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COVID-19 and Societal Wellbeing: A Text Analysis and Issues on National Sovereignty in Focus

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1. Introduction

This brief paper makes a text analysis of articles on COVID-19, a supposedly highly infectious pandemic, with a focus on its linkage with societal wellbeing. The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 has been making a significant impact on the way socioeconomic systems are operated. Most importantly, social distancing has become a new normal, with citizens keeping sizeable physical distances from each other while wearing a mask or a face protection. This new normality is presumed to make a dominantly negative impact on citizens' social wellbeing. Also, the worsened wellbeing in return is seen to make another negative impact on the larger-scale socioeconomic systems including the unity of a country as well as regional integrations. Section 2 makes an analysis

of COVID-19 with its connection to social wellbeing from this viewpoint. Section 3 discusses the source of human wellbeing from a rather theologically oriented, philosophical perspective. Section 4 provides a socio-psychological analysis of the US citizens' happiness in connection to COVID-19 and the US presidential election. Section 5 concludes this paper.

2. A text analysis of COVID-19

In this section, a text analysis of COVID-19 is made in connection to social wellbeing. The source texts for analysis are taken from the daily report articles (available on a subscription basis) covered by Foreign Broadcast Information Service¹ (FBIS) on the main issue of COVID-19. The articles released during January – April 2020 are pooled and treated as one corpus for text analysis, and those articles released during the period May – August 2020 are treated as another corpus, also for text analysis.

As for the analytical tool, the Text Mining Studio, which was developed and released by NTT Mathematical Systems (Japan), was used. Generally speaking, text mining or text analytics means turning unconstructed text data into high-quality information or actionable knowledge (Zhai, 2018). Also, by applying a specific algorithm, we can extract meaningful information, which could be useful for making sense of the linkage between the text and the social context it is in. Above all, content analysis is widely applied in social science studies (Yu, 2015). It classifies those words in a prepared document (or corpus) through detecting encoding rules to give them a new order.² Content analysis has a great value in observing any change in public opinions (Stemler, 2001). Generally speaking, natural language processing (NLP) requires common

¹ Its website (front page) is as follows: <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/foreign-broadcast-information-service/>.

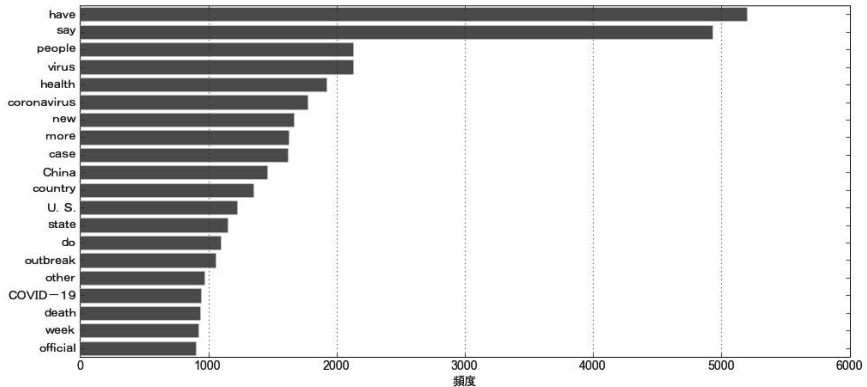
sense knowledge (e.g., about human psychology and economic policy), which we would supply. NLP-based on statistical methods can be done using the two sets of corpuses.

After extracting the articles on COVID-19, the total number of words is found to be 523,310 for the first corpus (period January – April 2020), and 554,648 for the second corpus (period May – August 2020). The basic analytical settings are as follows: those words with a frequency of at least one (no upper limit), words containing at least one character (no upper limit), and words repeated on the same line are counted just once; and the top 30 words that meet these requirements were extracted. Next, keywords of interest were analyzed as a figure of word-network. In this analysis, word combinations that are used at the same time, within the same chapter or line (within one Twitter comment) are extracted, showing the kinds of expressions in which the words at issue were used, and the other words and attributes that appear at the same time (co-occur).

