

Philosophical Discourse and Political Realism:

The Global West

and the Legacy of the 20th Century

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A Philosopher's Call

English translation from the original German

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Whatever else history may say about me when I'm gone, I hope it will record that I appealed to your best hopes, not your worst fears, to your confidence rather than your doubts. My dream is that you will travel the road ahead with liberty's lamp guiding your steps and opportunity's arm steadying your way.

Was auch immer die Geschichte über mich sagen mag, wenn ich nicht mehr bin, ich hoffe, dass sie festhalten wird, dass ich an Ihre besten Hoffnungen appelliert habe, nicht an Ihre schlimmsten Ängste, an Ihr Selbstvertrauen und nicht an Ihre Zweifel. Mein Traum ist es, dass Sie den vor Ihnen liegenden Weg mit der Lampe der Freiheit als Wegweiser und dem Arm der Möglichkeiten als Stütze beschreiten werden.

Ronald Reagan (1911-2004)¹

Amicis libertatis dedicatum

¹ *From a speech to the Republican National Convention on August 17th 1992. Ronald Reagan was the 40th president of the United States and initiated a far-reaching process of détente with the then leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev. - Aus einer Rede vor dem Republikanischen Parteitag am 17. August 1992. Ronald Reagan war der 40. Präsident der Vereinigten Staaten und hat mit dem damaligen Führer der Sowjetunion, Michael Gorbatschow, einen weitreichenden Prozess der Entspannung eingeleitet.*

*Cynics treat values as equivalent and instrumental. Statesmen base practical decisions on moral convictions. For me, a sensible definition of realpolitik is to say there are objective circumstances without which foreign policy cannot be conducted. To try to deal with the fate of nations without looking at the circumstances with which they have to deal is escapism.*¹

Henry A. Kissinger (1923-2023)

Philosophy – History – Politics: Political Realism and Global West

Rarely at the end of a historical epoch have philosophy, politics, and world history been so dramatically intertwined as in the 20th century, whose aftermath we still inhabit today. Even a quarter of a century after its calendar end, its legacy is hardly noticed, which is why the numerous political conflicts show no sign of abating. This is particularly evident on the world political stage, where numerous tensions and fronts have formed. The complexity of the situation now leaves many contemporaries at a loss, and the former hope for a better future has long since given way to a feeling of resignation.

In international relations in particular, we need politicians who are not driven by dishonest ambitions, but who exercise their office with personal responsibility and the necessary foresight, in other words, who understand *realpolitik*. If, as Henry Kissinger, who is considered a *realpolitik* politician par excellence, said in the quote above, this means taking objective conditions into account, then we need a helmsman who is guided by the circumstances at hand, i.e., by reality.

Indeed, anyone who wants to steer a ship through dangerous waters must always keep an eye on other ships, their own potential, and the capabilities of potential enemies. The helmsman will pay attention to anything that could become relevant. For him, what counts are the facts, the actual circumstances: the realistic perspective.

His idealistic mind, however, dares to gaze beyond the horizon of the ocean – two souls beat within his chest². Even in stormy seas, it searches for islands of hope and confidence. In the moonlight, the captain hums songs of peace and friendship, hymns of global brotherhood touching his heart. But the storms of the rough sea

¹ From an interview with the magazine DER SPIEGEL (28/2009), dated 5th of July 2009.

² Kissinger: „*There is no realism without an element of idealism.*“

drown out the delicate melodies. Ideals are like a glance at the starry night sky: who knows if everyone will ever find the same message in them?

In the antagonism between facts and visions, a third dimension has emerged between the fronts that experienced helmsmen must keep in mind: the conditions in the depths of the waters – the eddies and currents that are not easily visible but are undeniably present. These are manifestations of water, its elemental properties, now on a large scale. On rivers, lakes, and seas, its behavior is part of reality and thus influences navigation.

Looking into the depths actually means looking at human nature, the human condition – *conditio humana*. How could one possibly seek to fathom the essence of politics while ignoring human beings as its fundamentals? Certainly, existential questions initially refer to the philosophical-theological realm, often with individual significance. Ultimately, however, human nature is woven into a larger worldview with far-reaching significance. But what if currents can be discerned from this depth of reality that form a fixed constant – and are therefore real?

An idealistic theory will seek philosophical discourse simply in order not to lose its footing, given that it should always have the optimum in mind. But political realism will have to focus even more on the human condition: less to discuss fundamental existential questions analytically, and more to be able to calculate the practical consequences. Only when all dimensions of reality are taken into account can one speak of *real realpolitik*.

