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Robert Elliott Allinson

Soka University of America, [rallinson@soka.edu](mailto:rallinson@soka.edu)

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## The Possibility of a Global Civilization

Robert Elliott Allinson  
Professor of Philosophy, Soka University of America  
rallinson@soka.edu

### Abstract

This article inquires into the question of what is civilization. It considers that a *sine qua non* of a civilization is a non-violent culture. It investigates the concept of violence and extends the concept to cover examples of citizens who live in conditions of poverty, ill health, lack of food, lack of education, lack of adequate housing, and inadequate living conditions. The argument in the article is that a civilization that allows such conditions to exist perpetrates violence upon its citizens and therefore does not deserve the appellation, 'civilization.' Those citizens who do not protest against such violence are not mere bystanders but are accomplices to the violence. The article raises the question whether civilization can exist in the context of nations engaging in an arms race, especially a nuclear arms race. It raises the question whether civilization can exist in nations that enable climate crisis through endorsing and permitting the use of fossil fuels. It inquires into the question of the relationship between the philosophy of man and the kinds of nation states that exist. It argues that a better understanding of the nature of man would lend itself to the concept and construction of a viable global civilization. In order to achieve a global civilization, it is argued, one needs to construct a philosophy of man that incorporates insights from Rousseau, Mencius and Confucius.

### What is Civilization?

There are many ways in which we can understand what a civilization is. We can look to scientific achievements, great accomplishments in art, architecture, scholarship, medicine and literature, technological advancements, the establishment of a successful nation state, the flourishing of trade, the economic development of the country that is to be considered as having attained a civilization, its literacy level, its provision of a sustainable life style for its citizens, its role as a peacemaker among nations and many other markers of attainment.

In recent years measures have been taken not only for GNP, but for GNH, or gross national happiness. What is happiness, as Aristotle noted, must be considered first, and this is no different from our times than it was for his.<sup>1</sup>

These all sound like admirable criteria. However, we need to pay careful attention to the standards for economic, educational and political equality.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095a16-22

- Does the country in question take care of its elderly, its minority groups, its indigent citizens? Does it provide security for its citizens from foreign and domestic terror?
- Does it provide equal educational and employment opportunities for all of its citizens? Does it provide equal working and leisure conditions for its female citizens, for its senior citizens, for its children, for its immigrant population?
- Does it provide equal opportunity for housing, transportation, water, food, and health care for all of its citizens? Does it provide equal justice for all of its citizens? Is its incarceration system fair and livable, or better yet, has it found a different and better solution to the problem of crime?

These are all tall orders. However far we may be from finding countries that satisfy all of these criteria, we still need to consider another angle and that is, freedom from violence. Violence can take many forms, from extreme physical violence and practices of discrimination to microaggressions of ignoring people on the street or in one's workplace by looking through them or treating them with arrogance, injustice and a lack of inclusion, respect and/or a lack of positive affirmation.

The acceptance of poverty, illness, a lack of adequate health standards, or poor living standards for population groups inside one's nation is an acceptance of violence. The concept of non-violence derives from the Jain concept of *ahimsa*, or a restraint from inflicting harm to oneself or others. When we participate in a society in which one tolerates or accepts a population of those who lack adequate housing, food, medical care and education, we are condoning violence or harm. By doing nothing about this harm, we are its enablers. There is no such thing as a neutral bystander.

Unlike some of my distinguished colleagues, who have given much detailed and meticulous thought as to how to utilize our advanced technology and superstructures to achieve peace among nations, I wish to explore another dimension, what I can call an inner normative ethical revolution.

## **Human Relations**

As our discussion of refraining from harm doing or violence can range far and wide, let us focus our discussion today on the area of ethical relations.

Ethical priorities are incredibly influential in so many critical domains. Two topical examples. Firstly, climate change can be reversed by choosing not to utilize carbon-based fuels. The major obstacle to this is placing profit as a higher priority than an ethical relation to nature and to sentient life on the planet and the future of civilization. So powerful can be the influence of ethics!

