

## On the Guiding Significance of *No Man Is an Island*

Liya He, Chi Huang

School of Foreign Languages, Chengdu University of Information Technology, China

### Abstract

*No Man Is an Island* is a poem written by John Donne, a well-known spokesman of metaphysical poetry in the 17<sup>th</sup> century England. This paper focuses on the guiding significance of the poem for modern people. To begin with, this paper explores its significance in defeating COVID-19 in the modern international community. Then the paper points out its significance for people with social phobia and for those who want to improve their life quality. Through analysis of the poem and its significance, it is expected that people in the world will get more united and do some contribution to the construction of a human community with shared future.

### Keywords

*No Man Is an Island*; Community; Significance; Metaphor.

### 1. Introduction

*No Man is an Island* is the work of John Donne(1572 - 1631), an English metaphysical poet and bishop of St. Paul's Cathedral in London during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. He is good at emphasizing his thought by fantastic metaphor and extravagant hyperbole.

John Donne distinguished himself from conventional imagery and used extended metaphor to contrast totally different things in a creative and thought-provoking style. He influenced not only his contemporaries but also poets of the twentieth century such as Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888 – 1965) and John Orley Allen Tate (1899 – 1979).

In 1623, the plague broke out in London, and the 51-year-old Donne was also infected with the disease. Undaunted by the widespread fear that would overwhelm ordinary people, Donne wrote *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*. In Devotions 16-18 he claims to die vicariously in the death of the man "for whom the bell tolls". Donne's experience should not be regarded as an individual event, but also a microcosm of human destiny. The poet is so popular because it demonstrates the essential relationships of all human beings——connection and concern. John Stubbs, an affiliate of Harvard University's Berkman Klein Center, sees Donne as a reminder that the individual cannot be separated from the group, and there is no isolated island life. <sup>[4]</sup>As early as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the poet illumined his philosophical views in his poetry, which is the same as the value of a human community with shared future in modern society.

### 2. Text Analysis of *No Man Is an Island*

The poem says, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main". That is to say, no man can become a complete island. Donne compares each man to a piece of the continent and a part of the whole. John Donne uses metaphor and dialectic to explain the interdependence of human existence. Man cannot exist independently without some external things to help. But at the same time, everyone matters. When using the following famous powerful geographical metaphors, Donne writes "If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were", which further describes the close relationship between the whole and the part, and the loss of the whole naturally affects the interests of the individual. In the end, Donne says"

any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee", in which he explains the link between the fate of the individual and the fate of the whole mankind. By analyzing the symbolic significance of funeral bell tolling, Donne punctuates his thesis that one man's life and death are closely connected to another man's.

In a macro sense, since the earth is also in loneliness, the recognition of human's overall identity is closely related to loneliness. One of the benefits of loneliness, however, is that it allows humans to transcend their physical limitations and build themselves in relation to others. Donne tells readers that the good you do for others is in turn good for you. There are no flowery and beautiful words in the whole poem. What impresses people most is the metaphor that continues from the beginning to the end. It's metaphor with a touch of sadness. Because one's destiny is tied to the destiny of others, the fate of all people is an indivisible small land, the pain of others is also one's own, and the sound of others' death is also one's own end.

### 3. The Significance of No Man Is an Island

Nature has the butterfly effect. A butterfly in the Amazon rainforest in South America can cause a tornado in Texas two weeks later merely by flapping its wings occasionally. Like the natural world, human society is also an interconnected whole. *No Man is an Island* is the first poem to put forward the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind and it has guiding significance to modern people.

#### 3.1. The guiding significance in combating COVID-19

At the beginning of the year 2020, a sudden novel coronavirus epidemic broke out, which is the worst pandemic to afflict humanity in this century. It's a major public health emergency that has spread faster and wider than any other since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and has proven to be the most difficult to contain. In the face of this pandemic, no man can be isolated and become a far-away island. China immediately waged an all-out people's war on the virus. The whole society was mobilized to join the national prevention and control effort. Under the CPC's strong leadership, the Chinese people united as one and succeeded in turning the severe situation down.