Figures 1 and 2 show the results of the word frequency analysis for January-April 2020 and May-August 2020, respectively. The words “have”, “say” and “people” are used frequently in both cases. The words “virus”, “health” and “coronavirus” appear next in the first corpus, while “COVID-19”, a newly coined term, is more frequently used in the second corpus, reflecting the word use gaining popularity. “China” appears in the first corpus (Figure 1) followed by “US”, while in the second corpus (Figure 2), “China” does not appear and “US” is the only country listed in the Figure, possibly as a result of the pandemic becoming widespread in the US, away from China in the second

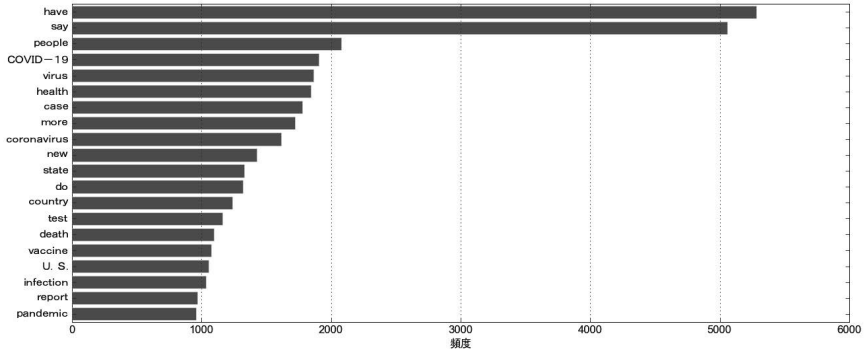
² Usually, the setting up of a dictionary or lexicon is a part of the content analysis, and the collection of words or dictionary can help you look up and extract specific words out of the documents, and then conduct statistical analysis on them, such as frequency analysis, matching and so forth.

Figure 1. Word frequency analysis for the first corpus (period: January-April 2020)



Source: Made by the authors based on the daily report articles on COVID-19 covered by Foreign Broadcast Information Service.

Figure 2. Word frequency analysis for the first corpus (period: May-August 2020)

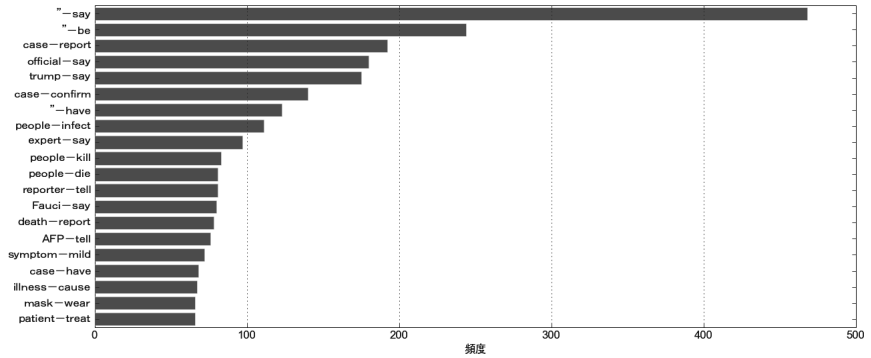


Source: As for Figure 1.

period.

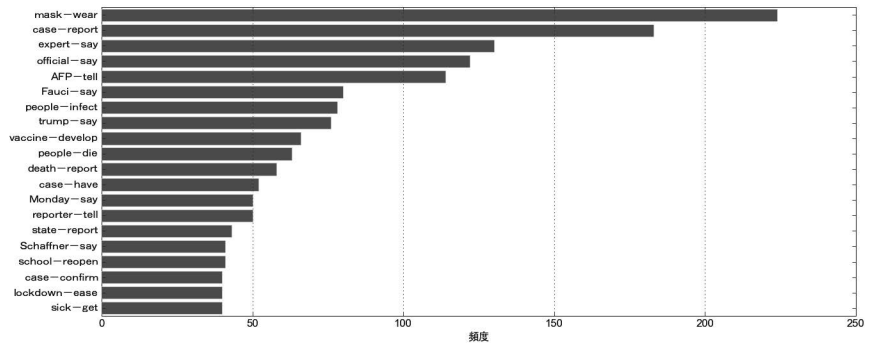
Next, modifier-modified analyses are made. Results are shown in **Figures 3 and 4** for the two corpus periods. While the first period lists “mask-wear” at the bottom, the second period lists the word combination more frequently,

Figure 3. Result of modifier-modified analysis (for January-April 2020)



Source: As for Figure 1.

