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Editorial Policy

MEΘEXIS Journal of Research in Values and Spirituality is a peer-reviewed journal, open access, printed and online. The journal aims to bring the best in academic research on values and spirituality to scholarly or interested public audience. It seeks to promote informed debate, and is not tied to any one particular viewpoint. The journal presents a range of views and conclusions within cultural and spiritual traditions, publishing invited & not invited papers and reviews. It is a publication of The Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality.

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EDITORIAL

MEΘEXIS Journal is aiming to publish research articles dealing with the various aspects related to values in their connections with spirituality. There are many approaches on values, made from diverse perspectives and conceptual frames, but the focus of this Journal is on how values are linked with and backgrounded by spirituality.

The impact of values in the world of today is more visible than before, due to recent global evolutions and crisis. If no more than three decades ago, future globalized world was seen as a big village sharing common core values, nowadays things are quite different. Now is more than obvious that attempts to uniform global values are mere illusions. But this evidence is a very good thing. Of course, distinct cultural and religious values can produce tensions and conflicts among people and communities, but this always happened in history. Yet, the way we are communicating now and the unprecedented mobility is a great chance to better understand the core values of each cultural and spiritual horizon and bridging cultures, communities and people. And, as much, a chance to learn from the wisdom of cultural and spiritual traditions, from the way that they are putting in play values.

Spirituality, in the particular forms or practices, in the specific ways of representing human, world or ultimate reality, is an invaluable resource of practical wisdom, so much needed in dealing with today crisis, moral, social, economic, ecologic or pandemic. A result of millennia of dealing with human scopes and human limited ability to reach them, spirituality provides the background for core values of the cultural and social horizons.

For these reasons, its critical to investigate how spirituality shaped the values of today cultures, communities, or influenced us as individuals. Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality, publisher of the Journal, developed such investigations in the last decade. There were organized conferences and seminars, it was made field research in different parts of the world, with written and media outcomes. This includes co-foundation and the developing of

International Research into the Philosophical and Theological Work of St. Gregory Palamas, or the production of a very successful documentary, *An American Experience of Romanian Hesychasm*. Methexis Journal is intended to be a platform for further promoting this research approach and to catalyze new ways of investigation.

Inaugural Issue

First issue of MEΘEXIS has two research focuses. First section includes four papers inquiring the relationship between *values*, *spirituality* and *transcendence*.

Tone Svetelj in *Repairing or Embracing Human Imperfection?* is questioning the search for the fullness of human existence: how to discover a meaningful life within the boundaries of an imperfect human nature? Jove Jim S. Aguas, in *Gabriel Marcel on Creative Fidelity, Hope, and Transcendence*, discuss Marcel's notions of creative fidelity and hope as foundation of our relationship with our fellow men and the transcendent and mysterious being. Jānis Tālvāldis Ozoliņš is evaluating, in *Modern Moral Philosophy and its Problems*, the apparent failure of modern moral philosophical theories to provide any adequate guidance in moral decision-making, and the reasons for that. Maxim Mikhalev, in *Civilization Borderlands as Spiritual Diversity Specially Protected Areas*, provides an account on his field research on the twilight zones along civilization contact lines, those having the ability to tap wires from the depths of unknown and transform the unborn images of the 'elusive Other'.

The second section includes papers presented at a Workshop co-organized by the Iași Center of the Council for Research in Values in Philosophy, George Mason University (U.S.A.) and Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași (Romania) on June 26, 2021. Event's topic was *Fear, Weakness, Uncertainty. Time of Pandemic*, participants debating on how has the pandemic affected the way in which we think about ourselves, our societies, our faith traditions. In this issue were included some of the contributions to this vivid and insightful debate. Jānis Tālvāldis Ozoliņš proposes a discussion on *The Politics of the Pandemic and the Rise of Authoritarianism in Australia*, Thomas Menampampil is evaluating *Compassion in Time of Crisis as Best Expression of Intercultural Concern*, Ernest Beyaraza discuss *Fear, Weakness, Uncertainty in the African Experience*.

We included also shorter accounts on the critical time of pandemic, powerful *reflections* came from and in the life-threatening moments of pandemic (also presented during the workshop). Asha Mukherje expresses *the emotional time of the terrible pandemic wave in India*, Umut Asanova seeks *an anti-fear solution during pandemic crisis: philosophy role in empowerment of intellectual courage*, and Anthony Savari Raj offers an optimistic message in *Crossing Borders in the Sky: Reflections on the Vertical Frontiers of Cultures*.

Dan Chițoiu & Corina Domnari

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Values, Spirituality, Transcendence

Repairing or Embracing Human Imperfection?

Tone Svetelj

Hellenic College Holy Cross, Boston / Boston College

Abstract

The search for the fullness of human existence manifests itself in a secular society on two levels: first, the predominant claim is that the fullness of existence is within the reach of human effort, any reference to the transcendence is not necessary; second, the fullness of existence also needs to include transcendental dimensions. Modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism and the ideology of social justice belong to the first level. Despite their positive energy and unprecedented potential, they remain exclusive, i.e., not able or not willing to explore alternative options, even though they claim to be all-inclusive and free from possible constraints. At the same time, they are unable to embrace the limitations of human nature. Today, as in the past, the search for the fullness of human existence remains a spiritual challenge, reopening the question of how to discover a meaningful life within the boundaries of an imperfect human nature.

Keywords: modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, totalitarianism, social justice, spirituality, meaning.

Introduction

Referring to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age*, we moved from a society in which it was virtually impossible not to believe in God, to a society in which faith is one possibility among others.¹ In a secular society, faith in God becomes an option among many other options. Through his pivotal work, Taylor demonstrates that it would be too simplistic to conclude that belief and unbelief should be now seen as two rival theories and that it is just a matter of time

¹ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 3.

when one of them will lose and disappear. What is true is the following: by living in a secular society, both believers or unbelievers struggle in their search for and the experience of the fullness of human existence. Resurging in a secular society is the possibility of exclusive humanism, which somehow ends the era of “naïve” religious faith and argues in favor of the option that the fullness of human existence can be found without any reference to transcendence, i.e., without any good that is beyond human flourishing.² The new humanism argues that human flourishing should be found exclusively within the domain of human power. It is up to humans to create or discover a new global order of mutual benefits, grounded in human benevolence and the aspiration to universal justice. The creation of this new order will be based on activism and an interventionist stance towards nature and towards human society. Viewed as universal, the new order will re-organize all restrictions and exclusions on a global level, and it will be energized by the idea that we humans are motivated to act for the good of our fellow humans. Even though this new order seems to be open and all-inclusive, in reality it remains exclusive because in its search for better solutions and the actualization of human flourishing, it avoids any reference to something higher than human flourishing, something that humans should reverence or love or acknowledge.³

This article argues that modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism, and the ideology of social justice are attempts at creating such a new world order on one hand, and on the other, they are expressions of the modern search for the fulness of existence. This search radiates an incredible amount of energy and originality, something unprecedented in the entire human history. However, as effective as this modern anthropocentrism might appear, it remains exclusive in its approach; it dismisses the option that the new order should be based on the transcendental and beyond purely human horizons of significance.

Modern Pelagianism

Whether secular or not, modern society and culture have been profoundly influenced by the idea of freedom. The call to freedom might include a spectrum of intensity moving in various directions: from freedom from family, tradition, God and community, towards freedom based on self-creation and celebration

² Ibid., 20.

³ Ibid., 245-247.

of the individual. As appealing and as triumphant this search for freedom might be, there is an irony within: creation of a new hierarchy of values and a new elitism with freedom at the upmost position is paradoxically destroying the framework that makes real freedom possible.

Overemphasizing the importance of freedom as the primordial feature of human nature is nothing original in our time. 1600 years ago, Pelagius – a highly educated and gifted British monk and theologian, advocate of a harsh asceticism and well known by his persuasiveness in public speaking – claimed that God gives all men power to obey God's commands. Once acquitted with this power, it remains up to individuals to achieve their salvation by the force of their own will and effort; God's support is not necessary. This position can be summarized as "since perfection is possible for man, it is obligatory."⁴ By working hard enough, every individual can become perfect, if they decide and will so. It is up to their free choice to create themselves, and to fix their own future and destiny. Believing it to be the right way to his salvation, Pelagius personally turned to asceticism, self-punishment and strict outward morality. His decision was partially due to his genuine desire to reform the church in Rome from its spiritual shallowness, indifference and moral laxity. Pelagius believed that both church reformation and individual conversion should not be based on God's grace and help; rather, it is a matter of one's choice and free will to do what God expects us to do.

As a critique of this position, Augustine – Pelagius' contemporary – taught that man's free will is not as powerful as it seems to be. Due to our fallen and sinful human nature, humans struggle to believe in God and respond on their own to God's call. It is through God's grace that man believes in God, and only by depending upon God, can mankind reach their salvation and sanctification. However, human dependence upon God and God's intervention does not take away an individual's moral responsibility and efforts. Augustine states that the solution to moral laxity and moral transformation is not primarily a matter of human effort, as Pelagius claimed. He viewed it as a matter of grace from God, which touches the human heart, transforms it and evokes a life of surrender to God in joyful gratitude.

Even though Christian tradition endorsed Augustine's theological position and considered Pelagianism as heresy, Pelagius' teaching has resonated throughout Western history

⁴ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 342.

continuing into the present time. According to W. Farley, the theological and philosophical conflict between Pelagius and Augustine, as well as two millennia of Christian tradition teach us, firstly, that the cure for human lukewarmness should not be based solely on more discipline, rigidity and asceticism, as Pelagius claimed, but on the repetitive and clear proclamation of human sinfulness and unworthiness of God's favor, as well as of the human need of God's helping grace and loving presence. Secondly, the Augustine – Pelagian conflict reminds us that a true and clear doctrine in the matter of our faith is crucially important. Clarity about the depth, power and debility of human sinfulness needs to be clearly presented in Church doctrine in order to avoid confusion. The same teaching reminds the Church to be humble and needful. Through solid teaching regarding the power of sin, believers will understand better the nature of sin, and consequently have better control over it. Thirdly, Augustine's battle and opposition against Pelagius' teaching is the battle of every generation. Since Pelagius' teaching has been spreading throughout the contemporary church and society, Augustine's position remains an inspiring source for our reflection. Fourthly, since Pelagianism is the default religion of humanity, repetitive clarifications and teaching about sin and its manifold effects on human life are necessary, otherwise Pelagianism will proliferate.⁵

Within the frame of this reflection, it would be too naïve to arrive at the conclusion that Pelagius' emphasis on self-reliance is something that is contained only within the secular ambient with the lucrative industry with its self-help books, pervading all facets of culture, education, social policy, fashion, crafts, psychology and spirituality;⁶ the institutionalized churches share the same culture. Narratives of many contemporary theological and spiritual writings include exhortations to "just have faith, make a decision for Christ." As pious and as religious they might appear, they can be seen as a revival of Pelagian teaching. For example, many church leaders express an indisputable wish to build a larger church with an expensive membership. This wish just might be imbued with the Pelagian's spirit of *we-can-do-it*. This kind of thinking struggles to

⁵ William Farley, "Augustine vs. Pelagius, and Why it Matters Today," *William P. Farley*, September 18, 2019, <https://williampfarley.com/augustines-vs-pelagius-and-why-it-matters-today/>.

⁶ Alan Apperley, Stephen Jacobs, and Mark Jones, "Introduction: Therapeutic Culture," *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research* 6, no. 4 (2014): 725-726, <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146725>.

integrate the fact that, first, it is God who is calling us with an invitation to listen to Him, and, our reply comes only as a response. As Christians we believe that God is our Savior and that we have already been saved. Church teaching, acting, and our daily lives are supposed to be an answer to God, who is within, calling us. The Bible offers us a myriad of examples of God's calling. Since God, and not we believers, is the primordial actor, we are not drawn to God by our efforts to give our lives to God and follow Christ. Christ is the one who gave his life for us. Since Christ has already chosen us (Jn. 15:16), we can follow Christ, have faith in Him and live out of the love God has for us.

The experience of faith can be compared with our experience of falling in love. We do not choose when and how we will fall in love. Falling in love happens to us following a certain consequence of events with which we have been voluntarily or involuntarily involved. The act of falling in love is beyond our control; it is a gift offered to us. We are able to accept this gift because of our simultaneous experience of love. So, our answer is much more than an act of free will and choice. In a similar way, we cannot choose when and where we will have faith, which is an act beyond our control. Since it is a gift or grace given to us from God, we suddenly find ourselves facing it. Our acceptance of this gift, i.e., having faith in God, is possible because God has already chosen us and loves us. Augustine in his book *Confessions, Book VIII*, beautifully illustrates his decades long struggle and inner fight with having faith in God. The events of his life added up to the moment when one day he was in a garden and heard voices of children playing a game. That moment was so powerful for him that he was moved from doubt to faith. He was able to do so not because he finally decided on his own to make this step; he experienced God's presence, which enabled him to believe in God. "No one can come to me, unless drawn by the Father who sent me" (Jn 6:44).

Once experiencing love or having faith, our life has been transformed to the point that we cannot continue in the old way. After his conversion, Augustine spent the rest of his life studying, teaching, and spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ, as well as supporting believers around him. In a similar way we can read the story of St. Paul, who converted from being a persecutor of Christians to the greatest missionary of Christianity. Genuine conversion is not a matter of one's choice and human efforts. Genuine conversion is so touching and so transformative that one cannot remain indifferent; nor can one continue living the same life as before his conversion.

The examples of St. Augustine or St. Paul demonstrate, as painful as any personal crisis might be, the same crisis offers the possibility of a turning point in one's life. The Greek word *crisis* literally means “act of decision, separation, judgment, turning point, sudden change,” when one has an opportunity to decide how to continue his life. When in crisis, people who are proud to ground their lives on secular values, as well as members of institutionalized religions, struggle to justify their belief positions as meaningful. However, all of them face a similar dilemma whether the true meaning and fulfillment is something that can be self-created, or something that should be accepted as a gift and invitation to transcend pure human existence. Following this logic, the old Pelagius-Augustine dilemma remains as vital today as it was 1600 years ago.

Cultural Marxism

The term “cultural Marxism” can be controversial, depending upon the person asked for an interpretation. Some might say that such a culture does not exist, it is just a conspiracy theory, while others state that this term refers to everything that is undermining our society.⁷ If a clear and short definition is not feasible, let us list some characteristics of this cultural phenomenon. In general, cultural Marxism views traditional culture, rooted in the values of the nuclear family, marriage, traditional morality, law, order and patriotism, as the source of oppression and division. According to this way of thinking, these traditional values should be replaced with multiculturalism and political correctness in terms of equality, diversity and inclusion. Cultural Marxism is not an invention of Karl Marx. Marx did not pay much attention to culture as such. His main concerns were economy, class struggle, capital, division of labor, alienation and a classless society. However, Marx's successors, especially the members of the Frankfurt School, soon realized that culture is a critical element to any social change. Once culture changes, economical change will follow organically.

Whether we call it cultural Marxism or not, the fact is there are some aggressive advocates and institutions in Western culture

⁷ Andrew Lynn, “Cultural Marxism,” *The Hedgehog Review-Critical Reflections on Contemporary Culture*, Fall 2018, <https://hedgehogreview.com/issues/the-evening-of-life/articles/cultural-marxism>.

who work to replace traditional Western values with an imaginatively more progressive, liberal and critical ideology based on relativism. Their liberal ideas gradually introduce a growing imbalance in society. They are especially attentive when referring to the ideals of equality, diversity and inclusion, the importance of minorities, homosexuals, immigrants, people of color and non-Christians. At the same time, they become aggressive critics, lacking sensitivity, when referring to the traditional roles of parents, father and mothers, heterosexuals, tradition, the relevance of local societies and Christianity. What once was considered to be an absolute is now releasing its place to what is relative, which in terms of political correctness calls for recognition and inclusion.

This kind of culture and mindset is progressively occupying its place in the field of academia, from philosophy and sociology to English, literature, psychoanalysis, history and pedagogy. It would be simplistic to conclude either that cultural Marxism now blankets the world, or to ignore, simplify or reduce its importance. A. Mendenhall suggests that growing interest in feminism, gender studies, critical race theory, post-colonialism, and other similar disciplines call for our attention and require serious study in order to comprehensively understand them by contextualizing their appearance, questioning and challenging their assumptions. The fact is that cultural Marxism does exist. It has a history, followers, adherents, and exerts a strong influence on academia, society, and our culture.⁸ However, this does not mean that academia or our culture must belong to the exclusive domain of the authority of cultural Marxism. Academia, especially in the field of humanities, needs to retain its research rigor, based on its clearly defined mission, purpose and identity, while fostering unbiased research, investigation and dialogue in view of a more complete understanding of the truth. This has been and should remain the mission of academia and its contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of society at large.⁹

While economic Marxism has lost its battle with capitalism, cultural Marxism appears to be much more resistant. Western Europe as well as the USA seems to be breathing a kind of blindness and naivety that totalitarianism cannot happen in their midst. No

⁸ Allen Mendenhall, "Cultural Marxism is Real," *The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal*, January 4, 2019, <https://www.jamesgmartin.center/2019/01/cultural-marxism-is-real/>.

⁹ Lorenzo Compagnucci, and Francesca Spigarelli, "The Third Mission of the university: A systematic literature review on potentials and constraints," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 161 (2020): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2020.120284>.

one denies that totalitarian regimes exist, but only out there and far away from us; if necessary, we will fight against them. Due to its recent history, Eastern Europe remains more vigilant when faced with the assumption that there should only be one official ideology. Any kind of imposition, or lack of opportunities for free expression and confrontation, one-sidedness, negation of significance of local, or overlooking of the importance of traditional values, are still living memories in many parts of Eastern Europe. This vigilance diminishes in the Western parts of Europe and the USA.

It would be too naïve to expect a serious and fruitful confrontation with cultural Marxism from any kind of political power or authority, as if they are the only force able to stop the present crisis. The fact is that some advocates of cultural Marxism as well as certain politicians use an identical language, promulgating ideas similar to cultural Marxism. As already mentioned, the Greek word *crisis* literally means “separation, judgment, decision, turning point,” when something needs to happen in order to avoid more devastating consequences. Resistance against cultural Marxism has become a long-standing mind set, calling for serious intellectual honesty, respectful confrontation and spiritual awakening, based on a serious attempt to critically examine the principles of cultural Marxism.

Soft totalitarianism

It is easy to detect hard totalitarianism because it appears with threat, force, persecution, torture, prison, and execution. It is much harder to become aware of soft totalitarianism, which has the same goal as the hard one, but introduces itself as something therapeutic and beneficial. Readiness to embrace soft totalitarianism depends on people being afraid to lose their comfort, status and conformity. In order to keep these benefits, people are willing to compromise their deepest convictions.¹⁰ How is it possible that willingness to compromise has become so pervasive?

More than 50 years ago, Philip Rieff in his book *The Triumph of the Therapeutic – Use of Faith after Freud* almost prophetically anticipated the development of the Western mindset, remarkably influenced by the discoveries of Freud and the practice of psychoanalysis. In his writing, Rieff states that we moved from a

¹⁰ Andrew T. Walker, “An interview with Rod Dreher on Soft Totalitarianism,” *CBWM*, June 8, 2021, <https://cbmw.org/2021/06/08/an-interview-with-rod-dreher-on-soft-totalitarianism/>.

religious man living in a religious culture to an economic man with an economic culture, and onto a psychological man and a psychological culture. While the religious man searched for the meaning of life within cultural and religious traditions, and the economic man within economic aspirations, the psychological man moved away from everything outside of himself. His primary interest is having a balanced and peaceful mind. His search for meaning is reduced to only that within himself, his prevalent mind feature is indifference, and his primordial goal is to seek his own pleasure. The move from the economic to the psychological man is also a move from the economic toward a therapeutic and psychological society. If once Western cultures were strong with clear ideas and values, committed to certain goals, critical in their intellectual mindset, following the move the same cultures have become more remissive, less ready for serious commitments, uncritically welcoming and absorbing new ideas, standing for nothing, and negating any binding transcendent order. The growing vacuum surrounding the meaning of life has been slowly filled with Freud's discoveries and psychoanalytical attempts to strengthen man's inner resources against what is obsolete in him. The super-ego, presenting the internalized ideas acquired from one's parents and society, has become more relaxed and allows individuals freedom in making their choices about solely what matters for them personally.

The steadily growing emphasis on freedom is accompanied by a gradual raising of inner confusion, calling for external help. So, analytical therapy can be seen as a re-education process, teaching us how to cope with ambiguities, ambivalence and contradiction in us.¹¹ For the religious man, it was culture and religion which offered them consolation, binding social commitments and the promise of salvation. The economic man found solutions and meaning in the principles of economy. Once imbedded in the psychological culture, the psychological man has no mechanisms for salvation. His communal purpose has been impoverished, and his self-absorption with minimal group commitment has strengthen. In short, the psychological man stands for nothing, stays detached from society, and his salvation is left to his individualistic choice. Psychological man should not be judged, but understood and allowed to give expression to any of his instincts.

Some followers of Freud's position soon realized that Freud's understanding of the psychological man was too narrow and

¹¹ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic – Use of Faith after Freud* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 55.

missing important points for external orientation. Since Freud's followers struggled to refer to traditional religions as pre-established value systems, they searched for a replacement. Accordingly, they attempted to create their own pseudo-religious systems of thought. Jung proposed a religious psychology with archetypes in the collective unconscious; Reich suggested political activism as the way to self-fulfillment; Lawrence proposed erotic experience as a therapy to integrate the self. All of them failed as they were unable to replace the position of religion. Now we live in the aftermath of the psychoanalytical movement with its anti-religious mindset and the introduction of pseudo-religions. Today there is a strong presupposition that we know something our predecessors did not know, and that we should be free to enjoy all the pleasures of our senses. Referring to Dostoevsky, Rieff wonders at this point whether the question "Can civilized men believe?" should be replaced with "Can unbelieving man be civilized?"¹²

As one-sided as Rieff's insights written in 1966 might appear, it touches one crucial point in our reflection. How much is psychological therapy, even when intended as a treatment to relieve or heal inner disorder, opening us to a transcendent reality as the final goal of human existence? ¹³ Assuming that there is a transcendent reality, how is this reality understood, especially within a culture of soft totalitarianism? There is no doubt, a good therapy can bring into our broken reality many benefits and help us on our journey to relieve inner pain and suffering. As audacious as this might sound, the question remains whether the therapeutic culture with its uncritical promulgation of therapeutic approaches is about to become a kind of modern ideology and soft totalitarianism? If therapy is not guiding us towards the ultimate mysteries of human existence, it can easily slide into an illusion and utopia followed by totalitarianism.

H. Arendt defines totalitarianism and totalitarian society as an ideology that "seeks to displace all prior traditions and institutions with the goal of bringing all aspects under control of that ideology. Wherever totalitarian philosophy has ruled, it has begun to destroy the essence of man."¹⁴ While it is easy to detect hard totalitarianism, this is not the case with soft totalitarianism. Often undetected, it comes to us via the surveillance culture,

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Kenneth Pargament, and Hisham Abu Raiya, "A Decade of Research on the Psychology of Religion and Coping," *Psyke & Logos* 28, no. 2 (2007): 761.

