

The Personalist Social Contract

The Personalist Social Contract:

*Saving Multiculturalism,
Artificial Intelligence,
and Civilization*

By

Dominique J. Monlezun

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-8332-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8332-0

To Susan, Lucy, André, Jude, my parents, and extended family—I am not me without you.

To Dr. Colleen Gallagher, Dr. Cezar Iliescu, Dr. Alberto Garcia, and Dr. Richard Velkley, Dr. Rebecca Mark, and Dr. Shane Courtland—your mentorship echoes in every one of my pages.

And to *Esse*, where our human family and hope for a common future find their rest.

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INDEX OF ABBREVIATIONS

a.	article
ad	reply
A.D.	<i>Anno Domini</i>
AI	artificial intelligence
bk.	book
B.C.	Before Christ
c.f.	<i>conferatur</i> ('refer to')
ch.	chapter
<i>ibid.</i>	<i>ibidem</i> ('in the same place')
i.e.,	<i>id est</i> ('in other words')
para.	paragraph
pg.	page
p.	part
sect.	section
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
<i>UDHR</i>	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
<i>UDBHR</i>	Universal Declaration on Ethics and Human Rights
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization
USA	The United States of America
vol.	volume
WWI	World War I
WWII	World War II

CHAPTER ONE

UNITE OR DIE?

“A child is a child of everyone.” – Sudanese proverb¹

1.1. Slavery, power, and philosophy

75 Igbo Africans from modern-day Nigeria overpowered their ship tyrants and marched to their drowning deaths in Georgia’s swamps, rather than submit to American slavery under a silent May 1803 night sky. Some say they sang as they waded into the marsh, “The Water Spirit brought us, the Water Spirit will take us home.”² Some say they thought they could walk back to Africa on the seas, and even if they failed, freedom was worth the risk.³ Others say it was America’s first freedom march.⁴ What we do know, is that they were never slaves again.

Today, we often hear how our world has never been more free, rich, advanced, and connected. And yet so many of us feel like it has never been more trapped, unequal, manipulated, and divided. We have nearly non-stop news coverage on every screen of pandemics and propaganda, state-sanctioned repression and violence, computers that think for themselves and science that makes weapons which can end us all with a key stroke. Many of are left wondering are we also sinking in this modern midnight marsh? Are we also still chained? Is returning home even possible?

¹ Levy, Patricia et al. *Sudan*. New York, NY: Cavendish Publishing, 2017, pp. 64.

² Ciucevich, Robert. “Glynn County Historical Resources Survey Report.” *Glynn County Board of Commissioners*. July 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20160305042643/http://www.glynncounty.org/documents/8/188/2009_Glynn_Co%20_HRS_Report2.PDF.

³ Watts, Linda. *Encyclopedia of American Folklore*. New York, NY: Facts on File, 2007, pp. 211.

⁴ “Slave Legend Draws People for Two-Day Remembrance in Coastal Georgia.” *Associated Press*. 2 September 2002, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160303213637/http://www.ssiheritagecoalition.org/articles-about-ssaahc.html>.

As a physician, I began writing this during the COVID-19 pandemic as I lost more and more patients, with many of those who survived increasingly asking these questions to me. I cannot fix a broken heart with a stethoscope, nor give meaning with a pill to someone who has lost who she is. To heal my patients, I increasingly realized I had to (at least try to) heal what is fundamentally broken in humanity and crumbling in our modern civilization. So I sent the finished book to the publisher on the 4th day of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, by which time 1,115 civilians were wounded and 165 dead (in addition to 33 children) including after an orphanage was assaulted by the Russian military.⁵ A Ukrainian woman huddled in a subway-turned-bomb shelter confessed through tears, "You wake up at 5 a.m...and you find out the world is no longer the safe place you imagined... I hope that Europe and USA, they will support us the most because [Russian President] Putin ... understands only the language of power."⁶ Between the pandemic and war, we are increasingly left to collectively wonder what is this new world we are waking up to, one dominated by power alone?

The smaller questions seem so much smaller and irrelevant compared to these bigger ones. Does it really matter what job I have or shoes I buy or neighborhood I live in if I am not free or there is no meaning in any of it? These are not only defining questions, but ones that are as old as humanity. And not just abstract and philosophical but urgently concrete and practical—it seems that we have to have at least a minimum set of shared beliefs that hold civilization together, and today it seems like we cannot even agree to that. How do we get along if we all are seeking different things? Is what I am seeking not defined by who I am? Then who am I? Who are we...what we do really want...where do we belong...with whom do we belong...is there an ultimate destination where happiness and peace can be grasped, possessed, and remain with us? Or slowly, steadily, like a crawling, growing madness do these silent whispers continue to build from within us but never heard outside—and never quieted inside—voicing the surging fear become panic that we will never reach home again, that happiness is just a watery mirage, that there is only war within

⁵ Madani, Doha. "16 Children Killed so Far During Russian Invasion." *NBC News*. 27 February 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/live-blog/russia-ukraine-live-updates-n1290057/ncrd1290127#blogHeader>.

