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# PEGASUS

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE CAUX ROUND TABLE FOR MORAL CAPITALISM  
NETWORK LOOKING AT BUSINESS ABOVE THE CLUTTER AND CONFETTI



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# Introduction

In reading the essays included in this issue of *Pegasus*, I was reminded of Paul Gauguin's painting now in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts with the title:

*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?*



Gauguin painted this in Tahiti in 1897 or 1898. The questions he asked are existential and eternal for our species. Our challenge at the Caux Round Table is to think well about 1) where we have come from - the history of capitalism; 2) what are we - material or spiritual beings; and 3) where are we going - what should a moral capitalism be?

This issue of *Pegasus* is a deep dive into the human condition. Our contributors, Caux Round Table Fellows and Richard Broderick, Editor of *Pegasus*, from different perspectives converge on a common fact – our lives are bifurcated, simultaneously lived in different realms. One is the moral, the spiritual and the other material and practical.

Which one is real? The one in our minds or the one which we can touch?

Are there two realities which we intermeditate or really only a single composite one, embracing different modes of being in the world?

Michael Hartoonian speaks of the infrastructure of our lives as spiritual and as communal, connecting with others.

José Luis Fernández Fernández envisions socialization as the infrastructure of our lives, joining together the psychology of the person and the reality of the other. Jose Luis makes a distinction between relationships and transactions, joining, I think, our other writers in pointing to the greater meaning available in relationships than what can be provided by transactions.

Kazuhiko Togo brings forth a Japanese sensibility towards nature which can become part of our moral lives as well.

Rich Broderick summarizes the insights of Simone Veil on the need for roots in memory and the past in order to live better in the present and create a future.

Abdullah al-Ahsan turns to history to speculate on the spiritual forces driving us into a post-Covid future.

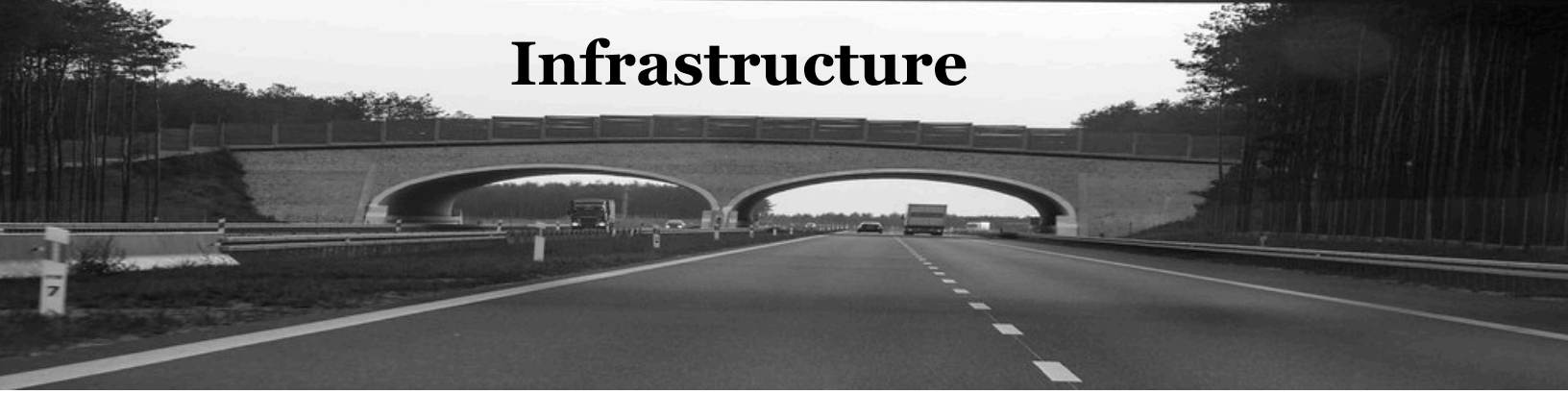
A second theme in these reflective essays is how we live not alone in this or these realities. We live with others; communications with others defines our life experiences. Communications, as Michael Wright argues, is both the realm of moral dynamics, of us and them, but it is a physical realm as well, an intersection of time and space.

To me, all the essays provide context to the Caux Round Table's commitment to stakeholders – stakeholders are the infrastructure for our firms; they are the “natural order” in which we communicate and so in Japanese fashion form relationships with the world, not using it for transactions only.

*Stephen B. Young*  
*Global Executive Director*  
*Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism*



# Infrastructure



***“Here each individual is interested not only in his own affairs, but in the affairs of the city as well. Even those who are most occupied with their own business are, extremely well informed on general wellbeing. We do not say that a man who takes no interest in his city, is a man who minds his own business. We say that he has no business at all.”***

Pericles, Athens’ first citizen, 431 B.C. (from the Greek translation)

Developing and maintaining our common wealth enhances our private wealth and the creation of private wealth enhances our common wealth. This is true, however, only if we understand wealth as the pursuit of excellence of individual character, in institutional integrity and community harmony. Within the democratic society, there is a natural tension between what goods and services constitute the common wealth and which belong within the private (wealth) market. Investment in the public infrastructure helps private individuals, business and industry operate more efficiently, productively and profitably. Schools and universities; streets and highways; electric and gas utilities; even parks, hospitals, libraries and museums – all public amenities – serve to benefit citizens, firms and their employees. Likewise, a robust common wealth is dependent upon vigorous, expanding private wealth. This is the basic tension about infrastructure: how to foster both private wealth and common wealth?

Material infrastructure must, however, be married with a moral infrastructure. Individuals take responsibility for the integrity of schools, roads, etc., but must also engage and debate others with civility, honesty and comprehension. That is, what ideas and items are part of our common wealth and which are private? For example, are hospitals (healthcare) a private or common good? What about manners and polite behavior? Within the public place, what obligations do we have for each other’s wellbeing? Do we practice the Golden Rule? Is it taught by our culture?

Alongside the marvel of America’s experiment in republican government has been its immense and imbalanced economic development. In fact, with exception of the Preamble, the U.S. Constitution can be interpreted as a document significantly designed to foster business and economic growth – or private wealth. For example, property ownership in the new nation was broadly dispersed among the white populace, with easy access to land. The quest for private wealth by Americans has been a driving force behind our nation’s vast economic development. Perhaps, because of this history and lack of knowledge and practice of the amendments to the Constitution, many Americans have little understanding of our common

wealth. We often fail to see the relationship between the common wealth ideals stated in the Preamble, with their implementation through the amendment and court processes.

The intense private and government investment in business and technology has made America a land of innovators, but also without attention to enrich the common good. This has led to reluctance and bias that truncated the meaning of moral infrastructure and diminished the wellbeing of many. On the other hand, it has also created a healthy tension and debate between what the individual can become, while embracing the citizen's responsibility for sustaining a healthy community. This debate, within any definition of democracy, must be ongoing and adaptable. That is, the moral infrastructure, being more stable, serves as the criterion for the disposition of the private market. The tension and debates between morality and materialism, between law and ethics, can help us approach community harmony.

Thus, infrastructure is a complex abstraction, embracing the attributes of both concrete and disclosure concepts. Within the political economy of democracy, it also carries the rhetorical and theoretical arguments between the common good and private good. This is a natural tension within a democratic republic. How should the material and moral arrangements be structured? That is, what should be owned by all citizens together and what should be owned by the individual? Again, this is an ongoing debate.

### **The Role of Space and Place in Creating Infrastructure**

The fundamental desire of the human mind is to create place out of space. This is a humble truth because the earth is a space of which most is unsuitable for human life. It is either too wet, too dry, too hot, too cold, too high or too low. Space is frightening and dangerous. To survive, humans have to create places from this space. They create a home. A simple way to think about this, without being simple-minded, is to consider the Conestoga wagon moving across the Great Plains – to the people making the journey, a harsh and dangerous space. The pioneers might decide to stop in what is now western Nebraska and build a home. The attributes of that home, like all homes, include an esthetic, safe, life supporting and a shared material and moral arrangement – a wealth held privately and wealth owned in common to which all can contribute, use and trust. In the case of our Nebraska friend, the common wealth is manifested in helpful neighbors, a road on which to haul goods and a respect for common, human wellbeing. The common wealth was and is wealth to use, enhance, contribute to, trust and pay for, together.

