The Mindful Researcher: Transforming Academia from Within

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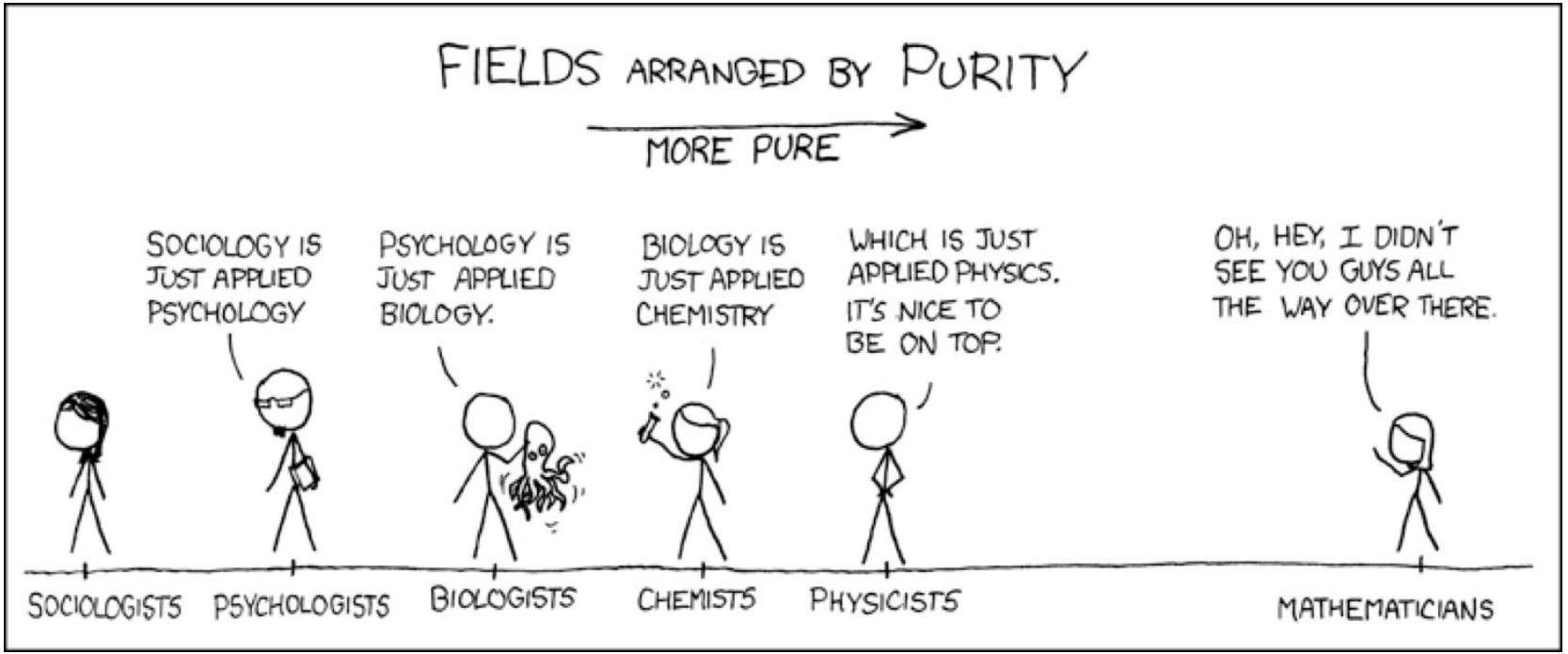
Interdisciplinarity