⁶ Vogt, Adrienne. "On the Ground: Woman Sheltering in Subway Station Expresses Uncertainty and Disbelief." *CNN*. 24 February 2022, https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-news-02-24-22-intl/h_5110f99659a1a4df65307e94e18ea58e.

and without, that nothing satisfies. In a strange land among strangers even to ourselves, have we lost our way, resigning ourselves to a harsh imprisonment of indifference saying that home and happiness are lies and illusions, and do we just need to accept the nothingness inside us that will soon engulf us eternally? Do we just need to forge some caricature of self-created identity or fleeting wealth or pleasure or power or prestige to call our own, only for it to moments later fall lifeless beside us when the swamp reclaims us?

Or is it better for us to return to our former chains, for though slaves we may still be 'safe'? Prisoners of power structures and systems in which the powerful few control the weak many, where injustice, racism, inequity, violence, discrimination, manipulation, and exploitation are just the necessary conditions for us to remain alive for a little longer (regardless of whether this is considered living). And yet we see the world increasingly consumed with individual and societal violence that leaves us to choose between a watery servitude, or grave. All this while our tools become more and more advanced and diverse cultures increasingly silenced and seemingly even human civilization threatened. Where a child is not a child but only a product (along with us) used by powers beyond our small communities for ends we do not know, but know they are not for our good.

Since history began, has politics not kept the powerful in power as 'might' makes what is considered 'right'? All the while philosophers mutter empty, nonsensical sayings that ignore, mock, or even reinforce our continued slavery or impending deaths. The brilliant, controversial, revolutionary modern philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900 A.D.) proudly proclaimed, "Why I am so wise. Why I am so intelligent... Why I am a destiny"? Because as he asserted, he alone was making the evolutionary march from humanity's ape ancestry, past modern humanity, to ultimately reach the apex—the "Übermensch" (Over-man). And as such he transcends the 'slave morality' of Judeo-Christianity and even the post-Enlightenment modern philosophy which succeeded it as the foundational belief system of Western and then eventually modern civilization. It was the 'slave morality' which appealed to a common human nature and reality to propose logically and experientially that 'right' makes 'might,' that politics must be constrained by philosophy, and power sought by politics must be subordinate to the good sought by philosophy (or all peoples will

be made subordinate to the powerful who become tyrants over them).^{7,8,9} But Nietzsche elevated himself to be the Over-man over all other Homo Sapiens ‘foolish’ enough to believe such fairytales. He countered that such belief systems are only lies and illusions, for they ‘defend’ objective philosophical truths or claims about reality when they actually only assert psychological or subjective ‘truths’ meant for the weak to grab power...such slave morality values as goodness, evil, justice, mercy, and forgiveness are only hollow words which ignore humanity’s original ‘master morality’ in which all that actually exists is good or bad, power or not having it, rulers but no rules.

But before the modern German *Übermensch*, the ancient Greek agnostic physician-philosopher, Aristotle (Greek: Ἀριστοτέλης, 384–322 B.C.), foresaw and rejected the tyrants and the mob through a proposed logical refutation, later refined by the Italian Christian priest-philosopher, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274 A.D), who saw common sense and multiculturalism as strengths not barriers. He integrated classical secular, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian philosophies with their teleological metaphysics. All other domains or disciplines of human knowledge study particular things or beings, like the human body in biology or gravity in physics. But metaphysics is the only domain that principally studies being itself (or being as being), and so it is the philosophical sub-discipline that is the foundation of all other domains—including the ethics showing us what are good actions that should to be done to others and those evil (absence of good) to be avoided. If we cannot show the truth that being is real, then there is no point to study any specific beings. And by thinking logically about our common human experience, Aristotle formulated metaphysics and (formal) logic and by reasoning backwards from current beings which are effects of prior causative beings, he argued that ultimately there has to be an Uncaused Cause...Aquinas following him argued that all beings are also goods, that we act to obtain goods, and ultimately we want the Supreme Good that alone can satisfy us (which is the same thing as the Uncaused Cause which is also our Final Cause or end that generates and orders all other goods and by which all goods exist) (para. 1072b18–28 of

⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals & Ecce Homo*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York, NY: Vintage, 1967 (1908), pp. 201–209.

⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Edited by Adrian Del Caro and Robert Pippin. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006 (1883).

⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Beyond Good and Evil*. London, UK: Penguin Books, 1973 (1886).

