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Short Notes on Sense Making in Crisis



Dr. Marc Gafni

The Center for Integral Wisdom

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Sense Making in Crisis

As I churn through an inbox filled each day with articles, questions, and commentary about the Corona virus, I see the incredible range of our response. I read about health care workers risking their lives to save the dying, and friends sharing recipes and cocktails on Zoom, and everything in between. I say this with no judgment—there is no one way to respond to such a crisis. But whatever our response, most of us are asking what sense we can make of the meteorlike (but actually well-predicted) arrival of Covid-19 in our presence. The crisis reveals our lack of a map, and the need to articulate a new one. We need a shared story that includes but is underneath all our experience, no matter how varied. This is a time for sense making, both personal and collective. A shared story includes a sense of where we are—a shared universe story, together with who we are—a shared narrative of identity, and what we should be doing—a shared ethos.

Decentralized Sense Making

We need this because we live in a moment of decentralized sense making. We cannot rely on the government, the universities, the press, or the religious institutions and the alternative churches of the human potential movement in its New Age varieties. There is wisdom in each of those, but they are as fragmented as our sense of larger patterns and larger worldviews is fractured. We need to find our way back to a vision of goodness, truth, and beauty, based on the best information in the interior and exterior sciences that we have available to us. By exterior science I mean the hard and soft sciences with their measurement, experimentation, and data collection. By interior sciences, I mean the validated gnosis interior experience—the world of spirit, feeling, and inner wisdom. Together they are teaching us where we are, who we are, and what needs to be done in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

The Realization of Unique Self

We are in a powerful moment of evolutionary reset. We have the potential now to redefine our identities as humans. The central knowing that is crystalizing in this evolutionary moment, sourced in the interior sciences, is that each of us is a Unique Self, with a unique perspective, quality of self and capacity for action. Our Unique Self is not simply our talent as separate monadic units. According to the best of the interior and exterior sciences, we are each—not fundamentally apart but rather—part of the larger whole of existence. But we are distinct parts. Each of us are unique emergents of the entire system. We are unique configurations of the larger field of life and consciousness. And therefore, we each have a unique gift to give that is needed by the whole. That is our core identity.

Blessed by Unique Self Heroes

This understanding of identity has not yet emerged into society. But more people are recognizing that we are not cogs in a production machine, nor merely a monadic separate self in a win-lose success struggle but rather—I am a Unique Self—had not yet emerged into society. The separate self identity still dominates culture almost entirely. But with the crisis of Covid-19 we have been blessed with so many heroes, Unique Selves in action every single one of them. Heroes, like poets, are often several steps ahead of culture. And as Unique Self the first response that our sense making demands is unique action. That is what it means to be the hero of your own life.

In the face of tremendous tragedy and urgent need we have seen so many people step up to give whatever unique gifts they have. They are not waiting for direction from others—they are putting their lives on the line and supporting others in every way possible. They are doctors coming out of retirement, they are teenagers delivering food, they are neighbors staging a drive-by birthday party complete with horns and balloons, they are sewing masks, they are applauding health care workers every night from their balconies, they are telephoning people who live alone, they are sending money to first responders and restaurant workers who lost their jobs. This is beautiful to experience, and tells us everything about one major thread of human nature—our inherent capacity to align with goodness and love even at great risk to ourselves. That makes sense only if we feel our identities to be unique and needed expressions of the large field of consciousness and love, not separate selves essentially alienated from the whole.

The immediate steps in sense making take place in the context of actions like these. The very first thing that needs to be done is to heal the sick, to have enough ventilators, to have enough beds in hospitals, to protect those who work in them, to make sure that everyone has access to basic necessities as we face a new economy.

The Next Step in Sense Making: Not Returning to Business as Usual

But the Covid-19 virus requires an even deeper sense making. It is not just an isolated event that we will get through, as we mourn our losses, celebrate our heroes, and return to life as it was before. Covid-19, a catastrophic event, is a dress rehearsal for existential risk. Existential risk is the prospect of a disaster so great it threatens life on earth. Anyone who thought—which was almost everyone—that our global society was just too big to fail, that the essential structure of society could never break down, knows now that this is simply not true. So, while there is yearning to go back to business as usual that would be tragic and potentially lethal. There could be nothing more tragic and more desecrating to all who have died than to waste

this tragedy. Sense making is the way we honor the dead and dying. Through them we honor our future.

