Human Nature Against Human Survival

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Abstract

This essay explains that the biggest obstacle to human survival may not come from external threats, but from human nature itself. Although human beings have compassion, cooperation and moral reflection, these qualities are often less stable than aggression, selfishness, fear, arrogance and short-sightedness. This article combines scientific, religious and philosophical evidence to explore whether human nature can really support the sustainable collective survival of human beings. Scientific research shows that aggression, group bias, cognitive bias and lack of long-term judgment ability make it difficult for human beings to effectively respond to large-scale crises such as climate change and nuclear risks. Christian thought interprets these problems as manifestations of sin, moral disorder and collective corruption. The views of philosophers such as Hobbes, Schopenhauer, Rousseau and Hardin also show that self-interest, distrust, competition for status and destruction of public resources will continue to harm the common interests. These perspectives together support a pessimistic conclusion that human beings do not necessarily make continuous progress and do not have the ability to self-correct. Although it is not certain that human beings will become extinct, the existing evidence shows that human nature is still dangerous and unreliable, and self-destruction progress and possibility.

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Human beings have long imagined that the future life will be scientific progress, social prosperity and universal happiness. History is often portrayed as a story of continuous improvement, as if technological progress and institutional strengthening are enough to prove that mankind is moving towards a safer and more rational world. However, the crises of today's era hint at another possibility. The greatest threat to human survival may not come from nature or fate, but from human nature itself.

Although human beings have empathy, cooperation and reflection, these qualities are often limited and unstable. In contrast, selfishness, aggression, fear, jealousy, arrogance and short-sightedness seem to be more persistent in different social and historical periods. Robert Green believes that irrationality, crowding, jealousy, aggressiveness and short-sightedness are not rare defects that exist only in a few abnormal individuals but are repeated patterns in human behavior. Robert Sapolsky also pointed out that violence, competition and prejudice are not exceptions in the moral sense, but repeated human possibilities shaped by biological mechanisms, personal experiences and social environment.

Scientific research further reinforces this pessimistic view: aggression, cognitive bias and weak long-term judgment ability are common components of human behavior. Religious thought gives this model a moral meaning, while philosophy explains how competition, distrust and self-interest repeatedly destroy collective well-being. Therefore, this paper believes that human nature cannot be relied upon to produce progress or self-correction but is the result of deep instability and easy to slip into self-destruction. As modern technology and global systems continue to expand the power of human beings, these characteristics make disasters caused by

human beings themselves more and more likely and make lasting survival far from as stable as optimists imagine.

Scientific Evidence: Biology, Bias, and Planetary Risk

Modern science supports a comforting idea: violence and selfishness are just a slight distortion of an originally harmonious species. One of the clearest findings in psychological literature is that aggression is neither rare nor abnormal. Anderson and Bushman directly defined this theme as follows: "All violence is aggression, but many instances of aggression are not violent" (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). The reason why this sentence is important is that it expands the scope of the problem. Human destruction does not only begin with murder or war, but also with humiliation, threat, coercion, exclusion and domination. Sapolsky's theory further reinforces this dark picture. He points out that there is no single cause of aggression. Social learning, hormones, neural circuits, childhood experiences and group identity will all interact before behavior occurs. Therefore, aggression is not an accidental stain in human life, but one of the recurring and very normal possibilities, which is deeply embedded in the mechanism of human daily behavior. Greene also came to a similar conclusion in more moral language. He wrote: "human nature is stronger than any individual than any institution or technological invention" (Greene, p.16). If this is true, then advanced systems cannot eliminate the dangers created by human beings themselves. They are just tools that amplify these dangers.

Optimists believe that human cooperation is stable enough to ensure long-term survival. But scientific evidence does not support this. Human beings do cooperate, but such cooperation is often selective, conditional, and hostile to external groups. De Dreu and his collaborators found that oxytocin, a hormone usually associated with trust and social connection, "promoted

in-group trust and cooperation, and defensive, but not offensive, aggression towards competing out-groups" (De Dreu et al., 2010). For those who naively believe that human beings have universal goodwill, this is a very shocking discovery. It shows that even the biological basis of attachment relationships may contribute to conflict. People are connected to each other not only because they are human beings in the general sense; they are more connected as members of a specific group, and this solidarity tends to become sharper in the opposition to other groups. Fehr and Gächter came to a similar conclusion in the experimental study of public goods. They wrote: "We show that cooperation flourishes if altruistic punishment is possible and breaks down if it is ruled out" (Fehr & Gächter, 2002). In other words, large-scale cooperation is often not the result of spontaneous virtue. The reason why it can be maintained is that traitors will be supervised, resented and punished. This shows that once the system is weakened, the implementation fails, or the responsibility is dispersed in the huge system, the cooperative order may collapse quickly.