These material and moral arrangements we can call infrastructure and they sustain our homes through human-environmental-technological relationships that connect us to time, place and each other. Relationships are developed and endure through cultural transformation which protects, as well as victimizes people, depending on their ability to change skill sets and value preferences. We must understand, however, that one's ability is often defined by public policy – common wealth. A slave, for example, cannot change skill sets and thus, is left within the vicissitudes of the dominant society's norms. Cultural change demands that humans evaluate which relationships to keep, change or replace. It has always been the case that humans, using cultural knowledge as their guide, have taken slow and wandering steps through time, creating new homes from the adapted wisdom of the past. Some use it well and succeed, while some don't. But, in the end, we all want to make it home...like in baseball or great literature,

but it demands a high cost, great effort and cooperation.

Our integrity regarding the constructs of human habitat and our ability to comprehend or understand the world and ourselves is primarily a function of understanding place as home, moral relationships and our sense of temporal sequencing.

In a real sense, we acquire a critical mass of information (facts) always within created structures and systems of our homes. Meaning holds fast to those structures. We permit ourselves to construct a rough, cognitive map of our world, based on our created structures. This requires a degree of knowledge, but it's never sufficient for us to be aware of the innocence of our own ignorance. This innocence keeps us from understanding the importance and meaning of moral infrastructure, which happens to be the road to survival, not only for a home or family, but for the species.

There should be a simple truth: if we understand home (community) as an open system, we understand the meaning of infrastructure. If we understand our home as a closed system, we are already dead and there is no need for moral or material interchange, communication and commerce.

## **Institutions and Infrastructure**

People create institutions to meet social and individual needs. Whether family, church, school or business, institutions serve human needs, such as procreation, answering questions of meaning, passing on critical knowledge or producing and distributing goods and services. Each institution has a role, responsibility and identity. An institution becomes irrelevant when it no longer meets its responsibilities and will have to change or fade from meaning. Infrastructure is not an institution. It is the glue that allows institutions to be in relationship. Owned by all citizens, the infrastructure demands addressing the question: how will the common wealth be funded and what elements – roads, schools, hospitals, utilities, etc., - define the common wealth and why?

The debate over the allocation of tax revenues and whether or not museums and hospitals, for example, should be defined as infrastructure is an ongoing issue, but tied to the level of morality in society. If the moral level is high, then the same roads will be able to handle increasing traffic. People will understand that driving is a team sport and will show respect and civility to one another. If the material infrastructure is not married to the moral infrastructure, driving (transportation) will become sluggish, expensive and corrupt. The same will happen to the market, in general. Without a healthy moral connection or infrastructure between and among institutions, the whole economy shrinks and individual institutions become dysfunctional.

## **Counterfactual Sets and Evolving Infrastructures**

There is a necessary balance between evolving technologies and the moral strength of society. Absent moral competence, we should expect a widening gap among people regarding education, income, wealth, political beliefs and family wellbeing. How do tools and technology impact people's lives in general? A wave of increasing technologies does not raise all boats. If technology advances and there is static or a decline in individual ethical behavior,

then individuals and institutions need to engage in predictive modeling that illuminate alternative possibilities of future imbalances of morality and technologies in infrastructures. The evaluative rule applicable here is: “my self-interest is enhanced when the self-interest of others is enhanced.” This is the golden rule of community harmony.

## **Conclusion**

Infrastructure, by its very definition, is synergetic, bringing together objective, as well as subjective meanings, at the same time. There is a material, measurable infrastructure and a moral, qualitative infrastructure. They reinforce each other. In many ways, however, the moral infrastructure is more important than the material infrastructure because it diminishes those human distractions, like selfishness and greed and opens the market to our better angles. It’s this configuration that gives capitalism its moral power and individuals their personal worth and responsibilities, that is, their sense of happiness.

*Special note: The author would like to thank Stanly Trollip and Brandon Hannon for reviewing and making helpful suggestion to this essay.*

*Michael Hartoonian is a Fellow with the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism.*



## Gravity & Grace: Simone Weil and the Need for Roots

*Albert Camus called the philosopher Simone Weil “The only great spirit of our times.” T.S. Eliot said she was the greatest saint of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Charles de Gaulle said she was insane. But who was she and what is the Simone Weil philosophy?*

In life, we all inhabit, whether we wish it or not or even recognize the dichotomy, two separate, but interconnected worlds. This was the ultimate theme explored by Simone Weil, a brilliant, though eccentric idealist, who was born in France in 1917 and, after a lifetime of teaching, exploring working life in factories and fighting on the side of the Republic in the Spanish Civil, ended up in England on contract with the French government in exile.

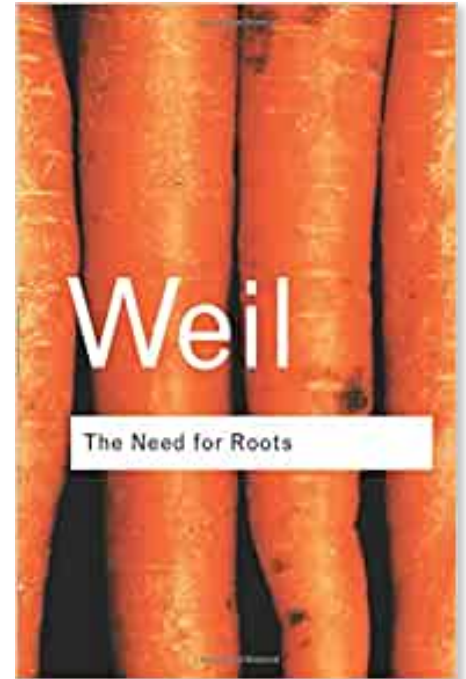
After the French loss and the establishment of the pro-German Vichy Government, Weil emigrated to the U.S., moving to London working for the French government. Before her untimely death in 1943, she wrote a seminal work titled *The Need for Roots*, on behalf of Charles De Gaulle. While he dismissed her as a loose cannon, several generations of intellectuals and authors have lauded her brilliant, if somewhat eccentric analysis of how societies succeed and, just as critically, how they fail, as they had in Germany in 1933 and in France in the years before the outbreak of war.

As described in a recent book about her life and work, Weil was “An anarchist who espoused conservative ideals, a pacifist who fought in the Spanish Civil War, a saint who refused baptism, a mystic who was a labor militant, a French Jew who was buried in the Catholic section of an English cemetery, a teacher who dismissed the importance of solving a problem, the most willful of individuals who advocated the extinction of the self” (*The Subversive Simone Weil: A Life in Five Ideas*, by Robert Zaretsky).

*The Need for Roots* explores one of Weil’s most salient themes and the one perhaps most applicable to contemporary civic strife in America and elsewhere.

To be rootless is to suffer social alienation. Weil anticipated the many forms of social alienation and psychological torment faced by working classes today, including the American (white) working class. Zaretsky rightly points out that “Weil had already witnessed the atomization and the anomie bred in the factories and the sense of having become forgotten or invisible on farms.” Atomization and anomie bred by hierarchal systems rooted not in any sense of mutual responsibility, but on raw power alone – the power to cast people out, deprive them of work, income and social status, of anything but the most demeaning kind.

The uprooted person is in potentia the fascist, the nationalist, the white supremacist. Weil understood (and personally witnessed) that people who feel socially alienated, their roots



severed, will almost invariably react in ways, politically and economically, that sever the roots of those around them.

The first and most obvious is that shambolic structure of hierarchy, fear, ambition, received wisdom and prejudices that, in many countries, we think of as “the real world.” This is the world of bosses and subordinates, police and citizenry, wars of conquest, wars of survival, the accumulation of great wealth and what Nietzsche called the “Triumph of the Will.” Though this concept of the real world can be encountered in every culture, it is one particularly attractive in the Western world where, since the time of Greece and Rome, “will” has been stressed over other possible cultural traits, like spirituality, family structure and the heart and body in favor of the logical and rigid stress on non-emotional analyses of the left brain of the human mind.

At the time, we also dwell in a parallel universe that for the sake of simplicity, I will refer to as “reality.” This is the realm of existence in which we are, all of us, creatures, who come into the world with nothing and leave the world with nothing, where our very survival at the beginning and end of our physical existence is completely dependent on the willingness of others – parents, siblings, strangers, our grown children, nieces and nephews – to give up a significant element of their own comfort and wealth to care for us at a time when neglect would mean not only suffering, but certain and untimely death.