Our Crisis Is a Birth: Birthing the New Narratives

Crisis is an evolutionary driver. Breakdowns can become portals for breakthrough, even as an emergency generates emergence. A crisis can be a birth. But, in order for Covid-19 to **not** be the beginning of a cascading chain of catastrophic and ultimately existential risks realized in our lifetime, we must make structural changes in governance, health care, medicine, infrastructure, politics, relationships, in just about everything. We must evolve the deepest assumptions of our culture, and ultimately of our consciousness. I call this basic reset “evolving the source code.” If we are really going to create a reset in our society, we don’t just need a new approach to politics, government, and finance. We need a new universe story, a new narrative of identity and desire, a narrative of community, a new story of our power.

In this time of global reaction where the notion of local is obsolete, where all of our challenges are global and require shared global action, we won’t make it without a set of shared narratives. We need to know that what unites us is far greater than what divides us. We cannot unite to respond effectively to the caprices of shared human fate if we do not have a deeper sense of our shared human destiny.

Outrageous Pain: Outrageous Love

Despite the best of our science, and no matter what we do, the world’s pain, dislocation, disruption, and suffering is intense, and not just from the corona virus. The world’s pain is outrageous, and always has been. We, as humans, are baffled by the pain of life, so much so that many of us get overwhelmed and give up trying to help. But what we need to realize is that the response to outrageous pain is something equally outrageous. The only true response to outrageous pain is Outrageous Love. We need to open to the underlying nature that is so powerful and often so hidden in each of us. That must be the core of our sense making. Any true action that we take to help and connect has this source.

We are not speaking here of a love that is mere human sentiment, but of love which is the heart of existence itself and in which humans participate. We might call this Outrageous Love or evolutionary love or simply Eros.¹

¹ As the following paragraph makes clear, by Eros I do not refer to the sexual. There were twelve billion years of Eros before there was any sex. The sexual models the Erotic. But it does not source or even vaguely exhaust the Eros. Eros is the core animating quality of reality itself.

Eros

Eros is the experience of radical aliveness, seeking ever-deeper contact and ever-greater wholeness. This Eros is the nature of reality all the way up and all the way down the evolutionary chain, over billions of years. We are, each of us, unique incarnations of that same Eros that animated all of reality. This simple thread is core to our shared universe story, narrative of identity and call to action—answering the questions of where we are, who we are, and what to do. We must overcome what Albert Einstein once is said to have called the illusion of separateness—even as we realize our uniqueness, and at least for a few moments, be lived as love.

This insight forms the core realization of the divine in the interior sciences. The Tao, God, or Spirit, or whatever name we use, is an infinity of power. There is no end to it, no limit to its source. Infinity does not need our finitude—our limited humanity—in any obvious way.

And yet Spirit allows itself to feel the pain of another, to cry tears for another, to be moved and blown up by the suffering of another. This God is Outrageous Love. That is the nature of Spirit's power. And that power lives as us.

The Infinity of Intimacy

The greatest power is to transcend our narrow self-interest, because it is in that power that we find—and feel—each other's pain and joy. The infinity of power is the infinity of intimacy. Neither has a limit—we only block it ourselves, in our unwillingness to feel. This is a new definition of power, but it is one we know deep down. It is the power to be intimate. And by intimacy we mean something very specific. In common use today it means sexual connection, but that is not our meaning here. We mean a kind of intimacy that applies at different levels, from subatomic particles forming atoms all the way to relationships. For us it is the experience of shared identity in the context of otherness. It involves mutuality of recognition, of pathos or feeling, of purpose. Intimacy is the interior of interconnectivity—what it feels like inside. It is the structure of reality—the intimate universe.

Without a dime to its name, intimacy makes our lives worth living. Much of the suffering of the world—addiction, depression, loneliness, meaninglessness—results from the inability to find connection. These are failures of intimacy. When we are alienated from our intimacies, whether we be quarks, cells, plants, animals, mammals, or humans, we are not able to find the power that truly moves us. The story of evolution is the evolution of intimacy. In humanity, intimacy becomes conscious of itself. And now, with the Covid crisis, we become conscious of the power to be intimate in both its presence and its absence.