This work is devoted to this comprehensive view. The *Global West* is linked in a special way to the history of the 20th century, even though its roots reach far back into the past. Its foundations are closely tied to the human condition, and its political, especially geopolitical, consequences point the way to an era that cannot yet be predicted. The conceptual and substantive analysis arrives at the fundamental axioms of the West and lists the maxims that *real realpolitik* must keep in mind in the future.

The Global West

Philosophy and Vision of Universal Sovereignty

Confrontation and Rhetoric

A new term has entered the political sphere: the *Global West*. It is preceded by two concepts that only became popular in the last decade of the 20th century: *globalization*, which emerged as a description of increasing global interconnectedness and interdependence, and the *Global South*, a friendlier term for developing countries.³

Talk of the *Global West* only gradually began after the turn of the millennium and has now found its way into political, and in particular geopolitical, language. It usually refers to all those states that were once classified as part of the *Western world* or *the West*, at a time when the East-West conflict dominated the second half of the 20th century. On the Western side were liberal democracies, industrialized countries with constitutional governments led by the United States, which were opposed in the East by the allies of the Soviet Union. When the division of Europe came to an end, talk of globalization soon arose, and not only in relation to global trade. The world seemed to have become a global village in which the planet's problems could now be better solved. Within the framework of organizations such as the UN, the ultimate goal was to establish a „global domestic polity“⁴. Thus, the 1990s became a decade of relative *détente*.

Now, decades later, when people talk about the Global West, it is usually a rhetorical attack by authoritarian⁵ and totalitarian states. They are trying to paint a picture of a powerful, globally active alliance that poses a threat to all other states. Opposing them are the countries of the Global South, a vaguely defined group of countries that have different ambitions but are in any case not considered part of the Global West, but rather its victims. When in doubt, authoritarian states count themselves among the Global South or at least declare their solidarity with it.

This supposed global opposition is reminiscent of the North-South conflict, which was used in the 20th century to describe the relationship between industrialized and developing countries. In addition to describing inequality, the focus was always on accountability for these terms and conditions, which was often attributed to the industrialized countries.

³ Although both terms can be traced back to the 1950s and 1960s, they were only used occasionally until the 1980s. The same applies to the term "Global North".

⁴ Although the term was first used in 1963 by physicist and philosopher Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, it only gained popularity with the democratic upheaval in Europe.

⁵ Viewed critically, this term is a euphemism that evokes associations with authoritarian upbringing, but which can nevertheless be characterized by a certain affection and respect for children. The term "authoritarian" for dictatorships that trample on the dignity and rights of the individual is due to widespread *political correctness*, which is obvious in terms of content.

If today it were only a question of the distribution of global wealth, it would be more appropriate to speak of the "Global North", although even this term would only be suitable to a limited extent. However, it does not exist in common usage, nor does a "Global East", which could serve as a collective term for socialist or communist-oriented states. In fact, it is neither about wealth alone nor about ideological relics from the Cold War era. Ultimately, the "Global South" is an awkward term that is intended to serve as the antithesis to the rhetorically demonized West and is therefore as vague and ambiguous as possible: it refers to the axis of authoritarian states which, although by no means homogeneous in composition, defend their difference from the West and often seek to present themselves as the better alternative.⁶

Geography and history

Far away from today's politicization of the West, its conceptual origin lies primarily in Eurocentric cartography, which also shaped the discourse on the Occident and the Orient. The Orient – the land of the rising sun – is contrasted with the Occident, where the sun sets again⁷. Whether the West ends at the Atlantic Ocean or – after the discovery of the New World – in the USA may be a matter of opinion, as may whether the East is located on the Arabian Peninsula or in distant Japan. Ultimately, every point on earth has its own individual and therefore relative points of reference, so that talk of the West in this context has historical connotations.

Over the course of recent history, what was once a geographical contrast has become an ideological opposition that has now taken on geopolitical significance. However, the causes and trends are so diverse and contradictory that the original antagonism has long since entered a phase that transcends specific regions or religions.

Even the often-cited contrast between the religions of the West and those of the East is much more nuanced when examined in detail.⁸

The distinction between a scientific West and a non-progressive East is similarly limited. Depending on the region and cultural circle, this contrast was and is indeed observable, often with considerable sharpness. However, this also applies to other continents and societies. Historically, various inventions originated in the East,

⁶ Central political terms are also subject to competition. For example, the Chinese government responded to the "*Summit for Democracy*" opened by US President Biden in 2021 with a paper entitled "*Democracy That Works*."

⁷ The ancient Greek *ἑσπερος* / *hesperos* (evening) and the Latin *vesper* (evening) are derived from the Indo-European root *wes- (evening/night).

