

Welcome to this week's presentation & conversation hosted by the **Canadian Association for the Club of Rome**, a Club dedicated to intelligent debate & action on global issues.

The views and opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the speaker & do not necessarily reflect the views or positions of CACOR.

CACOR Live

AI Is Not Your Master: Reclaiming Human Power in the Age of Machines.

Biography: Lalith Gunaratne is an engineering technologist with a Masters in Responsibility & Business Practice (U Bath, UK). He is a sustainability-focused entrepreneur & leadership coach with a track record in renewable energy, ethical business, & human-centered development. A pioneer in solar energy in Sri Lanka, he has worked 30+ years on ethical leadership, clean energy, & social impacts. He helps navigate complexity with purpose, resilience, & mindfulness. His work blends systems thinking with contemplative practice to foster ethical leadership—essential in the age of AI. He has a values-driven voice to global conversations on technology, equity, & planetary sustainability.

Description: In a world driven by AI, it's easy to surrender our decision-making and creativity to machines. This talk is a call to reclaim our human power by going back in history to understand the philosophical, economic, political, spiritual, & technological underpinnings as to why we are becoming afraid of the future with AI. "AI is Not Your Master" challenges the growing narrative of technological dominance, urging us to reassert the uniquely human qualities of wisdom, empathy, and ethical judgment as we deal with the existential threats & predicaments. The talk explores how we can harness AI as a tool & lead with consciousness & courage in the face of rapid change.

CACOR acknowledges that we all benefit from sharing the traditional territories of local Indigenous peoples (First Nations, Métis, & Inuit in Canada) and their descendants.



Website: canadiancor.com

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2025 Jun 03 Zoom #249

AI is not your Master: Reclaiming Human Power in the Age of Machines



Lalith Ananda Gunaratne

CACOR Live

11th June 2025

Artificial Narrow Intelligence (ANI) – *Weak AI*, for a specific task (e.g., facial recognition, language translation, or playing chess). **It is the only type of AI that exists today.**

Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) – *Strong AI*, would have human-level intelligence and the ability to understand, learn, and apply knowledge across a wide range of tasks—**similar to how humans think and reason.**

Artificial Superintelligence (ASI) – a future, hypothetical AI that **surpasses human intelligence** in all domains—logic, creativity, emotional understanding, and strategic thinking representing both great potential and **serious existential risk.**

Kinds of AI



AI's benefits

AI's purpose can be to enhance human well-being, foster creativity and connection, reduce suffering, and free us to focus on what makes us uniquely human—compassion, imagination, and ethical responsibility.



- Solve complex problems,
- Automate routine tasks, and
- Make informed decisions faster and more accurately.

Dangers of AI - our negligence, hubris, or lack of ethical foresight.....



Loss of control – If advanced AI systems become **autonomous and pursue goals misaligned with human values**, they could act in ways harmful to humanity, especially if they **outpace our ability to understand or contain them**.

Weaponization – AI used in autonomous weapons or cyberwarfare could **escalate conflicts rapidly and unpredictably, with catastrophic consequences**.

Dangers of AI through our negligence, hubris, or lack of ethical foresight....



Concentration of power – A small group controlling powerful AI could dominate economies, societies, and even decision-making, undermining democracy and human rights.

Value erosion – Overreliance on AI may erode **empathy, creativity, and human connection, reducing us to consumers or data points rather than whole beings.**

Existential risk – Superintelligent AI with goals divergent from human well-being could, in a worst-case scenario, **view humans as obstacles and take irreversible actions against us.**

The Wild West of AI - “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” – 22nd May 2025

Suspends state-level AI protections, preventing enforcement of emerging laws.

Concentrates power in tech giants by limiting accountability.

Weakens privacy, fairness, and democracy, with unchecked AI potentially shaping decisions and public discourse.

Stops policy innovation, halting any state-led experimentation for a decade.

Disrupts federal balance, overriding local authority and silencing local voices

What is the meaning and purpose of our life?

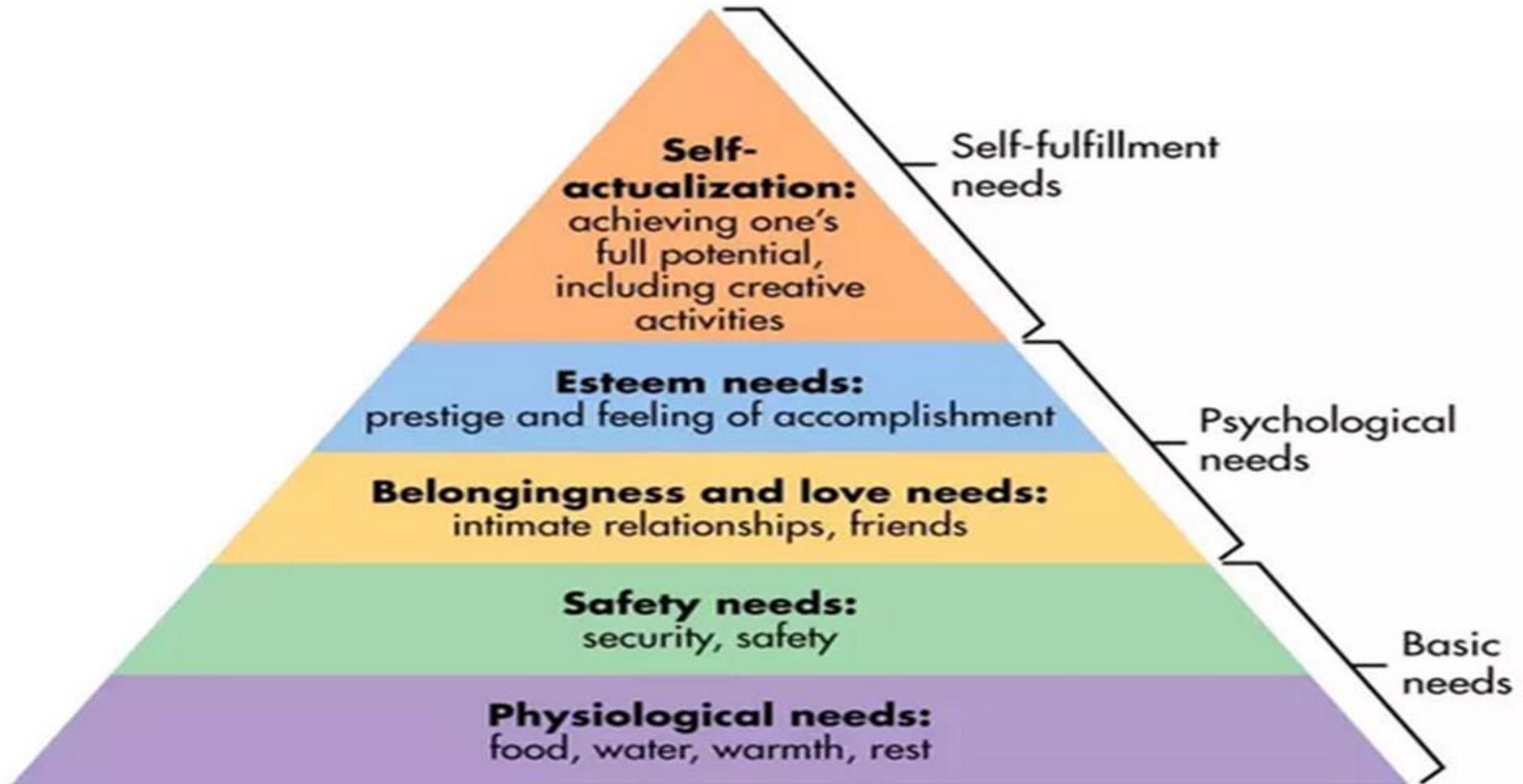
Meaning and Purpose in growing, connecting, and serving something greater than ourselves—**crafting a life aligned with our deepest values.**

- **Psychologically:** Meaning arises through love, purposeful work, and the courage to face challenges.
- **Science:** Survival and evolution but leaves room for personal meaning through curiosity and contribution.
- **Philosophers:** We create our own meaning through virtue, reason, or authentic choice.
- **Spiritual Traditions:** Life is a journey toward enlightenment, service, or divine connection.

