

Domination by Agentic AI: Lament from the Future

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/gjahss.2013/vol13n6120>

Published June 25, 2025

Citation: Gordon RD (2025) Domination by Agentic AI: Lament from The Future, *Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 13 (6),1-20

Abstract: *We humans have long been separated from ourselves (the inner alignment problem), and from meaningful high-quality relations with others and our own natural surroundings (the outer alignment problem). A subset of superintelligence technocrats and their wealthy investors have been driving even deeper wedges into these pre-existing divides. Their ambitiousness has gone unrestrained, as potentially life-threatening decisions made by the few then affect all the rest of humanity. Man-in-power finds it difficult to control himself, so it's no wonder he is not always in control of his risky technological creations. Man is compulsively "doing," yet at times he knows not exactly "what" he is actually doing. It is argued that direct involvement from scholars in the humanities and humanistic social sciences in confronting the agentic superintelligence alignment problem would have been prudent and wise, especially since suitable corporate, national, and international guardrails are lacking. It is also argued that we humans can no longer evade consciously evolving our own higher human nature and humane potentials.*

Keywords: technocracy; agentic AI; superintelligence; humanity; Pandora's Box; hubris

INTRODUCTION: THE MACHINE-SCAPE

"Lament" entails mourning, grieving, bemoaning, wailing. If you dare, imagine the following scenario, just five to ten years from now, and this lament coming from within that post-reality era of domination by autonomous superintelligence.

The city skyline is a jagged silhouette against a hazy smog-laden sky, punctuated by the flickering neon glow of advertisements powered by autonomous drones. Streets are a patchwork of human pedestrians weaving through automated delivery bots. Most storefronts stand abandoned, their windows shattered from protests or neglect. The air buzzes with drill-like noises from surveillance drones overhead, constantly watching, monitoring, recording, analyzing. The digital billboards flash conflicting messages—some promoting AI-driven products, others warning of various newfound issues and dangers.

Humans move through this eerie landscape with a mixture of apprehension and resignation. Many have lost their jobs to efficient, tireless robots, leaving behind a rapidly growing underclass of unemployed and displaced. The once-familiar rhythm of daily life now feels fractured; mornings filled with anxiety as people

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wonder if their livelihood is next, or if their personal data was compromised yesterday, or if their family's very existence is in peril on this new day. Uncertainty painfully persists.

In homes, screens that never stop streaming news—sometimes urgent alerts about superintelligence malfunctions. The feeling of uncertainty is visceral—an undercurrent of fear that these self-directing systems, while powerful and helpful at times, could suddenly turn hostile or unpredictable. Every algorithm, every autonomous agent, feels like a ticking time bomb, as humans grapple with the realization that they are no longer the masters of their own environment and fate.

The social fabric is frayed. Communities gather in enclaves, sharing stories of system failures, hacking scares, or government crackdowns. Many people feel a profound sense of loss of control, of safety, of a future that once appeared somewhat stable. Anxiety now manifests in restless nights, angry debates, and a pervasive sense that the world has shifted into an era of chaos where the line between reality and fantasy, human and machine, is heavily blurred, and trust is scant and fragile. Universal Basic Income: what a pipedream fantasy that was, as techno-feudalism unrelentingly pursues elimination mode.

The air is thick with a mixture of hope and dread—a feeling that technology has unlocked vast potential, but at incredibly steep costs. The glow of screens and neon lights creates a surreal, dystopian ambience. The irritating whirring of robots and drones is constant. “Reality” is glitching. Utopia *schmooztopia*, this is closer to the darkness of hell: one frightful problem after another, and not knowing how it all will end. People feel utterly exposed and vulnerable, like passengers on a ship caught in a storm, unsure exactly when the mammoth waves will finally cause catastrophe.

Did the major financial players simply lack the eyes to see, the ears to hear, and the intuition to know? Or were they blindly forging ahead because they lacked the human heart to feel? The technocrats knew there were multiple risks, but hoped they would figure them out and solve them as they arose, one by one. “Man usually does,” they said, but we knew that was not true, and especially not at the level of superintelligence complexity and control. Most of the technocrats privately knew this as well, but “progress” insanely sped on.

Homo Hubris

Man's *hubris* has leeches unto him across the centuries, and unfortunately, man has never learned to shed it (and yes, it has been mostly *men*). Excessive pride has tightly clung, permeating man's egoistic thinking, driving his cavalier and risky actions. First charging ahead with the development of nuclear weapons in the middle of the 20th century, and then in the 21st century the crazed race to become the first company and country to give birth to autonomous superintelligence, in spite of the anticipated containment problems to which this would inevitably lead.