¹⁴ Hanna Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1973), VIII.

collecting, recording, and storing an incredible amount of data about us. On the psychological and social level, soft totalitarianism comes to us as therapeutic under the guise of helping and healing. This threat is easily dismissed in terms of “political correctness,”¹⁵ which became an excuse for any kind of serious confrontation. Since traditional cultural and religious values are seen as limiting, oppressing and dividing, the solution is a therapy that respects and tolerates only inner wishes, drives, passion, enjoyments, dreams, decisions, and personal preferences.

While the external cultural and religious boundaries have been softened and progressively removed, inner emptiness spreads its roots even deeper. Many people in the Western materialistic societies are deeply convinced that it is their right to be happy all of the time. Their understanding of happiness does not include any notion of sacrifice, which might be necessary now in order to achieve happiness later. A happy life, free of sacrifice and struggle, became a kind of modern dream or ideology, based on the ongoing search of comfort and bodily pleasures. This search can be wrapped in religious language implying that God wants us to be happy. Such a position, of course, leads us towards a moralistic therapeutic deism. God is welcome into our life as long as He only makes us happy. He is not allowed to require anything from us.¹⁶

As attractive and as appealing bodily pleasures might be initially, they can literally become an addiction, transforming our initial search of pleasure into a life of dependence on passion. If one does not learn how to control one's own passions, these passions can easily take control over us by pushing us to search for even more comfort.

Resistance against soft totalitarianism is not possible if it not based on a solid spiritual life. Even though this spiritual life includes both sacrifice and renunciation, it brings joy in that we live for something, not against something. Spiritual life is not the same as optimism which posits that everything will be fine. Spiritual life is about hope that God who sacrificed himself for us is with us.¹⁷

Confrontation with the therapeutic culture with its emphasis on the inner world can be taken as an opportunity to rediscover what really matters, both on the social, cultural as well

¹⁵ Rod Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents* (New York City: Sentinel, 2020), 2.

¹⁶ Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2008), 5.

¹⁷ Ivan Platovnjak, “Christian Spirituality as Sacrifice?” *Nova Prisutnost* XVI, no. 1 (2018): 33-38, <https://doi.org/10.31192/np.16.1.2>.

as on the personal level.¹⁸ Psychological knowledge and therapeutic understanding of the self are legitimate articulations of experiences of suffering, which were formerly confined to a private life. If it does not open us to something life giving, fulfilling and meaningful, the painful confrontation with human imperfections and wounds remain frustrating. Rediscovery of the importance of the spiritual is only gradually catching interest within the field of psychology and therapy.

Ideology of social justice

No one should deny the importance of social justice, which is generally described in terms of a balance between individuals and society, and measured by the fair distribution of wealth, protection of personal liberties, and the provision of equal opportunities and treatments, regardless of one's legal, political, economic or other circumstances. This broad and rather descriptive definition of social justice leaves much room for more or less authentic interpretations. In the light of this article, let us open the question whether social justice can become an ideology as well? If the answer is affirmative, what does this mean?

Referring to Dreher, nowadays “elites and elite institutions are abandoning old-fashioned liberalism, based on defending the rights of the individual and replacing it with a progressive creed that regards justice in terms of groups. It encourages people to identify with groups – ethical, sexual, and otherwise – to think of Good and Evil as a matter of power dynamics among the groups.”¹⁹ This need to identify with groups can be partially explained as a human need to belong to a larger entity, which in turn confers to the members of the groups their own reference points and identity. In the past, the reference points were religious and political authorities. A special place was reserved to holy people who, with their spiritual wisdom, became an inspiration for many. These references, as well as social, cultural and religious boundaries, have been softened in our time, which have consequently led to a weakening of the identification references and to a resistance to adopt the traditional cultural and religious values. Consequently, individuals experience within themselves a frightening emptiness and lack of meaning, as well as a desire to find new orientation

¹⁸ Katie Wright, “Theorizing therapeutic culture: Past influences, future directions,” *Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 4 (2008): 321, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783308097124>.

¹⁹ Dreher, *Live Not by Lies: A Manual for Christian Dissidents*, XI.

references. Today their selection of new reference points is almost imposed upon them by the social media and higher education, proclaiming the new creed and justice in terms of diversity, inclusivity, and equity. The identification reference points, in this case, are not leaders or inspiring strong authorities, but rather, newly created social groups who have been apparently suppressed in the past. Identification with these groups becomes automatically a call to action and, if necessary, even to violent and revolutionary interventions in order to remove past forms of oppression. Not without surprise, today such actions should be seen as peak achievements of a new culture and civilization, as something humanistic, which is finally settling accounts with the past oppressive history, based on capital, class struggle and alienation.

Consequently, belonging to a new identification group turns out to be a moral issue, related to the question of justice in terms of diversity, inclusivity, and equity. Every kind of critical argumentation, confrontation and disagreement about the meaning of these terms should be rejected as hate speech, which is, by definition, something unjust. More specifically, any promulgation of traditional values about family, education, law, tradition, patriotism and heterosexuality should be hindered because it does not support and include multiculturalism, open immigration, homosexuality, moral freedom, LGBT values. Subsequently, the principles of diversity, inclusivity and equity create a new ideology of social justice, which is at the same time a powerful mechanism for controlling and excluding any kind of argumentative confrontation. It is an ideology which, with its all comprehensiveness, tolerates no alternative way of thinking and determines not only how to think but how to act.²⁰

As all other utopian attempts, the ideology of social justice with a seemingly humanistic face can easily become a dictatorship and totalitarianism, leading into new forms of exclusion, separation, injustice and, if necessary, new human sacrifices. As such, it is doomed to fail because it lacks one fundamental truth of human existence, the question of evil. Even though this ideology supports political revolution, social engineering and policy tweaking, it will not be able to stop human envy, strife and deceit.

²⁰ Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Credo House Publishers, 2020), 3-4.

It forgets that evil does not primarily reside in politics, society and economy, but rather in human hearts and minds.²¹

This desire to create a new just society based on diversity, inclusivity and equity can be interpreted as an expression of a much deeper spiritual challenge. Williams describes this challenge in terms of the old temptation to play God and pretend to be sovereign lords over one another,²² similar to the biblical story of the Tower of Babel. Added by Williams' reflection, we can conclude that the failed attempt of creating a perfect society as well as the ideology of social justice are revealing two points: (1) In the Babel story, there is misplaced worship of the Creator and negligence of giving Him honor and gratitude He is due. In an analogical way, the ideology of social justice places itself so high that it becomes unable of critical self-examination, which would relativize the same ideology. (2) In both stories, there is a bowing to the cosmos and endowing created things with an ultimate value that they are not due.²³

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, this article presents modern Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism and the ideology of social justice as modern searches for meaning. They are appealing, expressive, and hiding at least the apparent potential to create a new and better world order. They struggle to embrace the true nature of human existence. A. Solzhenitsyn, in his 1978 Harvard commencement speech, proclaimed that “we have placed too much hope in political and social reforms, only to find out that we were being deprived of our most precious possession: our spiritual life.”²⁴ Any form of social or political reform will remain partial, if it does not include the spiritual component of human existence. Supporters of any kind of ideologies too easily forget the fact that human existence cannot be reduced to one or a small number of one-sided principles, such as Pelagianism, cultural Marxism, soft totalitarianism or new forms of social justice. Human

²¹ Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Zondervan, Michigan: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 17.

²² *Ibid.*, 14.

²³ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁴ Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, “A World Split Apart,” Commencement speech delivered at Harvard University, *American Rhetoric*, June 8, 1978, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/alexandersolzhenitsynharvard.htm>.

existence is in many ways too complex and mysterious, and will remain inaccessible to our comprehension, unless it opens itself to transcendental dimensions. This opening should not be understood in terms of a return to and reconstruction of a harmony between the state and the church, as it might have existed previously in our history. Recreation of history is another naïve, utopian and ideological solution. The present day with all its social, cultural, national, political, economic and religious components is the only time at our disposition, within which we are called to discover life's meaning and inner fulfillment, even though only in a temporary form. The key question remains whether or not are we willing to look further and transcend solutions based on any kind of ideological principles, which by definition are closed and one-sided.

The search for new solutions should not be identified with a desire to look for victory, power and the creation of a more perfect world, as spiritual as this might sound; this is nothing but a temptation, even though many secular as well as non-secular prophets claim to know what the best solution or God's will is. If the creation of a perfect world is not within the power of human reach, then what remains is an ongoing struggle against different forms of injustice and distorted argumentations, calling for more complex solutions.

All humans as spiritual beings, and in particular way Christians believing in salvation through Jesus Christ, are invited to embrace the journey of imperfection and broken hearts. 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ showed us the path by embracing pain and suffering as one of the essential dimensions of human existence. However, this does not mean that our dealing with pain, suffering and death are expressions of our lack of power and silent resignation. Our dealing with them is an expression of honest desire to face our reality, as it is, with all human weakness, imperfection and the need for help. The presence of pain, suffering and death in our life might look cruel, but at the same time, they should not be seen as having the final word regarding our existence.²⁵ Not surprisingly, this idea remains strange and awkward to a secularized mind set, grounded in the ideas of self-empowerment and self-perfection.

The present challenge of Christianity should not be seen as a question as how to return or regain a position of power in a society that was once based on Christian principles and values. The

²⁵ Ivan Platovnjak, "Spiritual Help for Persons Suffering from Depression / Duhovna pomoć osobama koje pate od depresije," *Nova Prisutnost* XVIII, no. 2 (2020): 266-277, <https://doi.org/10.31192/np.18.2.3>.

authentic struggle of Christianity is how to introduce into this broken and imperfect world, colored by different ideologies, the good news of hope and love that go beyond human brokenness and imperfection. This struggle can easily become a place of temptation. As Jesus was tempted at the beginning of his public mission (Mt 4,1-11; Mc 1,12-13; Lk 4,1-13), so too is Christianity in our time dealing with the temptation to possess something better, and consequently to look from above on others and to deserve a higher place of respect in society. The true power of Christianity is not in its being loftier from the rest of the world; the true power is in its being in this world, and at the same time transcending this world by striving towards God who loves all human imperfection.

Let us conclude with the image of human as the *homo viator*, an image borrowed from J. Pieper. As *viator* – travelers, individuals have not yet reached their destination, which is the realization of their potential as an existing being. If this existence is conceived exclusively in its temporality as a “being in time,” the same existence fails to comprehend the true nature of its subject. Anyone who strives to understand human existence within temporality, will find hidden the “life beyond” time, as well as the very meaning of life in time.²⁶

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²⁶ Joseph Pieper, *On Hope* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 16-17.

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Gabriel Marcel on Creative Fidelity, Hope, and Transcendence

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Abstract

Despite the materialistic and secularistic tendencies of the world today, we cannot ignore our relationship with God. Our existence as human beings is defined by our relationship with our fellow men and God. Two values that characterize our relationship with our fellow men and God are fidelity and hope, which were the focus of the philosophy of Gabriel Marcel. In this paper, I discuss Marcel's notions of creative fidelity and hope to show how they serve as the foundation of our relationship with our fellow men and the transcendent and mysterious being. Creative fidelity and hope lead us to the source of our being – the transcendent being – God.

Keywords: fidelity, hope, transcendence, Gabriel Marcel.

Introduction

In a world that has become materialistic, individualistic, and secularistic, our human spiritual values, relationships with fellow human beings, and God are often ignored or set aside. The focus is usually on the individuality or the independence of man and the material progress of society. While these matters are important to man and society, we cannot ignore the spiritual and relational aspects of human existence. Man, after all, is not just a physical and independent being; man is a relational and spiritual being who establishes relationships not only with his fellow men but with the Divine Being – God. The two values that define our relationship with our fellow men and God are faithfulness or fidelity and hope. In ordinary language, fidelity is usually associated with faithfulness, and faithfulness is related to commitment, so that fidelity, faithfulness, and commitment are often used interchangeably. But the question is, how does one become faithful and committed? What is the very basis of fidelity? Is fidelity merely

faithfulness or constancy over time? Is fidelity real, or is it even possible to be constant and committed to a person over time? What could guarantee our fidelity? Hope is often associated with despair, which is the overcoming of despair. It is often understood as an expectation or desire for deliverance from an undesirable condition. The person who hopes somehow anticipates a favorable result or outcome. The French existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel relates these two values. Our faithfulness and commitment are not only confined to our relationship with our fellow human beings; we also have a relationship with the Divine Supreme Being or God. So how does fidelity relate to our connection with God? And how does hope relate to our faithfulness or fidelity to God? In this paper, I discuss Marcel's notions of creative fidelity and hope to show how they serve as the foundation of our relationship with our fellow men and the transcendent and mysterious being.

Creative Fidelity

At the outset, it seems easy to connect fidelity with constancy or with immutability. According to the French existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel, constancy could be considered as the “rational skeleton of fidelity.”²⁷ The two, however, must be differentiated. Constancy could be construed as perseverance in a certain goal or purpose. Constancy could also be understood as immutability which means remaining unchanging over time. But fidelity requires more than just constancy over time; it implies another element which Marcel refers to as *presence*.

Marcel admits that it is difficult to put in clear words the meaning of “presence.” When I regard someone as a faithful friend, for example, I mean he is someone who does not fail me, someone who stands by me no matter the circumstance or situation is. In this sense, presence is different from constancy. Constancy can be applied to others and to one's self as when somebody is constant to himself for his own purpose. But one is *present* for the other or, more precisely, to a *thou*.²⁸ To be present for someone is to assure the other with all one's intentions that his inner feelings and dispositions for the other will not change. So that if one is not there at the very moment when his presence is needed, then his fidelity becomes questionable. Presence, of course, should not be construed as always being physically present for the other; it involves making

²⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 153.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 154.

the other feel that one is *with* the other. The mark of presence is the mutual bond with the other. For Marcel, it means that the self is “given” to the other and that givenness is responsively received or reciprocated.

Fidelity as constancy can be based on duty or obligation; it could be interpreted as fulfilling one’s duty or obligation to the other. One can make great efforts to be steadfast for the other, to stand by the other’s side when the other needed him most. But if his presence is simply based on his idea of duty and he simply wants to be the person or friend he thinks he is must be – a faithful – dutiful friend, then this sense of fidelity as constancy based on duty or obligation can hardly be a genuine fidelity for the other. While his conduct is admirable and unquestionable, he is more faithful to his idea or model of himself as a faithful friend than as faithful to the other. Marcel poses this question: “If I will be constant, or if I am careful to fulfill certain obligations, I can, and almost inescapably seem to myself to be, a faithful friend of X. But how does the situation seem to X?”²⁹ Of course, X will appreciate my actions or gestures. But somehow, something is shattered within him because the gestures are made out of duty or obligation, not because of him. Duty or obligation can be dispensed with we can turn our back on our obligation, and when duty is dispensed or abandoned, will faithfulness still be there? A husband is faithful to his wife because, as a good husband, he has the duty to be faithful and stand by her side. Other people will probably appreciate him for being a faithful husband, but such faithfulness is not genuine.

A genuine fidelity for Marcel is one that is based on spontaneity, that is, a faithfulness that is not “coercive” but rather independent of the will – a pure spontaneity. Marcel expresses that “fidelity as such can only be appreciated by the person to whom it is pledged if it offers an essential element of spontaneity, itself radically independent of the will.”³⁰ A constancy that is based on duty or obligation alone cannot prosper into a genuine fidelity. It is in danger of being replaced by an inner struggle that could develop into aversion. Marcel cites the example of fidelity to a particular ideology. When one joins a political party or a social group, he is expected to follow and obey certain rules and prescriptions. This is to ensure compliance and discipline on the part of members. To a certain extent, such discipline could be coercive, and there is the danger that such discipline could be internalized to the point that all inner spontaneity on the part of the individual is lost. The more

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

organized the group or party, the more it could encourage hypocrisy and subservience. The extreme result could be a kind of totalitarianism. Such danger could also lurk into some basic personal relations like friendship and marriage. While the marital union is based on personal and individual decisions and will, one spouse could be faithful to the union and the other only out of a pure feeling of duty. Fidelity then is reduced to a constancy that is based on duty or obligation.

Now, what does it mean to be faithful or to pledge fidelity? According to Marcel, the pledge to fidelity is based on some inner disposition. But we know that inner dispositions could change over time – inner dispositions, whether feelings or decisions, could be affected by a lot of factors. Hence the question is, can one still guarantee that the disposition he has at the moment he commits himself will not change later on? When I commit myself and pledge my fidelity, I am almost certain that my inner disposition, decision, and resolve will not change. It seems almost certain at that moment. However, will this seeming certainty be enough to hold my promise? Will this anchor fidelity on a solid foundation? How about if the person I pledge my fidelity to, changed in the course of time? Certainly, my inner disposition can change, either because I changed or the other person has changed. With this possibility, can I still act as though my disposition is unchangeable?

Assuming that in the future, I can still act as though I still have the same disposition, say, for example, I can make an effort to make it appear as though as I am still in love with the other person, even though I am no longer in love with the other, can I consent to promise something about myself which will turn out to be a lie later on?

Marcel shares a story of somebody visiting a friend.³¹ Supposed I visit a disabled friend out of pure politeness of being by his side. The visit delighted him, and I sympathize with his solitude and understand his need for company. Feeling such impulse to relieve him of some sufferings, I commit myself to visit him regularly. When I made that promise, I was not dwelling on the possibility that my present disposition would change; neither did I anticipate that there could be other factors that could change it. When I made the promise, it seemed to me “to spring from the inmost depths of my being.”³² I truly pitied him then, but later the pity was no more than theoretical. I have to recognize that the

³¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 47.

³² *Ibid.*

impulse no longer exists. But when I made the promise, my situation has changed; someone was already counting on my promise. Now suppose that at one point I have been invited to a very important occasion which I really want to attend but it coincided with my visit to my friend. I do not want to break my word and disappoint him. Although it is very much possible that he could understand if I do not come for a visit. So it is on me whether to visit him or honor the invitation. I have to act, and I decided to visit him hesitantly, keeping the invitation to myself and just like in the past my friend is delighted.

Here lies the paradox of fidelity according to Marcel – I and the other person to whom the promise or pledge is made mutually imply each other; both cannot be separated. In the situation we just narrated, there is the appearance of fidelity in the eyes of the other and a lie in my own eyes. The truth about this situation is that there is something which does not depend on me; it does not rest with me not to prefer the invitation over the visit, which has become an irksome duty.³³

Given this scenario, it seems to lead to the following implications. I have to acknowledge that the commitment I made was wrong in the very first place because I will not be able to fulfill it because of certain constraints. Second, I have to ask myself whether I should have revealed my real feeling and not concealed it because I was wrong at the onset. In other words, we are not supposed to make any commitment or pledge fidelity because we cannot guarantee that our dispositions will not change, and therefore we cannot honor our promise, we are sure to fail in our commitment – in a sense, fidelity is sure to fail, if not tomorrow in the future. But such an attitude would make social life quite impossible because nobody can depend on or trust anybody.

Such attitude is based on certain postulates. At a certain moment, I can identify myself with my state, which I can apprehend at this precise moment. Everything outside this state is obscure, impenetrable and I cannot make any valid assertion about it.³⁴ This postulate is linked to a particular representation of the inner life which Marcel characterizes as “cinematic.” It interprets inner life like a film I am watching, which I can pause at any moment and take “snapshots” of my inner life and make assessments of it. Such is impossible, and even if that would be theoretically tenable, the “snapshots” of our inner life must be evaluated in terms of a larger

³³ Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 160.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

whole which is actually indeterminate. “The personality infinitely transcends what we may call its snapshots states.”³⁵

Another postulate holds that the future state will occur the way external events happen; they are as unpredictable as the weather. So I may be in a good mood right now, but who knows what will be my mood tomorrow. Such a position is tantamount to saying that there is no efficacy on my part with regard to my inner life. I am denied of any capacity to act for myself and for creating myself.³⁶ In other words, we just go through the motion in our life; we do not determine our actions.

However, on the contrary, according to Marcel, when I commit myself, I guarantee in principle that such commitment or pledge will not again be put in question, I do not doubt my commitment in the very same manner that I do not doubt the inner disposition I have when I made the promise. This active volition not to question “intervenes as an essential element in the determination of what in fact will be the case. It at once bars a certain number of possibilities; it bids me invent a certain *modus vivendi* which I would otherwise be precluded from envisaging.”³⁷ Marcel refers to this as *creative fidelity*.

To ask how I can test the initial assurance, which is the ground of my fidelity, leads to a vicious circle. In principle, according to Marcel, “to commit myself I must first know myself; the fact is, however, that I really know myself only when I have committed myself. That dilatory attitude which involves sparing myself any trouble, keeping myself aloft...is incompatible with any self-knowledge worthy of the name.”³⁸ Fidelity of this sort may appear to a spectator to be a vicious circle because he views it from the outside. When viewed from the outside, fidelity may appear to be incomprehensible, impracticable, maybe a grave risk. But what may appear from the outside as incomprehensible is experienced from within as growth, as deepening, or as an ascending. Marcel says: “In swearing fidelity to a person, I do not know what future awaits us or even, in a sense, what person he will be tomorrow; the very fact of my not knowing is what gives worth and weight to my promise. There is no question of response to something which is, absolutely speaking, *given*, and the essential of a being is just that – not being ‘given’ either to another or himself.”³⁹

³⁵ Ibid., 162.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 163.

³⁹ Marcel, *Being and Having: An Existentialist Diary*, 47.

All fidelity, according to Marcel, is based on a certain relation that is felt to be unchangeable, and therefore it has the assurance that it cannot be fleeting. The mystery of commitment or fidelity is focused on a privilege and decisive moment. Of course, it cannot be avoided that such mystery could be reduced to habit or some social constraints. There is always an attempt to devalue fidelity by interpreting it as a mode of affection for oneself or human self-respect and pride. Such an attempt is related to the subjective interpretation of knowledge, which asserts that I cannot know anything except my conscious states.

By relating fidelity to spontaneity, Marcel implies the element of sincerity, genuine feeling or love. Sincerity is distinguished from an obligation that has a coercive character. He is critical of the ethical rigorism of Kant, who based the rightness of an act on duty or obedience to an imperative, which could lead to inner conflict between one's inclination and one's obligation. The fulfillment of an obligation against one's inclination and devoid of sincerity cannot be identified with fidelity.

An ethic of obligation can be based on egoism, especially when one does the right thing simply because he wants to come up to one's own standard. According to Marcel, an ethic of obligation can be construed as symptomatic of "fanaticism of the ideal." What is then problematic for Marcel is a kind of commitment that avoids the rigorism of the Kantian position, which is devoid of any positive feeling or desire on the one hand and a kind of commitment that is contingent on one's own state of feeling or desire.⁴⁰ Scheler avoids the formalism of Kant by positing a kind of ethics that is based on a feeling of values. In order to avoid both extremes, Marcel proposes a creative fidelity that is neither coercive nor contingent.

However, how can fidelity be creative? In what sense is fidelity creative? To be creative is to exist existentially. It is easy to construe existence as simply to be or to live, to breathe. But for a human being to exist is not only to live or breathe or move. For Marcel, to exist existentially is to exist as a thinking and feeling and creating being. To exist is not only to function like objects; according to Marcel, human beings have a creative impulse. Our mode of being or existence is dependent on our creative development. Those who pursue their creative development live their life qualitatively at a higher mode of being than those for whom experiences are another facet of their functionality. Marcel says, "A really alive person is not

⁴⁰ See Robert Rosthal. Translator's Preface, in Gabriel Marcel's *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), xxxiii.

merely someone who has a taste for life, but somebody who spreads that taste, showering it, as it were, around him; and a person who is really alive in this way has, quite apart from any tangible achievements of his, something essentially creative about him.”⁴¹ The acts of love, admiration, and friendship are creative acts. Hence to exist existentially is to love, to admire, to relate with others.