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*¹⁰ and I.8.1-3 and 6.28 and I.16.3 of Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*]^{11,12}).

European Enlightenment philosophers nearly a millennia later created modern philosophy (by which modern society was manufactured) by rejecting rather than logically refuting or disproving the above. They opted instead to reportedly identify and justify 'objective truths' solely on the basis of varying conceptions of an abstract universal rationality (as an impartial third-party standard of morality based on people's common ability to naturally reason toward what is true and good according to each individual's search for it). Kantianism, the social contract, utilitarianism, and similar systems so flourished and since framed virtually all scientific, social, political, and economic aspects of modernity. After 200 years of such attempts, Nietzsche arose from within that tradition to revolt against modern philosophy that revolted against classical philosophy. He claimed that both produced the same slave morality unworthy of the new Superman who would transcend the old man of humanity. Such morality, according to Nietzsche, birthed modernity's nihilism in which the individual 'realizes' the Enlightenment failed to justify objective truth not simply because it attempted to use subjective constructs of rationality masquerading as a knowable objective metaphysical foundation, but also because there is no objective truth and thus no intrinsic meaning to life. According to Nietzsche, all history's 'objective' claims are really just subjective claims one can quickly dismiss and need not even logically refute, on par with you claiming vanilla ice cream is superior to chocolate which I reject now (and we can both change our minds later about). And so rather than attempt to produce a new rationality without the supposed flaws of classical and modern philosophy, Nietzsche tosses out all rationality and philosophy (for according to him not even modern philosophy can defend the new systems it created on its own terms after they refused to return to the classical ones). Philosophy as humanity's historical check on politics since devolved into politics' new weapon as the ideologies of the 20th century, clashing and creating the bloodiest

¹⁰ Cohen, S. Marc and C.D.C. Reeve. "Aristotle's *Metaphysics*." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2020 ed. Edited by Edward N. Zalta. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2020/entries/aristotle-metaphysics>.

¹¹ Aertsen, Jan. "The Convertibility of Being and Good in St. Thomas Aquinas." *New Scholasticism*, vol. 59, 1985, pp. 49-70.

¹² Amid the lack of academic consensus for medieval text citation styles, Aquinas's works unless otherwise noted will be cited according to one of the most commonly used contemporary styles: Part (i.e., I).Question (i.e., 23).Article (i.e., 2).

century on record through the world wars and subsequent Cold War proxy conflicts. What is 'right' so was pronounced by those with 'might' to keep it.

So this is the world we seem to find ourselves in now. The people in power tell us what we are permitted to do as their products, early Enlightenment modern philosophers tell us we have to follow the moral rules (they created but cannot ultimately justify), and late modern philosophers tell us philosophy is dead (and there is no truth but only power we have to seize for ourselves). But common sense throws up red flags at this point for us. Without philosophy it seems there is only politics, without truth there is only power, without the right there is only might, without the pen there is only the sword, without acting together to survive there is only increased threat of elimination from a violent few, for without the person there is only an animal (except where an animal kills what hunger tells it is needed for survival, the person who has lost reason telling her/him what is needed for her/his fulfillment not just survival subsequently has no limit to her/his violence, becoming more like a drunk brawler you cannot reason with but only restrain).

And it seems many days that our world is just one big drunk brawl. Without any common moral language or meaning, we yell past each other with anger and fear as our global human family shrinks by our own severing hands into smaller and smaller tribes. We eye each other more and more suspiciously behind ever growing walls of distrust, disagreement, and disintegration not only of society but even its underlying science, politics, and economics—and ultimately its philosophy and related religion upon which the entire structure of society rests. A more philosophically technical way of putting this is that modernity is dominated by an almost awe-inspiring technologically sophisticated science within a Western-led liberal democratic capitalism, all built on a non-realistic nihilistic post-Enlightenment modern philosophy (oscillating between Kantian deontology with universal duty-based rules and utilitarianism that generally lets us break those rules and use others as long as we justify doing so to maximize the utility or pleasure of the many). And this whole structure rests on a foundational mixture of atheism and agnosticism alternating from vague deism or pantheism to open hostility to any alternative religions. It has been a great run, but that run is coming to a rapid end. A growing consensus of the world's leading societal and scientific figures increasingly warn of the very real and urgent existential threats we pose to ourselves—our divisions

are becoming too sharp and technologies too powerful to leave much margin of error or time to fix what is broken with our civilization.¹³ Our multiculturalism which built it and our artificial intelligence (AI) which increasingly drives it, as our greatest strength and tool, are increasingly weaponized to undermine it.

