

# Citizenship and the Measure of All Things

By

Rev. Dr. Todd F. Eklof

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Whether there are biological means of distinguishing one group of people from another is debatable and requires those debating to agree on the precise meaning of the terms they use to avoid confusion. But doing so is more difficult than “common sense” would lead many to believe. Certainly, if you fly to Egypt, then Russia, then Scandinavia, you’ll notice physical characteristics clearly distinguishing their respective populations. In general, Egyptians, Russians, and Scandinavians look a bit different from each other. But, as anthropologist C. Loring Brace points out, we wouldn’t notice these distinctions if, instead of flying, we walked from one region to the next. “The people at any adjacent stops along the way look like one another more than they look like anyone else since, after all, they are related to one another. As a rule, the boy marries the girl next door throughout the whole world, but next door goes on without stop from one region to another.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, the distinction between the people of different regions is blurry because we all blend into each other.

Modern genetics, furthermore, informs us there is more genetic variation between two chimpanzees living in the same troop than there is between any two people on the entire planet.<sup>2</sup> There’s more genetic difference between sibling species of warblers, so physically identical that they can only be distinguished by their songs, than there is between any two people on earth.<sup>3</sup> Scientists are still trying to understand why this is so, why there is so little genetic variation in our species. What we now understand is that modern humans, having diverged from earlier hominids, originated around 200,000 years ago in the East Africa region. In the 1990’s some scientists began theorizing modern humans were nearly wiped out 70,000 years ago due to some sort of cataclysm, perhaps a volcanic eruption, causing our genetic line to “bottleneck.” According to this theory, the 10,000 to 30,000 survivors are responsible for the narrow genetic lineage humans share today. More recent findings suggest this Bottleneck Theory is probably hogwash, but the point is, science recognizes how unusual it is for the members of one species to be so closely related and is still trying to figure out why this is so of humans.

There are also ideological and cultural differences accompanying the regional differences between us, but if we examined them closely we would find these too blend together across the globe, that we influence each other, not matter how different we are, and we cannot help but appropriate each other’s ways. This is so despite our continuous insistence we are divided by *ἔθνος*, the Greek root of words like, *nation*, *nationality*, and *ethnicity*. These categories are imagined matrixes overlaid on our perception of reality that have no empirical or genetic basis. So, what happened? How did we come to accept there are different “races” of people, people, that is, who are thought to be so different from each other as to be members of a different race—whatever the word “race” means to begin with?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/does-race-exist/>

<sup>2</sup> Gribbin, John, & Cherfas, *The First Chimpanzee*, Barnes & Noble, Inc., U.S., 2001, p.144.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Humans are thought to have originally lived in autonomous family size groups and tribes, so few that some may never have encountered another group of people. Until the end of the Neolithic period—the Stone Age—these human groups are also thought to have been territorial creatures, meaning they were connected to a fixed place in which they lived, hunted, and gathered. “For thousands of years this principle remained essentially unchanged,” Pierre Teilhard de Chardin writes, “it was the land, despite all social readjustments, which remained the symbol and the safeguard of individual liberty in its earliest form.”<sup>4</sup>

“In this phase of human evolution,” Erich Fromm says, “[humanity] still feels [itself] part of the natural world, that of animals and plants.”<sup>5</sup> But eventually our species moved from what he calls a “passive relationship” with nature, in which we identified with and felt a part of nature, to an “active relationship,” in which we began to control nature through animal husbandry and agriculture. During this phase, as our societies grew, we began to identify less with the land we had once thought ourselves part of, and more with the rules, dogmas, and customs of the communities we were part of. At this point, Teilhard de Chardin says, “the citizen finds [one’s] centre of gravity gradually transferred to, or at least aligned with, that of the national or ethnic group to which [one] belongs.”<sup>6</sup> Or, as Fromm says, we have “escaped into a new idolatry of blood and soil, of which nationalism and racism are the two most evident expressions.”<sup>7</sup>

