

# Ethics Towards the Second Beginning<sup>1</sup>

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## Этика в направлении ко Второму Началу

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**Abstract.** The prevalence of moral relativism, skepticism, nihilism and techno utopianism makes people live in a world of moral retreat, faith collapse, gods retreat and technology dominance. Under this background, the survival and development of ethics are also facing challenges. For this reason, it is particularly important to examine the various crises that contemporary ethics has encountered, reflect on the foundation of ethics based on the first beginning, and construct an ethics based on the second beginning. The ethics of the second beginning moves from the regulation and domination of the human beings to the care of the true state of the existence of the human beings. It pursues ecological wisdom beyond the traditional three kinds of wisdom, and moves toward the unity of heaven and humanity in the post-subject-object relationship. It displays the ethical spirit through the spirit and the comer, and reshapes a harmonious world of symbiosis, coexistence and common good.

**Keywords:** Ethics; The Second Beginning; Common Philosophy.

**Резюме.** Распространение морального релятивизма, скептицизма, нигилизма и техноутопизма заставляет людей жить в мире отступления морали, крушения веры, отступления богов и господства технологий. В этих условиях выживание и развитие этики также сталкивается с проблемами. По этой причине особенно важно рассмотреть различные кризисы, с которыми столкнулась современная этика, поразмыслить над основами этики, заложенными в первом начале, и построить этику, основанную на втором начале. Этика второго начала переходит от регулирования и господства над человеческими существами к заботе об истинном состоянии существования человеческих существ. Она стремится к экологической мудрости, выходящей за рамки традиционных трех видов мудрости, и движется к единству Неба и человечества в постсубъект-объективных отношениях. Она проявляет этический дух через дух человека, и восстанавливает гармоничный мир симбиоза, сосуществования и общего блага.

**Ключевые слова:** Этика; Второе начало; Общая философия.

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<sup>3</sup> The viewpoint of the Second Beginning ethics is proposed by Professor Liu Xiaoting based on Chinese Taoism and the Biocosmology. Also, I would like to thank Konstantin Khroutski for his contributions to Biocosmology. Their insights and research have undoubtedly enriched our understanding of this fascinating field. (1) Xiaoting Liu. The Crisis of Civilization and the Philosophy of the Second Beginning [J]. *Theoretical discussion*, 2021(6):102–110. (2) Xiaoting Liu. The Wholeness of Nature and the Roots of Civilization [J]. *Biocosmology – Neo-Aristotelism*, Vol.11, Nos.3&4, Summer/Autumn 2021. (3) Xiaoting Liu. On Deep-Seated Organic Property of Universe [J]. *Biocosmology – Neo-Aristotelism*, Vol.8, Nos.3&4, Summer/Autumn 2018. (4) Konstantin S. Khroutski. Editing the English version of the Biocosmology Initiative, year 2022 [J]. *Biocosmology – Neo-Aristotelism*, Vol.12, Nos.3&4, Summer/Autumn 2022.

## *Introduction*

In the process of the development of human society, a variety of ethical norms have been formed to meet the needs of human survival, maintain social operation, regulate and improve social order. Virtue ethics, deontological ethics and consequentialist ethics are the three most influential and representative ethical theories. However, humanitarian crises such as trade conflicts, military wars, and the global pandemic of infectious viruses have brought new challenges to mainstream ethical theories and affected the stable and orderly life of human beings. How to get out of Konrad Lorenz's eight SINS of civilized humanity and the risks they bring to human existence, it is necessary to explore the ethics towards the second beginning.

### **1. The crisis of contemporary ethics**

There are many factors for ethics to encounter crisis and challenge. Simon Blackburn of the University of Cambridge, UK, argues that ethics is challenged by seven factors<sup>4</sup>: The collapse of faith and the failure of authoritative laws and norms caused by the death of God. Relativism raises questions about the universality and objectivity of moral norms. The selfishness and egoism of ideas and behavior caused by egoism. A pessimism derived from some combination of evolution, biology, and neurology that arises from evolutionary theory. The futility of moral persuasion, moral education, or moral experience caused by genetic determinism in life sciences. The abstraction, dogmatism and simplification of moral norms caused by irrational directives. The misjudgment of the perception of moral behavior caused by the illusion, and even the complicity with mediocre people.

