



Dialogues Between Neohumanism and Emergent Philosophies

Stephanie Ezra

Abstract: This article investigates how participatory foresight methods, particularly scenario-based games, can surface, challenge, and reconfigure our assumptions about ethical leadership and moral systems in imagined futures. Drawing on a live online session of the Dreams and Disruptions game hosted by the Canadian Foresight Network in June 2025, the paper reconstructs a collaboratively developed scenario titled Philosopher Kings and Social Bankers. The scenario emerged over a 45-minute co-creative process facilitated by a volunteer foresight practitioner and guided by thematic prompt cards spanning ecological, spiritual, technological, and governance dimensions. The session brought together participants to imagine a post-fossil fuel society grappling with questions of equity, authority, and collective values.

Methodologically, the article employs speculative ethnography, a hybrid approach that combines immersive participation with critical, reflective analysis. Rather than treating the game's output as mere data, the author assumes a dual role: both as a scenario co-creator and as a critical interpreter of the narrative that unfolded. This lens allows for a nuanced exploration of how moral imaginaries are shaped through improvisation, symbolic association, and group dynamics within compressed temporal contexts.

Central to the paper is an interrogation of two contrasting models of moral leadership that emerged during the game: the algorithmically derived social credit system and the spiritually

enlightened figure of the Sadvipra. While the former suggests a systemic, data-driven approach to behavioral governance, the latter draws from Neohumanist philosophy, personifying ethical clarity in a single, charismatic leader. The article critically examines both paradigms, highlighting the risks of moral outsourcing, whether to algorithms or enlightened individuals, and questioning the long-term resilience of systems dependent on centralized ethical authority.

In contributing to the Enlightened Leadership special edition, this article offers a unique perspective on how futures literacy tools can be mobilized to engage with core Neohumanist themes: ethical universality, spiritual maturity, and collective upliftment. It raises vital questions about the viability of leader-centered moral systems in a time of accelerating uncertainty and complexity. Rather than rejecting Neohumanist ideals, the paper proposes a reframing, arguing for Sadvipric qualities to be distributed across institutions, relationships, and cultures, rather than embodied in singular figures.

Ultimately, the paper positions foresight games as philosophical laboratories, spaces where competing ethical frameworks can be playfully tested, symbolically enacted, and critically deconstructed. In doing so, it calls for a deeper integration of structural ethics into futures work, inviting readers to imagine governance and leadership not as personal attributes, but as shared societal capacities.



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1. Introduction: Imagining Ethics Beyond the Present

What kinds of leadership might guide humanity beyond capitalist collapse, ecological degradation, and epistemic fragmentation? While many visions of the future oscillate between techno-utopianism and dystopian crisis, there remains a quieter, more vital question: Who - or what - will embody ethics in futures yet to be born? This article explores that question through the lens of speculative ethnography and futures gaming, drawing on Neohumanist^A philosophy¹, systems theory, and personal experience inside a structured foresight exercise.

On June 18, 2025, the author participated in *Dreams and Disruptions*, a facilitated foresight game created by Shermom Cruz² and hosted virtually by the Canadian Foresight Network. Designed to provoke creative thinking about long-term societal change, the game assigns participants a time horizon, scenario archetype, drivers of change, and wildcard disruptors, all within a playful, time-constrained format. During one such game, the scenario organically evolved toward the emergence of a centralized moral figure known as the Sadvipra B, a Neohumanist archetype of enlightened leadership¹. This emergent dynamic, co-created by participants and catalyzed by game prompts, raised pressing philosophical questions about power, justice, and collective coordination in speculative futures.