Moreover, the creative spirit moves away from the objectification of our humanity. To exist creatively is not only to develop oneself but to relate with others; creativity is essentially tied relationally to others. Creativity, therefore, is connected to intersubjectivity. Intersubjective relations or our participation with others allow us to respond to others as creative and participative beings. Intersubjective relations as creative draw us to an experience of the self as a being-among-beings.

Creative fidelity entails a commitment to acts which draw the person closer to others, which is balanced with proper respect for the self, thus, self-love, self-satisfaction, complacency, or even self-anger are attitudes that can hinder one’s existential progress and could go against the creative impulse. In order to have a greater sense of being, one must have creative fidelity. For Marcel, “it is real fidelity only when it is truly creative.”⁴² In other words, creative fidelity is fidelity that *creates* the self to meet the demands of fidelity.

As we have already mentioned, fidelity as a belief in someone requires presence aside from constancy over time. Presence implies an affective element; thus, a mere constancy over time is not enough. For Marcel, “a fulfillment of an obligation *contre-cœur* is devoid of love and cannot be identified with fidelity.”⁴³ The “problem” then posed by fidelity is that of constancy; the mystery of fidelity is the question of commitment, of commitment over time. How are we able to remain *disponible* over time? How can we provide a guarantee of our “belief in” someone? The possibility of fidelity gives assurance that *disponibilité* or availability and creativity are related ideas. Availability or disposability is to believe in the other; it means to place oneself at the disposal of the other and maintain the openness of *disponibilité*. Creative fidelity is to actively maintain ourselves in a state of openness and permeability, in *willing* ourselves to remain open and available to the other. The truest fidelity is creative, and as such, it creates the self so that it can respond to the demands of fidelity. According to Marcel, the

⁴¹ Gabriel Marcel, *Mystery of Being I*. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1950), 139.

⁴² Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, 168.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

temptation to be unfaithful is always there, either on the part of the self or the other. Such temptation is seen in terms of a test of the self rather than in terms of the betrayal of the other. Thus, if fidelity fails, it is more of a failure of the self than a failure of the other.

However, fidelity is always open to doubt. One can always call into question the reality of the bond that links one to the other. One can doubt the presence of the person to whom one has been faithful. Thus, one can suspect whether the other will also be faithful. However, the more disposed the self toward the ontological affirmation to the affirmation of Being, the more that the self is inclined to believe that the failure of fidelity is his or her failure that results from one's insufficiency rather than that of the other. According to Marcel, "the ground of fidelity that necessarily seems precarious to us as soon as we commit ourselves to another who is unknown, seems, on the other hand, unshakable when it is based not, to be sure, on a distinct apprehension of God as someone other, but on a certain appeal delivered for the depths of my own insufficiency *ad summam altitudinem*."⁴⁴

Marcel further elaborates on the nature of creative fidelity. Creative fidelity is based on the collaboration of two acts, one of which depends on our own initiative and the other on the response of the other. A commitment implies a refusal to put a future state of mind or attitude in question, and this attitude is based on our interpretation of the future conflict between how one feels and what one ought to do, as a temptation or trial. The apprehension of the possibility of conflict between what one feels and what one ought to do makes the commitment a risk. Although this conflict can be resisted, it is not enough to erase the doubt that my commitment may have been mistaken. The object of one's commitment may not prove to be worthy of the commitment, or certain conditions have already changed.

Hope

Marcel stresses that the commitment must be infused with hope to make this commitment unshakable and establish the relationship on solid ground. "Hope is the final guarantor of fidelity; it is that which gives me the strength to continue to create myself in availability to the other."⁴⁵ However, what is hope? In what sense can it be the guarantor of fidelity?

⁴⁴ Ibid., 167.

⁴⁵ Brian Treanor, *Aspects of Alterity: Levinas, Marcel, and the Contemporary Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 85.

Hope, according to Marcel, is always related to how we deal with and overcome the trials of life. These trials can be in the form of illness, separation, exile, or slavery. Hope is situated within the framework of the trial, not only corresponding to it but constituting our being's veritable *response*.⁴⁶ Throughout a particular trial, one finds himself "deprived for an indefinite period" of a certain light for which one long for. Such trials can be considered as a "form of captivity" and can cause despair, and one can "go to pieces" or lose himself. Thus, for Marcel, there is no hope without the temptation to despair, and hope is understood as "the act by which this temptation is actively or victoriously overcome."⁴⁷ Hope guarantees fidelity by defeating despair – it gives us the strength to continually create. Thus, when there is hope, there is always the possibility of despair, and only when there is the possibility of despair then can we respond with hope. Despair is equivalent to saying that there is nothing in the whole of reality to which I can extend credit, nothing worthwhile. Marcel further says: "Despair is possible in any form, at any moment and to any degree, and this betrayal may seem to be counseled if not forced upon us, by the very structure of the world we live in."⁴⁸ Hope is the response to this betrayal; it is the affirmation that reality will ultimately prove worthy of an infinite credit, the complete engagement, and disposal of myself.

One of the often-repeated statements of Marcel about hope is that the essence of hope is not "to hope that X", but merely "to hope ..." But does it mean to simply hope? When we hope that X, it means that there is a specific object that we desire, that we want to attain like "I hope that my illness will be cured," or "I hope that this pandemic will end soon," or "I hope that my family will not be infected by the COVID 19 virus." Thus, it would seem that hope is always associated with some specific or peculiar objects, and by some calculation of different possibilities, the desired object could be attained. But to simply hope does not have any object. Marcel says, "hope, by a *nisus* which is peculiar to it, tends inevitably to transcend the particular objects to which it at first seems to be attached."⁴⁹ The person who hopes does not imagine or anticipate the condition that would deliver her from her plight; rather, she merely hopes for deliverance. There may not be a certainty that one will be cured, the pandemic will end soon, or that one's family will

⁴⁶ Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1951), 30.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁸ Gabriel Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, trans. Manya Harari (New York: Citadel, 1995), 26.

⁴⁹ Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, 32.

not be infected by the virus, but the person merely hopes for deliverance in whatever form. The more that hope transcends any anticipation of the form that deliverance would take, the less it is open to the objection even in cases when the hoped-for deliverance does not take place. One's desires can be thwarted, but he remains to hope, and no outcome will shake him from hoping. According to Marcel, it is the very non-specificity of hoping that gives hope its power. This clearly distinguishes the tone between the absolute statement "I hope ..." and the statement, "I hope that ...". This distinction, according to Marcel, clearly runs parallel to that which obtains in all religious philosophy and which opposes "I believe" to "I believe that."⁵⁰

If hope does not have a specific object or it tends to transcend the object attached to it, what about the subject who hopes? What is the fundamental characteristic of the subject in "I hope?" This subject who hopes is definitely not identical with the "I myself ..." According to Marcel, the subject in "I myself" is always present and will manifest itself whenever there is a question not of hope but of certainty or even doubt. The "I myself" is always identified as an ego that draws attention to itself and distinguishes itself from others. The "I myself" is identifiable with the statement "It is I who ..." such statement implies that there are, on the one hand, those who are excluded about whom one must be careful not to think, and, on the other, there are those we want to be our witnesses.⁵¹ In other words, the ego always wants to be recognized as different from others; it detaches itself from others. The same attitude underlies the statements "I am sure" and "I doubt." According to Marcel, it is different with "I hope." He says, "Here there is not, and there cannot be the note of defiance or of provocation which, on the contrary, so easily becomes essential to *I doubt* and *I am sure*." The difference is due to "the fact that "I hope" is not orientated in the same way: there is no statement directed towards, and at the same time against, some other person either present or imagined."⁵² The subject in "I hope" does not see itself as against or opposed to others.

This brings us to the difference between hope and optimism. It is easy to identify hope with optimism. Optimism, like fear or desire, imagines or anticipates a favorable or unfavorable outcome. We "desire that x" or "fear that x." The optimist is he who has a firm conviction, or in certain cases just a vague feeling that things tend

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 13-14.

⁵² Ibid., 33.

to "turn out for the best."⁵³ However, as already mentioned, hope for Marcel is different; we do not hope that x, we simply hope.

According to Marcel, the optimist always thoroughly reconsiders things from a sufficient distance or detached manner to 'extrapolate the conclusions. The optimist believes that "It always comes out right in the end"; "We shall be bound to see . . ."; "If only we don't allow ourselves to stop too soon ..." These are the formulae that constantly recur in the speeches of optimists. ("speech" because the optimist is essentially a maker of speeches.)⁵⁴ Such optimism "remains strictly in the province of the "I myself." The optimist introduces himself indeed as a spectator with particularly keen sight."⁵⁵ Such optimism excludes the intervention of faith, or even the direct participation, the engagement, which comes into being as soon as life is regarded as something other than purely external. The optimist sees the cause of despair or of a desperate situation as something that can be analyzed, and given the right calculation and consideration of the possibilities, everything will turn out right.

Marcel admits that it is quite difficult to describe hope as he says that hope is a mystery and not a problem. A problem is a question in which the identity of the person asking the question is not an issue. In a problem, one is not personally involved in the issue at hand. A mystery is a "problem that encroaches on its own data."⁵⁶ Such a "problem" is, in fact, meta-problematic; it is a question in which the identity of the questioner is an issue. On the level of the mysterious, the identity of the questioner is tied to the question.⁵⁷ Thus, to describe hope as a mystery is to always relate it to the person who hopes, to the person's desires and trials. Hope indeed is not something definite and specific and of a fixed pattern, to hope is not to rely on some objective calculation of possibilities based on certain data or technic, something that an optimist would do. The very basis of hope is the non-validity of certain assertions, the truth that the more the real is real, the less does it lend itself to a calculation of possibilities on the basis of accepted experience. Marcel further explains, "hope quite simply does not take any heed of this sum total." In a sense, it might be said that hope is not interested in the *how*: and this fact shows how fundamentally untechnical it is, for technical thought, by definition, never

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 19.

⁵⁷ Brian Treanor, *Gabriel (-Honoré) Marcel*, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed September 12, 2021, <https://meinong.stanford.edu/entries/marcel/index.html>.

separates the consideration of ends and means. An end does not exist for the technician if he does not see approximately how to achieve it.⁵⁸ The person who hopes to recover from illness is not so much concerned about how he will be cured; the person who hopes for the pandemic to end soon is not so much concerned about how the pandemic will end, and the person who hopes for his family to be safe from the virus is not so much concerned how his family will be safe from the virus.

According to Marcel, "hope consists in asserting that there is at the heart of being, beyond all data, beyond all inventories and all calculations, a mysterious principle which is in connivance with me, which cannot but will that which I will, if what I will deserve to be willed and is in fact, willed by my whole being."⁵⁹ To hope is always to hope against hope, that is, Marcel adds, even when I cannot find a sufficient reason to hope, even when there is no empirical proof for what I hope for. This is the connection between faith and hope; a mysterious being affirms the person who has faith and hopes.

It is the essence of hope "to exclude the consideration of cases... and it can be shown that there exists an ascending dialectic of hope whereby hope rises to a plane which transcends the level of all possible empirical disproof – the plane of salvation as opposed that that of success in whatever form."⁶⁰ Hope, therefore is not some form of passivity or resignation or surrender; it remains active; it wills not only for oneself but also for others. The essence of hope is just to hope. The person who hopes does not accept a current situation as final, nor does he or she imagine or anticipates the circumstance that would deliver her from her plight, rather he or she merely hopes for deliverance. He who hopes says simply: "It will be found." "In hoping, I do not create in the strict sense of the word, but I appeal to the existence of a certain creative power in the world, or rather to the actual resources at the disposal of this creative power."⁶¹

Marcel, however, points out that that there could be some degradation of this understanding of hope. It is possible that "to hope in" becomes "to expect from" then "to have due to me," that is to say, "to count on" and finally "to claim" or "to demand." This is because we have a tendency to substitute for an initial relationship, which is both pure and mysterious, subsequent relationships, that

⁵⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁹ Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 28.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, 52.

although more intelligible, are more deficient as regards their ontological content.⁶²

Concluding Remarks

Man is a *homo viator*, a wanderer in search of a higher purpose; there is an ontological exigence toward something greater than us. Creative fidelity and hope are ontological phenomena that have a significant bearing on our relationship with others and to that mysterious being or Absolute Thou. Our existence has a transcendent nature, and this is manifested in our concrete human experiences. Our experiences show this value-laden nature of our existence and being, which gives us insight into the transcendent nature of our existence. We are not isolated self-contained subjects or individuals. We do not solely cause the value of our lives, or of our existence. There is “a transcendent aspect to human existence because it is already endowed with value, which no individual brought to it, or created, but which we recognize, and which will exist after we are gone.”⁶³ There is something beyond us.

Such experience of transcendence is something that should be understood not as coming from the outside, although we recognize that it has independence from any individual. We recognize the transcendent from our own experiences, both in our personal experiences and in our experiences with other beings. Hence transcendence can also be understood as “reaching out of myself toward the intersubjective nature of our existence,”⁶⁴ and such reaching out is essential in our existence, without which we will not experience authenticity and fulfillment. Such experience of transcendence is enriched by creative fidelity and hope. Thus, we can say that creative fidelity and hope are essentially related to transcendence, and they allow us to experience not just our fellow human beings, but then it leads us to that transcendent and mysterious being – the Absolute Thou who is the source of creative power. “Absolute hope is inseparable from a faith which is likewise absolute.” And for Marcel, this only possible source from which this absolute hope springs must always be stressed. To finally conclude, I end with this insightful quote from Marcel about absolute hope: “It appears as a response of the creature to the infinite Being to whom it is conscious of owing everything that it has and upon whom

⁶² Ibid., 56.

⁶³ Brendan Sweetman, “Introduction,” in *A Gabriel Marcel Reader*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2011), 6.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

it cannot impose any condition whatsoever without scandal. From the moment that I abase myself in some sense before the absolute Thou who in his infinite condescension has brought me forth out of nothingness, it seems as though I forbid myself ever again to despair, or, more exactly, that I implicitly accept the possibility of despair as an indication of treason, so that I could not give way to it without pronouncing my own condemnation. Indeed, seen in this perspective, what is the meaning of despair if not a declaration that God has withdrawn himself from me? In addition to the fact that such an accusation is incompatible with the nature of the absolute Thou, it is to be observed that in advancing it I am unwarrantably attributing to myself a distinct reality which I do not possess.⁶⁵

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⁶⁵ Marcel, *Homo Viator: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Hope*, 47.

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Modern Moral Philosophy and its Problems

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Abstract

In this brief paper we undertake a reflection on the apparent failure of modern moral philosophical theories to provide any adequate guidance in moral decision-making. Anscombe, for example, contends that moral philosophy will never advance until there is an adequate moral psychology. MacIntyre laments that moral philosophers have not been clear about what their central questions are. This leads us to consider whether we need normative moral theories at all, leading to a discussion of the viability of intuitionism as a guide to moral actions, and if one of the central moral questions is about the nature of the good, whether it is as unanalysable as G.E. Moore proposed. We conclude that its unanalysability opens the door for a theological answer to the nature of the good. Finally, concluding that the nature of the good is not the expression of human passions, but is external to human beings, we provide a short classification of moral theories according to whether they are realist or anti-realist, cognitivist or non-cognitivist.

Keywords: good, moral realism, cognitivism, meta-ethics.

Introduction

Both Anscombe and MacIntyre in their different ways are critical of modern moral philosophy. Anscombe argues that it is not profitable to do moral philosophy because we do not have an adequate moral psychology. She also thinks that conceptions of moral obligation and moral duty should also be scrapped because they are remnants of a conception of ethics which has been long abandoned. She has little time for the English moral philosophers of the nineteenth and twentieth century, contending that the differences between them are slight and unimportant. She adds that most of the moral philosophers, from Aristotle, Hume, Kant to Mill, had large faults and could not therefore be taken to be very

illuminating on the problems of moral philosophy.⁶⁶ MacIntyre, writing just a few years later, concurs with Anscombe's position, stating that moral philosophers have failed to answer the moral questions which they set themselves because they have failed to be clear about the questions themselves. In particular, he says they have failed to distinguish between "What actions ought we to perform?" and "What kinds of things ought to exist for their own sake?" The answer to the first question, MacIntyre proposes, is that we should perform those actions which will bring about more good than alternative actions. This answer, he observes, raises the question of what we mean by "good", a question which G. E. Moore answered by claiming that "good" is unanalysable.⁶⁷ If this is the case, then to say we should perform those actions which will bring about more good than others provides no answer to the question of what actions we ought to perform because we have no means of deriving a consensus about what we could possibly mean by "more good", since we don't have consensus about what we mean by "good" since it is analysable. From a metaethical perspective, without some conception of what is meant by the "good", our normative moral theories will be provide little guidance in helping us decide what actions we ought to perform. Arguably, for various other reasons, this is the situation in which modern ethical theories find themselves, rejected in favour of intuitionism and emotivism, in which moral decision-making is determined by the aphorism, "If it feels good do it."

In this paper we want to briefly examine firstly whether we really need ethical theories to decide how to act in moral situations, secondly, to consider different approaches to moral theorizing and to consider, thirdly, whether there is a plausible conception of "good" available to us. In relation to the first question, we will argue that intuitionism about the nature of moral good leads to emotivism and relativism, and so is too weak to provide moral direction. In response to the second question, we show that moral theories can be helpfully classified into moral realist and cognitivist moral theories, and moral anti-realist and non-cognitivist theories. Finally we propose that Moore is right to say that the "good" is unanalysable because the good is identifiable with God, a conclusion which is unlikely to satisfy most moral philosophers, since it

⁶⁶ G.E.M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 124 (1958): 1-2.

⁶⁷ Alisdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1966), 249.

transcends the boundaries of moral philosophy by stepping into theology.

The best known normative ethical theories and arguably the most discussed both in ethics classes in higher education and amongst moral philosophers are Natural Law Theory (NLT), Virtue Ethics, Kantian Ethics (deontology) and Consequentialism (utilitarianism). They have all been subjected to criticism and modifications over time in response to those criticisms. New Natural Law Theory, for example, as developed by John Finnis, argues that its formulation is not dependent on belief in God as the origin of the Law.⁶⁸ Similarly, virtue ethics does not depend on recognizing that the ultimate end of the pursuit of virtue is God.⁶⁹ Kantianism too has attempted to develop a better understanding of what Kant meant by the building of the kingdom of ends.⁷⁰ Consequentialism, and its more modern variant, utilitarianism, has been the most widely used theory in recent times.⁷¹ All of these theories are teleological theories because moral actions are taken to be directed towards some end. All of them, for various reasons, have been found wanting, particularly in providing guidance in difficult moral cases. In addition, given that most people are not familiar with normative ethical theories mentioned, they are unavailable for assisting moral decision-making. Though there are other ethical theories, and in what follows we will make some brief mention of these in the context of a discussion of the classification of moral theories, it does not appear that people use these either.

Do we need ethical theories to help us decide how to act morally?

Given that it is unlikely that the vast majority of people have studied any moral theories, the puzzle is how they make moral decisions, since ignorance of moral theory does not preclude them from making moral judgements or engaging in moral actions. Experience tells us that it is evident that people do make moral judgments and engage in moral actions, since it is impossible to live

⁶⁸ John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd Ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶⁹ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁷⁰ Christine Korsgaard, *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁷¹ R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952).

Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 3rd Ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

in society without doing so. The ability to do so does not seem to be the result of parents teaching their children anything about moral theories, though they will almost certainly have introduced them to moral principles. For example, “Don’t steal your brother’s cake, don’t hit your sister, don’t tell lies and do as you are told.” Lack of knowledge of moral theories is not an obstacle to moral decision-making. It is possible to hold that we do not need ethical theories to help us decide how we should act morally because we all have a moral compass that will enable us to decide what is the right thing to do in a particular situation. The idea of conscience, for example, stems from the conviction that human beings have at least a rudimentary conception of right and wrong. Thomas Aquinas, for example, acknowledges the significance of *synderesis*, the existence of conscience, as the starting point for morality, but argues that our conscience can err, if we remain ignorant of the natural law. This means we need a well-formed conscience for good moral decision-making.⁷² After all, it is quite possible that someone’s conscience is corrupted so that he does what is evil. Our conscience has to be schooled about what is virtuous and good. If we hold the view that we have a moral compass that is invariably right, then we are *intuitionist* about moral actions. That is, somehow we know what the right thing to do is. Standardly, intuitionists hold that moral principles are self-evident and non-natural, that is, not reducible to physico-chemical processes of some kind. Though there is a kernel of truth in intuitionism and it has regained popularity in recent decades, it leaves a large number of questions unanswered. For instance, even if we believe that there are self-evident moral principles, how do we know that our intuitions about a particular action are right? That is, how do we justify our intuitions about how to proceed in a particular situation? Moral principles are general principles, but it may not be enough to say to someone, “Don’t steal”, when he is faced with feeding his starving family. St. Basil famously says that not sharing what you have in abundance with the poor is robbing them of what is rightfully theirs, so it seems that if the poor man takes from the rich man to feed his family he is not stealing, only taking what is rightfully his.

Basil says: “Why are you rich while another is poor, unless it be that you may have the merit of a good stewardship, and he the reward of patience? It is the hungry man’s bread that you withhold, the naked man’s cloak that you have stored away, the shoe of the

⁷² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica I-II*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Bros., [Republished 1981], Westmoreland, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1948): Q. 79, Art. 13, Q. 19.

barefoot that you have left to rot, the money of the needy that you have buried underground: and so you injure as many as you might help.”⁷³

During the Covid pandemic with many small businesses ruined or faced with ruin and unable to pay their debts, let alone able to support their families and dependents, who could blame them if they turned to stealing to keep body and soul together. Aquinas comments that it is one thing to have general moral principles, quite another to be able to apply them in particular cases.⁷⁴ This leads us to think about the reasons for acting in a particular way and not another. Anscombe reminds us that Aristotle distinguished between intellectual and moral virtues, raising the question whether someone who fails to think something through and so fails to do something is morally blameworthy.⁷⁵ While she does not provide an example, there are plenty to draw on. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, a government official is charged with deciding when to lockdown a city when an outbreak of the virus occurs but makes a wrong judgment about the timing of the lockdown, advising it too late with the result that the virus spreads. Despite basing her decision on the best available information, she failed to interpret it correctly. The moral question is whether she is morally blameworthy because she did not think it through properly, a failure of intellectual understanding, or did not consult a sufficient number of medical experts who could have helped her reach a better decision. Another example is of government officials who fail to adequately implement hotel quarantine by not thinking through the required checks and balances with the result that many more people die of the virus than would otherwise have. Intuitions about what is morally right are not invariably correct and must be supplemented by an adequate understanding of particular situation.

Intuitionism

There are two kinds of intuitionism: (i) internalist intuitionism and (ii) externalist intuitionism. According to internalists, our intuitions arise in our minds and hence, intuitions about the nature of moral principles are given as self-evident principles in our minds. Moral principles are mind dependent. One

⁷³ St. Basil, *The Complete Works of St. Basil*, trans. Philip Schaff (Seattle: Amazon, 2016), xii, 18, Kindle.