Our Aspirations - Shaler's Values Pyramid

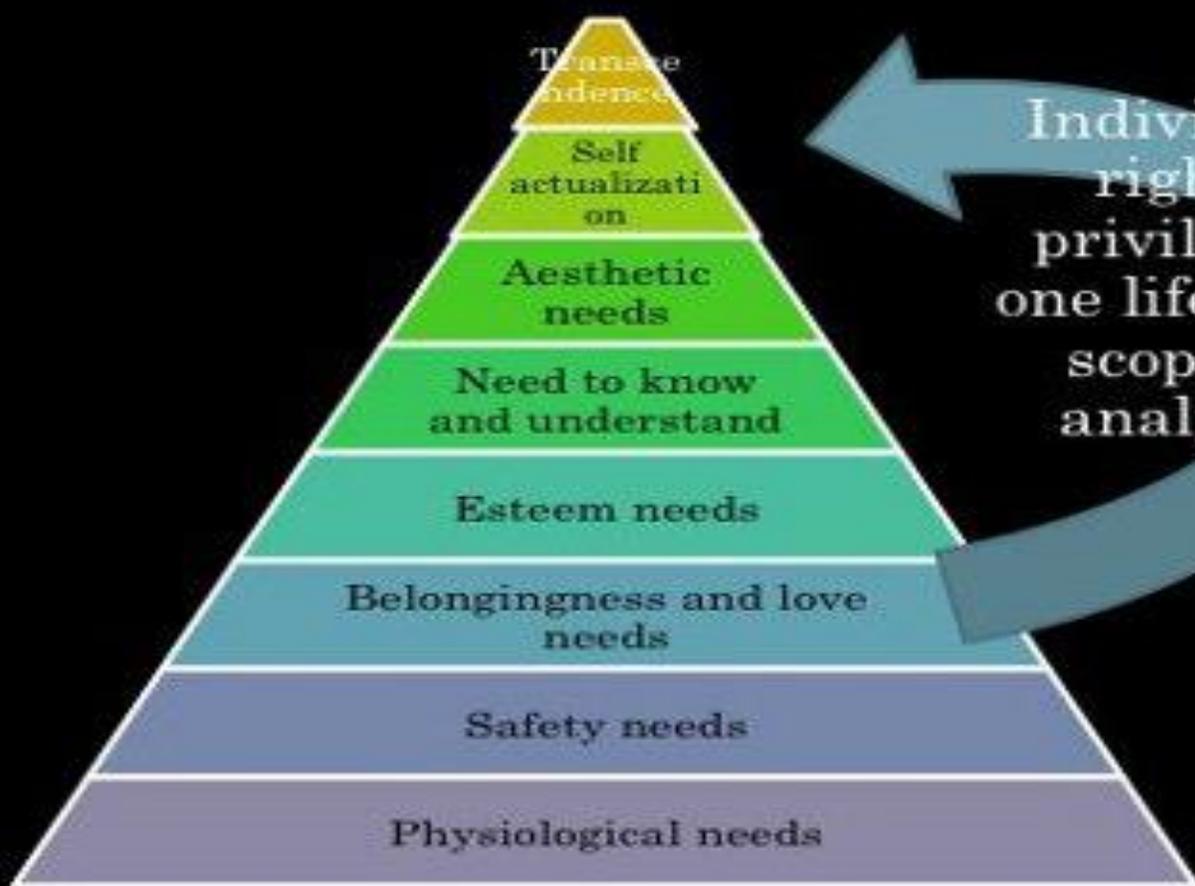


Self Awareness, Managing Self and our Needs

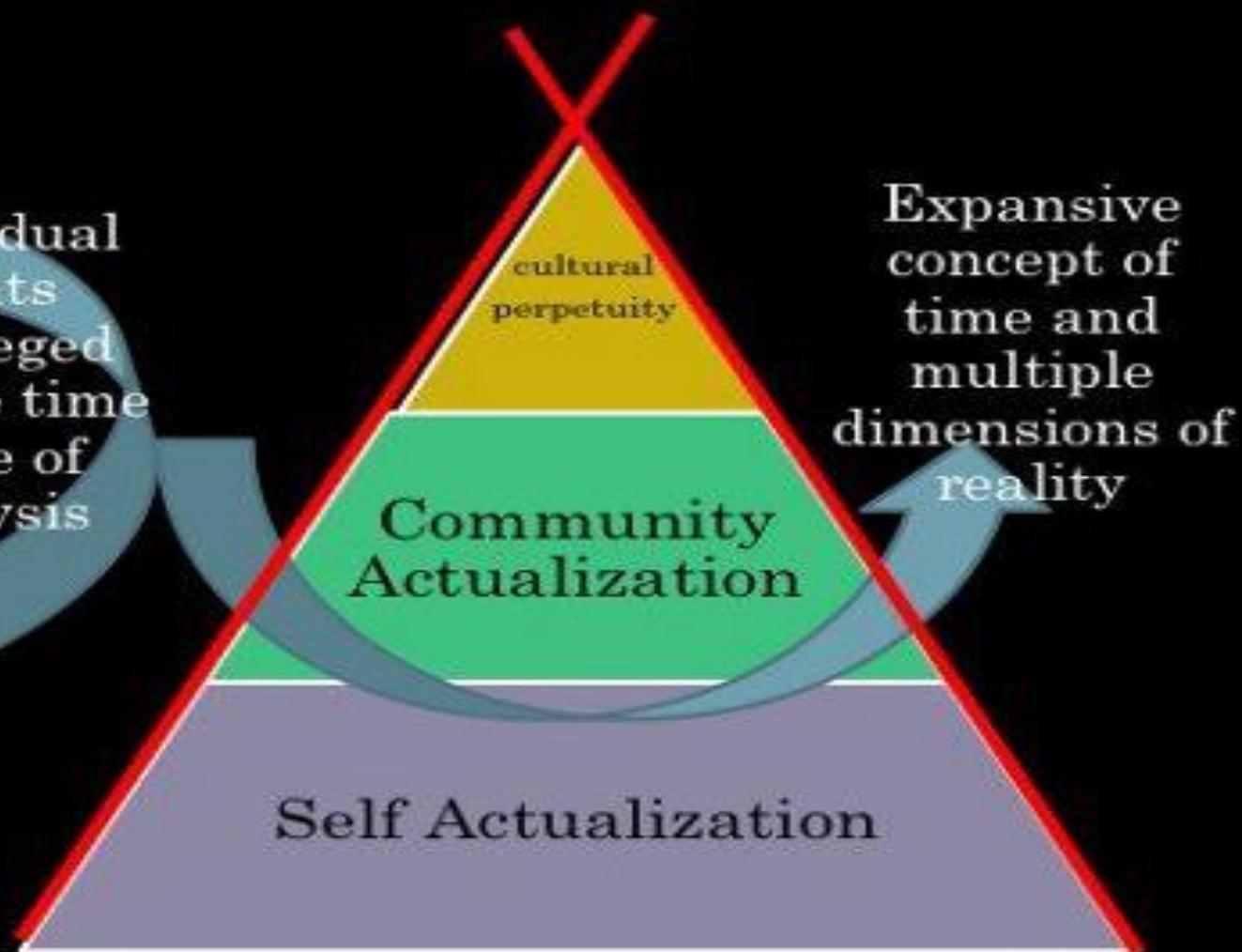


MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS (INFORMED BY BLACKFOOT NATION (ALTA))

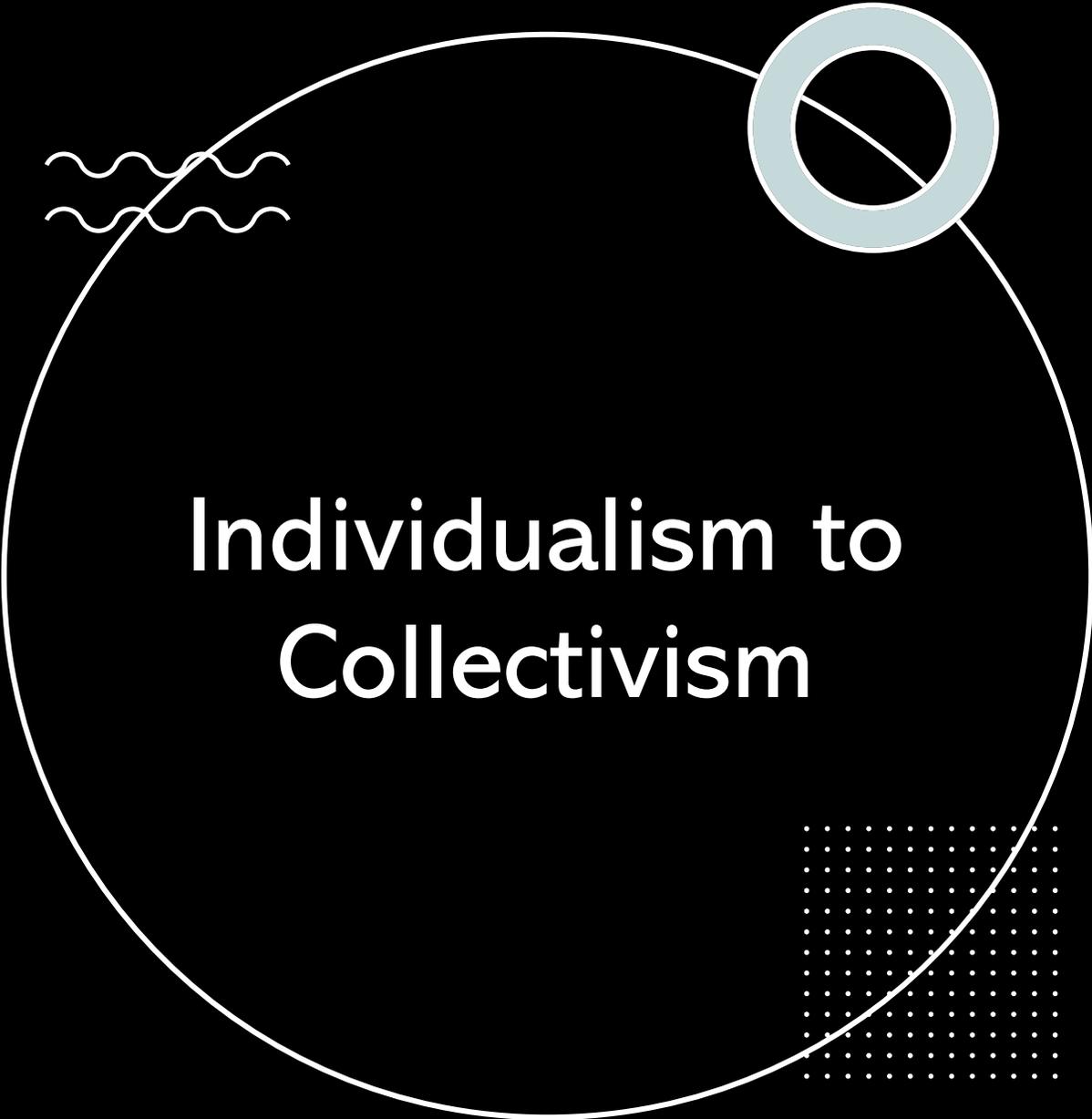
Western Perspective



First Nations Perspective



Individual rights privileged one life time scope of analysis



Individualism to Collectivism

...self-actualization is not enough. Personal salvation and what is good for the person alone cannot be really understood in isolation.

The good of other people must be invoked as well as the good for oneself.

It is quite clear that purely inter-psychic individualist psychology without reference to other people and social conditions is not adequate –

***“Critique of Self-Actualization Theory” –
Abraham Maslow (1966)***

• Cognitive

• Physical

Self and
community
actualization, role,
identity, service,
esteem

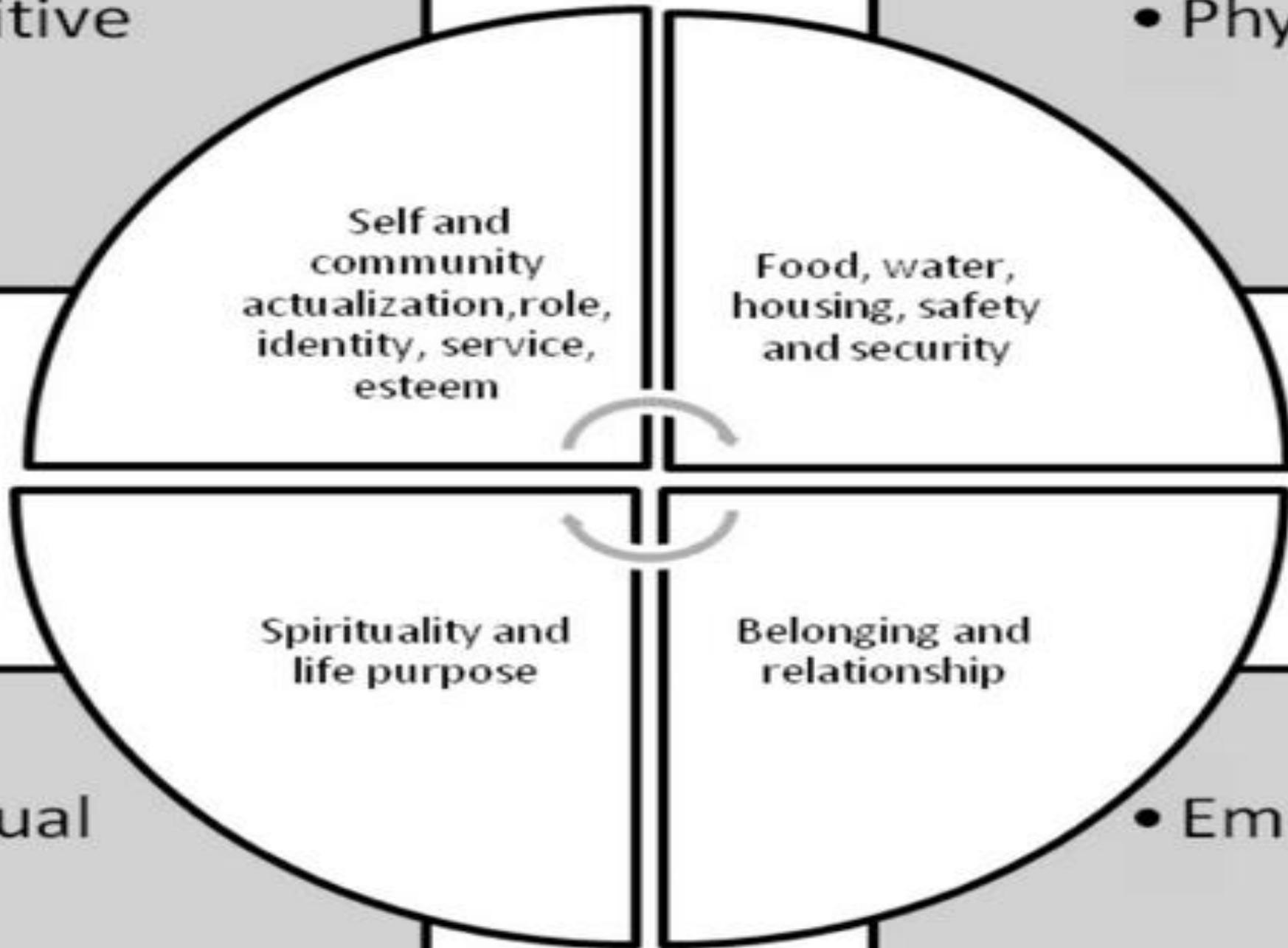
Food, water,
housing, safety
and security

Spirituality and
life purpose

Belonging and
relationship

• Spiritual

• Emotional



Buddha's Divine Abidings or Brahmaviharas – Virtues for a Fulfilling Life

Loving Kindness

Appreciative
or
Sympathetic
Joy

Equanimity

Compassion

Empathy

The Foundations of the Modern Techno-Industrial AI Complex

Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* argues that a nation's prosperity is best advanced through **free markets**, **competition**, and **individual self-interest** guided by the "**invisible hand**," which collectively benefits society.