The crisis of ethics also stems from the fact that traditional ethics have been questioned due to its unique academic style, specific ideological resources and general concept of good. For example, scholars represented by Gerald Doppelt put forward three noteworthy viewpoints<sup>5</sup> [Gerald Doppelt. 2002]. One is that traditional ethics is primarily aimed at professional academic philosophers and thus insulates itself from the scrutiny of lay groups and wider audiences in other disciplines. Second, traditional ethics draws its resources from its own ancient ideas, arguments, and theories, and isolates itself from those provided by the natural sciences, the social sciences, history, political struggles, or personal experience. Third, traditional ethics aims at elucidating and justifying general and universal principles or ideals of good, and its interpretation and justification are carried out on the abstract basis of reason, which is contrary to the rights of modern democratic states to defend the cultures of racial,

<sup>4</sup> Simon Blackburn. *Ethics: A Very Short Introduction* [M]. Oxford University Press, 2001, P. 9–50.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald Doppelt. Can traditional Ethical Theory meet the Challenges of Feminism, Multiculturalism, and Environmentalism? [J]. *The Journal of Ethics* 2002(6):383–405.

national and religious minorities and their unique cultural practices and autonomy.

The crisis of ethics also stems from the influence of technological utopianism, the development of new technologies such as nuclear weapons, modern biotechnology, and artificial intelligence, leading most people to believe that scientific rationality must lead to the increase of knowledge in the natural sciences, and at the same time lead to the progress of political and moral science. However, the global pandemic of the novel coronavirus has exposed the humanitarian crisis brought about by scientific rationality. When scientific rationality and modern technology become tools of interest competition and power struggle, the development of science and technology will aggravate and even expand the scope and scale of human-made disasters. It can be seen that what science and technology can bring does not mean what science and technology should bring, and the ethical problems derived from the development of science and technology have plunged mainstream ethical theories into a new crisis. As Hans Jonas has long pointed out, the anthropocentric tendencies of traditional normative ethics will accelerate the usurpation of humanized technology over nature, and create hidden dangers for the planet's survival [Hans Jonas. 1984]<sup>6</sup>. Paula Boddington also argues that “we can use virtue ethics, but we need to pay attention to whether the virtues of the old world are appropriate for the new world we are creating, and consequentialism sees avoiding pain and increasing happiness as the criteria for ethical decision-making, which raises the question of whether technology can produce happiness” [Paula Boddington, 2017]<sup>7</sup>.

With the development of modern emerging technologies, especially the gradual extension, enhancement and replacement of human agency and action power by artificial intelligence, moral motivation, moral choice and moral judgment advocated by consequentialism [Paula Boddington, 2017]<sup>8</sup>, deontology and virtue theory are challenged, resulting in the prevalence of moral skepticism, nihilism and relativism. Nihilism means, In Nietzsche's sense, that we lack all goals. In fact, what Nietzsche is expressing is the destruction of the spiritual expression and sacredness of the natural person. In aiming at the other beginning, nihilism must be grasped more fundamentally as an essential consequence of the abandonment by being. The genuine nihilism is one's unwillingness to acknowledge the lack of goals. Therefore precisely where one believes one again has goals, where one is again “fortunate,” where one proceeds to making equally available to all “people” the “cultural

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<sup>6</sup> Hans Jonas. *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* [M]. The University of Chicago Press, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> Paula Boddington. *Towards a Code of Ethics for Artificial Intelligence*. © Springer International Publishing AG, 67-68 (2017).

