



# Discovering Identity: Between Tyranny and Chaos

Jonathan Pageau

## About the Author

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This paper was edited by Benedict Rogers, Johnny Patterson, Joshua McNicholas, and Anna Webb.

# Discovering Identity:

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## Between Tyranny and Chaos

*Jonathan Pageau*

The rapid acceleration of technological transformation in the modern age, especially information technology, has had massive effects on how we view ourselves, how we view our participation in our communities, our national identities, as well as our participation in what has been called the “The Global Village”.<sup>1</sup>

Technology has many transformative effects, but even when understood in its most simple form as the artificial increase in power and extension of human capacities, technology has certainly accelerated both the centralising and unifying aspects of identity, while simultaneously contributing to the deconstruction of identities that has characterised postmodernity. It is crucial today to understand how identity is affected by the digital age, and how our sense of identity is shaping the technology that we are bringing into existence.

Identities at all levels, from the individual to the family to the nation and beyond, are invoked and participated in to unify us against chaos and fragmentation. On the flipside of that, the resistance to these same identities can be perceived as a thrust towards freedom, loosening the hold such identities have in fixing and constraining. In our politics, on our social media feeds, and on our television screens, we witness every day how multiplicities and unities dance with each other.

The great Persian poet Rumi, in his poem “Birdwings”, invites us to the dance when he declares that:

“Your hand opens and closes, opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed. Your deepest presence is in the every small contracting and expanding, the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as birds wings.”<sup>2</sup>

It is impossible to declare that the digital landscape only protects or fragments us, frees or enslaves us. The digital world makes the hand both more open and more closed simultaneously, and it does this in increasingly powerful ways. Nowhere has postmodern malleability, performance, and fluidity of identity been as evident as in the online world of anonymous digital avatars. At the same time, nowhere has totalitarian identity been so captured and centralised by tyranny as in gamified social credit systems. We need to examine identities as unifying principles that play with or against each other, and how they are both necessary and dangerous, so that we can

then explore how and why the digital world acts as an accelerant to the opportunities and challenges of identity.

Identity—the question of who we are as human beings—is perhaps one of the most important subjects of our day. To understand how the digital landscape is changing the nature of identity, we must first understand identity itself. In this essay, I will begin by exploring the complex, layered nature of human identities—how different forms of identity give us order, but also can be destructive. We will then turn to how the twentieth century reframed human identity as the pendulum swung between the totalising impulse of the modern state on the one hand, and the deconstructivism of postmodernism on the other. From here we will examine the impact of the digital age on these matters, looking at the dangers of the catalytic effect of digital technology, and asking the question: what will it take to flourish in this digital age?

## Understanding Identity

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*Perhaps the most explosive and important subject in the world.*

“In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him;  
Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their  
name Adam.”

– Genesis 5:1-2.<sup>3</sup>

Identity is the most explosive and most important subject in the world. Hidden in the question of identity lie the political minefields of nationalism, immigration, war, gender, social classes, racial differences, and even abortion and euthanasia. Identity contains the good and ill of all “isms”, and it is bound up in all positions of authority and social functions at different scales in a social body, or even authority within our own minds. It mirrors itself in our own biography, then in the familial, tribal, and religious coherences we call home as well as in their sometimes-violent competition.

Simply put, identity is the positing of the privilege of an “inside” over an “outside”. The inside of an identity is understood as a form of unity, a unity bound together by a common name. This name reflects common origin, common purpose, and/or common traits, and the name encompasses a pattern that unifies otherwise indefinite complexity and multiplicity.

It is impossible to think individually of the 350 million or so people living in the United States of America; in fact, it is precisely the unity of those 350 million within a single nation which makes one consider them at all. They are Americans. Of course, those individuals are not only Americans, they are husbands and wives, accountants, Star Wars fans, and an indefinite amount of other things, but the identity of being an American is not only useful, but it is real—as real as any other identity, when

considering relevant issues these 350 million people share with the others at the national scale, like national security, trade, and international relations.