Secondly, the projected fear of the loss of human control to artificial intelligence can possibly be decreased by programing artificial intelligence with ethical values.

These are topics of significant importance and can be saved for another occasion. The thesis I should like to advance today is that ethical relations are indeed the starting point of a civilization. As much as we might alter the specific structures of human society; e. g., its political structure, its educational opportunities, its economic opportunities, and so on and so forth, I contend that no country can count itself as civilized unless it has in place an honest, just, fair, respectful and a non-harm-doing, non-violent mode of human relations — as well as our relations to nature — as the foundation of all political and organizational structures. Since the phrase non-violence has become so commonly used as to lose much of its emotional connotation and therefore its meaning, let us use, ahimsa, non-harm doing, its original cognate.

Political structures, whether democratic or non-democratic, cannot function properly without a priority given to ethical considerations. In the best of democratic societies, the principles of participatory democracy can be easily warped by unethical motivations undermining the democratic processes. For example, interfering with calculating votes through gerrymandering destroys representative democracy.

For classical Greek philosophy, especially through the eyes of Plato and his student, Aristotle, one could not achieve an ethical society without proper political structures. Ethics was not considered to be functional on its own. Ethical behavior could only come into being within the right sort of political organizations and structures. Plato introduces the idea that the investigation of justice in the state needs to precede the inquiry into justice in the individual, his *Republic* being Justice writ large and hence easier to perceive.<sup>2</sup> Plato's student, Aristotle, follows his master and discusses in his *Politics* that it is only in the appropriate political structure that ethics can be realized.<sup>3</sup>

Today, in the global community, we must consider reversing the ancient Greek order in which ethics can only be fulfilled through politics; we should reverse it to the priority that politics can only properly function if it is governed by ethical values. The reason for this reversal is that in ancient Greece it was taken for granted that civilized humans were governed by ethics and all that was necessary was to enable personal ethics by putting proper political polities in place. Today's world is different. The role of personal ethics today is no longer something that can be taken for granted. In addition, since the European Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we have put democratic political structures in place that function similarly to the political structures that governed ancient Greece and Rome. Ethics, however, has largely been absent.

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<sup>2</sup> *Republic* 368c6-369a2

<sup>3</sup> *Politics* 1253a30, 12811a1, *et passim*

Politics can only function to achieve egalitarianism, freedom, security, health care, senior care and subsistence for its citizens if its citizenry is strongly motivated by ethical intentions. During the European Enlightenment, notable progress was made through the reform of political structures. In the works of Montesquieu in particular, the notion of the separation of powers to achieve a balance of power was a great achievement. It created the phenomenon of countervailing powers, countering any branch of government from obtaining supremacy and consequent domination.

The problem in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that unethical behavior has undermined the efficacy of countervailing powers. The Supreme Court (I single out the United States as my primary example) loses its stature as an independent, objective council when its members succumb to influence by politically partisan billionaires. The House of Representatives and the Senate lose their ability to work together to support or if needs be to deter the power of the Executive Branch when its members are bought by Big Pharmacy, the Tobacco Industry, and the National Rifle Association. In short, the lack of ethics cripples democracy. Oligarchy replaces democracy.

Further erosions of the rule of democracy have come into being by the power of mob rule, what Plato feared as the ultimate fate of democracy. What can constrain the masses who are not governed by the political countervailing powers? The ultimate example was the invasion of the Capitol by unconstrained masses of people. What is to constrain such events? The lack of the ultimacy of the principle of non-violence, non-harm doing is the real problem, not the failure of democracy as such. Democracy today cannot function without ethics.