<sup>8</sup> Paula Boddington. *Towards a Code of Ethics for Artificial Intelligence*. © Springer International Publishing AG, 29-30 (2017).

assets” (movies and trips to the beach) that were closed off to “most”-precisely here, in this noisy intoxication with “lived experience,” resides the greatest nihilism, the deliberate turning of a blind eye to human goal-lessness, the “ready to wear” avoidance of any goal-setting decision, the dread of all decisive domains and of their opening [Martin Heidegger, trans by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly1999]<sup>9</sup>.

The crisis of ethics is a common problem facing mankind. At the basic level, the common difficulties of human society are due to the two-level tension between the whole and the individual, the rapid increase in the complexity of the system, and the disconnection between thinking and doing. “One way to change is to move beyond the antagonism between philosophy of the whole and philosophy of the individual towards a philosophy of the common... According to this, the third philosophical thought of different ancient and modern times... Reconstructing the philosophical paradigm of a new civilization based on the Second Beginning” [Liu XiaoTing. 2022 )<sup>10</sup>. In this situation, it is particularly important to reflect on the dilemma of philosophy based on the first beginning and construct ethics based on the second beginning.

## 2. Reflections on the ethics based on the first beginning

The conceptual support of ethics based on the first beginning is the naturalization approach, the conformist concept, which mainly points to the good, welfare or happiness that people can obtain. Ethics based on the first beginning relies on some universal norm, appeals to a single principle or foundational concept, and its driving force is mainly the fear of the natural god, the obedience to authority, the fear of punishment, and the consideration of the maximum benefit, turning benevolence into a means rather than seeing it as the true good.

Under the naturalization approach and the theory of conformity, ethics based on the first beginning focuses on the investigation of moral language and ethical concepts, focuses on the meta-ethical questioning of “what is good”, “what is right”, and the priority between good and right, or on the normative ethical discrimination of “What kind of people are good or good” and “what kind of behavior should be or justified”, or on the investigation of moral concepts and moral behavior, or on empirical description and investigation of ethical and moral phenomena in daily life. The main problem with this naturalized approach and the conformist perspective is that all beings are mouldable

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). German edition: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 65 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1989).

<sup>10</sup> Liu XiaoTing. Creating Co-philosophy based on Biodiversity [J]. *Academic Frontiers*, 2022(2): 80–93.

or to be moulded, but who is qualified or should shape the being in what way is subject to further argument.

Ethics based on the first beginning relies on some universal norm, and tries to direct people's thinking and behavior to some norm. It asks what good is worth pursuing, and it focuses on standards for how humans should behave and how society should be organized. However, according to Heidegger, this claim to the universality of norms should be questioned. The expression “generality” is ambiguous, especially since the designation of what is thought as the KOIVOV is already not based originally on what is itself seen but on the “many,” on “beings”...the “many” are the “over and against” without properly and previously being determined in their truth [Martin Heidegger, trans. by Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly, 1999]<sup>11</sup>.

Ethics based on first beginnings emphasizes universal norms, which means that it tends to treat everything as “representable” or to be shaped. The problem is that the expression of a natural person's spirit can neither be precisely calculated nor precisely measured. Just as morality and sacredness are difficult to measure and calculate, a person's conscience and love cannot be regulated. Therefore, utilitarian ethics regards the increase in the maximum surplus of happiness of the greatest number of people as the standard of moral judgment, which is criticized by virtue ethics.

From the perspective of existentialism, whether it is to choose a naturalized approach, a conformist perspective, or to rely on some universal norm to reach the good, welfare, or happiness available to human beings, ethics based on the first beginning mainly appeals to basic ontology, and its theory is more to prescribe the existence in order to dominate the existence. The greatest dilemma of ethics based on the first beginning is that in the face of the emergence of intelligent man, cosmic man, and interstellar man, it is difficult to continue to define and dominate the being. Therefore, it is very important to construct an ethics based on the second beginning.