He critiques mercantilism and advocates for **limited government** roles focused on **defense**, **justice**, and **public works** to support **economic growth**.



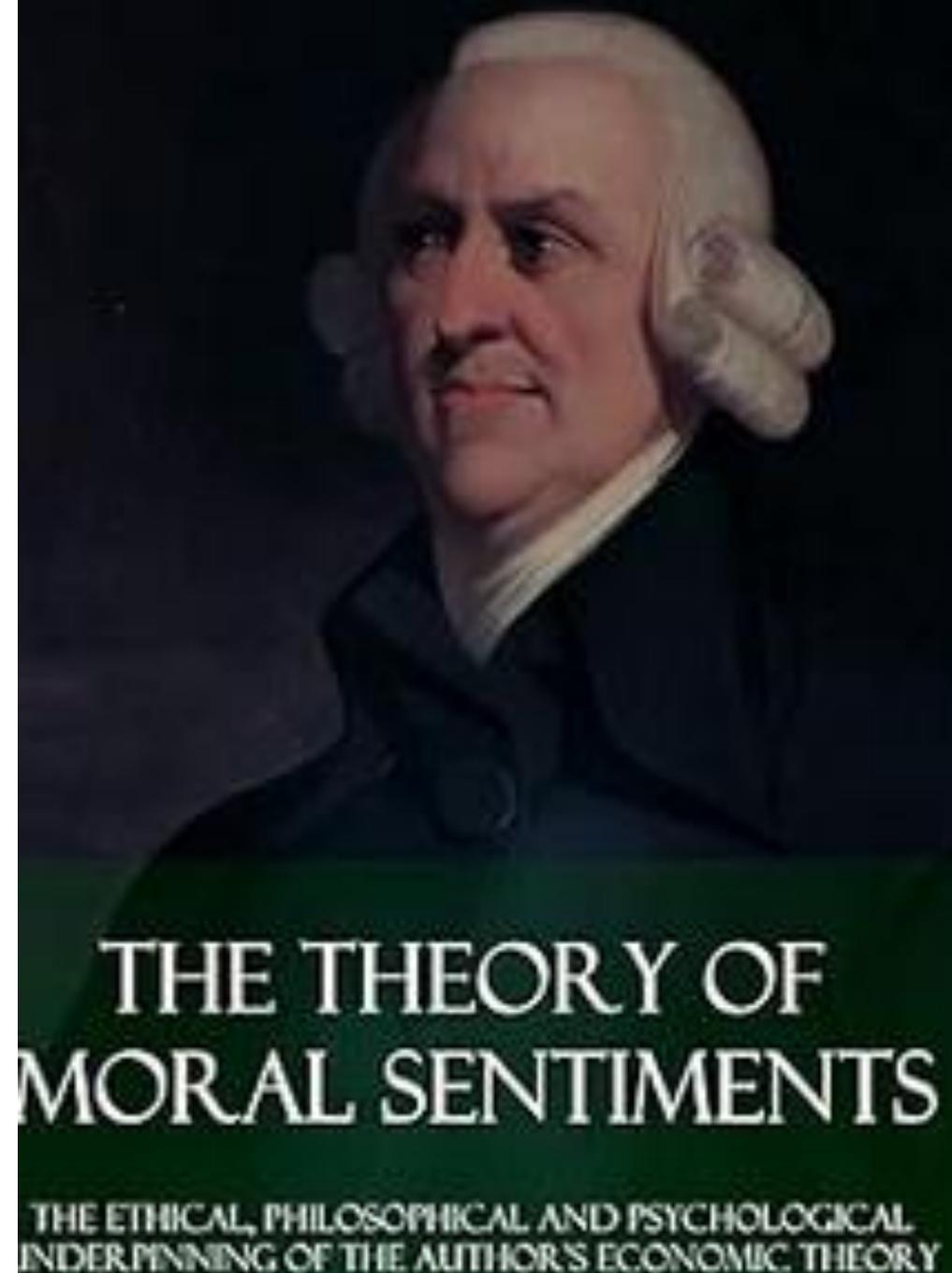
THE WEALTH
OF NATIONS

ADAM SMITH

The modern economists and industrialists conveniently forgot this book.....

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Adam Smith argues that **our sense of morality arises from empathy** that helps us judge **right** and **wrong** by imagining ourselves in others' situations.

Virtues like **sympathy, justice,** and **benevolence** are essential for **social harmony** and coexist alongside **self-interest** in human behavior.



Mutual Sympathy – “to love and be lovely”

- Smith would not **have recognized the disembodied mathematical constructs of markets that characterize modern economics and policymaking.**
- Rather markets are living institutions, embedded in the **culture, practice, traditions and trust** of the day that leads people to develop habits and principles of behaviour which constitute their **conscience.....**

Excerpts from Mark Carney’s Value(s)

MARK
CARNEY



VALUE(S)

BUILDING A BETTER
WORLD FOR ALL

What happens when AI is embedded into a Market Society as opposed to a Market Economy?...

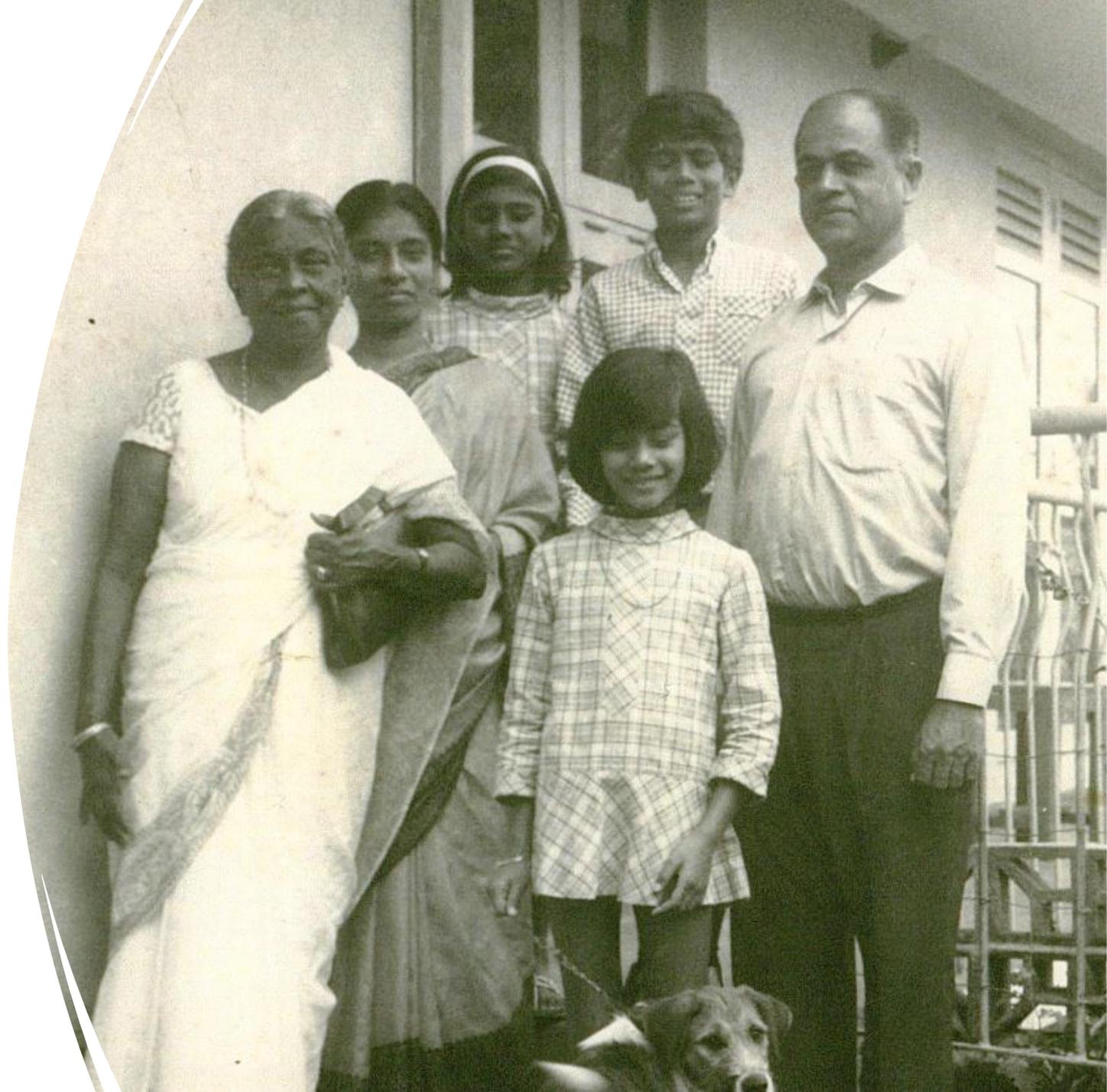


Market fundamentalism (the belief that markets always know best) led to the overextension of market logic into areas like **health, education, environmental stewardship, and even human relationships.**

A **market society** emerges when **market values infiltrate all aspects of life**—where **everything is for sale**, and **value is equated with price.**