⁷⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica I-II*, Q.95, Art. 2.

⁷⁵ Anscombe, “Modern Moral Philosophy,” 2.

explanation for this is to argue that moral principles are explicable in terms of moral psychology. Arguably, something like this is behind Anscombe's proposal that there is no point doing moral philosophy until an adequate philosophy of psychology has been developed.⁷⁶ A naturalistic conception of human psychology results in its reduction to physical activities in the brain, so that moral principles are explained in terms of particular kinds of brain activities that have evolved as some kind of survival mechanism. Evolutionary ethics argues that moral principles are the product of the evolution of social beings such as ourselves and not the result of a moral sensibility bestowed on human beings by an all-loving God.⁷⁷ Externalists hold that intuitions arise through the unconscious absorption of the moral principles of the social milieu in which an individual is raised. Hence, moral principles are not internally inscribed in the minds of individuals through some evolutionary process or through an endowment of the soul but are learned through interactions with other members of the community to which individuals belong. A similar naturalistic evolutionary story can be told in relation to how societies come to have the kinds of moral principles that they have. In this case, however, the explanation of how moral principles have developed is in terms of an evolutionary social psychology rather than psychology of the individual person.

While naturalistic, evolutionary psychological explanations for the development of moral principles may be attractive, they do not address the fundamental question of how we come to regard some actions as morally good and right. It is no explanation to state that moral principles, such as "Don't steal", "don't commit adultery", "don't murder" have evolutionary advantages because they minimize social conflict with a community thus ensuring its survival and that this is synonymous with what is good and right. This is because it is not self-evident that these are synonymous. That is, it remains a value judgment that what has evolutionary advantages is morally good and right. Some environmentalists have questioned this by arguing that human beings are a pestilence on the natural world and it would be better off without them. If so, then the very things which confer evolutionary advantages on human beings are bad for the planet, rather than good and so it would be morally right if human beings became extinct. The point is not that

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁷ Anthony Flew, *Evolutionary Ethics* (London: MacMillan, 1967).

Scott M James, *An Introduction to Evolutionary Ethics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

the radical environmentalists are right, rather that the argument that evolutionary advantages which ensure the survival of the species are synonymous with what is good is false. It is false because evolutionary advantages that contribute to the survival of the species are only good if it is already assumed that survival of the species is a good. It is not self-evidently so and any intuition that it is good needs explication.

A critique of intuitionism is provided by Ayer in *Language, Truth and Logic*, based on his positivist account of language and meaning. Only those sentences could be said to have meaning are those which are empirically verifiable or can be connected to such sentences. This leads him to adopt an emotivist account of moral statements in which they express an individual's likes or dislikes about particular kinds of moral actions. The problem is that this leads immediately into a relativistic morass, since there is no conception of a moral law to appeal to that everyone is bound by. Ayer's reduction of moral statements to expressions of feelings about certain states of affairs while providing a critique of intuitionism leaves us worse off since it reduces moral actions to a matter of taste and provides no explanation why we regard some actions as evil.

Ayer proposes that there are four kinds of ethical propositions: (i) propositions which express definitions of ethical terms; (ii) propositions which describe moral experience and their causes; (iii) propositions expressing moral imperatives; and (iv) propositions expressing actual moral judgements. Ayer thinks that moral philosophy is generally only concerned with the first kind of propositions, while the second kind fall into moral psychology. Exhortations to act in certain kinds of ways, Ayer does not think belong to moral philosophy at all, since they are statements of commands. This is because typically commands are not statements about states of affairs in the world that can be true or false but are directions to action. Thus, "Do not steal!" is much like "Manchester United!", where we are exhorting our team to greater heights of competitive play on the field.⁷⁸ He does not think the last kinds of propositions belong among ethical propositions, because judgments about moral propositions are expressions of what someone feels about a certain action. Since someone else can feel something different, a judgement that it is wrong to steal, for instance, can be neither true or false. Since it can be neither true nor false, such a statement is factually meaningless since it does not correspond to

⁷⁸ A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Penguin Books, 1971), 110.

any empirically verifiable feature of the world.⁷⁹ Ayer holding that moral propositions have no connections to the real world of human affairs but are just expressions of desires that individuals act upon. In getting rid of intuitions, he also throws out our moral compass.

If moral philosophy is unable or unwilling to assist us in deciding what actions are morally right or morally wrong, then the criticisms of Anscombe and MacIntyre are apt. Once we allow that moral propositions are not prescriptive about what constitutes morally good action, then they reduce to merely descriptions of what human beings do. That most human beings regard certain actions as morally wrong is explained empirically by theorizing that most human beings have been socialized through hegemonic power structures in society to hold particular moral principles. Once these power structures are interrogated and overthrown, they can be replaced by a new moral order. The problem, however, is that if the original moral power structure is not based on objective moral principles, then neither can be the new moral order. We simply replace one moral set of moral principles with another.

Ayer's analysis of moral statements, which are statements of value, was concerned with whether they could be reduced to empirical propositions. He did not have anything much to say about the analysis of what we mean "good" or "right", or whether one can be reduced to the other. Along with Moore, however, in an attack on utilitarianism and certain kinds of subjectivism, he held that "X is good" is not synonymous with "X is pleasant."⁸⁰ He distinguished between those sentences which express normative or prescriptive ethical propositions and sentences which express descriptive ethical propositions. "X is wrong" could mean that it is a normative principle that "X is wrong" or it could mean that in a particular society, "X is wrong" is empirically the case, that is, a particular society hold that it is wrong. If we assume that there are normative ethical principles, argued Ayer, we are accepting the existence of a class of propositions which cannot be verified by empirical means and must arise from some mysterious form of intuition. The difficulty, says Ayer, is that different individuals may have different intuitions about what is morally good. If this is so, there does not appear to be any way to adjudicate between these positions.⁸¹ Ayer proposed that moral propositions are a form of expressivism, that is, expressing a particular emotional stance about a moral judgment. That is, like Hume, Ayer thinks that moral evaluations

⁷⁹ Ibid., 111-112.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 107.

⁸¹ Ibid., 108-109.

are nothing more than expressions of approval or disapproval of certain actions. A moral statement is an expression of individual subjective feelings about a particular action. As we have remarked, this seems to be the position that the modern world has reached: with no moral law to guide it, only evanescent feelings remain. This is an unsatisfactory result, which forces us to look again at how the objectivity of moral principles might be secured. This leads us back to a consideration of what we mean by “good” and “right”.

Good and right

The relationship between “good” and “right” requires explication, since the two are not synonymous, though it seems to follow that what is morally good is also morally right to do. Here we will concentrate on the “good”. What we mean by good occupied the pre-Socratics, who connected it happiness, proposing a variety of ways in which happiness could be understood. Thus, the Stoics saw it as indifference to both pain and pleasure, while the Epicureans held that it was to be found in pleasure, understood as harmonious living. Socrates, as Plato relates, held that the good, which is happiness, was to be found in virtue. Aristotle, who discusses the nature of the good in *Nichomachean Ethics*, proposes that the good was to be found in the excellences of things. Hence, a good knife was one which performed its function of cutting things well, a good musician was one who played his musical instruments well and entertained his listeners.⁸² Good, according to Aristotle was connected to *eudemonia*, happiness in the broadest sense, and for Augustine, as well as for Aquinas, the ultimate good for human beings is to be with God. As Augustine says, “*You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.*”⁸³ *Pursuit of the good, however, is not a single-minded self-centred concern by individuals for their own happiness alone, since, as social beings, our well-being depends on our relationships with others. Individuals cannot exercise the virtues, displaying courage, temperance, justice and practical wisdom except in concert with others. Classical theories of ethics concentrated on the nature of the good, whereas more modern theories, such as deontology, have focused on our responsibilities and obligations to others and hence on what is right to do. Right, however, is not divorced from the good,*

⁸² Aristotle, *The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976).

⁸³ Augustine, *The Confessions and Enchiridion*, trans. Albert Cook Outler (Louisville, Kentucky: The Westminster Press, 1956): Book 1, Ch. 1.

since doing what is right is related to doing what is just, and the just person is a good person. To do what is morally good is to do what is morally right. Hence it is reasonable to connect what is morally right with what is morally good.

The question of what is meant by “good” has been a central question for meta-ethics, as we have stated, since the pre-Socratics. G.E. Moore took up the question in his *Principia Ethica*, originally published in 1903. Moore’s central thesis was that ethical terms were non-natural, that is, they were not amenable to empirical study. Thus, he denied that the “good” could be reduced to “pleasure” or “desire”. The good was not a psychological property. Moore’s argument came to be known as the Open Question Argument.⁸⁴ What is interesting is that Moore assumes, against the anti-realists of his time, such as C.L. Stevenson, Herbert Spencer and T.H. Green, that there are moral facts, which is to say that it is true that some moral actions are good and some are evil, independently of what anyone might think of them.

Assuming that what is good is also what is right, Moore’s Open Question Argument refutes all claims that “goodness” is analytically or *a priori* equivalent to a term ascribing natural features to acts. Moore concludes that “good” and, we would add, “right” are unanalysable. Moore says that good is undefinable.⁸⁵ One form of the argument is the following: (i) An act has a property which is causally responsible for the tendency of acts towards, say, social stability; (ii) It is not goodness, since it is an open question whether such acts are good; (iii) Therefore goodness cannot be *a priori* equivalent to this property. Unanalysability of the good can be seen, according Moore, by considering whether when we think that something is good because it satisfies our desires we can still ask whether what satisfies our desires really is good. For instance, suppose we desire to obtain our degree – it seems obvious that since we desire the achievement of this goal that we regard it as good. Hence, directing our energies in its achievement is good. The problem that Moore identifies is not that satisfaction of our desires could not be held to be synonymous with good, but rather that it is not analytically the case that satisfaction of our desires is equivalent to what is good. For instance, in proposition 1) Satisfaction of our desires is good, good is not synonymous with “satisfaction of our desires”, as the tautology, 2) Satisfaction of our desires is satisfaction of our desires, is not informative. Claiming

⁸⁴ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 54-55.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

that something is good requires a further explanation. Proposition 1) is not an empty statement, since the satisfaction of some desires may not be good but evil. Describing something as good ascribes a substantive property to the subject of a sentence. We have to provide an argument, and this will depend on more than our feeling that accomplishing a particular goal is good, since it really has to be good independently of our feelings about it. Good cannot just reduce to being what an individual thinks is good, since if something is good it is good whatever any individual may think and so is universally good. Good for Moore is neither a natural property nor a metaphysical property. While Moore considers the good is unanalysable, it is possible to propose that good underwrites all of creation and is immanent within it, but this does not solve how the satisfaction of particular desires should be linked to what is good or that satisfaction of some desires is evil.

Nevertheless, the thought that good underwrites all of creation suggests that a substantive conception of the good can be elaborated if it is recognised that the good, the source of everything, is the Creator, the source of all being. Good is unanalysable because it is the infinite and mysterious God Himself who has willed the universe to be. What God has willed to be takes a particular form, as Genesis says, God moved over the darkness, and created heaven and earth (*Genesis* 1.1). One solution is to propose that the good is something which is not just unanalysable but refers to transcendent properties inherent in the nature of created beings and in the moral actions of human beings that are morally good. Throughout *Genesis* chapter 1 the author repeats that God saw what he had created and it was good. What is good is what God has made, and as, Aquinas notes, the source of moral law is the eternal law that governs all of God's creation.⁸⁶ The moral law is not the invention of human beings, but is external, since it is an expression of the Divine order that the Creator has willed for the good of his creation. To live well human beings need to live according to what has been ordained as fulfilling of human nature. This is also Aristotle's insight, that what is good for human beings is to live in accord with their natures, that is, according to the moral law. Morally good actions will be those actions which can be variously described as virtuous, dutiful and upholding basic human goods that enable human beings to realise their fulfilment, which is to return to their Creator. A theological understanding of what is good adds to a substantive conception of the good.

⁸⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q.93, Art. 3.

Another approach to explicating the good is to deny there is any property corresponding to the good, and argue that morally good actions are those which express the preferences of agents. Hume, perhaps the originator of expressivism, held that moral statements express the particular sentiments an individual has towards certain kinds of actions. Hence, since someone dislikes theft, she expresses a negative sentiment towards it. Similarly, someone who reacts negatively to the torture of innocent children, expresses disgust and loathing to such torture and hence, regards it as morally wrong. Hume observes that most human beings have similar sentiments about various actions, and hence, it is not surprising that a majority of people hold certain moral actions as morally wrong. In more recent times, governments, corporations and businesses have ruled that unvaccinated people are prohibited from entering shopping centres, restaurants, sporting events and other public areas. While many support such measures, there are those who regard such discrimination as morally wrong. Popular and majority sentiment which supports discrimination against the unvaccinated is not necessarily morally good or right and hence does not settle the question of what is meant by the good. As we have seen, in discussing Ayer's rejection of intuitionism, that this leads to a quagmire of relativism, even if a consensus about moral propositions can be achieved.

Meta-ethical Theories and Moral Propositions

What we mean by "good" is one of the central pre-occupations of meta-ethics. The dividing line between approaches to what "good" means falls between those who think that there are moral facts and those who do not. Intuitionists, both internalists and externalists can be divided between those who think that there are moral facts inscribed in the human mind and those who believe that there are no moral facts independent of human beings rather that moral propositions are human constructs. Our discussion began with the question whether intuition was sufficient in moral decision-making and it soon became apparent that it was not enough. Not only could intuition not provide sufficient guidance in difficult moral situations, but it also could not provide an adequate account of what we meant by "good". Emerging from a consideration of these meta-ethical theories is the realisation that the normative ethical theories which we commonly hold divide along axes established by our consideration of the question of how we ought to act. Intuitionists fall into two camps, those who are moral realists, who think there are moral facts and those who are moral anti-

realists, who do not. This provides one axis. A second axis is provided by those who think moral facts can be known and those who do not – that is, cognitivists and non-cognitivists.

Most moral realists will also be cognitivists, since they think that it can be demonstrated that some moral statements are actually true. In the same way, a statement in the moral sphere, such as, “Lying is wrong,” points to an objective feature of the world and can be established by pointing to a feature of the world. Anti-realist cognitivists would hold statements in the moral sphere can be about what is true or false, but this is not about features of the world, but about the moral domain that human beings have constructed. If there is a moral fact about the world, it will be so because human beings have created it as a means of constructing relationships with one another and regulating them. They can, however, be cognitivist, since they can accept that within the construction of morality there can be moral statements which are true or false, but that these are not about the world, but about a socially fabricated subjective human construct.

The anti-realist non-cognitivist like the anti-realist cognitivist believes that morality is a socially fabricated construct, but denies that there are any statements that are made within that construct which are either true or false. At best, in this case, moral statements will be conventions, agreed to by human beings. Hume argues that morality is an expression of likes and dislikes, and because human beings are very similar to one another, it is not surprising that they will have the same likes and dislikes. What disgusts one person is very likely to disgust another and what one person likes is very probably going to be something that is liked by another. Morality in this case largely reduces to a matter of taste.⁸⁷

There are many different meta-ethical theories and they will fit the four classifications that we have outlined to different degrees, as there is always some argument about whether a theory is cognitivist or non-cognitivist, as well the extent to which it is realist or anti-realist. We briefly discuss some examples of theories which fall within each of the classifications, bearing in mind that there are variations amongst all of them. Debates between different proponents of various meta-ethical theories have dominated discussion of moral philosophy for centuries and anti-realists have some justification in their claim that the lack of agreement about the basic concepts of morality point to its lack of reality and that it is really about desires and preferences.

⁸⁷ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

Moral theories which fall in the moral realist and cognitivist category will have their foundation in some form of naturalism which claims that there are certain features of what it is to be a human being that dictate that our ways of acting towards them. Natural Law theory, for instance, is a moral realist and cognitivist theory, since it claims that there is a distinct human nature and that by examining the features of human experience, it is possible to determine what is good for human beings. What is good for human beings is not a matter for conjecture, but is an objective feature of the natural world. The truth of statements such as “Killing of innocent human beings is wrong” can be established by reference to the basic human goods, one of which is the good of life. Another theory which falls in this category is Virtue Ethics, which also claims that it is possible to specify in what the good for human beings consists. For the virtue ethicist, human flourishing or human fulfillment is obtained through the practice of virtue. What is good is what leads to virtue and virtue, in turn, leads to the ultimate end of human beings which is happiness.

In the moral realist and non-cognitivist category are those moral realists who agree that there some moral statements which are true or false, but as a matter of fact, it is not possible to establish which are true or false. It would seem to follow that we also deny the third condition, namely that there are ordinary means to establish the truth or falsity of moral statements. Error theorists, such as J.L. Mackie hold that it is the case that some moral statements are true or false, but as a matter of fact it is not possible to establish these as such.⁸⁸ What is means is that though there is agreement that there are moral statements which are true or false, there is no agreement about which statements are. Consequentialism, for example, holds, in its simplest form, that an action is good if on balance it is better to act in one way rather than another. Put another way, an act is good if it leads to the greater good for the greater number. Here we can agree that some statements can be true or false, but which ones are true can never be determined ahead of assessing a particular situation.

In the anti-realist and cognitivist category the claim is that our moral theories are a human construction and so do not appeal to an independent metaphysical reality. Anti-realism is generally taken to imply a form of idealism, which to say that whatever it is that we know about the world is mind-dependent. In its classical formulation, idealism claims that all that we can know about the

⁸⁸ J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1977).

world is our perception of it and more strongly, that the world just is perception. Moral anti-realism, therefore, holds that moral theory is constructed from our experiences which shape our accounts of what is morally right and morally good, independently of an objective reality. That is, what is morally right and good will depend in some way on normative judgments about how rational agents will act in certain circumstances. Kantian ethics is usually thought to fall into the anti-realist and cognitivist camp, though it is true that some Kantians defend a realist interpretation of Kantian ethics. Arguably, Kant can be defended as an anti-realist because he holds that we cannot know the *noumenon*, the thing-in-itself, only the phenomenon, how it acts on us, though it is to be acknowledged that this far from a decisive argument in relation to Kantian ethics.⁸⁹

In the fourth category, the anti-realist and anti-cognitivist quadrant, theories deny that there are any moral statements which are true or false, from which it also follows that they deny that we are capable of knowing any moral statements which are true or false. It also follows that there are no means for establishing the truth or falsity of moral statements. Theories which fall into this category will be various subjectivist theories, including expressivism, emotivism and intuitivism. Expressivism, for example, claims that moral statements are expressions of particular preferences. Moral statements are descriptions of what moral agents hold about particular actions and situations without holding that what is described refers to an objective state of affairs. Thus, if we claim that torture of children is wrong, this is because we are expressing a particular attitude towards torture of children. We do not like it or are disgusted by it. On the other hand, if we say that we like bondage and sado-masochism, we are expressing our liking for it and hence it is not morally wrong, but morally right. A moral theory which falls into this category denies that there is an objective moral realm.

Conclusion

As is apparent, there is a great diversity of views about the nature of the good, about what is morally right or wrong and whether the truth or falsity of moral judgments can be established. Informing these questions are differing conceptions of human nature, the relationships between persons and of the ultimate end of human beings. Different understandings of these will, to a great

⁸⁹ I. Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary McGregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

extent, determine our moral commitments. From the diversity of meta-ethical theories emerge a number of normative ethical theories that assume that concepts such as the good, positive and negative freedom, moral rightness and wrongness are understood. Where most normative ethical theories agree is the need for the principles of moral decision-making to be universal. That is, the moral principles that guide our decision-making need to be able to be applied consistently and rationally in a variety of contexts and circumstances. This does not mean that there will not be differences of opinion among people about what is thought to be morally right, even when they apply the same set of normative moral principles to the same case. Differences will be the result of different perspectives of the state of affairs on which a moral judgment is going to be made and the variety of assessments possible that can be made of a particular situation.

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Civilization Borderlands as Spiritual Diversity Specially Protected Areas

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Abstract

Borderlands are normally taken into consideration only as entities that separate and not as objects of inquiry *per se*. This is the result of the fact that most of researchers fail to recognize that borders are not just abstract lines between two plates; they are ‘immaterial bodies’ that develop according to their own inner logic. Borderland civilization should receive the special status of *Sacred Reserves*, that would imply a set of regulations and policies, both restricting and encouraging, in the same way as it is done with regards to *Nature Reserves*.

Keywords: Borderlands, Spiritual Diversity, Sacred Reserves.

Borderlands as Immaterial Bodies

The Ecumene is not a homogenous entity, but rather a mosaic of civilization plates that create our planet’s cultural tracery in the same way as tectonic plates make up a distinctive portrait of the Earth’s surface. The original design of such plates and their juxtaposition are determined by the natural forces as their existence, formation and development are inextricably linked to the climate patterns and landscape limitations. Draughts and floods, mountain ranges and rivers, forests and deserts shape the face of the planet, and at the same time define those often-blurred borders that separate civilizations from each other. It shall not be forgotten, of course, that besides those natural factors that remain more or less constant throughout time, the actions of humans further shape and reshape the plates. These changes are highly volatile, rarely predictable and sometimes based on incomprehensible logics: war and peace, roads and roadblocks, scientific discoveries and anthropogenic catastrophes erase borders and expand frontiers constantly – a process that we often call ‘history’. The plates are

changing their sizes and shapes as various societies are appearing, developing, mutating, overlapping, dividing, merging and disappearing. And with them the lines that separate those plates change accordingly, those obscure lines that people tend to forget to mention when speaking of the cultural mosaic of the inhabited world.

This is unfortunate, as in reality, although being subjected to frequent changes, those lines tend to harden quite fast and soon turn into distinctive entities of a sort, acquiring their own identities in the same way as ‘corridors’ have theirs, being different from the rooms they are entitled to connect or separate. Borders are not an illusion and not just a pure abstraction; to the contrary, those lines on the maps are real, they do actually exist and perform their functions. Even worse, their behavior more than often leads to global shifts that shape the destinies of plates themselves by making them quarrel or co-operate, sometimes destroying or shredding the old, sometimes giving birth to the new. Quite often those lines are particularly nasty creatures indeed. They can make the Ecumene moving and shaking; even the smallest impulses – those that may look insignificant elsewhere – can gain tremendous momentum as they travel along those lines of separation and pull the trigger of the world equilibrium, making plates collide and crumble. It is true that insignificant changes taking places in those areas can have consequences that much outweigh their original force. This mechanism itself is worth of serious attention, for its understanding can help people to take necessary precautions, manage unpleasant social frictions and avoid performing actions that could damage the existing order.

Borderlands, however, are normally taken into consideration only in respect to the entities they separate and not as objects of inquiry *per se*. This is probably the result of that regrettable fact that most of researchers fail to recognize that borders are not just abstract lines between two plates; they are ‘immaterial bodies’ that develop according to their own inner logic. Any border, in fact, only touches the plates that surround it, but belongs to none of those plates, it remains independent and ‘real’; one can imagine a border as a chain of hollows that are not filled with the social and cultural matter the host plates are saturated with, but with a ‘different kind of matter’, something that for a time being we may call ‘void’. These hollows can be reduced to a minimum, but they nevertheless exist everywhere as the ever-changing jigsaw contours of cultural areas always allow some space in-between two or more plates, where cavities, tunnels and holes

create the bizarrely-shaped continuity that, to our understanding, constitutes the actual borderland.