In this reality, we are not engaged in a zero-sum competition in which one party wins, the other party loses and God help him or her or them trying to survive in a world without material resources. We are, all of us, invited, figuratively speaking, to a banquet of infinite resources: to share in a bounty – the bounty of life itself – that grows, rather than decreases every time we allow ourselves to settle at the table.

Mind you, with few exceptions – single-minded economic predators versus prophetic figures who deliberately choose to pursue the spiritual, rather than material path – we all live our lives balanced between the uneasy marriage of “the real world” and “reality.”

In practical terms, this dichotomy can be observed in the distinctions between a “profession” or “job” that offers, in exchange for our concentration, material rewards – wealth, power, fame – and a “vocation,” in which the goal we pursue is done for the sheer love of the pursuit itself, whether art, poetry or helping the poor and hopeless, with little, but secondary concern about sustaining our physical possessions, whether in terms of money, property or any other measure of what the world likes to label “success.”

An individual judged a “failure” by every measure of worldly success, Weil was a “genius” in the pursuit of spirit and universal wellbeing. Even today, she is a figure who conjures up debate about her mind and accomplishments.

She is believed to perhaps have existed on the spectrum of high achieving autism. The offspring of a French Jewish family who, like many Jews who migrated to France from Eastern Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, changed their very Semitic last name from “Levi” to a sonically coordinated French name, “Weil” (pronounced “Vey”), she threw herself into trade unionism and enlisted in the Republican cause in the Spanish Civil War, where she served

until injuring herself in a cooking fire. According to social norms, she was not even the most accomplished member of her family. Her older brother, André Weil, was a brilliant mathematician who served as Director of Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study, founded to honor Albert Einstein's legacy, until André's death in 1998.

Despite her older brother's worldly success, she is perhaps remembered today as one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most revolutionary thinkers. The collection of her essays titled *Gravity and Grace* offers her prophetic thoughts on the relationship between the physical world and the human spirit. But her best known work continues to be *The Need for Roots*.

In today's world, dominated by mass media, celebrity hood, destructively partisan domestic politics and rancorous foreign affairs, there is probably no more relevant works than Weil's *The Need for Roots*.

Simon Duffy of the Centre for Welfare Reform in London summarizes the book's continuing relevance:

*Simone Weil is passionate about equality - real equality. She has no time for those who shout 'Liberty, Equality & Fraternity' and then march us straight to hell: left for mass starvation and the Gulag, right for war and the gas chamber.*

*But she knows that equality is more than an adherence to a legal formula, such as "Everybody's got equal rights." For her, human equality is a fundamental feature of reality:*

*The combination of these two facts - the longing in the depth of the heart for absolute good and the power, though only latent, of directing attention and love to a reality beyond the world and of receiving good from it - constitutes a link which attaches every man without exception to that other reality.*

*Whoever recognises that reality recognises also that link. Because of it, he holds every human being without any exception as something sacred to which he is bound to show respect.*

*This is the only possible motive for universal respect towards all human beings. Whatever formulation of belief or disbelief a man may choose to make, if his heart inclines him to feel this respect, then he in fact also recognises a reality other than this world's reality. Whoever does not feel this respect is alien to that other reality also.*

*...Looking forward is always difficult, for as Weil says:*

*The future brings us nothing, gives us nothing; it is we who in order to build it have to give it everything, our very life. But to be able to give, one has to possess; and we possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated and created afresh by us. Of all the human soul's needs, none is more vital than this one of the past.*

*...Weil rightly observes that rights are not the bedrock of morality - in order to exist there must be obligations - duties - and her task is to help identify what those duties are. But instead of simply outlining the 10 commandments or some other list of duties, she seeks to understand the proper purpose and shape of those duties. For example, some of our duties seem to be about meeting straightforwardly material needs: food, protection from violence, housing, clothing, heating, hygiene and medical attention.*



Simone Weil

*This is straightforward, but this is not her main interest. Weil also identifies a range of spiritual needs - things essential to the welfare or development of the human soul. She outlines these needs in the form of a list, many of which come in the form of pairs: order, but also liberty; obedience, but also responsibility; equality, but also hierarchism; honor, but also punishment; freedom of opinion; security, but also risk; private property, but also collective property; truth.*

*Her whole analysis is very interesting and very tightly written. It can be read on its own quite briefly. Personally, I find much of this very convincing and helpful for our situation today. For example, we can use Weil's framework to think about income security today.*

*Think how we might meet someone's basic need for food. First, we can meet it directly - by giving someone food. Or instead, we can give someone money to buy food. The advantage of this second approach is that it means that the person can now exercise liberty and responsibility. This is why food handouts or welfare cash cards are much worse than a decent system of income security. They damage the soul.*

*However, we can design very different systems of income security. For instance, if we make the system highly dependent upon the person's poverty, highly means-tested, then we may push people into a position of deep insecurity and at the same time, we will make it riskier for people to take risks. A bad system of income security will be inadequate, insecure and yet will reduce people's willingness to take risks. That is exactly the kind of system we have in the UK today and this system also damages the soul.*

*It is for these kinds of reasons that some of us advocate a system of basic income. On this model a basic income is sufficient and universal. Such a system provides security and a positive incentive to take risks. It could support the welfare of the soul.*

*This is my example - not Weil's - but I offer it just to show that Weil's framework suggests the kinds of questions we should ask if we are really interested in justice. If we only ask how much bread the state is giving or how much money people are getting, then we will not find out whether people's real needs are being met - because those needs are both material and spiritual.*

It is clear that Weil's thesis, though created under unique circumstances and in heat of the deadliest war in history, bears striking similarities to the Caux Round Table's sets of principles for a sustainable business system and, in particular, the need to serve all of a company's or political establishments stakeholders and not just shareholders. *The Need for Roots* offers a parallel to the very idea of a moral capitalism that is, it might be said, the root of everything the Caux Round Table stands for.

*Rich Broderick is Director of External Affairs for the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism.*

## A Dialectical Approach to Understanding Complex Social Relationships

Human life in society, on the one hand, always flows and unfolds through complex institutional channels. On the other hand, it is modulated by many other individual factors. Some, of a psychological nature, can become more or less predictable, especially if the observer has a reasonable experience of life; a circumspect and well-developed capacity for observation; and when to this is added the ability to infer patterns of behavior and anticipate scenarios and modes of behavior that are sufficiently plausible and reasonably probable.

However, in the whole process of this kind of social construction of reality as a whole and of the particular life of each subject in particular, there is almost as much, if not more, of unpredictability and spontaneity as of keys adapted to previous, objectified and linguistically available schemata. The institutional heritage objectified and pre-existing at the arrival of the new subjects to the human social world is transmitted through universally recognizable channels in its deep structure, although with nuances and singularities in each stable human group.

The mechanism I am referring to is none other than the so-called *socialization process*. That is to say, a way of insertion in the social context that is always open to the subject. In fact, it starts from the family nucleus in which the subject - the child, the neophyte - is naturally inserted at birth; it runs through the channels of *secondary socialization*, from infant school and continues to unfold from context to context, from the most common and shared, to the most sophisticated of the spheres of belonging of which the subject is to form part in his later life.

It is in this complex social dynamic that each person is inserted, from which he or she develops his or her existence and from which he or she discovers ways and finds providences to write the particular *biography* for which each person ends up being, in the last instance, responsible. It is not strange, therefore, that it is almost impossible, on the one hand, to grasp intuitively and at a glance, once and for all, the whole complex moral process of becoming a person and of precisely becoming a person in a certain way - good or bad, better or worse. On the other hand, the epistemological effort to try to find keys of interpretation that shed light on those intricate mechanisms and processes through which the unfolding of human life in society takes place takes on its full meaning.

It is tempting to adduce a dualistic, interpretative scheme by reference to two poles, if not opposites, at least of opposite sign, one of which, automatically, would be invested with a greater halo of desirability, being considered, at least implicitly, superior to the other, while the latter would be qualified in counterpart as having a lower axiological level.