Figure 4. Result of modifier-modified analysis (for May-August 2020)



Source: As for Figure 1.

implying the growing importance of mask wearing practice over time. Also, “expert-say”, “School-reopen”, “Lockdown-ease” appear in Figure 4, reflecting the need for expert opinions as well as the spread of socio-economic concerns.

Network analyses have also been made, as shown in **Figures 5 and 6**. As shown in these Figures, negative adjectives are dominant: “severe”, “infectious”, “bad”, “fragile”, “horrible”, “viral”, “dangerous”, “aggravated”,

Table 1. The choice of normal purchase and panic purchase at the time of COVID-19

Others' choice My choice	Normal purchasing of daily necessities	Panic purchasing of daily necessities
Normal purchasing of daily necessities	(2, 2)	(-1, 1)
Panic purchasing of daily necessities	(1, -1)	(0, 0)

Note: the first figures in the parentheses denote benefits (or costs if negative) to “me”, and the second figures denote benefits (or costs if negative) to “others.”

Source: Made by the authors based on the standard game theory.

“risky”, “terrible”, “dead” and the like are used in both periods, and there is not much difference between the two periods in this sense. Overall, the articles express the psychologically threatening circumstance citizens across the globe are placed in.

Below is a brief comment on the nature of human wellbeing in the context of COVID-19, which has been imposing a physical as well as psychological threat upon citizens (or humans). Citizens’ selfish behaviors, e.g., panic purchase of essential daily necessities (e.g., foods, drinks, Kleenex and sanitizers) overreaction to the incidents related to COVID-19, due to human “bounded rationally (Simon, 1961).” **Table 1** depicts this point. This is a “coordination game” in game theory, and each of the two “players” (“myself” and “others”) have the two choices (o strategies) of “normal purchasing” and “panic purchasing” of daily necessities. As long as you (as “myself” in the Table) do not change your choice (or strategy), the others will benefit by betraying you and choosing “panic purchasing”.

Then your “rational” strategy with this knowledge in anticipation would be to engage in “panic purchasing” also. If both players (yourself and others) stick to the same strategy of “normal purchasing”, then the public order of

“everyone is engaging in normal purchasing” would prevail as an equilibrium of this game (and indeed, this is one of the two Nash-equilibrium of this game); however, with bounded rationality, all citizens (including yourself) would oftentimes opt for the other Nash-equilibrium, i.e., “panic purchasing.” This is a situation of “war of all against all” in the sense discussed by the British political philosopher Thomas Hobbes in the context of the source of sovereignty of nation states, as discussed in the next section.

3. A socio-psychological analysis of the US citizens’ happiness in connection to COVID-19 and the US presidential election

3.1 The impact of COVID-19 pandemic:

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, emotions have become very negative and people are constantly worried about their health issues (family and their own), unemployment, income and personal relationships. It is normal for people to have symptoms of anxiety and depression during these uncertain times, but at the same time, it is important to pay attention to the far-reaching impacts that this pandemic may cause. The integration of body and mind is essential for quality living, so it cannot be ignored. Since mental health is one of the foundation blocks of human life, mental well-being will undoubtedly become an important issue that all countries need to seriously handle in the post epidemic stage.

The COVID-19 pandemic is currently the most critical public health issue in the United States. More and more people are suffering from psychological problems, as the pandemic continues to spread, and the death rate continues to increase. A survey that was conducted from early April to late April in 2020 by Johns Hopkins University found that the proportion of adults with reported psychological distress during pandemic was 3 times more than

that in 2018 (Manderson and Levine, 2020). The researchers analysed the responses of 1468 adults aged 18 and above and compared the psychological distress measures in the survey sample with the same measures in the 2018 National Health Interview Survey. They found that 13.6% of American adults reported symptoms of psychological distress in April 2020, more than three times as much as in 2018, and 3.9% in 2018.

Subgroup analysis showed that the symptoms of psychological distress were the most serious among young people aged 18 to 29, adults with an annual family income of less than US \$35,000 and Hispanic adults, accounting for 24%, 19.3% and 18.3% respectively. This indicates a significant increase compared with the data in 2018, which were 3.7%, 7.9% and 4.4% respectively, while the subgroup with the lowest prevalence of severe psychological distress was the lowest. However, the prevalence rate doubled from 3.8% to 7.3% in 2018. Furthermore, according to the report of hotline statistics in many states and regions, the number of people who seek help due to domestic violence, mental illness and drug abuse after home isolation is higher than before. It is also important to know that young people are very vulnerable and have higher risks of developing serious mental health problems during this time, even though they may be a lower risk of COVID-19 infection. When we are faced with an invisible enemy like COVID-19, one of the emotional challenges is confrontation with great uncertainty. Not knowing who, when, where and how a person is affected, can create enormous panic and fear across communities.

