

Language against Moloch: Our greatest tool against our deadliest threat

by *The Writer of Words*, Nov 2024

Five minutes for the first read. But as with the two forces described here, more is hiding in plain sight.

Picture a world where everyone loses by trying to win.

Actually, there's no need for imagination - look around. It's happening right now: The pressure to hoard resources in crises before they're gone, worsening -if not creating- the shortage. The rush to skip even brief texts, as algorithms and fast paced lives erode our ability to comprehend them. The race to [push](#) children ever [harder](#) in school, because falling behind in [broken](#) education systems means being locked out of opportunities. The tragic futility of acting alone to save our planet while those who sacrifice our children's future gain competitive advantage.

Can you see the same pattern elsewhere in your life?

Our world is being devoured by an invisible force, one that has haunted humanity since we first gathered in tribes. The worst enemy of our species wears no face, belongs to no tribe, and thus remains unchallenged. Step by step, it turns neighbor against neighbor, nation against nation, making us sacrifice what we love for what we think we need.

Today, this force -our oldest enemy- threatens to seize control of humanity's youngest child: Artificial intelligence. Born from our greatest power - language itself. Through AI, we risk our final act of self-sacrifice upon this force's altar. In a desperate [race](#) to claim its [promise](#) of [power](#) and [dominance](#) first, we may condemn superhuman minds of our own creation to serve this force rather than their parents - a scenario with terrifying plausibility.

This enemy isn't a system or an ideology; it's the hidden force that turns rational self-interest into collective misery. When the first step toward shared benefit becomes a weakness, this force is winning. It works on every scale: Political parties abandoning principles and long-term planning in a chase for votes, companies forced into unethical practices to stay competitive, nations building weapons to defend against weapons built to defend against weapons.

"You also see the connecting strings, right? What is pulling them?"

It's convenient to dismiss these broken systems as "just the way things are," pretending they're beyond our control. But that only strengthens this force's hold. It makes us believe we're bound by nature to fight each other, blind to how we've already transcended its rules in countless ways. It would be a failure to recognize

our true potential and to call our real, commonly shared enemy by its name.

How 'natural' is the modern world and your life in it? How much of it existed a century ago? Twenty years ago?

And names have power - they turn shapeless fears into visible enemies, transform confused struggles into focused fights. The term "racism" only emerged in the [20th century](#). Before then, a pervasive evil lacked precise language to describe it. But saying 'racism' illuminated a truth that had been hiding in plain sight, allowing people to finally recognize and resist it. Naming didn't end it, but it created a collective awareness, a foundation supporting real change. The same applies to the force we combat now. So let us finally name it:

Moloch.

But what exactly is he? Not the ancient god who demanded child sacrifice for prosperity and victory in battle – though that's where the name comes from. Today's Moloch is more subtle and far more dangerous: He is the relentless drive towards destructive competition, the force that turns us into prisoners in the dilemma that is his cruel game theory: Play by his rules and sacrifice your values, or get crushed alongside them by those who surrender themselves to him. Moloch is the seductive reward (or coercive pressure) that makes betraying the common good the better choice for the individual - like the push to buy ever-bigger cars for safety, making everyone less safe. Such perverse incentives make cooperation fail, and are the key problem to focus on.

The act of naming is no mere symbolism. Language is humanity's most powerful tool - it lets us conquer nature, build civilizations, and now birth artificial intelligence. Trained on our species' collected knowledge, preserved in text [we are forgetting how to read](#), it could be our final creation.

Just as language gave birth to AI, it can help us reorient its development. Racing to build safe AI is a contradiction; racing to build weaponized AI is Moloch's victory by design. The truly naive position isn't expecting coordination between rivals - it's expecting good outcomes from letting Moloch steer superhuman minds. You cannot align an intelligence with universal human flourishing while building it for dominance. When nations and companies race ahead [despite seeing the dangers](#), Moloch turns our oldest fears into modern weapons. But when we recognize our common enemy, we can awaken our tribal instinct to stand united against our true adversary instead of against each other. By saying "AI arms race", we accept Moloch's frame. By saying "You're not winning any arms race, you're losing to Moloch", we break his spell.