This is the case, for example, when an excessively dichotomized distinction is made between what may be understood, on the one hand, by *relationships, lato sensu* and by *transactions*, on the other. Naturally, the latter are usually conceptualized as a special type of relationship that is supposedly less noble than those entered into openly or altruistically. Thus, when we refer to transactions, this concept is usually tinged with a tone of pragmatic or economic interest that tends to be perceived as a *less pure* motive than the one that emerges in direct interpersonal relationships in which no strategy is involved as a way to achieve something that, going beyond the pure relationship, is carried out in pursuit of some transitive purpose between the subjects that engage in them.

Another area in which the separation between conceptual poles ends up being tinged with a positive assessment in one case and not so positive in the other is that which has to do with the exercise of work and profession, understood as an occupational activity that is carried out, above all, to obtain the necessary resources to meet the needs that life brings to the surface for each person. It is true that, together with this economic aspect of access to income that paid work brings with it, there are two other complementary and inseparable issues: on the one hand, the possibility of developing people skills and talents by virtue of their work and, on the other hand, the fact of constituting an effective and dignified way of inserting oneself in the social concert.

However, in the eyes of some interpretations, working to earn the money needed to lead a decent life is a less lofty motive than the one that tends to be associated with the exercise of labor activity when it is carried out in response to a calling, a vocation.

*Vocare*, in Latin, means “to be called,” “to receive a calling” and to respond to it. The classic example is the one narrated in the Bible when Samuel, being a child in the service of Eli, in the temple, appears three times throughout the night before his master and says: “*I come because you have called me!*” When Eli realizes that the boy is being summoned by someone other than himself, he advises him in these terms: “*Go back to bed and if you hear again that you are called – “Samuel, Samuel!” - say: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening!”*”

Apart from Samuel and perhaps a few dozen other *privileged* people throughout history, the usual thing is that those who, after years of working life, end up recognizing that, in fact, they could undoubtedly say that they have developed or are developing their professional work in response to a *vocation* would not be able, generally speaking, to point to a specific date or even a context in which, in a more or less vague way, they were aware of having been summoned, called by name to dedicate themselves to a certain task. Whether it is a teacher, a doctor or a professional violinist, things do not usually happen in such a *fantastic* way. Who, perhaps with the exception of priests, nuns and monks, i.e., those who choose to enter into religion after having felt a specific calling, could claim seriously to have felt called to become, for example, a plumber or a video game programmer?

Now, there is no doubt that when someone looks objectively at the course of a long and fulfilled professional life, even in the usual supposition that she has never heard anyone calling her by her name, in the manner of Samuel, if she tries to unravel the meaning of her life and professional course, perhaps she could hypothesize that she has been led *as if* she had been answering to a calling that, impossible to identify *a priori*, appears clear when looking back and considering her own life history.

In this regard, my own *curriculum vitae* could be seen - at least for me - in some way significant: I entered the first year of my university degree in October 1975 when I was 16 years old. I am still working in the same academic institution where I studied my Ph.D. and my M.B.A., among other courses and in which I am now working as a Professor. And that, without having ceased to be linked to my *alma mater* for a single year of the almost 46 years between the day I entered for the first time through its gate and today. Looking back, objectively recognizing that there is no one in my university who, by far, can offer such a record, I sometimes consider that vocation is something that can be heard, not only neither always, at the beginning of a professional career. It could, as well, be understood as something that can be found as one progresses along it or even - and this may be the most frequent situation - vocation is something that is inferred and recognized only when one is approaching the end of the journey.

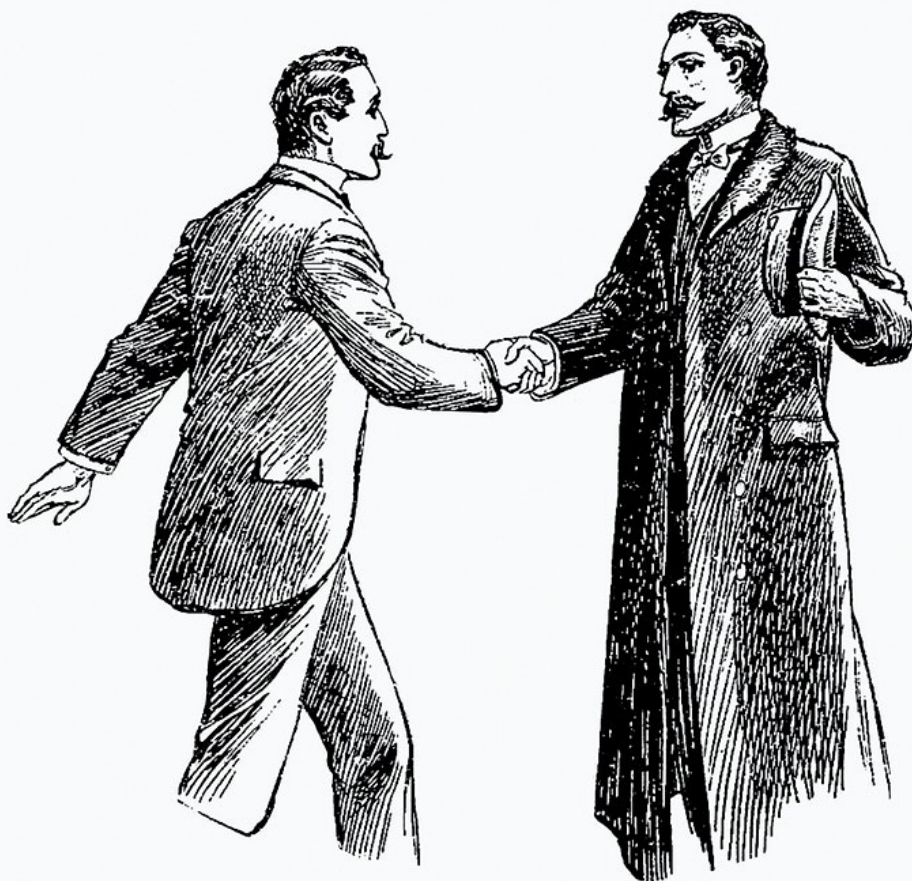
Therefore, while I recognize the plausibility of a dichotomous approach and, consequently, always more in favor of one of the poles than the other, I tend to feel more comfortable, intellectually speaking, when a *dialectical approach* with three poles in a constitutive and dynamic relationship is used to try to understand complex social phenomena, at least as intricate as those I have just indicated.

Thus, although I read with pleasure and profit Bergson's intuitions *Les deux sources de la moral et de la religion* about *open morality* and *closed morality*, about *open religion* and *closed religion* or when I grasp the sense of the nuanced difference between what Ferdinand Tönnies' *gemeinschaft* - *community* - and *gesellschaft* - *society* - entail (*gemeinschaft und gesellschaft*) or even when I recognize the sharpness of analytical criterion that Karl Mannheim (*ideologie und utopie*) evidences in thematizing the connections and differences between *ideology* and *utopia*, I think that the triadic-dialectical approach has two advantages, in my opinion, over the dichotomized one that deserve to be stressed.

On the one hand, it avoids the tendency to a certain value simplism that ends up attributing to the positive pole a superior ontological rank. On the other hand, it is more in tune with the reality of the institutional facts and the processes of insertion of the subject in the social environment by underlining the dynamism of dialectical autopoiesis between the three poles, (1) the subjective-producer, (2) the objective-institutionalized that is internalized in the process of socialization and (3) the subjective-product, which shapes the person by virtue of the processes of socialization. In this respect, I consider the theoretical approach derived

from the sociology of knowledge as developed by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their classic work, *The Social Construction of Reality*, to be very useful.

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## **Covid-19: An Opportunity to Redress the Arrogance of Human Beings Against Nature**

The historic impact which the Covid-19 is giving to the world, from the perspectives of history, politics and society, is broad and deep, but in my view, the most important aspect is the changes that occurred in the relationship between nature and human beings. Or in other words, the challenge for the human beings is whether they can change the relationship sufficiently deep and sufficiently broad so that henceforward, human beings and the nature can live happily together. If human beings fail to do so, our future might be doomed in a most serious manner.