⁸ Certainly, the Christian-monotheistic West can be contrasted in general terms with the predominantly Hindu and Buddhist East – for a certain period of history and within geographical limits. However, countertrends must be disregarded, both the monotheistic currents in ancient Egypt, Persia, and the religions of the East, but also the pantheistic currents in the Western world, for example.

and philosophical writings reached Europe via Arab-conquered Spain, which took the lead in the emerging sciences from the 16th century onwards.

In this context, the German sociologist Max Weber distinguished between the economic systems of the Orient and the Occident, attributing a high degree of rationalization to the latter. Instead of personal relationships, sober price calculations dictated market activity – and thus increased the efficiency of production. In the 20th century, the success of the Western industrialized nations aroused the interest of many countries that also wanted to modernize in this direction, i.e., develop their potential⁹. On the other hand, fascination with the seemingly distant cultures of the East (and beyond) has a long tradition in Europe. Despite all the conflicting trends and developments, one thing remains clear: it is not different religious traditions, architectures, languages, or customs that form the core of today's confrontation. They may accompany and illustrate some of the contrasts, but the roots lie much deeper and have long since detached themselves from geography. It is about the existential questions of humanity and the answers provided by philosophy.

Philosophy and politics

When we locate the cradle of philosophy in ancient Greece today, we do so in the knowledge that various ideas and concepts arose in many cultures, were perhaps discussed, but may never have been written down. These developments only become historically tangible when the paths of thought do not end without a trace, but find their way into society and are passed on.¹⁰ In this respect, the Greek philosophers achieved a historic breakthrough. The way in which they thought about the connections between the world and the position of humankind has secured them a place in the history books forever. This is where the natural sciences and humanities find their historical starting point, this is where the philosophical foundation for the *Global West* is to be found, and this is also where the origin of its name can be found.

Greek philosophy flourished when cultural exchange in the Mediterranean region combined with a vibrant trade in goods was fostering a climate in which free discourse on existential questions could take place. The legends handed down by Homer lay far in the past, and courageous thinkers were searching for new answers to old questions.

⁹ In this respect, the term "developing country" initially carries with it a hope for the future; the goal of development naturally refers to economic and political-philosophical goals.

¹⁰ Traditions of philosophical concepts can be found – independently of one another – in many advanced civilizations. Philosopher Karl Jaspers also referred to the period from around 800 to 200 BC as the "Axial Age", since central philosophical foundations "arose almost simultaneously in China, India, and the West during these few centuries, without their knowing about each other." (*The Origin and Goal of History*, 1949, 20).

The first step on this new path is the explanation of nature and its processes. The first theories about primordial substances and elements emerge, but cannot be tested due to a lack of technical equipment. In the end, however, more remains than mere speculation: the fundamental possibilities – atoms, elements, primordial principles – are already being formulated in this era, two and a half millennia before modern physics.

The second pillar of Greek philosophy deals with the nature of man, which affects him both as an individual and in his role in society. It addresses fundamental questions of knowledge, just living, and coexistence in the community. In the broadest sense, therefore, it is questions of politics¹¹ and ethics that determine the discourse. Here, too, models are developed that form the basis of today's modern theories. Overall, Greek philosophy thus provides the central intellectual foundation for *Western* culture.¹²

Another new beginning heralded the Age of Discovery. At the end of the Middle Ages, increasing trade – as once in ancient Greece – was linked to the flourishing of cities, whose wealth allowed science and culture to thrive. Universities were founded throughout Europe.

With the emergence of the natural sciences, it became increasingly possible to decipher the laws of nature, explore unknown regions, and find new routes around the globe. The onset of research soon enabled unprecedented advances in all areas of technology, medicine, and the production of everyday goods – a development that continues to this day. Scientific progress and its fruits have shaped people's lives ever since and have become a hallmark of the *Western* lifestyle.

However, research and science are a universal phenomenon. Although they may have made their breakthrough in European-Western culture, it is foreseeable that the scientific approach to the world in theory and practice will one day become a matter of course worldwide.

However, scientific progress and its fruits are only one part of "Western identity." Constitutive for *the West* is the understanding of human beings as individual actors who have inviolable rights to freedom in their private sphere and the right to participate in political and social decision-making. While state powers essentially derive from the will of the sovereign – the people – the personal sovereignty of the individual derives from inviolable human dignity.

From the earliest reflections on human nature, through Greek philosophy and the Age of Enlightenment, to today's "Western" understanding, it has been a long

¹¹ *Politics* is understood here in a broad sense according to Aristotle, who described humans as *zoon politikon* (social beings).

