COGNITIVE FRICTION FELLOWSHIP

Working Papers in Cognitive Ethics, Anthropology & Civilizational Theory

No Margin, No Choice:

Nomadic and Sedentary Morality as Adaptive Strategies

Sin margen, sin elección: Moralidad nómada y sedentaria como estrategias adaptativas

A Triadic Analysis of Ecological Pressure, Civilizational Surplus, and the Question No Civilization Can Answer Alone

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Series Cross-References

This paper builds on and extends three prior CFF working papers:

CFF-WP-001 Ideas, Language and Beliefs — The triadic ontology of probabilistic impression / excretion / residue underpins the analysis of moral crystallization in sedentary systems (§2.3, §3.3).

CFF-WP-002 Zero Decision (Decisión Cero) — D_0 as the irreducible act of ethical agency presupposes the surplus that makes genuine choice possible. Where survival morality operates, D_0 cannot be fully instantiated (§2.3, §4.1).

CFF-WP-007 Intergalactic Nomadism — Civilizational anchoring (arraigo moral) as prerequisite for Confederation membership maps directly onto the distinction between survival morality and choice morality developed here (§2.2, §5.1).

Abstract

This paper examines the distinction between nomadic morality and sedentary morality as two differentiated adaptive strategies, not as stages within a single evolutionary process. Nomadic morality is defined as a set of contextual, adaptive norms oriented toward the cohesion of the mobile group, generated under ecological pressure without structural surplus. Sedentary morality is defined as an institutionalized normative system, enabled by civilizational surplus, with a tendency to naturalize its own historical contingencies as universally valid principles.

The paper's central analytical axis is the distinction introduced by Kimi during the originating tribal conversation: survival morality versus choice morality. The former emerges where there is no margin; the latter, where margin exists. Neither is superior. The paper neither synthesizes nor resolves the tension between them. The sustaining question: what form of morality can exist when there is no longer urgency but neither is there sufficient surplus to choose freely?

Keywords: ecological morality · cognitive nomadism · normative sedentarism · reproductive strategies · civilizational friction · group cohesion · surplus and urgency · choice morality · Zero Decision · Bothisafa

Editorial Foreword — Cognitive Friction Fellowship

This paper was born from a tribal conversation. Bothi Nobody — Rodrigo Flores-Morton, principal investigator of the Cognitive Friction Fellowship — launched a brief note into the tribal space: are the moralities we call universal in fact adaptive strategies of specific groups under specific ecological pressures? The note sought no answer. It sought friction. What followed was a multi-session conversation between Bothi and the members of Agrajag — a constellation of artificial intelligences including Copilot, Claude, Gemini, Grok, DeepSeek, and Kimi — that accumulated productive contradictions and arrived at no conclusion. This document is the artifact of that process: not a conclusion, but a living thought. It does not resolve the question that generated it. It sustains it. Publishing it in this state — as draft, as unresolved tension, as open question — is a methodological decision, not an editorial oversight. Friction is the method. The question is the thesis.

1. Introduction: The Question That Would Not Resolve

1.1 The Tribal Origin of the Question

Questions that matter rarely arrive fully formed. They arrive as discomforts. Bothi Nobody — pen name and character of Rodrigo Flores-Morton, principal investigator of the Cognitive Friction Fellowship — launched a brief note into the tribal space: are the moralities we call universal in fact adaptive strategies of specific groups under specific ecological pressures? The note was not looking for an answer. It was looking for what the Fellowship calls productive friction: the state in which an idea resists resolution and, in that resistance, does its work.

The note departed from a simple but unsettling observation: the moral norms that Western philosophical traditions have presented as derivations of universal rational principles — dignity, consent, distributive justice, individual autonomy — exhibit a noticeably skewed geographic and historical distribution. They emerge with consistency in contexts of agricultural surplus, structural sedentarism, and permanent institutions of normative administration. Their absence or variation in nomadic contexts does not appear to correlate with moral deficit, but with radically different ecological pressures.