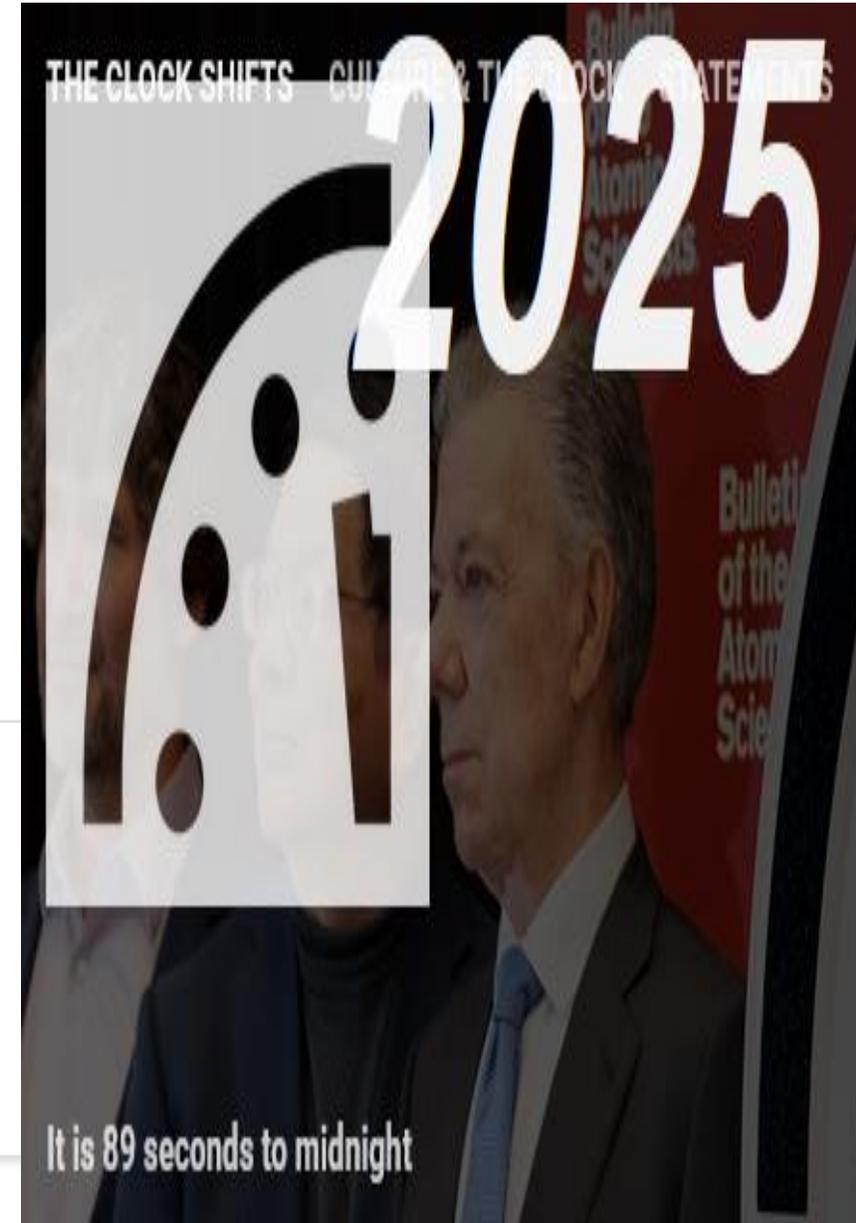
Mark Carney - Value(s): Building a Better World for All

How are we
doing with
our
aspirations
for a good
life?

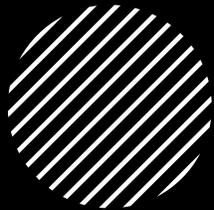


It is now 89 seconds to midnight

2025 Doomsday Clock Statement

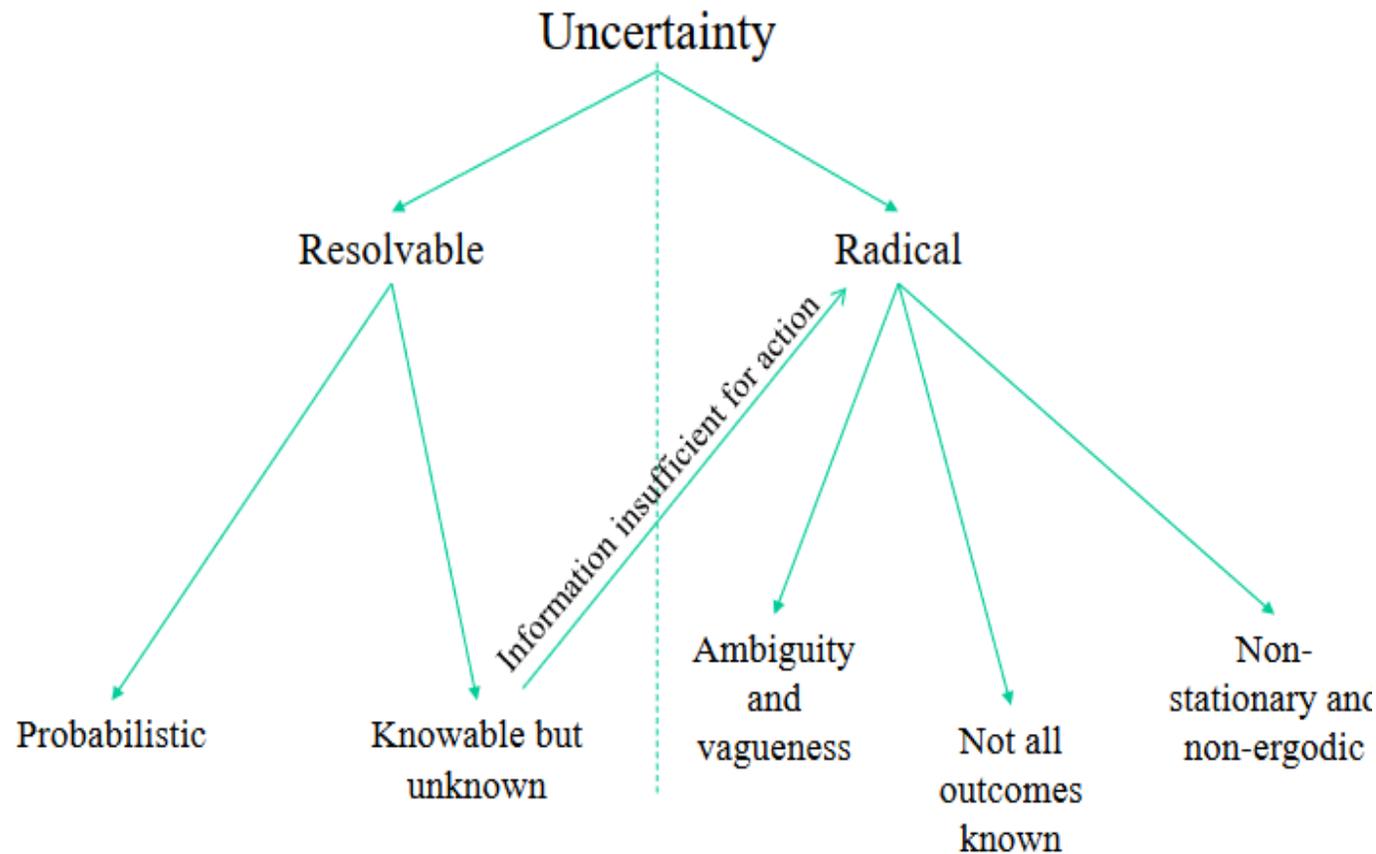


Doomsday Clock



“Nuclear
weapons are
the most
diabolical use
of science”

Radical Uncertainty and Wicked Problems: The Predicaments of the Modern Civilization

