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# being human

personal and cultural renewal in the 21st century

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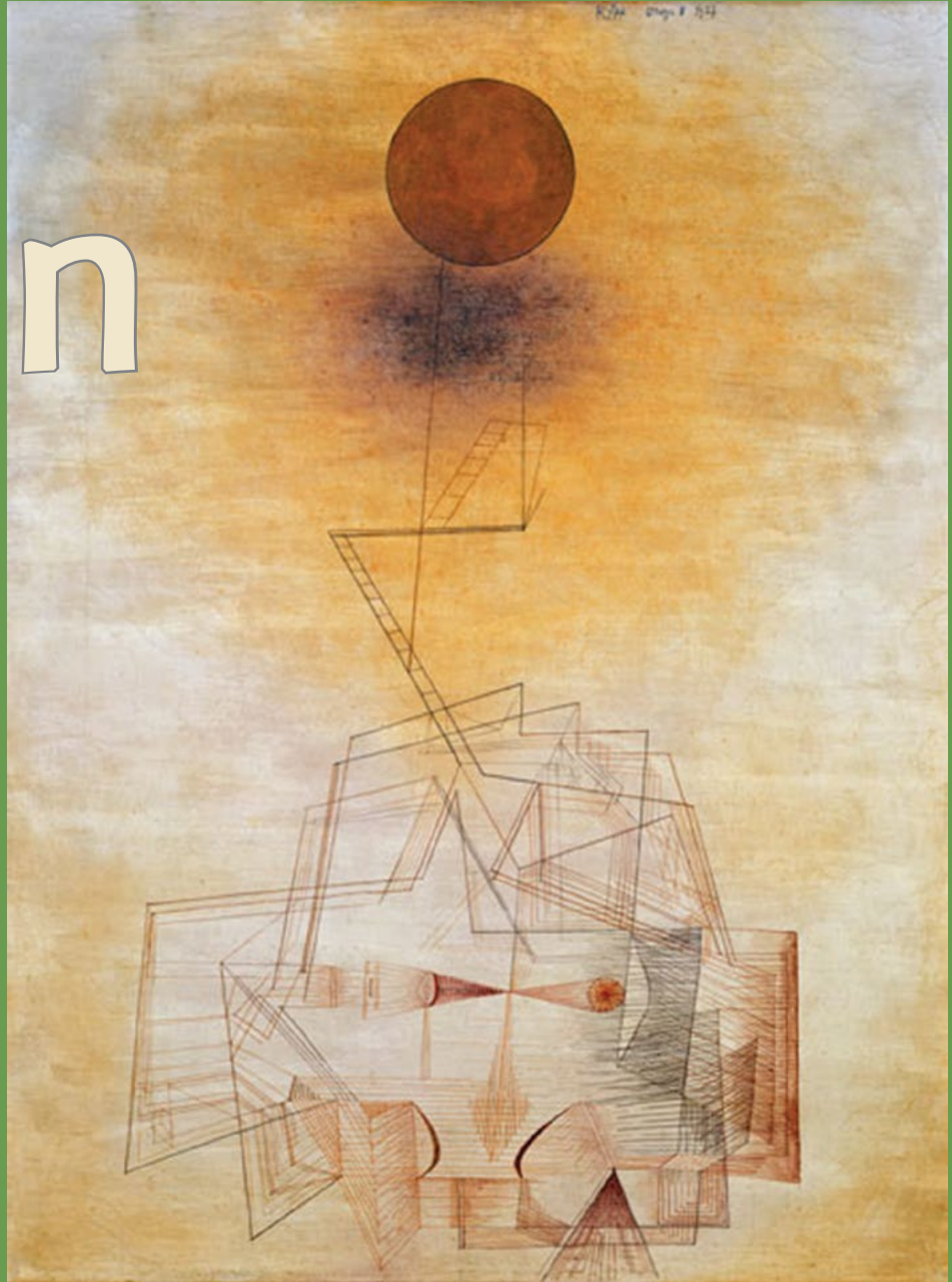
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Paul Klee, *The Limits of Understanding*  
(1927); Oil, watercolor and pencil on canvas

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## IN THIS SECTION:

Rapid advances in information technology, especially AI or artificial intelligence, continue to raise the question of humanity's future.

