

## Let Us Return to Nature: The Restoration of the Original Nature of Human Beings

Seog Byung Kim  
March 2019

*This is a chapter in the newly produced Character Education Textbooks, the introduction of which begins on page 30*



*Nature evolves and constantly grows*

Kant took a stroll at a fixed time daily to the degree that people called him a living clock. One day, however, he forgot to take his walk, a lifelong habit, while immersed in reading Rousseau's *Emile*, or *Treatise on Education*. After that Kant confessed, "As a person who naturally pursues the truth, I have believed that knowledge alone can achieve the glory of humankind. In that sense, I have held in contempt the ordinary masses who know nothing. However, having read Rousseau, this blind prejudice disappeared. I learned from Rousseau how to respect human beings. I became a moral egalitarian with respect for human nature." After that, he hung a portrait of Rousseau in his library and did not forget this determination during his life. Rousseau anguished deeply about how to overcome the contradictions of 18th century Europe. At that time, the political system maintained the feudal system that suppressed and exploited citizens and peasants, who were the majority of the people, while a minority ruling class enjoyed the privileges and power. In order to overcome these social contradictions and problems and realize an ideal life and society, Rousseau advocated return to a "state of nature." We must abandon the lifestyle where we have deteriorated through artificial and acquired habits of society and act naturally by responding to the original, natural consciousness of human beings.



*We are struggling to return to our primordial human selves*

Rousseau's words "state of nature" do not have the one-dimensional meaning of rejecting civilization and returning to the wilderness, but means that we must overcome the absurdity of the contradictory and unequal civilized societies and instead make a harmonious, neutral and peaceful condition through returning to original human nature. Rousseau criticized the human-ism pursued after the Renaissance and emphasized living according to your natural, true character rather than through human reason. In the *Social Contract*, Rousseau criticized the overindulgences and contradictions of civilized society that was not free and equal, saying, "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains." "Nature" in Western

languages means your inherent character. Rousseau advocated restoring the inherent nature and the original form of a peaceful, free and equal society tempered by compassion.



*In completing our personality, we will reveal our restored original inner beauty*

Rousseau emphasized that in order to restore the true character that human beings are born with, we must be in contact with nature's wonders and nature's beauties (education according to nature). He said, "Nature never deceives us; it is we who deceive ourselves." Rousseau spoke about looking at nature and learning from nature, which constantly disciplines itself. He observed that a child is in their natural state before receiving education in civilization, and is like a blank sheet of paper and thought we should restore this kind of true character through natural education -- that artificial training for children suppresses natural spontaneity.



*People everywhere seek freedom, but true freedom blossoms only when we fulfill our responsibilities by working hand-in-hand with our Heavenly Parent*

### **The fallacy of humanity's attitude toward creation**

Rousseau's claim that nature is closer to the original nature of human beings (than within civilization) sounded an alarm bell to the existing Western view. Previous thought distinguished nature from human

beings and regarded nature as a material existence without life. All the movements, changes and life phenomena of nature are explained through concepts of physical science; the newer thought of his time tried to reconstruct complex natural phenomena by reducing them to simple, general laws of cause and effect. It upheld anthropocentrism and ignored the complicated nature of the natural world, instead trying to understand the order of nature and pursued control of nature. One such thought of an empiricist was that we should hunt what is roaming around and make it a slave to serve human interests.

Anthropocentrism defines human beings and nature as subject and object, and sees nature as the object of conquest and development through differentiating terms, such as, civilization and barbarism, order and disorder, or development and stagnation. Rational human beings are seen as "developing and taming" barbaric nature through the force of culture and reason, and treat nature as objects that are possible to manipulate according to human needs. Anthropocentrism excludes the purposive and self-value of nature, and instead it teaches that nature functions as an object through which to accomplish the human-centered purpose.

Since the Industrial Revolution, the mechanistic worldview concerning nature reinforced the perception that human beings were the center who define and control natural reality. Anthropocentrism classifies everything -- for example, human beings and nature, Europe and the Orient, enlightenment and barbarism, reason and emotion, and men and women. It gave birth to a hierarchical order. Dichotomous thought, which further classifies everything as "black or white or good and bad," believes personal reality is the correct view, is the center; and differing views are all incorrect, or the periphery, and by denying any middle ground is not open to a constructive attitude.

Along with the development of science and technology an environmental crisis has developed that is causing serious problems related to global warming, climate change, and the damage of the ecosystem. With the rise of self-examination, anthropocentrism is viewed differently, and instead it is seen that human beings should embrace the philosophy that humanity is part of the ecosystem and should restore the mutual relationship we had with nature; this is now being actively discussed. In addition, sustainable development is a topic with international consensus -- that the environmental crisis can be overcome by working together.



*"Let us show the world and our young people that a new age of peace, an age of true families and an age of the blossoming of true humanity is dawning." – Father*

### **Restoration of the original nature of human beings and the ecosystem**

Abandoning anthropocentrism and finding sustainable development should be an alternative plan. More than any age previously, we are living a convenient life with advanced science and technology and are enjoying material abundance. Politically, democracy has been realized and the dignity of the individual has become evident; various political efforts are being attempted for the sake of the expansion of freedom and human rights. At the same time, individual happiness has not risen in tandem with the material and institutional conditions for happiness that are being fulfilled. Instead, the suicide rate is gradually rising, marriage rates are decreasing, and many couples do not intend to have children. Now, more than in the past, young people feel more anxious than hopeful about the future.

To overcome this crisis, a more fundamental alternative is needed. In the meantime, we need to transform the material-centered direction of life that we have been pursuing. Human beings have two components -- mind and matter. We cannot arrive at happiness only by developing economies that have greater capital and increasing conveniences through science and technology, but must also pursue spiritual values following the voice of our conscience as the standard for returning to our original God-given nature. The true owner of human beings is not capital, material or science, but is our conscience; we must awaken that so that we can attain self-governance and genuine happiness. When human beings recover their original nature, the crisis of nature can also be solved. True subjectivity arises when we understand the value of existence and of the object and are able to sacrifice ourselves while recognizing these. When we establish a mind that is willing to sacrifice human convenience and the desires for over-abundance so that we can understand the value of existence and the order of nature and recover these values, we can solve the crisis of nature and have peace within an ecological community.



*Compassion touches the human heart even when demonstrated by other species.; we pass on this characteristic only by demonstrating it*

A Chinese poet, Yeon-myeon Do, wrote a poem pleading for his countrymen to return to the fields of their hometowns, fields that would otherwise be devastated. He said that until that time, they had made their noble minds slaves of the flesh and if they did not return, they would be sorrowful and sad. He himself left his office to return to the fields and started farming. Likewise, this is the time when we must restore our internal original nature by returning from the artificial city civilization to a more natural life.