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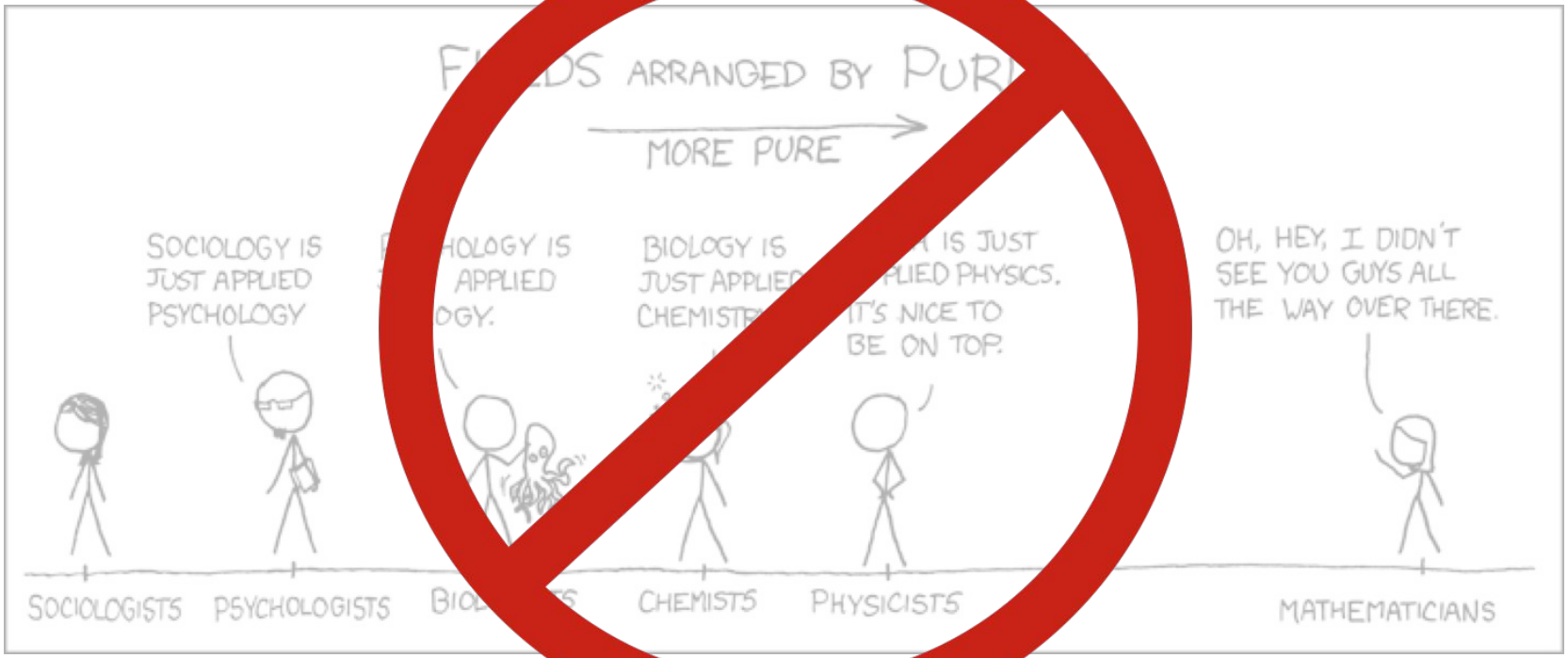

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Interdisciplinarity

Interdisciplinarity

+ quality of research
+ replicability
+ slow science
+ collaboration
+ co-authorship
+ shared resources, values, ethics, decision making
+ …

“what serves here now?”

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runaway competition -
narrow “excellence” -
power dynamics -
career pressure -
precariousness -
lack of support -
segregation -
publication bias -
... -

… contemplative values?
… quality of relationships?