What went wrong in the relationship between the human being and nature in the past? The history of human beings is quite complex and global, but it eventually developed to a strong Eurocentric system: first, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century under the rise of absolute monarchy and the first wave of imperialism, lead by Spain and Portugal; secondly, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century under the industrial revolution and the second wave of imperialism lead by Great Britain, France and Netherlands, later joined by America, Russia, Germany and Japan. That second stage eventually led to the deadly two world wars fought among the imperial powers, which left America as the leading victor. The world continued to develop under the American-led liberal international order, based in the belief of the superiority of human beings and the power of science and technology over the nature. In general, that kind of social development has been defined as the development of modernity. Nature became just an object of exploitation and control by human beings. Human life became richer as ever, but in that process, the devastation of nature began to take place in an unprecedented manner.

“Virus has been transmitted through wild animals. The devastation of virgin forests and rapid urbanization increased the possibility of the encounter between wild animals and human beings, resulting in the spread of viruses (Osawa Masayuki).” In that sense, one can easily see that the fight against viruses has common objectives, as the Sustainable Development Goal’s objective 13, “global warming,” objective 14, “protecting the sea (against plastic pollution)” and objective 15, “protecting the land (against devastation of forests and deterioration to deserts),” where human beings’ power had overridden nature’s power.

What can we do about this situation? The reflection of the excess of human activities over nature does not automatically negate the value of economic and social development, which humanity has enjoyed to create richer and safer societies over the last seven centuries. Vaccine, which is the result of scientific development, is now considered as the paramount tool to vanquish Covid-19. But the key philosophy required here is that we need to slow down and consider life with larger and deeper appreciation of coexistence with nature. This is the direction with which many advanced countries are moving towards. In the case of developing countries, whose objective is the enrichment of their economy, the answer is not that simple, but at least they can watch the situation that developed countries are facing now and learn from the mistakes already committed by them.

In this changing relationship between human activities and nature, Japan might be situated in a very unique situation. That uniqueness derives from Japan only, different from China and other Asian countries. Japan has a singularly unique and rich history in philosophy,



culture and society respecting and coexisting with the nature.

It started with the long period of the Jomon Era (14000BC~1000BC) of animism, developed into Shinto, where people saw divinity in all natural existences. Then, after the introduction of Buddhism through China in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Japan developed a unique coexistence of Shinto and Buddhism.

But in the 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century, an astonishing belief in a Kyoto Buddhist school of Tendai Hongaku reached the height of affinity toward nature, that not only human beings, but all life in this world, encompassing “grass, trees, soil, shall be saved.”

In the 13<sup>th</sup> century came Kamakura Buddhism, which is usually considered as marking the height of Japanese Buddhist thinking, Zen for Samurai (warriors), emphasizing self-help and spiritual training, *Nenbutsu* (prayer) for commoners, emphasizing help from Amida (closest to Buddha).

In terms of their distance with the nature, 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> century Kyoto school has already created its basis and in the last era of Japan’s feudalism, the 260 years of the Edo period to be succeeded by the Meiji Restoration (1868), affinity to nature had become a part of natural spiritual, cultural and social tradition.

I hasten to add that present-day Japan is a total confusion of a mixture of the continuation of powerful modernization efforts where science and technology should win over nature and the thin and desperate efforts trying to regain what is being lost in history. But for those who want to restructure our society to regain the deep and broad spiritual tradition of its affinity to nature, Kawakatsu Heita, Hattori Eiji, Kondo Seiichi and Yamagiwa Juichi, to name a few, coronavirus is a real opportunity to strengthen their efforts.

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## Post Coronavirus World: Could We Expect a Better Domain?

**Abstract:** The Covid-19 pandemic has already made an impact on our life; it has changed the way we function. How lasting will its impacts be? Are there similarities between this pandemic and earlier pandemics in history? Why do pandemics happen? Some earlier pandemics have caused major civilizational changes. Is this pandemic going to affect our civilizations today? This article discusses and comments on these questions.

**Key Words:** Covid-19, Pandemics in history, Black Death, Civilization, International politics and National sovereignty.

On observing the initial surge of Covid-19 last year, I wrote an [article](#) and observed, “The coronavirus pandemic is not over yet and anyone hardly knows when and how it will end, but many observers of international affairs are already expressing their views on the subject. The current situation is very worrisome and everyone wants to get out of it as soon as possible.” I also noted that, although there was a consensus that the world would be different in the post-coronavirus atmosphere, there were sharp disagreements on the nature of those states of affairs. The overall situation has not changed much during the past year, except for innovation of some vaccines to prevent the uncontrolled spread of the disease. However, new variants have emerged that are more contagious than the original one. Random lockdowns and other restrictions continue, along with increasing number of infections and deaths. I, therefore, continue commenting along the same lines.

“Global trade will partly recover, but more of it will be managed by governments, rather than markets,” envisages Richard Haas, President of the Council of Foreign Relations. He also believes that, “Civil liberties will be treated by many as a casualty of war” and “Ideally, the crisis would bring renewed commitment to building a more [robust international order](#).” Stephen Walt, a Harvard academic, thinks that since the 1918 “influenza did not change the big power rivalry;” this pandemic too will “strengthen the state and [reinforce nationalism](#).” Another establishment strongman, Henry Kissinger, a former U.S. National Security Adviser and Secretary of State, who is famously reported to have said, “Depopulation should be the highest priority of U.S. foreign policy towards the third world,” believes that, “The coronavirus pandemic will forever [alter the world order](#).” On the political front, French President Emmanuel Macron has said, “Many things that we thought were [impossible are happening](#).” So, what should we expect in the post coronavirus world? “The day after when we have won, it will not be a return to the day before, we will be stronger morally,” Macron claimed. Really? Wouldn’t it be foolish to believe that one will come out strong when one does not even know what is happening? We need to examine possible scenarios in the post-coronavirus world. Honestly, since no one knows when this pandemic will end or how it will end, it is almost impossible to expect what to expect at the end of the tunnel. Yet, ignoring such an enterprise will not serve the purpose of studying history. Such studies, in my view, should take in a broader perspective of history.



## Parallels in History

The closest parallels to the current pandemic are the 14<sup>th</sup> century Black Death and the 6<sup>th</sup> century Justinian Plague. Referring to an earlier, similar world crisis, one history textbook – [Worlds Together Worlds Apart](#) – records, “People who had enjoyed prosperity and good government for centuries now lived in utter disbelief that the world had been turned upside down and that the wicked triumphed over the virtuous.” Interestingly, both the Justinian Plague and the Black Death, according to historians, [originated in China](#) and resulted in millions of deaths all over the world. The first lesson that one derives from these two experiences is that it will be a mistake to expect that the crisis will be over in weeks or months. Some of the earlier pandemics lasted for years, with aftershocks for decades. One of the aftershocks of the current pandemic is already happening – the economic depression. Literally millions had lined up for unemployment benefits in most developed countries. Economic depressions following pandemics are not new phenomena, however. We know little about impacts of the Justinian Plague, but historians generally hold the view that the Black Death “actually created opportunities for Europe's poorest people.” According to one author, “The end of feudalism, [opportunities](#) for entrepreneurs and the rise of the middle class all occurred [in the wake of the Black Death](#)” in Europe. In Asia, Ottoman, Safavid, Mughal and Ming dynasties established powerful empires that allowed participation of people belonging to all segments of their societies, ensuring enormous economic growth that attracted Europeans. Therefore, if we were interested in learning from history, we should have empowered the poor and the middle class. Have the rescue packages declared by various governments benefitted the poor and the middle class? So far, only some huge corporations have immensely profited from the situation. This must lead us to contemplate what direction we are heading.

One Forbes article claims that, “As the ripple of Covid-19 careens around the globe, it’s forcing humankind to [innovate and change](#) the way we work and live.” The article makes nine future predictions – all technical – none philosophical or even structural. Will we learn from the Black Death experience? As noted above, our intellectual and political leaders would like to see stronger nationalist governments in the post-coronavirus world, but isn’t our current situation very similar to pre-14<sup>th</sup> century Europe? Aren’t certain elites manipulating both authoritarian and democratic regimes? Aren’t states trying to outsmart one another? In this connection, what comes to my mind is the story of Israeli spy agencies stealing coronavirus testing kits destined for another nation. In March 2020, [Israeli Mossad](#) was reported to have “obtained coronavirus testing kits for the country,” for which the spy agency received messages of appreciation both from the Prime Minister’s office and from the Director General of Health Ministry for acquiring “required and vital equipment from abroad to help with the coronavirus crisis.” Israeli media also reported that, “the Mossad haul included 100,000 kits procured from Gulf Arab states that do not formally recognize Israel, but which have pursued low-level coordination on regional security challenges, such as Iran.” The implication is that, since the country for which the goods were destined doesn’t recognize Israel, Israel had every right to “acquire” the equipment. Isn’t this bullying, like medieval proprietors? I fail to understand how this conduct is any different from those of pre-14<sup>th</sup> century European feudal lords.