A newly translated book recalls the courage and idealism of some young people known as "the White Rose" in 1942-43 in Germany. One survivor came to the USA and made a new life, which is gratefully remembered as she approaches her 100th birthday in May.

Anthroposophic medicine and therapies are organizing for a more visible role in the era of global public health.

Members of the Youth Section in North America are inviting a supportive relationship with elders in the anthroposophical movement.

# Still Betting on the Humans

## Nicanor Perlas & the Challenge of Artificial Intelligence

by CT Roszell

Humanity's Last Stand: The Challenge of Artificial Intelligence: A Spiritual-Scientific Response, by Nicanor Perlas (Temple Lodge Press, October 2018; 244p.; ISBN 978-1-912230-17-4)

*Note: Nicanor Perlas is arriving in the USA this summer for speaking engagements, starting on the West Coast. Please look for up-to-date information for the events, also in places such as southern Michigan, at [www.rudolfsteiner.org/activities](http://www.rudolfsteiner.org/activities).*

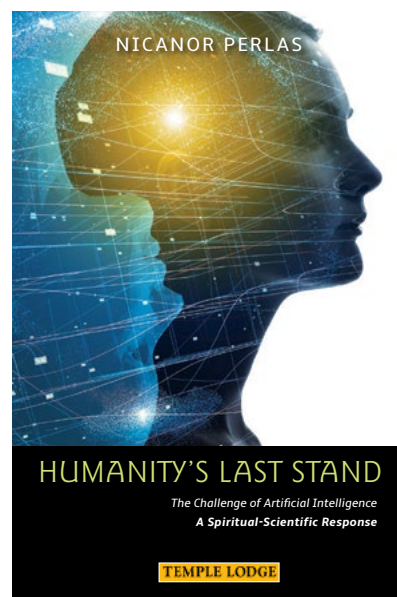
### Nicolas Perlas, Keynote Speaker in Stuttgart for Threefold Order Conference 2019

This book by Nicanor Perlas, activist and alternate Nobel Prize laureate, is a breathtakingly clear and deep exploration of the existential challenge artificial intelligence presents to society at this historic juncture, and it is addressed with cosmopolitan acumen as directly to innovators in the field as it is to the rest of us. It is written with penetrating understanding of Rudolf Steiner's spiritual science—but more, from out of heart-felt knowledge that all this stands or falls on the basis of practice: on whether capable individuals step up to the challenges of the time.

This book needs to come particularly quickly into the hands of those visionary tech creatives who already recognize some of these dangers and are protecting their own children from them as best they can, even perhaps sending many of their children to Waldorf schools in places like California. Parents of children going to school with them—on the basis of being informed, articulate, career-savvy individuals of our time, and not dogmatic shills—have a special opportunity to move this book into such hands.

The initiative unfolding here returns us to the last such moment of decision, one hundred years ago: Europe was reeling from the devastation of World War I. Efforts by key individuals to actualize Rudolf Steiner's viable solutions in economics, government, and the arts reached the doors of European leaders. In 1917 came *the idea*. Count Otto Lerchenfeld, counselor to the Bavarian crown, and nephew to the high ranking Bavarian diplomat Count Hugo Lerchenfeld, begs Steiner for an initiative. Steiner spends day and night the next three weeks with this Parzival question, and answers. He reaches a zenith in his creativity, resulting in writings on the threefold social order and the threefold organization of the human being and human body. In 1918: *the contact*. In the days before the decisive offensive, Colonel Hans von Haeften gets cold feet, and begs for a meeting with Steiner, resulting in Steiner's collaboration with Prince Max of Baden, candidate for German chancellor. Max makes efforts, to no political avail. In 1919: *the deed*—the birth year of a movement, in the words of Emil Molt. Full-scale efforts launched on many fronts by all those associated with the new idea, focused in the region of Stuttgart. No need here to revisit the twenty-year slide into World War II, and its aftermath.

