

# Natural Belief Based Ethics toward Sustainable Development

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**Abstract:** The history of human belief indicates: the primitive belief of nature maintained the harmonious coexistence between Man and Nature for thousands of years, only after the Religious Process and the Process of Science and Technology, it fell successively into mysticism and nihilism as well as the present human belief crisis and further leads to the severe relationship between man and nature. Therefore, we need an axiomatic system identified and accepted by all peoples in the world. Natural belief, or simply to say, worshipping nature could be the independent and universal ethics above any countries, religions, regions and cultures that leads to sustainable development. Its theoretical and practical issues are also discussed.

**Keywords:** natural belief ethics sustainable development

## Introduction

The world is now experiencing social transition accompanying the development of the market economy. However, some social problems turn up at the time that the traditional value was broken up while the new one has not yet established, among them the most sensitive to the public is the moral decline, including the social morality deficiency and individual demoralization etc. Most scholars attribute these issues to modernity characterized with market economy, democratic politics, science rationality, historical teleology and cultural values oriented with modern progressive doctrine.<sup>[1]</sup> Daniel Bell (2010) said that the fundamental issue of modernity is the belief.<sup>[2]</sup> Belief is the attitude and self-consciousness of highly trust, warship, reverence, pursuit toward something beyond reality, beyond oneself and pursuing the top value with which to control over one's spiritual life, it is one's pursuit of ultimate value (Yuliang Wang, 2000).<sup>[3]</sup> However, the profit-driven characteristics of market economy inspired human born avarice, and was kept constantly on the run to meeting his unlimited material demands. Therefore, it is hard for people to find the ultimate concern for the meaning of their life. What's more, due to the slavery of instrumental rationality of science and technology, the people, especially the young rarely realize their sense of subjective value. Just as professor Bolin Gai (2006) said, "The major issue of belief right now is not whether we need, but what we need to choose, or it is the issue of how to choose one's belief under the coexistence of multiple values"<sup>[4]</sup> Therefore, seek back the belief and constructing current people's belief system become the imperative issue for present society, especially for the theory of ethics toward sustainable development.

Toward the current crisis of environment, resources and populations, the United Nations has made great attempt to set off the worldwide movement characterized with the green, energy-saving and emission-reduction etc for the past 30 years. However, in terms of the internal conflicts of values, this movement remains "much cry and little action" with the passive, inactive external and technical way of governance. Just as Zexiong He (2008) stated that it is not optimistic in the practice of Sustainable Development Strategies, both developed countries and undeveloped ones seldom meet their commitments toward sustainable development.<sup>[5]</sup> Therefore, the above problems could not be resolved unless we humans rethink of and reorient the relationship between man and nature as that the humans are part of nature and it is nature who brings the life to humans and yet provides continuous supplements to the living of humans. Without nature, there will be no humans and that's why we call it Mother nature or Mother earth.<sup>[6]</sup> At this point of view, we humans have no reason to separate ourselves from nature, as the value of anthropocentrism we have been holding for the past decades, in stead, we ought to respect and worship nature, as what we call the natural belief, identifying and accepting the fact that all things including humans in the universe have their internal values. Comparing with other values, natural belief is both unique and universal. It surpasses the boundaries of religions, countries, regions and cultures.

### **The Value of Natural Belief Based Ethics**

Belief is a kind of expressive form of spiritual wish and value purpose, which in fact represent human cultural and spiritual existing will and meaning (Junren Wan, 2001).<sup>[7]</sup> Traditional cultures in oriental countries such as China, India etc. could be the typical culture based on natural belief. It regards nature as not only a phenomenal material world but also a spiritual world with ultimate meaning of value, which composes a three-in-one natural belief and spiritual system by the three original value of life creation, moral principle and harmony. Life creation discloses the fact that nature gives and raises life and endows all things with the ability of free life creation.<sup>[8]</sup> Moral principle is deduced from the moral of nature, a just, honest, fair and broad naturalist spirit based on kindheartedness freely keeping the order. On the base of the above two values harmony reflects a coherent symbiosis and diversity in unity life order and spirit composed with poly basic, abundant characters of all existing things. Therefore natural belief provides a universal axiom for human ethics.

The other theoretical value of Natural belief could be that it provides a broad idea framework of “Infinite game”. According James Carse, all human activities can be summed up in two games: one is “finite game”. It regards all participants as an independent individual, and fixes game rules as well as the point of beginning and end, so as to decide winning or losing at a limited time. The other is “infinite game”. It is a natural process without any beginning and end. It emphasizes the relationship but no opponent, no competition between individuals, and its final goal is not to win or to lose, but the participants enjoying the continuous game and its warm atmosphere.<sup>[9]</sup> In the past few decades, the human has been playing finite games, regards nature as their opposite and continuously deprive the natural resources to meet endless material needs, to gain temporal achievement, enjoying short-time happiness etc. and in the end leads to the current human existence crisis. On the contrary, Natural belief consider human as an integrated part of nature, seeking for harmonious coexistence with nature, neither concerning who wins or who lose, the only concern is to keep the human living happily with nature forever.