As a 'saving' culture is not common in the States, many people have been relying heavily on their jobs in order to cover their daily expenses. In order to minimize the chances of infection, social distancing was enforced, so many industries, such as tourism and retail, have been greatly affected and shut down. As a result, the unemployment rate has dramatically increased this

time. The loss of income has further magnified the impact of COVID-19 and many Americans are feeling that this crisis is much worse than they had initially anticipated. In saying this, the media and communication have played an influential role in gaining an objective understanding of the situation.

According to Phillips (2020), those who have shown great support to the Republican party tend to place more trust in the media coverage from Fox News, whose views towards the pandemic are more skewed and less objective. Most of these supporters strongly believe that wearing a mask is a symbol of suppression and takes away their liberty and freedom of speech. This intense reaction is also an indication of a lack of trust towards the scientific community. The sensational influence of media channels, which often highlights President Trump's strong disbelief of scientific facts, seemed to be driving the momentum of the anti-mask movement.

In contrast to the United States, wearing a mask seems to be a very common practice in Asia, especially in countries such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Mainland China. The strong resistance and accelerated anger towards wearing mask is not only a strong reaction towards the so-called "liberty" and "freedom of speech", but it's also driving certain groups of Americans to become hostile and hateful towards the Asian community, both inside and outside of America. For example, Asian people have been heavily targeted and physically assaulted or verbally abused on the streets, at work or at school. These incidents have occurred more frequently since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic and xenophobic tensions have become particularly high during this time. The lack of respect and trust towards different races and ethnicities has created a radical split in American society. Many people living in American are feeling less safe and this lack of stability has created another layer of anxiety on top of their fears of COVID. One of my³ clinical clients, who is an immigrant from Hong Kong (China), has shared her experience of

discrimination at work. Her colleagues have called her “Wuhan COVID”, but later claiming that they were only joking. This is not an isolated incident; it is in line with the current trend which is becoming increasingly serious, as many Asian Americans working or studying in America seem to have reported similar experiences.

On top of this, many people stated that their sense of disconnection and loneliness has gotten stronger during the city lock down. Family gatherings were no longer possible and visiting the elderly at nursing homes has become one of the high-risk exposures. Even though communication technology is available, such as ZOOM and Teams, those who live alone (without pets) have found it particularly difficult. In many Western countries, physical contact is very important as it is a way to connect with people and to show affection. The warmth of the skin conveys a sense of comfort and security, and it is often very helpful in reducing stress. Therefore, the lack of physical connection with others has become one of the challenges for many Americans.

The most dangerous part of COVID-19 is its unknown factor. It is hard to determine if a person has contracted COVID-19 or the flu. To a certain extent, it has become increasingly difficult to whether the symptoms, such as sore throat, runny nose, headache, cough and drowsiness, is caused by COVID-19. Also, there are patients who are asymptomatic, which presents an even greater challenge to detect those who have contracted the virus. In a way, COVID-19 is not only a threat to our health and immune system, but it is also challenging our physical and mental well-being. COVID-19 has suddenly become this imminent invisible enemy that always has the upper hand. Initially, it mostly affected people with basic health problems and a weaker immune system, then it seemed to become high risk for everyone. The

³ This is the experience of one of the authors of this paper, Sami Wong.

latest development is a new COVID mutant strain, which undermines our confidence of the vaccine that has just been developed. As anxiety arises from these life and death situations, people have become increasingly frustrated with the fact that we do not know when the pandemic will end.

3.2 The impact of political divide in the US

On top of the challenges created by the pandemic, the political divide seems to have added more stress and anxiety to the American population. Many research studies have shown that the recent election has created a stronger divide in America between the Republicans and the Democrats. Republican supporters seem to be more concerned with conspiracy theories, such as the belief that COVID-19 is a hoax or that is a manipulative tool used to control the population, whereas Democrat supporters are more concerned with the capacity of public health system to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, and scientific information and advice to stop the spread.