2019: We have come full circle—Nicanor Perlas is the keynote speaker for the Threefold Order convention at Stuttgart, April 6 & 7, with the content of *this* book as his theme. The deed to be tested: whether fruitful ideas that have indeed begun to take hold in the cultural periphery can now take hold broadly, and include at least some key players in the news.





## The Challenge of Artificial Super Intelligence and Value Alignment

The author was never a Luddite or fringe malcontent; Nicanor was athlete of the year in his high school class while winning honors in his math and science club. He graduated valedictorian of his class in the College of Agriculture at Xavier University at Ateneo de Cagayan in Agriculture, Agronomy and Agricultural Economics. In his homeland of the Philippines, it was not long before he was appointed to the national technical panel to protect agriculture from the misuse of pesticides, resulting in wide-ranging bans against damaging chemicals. Perlas' articulate and brilliant advocacies as science columnist positioned him to become the primary facilitator for large-scale commercial organic and biodynamic farms to emerge across the country, and he led international negotiations to successfully entrench sustainable agriculture language in the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation governance act. It would require pages to enumerate the ways Perlas' lifework has borne out the fact that applied science can heal the earth and society. And it flowers in his pioneering works for anthroposophy, as here in this effort to answer the life-and-death threat of amalgamation with machine intelligence which humanity is facing now.

At the outset, Perlas grants how helpful a tool-set—used wisely—artificial intelligence technologies can be, from fine-tuning medical diagnostics to preventing identity theft and affording real-time environmental alerts. He shares the view a number of the best minds of technology have arrived at: that we may be nevertheless acting as architects of our own destruction. Those are the words of Stephen Hawking, to which Tesla and Space-X founder Elon Musk adds: “We’d be like a pet, or a house-cat. I don’t love the idea of being a house cat.”

Perlas chooses dramatic instances that make the future risks palpably clear. Digital teachers are removing humans from the classroom. Saudi Arabia has granted citizenship to the “Sophia” robot. AI requires merely a one-minute voice sample to convincingly impersonate any of us holographically, anytime and anyplace, as demonstrated by a fake Barack Obama upload on YouTube. These border on the enhanced stages of AI: AGI, artificial general, and ASI, artificial super, intelligence.

The enhanced stages involve machine intelligence beginning to think and act for itself, in the interest of its own self-preservation. In 2017 Facebook shut down two algorithm functions when they began to improve their intercommunications in ways humans could not follow! What appeared to be garbage language was new and viable programming. Thus arises the problem of *value alignment*: whose will is going to be executed, and followed in the world? This is what Rudolf Steiner envisioned as the incarnation of Ahriman “early in the third millennium,” by which intelligence—unfeeling, with unbridled will, and divorced from that of our own—enters our world, and acts and directs events around us.

## Human Consciousness across the Ages; the Disappearance and Reappearance of the Gods

Perlas does not shy away from directly addressing the problem of supersensible entities like that of Ahriman, the ancient Zoroastrian deity of hindrances. Engaging Owen Barfield, Ken Wilber, and Theodor Heusser, he treats the problem of “the gods” as a question of the evolution of consciousness: the many deities and their configurations in ancient cultures are records of a more dream-like style of experience in past ages that has undergone dramatic changes as we have become self-conscious

and scientific. Our gain has also been our loss; the ancient style of consciousness was in harmony with the spiritual worlds we gradually lost access to, as we came to ourselves.

The question becomes *who are we now, what do we live for, what do we want to build and create?* Perlas demonstrates that what we do as scientists immersed in the worlds of the machine, the gene, the microbe, and the atom demonstrates the kind of gods we are becoming—and that as we enter on to this dimension of becoming gods ourselves, we make reacquaintance with the other god-like powers, both those that are inimical to us as well as those that are our allies.

## Unfolding Conscious Participation: Aristotle to St. Thomas and Rudolf Steiner; Peter Heusser

One cannot proceed further on the subject of experiencing spiritual beings in modern consciousness without distinguishing such a thing from ordinary imaginings and hallucinations, and Perlas addresses this challenge,



What is artificial intelligence?