The Fact Pattern of Corona: Expressions of the Global Intimacy Disorder

The virus itself was generated by a failure of intimacy. It is an expression of a global intimacy disorder. This is not a spiritual claim. It is simply the fact pattern of the virus. Covid-19 was spawned in wet markets of Wuhan China where the poor came to get their bush meat. The wet markets are inhumane, unsanitary and they prey on poverty, though not much more so than factory farming methods in the United States. We split off the poor by not providing good nourishment, safe and sanitized. We split off from animals and allow them to be cruelly killed. And many balls were dropped by governments failing to communicate or to act on information that might have contained the virus.

Bill Gates warned us years ago that such a pandemic could happen, and that we were not prepared. In a global world these split-off intimacies explode in our face. We thought somehow, we would be excluded. It would happen to someone else. And our core identity was not as Unique Selves—unique configurations of intimacy with unique gifts to give—but rather as split-off separate selves, pursuing our success stories, in the win-lose metric of all of modern culture.

As separate selves measured in terms of these win-lose success stories, so many ignored the warning. Very few were willing to risk job and success to challenge the efficiencies that made our system fragile and not resilient. The Unique Selves who did were ignored or silenced, their voice of Outrageous Love unheard. Quarterly reports, bonus, advances political and economic silenced the Unique Self voices of Outrageous Love who should have spoken out.

New Stories: Conscious Evolution and the Intimate Universe

To be informed by this tragedy, to turn fate into destiny, we need to participate and support the articulation of a new story—one that challenges old definitions of power, identity, and intimacy. We must begin to realize the truth of the sciences, interior and exterior, telling us that we live in an intimate universe.

Evolution itself is the progressive deepening of intimacies. This is the moment when evolution becomes conscious of itself in human beings. This is the age of conscious evolution and conscious intimacy—interpersonally, politically, socially, and economically, on a global and ultimately, even on a cosmic scale. It is the moment when we realize that we live in an intimate universe. And that the intimate universe from quarks to culture—all of it—literally lives in us.

The allurements to ever-deeper coherent intimacy, that moves quarks to join together and transform single celled bacteria into multicellular organisms, all the stages of evolution, interior and exterior, are coded in us. We are the intimate universe in person, now conscious of itself.

And this is the moment to evolve the next level of intimacy in our new universe story and narratives of identity. It is our stories that shape our destiny.

Historian Yuval Harari was not wrong when he confirmed the historical axiom that I have been pouring my heart into formulating and articulating for the last decade to anyone who would listen; the only way to change the trajectory of history is to change the story.² Because reality itself, at its very core, is a story.³ That is why human beings think not in terms of facts or even numbers, but in terms of stories.

We have reached the age of the Anthropocene, when our human narratives and the actions that flow from them will either unleash potential catastrophic or even existential risk—dystopia—or generate a utopia unlike anything the world has ever seen. It all depends on which story we tell. Just like the human capacity to tell the greatest and most accurate possible story of reality, in that moment, marked the emergence of the human being from the hominids birthing human civilization, our present capacity to tell a new and ever-greater and ever-more accurate story—the story of the new human and new humanity—will birth the next great stage of civilization. But if we fail to become the storytellers of the new human and new humanity, our failure may well end civilization.

In the current political moment, we stand with the few social and political thinkers who are correctly proposing that American society use this crisis as inspiration to restore the social safety net, create an inclusive and efficient public health system, and deliver such important social goods as affordable housing. Those proposals are courageous and urgent. But the way they are being framed in the language of old liberal agendas will not work. These calls, which we have heard before, are doomed to failure unless they are based on new and accurate stories. Our new universe stories and narratives of identity, community, power and desire can actually create new trajectories in society.

These new narratives must move beyond what has been termed “polarity politics” and effect a new synergy of the best of conservative and liberal concerns for society, not only in the United States but around the world. What unites us in these new narratives is far greater than anything that divides us. Transformative action that can genuinely change the game emerge from the radical, source-code changing sense making we are talking about. At present, this kind of sense making is almost nowhere to be found, neither in spiritual nor political visionary communities.

² He was however categorically wrong in abandoning the integrity of the historian and falling prey to the postmodern dogma which makes the faith assertion that all stories are pure fiction and that therefore there is no essential distinction between a story of universal human rights and a totalitarian story of horrific cruelties.

³ For an initial treatment of this core idea rooted in information theory, see Marc Gafni and Barbara Marx Hubbard, *The Intimate Universe: Global Intimacy Disorder as Cause for Global Action Paralysis* [Forthcoming May 2020]. For a more in-depth treatment, see Marc Gafni, Zachary Stein, Barbara Marx Hubbard, [Title] *CosmoErotic Humanism - Toward the New Human and the New Humanity: Homo Amor* [Subtitle] *The Tenets of Intimacy and the Social Miracles* [forthcoming].