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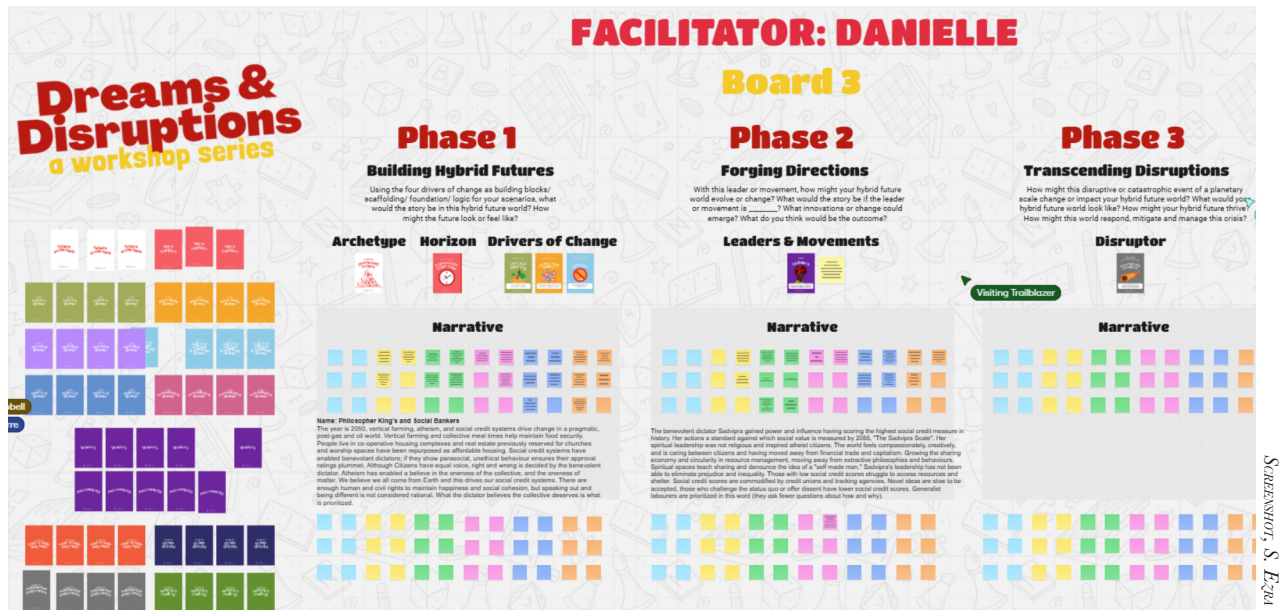
This paper uses the game session as a fieldsite for speculative ethnographic reflection, analyzing how ideas of ethics and leadership emerged not as abstract doctrines, but as embodied tensions negotiated in real time. Through this lens, the article examines the contrast between Neohumanist ethics and secular emergent systems (such as algorithmic governance and social credit structures), and probes whether the embodiment of ethical values in individuals, rather than systems, is a help or hindrance to futures literacy³.

In doing so, the paper contributes to broader conversations within post-capitalist and posthumanist thought about moral authority, participatory foresight, and the design of value-driven futures^{4,5}. Rather than propose answers, it seeks to map the terrain of open ethical questions, and test the utility of futures gameplay as a tool for philosophical inquiry.

2. Methodology: Speculative Ethnography Through Gameplay

This paper draws on a short-form, co-creative futures exercise as both its empirical grounding and methodological springboard. The scenario at the heart of the analysis was produced during a virtual session of *Dreams and Disruptions*.

The full virtual session lasted approximately one hour, with around 40 minutes dedicated to the breakout gameplay in groups of four to six participants. The remainder of the time was used for introductions, facilitator instructions, and a plenary restitution phase. Participants were randomly assigned to breakout rooms, while facilitators had volunteered ahead of time. All participants were members of, or adjacent to, the foresight community, which contributed to the quality and speed of immersion.



"The spiritual leadership of the benevolent dictator Sadvipra was not religious and inspired atheist citizens."

- From the Digital gameplay plan laid out for participants of the Dreams & Disruptions workshop series

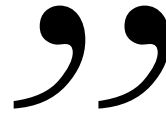
The game structure is divided into three facilitated phases, supported by a shared Miro board. In phase one, players were assigned a future-oriented archetype (in this case, a “preferred future”), a temporal horizon of 2050, and three randomly drawn drivers of change: vertical farming, a social credit system, and atheism. In the second phase, a leadership archetype card was drawn, revealing the “Sadvipra”, an idealized moral leader based on Neohumanist philosophy. Finally, the third phase introduced a disruptive wildcard: a comet on a collision course with Earth. Each phase was punctuated by group dialogue and collaborative input via digital sticky notes, with the facilitator synthesizing a live narrative to maintain coherence and engagement.

