

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Community of Common Destiny for Mankind

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ABSTRACT

The global spread of the new coronavirus and the epidemic caused a major global public health crisis. The question of human existence is once again threatened and challenged. Starting from the relationship between viruses and humans, which not only involves the relationship between disease and medical care, it also reflects the deep-seated problems of the relationship between man and nature, man and man, man and itself. Facing the crisis of humans who conquered nature, we need to strengthen the ecological awareness of the unity of man and nature and gradually start thinking about the relationship between species, face the biological characteristics of humans, strengthen species consciousness, and rational reflection. This starts from the ethical relations between man and man, man and it-self, enhancing the sense of a community of shared future for mankind, promoting comprehensive changes in ethical relations.

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The COVID-19 pandemic, currently raging worldwide, has drawn very close attention from every nation, including China. As a public health crisis of global importance, the pandemic caused many side effects internationally: economy, politics, and even society, COVID-19 has an adverse impact on global economic stability and intergovernmental political trust. As a matter of fact, there are more global-scale challenges to address that have sparked off more psychological and social problems than in calmer times. When we look at the relationship between man and the pandemic, we will identify not just how this disease relates to healthcare service, but also how humans relate to nature, to one another, and to the ego. The pandemic has led people to rethink about the establishment of the community of common destiny for mankind.

1. THE ECOLOGICAL SENSE OF THE UNITY OF MAN WITH NATURE

The outbreak and spread of the novel coronavirus has centred a lot of people's attention to the long-overlooked discipline of microbiology.

More than that, it attracts unprecedentedly increasing self-reflection from people. In *The Joy of Life*, Heinrich August Winkler remarked: "The coronavirus' features are found only in the organism and its existence has been closely related to the nature of the environment." [1] In the subsequent analysis, he added that the existence of the virus as a microorganism has deprived life and death of their normal significance. The virus appears to be a being between life and non-life. In this light, the relationship between man and the virus is analogous to the relationship between man and the being of a particular species.

Insofar as the virus is concerned, it was a being, originally unknown to humans and parasitizing other faunal species. The virus has a way of existence and reproduction of its own and reflects the more hidden part of nature. Man is but a natural being in the natural world, in spite of his intellect and strength as well as contemporary science and technology that has catapulted him to a supreme high hard to reach for other natural forms of existence. Karl Marx was more specific: "The so-called link between nature and man's spiritual and corporeal life is in fact one

between nature and the ego, because he comprises part of nature.”[2] It means that man’s initiative is not absolute and that he is perpetually subject to the premise that he is part of nature.

Some eco-philosophers reassessed the role man plays in nature. American philosopher Holmes Rolston III remarked: “We’re at the top of an iceberg. Although we did surface excellently from the natural sea, nine tenths of the iceberg still belongs to nature.”[3] By that Rolston means, while man sublimates himself as he changes nature and subsequently reaches a supreme high, he remains part of the natural world, from beginning to end. It is primarily the development of science and technology that picks man out of nature and endows him with superiority. The burgeoning of science and technology comes with substantive changes to man’s thoughts—from the fear of nature instilled by religious tradition to the trial to dominate nature and its relationship with man. Nature is therefore conquered, changed and harnessed.

Science and technology plays a key role in man’s domination of nature. Canadian philosopher William Leiss pointed out: “Our concept of domination of nature was introduced based on this factor by Bacon and more, the traces of whose effort to dispel the haunting fear are still distinguishable.”[4] British philosopher Francis Bacon, as the first man to initiate a turn from the curiosity for nature, gave an impetus to the full-scale rise and burgeoning of empiricism. Overdependence on new scientific methodologies creates a type of powerful domination in the social context and therefore nature appears to have no secret to conceal from man. Horrible and arbitrary world views lead to insufficient evaluation of the inner value of nature, hence a face-off between man and nature that is landing man in various crises of existence.

The invasion of the virus caused us to think more. First of all, will we have no natural enemy? Should we respond to the threat of various natural enemies with a cultural or technological shield? If not, how can we adjust ourselves accordingly? When criticizing Herbert Marcuse’s pessimistic opinion about science progress, German philosopher Jürgen Habermas confronted and reflected on the negative impact of science and technology. He said: “Dissemination of technologically useful knowledge is unlikely to substitute for the massive force of self-reflection.”[5] This is in fact an important proposition that scientific advice on the public

sector is still needed to normalize political governance because the overconfident attempt to control and dominate nature will unavoidably expose ourselves to further threats and challenges. The coronavirus outbreak is a crisis man experiences in his conquest of nature. This event worsens the relationship between man and nature, putting human health and even life at unprecedented risk. For these considerations, it is necessary to consolidate the fundamental relationship between man and nature.