The whole house of humanity seems to be increasingly crumbling, and we do not even have the internal resources to save it. Despite the amazing advances produced in this structure, there seems to be the growing suspicion that to get different results we need a different (or at least improved) resources. To plug the roof, we may need to first start with the building's foundation. To save the home (or at least as much of modern secularist society and philosophy that is salvageable), we may first need to go outside of it as repairs from within for the last few centuries are increasingly limited at best and futile at worst, in the words of the people who have tried and failed from within this tradition.

To understand their diagnosis and proposed treatments, we need to know a little more of modernity as a tradition or system of thought and related practices. Globally modern society is largely dominated by the Western world (North America and Western Europe, which are in decline currently amid the rising power of Russia and China [after their current states were remade by the West in their push to compete with it]). And modern society is dominated by modern philosophy which is largely dominated by the colonial 16th century white European wealthy nations who sought to dominate the world by rejecting the limitations they saw placed on them by the 'authorities' of their day. The 1543 Scientific Revolution revolted scientifically against the ancient Aristotelian sciences. The 1517 Protestant Reformation revolted theologically against the Catholic Church. And the 1637 and onward Enlightenment revolted philosophically against Aristotelian metaphysics and morality (imported by the Church via Aquinas). The latest paved the way for the subsequent rejection of the clergy and kings whose authority was supposedly intertwined with the former. And finally, authority itself was finally absolved (aside from maybe science itself freed from any underlying foundation), birthing the modern narrative. This account says truth could be defined by each individual for each individual. Anything beyond what could be measured

¹³ Mecklin, John. "At Doom's Doorstep: It is 100 Seconds to Midnight." *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. 20 January 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2022-doomsday-clock-statement.pdf>.

was rejected as irrelevant or inaccessible. The world was reduced to only the immanent.¹⁴ It is a world that is cold, impersonal, mechanical, but at least free for each individual to define her/his freedom and life on her/his own terms.

Central to this story is its assertion that for the last few centuries religion and science have been fighting a war that science has increasingly been winning. And so today, secular science ‘freed’ from the illusion of God or objective truth has provided a compelling, comprehensive, and complete account of us and our universe that no educated and rational modern individual could possibly consider the ‘superstitions’ of religion or philosophy. Late modernity’s Nietzsche, the American atheist philosopher Richard Rorty (1931-2007 A.D.), as one of contemporary philosophy’s most celebrated and influential voices argued we need to grow up past our childlike collective religious, philosophical, and psychological fairy tales and become practical adults like the late modern pragmatic philosophers he followed:

Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey are in agreement that the notion of knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation, needs to be abandoned. For all three, the notions of ‘foundations of knowledge’ and of philosophy as revolving around the Cartesian attempt to answer the epistemological skeptic are set aside. Further, they set aside the notion of ‘the mind’ common to Descartes, Locke, and Kant—as a special object of study, located in inner space, containing elements or processes which make knowledge possible...[The pragmatists rather] set aside epistemology and metaphysics as possible disciplines.... [They] glimpse the possibility of a form of intellectual life in which the vocabulary of philosophical reflection inherited from the seventeenth century would seem as pointless as the thirteenth-century philosophical vocabulary had seemed to the Enlightenment.¹⁵

Almost a century after Nietzsche pronounced ‘God is dead,’ Rorty would declare that so is philosophy (leaving only an American pragmatism joined with metaphysical naturalism as a type of stripped-down intellectualization). Yet it appears that the modern science and politics which took the place of classical religion and philosophy witnessed the

¹⁴ Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (Belknap Press), 2018.

¹⁵ Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979, pp. 6.

two world wars of the 20th century, the greatest surge in state-sponsored violence, rapid weaponization of humanity's most powerful technologies ever developed, and increasing contemporary crises we cannot even seem to agree are crises let alone how to fight them. There is a growing global fear our world is on fire, and we do not know how to stop it. Nor that enough of us even want to try.^{16,17} It seems that modern subjective philosophy (and modern society it is built upon) revolted against classical objective philosophy, only to shortly thereafter revolt against itself, leaving our world without a foundation or a direction.

...But before this modern chaos, there were ancients who thought we can be free of our tyrants, lies, illusions, and that we can find a home in happiness, justice, and peace. These ancients had a different common vision of reality that modernity rejected but never refuted. It was a vision that was a not perfect, but one that was real. Standing before the world's first democracy in Greece's Athens, Socrates (470-399 B.C.) as the first comprehensive philosopher defended this vision:¹⁸

We do not know, neither the Sophists [Academics], nor the Orators [Politicians], nor the Artists, nor I, what is the true, the good, and the beautiful: but there is this difference between us that, although these people know nothing, they all believe they know something. Whereas I, if I know nothing, at least am not in any doubt about it. So that the whole superiority in wisdom which the Oracle attributes to me, reduces to nothing more than that I am fully convinced that I am ignorant of what I do not know.¹⁹

The assembly threw him on trial for 'impiety' to the city's gods and for 'corrupting the youth' when he challenged them to truthfully pursue the ultimate good not simply wealth or power or pleasure or prestige, offering rather a story about prisoners to demonstrate his point. In the Allegory of the Cave, Socrates described slaves with their backs to the cave entrance, feet shackled, and eyes fixed on the wall images they believed were real

¹⁶ Mecklin, John. "At Doom's Doorstep: It is 100 Seconds to Midnight." *The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. 20 January 2022, <https://thebulletin.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2022-doomsday-clock-statement.pdf>.