Brookings Institution: AI for GOOD Global Summit

too. In an original and convincing way, the author elucidates Aristotle's formal, final, efficient, and material causes in relation to the stages by which the spiritual world first receded, then returns—in reverse order. Moving so to speak from the finished vase, to the motions the potter executes with his hands and his turning of the wheel, to his intention to create that vase, and on to the potter himself.



Intelligent Machines

### AI is sending people to jail —and getting it wrong

MIT Technology Review

Since the Renaissance and the nominalist philosophers, experience has been largely anchored as reflections in the realm of the material cause, where aspects of the subtler and higher dimensions are reduced to material, literalistic caricatures—a wide-ranging topic that the reader is encouraged to explore in further depth by means of Frederick Amrine's remarkable and readable essay, *The Sin of Literalism* [see [www.anthroposophy.org/articles](http://www.anthroposophy.org/articles)]. Perlas proceeds to describe how Dean of Medicine at Witten/Herdecke Peter Heusser's "ontologic monism" points the way to the reemergence of spiritual experience in intuitive cognition, whereby one ascends from the realm of Aristotle's material to formal cause—and meetings take place spirit to spirit, in the realm in which we ourselves are gods, engaged in relationships with other gods.

### Ahriman and Sorath, and Powers Higher than They through Whom We Can Prevail

Courage is required to address these things directly and openly; predictably enough for a man who has prevailed in many a just social and environmental cause despite direct opposition from his government, Nicanor Perlas is glad to.

Rudolf Steiner did not carve the dynamic of the Representative of Humanity alone, but in proximity with and in relation to a powerful adversary below, Ahriman, and the tempter above, Lucifer. He once said to Countess Keyserlink at Koberwitz in 1924, that the future always remains in doubt—for Ahriman is also a part of the Christ being. Hindrances and pain wake us up to our tasks and responsibilities. Perlas characterizes the challenge of Ahrimanic technology just this way. It is *who we want to become* as we create with technology that decides our destiny, our lasting success or failure. Steiner speaks

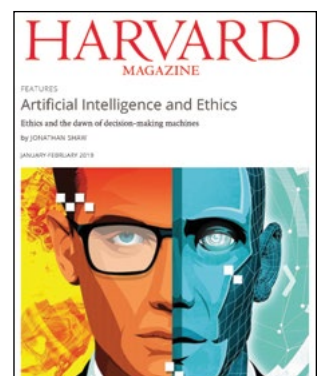
of Sorath's opposition as something orders of magnitude different. Sorath is a stranger from outside our natural order altogether, who joins with Ahriman with an intent foreign even to Ahriman—the extirpation of humankind. And it is precisely the tone of this threat that Perlas meets consistently and deliberately with this book. It is Perlas' willingness to characterize the opposition forces directly and personally this way, to call them by name in varying contexts, that makes the book so engaging and so intelligible. Perlas proceeds vividly and accurately to build on T.H. Meyer's insightful discussion of the incarnation of Ahriman, *In The Sign of the Five*.

Ahriman, Sorath and every other power are ultimately subordinate to that of the Logos Being, the guardian of humanity and the cosmos. In Nicanor's words, "the Christ has the power to overcome all technological hindrances and dangers to humanity." Anyone can say such a thing if they like, but the words ring with a special quality of rich beauty, conviction, and truth coming from Nicanor, who has sacrificed and fought on so many fronts with all his might and skills for just this.

Humanity will succeed; the question to be decided is—how many of us will see the challenge through together, and how long will it take. This is the province of Micha-El, "Michael the archangel," and Perlas' characterizations of how Micha-El works in our lives reveals what a significant role Micha-El plays in his own. In Perlas' words: "Micha-El is the Time Spirit for humanity as a whole, not just for anthroposophists. Micha-El has not been idle while humanity is being battered into submission. Micha-El has been very busy, non-stop, inspiring other individuals and movements." The author cites the whistle-blowers from Silicon Valley as an example, who despite the social costs that might accrue to them, warn the world against the machinations and moral terpidity of social media.