## Why Do Pandemics Happen?

Discussing the current pandemic in an article titled "[What to know about pandemics](#)," Medical News Today magazine says that, "Medical science has advanced rapidly in recent years, but it is unlikely ever to offer full protection from a possible pandemic because of the novel nature of the diseases involved." The term "novel nature" indicates the limitation of medical science on the subject. Therefore, one must admit that our current knowledge of natural sciences have failed the test of finding the origin of what President Macron calls "an invisible" enemy. As a student of humanities and social sciences, I am persuaded to look into history for possible clues and interestingly, although we find plenty of evidences of pandemics occurring, like the Justinian Plague and the Black Death, in history, they hardly provide any scientific explanations of such happenings in the world of civilizations. However, the question is – what lesson does one derive from the stories of pandemics and other catastrophes in history? Were those simple, natural calamities or do those events have any deeper meaning? Is there a connection between social upheavals and natural disasters? Religions generally deal with such questions and discuss ethical and philosophical matters that also involve questions about the purpose of life and human creation. The question of religion is a sensitive subject, however, for most natural and social science disciplines today. One, therefore, should venture into examining the question from the perspectives of reason, science, humanism and progress.

Most scholars today try to comprehend human nature by only studying post-14<sup>th</sup> century European history. Although historians generally agree that religions permeated life in all civilizations in history, religious teachings receive very little serious consideration when looking for causes of natural calamities mainly because religions have often given confusing, sometimes contradictory responses to many questions. One major issue in this context is that we have scant reliable sources about ancient civilizations. This has led to a great degree of misperception about our understanding of religion today. To complicate the subject, religion and science turned out to be opposing phenomena. George Sarton, in his voluminous [Introduction to the History of Science](#), has demonstrated that until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, theology was a part of scientific enquiry, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, social sciences developed different methodologies for comprehending religions from practices of followers, rather than their declared ethical and philosophical standing. Today, one witnesses diverse responses to the current coronavirus catastrophe. President Donald Trump declared a day of prayer, but in practice, used the phenomenon for his political milestone. Some [Buddhist](#), Christian, Jewish and Muslim clerics came forward with [solace and recommendation](#) of prayers and contemplation during this time of tests and explanations about how pandemics occur due to their perceived immoral practices. Some Hindus came forward with the recommendation of [drinking cow urine](#) to cure. While some have identified the pandemic simply as a [divine punishment](#), others, mostly fervent followers, have sought miraculous cure of the disease; some faultfinders found scopes for attacking religions. According to a Bangladeshi writer, when "human beings are in peril, [gods flee first](#)." A Pakistani "scientist" has found reasons to accuse the Prime Minister, Imran Khan, for his alleged "denial" of [Darwin's evolution theory](#). In India, the [Islamophobic mass media](#) outlets have found a good reason to attack a small minority Muslim group for "spreading coronavirus" in the country.

Thoughtful scholars, however, have made significant contributions in studying the subject. Based on his readings of earlier civilizations, the 14<sup>th</sup> century historian, Ibn Khaldun, identifies [“moral decadence”](#) or *zulm* as “one of the great threats to civilization,” while defining moral decadence as inequality and injustice, in a broad sense. In his *Muqaddimah* or introduction to world history, he explained how the ruling elite monopolize resources and deny the common people of economic opportunities that leads civilization or *‘umran* to decline. The 20<sup>th</sup> century historian, Arnold Toynbee, was more specific. After studying world civilizations, he explained “History is shaped by spiritual, forces” and submitted that [“civilizations sank](#) owing to the sins of nationalism, militarism and the tyranny of a despotic minority.” Unfortunately, most policymakers and politicians today are either not familiar with pre-Renaissance history or they do not want to take so long a view of history.

## **Is the Pandemic a Divine Punishment?**

How does one differentiate between the explanations of researchers like Ibn Khaldun and Arnold Toynbee and those of the [Pennsylvania lawmaker](#) or the [Israeli Rabbi](#) or [Al-Qaeda leaders](#)? Academically, it is not difficult to distinguish between the two sets of observations. However, the question is – how does one relate social upheaval with natural disasters? The Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant, legitimized his [“conjectural beginning of human history”](#) with regard to the progression of human actions related to “their first beginning” with what he called “a pleasure trip sketched out in the Old Testament.” Could we also visit the Old Testament for our purpose? Prophets Amos, Isiah and Jeremiah warned their peoples against greedy, wealthy moneylenders abusing and depriving small farmers of their possession and take them to bondage. The prophets, according to a history textbook, “denounced the pomp of the [heartless rich and hypocrisy of the pious](#) Jews, who worshipped God in the prescribed manner, but neglected their social obligations to their neighbor and demanded justice.” One will find similar ideas in the Qur’an (107: 1-6). In fact, these teachings are common in every civilization in history.

It is very difficult to establish connections between social upheaval and natural calamities. One major problem in comprehending this issue is that [lay clerics](#) try to relate every calamity with one or more perceived social evils. It is important to bear in mind that warnings are not always followed by immediate calamities and not all calamities are punishment. However, if one takes the example of the above-mentioned Biblical prophets, one finds the events occurring in a span of about two and half centuries. Prophet Amos lived in the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC; prophet Jeremiah lived during the earlier part of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, who witnessed siege, occupation and destruction of Jerusalem – an action that included the rage of the temple of Solomon that continued for almost two years. Historians have not recorded all-natural calamities that occurred during the period between Amos and Jeremiah, but the former’s messages must be considered a warning for a major disaster. Nevertheless, our knowledge of history suggests that one should not generalize all-natural calamities into one category – some have been warnings, some punishments and some might have been normal events. The Qur’an utilizes history as a source of knowledge, next only to revelation: it appeals its readers to travel around the world and learn from the experience of earlier communities and from the ruins of earlier civilizations (6: 6; 10: 13; 10: 94; 10: 102 etc.). The Qur’an insists that its followers must seek guidance from history rationally and wants its followers to find signs of the Creator’s mercy and power in the transformation of lifeless earth to flourishing civilization (36: 31-34).

## Are We More Civilized Than Pre-Renaissance Europe?

We ask this question because scholars have observed progress of Western civilization differently. While sociologist Robert Nisbet in his 1980 publication has [expressed skepticism regarding Western progress](#), cognitive psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker in his *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism and Progress* (2018), claimed that “The Enlightenment, science, reason, humanism and progress [keep improving our world](#) until today, making it a better place day by day.” Are we really making progress based on reason, science and humanism? On the eve of the last New Year’s day, Pinker further supported his thesis with some statistical information that, “Though civil wars persist, the overall rate of [deaths in wars of all kinds](#) plunged a hundredfold between 1950 and 2005, from 22 per 100,000 people per year to 0.2. After rising to 1.5 in 2014 during the horrific Syrian civil war, it halved to 0.7 in 2018.” However, I fail to understand how Pinker could ignore [almost half a million dead](#) and millions more wounded and displaced in Afghanistan and Iraq during the early years of the 2000s. Even if one considers these numbers simply as collateral, how can one disregard abusive behavior that came with this? However, on human casualties, Pinker has a cautious remark – “[pandemics that could hop continents](#) and cyber-sabotage that could bring down the internet” in 2020s, but “safeguards for such possibilities have worked so far, which “must be strengthened.” Will strengthening of safeguards ensure our civilizational progress? I am not sure whether Pinker would hold on to his thesis in view of the developments since the beginning of 2020. Could we still assert that we are still walking along the Renaissance of humanism? In fact, an in-depth analysis may demonstrate that the current situation could be worse than that of pre-Renaissance Europe.

