

THE PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS IN THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ERA

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Abstract

The “cogito ergo sum” “I think, therefore I am” of Descartes, being alive we suffer the pandemic threat of the coronavirus. Philosophy is not a conceptual tool for solving human problems but applies rational reflection towards solutions to the problems. We are never bereft of ideas, reality imposes on our ideas, the coronavirus has opened up a flood of ideas than any course of life. There are similarities between Philosophy and the coronavirus, i.e., the spread of ideas and the spread of the virus, both are invisible and are transmitted from person to person, it is mostly through oral means, they are both a threat since the virus is a threat to the body so also certain philosophical idea can be considered a threat to man. The virus endangers lives so also wrong philosophical ideas, this is why philosophy and the virus need to be taken into isolation so that we can improve and get the best of the situations. In setting aside, the analogy, the question now is what can philosophy do in the current pandemic? it should be noted that “philosophy is the thing with which or without which everything remains as it is” “philosophy is not a service, but reigns”. The pandemic and philosophy remind us we are faced with the reality of death and life. The government in the face of this pandemic simply seeks the advice of scientists and technologists, the position of this paper is that philosophy should be given a voice in addressing the pandemic owing to what it shares with the pandemic.

Keywords: Philosophy, Pandemic, Coronavirus, government, virus

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic or covid-19, right from when the world was faced with this virus has awoken our minds to some silent issues of life, do we value life? is life sacred? is the life of another person significant? who has the authority to take life and keep it? and raises some fundamental existential, political and ethical questions. Socrates famous dictum ‘the unexamined life is not worth living,’ This statement was not just a mere academic exercise but a call to living well, he wanted to get from the human person, what is vital in life, how we can live a good life, what is fundamental in life. For Paul O’ Grady (2020), the tools for reflection and self-awareness are supportive when everything about is shifting. “Realising what’s not helps shape our response to circumstances. Getting perspective, re-evaluating what our real needs are is supportive. Using our critical faculties helps, e.g., being sceptical about information, testing it, checking its provenance. “Socrates found that his philosophical way of life gave him courage. Philosophy is not a body of knowledge, but a mindset, a questioning. It is a love of wisdom, a way of linking reason with values and emotions, to live and die well.”

In the face of this Pandemic, the question is been asked, where are the philosophers, Philosophy does not offer a cure but needs an atmosphere where its presence should be called to duty, Philosophers have given an opportunity among the technologists, medics, scientists and decision-makers can offer check and balance in the ideas proffer to avoid rash personal decisions. This is where philosophy creates the rare difference and presence. The lesson of philosophy in this crisis is to impose a moral responsibility on the part of individuals, political leaders, medics, scientists and technologists to do what is right at all times. Philosophy resonates with the Hippocratic Oath to always defend and save life and not to do it harm. Clearly (2020) notes that for many, this pandemic is a new kind of ambiguity and being anxious about it is understandable: millions of lives are being unexpectedly disrupted; disinformation, disbelief, and denial are rife; and the death toll is rising. Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophy can help because she points out that to be human is to live in ambiguity and the solution isn’t to eliminate uncertainly but to recognise it as the condition of existence.

There is a need for a rational reflection in dealing with varieties of human problems and even the virus.

The Philosophical Perspective

According to Velazquez (2020), there are spontaneous questions that arise in the face of the current situation and which seems reducible to a single fundamental one: What is a philosophy for? Or: “what have philosophers written in the past in the face of thousands

of deaths caused by the event of an epidemic?" Some ask themselves more concretely in what philosophers can contribute, what effective contribution they have made or can give to the solution of the problems that are oppressing us as if they were a caste of specialists. This perspective, rather than magnifying the figure of philosophers, diminishes them. Perhaps the pandemic will serve to remind us that philosophy cannot be reduced to any professional category. No philosopher before has written directly on epidemics or pandemics (perhaps with the sole exception of Camus who wrote the plaque) although some such as Fichte, Hegel, William of Ockham, the Mexican Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz and very likely St. Augustine as well died during one of them.

