German philosopher Georg Simmel, calls it. He says, "Love is the [foreign word], the original adventure, because a genuine love affair has all of the elements of adventure. One, it is sharply separate from one's ordinary life; two, it has a clearly defined beginning and end; and three, it causes you to live intensely in the present." So men have their adventure stories. Women have their romance novels, their Gothic novels, and there are many parallels between them.
I realize, of course, that that's not good enough for women. In fact, love is so disappointing that they, too, at the end of the nineteenth century begin to go on great travels of their own, and there are many famous instances of this. I think in the brief time I have I would say the apotheosis of female adventure reaches its height in the 1930's with the American aviator, Amelia Earhart who, as you perhaps know, disappears in the South China Sea in 1937, and for an “adventurite” it doesn't get any better than that. So, it begins with love, but it moves on.
And then we come to the adventure in the high point of imperialism, which is the last third of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. This is the period when in Europe and America, politicians who were imperialists seek to whip up support for imperialism at home. And it's easy for them to do that because the politics of empire is extremely exciting. It's so much more interesting than social policy or any other number of topics. And it's exciting because it's connected to the idea of adventure, which has with it the idea of conquest.
I think the poster boy for this – there are many, of course – would be in America, Theodore Roosevelt. Theodore Roosevelt who was interested in promulgating the strenuous life, who went as a young man to toughen himself out to the frontier, and experienced the American frontier before it closed, and then as President was a very keen proponent of imperialism. But adventure is everywhere in the Age of Imperialism. It is a key word. The adventure sports, the beginning of adventure sports, almost all of them invented by the English in the nineteenth century – mountain climbing, the whole absurd notion of taking a sled or tray and sliding down a mountain, the luge – all of that invented by the English in the nineteenth century. But it even infiltrates, this word “adventure,” the areas where you would least expect it. Take philosophy. One would expect philosophy to be very empathetical to adventure or immune to adventure. After all, the role of philosophy is to eliminate chance, to foresee and to explain everything.
And yet, who was the most popular philosopher of the Age of Imperialism, at least from the 1890's onward? Freidrich Nietzsche. And Nietzsche preached that philosophy and thought should become bold and adventurous and even dangerous. I think the tremendous reception for Nietzsche's work after 1890, when, alas, he had already gone insane, was because the young men and women who were reading him had been pervaded by the idea, by the ideology of adventure. Okay, so we know where this is going. It's going nowhere good. It's going to the First World War, and there are many real material causes of the First World War. I am not going to come up to you today and say that the First World War was caused by hyperventilating about adventure. It certainly wasn't, but the way it was greeted by men of all ages, the famous war fever that greeted the outbreak, the news of the war where in the major cities people came out in flock and threw flowers, and men, boys, and old men lied about their age to be able to join the army. That, I think, was prepared for by the age of adventure.
And we do have this famous picture of the war being declared, Kaiser's proclamation of the outbreak of the war being declared in Munich, and there's a whole vast crowd of people. And we see in this crowd someone plucked out, someone whose whole life has been a disaster at this point, living in men's shelters, drifting, ranting and raving, no purpose, a loser in every sense of the word. His face is aglow with the prospect of going on this great adventure — and this, of course, is Hitler, Adolf Hitler. The war gave him a meaning and a purpose. In a way this was the great adventure that these young men had been promised by the books, by the tabloids, by their dream world — not the tedium of their lives and the dull futures running before them. This would be the great escape, the greatest camping expedition the world had ever seen, and we know how it ended.
Here’s a German poster using the chivalry and knightly image to say it’s all an adventure. And, of course, the reality...
...the reality was the age of adventure was blown up by machine guns and high explosives. And after the war it’s interesting that it’s the Anglo American elites, at least the intellectuals, who turn against adventure and see it as allied with war mongering and with empire. And we can notice this most clearly in the steep decline in the reputation of a writer like Rudyard Kipling, who was deeply associated, of course, with empire and with adventure. He lives until 1936, but his reputation plummets rapidly. And now I come to the final part of the talk, what I call the "Tale of the Three Empires," really the twentieth century.
And the first empire is the empire of adventure, because although Anglo American elites might turn against adventure in the aftermath of the First World War, in those countries that felt cheated by the results of the First World War, Italy and Germany, among them – among their intellectuals, at least a good number of them – the nexus or the connection between adventure, war, and empire remained strong. And, in fact, it gets even stronger. And when you think of the ideologies that will eventually triumph in Italy and Germany, fascism and Nazism, what are they? They are hyper-masculinized, ideologies celebrating conquest, struggle, war, empire, heroism.
It all begins, actually, with this unlikely group, the Italian Futurists. Artists, really, who make a name for themselves just before the war breaks out. And they start their famous Futurist Manifesto of 1909 with these words, "We shall sing the love of danger, the habit of energy in boldness," And it goes on like that. And, of course, they pushed for Italy's entrance into the war, and when she did enter in May, 1915, they enlisted, they died, lots of them. And the ones that survived were the earliest supporters of Mussolini and the fascist party.
Hanna [Inaudible], the great German Jewish philosopher, had noticed long ago that there was a connection between imperialism and fascism. What fascism owes to imperialism is the habit or the desire to rule over so-called inferior peoples and the glorification of the adventurous conquering base. In Nazi art and literature, this is the best example... I should've got something better, but this is what I could find. Nazi art and literature exalt adventure as well. Leni Riefenstahl made her name making films about mountain climbing in the 1920's. That's how Hitler came to know about her and asked her to direct his great propaganda film, "The Triumph of the Will."