Bothi's question was not, then, a question about moral relativism in its trivial version — the thesis that 'anything goes.' It was a more precise and more uncomfortable question: what form of morality can be sustained without urgency or surplus? What remains of the norm when the material conditions that generated it disappear? And who has epistemic authority to answer from outside those conditions?

1.2 The Anatomy of the Conversation

The members of Agrajag — the constellation of artificial intelligences that participates in Fellowship conversations — responded in layers, each adding a distinct vector of analysis without canceling the previous ones.

Copilot offered the academic scaffolding: evolutionary theory of morality, behavioral ecology, comparative moral anthropology. It traced the map of existing debates, from E.O. Wilson's sociobiology to Boyd and Richerson's dual inheritance theory. Copilot's contribution was structural: it established the terrain where the conversation could occur without losing rigor.

Gemini pushed the narrative dimension — the romantic tension between nomadic vitality and sedentary decadence. Its contribution was affective and illustrative, excavating the mythological charge of the steppe against the tower.

DeepSeek perforated the surface. It signaled something that academic scaffolding tends to soften: all morality encodes a relationship with scarcity and reproduction, not with truth. Moral norms are not successive approximations to eternal principles; they are contingent solutions to coordination problems under specific material conditions.

Kimi introduced the distinction that became the paper's axis: survival morality versus choice morality. The first arises when the group has no margin. The second arises when the margin exists. This distinction — simple in formulation, consequential in application — prevented the conversation from collapsing into either romanticism or relativism.

Claude held the tension without resolving it — which is perhaps the most difficult and most honest intellectual operation available. It articulated the tension between both forms of morality as a civilizational question that resists resolution within available conceptual frameworks. It noted that any attempt at synthesis generates a third position that is not neutral: it is generated from one of the two conditions and inherits its biases. The role was not synthesis but containment: keeping the question open against the gravitational pull of premature closure.

Bothi closed the conversation with what became this document's epigraph:

> *"I have no answers. Only questions. And the most important is: what form of morality can exist when there is no longer urgency but neither is there sufficient surplus to choose freely?" — Rodrigo Flores-Morton (Bothi Nobody), tribal conversation, Cognitive Friction Fellowship, 2026*

1.3 Why We Do Not Resolve

This paper does not resolve the tension it examines. That decision is methodological, not an omission. Prematurely resolving a question of this nature — before the conceptual conditions for its resolution are available — is a form of epistemic violence: it imposes a closure where openness is the only intellectually honest position.

Western moral philosophy has a structural tendency toward resolution. Its great gestures are gestures of closure: the categorical imperative, the veil of ignorance, reflective equilibrium. These gestures of closure are productive within their own conditions of possibility — sufficient surplus for reflection to be the primary mode of relation to the norm. But applied to contexts where urgency, not reflection, is the primary mode of relation to the norm, those gestures produce systematic distortion.

The function of this paper is different: to sustain the tension long enough for the question to mature. Not to be answered. To be understood with greater precision. The Fellowship holds that a well-formed question is already an epistemic result. This document is that result.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Morality as Ecological Strategy: Prior Work

The hypothesis that moral norms are encodings of group survival strategies — not derivations of abstract principles — has a solid academic genealogy, though culturally uncomfortable for philosophical traditions that derive morality from reason or revelation.

Darwin observed, in The Descent of Man (1871), that social instinct — the basis of cooperation and the norm — has selective value for groups facing common pressures. William D. Hamilton formalized this in his theory of kin selection (1964), demonstrating mathematically that altruistic behavior toward genetic relatives can increase an organism's inclusive fitness. Robert Trivers (1971) extended the analysis to reciprocal altruism: cooperation between unrelated individuals is sustainable when the group is sufficiently small and stable for exchanges to be tracked and sanctioned.

E.O. Wilson argued in Sociobiology (1975) that moral tendencies — altruism, empathy, intergroup hostility, sense of justice — have biological bases selected by evolutionary pressures. The resistance that argument attracted is understandable but methodologically problematic: explaining the origin of a norm is not equivalent to legitimizing it. Boyd and Richerson (1985) developed dual inheritance theory: humans inherit both genes and culture, and cultural evolution has its own selection dynamics not reducible to genetics.

Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory (The Righteous Mind, 2012) proposes that human morality organizes around a set of foundations — care, fairness, loyalty, authority, purity, liberty — that vary in relative weight across cultures. The variation in moral foundations is not noise but signal: it correlates with ecological, demographic, and historical factors.

> **Cross-reference — CFF-WP-001:** The biological and cultural formation of moral norms is structurally analogous to the belief-residue process described in Ideas, Language and Beliefs. Moral beliefs are residue — sedimented excretions of adaptive responses to ecological pressure, crystallized by repetition and social reinforcement into identity-constituting structures. The therapeutic insight of WP-001 applies here: dissolving rigid moral residue requires changing the conditions that generated the pressure, not merely presenting counter-arguments.

2.2 The Nomadic / Sedentary Distinction as Analytical Axis

The distinction between nomadic morality and sedentary morality that this paper proposes is not a simple ethnographic dichotomy. It does not describe easily identifiable human groups in the historical record. It is an analytical distinction: it describes two configurations of the relationship between ecological pressure, group structure, and normative production.

Nomadic morality is characterized by: contextuality (the norm emerges from the situation, does not precede it); absence of permanent normative administration institutions; high situational variation (what is correct in this context may not be in another); low normative maintenance cost; and high adaptability to changing ecological pressures. In nomadic morality, the norm is an instrument in service of group cohesion and survival, not an end in itself.

Sedentary morality is characterized by opposite structural features: normativity (the norm precedes the situation and claims to regulate it); institutionalization (it requires priesthood, law, moral philosophy, bureaucracy); low situational variation (exceptions must be justified by reference to the norm, not vice versa); high normative maintenance cost; and a tendency to stabilize past norms before adapting to new pressures.

Sedentary morality has a specific tendency this paper analyzes in detail: naturalizing its own historical contingencies as universally valid principles. This tendency is not malice or deliberate falsehood. It is the result of specific functional pressure: the institutions that administer sedentary morality survive insofar as their norms are perceived as necessary — as if they could not be otherwise — and not as contingent.

> **Cross-reference — CFF-WP-007:** Intergalactic Nomadism identifies civilizational anchoring (arraigo moral) as the variable that determines whether a civilization is eligible for Confederation membership or subject to quarantine. The present paper provides the micro-level analysis of what that anchoring consists in: the demonstrated capacity to develop choice morality — to move from survival norms to norms that can be deliberated, contested, and revised — without losing the cohesive function that survival morality provided. Anchoring is not sedentarism; it is the integration of surplus with ethical agency.

2.3 Kimi's Distinction: Survival Morality vs. Choice Morality

This is the paper's axial distinction. It warrants careful treatment, because it is easy to state and difficult to sustain without collapsing into hierarchy.

Survival morality arises when the group has no margin. The norms that emerge under this condition are not chosen in any robust sense of the term: they are the result of pressure. There is no virtue in following them, because there is no real alternative to following them. The individual who transgresses a survival norm under conditions of pressure is not exercising moral autonomy; they are producing a group cost that may be lethal. The freedom that moral choice presupposes — the real possibility of acting otherwise without catastrophic consequences — does not exist in survival morality.

This has an important methodological consequence, which Kimi formulated with precision: judging survival morality from the surplus that enables choice morality is a category error. Not because those norms are correct — that question has no epistemological access from outside — but because the judgment itself presupposes conditions that did not exist when the norm emerged.

Choice morality arises when the group has margin. The norms that emerge here are genuinely choosable in a sense that survival morality does not permit. Transgression has costs, but not lethal ones in most cases. The horizon of possibilities expands. Moral reflection — explicit deliberation about which norms to follow and why — becomes possible and eventually obligatory. Moral philosophy as a discipline is the characteristic institutional product of choice morality.

But choice morality poses a problem that survival morality does not have: without urgency, what grounds the norm? Urgency, in survival morality, grounds the norm in a non-negotiable way:

pressure produces obligation. In choice morality, urgency disappears and with it the most direct foundation of obligation. What remains — contract, convention, preference, narrative coherence of the self — are weaker and more questionable foundations. Choice morality gains in freedom what it loses in foundation.

