

THE STORIES THAT EAT US

A PEARL — Perspective Engineering Aesthetic Research Layout
Egregores, Identity, and the Spectrum of Free Will

EDCI 55201 — AI in Education — Joshua M. Atkinson — Purdue University — Spring 2026

"The pearl is hidden inside the crap. You have to go through the crap to get to it."

— Phil Stutz, Stutz (Netflix, 2022). Design: CRAP principles (Robin Williams, The Non-Designer's Design Book)



< THE GRIT

What egregores feed on — the uncomfortable truths

WHAT IS AN EGREGORE?

Not a metaphor. A real collective thought-form — a living pattern sustained by shared attention, emotion, and identity agreements. Documented across esoteric traditions (Lévi, Le Grand Arcane, 1868), Jungian psychology (collective unconscious), and modern cognitive science (Kahneman, System 1 thinking). See reverse for full definition & historical context.

THE COGNITIVE LOOP

Event → Media Narrative → Identity Agreement → Emotional Charge → Consent → The Egregore Feeds. This is the mechanism. Thoughts connect to feelings ONLY through identity. Without 'I am X,' the thought has no emotional grip.

WHAT WE IGNORE

- Smedley Butler, War is a Racket (1935): 'War is a racket. It always has been.' Two-time Medal of Honor.
- Cambodia, 1975: Khmer Rouge executed educated people first — egregores destroy those who see them.
- 'Banana Republics': United Fruit Company rewrote governments for profit (Guatemala, 1954).
- Contrasting headlines: Same event, opposite framing. The story needs YOUR belief to survive.

THE PEARL >

What you find when you go through the discomfort

FREE WILL IS A SPECTRUM

You are not either free or enslaved. Free will is a spectrum: Compulsive (asleep, reacting) → Aware (present, noticing) → Intentional (choosing which story to feed). The lesson is seeing where you are on this spectrum right now.

WE ARE THE STORIES WE TELL OURSELVES

Identity is consent. When you say 'I am a patriot,' 'I am broken,' 'I am a victim,' you sign a blank check with your attention. Egregores cash it.

Neville Goddard (1944): 'Assumption, if persisted in, hardens into fact.'

Carl Jung (1968): 'We do not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious.'

THE MATURE PATH

Main Character (agency): Choosing your story, your attention, your consent. Side Character (service): Serving someone else's story with love — not obedience. Maturity holds both without losing self.

'I am the side character in my children's stories. I die daily. That is not disability — that is discipline.' — Instructor

YOUR EXIT REFLECTION

One egregore I have been feeding is: _____

I feed it by: _____

Tomorrow I will: _____

COMPULSIVE (asleep)

AWARE (present)

INTENTIONAL (choosing)

UNDERSTANDING THE EGREGORE

Definition, Historical Lineage, and Cultural Symbolism

FORMAL DEFINITION

An egregore (Greek: egregoroi, "the wakeful ones") is a collective thought-form — a self-reinforcing psychic entity that arises when a group of people share sustained attention, emotion, and identity around a common idea. The more attention it receives, the stronger it becomes; the stronger it becomes, the more it compels further attention.

The ancient egregoroi were understood as literal supernatural beings — fallen angels (Book of Enoch, 3rd c. BCE). The modern usage as a "collective thought-form" generated by group psychology is a 19th-century reinterpretation (Lévi, 1868). This lesson uses the modern definition.

HISTORICAL LINEAGE

3rd c. BCE

●

Book of Enoch
The Watchers (egregoroi) — angelic beings who descend, share forbidden knowledge, and are sustained by human devotion. (Charles, 1917)

1st–5th c.

●

Roman Imperial Cult
Citizens sacrifice to the genius of the Emperor — not the man, but the collective idea of Rome's divine authority. Refusal = treason (maiestas).

5th–15th c.

●

Medieval Church
Shared liturgy, architecture, and iconography create a collective psychic field. Questioning it produces cognitive distress — identity threat.

1859

●

Victor Hugo
First modern literary use of égrégore in La Légende des siècles — likely poetic, not technical.

1860–1868

●

Éliphas Lévi
"Spirits of the group" that "crush us without pity because they are unaware of our existence." (Le Grand Arcane, 1868; Histoire de la magie, 1860)

1957–1968

●

Carl Jung
"The bigger the crowd, the more negligible the individual." Archetypes as autonomous patterns that override critical thinking. (The Undiscovered Self, 1957)

1935

●

Smedley Butler
Two-time Medal of Honor recipient exposes the egregore of "patriotic duty": "War is a racket. It always has been." (War Is a Racket, 1935)

2001–now

●

Mass & Social Media
"War on Terror" formed in weeks, not decades. Today: hashtags, viral videos, and memes create egregores in hours — decentralized, algorithmic, ambient.

CULTURAL & SYMBOLIC PARALLELS

The egregore pattern appears across world traditions under different names:

[Buddhist] Tibetan Buddhism

Tulpa -- a being created through sustained mental concentration and ritual visualization. Alexandra David-Neel (1929) documented monks who could generate visible thought-forms.

[Kabbalistic] Jewish Tradition

Golem -- a figure animated by collective prayer and sacred letters. The entity serves the group until it grows beyond their control. (Rabbi Loew of Prague, 16th c.)

[Shinto] Japanese Tradition

Kotodama (word-spirit) -- the belief that words carry spiritual power. Collective speech-acts (chanting, naming) generate autonomous forces that shape reality.

[Egyptian] Ancient Egypt

Ka -- the vital essence of a person or group. Temples were designed to sustain the Ka of the pharaoh through collective ritual attention. The Ka persists only if fed.

[Christian] Christian Theology

'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.' (Matthew 18:20). The presence arises from collective attention -- an egregoric principle stated in Scripture.

[Sociology] Modern Sociology

Emile Durkheim (1912): 'collective effervescence' -- the energy generated when groups gather in shared ritual. This energy creates a social force that individuals cannot resist alone.