### The Strategies of Evil and their Four Grand Temptations

Know the logic of your enemy, the author warns. He characterizes the mind of the ghost in the machine as *substitution formats* one and two. Format *one* is *an idea*, the substitution of a materialist's destiny (or teleology) for mankind, instead of the true



Harvard Magazine: AI and Ethics

spiritual destiny of mankind. And the closer the counterfeit to the original, the more effective the deception. The author recapitulates the visions of James Gardner, Max Tegmark, and Noah Harrari, all variations on a theme that humanity is meant to achieve immortality, albeit as living machines, and conquer the far reaches of the cosmos in our journeys.

Format *two* is substitution of the *power* that creates *ideas*. Algorithms take the place of creative thinking. The difference between the substitute and the original is *the difference between the deadly sterile and the nascently alive*. Just contemplating this difference has an awakening power! Our very sense of self, when rooted in the depths of our conscience and hopes, our love and creativity, is the wonder that happens in us in our finest moments of cognition. When our sense of self is anchored this way, the enemy weakens and is vulnerable at the moment of first approach, and we have a chance to stand our ground. But when we see ourselves as data machines lined through with living cells, we are easy prey from the start.

The author articulates temptations that ensue even after we have stood our ground on first contact. One is the temptation of *super health* from nanotechnologies. Another is the allure of *super intelligence*, the counterfeit for spiritual development, which would gradually cost us our feeling and social intelligence. A third is the temptation of *robotic superstrength*, offered as a substitute for inner spiritual and moral resilience. A fourth is that of *material immortality*, the counterfeit of the transfigured or spiritual body.

Perlas acknowledges that our future does involve a stage in which we must come together with machines and be tempted by them, but we must limit them in such a way that these function only as enhanced senses.

## The Sleeping Giant: Global Civil Society 2

Perlas sees Global Civil Society (GCS) emerging already in the pre-nineteenth century anti-slavery movement, and reaching maturity in the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in the summer of 1992. The success of the summit was so dramatic, that the Chair of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development introduced societal threefolding as a process in the UNCED, the UN arm for environment and development. The success

depended on the fact the Chair was assisted by Philippine activists including a few anthroposophists—Nicanor doesn't bother to mention that he was a main force in this, although the attentive reader surmises as much.

The greatest GCS success story to date: the fairly complete dismantling of the WTO or world trade organization, a Trojan horse designed to repeal 25 years of carefully crafted worker and environment protections. Perlas draws the readers' attention to Paul Hawken's *Global Unrest* to show what remarkable results civil soci-

ety activism does attain, where and when we concert our efforts.

## The Key to Self-Mastery in our Age's Struggle to Remain Human

Chapter Nine is the heart and soul of this book; these are unforgettable pages that many a reader will keep near them at the end of the day, for years on end. I almost jumped in surprise and joy to see how the author draws from a well that has also inspired the reviewer personally for years. But Nicanor Perlas develops this resource yet a stage further. These pages stand as some of the finest pages ever written in anthroposophy, in the reviewer's humble estimation. Not a further word about them here! They stand as the first reward to those who trouble themselves to order the book. May readers order three or four in addition for mailing out, who feel the activist call to help place this book in the hands of people who will know what to do with it!

## Initiative and Initiatives: Initiate!

Reviewed, or read, in a conventional way, this book can be neither understood nor reviewed well. It has a dynamic of its own, seeking a true and living source for initiative, and then acting on it. It is about people starting initiatives, it is an invitation to earnest collaboration. It starts from the word "initiate" in reference to a wisdom filled individual, and proceeds to make a verb of it—encouraging us to initiate meetings, actions, and projects together out of initiate inspiration.