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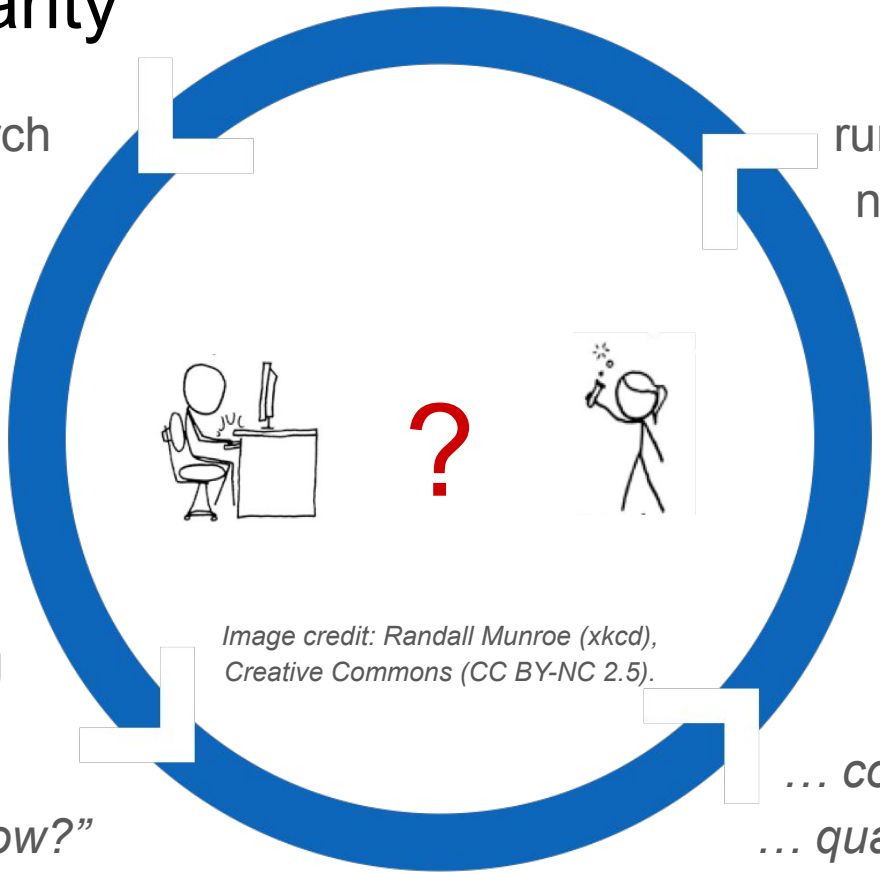

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… contemplative values?
… quality of relationships?

Voices from our community @ ESRI 2020 (1/2)

“... I'm looking for a chat on **how to integrate contemplative practice into the practice of science**. How can I implement contemplation into how I am doing science? **I love science, but I am struggling to navigate the rat-race culture of academics.**”

“... I'm struggling with the frenzy academic life and institutional focus on individuals **(rat race for publications and funding**, need for self promotion, etc.). I'm slowly coming to peace with the realization that it is simply **not in line with my vision of a fulfilling life** and my personality. I have recently decided to step back a bit (...) I would love to connect with people who share similar doubts. Maybe we can **figure out together how to contribute** to the quest for knowledge without giving in to the unhealthy demands of traditional academia”

“I can completely relate to your doubts. (...) Hubris, lots and lots of **hubris is abounding within academia … and losing sight of the real goal.**”

Academic rat race

“The challenge we face is that of rooting out anything and everything that distorts and devalues **human relations**.”

“A rat race is for rats. We’re not rats. **We’re human beings.** Reject the insidious pressures in society that would blunt your critical faculties to all that is happening around you, that would caution silence in the face of injustice lest you jeopardise your chances of promotion and self-advancement. This is how it starts, and **before you know where you are, you’re a fully paid-up member of the rat-pack. The price is too high. It entails the loss of your dignity and human spirit.** Or as Christ put it, “What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?””

– Jimmy Reid’s inauguration speech (1972), taken from https://senscot.net/speech-jimmy-reid/

A “collaboration conundrum” ... on all levels

How to go from hyper-competition to (interdisciplinary) collaboration? → Collaboration is …

1. **beautiful**
   - e.g. Nature, CERN, …; “epistemophilia”
2. **needed**
   - complexity of global, cross-cultural, … challenges
   - e.g. Evan Thompson’s keynote (2016), “Mind the Hype” (Van Dam et al., 2018)
3. **difficult**
   - systemic issues: scarce resources, power hierarchies, segregation, …
   - “excellence” vs precariousness, **publish-*and*-perish** culture, “rat-race”
   - incentive structures, publication metrics
     - initiatives: Lindau Guidelines, RoRI, DORA, Leiden manifesto, Hong Kong principles, … (What’s missing in them? → The **contemplative** process!)