The author's role was that of an active participant-observer. Contributions were made both through written input and verbal engagement. While no formal recordings were made and no identifying data was collected, a few screenshots of the Miro board were taken post-session to aid later reflection. The spontaneous, time-boxed nature of the process resulted in a rich, if partial, co-created scenario that now serves as the foundation for retrospective analysis using speculative ethnography.

Speculative ethnography—an emerging practice in futures and design studies—combines imagination, narrative construction, and reflexive critique. Rather than aiming to forecast or empirically map the future, this method treats co-created future scenarios as cultural artifacts that reveal present-world assumptions, values, and tensions. In this case, the gameplay allowed participants to briefly inhabit a possible future society with its own logic, power structures, and moral codes. By distancing the conversation from present-day reality, the game enabled participants to surface philosophical themes—such as authority, fairness, and social regulation—that might have been constrained in more conventional formats like interviews or focus groups.

Moments of conceptual friction emerged naturally during the game, especially around the topics of social credit systems and the benevolent dictator figure. These concepts prompted brief ethical discussions and comparisons to current systems of economic and moral judgment. Although the session was too short to explore these dynamics in depth, they sparked lines of questioning that the author pursued in greater depth during post-game reflection and writing.

Western credit systems scores create an algorithmic caste system. When applied to moral governance, they risk promoting performative ethics - where virtue becomes a gamified signal rather than an embedded practice.



Ultimately, the *Dreams and Disruptions* session functioned not just as a playful prompt but as an exploratory ethnographic field site within a liminal, time-bound speculative frame. As a verbal thinker, the author found this format particularly conducive to emergent, conversational insight. While the scenario developed in the game was partial and provisional, it provided a meaningful lens through which to interrogate broader questions of enlightened leadership, social coordination, and post-capitalist futures.

3. The Scenario Narrative: Philosopher Kings and Social Bankers

The scenario co-developed during the *Dreams and Disruptions* foresight session was titled “Philosopher Kings and Social Bankers” an evocative synthesis of moral leadership and economic restructuring. Created in under 45 minutes, the game enabled us to create a scenario which unfolded over three structured phases. While rich in symbolic and systemic gestures, the narrative emerged under clear temporal constraints, and much of its philosophical depth was surfaced only in post-game reflection. What follows is a reconstruction of the imagined world, supplemented by critical interpretation.

Phase 1: The Pragmatic Collective (2050)

The first phase was shaped by three randomly drawn driver cards: *vertical farming*, *atheism*, and *social credit* systems. These set the stage for a future society structured around sustainability, secularism, and behavior-based governance. Group members added their own contributions - communal meals, cooperative housing, and the repurposing of religious buildings - which fleshed out the social fabric of this speculative world.

At the heart of this society was an emerging idea: a benevolent dictator empowered not by force, but by a high social credit score reflecting ethical behavior. The notion was introduced by one

participant (the author), drawing from personal reflections on post-capitalist transitions. While this idea was not deeply contested during the game, it was engaged with receptively and iteratively shaped by the group. In this imagined world, moral authority resided not in religious dogma or inherited power, but in an algorithmic system of social evaluation. Atheism, as represented in the scenario, did not suggest moral emptiness but rather a kind of material unity—a secular worldview in which ethical behavior emerged from collective rationality and shared survival imperatives.

Given the short timeframe, some philosophical tensions - such as the marginalization of dissent or the implications of moral centralization - remained unexplored in the session itself. However, these ambiguities surfaced upon later reflection. In retrospect, the group’s general enthusiasm for coherence and order might hint at a broader social tendency to accept ethical paternalism when framed as pro-social.

Phase 2: Rise of Sadvipra (2055)

The second phase of the game introduced the Sadvipra card - a reference to the Neohumanist concept of the spiritually enlightened, morally grounded leader¹. Within seconds, the group recognized how closely this archetype resonated with the benevolent figure imagined in Phase 1. The card was embraced not as a disruption but as symbolic validation, a narrative confirmation bias, reinforcing rather than challenging existing trajectories already underway.

From this emerged the figure of Sadvipra, a woman of color whose social credit score set a new standard for moral leadership. Her influence was imagined to extend beyond governance, shaping culture and values through what was dubbed *The Sadvipra Scale*. Does reducing moral worth to a score, even symbolically, undermine Neohumanist ethics? While not articulated in great detail during the session, this figure evoked a sense of elevated

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purpose, post-capitalist reasoning, and non-religious spirituality. Her presence reactivated former religious spaces as ethical and cultural commons, and catalyzed a shift toward a circular economy and sharing-based resource management.

