



The Martian: Individuals' Efforts to Maintain the Common Good

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Abstract: This thesis tries to analyze the relationship between individuals and groups or Mark and the crew of Hermes in the film *The Martian*. It mainly includes three parts: introduction, Mark: hero and each crew member. And the author tries to conclude that the relationship between individuals and groups is reciprocal and complemented. The members should maintain the common good and the groups should protect its members' rights without conditions and in all situations. If so, the whole human beings or society can get a progress.

Keywords: Individual; Common Good; *The Martian*

1. Introduction

People have to believe both individualism and common good. And human beings are united by their common practices, language, cultural tradition and shared social understandings. Actually, the community has already existed before the form of government or nation. People spontaneously form a community. But such kind of community must equip with a leader who can decide or judge the rightness when people within the community quarrel or fight with each other. Thus, there appears government and the governed have to elect all the management persons whom everyone believes in to manage and arrange the public affairs. And as Thomas Paine, one of the British thinkers and authors, says in his book *Common Sense* that "society in every state is a blessing, but government even in its best state is but a necessary evil in its worst state an intolerable one." (Thomas Paine 4) He also says as the followings:

Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness positively by uniting our affections, the latter negatively by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher. (Thomas Paine 4)

And according to Robert E. Godin, a community is a social unit (a group of living things) with commonality such as norms, religion, values, customs, or identity. The same with group members, because they have common target, beliefs, identity and so on. (Robert E Goodin 463-467) Thus, here comes the question-- how to balance the individual rights and common good? Or how to deal with the relationship between individuals and groups? In this film, the question is how Mark deal with the relationship between himself and the crew. He is an independent and autonomous individual but at the same time, he is a member of the crew. He should not only consider the interests of him but also think about the whole interests of the crew. Individuals have to prepare to sacrifice their life for the common good if necessary and they ought to protect their own rights instead of just giving up without doing anything. And as individuals, they should spare no efforts to maintain the common good. While as one group, it should consider everyone's rights. Individuals can leave as he or she wants but as long as he or she belongs to the group, he or she should be loyal to the group and consider for it. This is a reciprocal and complemented relationship.

Individualism appeared after the end of aristocratic age because people has been liberated. In aristocratic communities, citizens have fixed position, that is to say, one above the other. The result is that everyone seeks the help of his above person whose patronage is necessary to him and his following person whose cooperation is important to him. So, in the coming of democracy America, people tend to consider themselves alone for the clear division of work and they

don't need to sacrifice themselves sometimes. People seek for freedom and equality and they try their best to maintain the common good and at the same time, to maintain their own interests and properties. As a result, they get enough wealth and understanding to meet their needs. They don't owe or expect anyone. Therefore, they have formed the habit of always isolating themselves, and they often think that their destiny is in their own hands. Such kind of individualism is the normal seeking of individual Americans and they just want to be themselves in the life of communities. People cannot escape the life of communities, but they can choose the way of living within the communities. They are born living within communities or groups such as families, relatives, schools and so on. They can live as they like, but they must maintain those groups and deal with the relationship between individuals and groups best. They cannot lose themselves in communities and they also cannot ignore the existence of communities in their life. So, in order to gain a good development of themselves, they have to try their best to maintain the common good and in return, the communities have to protect the rights and interests of their members so that the communities can last longer and also get a development and generations of their own.

From the opinions of Robert E. Goodin, in philosophy, economics, and politics, common good refers to something shared and beneficial to all or most members of a particular community, or realized through citizenship, collective action, and active participation in the field of politics and public service. And many great thinkers devote their own thinking on it such as Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Karl Marx and so on. Liberals base their theories on notions of individual rights and personal freedom, but neglect the extent to which individual freedom and well-being is only possible within community. Once people recognize the dependence of human beings on society, then their obligations to sustain the common good of society are as important as their rights to individual liberty. So, in the same way, once people recognize their dependence on groups, then they will spare no efforts to fulfil their obligations and to maintain the common good of the groups they stay in. (Robert E. Goodin 467-469)

2. Mark: The hero

For instance, Mark is the typical example to illustrate the efforts of individuals to maintain the common good. Firstly, he chooses to give up his life for the safety of his crew members. From the beginning of this disaster, he doesn't feel negative about this. He positively seeks ways to live on Mars by his instinct and he doesn't just give up or just wait for NASA's rescue. But at the time when he hears the failure of NASA's sending of food for him and the destruction of his potatoes' plants, he begins to feel sad and prepares to give up or sacrifices his life for NASA. He doesn't want his crew members to come back and risk their life to save him. So, he writes a letter to commander Lewis asking her to take care of his parents. This is a kind of sacrificing spirit for the maintenance of common good. Secondly, he chooses to be loyal to NASA. He continues to finish the former Mars mission of NASA at the time when he knows that it is possible for him to die on Mars. And he still puts his mission in the first place, by which he can devote his power for NASA's this-time mission and promote the development of American flight career or maintain the common good of NASA. Thirdly, when his crew members come to pick him up following Rich's plan, he chooses to stick a hole on his own spacesuit so that he can make use of the pressure to push himself to get closer to his crew members when there is a little bit inaccuracy about the picking distance. If so, the crew members can pick him easily. In order to maintain the common good, he risks his life to do so. If the crew members fail to pick him up in the space, he will just float in the wide spreading space until the death comes to him. Finally, he comes back to earth and works as a trainer of the Astronaut Candidate Program. He says in his class that "you do the math, and you solve one problem and the next. If you solve enough problem, then you get to come home" (02:22:59-02:23:07). He passes positive power to the next generations of astronauts and encourages them to devote their power to American space career. In this way, he maintains the common good of American astronauts or American nation.

So, why Mark does so? The reason is that Mark knows the close relationship between him and his groups, and the relationship between him and the society. He realizes his dependence on his group and the society, so the common good becomes as weight as his personal rights.

3. Each crew member

Commander Lewis, the leader of the mission crew, works as a key person within this group. Her working goal is to complete their mission and bring all the members home. And meanwhile, she gives exact instruction to other members and unites each other. At the beginning, she chooses to give the order of launching the MAV after searching Mark in vain, which is out of the consideration of the whole safety of other members. And then, when all the members vote to the rescuing action, she said that if there is one person disagreeing the action, the plan will be canceled. At this time, she, at least, tries to keep the common good of the crew despite she already disobeys the instruction of NASA. And at last, she changes Beck with herself when they have to send one person in the space to pick up Mark. She wants to keep other members' safety in a largest degree. In other words, once some accidents occur, she can maintain the most common good of her team. All of her actions are to keep her team members safe in a largest degree. Those are her efforts to maintain the common good of the crew.

And other four persons also try to maintain the common good of the crew. For instance, Beck, the doctor, says they have to go when Mark has lost in the storm. He says "Commander, I know you don't want to hear about this, but Mark is dead. My friend just dead and I don't want my commander dead, too" (00:07:20-00:07:30). In such dangerous situation, he stays calm and tells others to realize the truth, by which he keeps the whole group safe. Martines also makes the MAV stand by using all the means, by which he can buy more time for Mark and his crew members. Although all the behaviors or actions are their working obligations, they make breakthrough all the time hoping they can go together with all the members.

4. Conclusion

So, all the crew members are trying to maintain the common good. But the "good" is regulated by the society or the community. And there is a public ranking of conception of good. It encourages people to adopt the conception of good that conforms to the community's way of life. In this way, they are called conformist. All the crew members are conformed to the high ranking of conception of good and maintain the high ranking of common good.

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