The different beliefs between religion and science, Republican and Democrats, have often resulted in violent clashes, which have put a lot more stress on people as their sense of safety is eroded. As there are many different versions of COVID-19 narrative, many Americans are confused about the actual situation and some still strongly believe that it is only a government conspiracy. When the reality of the pandemic is distorted, xenophobia and social slit might be the result of this phenomenon. For example, the death rate from virus infections in the privileged groups seem to be much lower than those in underprivileged groups, and as a result of this, the privileged group of people are more inclined to believe that COVID-19 is not as serious as reported. Due to this belief, they may continue to live in denial and pose a risk to others, while the death rate is increasing dramatically every day.

3.3 2021 Presidential Election

The election is a pillar of American democracy and it is important to note that it is often considered to be one of the most significant events in the United States. However, the 2020 election has been put under the spotlight as it has been heavily undermined by Trump's voter fraud conspiracy theories, which have further magnified the political divide. As Hardy stated (2020), approximately 54% of American population believe that the voting process has been transparent, and they have enough information about the vote account. However, there is around 44% of the population feeling that the information is lacking, and it is difficult for them to anticipate the election outcome. 88% of Trump's voters strongly believe that the voting result is not legitimate, and they insist on conspiracy theories heavily instigated by Trump without any evidence. Trump continued to pressure different states to recount their votes as he strongly believes that many votes had been deliberately miscounted during the process which led to his defeat in the election.

This divide between Republicans and Democrats has created enormous stress for the American population. According to Hardy (2020), around 68% of the adult American respondents claimed that 2021 election has created more pressure in comparison with the one in 2016. Black respondents, in this case, are affected greatly and they experience greater anxiety. This group of respondents is highly aware of the current social division and inequality issues, and their anxiety level and sense of helplessness have become increasingly stronger. For instance, Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted the longstanding inequality in the United States.

3.4 Summary of this section

The COVID-19 pandemic is no longer just a virus that only threatens

people's physical health, it also threatens people's mental wellbeing, as well as further magnifying the social injustice, social welfare and health policies. It has caused a very high number of deaths and with the news of a new mutant strain, people are feeling more and more uncertain about the pandemic and whether development of the vaccine can stop it.

On top of this, the process and the outcome of the election, in many ways, have accelerated social division and disintegration. Americans are feeling more stressed and isolated as social connections are challenged and eroded, so learning how to deal with stress and seeking additional support systems to help with mental health problems is an urgent need. It is important to find a way to re-establish these connections as much as possible during this difficult time.

4. Sovereignty of nations in the context of human happiness

With the conjecture that under social stresses (e.g. COVID-19) citizens tend to choose the socially least happy situation of “war of all against all” (which is only irrational after all), this section considers the links between the sovereignty of nations and human happiness. Politically and economically speaking, a sovereign nation is supposed to be the provider of citizens' happiness, or their inner peace of mind, through its mainly external policies. How can this be possible? Thomas Hobbes, a British political philosopher, established what is called the social contract theory. In his *Leviathan* (Hobbes, 1985), Hobbes made a theologically oriented philosophical discussion as to the source and necessity of sovereign nations.

Hobbes's *Leviathan* (first written in 1651) comes into the picture at the dawn of the English Enlightenment, when things (natural as well as social) started to be explained without reference to the Christian God. This is the primary source book used in the thesis. Importantly, while Hobbes's logic on

the primacy of civil over ecclesiastical authorities in Part I and Part II has been studied fully, his theological discussions especially in Part III is the focus of discussion in the thesis. This is partly because of the enlightenment spirit after the 17th century onward. Indeed, other works pertinent to the rivalry between ecclesiastical and civil authorities by Hobbes refer both to theological as well as secular logic which justifies the sovereign nation to prevent human natural state of the famous “war of all against all”.

