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The Next Spring

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“Ashes to ashes, dust to dust” (Episcopal Church 485), people whispered their prayers in memory of their loved ones—finally, as one reaches the end of life, one is addressed namelessly but of an integral part of nature. In death, all life as we know it must meet the same fate.

One renowned American marine biologist, Rachel Louise Carson, before her untimely demise, reminded the world the importance of man's attitude towards nature and that we wield a fateful power to alter and destroy nature while stating man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself. Her testimonial is evident as human waged war against nature starting from our rapid advancement.

In 19th century, Industrial Revolution marked the surge of improvement in efficiency in human activities. As manufacturing of transportation means and machines enabled exports and imports, saved labors and lowered costs, it implied greater quality of living—at a cost of over deforestation, high usage of fossil fuels and greenhouse gases emissions in large concentration. (Fagbohunka 434, 437). When Radioactive elements were first discovered by Marie Curie in later in the same century, the world celebrated it, rewarding her a Nobel prize. In search of cleaner energy, people made

use of her discovery to contribute to nuclear energy, supplying 10% of world's electricity nowadays (“Nuclear Power”). Only when incidents like Chernobyl disaster in 1986 which occurred due to the hands of untrained personnel, had warned the world of its irreversible effects—contaminating the environment along the food chain, affecting food supply of UK (Food Standards Agency) and Norwegian diets (Strand *et al.* 385–392), some 30 years after the explosion and still counting.

In modern sciences, we are susceptible to Newton way of thinking—readily separating ourselves from the boundaries of the world of physics, towards the world of abstract mathematics (Cohen 59). As we encounter simple facts, we either distinguish them as either a real simplicity or a complicated whole of mangled elements. (Poincaré 161) This habit of extraction of facts from reality draws us away from thinking about its natural occurrences or how its unnatural proportion will bring about consequences if mishandled. It is important to note that many scientists explore knowledge because of altruism and the beauty of science, and by no means of harm (164)—In fact, they are capable of assessing and calculating how their findings can be appropriately used in the future and keep its extent of harm at bay.

At core, it is unfair to blame humans for advancing technologically and practically as it brought about betterment of living, a survivability advantage, progression that appeals to true universality, which coexists with cultures around the globe (Sivin 225). It is lethal however, are humans' lack of provision and haphazard accounts, their haste of improvement without balance and their biased selection of facts, to shun truth from public. Carson herself fell victim (Stoll) of a messenger whose mission was nothing but to inform and forebode the hazards and dangers of our

ways and to suggest alternatives in exercising our knowledge in a more cautious and natural manner.

At this point we may wonder, is nature really that passive and helpless? What humans may not know was their power and capability create nothing but a false sense of controlling the great nature, a deception from reality that they, themselves, is hopelessly dependent on nature.

“Man is a part of nature” as Carson reiterated her “web of life” illustration of human-nature relationship—the intimacy and essentiality between us and the green and the green with animals are not a matter of choice but an existing codependency and correlations. (*Silent Spring* 141).

Physically, we need natural resources to survive, water to keep us hydrated, and food to keep us nourished. Ancient civilizations are seen developing around waterbodies for agriculture (Macklin and Lewin 228, 242) and how Natural Valleys and deserts shield one from invasion (Hart 206). Mentally, we may consider ourselves of sheer material or of both spiritual and material (dualism) (Kandel 182). Nonetheless, nature is found to appeal to both—providing pleasurable stimulation, a tranquility to mind, a source of psychological existence and identity and even a spiritual well-being. (Moghadam 92)

With all things considered, we are by far passively enjoying these necessities as a basis of life, unknowingly, taking them for granted. Consequently, as the notorious cycle continues, humans live for their own good, stripping bares the forests, dyeing the river black, hunting down every peculiar creature they see, blithely unaware that they are tearing down their home, poisoning their mind, gunning down their every livable chance.

The irony is that many historical warfare is often a competition for resources. As Earth’s resources are limited, war seemed like the only option

to guarantee security and safety. Before long, we have already dwindled our own resources, for at the end, the death of future generation marks the defeat of humanity but never the end of nature. To war against nature is to fight a lost battle where the consequences are by default mankind to bear, as written by Carson in *Sea around Us*,

It is a curious situation that the sea, from which life first arose should now be threatened by the activities of one form of that life. But the sea, though changed in a sinister way, will continue to exist; the threat is rather to life itself. (xiii)

How then, should humans position themselves in nature? What role should they play?

In Chinese sciences, man is never separated from Nature. Eastern thought system sought to systematize the universe of things and events into a structural pattern which conditioned all mutual influences of its different parts. (Needham 214) This goes hand in hand with Carson's idea of life, where our action is not a one-way mechanical causation, detachable formula or a single target, it should be considered as system in its entirety. To simply put, humans should put themselves in shoes of both user and manager. The former represents their inevitable desire and drive to consume natural resources, the latter holds their needs accountable, to maintain a balance between nature and humans.