### **3. Construction an ethics based on the second beginning**

The ethics towards the second beginning will go out of the naturalization approach and the concept of conformity. It has changed from prescribing and dominating human beings to caring for the true state of human existence. It pursuits an ecological wisdom beyond the traditional three kinds of wisdom and it goes into the unity of heaven and humanity in the post-subject-object relationship. It

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). German edition: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 65 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1989).

displays the ethical spirit through the spirit and the comer, and reshapes a harmonious world of symbiosis, coexistence and common good.

Firstly, ethics towards the second beginning seeks ecological wisdom beyond the traditional three kinds of wisdom. Ethics, based on the first beginning, tends to interpret wisdom in terms of the type and nature of human activity. Aristotle, for example, divided the types of activities in which man uses his intellectual power into theory, practice, and creativity. Theoretical activity refers to things with invariable origin, which is an activity with intrinsic purpose carried out within reason, independent of external things, and is a meditation on the natural world, human beings and social existence out of interest. Practice is a kind of activity with intrinsic purpose in people's communication (ethical or political) affairs. It makes people reflect on all behaviors and guides them to achieve harmonious order relations. The purpose of practice is to pursue some moral behavior. *τεχνη* is used to describe production activities such as artisans and technicians, and is also used to express creative activities such as poetry and literature. Technical activities are activities that people carry out towards the production of some external product, which depends on the tools and materials used (external things or materials). According to Aristotle's three divisions of the use of intellectual power (theory, practice, and *τεχνη*, intelligence can be divided into theoretical intelligence, practical intelligence, and technical intelligence, and wisdom can be divided into theoretical wisdom, practical wisdom, and technical wisdom.

Ethics, based on the second Beginning, seeks ecological wisdom beyond the three intelligences. Because on the basis of practical wisdom, ecological wisdom absorbs, but is not limited to, the goodness of practical thinking, choice, judgment and decision that practical wisdom involves. Aristotle's discussion on the ontology of limited contingency based on practical wisdom provides a reference for us to construct the concept of ecological wisdom, that is, we can understand ecological wisdom as the virtue of ecological intelligence, and ecological intelligence as the rational power of human beings to deal with things/affairs related to human life and required state.

On the basis of theoretical wisdom, ecological wisdom considers the universal laws of the natural world pursued by theoretical wisdom, but is not limited to inquiring into the origin and essence of things. Ecological wisdom is concerned with the real grasp of the natural law of things, but with a critical reflective attitude to explore the conditions and possibilities of co-existence, it pays attention to the changing, accidental, changeable and mouldable things.

On the basis of the technical wisdom, ecological wisdom absorbs the intellectual power emphasized by the technical wisdom to make the production activity conform to the Logos, but is not limited to

the concern of external products. Ecological wisdom pursues the ecological balance between man and nature, rather than continuously developing technology and making certain products to satisfy people's desires. It relies on external things, but pays more attention to people's internal self-inhibition.

Secondly, ethics based on the second beginning pursues the unity of nature and man in the post-subject-object relationship. Because, in ancient times, people were interdependent in the extreme lack of means of production and living, in modern times, With the abundance of material means of living and the improvement of material living standards, people began to enter a relatively independent state, in the future, in the state of greatly improved material living standards of human beings, Mankind will eventually aspire to a state of free and comprehensive development. If we say that in the primitive pre-subject-object relations, the basic sentiment of mankind is wonder. When human beings enter the subject-object relationship stage, the basic sentiment of people is to release and obtain, the pursuit of external freedom, extension expansion, outward expansion. When human beings enter the post-subject-object relationship stage, the basic sentiment of people needs to move towards internal self-discipline, inner inhibition and inward convergence<sup>12</sup>.

Professor Zhang Shiyong<sup>13</sup> put forward a explanation from the three stages of individual spiritual development and national cultural development. He believes that the early concept of human beings is “the original unity of human and nature”, which is a structure of “unity of heaven and humanity in the pre-subject-object relationship”. In this stage, human beings lack independent self-consciousness. The second stage is the structure of the “subject-object” relationship, in which human highlights his subjectivity. The third stage is such a structure, which includes the 'subject-object' relationship, but goes beyond the 'subject-object' relationship, which is a 'higher unity of nature and human'. This is a structure of “unity of heaven and humanity in the post-subject-object relationship”. In this stage, a man not only realizes himself, but also transcends himself and merges into one with others.