Aspects of inequality and exclusion began to emerge tentatively in the group discussion. Participants noted that dissenters or non-conformists could find themselves with lower social credit scores, potentially losing access to shared resources. However, time limitations meant these concerns remained underdeveloped during the session. It was only in post-workshop reflection that the full implications of such a system - moral metrics, conformity bias, algorithmic virtue - became more apparent to the author.

Phase 3: Cosmic Disruption

The final phase introduced a dramatic plot twist: a planet-altering comet. Though drawn hastily due to time constraints, the card acted as a powerful narrative close. Its symbolism was clear, a reminder that even the most morally coherent or technologically sophisticated societies remain vulnerable to cosmic or existential disruption.

The group did not have time to fully process this disruption within the game framework. However, its timing and framing cast a retrospective light on the scenario: what happens when moral systems are centralized in a single leader or paradigm, and that paradigm is shaken? The comet became, in effect, a rupture that exposed the contingency of the entire imagined world.

In this sense, the scenario ends not with collapse, but with radical openness. While the game offered glimpses of utopian logic - sustainability, equality, ethical leadership, it also revealed through its final disruption the limits of foresight, control, and centralization. The figure of Sadvipra, however powerful, could not outwit cosmic entropy. What remains is the question: might more distributed,

adaptive systems of moral imagination prove more resilient than those anchored in charismatic leadership?

4. Analysis: Emergent Philosophies vs. Embodied Ethics

The scenario developed in the *Dreams and Disruptions* game workshop presents more than a fictional narrative - it acts as a microcosm of contemporary tensions between emergent philosophical systems and inherited models of moral leadership. On one side lie emergent secular models, including algorithmic governance, distributed decision-making, and non-spiritual ethical collectivism. On the other are traditional and Neohumanist paradigms that personify ethics through enlightened individuals - charismatic, spiritually evolved leaders tasked with embodying society's highest moral aspirations.

The scenario's arc - from communal atheistic collectivism to the emergence of a female Sadvipra and a morally infused comet-disrupted climax - provides a speculative playground to interrogate these contrasting frameworks. What emerges is not a binary of good vs. bad, but a need to critically evaluate the structures we imagine to carry our ethics forward.

Neohumanism: Ethical Universality or Spiritual Paternalism?

Neohumanism, as defined by P.R. Sarkar¹, centers on universal love, rational spirituality, and the ethical upliftment of society through enlightened leadership. The Sadvipra, the concept of a spiritually mature and fearless moral guide, stands at its core. Within the game, the card representing the Sadvipra functioned as a symbolic boon: a clarifying persona whose presence instantly stabilized the emerging world. In this sense, the scenario replicated a common cognitive move in futures thinking: personifying ethical certainty in the form of a leader or guardian figure.

While emotionally and narratively effective, this move raises troubling questions. Is ethical personification a shortcut - a kind of moral outsourcing that absolves society from grappling with the complexity of value negotiation? Can universal care be truly universal if it must be mediated through a singular moral voice?

From a critical standpoint, Neohumanist leadership risks replicating old religious patterns of spiritual hierarchy. Framing ethics through a spiritually evolved individual, no matter how benevolent, reintroduces a familiar dynamic: that of followers awaiting guidance, rather than citizens cultivating collective agency. This is particularly problematic in a world where centralized spiritual or moral leadership has historically led to power consolidation, institutional abuse, or dependency. The Sadvipra, as a concept, may be inspiring at an individual level, but in terms of systems change, it can inadvertently re-create hierarchical and paternalistic modes of governance.

Algorithmic Morality and the Limits of Systemic Substitutes

In contrast, the scenario's early implementation of social credit systems represents a secular, data-driven attempt to encode moral behavior. Algorithmic systems, whether fictional or observed in real-world cases, such as China's developing social credit system have begun to encode moral behavior in data-driven ways, often functioning as instruments of social control and exclusion⁶. Similarly, Western credit scoring mechanisms enact covert moral hierarchies that influence access and agency⁷. North America's entrenched credit score culture - tries to automate ethical judgment through measurable behavioral metrics. In theory, such systems could reward cooperation, discourage harmful behavior, and provide accountability. In practice, however, they often function as instruments of control, exclusion, and inequality.