¹² Added to this are the principles of Roman law and, in Europe, the influence of the Judeo-Christian religion. These three factors are considered the constitutive pillars of Europe. The end of Greco-Roman antiquity is often associated with the closure of Plato's Academy in Athens in 529, while at the same time the first Benedictine monastery was founded on Montecassino – a milestone for the Christian-influenced European Middle Ages.

journey with numerous contradictions and setbacks. And yet, ultimately, it is this image of humanity that forms the basis for a freedom-oriented and democratic society. In such a society, it is the task of the state to secure the individual freedoms of each person and to ensure the democratic origin of all politics through appropriate procedures. Because laws and regulations are necessary in practice, as are courts and authorities, a "Western" state can only exist as a constitutional state, not as a loose and non-binding community. Individuals must be able to rely on their dignity and rights being protected at all times.

Sovereignty and sovereignties: the ultimate justification

The West depends on the outlined conception of human dignity and personal and political sovereignty as a philosophical concept, but also as a political, even geopolitical paradigm¹³. The conception of humanity – and its ultimate justification – determines which political, social, economic, and cultural order is appropriate to human nature. We can be just as sure that this order will prevail over time as we can be sure that a scientific worldview that corresponds to the nature of our universe will prevail.

The most popular objection comes from the field of natural sciences and can be summarized as follows: Since all processes in the universe occur according to physical laws, this also applies to all bodies, living beings, and humans. From the heartbeat to the finest processes in the brain, everything is purely physical in nature and part of a long and complex chain of cause and effect, similar to a clockwork mechanism, only in the field of biology. Humans have neither a subtle soul nor free will beyond the laws of nature, and neither can any kind of dignity be ascertained. What is not accessible to scientific research is not real.¹⁴

Although this "naturalistic" worldview has gained more and more followers with the increasing successes of science, it has a fundamental flaw. Even if it repeatedly gives the impression of being a physical thesis, the conclusion of many years of research, so to speak, the opposite is true. The question of the scope of a physical worldview is no longer a physical question, but a philosophical one, and thus exists on a completely different level.

In the philosophical discussion, which can only be hinted at here¹⁵, considerable problems arise when attempting to reduce free will and human consciousness to

¹³ The concept of the paradigm as a comprehensive framework for interpretation and understanding seems particularly justified in this case because, in addition to the scientific-theoretical level (from which it originally stems – cf. Thomas Kuhn, 1962), it also touches on existential, practical, and (geo)political foundations.

¹⁴ David Lewis: (1983, 361): *"The world is as physics says it is, and there's no more to say."* This position goes by several names, such as materialism, positivism, or empiricism, but essentially always proceeds from the same assumptions.

¹⁵ Some additional thoughts can be found in a separate prologue to this essay.

neural processes or to translate ethical questions into mere psychological states. However, a naturalistic view of humanity must reject moral and aesthetic questions as meaningless empty concepts¹⁶, and the human pursuit of justice and the search for meaning as complex hallucinations and projections of a brain, which in turn is an extremely complex apparatus¹⁷, ultimately determined by biochemical causalities, that controls the organism. The self-image of humans as autonomous beings therefore necessarily presupposes that, in addition to physical processes, there is a transcendent reality that provides a foundation for the human spirit, dignity, and freedom. Incidentally, this also applies to the physical constitution of the world, the causes of which cannot be physical again. Ultimately, the origin of the physical world is not a physical theory, but a fundamental philosophical question.

In summary, it can be said that the great existential questions of humanity, as Kant formulated them¹⁸, transcend the scope of interpretation of physics.

Finally, it should be noted that the naturalistic paradigm is highly counterintuitive because all humans, even its followers and proponents, act in everyday life as if they were making ethical decisions or conducting science of their own free will and extracting secrets from the world. The more complex the discourses become, the more absurd it seems that neurological programs alone have determined the course and interactions of the discourse.

Without wishing to discuss specific philosophical or religious concepts at this point, it can nevertheless be said that the determination of human dignity (and the rights and duties that follow from it) requires a transcendent understanding of the world that also leaves room for further existential questions. The "Western view of humanity" – but not only this one¹⁹ - necessarily presupposes this view of humanity and thus of reality as a whole.

Ultimately, this is not a matter of arbitrary choice in the sense of freely selecting from several available options. In fact, there is only one reality available, and it

¹⁶ „Where positivist reason dominates the field to the exclusion of all else ... then the classical sources of knowledge for ethics and law are excluded“ – Benedict XVI in his address to the German Bundestag on September 22, 2011.

¹⁷ Even a possible coincidence would not fundamentally change the quasi-programmed sequence of brain functions, but would merely "loosen it up" with a few unpredictabilities.

¹⁸ "The field of philosophy [...] can be reduced to the following questions: 1) What can I know? 2) What should I do? 3) What can I hope for? 4) What is man?" (Critique of Pure Reason, B833,1787) – In 1897/98, French painter Paul Gauguin named a painting with similar fundamental questions: "Where do we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?"