So, now is the moment to recognize that this kind of source code evolution is the categorical imperative of this moment. Let's shout it from the rooftops and enact change that wells from our deepest understanding of who we are, where we are, and why we are here.

Flawed Sense Making in Corona: Spiritual Bypassing and the Hubris of Control

Instead in our collective effort to make sense of the crisis, there are two responses to the virus that we see frequently online. The first is that it is a gift of some sort, to which the response is gratitude, along the lines of "Thank you Corona." In the early days of the virus at least a dozen people sent me a video that said "Thank You Corona" thinking that I would be moved by its ostensible spirituality. I was not.

It's true of course that one may feel grateful for some personal change the virus has brought. There is no question that it has allowed some people to live a more relaxed and perhaps introspective way that is beneficial to them and potentially to the world. But to walk into an emergency room today and express gratitude for the virus would be obscene. Any sense making that you cannot speak in a New York hospital this week is not kosher. The virus has led to extreme acts of compassion, yes.

And the gas chambers of the Holocaust—without question—helped motivate the UN to establish the state of Israel. But Israelis do not thank Auschwitz for catalyzing the establishment of Israel. Saying "Thank you virus" has the feeling of spiritual bypassing, John Welwood's term for avoiding the suffering of life by appearing to rise above it. It is grotesque not to acknowledge that the virus is killing people and their caregivers, in a particularly agonizing way. It is creating grief of manifold dimensions, both medical and economic, especially to the most vulnerable and we are just at the beginning of those losses. The virus is not a gift. And for those experiencing it as such to express it that way is a colossal failure of intimacy. As we saw, this failure is the root cause of the virus in the first place.

A second interpretation we hear—one that is moving through religious communities—is that the virus is punishment—we are being punished for something, for example for our treatment of the earth. In its classical religious form, making its way around the internet, that something is a particular sin or failure of piety, singled out by that religion or spiritual group. In one formulation, the virus is attacking our lungs to tell us that the earth's lungs are on fire, to tell us to stop polluting the earth. Surely there is an environmental dimension to this crisis, but the virus is not a conscious being sent to deliver a message—and attacking the most vulnerable in order to do so. Although the language is more modern and polite, it recalls the fire and brimstone sermons of old—Jonathan Edwards' 18th century "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." The same is true of the New Age "law of attraction," that we are responsible for what we attract into our lives, and so we have as humans created the virus to teach ourselves a lesson, and that those who succumb have "a low vibration." Both positions have abounded in their

respective echo chambers on the internet. The religious position is cloaked in piety and the New Age position garbed in its version of piety, radical self-responsibility.

But underneath their respective fig leaves, both positions reflect a demand for certainty, an effort to control the narrative—to explain why this happened in Kosmic terms. The truth is that we do not control the narrative. We can correlate the virus to failed intimacy, which is not a metaphysical claim but a verifiable fact pattern. We cannot make spiritual claims to know that a virus is either punishment for sin or that we attracted it into our lives because of our vibration. Both the classical religious claim and the New Age claim are forms of human hubris. We do not always know why suffering occurs and is allowed to occur. We live in a universe far larger than we know, with no reasons that could satisfy the human intellect. Suffering is a condition of life in an often fragile body. The strongest among us are no match for that force of nature. Our vulnerability is a fact, and sooner or later we must bow before that mystery.

From Unbearable Intimacy to the Intimate Universe

The real question is how we respond. Vulnerability is not a new fact—but we can now see how widely shared it is among us. It is universal. Money provides some cushion, but the wealthy who fled to their second homes cannot ultimately escape this virus or one like it. It is tragically true that in this pandemic—thus far—the poor who are more likely to have previously existing conditions, depleted immune systems, and often do not have the luxury of social distancing, are suffering in wildly disproportionate terms to the privileged wealthy.

But that will change in future crises. In the end, there will be nowhere to hide. The Bastille will always fall. We are rapidly moving toward an intimacy long realized as a spiritual state by the mystics but now obvious in our biology—what Zak Stein called “an unbearable intimacy.” But it is only unbearable if we do not accept its terms. What happens in China does not stay in China—we are all drawn into this global economy and our health will reflect it. It will be bearable if we learn how to love the connections among us. It will be bearable when we realize that we live in an intimate universe, all part of the same field of intimacy even as each of us are its unique incarnations.