Voices from our community @ ESRI 2020 (2/2)

“For some reason we are eager to discuss and reflect on everything, down to the language we use to share these reflections, but **the forces that shape the institutions that host and feed us remain in the blind spot of our awareness**. (...) What I find most regrettable about the trajectory that academia has been thoroughly following in the past 20 years or so is that it has not been discussed and decided by the community of researchers, nor do we seem able to **influence it decisively**.”

“... given that contemplation is partly self-inquiry, it may be **a natural thing for a contemplative science that seeks to be part of academia to put self-reflection about the workings of academia on its agenda?**”

– Frank Schumann, ESRI 2020

We need an inclusive approach!

If we aspire to “do science differently” and fully embrace the diversity of our contemplative practices and traditions, to embody and enact our values (compassion, generosity, integrity, …), to build community and support, and to safeguard scientific rigor / excellence ...

… we need to integrate all levels: top-down (policy makers & funding agencies, public, academic leadership & administration, …) & bottom-up (research teams, students, …)

→ How?

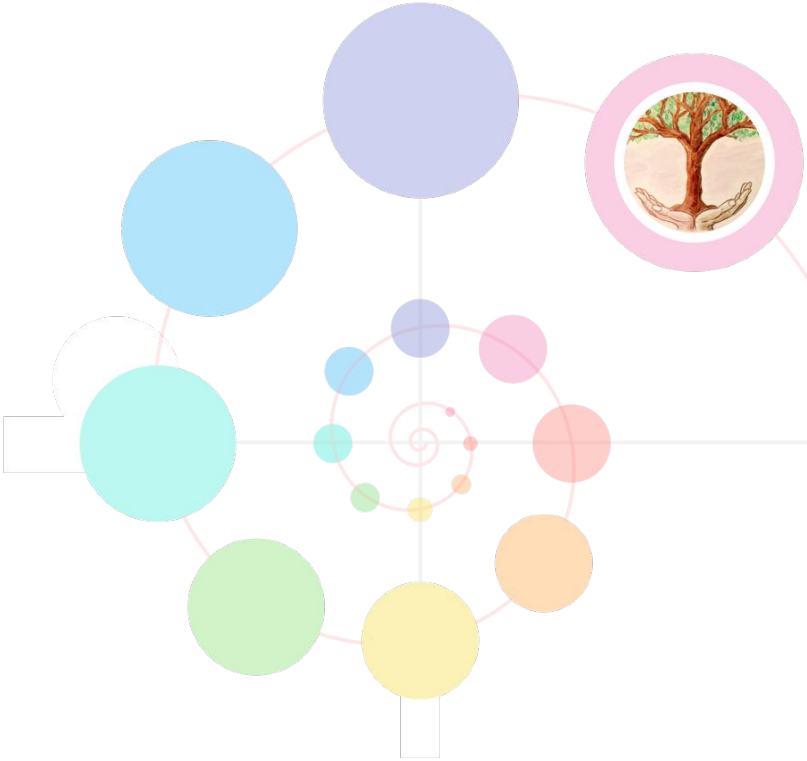
“In order to better connect top-down approaches with what happens on the laboratory floor, we need to have a closer look at the **practices, concerns, and decision-making processes in everyday research routines**.”