We are all familiar with what nationalism brought to us during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Witnessing developments in pre-WW1 Europe, Oswald Spengler came up with his [The Decline of the West](#) thesis. Historian Arnold Toynbee then followed the same approach, studied 26 different world civilizations and concluded that:

“If there was any validity in the writer’s procedure of [drawing comparisons](#) between Hellenic history and Western, it would seem to follow that the Western society must, at any rate, be not immune from the possibility of a similar fate; and, when the writer, on passing to his wider studies, found that a clear majority of his assemblage of civilizations were already dead, he was bound to infer that death was indeed a possibility confronting every civilization, including his own.”

In order to prevent a civilization from decline and fall, one should examine and identify fundamental characteristics of a civilization. Both the 14<sup>th</sup> century historian Ibn Khaldun and the 20<sup>th</sup> century historian Arnold Toynbee agree that civilizations emerge out of human necessity. Humans need to cooperate with one another, not only for their survival; they also need and enjoy one another’s company. Civilizations originate out of human cooperation, not coercion. Social stratification occurs only when a civilization advances and become complex at a later stage of any given civilization. Will the current pandemic crisis push us toward Toynbee’s prediction? How can one be sure?

We all are aware of the failure of the League of Nations in preventing WW2. Is not the performance of the United Nations much worse than that of the League of Nations? Some



U.N.-member nation states are nakedly using the concept of national sovereignty to suppress dissent voices, as evidenced in the case of [Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi](#). Should one accept civil liberty just as a consequential casualty of reinforced nationalism when one reads reports of healthcare workers in many countries being punished only for highlighting facts that their governments were lying about providing them with adequate necessary kits for treating infected patients?

After the latest outbreak of pandemic in India in April 2021, when miles-long dead bodies for cremation made international headlines and havoc in the social media, the government came forward to accuse those who complained about losing loved ones. According to a BBC report, officers in Uttar Pradesh state charged Shashank Yadav with [spreading a rumour](#) over oxygen shortages “with intent to cause... fear or alarm.” Therefore, the protection of the “national image” is more valuable than human life! The earliest documented Covid-19 case caused by the delta variant (B.1.617.2) [was first found in the Indian state of Maharashtra](#) back in October 2020 and has since spread widely throughout India and across the world. However, India would not let this variant be called the Indian variant like earlier variants, such as the [UK variant](#) or [South African variant](#). The World Health Organization labelled it a “variant of concern” on May 11 and then it came to be known as the delta variant. Such is the power of national sovereignty in the world today! Is this civilization? Is this behavior any different from pre-14<sup>th</sup> century feudal Europe? One finds similar treatment of Palestinians in Israel. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has reported that, “The severe impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is clearly seen in the numbers: more than 3.1 million deaths and rising, 120 million people pushed into extreme poverty and a massive global recession. As suffering and [poverty have risen](#), some data show an increase in another extreme: the wealth of billionaires.” Weren’t the feudal lords making money in pre-14<sup>th</sup> century Europe? Could we still call ourselves civilized? Could we still subscribe to Francis Fukuyama’s optimism on liberalism and the role of the U.N., in the post-Cold War world, as reflected in his *The End of History and the Last Man*? If the current situation does not lead us to contemplate and looking for its causes and remedies, I do not know what will!

### **What Does the Current Situation Indicate?**

If we analyze the current situation in light of our discussion above, we should not miss the point that influential politicians and policymakers are unwilling to draw any lesson from history. President Trump politicized the pandemic. However, the most dangerous is the growth of Sino phobia in U.S. politics. President Trump accused China of concealing information about the outbreak of the disease, although according to an Israeli media report, the [“US alerted Israel, NATO to disease outbreak in China in November.”](#) One author wrote, “The pandemic won’t make [China the world’s leader](#).” Another has claimed that, “China, America’s most powerful rival, has played a particularly harmful role in the current crisis, which began on its soil.” Still another said that, “The diplomatic, economic and military pressure that Washington can bring to bear on Beijing will put Xi and the Chinese Communist Party he leads under enormous strain.” Is the U.S. considering a regime change in China? We witnessed regime changes in Iran in 1953 and Iraq in 2003, with devastating consequences.

This raises a question about the objective of social science research. Should the researchers be directed toward finding the truth or directed toward promoting certain interests? Is it very difficult to identify certain elites within the nation states promoting their group interests in the name of national sovereignty? Within the last three decades, we have witnessed how the former Harvard academic Samuel Huntington had manipulated history to [promote his clash of civilizations thesis](#). He said, “Fifty percent of wars involving pairs of states of different religions between 1820 and 1929 were wars between Muslims and Christians.” Even a primary student of history knows that these wars were not religious wars; colonial interests and nationalist ideologies motivated actors of these wars. In addition, more than 50 percent of the total world population during this period was either Christian or Muslim. Is it surprising, then, that these actors happened to have been either Christian or Muslim? In other words, the clash of civilizations thesis seems to have been contrived to promote certain interests, but unfortunately, the thesis became the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy during the first couple of decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

If an attempt is made to achieve a regime change in China, there is a strong possibility of the current situation deteriorating to a very low level. One opinion essay has already claimed “that [China is pursuing](#) mainly [cyber-warfare techniques](#) and antisatellite weapons.” I do not know whether Pinker even conceived of the current pandemic situation when he wrote the article, a cyber-warfare will definitely lead our world back to the stone age. This reminds me of Pakistan’s former President Pervez Musharraf’s statement that, “The U.S. had threatened to bomb Pakistan “back to [the stone age](#)” in ’01 unless it cooperated in the U.S.-led War on Terror.” The clash of civilizations thesis soon brought the War on Terror that resulted in millions of death, wounded and displaced. The process of demonizing the people of Palestine and Kashmir had begun almost at the same time as the establishment of the United Nations and by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Uyghurs and Rohingyas had joined the group of deprived and dispossessed. The rest of the world hardly saw this development as discrimination and injustice against innocent people.

## **What We Can Do to Restore Normalcy**

Our knowledge of history convinces us, with certainty, that normalcy will return, but nobody can determine a timetable for that. Our knowledge of history of the Black Death also tells us that post-pandemic Europe witnessed opportunities for the poor. Circumstances forced economically weak feudal elites to give in to demands of time: opportunities had to be opened to the public. Could we do the same this time? The current international structure will hardly allow such opportunities for common people very easily. Policymakers are already talking about “reinforced nationalism,” but our knowledge of history suggests that such solutions will be disastrous. The pandemic may slow down or perhaps be brought under control, but that is not going to take care of the ripple effects – the financial and perhaps food crises that are going to follow. The Trump Administration’s recovery packages look so superficial – most likely, it is simply printing notes, but this will definitely backfire. Gold or similar wares – not gun power – must support currency notes.

Almost all civilizations in history teach us that religions permeated creation of trust in securing cooperation of people through ideas of divine authority. The divinely selected chiefs were entrusted with the responsibility to treat every single human being with dignity, equality



and justice. If we apply this principle today for recovery from the pandemic, we must free ourselves from the control of institutions like as the World Bank, IMF and the U.N. Security Council, etc. We must understand that these institutions are not just mid-20<sup>th</sup> century creations. Their foundations are centuries old. Behavior of the elites that control these institutions is not very different from the “heartless rich and hypocritical pious” against whom the Old Testament prophet, Amos, had warned. The plunder of Bengal wealth at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, confiscation of the Suez Canal in the 1870s and scramble for Africa are only some known events in this regard, but the suppression of the Indian cotton industry to promote the British cotton industry is not widely known.

Are we in a position to challenge the ruling elite today? My understanding of history and world affairs tells me that we are. The Palestinians, Kashmiris, Uyghurs, Rohingyas and more are artificially locked-down, but the rest of humanity is capable to stand against arrogance, corruption and exploitation by a tiny elite. They are capable to bringing change – not Obama type change, but real change. What is needed is to come out of the corrupt financial system. It should not be difficult to begin with low-level barter trade and establish confidence and trust based on human dignity and mutual respect. This approach will build trust among participants – a criterion that Ibn Khaldun has pointed out as necessary for a flourishing civilization. Mutual trust will demand transparency in governance and in the process; common people will find opportunities that, in turn, generate economic growth and prosperity. It will be a slow process, but will be more dignified, durable, participatory and respectful.

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# **Synchronous Communication is Rendering Our Moral Codes Obsolete**

Thesis: ‘Time for reflection’ is inseparable from understanding and its removal from our communications, via the speed and synchronicity of our newly found connectedness, is making our moral codes obsolete and creating a potentially insurmountable adaptability challenge to our survival as a species.