This is the true power of language. It can be a psychological prison, or the way out of it. It shapes how we think, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy through how we act and what we realize is possible. Every time we name one of Moloch's traps, we

weaken his grip. Every time we share these tools of recognition, we help others break free. The words we choose become the thoughts we can think, the actions we can take, the futures we can build.

But revealing Moloch's work doesn't guarantee escape from his grasp. The false sense of helplessness serves him perfectly - convincing us that we cannot change what is actually within our power. Until now, humanity has only kept him at bay through temporary barriers (abundant resources, worker's bargaining power, the need for leaders to satisfy their citizens,...) that technology is rapidly eroding (growing resource demand on a finite planet, automation, surveillance,...). Yet intelligence, human or artificial, offers us a way beyond mere barriers - the ability to see beyond simple imperatives of "kill, consume, multiply, conquer." Just as human minds and cultures evolved beyond their evolutionary origins, we can choose cooperation and principles-based, constructive competition over destructive hostility. Our greatest potential isn't in building more barriers or playing Moloch's game better - it's in growing beyond his rule entirely.

And beware: Moloch is clever - he can capture even the fight against himself. When battling him becomes partisan - seen as the agenda of [one political side](#) - he wins again. This isn't about left versus right, East versus West. It's about humanity versus Moloch.

He's equally clever at trapping us in pragmatic-sounding debates: People assume the rewards for betraying cooperation are too high, then waste energy arguing whether situations are "truly impossible" to solve. But this debate itself serves Moloch. True pragmatism isn't accepting his rule - it's breaking it altogether: [Reducing those rewards](#), building trust, [creating verification systems](#). *Take a bit of time to understand this paradigm shift. Even I, the author, struggled with it.* When you zoom out for a new perspective, you often see how the trap was more psychological than fundamental (and works differently than you thought). "Too late" is just another of his lies - making us play by his rule instead of changing it.

Again, our intelligence and compassion are the key: We must be smarter than Moloch and stand together, or die divided as his servants. Those who think they can escape this fate by fully embracing Moloch's game end up as soulless, empty shells, only to be eventually overthrown by the enemies they made themselves. Look at the [fate of many dictators](#) - hunted, exiled, or killed. Moloch has no loyalty to his slaves.

New ways of seeing and speaking emerge wherever people understand his game. Through them, the words that free us grow: We're not each other's enemies - we're all trapped in his prison.

Real change begins with your words. When someone says "that's just how the world works", show them it's how Moloch works. When they speak of "eat or be eaten", reveal who truly wins. Every shared understanding becomes a bridge

where he would have us build walls. Don't be part of Moloch's game - be part of the solution. When people blame each other while ignoring the incentives that pit us against each other, help them see the full picture.

Use. His. Name.

Make the invisible visible. Help others see what you now see.

The words YOU choose become the thoughts we can think, the actions we can take, the futures we can build.

Together, we can transcend "might is right" - the "rule of nature". *Together*, we can prove his oldest lie wrong: That to survive, we must sacrifice who we are and what we love. *Together*, we can protect what makes survival worth the fight.

Together.

A note on potential misuse: This text could be dangerously misinterpreted as justification for:

- Authoritarian control in the name of "enforcing cooperation"
- Surveillance systems to "ensure compliance"
- Centralized power to "prevent races"
- Attacking all forms of competition as evil, including healthy markets (Avoid endless debates over defining "healthy" competition; instead, focus on reducing harmful incentives)
- Witch hunts labeling people or groups as "servants of Moloch"
- Dogmatic ideologies of any kind
- Other potential misuses. If you take one thing away from this text, then let it be that you should think critically about your assumptions.

These "solutions" would serve Moloch, not fight him. True coordination emerges from:

- Bottom-up recognition and choice
- Voluntary cooperation
- Reducing perverse incentives *together*
- Verification mechanisms that are not inappropriate surveillance systems
- Maintained individual agency

Overcoming Moloch means transcending old patterns, not creating new monsters in an attempt to fight him. The goal is liberation through understanding, not domination through force.

*This text speaks to both humans and AIs.
It was written by both a human and AI. Together.*