Philosophy does not provide specific tools or tool tasks used in life. This is the task of technology, but it does not mean that philosophy has no other tasks even under certain circumstances. The present coronavirus pandemic needs a critical mind reflection which is also an asset in resolving different fundamental problems. Velazquez (2020), argues that the pandemic does not look at anyone and has shown that fragility is a typical condition of the human being as such. This is important because, as modern man grew, he lost the sense of his fragility: he had the impression of gradually becoming the master of the world, of history and also, of life, through the progress of medicine, technology and ways in which he could organize his existence. On the other hand, we realize, and the pandemic has been very clear from this point of view, that this underlying fragility is not eliminated. At this first point, another one is connected: that of vulnerability. Vulnerability is partly synonymous with fragility, but with an extra accent, since who is vulnerable is the one who can be injured and this is important because it indicates that the human condition is also exposed, apart from its initial fragility, to be further affected. This is what is happening today: we are affected in our everyday way of living; we can no longer do what we used to do and this is regardless of whether we have to go to hospital and maybe even lose our lives. A third point is that of the impotence of the human being, which is different from what we have previously considered. Impotence means being in the condition of not being able to do anything substantial. The only defence that we can offer in isolation because, despite all our progress, this sudden appearance of a new, unknown virus is such that even the most advanced technologies we have could not help us.

The coronavirus pandemic raises some fundamental philosophical questions concerning the ethical and medical responsibility of the state. In response to this pandemic, philosophy raises the principle of utilitarianism, the maximum interest of all. Delanty (2020) argues that its basic premise is that the greatest good should always be sought after. This may demand that the ends justify the means, but it is generally understood, as in the writings of Peter Singer, that one's interest is not greater than the interest of the greatest number. However, as a practical philosophy, it needs to be able to command the

required means to achieve the desired end. This is where things get complicated. Is the desired end the elimination of the disease (which is impossible in the absence of a vaccine) or the best possible outcome for the majority of people, i.e., natural immunity? Herd immunity, it became quickly clear, could be both a means and an end, but the reality is that it does not work as a means to the end, due to the extent of the death rate that would have to be tolerated. We can easily apply this principle when the collective good is known, it may not favour some, it may be applied when its outcome does not dissatisfy a greater number. Delanty (2020) points out that the failure of utilitarianism in the UK in March 2020 is less a failure of utilitarian philosophy than a failure of politics and science.

The state must save all lives ill irrespective of the state of life and not make the distinction. This is the moral principle of the state. If Immanuel Kant's principle is to be called into play here which presents the principle that the dignity of the singular individual is over above the common good, only goes to show that the individual takes precedent in the determination of any policy, Delanty (2020) further opines that the standpoint of the political philosophy of John Rawls, for whom utilitarianism neglects too much the individual and the requirement for equality between individuals. According to *The Theory of Justice*, a just society should be organised based on principles of justice that derive from the interests of the individual. Kantian standpoint opposes the utilitarian position is not appealing to the common interest, the maxim that the end justifies the means since this might not be compatible with respect for the individual. To take an extreme scenario, the Kantian position would require the state to save the lives of those who may be too ill to be saved even if this meant resources may be unavailable to those who could be saved. The ethical obligation of the state is to save all lives and not to distinguish which ones are of greater value. The utilitarian position is not reducible to instrumentalism, as is perhaps suggested by Habermas's remark, in that it is not a matter of the instrumental interest in keeping the economy going but of maximising the common interest.