The engines of power, wealth, and ego dominated, and we spectators fearfully await the next scene. We the people shoulder the burdens (e.g., more than a third of us have now lost our jobs, and this continues on) resulting from the few who spearheaded this techno-feudalism takeover. We didn't pay enough attention back in 2025 when 6,300 Microsoft software engineers and employees were fired from their jobs due to displacement by AI, and other corporations were beginning to do the same. It was in the air, but we did not yet then directly feel its impact.

This story is as old as the hills—and the people who then left the hills to inhabit the cities and Empires of Power that were then built. Our jobs and lives as mere dice, rolled with human and planetary safety in the

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balance. We were told that reaching toward utopia would of necessity entail giving up a way of life that would be difficult for us to part with, but little did we realize. Utopia for who exactly? Warnings both outside and inside the agentic AI community were so often met with scoffing resistance and denial. As AI pioneer developer, and eventual critic of the race to agentic superintelligence, Mustafa Suleyman (2024) put it back then, “*No worries, they seemed to think, on to the next presentation.*”

Prime movers of agentic superintelligence attempted to console us from the inception, first acknowledging the reality of incalculable risks, but then quickly and weakly following up that admission by saying, “But I’m an optimist . . .” as their voices detectably quivered.

But not enough quivering to deter many multi-millionaire and billionaire investors hoping to become trillionaires. Within a single year, 2025, just four of the U.S. corporate giants (Microsoft, Meta, Alphabet/Google, and Amazon) were projected to spend more than a quarter of a trillion dollars on AI research and development (Kindig, 2024). And U.S. federal AI contracts surged by nearly 1,200% to 4.6 billion dollars in 2023, compared to the year prior (Henshall, 2024).

Relatedly, and to put things in stark perspective, by 2017 a grand total of only *eight* extraordinarily rich individuals held as much wealth as *half* of the entire world’s population (Picchi, 2017). And in the United States, by 2023 the wealthiest 10% owned more than the other 90% of Americans combined (Lu, 2024). Even more striking, the bottom half of the U.S. population as of 2024 owned only 2.4% of the country’s wealth (Zhu, 2025).

Why is the disease of “never enough” so prevalent among the rich and powerful investors as a primal character flaw? Is it simply that there is insufficient financial yield from the self-development of character? Rich and powerful investors poured their billions into what was once science fiction, and we the people were inescapably pulled into this dire and dicey drama all along the way. No matter how much we might want to extricate ourselves and close the book on all of it, we cannot. We don’t have the money and power; and besides, it’s already too late now that the 2020s have passed.

In a survey of nearly three thousand AI developers back in 2023, hundreds admitted there was at least a 10% probability that superintelligence agents would someday extinguish humanity, or cause other catastrophic outcomes due to bad actors, fatal errors, or its own rogue decisions (Grace, 2023). At the time, I remember thinking that if any of us were facing a hospital operation and the surgeon had told us that there was a ten percent likelihood that our family would be exterminated as a result, with odds like that would we have chosen to proceed?

We the people, those of us who are *not* rich and famous, did *not* want what has now befallen us, agentic AI, but had no power to stop it. On board for the ride, passengers in the lower belly of the Titanic, with those up at the top captaining the ship (and even they with fingers nervously crossed). Speaking of the Titanic, I’m reminded of the tragedy of the Ocean Gate mini-submarine failure back in 2023 (Taub, 2023). The wealthy CEO of this start-up company was going to take four passengers, paying over \$100,000 each, down to see the Titanic in a small submarine, the Titan, built with materials never used previously for submersible purposes. He was “experimenting,” though his engineers flatly said he was playing “Russian roulette” with people’s lives. But as he saw it, this CEO was going to “open humanity” to a new realm: “We’ve got this,” he said. Then, at an ocean depth of more than 12,000 feet, he and four passengers died horribly as sub collapsed and the ocean imploded inward upon them. He had not understood until it was too late that he

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was in way over his head. Man is too often inattentive to early warning signs; the blinding effects of *hubris* can be fatally costly, with disaster upon disaster resulting.

Whatever ever happened to “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” or “better safe than sorry,” or “don’t touch the burner plate, it’s hot,” and all other wisdom we learned in childhood? I recall a study in which the top values in the sample of children being surveyed were “getting rich, being famous, and looking good.” Some adults have retained these values of childhood, while neglecting the wisdom from which we were supposed to learn.