The current religions or folk beliefs in China, India and Nepal etc. could be handed down from the above natural value belief system. At the base of worshiping nature, respecting nature, it regards nature as morality and morality as nature, and through religious and philosophical selection process, finally seeking for the state of harmony between man and nature. It is a process of mentally analysis and life experience. In the process of analysis, it reflects a philosophical feature and in the process of life experience it reveals religious feelings, two of which mutually balances human spiritual life, and this makes it possible to maintain the natural belief (Chun Shan, 2003).<sup>[10]</sup> That the harmony value undergone thousands of years without any changing demonstrates itself as rationality and science, especially at current era of severe crisis between man and nature, esteeming the value of nature reflecting further of its theoretical value of axiom and practical value of life guidance.

### **Characteristics of Natural Belief Based Ethics**

Compared with traditional ethics, the natural belief based ethics has the following features:

#### **(1) Different path on construction:**

Some traditional ethics, for example in China, followed a “top-down” path constructing social normative ethics, focusing on providing theoretical support for maintaining social order, while neglecting individual value and belief, the base stone of virtue ethics at which the normative ethics established.<sup>[11]</sup> It tried to promote individual virtue through the way of social education. The reality demonstrates that this kind of social normative ethics functions only in the era of power domination, while in the era of advocating democracy, freedom, human right and individual value, the traditional ethics is sure to fail in its functions. Therefore, at present situation of moral crisis, it's indeed necessary to reconstruct ethics in a “down-top” path to set up a new ethics that conform the individual value and social value by strengthening natural belief and then establish normative ethics in a broader perspective, e.g. the relationship between man and nature, so as to realize its theoretical support and behavior guidance functions.

#### **(2) Different range of study**

Traditional ethics separate human from nature, and limit itself with in the range of human society, as what we call it anthropocentrism, only talking about the interpersonal relationship. That's why current ethics could not deal with the severe relation between man and nature. Natural belief based ethics put itself in a broader framework talking about the relations between man and nature, making it possible to concord the values of individual, society and the nature. It regards human as part of nature with fate and death linked together. Thus, it breaks through the limitation of traditional ethics, and enlarges its study from interpersonal relations to that with the society and nature. Further, it puts human ethics into the ethics of relation between man and nature.

Therefore, Natural belief based ethics provided theoretical basis for resolving the severe environmental problems, See Figure 1.

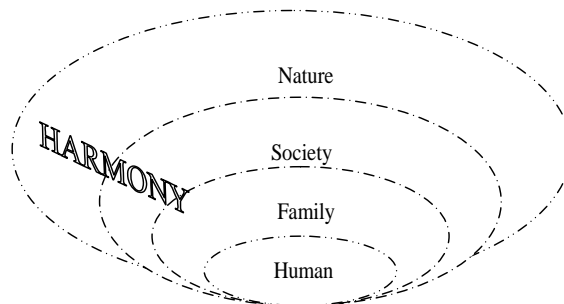


Figure 1 Ethic Relations Based on Natural Belief

### (3) Different goals to reach.

Traditional ethics' narrow perspective also limited its goals within interpersonal harmony and unable to give guidance and regulations to those beyond humans. What's more, according to James' finite game, the traditional so called harmony is only a temporary harmony in the historical range. It would be ended with the certain society disappeared. However, the natural belief based ethics considers human life as an infinite game, no beginning and no ending, and yet each layer of human life from individual to family, to society and till the nature all open and linked, (in a finite game each layer is closed). Therefore, this infinite game aims to gain long-term and forever harmony, even if there's some disharmony, it can recover itself by changing the game rules, for both human and nature share the same goal.

### (4) Different function mechanism.

Traditional ethics mainly functions by means of external normative ethics and related laws, especially traditional ethics in some old oriental countries such as China, North Korea etc. depends on the one-way education of the officially made macroscopic normative ethics theory. And this external mechanism only functions in some bureaucratic society, while it will lose its function in present people oriented society. Natural belief based ethics constructs itself on the microscopic perspective of human nature, and starting from individual belief and needs such as selfishness or selflessness exploring the relations among individuals, society and nature. Its essence is to arouse one's internal motive to realize self-adjusted moral behavior. And further, due to this mechanism in accord with individual value, there will be no cognitive contradiction and conflicting emotions generated by means of external power,