To respond to the core global intimacy disorder that underlies the pandemic, our economy will need a radical restructuring—literally an evolution of intimacy. This involves massive investment in public goods, involving ideas like universal basic income that only months ago seemed far out. Public health will demand attention to our health care system and our food sources. Many other implications will emerge. At one level or another they all involve our up-leveling of intimacy. The material and spiritual planes of intimacy that once seemed so separate have merged into one.

The Evolution of Intimacy

At the core of the evolution of intimacy is the evolution of identity—from separate self to Unique Self. Uniqueness is not separateness but the currency of our interconnection. We are each an irreducibly unique expression of a love that is the animating Eros and energy of all that is. It lives in me and through me, and it never was, is, or will be again. As such I have an irreducibly unique perspective and an irreducibly unique quality of intimacy, which taken together foster my unique capacity to give my unique gift into my unique circle of intimacy and influence.

It is through our Unique Self that we join the Unique Self Symphony. The Unique Self Symphony is a new structure of intimacy, the self-organizing universe come alive through each of us giving our unique gifts. That makes us part of the unique configuration of evolutionary love that our reality needs right now. Our response to suffering is the unique voice of our intimacy. It is the way we reach out to a friend's pain, and it is the way we recognize and respond to the suffering in the world.

The Fear of Death: The First Shock of Existence

But there is yet another piece of sense making we must do. We must address the fear of death that Covid-19 has invoked across the globe. The fear of death has two dimensions, what we might call the first shock and second shock of existence. The first shock in our lives is to realize that we and all that we love will die. Indeed, it was the first shock of existence itself, the fear of death, which pressed us inward toward the intuitions of the Divine generated by all the great wisdom traditions. Few of us want to die, so—as we contemplate our finitude—it is that contemplation that opens us up like no other to the meaning of life itself. Death is ultimately non-negotiable. But we understood that it was a night between two days. And our fear of death, as understood by Spirit's humanistic response to the first shock of existence, was realized as an invitation, even a demand that we live well.

We fear death mostly when we have been afraid of life, when we have not lived the life that is ours to live. The religions realized that the fear of death was at its core the madly loving demand of reality or Spirit that we live the most good, true, and beautiful life that is possible. So when we fear death, it is partly at least a fear that the ladder we climbed in life was perched against the wrong wall, and thus our climbing was all in vain. The weakness of the religions was that they each claimed to be the only right wall. Each demanded obedience to its particular form against all others who were deemed heretics or infidels, by different names. It was only the coin of absolute obedience—not to a universal *ethos*—but to their particular ritual forms that gave passage to eternity.

Many of us have moved on from traditional religions for understandable reasons—their ethnocentrism, sexism, racism, and other shadows of their great truths. But we also need something they gave us, even the reason they came into being. The baby is not the bathwater.

They gave death a Kosmic context, a place in the great scheme of things. One of their great truths is that death is not the end—it is a portal into a deeper reality of consciousness.

In this post-traditional world, we seek universal truths, which are seeded by the great religions but transcend them into a shared language of meaning. This is the new narrative of identity, “Who Am I?” to which we referred above. This is the story of Unique Self, the inherent human joy and responsibility to playing our instrument and giving our unique gift into our unique circle of intimacy and influence, thereby participating in the Unique Self Symphony of reality evolving to ever-deeper levels of care, love, and intimacy. We remember the great truth of modernity that reality is not static, it is a dynamic story. Reality is evolving, moving, going somewhere. Indeed, this realization of the grassroots, decentralized, bottom-up self-actualizing Unique Self Symphony is itself a new disclosure of evolution. The leading edges of science are just beginning to recognize this new emergent, referring to it as the self-organizing universe itself which moves to create ever-deeper levels of value, of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Or what we might simply call the evolution of love.

In the deepest sense, the fear of dying is of not having lived your Unique Self—the life that was yours to live. It is the fear of dying and not having made the contribution that your very cells know is yours to make. The way to transcend the fear of death is therefore clear—to live your story, your Unique Self, to the fullest, giving your unique gift, writing your poem, singing your song, and being the unique configuration of intimacy and desire that reality intended in its incarnation as you.

These are the revelations pressed into our knowing by the contemplation of death, the first shock of existence. Without this truth, death becomes a terror to avoid by whatever means possible.