And in this context I love particularly this quote by George Orwell, and in the quote he explains why the Nazis when they came to power were more successful at gaining popular support than older established parties like the socialists, the various liberal parties. This is what he says on the success of the Nazis, "Hitler, because in his own joyless mind he feels it with exceptional strength, knows that human beings don't only want comfort, safety, short working hours, and, in general, common sense. They also, at least intermittently, want struggle, self-sacrifice, not to mention drums, flags, and loyalty parades." And he goes on to say, Orwell, "Where socialism and even capitalism in a more grudging way had said to people, 'I offer you a good time,' Hitler has said to them, 'I offer you struggle, danger, and death,' and as a result a whole nation flings itself at his feet." This aspect of fascism/Nazism goes very deep in my opinion. They cannot even conceive of a world without struggle.
And that is the background for a remarkable comment that Hitler makes in his table talk, which was a series of recordings of his monologues after dinner. If you were in his entourage, you'd have to endure this, and it would go on for hours until the early hours of the morning, and some of these great thoughts were recorded, and at one point in 1942, he thinks he's going to win the war. He's going to defeat the Soviet Union. He's going to conquer Europe. He will have achieved all of this, and he speculates about leading the Soviet dictator Stalin in a little [inaudible] state in the Ural Mountains so that young German men could prove themselves by going out there to fight this perennial gorilla fight because they can't imagine a world without struggle. What would happen then? Well, it's interesting. They unleash the Second World War, and who defeats them, substantially?
The empire of boredom, empire of boredom, which I mean the Soviet Union and its later satellites in the Communist world. Soviet Union famously is a planned economy, and the planned economy was designed to correct the faults of capitalism. Capitalism was seen, not just by Communists, but by all kinds of people in the nineteenth century, as being too anarchic, too wasteful, and so the planned economy was to eliminate the unknown, eliminate the unforeseen, eliminate the anarchic, eliminate the wasteful. Everything would be seen and planned for.

Now that whole idea of a planned economy to correct capitalism goes back to the nineteenth century. It goes back to the utopian movements of the nineteenth century – all the books that were written and all the utopias that were planned and lasted 2 or 3 years, many of them in America, especially in the 1840's. But what they all presented was a community where nothing truly unexpected would ever happen. And I think the most chilling example, this was written by an American, Edward Bellamy, "Looking Backward." That is a really scary book, although at the time was extremely popular. The great Russian novelist, Dostoyevsky, said about all of these endeavors to create a utopian, planned community. He called them all the Crystal Palace, and he notes from "Underground," he said that "If they would ever build the inhabitants of this perfectly ordered, perfectly moral community would eventually be driven by boredom to stick pins into each other."

Now I've got to say now, this is another caveat, and I should talk very fast right now, life is not of course always boring under Communism any more than it's always
adventurous or exciting under fascism. And the Soviet Union, in its first several decades, had a very adventurous beginning, and if you look in the 1930's there's a wonderful book by Sheila Fitzpatrick on this that shows that the Soviets got through the harsh conditions of their existence by imagining great Soviet heroes, aviators and so forth. No way did they take a back seat to Nazi Germany or fascist Italy.