Thirdly, Ethics towards the second beginning arises from and goes towards the “Dao” of the primordial realm. This is a transcendence of the traditional abstract, conceptualized and idealized moral view of conformity. This is because the theory of conformity breaks down moral thought into its parts, eliminates useless thought, and organizes useful thought into a systematic moral theory. Based on this, the ethics of philosophers are quite different from the primitive ethics in culture<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Liu Xiaoting. The Crisis of Civilization and the Philosophy of the Second Beginning [J]. *Theoretical discussion*, 2021(6):102–110.

<sup>13</sup> Zhang Shiyong. The Philosophy of Connecting Everything [J]. *Foreign Philosophy*, 2021(6):28–39.

<sup>14</sup> James Griffin. *What Can Philosophy Contribute to Ethics?* [M]. Oxford University Press, 2015:1.



According to Heidegger's understanding, the philosophy of the second beginning goes beyond the disjunctive construction of “existology” and “metaphysics,” as he puts it, “In the domain of the other beginning, there is neither “ontology” nor any “metaphysics.” No “ontology,” because the guiding question no longer delimits the measure and the sphere of inquiry. No “metaphysics,” because the procedure is not at all to pass from beings as objectively present or objects as known (idealism) and step over to something else”<sup>15</sup>.

Ethics towards the second beginning integrates morality into the original realm of life, practice, history and experience. Under the influence of the philosophy of the second beginning, the ethics towards the second beginning must also return to the original territory of man, and go out of the moral standard defined by the moral view of conformity. It comes out of the rigid world that is pre-solidified, objectively established, or stripped of the practical initiative of the actor, and the “pure scientific world” dominated by instrumental rationality and utilitarian calculation. The ethics of the second beginning should go beyond the conceptual world built on the basis of scientific logic or numerical symbols, and emphasize the understanding of the great ethical spirit in the original territory of the living world<sup>16</sup>.

Moral meaning can only be spoken in the context of original circumstances and experience. Unlike what conceptual ethicists say, morality is not an immutable entity, but arises in the original situation. The original situation cannot be abstracted as a cognitive object, but as the source of morality. The western traditional philosophy, beginning with Plato, always regards the highest good as the highest ideal object and believes that it can be grasped or approached through conceptual abstraction and rational cognition. In modern times, when philosophers represented by Dewey began to prove that the philosophical method of the first beginning could not find the ultimate good, good and truth became relative and practical. However, in the view of the seekers of wisdom in the East, “conceptualization, ideation and representation can only make us fundamentally trapped in the narrow situation of 'ignorance' and lose the original vision of experiencing ultimate reality”. It is only in the direct experience of pre-concept or non-concept - representation that ultimate reality and truth can be comprehended”<sup>17</sup>. Accordingly, the meaning of ethics and moral goodness can only be truly

<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999:48). German edition: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, ed. F.-W. von Herrmann, Gesamtausgabe, vol. 65 (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Zhang Xianglong: *Heidegger's Thought and the Chinese Way of Heaven: The Opening and Blending of the Ultimate Vision* [M], Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1996:5.

<sup>17</sup> Zhang Xianglong: *Heidegger's Thought and the Chinese Way of Heaven: The Opening and Blending of the Ultimate Vision* [M], Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 1996: 8.

understood if it is placed in the original situation.