This fixation continues today, as we saw just this week when Donald Trump made headlines after saying he’s “proud” to be a Nationalist, and through the horror of another racially motivated mass shooting at a synagogue, and the threat of a military response to thousands of refugees heading toward the U.S. border. But some have been wise enough to question this delusion for thousands of years. 2000 years ago, for instance, the Roman philosopher, Epictetus said, “there is but one course open to [us], to do as Socrates did: never to reply to one who asks his country, ‘I am an Athenian’, or ‘I am a Corinthian’, but ‘I am a citizen of the universe.’”<sup>8</sup> Epictetus thought national identity makes about as much sense as identifying with the exact spot where one was born. If this were the case for me, I’d still be living in a San Francisco hospital bed, which I’d defend with my life as the greatest hospital bed on Earth. Perhaps I’d be at war with people born in other hospital beds, or allied with others to fight our common enemies in foreign beds on other floors. “Why do you say you are an Athenian, instead of merely a native of the little spot on which your bit of a body was cast forth at birth?” Epictetus scoffs. But when we recognize we are all “united” as children of the Universe, then our identity with “Caesar,” or, “Rome,” or any other nation of government, seems ridiculous.

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<sup>4</sup> de Chardin, Pierre Teilhard, *The Future of Man*, Harper & Row, New York, NY, 1959, 1964, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup> Fromm, Erich, *The Sane Society*, Henry Holt & Company, New York, NY, 1955, p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> de Chardin, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Fromm, *ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Epictetus, Book I, Chapter IX (see Oats, Whitney J., ed., *The Stoic and Epicurean Philosophers*, Random House, New York, NY, 1940, p. 239.

It may be, however, that our species is on the verge of finally abandoning our collective validation of εθνος, despite Trump's recent call to strengthen our nationalistic tendencies. This is so, not because we have finally seen the light and are heeding the ancient wisdom of Epictetus, but because we have no other choice, because the forces of evolution have been moving us in this direction since our beginnings and there is nothing anyone can do to prevent this inevitability. Again, as Teilhard de Chardin knew of evolution in the 1940s, "Life moves toward unification..."<sup>9</sup> we can progress only by uniting: this, as we have seen, is the law of Life."<sup>10</sup> He believed, as do others, that evolution is a process of convergence, during which less complicated parts merge to become more complex structures, ever moving Life itself toward greater states of unity and consciousness; "this summit, towards which all our striving must be directed," he says, "can only be attained by our drawing together, all of us, more and more closely and in every sense—individually, socially, nationally and racially."<sup>11</sup> He calls, "the biological dilemma confronting our zoological group,"<sup>12</sup> the choice to "unite or perish."<sup>13</sup> Since evolution seeks our survival, we are swept up in its current toward unification.

As historian Yuval Harari further explains, 12,000 years ago there were many thousands of different human communities living on Earth, few of which knew of each other. 2000 years ago, the number of these "dwarf worlds," as he calls them, had shrunk to just hundreds, or maybe a couple of thousand at most. 500 years ago, "90 percent of humans lived in a single mega-world," he says, which included not thousands, not hundreds, but only four distinct societies, the Mesoamerican, the Andean, the Australian, and the Oceanic worlds. And, "Today," he says, "almost all humans share the same geopolitical system... the same economic system... the same legal system; and the same scientific system..."<sup>14</sup> Sounding a lot like Teilhard de Chardin, Harari says, "From such a vantage point it becomes crystal clear that history is moving relentlessly towards unity."<sup>15</sup>

"Moving relentlessly" may not be an understatement if futurist Ray Kurzweil is right about evolution happening exponentially. "It starts out almost imperceptibly and then explodes with unexpected fury," he says, "unexpected that is, if one does not take care to follow its trajectory."<sup>16</sup> That trajectory, moving us toward greater complexity, unity, and consciousness, Teilhard de Chardin concurs, is unstoppable; "it would be easier at the stage of evolution we have reached," he says, "to prevent the earth from revolving than to prevent Mankind from become totalized."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> de Chardin, *ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 2015, (Kindle version), loc., 2607.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 2562.

<sup>16</sup> Kurzweil, Ray, *The Singularity is Near*, Viking, Penguin Group, New York, NY, 2005, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> de Chardin, *ibid.*, p. 229.