John Stuart Mill thought that voters who were educated should receive more ballots to vote.<sup>4</sup> Education, however, is not enough. We must also consider, what kind of education? Consider Nazi Germany, where Hitler was elected Chancellor through a democratic vote despite his ardent advocacy of unethical behavior. Among his loyal followers were educated nurses, teachers, professors, lawyers, judges, and physicians, all persons of high education. Among his top Nazi officials were men with university doctorates. Joseph Goebbels, his propaganda Minister, had both an M.A. and a Ph. D. His doctorate in German literature was earned from the University of Heidelberg, Germany's oldest university.<sup>5</sup> Did this education include the subject of normative ethics? Consider the iconic example of the Angel of Death, Joseph Mengele, a physician whose behavior hardly followed the ethical principle of *Primum Non Nocere*. Germany just before the Nazi period was considered to have reached the high point of civilization in Europe.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf., John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5669/5669-h/5669-h.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Felix Heidenreich, 'Hannah Arendt in Germany Today, Between Contested Philosopher and Public Icon,' *Raisons Politiques*, 2018/2 (No 70), p. 129.

And yet, look what happened. Nazi Germany and Hitler's minions slaughtered six million Jewish people of whom one and one-half million were children. Innocent human beings. This, civilization?

What then of Rousseau? Kant thought so highly of this thinker that his portrait was hung above his desk; Rousseau wrote that it was civilization that warped mankind.

In the state of nature, Rousseau asserted, prior to reason, human beings were filled with cooperation and kindness. We possess ... "a natural repugnance at seeing any sensitive being suffer, and, in particular, being like ourselves." And "... so long as he [man] does not resist the internal impulse of compassion, he will never do harm to another man ..."<sup>6</sup> As men came into association with each other under the guise of civilization, selfishness and greed came into being.

Rousseau has been criticized on the grounds that there has never existed such a state of nature as he described, so he had no historical evidence for his starting point. However, this critique misses the mark. Rousseau did not need to have recourse to an evidentiary state of nature; it is his imagination of a state of nature that should be the proper object of our attention.

How does he reach his conclusions? Though he does not explain his methodology, it appears as if he applies the criterion of introspection in a self-phenomenological experiment. The question should be: What is the nature of human beings in their natural state? What is human nature?

What of the animal kingdom? What characterizes most animals is their cooperative and altruistic natures concerning relations among their own kind, their own species. Dolphins are known to swim under injured or sick dolphins to keep them afloat and prevent them from drowning. Jane Goodall, that remarkable anthropologist, recounts in her *Through a Window: My 30 Years with the Chimpanzees of Gombe*, the story of a chimpanzee, no relative of the victim he rescues, diving into a river to save a young chimpanzee from drowning. There are tales of elephants working together to drag their peers overcome by sunstroke and having collapsed, away from the sun and under the shade of a tree, to protect them from dying from the relentless heat.

My point is, if this characterizes the behavior of animals in the wild, then why should the human animals' behavior in the wild be any different?

When there is a new-born bunny or tiger cub, no one dubs that new-born evil. Animals do not come into the world under the burden of sin.

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<sup>6</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundation of Inequality Among Men*, 1754 <https://ota.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/repository/xmlui/bitstream/handle/20.500.12024/2524/seconddiscourse.htm?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

As Rousseau writes in *Émile*, there is no original sin in humankind.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps, Rousseau is right. For Rousseau, compassion is inborn in the human being. Compassion occurs prior to reflection.

In this concept, Rousseau is at one with Mencius, the great Chinese Confucian philosopher of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE whose book, *The Mencius*, is one of the classic four books that for centuries formed the cornerstone of Chinese education. It is only when human beings attempt to construct a society, an artificial structure, that they become removed from their gentle nature. What then, shall we retreat to the jungles, the rain forests or the deserts? No, this is not the answer, although the extremes of climate in the years to come or the ravages that are the outcome of a nuclear war may force us to do so. In the meantime, our only recourse is to establish the right sort of civilization, a civilization that does not permit or enable violence or harm doing.