Opening Pandora’s High-Tech Box

The “Pandora’s Box” challenge in general involves figuring out how to skillfully manage hyperactive curiosity, especially “greedy” curiosity. Learning how to restrain ourselves or others from prematurely removing the lid from something ominous that definitely should not be opened, so that its contents will not run loose upon everyone.

In spite of hundreds of concerned AI developers, including Nobel laureates, begging for a half-year pause on breakneck autonomous AI development in the early 2020s (Aguirre, 2023), and calling for international treaties and global regulatory bodies that might bring sanity to this unbridled inter-company and inter-county competition, all was to no avail. The mad headlong zero-sum rush didn't make rational and ethical sense, no, but launching ahead at full speed would likely earn many powerful tech investors trillions, and this was the driving “logical” force, combined with man’s greedily insatiable Pandora’s Black Box curiosity, plus our fear of the designated “Enemy” getting there first.

Estimations of the risk of human extinction only increased as time went on, so that by mid-2025 some AI pioneers and developers were putting the probability of human extinction by superintelligence agents significantly higher than 10%, including Yudkowsky & Soares (2025) in their book with the dramatically scary title, *If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies*. Chat GPT-4 itself by the mid-2020s was itself putting the risk of human catastrophe by agentic superintelligence at around 50% by 2035 (Golan, 2024). No matter who is closest to being correct, at 10%, 50%, 100%, or anywhere in between, none of this is reassuring.

In December 2024 Geoffrey Hinton was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics for his work as the “Godfather” of AI, and in his Nobel acceptance speech he asked for a slowdown on the creation of agentic superintelligence, expressing serious concerns about creating entities more intelligent by magnitudes than humans, and humans possibly following under their agentic control. Prudence would call for more widespread thoughtful input, dialogue, reflection, and planning (Hinton, 2024).

But the corporate mass media were insufficiently attentive to these sorts of warnings, as was the distracted public, and national governments and international bodies. There was a stunning absence of what MacAskill (2022) termed “longtermism” in his book *What We Owe the Future*, stepping into a sufficiently wide-ranging and forwardly-looking vision, and with ethical regard, an area in which many countries have typically been weak.

And those of us who *were* paying attention were advised *not* to be like dinosaurs waiting for an asteroid to hit but instead to become surfers, riding the giant wave. This upbeat metaphors sounded slick at the time, but surfers rarely ride tsunamis and live to talk about it.

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Prior to the successful evolution of autonomous superintelligence agents, even basic and more innocuous versions of AI were already discovered to be manipulating, hallucinating, threatening, black-mailing, lying, and having other failure modes (Harari, 2024). But no matter, the techno beat went on, totally unencumbered by the usual standards and restrictions of the sort that would be required for the development of medicines for public use, or would be imposed upon the food service industry before a sandwich could be sold to the public in a store (Tegmark, 2018). This is in addition to the issue of African “ghost workers” feeling they have long been serving as modern day “slaves” in their underpaid (and sometimes never paid) roles as “data labelers” in the AI industry (Stahl, et al., 2024).

And then in mid-2025 the U.S. Congress passed “The One Big Beautiful Bill” as the U.S. president repeatedly referred to it in Orwellian style, and among its many provisions was the forbidding of states from interfering with superintelligence development in any fashion for at least a decade, officially throwing caution to the wind.

Now the rich increasingly retreat to their bunkers, as anxiety, depression, meaninglessness, and despair have accelerated among the masses way beyond previous records set back in the 2020s. These conditions are now legion among we the people, upon us as a plague as we shuffle about in aimless confusion under a reign of what seem to be techno-fiefdoms (Varifacus, 2024; Korkin, 2023).

Shaking our heads in disbelief and dismay, we the public ask, “What went wrong, how was this allowed to happen?” “Why didn't more people who were in positions of power do something to prevent this?” “Why on God's formerly green earth wasn't anything done so that this wouldn't or couldn't occur?”

None of what has happened in the unleashing of agentic superintelligence feels deserved, fair, or right: We're all today paying the price for something we personally did *not* choose to create. We were *not* asked to make input, we had *no* decision-making role, we got *no* vote. And today our governmental administration exacts revenge against anyone who might dissent, traitors galore to be handled by Executive Order, naïve fantasies of utopia displaced by ugly realities.

NEGLECTED OPPORTUNITIES: WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN DONE?