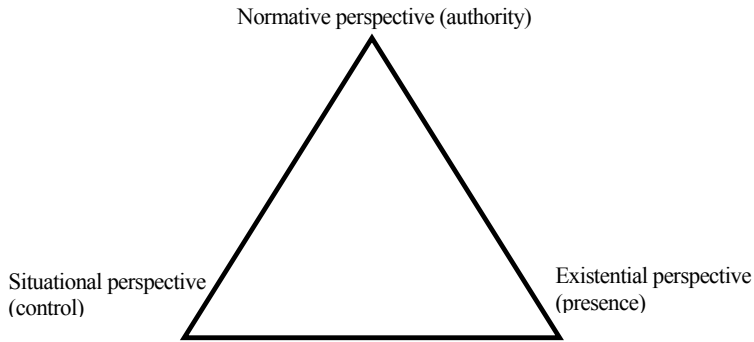
Hobbes discusses, in Part II of *Leviathan*, “Of Common-Wealth”, how national sovereignty should be established by social contract. He showed a natural law that “people should carry out the contract”, and adds that a promise is just a word without a sword, and it has no power to protect people. Therefore, it becomes necessary to create a sovereign⁴ who has the power that far exceeds the power of individuals.

And the sovereign transcends civil law, the subject cannot condemn or punish the act of the sovereign (representative), deny his subjection and change his form of governance without his permission. I can't do it either. In this way, absolute and inviolable sovereignty is requested. However, the request is only for the purpose of preserving the people, and it is the crowd (people) who creates the sovereign as an artificial human.

Human happiness, however, might not really be secured by the national security. This is because of the inherently external and utilitarian nature of

⁴ The common-wealth is an “artificial human”, and it is indeed the great Leviathan. And only this entity is called the sovereign, and all are his (or its) subjects. The sovereign, in *Leviathan*, has: (1) the right to collect money and soldiers, (2) the right to peace of war, (3) the right to legislation, (4) the judicial power, (5) the right to judge matters necessary for the peace and defense of the subjects, (6) the power to appoint agents, (7) the power to appoint teachers and examine what doctrines are in contradiction with the defense, peace and interests of the subjects, (8) the power to reward and punish, and (9) the right to grant honor. Overall, the sovereignty shall retain the “power to protect the subjects,” which constitutes the core of sovereignty.

Figure 7. Tri-perspectives of John Frame



Source: Based on Frame (2000).

what is provided by sovereign nations: they attempt to provide more goods and services to bring about inner happiness, yet without the sovereign nation's inability to micromanage the provision of goods and services, human happiness eludes utilitarian means of provision. Further, individual citizens supposedly have inner sphere which is supported by transcendental values, most notably Christian values in the case of the United States of America which was established as a (new) kingdom of God.⁵

Figure 7 shows the tri-perspectives (i.e., normative, situational and existential perspectives) proposed by Frame (2000), from a Christian theological perspective. Unless we presuppose a transcendental norm, there is no frame of reference for human epistemology, as the triangle shape (each apex is determined by the other two apexes) suggests.

Citizens (or humans generically) cannot stably define and perceive well-

⁵ The US one dollar notes, for example, have the printed words "In God We Trust"; the God here means Christian God; and this phrase is the official motto of the United States of America (H. CON. RES. 13, "Reaffirming 'In God We Trust' as the official motto of the United States", <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-112hconres13rh/pdf/BILLS-112hconres13rh.pdf>).

Table 2. Consequence of keeping/surrendering natural rights

Others' choices (right) My choices (bottom) \	Others surrender their natural rights	Others keep their natural rights
I surrender my natural rights	Consequence A: (my benefit, others' benefit) = (10, 10)	Consequence B: (my benefit, others' benefit) = (0, 20)
I keep my natural rights	Consequence C: (my benefit, others' benefit) = (20, 0)	Consequence D: (my benefit, others' benefit) = (2, 2)

Source: Made by the authors.

being (in the realm of “situational perspective”) unless they are informed of the normative as well as existential perspectives. And there is no guarantee that the normative, situational and existential perspectives cohere, unless there is a transcendental “god” as the only source of coherent perspectives. It is also irrational for humans to assume human rationality: Rationalism supposes that the human mind is the ultimate criterion of truth. Humans, however, are clearly limited in their rationality or mental faculty. In this sense, human happiness at least of the US citizens, when they adhere to the historical value systems, fundamentally need to be supported by inner transcendental values.