The idea of humanity finally become one, and that it's happening now, ready to sneak up on us at any moment, may make me sound foolish given all that's going on in our world right now. But I see the rise of Nationalism and Authoritarianism today as a reflexive response to the panic caused by this looming change, the end of patriarchal, hierarchal civilization. Some may say that I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. In his book, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, philosopher Peter Singer says, "Until recently such thoughts have been the dreams of idealists devoid of practical impact on the hard realities of a world of nation-states. But now we are beginning to live in a global community."<sup>18</sup>

Our provincial differences are blending together in a broader human culture spread across the globe. Did you know, for example, that more Americans watched the 2018 World Cup than watched the National Football League's Super Bowl, along with more than a billion other people round the world? Earlier this year the story of twelve kids and their 25-year old football coach trapped in a flooded Thailand cave was an international concern, and their rescue an international effort that included rescuers from England, Australia, China, and the U.S., in addition to those from Thailand.

For better or for worse, we have a World Trade Organization, a World Bank, an International Monetary Fund, an International Criminal Court, and a United Nations, and we make international agreements like NAFTA, the KYOTO Protocol, and the Paris Climate Agreement, and have nongovernmental organizations like Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Oxfam International, all of which have emerged to help us deal with the reality of a people that are part of a budding super-society that shares one planet, one environment, one economy, and one communications network.

Yet, instead of recognizing this new transnational reality and actively working to articulate and accommodate it, most of us are still speaking in terms of a dead system of nation-states and races that no longer hold meaning. In the U.S., when NFL Colin Kaepernick refused to stand for the National Anthem in protest of racism, those fearing the unification of humanity that's now happening, recoiled into a nationalistic morality by accusing him of being unpatriotic. Fromm says, "Nationalism is our form of incest, our idolatry, is our insanity. Patriotism is its cult."<sup>19</sup> But recoiling into Nationalism, excusing racism in the name of patriotism, is precisely the way many conservatives are attempting to deny the undeniable transnational age that is already upon us. But many progressives aren't coping any better. Instead of nationalism, they are committing colonial linguicide, using the technologies of political correctness to shame and silence others in their misguided attempt to control the social narrative, and, thus, the mindset of others as we rapidly move toward becoming a unified species.

In 1492, the Spanish grammarian, Antonio de Nebrija said, "siempre la lengua fue compañera del imperio,"<sup>20</sup> (*language was always the companion of empire*). A hundred years later, British

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<sup>18</sup> Singer, Peter, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Yale University Press, U.S. 2004, p. 196.

<sup>19</sup> Fromm, *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> Crowley, Tony, "Colonialism and Language," *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Language Sciences*, ed. P. Hogan, Cambridge, 2008.

colonialist, Edmund Spencer said similarly, “it hath ever been the use of the Conqueror, to despise the language of the conquered and to force him by all means to learn his [own].”<sup>21</sup> Progressives may not appreciate the accusation some are striving to establish one global language, or one politically correct way of saying things, in order to force their mindset onto everyone else, but that’s precisely what the colonization of language is all about, chilling speech by pressuring others to speak only as we see fit.

It’s the same reason Catholic Inquisitors once executed those found guilty of *heresy*. Heresy is from the Greek word meaning “choice,” and heretics were those who chose to say things contrary to Church doctrine. McCarthyism is an example of how the U.S. government effectively did the same thing, making it illegal to talk about socialism and worker’s rights in what’s supposed to be a “free” country. Those convicted by its House Unamerican Activities Committee were imprisoned and blacklisted, meaning they didn’t have a right to be free to make a living if they disagreed with the status quo, just as Trump has said football players who refuse to stand for the National Anthem should be fired.

Linguistic colonialism is the reason, after 500 years of British colonialism, English is one of the top three languages in the world, even though England is little more than half the size of California, and why even more people round the globe speak Spanish, though Spain itself is only about as big as Texas. This effort to impose one’s own values and mindset by controlling the language of others, and, thus, controlling the conversation, is why the ancient Roman Empire forced Latin upon its subjects, and why Japan imposed its language on those it conquered at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and why China is currently forcing Tibetans to speak Mandarin, and why, in the modern era, the governments in Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, and right here in the United States, forcibly removed indigenous children from their homes and placed them in institutions where they were punished for speaking their native tongues.