¹⁷ Monlezun, Dominique. *The Global Ethics of Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020.

¹⁸ Kraut, Richard. "Socrates." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. 23 December 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Socrates>.

¹⁹ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. "Apology of Socrates." *The Two Discourses*. Edited and translated by Victor Gourevitch. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997 (1765), para. 21b-22e.

and constituted reality itself (but were only projections by puppets manipulated by the powerful few standing behind them [think the 1999 movie, *The Matrix*, as a modern retelling of this idea]). Yet one prisoner somehow broke free, crawled upwards out the cave, and saw the beautiful freedom outside illuminated by the sun in which all things could be seen clearly and directly. This freedman thus became a philosopher, a ‘lover of wisdom,’ by coming to the beginning of wisdom or knowledge about the good itself (the ‘Supreme Good’) represented by the sun that makes all other goods clear, intelligible, and ordered under itself...Overcome by hope, this lover rushes back to his fellow prisoner to tell them about this Good (who even the leaders and teachers are under), and about the objective reality they could personally begin to each see and understand slowly, to gradually embrace and be embraced by this goodness which is a true and beautiful, freedom in which the human person is existentially home. Then the puppeteers stood up. And the powerful of Athens executed Socrates.

But not before the flicker of this story broke out in the darkness and spread across the ancient world. Not before word reached the ears of desperate prisoners that just because there is disagreement on freedom or happiness or meaning or morality or truth or goodness, it does not necessarily mean that they do not exist. Our home may still be out there. And so Socrates’ student, Plato, rejected his day’s nominalism (what was later defined as the philosophical position rejecting any universal abstract objects outside of one’s conceptualized terminology for them) by asserting realism. Plato thus proposed a real demonstration of reality made of forms (like beauty or human nature which is universal and abstract) which determine their related matter (like a beautiful statue or a good human being which are particular and concrete). His student, Aristotle, then developed this demonstration of matter as existence (describing that a thing is in being) and form as essence (describing what makes that thing be in being). A human individual in front of you is not just what is measurable, for your intellect can reach through the senses to what is beyond them. Your intellect can see the human individual as a particular matter in front of you, existing according to her/his essence that is universal human nature (but unlike Plato’s forms, Aristotle’s essences only exist in the things by which they exist).

For Plato and Aristotle, we can actually use our senses and reason to trust our reality that is given to us, unlike their contemporaries prefiguring our modern philosophers who argued we cannot trust ourselves but rather must

impose a constructed 'virtual reality' or account upon reality upon which we agree to build a society in that 'reality.' Following them, our contemporary world largely asserts we can only trust the material (i.e., scientific) account not its underlying immaterial (i.e., philosophical) demonstration (which shows how we can trust our senses in the first place). But how can we trust science alone when it relies on the philosophical demonstration that we have an intelligible and knowable reality (which science alone cannot prove)? Such demonstration shows how our material universe operates according to an immaterial order that we conceptualize as discrete scientific laws. We use our senses (to make measurable observations of material phenomena) and then our reason (to abstract a mechanical cause and effect system, and then formalize that system according to those laws as causative principles). And how can science (which deals only with material) tell us there is nothing beyond the material? Science has been a constant and necessary domain of knowledge from ancient times, aided and aiding the other domains. But to set it as the absolute sovereign over all domains of knowledge (or even replacing most if not all others) seems to take a leap of faith so radical that only modernity has attempted it. It seems to take much more faith (and much less reason) to dogmatically assert there is no god or God than to grant at least the possibility even on scientific grounds (based on the boundaries of what the scientific method can assess). It seems the risk for freedom (and survival) requires we be freed from fear of other domains of knowledge and cultures and peoples to find the truth (and tools for saving civilization) wherever it (and they) can be found.