As a human being, I experience within me several thoughts and desires, yet some desires and thoughts are embraced, while others are suppressed and fought: one thought appears as “me”, or at least the “best me”, while another thought appears as a “temptation” and something which is destructive to “me”. In a way that is analogous to a person, a family will develop certain codes and behaviours, and these codes will be indicative of participation—a reflection of “inside”—while other behaviours will be seen as destructive to the cohesion of the family, and therefore a “bad influence”. The destructive patterns are those that lead the family to no longer be what it should be and are therefore indicative of an “outside”, in the sense of moving the family closer to its own dissolution. This pattern of identity repeats at all levels of being, from the existence of objects which can be better or worse at their function, to the notion of being human itself—an identity which joins all of us that share human nature.

Identities are necessary for the existence of the world, and necessary to the coherence of our experience. In fact, we cannot escape them, for they are the very way the world is experienced as ordered. Identity is a name, a pointing, a “that”. It is a fixing of something by the recognition of a centre around which it is organised. Yet, it should be evident that no identity is fixed or cast in immovable stone. Identities are of course necessary for us to function in our surrounding, though we cannot only be fixed and stable. We are also changing. We are not only ourselves, but always becoming.

In the words of the French academics Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari:

“A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or flow, where everything is constantly changing.”<sup>4</sup>

This is the other side of the pendulum of identity, which is the fact that all embodied things are changing. There is always something that we are becoming or have the potential to become.

This duality, that is, the relationship between identity and change, is as old as the world. It is captured in the ancient Mythological and Biblical visions of Heaven and Earth, and in the Yang and the Yin. It is also captured in the famous opposition of Parmenides and Heraclitus as well as in Aristotle’s vision of Actual and Potential. In order to formulate identity, we must also formulate difference and change to distinguish any specific identity from what it is not. The same goes the other way: in order to formulate change, identity is necessary to even know “what” is changing. The two are completely interdependent.

## The Importance of Identity

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*How can we find our place in the world?*

“The individual is not born for himself, but for his country and for his family.”

– Plato, *The Republic*.<sup>5</sup>

When properly construed, identities enable us to participate in reality through multiple facets. They help us to know our places in the world. In the essay that Jordan Peterson and I wrote for the 2023 ARC Conference, “Identity: Individual and the State Versus the Subsidiary Hierarchy of Heaven”,<sup>6</sup> we described in great detail how identity is subsidiary in form, and how multiple identities stack onto each other and dance together into multiple participations.

Our identities direct our participation in the world. They provide meaning and direction. We are persons in groups, existing in families, communities, nations, but also clubs, teams, gender roles, leadership, and service roles. We are all citizens and strangers depending on the circumstances. Our identities are never owned by any of us, or entirely self-determined; rather, they are negotiated with others and serve higher purposes of order and participation. In this vision, even negative identities can serve higher purposes. If I recognise or am recognised as an alcoholic, as a liar, a criminal, or a stranger to a specific group, these are forms of participations nonetheless, which preserve the integrity of the ideal and to help me know what I need to do to participate “properly” in the order of the world.

When something fragments into its parts or it is invaded from the outside and destroyed, it is no longer the thing itself. This is the best definition of death we can have. Death is decomposition—it is when something ceases to be itself and its elements are broken apart, becoming potential for another identity. When I die, the elements that constituted me separate from each other, decompose, and become “food” for other identities, insects, and plants—becoming “earth” for all intents and purposes. In the same way, when the Romans reduced Carthage to rubble, the city ceased to exist. All identities are made of parts. These parts are also identities which have parts. This is true of all levels of identity, from the individual to the groups we are joined to. We need the myriad identities established by a proper subsidiary system. They are the way we find our place in the world.

## The Excesses of Identity

*When identity politics can lead to totalitarianism, conflict, and oppression*

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul. But it is necessary to recognize that the need for roots is also one of the most dangerous, leading to exclusion and tyranny.”

– Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*.<sup>7</sup>

But the need for identity does not preclude identities from having their shortfalls. In fact, so much of the postmodern critique since World War Two has been a reaction to the vicissitudes of identity. Because the strong nationalism and racial theories of the Axis powers led to attitudes of conquest and to the dehumanising of marginal peoples, the West has been very sensitive to the abuse of identity and its relationship to violence. An identity can become a weapon wielded against one’s perceived competitors, leading to war and conquest. Identity can also impose itself too strongly on the elements that constitute it, mistaking uniformity for unity, eliminating the more granular identities of its own constituent parts. This is often how we understand tyranny. This tyranny can express itself at every level of participation, becoming iron-fisted control in one’s own life, one’s family, one’s religious community, or one’s nation.