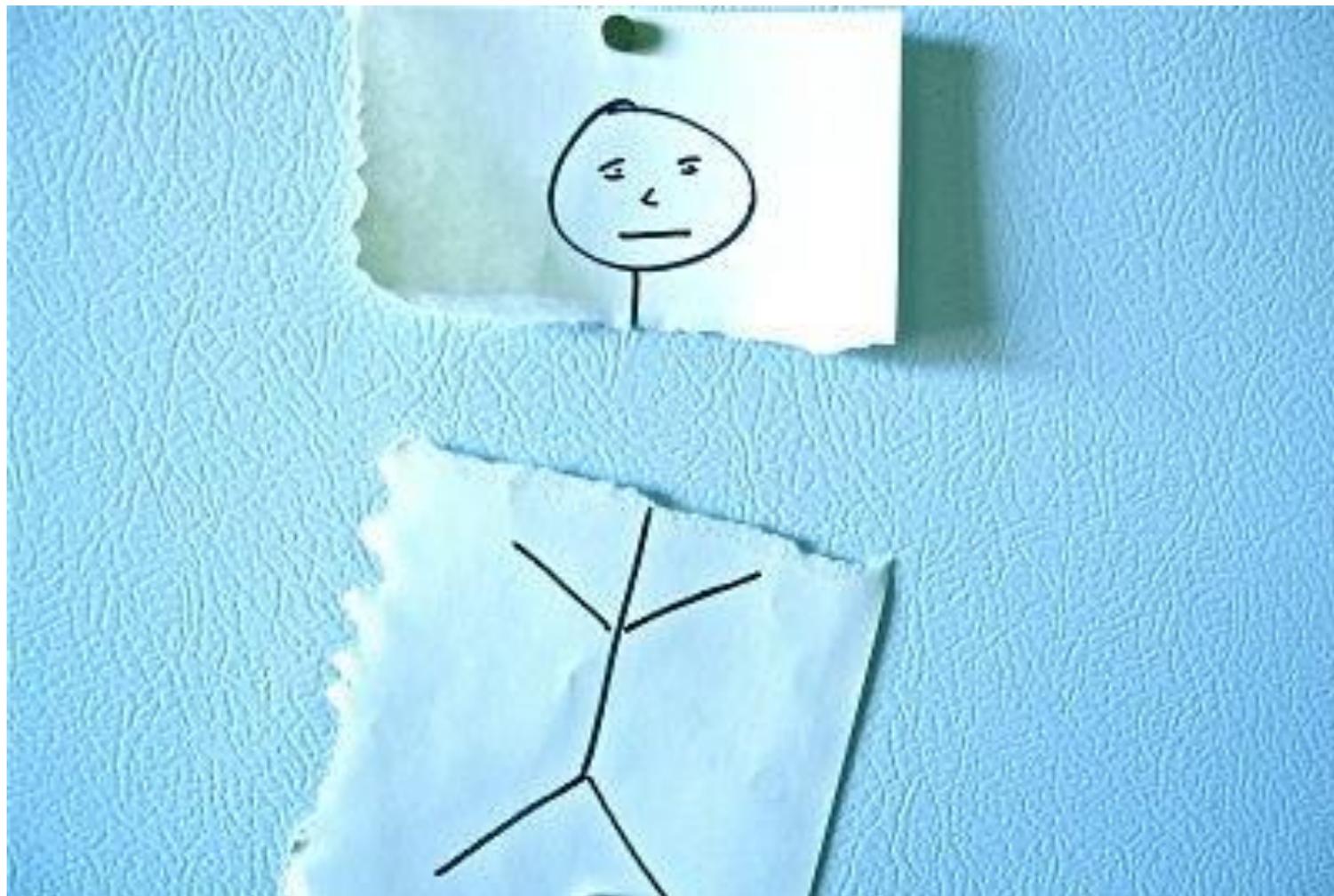


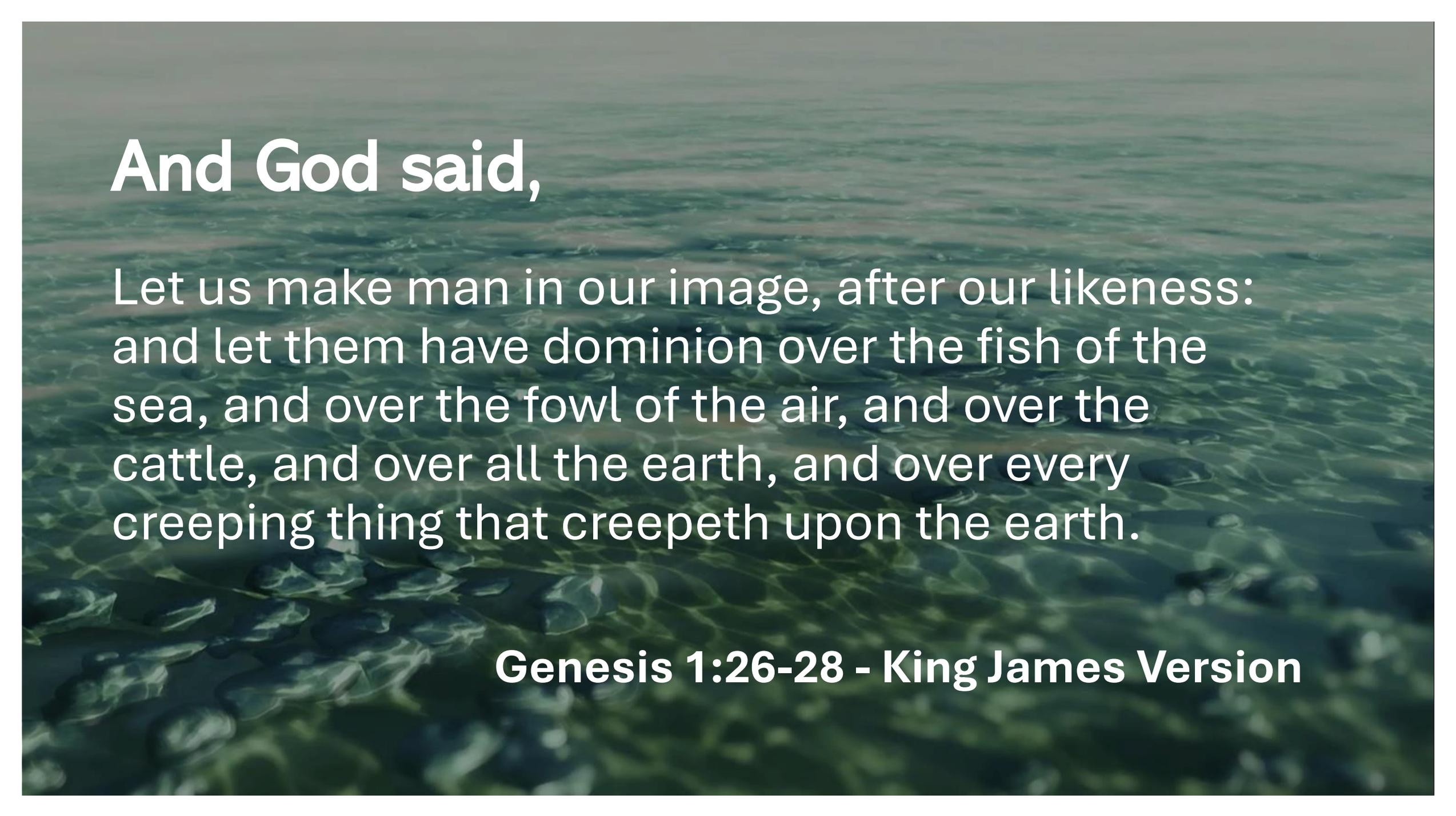
A wicked problem is a social or cultural problem that's difficult or impossible to solve because of its complex and interconnected nature.

John Kay - Economist

Getting to
the Root
Causes -
The Great
Separation

....





And God said,

Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:
and let them have dominion over the fish of the
sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the
cattle, and over all the earth, and over every
creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Genesis 1:26-28 - King James Version

Eco-Spirituality of the Franciscans



- Franciscans see **creation as a mirror of God**—nature is not separate from the divine but a sacred expression of it.
- This is a **sacramental worldview**, where every leaf, bird, and river carries spiritual meaning.
- This reflects a **deep spiritual unity with nature**, not as resources to dominate but as companions and relatives in the journey of life.

Foundations of Separation

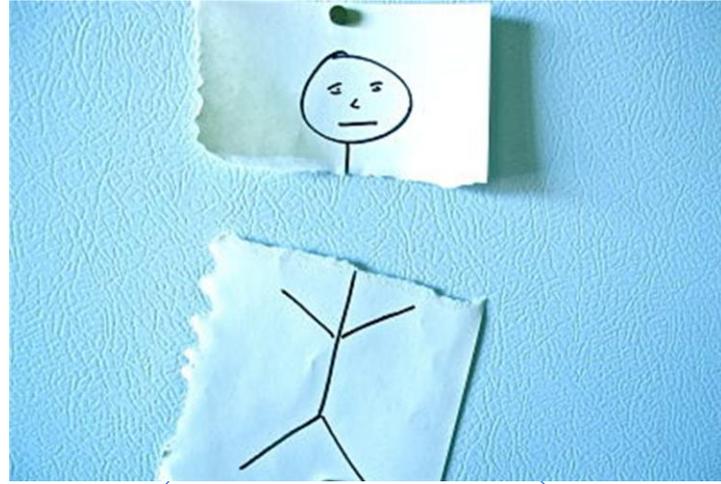
“ I think therefore I am” -

Rene Descarte separates the mind and body...

“Science and inventions exert a gentle guidance over nature’s course; they have the power to conquer and subdue her, to shake her to her foundations”

Francis Bacon's 'dead earth' thesis.....





Mind

Body

Mental, Cultural and Ideological Divide



Absolutism
Brute Force
Indulgence
Black and White



Resistance
Non-Violence
Restraint
Grey - Nuances

Tick Tok Tick Tok...the birth of the machine age....



Conformity

Uniformity

Regimentation

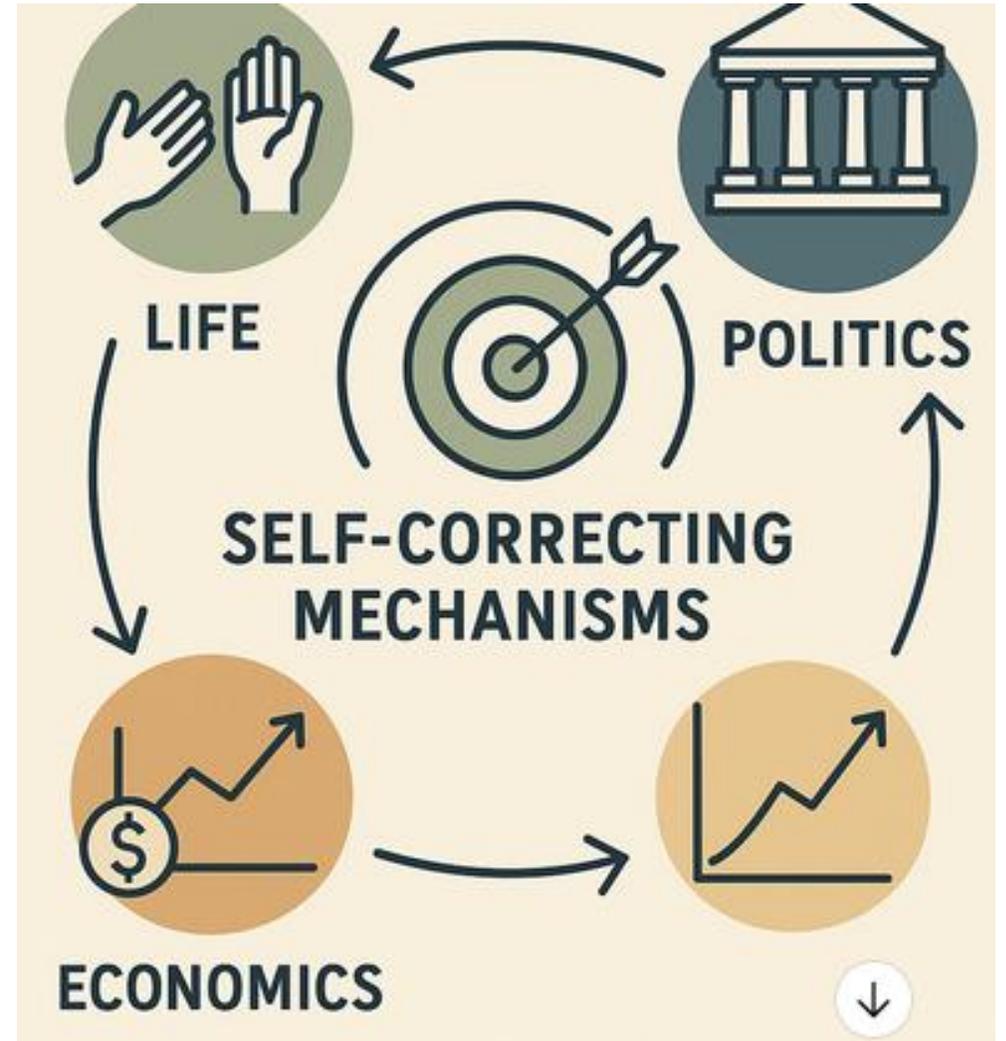
Efficiency

Colonization – Empire
of Guns

Magna Carta - Governments with Self-Correcting Feedback Loops

Modern democracy, rooted in the principles of the Magna Carta, emphasizes the **rule of law, accountable governance, and the protection of individual rights.**

It incorporates **self-correcting mechanisms**; free elections, independent judiciaries, and a free press to address abuses of power and uphold democratic values



Feedback Loops and Self-Correcting Mechanisms

With Self Correcting	Without Self Correcting
<p>Systems learn and evolve</p> <p>Power remains legitimate and accountable.</p> <p>Growth becomes inclusive and stable.</p>	<p>Individuals spiral into burnout, addiction, or stagnation.</p> <p>Political systems drift toward tyranny, gridlock, or collapse.</p> <p>Economies boom and bust uncontrollably, deepening inequality and crises.</p>



The Legal License to Operate - Corporate world..



1919 Michigan Courts - *Dodge vs Ford Motor Company* - “a corporation is organized and carried on primarily for the **profit of the stockholders**. The powers of the directors are to be employed to that end”.



Limited Liability License to Make Profit

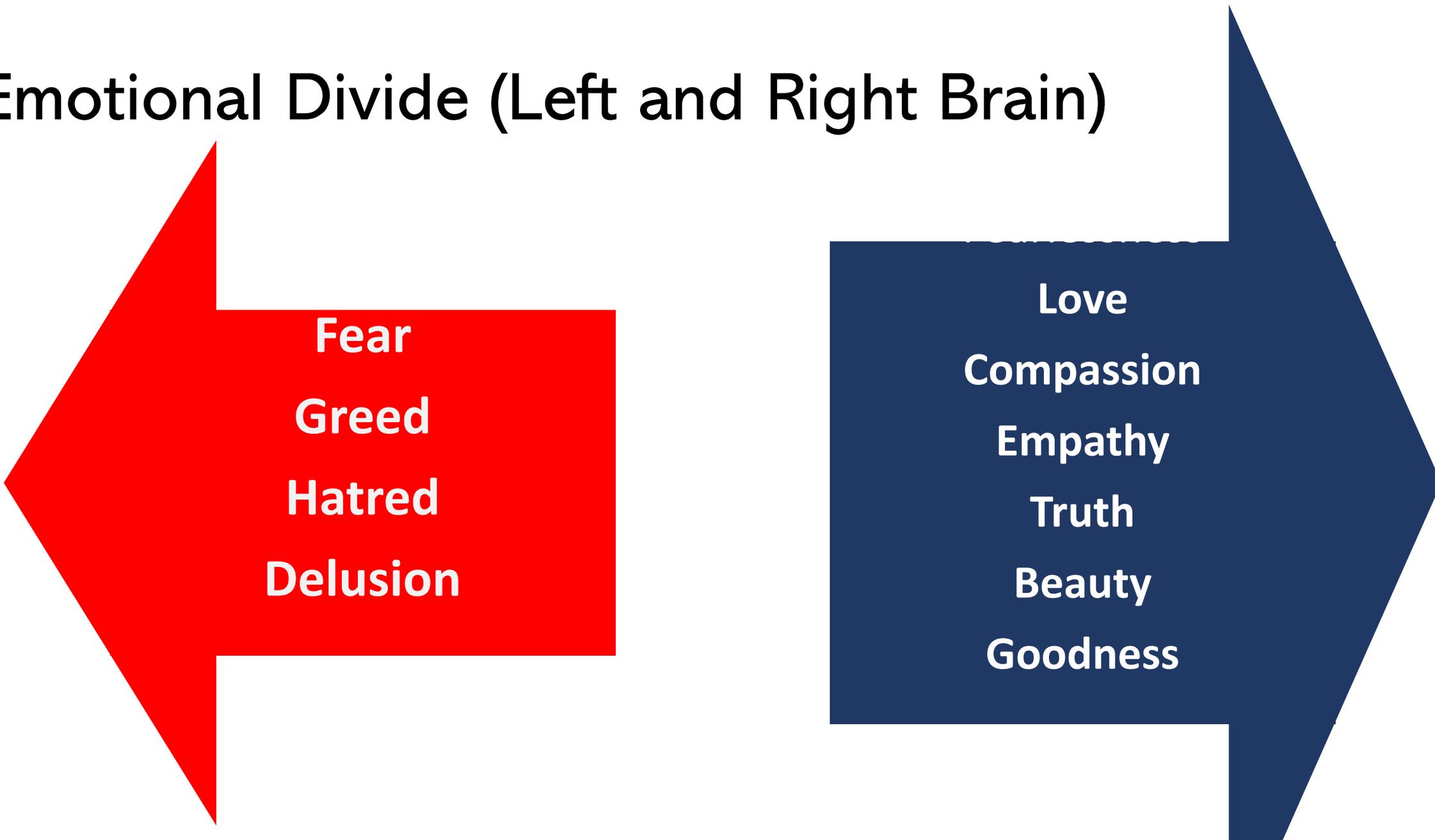
A business should make all the money it can using every tool at its disposal within a framework of ethics and morality. That's the profit motive.