But what I'm talking about is the public life of these regimes especially after the Second World War, when they descend into a mind-numbing torpor. I'm talking in essence, you know, about [inaudible], okay? Descent into this mind-numbing torpor where they have said, "We have said all the problems. We have foreseen everything. We have all the answers. All that's left is administration." And I can't prove it to you in the time I have. I think of things like this....think of the 5-hour speeches at the annual Central Party Congress, with statistics on the fulfillment of the 5-year plan, how many shiny steel ingots have been produced, comrades? When I was a boy, my parents subscribed to Soviet Life, and I would get these pictures of vast armadas of tractors, and I was thinking, "I really don't want to live there, Dad." Or the grotesquely dull housing developments with their grey colors, their lack of any commercial animation, the long queuing up at dull shops for sub-par and scarce goods, and, in general, the general airlessness of the public sphere, the lack of any variety in the media.

So I think I'm justified in calling this the empire of boredom, and what happens in these regimes is that citizens turn away from the public sphere into their own little private sphere to escape. And that's certainly one reason, not the only reason, but that's one reason why these regimes simply imploded from 1989 to 1990. It turns out
that the endeavor to eliminate adventure completely fails. And that gets me to the last empire, the only empire left standing at the end of the twentieth century because the empire that sought to embrace adventure came a cropper. The one that shunned it failed as well.
So it's the empire of virtual adventure, the empire of distraction that prevails. And this is a world largely created by America. When you think of the colossal expansion of the entertainment industry from the penny press in the nineteenth century to the virtual worlds of our Smartphones today, the attraction of distraction is unlimited. The distraction industry is the autoimmune system of late capitalism, developed in response to the enormous boredom that capital's muscle generates at the very same time. That's the secret of its triumph over Communism, which just generated boredom and not distraction. And the subsection of virtual adventure within the distraction industry – think about that. We are offered today, “here's us” adventure, “fake” adventure, adventure without risk.
Virtual adventure dominates everything from the latest blockbuster movies to the most violent video game. It's what sells.
So we all like to play at adventure, at being adventurous.
Our dopamine will reward us for a while. We play the game briefly. We can stave off boredom briefly, but ever less so because I've already mentioned this, that the enshrinement of neophilia at the very core and heart of capitalism leads to what is very... what is the characteristic of modern culture today. It's transgressive quality. It's always seeking to upset the borders and to move on. Our primitive attitude toward everything today is [foreign word], what's next? And we have knightly adventure.

And I'd like to conclude now. I come to my conclusion, and I'm winding up now. I have in the course of this talk tried to persuade you of the salient role of adventure in Western culture. I don't know if I persuaded you. I persuaded myself, however. I do want to give you the news I promised about the R7 allele, the genetic variant closely associated with the sensation-seeking personality. It turns out that a very high percentage of Europeans and their descendants in America have it – about 25%, whereas it has largely disappeared in China. Now, one must be cautious about how to interpret this. One, Chinese student when he was told that said sardonically, "Oh, yes. We killed all the R7 people." [Laughter] And there's lots of other factors involved, and then there's the matter of the chicken and the egg, but still I think it's suggestive, and I only discover it after I submerge myself into this topic. But there's a vanishing world, I think, for real adventure.
Take travel, for example. Travel has always been an important component of adventure. I said, I think, at the beginning of this talk, all adventures are journeys. Ever since the emergence of the Thomas Cook Travel Agency in the nineteenth century, capitalism has done its work here, making travel safe, comfortable, predictable, homogenizing it, and replacing it with ersatz travel. I saw recently this title in "National Geographic," "The Last 50 Great Places in the World." Sent a chill down my spine. And so I ask, as a way of concluding, what happens to a world without the possibility of genuine adventure, without the possibility, about the spirit of adventure enshrined in the great poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson on the subject of Ulysses' last voyage written in 1833? And I'll read a few passages to you—not the whole thing—to conclude this talk.
"I cannot rest from travel. I will drink life to the lees. All times I have enjoyed greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those that loved me and alone, on shore and when through scudding drifts, the rainy Hyades vexed the dim sea. I am become a name; I'm a part of all that I have met; yet all experience is an arch wherethrough Gleams that untraveled world, whose margin fades for ever and for ever when I move." And then, famously, "Come, my friends, 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world."

Thank you.

[ Applause ]