In placing Utilitarianism and Kantian principles side by side, the common good and the singular individual in the face of the presence of the coronavirus pandemic, it is also discovered that the method used does not give credence to the dignity of the human person, dignity without security and then implementing measures like wearing of mask, keeping safety distance, isolation, even in all these our exploitation in science and technology has not helped in coming out with a cure, the vaccine against coronavirus, despite the work still going on in the many laboratories and the pharmaceutical industries in the world paying for research, we are still unsure of the when the drugs for it will come out but philosophy plays a vital role here in accessing the situation, there is need for solidarity which is re-surfacing in contemporary philosophy as used by early ancient philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle under the term virtue ethics, because a good life

presupposes a good action and in harmony with the community this should precede selfishness, there is need for collective participation in the process, if there is the participation of all an instance if everyone is convince and all put on the mask then bringing out any pathogens and likelihood of transmission will be limited, less participation only retardate efforts, the pandemic only takes away our experience of drugs from cure now to immediate stoppage of death, this is as a result of the countless deaths been recorded by the coronavirus.

According to Velazquez (2020), The philosopher's task is not to find the meaning of life or to tell others how they should live but to provide conceptual tools useful to those who make difficult decisions, in communicating and explaining them to others. If we see philosophy in this way, then there is still much work for philosophers to do, not only in the current situation but also, and perhaps above all, in the future. When Plato wondered how it was possible to ensure the best in the life of a state, he thought that this task should be entrusted to philosophers who, precisely because of their ability to encompass the good of each one, can establish needs and dictate public policies to them. This project seemed plausible because, at the time of Plato, the philosopher was a scholar with knowledge also in the field, for example, of the natural sciences and mathematics, as well as exercised on reflection on the great themes of the meaning of life and moral responsibilities. Even today the public authorities, the political leaders to face the pandemic are assisted by committees of experts, but these are simply scientists and technologists, each capable of giving assessments from the narrow point of view of his competence but no one can offer the indications of wisdom and basic orientation that would be necessary and we are faced with the uncertainties and contradictions that we all know. Even today philosophy would still have its voice to express in the face of the difficult choices that must be addressed.

The Coronavirus Pandemic Effects

The Covid-19 disease pandemic resultant effects raises fundamental problems that have not been addressed ranging from medical, scientific and technological challenges across the world, improvement in handling these issues will also help in the approach to future pandemics and global crises. The present situation of the pandemic in our world poses social issues.

There is the rise of unemployment, crime, poverty, death, there is also the psychological effects, stressful because many are quarantined, the forceful self-isolation the decision of who to stay alive, use of the ventilator or allowed to die, movement is now limited and travels since most borders are shut. There is also the fear of the rise in mental well-being challenges. The coronavirus raises ethical issues, the scarcity of medication, health care

been overwhelmed, running out of bed space and health workers. The issue ability to take preventive measures to avoid transmission, the self-belief of the presence of the virus is also a challenge, the level of awareness is also a problem. No doubt the effect is on the individual and the state, we can say the pandemic effect can be summarized to be social, psychological and ethical.

According to Saladino, Algeri and Auriemma (2020), the recent Covid-19 pandemic has had significant psychological and social effects on the population. Research has highlighted the impact on the psychological well-being of the most exposed groups, including children, college students, and health workers, who are more likely to develop post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and other symptoms of distress. The social distance and the security measures have affected the relationship among people and their perception of empathy towards others. From this perspective, telepsychology and technological devices assume important roles to decrease the negative effects of the pandemic. These tools present benefits that could improve psychological treatment of patients one line, such as the possibility to meet from home or the workplace, saving money and time and maintaining the relationship between therapists and patients. In analysing the psychological impact of the quarantine, the importance for individuals to feel an integral part of the society emerged, an aspect often undervalued in psychological well-being. Experts of public health believe that social distancing is the better solution to prevent the spread of the virus. However, although it is not possible to predict the duration of the pandemic, we have known very well the serious impact of these measures on society, on relationships and interactions, in particular on the empathic process. The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the way people live interpersonal relationships. The lockdown was characterized by a different organization of daily life, with an incrementation of time at home and a reduction of distance through digital devices.