The important lessons to be taught are ethical lessons. We need to instill and repeatedly educate unequivocal ethical values that our civilization has torn asunder. A study of one year old babies at the infant cognition center of Yale University has demonstrated that infants are born with a sense of right and wrong and, when tests are given, the infants, prior to learning language or being exposed to education, tend to choose right behavior, that is, ethical, other-directed behavior over wrong behavior, that is selfish behavior that is hurtful to others.<sup>8</sup>

Rousseau had a point. The wrong sort of civilization, the kind of civilization that sanctions aggressive competition, that rewards success obtained at nearly any ethical cost, corrupts humankind. Mencius, with his famous example of the child in the well, knew this long before Rousseau, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE.<sup>9</sup>

In Mencius's justly famous example, his argument was that the human being, untainted by civilization, was prompted by altruistic motivations. In my modern reconstruction, his argument was phenomenological; that is, everyone was encouraged to imagine the situation and see how she or he would feel.

Everyone was to imagine a child, not a relative, about to fall into a well. Let us imagine the child at five years old. We may update the example to a child running into the street, about to be struck by an oncoming car.

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<sup>7</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, Project Gutenberg, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/5427/pg5427-images.html.utf8>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf., Paul Bloom, *Just Babies: The Origin of Good and Evil*, New York: Broadway Books, 2013. Susan Chun, "Are We Born with a Moral Core? The Baby Lab Says 'Yes,'" CNN, February 13, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/02/12/us/baby-lab-morals-ac360/index.html#:~:text=Paul%20Bloom%2C%20author%20of%20E2%80%9CJust,a%20rudimentary%20sense%20of%20justice>.

<sup>9</sup> The *Mencius* 2A: 6.

Mencius asks us (I have modified his approach, but not altering its meaning) to introspect and discover what feelings are suddenly and spontaneously aroused in us. He claims that we will be affected by the feelings of alarm and compassion, strangely and interestingly coinciding with Aristotle's claim of what feelings are aroused by the spectator of tragedy.

In short, every human being, unaffected by thinking about the impact of their action by the judgment of others, possesses a nature that is altruistic, that is, full of compassion for every human being in suffering. That such emotions arise in every person *suddenly* in Mencius's example mitigates against the idea that such emotions are the result of reflection, reason or thinking. Mencius's idea supports Rousseau. One could argue that such a feeling could arise as the result of much ethical education and training in the rule to help other human beings in suffering. Following a rule, however, does not necessarily give rise to a sudden emotion.

Mencius even illustrates what happens when civilization disrupts nature. He gives the example of a mountain, once green, decimated by axes and hoes, becoming bald.<sup>10</sup> Nowadays, the technologies of strip mining, surface coal extraction, oil shale mining, and open-pit mining provide even more graphic evidence of environmental destruction. It is not only technology that Mencius is pointing to as the culprit. Technology is a metaphor for the tampering with nature, in this case, the nature of the human being. The human being will be stripped of its green shoots, the sprouts of its core, essential ethical nature. The methods today include more sophisticated weapons than axes; there are digital axes now, the axes of social media, spouting untruths and encouraging violence through video games.

Someone may object. The Nazis were not kind to others. They bayoneted pregnant women and tortured people to death. This is precisely Mencius' point. The Nazis were influenced by false thinking, by evil propaganda. They were not acting out of their true human nature. They were corrupted by false thoughts, thoughts that misdirected them away from their true human nature. So, even we can be corrupted. What is important to remember is that the entire idea of corruption implies that the roots of our nature must be good to start with.

Of course, what I am saying is debatable. The Chinese thinker Xunzi thought the opposite of Mencius. He thought that the human being was born evil, born, as he states in his classic work, with envy and greed.<sup>11</sup>

From my perspective, I have recourse once again to Rousseau. For Rousseau, envy comes into being only in civilization; greed, as well.

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<sup>10</sup> The *Mencius*, 6: A8.

<sup>11</sup> The *Xunzi*, Chapter 23.



One becomes greedy to make sure that she or he possesses more than the next person. In a state of nature, there is no need to compete with others. Has anyone ever seen an obese coyote, tiger or deer? Animals have no desire to eat beyond what their body needs. They are not driven by envy. Hunger, in my example, is a metaphor. Animals are not by nature in competition with members of their own species. Of course, males do combat with each other in competition for mates. This, however, is a special behavior confined to this life cycle. Even here, the fights do not end in violent killings. They end in one male giving in to the other. That is all.