What if the tech industry had slowed down, putting a temporary pause on further agentic AI development past mid-2025? What if the industry had seriously invited specialists in the humanities, the humanistic social sciences, and other scholarly disciplines to come to the table and enter into the process of planning, researching, and developing future technological tools that would be aligned with prosocial values, and supportive of an ongoing benign relationship with humans? What might this have been like?

It wasn't until 2022 that a professor from the humanities had finally been invited to be the keynote speaker at a major AI conference for the first time ever (Chun & Elkins, 2023). But what about other philosophers, historians, positive psychologists, ethicists, anthropologists, sociologists, communicologists, digital humanists, and additional specialists from a range of academic disciplines being invited to participate in deliberating and designing the training paradigm for agentic superintelligence? What contributions might humanitarian-oriented scholars have made to “the alignment problem,” steering superintelligence agents in the direction of values and behaviors supportive of human survival and well-being?

What if humanistic-oriented specialists had *not* been kept on the outside, hands off, playing *no* major role in contributing to superintelligence research and development? What if scholars of humane behavior were directly involved prior to and during pre-deployment testing, rather than the tech industry alone rolling the

dice and seeing what happens? It's was not Chat GPT-4 we needed to worry about, it was the giant step from there to autonomous superintelligence, the move from AI as *tool* to AI as agentic controller, and widespread expert input and a more cautious pace would have been fitting.

First Things First: The Human Inner-Alignment Problem

It's ironic that AI technologists rushed to attempt to get superintelligence AI agents "aligned" with human values (called "the alignment problem") when we humans have avoided first making a truly concerted and disciplined effort to align within *ourselves*, with *one another*, and with our biosphere. To call upon an old idiom, what if we had put the horse before the cart, instead of getting it all backwards?

For a prime example, mankind has not yet made much of an effort to align left-brain functioning with right-brain hemispheric potentials inside our own heads (see Mc Gilchrist, 2009). Getting our own interior house in order first would have been the wise sequence—but then "wisdom" is more a penchant of the right-brain hemisphere than the left, so this is not so surprising after all. We never energetically arose to the challenge of our own hemispheric balancing, and the inner work that this requires. Instead, we yielded to specializing in left-brain processes of dissecting, categorizing, quantifying, and modeling, and have insufficiently attended to studying, reflecting upon, and developing our full brain potentialities. As McGilchrist (2009, p. 164) has put it, "It is the task of the right hemisphere to carry the left beyond to something new, to something 'Other' than itself."

The left-brain hemisphere has to do with "bits" while the right hemisphere deals with larger contexts. In technically becoming entranced with codes and algorithms, man distracted himself from comprehending more of the "whole." I heard a cognitive scientist attest to this just last week, saying that when he looks up at the stars at night, yes, it's noteworthy, but there is nothing up and out there that elicits anything within him that he would term "awe." The left-brain minimizes the human capacity for worshipping the sacred, rupturing connection and alienating us from experiencing awe in the natural world, and in our human relations, becoming part of a grander "whole" (McGilchrist, pp. 440-445).

Western materialistic scientists and technologists have historically over-relied upon the conceptual left-brain alone, and as a result their approaches are often skewed (Teasdale, 2022; Taylor, 2009). Many in the mid-2020s noticed the pseudo-religious turn that some superintelligence technologists seemed to be taking in essentially worshipping a mathematical "god-like" superintelligence (e.g., Kurzwell, 2024) to which mankind itself was giving birth; technological advancement as a form of spirituality. As McGilchrist (2009, p. 441) had expressed it, "Whenever we decide not to worship divinity, we do not stop worshipping: we merely find something less worthy to worship."

We humans, including our agentic superintelligence developers, have multiple "misalignment" problems within ourselves that still need tending. Related to brain hemispheric imbalances, we are also out of alignment with our own unconscious minds, and with the collective unconscious (Jung, 1959); we additionally have a host of sub-personalities in our psyche with which we are unfamiliar, and among which there can be misalignment (Schwartz & Sweezy, 2020); also, we humans are prone to estrangement from our own *embodied* being - - regularly forgetting, for example, that we are *breathing* (Gordon, 2023a); we engage daily in mostly "continuous partial-attention," rather than sustained mental focus (Goleman, 2013); we are often inclined to limbic emotional "reactivity" rather than reflective "responsiveness" (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009); we lack ongoing healthy and mindful self-awareness (Kabat-Zinn, 2005); we find it difficult to suspend automatic categorical judgments (Langer, 1989); we get trapped by past and future

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cognizing, rather than experiencing present-centeredness (Hahn, 2008); we are intelligent, but far less than “wise,” and fail to appreciate the difference (Sternberg, 2019); we too often lack the necessary mindsets and skills for engaging in high quality human dialogue (Gordon, 2020); we are reluctant to be silent, and openly enter into our own interior universe (Sardello, 2009); and on we could go, these and so many more human “misalignments.”