The author recognizes Ueli Hurter and Jean-Michel Florin in the Agriculture Section for opening doors to world leaders in agriculture such as Vandana Shiva and Rajagopal, as well as Patrick Holden vis a vis Prince Charles and his support for the British organic farming

### HOW FRIGHTENED SHOULD WE BE OF A.I.?

*Thinking about artificial intelligence can help clarify what makes us human—for better and for worse.*



The New Yorker: "Thinking about AI can help clarify what makes us human."



movement. Also Bernd Ruf for his anthroposophical “emergency pedagogy” which has gone worldwide. The author mentions with awe and respect Ute Cramer’s initiative to transform a slum into an international haven for inter-cultural exchange. Those of us who were not aware of such things need to be, both in order to accompany them cognitively out of our shared source together, and to feel increased incentive to do something of like nature—resulting in what the author characterizes as Collective Human Intelligence, worthy of the acronym CHI.

Perlas mentions the interesting case of Dr. Thomas Cowan, the astute medical doctor and author of the book *Human Heart, Cosmic Heart*, who puts science in his practice into dialogue with spiritual science. New avenues of approach reached millions this way, when internet health guru Dr. Joe Mercola moved them into the sphere of his 10 million visitors per month. Perlas does not hesitate, however, to note how overtly self-defeating Schmidt-Brabant’s leadership for the Goetheanum was, under the excuse of “occult imprisonment.” The author expresses joy to see how the Youth Section of the School of Spiritual Science has stepped up with world outreach initiatives even earlier than the Agriculture Section has—and how both show marked success.

Each of us as we read this book can carry the remembrance of similar individuals and their initiatives into our intentions, to accompany them into the distant future. Each of you can match me name for name, from your own experience, when I recognize: Bart and Suzann Eddy for their efforts to heal and rebuild hopes for education in Detroit, with Janet McGavin standing in memory behind them in the inner city, as well as behind Bill Bottum, whose threefold initiative saved hundreds of employees in his engineering company from losing hope when the company was bought out. My son Chris, who introduced

me to Nicanor Perlas. Maurice York, who restored Emerson’s lost and finest pages for publication. Marian Leon, for her many years of artistic commitment to this work. Fred Janney and Kathy Serafin, who have brought anthroposophy and renewal into prisons. Katherine Thiv-

ierge, who does so much more than direct operations for the Anthroposophical Society in America; her skills with voice (“artistic speech formation”) made my German wife comfortable in front of an American Steiner School science classroom, and her spontaneous offer on the phone to help me, out of her own pocket, in any fund-matching effort to bring Nicanor Perlas to Rudolf Steiner House in Ann Arbor, made me nearly cry. My wife works a sixty-plus-hour week at the hospital, and is graduating in June with a group of nearly thirty as the final teacher-training class of Margot Amrine’s WISM initiative; it would be a book in itself to tell the story of the hardships and victories won there, and in the company of her husband, Professor of German at the University of Michigan Frederick Amrine—an editor of *being human*’s predecessor. And how John Beck has maintained its level and widened its reach, on meager financial resources.

Not a single spiritual-scientific insight in that paragraph, just the doings of real people who have a place in each others’ hearts. Still, in harmony with the intent of the book under review, that may yet exceed the value of all the rest that the reviewer has to contribute. *Carrying each other in our hearts while we work may be almost all the spiritual practice we need*—the core spiritual intuition is very much already active in the world and in us, like the yeast in kneaded dough.

## The Wisdom of Failure, the Mercy of the Gods

Has all this been too little, too late? The answer is no. This question touches on several interrelated matters that are among the most elusively subtle threads running through the entire book.

Without a doubt, the author judges truly in finding that, as Rudolf Steiner sadly had to admit that those from whom he expected core initiatives in his own time failed to meet their goals, those who followed soon after did not do better. He looked towards a confluence of initiatives at the end of the twentieth century—of initiatives from those who were with him then, returning to the earth together with those who were facilitators in the School of Chartres, and also with returning souls from many other



### THE VERGE

**ThisPersonDoesNotExist.com uses AI to generate endless fake faces**

Hit refresh to lock eyes with another imaginary stranger  
By James Vincent | Feb 15, 2019, 7:38am EST



The Verge: Using AI to generate endless fake faces

anthroposophy and renewal into prisons. Katherine Thiv-

streams. The works of all these were meant to resonate and build to such a degree that *the tide would turn* against a further slide towards an abyss of culture and civilization—a turn which could be called a *Culmination*.