¹⁹ Ideologies and sciences that speak of active knowledge of new things, of solidarity or values, of ethics and aesthetics, also point to transcendent references. For them, as well as for many representatives of the Western lifestyle, this connection is mostly unknown or seems irrelevant. In fact, otherwise the individual would lose themselves in a predetermined chain of events and the supposed spirit would float away in a permanent fluid of psychological illusions. This would reduce the claims of science to absurdity and degrade humans to ridiculous puppets.

lies beyond human control. Whatever its nature may be – and however heated the debate about it may be – it can be said with certainty that there is no other option but to accept reality as it is: Reality is the ultimate validity, it stands above everything else: The sovereignty of the absolute prevails.

Multiple disruptions: between evolution and revolution

At first glance, the concept of the West outlined above appears to be a vaguely constructed model of society that originates more from the realm of political and religious utopias than from reality. The core of the criticism is therefore: if the outlined concept of human beings with dignity, rights, and sovereignty is *indeed* – *in reality* – consistent with their nature, and if the resulting free social order is therefore the appropriate concept, why has it not prevailed on its own throughout history, but instead so often struggles for survival?

At first glance, this objection seems justified; indeed, it seems obvious when looking at history and the present day. While the path of science has been relatively straightforward, influenced only sporadically by religion and politics, the search for a viable form of society appears to be changeable and at times disoriented. Why is the path so rocky?

The answer lies in various gaps, setbacks, persistencies, and countertrends, which can be summarized broadly as disruptions. These have various spatial-temporal, social, and cultural dimensions and can reinforce each other.

- Temporary disruptions: Although the beginnings of a liberal constitutional state can be found in all cultures, the development of such a state, despite early attempts, for example in ancient Greece, is a comparatively modern development that did not have broad support among the population. It was not until the 19th and 20th centuries, when citizens discovered their own empowerment and sovereignty, that the idea of human rights and democracy gained traction – with the well-known obstacles and setbacks.
- Spatial disruptions: While Western values have been able to establish themselves in one part of the world, traditional systems have retained their status elsewhere. This may be due to a lack of awareness of one's own sovereignty, so that one can speak of a lack of enlightenment about one's own maturity. At the same time, this natural development is being slowed down by political or religious forces.
- Chronological disruptions: Although awareness of one's own sovereignty is constitutive of human existence, history has repeatedly seen the emergence of restorative and reactionary movements that call into

question the values that were once so painstakingly achieved. Even though Western values – and the prosperity that accompanies them – have developed a global appeal, historical development is by no means automatic. The most significant setback to date was the period of fascism in Europe, especially National Socialism in Germany.²⁰

- Personal disruptions: Attachment to liberal democracies can diminish at various levels and turn into the opposite, both among ordinary citizens and political leaders. Even dissatisfaction with social, economic, or political developments can lead to the abandonment of the most fundamental pillars of human coexistence, always accompanied by the danger of a general social setback.
- Cultural disruptions: A glance at societies that consider themselves free and democratic shows that even within national borders, there are differing views on which fundamental values should form the foundation of the state. This is not a matter of individual laws and political directions, which are then to be decided in the democratic process, but of fundamental questions of ethics, politics, religion, and culture. Even across countries, there are more or less significant differences in the understanding of democracy and freedom.²¹
- Strategic disruptions: Defending the free world against expansive and authoritarian forces and securing one's own existence – military bases, raw materials, allies – repeatedly leads to strategic alliances with states whose internal constitution contradicts one's own values. The moral dilemma is obvious and can lead to dangerous indifference among citizens and politicians alike.²² This can create an impression of equality and legitimate permanent coexistence.

²⁰ Sociologist Jürgen Habermas describes the democratic realignment that began in post-war Germany as an “*economic and political, and later to some extent also cultural, process that [will] only [become] irreversible once cultural Westernization has permeated the mentality of the entire population*” (in an interview with Barbara Freitag in July 1989).

²¹ Of course, a society's true understanding of personal dignity and freedom is not reflected in middle-aged adults with average incomes who have both feet firmly on the ground. Rather, the real values are reflected in the status of young people, senior citizens, and socially disadvantaged groups, as well as in the conditions in prisons, the military, and other institutions and authorities that can affect personal sovereignty.

²² The strategic principle “*the enemy of my enemy is my friend*”, which has been known for millennia, may be strategically justified in existential emergencies, but it cannot replace the ethical foundations of (power) political decisions.

If one understands the discovery and realization of liberal and democratic principles based on the rule of law as a gradual development with different prerequisites from culture to culture, then one must expect such differences from the outset. Even though there have been repeated revolutionary movements from dictatorships to democracies throughout history, the historical process is nevertheless evolutionary in nature.