These inlays of void that grow like 'negative mushrooms' at the surfaces of the structures they separate do have lives of their own; they are objective beings, albeit elusive and slippery. They do have birthdays; they develop careers and eventually pass away. They are hard-to-catch entities that can move, fuse into one another, split, change their shape, size, depth and width; they progress, regress and stagnate. They seem to be embodied in the host object – the civilization plates – but the truth is that, these superficial irregularities are more connected with their filler, an immaterial substance that can turn any hollow into a protuberance or a tunnel into a bridge if observed from a different perspective. As such, borderlands are nothing else but solidified intrusions of a different kind of matter that have struggled its way from beyond the *Ecumene*. The better name that would reflect its opposition to the normal social matter of the host plates should be 'guest-matter'. In other words, borderlands are immaterial bodies filled with a matter different from the one the social fabric is made. For this reason, they deserve serious attention as objects of study in themselves, not only as a derivative of the surrounding entities.

Knowledge Sanctuaries

It is argued here that because inhabitants of those lands happen to be exposed to such intrusions of guest-matter, they are able to see things from radically different perspective. As such, those of them who are blessed, or maybe cursed, with talents to feel, to see, to touch and interpret the messages from the realms lying beyond rationality and elaborate them conveying their energies to ordinary people, can indeed become the ones whom we shall look for. Prophets, mystics, preachers, shamans, writers, artists, musicians living and working in those twilight zones along civilization contact lines have the ability to tap wires from the depths of unknown and transform the unborn images of the 'elusive Other' into something more stable, perceivable and understandable by ordinary people. The one who dares to venture in discovering the spiritual life of people inhabiting such areas and their inner world, the one who will be able to feel deeply their worries and hopes, to read carefully and interpret diligently their dreams and visions, will be the one who could come closer to discovering the true diversity of reality.

As such, those lands in-between where guest-matter makes its way into our world shall be taken into consideration not only for

security reasons as it is the case now and shall not be just feared for the disorder they can bring, but shall be also valued and studied as the priceless depository of human creativity. Their unique culture can impregnate the world with ultimate productive force, and as such these wells of cultural energies shall be explored and protected rather than being clogged up and buried. The policy of the enforced development here is suicidal as it causes humanity lose the source of its creative energy. The importance of those places for the humankind and the need to save and protect those cracks through which the guest-matter can be experienced shall be understood by everyone. Borderlands are indeed too special to be reduced to the level of the surrounding lands, they can work as workshops of humanity; they are laboratories of the future, and as such the policy towards them is ought to be special. As a matter of fact, caring of hollows that constitute borderlands is necessary not only for philanthropic reasons, but for practical purposes as well, as their existence is the indispensable precondition for the existence of the world-as-a-system. Indeed, we can note that if there is no clearance left between two plates, they start struggling up onto each other causing conflicts and blocking movement, while emptiness allows sliding and rotating and eventually harmonious development. Borderlands can indeed be either destructive or creative, with the final outcome depending largely on how people handle them, and ignorance and eradication do not look like the best strategies in this case. If treated with care, those hollows can become important centers of power – reference points that would link worlds and make them rotate. They would create axes, provide landmarks and generate energy for heating and lighting our world up.

Unfortunately, with the current centrist development paradigm fueled by traditional fears and disdain for everything that fall in-between and with the new distance-killing technologies that facilitate unification and make it easily achievable, these people have little chance to avert destructive outside influence, cultural persecution, homogenization and taming in the name of progress; not only their talents and wisdom can be lost, they too soon can easily found themselves on the breach of extinction. To avoid this, we now need the change in approaches that could benefit both people living in the borderlands and in the centers. Provided that the policy towards these unique areas changes getting aimed at protection, careful study and cherishing their culture instead of enforcing modernization and unification processes, frontier people will be saved from indignity and inferior complex as they would restore self-confidence and will have reasons and resources to develop their own culture from within. This will not only prevent

them from becoming marginalized and seditious, as only those who are firmly rooted in their own culture can live a peaceful and harmonious life, but will benefit us all as their knowledge becomes universally available. Generally speaking, civilization borderlands shall become specially protected territories where spirituality is welcomed, nurtured, studied, emphasized, encouraged and given priority over economic development. Due to their proximity to the inlays of guest-matter people that inhabit these special places of the Ecumene possess skills, knowledge and wisdom that can benefit us all. In turn, mainstream societies should recognize them by granting them dignity and honor.

Sacred Reserves

During this battle for borderlands spiritual intactness, we should consider borrowing methods from the environmentalists, especially their public relation strategies and campaigning techniques aimed at delivering their message. We should provide carefully selected, nicely presented and thoughtfully formulated concepts that are characterized by both scientific depth and emotional impact that ensures that people not only realize the need to protect the fragile environment of the borderlands, but get emotionally addicted to the cause of their preservation. Not only those PR and education techniques, however, should be borrowed, but the technologies of creating national parks, national reserves and other specially protected areas too, as they proved to be tremendously effective in securing biodiversity. The idea of extracting territories crucial for planet's well-being is indeed reasonable in the case of civilization borderlands, and spirituality and cultural diversity require the same level of protection, as their uniqueness is threatened now by both rampaging materialism and homogenization now. In fact, although dispersed, evasive and evanescent, it is spiritually that dwells in these specific places, and, similarly to nature parks, such territories shall be freed of aggressive development that harms their integrity and as such infringes the well-being of humanity. Due to this, they should be given as much attention and care as global biodiversity.

As such, it is necessary now to start promoting *Sacred Reserves* concept into global legislation so that it becomes available for the lawmakers worldwide. Civilization borderlands fall perfectly into that category, as such territories of guest-matter intrusions have been detected and signposted by the ancients, who treated them as holy, and those monuments and legends that they have attached to them can now work as pretext for including them in the

list of lands requiring protection. For providing such arguments, however, we should borrow knowledge of the landscape from the ancients as they had worked out effective methods for mapping these areas of special spiritual importance. Many of those altars have been forsaken or demolished, but even now their debris can guide those who would dare to sort out the Augean stables of our ancestors' cultural heritage and separate the wheat of timeless wisdom from the chaff of petty superstitions. Despite many of those signs and rituals have been abandoned and plunged into obscurity, overgrew with nihilism and fell into oblivion they can be re-discovered and revitalized now.

Once defined, described and designated, civilization borderlands can be granted special status as *Sacred Reserves* that would imply a set of regulations and policies, both restricting and encouraging, in the same way as it is done with regards to Nature Reserves. Borderlands of civilizations are often remote, inaccessible and already well-guarded by the natural obstacles that makes the process of their delineation easier. The authorities need to realize, however, that the real resource of such lands is neither timber, nor coal, but local people and their knowledge that they cherish, long for and possess, because this knowledge is truly unique and, if shared with outside world, could benefit both humankind as a whole and borderlanders people in particular. Important to note that, unlike nature protection, where outsiders are normally taking the leading role, spiritual protection shall be characterized by the direct involvement of local people, while help from outside shall be reduced to minimum and confined to providing those with opportunities to take things in their own hands and start caring of their culture themselves. Culture policies can't be enforced indeed, they can only be implied.

In general, people of these lands shall be given freedom and supported to do what they are best at – that is at dealing with holistic knowledge of the complexity of the Universe that they can acquire through the surface discontinuities of the social fabric. This will not only let them realize their missions that will in turn boost their dignity, that will also help borderlands to take proper place among others and perform functions they can and they should perform. Any community, big or small, needs museums, libraries and laboratories; in the same way the Earth needs borderlands as the gates to the knowledge that lies beyond it. Some of them can work as perfect libraries of human thought that not only conceal treasures of ancient wisdom that is kept there intact and alive, but are also staffed with skillful local “librarians” that know how to handle the archives of the humankind. Some will work as

workshops of future, boiling cauldrons of ideas, concepts and visions, think-tanks that will be shaping the future of the planet. They indeed shall remain as such – a tranquil towers of knowledge, a place where the wise and sensitive are doing their job, undisturbed and respected.

These sanctuaries shall not become reservations for certain ethnic groups, however, but rather work as refuge areas for those committed to knowledge, regardless their nationality. Sacred Reserves shall be modeled after inclusive Special Economic Zones rather than after exclusive Aboriginal Lands. China's Shenzhen was designed as an artificial economic enclave where rules and regulations were completely different from those in the surrounding territories and it could leverage on its proximity to Hong Kong, itself an enclave of economic guest-matter in the discontinuity of China's surface. Such special status and special policy introduced for Shenzhen drew to its construction sites those people from the hinterlands who valued money above all, and as a result it became their Mecca, their *Territory of Gold*. In the same way, for those to whom Spirit and Knowledge represent their biggest values, specially protected border areas would become Special Zones. They would be able to enjoy different regulations there and benefit from the proximity of enclaves of spirituality inside the discontinuities of the society surface. Generally speaking, those lands in-between, those workshops of the humanity must and should become specially protected *Territories of God*, refuge areas for those who seek Spirit rather than Wealth.

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IN FOCUS
Fear, Weakness, Uncertainty.
Time of Covid

The Politics of the Pandemic: The Rise of Authoritarianism in Australia

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Abstract

Undoubtedly the past two years of the Covid-19 pandemic have been challenging for every nation. The response, however, has been varied. In this paper, beginning with a brief overview of how the virus has progressed in Australia, we consider some worrying developments. Although the speed with which state governments assumed emergency powers to deal with the virus showed a commendable degree of leadership, the continuing reliance on these powers to close state borders and to lockdown their citizens demonstrates a shift towards authoritarianism. Worse still, is the willing compliance of the majority of citizens in their own incarceration. The state of Victoria has the dubious honor of being the most locked down state in the world. The effect on mental health, particularly school children who have missed a significant portion of the school year, small businesses that have been forced to close, and workers unable to work from home, has been severe. State governments, by and large, have ignored this and continued to use lockdowns as the means of trying to control the spread of the virus. More recently, has come the realisation that eliminating the virus is not possible, and the end of lockdowns can only be achieved through mass vaccination. Rather concerningly, this has resulted in a further lurch towards an authoritarian state with growing support for mandating vaccination. We argue that the turn to totalitarianism should be resisted.

Keywords: Covid-19, lockdown, authoritarianism, Victoria, pandemic.

Introduction: Historical Context

It cannot be doubted that the Covid-19 pandemic has generated a large number of challenges for us all as we move well into its second year. These challenges have been very different for different countries, cities and regions. In this short reflection, I will deal with the context of the pandemic in Australia, and from the point of view of someone resident in Victoria, the state in which the

largest number of deaths from Covid-19 occurred – 820 out of a total of 910 deaths⁹⁰ for the whole of Australia – and which has suffered the longest period of lockdown and greatest frequency of them. To date, there have been 30, 356 total cases in Australia. By any measure, Australia has been remarkably successful in containing the virus. This success has come at a cost.

In 2020, when Victoria experienced a spike in Covid cases, and a surge in deaths, mostly in aged care facilities, Melbourne, the state's capital, was locked down for 112 days. Regional Victoria, despite having very few or no cases, was also locked down, but the restrictions eased as time went on, so that there was more freedom of movement outside Melbourne. To prevent movement from metropolitan Melbourne to the regions, police were stationed on the major highways to prevent people in Melbourne from travelling to regional Victoria. Similarly, people from regional Victoria could not travel to Melbourne either. Severe restrictions were in place in relation to funerals and marriage ceremonies.⁹¹ Religious services were unable to be held and churches were closed. Only two visitors were allowed to anyone's home and outside gatherings were forbidden. Masks were to be worn both indoors and out, reasons for leaving one's home were restricted to grocery shopping, visiting a medical practitioner, doing essential work (such as health care work), exercise and care giving. A curfew was in place.

Other states did not experience the same surge in either Covid cases or deaths, and were able to ease restrictions much sooner, however, each state determined that it would close its borders to those states which continued to have Covid cases. During Victoria's long lockdown in 2020, Victorians were prohibited from entering the other states. International borders were also closed, and only some flights were allowed into the country, mainly in order to repatriate Australian citizens who had been overseas. This has continued during 2021 with international borders still closed and unlikely to re-open until sometime in 2022, if then. More recent outbreaks of Covid have been the result of returning travelers while in quarantine infecting people, and Victoria in August 2021, entered

⁹⁰ "Coronavirus (Covid-19) numbers and Statistics," Australian Government Department of Health, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/coronavirus-covid-19-current-situation-and-case-numbers>.

⁹¹ For instance, only 10 mourners were permitted to attend a funeral. Marriage ceremonies were restricted to the bride and groom, the marriage celebrant and two witnesses. These restrictions were re-introduced for Victoria's sixth lockdown in August 2021.

its sixth period of lockdown, and has remained under severe restrictions. This time, however, during July 2021, New South Wales, the largest Australian state by population, experienced a surge in cases of the CoVid-19 virus Delta variant, and was placed under lockdown, that by the middle of August 2021 extended to the whole state. Parts of the northernmost state, Queensland were also in lockdown in August 2021. In all, by mid- August 2021, 15 million people in the eastern mainland Australian states were in lockdown.

There is no question that the draconian measures taken by state governments to contain the Covid outbreaks have worked up to now, but this has come at considerable cost. Leaving aside the economic ruin faced by many small businesses such as restaurants and cafes, there have been significant social costs. The effect on people's well-being as a result of anxiety, of stress due to changed work circumstances and the inability to lead a normal social life has yet to be quantified. There is growing evidence to suggest that there has been a significant rise in mental illness as people struggle to cope with daily life under the restrictions that have been imposed.⁹² Children had a disrupted school year in 2020, but in Victoria, have also faced a disrupted education for some months in 2021 also. Learning has taken place via Zoom, but it is evident that this has not worked very well, and pupils have struggled with its impersonal nature. The same situation has also faced students in higher education, with universities being forced to move nearly all their teaching to an online form. Face to face teaching has still not fully resumed. The use of Zoom or some other like platform to conduct meetings, teaching and other activities has become normal during this period, but it is obvious that it is a poor substitute for face-to-face interactions. The loss of human contact has been severe.

People in Victoria, after a few half-hearted public protests about mask-wearing and the severity of the restrictions countered by the presence of a very large contingent police in riot gear, have meekly submitted to the authority of the state. The premier, Dan Andrews, has enjoyed a cult following for his severe restrictions over the long lockdown in 2020, and there is little questioning of the need for further restrictions in 2021 over more recent single figure outbreaks of Covid. The sixth severe lockdown has come a scant nine days after the fifth and is more severe in that people are

⁹² K. M. Bliźniewska-Kowalska, A. Halaris, S.C. Wang, K. P. Su, M. Maes, M. Berk & P. Galecki et al., "A Review of the Global Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Public Mental Health, with a Comparison Between the USA, Australia, and Poland with Taiwan and Thailand," *Medical Science Monitor: International Medical Journal of Experimental and Clinical Research* 27 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.12659/MSM.932220>.

prohibited from visiting their families and may not travel more than five kilometers from their homes. People are assured that imposed restrictions are necessary, for everyone's good and based on scientific evidence. Unfortunately, none of the scientific evidence on which continuing restrictions is purportedly based has been released and little attempt to provide a justification for them. Nor is it at all clear that such severe restrictions are necessary. There is, for instance, little evidence that masks are effective in preventing Covid transmission or protecting people from infection, but they are mandatory both inside and outside. The government expects people to trust them and accept the curtailment of their freedom of movement. There is no debate about the nature of the restrictions nor their necessity. Along with freedom of movement, freedom of speech has also been restricted. Questioning government decisions is met with the mantra that the decision is what "the science" advises and there is an overtone that suggests question the government is somehow subversive and undermining its efforts to keep everyone safe.

In June 2021, Victoria was once more locked down under quite drastic restrictions after an outbreak of Covid occurred in hotel quarantine and escaped into the community. This was the Delta variant, originating in India, and described as a "beast of a virus." It was said to be transmitted by even the most fleeting of contacts and the state was locked down, even though it was not present outside Melbourne. Transmission of this virus variant has been shown to not be as virulent as claimed.⁹³ There was no discussion about the wisdom of closing down businesses that were just beginning to revive nor whether it was necessary for schools to close. There was no thought given whether it was necessary to impose the same restrictions on regional Victoria, where there were no cases of Covid. The government simply imposed the restrictions and expected people to obey.

From the actions of the government, it seems plain that the intention is to eliminate the virus, rather than contain it, even though publicly it is said that the aim is to contain and learn to live with the virus. Restrictions, however, do not generally ease until community transmission reaches zero cases over a number of days. This appears to be the strategy in all states. The only state which appeared to be learning to live with the virus and was taking steps to do so has been New South Wales, the most populous Australian state, with 8.2 million people. There, the approach has been to

⁹³ It is said to be more contagious, but not as virulent. That is, it is more easily transmitted, but is not as deadly in its infection.

decentralise the response to outbreaks of the virus and to place restrictions only on those regions where it is necessary. Unfortunately, the most populous parts of the state, including Sydney and city of Newcastle and the Hunter Valley to the north of Sydney have been locked down due to an escalating number of cases of the Delta variant of Covid. Victoria, on the other hand, has a highly centralised, bureaucratic approach that tries to protect the populace by the blunt instrument of blanket restrictions across the whole state, when the vast majority of infections have been confined to Melbourne. NSW has a right of centre, liberal conservative government, while Victoria has hard left socialist government, and this undoubtedly has significant influence on decision-making. The Victorian government in this regard resembles the old Soviet Union, in which all power is centralised, and in the hands of one individual, the Premier.

Vaccinations against the virus are now beginning to be rolled out, but again there are various political issues which surround their availability. The roll-out of the vaccinations is the responsibility of the federal government, which has purchased a very large number of vaccines – the Astra-Zeneca (now called Vaxzevria) and the Pfizer vaccines. The Astra-Zeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine has had quite a negative press in Australia because it has been associated with blood clots and several people have died.⁹⁴ Originally the Astra-Zeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine was only available to those over 50, but now has been restricted to those over the age of 60 as a result of adverse reactions to the vaccine among those aged below 60. More recently, due to the rising number of cases, governments have shifted ground again and now are proposing that anyone over 40 should get the Astra-Zeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine, if his or her General Practitioner agrees. There has been a slow uptake of the vaccines in Australia, possibly because there is such a low number of cases of Covid in the country, so there does not appear to be a great urgency to get vaccinated. The delivery of the vaccines is in the hands of the states, which leads to the shifting of blame for shortages of vaccines to the federal government, even though Victoria has been accused of hoarding vaccines and not

⁹⁴ “Covid-19 Vaccine Weekly Safety Report,” Australian Government Health Department Therapeutic Goods Administration, accessed June 27, 2021, <https://www.tga.gov.au/periodic/covid-19-vaccine-weekly-safety-report-27-05-2021>.

rolling them out.⁹⁵ The opportunity for political points scoring seems to be too good to miss.

With the rising number of cases of the Delta variant of the virus, the decision has been taken by the Federal government to attempt to increase the rate of vaccination with the aim to have at least 70% of the Australian population vaccinated by Christmas 2021. It is clear that policy has now shifted towards the opinion that with 70% of the population vaccinated, the need for lockdowns will be unnecessary. Various government strategies have been employed to cajole people to get vaccinated. In Victoria, the state government's main strategy is to use threats, rather than positive incentives. The Premier has stated rather menacingly that lockdowns will continue until people come to their senses and get vaccinated. Those who object to vaccination are described as dangerous lunatics, jeopardising the health of the community.

For governments with a desire to be seen to be in charge and providing leadership, the virus is heaven-sent. It allows leaders of all political persuasions to be seen to be protecting people and fighting the virus. In Australia, it has seen several state governments returned with increased majorities on the strength of their handling of the pandemic. It has allowed governments to invoke emergency powers and to hang on to them and especially state governments in Australia discover a relevance that had all but been lost. The temptation to continue to hold onto the emergency powers for as long as possible is strong, but hopefully state leaders will realise that the real work of rebuilding economies and people's lives will begin once the pandemic is over.

Saving the body but destroying the soul

The reaction of many people, particularly in Victoria, about the severe restrictions that they have had to live with during the pandemic has generally been meek and mild. A large number approve of the lockdowns and the bellicose stance of the Premier against criticisms of the severity and length of lockdowns.⁹⁶ He

⁹⁵ "Victorian Authorities Hit Back at Claims the State is Hoarding Vaccine Doses," The Global Herald, accessed June 22, 2021, <https://theglobalherald.com/news/victorian-authorities-hit-back-at-claims-the-state-is-hoarding-vaccine-doses-7news/>.

⁹⁶ See, for example, this report from the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). The ABC has been heavily criticised for being overtly left-leaning: Richard Willingham, "Premier Andrews needs to offer hope to ease mounting anger, but it is nearly an impossible task," ABC

frequently begins his daily press conference with stating that he makes no apologies for wanting to keep Victorians safe from the virus, from hospitals overflowing with sick and dying people and doing everything he can to return the state to some semblance of normalcy. Although he claims that he understands that people are missing their families, that sons and daughters cannot visit their elderly parents and vice versa, but without harsh restrictions, the virus cannot be beaten, and we cannot emerge from lockdown. While it is possible that as the series of lockdowns grows longer people might begin to rebel at the curtailment of basic freedoms,⁹⁷ there seem to be many people who seem to enjoy being ordered about by the government and treated as naughty children and spoken to patronisingly.

This phenomenon, of the willingness of people to give up their freedoms without much thought seems at first glance strange, but it seems clear that they value their lives above all else. In return for the loss of freedom, they will be protected by the state and their lives will be preserved. The emphasis is on saving the body, but at the cost of the soul. We have already alluded to the rise in mental health illnesses. The state government's justification for the harsh lockdown is that this is the only way in which the pandemic can be controlled, otherwise, both infections and deaths will likely run into the thousands and the state's hospital system will be overwhelmed with patients suffering from the virus. Certainly, as the very large number of cases and deaths that occurred in the United States, Italy and other countries in 2020 showed, a rapid response could in large measure prevent an explosion of cases and deaths. The Victorian situation, however, has been far from dire with relatively small numbers of infections from the Delta variant of the virus in the current lockdown. The government points to the situation in New South Wales where the number of daily cases have been escalating as a justification for introducing a severe lockdown. For example, in New South Wales in the first week of August 2021, the average number of daily cases was 252 in a state of 8.2 million people. This equates to 3.073 cases per 100,000 residents. By comparison, in Victoria, with a population of 6.7 million, the average number of cases of CoVid in the first week of August was 9, which equates to

News, July 24, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-24/victorian-government-retains-confidence-despite-lockdowns/100318930>.

⁹⁷ Sporadic protests have occurred. Calla Wahlquist, "Protestors in Melbourne clash with Victoria Police after Seven Day Lockdown Announced," *The Guardian*, August 5, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/aug/05/victoria-covid-update-snap-lockdown-being-considered-after-eight-new-cases-recorded>.

0.134 cases per 100,000 residents.⁹⁸ There has been only three deaths recorded from CoVid in the whole country, all three having occurred in New South Wales, during these most recent outbreaks of the virus. In New South Wales only Sydney, Newcastle and Hunter Valley are locked down, while in Victoria the whole state is locked down, despite few Covid cases being detected in the regions outside Melbourne.