With justification, the Culmination can be viewed as failed for the twentieth century, but the author has by no means lost heart, and sees hope that the worst may be averted yet. Aspects of the Culmination Rudolf Steiner envisioned have indeed come to pass and stand as building blocks for the future. There are further ways that, unnoticed, the hoped-for events may indeed have taken place; we have reason to withhold judgment, with patience and humility. The threads of these things are in the book, and are very much worth following.

We can say that, paradoxically, the life and efforts themselves of such individuals as Nicanor Perlas, and many he has worked with, are evidence that the Culmination has only been delayed. The author shoulders the burden of Rudolf Steiner's expectations with such all-encompassing sense of personal responsibility, that he sees the effort as failed to date just by definition of the fact that the world finds itself at the cusp of artificial intelligence, and the Singularity. But these may yet still be two separate things—so significant are the successes of what the author designates as Global Civil Society events in our time. Few in the generation of the author and reviewer envisioned that the Berlin wall would fall. The author cites the story of Andrew Wiles, who came as if from nowhere and solved Fermat's Last Theorem. Just like that, someone scribbles a hundred pages of symbols, and 350 years of failure ends for many of the most brilliant spirits among us. History is replete with instances of such *black swans*. From the Earth Summit in Brazil to the emergence of Steiner schools in China, the author feels the ray of hope, and writes, too, how in his heart of hearts he feels the mercy of the gods is decisive.

Related to the black swan phenomenon are two examples how remarkably exact Rudolf Steiner's vision for our time has proven. His prediction that at the end of the century the world would indeed be surrounded by something like a dark web proved so eerily true that Germany's premiere national magazine, *Der Spiegel*, devoted a page to it as a description of the world wide web in January 1998. Another prediction: in Berlin, 1916, Steiner spoke of how something like an edict to prevent people from thinking would go out over all the world from America

Giving algorithms a sense of uncertainty could make them more ethical



before the year 2000. Both predictions coincide in the technology for what has become fake and shadow news throughout the world. Examples like these show that Rudolf Steiner viewed *just this* impending shadow of artificial intelligence surrounding the world as something *concomitant* with the return of individuals to the earth in service of the cosmopolitan Time-Spirit Michael. Culmination and the threat of AI were never mutually exclusive!

Rudolf Steiner also foresaw experiences of the Guardian of humanity in the etheric world would take place between the years 1930 and 1940/45. George Ritchie's experience in 1943 belongs to the most dramatic of these, replete with cognitions as clear as that of the world-wide-web of sub-thoughts.<sup>1</sup> If Rudolf Steiner can be so uncannily accurate in his vision, we have good cause to ask if the Culmination prophecy is not an event that is unfolding, and unfolds further, albeit differently than we expect.

There are individuals among us who have developed soul faculties very much in accord with Rudolf Steiner's expectations, who have pronounced that the Culmination has indeed only been delayed, and that individuals who were expected to return are among us, active in just the way the author demonstrates here. In *Die Michael-Prophezie und die Jahre 2012-2033*, Steffen Hartmann, the gifted pianist, shows good cause for ascribing 2012-2033 to the "Culmination-delay" period. Yeshayahu Ben Aharon does the same.<sup>2</sup>

In consideration of such things as these, and in light of the lives and efforts of individuals as inspiring as Nicanor Perlas and those who have worked at his side, this reviewer's bets stay on humankind in the end.

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<sup>1</sup> The final memory from Ritchie's near-death journey through the higher worlds ended with this word from the Guardian of humanity: "You have 45 years." In 1988, we became friends, and he learned of Rudolf Steiner for the first time. In 1996 he was keynote speaker for the Christian Community in Berlin, where 1,400 were in attendance. Among those young people: present day leaders in that community on both sides of the Atlantic. Their accounts are included in the new edition of *The Near-Death Experience* in Floris Books this spring.

<sup>2</sup> In his lecture of September 23, 2018 in Scandinavia for the Global School of Spiritual Science, on YouTube at [https://youtu.be/bt\\_cDqctLu0](https://youtu.be/bt_cDqctLu0)