As discussed during the game and further reflected upon afterward, Western credit systems already operate as covert moral hierarchies, quietly encoding assumptions about worthiness that disproportionately penalize non-conformity, punishing the economically precarious, and reinforcing consumption-based social belonging. Far from neutral, these scores create an algorithmic caste system. When applied to moral governance, they risk promoting performative ethics - where virtue

becomes a gamified signal rather than an embedded practice.

Thus, both the Sadvipra and the social credit system, despite their contrast, share a troubling feature: they outsource moral agency - one to a charismatic individual, the other to a data system. Both invite society to look up (to a leader) or outward (to an algorithm), rather than inward and collectively to define and enact values.

Futures Literacy Without Saints or Scoring Systems

This brings us to a critical reflection on futures literacy. As defined by UNESCO and foresight scholars, futures literacy involves the capacity to imagine and rehearse multiple futures, to hold space for uncertainty, and to resist determinism - be it technological, ideological, or charismatic. Yet, as the game demonstrated, even among futures-literate participants³, there remains a gravitational pull toward personified ethics. The Sadvipra card was not debated - it was embraced. In part, this reflects narrative convenience. But more deeply, it reveals a habitual yearning for certainty, for a wise adult to "take over" from a world perceived as out of control.

This is precisely where futures literacy must evolve. Rather than modeling moral clarity through fictional saviors, futures work could help people explore structures that decentralize ethics - including collective governance, consensus-based institutions, peer-based accountability systems, and deliberative decision-making. What if instead of imagining the next great leader, we explored what it takes for ethical behavior to become systemic, embedded in norms, protocols, and shared capacities?

Post-game reflection revealed this exact tension. The workshop participant-author, initially intrigued by the idea of a benevolent dictator as a transitional aid, began to recognize the limitations of moral centralization. What happens when the leader dies? Do we look for a successor? Do we freeze moral reasoning in their name? Such systems risk becoming heroic grief projects - where ethics is a relic of an imagined past, not a co-created present.

The Ethical Imagination as Collective Infrastructure

The challenge, then, is to construct futures where values are not embodied in individuals but distributed across systems - where no one person

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holds the moral compass, but everyone is taught to read it. This demands a futures literacy grounded in structural imagination, not just scenario play.

The comet in the scenario, uncontrollable, apolitical, anti-charismatic, reminds us that even the best-designed systems must remain humble. And perhaps the greatest humility is to recognize that no system of governance or moral order should depend on any one person, however enlightened.

This is not an argument against Neohumanist values, but a call to disembed those values from the need for a leader. We need societies of Sadvipric quality - collaborative, wise, fearless - not societies that await a Sadvipra. In this way, emergent philosophies of distributed ethics and accountable systems may offer more durable, resilient futures than any utopia anchored in a singular moral figure.

5. Implications for Practice: From Enlightened Individuals to Ethical Infrastructures

The scenario developed through the *Dreams and Disruptions* game opens a window into how alternative futures can stretch our ethical imagination, and also where that imagination still defaults to familiar figures of authority. But perhaps the more pressing implication is this: the tools we use to imagine the future can also teach us how to ethically inhabit it. For foresight to serve human evolution, it must do more than forecast potential change; it must create participatory spaces where ethics becomes a shared process, not an abstract value handed down from above.

Scenario Games as Ethical Laboratories

Speculative gameplay, such as the *Dreams and Disruptions* foresight game, offers a powerful and accessible method to engage futures literacy. In the context of the June 2025 workshop hosted by the Canadian Foresight Network, the format helped strangers collaboratively imagine a world shaped by emergent systems like vertical farming, social credit, and cooperative housing. The short time frame encouraged quick consensus-building and narrative flexibility. But crucially, it also revealed the tendency to seek clarity through symbolic figures, like the Sadvipra, when navigating ambiguity.

This suggests that scenario games are not merely narrative tools; they are laboratories for ethical rehearsal. They create low-stakes environments in

which participants can test the implications of different governance models, challenge norms, and observe how easily values become personified when structures are unclear. However, to unlock their full potential for transformative thinking, games like *Dreams and Disruptions* may benefit from tailored enhancements: for example, custom card decks focused on alternative governance, post-capitalist imaginaries, or emergent community ethics. Without such provocations, certain directions, like collective power without leadership, may remain unexplored.