The point is that civilization requires that human beings, as the famed, late novelist Kurt Vonnegut says, to be kind to each other. It is as simple as that. In Buddha's language, echoed by the late Albert Schweitzer, we must show compassion to all sentient beings.<sup>12</sup> In today's world, we must take this further. We must show compassion to all beings, including non-sentient beings. Mountains, for example, contain coal. The destruction of mountains and the extraction of coal is the starting point of the burning of fossil fuels. This burning of fossil fuel fills the air with carbon dioxide. The carbon dioxide traps the heat of the sun and prevents it from escaping. The heat from coal production accounts for one third of the rising of the temperature of the world.<sup>13</sup> This heat melts our ice caps and our oceans overflow. All because in the very beginning we did not care for non-sentient being.

We must also consider another extremely crucial point. When we speak of human nature, we do not need to be purely descriptive. If we remain descriptive in our account, we can only point to history which, as Simon Wiesenthal has described, is the story of man's inhumanity to man. The investigation of human nature possesses the unique characteristic in which the subject and the object of our inquiry is one and the same. We are not mere objects of study. We are subjects, that is, active agents. We can make our nature what it is, what we want it to be. We are not simply passive recipients. We shall return to this point in the sequel.

Our modern society, governed by the race of capitalism, mitigates against ethical principles. It is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve an ethical society under a capitalist civilization. An ethical world would be a world in which there would be no poverty. However, there is an *abundance* of poverty. Each instance of poverty, hunger, malnutrition, disease, lack of shelter, lack of water is an example of violence, of harm being done. All of these conditions are preventable. The lack of action by the human community on behalf of those deprived is an act of violence. We live in a most violent society, a society of widespread harm doing, a civilization of violence. Can we call this civilization? Have we ever reached civilization? Has there ever been civilization?

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<sup>12</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Philosophy of Civilization*, Amherst, New York, Prometheus Press, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> "Fossil Fuels and Climate Change: The Facts," February 18, 2022,

<https://www.clientearth.org/latest/latest-updates/stories/fossil-fuels-and-climate-change-the-facts/>.

There are other dangers, some of which I have already mentioned. There is the danger of climate chaos. This is brought on by the cooperative violence of governments and giant corporations. As scientific evidence mounts, there are clear and present dangers that the glaciers will melt to the point of flooding our coastal cities; that tornadoes, floods, tsunamis, hurricanes and typhoons will devastate our cities; that heat will dry up crops, that many places where human beings now live will become uninhabitable. And then, what will be the behavior of those who have versus those who have not? The violence that we now see emerging will be magnified a thousand-fold. Civilization, now a far distant dream, will become a total phantasm. Dystopia of the worst possible kind imaginable will become reality. The apocryphal reply of Gandhi, when asked what he thought of Western civilization, ‘that it would be a good idea,’ will become, ‘it was once a good idea, but now has become unobtainable.’

Then, there is the ever-present looming possibility of catastrophic nuclear war. We are still in a nuclear weapons arms race. Increasingly, new countries are obtaining and testing nuclear weapons. We may not need to wait until the climate makes our planet uninhabitable. We may beat nature to the punch.

Are there any solutions? Yes, of course. There are nations working on methods to stop climate deterioration. Norway has mandated electric vehicles since 2007. Now, a high percentage of vehicles on Norway’s roads are electric.<sup>14</sup> This is wonderful, but only a drop in the global ocean. However, it demonstrates that we can prevent climate devastation and know how to do it. This is an important first step of the baby.

What of mass shootings that characterize America today? They are becoming more common, virtually one a day in 2023. Those enamored of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment spread its illusory interpretation that it intended to provide private citizens with any number and kind of weapons and ammunition. The wording of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment is: ‘A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.’ It is in order to maintain a militia, it reads, that we must not prevent people to bear and keep arms. It is for the sake of a standing army that the right soldiers, not private citizens, should not be prevented from possessing arms. This dates back to the historical need for states to raise standing armies, to allow these armies, or militia, to bear arms.