## **Background**

Moore’s law made more than just chips smaller, faster and interconnected. It fused together our world, connecting us in new ways in space and time. What it has not done (yet) is alter our DNA in evolutionary synch with our technology. While technology is changing and being adopted at exponential speed, our human nature and our biological clock has not kept pace. If our minds and bodies were able to keep pace, we would be self-healing, self-programing, operate as a high-performance system, exist in balanced harmony with our planet’s resources and we would not experience jet lag. We have created a very complex, interrelated, interconnected, interdependent and instantly interactive world.

Our not-too-distant ancestors and some tribal communities yet today, communicated in a time horizon that allowed for reflection. We could find a corner inside or outside the cave to ponder and take time to reflect upon decisions relative to our existence and future. Then, we started communicating with other caves and other communities of caves using designated humans (messengers, not all of whom made the return trip). From there, we expanded to smoke signals, beating drums, horses and pigeons. There was always time to review the ‘data’ and ‘reflect’ before responding. Time was built into the process and bounded by the technologies being used for our very human to human communications.

Then, we adopted the telegraph, then the telephone, then the radio, then satellites, then fiber optic cables, then Wi-Fi and soon, we will adopt LiFi technologies, all to enhance our communications. As we made our way up the communications efficiency curve, we discovered that technological change is exponential and human change is not. Our communications went from slow and serial to simultaneous and synchronous, suddenly. We, however, have remained status quo biologically, mentally and ethically. Our reactions are still based on hunter/gatherer genetics, our planning language is still agrarian based and our hard-wired human system is still connected to primal circuitry and our ethics are still anchored in a pre-technological time

## **Ramifications**

The scale of the juxtapositions we are experiencing at speed are new to humanity and represent a point of departure. While our knowledge is growing exponentially, so too is our ignorance and as our connectedness is growing, so too is our tribalism.

We are not just experiencing a change in the velocity of communications, but also a literal sea change in its volume and as illustrated above, most definitions of synchronicity in communications in the past considered only person-to-person or finite and

measurable groupings. An increasing volume at velocity is another way of describing a power law, which simply means the amount of volumetric change per unit of time is accelerating. The amount of data being created and consumed is increasing at ever increasing rates. The volumetric increase at velocity is over stimulating the individual at the same time that it is diminishing

The exponential era has arrived and the leading edge of it is synchronous communications. The explosion of global telecommunications has taken place in the space of two short and fast-moving decades that have seen the pervasive adoption of cellular networks, combined with the near-ubiquitous availability of connected devices that are redefining our business and personal interactions in every corner of our world. The convergence of these technologies has enabled virtual and nearly instant connectivity between individuals, families, groups, organizations, companies, governments, teachers and students in the form of instant messaging, conference calls, video conferencing and distance learning. In the Exponential Era, the only limitation to synchronous global communication is network load and time delays measured by the distance electrons must travel, point to point, at nearly the speed of light.

The number of interconnected networks will multiply and become more cost-effective as satellites are deployed, the flexible cloud becomes ever more accessible and chips utilizing light reduce the time and cost for transmission. Our global telecommunications infrastructure and our 'networks of networks' have created an inherent transmission capability for data, voice and video to be accessed, aggregated, analyzed and acted on anywhere, by anyone, at any time. Those with greater access to this instant flow of 'digital water' will quickly gain peerless advantages and possess nearly omniscient and possibly unchecked power at scale. Reflect, for a moment, on a ubiquitous surveillance state controlled by a few.

In the Exponential Era, we are living with dramatic changes to the space and time relationships of human interactions that have defined our ethics throughout history. What we define as "acceptable" and "moral" codes are behaviors that, over thousands of years, have developed based on the immediacy of both the co-location of the participants and their actions being observable. The diversity of available actions was limited, the predicted range of outcomes was limited, the time frame in which the behaviors were observable was limited and the context was almost always limited. Many of those limitations no longer apply. Converging technologies are creating entirely new ecosystems that have never existed before, amplifying the consequences of our actions at much larger scales. Incidences, like the interruption of regional gas lines, will become more frequent, larger in scale and impact us faster.

In this new era, an action that only takes a few seconds, like the click of a button, can have significant global ramifications. Other cumulative actions over an extended period, like the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere during the last 150 years and continuing virtually unabated, result in *unforeseen* ramifications that will be felt for centuries to come. Today, business, government and academic leaders must make decisions about adopting and deploying technologies whose expanding impacts on their people, community and planet are most often unforeseeable. Due to the complexity and high adoption rates of modern



technologies, decision-making has become fraught with overwhelming and interrelated challenges, often making the consequences of our technology decisions no longer obvious and because perturbations are in an unmapped future, they are no longer observable.

We actively engage in blindly accelerating technologies, from innovation to ubiquitous adoption, almost fecklessly. Yet, historically, we have been unable to foresee and/or effectively adjust to the results of our actions over time. Current examples of unintended consequences and ethical impacts of previous science and technology choices include our energy generation sources affecting climate change, our mundane necessities creating oceans of plastic and our unfettered use of communications, subsequently exploding tribalism and enabling the weaponization of social media.

At a primal level, we are geared to respond based on a combination of our DNA 'setpoints' and our learned behaviors, be they physical (muscle memory), intellectual or emotional. Our responses to our many faceted environments and contexts constitute our 'behaviors.' Our learned behaviors come from the frameworks established by others for us (principles, codes, rules, training, indoctrination, etc.) and the experiences that frame our lives and are unique to each one of us. The foundational timbers for these frameworks come from the shared values we learn in our intellectual, physical and emotional environments. These baseline, shared values determine how we perceive each message and shape how we bias the messenger forming the basis for how we respond ethically. But that has changed, as the loss of 'the time to reflect' has increased well beyond our accelerating, urgent need for 'the time to reflect.' In many ways, this unprecedented shrinking of our understanding window, the time that it takes to truly understand incidences and potential decisions in an ethical context, makes our current ethical frameworks of moral codes obsolete. They simply are not built for volume at velocity.

The question becomes how best to address the virtual elimination of our reflection time and its subsequent unrecoverable absence? The void is challenging our very existence, on a fused and lonely planet.

While it may seem utopian to think we can find common ground across humanity, the realities of living in a world that is 30% above its ability to support life are beginning to connect and resonate. The decline in 'climate change deniers' is a case in point. Much like the reckoning that comes with a change in perspective, that if your neighbor loses their job, it's a recession, but if you lose yours, it's a depression. Changes to living conditions for people in drought-ravaged north Africa suddenly becomes more accessible and relatable when it happens to people in California.

Perhaps we are approaching a point in time where synchronous communications can be used to alert humanity and thereby make it more malleable to save itself.

Often in nature, we see malleable behaviors that work for high density populations in schools of fish and flocks of birds. With all our vast computing power and data sources, it doesn't seem utopian to find a set of 3-5 shared values that can be accepted as the basis for being part of the human tribe. Are we finally ready to adopt a rules-based framework for behaviors? If

birds can fly in flocks without crashing into each other, yet instantly navigate the sky to the benefit of the individual using just 4 rules, why can't we ethically navigate our way?

Without a framework of shared values, synchronous communication in a fused world has the potential to accelerate the fraying of our social fabric by robbing us of our time to reflect. That missing lack of reflection time in our decision cycles exasperates our inequalities, inequities and climate change.

We have the history of mankind's moral codes across thousands of years and 99% of the variants of our human behavior are codified. We have a rich reservoir of belief systems data from which datasets can be extracted and correlated. We can use the very technologies rapidly moving beyond our control to find new ways to identify and connect values across peoples and millenniums to help us shape a framework of shared values for navigating an exponential era.

Our quest should be to find the acceptable boundary conditions under which all individuals can maintain their personal identity, yet together navigate the existential successfully.

Without taking away the independence of the individual, is it possible for us to find a bounded and informed decision-making process that can buy us the time to reflect and make decisions that will achieve ethical outcomes at scale? Physics and the natural world show us that all systems where the 'work' to expand overcomes the 'work' to contain and maintain the system (a water droplet and surface tension) spontaneously collapse. Will our moral codes become obsolete with the spontaneous collapse of reflection time brought on by synchronous communications?

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