The heart of a scientist - virtue for a better future

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The COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating our world in recent years, but this pain it brings also further covers our already blind eyes and weakens our already hesitating hands in facing the ominous future – the potential self-ending tale of humanity. If only environmental destruction was really a hoax; unfortunately, the cold numbers draw a trajectory towards an imminent catastrophe [1]. Humanity had the chances, but time after time many of us kept choosing to be selfish. After thousands of years, we humans have advanced greatly in terms of knowledge and technology; but how much have our hearts grown? Even among layers of serious global crises, people still hate, deceive, harm each other (and themselves), for the purpose of personal material gain or delusional power over other fellow humans. It is saddening.

In this time of challenge, science is the eye of modern humanity. But is science really the indifferent voice of knowledge fueled by neutral curiosity, or is it the very human effort built on tears and hope? Why do we try to move forward? For what are we keep working year after year? When the world is burning and people are suffering, what is on our minds?

In the early days of my (still young) career in science, I came across three major works of a scientist (who I have been working with). These short papers, published by the prestigious *Nature*, discussed several important points in the system of doing science [2,3,4]. While the content is interesting and valuable, what truly stayed within me after reading are the “soul” of those works.

Such thoughts are deeply intertwined: the morality issues of individuals and organizations in the scientific community, the endless efforts of those who pursue true virtues, and their hope putting on the new generations. Behind the rather solid words of the scientific writing style are the underlying oceans of emotions – human emotions: frustration and disappointment towards the systematic corruption, pain and sadness towards the unnecessary ignorance, joy and pride towards exploring the complex beauty in society and life. From my personal viewpoint, this so-called “inner fire” can be even more powerful than the insights it brings forth.

Walking onto the mortal battle in front of our eyes - to which most choose to rather be blind, humanity needs a change of heart for the better; and we scientists should remind ourselves of the very reasons behind our endeavors, for otherwise there would be no future to reflect upon this moment. For me and some other colleagues in our team, the most impactful scientific works would be those built on and built for the voice of the heart: the darkness of suicide and the light of human connection [5], the hatred creating terrorism and the trust for world peace [6], the greedy culture of business and the irreplaceability of Mother Nature [7].

At the end of the day, when the flames of the world and the ego have subsided, I come to a vague realization that, probably, there is a humble reward to all our efforts of leading a good life in this existence of impermanence: the salvation for virtue.

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