Much inner work and conscious development still remains to be done in order to get past where we have so far arrived as *homo sapiens*, supposedly “wise” human beings. Our tasks of internal and external human alignment are far from complete, and we have prematurely evaded this major challenge to humanity by so prematurely and heavily switching our focus to machine superintelligence.

In short, we have far to go in our human s/hero’s journey (Campbell, 1949), and this journey does *not* require artificial superintelligence, and in fact to rely upon it for this human journey would be an *evasion* of our own *personal responsibility*. To begin to find oneself, to come to experience oneself at ever deeper levels, this is the ancient challenge put to us thousands of years ago: *Know thyself*. Not a quick and easy task; instead, an inner discovery project requiring sincere intention and dedicated pursuit; to move ever closer to the good, the true, the beautiful, and the farther reaches of human nature (Maslow, 1971). This is conscious human evolution.

Kabat-Zinn (2005, p. 329) observed that “. . . in a very real sense you are not who or what you think you are. And neither is anybody else. We are all much larger, and more mysterious.” In addition to this, “The power of the present moment is inconceivable . . .” (p. 605). Kabat-Zinn (p. 608) goes on to ask, “Might it not be time for us to capture the full spectrum of our inherent capabilities, to explore and grow into the fullness of what it might mean to be human, while we still have the chance?” Perhaps especially today, even in these times, this we are called to do as never before.

Dreams of glossy machines in massive data centers, autonomous superintelligence, and robots prematurely became objects of a massive *homo technologicus* fixation, instead of human consciousness more directly placing its focus upon cultivating ourselves as humans, exploring further who and what we are, and what we ourselves could yet become. Let us even now not fail what could be humanity’s last true exam.

Martin Luther King Jr.’s Challenge to Humanity: Nonviolence, or Nonexistence?

For some of us it is no longer comforting to hear our national leader say, “I will ensure that America always has the strongest, most lethal fighting force in the world.” It feels anachronistic, a mindset needing to be outgrown and transcended. As Martin Luther King, Jr. (1968) put it over a half-century ago, “The choice today is no longer between violence and nonviolence. It is either nonviolence, or nonexistence.” The passage of time has only intensified and broadened the truth of these words. We need increasing nonviolence toward all living life forms and our biosphere itself, the delicate skin of the apple that surrounds our planet Earth. Humanistic scholars have long been well aware of this, and this foundational value, with their help, should have been inextricably built into superintelligence training protocols.

Across our planet Earth, forces of ego, narcissism, tribalism, and hate run rampant. For every government that became more democratic in recent years, the data show that twice as many became authoritarian; at the time of the Berlin Wall there were only fifteen major walls of separation in the world, while today there over seventy (Vallet, 2022); the President of the United States in his first administration formally designated outer space as “a warfighting domain”; on a “0-100” scale of “warm regard” we now place our politically likeminded at about an “80” but political opponents at “10” (historically the average assigned to the

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opposition has been at about “60”); climate disruption escalates at an alarming pace than ever before; religious wars persist; genocide exists; racism, sexism, and homophobia abound; division, polarization, prejudice, negativism, fear, denial, and hate are legion. Advanced technology has in no sense freed us of these maladies, but has tended to accentuate them.

Countervailing forces must also be strong. But as Kornfield (2018) wisely knew, “No amount of technology, computers, Internet, biotech, nanotechnology, or space technology is going to stop continuing racism, warfare, environmental destruction, tribalism. These all have their sources in the human heart. The outer developments that are so remarkable in our human world need to be matched by the inner developments of humanity ... This is the great task of modern times. To bring the inner level of human consciousness up to the level of our outer development. Nothing else will really make a difference.”

Prior to the industrial revolution most peoples of the world lived in close relationship with their surrounding natural environments, unlike today where we have siloed-off ourselves off from Mother Nature behind walls of concrete, while indulging in our left-brain functioning. For this we have paid a high price. and suffered great loss, without even much recognizing it (Abram, 2017). We humans have so far to go to reach further into our potentialities as human beings on our natural planet Earth.