For arms were not provided by the government. Citizens who were to become soldiers needed to bring their own arms. For this, they needed a legal justification.

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<sup>14</sup> Cf., Mark Kane, “Norwegians Replaced A Fifth Of Their Cars With All-Electric Ones,” InsideEVs, January 1, 2023, <https://insideevs.com/news/628846/norway-fifth-car-fleet-electric/#:~:text=Before%202025%2C%20a%20third%20of,expected%20to%20be%20zero%20Demission.&text=Norway%20is%20at%20the%20forefront,the%20country%20are%20all%20Delectric>.

This was the purpose of the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment, very clearly stated in the grammar of the English language. Of course, no one envisioned the type of weapons of mass destruction that those who claim that they follow the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment maintain should be their right to purchase and to carry, fully armed wherever they go. Even in the Wild West of America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when those who carried guns went into a saloon, they were required to park them at the door.

The argument is that it is mentally disturbed people who indulge in mass shootings of children in elementary schools and citizens in their daily life in banks, movie theaters, synagogues, churches, mosques, and shopping malls. The point is that these mentally ill people could do no harm if they did not have access to weapons, especially military grade weapons of mass destruction. In more civilized countries, in New Zealand and Australia, at the first instance of a mass shooting, weapons were banned, and citizens turned in their weapons to be melted into metal.

My point is, at least one of the dangers that we face, that of mass destruction of a nuclear war, can be averted by taking a clear and simple measure, to wit, the abolition of nuclear weapons. We do not consider it utopian to turn in our weapons as in the case of New Zealand and Australia. We do not consider it utopian to ban private weapons as is the case in most Asian and European countries. If we can ban weapons on a national basis, why cannot we ban weapons on a global basis? The movement of No First Use is a step in the right direction.

Clearly, much has to be changed. What is most important to start with is the foundation. The foundation of a house is the most important building block. If we do not start with the right foundation, it does not matter how elaborate and how extensive the edifice is that we build. The primary foundation that has to be changed is our view of human nature. As long as we believe that human beings by nature are selfish brutes, prone to violence and devoid of a caring nature, it is not likely that we shall change our practices that strip our planet of its nature and equally unlikely that we shall give up our right to bear arms freely and openly to use against other human beings. For, in the minds of violent persons, the right to bear arms is the right to use arms.

What is needed to make civilization possible is a change in our ideas of the nature of humankind. What is needed is a deep, dedicated, consistent and long-term philosophical and ethical education. Plato calculated that one needed an education until one was at least 50 years old before one could be considered to be a ruler.<sup>15</sup> Now, whether or not self-consciously, the majority of human beings educated in the West are Hobbesian. The majority of human beings in the Western World, in Western “Civilization,” whether or not they have read Thomas Hobbes, see man as he did, as *Homo homini lupus*, that man is a wolf to man.

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<sup>15</sup> *Republic* 539d-540ab

What is needed prior to a revolution of society is an inner revolution. A revolution in our idea of what is man. A very crucial ingredient here is the treatment of females. One must remake the idea that man was made first. The new herstory must be that woman was made first and man was made from the breast of the female. Does this not sound more similar to biological reality?

It is a most difficult, but not impossible task. It is important to remember in this task of coming to know the true nature of man that this task be philosophical and not scientific. It does not fall in the realm of artificial intelligence. In scientific methodology, we describe the object of our investigation. This is understood as an objective methodology. We do not allow subjective considerations to affect the data that we are collecting. In natural science our human concerns do not affect the situation that when we add two Hydrogen atoms to one Oxygen atom, we form the molecule of water. We do not create this; it is the independent and objective work of nature.

When the social scientist takes a poll of potential voters, the social scientist does not (or should not) affect the polling. She or he takes the poll of the voters and describes what she or he finds. She or he does not (or should not) alter the data to be described. The work of the scientist is descriptive. The data of the scientist are what she or he finds. The scientist does not create them.