Geopolitics and vision

Assuming that the concept of humanity outlined above, within the framework of a worldview open to transcendence, actually corresponds to reality, one can assume that, despite possible setbacks and in the long term, the idea of a liberal and democratic state will prevail throughout history. This observation could already be made in the 20th century, when it became clear that individual dignity and freedom did not merely spring from a philosophical concept, but corresponded to the consciousness of many people in all parts of the world.²³ In fact, numerous democratic processes and peace initiatives were launched in the 1990s, leading some researchers to foresee the emergence of a "global domestic policy"²⁴ that would gradually resolve international conflicts.

From a geopolitical perspective, however, the image of a community of states now moving toward a democratic community at their own pace and under their own conditions has been overtaken by a contrary reality. For alongside the states of the "free world"²⁵, there are and have been a number of dictatorial regimes whose primary goal is to retain power or implement a political or religious ideology and which oppose the Western world, united if necessary. They may secretly suspect that sooner or later there will be, indeed must be, a path to freedom, but they resist this insight and the consequences that arise from it. Ultimately, they are resisting a reality that is impossible to resist.

Contrary Principles: "Two worlds"

On the international political stage²⁶, there is a significant conflict between authoritarian and free states, which is fundamentally asymmetrical in nature. The cause lies in the opposing views of social coexistence.

²³ Philosopher Francis Fukuyama spoke of "the end of history" as early as 1989, when people around the world demanded their rights and sovereignty and this became apparent to be a universal claim.

²⁴ See footnote 4.

²⁵ This alternative term is also historically charged – since the East-West conflict.

²⁶ The metaphorical term evokes associations with a play, but these seem cynical insofar as millions lose their lives and dignity and many billions are politically, socially, and economically affected. The destruction of resources is happening on a global scale and ultimately leaves its mark on virtually everyone on the planet.

In the democratic world, the state exists for the sake of its citizens. Its sole justification is to enable people to live in dignity and to ward off any infringements on their sovereign way of life as far as possible. In a free society, the state must justify its actions and prove that stronger restrictions are necessary and without alternative. It is not the citizen who must justify his freedom, but the state that must justify its interventions.

In authoritarian and totalitarian states, this principle is reversed: the state and its political leadership are sovereign, whether on religious, political-ideological, or personal grounds. The individual, insofar as one can still speak of such a thing, is subordinate to this *raison d'état* in every respect. Of course, there are gradual differences: "Gentle" dictatorships may leave economic and social activities unmolested and only persecute political criticism, while totalitarian regimes want to arbitrarily control people's thoughts and their very existence. In the end, however, the individual is powerless against the ruling regime; he can claim neither rights nor dignity, his freedom of action is granted to him from above and can be restricted or revoked at any time. An existential risk accompanies their entire lives and deforms social coexistence – and sometimes individual personalities – down to the smallest detail. The *raison d'état* – the survival of the regime – dominates and affects all areas of human existence.²⁷

International level

This priority of authoritarian states is reflected at the international level: all efforts are directed toward securing the existence and power of the ruling regime, and all other political or ideological objectives are subordinated to this endeavor. Since the primacy of maintaining power already means that human rights and ecological or cultural values are curtailed, ignored, or combated internally, these values are also of no significance for a dictatorship's international relations – except as propaganda in the fight against real or perceived threats to the regime.

The immediate danger to authoritarian systems comes from their equals: because they respect neither the sovereignty of their citizens nor that of other states, there are no binding rules governing mutual relations: the principle of strength applies – outward-directed violence is always aimed at securing the regime's existence. At the international level, the law of the jungle prevails – military power is needed to survive. In a climate of mistrust, alliances are often uncertain and one's own existence is constantly at risk.

A fundamental – internal – danger for repressive regimes is their own citizens, who could resist their oppression and demand their individual and political rights. Although democratic states support oppressed peoples in principle and defend

²⁷ In reality, these terms refer to labor and extermination camps, torture centers, oppression, and atrocities of unimaginable proportions: they are the deepest existential abysses.

their rights at the international level, they usually limit their activities to expressions of solidarity and resolutions. Active assistance, which would also involve forceful intervention, can only be expected in extreme exceptional cases. While the free world can form alliances to protect itself from military attacks by dictatorships, the possibilities for coming to the aid of oppressed peoples remain limited. Democratic states generally shy away from the use of military force or political pressure because they rely on negotiation, understanding, and goodwill. Furthermore, there is always the risk that foreign intervention will be met with skepticism by the population, forcing political decision-makers to withdraw their support. With each new election, there is a possibility that the political mood will change and even historic alliances will come to an end.

Openness to change and the dependence of political leadership on the will of sovereign citizens is the central characteristic of free societies. At the same time, this transparency and openness represent an open flank for the axis of authoritarian states.

