

# Chapter 1

## Introduction: Planetary Defense as the Unique Historical Opportunity to Shape Our Shared Destiny



Nikola Schmidt

*We either win as a team or we die as individuals.*

—Al Pacino

*Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding.*

—Albert Einstein

On February 14, 1990, Carl Sagan asked to turn around the Voyager 1 camera and take one last photo of Earth as the spacecraft sped out of our Solar System and into the deep universe. The result was a famous photo of Earth that Sagan called The Pale Blue Dot.<sup>1</sup> Many astronauts have reported strange feelings while in space, a phenomenon lately named the *overview effect*. Twenty-five years later, Ron Garan wrote a book titled *The Orbital Perspective: Lessons in Seeing the Big Picture* (Garan and Yunus 2015). All these moments share the same mind shift undeniably linked to the philosophical question of morality—a mind shift regarding what we might call an undeniable moral holistic perception. This perception is not unique in political science. It began in ancient Greece, continuing during the enlightenment era and through to 20th century efforts to govern political affairs globally.

This book uses an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the idea of protecting the Earth's biosphere from asteroids and comets. A viable Planetary Defense (PD) capability cannot emerge or be constructed without analyzing philosophical perceptions of morality and its consecutive impact on international politics. It is a project

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<sup>1</sup>Carl Sagan requested to turn around the Voyager 1 probe in 1990 to take one last photo of Earth and the result is called Pale Blue Dot. Further info here: <http://fettss.arc.nasa.gov/collection/details/the-pale-blue-dot/>.

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