

## FEATURE

# The "Perception of One" in Humanity

T. C. Peng

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*As the saying goes "Charity begins at home," so the world peace can start with the "Perception of One in Humanity." We must view people, regardless of race, creed and culture, as one human-family. We have differences of opinion, we also have much **in common** which, properly defined and adopted by all of us, can bind us together and provide us with peace on Earth as a result.*

### Definition

What is humanity? Based on Random House Webster College Dictionary (2nd Edition, 1997), humanity means

1. All human beings collectively; the human race; humankind
2. The quality and conditions of being human; human nature
3. The quality of being humane; kindness; benevolence; goodwill.

Definition (1) says that humanity is the totality of human beings, and is thus the basis for the "Perception of One" for all individual humans. To put in the Confucian terms; We are all in the family (Note 1). In Confucian tradition, the concept of family is applicable from a single household all the way to the entire human kind. Definition (2) refers to human nature, presumably both good and bad (e.g. Love and Hate). Yet, definition (3) speaks only of good human nature. Simultaneous use of Definitions (2) and (3) could be interpreted to mean good nature only. Coincidentally, this is similar to the Confucian tradition: a person is born good until the social environment turns him into a bad character.

Note 1. Catholics call priests fathers & brothers and nuns mothers & sisters.

### Consumption of Natural Resources

While people are still earth bound, the rising of living standard since the industrial revolution has resulted in an ever-increasing individual consumption of natural resources. It is an irreversible process (e.g., people, used to cars, do not want bicycles for transportation). There are now "have" and "have not" classes within a nation and between nations. A constant battle is being fought for controlling the natural resources nationally and internationally. The outcome of this battle is often determined by the military power based on "Us vs Them" mentality. In doing so, people inevitably starts to define "Us" as the superior and good and "Them" as the inferior and bad. Once that concept sets in, there is no room for the perception of one in humanity.. Whatever the winner does is rationalized and justified, whereas the loser simply become invisible, or worse less than human beings. We have seen this scenario played out with the Nazi Germany (1939-1944) in Europe and Japanese Imperialism (1894-1945) in Asia.

Is there an alternative? Yes, there is. But the alternative requires the acceptance of "the perception of one in humanity." Simply put, one can not care for others without first thinking of the others as "equal" human beings entitled to share the natural resources of this earth. Everyone has to agree in principle that this earth is for all of us. We must respect each other's legitimate claims of individual and national sovereignty. We must learn to share this earth and its resources that sustain us. At the same time, we must not waste the natural resources just for personal pleasure at the expense of the common good. "Might is right" based on military power may be an easy solution in short term, but is a disaster for the mankind in

long term. We need to learn the lessons of the Nazi-Germany and Japanese Imperialism.

The perception of one in humanity has a special meaning for the religions of the world. Religions of various doctrines were created independently at different parts of the world and at different times. The need of religion arose from the realization that humans are not the masters of the universe, not of this earth, and not even in control of its characters. The appeal to a super-being to relieve misery or to search for spiritual meaning is human which exists in all of us, especially at the moment of despair. Religion has served the humankind well to calm its troubled mind individually and collectively.

Religions over all the world serves the spiritual need of individuals or a community so long as they are directed inward for that individual or that community. Religions serves the society and nation when they lift people's spirit from misery and poverty so long as the people want the religious help and do so voluntarily. However, there will be a conflict if one religion tries to impose its doctrine on people no matter how good intention it is. It is even a worse situation when two religions with claims of universal truth of their own wage war against each other. The irreconcilable religious dogma has caused and continue to cause the worst bloodshed among humankind (e.g., the Crusaders 11-13th century).

The religious conflict doesn't have to be resolved that way if only the followers of all religions realize that the basic idea of religion is to help people and to relieve mankind from misery and poverty. That fundamental message is actually within the context of all religions in spite of their outward differences in their forms of worship or symbols of beliefs. It is more important to extend useful help to a fellow human beings here on earth than to worry about where one's soul might be after death. We really need to think seriously about the perception of one in humanity, and thus liberate us from our

selfishness, greed, small vision and all the rest of bad characters of human nature.