The statistics are stark, pointing to a massive over reaction to the number of infections. If we accept the government justification that since the Delta variant of the virus is much more contagious than earlier iterations of the virus and that if it is not contained it will spread exponentially through the community, resulting a very high death toll, then its imposition of a strict and severe lockdown is reasonable. It is possible, however, to point to countries where the virus has spread rapidly through the population resulting in a high number of deaths, but lockdowns have been less onerous. The Indonesian government has a much stronger case for lockdown than either New South Wales or Victoria, yet, despite high numbers of cases daily, has prioritised keeping the country open and is not locked down, though restrictions have been implemented. These are not as severe as those imposed in Victoria. This has resulted in a high number of average daily cases. In the most recent statistics, there were 49,000 daily cases in the country. With a population of 272 million, this amounts to 18 cases per 100,000 inhabitants.⁹⁹ This is considerably more per 100,000 inhabitants than in either New South Wales or Victoria. It would be expected that, given the much larger number of cases per 100,000 inhabitants, the response in Indonesia would be correspondingly much harsher than in Australia and that restrictions on people would be more severe. This does not appear to be the case, however.

Though arguably the comparison might be thought to be invalid because it is comparing countries which are very unlike in terms of populations, economic strength and ability to adequately respond to the pandemic, it nevertheless illustrates that in certain

⁹⁸ By late August both these figures have risen. NSW has nearly an average of 600 cases daily, while Victoria has an average of 40 cases daily. Lockdowns do not seem to be working to keep case numbers low.

⁹⁹ Data from the German-Indonesian Chamber of Commerce have indicated a drop in daily number in early August 2021, though they remain high. "Covid-19 Developments in Indonesia," German-Indonesian Chamber of Commerce, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://indonesien.ahk.de/en/infocenter/news/news-details/covid-19-developments-in-indonesia>.

areas, Australian restrictions have been very tight. The Oxford Coronavirus Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) provides data on 17 different indicators of government response to the pandemic and provides a more complete picture of various measures that have been taken globally by different governments. Researchers have developed a Government Stringency Index, which is a composite measure which is calculated on school closures, workplace closures, cancellation of public events, restrictions on public gatherings, closures of public transport, stay-at-home requirements, public information campaigns, restrictions on internal movements and international travel controls. It confirms that in some areas, such as school closures, restrictions on public gatherings, restricting people to their homes, not allowing travel beyond 5 kilometres from your home and no international travel (except in special circumstances) the Australian response has been quite harsh. In other measures, however, Australia has been doing relatively well in comparison to other countries.¹⁰⁰

The mantra from governments has been that harsh measures are needed to contain the virus and to keep it from infecting the most vulnerable members of the population. It is therefore necessary to restrict people's freedom of movement, as well as engaging in those activities which are crucial for the existence of a civil society and on which the state itself is founded. Preserving and protecting citizens from harm is one of the responsibilities of the state. Even libertarians such as Robert Nozick would agree that defence of the state is one of the few responsibilities that a minimalist conception of the state would accept.¹⁰¹ Though what Nozick has in mind when he accepts that defence of the state is a government responsibility, is defence against external enemies such as other states. The Covid-19 virus could be viewed as an external threat, but it is unlikely that Nozick

¹⁰⁰ Hannah Ritchie, Esteban Oriz-Ospina, Diana Beltekian, Edouard Mathieu, Joe Hasell, Bobbie Macdonald, Charlie Giatino, Cameron Appel, Lucas Rodés-Guirao, and Max Roser, "Coronavirus Government Response Tracker," *OxCGRT*, August 9, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/policy-responses-covid>.

This source, published by the Blavatnik School of Government at Oxford University, provides the most up to date data on the responses of governments around the world to the Coronavirus pandemic. As such, it is constantly updated.

¹⁰¹ Nozick argues that the state exercises coercive power, but this should be limited to safeguarding property and the state. Only the state may exercise coercive power. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1974).

would countenance the restrictions imposed on liberty because of the pandemic. This is because in his conception of the state, its role is to be limited to protecting citizens from violence, theft and fraud.¹⁰² In Nozick's state responsibility for health care and its provision is not the responsibility of the government, but of private individuals. It is doubtful that he would regard the provision of mass vaccinations by the government as one of its responsibilities. Nozick's focus is on enabling individuals to exercise as much freedom as possible and for governments to have minimal interference in the lives of citizens.

While we do not accept Nozick's minimalist conception of government, the recognition of the importance of individual freedoms and the right of individuals to pursue their lives with as little interference of governments is crucial. This is because aside from physical well-being, human beings are, as Aristotle points out, social animals.¹⁰³ Protecting its citizens from the virus through measures which isolate them from those relationships which give their lives meaning destroys their souls. The price being paid for the preservation of physical health in many cases is the destruction of all that makes life meaningful. Human beings, as social animals, cannot survive without interaction with others, as MacIntyre observes, in *Dependent Rational Animals* since we are dependent from the moment we are conceived on others.¹⁰⁴ The great tragedy of human existence is that too many times human beings are betrayed by those on whom they depend. Nevertheless, as social beings, human persons need the freedom to live, work, play and enjoy each other's company. Though the preservation of life is important, this is not merely our physical life, but our mental, spiritual and relational life. It is the latter which gives meaning to the preservation of the former. Human well-being depends not only on physical health, but also mental and spiritual health. The ailing soul needs to be helped as much as, if not more, than the ailing body.

It is possible to survive poor physical health, but it is far difficult to survive poor mental health. In placing their emphasis on preserving the physical life of their citizens, governments lose sight of the reasons human beings want to live. It is not merely for the sake of continuing to exist, but for the relationships that give that life meaning. Remove someone's reason to live and he or she may

¹⁰² Ibid., 27.

¹⁰³ Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (London: Penguin Books, 1981), Book I.3, 1253a.

¹⁰⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1999), 3.

continue to exist, but the joy of living a fulfilled life will be gone. We need to recognise, as Alexander Solzhenitsyn does, that in order to survive we need to recognise that it cannot be at all costs, since the preservation of our physical lives cannot come at the cost of losing our souls, as this destroys our humanity, that is, what makes us human.¹⁰⁵

The lockdowns described above have taken their toll on people's mental health everywhere. We have already mentioned the increase in stress and anxiety that has been caused. Preventing people from visiting their close relatives, for example, especially elderly parents who may already be living in isolation, is inhumane. Preventing families from being together, even if this prevents infections from Covid may be too high a price to pay. There is some evidence in Victoria, but also New South Wales, that the most recent Covid infection outbreaks that locked down Melbourne and Sydney have originated in parts of Melbourne and Sydney with high concentrations of migrants for whom family contact is vital and necessary for everyone's well-being.¹⁰⁶ Rather than condemning people for visiting their loved ones, perhaps it is more salient to ask why people are willing to risk contracting the virus just to see their families.

Because schools have been closed, then opened, then closed again, school children have developed various anxieties and phobias, one of which is obviously the fear of becoming infected with the virus. Not only has their schooling suffered, with teachers having to hastily assemble online materials at short notice, creating stress, but also their opportunities to interact with their school friends. For many people, the friends they make at school remain friends throughout their lives, providing support and solace, sharing in joys and other momentous moments. Being unable to attend school robs children of these opportunities to form lasting friendships. This is especially problematic for children who commenced their schooling in 2020, and who have experienced two years of disrupted schooling. It is also a problem for students who are completing their education and whose final year of schooling is crucial for gaining university entry into their chosen field of study. The constant stopping and starting of school has adversely affected

¹⁰⁵ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (London: Collins, 1974).

¹⁰⁶ Tahlea Aualiitia, and Dong Xing, "Sydney's Multicultural Communities Have Mixed Views on Lockdown – While Some Back the Measures, Others Fear They Target Migrants," *ABC News*, July 15, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-07-15/sydney-community-members-react-to-latest-covid-tactics/100292930>.

the ability for children to learn and led to high levels of anxiety and in a sizeable number of children various forms of mental illness.

Education, despite what seems to be a neo-liberal consensus, is not just about the acquisition of skills and capacities which will enable school graduates to be employed, but also about socialisation, the formation of character and the development of spiritual and moral virtues. As embodied beings the online environment does not provide the kind of opportunities for human interaction that the school environment is able to provide. Pupils cannot be attentive to each other if they are not wholly present to each other. It is possible to interact with each other online, and see and hear the other person on screen, but such a presence is vastly different from being bodily present. Since human beings are social creatures, learning to apprehend moods and emotions is an important skill, but this is not possible without the ability to actually read the bodily cues that people give when they are talking to others. Socialisation requires children to be able to apprehend when they are upsetting someone, to know if another is sad, happy or angry. They need to learn to respect one another and to be aware that others may not feel or think the same way that they do. This is hardly possible if they do not have the chance to be together for an extended time in an environment where they can interact together. Learning to cooperate with each other, to learn that they are not the centre of the universe and that what it is that they desire is not the most important thing in the world are lessons that require being bodily present to each other. Bodily presence is necessary so that children can interact and relate to each other, learning to deal with their emotions and navigating personal relationships with others. Although sight and hearing are generally thought to be the most important of the five senses that human beings possess, a strong case can be made for the pre-eminence of touch. This is because the sense of touch is experienced over the whole body, with the hands, feet and lips being particularly sensitive. It is the sense which enables us to experience spatiality, and to feel the world around our bodies. Through a caress, we can experience love, a touch on the shoulder, sympathy, or through a slap someone's anger. Its absence from the lives of children (as well as adults) is crippling for the development and maintenance of healthy human relationships. Online interactions while allowing for visual and auditory presence do not allow human beings to be present to each other as fully as bodily presence does and so educationally are poor substitutes for the classroom.

Of the five sense organs, touch is the one which is most immediately missed in online learning, and as we have argued

contributes more to learning than is immediately apparent. While organs of smell and taste do not seem to be as involved in the learning process as sight and hearing, nevertheless, being bodily present in the classroom enables the deployment of all five senses. Smell and taste are not usually extensively engaged in the learning process, but do have their place, even if only incidentally. In chemistry, for example, the sense of smell is important in detecting the presence of various organic chemicals, such as aldehydes and ketones, while taste is important in cookery classes. After sight and hearing, touch is the next most important sense, and its absence in online learning contributes significantly to the attenuated and unsatisfactory experience that often is online learning.

The effect of constant lockdowns has had a devastating economic effect on small businesses such as cafes, restaurants, small retail outlets, and other small service providers who have been unable to conduct their businesses during lockdown. Financial help was provided by the Australian Federal government in 2020, via a program called Job Keeper,¹⁰⁷ this program ended in March 2021 and its benefits did not flow to sole traders, but those businesses who had employees who could not work because of the lockdowns. In any case, the provision of financial support addressed only one of the effects of the Covid pandemic. Together with financial uncertainty, bad enough in itself, has been the effect on the mental well-being on small business owners who have invested their energies into their businesses. Many are not only facing financial ruin, but also the shattering of their hopes and dreams through no fault of their own. The effect on self-esteem and sense of self-worth has been equally devastating. Moreover, it is not possible to plan for the future if lockdowns are announced randomly and with little warning whenever a new Covid case occurs. Victoria, for example, has experienced six lockdowns, of varying duration, over the past year and a half, with over 200 days being spent in lockdown. Building a client base and planning for the future is not possible if there is no certainty. It is not surprising that there are high levels of anxiety and stress among small business operators, especially those who are providing services that cannot be replaced by online delivery.

For the most part, throughout the duration of the pandemic, government employees have been secure in their jobs and unaffected by the uncertainties faced by many of those employed in the private sector, small businesses and as sole traders. Decisions

¹⁰⁷ "Jobkeeper Payment," Australian Government. The Treasury, accessed August 21, 2021, <https://treasury.gov.au/coronavirus/jobkeeper>.

concerning the severity of restrictions and what services can continue to operate as the government tries to suppress outbreaks of the virus are made by bureaucrats who are in permanent employment and who have little experience or understanding of the impact on the lives of those affected by their decisions. Bureaucrats seemingly fail to understand that behind the statistics that they are fond of quoting to support their decisions to severely restrict the movement of people in the state and to close schools and businesses, are people whose lives are being destroyed. For example, for small business owners, mortgages are still required to be paid, families fed and clothed, children home-schooled when the schools are closed. Even if some financial relief is provided, generally this will not be sufficient, and unpredictable intermittent lockdowns do not allow for any kind of planning. It is small wonder that there is a significant rise in mental illness. Government, intent on suppressing the virus, fail to see the terrible effects of their chosen strategy in the fight against the virus.

Although people have been wearily compliant in observing the restrictions imposed during the lockdowns and those that continue to be in place, such as the continuing requirement to wear masks in indoor venues, save in restaurants which can provide proper distancing of diners, there is a disturbing trend for the government to use the police force and the army to help enforce its restrictions. This is most in evidence in the enforcement of border closures between states, and the requirement that individuals have permission to travel. The enforcement of lockdowns in, for instance, high rise apartments, is undertaken by police. Protests against lockdowns are met with an overwhelming display of force, with police sometimes exceeding the number of protestors.¹⁰⁸ It raises the question of who the police are meant to be protecting, and whether such displays of state power against its own citizens are necessary. The rising number of people attending such protests

¹⁰⁸ The most recent protest in Melbourne was held on 21st August, 2021. It was estimated that there were 4,000 protestors and there were violent clashes with police. See, Rachael Dexter, Cassandra Morgan, and Tom Cowie, "Six Police Officers Hospitalised, More Than 200 Arrested in Melbourne Anti-lockdown Protests," *The Age*, August 21, 2021, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/ridiculous-police-warn-protesters-ahead-of-anti-lockdown-rally-in-melbourne-20210821-p58kp1.html>.

Similar protests were also held in Sydney and in Brisbane on the same day. See, "Covid: Australian Police Clash with Anti-lockdown Protestors," BBC News, accessed August 22, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-58291873>.

could be because of rising mental fatigue at the number and length of lockdowns, as well as an inchoate sense of alarm at the loss of basic freedoms during the pandemic.

Vaccinations, Anti-vaxxers and Permits

Vaccination roll-out in Australia has been slow, though with the two biggest states, Victoria and New South Wales, largely locked down, and the Federal government aiming to reach 70-80% of the population vaccinated by December 2021, the number of Australians who have received at least one dose of one of the vaccines, Astra-Zeneca (renamed Vaxzevria and recommended for those over 60) or Pfizer, has been climbing. To date, some 46.6% of Australians over age 16 have had their first dose of Covid vaccine, while 25% over age 16 are fully vaccinated. Amongst the most vulnerable group, the over 70 age group, 82.5% have received their first dose and 50.9% are fully vaccinated.¹⁰⁹ It would seem that the government's target for this group at least will be reached in due course. The challenge will be for all age groups to meet the target.

One of the reasons for the slow up-take of the vaccines has been the adverse publicity that the Astra-Zeneca (Vaxzevria) vaccine, developed by the University of Oxford, has received because of the number of people who have suffered blood clots as a result of taking the vaccine. Though the numbers are very small, and there is more likelihood of death from car accidents, the media has highlighted each death in such a way that it seems that the number of deaths is much higher than statistics indicate. In Australia, 6 deaths have occurred that have been due to blood clots attributed to the vaccine, out of a total 6.1 million doses administered.¹¹⁰ The likelihood of blood clots is greater in younger age groups, those below the age of 60, which is why the vaccine has been recommended for use in those over 60. Nevertheless, looked at dispassionately, the risks of fatal blood clots are low. According to the Australian government statistics, the number of road fatalities per 100,000 inhabitants is 4.8, whereas deaths from Vaxzevria

¹⁰⁹ Scott Morrison, "National Cabinet Statement. Prime Minister of Australia," Media Statement, accessed August 16, 2021, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/national-cabinet-statement-51>.

¹¹⁰ Michael Woodley, "Two More Deaths Linked to the Astra-Zeneca Vaccine," *NewsGP*, July 22, 2021, <https://www1.racgp.org.au/newsgp/clinical/two-more-deaths-linked-to-astrazeneca-vaccine>.

blood clots is only 0.1 deaths per 100,000 inhabitants.¹¹¹ Despite these statistics, many people put off having the Vaxzevria vaccine in the hope that they might be able to have the Pfizer vaccine instead, which has fewer side-effects. Only belatedly, as a result of multiple lockdowns, have people come to the realisation that being vaccinated against the virus is prudent.

Government campaigns to encourage vaccination have oscillated between a saccharine appeal to communal solidarity to threats. An example of the first kind of appeal to solidarity is an advertisement expressing the sentiment, “we are all in this together,” with images of smiling celebrities with band aids (plasters) across their upper arms indicating that they have had their vaccinations and encouraging the rest of the community of laggards to get theirs. There is also a faint hint of a failure to do one’s patriotic duty if one does not get vaccinated. Such advertisements are far removed from reality, as illustrated by the fake band aids over the site of the vaccination injection. Unless the injection is utterly botched, there is no need for a band aid over the injection site. The fakery of the advertisement is hardly likely to encourage anyone to get vaccinated. There is also some inane virtue signaling by people proclaiming their vaccinated status on social media. Of a more sinister turn to authoritarianism are threats by the government to continue lockdowns and make them even more draconian if citizens fail to comply with restrictions and fail to get vaccinated.

As vaccinations are rolled out, there is debate about whether vaccination should be compulsory and whether it should be mandated for those who are front line health workers who may be vulnerable to infection, since they are tending to those who have the virus. At present, there is no government policy in relation to this, and hospitals and medical centers are left to make their own decisions. The ethical issue with making vaccinations compulsory revolves around the bodily autonomy of individuals and whether the government is justified in forcibly injecting people with a vaccine. There is no doubt that from a utilitarian perspective, ensuring that as far as possible all people are vaccinated is justified, since vaccination of, say, 90% or more of the population will mean little transmission of the virus. Thus, it can be argued that compulsory vaccination is for the greater good. On the other hand, taking respect for the autonomy of the individual as an inviolable principle would mean that compulsory vaccination is morally wrong because

¹¹¹“Road Statistics,” Australian Government, accessed August 16, 2021, <https://www.bitre.gov.au/statistics/safety>.

it is coercion, even if it results in more people contracting the Covid virus. It should be noted that no country makes influenza vaccination compulsory, even though large numbers of people around the world die from the influenza virus. Nevertheless, some companies have already stated that vaccination for employees against Covid is mandatory, if they wish to continue to work for the company.¹¹²

Other governments have been much quicker in making vaccination a condition for permitting people to leave their homes than has any of the state governments in Australia.¹¹³ Vaccination certificates, similar to those introduced in other countries, are also being considered, but not so much as a means of facilitating interstate and international travel, but as a punitive measure. Those who are unvaccinated will not be able to leave their homes nor work. In effect, they will become prisoners in their own homes, as well as second class citizens since their right to freedom of movement has been taken away. Though there is some discussion about whether vaccination should be mandatory, the proposal to restrict the unvaccinated from participating in ordinary life has the effect of compelling unvaccinated people to get vaccinated. While it is too difficult to tell whether there is majority support for compelling citizens to be vaccinated, the signs seem to indicate that opinion is tending towards compulsory vaccination.

There is, at least in Australia, and particularly in Victoria, a steady erosion of freedom for the ordinary citizen. Over the duration of the pandemic, it has become increasingly evident that

¹¹² For instance, on 4 August, 2021, SPC, a Shepparton food processing company, mandated vaccination against Covid for all employees.

Madelaine Morris, "Shepparton Food Processor SPC is the First Company in Australia to Mandate Covid-19 Vaccination for All Staff," *ABC News Breakfast*, August 5, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-05/spc-first-australia-company-to-mandate-covid-vaccine-staff/100351492>.

Another company, QANTAS, the Australian airline, has also mandated Covid-19 vaccination for all its employees.

Nick Bonyhady, "By Law, Employers can Issue 'Reasonable' Directions to Workers. Will a Compulsory Covid Jab Qualify?" *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 17, 2021, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/by-law-employers-can-issue-reasonable-directions-to-workers-will-a-compulsory-covid-jab-qualify-20210817-p58jfu.html>. Other companies are considering following the same path.

¹¹³ For example, France has already passed laws requiring a Covid pass for entry to restaurants and for travel. "French Parliament Approves Law Requiring Covid Pass for Restaurants, Travel," Associated Press, accessed August 21, 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20210725-french-parliament-approves-law-requiring-restaurant-covid-pass-vaccine-rules>.

state governments are seizing the opportunity to become more authoritarian and seeking to usurp the Federal government. Though the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, established a National cabinet consisting of himself, the six state premiers and the chief ministers of the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory, to help develop a consistent national policy on tackling the pandemic, there is cooperation only if it suits a particular state's sectional interests. The state premiers act as though they are the heads of their own independent countries, repeatedly blaming the federal government for various administrative failures, while accepting no responsibility themselves. Borders are locked down without consultation, cutting off parts of the country from other parts. Travel from one part of the country requires a permit, which one state may give and another withhold. Cooperation between states is often lacking, since each state guards its territory as if it is facing an invasion from the Covid infected people from neighbouring states. The lack of a single decision-making body has resulted in a number of tragedies, for example, where individuals have not been able to visit their dying parents.¹¹⁴ Bureaucrats seem to prefer a rigid application of the letter of the law, rather than risking the use of common sense, resulting in decision-making which violates human dignity by unnecessarily restricting freedom of movement when compassion is required.

Much of the problem could be ascribed to the Lilliputian abilities of the politicians and bureaucrats in charge of the states. State politics in Australia cannot be described as attracting the best and brightest minds. While a similar charge might be levelled at federal politics, it is far worse at the state level. With the possible exception of the NSW state premier, Gladys Berejiklian, the rest are mediocre, and the more mediocre the greater the resort to authoritarian edicts directed at controlling their citizens. This is not surprising, since the pandemic situation is complex, with many variables to be taken into account in decision-making about how to handle outbreaks of the virus. Listening to health advice, as some premiers are wont to do (and say they do), is only one part of the picture, there are economic considerations to be taken into account, as well as the social, mental and spiritual aspects of human life.

¹¹⁴ Some tragedies have occurred as a result of divided jurisdiction in which more than one state is processing applications for movement from one part of the country to another. Felicity Caldwell, "QLD Premier Says NSW Responsible for Man not Being by Dying Mum's Side," *Brisbane Times*, July 8, 2021, <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/qld-premier-says-nsw-responsible-for-man-not-being-by-dying-mum-s-side-20210708-p587xw.html>.

These are routinely ignored, as premiers, such as Daniel Andrews and Mark McGowan, pursue an unrealistic policy of zero Covid community transmissions.¹¹⁵

The demonisation of those who do not wish to be vaccinated is a very concerning trend, as is the idea that vaccination should be compulsory. It is consistent, however, with the ceding of individual freedoms to the government in exchange for being kept healthy, safe and secure. This is consistent with growing interference of government in people's private lives. Political correctness, supported by government, tries to control what people think, while government advertising tries to influence what people eat and drink. The conditions for making vaccination against Covid compulsory are already in place, since the community has already allowed the government to take away various freedoms in order to contain the spread of the Covid virus. Once vaccination is made compulsory, it is a short step to making healthy diets compulsory, to prohibiting the consumption of alcohol (except for no more than one standard drink per day to a maximum of five per week), and to enforcing mandatory morning exercise for everyone.¹¹⁶ That is, once the government seizes power over the health of individuals in one area, there is no logical reason why it cannot seize it in others. Individuals become slaves to the state, as they have yielded their autonomous decision-making over their own health to the state. Once decision-making in one area has been ceded to the state, a precedent is established for the further erosion of liberty in other areas. These are already in evidence. With border closures preventing Australians from travelling from one state to another, freedom of movement is restricted. More worryingly, with lockdowns restricting movement to a maximum of 5 kilometers from home, freedom of movement is even more constrained within states and cities. Curfews, of dubious support in preventing the spread of the virus, are also imposed. Restrictions on religious worship,

¹¹⁵ The Western Australian premier, Mark McGowan, who in the last election virtually wiped out the opposition parties, has declared he wants to eradicate Covid entirely from Western Australia. This is achievable if he can isolate Western Australia completely from the rest of the world.

