



COVID-19 and Spirit

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“Think of the earth as a living organism that is being attacked by billions of bacteria whose numbers double every forty years. Either the host dies, or the virus dies, or both die.”
— **Gore Vidal**

The Old Science

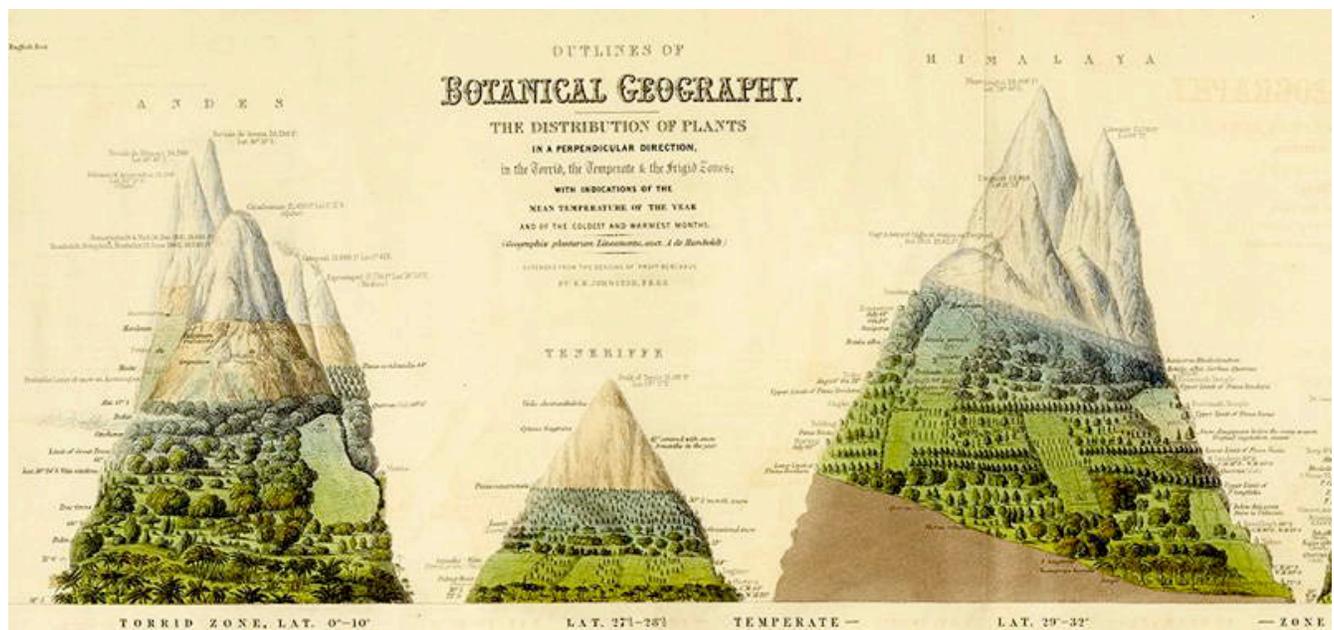
My own ideas about spirit are different enough that I don't talk about them. One half of me lives in science and the other in imagination, which I ascribe to growing up as a naturalist in a family of artists. This set me off on a trajectory shared by Leonardo and [Friedrich Wilhelm Heinrich Alexander von Humboldt](#), the romantic philosopher-scientist who insisted on a combination of nature and physics, and without whom Charles Darwin would never have boarded *HMS Beagle*.

A response to the question of “What is the spiritual reason for the coronavirus?” appeared on David Spangler's Lorian.org blog and made me feel I was not alone. Lorian.org is seen as a spiritual

organization, but it's really the White Man's indigenous tradition of herbalists and healers from before the Druids.

Scientific mysticism was evident in the spirit doctoring of Galen and Asclepius, from before metaphysics became today's religion of sales, multi-level marketing, and holy-book printed idols. It was evident in the 20th century reverence for mystery held by Einstein and Schrodinger, disparaged by Richard Feynman the calculator, discarded by Steven Weinberg the mechanist, and desecrated by Ray Kurzweil the industrialist.

In her Lorian.org piece called "[We are the meaning makers](#)," Drena Griffith addresses the spiritual meaning of COVID-19. She highlights the similarity between asking for *meaning* and *reason*. The meaning resides in the reason, which reflects our own meaning in the natural context. To this we might add the word "purpose," and so recognize that questioning the meaning, reason, and purpose as asking the same thing.



What's New?

COVID-19 is called "novel" but the human situation is more novel; more has changed in the human environment than for the virus. It is the nature of people to disregard changes in their own perspective: wherever we are always seems where we're entitled to be, and whatever we're aware of seems like all there is to be aware of.

As has been quietly declared in environmental circles, the virus's occurrence in humans is a result of our invasion into and destruction of natural habitats. The virus's transmission in humans is due to our density and mobility. If we were less dense, transmission would be slowed within communities, and if we were less global infection would be more localized.