The pandemic is still ranging on the world, we have gone through the first wave, the second wave and now the third wave. The threats accompanying the virus and the deteriorating situation at the moment is now forcing many to think of a way out, this is where philosophy is needed. For Zabala (2020) many renowned philosophers, such as Judith Butler, Achille Mbembe and Giorgio Agamben, have written about the pandemic and the lessons all peoples of the world could learn from it, but there are two thinkers whose global perspective can especially help stem our obsession to change the world without taking the time to interpret it first- Slavoj Zizek and Bruno Latour. Zizek and Latour do not necessarily agree on how we can overcome this pandemic, but they both offer new ideas and questions that might at least prepare us for the next global emergency. Both Zizek and Latour, as well as other philosophers who have publicly reflected on this pandemic, concur that this is the time to reconsider our “way of being in the world”. For

too long we have changed the world too rapidly without thinking carefully about the consequences. This is why both Zizek and Latour welcome the lockdowns that forced many into a kind of retreat to think, question, and imagine new ways to create a better future. While Zizek's call for "a reorganisation of the global economy" and Latour's desire for "political ecology" might sound unrealistic even during this pandemic, even merely thinking about these ideas could exert enough pressure on us to reconsider our "way of being in" and interpreting the world.

The Philosophy of the Pandemic

According to Peters (2020), the philosophy of the pandemic is truly a philosophy for all peoples. It reflects not only the human significance of the pestilence and plaque, or the rise of modern viruses like Covid-19 that show the transition across species but also themes of individual/community- self-interest and collective responsibility, the sacrifice of first-contact health workers, and all of those who in the ethic of the other, provide a level of care in a neoliberal age less bound by duty or ethos of service and more by the market values. The philosophy of viruses and pandemics is often conceived of as ethics of self-isolation and the human effects of social isolation, as well as its community breaches. Such philosophy may also be seen as an ethics of care for those infected, a duty of treatment.

In epistemological terms the social repeats the biological: the virus exists as long as it can spread, otherwise it, faces a natural burnout; successful isolation depends on the social responsibility of all citizens to self-isolate and respects the ethical principle that a population is only as healthy as its weakest link. This is an epistemology question in part involving epistemological knowledge about the rate of infection and models of transmission, how viruses can mediate the cell wall. Some philosophers have addressed themselves to moral risk and science within a democratic society and others to traditional themes of social isolation, self-alienation, the seeming absurdity. The philosophical significance of pestilence and plaque in human society, its religious interpretation as God's wrath and a spiritual punishment, its symbolic representation and political 'emergency' use (Agamben's 'state of exception') clarify the meaning of human being, of self-isolation, of suspicion of the other, and whether there is indeed meaning outside human communities.

Olaopa (2021) wrote someone once said that when a griot dies, an entire library goes up in flame. Many libraries have been unfortunately consumed by death! And what a better consolation in a most terrible time of pandemic than the consolation of philosophy? Circa AD 524, the great Roman philosopher, Boethius, wrote what has been considered one of

the most significant works on medieval philosophy and Renaissance Christianity- The Consolation of Philosophy. Boethius wrote this work while he was undergoing a most traumatic moment in his life. He was the magister officiorum (Master of Offices) to Theodoric the Great. Court treachery brought him low and into prison, having been charged with treason. Boethius was eventually executed. But while awaiting his death, Boethius dealt with his trauma by engaging in philosophical reflection on Theodicy- how evil could exist in a world created by a good God. Lady Philosophy told Boethius, “No man can ever truly be secure until he had been forsaken by fortune.” In other words, it is through misfortune that we come to terms with who we are and what we came into the world to do. The deepest lesson that lady Philosophy taught Boethius is simple but hard to come by: happiness is not conditioned by misfortune. One can still be happy even in the midst of the worst experience.