Because identity always implies an inside, an outside, and a hierarchy of participation leading to marginalisation, the margin and the outside can be construed as a danger to the coherence of the inside. At the outset, this is not a moral question, but simply an observation of how order functions. If I am creating a coherent recipe, let us say cookies, there is an order of participation for that recipe to attain the reason why I am making them. There are many possible iterations—let us say so much flour, so much sugar, some butter, and a dash of salt perhaps. Although it is variable, the order is important. If I add too much or not enough of any of the ingredients, the cookies will fail. They will be bad cookies. If I add a shovel of sand, overwhelming the recipe with something that is not in the recipe at all, whatever I am making will have ceded to the outside, and will simply no longer be a cookie.

Of course, when applied to human level identities, these questions now do in fact imply moral consequences, and in the wake of the brutal slaughter of millions of people, it is these moral consequences which lead to the postmodern attack on identities, whether that identity be narrative, national, ethnic, gendered, or religious. The existence of people, of genders, of nations, and every other human level of identification, necessarily implies the possibility of competition or conflict, and even war. When identity is formulated only as uniformity or opposition—when the “other” is always blamed for my own faults or seen only as an obstacle to be overcome in order to impose my own identity—this is where we see identity in danger of becoming tainted

by the sin of pride. The twentieth century shows this can have disastrous consequences.

## Identity: The Backlash

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*Devolutionary and revolutionary identity: the postmodern identity project.*

“The whole is the untrue.”

– Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, section 29.<sup>8</sup>

In order to combat the vicissitudes of identity and the excesses of order, thinkers and activists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have taken to the deconstruction of identity’s centring tendency. This de-centring is done by emphasising notions of “otherness”, highlighting marginalised identity, or simply focusing on change—how identity is a process, or how identity is fluid. This direction of thought is behind many of the social phenomena that fill the contemporary world. It has multiple iterations which might seem contradictory at first glance, whether it be libertarian individualism or the constant changes in the Pride flag. The devolution of identity to its parts has very deep roots in the history of thinking, and in our context even runs parallel to reductionism in the scientific field. A reductionist tendency believes that there is more truth in the breaking apart of beings towards their constituents; that, in fact, the most fundamental aspect of reality is the “particle”.

With the further breakdown of the particle into even smaller constituent parts—all the way down to unquantifiable “potential”—some people have come to believe that the fundamental reality itself cannot truly be known. Rather, it is a flux of probabilities, an indeterminacy which hides under the so-called “illusion” of identification—arbitrary categories which cannot be broken down to their material parts, and therefore cannot be said to exist. This is the devolution which characterises scientific reductionism, but it finds its social parallel as well. When someone calls for the “self-made man” or more radically declares that “identity is fluid”, the latter is just one step further into reductionism from the former.

This revolutionary form of identity is necessarily paradoxical in its best light, and simply contradictory in its worst form. When the Canadian Prime Minister announces, “There is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada”, and that we are a “post national state”,<sup>9</sup> he is expressing a contradiction. If Canada does not have an identity, then how and why is it being mentioned in the first place?

In truth, the structure of the devolution of identity always presents itself as revolutionary identity. All identities are made of parts which themselves have identities. To deconstruct higher identities, one must weaponise and mobilise parts

against the whole. And so, a smart postmodernist could say that we are not a “nation” but rather multiple “communities”. We are not “one”, we are “diverse”.

As so many of these terms can be heard today, it is important to recognise them. “We are a nation of immigrants”, we are “open”, and “inclusive”. This emphasis on being “legion” has a natural tendency to multiply, because all the parts of something also have parts, and so on, indefinitely. When the province of Quebec wanted to separate from Canada, the question of smaller communities in Quebec discussing whether they could leave Quebec immediately became prescient.<sup>10</sup> If there are those who still wonder at the constantly changing Pride flag, one should not be surprised, for it is the very nature of the margins to multiply as they reach into the fraying edges of identity.