Decentralizing Ethics: Shifting from Charisma to Commons

One of the key lessons from this scenario is the importance of moving ethical agency from individuals to systems. Rather than relying on the symbolic reassurance of a singular leader (no matter how benevolent), we must equip communities with tools to co-create and maintain ethical norms collectively⁴. In practical terms, this could include:

- Codes of ethics developed through community co-design, where stakeholders negotiate and agree on shared values and consequences.
- Ethics cafés and structured dialogue circles, allowing pluralistic and iterative exploration of moral tensions.
- Reflective practice and feedback loops, helping individuals and groups integrate moral reasoning into day-to-day decisions.
- Participatory foresight that explicitly surfaces the ethical dimensions of future scenarios, inviting participants not only to imagine change, but to define justice.

Such techniques, while still emerging, offer a path forward for those committed to Neohumanist values but uncomfortable with the concentration of moral authority in any individual. Ethics, in this view, becomes an infrastructure, a shared commons to be stewarded, revised, and protected.

Reframing Enlightened Leadership

Rather than abandoning the concept of leadership altogether, a more productive reframing may lie in separating leadership from power. In this reframed view, leaders are catalysts, not commanders, they spark conversation, model accountability, and nourish public imagination. Their role is not to impose direction but to create space for divergence,

foster difficult conversations, and help communities become literate in their own ethical development.

This vision of enlightened leadership aligns with Neohumanist values of universality and planetary consciousness, while avoiding the pitfalls of charismatic dependency. Leadership becomes a temporary function, rotating, distributed, and subject to community review. Moral exemplars, too, remain relevant, not as gurus, but as reference points in a living, evolving dialogue about who we want to be, and how we want to live together.

Prototyping Ethical Societies

The most actionable implications of this work may lie in small-scale experiments in ethical infrastructure. Imagine a school curriculum where students co-design governance models for their classrooms; a rural village experimenting with consensus-based decision-making; or a distributed network of local communities, each with its own code of ethics, yet bound by solidarity and shared learning.

These prototypes, inspired by Neohumanist values but freed from the need for moral authorities, can scale horizontally rather than hierarchically. They can act as living laboratories for collective foresight and ethical design, constantly iterating, failing forward, and offering alternatives to the extractive logics of capitalist modernity⁷.

As the scenario game subtly demonstrated, even when systems begin with good intentions, without vigilance and distributed ownership, they risk crystallizing into new forms of exclusion. The antidote is not a stronger leader. It is a stronger collective capacity for ethical action.

6. Conclusion: From Symbol to System

The comet that ends our scenario may be fictional, but the collapse we're living through is not. We are poisoning our planet, dismantling our democracies, and losing our grip on shared reality. Still, if we can face this together—with honesty, imagination, and collective will—there may yet be time to salvage what matters most. In the face of these, the allure of enlightened authority remains strong. But perhaps what our futures demand is not leadership from above, but ethical coherence from below.

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await a Sadvipra. In this way, emergent philosophies of distributed ethics and accountable systems may offer more durable, resilient futures than any utopia anchored in a singular moral figure.

Futures literacy, in this context, becomes not just the ability to imagine alternative tomorrows, but the capacity to cultivate ethical infrastructures that make those tomorrows livable. From foresight games to collective deliberation, we must move beyond symbolic figures and toward participatory architectures of meaning and morality. In doing so, we may yet realize the highest aims of Neohumanism, not through the authority of the few, but through the consciousness of the many.

As Arturo Escobar reminds us, “The task is not to find the one world that fits all, but to design worlds where many worlds fit.”⁸

Definitions

A *Neohumanism* is a socio-philosophical framework developed by P.R. Sarkar that expands the humanistic ethic to include all living beings and even inanimate entities, promoting universalism, rationality, and ecological consciousness (Sarkar, 1982).

B The *Sadvipra* is a central figure in Sarkar's social theory: a spiritually enlightened, morally courageous leader who acts selflessly to balance power among economic classes and uphold dharma (Sarkar, 1967/1992)⁸.

Endnotes

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