Marx identified the relationship between man and nature as one between transforming and being transformed, hence the construction of man’s life. He thought the natural world to be the inorganic body of man and by so doing he in fact confirmed the internal unity of man and nature in practice. He said: “Nature is not man’s body for its own sake, but man’s inorganic body. Man lives off nature. In other words, nature is man’s body which man must interact continuously with in order not to die.”[6] Marx aimed to materialize a true reconciliation between man and nature and establish the true relationship between them; however, the capitalist society makes it infeasible. Socialism with Chinese characteristics has the institutional basis for achieving the relationship because it pursues ecological civilization as part of human civilization. Chinese President Xi Jinping thus stressed: “Man is born by nature. Their relationship is one of mutuality, so our damage to nature ends up doing harm to ourselves.”[7]

2. HIGHER SENSE OF SPECIES AND MORE RATIONAL REFLECTION

History of philosophy includes many discussions of the nature of human existence. Generally, the majority of philosophers think highly of man as a being. In *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola remarked: “Man stands at the center of all created things and links up all living beings in nature. On the one hand, he is compatible with the transcendent world at heart; on the other hand he is the monarch and ruler of all created things on earth.”[8] However, things are not so simple because in actual life man is a paradoxical being. He borders on both an angel and a beast; he craves to be an angel, but however hard he tries, he can’t shed his beastly features. This very paradox lands the interpretation of man’s nature in such severe trouble that some thinkers think of man as a freak or an un-cracked puzzle.

As human society develops, man increasingly improves the capability of transforming nature, further complicating the relationship between man

and nature. There's no end to the discussion of what man is as a being. Daisaku Ikeda thus remarked: "What is man as a being and what is he supposed to be? When considering the problem we can't ignore the fact that man as an animal has many instinctive desires." [9] The view emphasizes that man has not truly shed the animal characteristics, so he should not turn a blind eye to his animal half. The invasion of the virus places our existence at risk, forcing us to reconsider the natural world we're in and our position in it. Prof. Liu Fusen said: "The contemporary crisis of existence facing us is in large part not one facing us as individual humans, but one facing us as a species." [10] Therefore, we need to rethink our relationship with other animals and microorganisms.

As a being man still belongs to the family of species and that's why he is not considered a matchless link of the chain of species in the face of the invasion of the virus. He has to know more about biology. Hoimar von Ditfurth said: "In fact we need more sciences, especially biology, in order to ultimately know how to survive." [11] Likewise, some Chinese scholars attach particular emphasis to the importance of biological knowledge, because research on natural and social science is still based on the fact that man is a living organism. While human society makes great strides ahead, existence—the problem that has kept company with man as always—remains unresolved. In the meantime, the biological nature of man has not faded out with the evolution of social culture.

Marx also confirmed the biological characteristics of man, saying: "As a natural, corporeal, sensible and objective being, man is the same as the animals and plants insofar as passivity, constraint and limitation are concerned." [12] If we say Marx found human activities to be subject to constraint or limitation of the natural world from an empirical perspective, the virus is then a typical case in which human existence is subject to the dictates of nature. In other words, man as a species in nature has not made himself completely free from threats and challenges from other species. In fact, every species in nature survives on its own, making every endeavor to seek its own living space. Each of them forms a separate link of the chain of species while maintaining their own rules for living. The appearance of man is a material event in the world of species because he acquires and excels in the ability to transform the natural world.

Enlightenment philosophy sees natural science as an example to follow in an attempt to place

reason above nature. It tries to shift from submission to natural mysticism to control of nature. Rolston said: "What nature has striven to create in the past billions of years, including millions of vivacious species, is now taken charge of by the human being, a later-appearing species with a developed mental and moral sense." [13] We seem to be becoming the measure of everything as well as the absolute master of all the other species by reason. Nevertheless, the existence and communication of the virus as a microorganism is constituting a substantial challenge to our life and health. We are open to more risks because of insolent reasons. Gao Qinghai commented: "Man deifies and sees himself as the master of the world. He has his own way, without scruples, resulting in the crisis of his own existence." [14] For this very reason he attaches great importance to rational self-reflection or rational introspection.

The appearance of the virus reminds us once again to reflect and think back on man's reason. Cognitive-technical rationality, as an integral part of man's sense and reason, should be subjected to control to some extent. We stress the sense of species and rational self-reflection with the primary aim of further bringing out the best in reason and criticism while further maturing reason. When it comes to the relationship between man and other species, he should shift from insolent reason to modest reason, face nature and other species more rationally, and introduce a material harmony between man and other species.

