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A CROWD OF ONE

The Future of Individual Identity

JOHN HENRY CLIPPINGER

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How do I know you are who you say you are? Why should I trust you? Where do we get our identities, our sense of who we are? Why, after thousands of years of conflict do people still become locked into cycles of violence, defining and defending their identities? What happens when our identities become digital? John Clippinger, one of today's preeminent experts on technology influences on business and society, offers a fresh and provocative perspective, grounded in everyday and historical examples, that offers a vision for a new scientific understanding of human nature and identity.

In **A CROWD OF ONE**, Clippinger takes us through the historical origins of identity and the way it is influencing—and being influenced by—today's world. He examines origin narratives from around the world and the religious underpinnings of many people's identities, and explores the competing theories of human nature developed by Hobbes, Adam Smith, and some of the other leading philosophical minds throughout history. He applies principles from evolutionary biology to show *why* and *how* we evolved some of our most unique capacities: trust, empathy, retribution, honor, virtue, leadership, reciprocity, and collaboration. Drawing on modern scientific studies, he debunks some of our strongest-held beliefs about individualism, rationality, self interest and moral absolutism. He challenges thinkers on the Left and the Right and proposes a new theory of leadership, social virtue, and cooperation derived from evolutionary biology and neuroscience.

Understanding what science is teaching about who we are can help us better navigate a world that is continuously transforming itself in unprecedented ways. Clippinger explains how new conceptions of identity and human nature can help us to understand the cultures from which terrorism is likely to spring and prevent it. Rather than use military force to inflame cycles of violence, Clippinger argues for a new kind of military mission that combines the restrained use of force with a capacity to create trusted and open indigenous civic institutions. He looks at how fears over big-brother surveillance in our digital world are warranted, and offers an alternative that is more secure, with ways to express, manage, and protect one's digital identities. He walks us through the "big bang" in next-generation online commerce, and explains how it may usher in a new era of capitalism that harnesses the powers of the invisible hand to direct resources in an economically efficient and ecologically responsible way. His conclusions will have profound implications for everything from social-networking sites like MySpace and virtual worlds like Second Life to the Open Source movement to the military operations going on in the Middle East and Africa.

John Henry Clippinger is a Senior Fellow at the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School where he is engaged in research on open identity and digital institutions. He has also worked for the Department of Defense on issues of network centric organizations and global security as well as for many other branches of government. He is a serial entrepreneur and an author of books and articles on artificial intelligence, language, business, and self-organizing networks. A graduate of Yale University, he holds a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania, and resides in Jefferson, New Hampshire.

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