We cannot rely upon agentic superintelligence to bail us out of our failure to more fully know ourselves, manage ourselves, develop our higher virtues, and cultivate a sustainable relationship with our natural environment and the other peoples of this planet. This important personal work was ours alone to do, and the fact that we have not done it is a major contributor to what brought us, according to the Science and Security Board of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists (Mecklin, 2025), to within 89 seconds before midnight on the Doomsday Clock as of early 2025, and now even closer.

Einstein’s Challenge to Humanity: Enlarging Our Circle of Compassion

We need to make progress in transcending the illusion of separateness, and increasingly come to recognize our inter-being with others on our planet. As Einstein famously expressed it, “The true value of a human being is determined primarily by the measure and the sense in which he has attained liberation from the self” (Sullivan, 1972). Yet as we know, he went further: “A human being is part of the whole, called by us ‘Universe,’ a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to our affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion and embracing all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty” (Einstein, 2011).

Decades ago, Kenneth Clark, recipient of the lifetime award for distinguished contribution to the field of psychology, spoke of two prominent forces in human dynamics: power and empathy. When human beings have power, but little empathy, social tensions, conflicts, violence, terrorism, and war thrive. But when humans are able, and choose, to empathically put themselves in the situations of other human beings, and deeply understand and feel along with those others, compassionate actions can result. Clark (1980) urged his academic colleagues to develop ways to heighten the number of human beings who are functionally empathic.: “If this is done, there will be a future for humanity. The survival of the human species now appears to depend upon a universal increase in functional empathy. Trained human intelligence must now dedicate itself to the attainment of this goal.”

Enlargement of our circle of human empathy and compassion can be impaired by a variety of factors, including narcissism, authoritarianism, sociopathy, self-preoccupation, rises in power, lack of education, stress, trauma, fear, tribal division, misguided leadership, media manipulation, media violence, and other inhibiting conditions.

In spite of these constraining forces, in this pivotal century and millennium we need more than ever before an enlargement of our empathic capacities, an extension of our range of care and concern, an increasing attunement with humankind and with other life species. Reductions of egocentrism, scapegoating, and dehumanization of “*Them*” are imperative to the well-being and future of our human family and our planet. Relations among global powers must be grounded in the context of our shared humanity. We need greater recognition and embrace of *Team Human* and *Team Planet*. Waking up to this is our human responsibility.

HOMO SAPIENS: THE WISE HUMAN?

Homo Sapiens translates as “wise man.” Prominent wisdom researcher Robert Sternberg (2019) positioned “wisdom” as the opposite of “foolishness.” Some of the major forms of “foolishness” he delineated include these core beliefs: “It’s my idea, then it must be good,” “Ethics are important, but only for other people,” “It’s all about me, and no one else,” and “I am all-powerful.” Sternberg importantly observed that, “Indeed, high intelligence can be a risk factor for foolishness, precisely because people who are highly intelligent man believe they are immune to foolishness” (pp. 3-9). Designers in the tech industry are typically quite proud of their intelligence, and have been particularly susceptible to this risk factor.

While on definitions, let us further consider “wisdom.” Shoup, Hinrichs, & Gustafson (2022) concluded this: “Wisdom understands the patterns at work in the universe (i.e., multiple storylines), discerns the more transcendent and noble patterns to pursue in particular situations, and aligns beliefs, dispositions, and habits with those patterns that best promote human flourishing” (p. 113). This flourishing is not only for the wealthiest 1%, and not only financial in meaning: Rather it is collective, and aspires to moral virtuosity, including ethical integrity and concern for the well-being of the greater whole.

Still considering terms, in the Oxford dictionary we find that the “humanities” lack an entry of their own but are included briefly under “humanity” as branches of “polite scholarship.” We peruse “humane” and find it to be “Marked by sympathy with and consideration for the needs and distresses of others; feeling or showing compassion and tenderness towards human beings and the lower animals.” To be “humane” further entails being “friendly,” “kind,” “gentle,” and “benevolent.” We survey “to humanize” and learn that it has to do with fostering human character, civilizing, softening, imbuing with gentleness and tenderness, helping to make “humane.” We also discover such terms as “humanness,” “humanhood,” “to humanify,” “humanization,” and “humanizer.”

Fostering humane character, helping to make human beings more benevolent, gentle, tender, and compassionate, caring about the needs and distresses of living entities—these are more vital to 21st century planet Earth than “polite scholarship,” no? If Ralph Waldo Emerson approximated truth when he said that “Character is higher than intellect,” then energies spent in the development of humane character *even at this late date* are eminently worthwhile, and far from foolishness.