In the case of the introspection of the human being, the nature of the human being is not something apart from the human being to exist and be left undisturbed. The nature of the human being is in the making, is a *facere*, not a *factum*. We accept the idea of biological evolution as a scientific explanation of the development of the species. However, we hesitate to accept the validity of the idea of a social evolution. We can become social evolutionists as well as biological evolutionists. Our ideas of ourselves must change and this change can take place at the same time as we attempt to alter our social and political structures so that they enable ethical choices, decisions and actions. We must attack on two fronts at once.

### **Social Evolution**

This idea of social evolution is not to be confused with the social Darwinism of biological reductionism.<sup>16</sup> There are social biologists who attempt to reduce all human activities as serving the cause of biological evolution. This is an entirely different approach.

The approach of social evolution is to consider that in the case of human nature, the subject and the object are the same. This is a core philosophical concept. The object is not separate from the subject.

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<sup>16</sup> The iconic example is Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Hence, one can prescribe as well as describe human behavior. Just as I may alter my behavior to become less selfish and more altruistic, my subjective change alters my objective nature.

As Aristotle famously wrote, ‘we become just by performing just acts.’<sup>17</sup> Our behavior shapes our nature. With philosophy we do not merely describe, we prescribe. Our nature is not something static and unchangeable; it changes under our own hands. We can become evil, and we can become good. As it says in Deuteronomy: ‘I have created both Good and Evil; therefore, choose Good.’<sup>18</sup> This is not a logical choice; it is a moral one.

There is no logic here. However, it does reveal that we have a choice. We can make things better. It is up to us to do so. The outer revolution, the change to society, the change in our eating habits, the change in the way we can creatively cooperate with nature, the change to ethical relations with our fellow human beings and other sentient and non-sentient denizens of the world, this is all dependent on an inner revolution, the revolution of understanding that our true nature is one of compassion, to be the ongoing caretaker of the world.

How do we know that this is our true nature? As the philosopher Aristotle has written, the full development of something is its true nature, the fulfillment of its purpose, its telôs, what it is meant to be. The full development of the acorn is the mature oak tree. The oak tree in its maturity is what the oak is meant to be. The acorn is not the nature of the oak tree. It is the beginning of its nature.

The human being in its infancy is not the full nature of the human being. In its self-interest, in its throwing of temper tantrums, the infancy of the human being resembles the current stage of nation states, aggressively displaying their weapons and plunging from time to time into war, much as infants throwing temper tantrums, when they cannot get their way.

The human being in maturity is a nurturing parent. The mature human being is a caretaker of those who are dependent upon her or him. *The full and real nature of the human being is to be a caretaker.*

Since we are not there yet, we need to nurture this nature. Just as a plant needs good soil, moisture and sunlight, human beings need a good political system, equally distributed economic sustainability and ethical relations. While the ancient Greeks thought that ethics found its realization in a political system, we must think that a political system finds its realization in ethical relations.

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<sup>17</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103b

<sup>18</sup> *Deuteronomy* 30: 15-20.

As Aristotle thought, the purpose of the State was to achieve the good life. Now, we must move beyond the contours of the nation state. In order to achieve the good life, it must be achievable by all planetary citizens. We must become citizens not of any particular nation state, but citizens of the world.

The question is not of this civilization or that civilization. The question is the building of a global civilization with global concerns. A global civilization is a civilization of nations in which there is no violence, no harm doing. The sign of poverty, of homelessness, of migration on a local or a global scale is a mark of violence. We live in a time neither of a state of nature nor a state of civilization. We live in a state of oozing barbarism marked by unprecedented violence, where child soldiers have become murderers. We not only murder our children, but our children murder our adults. This is new in history. This is something new under the sun. And this is not good.