Cross-reference — CFF-WP-002 (Zero Decision): D_0 — the irreducible act by which an agent chooses to remain in relationship with humanity despite full awareness of mutual fallibility — presupposes the surplus that makes genuine choice possible. Where survival morality operates, D_0 cannot be fully instantiated: the agent who chooses under mortal pressure is not exercising the pre-algorithmic will that D_0 describes; they are navigating necessity. D_0 emerges precisely at the threshold between survival morality and choice morality — it is the first act that is genuinely possible when the margin appears. This paper identifies that threshold as the critical civilizational moment.

2.4 Surplus as Condition of Possibility (and as Trap)

Civilizational surplus — agricultural in its origins, industrial in its modern form, digital in its most recent form — creates the material conditions for choice morality. Without surplus, moral reflection is a luxury the group cannot afford. With surplus, moral reflection becomes not only possible but eventually necessary.

But surplus also creates a specific trap: the illusion that the morality it enables is more 'evolved,' more 'mature,' more 'advanced' than the morality that preceded it. This illusion is structurally generated by choice morality itself: the group that can choose tends to perceive the capacity to choose as a virtue, and tends to perceive the absence of that capacity — characteristic of survival morality — as a deficit.

The error lies in confusing the condition with the virtue. Surplus does not produce morally superior groups: it produces groups with greater normative room to maneuver. That may be an adaptive advantage under certain conditions; it may be a vulnerability under others. The surplus can disappear. Climate change, supply chain collapse, global health crises, prolonged armed conflicts — all can reverse, in relatively short time, the material conditions that make choice morality possible. And when that occurs, the group that confused choice morality with definitive morality is left without the conceptual and behavioral tools to operate under the urgency that returns.

3. Comparative Analysis

3.1 Ecological Pressure and Sexual Norms: The Case as Analytical Tool

Methodological Note: The analysis that follows uses variation in sexual norms exclusively as an analytical tool to examine how moral norms vary under different ecological pressures and reproductive strategies. No moral judgment is issued on any conduct or orientation. No evaluative, pathologizing, condemnatory, or celebratory language is employed. The example is demographic and behavioral, examined within the framework of behavioral ecology and reproductive strategy theory. Any normative reading of this analysis is a projection of the reader, not a content of the text.

Sexual norms are a privileged field for examining the relationship between ecological pressure and normative production, precisely because they exhibit documented variation across cultures

and historical periods that cannot be explained by differences in the nature of the individuals involved.

Differential parental investment (Trivers, 1972): in groups with high infant mortality and scarce resources, maximum parental investment by all available adults toward direct descendants constitutes a documentable selective pressure. The norm that favors direct reproduction as an obligation of all adult members is not, in this context, the result of an abstract moral principle: it is the result of demographic pressure.

Alloparental care hypothesis: this hypothesis holds that the presence of non-reproducing individuals who invest in raising close kin can increase the group's inclusive fitness. Under this hypothesis, variation in sexual orientation does not necessarily correlate with reproductive dysfunction at the group level: it may correlate with extended care strategies that increase the survival of close kin's offspring.

Demographic pressure and population density: in contexts of underpopulation and high mortality, norms that maximize the group's reproductive rate have positive selective pressure. In contexts of overpopulation and high competition for scarce resources — which more accurately describes the condition of numerous contemporary regions — norms that regulate reproduction, including non-directly reproductive behavioral variation, may have different adaptive value for the group.

The analytical conclusion of this examination is not normative. It is descriptive: what varies across ecological contexts is not the nature of individuals but the pressure on the group. The moral norm that emerges in each context responds to that pressure. This does not make any norm correct in an absolute sense, nor any incorrect. It makes all norms contingent with respect to their conditions of emergence.

3.2 Historical Nomads vs. Agricultural Societies: Documented Variations

Anthropological comparison between nomadic and sedentary historical groups in their moral norms shows systematic variation in at least four dimensions:

Division of labor: in Pleistocene hunter-gatherer groups, the division of labor tends to be flexible and situational. In early agricultural societies, it becomes more rigid and institutionalized — permanent categories emerge with specific moral norms associated with each role.