3. THE SENSE OF THE COMMUNITY OF COMMON DESTINY FOR MANKIND

The appearance and spread of the virus once more confronts the world with the importance of creating a community of common destiny for mankind, driving us to develop more perspectives on how to exist and survive. In an era of technocracy, man's sense of belonging to and being rooting in existence weakens to some extent, resulting in him neglecting his biological nature. German philosopher Martin Heidegger criticized this oversight, saying: "The end to philosophy takes the form of the victory of a technocratic world and the success of the controllable configuration for the world's social order." [15] In his eyes, it is very important to investigate the ontological form of existence in order to reveal finiteness.

Man has unavoidably overstepped some behavioral boundary, thereby exposing himself to

some threats and challenges. Wherever it originates, the virus is not supposed to be transmitted to us of its own accord. Rather, we are infected with it in the transformation of the world which incurs us the crisis of existence. Japanese scholar Daisaku Ikeda is of the opinion that the natural world should not be seen as one different from the human world because the former, like the latter, is a form of existence running based on a law of motion of its own. British historian Arnold Joseph Toynbee said: "We are the members of a society where all people are supposed to have a horizon broad enough to embrace the whole of mankind. We need a cosmopolitan religion that enables us to realize we form part of the universe, a living organism." [16] He put particular emphasis on the view that man exists as an organism belonging to nature, only that nature exists as a different organism from man. Living organisms are interrelated and interlinked.

Ethics should play a more important part in man's reaction to the virus. Notable Swiss Catholic thinker Hans Küng said: "We should act with a sense of global responsibility in mind for the good of the biosphere, lithosphere, hydrosphere and atmosphere of our planet." [17] From the pandemic we have learned it's necessary to treat the relationship properly between people by seeing ourselves as the goal and standard. The Chinese government has long placed the personal safety and health of its people as the top priority. It undertakes very high responsibility for its people and the world. It has adopted immediate, forceful and scientific action to achieve milestones in fighting the pandemic. That is a very great contribution to the cause of global public health and safety.

Some countries keep politicizing and ideologizing the pandemic and such practices are bound to aggravate intergovernmental disputes and conflicts, compromise trust and cooperation, and discourage anti-pandemic efforts on the global level. The Chinese government is against such practices. It came through slings and arrows and sacrificed a great deal to improve the plague at home. When the pandemic worsened severely on the global level, China took the lead and devoted as many efforts to fighting the global pandemic as possible with a gesture of assistance and sincerity. President Xi Jinping pointed out: "Clinging to the belief in the community of common destiny for mankind, we'd like to share good practices worldwide, co-develop drugs and vaccines and give a hand to countries falling into difficulty, as much as we can." [18] In so doing China makes its unswerving commitment to facing up to the

pandemic along with the world. China's reaction instills a great amount of positive energy into the global battle against the virus.

The ego is an ethical entity whose desire and intention comes under the sway of society, civilization and view of nature from time to time. Therefore, he may find it hard to ensure the subject ego develops and matures in a sound way. Marx thus explicated the social origin of man-ego alienation: "In spite of man's increasing effort to place nature under control, the ego appears to become increasingly the slave of others or his own sordid behavior. What's more, even the pure brilliance of science seems to be shining on the dark background of folly and ignorance. All of our discoveries and advances seem to be instilling reasonable life into material force, while our life seems to be changing into fatuous material force." [19] This explanation is intended to state that man-man alienation and man-nature alienation is bound to lead to man-ego alienation. At the same time, Marx intended to say once man's greed gets the upper hand, he will be bound to debase his dignity and do harm to his own existence as a being. In order to gratify his greed, man intrudes himself increasingly into the living space of other species, providing the chance for the virus to take root and rage across the world.

Thanks to the virus, we are developing a deeper insight into the community of common destiny for mankind which strikes a chord with those who're like-minded. Some countries concur that the severe global health challenge to the whole mankind, which comes without borders and racial biases, cannot be solved by any country alone. From the point of view of mankind as a community, the challenge will involve a full range of revolutions in multiple ethical relationships, e.g. those between man and nature, man and man or man and the ego. A school of ethics intended to care about and protect man's life and safety is a must. As for the community of common destiny for mankind, President Xi Jinping has published a lot of works that focus closely on the destiny of the whole mankind and the heartfelt expectation of a beautiful future. He thus pointed out in the 19th CPC National Congress Report: "The destiny of the world rests with all the people on earth. The future of mankind rests with the choice of all the people on earth. The Chinese people are prepared to join hands with other peoples in propelling the community of common destiny for mankind in a commitment to initiating a beautiful future." [20] As a trustworthy world power, China exhibits and showcases it leads the international community to build the community of common destiny for mankind.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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