We need an inner revolution, a philosophical revolution. We need to envision ourselves and our sorority and fraternity of humankind as one family, as it is stated in Confucius' *Analects*, where all men within the four oceans are brothers.<sup>19</sup>

This was known long ago in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. And yet, we are far from achieving this ideal. We must work together, as a community of scholars to bring ourselves to change. We cannot leave the change of the future in the hands of the governments of the world, to international organizations or simply to the sheer passage of time. The governments of the world cannot act in time to save the planet. International organizations are too beset by politics. Time by itself is a passive enabler. It will enable the inequities of power to reduplicate themselves. Those in power increase in power; those who are weak become weaker. The gap between the rich and the poor will continue to widen.

It is us, as educators, as philosophers, as ethical, as global scholars, that is, as lovers of wisdom, who must assume the role of the philosophical Atlas of the world.<sup>20</sup> We must hold up the world. For, if we do not, the world will not stand on its own. Our task is to be builders, to build a global civilization. For a global civilization to come into being, it requires a plan, and it requires planning. It is the philosophers of the world, those who hold the repositories of wisdom in their minds and hearts to whom we must turn. To turn to all the civilizations that have existed in the past to mine the wisdom that all have to offer, those are the resources that we have at our command. We must not turn against each other; we must cooperate with each other. We must take the wisdom of Confucius together with the insights of Rousseau and Montesquieu, in short; we need a new Enlightenment.

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<sup>19</sup> *Analects*, XII, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Cf., Robert Elliott Allinson, *Awakening Philosophy, The Loss of Truth*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022.

I shall finish with two final points. Asia influenced the European Enlightenment. This knowledge that existed in the eighteenth century has become forgotten and only recently remembered.<sup>21</sup> We need to delve into our history to know that revolutions in human history have been fertilized by the philosophies of multiple civilizations. Voltaire cites Confucius as a source for breaking free from the superstitions and dogmas of the religion of his time. In our current epoch, it is not religion that possesses an iron fist that suppresses humankind. The oppression of mankind has taken on a different oppressor or, I should say, oppressors. Capitalism has, in many instances, as Marx had not envisioned, turned into feudalism. What is our clear and present danger now are rogue states, that is, states that like feudal lords of old, feud with each other and vie for supremacy. Extraordinary technological progress in communication and transportation has brought nations closer together. Ethical relations have not progressed to keep up with such technological advances.

As the renowned, innovative French filmmaker who recently passed away at the age of 95, Jean-Luc Goddard, famously quipped, there is, as Aristotle said, always a beginning, a middle and an end. However, as he famously amended, not necessarily in that order.

For Mao Zedong, the PRC passed from capitalism to socialism, in the order that Marx envisioned.<sup>22</sup> Now, it is passing from socialism to capitalism, an order of change that Marx did not envision.

In terms of the world at large, it would seem that the large nation states practice international capitalism. However, this is only an economic description. In terms of the relations of the world, the states function like feudal lords, warring with each other with nuclear weapons races, tests, and warring threats. We exist now in a period comparable in ancient Chinese historical times to the times of the Warring States. Most of our wars, but not all, remain as cold wars. However, cold wars do not always remain cold. All hot wars were once cold.

What have we to hope? In the time of the warring states of China, great philosophers came into being. Two of the most remarkable, in the history of Chinese thought, Mencius and Zhuangzi, both lived in the time of the Warring States, in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, BCE. Perhaps, as in Hegel's famous image, the owl of Minerva flies at twilight. This is that for which we can hope and that which we must take on as our responsibility.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf., Robert Elliott Allinson, Editorial, 'Do We Need a New Enlightenment for the Twenty-first Century?' Guest Editor, Robert Elliott Allinson, *Dialogue and Universalism*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3, 2021, pp. 9-13.

<sup>22</sup> Cf., Robert Elliott Allinson, *The Philosophical Influences of Mao Zedong, Notations, Reflections and Insights*, London: Bloomsbury, 2020.

We must, as philosophers, as ethicists, as intellectual scholars of civilization, take on our role as guardians of the world. Let us join together to do this. We do not have any other choice.

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