They therefore attempt to manipulate public opinion and voting behavior through political propaganda at all levels and to challenge the respective societies through controlled crises. The means range from the deliberate dissemination of false information to the creation of migration pressure at external borders to military provocations and attacks. Added to this is constant pressure on individual citizens and organizations that oppose the authoritarian axis, making them targets of media or physical violence. Ultimately, the goal is to destabilize democratic states through a broad range of actions at all levels, thereby deterring them from their commitment to preserving and promoting global freedom.

Even among politicians, awareness of these factors of power and influence is quite limited. The belief in the desire of authoritarian states for peaceful coexistence and their potential democratic development is more appealing than a ruthless analysis of the political situation.²⁸ In addition, the principles of the free world – the *Global West* – are repeatedly misunderstood and watered down.

²⁸ The reference to a supposedly "peaceful coexistence" during the Cold War is deceptive, not only in view of the conflicts that took place at the same time. Although a nuclear stalemate between the superpowers made direct military confrontation impossible, truly peaceful coexistence was only possible after the changes in the Soviet Union and the upheaval in Eastern Europe. This kind of forced coexistence can therefore only be temporary, as temporary as the forced internal coexistence between a dictatorial government and its oppressed citizens.

The Axioms of the West

In contrast to secular and religious ideologies, the West is characterized by a degree of abstinence: it lacks eschatological paradigms, economic planning scenarios, and utopian social models. The promise of a life of freedom and dignity seems virtually devoid of content. In fact, it is about a few fundamental aspects and structures²⁹. The freedom of the West also has an axiomatic dimension:

1. The sovereignty of the absolute: The open-transcendent foundation

This view of reality is a necessary basis for understanding human nature and political and scientific activities. Only on this basis can further existential aspects be discussed, with different ideological and religious references. Free and open discourse without ideological constraints is an essential core of the West.

2. The sovereignty of the individual: The right to shape one's own life

Human nature and dignity are based on a transcendent understanding of reality. This view of humanity gives rise to fundamental human rights that guarantee individuals the sovereign right to shape their own lives. This existential core of human existence is fundamentally beyond question: the sovereignty of the individual is inviolable, even in democratic decisions.

3. Popular sovereignty: Society decides for itself on its own concerns

The political regulations of the community must have a democratic origin, i.e., they must be based on elections and referendums. The development of society is fundamentally open. Popular sovereignty reflects the sovereignty of the individual at the state level – both sovereignties are interdependent: just as individual freedom unfolds in political participation, democracy is based on politically mature - and thus also free – citizens.

4. Solidarity through values instead of the organization of interests

In contrast to authoritarian states, which have allied themselves on the basis of subjective interests that can be contradictory and changeable, the intellectual foundation of the West is based on a transcendent concept in which values and dignity are not negotiable but are embedded in a deeper objective reality and

²⁹ This does not refer to the bureaucracy that is entirely conceivable in a free constitutional state, with all its advantages and disadvantages, but rather to the renunciation of ideological "programming" of human beings.

therefore actually apply. At the international level, this philosophical contrast must lead to a solidarity among Western nations that is never called into question, even in the face of the strongest political differences. This also includes standing together against authoritarian expansion.

5. Geopolitical vision: The Universal West

The project of the Global West is a universal project that can only ethically justify coexistence with authoritarian states on a transitional basis. If one accepts the validity of universal human dignity and rights as the foundation of all societies, then disregarding them is an evil that must be overcome. Authoritarian systems are *by their very nature* incapable of sustainable existence and therefore have only a limited one, which is why the Universal West is an intrinsic concern of the West³⁰ that cannot be separated from its essence.

Due to their lack of democratic accountability to the people – ultimately because of their contradiction to the philosophical foundation of reality – *authoritarian governments have, at best, limited sovereignty due to this lack of reciprocity.*³¹ *Real realpolitik*, i.e., a political stance that always views the *human condition* as the basis for action alongside geostrategic conditions, must never forget these connections. It can therefore only flourish on the basis of the foundations presented here as axioms of the West, whatever they may be called in the distant future.

Epilogue: Three Maxims for the Coming Quarter-Century

After the hopeful early years following the end of the East-West conflict, which shed at least a tentative light on virtually every corner of the globe, the international situation has darkened in many regions since the turn of the millennium.

At the international level, the systemic conflict of the past century has returned in a modified form: an axis of repressive regimes, associated with a network of authoritarian or indifferent states, has set itself the goal of establishing a counter-movement to the free world and gradually displacing it.

³⁰ In contrast to the economic and communication technology globalization of the 1990s, what we are now seeing is a globalization of human dignity in the context of a philosophically based worldview. It is least of all about a uniform culture behind which the ethnic diversity of humanity would have to disappear.