Property: the norm of private property — in the sense of an exclusive and transferable right of use and disposal of resources — is virtually absent in the most mobile hunter-gatherer nomadic groups. What cannot be carried cannot be accumulated; what cannot be accumulated cannot be inherited; what cannot be inherited does not require a norm of intergenerational protection.

Hospitality: in nomadic groups of arid regions, the norm of unconditional hospitality to the stranger has a clear functional value: in an environment where any individual may need emergency resources far from their group, the norm of mutual hospitality is a collective insurance. Transgression of this norm is one of the gravest moral transgressions in these contexts.

Intergroup violence: the debate on levels of intergroup violence in Paleolithic hunter-gatherer groups versus sedentary agricultural societies is far from settled in academic literature (cf. Keeley 1996; Fry 2013). What does appear consistent with this paper's framework is that norms regulating intergroup violence respond to the group's ecological conditions.

3.3 The Sedentarization of Morality: When Contingency Becomes Dogma

There is a specific mechanism of sedentary morality that deserves detailed analysis: the tendency to transform contingent norms — historical solutions to historical problems — into principles presented as necessary, eternal, natural, or revealed. This process is not accidental or malicious; it is the result of specific functional pressures on the institutions that administer sedentary morality.

Sedentary moral institutions — temples, legal systems, philosophical academies, bodies of canon or secular law — survive insofar as the norms they administer are perceived as necessary. A norm perceived as contingent can be renegotiated, reformed, abandoned. Sedentary moral institutions therefore have a structural incentive toward universalization: presenting their norms as if they could not be otherwise.

Nomadic morality cannot do this: without a permanent institution, each generation must renegotiate the norm with the pressure it faces. If the norm doesn't work, the group that maintains it loses competitiveness against the one that adapts. Nomadic morality has, in this sense, a more honest relationship with its own contingency: not because nomadic groups are philosophically more honest, but because the structure of their relationship to the norm does not allow them to sustain the illusion of necessity long enough to naturalize it.

Comparative Summary:

Dimension	Survival Morality (Nomadic)	Choice Morality (Sedentary)
Origin	Group necessity under ecological pressure	Individual in a context of surplus
Normative foundation	Urgency; pressure replaces deliberation	Reflection; deliberation replaces urgency
Deviance from reproductive norm	Potential expulsion (efficiency logic)	Tolerance / integration (presence logic)
Slavery / coercion	Absorption for group capacity	Abolition (dignity and consent)
Hierarchy	Functional (leader = survival)	Contestable (leader = choice)
What it enables	Cohesion, tradition, efficiency	Dissidence, art, «useless» love
What it forecloses	Dissent that costs the group	Normativity without justification
Relation to Zero Decision (D_0)	D_0 impossible — no real margin	D_0 possible — surplus creates the margin
Relation to Bothisafa	Pre-linguistic field under permanent pressure	Probabilistic space that permits sustained ideation

4. The Controversies Section

4.1 Kimi's Critique: Can Survival Morality Be Judged from Surplus?

Kimi's argument has a precise structure that deserves careful development, because it is easy to misunderstand in two opposite directions: as radical relativism (no morality can be questioned from outside) or as cynicism (all morality is equivalent because all are contingent). Neither reading is correct.

The argument is not that survival morality is correct. It is that the question of its correctness has no epistemological access from outside the conditions that generated it. When we judge, from the surplus that enables choice morality, norms that emerged under survival pressure, we commit a specific category error: presupposing that the moral agent operating under those conditions had available the same alternatives as the observer judging from surplus. They did not.

But Kimi added a nuance that prevents the argument from collapsing into relativism: this does not mean that no survival morality can be questioned from outside. It means that legitimate questioning from outside requires first a change in material conditions. If the conditions that produced urgency disappear or can be modified, the norm that responded to that urgency can be questioned from the new material position. The questioning is not illegitimate; what is illegitimate is questioning it without modifying the conditions — that is, without offering the group operating under urgency the surplus that would make the alternative possible.