Forms of Avoidance

Indeed, this is the terror of this time that we are between worlds, a time between stories. We have, on the one hand, ripped away the context of the old traditional religions but not yet realized the new narrative of identity, community, and universe, Unique Self and Unique Self Symphony in a self-organizing universe moving—with all of the agony and ecstasy—towards the evolution of love. So in this time between worlds, we are left with the original death terror of the first shock of existence which we seek to avoid at virtually all costs.

There are two forms of this avoidance, or what we might call a-void-dance, the attempt to dance around the void which is the fear of death. One, an obsession with busyness, entertainment, and diversion so as not to have to face that terror. This is what I have called in other writing pseudo-Eros, covering up the emptiness with an imitation-Eros that dulls the terror of mortality. The second has been to make death the enemy. The frantic obsession with life extension and even immortality—what has been called the War on Death—is a direct expression of this terror.

The corona virus has ripped away the veneers of pseudo-Eros and made absurd the pretensions of our war on death. We are left in this moment therefore only with the terror. But even as we go about our heroic battle to save lives, few name the fear of death that subtly transfixes the entire world in this moment.

This is what we have sought to name and transform in this part of our sense making. Precisely because we have ripped death from its mooring in a larger weave of sense and meaning, we are left only with its terror and not with its essential gifts.

Death Demands Our Deepest Integrity

Death demands our deepest integrity, our recognition of the human condition. To borrow William James' phrase, "It is only death that makes life a genuine option." In no way does this mean we abandon the ill to their fate, though it may at times mean we value the quality more than the number of their days. But it does mean we recognize our finitude—the limits that this life necessarily sets upon us. It means we do not waste our precious days in this life. It means we must find what in this lifetime we are uniquely here to do, and that there is meaning in what we pass on. It means we must give up some of our control and our assertion, as we recognize our fleeting presence and the depth of the fundamental mystery that underlies our existence on earth.

The Second Shock of Existence: From Catastrophic to Existential Risk

The second shock of existence is not the death of individual human beings, but the potential death of humanity. This is the existential risk we now face, one that began with the atomic bomb and has lurked in our consciousness ever since. In honor of the sick and the dead, we dare not waste this tragedy and what it portends.

We must allow this moment to spur us and invite the potential second shock of existence into our hearts—not in a way that paralyzes us, but in a way that inspires new levels of insight and realization. Just as the first shock of existence pressed us inward and generated the great intimations of spirit around personal *ethos* and Eros, so too the fear of the second shock of existence must press inwards and generate new insight around our collective *ethos* and Eros.

These are precisely the insights and realizations that will be necessary to prevent the second shock from taking place. These insights of Eros and *ethos* will bring together diverse strands of validated knowledge into new wholes generating new technologies both in the exterior and interior sciences.

The insights are those of medical science—in this case, how to minimize pandemics and vastly increase public health. They are the insights of economics—how to organize a recovering economy that needs a free market and an effective, protective, but not overbearing

government. We must be pressed by the urgency to create social democracies which both protect world security and protect the inviolable unique dignity of all of life. And, inseparably, they are the insights of interior science—how to deepen and expand our capacity for intimacy with those we know and those we don't. Evolution is the progressive deepening of intimacies, without which our global interconnection will rapidly become painful and ultimately fatal. Eros is the experience of reality seeking new intimacies—it is life-loving and joyful.⁴

New Languages Tell New Stories

Language is the mechanism of evolution. To evolve we must to evoke new fields of language even we pour new meaning into old worlds. Unique Self, Unique Self Symphony, Outrageous Love, and Evolutionary Love are new words. Eros is a word we redeploy, recovering and evolving its original meaning and liberating it from its reduction to the merely sexual. We need new languages to tell new stories.

New Stories Emerge from the Second Shock

It is precisely in this sense that the second shock of existence needs to press us inside to generate new levels of knowledge and meaning. Just as the first shock, the realization of the death of the individual, generated an explosion of profound spiritual intuition around personal *ethos*, the second shock must generate an explosion of collective *ethos*. We have to create new qualities of love. We have to generate new qualities and levels of intimacy. In the unbearable intimacy of a global civilization, we have to actually choose the intimate universe, which is the most accurate new narrative of reality. It's the understanding that reality at its core a love story, not a Harlequin romance but an ontological, for-real love story. We are wired for this.