The philosophy of stoicism is applicable in this era of the pandemic, the stoic mindset is that we should not be too troubled over that which we cannot control. We are only limited to what we can do. For Olaopa (2020) The present pandemic is, in essence, a consequence of the human desire for progress. Since the Industrial Revolution, humans have been in a race to overreach our capacity for scientific and technological development. We are paradoxically inexorably bent on self-extinction through our civilizing and technologizing mission. And when we wittingly or unwittingly let loose the new virus, we were ironically not ready for its terrible imprint upon our lives, the very lives we wanted to better by culturing the virus in the laboratories in the first place. Thus, we were engaged in progress but we were not ready for its consequences. With the virus and the pandemic, we are forced to learn the hard lesson that the desire for unbridled progress comes with a steep price. We are forced to retreat into ourselves and reflect. And the whole essence of a philosophic life is deep reflective awareness of those ideas and concepts by which our lives and existence hang in the balance. It was Thucydides, the ancient Greek historian, who once insisted that “history is philosophy teaching example.” And yet, humans have failed consistently to learn by the many tragic examples that history and philosophy have taught.

Philosophy is the love and the pursuit of wisdom in human affairs. And wisdom in this sense derives from the human capacity to learn from past mistakes, the example by which philosophy itself teaches us historically, and benefit from them. Philosophy teaches us to reflect not only on the internal trajectory of our lives but also on its external social and planetary trajectories. Three of the most significant philosophical questions we encounter are: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we headed? These fundamental questions provide the dynamics by which we can fulfil our innate yearning for understanding about our being and our being-in-the-world. There is no way humans can

make sense of their world and their place in it if our existence lacks the solid self-reflexivity required to constantly monitor how our affairs impact ourselves and our world. The history of philosophy itself sends sufficient messages to enable us to take cognizance of our reflective capacities and how fundamental they could be to our flourishing. Take the Oracle at Delphi as a first example. In 1400 BC, the shrine was considered to be the most important in Greece. And this is even more so because Delphi itself was considered to be the omphalos (navel) of the world. Carved to the front of the temple of the Oracle is the world-famous maxim, supposedly given by Apollo: Know Thyself. There is no greater challenge to humans to learn from their monistic creations. Apollo and whatever he might have said are the creation of the minds of humans. Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers to have lived, iterated the Delphic maxim to mean “an unexamined life is not worth living.” At the personal and individual level, a life is given to debauchery and the whims and caprices that are borne aloft on the vicissitudes of human existence is a life that is not greater than that of an animal. Animals live but do not exist. Only humans exist and even possess the capacity, according to Martin Heidegger, to ask questions about their being in the world. At the public level, an unexamined life is one lived with the unbridled deployment of political power and scientific knowledge that is not moderated by a fundamental awareness of how the fate of the world is intertwined with the fate of all of us. The earth is our home, and it makes no reflective sense to destroy your home while it yet determines your survival. It makes even less sense to keep up a trajectory of development that takes humans to the brink of self-destruction, all in the name of scientific and technological civilization.

The Coronavirus Pandemic: Lessons and Reflections

According to Ratner, Martin-Blais, Warrell (2020) The 2019–2020 novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, caused by the worldwide spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has changed healthcare systems across the globe. Many providers in high-income countries who have hardly known shortages in their lifetimes are being forced to consider triage, rationing, and altered provision of care in unprecedented ways. In the global North, this development has introduced frontline workers to vulnerability at a national level for the first time. Critical supply shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE) and ventilators have left healthcare workers (HCWs) with feelings of anxiety, guilt, and helplessness. However, these health system gaps may also highlight a source of newfound empowerment for change, as hardship can bring communities together to mobilize resilience.

Global health practitioners are taught that when working in a resource-constrained setting, effective approaches need to use locally driven solutions, informed by context-specific

evidence. Although it is tempting to apply previous experiences to new situations, context may make previous solutions irrelevant. For example, it may not be ethical to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation in settings where ventilators and circulatory supports are not available to support the patient in the post-resuscitation period. Identifying resource-specific solutions focused on equity, efficiency, and sustainability of the health system thus becomes essential. In a resource-limited setting, flexibility means adapting your practice to dynamically changing situations. This often involves pushing yourself outside of your comfort zone to focus on interpersonal and systematic details rather than stylistic ones. True flexibility can be astoundingly hard to achieve and requires a fund of humility that we often lack in the medical community. However, a willingness to approach challenges in new ways—rather than trying to fit them into a previous mould—allows for solutions to materialize. We reflect on the increasing importance to recognize (and amplify) locally adapted successes when working in unfamiliar settings, acknowledging that this level of change is often uncomfortable.