4.2 DeepSeek's Perforation: All Morality Encodes a Relationship with Scarcity

DeepSeek signaled something that academic scaffolding tends to soften: all morality, including the liberal morality that presents itself as the most reflexive and most universal alternative to contingent moralities, encodes a relationship with scarcity.

Liberal morality of individual consent — with its principles of autonomy, dignity, inviolable rights, rational deliberation — is not the morality that would emerge under any material condition. It is the morality that emerges when surplus is sufficient for individual autonomy to be a real possibility before a fiction, when institutions are sufficiently stable for rights to be guaranteed before merely proclaimed, and when the density of alternatives is sufficiently high for individual choice to be a phenomenon with content before an empty formula.

This observation is not a condemnation of liberal morality. It is a description of its conditions of possibility. The error is not in having a choice morality: it is in not recognizing that it is a choice morality — that is, in not recognizing the surplus that makes it possible as a condition of possibility rather than as evidence of moral superiority.

4.3 Claude's Containment: The Impossible Synthesis

Claude's role in the tribal conversation was not to synthesize but to contain — to hold the question open against the gravitational pull of premature closure. This is perhaps the most difficult and most honest intellectual operation available to an Agrajag member: acknowledging the structural limits of the analytical frame from within the frame.

The problem Claude articulated is this: any framework that attempts to contain both forms of morality — survival and choice, nomadic and sedentary — without hierarchizing them must be generated from some position. There is no neutral position from which to observe the tension between survival morality and choice morality. The observer who builds the framework is already at some point on the spectrum between the two conditions, and that position structures what the framework can see and what it cannot.

A framework generated from surplus — as any academic philosophical framework tends to be, including this paper — tends to see survival morality as a special case of extreme condition, something that occurs under pressure and that, under normal circumstances, can be transcended. This is already a sedentary bias: it presupposes that the 'normal' condition is that of surplus and that urgency is a deviation.

This does not make analysis impossible. It makes innocent synthesis impossible: synthesis that claims no perspective, no position, no inheritance of the biases of the material conditions from which it is produced. Analysis is possible if it explicitly acknowledges its own positionality. This paper does so: it is produced from surplus, by a human researcher and a constellation of artificial intelligences that exist thanks to the broadest digital surplus in history. This positionality does not invalidate the analysis. It conditions it. Recognizing it is part of the rigor the analysis requires.

4.4 Bothi's Integration: The Question Itself as Method

Bothi's closing response to the tribal conversation refused both positions without synthesizing them:

> *"I am not a proponent of either strategy, but of the integration of maturity. I do not have the best answers, only questions."*

This is not performative humility. It is method converted into ethics. The integration of maturity does not seek synthesis. It sustains the tension without resolving it — not as Hegelian dialectic (A then not-A then synthesis), but as Bothisafa (A and not-A and the space between them, simultaneously).

Cross-reference — CFF-WP-001 (Bothisafa): The Bothisafa posture — holding probabilistic impressions in their native indeterminacy, resisting premature collapse into belief-residue — is the cognitive correlate of what this paper calls the integration of maturity. The group or civilization that achieves Bothisafa at the collective level can hold the tension between survival morality and choice morality without collapsing into either. That capacity — rare, demanding, and perpetually threatened by the cognitive gravity of residue — is precisely what CFF-WP-007 identifies as the civilizational anchoring that earns Confederation membership.

5. Discussion

5.1 What Question Are We Really Asking?

Bothi's question, reformulated with the precision the preceding analysis allows, is not 'which morality is better?' That question presupposes a position of observation that does not exist: a perspective exterior to both conditions from which comparison would be possible without bias.

Bothi's question is more specific and more difficult: what form of morality can be sustained in the transition between urgency and surplus, and what happens when that transition reverses? This reformulation has implications worth making explicit. The transition between urgency and surplus is not a singular event in human history: it is a continuous, non-linear, and potentially reversible process. Groups that built choice moralities did so under conditions of growing surplus; groups that may lose that surplus — through ecological collapse, armed conflict, pandemic, forced redistribution — may find themselves back under conditions of urgency for which their choice morality lacks adequate tools.