– Mareike Smolka, workshop @ MBM Intercity Seminar (2020)

A brief history of our process … (1/3)

- 2010: CERN / ATLAS → collaboration
- 2012: Yoga Science Foundation
- 2013: Mind & Life Europe, Mind & Life
- 2015: **Contemplative Scientific Collaboration** (CSC)
  - poster @ ESRI 2016, talk @ ISCS 2016

Contemplative Scientific Collaboration



systemic key principles

values and intentions

practices and processes

community and expertise

pathways of wholeness

...

for details, please come to the **poster session!**

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- 2018: Wolfgang Lukas, Annika Lübbert, Frank Schumann, Dav Clark → **enActivists**

enActivists

- we **create spaces to build a supporting community**
- we invite curiosity, openness to surprise, contemplative practices & qualities
- we dance between structure (agenda) and emergence (needs)
- we experiment with forms, practices, … including collaborative decision-making

- we learn to embody such qualities everyday - they also inform our research processes
- we consider this to be a **central part of (contemplative) science and research** - especially in interdisciplinary “melting pots” (where schemata necessarily dissolve)
- we believe this provides a fertile ground for community-driven collaborative initiatives

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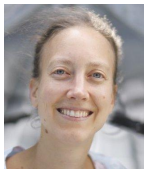
- 2020: ESRI → collaboration → CRC symposium proposal → **The Mindful Researcher**



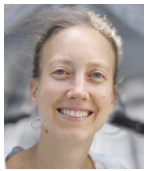
+ Sophie-Anne Perkins, Mary Rees, Mareike Smolka, Fr. Francis Tiso, Marieke van Vugt

The Mindful Researcher (1/2)

post-ESRI collaboration: **“The Mindful Researcher”** → this talk

+ Oussama Abdoun, Amy Varela, Francesco Noera, Rocio Martinez Vivot, Daniel Meling, Hendrik Stark

- Annika Lübbert → *“The Playful Academic”*
- Mary Rees → *“Engaging an Alternative Approach to Science”*
- Mareike Smolka → *“Socio-Technical Integration Research and Responsibility in Contemplative Research”* (STIR method, with Erik Fisher)
- Marieke van Vugt → *“Compassionate Open Science”* (Think Tank) and establishing a collaborative contemplative research community in Europe
- Fr. Francis Tiso → new monasticism



The Mindful Researcher (2/2)

post-ESRI collaboration on **survey questions** for the contemplative research community:

1. “What are the biggest **obstacles** to your ability to follow your contemplative-academic interest?”
2. “How important is it for you to have an **online community platform** for contemplative researchers?”
3. “Which initiatives do you consider as fruitful efforts to **change the academic system** for the better?”
4. “(...) are there [research] questions that you consider **too daunting** to explore further? If so, why?”
5. “What type of **support** would you ideally want to fulfill your contemplative-academic interests?”
6. “How do you meet your **existential needs** (...) while doing contemplative research?”
7. “How important is it for you to build a **strong community** of contemplative researchers, as a **support system** for research and practice?”
8. “What **obstacles** do you face when embodying contemplative practices/virtues in [academia]?”
12. What do you consider ingredients of **contemplative/mindful collaboration**?”

+ Oussama Abdoun, Gabriela Cortez, Heather McDonald, Willeke Rietdijk, Mathis Trautwein, …

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Next steps & invitation

- a **follow-up session** to this event (60')
  - Thursday, 12th November 2020, 17:00-18:00 CET
- an **online event** (3-4 hours) for deeper exploration, interactive dialogue, co-creativity
  - (in preparation)
- a **grant application** for an "innovation process" (1 year) to develop our ideas further
  - (in preparation)
- a **collaborative paper**, essays, blogs, …
  - (planned)

- **we invite you** to join us!

Summary

1. Potential of interdisciplinary, collaborative, contemplative research
2. Need to “transform academia from within” → integrative approach
3. Collaborative and co-creative power of a vibrant (research) community
4. Emerging initiatives (CSC, enActivists, Mindful Researchers, ...)

To visit our website → scan this:

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… and **we invite you** to join us!