So it appears our primary problem in modernity may be psychological, not philosophical. (Take a deep breath...there a lot of [more or less dramatic] questions in the next few lines that may be a bit tiring). How many of us have honestly never felt the fear of death, being trapped, never finding lasting happiness, belonging and being complete? If humanity's classical vision of itself was wrong then why did modernity not prove it? If this vision was so fatally flawed then why did modernity quietly embrace its fundamental insights (like human dignity, inter-dependent economic innovation, and global cooperation)? Why reject rather than refute it? Was it thus a rejection not from logic but fear (manifested as self-refuting irrationality that drove the modern revolutionaries to start a fight with philosophical, and continue that fight until they rebelled against the very immaterial laws of reason which made not only philosophy but all domains of human knowledge possible including science)? We champion diversity and tolerance in our modern society dominated by secular

liberalism (which has produced historic material successes benefitting billions, but also has unprecedented levels of state-sponsored and state-wide violence, suppression, and exclusion against non-secular religions and racial minorities—the very religions and minorities that our world is expected within the next few decades to be led by rather than the current secular white West).²⁰ If we can ask an extreme question now—what if modern philosophy’s initial revolt was ultimately a revolt against reason itself, and thus against the very soul of humanity, that has since metastasized like a cancer, undermining and co-opting all our social organs of science, politics, economics, and culture, leaving us as a stage 4 cancer patient who has failed every other treatment? Is there still hope for a cure, or just to be kept ‘comfortable’ until we die?

What if there is a real treatment out there? One that was discovered millennia ago...solid metaphysical ground upon which solid hope rests that satisfaction and fulfillment are possible, that individual happiness and shared peace can happen, that we *can* rebuild a shared existential home to call our own which has space for each of us...is this not worth at least a fair hearing? The most important question in the world—‘Who am I?’—seems to deserve at least the chance to be asked, and maybe even answered. For if we get wrong the personal definition of who each of us actually are as human persons, can this not lead to our shared global destruction as differing definitions compete, collide, and crush each other in a raging animalistic civil war leaving everyone eventually as collateral damage in this existential trampling by the mob? (Do we need to go in depth about historical examples including not just one but two world wars, repeated examples of nearly launched global nuclear attacks in the Cold War, along with the Holocaust, Rwanda genocide, the ISIS-driven Syrian refugee crisis, climate change indifference, racism, and so on?). Does each human being remain an animal or prisoner chasing the dancing, dying puppeteered images of fleeting satisfaction and fabricated reality at all costs—even each other and ourselves? So what does it cost us for a moment to stop and hear about a different way? Rather than tyrants and slaves, lies or illusions, war without peace, can we with our competing interests and belief systems unite to find a common home constructed with a solid foundation and framework that can house us all, and keep us in a sustainable peace?

²⁰ Hackett, Conrad and Marcin Stonawski. “The Changing Global Religious Landscape.” *Pew Research Center*. 5 April 2017, <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/04/05/the-changing-global-religious-landscape>.

1.2. Starting with annihilation

Why do we need to ask and answer these questions? To put it more succinctly—because we will destroy (and already are) each other if we do not. Never before in our history have our weapons more powerful, technology more advanced, and society more divided. We need to fix our broken humanity, and do it now while there may still be time. AI is already accelerated our existential threats from nuclear weapons, climate change inaction, pandemics, growing inequalities, and on and on—we cannot face these challenges unless we do it together, and we can do it together until we know who we are and how we can be together.

This is not ivory tower academic philosophy. This is real world practical survival, that is practical enough to realize it needs real philosophy.

Because I am a physician-data scientist and philosopher, I have real patients who bring real problems to me weekly and we have really limited time to solve them together. Death is a real and constant danger so I owe it to my patients to honestly tell them when the end is close and if we actually cure what is killing them, or keep them comfortable until it does. So these existential questions for humanity we are considering here are because they are real and urgent. Solely as a philosopher, I cannot demonstrate to medical physicians how to treat a patient dying from septic shock. And solely as a physician, I cannot demonstrate to philosophers that the patient's life is worth saving (or that all patients deserve for us as physicians to fight equally intensely to save each of them). For ultimately, we need both domains of knowledge, science and philosophy, to heal a broken humanity.

Therefore many may see this book as radical in our age because it proposes a simple and real answer—give the power back to the people. Rediscover the radical hope that we are unique persons who still share a common purpose, moral language, and identity. This book proposes we can take seriously common sense, which encompasses both scientific sense and ethical sense (allowing us to uncover the natural laws and moral law of our world). It proposes we can respectfully and thoroughly consider the insights of diverse cultures with their richly varied belief systems (which historically in our current day largely have not been heard by modern society and its underlying modern philosophy, dominated mostly by white richer single European and American males). It takes seriously what we believe to fix how we act, as bad ideas (philosophically) infect

and become embodied in our everyday lives individually, giving rise to bad science, politics, and economics collectively.