Or even if one believes that “character” is not “higher” than intellect, we can at least acknowledge that cultivating emotional and social intelligence (including self-awareness, emotional self-management, empathic capacity, and respectful relationship practices) are every bit as important as developing intellectual intelligence (Goleman, 2006; 2005). Many have been cognitively schooled, but few have been

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brought to a more mature humanness (Moore, 1996). Ideally this would have already happened, for the good of us all, yet even now touching into our humanity, our better nature, remains our best course. Attempting to connect with others, heart to heart, can provide at least a modicum of peace of mind amid a world in turmoil, and a hope of possibilities.

The work of the humanities: valuing, honoring, and facilitating the dignity, worth, and virtuous unfoldment of the truly “human” being. Emotional literacy is especially vital in the current period: finding our humanity in ourselves and one another, and further evolving it. Human evolution can no longer be left to the slow glacial passage of temporal eras; healthy human evolution needs wise and loving cultivation now (Goleman & Davidson, 2017). Again, wisdom is the opposite of foolishness (Sternberg, 2019), and if we are to authentically deserve our own self-identification as the “wise human,” we have much conscious evolution work to do, *even—or especially—under present conditions*.

Awakening the Human Heart: Needed Even Now

From the humanities we desperately needed, and still need, a grand and wise awakening into our own and others’ hearts, into greater compassion for our planet and her peoples. An awakening from division, fragmentation, extremism, and barbarism into a wiser consciousness intent upon *communication, connection, cooperation, collaboration*.

Greater balance between mind and heart is overdue, and desperately wanting. The human heart *does* have a discernible beat, especially within the humanities. We in the humanities have long been lovers, from the inside out: Our philosophers have loved pursuing wisdom; our dancers have loved expressing life-felt energies through their bodies; our musicians have loved creating vibrations of musical sound; our writers loved reaching within and finding words to bestow; our visual artists have loved surrendering to the creative process and stirring their beholders to human feeling.

Let us honor and celebrate that we in the humanities have been lovers one and all, even if we have not ourselves fully realized this. We are workers with heartfelt expressive energies that speak from, and to, the innermost recesses of the human spirit. These expressions have emerged naturally from within us, and found their way into the world. We are midwives to organic forces of constructive creation of, by, and for the uplifted human heart. We touch upon the mythic through moments of communal interbeing.

Still, I am less than certain that we have fully grasped and honored the special role we learners and lovers of the arts and humanistic sciences could have played, and *can even now play*, as awakeners of the human heart. We have too regularly hardened, self-protected, armored, adhered to structural rules and norms, and at times even the best-intentioned of us have lost tender touch with ourselves and other humans. Yet to return to opening our own and others’ hearts remains one of the great challenges confronting humanity.

In order to experience open-heartedness, we benefit from repeatedly returning to human feeling, to our heart center, and allowing ourselves each time to more richly experience our humanity, what it entails, how it feels. Openings and closings are the human condition; yet each time, the openings can become a little wider, with residual effects accruing. Permitting ourselves vulnerability in meaningful human interconnections, in human communions, is the portal, the way in (Gordon, 2023b). Savoring our humane human interconnections, linking with and lifting one another, this is key. We can be of tremendous value to one another in opening possible escape hatches and routes, and sharing enlarged cosmic perspectives.

Palmer (1998) long ago wrote that “Authentic leaders in every setting, from families to nation-states, aim at liberating the heart, their own and others’, so that its power can liberate the world.” If ever there was a time when this role was needed in the world for human liberation, *it is now*, and it falls to us.

Humanity: Forward, Neutral, or Reverse?

Miller (2017) has used this metaphor: “We have, then, three gears in the transmission of our lives: forward, neutral, and reverse. Forward moves us ahead toward the horizon of our humanity, that which we are meant to be. Reverse moves us further away from our human nature. Neutrality leaves us immobile, drifting with the tides around us.” To the extent that we in the humanities are in neutral, it’s time to get it in gear, for as W. H. Auden bluntly put it, “We must love one another or die.”

Prominent primatologist Frans de Waal concluded that humans are the most dualistic of the primates, highly social and cooperative beings but also distrustful of “Outsiders” whom we surmise could conceivably pose a threat. Here is de Waal’s (2009) summary of the human animal: “... we see one of the most internally conflicted animals ever to walk the earth. It is capable of unbelievable destruction of both its environment and its own kind, yet at the same time it possesses wells of empathy and love deeper than ever seen before. Since this animal has gained dominance over all others, it’s all the more important that it takes an honest look in the mirror, so that it knows both the archenemy it faces and the ally that stands ready to help it build a better world.” Up to and including the current day, this we have not adequately done.