In the digital sphere, the anarchic thread of challenge to identity is strongly present. The use of pseudonyms, digital avatars and personas, trolling, larping, and performative behaviour does provide a fringe to identity, opening bridges that escape families and tribes to reach across the online jungle and experience surprising new encounters. In the same way, the capacity to enter unlimited connectivity has made marginal identities capable of organising formally and informally into networks across space. This capacity not only makes possible certain collaborations that were once impossible, but also reinforces the strength of increasingly smaller and more specialised identities. As the digital world increases its hold on us, becoming the model and referent for our “real life” interactions, the chaos of multiplicity manifests itself in the increasing breakdown and alienation of embodied communities.

In contrast, we see the possibility of confronting injustice through anonymous connections online. The organic nature of Elon Musk’s X has made the challenge to top-down uniformity possible with access to alternative sources of information about the world, which promotes difference and combats the homogeneity of single narratives. Networks like 4chan and Reddit present the ultimate version of the anarchic tendencies within the digital world, as self-organising and barely reigned-in agents of chaos. They are populated with self-defining and performative “anon” accounts, all struggling to differentiate themselves from non-human “bots” that represent unknown, powerful veiled intentions. In similar ways, the cryptocurrency space presents itself as an anonymous alternative to centralised digital currency. This chaos can be a powder keg of radicalisation, but it does not prevent us from seeing how these revolutionary and devolutionary identities can present themselves as efficient resistance to tyranny.

## One Identity to Rule them All

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*The paradox of the state absorption of identity in an age of deconstruction.*

“Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order.”

– Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.<sup>11</sup>

As the devolution of identity moves forward, another pernicious effect is happening simultaneously: the radical unifying and fixing of identities. These two tendencies play off each other, through the dialectics of modernity in ways that sometimes seem bewildering. As we become more “individual” or even “fluid”, the intermediary identities that constructed all ancient worlds begin to fragment and devolve, subjected to suspicion and deconstruction. These identities—such as families, communities, religions, and ultimately nations—are represented as tyrannies from which to be liberated.

Though paradoxical, two tendencies simultaneously emerge. On the one hand there is infinite “self-expression” and “self-identification”, especially as marginal exception. On the other hand, there is the emergence of the “global village” where individuals become “citizens of the world”. Both extremes are mediated and facilitated by the increase in technical power and proficiency, both in the machine-like bureaucratic state, and with the increase in technological power—whether in transportation, medical capacity, interconnectivity, or surveillance and weapons. This techno-unity, presenting itself as the replacement for the more organic groups that usually constitute human interaction, takes on the shape of Kafka’s impersonal and anonymous bureaucracies of absolute power.<sup>12</sup> It is not only a question of government, but rather that both the gigantism of corporations and states move, seemingly without specific will, to that unified end. It is almost a manifestation of a strange social Darwinism. Companies acquire each other and states submit to international standards. Through all of this we can see the glimmer of upcoming global forms of control becoming seemingly inevitable.

As suggested already, such radical centralisation is also happening in the sphere of identity. The process started long ago with the bureaucratisation of identity in a dance with the development of the modern state itself. Photographs, IDs, passports, birth certificates, social security numbers, and all those official papers that “identify” you, or rather manifest the power of the state to become the final guarantor of one’s identity. These tools are all extensions of more ancient technological developments for identity, like personal seals and signatures. The increasingly bureaucratic and technological forms have become completely submitted to corporate and state control. In totalitarian states, the use of an “interior passport” was common practice, papers in which the right official stamps would legislate what travel, what purchases, and what areas someone would have access to.

The digital age and its techno-gigantism has accelerated control of identity, which includes constant tracking, surveillance, and authentication. These are both necessary and inevitable, because the small trust networks that would have constituted the world of our grandparents have been eroded through a constant pendulum swing between individuation and centralisation. Not that long ago, a handshake was considered a contract, whereas we have entered a world where one has to “prove” one’s identity several times a day through IDs, passwords, biometric measures, and other externally mediated means.

As the surveillance state becomes technically possible, we see its tentacles reaching into what in democratic societies has always been considered a “right to privacy”, with our devices passively listening to us, gathering our personal, and even biometric data, and creating our digital twin. It is not a coincidence that such practices would develop in parallel with a mirror desire to “self-name”, and to “self-identify” in ways that are increasingly personal, idiosyncratic, and based on personal whim.