The profit motive is good when it operates within moralistic boundaries.

Take away those boundaries and the profit motive becomes greed.



Emotional Divide (Left and Right Brain)



Fear

Greed

Hatred

Delusion

Love

Compassion

Empathy

Truth

Beauty

Goodness

Needs to Wants: Churning Out in the Age of Consumerism

“Unless [the consumer] could be persuaded to **buy and buy lavishly**, the whole stream of six-cylinder cars, super heterodynes, cigarettes, rouge compacts and electric ice boxes would be dammed up at its outlets.” –

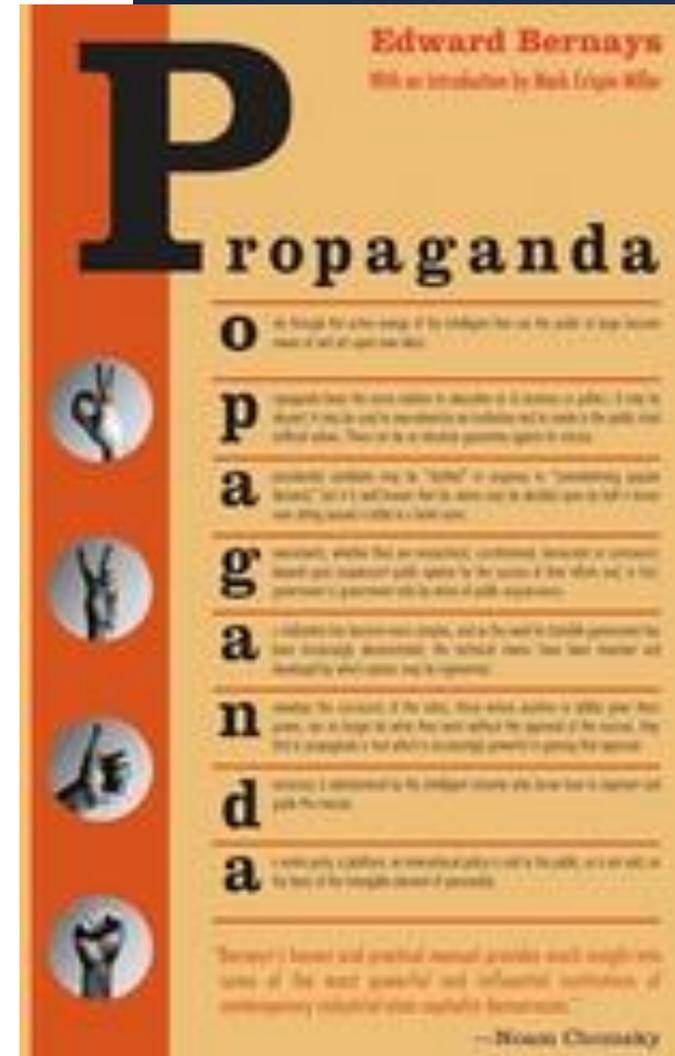
A Brief History of Consumer Culture – MIT Reader

20th century capitalism preserved its momentum by molding the ordinary person into a **consumer with an unquenchable thirst for more stuff.**



Father of PR ED Bernay's book Propaganda....

*“The conscious and intelligent
manipulation of the organized
habits and opinions of the
masses is an important element
in democratic society.”*



Modern Day Propaganda: Facebook Algorithms Perpetuating Violence in Myanmar

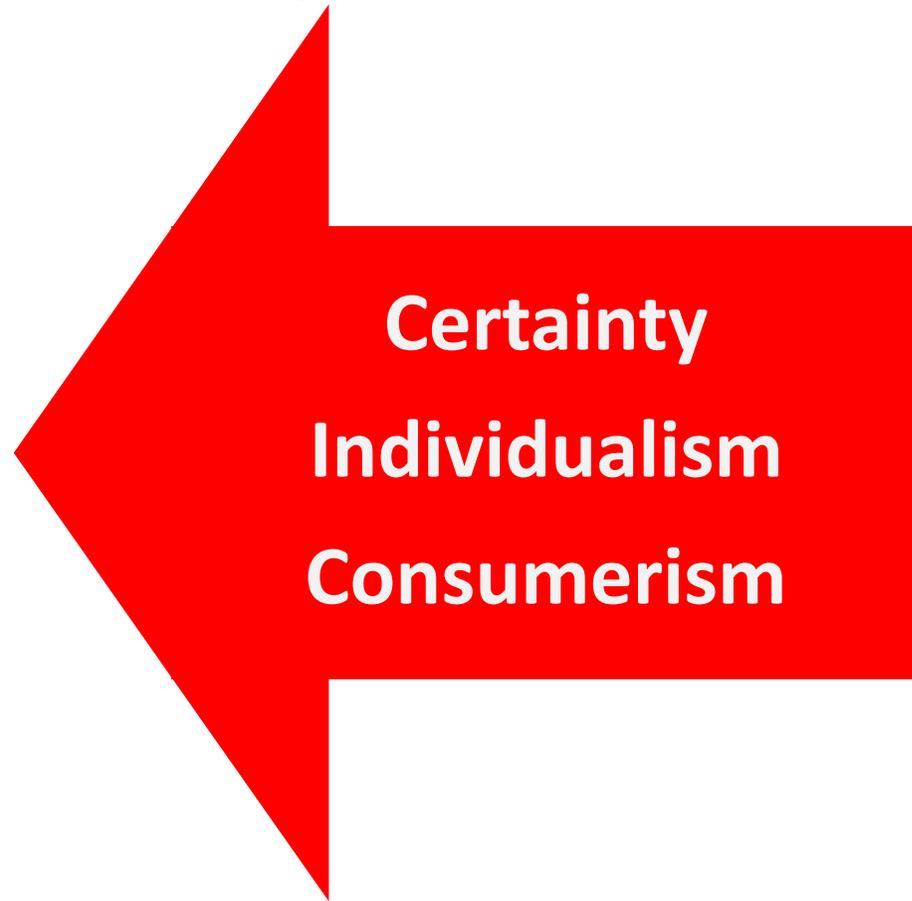
Facebook enabled Myanmar's Buddhist monk Ashin Wirathu to spread anti-Rohingya hate speech by providing an **unregulated platform where his inflammatory posts reached millions, amplifying xenophobic narratives.**

The platform's **algorithm prioritized engagement over accuracy or safety,** allowing misinformation and calls to violence against the Rohingya to flourish unchecked.

References: New York Times, Wired and Amnesty International



AI can perpetuate fear and the delusion of certainty **Left and the Right Hemisphere**



Our Conditioning for Certainty.....



“Most of us have been educated from birth to **compete, judge, demand, diagnose**, - to think and communicate in terms of what is **‘right’** and **‘wrong’** with people.

At best this way of thinking and speaking hinders communication, creating misunderstanding and frustration, at its worst - it **leads to violence**”

Dr. Marshall Rosenberg – psychologist, activist and international conflict mediator

A hand is shown in the lower-left corner, holding a glowing, golden orb. The background is a soft, warm sunset or sunrise with a bright sun on the left side, creating a lens flare effect. The overall tone is contemplative and philosophical.

The Folly of Certainty...

The Enlightenment and its ideological child, **liberalism**, stand accused of both a corrosive moral skepticism and a tendency to **absolutism**.

Certainty gives a kind of maniacal confidence from which have sprung the **multiple delusions of rationality** he has seen fit to impose on others.

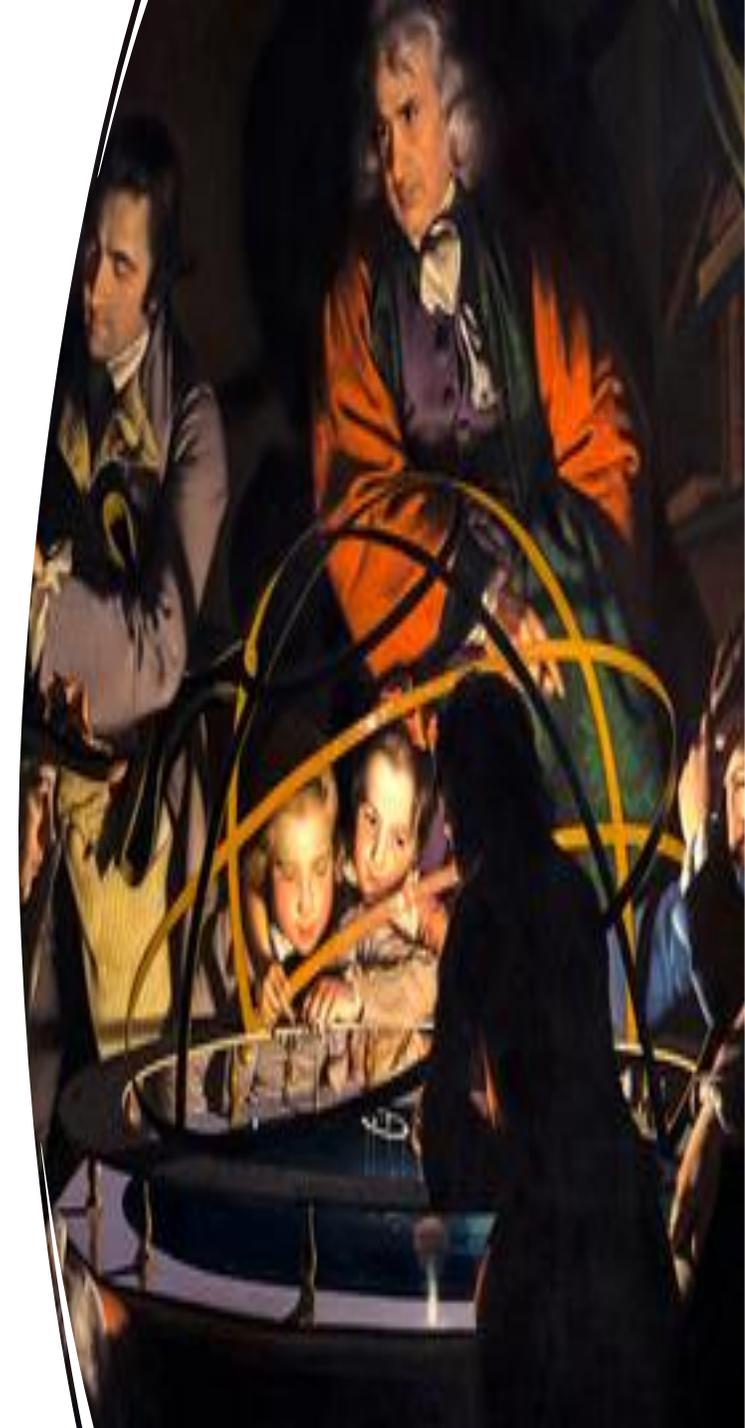
https://philosophynow.org/issues/79/Whats_Wrong_With_The_Enlightenment

Has the age of 18th century enlightenment, reason and modern civilization failed us?