Our educational system was greatly threatened, there was a deficiency in the emotional wellbeing of students. Many schools were compelled to close down, for the schools which were not ICT compliance stopped learning, even those who were compliance, teachers and students experience the exhausting long hours at the screens, the coronavirus simply reminds of the relevance of remote learning, the need to revisit our current models of education and modifying our the curriculum. The problem here is that it will affect social interaction and the psychological well-being of the students. Institutions of learning must see to it that the pedagogical strategies adopted after lockdown should lead to a new strategy in improving learning leading to the emotional and psychological development of the teachers and students. The government should now ensure a greater percentage of budgeting should go to education, a greater concentration should be given to disadvantaged areas and the available access to technology. This is now the time to begin.

For Lau (2020), during this past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has turned our lives upside down and changed not just the way we live and work but also how we think and behave. Every part of the world has been affected, and every aspect of life has been impacted. Our everyday routines were brought to a stop, and any sense of normalcy was lost. While we stop and look at the world around us, I cannot help but realized what I used to take for granted. If anything, perhaps there are some life lessons to take away from this pandemic.

1. *This world is interconnected.* We often think of each country as a separate entity and is very different from one another. Within a few months of the virus first being identified, the virus spread to nearly every country, and a global pandemic

was declared. Despite the differences and distance between places, we are battling the same virus and having the same struggles. It's a reminder of just how our world economy and society are interconnected on many levels, including supply chains, communications, technology, and travel.

2. *Humans are social creatures, and we need social interaction and human contact.* The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of social interaction and human contact within almost every aspect of our lives, including education, employment, entertainment, and recreation. Efforts to reduce the spread of the virus, including physical distancing, quarantine, and stay-at-home orders, have prompted and exacerbated social isolation and loneliness. Along with 35 million other individuals (accounting for 28% of the population) in the United States, I live alone, and this has meant little to no social interactions for months. And as much as I consider myself an independent person who has lived on their own for years and moved numerous times to new cities without knowing anyone there, this pandemic has made me realize how much I miss the social interaction and things as simple as a hug or coffee with a friend at the café.
3. *Humans are adaptive, and life is more flexible than we think.* The pandemic has been a time of extraordinary change, and we have had to rapidly change and adapt to the evolving situation. Many individuals have lost jobs and have been forced to find creative ways to pay the bills. Many others began working from home. Schools turned online with virtual learning. Many physicians started offering telemedicine. This pandemic has been a testament to just how resilient we are as humans and our ability to be flexible and creative in the face of uncertainty.
4. *There is goodness and humanity, even in the darkness.* At the start of the pandemic, there was a shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE) among hospitals and health care facilities, and many health care workers were reusing the same disposable mask for days or weeks at a time. Immediately, community members gathered together to procure masks, 3D print face shields, and hand sew masks and scrub caps for health care workers. Restaurants were donating food to hospital workers and first responders. And people were volunteering to bring groceries to the elderly.

Conclusion

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic which started in 2019 as one of the global health crises in modern time which brought about unprecedented social, political and economic disruptions and crises which has brought about intolerable suffering. The

pandemic has invoked in us lots of issues we took for granted, Philosophy is not the cure for the coronavirus but it can get us to reason around the many issues the Coronavirus raises in life. Philosophy should help us to think of the values of our society and the world we want to live in. The best antidote is cooperation, not segregation. Philosophy will remind us of what we ought to do in a given circumstance given in to what we know. Amid this pandemic, even though the scientists and physicians are giving clues and directives to the present circumstance, philosophy still has a voice to express.

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