Through this ferocious campaign, China has fought shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the world, which proves China's sense of itself as a responsible major country. In an open, transparent, and responsible manner, China has performed its international obligations by giving timely notification of a novel coronavirus to the WHO and to other countries and regions concerned. In addition, it has shared without reserve with others its experience in containing the virus and treating the infected, and has done all it can to provide humanitarian aid in support of the international community's endeavors to stem the pandemic. In an effort to contribute to the global battle, China has advocated building a global community of health for all, and made a series of proposals concerning international aid and vaccine usage.

#### 3.2. The guiding significance in overcoming social phobia

Modern society is moving towards atomization. Young people are inclined to focus more on self-actualization and accept the fact that they are born and die alone. The loss of sense of community leads to a spiritual loss that is difficult to cure. As a consequence, there are more and more teenagers, who are senior Internet users, suffering from social phobia. They are afraid of socializing and prefer to stay alone, so they can't feel the warmth of the neighborhood and can't find the sense of belonging in the community. They are reluctant to go out and order takeout when they are hungry. They look at their mobile phones anytime and anywhere, and they are indifferent to people and things around them. Although such a lifestyle might be

comfortable and efficient for them for a short while, they tend to feel empty, anxious and depressed in this comfort zone.

For the sake of their mental health, teenagers need to be encouraged to socialize, get out of their comfort zones, and observe the lives of those around them. In this way, when adolescents are confused, conflicted, and hostile to the unknown world, neighborhood can provide them with a sense of belonging, worth, security, presence, and validation. But that doesn't mean they have the right to make comments about other people's lives or pry into their privacy. "Every man is a piece of continent, a part of the main". There are borders between continents, and the relationship between people also needs a sense of boundaries.

### 3.3. The guiding significance in improving life quality

Nowadays, with the development of various hardware and software, and the improvement of various management measures, our city has too much functionality and insufficient ecology. Functionality means that something is done very efficiently, like a delivery man who can bring food to you in a short time. Ecology means that a variety of things depend on each other to form a stable system. This phenomenon causes a lot of contradictions. First of all, many teenagers often feel lonely and unsupported, even though they are communicating through social media every day. Secondly, many young people believe that only in the virtual world can they be themselves. However, they don't know how to communicate with others face to face in real life and they feel nervous when they meet strangers. Thirdly, as the government increases its investment in community construction, the community has become a very safe and comfortable space due to its closure, but it seems to lack social life in this space. Fourthly, young people in modern society are not only concerned about themselves and their family affairs, but also are always concerned about what is happening thousands of miles away.

The young people want to improve themselves continually, while using advanced social media to make grand comments on national affairs. However, just because of the abundance of information, their judgment of the world situation becomes very simple in many cases. On the one hand, they all focus on the earth which we are living in together. On the other hand, their vision becomes narrow, their emotions become volatile, and they are unable to accept different views, so that they begin to have difficulties in communicating. In modern society, the social function of the neighborhood is increasingly weakening. People can accomplish one thing efficiently, but don't know how to socialize with others. Part of the reason is that the individual is composed of many layers, and people only pay attention to the pure self and the country, ignoring the space between the two-- the neighborhood, and they fail to realize how the society is constituted through concrete correlation and differences.

## 4. Conclusion

*No Man is an Island* has guiding significance to modern people. The poem is worth reading and appreciating, both for its guiding significance in the fight against COVID-19 and for its assistance for people to overcome social phobia. Social networks have not made people more united, but more divided. The poem *No Man Is an Island* can serve as a guide to understanding the world. Neighborhood brings different positions into the same vision, thus forming a perspective. From this perspective, people can develop a better understanding of reality and thus develop new social relations and carry out new social activities.

While high-tech businesses instinctively increase efficiency, they also reduce human communication. Such changes are deliberately directed by the platforms because people can benefit from them. People should try to make the neighborhood a foundation for reflecting on their personal lives, testing grand ideologies and participating in public discussions, which is also conducive to the development of human's mental health.

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