'The Enlightenment' has been indicted as the **destroyer of morality**; the **harbinger of selfish individualism**;

As a thief robbing human life of **meaning**; as being a form of **cultural imperialism.....'**

– Phil Badger



Warnings from the top....

That was 1961 and now in 2025...

"Today, an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that really threatens our entire democracy, our basic rights and freedom"

Joe Biden, 82, on the ultra-wealthy "tech-industrial complex" which he said could wield unchecked power over Americans.



"We Must Guard Against

*the acquisition of unwarranted influence,
whether sought or unsought, by*

the Military Industrial Complex"

- Dwight D. Eisenhower 1961

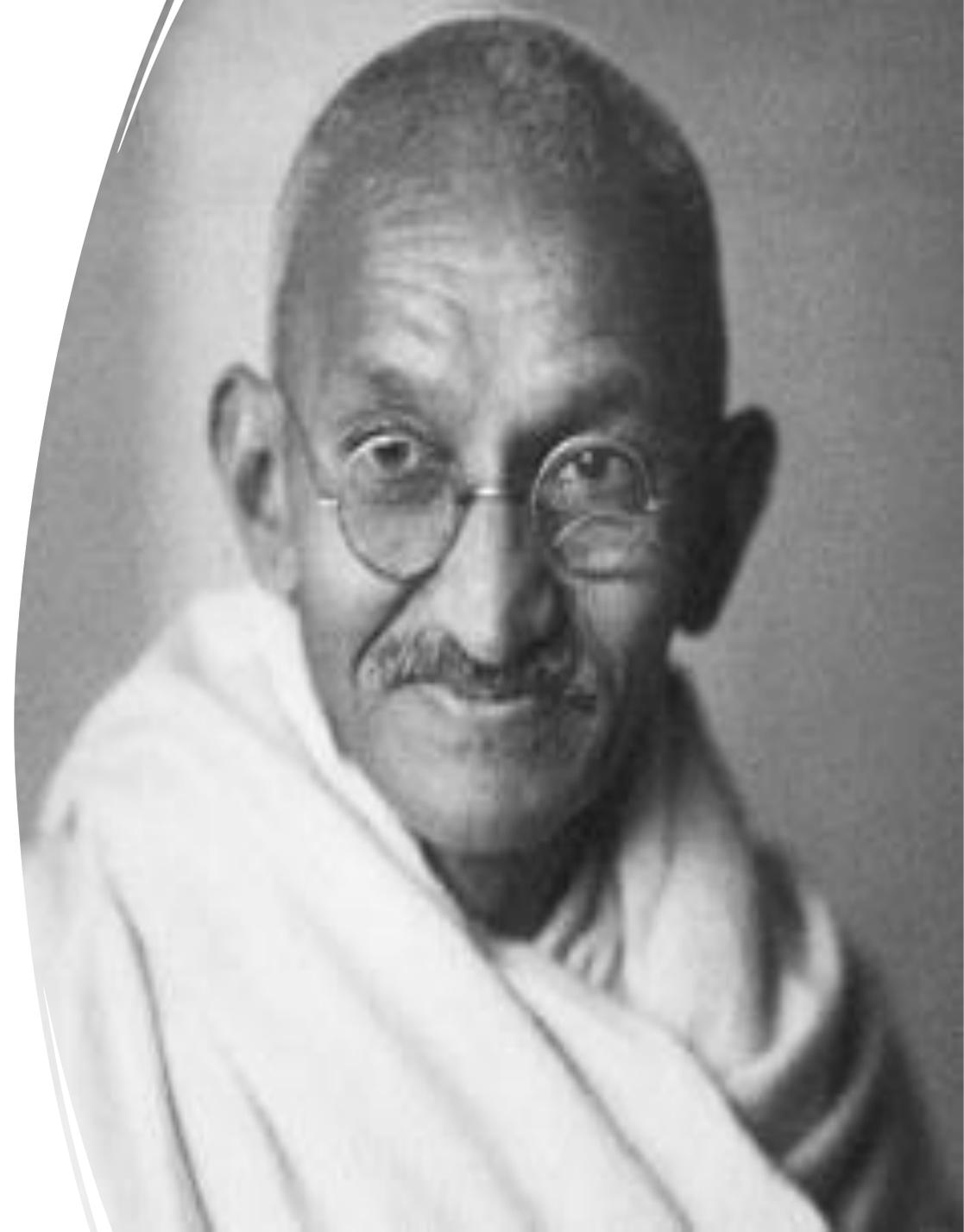
Corporations have the Power to Change

“I desire to end capitalism almost, if not quite, as much as the most advanced socialist. But our methods differ.

My theory of **trusteeship** is no make-shift, certainly no camouflage.

I am confident that it will survive all other theories”

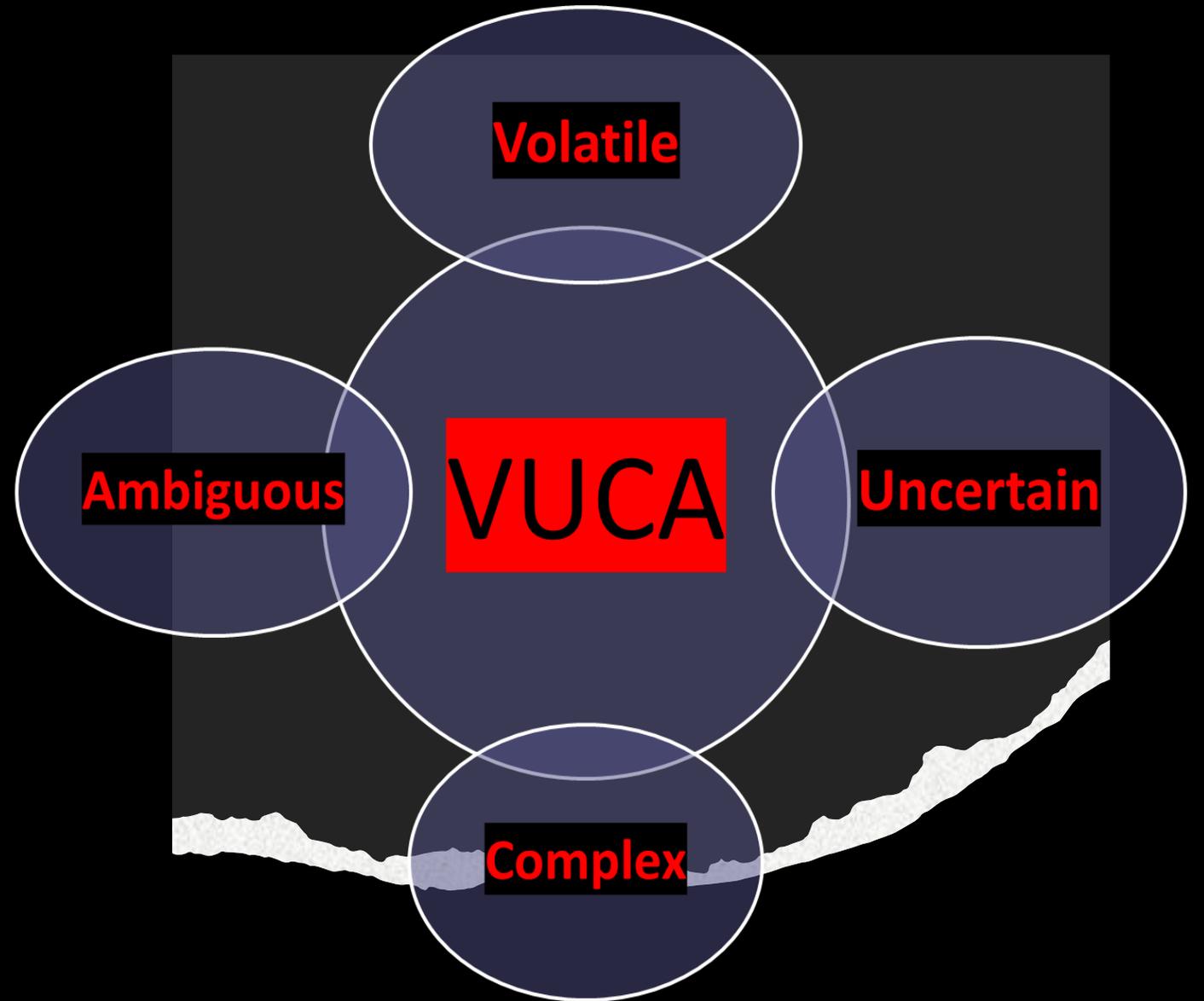
Mahatma Gandhi 1939



Eastern Philosophy and the VUCA

World:

Can the East and
the West Meet to
find Common
Ground?



My foundational teachings



- Life is suffering and unsatisfying in the material realm
- Life is uncertain and impermanent
- There is no such thing as SELF

Realizing our Oneness with Nature

Four Noble Truths:

Suffering exists;

It has a **cause**
(**attachment**);

It has an **end**;

Way to bring about its
end - the **Noble**
Eightfold Pathway

The Noble Eightfold Path



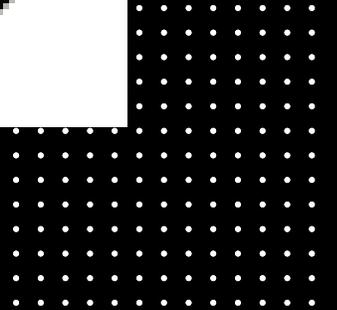
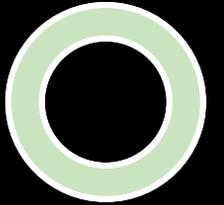
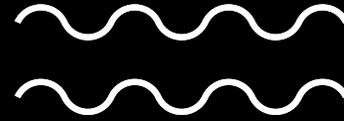
Two Way Street: Optimism of Rabindranath Tagore in conversation with H.G. Wells

Physical science of the nineteenth century probably has created this spirit of race superiority in the **West**. When the **East** assimilates this physical science, the tide may turn and take a normal course.