Hence, humans are also responsible for one another, keeping each other in check. The underlying moral responsibility is the respect for not only one's own position in the universe but also the ones who come before

and after. It is not rare to encounter active conservations and plantation propaganda in our daily lives and as we consciously understand, they are plausible and beneficial means. Yet, it must be known that the real war is fought daily, a war against oneself, a conflict between superego and id, a challenge pointed to our forgetfulness and momentary ease.

As of November 4, 2019, the United States President Donald Trump signed the nation out of the Paris Agreement on climate change, stating such accord would impose immense pressure on the American economy. “Denial is not a policy” as a protestor written this withdrawal as a one-sided decision from the Trump administration. (Friedman). Indeed, one could only fantasize to live long enough to testify whether humans have any substantial impact on the climate. However, as leaders, they must consider their decision as an indicator to sectors, a nation-wide representation of “user-manager” which will in time manifest, be determined and distributed top-down. In today’s worldview towards nature, truth is increasingly hard to discern as apparently, the authority and the people stand on two contrastive sides on the same issue—humans’ natural responsibility has seemingly reduced to simple matter of belief, a hearsay fantasy, which brings us to a dilemma—This constant “war” within oneself to maintain responsibility, amongst communities to reach consensus and across nations to ensure stability, what does it bring about to the world?

On the sandy shores of Versova in Mumbai, Afraz Shah, an Indian lawyer, took the community’s environment into his own hands, kick-starting the world’s largest beach clean-up in 2015. (Martinko) After some 119 weeks of continuous effort, the once trash-filled Versova beach has

become home to indigenous sea turtles in 2019. (Mazaris *et al.* 1) Despite his consistent work, Shah's operation is still subjected to criticism—disregarding it as “half-solved”. (Chaturvedi)

At the eye of the climate change controversy, Greta Thunberg made her remark in United Nation Climate Action Summit in 2019:

How dare you pretend that this can be solved with just “business as usual” and some technical solutions? With today's emissions levels, that remaining CO2 budget will be entirely gone within less than 8 1/2 years.

There will not be any solutions or plans presented in line with these figures here today, because these numbers are too uncomfortable. And you are still not mature enough to tell it like it is. (“Transcript: Greta Thunberg's Speech”)

There is a reason why Greta's speech resonated with many in the world because they too, feel desperate in face of a generational ordeal. Instead of a politically diplomatic speech, a frank, direct criticism is a better fit for the weight of the world's problem. There is no doubt that the world has grown aware of its issues. As the raft of slogans and protests permeated throughout the international scene, we grow familiar to critiques to the point where we take no underdeveloped ideas. Half-way resolutions are deemed ineffective.

Yet, what use is there for a voice that does not construct? Often times, solutions come from some wishful thinking accompanied with smaller steps. One example is the Seabin Project—an innovative technology that is described as “floating rubbish bin” which collects floating debris, macro and micro plastics or fibres. To this day, the project has captured over 1000 tonnes of waste. (“The Seabin V5”) One of the co-founders of the

Seabin Project, Pete Ceglinski, pointed out two of the greatest challenges are the “throw away” culture and “someone else will deal with it” mentality. Despite the project being technological, the radical solution is rather a cultural one—more education is needed for greater emphasis on plastics. (Creed, “An Interview with”) The aspiration for a cleaner ocean requires more than a project—a societal commitment to user-manager way of life.

Afterall, creativity and its actualization seem to be the only peace maker to the situation. Although reality is perpetuating towards dystopian, it is important to uphold an optimistic outlook where we believe problem can be fixed, actions still matter and worthwhile. Lest we become dismissive to any fruitful combinations that may be numerous or useless at first, yet ultimately, contributes to a harmonious picture in the future. (Poincaré 173).

In the world’s battlefield, each of us gets to answer for generations to come, with what attitude should we adopt towards nature? Which war are we fighting? What dictates our choices? What is worth it and what isn’t?

Yet, nature answers for no one as it only for that the being which it tends. (Darwin 75)

Silent fell as the prayers end. The voiceless blessing carries the weightless ashes amidst the soothing embrace of Mother Nature. It falls gently, paving a new pathway. Even in death, nature is at work, dawning for the new spring of life.

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Teacher’s comment:

Environmental issues, such as pollution, resources depletion and global warming, perpetually determine the future of humanity. This paper is a reflection on the quote of a renowned environmentalist Rachel Louise Carson, “Man’s attitude toward nature is today critically important But man is a part of nature, and his war against nature is inevitably a war against himself.” Howard gives explanations on why human war with nature unintendedly. These human interventions might startlingly lead to other environmental issues that subsequently end our civilisations. Thus, Howard argues that human should commit to a user-manager way of life to ease the possible tensions and conflicts. (YIP Lo Ming Amber)