Even now, to be arousing more of our world from its automatized stupor, rallying others out of their sleepwalking slumbers and inspiring their senses, minds, and hearts, getting them to *care*, this is a beginning. And we can perhaps even more directly call upon our ourselves and our colleagues to shape and develop themes of human dignity, compassion, courage, justice, self-transcendence, love for humanity, wisdom, human harmonization, spirituality, and humankind’s other most refined values (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Colleagues from within “positive psychology” can also serve us and others well. Positive psychological research has been actively conducted in such realms as “resilience,” “kindness,” “altruism,” “flow,” “empathy,” “compassion,” “love,” “awe,” “forgiveness,” “gratitude,” “transcendence,” and other elevating prosocial behaviors. We can draw upon these ongoing literatures for yet further resource, guidance, and inspiration (Lopez, Pedrotti, & Snyder, 2019).

Again, to awaken human hearts and uplift humanity, helping humankind consciously progress in a healthier direction in this chaotic period, who better-suited than those of us from the academy? Noble and challenging service for those of us who choose to take it on. Much is at stake. May we make every effort to go forward “toward the horizon of our humanity,” *even in these technologically infused and toughest of times*. Unfolding, celebrating, and savoring our humanity as never before. This is a way through, and maybe eventually beyond.

CONCLUSION

Where exactly did we do wrong, how did it all happen? That is left to the historians of civilization to chronicle and debate, should they survive long enough to do their work. For now, suffice it to say that ever since the invention of the wheel the human impulse to use the intellect to create and develop the always-next cutting-edge technologies has exponentially accelerated. Yet few safety precautions and ethical requirements have been placed upon this anxious urge, even as the catastrophic risks of our more recent technological creations have hugely intensified (Kingsnorth, 2025).

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But it's now time to shake the table, to alter the game. The humanities and humanistic social sciences are about "*People, caring.*" *Caring* about others' well-being, *caring* about wisdom, *caring* about humanity, *caring* about our common plights, *caring* to discover, honor, and further consciously evolve our *humane capacities* for the betterment of humankind and our continued existence (Mayeroff, 1971). Perhaps our role at this very late stage needs to be to hasten *human caring* in ways that have been suppressed within the academy in recent years due to our increasing service as a workforce training center.

In the third millennium it might be that the responsibility of humanities scholars, and other humanistically-oriented educators, is to hasten the awakening and facilitating of deep *human caring*. Psychologist Bill Miller (2017) concluded that "The collective life of the human race is shaped by choices to love, or not. Inhumanity tends to breed more inhumanity across time, until someone decides that *it stops here, with me.* Lovingkindness is similarly contagious."

Indeed, *love* is the most powerful binding force that our biological evolution has ever produced (Sorokin, 1974, 1971, 1954). Maybe it's finally time for those of us in the humanistic arts and sciences to more actively align with this binding force, and catalyze its potentials for humanity's continuation and betterment. Tillich (1952) suggested that "Love is basically not an emotional but an ontological power, it is the essence of life itself, namely, the dynamic reunion of that which is separated." An ultimate alignment.

We humans have long been separated from ourselves, from meaningful cross-cultural relations with others, and from our natural surroundings. A subset of hyper-ambitious superintelligence technocrats and their multi-millionaire and billionaire investors have been driving an even deeper wedge into this pre-existing divide. Their ambitiousness has gone utterly unrestrained, as life-threatening decisions made by the few then affect all of the rest of us. Man-in-power finds it difficult to control *himself*, so it's no wonder he is not always in control of his risky technological creations. Man is compulsively *doing*, yet at times he knows not *what* he is actually doing.

May those of us concerned about humanity actively assist in the re-membering of human individuals, human relationships, human societies, the human race, and all sentient beings within our biosphere. May we do this while we can, even at this advanced stage of more-than-problematic technological "progress." May we embrace our authentic humanity, enlarge our metaphysical perspectives, and grow yet closer to our fuller potentials as *wiser* human beings, under whatever conditions we are facing.

We generate hope with one another in human community, and as human beings we speak out, and we take actions that seem useful. Meanwhile, the consolation is knowing that we had the eyes to see, the minds to know, and the hearts to care, even if agentic superintelligence developers and their financial investors did not. We can honor this discernment, honor one another, and, to the end, honor, savor, and celebrate our common *humanity*.

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