Peter Law, "Mark McGowan Holds Tough Zero Covid Stance Even When WA Reaches 80 per cent Vaccination Coverage," *The West Australian*, August 15, 2021, <https://thewest.com.au/news/coronavirus/mark-mcgowan-holds-tough-zero-covid-stance-even-when-wa-reaches-80-per-cent-vaccination-coverage-ng-b881969246z>.

¹¹⁶ There is already an extensive literature which discusses the refusal of health care treatment of people who are overweight, smoke and who have made other poor life style choices resulting in poor health.

weddings and funerals, erode freedom of religion, a process already underway in a society hostile to religion. The Covid pandemic has provided a golden opportunity to accelerate this trend.¹¹⁷

A Concluding Note

Given that we are seemingly still in the midst of the pandemic, it is too early to be able to draw any conclusions about the trajectory of the virus. Neither is it possible to make any predictions about how governments will proceed in the face of new strains of the virus, re-infections and the effect that lockdowns, restrictions of various kinds are having on their populations. We have suggested that some dangerous trends have appeared in the way in which the state governments in Australia have handled the pandemic. These, with the complicity of a citizenry too willing to accept the edicts of state leaders, are leading to steady erosion of freedoms that most democracies have taken for granted. The same, unfortunately, is also the case in other countries though Victoria and Australia more generally have led the way in imposing stringent lockdowns that take away essential freedoms from their citizens. Having given up these freedoms because of the urgent need to prevent the rapid spread of the virus, as has been contended by governments following so-called health advice, citizens of different states and countries are justified in having some fear that these freedoms will not be returned. The longer the virus persists as a serious illness that can cause the death of a percentage of the population, state leaders will continue to argue for a continuation of the emergency powers that they have invoked during the pandemic.

In Australia in particular, state premiers having been largely irrelevant for so long find themselves in a position to reassert themselves and to exercise real power over the citizens of their states in defiance of the Federal government. This has been demonstrated over and over again where decisions agreed by the National Cabinet (comprising the premiers of the states, chief ministers of the two territories and the Prime Minister) are subsequently ignored by premiers.¹¹⁸ The only reason for this is

¹¹⁷ In the major cities, Melbourne and Sydney, churches are closed and no religious services can be conducted. Live streaming of services, however, is permitted, but this is a poor substitute for face to face attendance.

¹¹⁸ Sarah Martin, "Morrison Facing State Resistance Over Re-opening Plan as NSW Covid Crisis Worsens," *The Guardian*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/aug/23/morrison-facing-state-resistance-over-reopening-plan-as-nsw-covid-crisis-worsens>.

that defying the Federal government enhances the reputation of premiers in their states as tough and looking after state interests. This does no harm to their re-election chances. It does, however, a great deal of harm to the economic, social and mental health of their citizens and is utterly irresponsible and morally bankrupt. The most recent events suggest that the Prime Minister is willing to override the states in relation to lockdowns once the target of 70-80% of the population being vaccinated is reached. This target is expected to be reached by December 2021. The Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has also suggested that the pursuit of zero cases of Covid-19 is misguided and that Australians will need to live with the virus, if the country is to open up to international trade and travel once more.¹¹⁹ Remaining a hermit kingdom is simply not an option. It remains to be seen whether states will relinquish their coercive powers once the target number of vaccinations in the population is reached.

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¹¹⁹ Jake Evans, "Prime Minister Says that the Country Must Prepare for More Covid Cases and an End to Lockdowns," *ABC News*, August 23, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-23/covid-prime-minister-vaccination-lockdowns-must-end/100398686>.

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**Compassion in Times of Crisis.
The Best Expression of Intercultural Concern.
Reflections for Covid Times.**

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Abstract

In a crisis situation, people try to tap every bit of resource available for mere survival: economic, psychological, cultural. Even when the first two run short, the last rushes to help as a last resort: the cultural heritage of every community. Cultural convictions play a greater role in human decisions and social processes than individual choices and personal preferences. Intellectuals with a sense of responsibility do a great service to humanity when they try to stimulate a community's cultural sensitivity and strengthen its cultural convictions with regard to values that repeatedly stood with humanity in its most challenging times, and which are urgently needed in these difficult days. One such value is *compassion*.

Keywords: Compassion, Anger-Reduction, Intercultural Concern, Covid, Pandemic.

The Pandemic has Stirred the Sense of Compassion in Humanity

“Man is only a reed, the weakest thing in nature” (Blaise Pascal).

According to Francis Fukuyama, the driving force of recent history had been the assertion of identities by Minority Communities, weaker groups and small ethnicities. However, of late, the trend is on the reverse: today, dominant communities seek to affirm their identities, seeking recognition and pressing for their rights. For example, Samuel Huntington's *What Are We* presents the *identity-concern* of traditional Americans. Trump was the very incarnation of that concern with his 'America first' call. Populist parties of majority communities are gaining support worldwide over the same issue. Who are we? Who are we as Americans or British, Indians or Chinese?

But all of a sudden, the question has changed under pressure from Covid-19. In a moment or crisis, we are pressed hard to ask to a deeper question. Who are we as human beings? Man is only a 'breath', the answer comes from Blaise Pascal, a 17th century scientist and a thinker, "... a vapour, a drop of water is enough to kill him."¹²⁰ Man is only a reed, the weakest thing in nature, but he is a *thinking reed*, a reed with self-awareness, and to that extent infinitely precious even if most of the time, his self-awareness remains a mere dormant potentiality." It is often a crisis that awakens this potentiality, especially when it stirs *compassion* in the hearts of individuals and stimulates the sense of co-belonging and solidarity in communities, so that humanity shapes its ultimate destiny together. Different though we are in culture, we make one family, compassion brings us together.

Thus, with the eruption of Coronavirus, a *sense of solidarity* has been stimulated. Compassion has been stirred. China reached out with vaccine and masks to other countries. India offered assistance to South Asian nations. Many nations rushed to the help of India herself when she was in need. Western nations cooperated with each other and reached out to poorer countries. Vaccine production picked up pace. There was ready sharing of competences and skills. Compassion for each other stood out visible in a fragmented world.

Compassion: Humanity's Sturdiest Cultural Asset

"Oh men, direct your energies to promote the good of all mankind" (Rig Veda 8,49,4).

In an emergency situation, people try to tap every bit of resource available for mere survival: economic, psychological, cultural. Even when the first two run short, the last rushes to help as a last resort: the cultural heritage of every community. Anthropologists say that *cultural convictions* play a greater role in human decisions and social processes than individual choices and personal preferences. Intellectuals with a sense of responsibility do a great service to humanity when they try to stimulate a community's cultural sensitivity and strengthen its cultural convictions with regard to values that repeatedly stood with humanity in its most challenging times, and which are urgently needed in these difficult days. One such value is *Compassion*.

¹²⁰ Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. A. Kailshimer (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 347.

Thinking groups can join hands together with people of similar civilizational/cultural background for reflecting more deeply on their *respective cultural heritages*. In doing so, they are in fact assisting society to rescue certain core values, of which humanity itself is becoming forgetful of and negligent. A deeper search is the need of the day. For example, it is only in a moment of *deeper reflection* that we realize that being singularly selfish is self-defeating. “Self-interest, self-rights and self-preservation involve and are even advanced by self-sacrifice, self-discipline and self-giving.”¹²¹

It is in this context that Samuel Fleischacker, in his *The Ethics of Culture*, urges that communities of diverse cultural backgrounds bring together their collective wisdom and cultural assets from time to time in a common search for light and guidance in a society that is unperceptively losing their links with their cultural roots and ethical moorings. Pretentious philosophers and uprooted social scientists have attempted from time to time to develop cold social codes for their society, but these never succeeded to replace lived social values and ethical traditions derived from centuries old heritages.

Fleischacker feels that Enlightenment thinkers had despised the local cultural norms and traditional practices proper of various ethnic groups or regions in their eagerness to impose a well thought out moral philosophy. In consequence, several cherished *cultural values* and helpful ethical norms got lost. He says, “The enlightenment taught us to seek moral principles by way of philosophy, to abandon the provinciality and arbitrariness of cultural and religious traditions in favour of a universal theory of human nature. But over time we have found that philosophical theories have little to say about real ethical problems.” On the contrary, anthropologists have always argued that *culture is the source of all ethical beliefs and practices*. Philosophical musings tend to remain ethereal and distant. Cultures, on the contrary, give life, energy and relevance to values. Day-to-day guidance of inherited cultural norms is necessary for any community to continue to exist and function.¹²²

¹²¹ John Dalla Costa, *The Ethical Imperative* (Addison-Wesley: Reading, 1998), 105.

¹²² Samuel Fleischacker, *The Ethics of Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), ix-x.

Compassion Central to All Cultures and Civilizations, especially Those of Asia

*“I consider it my only duty to promote the welfare of all men”
(An inner conviction of Emperor Ashoka 268-232 BC).*

Ultimately, we need to admit that the *moral authority inherent in a society* no one else can substitute. It is a community that fosters, promotes and sustains a value system that meets with acceptability among its members. The authority of a community alone touches hearts and convinces minds.

We have referred to the *value of compassion* which is the greatest human need in times of crisis. It is a value deeply planted in the heart of all communities and cultures. Emperor Ashoka in this way, “I consider it my duty to promote the welfare of all mankind” (Rock Edict 6). Even if in this paper I make more references to Asian sources, this is an area where people of all cultural backgrounds and religious traditions can meet, dialogue, and share ideas and experiences together in order to construct a common future. Influenced by these teachings, many inspiring figures in recent history, like Mahatma Gandhi, have shown preference for a gentle approach to even the most complex problems.

Traditional cultures are most eloquent. Expressions like *Jen* in Chinese referring to goodness, and *Shu* meaning altruism, are powerful reminders of our obligation to cultivate such qualities. Human strength is derived from these virtues. *Tao Te Ching* 22 teaches that when one is *loving*, one can be strong. The ancient wisdom of Indians too says, “Oh men, direct your energies to *promote the good of all mankind*. Let your relations with all be characterized by love, *peace and harmony*. Let your hearts beat in unison with human hearts” (*Rig Veda* 8,49,4). For, the Koran II says, “All people are a single nation.”

The Message of Compassion Should be Brought to Daily Lives

“Let every hand give comfort to all living things and let it be the giver of health to the whole mankind” (Rig Veda 10-137-7).

Compassion should not be identified with condescending love nor be associated with a patronising attitude. It rather finds best expression in a *radical commitment to the welfare of the natural order, society* and humanity as a whole. It does not remain in theory; it reaches out to concrete situations, disturbed conditions, public places, intellectual centres, discussion halls, policy-shaping assemblies; to situations of tension, conflict, and of international aggressiveness; to the streets and to the slums, forgotten attics and

collapsing huts, and for the benefit of the weak and the weary and the rest of humanity.

If the spread of Coronavirus has given rise to a crisis, similar crises have risen repeatedly in human history whenever the ambitions of decision-makers and power-wielders collided. And this has been happening in our times too in various ways, manifesting diverse faces. The less privileged in society have become the greater victims. In such situations, while there is a possibility of indifference on the part of those in safer positions, there is also a spontaneous urge towards sentiments of love, *kindness*, and mercy, prompting acts of *compassion* in behalf of fellow-beings who suffer. It also suggests initiatives that will eliminate the possibility of such things happening again, by influencing public opinion and through the formation of groups that are able to propose an alternative approach to problems.

Unfortunately, there is a Compassion-Fatigue in the World Today

"It is never too late to give up your prejudices" (David Henry Thoreau).

We often speak about 'global warming' in relationship to climate-change. The fact is that there is a 'global cooling' of human relationships in the world today. *Compassion is weakening* in a market-dominated society. Vaccine nationalism was only a pointer. Some speak of the return of the 'ice age', cold and detached relationships, due to a changed style of life and work, new technologies pinning people's *attention on 'things'* (quick returns, prompt profits, success, achievements), *not on persons*; weakening of family bonds; individuals working away from homes and their cultural roots; weakening of values; fragmentation of the mind and superficiality of interests in an economy-dominated society; accelerated pace of life. Communications with each other have become hurried and *impersonal*. Profit and efficiency are considered more important than warmth and companionship. Relationship with family members and friends have turned matter of fact and businesslike.

In addition, there is a *compassion-fatigue* rising out of growing indifference to human pain. Violence so dominates the news every day that we have become *de-sensitized to human suffering*. Society is no more shocked even by the worst human tragedy. In such an atmosphere, it is difficult for people to maintain themselves in compassion. They grow indifferent and insensitive. There is unconcern, *lack of commitment and of compassion* even among good people.

Reasons for Tension may be Diverse, a Dialogue Can be Initiated

“He who holds back rising anger, like a rolling chariot, him I call a real driver; other people are but holding the reins” (Dhammapada 17).

Busy with economic initiatives and fierce competition, people learn to *harden their hearts*. And this indifference in society creates a free space for *violence to spread* in different forms: race against race, ethnic/religious group against ethnic/religious group, majority against minority and vice versa. Violence may be in the name of religion, ethnicity, nationality, territory, political rights, human rights, or social justice. Buddha, in his times, was shocked when he saw people going “along the banks of the Ganges striking, laying waste, mutilating and commanding others to mutilate, oppressing and commanding others to oppress” (*Digha Nikaya* 1,52). In all these conflicts, the strong usually have their way. And those who feel that they are unjustly treated take to violence in response.

Even though many of these conflicts are far beyond the reach of ordinary citizens, they can certainly take certain initiatives to address local tensions. Those who have experience in conflict-resolution insist that the first thing to do is to work towards *bringing down the anger*. So, rather than become judgmental, they give every aggrieved group a hearing. They study the history of each grievance contextually and with sympathy and search for answers together with concerned communities. Gradually a *dialogue can be initiated* with the parties in conflict in collaboration with people of good will of all traditions. Similar efforts can be made for bigger problems at other levels according to the measure of one’s social or political influence.

Cultural Differences Not Handled Sensitively Can Lead to Tensions

“Colour is a fact. Race is a social construct,”¹²³ strengthened by prejudices.

Inter-community problems have been growing in many multicultural nations in the world. Minorities have been making their voices heard even in advanced countries when they feel their interests are not attended to by the majority community, e.g., the

¹²³ Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste. The Lies That Divide Us* (New Delhi: Allen Lane, 2020), 67.

Basques in Spain, Welsh in the UK, Quebecois in Canada, African Americans in the US, Dalits in India. Wrong handling of *ethnic grievances* has often led to major conflicts, as it happened between the Hutus and the Tutsis in Africa. We hear of unease between the Dutch and the French speaking people in Belgium from time to time. Meanwhile Uzbeks have been fleeing Kyrgyzstan due to ethnic tensions. Something similar happened to the Armenians in Syria some time ago. There are frequent tensions between different ethnic groups in India, with over 4000 distinct communities and at least 42 political parties.

Such incidents in different parts of the world reveal the *power of ethnicity* and the *centrality of culture* in inter-community relationships in a multicultural society and the political life of a nation. There are not many countries in the world that do not have to deal with tensions related to ethnic and cultural differences. As the world becomes more and more multicultural, a deeper reflection on this issue has become necessary. Jonathan Sacks says, today we are able to see resurgent tribalism (exclusivism) as the greatest danger in our fragmented world.¹²⁴

Ethnicity defines for a community what it holds as most precious: its identity. For every community their own identity and culture are unique. They constitute the *ground for their selfhood*, collective existence, and for their ultimate destiny. That is why anthropologists consider self-affirmation of communities as something healthy, even necessary. We should not look at this phenomenon negatively. It provides the energy that a community needs for its very survival and self-enhancement. It serves a psycho-social purpose ensuring solidarity within the community in times of danger and motivation towards common goals. Compassion in this context will mean respecting the cultural identity of another community and showing concern for their interests.

Difficulties of Migrants in Places Where They Work

“If we believe absurdities, we shall commit atrocities”
(Voltaire).

People are on the move today. As job-seekers from rural areas rush to cities in search of employment, large numbers from Asia, Africa and Latin America have been moving into the US and EU for the same reason. Similarly, the number of migrant-workers from East Europe working in the West has increased. Over 3% of

¹²⁴ Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (London: Continuum, 2003), 47.

the population of the world is already *living in another country*, and over 60% of the migrants are living in the developed world.¹²⁵ Though there was an initial welcome for migrants during the post-War period for reasons of shortage of workers, the atmosphere changed considerably after the financial crisis of 2008 and more especially due to the intensification of migration during the political crisis in the Middle East in 2015. Some were, in fact, refugees.

Meantime, the *self-assertion* of the so-called '*sons of soil*' in many countries has been growing stronger day after day. They receive support from Right Wing parties which too have been gathering strength over the years. We ought to understand and respect the feelings of indigenous communities, especially as they experience threats to their jobs and fear for their culture. Their rights should be made secure. But at the same time, the human rights of migrants cannot be ignored.

Social observers foresee that this inter-mixing of people of diverse cultures, social habits, and religious faiths, is only going to intensify in this globalized world. There are no simple answers to all problems that may arise. All people of compassion and good will must come forward to help people in their need. In addition, every community has a right to be proud of their collective self and their *cultural heritage*. If they feel that their ethnic, cultural or historic identity is undervalued or threatened, and that their economic, cultural or religious rights are violated, they can become restive. If mutual relationships are not carefully handled, there can be instances of violence.

It is before these challenges that the present-day society seems to have broken down, clinging helplessly to one exaggeration or the other, with no *bridge-builders* between cultures and interests and with no agents of dialogue and reflection. We need *culture-translators* today, people who can explain the cultural meanings of one community to the other. There is a French saying, to *understand is to forgive*, to accept. Peace comes on the day when people understand that they need each other, they need each other's stock of energies, creative talents, cultural strengths, human resources, acquired skills and accumulated knowledge. Those who can make their respective societies see this are the greatest benefactors of humanity. But unfortunately, this is not what happens today. Populist leaders seek to confront each other; they provoke each other.

¹²⁵Milena Santerini, *Intercultura* (Brescia: Editrice La Scuola, 2003), 51.

Unfairness in One Direction Invites Unfairness in the Other

“When a man hurts you, and you turn back to hurt him, that would not cure the first injury; it would only create in the world one more wickedness” (Buddha).

History tells us that fighters produce fighters, till all turn fighters. This is equally true of *trade war*, *gun battle*, and *street fight*. After all, most societies passed through the stages not only of being hunters and gatherers, but also of being invaders, marauders, intruders, and crusaders. That instinct is still with human beings. They do not need too much of provocation to get it ablaze. Christopher Dawson says that in Homer’s world *all were fighters*: only knights, retainers, princes, and pirates; no citizens, priests or merchants.¹²⁶ The possibility of such a scenario re-emerging on the world stage is not impossible to visualize.

An over-emphasis on one’s rights can lead to troubles. When members of a community move into the field absolutely conscious only of their own rights, but *not educated enough about others’ rights*, about the limits to their own rights, a dignified way of affirming their rights, and a persuasive way of regaining lost rights, they are certainly hurting their long-term interests. It is not an *intelligent approach* to problems. Compassion vanishes from the world scene. We are in danger of making that happen. With the deadliest weapons around, “In the future no one wins a war,” says Brock Chisholm. It is the duty of alert citizens to suggest creative ways towards the solution of these problems and bring the message of compassion into actual life situations.

The Sharp Edges of the ‘Market’ Need to Be Blunted

The idea that egotism is the basis of the general welfare is the principle on which competitive society has been built (Erich Fromm).

In this area of civic responsibility what we notice is an abominable failure. *Aggressiveness of the market* competes with aggressiveness of arms. Egocentric lust for money and power dominates the world scene. Every sense of compassion is suppressed even as it makes the first move. Therefore, heroes/heroines of concern for others are falling in number, as *workaholic billionaires* accumulate wealth day after day. The ambition of these new heroes

¹²⁶ Christopher Dawson, *Dynamics of World History* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2002), 158.

is to wipe out their business competitors, with the result that fewer and fewer people come to own higher and higher proportion of the national/global wealth. For example, between 1980 and 2016 the richest 0.1% Americans saw their incomes quadruple.¹²⁷ The popular fashion is to applaud the so-called “wealth-creators.” Gene Sperling protests; she says, economic growth by itself should never be considered the ultimate goal for economic policy. Its value lies in the degree it serves what is most precious in people’s lives.¹²⁸

But unfortunately, the wars for colonies of the previous centuries have been replaced by wars for the domination of World Market. The vocabulary of profit-making and fortune-hunting fascinate the younger generations. All efforts for progress and development have come to be described only in terms of *adversarial relationships*, ruptures and discontinuities; not of collaboration, common endeavor and sharing of ideas, heritages and resources. That is why we are moving from one crisis to another. Mariana Mazzucato insists that value creation is a collective effort, every section of human society and every sphere of human activity co-shaping and co-creating markets, and playing an active role in contributing to its endeavor.¹²⁹ Those who forget this truth will have to pay the price, if not today, tomorrow. Companies that “exploit their workers, degrade the environment, deceive the consumer, and create a waste culture, will perhaps gain in the short term,” but lose out later.¹³⁰

The Mission of Anger-Reduction

“Here in this world anger is never pacified by anger. By non-anger is anger pacified. This is the ancient law” (Dhammapada 1,5).

Tensions can arise in any situation of clashing interests in the world. It can rise sky-high. In a particular situation, violence may have erupted and gone beyond control. And yet, a *compromise is possible*. Even stubborn opponents can come together after a serious conflict and emerge from the vicious circle into which they have been caught: rough words, harsh replies, violent action, and violence in return. Anger flares up and retaliation takes a new

¹²⁷ Heather Boushey, *Unbound* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2019), 5.

¹²⁸ Gene Sperling, *Economic Dignity* (New York: Penguin Press, 2020), 5.

¹²⁹ M. Mazzucato, *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2018), 280.

¹³⁰ Piero Ferrucci, *The Power of Kindness* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 13.

shape, whether it be in Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar, or in other situations of violence.

Every citizen can make his/her own contribution to bring balance into discussions and relationships between persons, communities or nations caught in a conflict situation. Sensitive persons make an effort to build up a creative opinion that seeks to bring a measure of '*anger-reduction*' in the community as the first step towards smoother negotiations. It is for this that we need to tap the cultural heritage of *compassion* deeply implanted in our cultures.

Working for anger-reduction has become a mission by itself. Centuries ago, Buddha said, "Never in this world will hatred cease by hatred ... hatred is ceased by love." It will only be after anger is reduced that we will succeed in bringing logic into discussion, good sense into conversation, persuasive skills into discussions, and fairness into conclusions. Regional or national conflicts, clash of economic interests, ethnic or ideological collisions, will call for *higher levels of thought* than those generated by immediate interests. Compassionate considerations that invite a deeper sense of justice and surer forms of mutual solidarity must be invoked. This pedagogy and approach will prove valid, whether it be a small family quarrel of simple people or a major war involving many nations. A *pedagogy of persuasion* is the only way forward.