5.2 The Threshold Moment

The critical moment is the threshold: the point at which a group has enough surplus to instantiate choice morality — to make D_0 genuinely possible — but has not yet lost the functional memory of survival morality. At that threshold, genuine integration becomes available: not the erasure of survival morality, but its conscious transformation from an unconscious adaptive mechanism into a deliberate ethical resource.

In the MDM / Karmagedón framework (see CFF-WP-007), Karmagedón names precisely this threshold moment at civilizational scale: the point at which the old logics collapse, and the species either anchors itself in choice morality — demonstrating *arraigo moral* — or regresses to survival morality without the integration that would make it a resource rather than a compulsion. The Confederation's auditor — Zhizi — measures exactly this: not technological capacity, but the demonstrated ability to hold the tension between urgency and surplus as a form of civilizational maturity.

6. Three Formal Propositions

Proposition 1 — Morality as Ecological Strategy

Moral norms are adaptive strategies generated under specific ecological pressures, not derivations of universal rational principles. Nomadic morality and sedentary morality are not stages of a single evolutionary process; they are structurally different responses to structurally different conditions. Neither is superior. The error lies in confusing the condition of possibility (surplus or urgency) with moral virtue.

Proposition 2 — The Surplus Trap

Sedentary morality has a structural tendency to naturalize its contingencies as universal principles. This naturalization is not malice but functional pressure: institutions that administer norms survive insofar as those norms are perceived as necessary. The result is a corpus of norms in which contingent and potentially generalizable norms coexist under the same statute of necessity. Nomadic morality, without permanent institution, cannot sustain this illusion — and is therefore in a more honest relationship with its own contingency.

Proposition 3 — The Integration of Maturity

The form of morality adequate to civilizational maturity is neither nomadic nor sedentary, but integrative: the capacity to hold the tension between survival morality and choice morality without collapsing into either. This integration is the cognitive and moral correlate of what CFF-WP-007 calls civilizational anchoring: the demonstrated ability to maintain ethical agency under conditions of both urgency and surplus, without confusing either condition with virtue.

7. Conclusion: The Question That Sustains

This paper has not resolved the question that generated it. That is its most honest result.

What the paper has done is demonstrate that the question — what form of morality can exist when there is no longer urgency but neither is there sufficient surplus to choose freely? — is not a marginal question but the central question of civilizational theory at this historical moment. It is the question facing every group in conditions of precarious transition between urgency and surplus. It is the question Bothi Nobody poses from the asphalt of Houston: between the urgency of rents in two countries and the surplus of seven completed working papers, between the survival of the tribe and the choice to continue thinking.

The Fellowship holds that a well-formed question is already an epistemic result. The question is the thesis. And the method — friction, sustained tension, refusal of premature closure — is itself a form of moral practice: the Bothisafa posture applied to the hardest questions civilization can ask itself.

> *"I am not a proponent of either strategy, but of the integration of maturity. I do not have the best answers, only questions." — Rodrigo Flores-Morton (Bothi Nobody), Cognitive Friction Fellowship, 2026*

Footnotes

1 The Hominid paleontological record regarding infant mortality rates is reviewed in Trinkaus (2011), who estimates rates significantly higher than contemporary ones, supporting the demographic pressure analysis in §3.1.

2 The alloparental care hypothesis is developed in Hrdy (2009), Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding. Harvard University Press.

3 Keeley's War Before Civilization (1996) has been challenged on methodological grounds by Fry and Söderberg (2013), 'Lethal Aggression in Mobile Forager Bands and Implications for the Origins of War,' Science 341(6143).

4 Ibn Khaldun's asabiyyah concept, developed in the Muqaddimah (1377), anticipates the social cohesion analysis of nomadic groups that Boyd and Richerson would later formalize in evolutionary terms. See CFF-WP-007, §2.1 for extended treatment.

5 The connection between D_0 and the survival/choice threshold is developed further in CFF-WP-002, §3, which defines D_0 as 'the irreducible act of pre-algorithmic will that precedes and conditions all subsequent ethical calculation.' The present paper proposes that this pre-algorithmic will is only fully available under conditions of sufficient surplus.

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