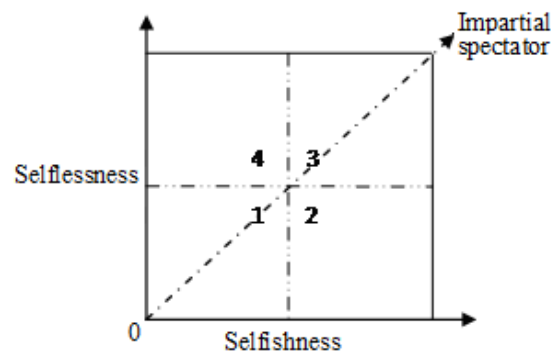
The value of natural belief based ethics provides us a possible path toward sustainable development. Firstly, natural belief has a history of thousands of years and till today it still functions as a spiritual life support to the majority of people, although different minorities has different forms of beliefs and even with different doctrines such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism and Muslim etc. Natural belief is the widely accepted value for most oriental countries. And this could be the strong practical basis for constructing the ethics on natural belief. Secondly, Natural belief regards nature as livelihood depends, and the reverence for nature, thanksgiving nature and return to nature, emphasizing the duty and responsibility toward nature, which is in agreement to Jonas Hans' term of "Responsibility command".<sup>[12]</sup> What's more, as for the behavior itself, natural belief is well in accordance with *Field theory* by the German psychologist Lewin Kurt (1890-1947) that human behavior is the product of interaction between human needs and the environment.<sup>[13]</sup> And this environment includes both mental and physical and natural environment. While natural belief emphasizes that human ought to adapt his living environment, and pursue for the harmonious coexistence between man and nature.

## 5. Application Mechanism of Natural belief Based Ethics

As stated above, the natural belief based ethics focuses on individual internal function mechanism, seeking

motivation from belief and human nature. According to Adam Smith, the founder of market economy, human nature has both selfish and selfless sides.<sup>[14]</sup> Selfishness consist of benefit oneself, one's home, one's group and one's country while selflessness includes benefit others, other home, other group, other country and nature. And this human nature analysis could be the logical starting point of Smith's market ethics. Therefore, all human moral activities could be adjusted between selfishness and selflessness, See Figure 2.

Another creation by Smith is the term he coined as "impartial spectator". Due to the implicit feature of human moral mental activity, Smith used trans-positional consideration methodology by introducing "impartial spectator" as the third "person" in one's mental action.<sup>[15]</sup> According to Smith, the "impartial spectator" stands for conscience, justice and fairness, which is supported by one's moral belief and enriched with moral knowledge and experience (in Figure 2 the slant line from the cross point of the selfishness dimension and selflessness dimension stands for the "impartial spectator"). When one faces some moral contradiction or choices that could not deal with by the obvious ethic rules, the "impartial spectator" will turn up as the judge to make the just decision.



**Figure 2. The Mechanism of Moral Regulation**

Figure 2 also described human moral career which is divided into four quadrants, we called respectively as the stage of germination, the stage of alienation, the stage of growth and the stage of maturation. Quadrant 1 is the stage of germination, the moral life beginning period with low selfishness and low selflessness, in which one's belief and moral experience has just germinated and the human nature of both selfishness and selflessness mutually develop. Examples can be found in the current young generation. With the growth of the individual, his knowledge and life experience becomes broader and his belief will be established, and then enter into the stage of alienation in Quadrant 2. Due to the impact of market economic environment, the selfishness dimension grows faster than that of selflessness, and then the human nature gradually lose its balance, and even in some certain situation might also break its moral bottom line. As stated above, the "spectator" requires belief to support and knowledge and experience to enrich. If there's no belief, the spectator could do nothing to the moral imbalance even if one has rich knowledge an experience. This might be the root reason of the current belief crisis. Further more, if there's no natural belief, the spectator could either do nothing to the relation crisis between man and nature. However, if one has firm belief as well as rich moral experience, he may easily step to the growth stage in Quadrant 3 with high selfishness and high selflessness, in which one's moral level goes up in accordance with his career improvement. The white collar class in current society could be such examples. When one feels self actualized and reaches a certain higher career, he will naturally transit to the maturation stage in Quadrant 4, which characterized with high selflessness and low selfishness, or more dedication and less demands. This could be the state as Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) depicted "the self-actualized man" who realized peak experience from the career achievement and meantime spouted altruism feeding back the others and the society.<sup>[16]</sup>

What to mention is that the above moral career process as well as its stages is only considered as the general process of moral development as well as its objective behavior. It doesn't mean to include all, especially some moral behavior in some urgent situation, for instance, diving rescue could be instinctive behavior rather than objective one. However, one thing is certain whether objective behavior or instinctive behavior both related to one's moral cultivation, or to say related to the maturation of the *spectator* in one's mind.

Above all, Natural belief ethics could be a feasible path toward sustainable development. One of the feasibility is that natural belief is the born instinct of humans, it could be awakening with the aid of enough drive and play its due

role, including dealing with the current belief crisis as well as the crisis between man and nature. The second is its well-known value of axiom: nature gives birth and brings up humans and humans ought to respect and feedback nature, or else, the humans endlessly exploit and destroy nature, at a result of mutually destroying each other. The third is natural belief based ethics regard human activity as an infinite game, focusing on maintaining rather than winning or losing, looking to the future rather than present, and this is just the fundamental reason for our present ethics innovation: ending the two decades' finite games so as for the human to step out of the dilemma made by modernity and towards the harmonious coexistence with nature. The last reflects that it constitutes at the logic starting point of Adam Smith's human nature and is possible to answer and deal with the issues generated from market economy and society.

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