When people began to study cognition, another equally disturbing scientific problem emerged: human beings are not only morally unreliable, but also not good at judging slow, abstract and cumulative dangers. Tversky and Kahneman's research on heuristics and deviations shows that people systematically misjudge probability, sample size and uncertainty. These are not laboratory effects that have nothing to do with reality. On the contrary, they are the kind of psychological errors that make it difficult for human beings to respond in a timely and effective manner before climate change, nuclear escalation or technological risks really evolve into disasters. Robert Gifford called these obstacles "dragons of inaction" and explained: "psychological barriers also impede behavioral choices that would facilitate mitigation, adaptation, and environmental sustainability" (Gifford, 2011). This is one of the scientific expressions that can best reveal the core issue of the debate. Humans can identify danger, but

they still can't take action with the level of danger. They will learn the situation, feel worried and think about how to deal with it, but they will not take action. Green described this behavior pattern as short-sighted and irrational, but scientific literature shows that this is not just a personality defect of a few bad leaders, but a weakness in the judgment ability of ordinary people.

When these ordinary human characteristics play a role in modern technology systems, their consequences become alarming. Climate science is no longer just asking whether warming will bring inconvenience but increasingly asking how serious the worst outcome may be. Kemp and his collaborators warned that catastrophic climate change is "a dangerously underexplored topic" and added: "there are ample reasons to suspect that climate change could result in a global catastrophe" (Kemp et al., 2022). This is not a prophecy, but a serious scientific warning. It shows that a species that is inherently inclined to denial, procrastination, tribal politics and the pursuit of short-term profits has created a global system that is enough to punish these similar tendencies at the civilized level. The same logic has emerged in the study of nuclear war. Xia and his collaborators concluded: "soot injections larger than 5 Tg would lead to mass food shortages" (Xia et al., 2022). A regional or large-scale nuclear conflict will not stop at a local level. It may lead to agricultural collapse, famine and secondary global political collapse. Therefore, science not only shows that human beings may be full of violence and prejudice but also shows that these common tendencies are now interacting with systems that are strong enough to threaten the future of the species themselves.

Even the moral language about prosocial behavior can hardly provide much confidence for human beings. Sapolsky asked such a question: "Does pure altruism actually exist?" (Sapolsky, p.22). The reason why this problem is important is that human imagination of oneself

often depends on exaggerating the stability of human kindness. We like to imagine that empathy will naturally expand as knowledge grows. However, Sapolsky's question shakes the idealized view of human goodness, implying that prosocial behavior may be more conditional and vulnerable than people usually imagine. Human care is often emotional, selective and unstable. It may be affected by fear, status threats, propaganda, ideology, etc. Scientific evidence does not mean that human beings are destined to be destroyed by a single evil instinct, but it means a set of common characteristics, such as aggressiveness, tribal attachment, prejudice, procrastination, motive reasoning and conditional cooperation. These characteristics will be combined in some ways to make disasters caused by human beings themselves more and more likely to occur. Science does not prove that extinction is inevitable, but it does show that human beings are not well designed to achieve the level of collective restraint required for modern long-term survival.

Religious Evidence: Sin, Desire, and Collective Moral Breakdown

Within Christian tradition, religious thought often puts forward a particularly pessimistic explanation of human moral capacity. Science describes bias, aggression and group conflict, while religion interprets these patterns as a deeper symptom of will disorder. Biblical narratives do not portray evil as an accidental error in the originally balanced human situation. On the contrary, they describe human beings as morally skewed and easily seduced by pride, evasion of responsibility, disobedience and destructive desires. In Romans 5:12, Paul wrote: "sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Romans 5:12, ESV). The importance of this passage is that it links moral corruption with death itself. Human beings are not just committing some isolated wrongs; they are in a state where a disorder will continue to spread in history. Under this framework, death is not only a biological fact, but also a sign of damaged moral order.

The Epistle of James expresses the same point more directly at the psychological level. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" James asked. " Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, James 4:1–3). Religion breaks the lie of human conflict. It rejects illusions and makes us realize that violence does originate from self. War is not caused by policies, weapons and the environment. On the contrary, they are the manifestation of the desire in the human heart. People compete for what they don't have. Human beings envy, covet and resent, and human beings will rationalize their hostility. This kind of religious interpretation is highly compatible with reality. This point deserves serious attention. National conflict, ecological destruction and economic exploitation are often packaged under decent language. Religion has torn off these disguises and has issued a warning to all human beings.