And because I am a dad of three beautiful kids and the husband of a strong wife, I am regularly reminded I do not have all the answers, but that together we can find them slowly—beginning with the realization that we need each other, that we belong to each other. So this will be a shared search for truth, not a lecture you sit through (which is how most modern philosophy was built).

Can I extend my hand proposing we take this brief adventure together, through the ages and sages, the madmen and methods, history's destructions and developments to try to understand who we are, why we are here, and where we are going? For as our technology advances from rocks and clubs to nuclear weapons and AI, the few can with increasingly ruthless efficiency rule the many with power that can enslave (or destroy) us all. We can afford less and less to get these big questions wrong. And we have less time to get them right together.

Other books on such topics start in different places—like happiness, justice, truth, goodness, or beauty—or different perspectives, like metaphysics or ethics or science or religion or human experience.

Let us start this one with our end, our annihilation, by our own freedom. And let us include all perspectives and domains where we may salvage answers which can give us the best chance of a future, one that is worthy of our humanity.

For despite all our different beliefs and values, can we not all agree that our tools are increasingly dangerous, powerful, approaching even cataclysmic? Our day's thousands of nuclear bombs can destroy humanity and planetary existence many times over. The growing warnings about increasingly sophisticated AI document the rapidly approaching point in which humans may lose control over it. Viruses can become engineered and explode into pandemics which race across continents destroying millions and costing trillions. Science showed us *how* to make these tools. But ethics must show us *why* (or why not) to do so, and so how to prevent them from becoming apocalyptic weapons by showing us why we should do the right thing caring for each other in the first place. If self-preservation is the minimalistic way to get our feet into the door of this book, then let us begin this journey together for night is close. And we

need to find our way back home (if it ever existed in the first place). Let us attempt to recover what meaning our lives may have, including what freedoms means, and how it can operate without each tearing the other apart with it.

1.3. Old rich white guys manufactured modernity?

Aside from avoiding annihilation, another reason to reconsider how we think and act toward others is the emerging critique that a bunch of old rich white colonial guys are our puppeteers telling us what to believe. Since modern society arose from the modern philosophy built by Descartes (with our global society dominated by the Western world largely produced by the western European Enlightenment he unleashed), practically every major pillar of our society is largely manufactured from middle to upper class white single European-American males who were increasingly skeptical of all cultures and belief systems different from their own.

In the Age of Western Colonialism from the 1500s to early 1900s, the riches exploited by Western Europe in Africa, Asia, and the Americas brought a vast and rapid accumulation and diffusion of wealth and culture concurrent with the associated Protestant Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and Enlightenment. This socio-cultural context of conquest and industry framed the lived experienced of such modern philosophers like Descartes, Rousseau, Kant, Darwin, and Nietzsche who thus framed modern philosophy, politics, economics, sociology, and anthropology with their world view that we are all one big machine increasingly tuned to perfection or at least progress under the knowledgeable hands of these great titans of modernity who knew what was best for all of us. Up to modernity, philosophy classically was the systematic investigation by logic of being and thus what is the Good and what is the good we owe to our fellow beings. But these modern philosophers who ‘knew better than us’ gradually conquered and colonized greater lands and disciplines until they killed off philosophy itself, with the final ‘victory’ over it declared by Nietzsche’s ‘God is dead.’ But in place of philosophy, ideologies rushed (as systems of related ideas which increasingly did not require reason to justify them. And without philosophy to resolve their competing claims (i.e., by an appeal to the neutral objective third-party standard of metaphysics and ethics reflecting on what being human means and so how we should treat each other), ideological conflict spawned humanity’s fiercest and bloodiest political conflicts become world wars in the 20th

century. Colonialism expanded until it collapsed in upon its own imperialistic weight among competing powers.

This contemporary colonialism critique increasingly asks the natural questions in the face of this historical trajectory. Do these old richer white guys actually know what is best for us? Do they speak for us all of us? Do they know us or care about what is best for us? Most of what we commonly believe likely came from those guys, such as the concepts that we must have liberal capitalist democracies to have peace, or we need class war for the worker to overturn the capitalists and establish equality, we have to seize power over others to get what we want, we will be happier when we richer or more famous, we can make our own truth (unless that truth counters the socially accepted 'truths' of the day or what science says is true as only society and science really can define what is real and true [so non-material things like love and friendship are just culturally conditioned myths or solely neural synaptic pathway-generated abstractions])—all these and more likely came from the desk or typewriter of white guys who mostly spent most of their lives separated from (or at least deeply skeptical of) family, friends, community, religion, and so on. They lived in times of European colonialism which exploited the developing world's human and raw capital to turn the world into a political economic machine of profit and growing inequalities. And they developed the Enlightenment philosophies to justify or at least perpetuate such systems, or so the anti-colonialism critique goes.