### League of Nations and the United Nations

The creation of the League of Nations after the World WWI and the United Nations after the WWII represents a step toward the ideal of "the perception of one in humanity." Although these two bodies differed in structure and process, both bodies were built on the concept that the world conflicts should be resolved peacefully by the assembly of nations. Nations, big or small, rich or small, powerful or not, are considered equals in their individual sovereignty. A democratic procedure, however imperfect it may be, was put in place to debate the international issues. Decisions were supposed to have rendered by ballots, not by military power of individual nations.

Unfortunately, like the League of Nations (1919-1939), the United Nations (1945 - present), heavy in principle and light in action, has lost much of its prestige and credibility as of late. The United Nations, lacking in enforcement of the collective decision on international affairs, has become ineffective as an impartial arbiters in settling global disputes. Reasons for this sad state of affairs are undoubtedly many and probably very complicated. However, one crucial factor is becoming clear to this observer. That factor is: not enough consideration is given to the ideal of the "perception of one in humanity" by all participating nations. Instead of cooperation to provide the service for the common good, member countries of the United Nation has been concentrating too much on politics of using the United Nations to further their own national interests.

On the other hand, the United Nations can and do form a consensus to further the common cause of the humankind when member countries come together in the spirit of the perception of one in humanity. For example, a great deal of good work has been done by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United

Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), International Labor Organization (ILO), International Criminal Court (ICC) and the United Nations Peace Keeping Force, just to mention a few. Global issues like environment protection, territorial integrity, sharing earth resources, and basic needs for living should not be decided by the military power of any single nation, but can and must be enforced for the entire world by an overwhelming majority (more than 3/4) in the United Nations with sufficient power for enforcement.

The United Nations is the last stand where the common good has to be at least recognized and preferably respected above the ambitions of any individual member nations, because there is no next higher authority to appeal to. If the common good of the global village means anything to the good human nature, it has to be manifest itself at the United Nations. Otherwise, we will be reverting back to the old rule; Might is Right. Let's hope and pray that the United Nations continue to exist and exercise in favor of the international morality, the good human nature, for years to come.

### Religions or the Collective Conscience

No matter what happened in the United Nations, religions, as separate and independent social institutions, can and do promote the perception of the one in humanity. Various religions of the world differ in their formal doctrine, practicing ritual, and even rules on daily living. Yet, most, if not all, religions do consider all people, believers or not, are human beings. As such, every humane consideration should and will be extended to each and everyone of us. However, sometimes certain religion considers its followers somehow morally more superior than the rest of the humankind. This kind of preference belief creates classes in society which can lead to the divisions and even conflicts.

When religions come into conflict with each other, another concept, less dogma and more inclusive called the Collective Conscience, can

be useful as a means for promoting the perception of the one in humanity. The main concern of the collective conscience is on the human family in time of crisis. As such, the collective conscience tends to go beyond the narrowly defined religious interpretations of spiritual life in religions, and to focus instead on the spontaneous and voluntary help originated from the good human nature. Then and only then, the humanity can be viewed as a whole and the perception of one in humanity is being realized.

As noted earlier, humanity also says something about (1) the quality and conditions of being human (properly defined freedom and independence, and rational economic well-being for everyone); human nature (2) the quality of being humane; kindness; benevolence; goodwill. Human qualities are mostly born by nature, but human conditions are often created and practiced by human beings (people). Being humane, kind, benevolent and good are desirable qualities, but human nature also has undesirable qualities such as envy, greed and criminal intent. Among the world religions and social philosophies, Confucian traditions tend to overemphasize the desirable qualities in humans, whereas the "original sin" concept of Christianity tends to be overly negative in condemnation of the pre-existence human condition. The reality is that humans are born with both the "desirable and undesirable" qualities.

### The Human Reality

In the real world, human qualities do lead to practical consequences. Thus, the utmost task of any civilized society is to ensure by civil and/or spiritual laws that desirable human qualities are nurtured and rewarded; and undesirable qualities are discouraged and punished, i.e. the "good" vs "evil" format. In so doing, the prospect of peace and harmony in all human societies will be enhanced. Yet, to live by these elegant rules of life is to beg the question: who makes the judgment of being good and evil? and who enforce the decision for rewards and punishments. Does the same judgment applies to everyone regardless of personal status and

wealth? These are the questions of fairness and/or universality. They are primarily concerns of civil laws, but spiritual laws can also help to re-enforce the doctrine of fairness and universality. After all, we are in the same human family. Of course, when morality (the desirable human quality) are involved, religious organizations can play a significant role, provided that *they practice what they preach*.