During the government reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic, the crisis was used in several countries to test out the concept of a completely digital identity—a digital interior passport, which would both identify you, while joining your very identity with a state approved “stamp” of approval, and permitting people access to different places, stores, churches, or medical establishments.

In Christian apocalypticism, there is an image of the “mark of the beast” in which a series of beasts representing civilisation, “causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive the mark on the right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of its name.”<sup>13</sup>

There is no need to panic and think I am declaring that this is the end of the world, but rather it is important to see that the desire and capacity to name, to number, and to include and exclude is a normal tendency of identity, one with positive and negative aspects as detailed above. What the text in Revelation is showing us is the “end” of that process—the tendency led to its destructive extreme—when a devouring civilisation reduces our smaller identities to its own, and reduces our existences to numbers that are accounted for in a great system of control. What the text is describing is a system in which our capacity to exist and participate in the world around us is completely subjected to the giant beast that comes out of the sea, what the author Paul Kingsnorth has recently been calling “The Machine”.<sup>14</sup> In such a situation, our identities become simply an expression of what The Machine wants, while giving us all the illusion that we can self-identify, as long as it is with devolutionary and revolutionary identities.

## Identity in the Digital World

*The double-edged-sword of digital technology.*

“In cyberspace, we wear all the masks, and we are all naked.”

– Quote attributed to Neil Postman by ChatGPT, No source.

In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, Socrates tells the myth of the Egyptian God Thoth who presents his different inventions to the great king, Thamus. Thoth presents the technology of writing to the King and frames it as a supplement, a “pharmakon”, to memory. Writing down things, the god argues, increases our power to remember them. Pharmakon is an interesting word which means both “medicine” and “poison”, in a similar way that we use the word “drug” in English. The philosopher Jacques Derrida has made this point in his famous essay, “Plato’s Pharmacy”.<sup>15</sup> King Thamus, evaluating Thoth’s gift, sees writing with an opposite perception. According to Thamus, rather than increasing memory, writing will weaken it by externalising it. By placing things to be remembered outside of our mind, we both increase our capacity to remember while reducing it simultaneously, because we then become dependent on the external tools of memory. I used to know my mother’s phone number, but since the advent of smart phones, though I can call hundreds of people at the drop of a hat, I do not know anyone’s phone number anymore. In fact, if writing affects memory and attention as pharmakon, the effect on memory and attention is incalculably larger through the development of digital memory, processors, search engines, and now AI which make the access to information nearly effortless.

This image of the paradox of writing is true for all technology. The more powerful it makes us, the weaker it makes us simultaneously. With a lighter, I am more powerful than my ancestors in making fire, but take that lighter away from me and I have no idea how to start one. This duality is captured in many other old stories besides Plato’s story of king Thamus, including in the biblical story of the garments of skin. When Adam and Eve fall at the beginning of the book of Genesis, they are exposed in their vulnerability and weakness, and to compensate for that weakness, God gives them garments of dead animal skin, which are both a blessing and a curse for the reasons mentioned above. They strengthen Adam and Eve while representing their weakness for needing these garments in the first place. They are a layer of death around them which increases their power to act in the world, while drawing them out of themselves. Early Church Fathers like St John Chrysostom understood these garments to be death and our reaction to it. They are both an image of our frailty, and everything we do in the world to stave off death and protect ourselves.<sup>16</sup> It is both sides of the breathing of identity, both the tendency towards dust that God describes as the consequence of death in Genesis 3,<sup>17</sup> as well as the overcompensation of dissolution through the civilisational impulse.

The process of the “pharmakon”—the supplementarity and exteriorisation which leads both to an external increase and an internal decrease—is something that has also

happened in the sphere of identity. If identities in the old world used to be found in participation—in family, communities, work environment, or church—technology has made it possible to both increase and legislate identity, while also making identity more vulnerable than it ever has been. Because identity is held “outside” of us, never has it been easier for one’s identity to be stolen. I cannot steal your presence, your word, your trust, your handshake, but I can steal your credentials, your passwords, your email address, and phone number. I can certainly steal your “garments of skin”, your digital twin. The narrative of aboriginal people resisting photography out of fear of their soul being stolen has always been seen as superstitious nonsense, but in the world of AI deepfakes, it has become difficult to still resist this intuition.