Finally, the ethics of the second beginning should aim at the common good. Because, the release of human nature has triggered the continuous use of technology by human beings to plunder, violate, occupy and destroy nature and others. The desire of self-storage, self-expansion and even egoism are important reasons for the survival crisis of human beings. In order to avoid the evolution of private ownership into predatory hegemony, it is particularly important to move from biological evolution to civilized evolution, and then towards the common good. This means that moral behavior cannot be seen as a means to good, and others cannot be seen as tools or means.<sup>18</sup>

Ethics towards the second beginning, its ethical spirit is shown through the spiritual man and the coming one, because, in addition to treating the human brain as a tool for human expression of thought, the understanding of brain function should undergo a fundamental change, that is, from the understanding of nature and physical nature to the understanding of spirituality and ethics. Human existence and development is not only the optimal accumulation of materials, the development and use of material resources and ecological environment, the creation and use of technical artifacts, are expressed in an ethical way, and human existence has continuity. Professor Liu Xiaoting regards “spiritual man” as a person who explores hope and self-salvation. As he said, “the person of the second beginning is the person who responds to the call of existence, is a civilized person, a whole person, and a person who explores hope and self-salvation.”<sup>19</sup> The man of the second beginning is the revealer of truth, the scepter of the truth of existence, who seeks a true knowledge and does not allow himself to be calculated, coerced, contrived.

If the common philosophy toward the second beginning advocates that “the world is one, all things are connected, and all existence in the wide universe is common”, the ethics of the second beginning aims at common good, which is to get out of the “class construction” existence state of individual---individual-heart---individualization, and move toward the “co-construction” co-existence state of common heart-community, which goes beyond the physical and data interpretation of human beings<sup>20</sup>. The ethics of the second beginning need to move towards the common good, as humans are social animals and, as members of the community, humans have the responsibility to fulfill our obligations to the community. For individual good, freedom is the highest way to realize it, but

<sup>18</sup> John Dewey. *Moral theory and practice*, EW, Vol.3, Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1969:47.

<sup>19</sup> Liu Xiaoting. The Crisis of Civilization and the Philosophy of the Second Beginning [J]. *Theoretical discussion*, 2021(6):102–110.

<sup>20</sup> Liu Xiaoting. Creating Co-philosophy based on Biodiversity [J]. *Academic Frontiers*, 2022(2): 80–93.

freedom cannot be obtained against social morality. The highest form of social good is duty, but social authority cannot be imposed by ignoring individual freedom. Common good is to seek a balance between freedom and morality in order to promote the common realization of individual good and social good.

The ethics of the second beginning is to go beyond the conceptual world based on scientific logic or numerical symbols. It emphasizes the great ethical spirit upheld in the original realm of the living world. The spiritual growth of human beings and the improvement of ethical quality, just like the operation of natural things, have their own “purpose” or law. Just as human beings cannot set a purpose or an end to the operation of nature, they cannot set a single norm and ultimate purpose for themselves in a world full of chance, change, and uncertainty.

### ***Conclusion***

The mainstream paradigms of ethics are typically categorized into three major types: virtue ethics, deontology, and utilitarianism. All of them adhere to the theory of correspondence and strive for definitive, universal ethical norms, regulating and governing beings through prescriptions. However, in the face of the impacts of digital capitalism, information capitalism, surveillance capitalism, and other phenomena on modern values, contemporary ethics is encountering significant crises. Therefore, it is crucial to reflect on the foundational assumptions of ethics based on the first beginning and explore a paradigm shift towards the second beginning. The ethics of the second beginning points to the great path of the original realm, pursuing ecological wisdom that transcends the traditional three kinds of wisdom. It aims towards a harmonious unity of heaven and humanity beyond the traditional subject-object relationship. With the pursuit of common goodness as its ultimate goal, it manifests ethical spirit through spiritual individuals and future beings, contributing to the reshaping of a harmonious world of coexistence, co-thrival, and shared prosperity.

The ethics towards the second beginning has gone out of the traditional naturalization tendency and the view of conformity, from the theory of survival evolution to the theory of spiritual transcendence, adhering to the ethical view that all things are one and all things are connected. In the standard of value judgment, it goes out of the utilitarian consideration of evaluating success or failure, and balances self-growth with the development of others and the coexistence of all human beings. In the shaping of human nature, it goes out of the material instinct, forging the cultural instinct, from material humanology to spiritual humanology.

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