I bring this up because a humanistic ethic is based upon individual fulfillment and expression. Human unification and solidarity cannot be achieved, as history has proven, by enforcing one mindset though limiting the speech, restricting the beliefs, or controlling the mindset of those we disagree with. We can argue and dialogue with those we disagree with, and should, but harmony cannot be established by the suppression of ideas. “Only union *through* love, and *in* love...”<sup>22</sup> can make it happen, Teilhard de Chardin says. He believed human solidarity can only be achieved if conjoined with a “personalizing totalization,”<sup>23</sup> by allowing every person, that is, to develop their “potentialities to the fullest extent...”<sup>24</sup> the individual must be allowed the widest possible liberty of choice within in which to develop [one’s] qualities...”<sup>25</sup> he says.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> de Chardin, *ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 242.

This is precisely what Erich Fromm emphasizes too, that “*the sole criterion of ethical value being [human] welfare*”<sup>26</sup> and “that the unfolding and growth of every person [should be] the aim of all social and political activities...”<sup>27</sup> and that love, which he defines as, “*the sense of responsibility, care, respect, knowledge of any other human being, the wish to further [that person’s] life,*” requires us to help others achieve and express their fullness. Fromm says, “The contradiction between immanent social ethics and universal ethics will be reduced and tend to disappear to the same extent to which society becomes truly human, that is, takes care of the full human development of all its members.”<sup>28</sup> So individual personality must not, and cannot, get lost in the process of global unification. Again, as Teilhard de Chardin puts it, “totalization by its nature does not merely differentiate but *personalizes* what it unites.”<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, to fully embrace the transnational reality that is upon, the evolution of humanity, the unification of our species into a global body comprised of complex, whole individuals, means a shift to global democracy, to a set of universal human rights that transcends all borders. Transnationalism means we identify with our species, not the “little spot on which [our] bit of a body was cast forth at birth.” It means we don’t see ourselves merely as Athenians, or Corinthians, or Americans, or Russians, or Mexicans, or Africans, and so on, but primarily as members of one human family. As Chief Joseph said, “The Earth is the Mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon it...”<sup>30</sup> It means we can no longer restrict our idea of democracy, that people ought to have an equal voice in how they are governed, to only those of our own country, any more than it should be restricted to those of our own political party, or color, or gender, or faith, or only to those we agree with. If we truly believe in the principles of Democracy, that people should be free to govern themselves, then we must want it for every person in the world. As a global society, furthermore, every person impacted by the decisions of one nation ought to have a voice and a vote in those decisions, no matter where they are from.

In a global Democracy, every person should be free to come and go wherever they want, as members of the Human race—as members of a global community. Just as in the U.S., where every citizen has the right to move freely across state lines, the people of the world must become free to move across the imaginary borders feeding our delusions of separation and segregation. In 1947, the same year Erich Fromm published his book about humanistic ethics, the same time Teilhard de Chardin realized humanity is moving toward unification, Gandhi said, “I would not like to live in a world if it is not to be one world.”<sup>31</sup> In speaking of what he called the, “cult of patriotism,” Gandhi also said, “My love therefore of nationalism or my idea of nationalism is that my country may become free, that if need be, the whole country may die, so that the human race may live. There is no room for race-hatred. Let that be our nationalism.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Fromm, Erich, *Man for Himself*, Henry Holt & Company, Inc., New York, NY, 1947, p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>29</sup> de Chardin, *ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>30</sup> Freedman, Russell, *Indian Chiefs*, Scholastic Inc., New York, NY, 1987, p. 111.

<sup>31</sup> Gandhi, *All Men are Brothers*, Continuum, New York, NY, 1958, 2982, p. 112.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 109f.

I realize this idea may seem radical, even threatening to some, as it obviously is. But, as you have heard, it's nothing new. It goes back to Epictetus in ancient Rome, and seventy years ago was simultaneously recognized by Erich Fromm in the U.S., Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in France, and Gandhi in India. Some may fear it. Some may violently resist it. Some may demonize those who dare talk about this dream Dr. King preached about and John Lennon sang about. But none of this matters because the transformation of human society is already upon us, and we cannot stop it from happening any more than we can prevent the Earth from turning. Human unification is the trajectory of evolution. The drive to become one world is a force of nature. The drive toward each other is the nature of love. It's what evolution wants. It's what humanity needs.