The problem of the exteriorisation of identity has caused an arms race between those who need identities to be verified, and those who wish to steal that identity for nefarious reasons. This creates an always increasing degree of risk as well as an increase in levels of control, tracking, and centralisation, as we aim towards complete verification and complete exclusion, always increasing the power and authority of the techno-state. With the advent of and reaction to COVID-19, we have almost all accepted biometric identification and tracking as an inevitable norm. At many airports and even customs, one only needs one’s passport and a picture taken by a machine. Soon the passport will become useless, as the data will be in the computer system. All we will need is our bodies and our complete and total submission to a faceless system of complete control acting as Zeus in the Theogony, deciding who is allowed into the world and who should be refused.<sup>18</sup>

On another front, by protecting us and shielding us from many of the old needs which constituted human communities, the technological world has made identity unstable, unmoored from its usual constraints. The stories of seeing people identify as a different gender or no gender, or even as cats and dogs (what we call otherkin),<sup>19</sup> have increased substantially as the online world colonises our “real world” embodiments. The language of fluid identification which accompanies much of progressive discourse can easily be understood when considering it as an example of devolutionary or revolutionary identity described above. Fragmenting and fluid identification must be seen as a necessary flipside to being a “citizen of the world”, as the radicalising dialectic of identity plays out in the digital age.

One of the best stories about technology is the fable of the genie’s lamp. A lamp is a technical device that makes light available when the sun is not there. The very thing the lamp does is already the genie in the lamp, because the lamp is itself an increase in power. It increases human capacity to get more of what they wish from the world through a supplement. In that sense, the genie’s lamp is very close to the Edenic garments of skin or to the Promethean fire which makes it possible for people to live in places that would normally be too cold for people, just as a real lamp makes it possible to shed light into darkness. Technology is always an increase in power and scale for aspects of humanity which are always already at play. It increases the reach of our desires, even the secret ones that we often do not dare see in ourselves.

In the case of identity, the digital world increases our dual desires: one of being safe versus one of being free; one of being sovereign versus one of participating in a greater whole; one of ruling versus one of being inspired to follow. The digital landscape, especially in terms of its effect on attention, memory, and identification, pushes us into the extreme of these complementary tendencies in ways that have possibly never been seen in human history. But like the story of the genie's lamp, each desire, when increased by seemingly unlimited power, has corollaries and side effects which are always intrinsic to the desire itself. Like the Greek King Midas' wish turning against itself,<sup>20</sup> safety leads to control, and freedom leads to anarchy when each are pushed too far with too much power. And in their extremes, each side also secretly calls for its opposite to react to their excess, which is why both extremes are manifesting simultaneously.

In this sphere, the *omega* point of the pendulum of desire and identity finds itself wrapped up in the horizon of Artificial Intelligence. It is coming at us like a freight train full of dynamite fuelled by our competing desires. It takes all the hopes and fears bundled together in its narrative presentation as a godlike avatar, coming to save or destroy us. It both makes humans more powerful than they have ever been in history, while questioning the very primacy of the human itself. It can be seen as being "all things to all people", an amorphous intelligence machine pointed at our desires like genie in the lamp. It can also be seen as the end of freedom and agency looming just beyond the next step in absolute control.

The question therefore remains what it is we should do about it?

## Love Your Neighbour as Yourself

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*Identity is found not in taking, but in giving*

"The more one forgets himself—by giving himself to a cause or another person to love—the more human he is."

— Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*.<sup>21</sup>

The solution to the problem of identity, even in the digital world, seems boring at the outset. It is simply the abandonment of pride for the sacrifice of love. The golden rule might appear as a cliché and seem sentimental, but it hides a deeper truth which is worth exploring. Love of neighbour as oneself contains a dual invocation, both to love another and to love oneself, and to always make one the measure of the other. It is neither deconstructive hatred of identity, nor is it prideful chauvinism. It is neither fluid transition, nor is it totalising permanence. Love of neighbour contains in its invocation the very breathing in and out, the graceful opening and closing of the hand invoked by Rumi in his poem.