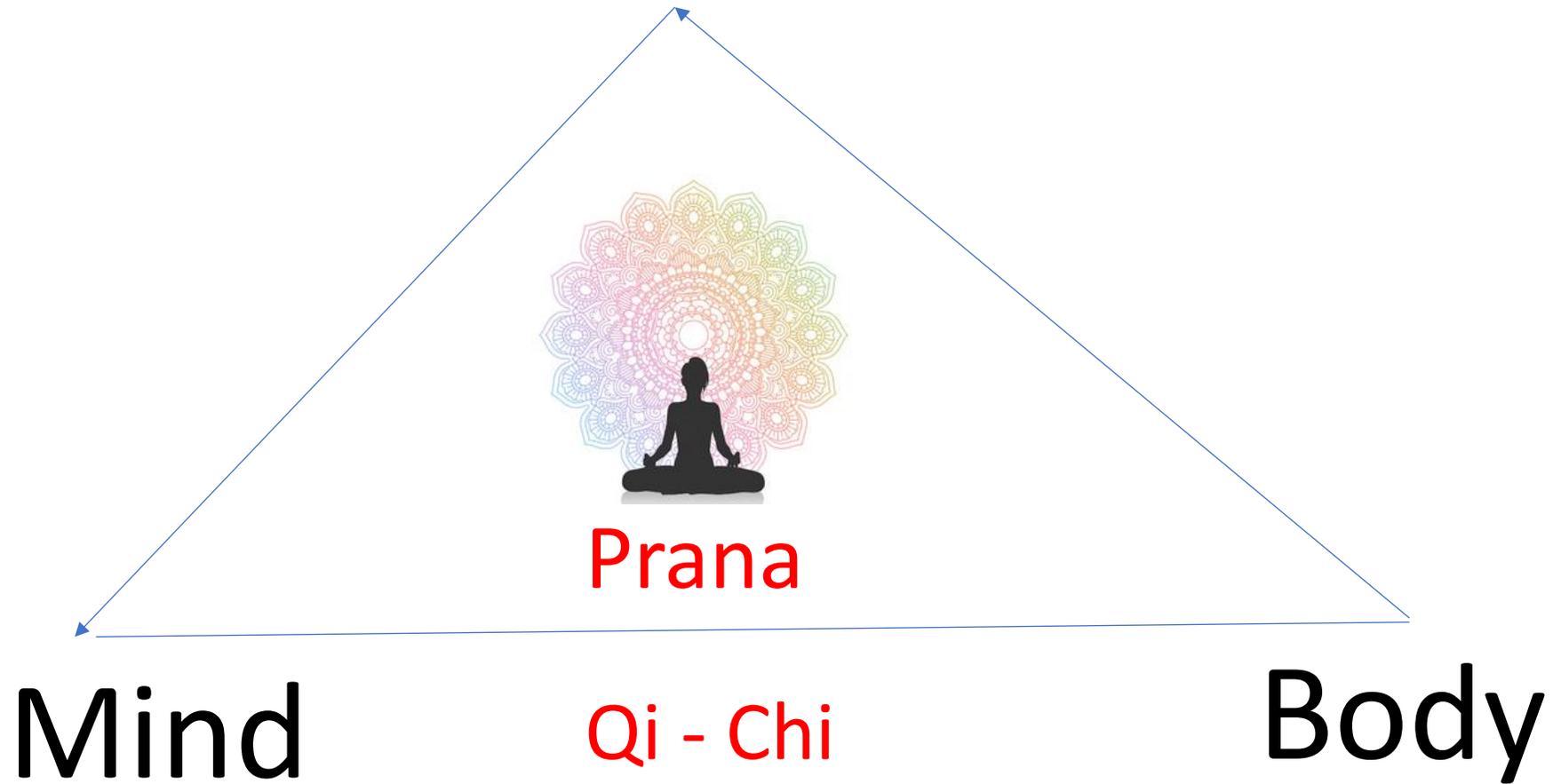


“The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven..”

— John Milton, [Paradise Lost](#)



The Breath connects the Mind and Body.....



A Mindful Awakening

Meditation is an act of awakening, to be awake to the fact that the earth is in danger and living species are in danger.

The practice of mindfulness helps us to touch **Mother Earth** inside of the body and this practice can help heal people and this Earth”.

Thich Nhat Hahn

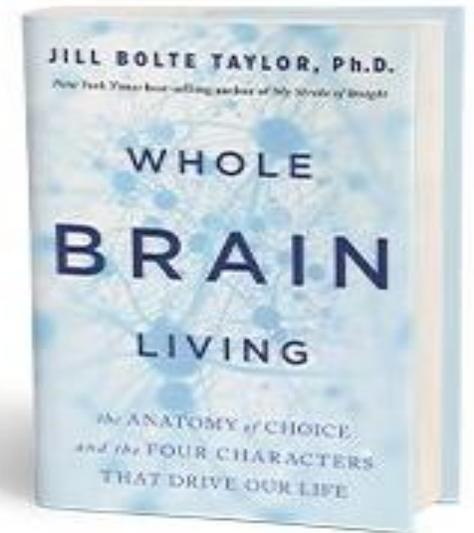


Focus on the Breath: Modern Neuroscience and Mindfulness

*Peace is only a thought away, and all we have to do to access it is to silence the voice of our dominating left mind by using the **breath**.*



Dr. *Jill* BOLTE
TAYLOR



The Boundless Whole Brain



*My **left hemisphere** had been trained to perceive myself as a solid, separate from others.*

*Take a deep breath to release from that restrictive circuitry, my **right hemisphere** relished in its attachment to the eternal flow.*

Jill Bolte Taylor

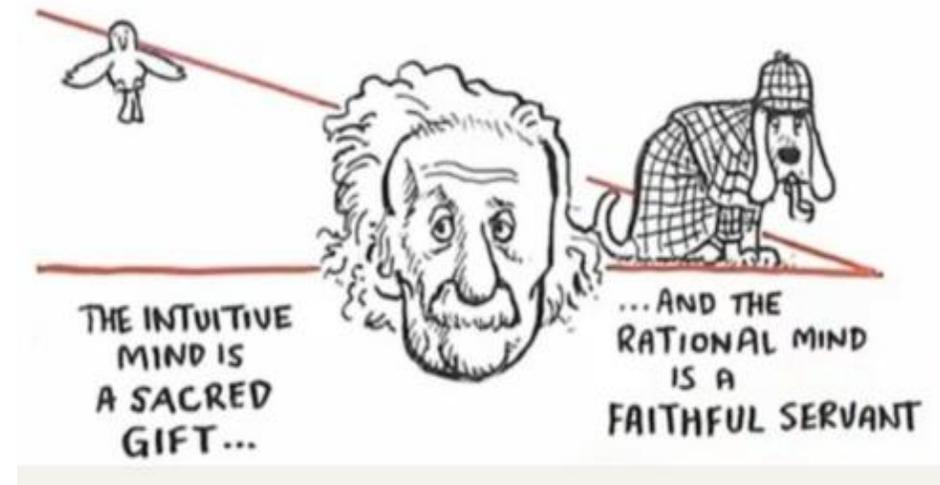
Fearful and Fearless Sides of the Brain



“The **left hemisphere** needs certainty and needs to be right - **Fear**

The **right hemisphere** makes it possible to hold several ambiguous possibilities in suspension together without premature closure on one outcome.” - **Fearlessness**

— Iain McGilchrist, [The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World](#)





Virtue, mindfulness, and wisdom are supported by the three fundamental functions of the brain: **regulation**, learning and selection.

The **brain regulates itself** – and other bodily systems –through a combination of excitatory and inhibitory activity: (ibid.,p.14).

The Divided Brain, Metaphysical Idealism, and Buddhist Mindfulness Practice.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372289530_The_Divided_Brain_Metaphysical_Idealism_and_Buddhist_Mindfulness_Practice [accessed Jan 23 2024].



Materialism posits a cosmos of isolated individuals alienated from an outside world of objects, and this perspective has helped to produce a **culture of rampant individualism, aimless consumerism and the destruction of the planet** (Hyland, 2017).

Moving beyond **materialism** means becoming able to perceive the **vividness and sacredness** of the world around us...transcending our sense of separateness so that we can experience our **connectedness with nature and other living beings**' (Taylor, 2018).

This perspective is essentially a **right-brain** phenomenon and is fully in keeping with a conception of **mindfulness** which is faithful to its **ethical and non-dualistic origins in spirituality**.

Dr. Iain McGilchrist sees AI not as a breakthrough in human-like understanding, but as a powerful extension



An amplification—of our **left-hemisphere** mode of intelligence: analytical, reductive, and disconnected from deeper meaning. Here's his perspective distilled:

- **AI amplifies the left hemisphere:** It excels at data processing, abstractions, and pattern-finding—the same mechanical, fragmented attention the left brain provides. Yet it lacks the **holistic perception, context, empathy, and understanding** that the right hemisphere gives us.

Dr. Iain McGilchrist continued.....

- **No true understanding or spiritual capacity:** Machines may simulate consequences based on data, but they don't truly *understand*—they are parasitic on human meaning. **They cannot support real intellectual or spiritual life.**
- **Risk of meaning erosion:** Overreliance on AI risks deepening a **societal crisis of meaning, reinforcing a sterile, hyperrational, left-hemisphere worldview, and distancing us from embodied reality, moral reflection, and lived wisdom.**
- **A tool, not a master:** AI must remain firmly in service to our full humanity—not as a **replacement for our richer, right-hemisphere ways of knowing.** We must preserve balance, nurturing presence, intuition, empathy, and communal wisdom .

Unity, Truth and Our Common Humanity: Tagore in conversation with Einstein

The species also belongs to a **unity**, to humanity.

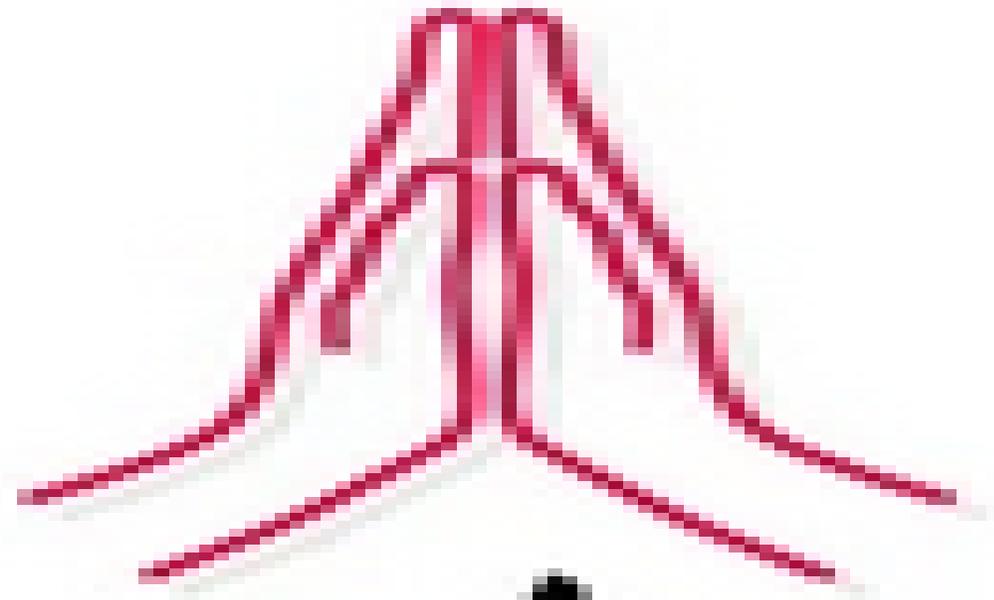
Therefore, the entire human mind realizes **truth**; the Indian and the European mind meet in a **common realization**.



**Truth is dead – long live
honesty.....**

**Ethics are dead – long
live morality**

John Verdon



Handwritten text in black ink, appearing to be a signature or a name, possibly reading "Mama" followed by a flourish.