Augustine further deepened this pessimistic religious view. He believes that human nature has been damaged and cannot be completely cured by his own efforts alone. In On Nature and Grace, he insisted that "by grace nature is repaired", and wrote elsewhere that human "nature, having been vitiated by sin" no longer has the original integrity (Augustine). These arguments are important because they deny an optimistic belief that education, intelligence or political reform alone is enough to make the human species perfect. Augustine does not deny that human beings can achieve some relative justice. What he denies is that fallen human beings can fully trust themselves. Reason is damaged by pride, desire loses order, and judgment bends towards self-love. From this perspective, the possibility of self-destruction is not surprising. Once an injured species acquires a huge power, it is likely to use this power according to the injured motives.

Reinhold Niebuhr brought this Augustinian pessimism into the modern political world. His most famous insight is that collective life tends to amplify human evil rather than correct it. As he wrote: "The group is more arrogant, hypocritical, self-centered and more ruthless in the pursuit of its ends than the individual" (Niebuhr, p.221). This assertion is a heavy blow to that hope: that is, moral progress will naturally appear with a larger-scale social organization. Individuals may experience sympathy, shame or guilt in direct relationships, but groups more often feel mission, dignity and righteousness. Nations, classes, races, parties and empires expand human ego by giving it a layer of moral cover. As a result, when human beings are organized on a large scale, they may not become more trustworthy; on the contrary, they may become more untrustworthy. This religious insight is especially important for modern age, because the biggest dangers today are collective: ecological devastation in the name of growth, militarism in the name of security, and dehumanization in the name of ideology. Groups do not necessarily civilize desire; they tend to sanctify it.

Recent Christian teaching on ecology extends the same moral logic to the global level. In 2022, Pope Francis raised the question: "What kind of world do we want to leave to our children?" And warned: "our selfishness, indifference, and irresponsible lifestyles are threatening the future of our children" (Francis, 2022). This is a theological argument, but it is also a judgment of the fate of species. It shows that environmental destruction is not only a policy mistake, but also a fact that human beings know the potential risks but do not act on them. People know enough to take different actions, but they continue to consume, deny, delay, and pass on the cost to future generations. Therefore, religion not only predicts disasters in the language of the end of the world; it also explains why a species continues to move in the same

direction knowing that it is harming itself. The answer is sin: it is not only a violation of the rules, but also an inner disorder expressed through pride, greed and indifference.

Therefore, religious perspective provides the deepest moral logic for the pessimism of this article. Science shows that aggression, prejudice and procrastination are common, religious thought explains why these characteristics persist even though the consequences are already very obvious. Human beings are not only lacking information, their inner self is contradictory. Their desires exceed their responsibilities, the group they belong to will amplify self-love, their pride will disguise themselves as innocent. Under these conditions, self-destruction no longer looks like an unimaginable accident, but more like a moral trajectory. Humanity may not be able to save itself just by knowing more. The deepest problem is not only ignorance, but also the character of human beings itself.

Philosophical Evidence: Egoism, Mistrust, and the Destruction of the Common Good

Thomas Hobbes' point of view proves this tragedy from the perspective of political philosophy. Without strong social constraints, human beings may not be able to maintain a just world because they are too self-interested and unstable. Among the classic pessimists, Thomas Hobbes is still of pioneering significance. In Leviathan, he wrote that there are "three principal causes of quarrel between human beings. First, Competition; Secondly, Diffidence; Thirdly, Glory" (Hobbes, 1651/2008). This is one of the clearest arguments to explain why self-destruction has always been lurking in political life. People fight for interests, security and status. What they are fighting for is not only survival but also desire. They may even be angry because of “a word, a smile, a different opinion,” or any sign of disrespect. Therefore, for Hobbes, conflict is not an accidental interruption of peace, but a predictable result of daily human

motivation. Once this insight is put into a world with nuclear weapons and a fragile ecosystem, its meaning will become extremely dark. If ordinary human conflict stems from interests, fear and glory, then the motive of modern civilization's conflict may evolve into the root of disaster.

Arthur Schopenhauer further reinforced this pessimistic argument by putting selfishness at the center of human behavior. In On Human Nature, he wrote: "In every man there dwells, first and foremost, a colossal egoism" (Schopenhauer, 1851/2004). Although this sentence is quite extreme, it captures a persistent philosophical doubt: human beings tend to understand the world from the perspective of self-interest first and then make moral judgments. Each individual only cares about their own interests first. Even seemingly noble behaviors may hide the desire for better self-identification. Greene's contemporary observation echoes this earlier pessimism. He believes that people wear masks to rationalize their interpretation of behavior and fall under the domination of irrationality and self-expansion again and again (Greene, 2018). Therefore, philosophy is not just about describing external conflicts. This makes us understand that if human beings are dominated by selfishness, it will be difficult to achieve the self-restraint, spirit of sacrifice and humility required for long-term collective survival.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau believed that human beings had some natural compassion but were later corrupted by social comparison and the private property system. In “Discourse on Inequality”, he believes that human beings have "an innate repugnance at seeing a fellow creature suffer". Elsewhere, he even claimed that "nothing is gentler than man in his primitive state" (Rousseau, 1755/2010). These statements are important because they remind us that pessimism should not become rough or hasty. Human beings are not completely cruel; they are compassionate. However, Rousseau's limited optimism did not completely overturn the argument