Once cultural evolution began, the human being and humanity went through many levels of evolution—all in the context of the noosphere, the level of the world of mind. Self-reflective humans have gone through many levels of development, of emergence, interior and exterior—until *Homo sapiens* have arrived at this incredible moment, when we've developed huge depths of exponential technology. We've also developed beautiful ideas of universal human rights, social mobility, modern medicine, and we've exploded life on this planet. We've gone from a population of half a billion to seven and a half billion in 150 short years, partly because of our medical science and other technologies. These are the dignities of modernity, generated by the new human Divine story seeded by the Renaissance.

⁴ Eros is part of the same field of language of Evolutionary Love or Outrageous Love. The terms are not isomorphic, but they describe the same phenomenological experience and ontological reality.

Flaws in the Storyline of Modernity

But the storyline has been flawed. Our conventionally accepted notion of the human being has been as a limited separate self, with no genuine interiors trapped in a metric that drives a success story requiring exponential growth and efficient but not resilient systems. It is precisely this sense of what our friend Barbara Marx Hubbard called win-lose metrics and what many theorists have referred to as the vulnerability of our fragile, complicated systems maximized for efficiency and not resiliency that has generated the fact pattern which is cause for Covid-19.

The Corona virus crisis has exposed the flaw in the story. Many of us were shocked to see that we would—or even that we could—shut down the economy to protect human life, especially the lives of the elderly and the sick. Some believed we should let natural selection take its course and let vulnerable lives be lost. Others argued that since we let far more people die every day from hunger, how would this be different? Humans are incapable of such a massive response, they said. But we did shut the economy down. The costs will be enormous, and we will never be the same, but we did it. Very little in this is good—many other important priorities have been cast aside. Had we listened to the warnings; the costs would have been far less. But now we know something very important: We are not willing to betray our humanity in the way many assumed we would. The storyline that we are disconnected individuals was flawed, and has proved unworkable for most people in a civilized society.

Part of the reason for the closure was straight-up fear of death—it was the lesser of two evils. But there is a deeper motive, a deeper love story that has taken over. It is a story of heroes. For the hero is moved by love of the larger community, which transcends even death. The hero knows that death is not final and that by aligning with the larger love story we transcend death even if we die. The heroes of this moment remind us of the deeper truth of reality. Reality is not a fact but a story. Not an ordinary story but a love story. Not an ordinary love story but an evolutionary, an evolving love story. And our personal love story, our personal Outrageous Acts of Love are chapter and verse of this evolving love story.

The Truth that Heroes Know

Now it is time for culture to claim the truth known by these heroes and evolve the story, that underlying sense of who we are. It is time we focused not on the defects in our nature, but on the massive strength of what we can do and be. I have suggested we name ourselves *Homo amor*—focusing on our inherent evolutionary love for each other and for life itself. The *Homo amor* human realizes that reality is Eros and that we are unique invaluable expression of that Eros. *Homo sapiens* advanced our evolution with complex language and thought. When *Homo sapiens* fulfills him/herself as *Homo amor*, we realize that every human being is a Unique Self, and no one is outside of the circle. It really is one love, one heart. This amounts to a new narrative of identity. There is a new universe story. The new universe story is a love story. Evolution is the love story of the universe.

Just in Time for a Time Like This

An angry God did not send the corona virus—it is the physical-world consequence of our split-off intimacies. We ignore suffering—the suffering of the animals, the suffering of the poor. Then, even when we know a pandemic is in the offing, we don't focus on it, because somehow, we think it won't affect us. We defund agencies that actually deal with and prepare for pandemics. We split off from the possibility. We think somehow the poor or the underprivileged or someone else is going to be affected. We don't actually take seriously our obligation to take responsibility for humanity. We're too caught in our success stories. We're too caught in working out our traumas. We turn our attention away.

New Thought systems tell us we create our own reality. In a sense we did create this—we let it happen and there are many things we need to change. But individuals did not bring it on themselves, and there are many other catastrophes that happen to humanity that cannot be predicted or avoided. Death and suffering are part of life—woven into its DNA. We have to stand for suffering. We have to do sense making that responds to and honors the dignity of suffering. And we have to respond to the call, invitation, and demand of this moment. We humans are wired for this—we know that now. The front lines of exterior response call us to help the sick and the newly unemployed. The interior response calls us to go inside for resilience and deeper spiritual connection to others. At times we do both. Our task is before us, and we reinforce each other in our work.

This is the moment in which the first shock of existence can be sensed by everyone, and the second shock of existence lurks at the door. This is the time.

We were born just in time for a time like this.