This point is depicted in **Table 2** (this is the situation of Prisoner’s Dilemma⁶, taken from the field of game theory in modern economics): from a human “rational” and “selfish” perspective, the political game of whether to keep own natural rights or surrender it becomes two choices, with the consequent gains to self and the others, i.e., the first figures in parentheses in the table denote

⁶ The prisoner’s dilemma in game theory is a paradox in decision analysis in which two individuals (or players) pursuing their own self-interests (personal benefits) do not produce the optimal outcome, ironically. The typical prisoner’s dilemma is defined in such a way that both parties choose to try to maximize personal benefits at the expense of the other individual’s benefit. As a result, however, both individuals find themselves in a worse state than if they had cooperated with each other in terms of the actual benefits gained. As a lesson, the lack of cooperation or social orderliness leads to the consequence of social impoverishment.

gains; the larger figure, the more benefits. Both self and others try to selfishly maximize their benefits, they tend to keep the natural law; as a consequence, the war of all against all becomes a norm of the game, and this means the gains to self and others are, ironically, the smallest ($2+2=4$, which is smaller than any other sum of the social consequence in the Table), since there is no security and material affluence based on security.

Thus, “I keep my natural rights” and “Others keep their natural rights” become a logical consequence, since the personal benefit would be maximized when you keep the natural rights and others surrender them; all the parties involved, however, would think this way, and the consequence is that all will try to keep the natural rights but the gains are minimal (2 instead of 20 or 10 in the figure). In the Table, Consequence D: natural state (which is outside law), the worst-case scenario, will be realized instead of Consequence A: Social contract (which is inside natural law or orderliness).

What is notable here is that the consequence of Consequence D, or “all keep their natural rights” is seen to be *outside* the natural law or orderliness, since the situation is “war of all against all”, and no one will attempt to pursue social orderliness through complying with the natural law. When both individuals surrender their natural rights, the society is seen to be inside the natural law (Consequence A); that is, the whole human system is not always under an orderliness. This is an inconsistent situation, since not all the consequences are *inside* the realm of some sort of an overall social norm; even in the choice of surrendering natural rights (Consequence A), there is always the chance of returning back to Consequence D. This lack of orderliness is indeed a serious source of social unrest, or unhappiness.

It would therefore be imperative to secure or restore citizens’ inner transcendental values in the realization of societal happiness, at least in the US (which was established as a Christian common-wealth) beyond external

(or utilitarian) means.

4. Concluding remarks

COVID-19, a highly infectious pandemic with its vaccines or medical cures undeveloped as of now, serves as a real threat to the self-preservation of humans (citizens), as expressed by the negative adjectives in the text analysis and as discussed by Thomas Hobbes in his *Leviathan*. He addresses Common-Wealth in *Leviathan*, discussing how national sovereignty should be established by social contract. Hobbes showed a natural law that “people should carry out the contract”, and adds that a promise is just a word without a sword, and it has no power to protect people. It therefore becomes necessary to create a sovereign who has the power that far exceeds the power of individuals.

Citizens’ societal wellbeing, however, will not be secured even by the sovereign, since all in all, the provisions by the sovereign nations are external only without recourse to the inner part of its citizens. A human commonwealth, however well-meaning the secular government with sovereignty might be, is inherently unstable (as witnessed by the incident of COVID-19), and micromanaging citizens’ socioeconomic life is beyond its purview. It would be all the more detrimental to assume that the state has such a control power, since that would further marginalize those citizens, through imposing the sense of being left out and forgotten.

As national governments cannot, even with “sovereignty”, micromanage citizens’ external and internal well-being, it would be necessary to restore the place for transcendental value systems for a sound social wellbeing. COVID-19 is a physical (external) as well as psychological (internal) threat to citizens across the globe. The alignment of civil-government’s provision of necessary goods/services, and transcendental value systems (including religious values) would be an indispensable source of human happiness. Perhaps the pursuit

of wellbeing should be made in the context of pursuing transcendental values beyond “self”, since the pursuit would only bring about disillusionment upon failure, and the sense of happiness would be evasive against those with selfish mindsets. Restoring the sense of being monitored and guided by “God” of the transcendental value (as expressed e.g., in the US national motto of “In God We Trust”) would be expected to stabilize at least the inner part of citizens’ (or humans’) uneasy conditions. Admitting that citizens (or humans in general) living in nominally “sovereign” states are only boundedly rational (Simon, 1961) would be important in a world with the lack of peace observed in the form of international conflicts. It is expected (or sincerely hoped) that the craving for “undefined” part of yet-to be realized human wellbeing would, instead of dividing, integrate citizens and fill them with a sense of sustained social as well as individual happiness.

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