in this article in the end, because he also believed that social development would corrupt natural compassion through comparison, vanity, dependence and inequality. Modern human beings no longer live in a primitive state; they live in a social order shaped by reputation, competition and insecurity. In other words, Rousseau's challenge did not completely overturn the conclusion of this article in the end. No matter what human beings have been like, human beings in the course of history have been deeply exposed to the shadow of corruption.

This corruption has become politically lethal in Garrett Hardin's famous discourse on the issue of common land. Hardin stated this issue in an extremely harsh way: "Ruin is the destination towards which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest" (Hardin, 1968). Although his article has been criticized in some important respects, its core logic is still very powerful for this discussion. When individuals and even countries can benefit in private while transferring costs to the public sphere, it will increase the cost of resource acquisition and shared resources will become more vulnerable. This applies not only to the market, but also to the atmosphere, oceans, biodiversity, and even global peace. Carbon emissions, arms races, the dissemination of false information and excessive consumption are all in line with this structure. Every actor has a reason to breach the contract, delay, consume or dominate, and at the same time hope that others can act responsibly. Therefore, destruction does not require public evil intentions. It may only be caused by the rational pursuit of local interests by ordinary actors under weak moral and institutional constraints. This is one of the darkest contributions of philosophy to the problem of human destiny: a species does not need to desire complete destruction to move towards destruction.

Therefore, philosophical evidence converges into a serious conclusion. Hobbes shows that fear, interests and status will repeatedly create conflicts. Schopenhauer shows that

selfishness permeates the will. Even the relatively optimistic Rousseau admits that society corrupts the mercy of nature through comparison and dependence. Hardin shows how rational behavior at the individual level can create disasters at the collective level. Overall, these insights outline a picture of bleakness. Human beings do not need hatred to be extinct to move forward towards it. People will only continue to act in a familiar way. Everyone will fight for personal interests, so they are less willing to sacrifice immediate interests for the sake of distant coexistence. In this case, philosophy supports the pessimistic conclusion that the risk of self-destruction has been embedded in the daily motivation of human beings.

Conclusion

In summary, the evidence of science, religion and philosophy mentioned above all points to the same conclusion. Science shows that aggression is a recurring human possibility. Cooperation is often local and limited, while human judgment is deeply influenced by prejudice and difficult to support long-term collective action. In Christian tradition, religion believes that these failures are not only failures in information, but also failures in will: desire fights with each other within oneself, sin distorts judgment, and the group often amplifies selfishness instead of solving it. Philosophy shows that egoism, mistrust, status competition, and rationality that will destroy common people are all enduring characteristics in social life. Although these traditions cannot prove in certainty that human beings are bound to become extinct. It is unreasonable to require such a standard of proof. But putting them together constitutes a powerful probabilistic argument: human nature is not suitable for stable planetary stewardship but is increasingly capable of creating disasters that threaten the entire human species.

We should note that this danger does not only come from those who are obviously evil. It also comes from ordinary people who act in their usual way: defending the group they belong to, chasing advantages, denying unpleasant truths, obeying emotional narratives, and repeatedly delaying the necessary sacrifices until it is too late. Greene's analysis is convincing because he emphasizes that human beings are still vulnerable to destructive tendencies; and Sapolsky's explanation is particularly useful because it shows how deeply these tendencies are embedded in biology and behavior. Modern civilization amplifies this danger but does not transform the species. We still bring ancient passions into a world with unprecedented leverage.

What makes this moment unique in history is not that human beings suddenly become worse, but those ancient pride, fear, tribalism and shortsightedness, which are now playing a role through technologies and institutions that are powerful enough to globalize the consequences. Human beings do have enough goodness to build civilizations, form moral ideals, and sometimes be able to restrain themselves. However, history provides little reason to believe that these abilities are stable enough to overcome pride, fear, rivalry and denial in the long run. In an era of rapid expansion of climate destabilization, nuclear risk and technological power, this vulnerability may be fatal. The "true" nature of humanity is not pure evil, but it is dangerously unreliable; unless it can be restrained more successfully than history has shown so far, it is likely that it will not push the species to lasting progress, but to self-destruction.

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