³¹ In exceptional situations, such as the overthrow of a dictatorship, the legitimacy of a government may temporarily arise outside of democratic processes. In any case and at all times, however, the sovereignty of the individual must be given the highest priority.

In the face of this historic challenge, the Global West has long pursued a defensive strategy and ignored the growing danger of the authoritarian wave: militarily, politically, and in terms of its philosophical foundations. The erosion has two sides: on the one hand, authoritarian tendencies are emerging within several states, and on the other, mutual cooperation – including military solidarity – is in serious danger.

In this historic test, there is a need for a fundamental return to the foundations of the liberal movement, but even more so for confidence that a free society threatened by a repressive aggressor will not surrender without a fight. The power of freedom has its roots beyond political manipulation and military repression: history has shown and will show that it will ultimately prevail and assert itself. The concept of the Free World will one day disappear, but not because authoritarian systems have stifled this, but because its necessary counterpart, the repressive wave, will hopefully have ebbed away in the not too distant future.

The challenges for the coming decades can be summarized in three basic maxims

1. A return to the philosophical foundations of human freedom and dignity and their political consequences

The philosophical correctness of the 20th century has now been replaced in many cases by disinterest and relativism. Given the overwhelming diversity of opinions on practically every aspect of life, even ordinary day-to-day political issues have often become enormous challenges. This makes the search for the foundations of the free world seem all the more futile today, because it touches on philosophical or theological aspects that one may tolerate, but certainly should not discuss. Because this despondency inevitably leads to a lack of perspective and thus to a crisis of meaning, this is where we must start.

The dignity of the individual as the starting point for all free individual and state existence necessarily presupposes a transcendent understanding of reality. This foundation must – at least in its central aspects and consequences – be placed at the heart of political action and, to some extent, also in the consciousness of the people who ultimately derive their existence from it.

2. The geostrategic orientation and mutual security of the free world as a response to uncertainties within its community

In liberal democracies, there is naturally a risk that a country will withdraw *politically* or *militarily* from the alliance of the free world or call it into question. Such vicissitudes must be anticipated and countered preventively at all levels. As sovereign, the people can at any time vote for outcomes that weaken the existing alliance of values. However, *individual democracies themselves* should

be institutionally protected against their own abolition. Even greater protection within the framework of an alliance of states would be desirable.

The free world as an alliance of values must in turn arm itself against a security risk that would arise if one central and/or several smaller security guarantors were to disappear. In addition to a geostrategically relevant national reserve, this also requires a security architecture that is as resilient as possible and immune to national solo efforts, and that is capable of deterring attacks by the authoritarian network to the greatest possible extent.

3. Consistent and sustained commitment to the free world at the international level, in the awareness of a historic victory for freedom

The goal of mutual security is not only to safeguard the sovereignty of individual states in the narrow sense of *national interest*, but also to preserve the historical achievements of the free world—without setbacks, if possible—and to realize the universal claim to fundamental human rights. The defense of the Global West is therefore ultimately always in the morally justified national interest.³²

The states of the Global West would therefore be well advised to consistently expand and secure the free democratic order in their own countries so as not to discredit the idea of freedom through inadequacies.

Externally, they must clearly and unambiguously demonstrate their opposition to the authoritarian paradigm. On a philosophical level, the existence of dictatorships is an affront to the absolute³³. Their rule and their gains are relative, their ideology, insofar as it is tangible, a *fake philosophy* whose long-term fate is predetermined: it will end in complete nothingness. All the glory of their potentates will one day turn to dust in the face of truth – with the exception of those leaders who dare to change course.

The maxims mentioned are not a utopian or fundamentalist program, nor do they reject diplomacy, geostrategy, and *realpolitik*³⁴. They call first for a consistent and not just half-hearted return to tradition, and then for protection against the uncertainties that have become increasingly apparent in the 21st century. The fact that the ultimate goal is the universality of human rights – and nothing else means

³² A policy based on human rights and fundamental values cannot turn a blind eye to hunger, hardship, and oppression, nor can it claim that conflicts are not in the "national interest" to be resolved. What one's own options for action look like in practice is, of course, another matter entirely.

³³ It is difficult to find a more concise way of describing the unreality of regimes that find themselves in a state of fundamental theoretical and practical disorientation.

³⁴ Realpolitik is not understood here as opportunistic political maneuvering, but as a comprehensive political style that is aware of realities—including transcendent ones—and their implications.

a free world for all or a *universal West* – should no longer be questioned with respect to the human rights declarations of the last three hundred years.³⁵

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³⁵ The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks of human dignity, while its American and French precursors speak of inalienable rights, each of which implies a non-positivist foundation.