Because parts of human nature are seriously flawed and a good person can become flawed when exposed to temptations, it seems that the only reasonable alternative is to have super-being(s) as an absolutely impartial and final judge who is unreachable by human influences. But then, the question becomes how do we know the final judgment from the super-beings? Thus far, that judgment can only be delivered through human messenger(s)! *We are back to the human beings burdened with good and bad characters.*

However, there is a way of balancing human natures by imposing virtual consequences of person's acts on to the person's self. This is the essence of the Golden Rule (Note 1): put oneself in other's position with all its ramifications and consequences before one draws any judgment. Taking up other's position (usually the opposition) forces one to be fair and objective. The Golden rule is upheld by all religions and social philosophies of this world. That is the universality we have been looking for.

In addition to the Golden rule, there is also the issue of species survival. As any Darwinian will point out that the universe is basically competitive in nature for the survival of living species under the universal law of natural selection. Much of the recorded history on human society indicated that when individual in a society identifies of each other as equals struggling for an identifiable common cause, that society is likely to flourish, whereas the societies that people fight amongst themselves is likely to perish. So, whether authoritarian or democratic, society as a whole survives as long as people in that society

takes the perception of the one in humanity. The final question is how big that society can be? To which the Confucian tradition will say: the whole humankind (Note 2)!

#### Note 1: The Golden Rule

**The Golden Rule tells people how to treat each other. 12 different beliefs made similar statements as follows: (as documented by The Observer, P.O. Box 270214, St. Louis, MO. 63127).**

Baha'i "Desire not for anyone the things that you would not desire for yourself. Baha'u'llah (Gleanings LXVI)

Buddhism "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." Udana-Varga,5:18

Christianity "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" Matt 7:12

Confucianism "Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you" or "Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself Analects 15:23 or 15:24

Hinduism "Never do to others what would pain thyself Panchatantra 111.104.

Islam "Do unto all men as you would they should do unto you, and reject for others what you would reject for yourself. Mishkat-el-Masabih

Jainism "In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures our own self Lord Mahavira, 6th century B.C.E.

Judaism "What is hateful to you, do not to your fellowmen. That is the entire law...." Talmud, Shabbat 314

Native American "Respect for all life is the foundation" The Great Law of Peace

Sikhism "Treat others as thou wouldst be treated thyself. Adi Granth

Taoism (or Daoism) "Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss your own loss" T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien

Zorosatrianism "That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself. Dadistan-i-Dinik, 94:5

Note 2. This Confucius' Vision: the "Great Common Wealth State":

(A Translation of original Chinese text by scholars of Confucian Hall, Hong Kong, China).

When the prefect order prevails, the world is like a home shared by all. Virtuous and worthy men are elected to public office, and capable men hold posts of gainful employment in society; peace and trust among all men are the maximums of living.

All men love and respect their own parents and children, as well as the parents and children of others. There is caring for the old; there are jobs for the adults; there are nourishment and education for the children. There is a means of support for the widows, and the widower; for all who find themselves alone in the world; and for the disabled. Every man and woman has an appropriate role to play in the family and society. A sense of sharing displaces the effects of selfishness and materialism.

A devotion to public duty leaves no room for idleness. Intrigues and conniving for ill gain are unknown. Villains such as thieves and robbers do not exist. The door to every home need never be locked and bolted by day or night. These are the characteristics of an ideal world, the Commonwealth State.

*Tzy C. Peng received his Ph. D. from Northwestern University (1959) in Evanston, IL., had been working in aerospace industry for 33 years (1958-1991). He has been active in the St. Louis Chinese American Community since 1967, and the community of the Greater St. Louis since 1988. He became the publisher of the non-profit Chinese American Forum (CAF) Quarterly magazine since 1997.*