In practice, it is possible to see such an approach play out at every level of being. It does not simply apply to individuals, but to all forms of corporate identities as well. It does not radicalise us. It does not make us idiosyncratic and isolated numbers in a global automated system. It also contains an invocation to act properly at the right level. I am asked to love my neighbour, that is the person living next to me, but also my neighbour in the broadest sense, the “Samaritan” who is not of my people. Even in the more radical formulation: “love your enemies”, we find the balance we need. I do not need to pretend that my enemies are not my enemies. They might as well be my enemies, but I should always want the very best for them. This truth applies within the frame of the dual movement of identity I have been exposing through this entire paper. Identity needs change like change needs identity. The “right hand” needs the “left hand”. We need both the movement towards unity and the movement towards change and diversity. These two tendencies in a dance are the very structure of existence itself, and though we are allowed to take a side in the great symphony, we must nonetheless recognise the absolute necessity of opposition to the position we hold.

In the digital world, this recognition becomes difficult, but it only becomes difficult if we do not understand the effect of the “garments of skin”. It becomes difficult when we let the digital landscape completely define and colonise our immediate experience and connection with others. The people living on my street are neither anonymous digital avatars, nor are they nodes in a social credit system; at least not yet. We have seen glimpses of what that can look like during COVID-19, but there is still room to build small arks around us to resist the extremes.

All of this can be folded into our vision of the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship. Identity is not found in taking, but in giving, not in demanding, but in being responsible. We look to find the places where we can become involved at every level with the right level of self-sacrifice and participation, on the individual, local, national, and international level, always being careful to not let those collapse into each other. The digital world is a tool. It is a supplement which must always be subject to the heart of the matter; that is, to the right posture, the right outlook, and the right attention.

Even Artificial intelligence, if placed in its proper place, aligned by our deepest presence in the every small contracting and expanding of a guiding hand, could play a role in stabilising the extremes. Though we cannot foretell if the pendulum will be wrenched from its axis, we can work every day to reach across with love of neighbour to make the movement beautifully balanced and coordinated as birds’ wings.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, 1989.

<sup>2</sup> Jalal ad-Din Muhammad ar-Rumi, *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks and John Moyne, 1995 (poem first written circa. 1273).

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 5:1b-2a (King James Version).

<sup>4</sup> Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1980.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, circa. 375BC.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Pageau and Jordan Peterson, "Identity: Individual and the State versus the Subsidiary Hierarchy of Heaven", *The Alliance for Responsible Citizenship*, 2023, <https://www.arcforum.com/a-better-story/the-subsidiary-hierarchy->.

<sup>7</sup> Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots*, 1949.

<sup>8</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, 1951.

<sup>9</sup> Guy Lawson, "Trudeau's Canada, Again", *New York Times Magazine*, 8 December 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/13/magazine/trudeaus-canada-again.html>.

<sup>10</sup> "The Cree of Quebec hold their own referendum in 1995", *CBC Archives*, accessed 18 November 2024, <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/1.3334898>.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1969.

<sup>12</sup> See: Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, 1925; Franz Kafka, *Metamorphosis*, 1915.

<sup>13</sup> Revelation 13:16-17 (New King James Version).

<sup>14</sup> See: Paul Kingsnorth, "The Tale of the Machine: A user's guide to my essay series", *The Abbey of Misrule*, 29 June 2023, <https://paulkingsnorth.substack.com/p/the-tale-of-the-machine>.

<sup>15</sup> See: Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, 1972.

<sup>16</sup> See: Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person: No 5*, 1987, p.86.

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 3:17-19 (New King James Version).

<sup>18</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, circa. 730-700BC.

<sup>19</sup> Pedro Feijó, "Why be human when you can be otherkin?" *University of Cambridge: Research*, 2016, <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/features/why-be-human-when-you-can-be-otherkin>.

<sup>20</sup> In Ancient Greek Mythology, King Midas wishes that everything he touches would turn into gold. However, the granting of this wish soon becomes a curse, as his food, and then even his own daughter turn to gold at his touch. He eventually asks for the curse to be taken from him, and the god Dionysus grants his request.

<sup>21</sup> Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search For Meaning: The classic tribute to hope from the Holocaust*, 1946.



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ISBN: 978-1-916948-48-8

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February 2025