Many of these old white guys tell us we cannot believe in any 'truth' outside of the machine, like God, authority, or reality, and that we have to become our own gods, governors, and sources of meaning...But the natural question is begged, why do we have to dogmatically believe them? What makes them right and everyone else wrong? Especially if they tell us that there is no truly right or wrong thing, just socially or scientifically acceptable or unacceptable things?

If I am your patient, you are my physician, and I stumble into your hospital telling you I am sick, what would you need to help me? Would we not need a common language allowing us to communicate the same concepts like a third-party objective standard to understand and fix the problem? (Like you trusting your senses that you see and hear me and trust I am really standing in front of you, and that we have a common language communicating common concepts signifying things with meaning we can both understand. This would be the bare minimum for you to understand

me when I tell you I my car popped a tire and flew off the road hitting a tree and now I have a worsening confusion, pupillary dilation of my left eye, and left arm weakness...as my physician, you would use biology as a third-party objective domain of knowledge to inform how you diagnosis the problem with me [epidural hematoma i.e., brain bleed] and treat it [emergent brain surgery if it is bad enough]). Outside of modern medicine, daily life only confirms our universal and persistent dependence on our underlying belief we exist in a reality we can trust along with our physical senses and common sense informing our actions to survive individually and as a society, going about our daily lives to school, work, the grocery store, community organizations, etc. And so should we be at least skeptical of these old white guys when they produced a philosophy that ultimately tells us we should be skeptical (or even reject) our senses, the reality in front of us, our ability to have a common moral language, the existence of reliable objective standards to determine the truth of what is good to do and evil to be avoided? Especially when it seems all the while their philosophy may not only fail to help us solve real problems among and within us, but it also gives us no convincing reasons we should believe them more than our experience and common sense as unique persons in a community of persons?

To take it a step further, if I am your patient, you are my physician, and I frantically raced into your hospital and screamed that everything you see is just a computer-generated illusion in which we all are just controlled by some master AI I must grab the closest scalpel to kill myself and all the patients around me for us to escape it, would you try to reason with me out of my argument? You would restrain, sedate, and treat me for presumed drug intoxication (ruling out comorbid paranoid/delusional psychiatric illness). If the old white guys who made modern society by making its underlying modern philosophy tell us we cannot even reason (together to what is truly good to do because there is no reason, no senses, no objectively reality to trust outside of what each person asserts subjectively is true or good for herself/himself), then it seems like we cannot use their way of thinking alone to fix our thinking that may be broken and thus our world's problems that remained unsolved because of it.

This is not an *ad hominem* attack against those thinkers (indeed many provided modernity great insights making billions of lives better), but they are honest questions about should we unquestionably and dogmatically accept what they assert (particularly when they made a name for themselves by passionately advocating for their society to question the

classical truths they were told). Thoughts cannot be understood separate from the thinkers who produced them. So should we at least out of fairness and intellectual honesty consider the insights of i.e., Jewish Mexican rabbis, Catholic Nigerian moms, Buddhist Chinese farmers, and all the world over? It seems we can agree it is in principal and probability unlikely that only richer white colonial males have good ideas. And that we should let the rest of the world speak for itself, including the common person, common sense, and common traits running across every culture and age (i.e., like the beliefs that we should do good rather than evil, treat people fairly, recognize our need for others and their need for us, realize we do not create ourselves or are fully in control of our entire universe nor can we explain it all now or ever, understand we have needs beyond what our senses and science tell us exist, know we need certain common beliefs to hold our society together). Does not the rest of the world have the right to speak also (not just the colonial European-American modern powers)? So in this book we will take seriously multiculturalism with its pluralism (diverse belief systems), the person central to them all, and the reality that modern society and philosophy (dominated mostly by those richer white males) may not have all the answers.

Should we thus consider the alternative path proposed by an agnostic physician-philosopher and scientist centuries before those modern thinkers, an ancient Greek who listened and learned from his patients, who used mathematics to build a better way to reason, and tried to teach justice to real politicians in the messy reality of practical life (including Alexander the Great). This thinker and do-er, Aristotle, may provide a way for us to listen and take seriously the wisdom of people who think differently than we do, people not solely in modernity's predominant American-European liberal capitalistic democratic tradition. It seems like we owe it to ourselves and to the world to ask these and related tough questions until we get real answers that work, that satisfy, that heal and unify. Otherwise how can we reach a future that belongs to the whole world (not just the people in that tradition), including a world increasingly struggling amid divisions and challenges it seems less and less able to solve itself?

And so this book will explore those proposed answers from the voices philosophy and society have historically excluded, including the world's diverse cultures and belief systems with an ethical system that is articulated by the world's nations in the United Nations' (UN's) and its foundational *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) and its