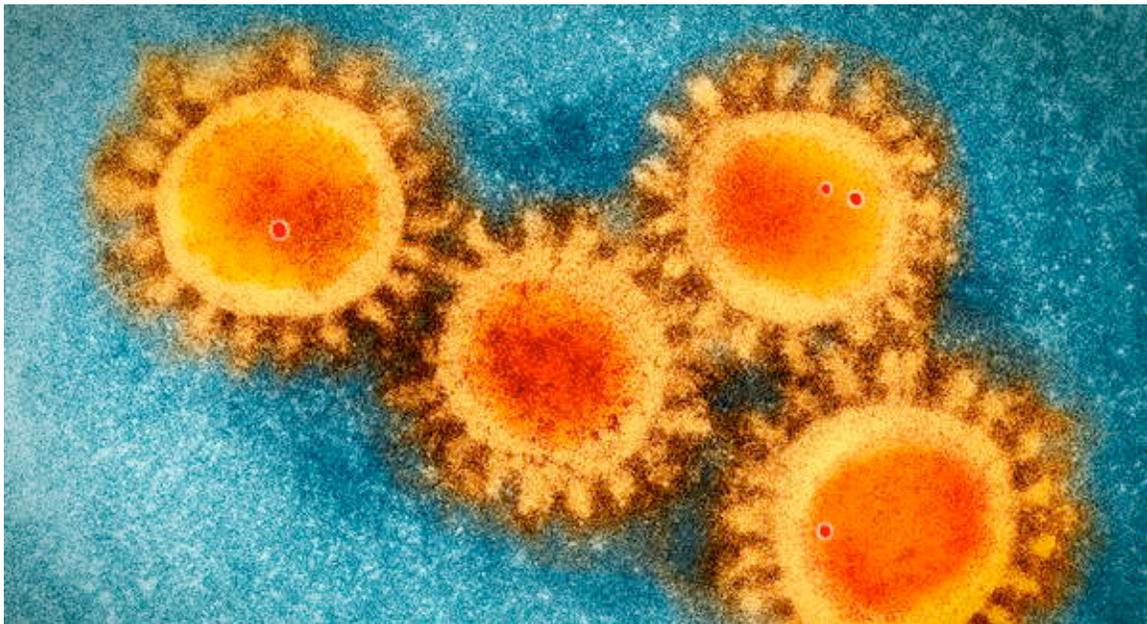
Life on earth began abruptly when conditions stabilized in the seas. Soon afterwards, I understand, viruses are thought to have appeared. They've been with us from the start and, while we've evolved, they haven't. But then, it's not clear that they needed to. It's three billion years from the time of the first cells and viruses now seem just as plentiful as ever, maybe more so. While our path has been a complement of increasing complexity and reproductive success, viruses have aimed for reproductive success only.

Think of life as coming in one of three forms: symbiotes, saprophytes, and parasites. The symbiotes have a mutually beneficial relationship with another life form. The saprophytes (animal saprophytes are called saprozoites) and parasites don't benefit another species. They either mine resources left behind, or extract resources from living systems.

Humans are hardly mutualistic. We farm crops and animals, but neither are natural situations. Our reliance on natural resources is saprophytic: we extract resources from non-living material. The majority of modern culture's relationship is parasitic, which is also a virus's defining relationship.

I'd like to say this virus experience will teach us something about our own parasitic relationships. Unfortunately, it's not an easy lesson, but it is some kind of lesson, nonetheless.

Maybe all parasites feel entitled to their hosts. You wouldn't feel entitled if you were at a loss whenever you went out of balance, you'd recognize your role. It does seem that the global scale at which we're exploiting resources is at a tipping point. There is a certain balance, even for parasites.



Reflection

I'm dismayed at our culture's lack of reflection. Reflection is a prerequisite for perception and requires taking responsibility. We're not reflective in situations where our needs are satisfied. It takes some disruption to start people thinking. The worst thing about globalization is the lack of feedback.

Those who benefit from and depend on the fruits of modern culture are not aware of its injuries. This clearly can't go on, and it seems we're reaching the end. Might the virus be the wake-up call we need?

I don't make a big deal of it, but I think questions of spirit are questions of meaning, reason, and purpose, and, in this regard, natural science has spirit. But "natural science" is not what we call science today which we associate with technology, automation, explanation, knowledge, and engineering. It's the metaphysics of Goethe or the wonder which Feynman expressed — in spite of himself — when he said, "I was born not knowing and have had only a little time to change that here and there." This kind of humility is nowhere evident in anything Ray Kurzweil has said as the voice of science today:

Our sole responsibility is to produce something smarter than we are; any problems beyond that are not ours to solve.

— **Ray Kurzweil**, Director of Engineering at Google

There is a sort of natural justice where, in a world out of balance, one of the first strikes in response comes from the least intelligent living things. A blow devastating an imbalance created by humanity's smartest men and — all talk about gender equality aside — modern culture's progress is testosterone-fueled. If nothing else, it should show us that no amount of control makes up for a lack of balance.

Our imagination is struck only by what is great; but the lover of natural philosophy should reflect equally on little things.

— **Alexander von Humboldt**

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