Please meet us at the poster session today:
“Towards a Contemplative Scientific Collaboration, Community and Culture”

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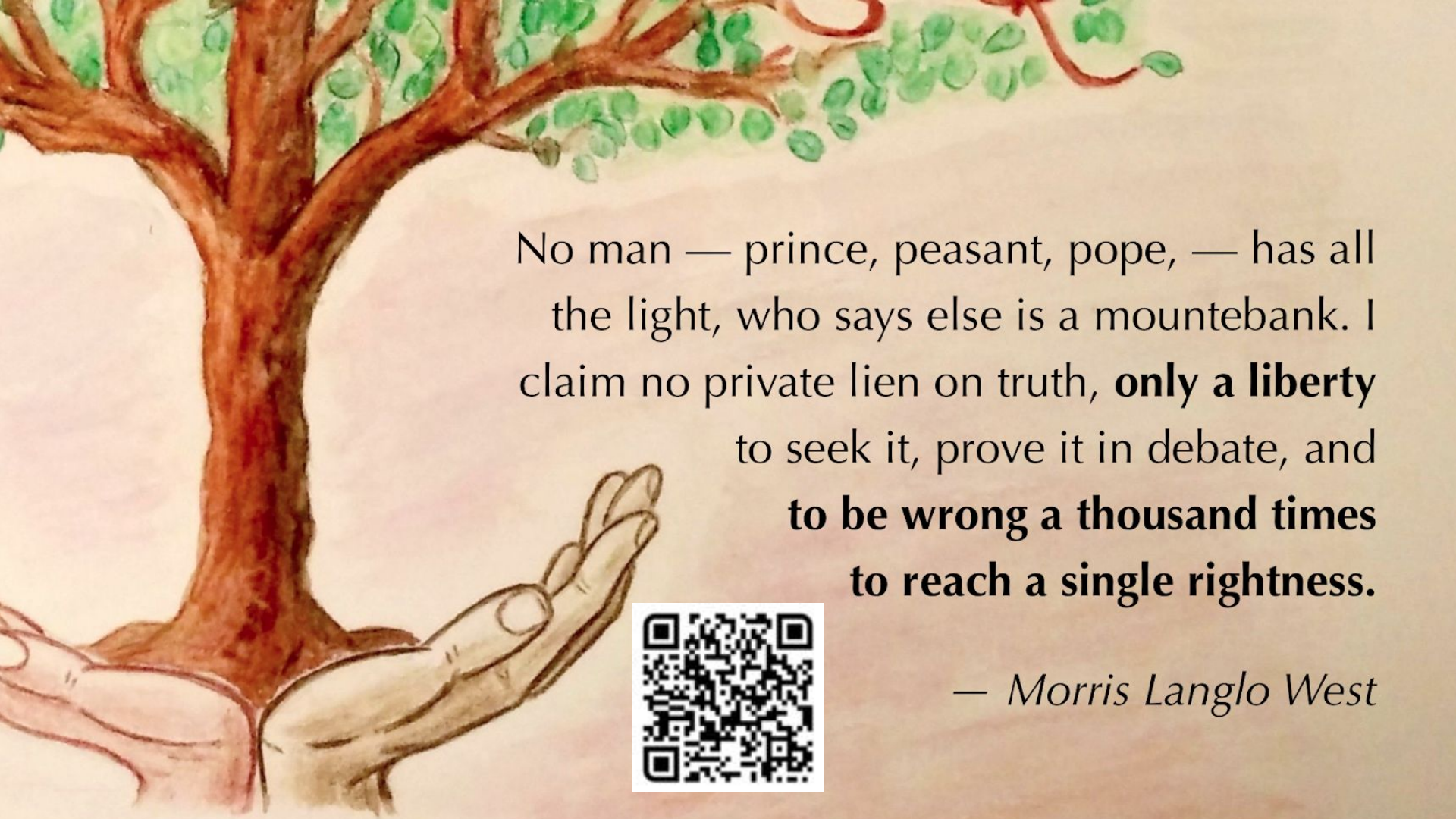

No man — prince, peasant, pope, — has all the light, who says else is a mountebank. I claim no private lien on truth, **only a liberty** to seek it, prove it in debate, and **to be wrong a thousand times to reach a single rightness.**

— *Morris Langlo West*

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