Forgiveness for Historic Injuries

"He abused me, he beat me, he defeated me, he robbed me"—in those who do not harbour such thoughts hatred will cease (Dhammada 4).

It can happen that anger accumulates over the years and is handed down from one generation to another: hurtful emotions connected with national humiliations, defeats, historic injuries received centuries ago, remain fresh in *collective memory* as though they happened only the other day. These are the negative assets, deficit capital of a society, of a religious community, ethnic group, and sovereign states. What are remembered most as biased accounts. Most historians claim to be avoiding a communitarian bias and ethnocentricity, but rarely succeed in doing so.¹³¹ Unconsciously they remain close to their national or civilizational perspective, handing on collective prejudices and negative memories to the next generations. Dormant anger built on such

¹³¹ Jack Goody, *The Theft of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4.

memories can explode any day. The *Chinese or the Koreans* may remember the Japanese occupation of their territory, African Americans and colonial countries the hardships they suffered at the hands of their colonial masters. Such memories can be deliberately kept alive; but they can also be consciously set aside.

M. J. Akbar tells us how for the Muslims, the rapid advance of early Islam is a matter of great pride. It entered India in the same year, 711, that it entered Spain.¹³² As its pride thrives on its historic achievements, its anger feeds on the memory of the battles lost: their capture of Constantinople in 1453 or their *defeat at Lepanto in 1517*.¹³³ The destruction the Twin Towers in 2001 has something to do with the accumulated anger built around these or other similar humiliations. We hear of such expressions of anger that keep recurring from time to time in different parts of the world.

But healing can be brought even to historic memories. As Japanese Prime Ministers have apologized to China and Korea, Tony Blair *apologized to Ireland* for the Irish famine. The rebuilding of Europe under the Marshal Plan helped a great deal to bring healing to western memories after World War II. Barack Obama and Shinzo Abe visited Hiroshima together to cry together “Never again!”. Creative people look for creative ways of expressing *mutual forgiveness*. Mahatma Gandhi did this in his own unique way after each inter-religious clash in his country.

In any case, ultimately *forgiveness and healing* must come into the streets, into byways and side-lanes, into market places and worship places, into homes and hearts! All the accumulated energies spent on hate-filled ruminations and thoughts of revenge among people, can be directed to life-saving and prosperity-promoting activities in future. Should not people of various cultural traditions engage themselves in dialogue in view of these possibilities? Compassion must become the cornerstone of justice.

There was a great Emperor in India who in his young days was all set on world conquest. History tells us how he led a mighty army against the Kalingas (Odisha) and killed a 100,000 people and led a bigger number into exile. But then, the instinct for *compassion*, caught up with him. He was filled with *deep remorse* and was converted to a philosophy of non-violence (*Ahimsa*). His name was Ashoka (269-232 BC).

¹³² M.J. Akbar, *The Shade of Swords* (New Delhi: Roli Books, 2002), 146.

¹³³ Andrew Wheatcroft, *Infidels* (New York: Random House, 2004), xxx.

He gave up his ambition to conquer the world by means of arms. He developed another strategy: one of *conquest by dharma* (goodness, uprightness). He felt, this manner of conquest would give satisfaction to victors and vanquished alike. He encouraged the spirit of *happy relationships and dialogue* among differing religious groups and cultural traditions in his empire. He became a totally dedicated person, asking that reports about the welfare of the people to be brought to him at all hours of the day wherever he was, even if he was at his meals or in bed. “I consider it my only duty to *promote the welfare of all men...* . There is verily no duty which is more important to me than promoting the welfare of all men” (*Ashoka’s Rock Edict 6*). It was Ashoka who sent out Buddhist missionaries all over Asia.

Bringing Compassion to the Highest Levels of Planning, e.g. to Arms Race.

“*Violence is suicide*” (*Mahatma Gandhi*).

Compassion can be brought to the highest levels of political and economic planning: for example, in the context of the world today, to situations of Arms Race between neighbouring countries, to border disputes, and murderous competition. The biggest arms producers in the world today are in the developed world. Arms sales have become one of their chief sources of income. Unfortunately, this trade itself has been moving into irresponsible hands in many countries with the privatisation of arms manufacturing. Weapons move also into the hands of sales agents and distribution teams that *lack any sense of social responsibility and transparency* ... and reach armed militias, insurgent groups¹³⁴ and totalitarian regimes. Does compassion have a say in any of these matters?

What is more alarming is that democratic governments themselves seem to be sliding into the hands of corporate giants who contribute to their elections. This is truly worrying. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse quotes Trevor Potter, the former Chairman of US Election Commission, “More and more citizens felt that government had become a tool of campaign contributors rather than responsive to average voters.”¹³⁵ While these deviations in political trends in major democracies are not within the reach of every citizen, everyone can do something to set society thinking.

¹³⁴ Andrew Feinstein, *The Shadow World: Inside the Global Arms Trade* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), xxiii.

¹³⁵ Sheldon Whitehouse, *Captured* (New York: The New Press, 2019), 21.

Everything begins in a citizen's mind: an *attitude of concern for others*, for other communities, other nations, other societies ... invoking one's own stock of compassion and building up determination. In a democracy, everyone's opinion counts, whether spoken or written. "Words have wings," said Homer centuries ago (*Iliad I.1.201*). Thus, every citizen can develop a political opinion that seeks to set politics of one's own country in order and to develop policies that favour international peace and healthy relationship among peoples. It sets in motion processes of conversation, dialogue, discussion, and debate, which ultimately influences decision-making. In this manner, compassion can be brought even to the highest levels.

Some creative thinking may be good, asking how *compassion* and balanced thinking may be taken to places like the Universities where ideas are generated, Legislatures where policies are shaped, the Media where information is shared; the Market place where the livelihood of ordinary people is generated ... always sparing a thought for the poor, the weak, and the environment.

Compassionate to Nature

"All nature, oh my heart, is your fellow-creature" (Iqbal).

Today everybody will agree that *compassion* is due not only to fellow-human beings; it is due to every element in nature as well. Asian sages were highly sensitive to the needs of *all living things* and to all other elements in nature. In modern times, human society has lost something of that sensitivity. The products of technology and supermarkets have made people's life easier, faster, more efficient, but also colder and harsher: harsher to weaker cultures and traditions; harsher to life in its multiple forms, harsher to nature in its diverse existences. And yet *human life depends on nature*; human beings are nourished and nurtured by nature. Apart from it, they would be reduced to nothing. All their impressive achievements would be mere empty show. Theodore Roosevelt used to look at the *stars and galaxies* to remind himself how small he was even though he headed the mightiest nation in the world.

Centuries ago, Jain sages had taught, "A wise man should not act sinfully toward the earth, nor cause others to do so" (Jainism: *Acaranga Sutra* 50). "Reckless men who cut trees down for their pleasure destroy many living beings. By destroying plants...a careless man does harm to his own soul" (Jainism: *Sutrakritanga I.7.9*). Emperor Ashoka, to whom we referred earlier, forbade the destruction of forests. The Muslim poet Iqbal sang, "All nature, oh my heart, is your fellow-creature." And Rabindranath

Tagore, “I asked the tree, speak to me about God. And it blossomed.” *Compassion* towards nature is an area of most relevant dialogue in modern times. If we do not respect nature, we poison ourselves.

Bring Compassion to Leadership in Society

“There is a way to get the people; get their hearts and the people are won over” (Mencius).

Mahatma Gandhi’s teaching about having a milder approach to most complex political problems has impressed the world. What he was doing was fully in keeping with the most ancient traditions of Asia. That is why he was able to command millions. Confucius used to say, “If you are *kind*, then you will be able to command others” (*Analects 17.6*). And he himself, a great teacher, showed how he intended to be kind, “If even a simple peasant comes in all sincerity and asks me a question, I am ready to thrash the matter out, with all its pros and cons, to the very end” (*Analects IX,7*).

It is something admirable to have the capacity to *understand other people’s feelings* and their points of view and have *empathy* for them, even when we disagree. We need to step out of ourselves and enter into other people’s lives with understanding in situations of conflict. That is *compassion*. That sort of relationships nourishes the life of communities. It is absolutely needed for promoting collaboration and preserving *social cohesion*. Vivekananda, an Indian thinker, used to say that the sole aim of his life was to stop mutual wrangling, to teach universal truths, to *bring all people together*, so that they might love one another and work in peace for their common good. In this sort of generosity, the giver himself becomes a beneficiary. The more the sage “gives to people, the more he has” (*Tao Te Ching 81*).

If Kindness Helps You, It Helps Others Close to You

“You do yourself a favour when you are kind” (Prov 11:17).

If kind leaders bring blessings to their followers, warm-hearted parents ensure physical wellbeing to the children they nurture. Recent researches show that people whose *parents were warm, patient* and affectionate have lower incidence of ulcers, alcoholism, heart disease; the opposite group manifest opposite conditions. Human warmth is expressed in diverse ways: a smile, a brief chat, a pat on the back, or a wave, these and such things are extremely powerful in creating a sense of belonging. In search of this *sense of belonging*, young people seek affiliation even in the

most radical groups and armed outfits in difficult situations. These are issues over which an intelligent dialogue among people of diverse traditions would be useful.

Piero Ferrucci says, being kind to others and being kind to ourselves is the same thing. It is strange: the more we promote others' interests, freedom, happiness, wellbeing, the more we promote ours.¹³⁶ Compassion confers unforeseen blessings. Modern medical sciences confirm that this is true: that kind people are healthier and live longer, are *more popular and productive*, have greater success in business and lead happier lives than others. This is because thoughts of human beings influence each cell in their body, affect blood pressure and the blood flow, nourishing every organ and every faculty. They ought to remember more than anything else that they are internally so 'designed' as to be caring, empathic, and open to others. That is why they find it a pleasure to help, and that is why their constitution benefits, because *they are born to be kind* and compassionate. They will sleep more easily and wake more cheerfully because when they love people. Other people will love them; external dangers will not harm them. Their faces will be radiant and mind serene. They will be able to serve humanity.

Compassion in the World of Intellectuals

"Kindness in words creates confidence. Kindness in thinking creates profoundness. Kindness in giving creates love" (Lao Tzu).

Last of all, let us come to the world of intellectuals: being good to others in their case means paying respectful attention to the studied opinions of other savants. For example, Amartya Sen's *The Idea of Justice* points out how much injustice has taken place in recent history in the name of justice, because the contending groups did not have the ability to *respect each other's' point of view*. The Nobel Prize winner, asks that such matters be subjected to what he calls "*Public Reasoning*." When opinions of intellectuals differ, mutual respect and eagerness to look at things from another person's point of view will open the door to further understanding of the issue.

Compassion here makes an entry under a new garb: *deference to others' considered opinions*. Thus, Sen urges a scholar to recognise that another scholar's theory may be equally impartial,

¹³⁶ Piero Ferrucci, *The Power of Kindness*, 274.

fair, unbiased, and dispassionate,¹³⁷ that he/she may have additional information¹³⁸ and may be guided by competing principles with equal validity, and may be looking at the same facts from another perspective.¹³⁹ In addition to all these, they must recognise that people of other cultures and other continents may be viewing the same issue through their own cultural categories.¹⁴⁰ Respect for cultures is as important as respect for other scholars' opinions.

On the one hand, people feel that cultures and values are dying out; on the other, there is hope. Values proposed by centuries-old cultures cannot die out totally. For example, compassion clings to us even when we act against it. So, the cultural energies that are under intense pressure from global materialism will show their strength as need arises. Covid-19 has drawn forth what is best in all of us. For, *cultures have an inner sturdiness* of their own. What is important is to avoid all sorts of fanaticisms constructed around cultures and exclusive attitudes. "Made up of history and experience, memory and expectation, cultures have their resiliency."¹⁴¹

They teach us compassion, and *compassion is here to remain*. It will save us not only from Coronavirus, but from every divisive trend in human society.

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¹³⁷ Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (London: Allen Lane & Penguin Random House, 2009), 57.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 409.

¹⁴¹ John Dalla Costa, *The Ethical Imperative*, 220.

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Time of Covid. Fear, Weakness, Uncertainty in the African Experience.

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Abstract

The time of Covid is characterised not only by fear, weakness, and uncertainty but also by how different societies and individual persons in the world have faced these challenges, the lessons the people have learnt from past similar issues and lessons for future concerns and possibilities. The pandemic which erupted in Wuhan, China, was controlled by the Chinese people at a similar speed with which it had erupted. Two storied makeshift hospitals, one with 1,000 beds and the other with 1,500 beds were constructed in the record time the world will live to remember. The way the country is organised also helped, but the economic muscle and the technological advancement were vital in stopping the spread of the pandemic. These measures were reassuring (*Quod issti et istae, cur non ego?*). Thus, elsewhere, particularly in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and North Africa the virus spread like fire, but the quick response from American leadership, WHO, other world leaders and organisations gave hope to humanity. The spread of the virus was found to be through people's movements, mainly air traffic, thus leading to the border closures and countries' lockdowns. This phobophobia exacerbates the fear created by closedowns. People who could not travel home were left in fear and helpless in foreign locked down countries. Introduced measures of quarantining people for two weeks created more fear. Curtailing movements affected the people's comfort zones and means of livelihood, thus creating more uncertainty and fear. At individual level, fear, weakness, and uncertainty are increased by the non-performing institutions.

Keywords: Covid, Pandemic, Awareness, Psychological Disposition, Fear, Weakness, Uncertainty, Collective Memory, Quarantine, Phobophobia, Colonisation.

Introduction

The sudden appearance of COVID-19, its quick spread, strange attacks, and slow but sometimes quick deaths have locked the world under fear and exposed the world's weakness and uncertainty. In this paper, I examine these phenomena and the subsequent changes in the world, focusing on the fear that the pandemic has spread in Africa, including my four-fold personal direct experiences with the pandemic. Then, I delve into the reactions to the pandemic, mainly of governments, particularly the novelty of the enigmatic lockdowns. In certain countries, people's movements were stopped in order to manage the pandemic and its spread. Such and similar measures have affected people and societies. I take special interest in the fear that the sudden measures have brought to urban dwellers, who depend on markets for food. Similar fear is shared by the sick, many of whom have helplessly died in their houses. Some pregnant women have delivered without medical assistance. Others have lost their lives. The fear haunting the pregnant – awaiting their turn, and aware of little improvement in the facilities – is inconceivable. I examine the fear brought about by the uncertain future. Any society secures its future by educating the young. The pandemic has made the educational system totally confused, unpredictable, and unreliable. I look into the plight of the future society with people able to study abroad, others studying online, and the majority locked up in their houses where even listening to a radio is an unaffordable luxury. I focus on the predicament of the naturally free people now forced to look at each other's' face till hatred intervenes. I pay special attention to the families that depend on a bread earner, now locked up where they cannot reach him or her, and then the domestic violence that has ensued in many families due to the pandemic.

While these and more occurrences may be shared by all people all over the world, I single out Africa whose status in this world is special. The racism that grew in Europe, directed against Blacks, Jews, and Roma, or Gypsies, ended up being seriously suffered by Africans in America, Africa, and other parts of the world. Clear documentary evidence shows how Blacks have been lynched, hanged, shot, poisoned, sentenced to death, tortured to death and murdered in many other ways simply because of their skin color. In this paper, therefore, I look at how the bad relationships are made worse by COVID-19.

Regardless of the COVID-19 great scare, Africa is relatively calm. In order to explain this calmness, I discuss the African

quandary of the untold suffering through which people became traumatised and the extraordinary faith that keeps them afloat. I once listened to a misguided racist argue that Africans have nothing except God. I have listened to some similarly wrong views that Africans embrace modern religious life for material and monetary benefits, wondering why many are Franciscans, how many own merge churches, among other questions. The explanation for African religiosity is the transcendentalism that is far beyond material and monetary values. The complexity of the world views within which Africans understand life and live, the holistic approach to life, the belief systems that define human relations and life style, the unshakeable human values that defy temptations of material and monetary values, among other aspects of traditional life, and how they sustain people's hopes amidst challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic.

This leads me to the discussion of the erosion of the fundamentals of life, like values, at the hands of philosophers, like Nietzsche and non-philosophers, like Max Weber. Other philosophers, like Kant, regard Mind as the sole explanation of everything. This has led to Constructionism, according to which everything, including life itself, is a human construct. Existentialism and similar philosophical positions that reduce life to meaninglessness have thrown human beings into an unfathomable abyss where anxiety, fear and anguish have no solace. When COVID-19 attacks such people without hope in Divine intervention or life after death, sheer despair reigns.

The Pandemic Outbreak

The first outbreak of COVID-19 was reported in Hubei, China. The first case of the disease was reported in Wuhan on 31st December, 2019. COVID-19, therefore, means corona virus disease of 2019. On January 5, 2020 WHO issued a statement that 5 days earlier they had been informed of cases of pneumonia of unknown cause detected in Wuhan, Hubei province. On 23.01.2020 authorities sealed off Wuhan, a city of 11 million people. By then, transmission from person to person had been confirmed. On 30.01.2020, WHO declared a public health emergency of international concern. China had already reported 9,692 cases and 213 deaths. 20% of the patients were seriously ill. On 11. 2020, WHO announced the official name of the novel disease: COVID-19. The disease had been detected in 20 other countries, but majority patients were in China. By 27th March, 2020, the pandemic was reported to have spread to 177 countries, Europe being the

epicenter.¹⁴² The disease was compared to the previous severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS-COVID-2), and speculations were that it would ebb with warm weather. This made people believe that hot countries, like Africa, would be spared. Data from COVID-19 Data Repository of the Johns Hopkins Center for Systems Science and Engineering, Biltmore, MD, USA, was used to plot the cumulative number of cases since the diagnosis of both the first patient and the first 5 patients by country, both in Europe and Africa. At the time of writing this paper, end of October, 2021, 05 million deaths have been reported, but it is widely believed that the real numbers could be thrice as many. Either way, this is the biggest number of deaths caused by a pandemic and it has not yet ended.

General Fear and Panic Due to COVID-19

COVID-19 is highly contagious. It is caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome. Its symptoms included fever, cough, headache, fatigue, breathing difficulties, and loss of smell and taste. The symptoms begin from one to fourteen days after the exposure. The unable to breathe victims, reported through mass-media, left the world quaking. Respirators, too, and the patients' struggle for life underneath them looked dreadful. But, even more dreadful to majority people in the world was the idea of respirators' availability, let alone affordability, and the general treatment. The disease was everywhere, but not everywhere could it be managed. Many live at the mercy of nature, but COVID-19 had to be managed or else sure death was waiting around the corner. The best example of COVID-19 management was China which built 2 new hospitals within 10 days and isolated other places to deal with the pandemic. On 03.02.2020, a 1,000-bed hospital was ready, and yet another one, of 1,500 beds, was also ready on 08.03.2020, after only 5 days. 40 other hospitals and 16 make shifts were set apart to fight the virus war. On 10.03.2020 President Xi of China declared that the disease had been "basically curbed." While different medical measures throughout the world had been taken, the fear could not be conquered. The continued scary aspect of the disease was its being asymptomatic. In medicine, any disease is classified as asymptomatic if a patient tests as carrier of a disease or infection but experiences no symptoms. This clinical silence is very dangerous for the spread of the disease unknowingly. Its realisation

¹⁴² E. Dong, H. Du, and L. Gardner, "An Interactive web-based dashboard to track COVID-19 in real times," *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 20, no. 5 (2020): 533-534, [https://www.doi.org/10.1016/51473-3099\(20\)30120-1](https://www.doi.org/10.1016/51473-3099(20)30120-1).

became a big source of fear of COVID-19. No one could be sure of anyone else. This was mainly true of travelers. Couples that had not met over a period were forced to quarantine before they reunited.

Central and Western Africa

In West Africa, the first confirmed case came later than the one in Europe, but once confirmed, numbers expanded fast. The particular concern was Burkina Faso and Senegal where the rates were similar to those in Italy and Spain. In Senegal, the first 3 cases of community transmission were confirmed on 21.03. By 27.03, they had shot up to 119.

West Africa, generally, was prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic by the 2014 Ebola pandemic, but the poverty factor is of special significance. Despite the rich natural resources, most West African countries have fewer than 05 hospital beds per 10,000 of the population and fewer than 02 medical doctors per 10,000 of the population.¹⁴³ Half of all the West African countries have per capita health expenditures of less than 50 USA dollars.¹⁴⁴ This may be contrasted to Italy and Spain with 34 and 35 hospital beds, respectively, per 10,000 of the population, 41 medical doctors per 10,000 of the population, and 2840 and 2506 US dollars, respectively, per capita expenditure.

West Africa has a young population assumed not to be susceptible to COVID-19. However, rates of other risk factors are similar to those in Europe, e.g., 27% of Gambians have hypertension and 06% have diabetes. Rather than the climate, the reason for COVID-19 starting later in West Africa is generally believed to be the limited international air traffic.

Northern Africa

The idea of international air traffic could be corroborated by Northern Africa. The Maghreb is more globally connected than Africa South of the Sahara. Besides being connected to Western and Asian countries, the Maghreb is part of the Arab world. There are also more intra-flights within the Maghreb than the rest of Africa. The COVID -19 cases in countries like Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco were, right from the beginning, comparable to those in Europe and the Middle East. There were stories of some North

¹⁴³ “Global Health Observatory,” WHO, accessed July 1, 2021, <https://www.who.int/data/gho>.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Africans working in China having returned for Christmas holidays already infected. However, the flights among them and between them and both the Middle East and Europe could be a more plausible explanation of the fast circulation of the pandemic. Reporters tend to combine Northern Africa and Middle East Countries in their Covid-19 reports. For example, on 17th March, 2021, new cases were reported to be 9,535 in Jordan, 766 in Tunisia, and 466 in Morocco.

Eastern and Southern Africa

When COVID-19 invaded the world, one of the quick reactions was searching for a vaccine. Jean-Paul Mira, a French researcher, made a racist statement: “If I can be provocative, shouldn’t we be doing this study in Africa, where there are no masks, no treatments, no resuscitation?” He compared this to some AIDS studies, “In prostitutes, we try things because we know that they are highly exposed and that they do not protect themselves.”

When a COVID-19 vaccine trial was based at the University of Witwatersrand, Shabir Madhi, Professor of Vaccinology, and leader of the New COVID-19 vaccine trial in South Africa stated, “It is important that vaccines be tested in Africa to see how they perform in the local context.”¹⁴⁵ In reacting to this, and similar ideas and utterances, Phapano Rasha, the protest organiser against the University of Witwatersrand vaccine trials had this to say, “The narrative we get is that our continent is a dumping ground. First ensure it works elsewhere before bringing it to Africa.”¹⁴⁶

Fear of COVID-19 in Africa

The protest organised by Phapano Rasha was, clearly, out of fear. Fear of COVID-19 in Africa, like anywhere else, is caused, mainly, by stories about the manner in which the virus kills. In the global village, the stories are corroborated by scary scenes in Bergamo, North Italy. They become real and tangible. One vividly sees hospitals full of the infected. Mortuaries teeming with dead bodies. Burials being replaced with burning bodies. In Brazil, bodies lie out there with no one to bury or burn them. In India they burn bodies till they run out of fire wood. Leading countries like USA, UK, and mainland Europe, this time, lead in infections and deaths.

¹⁴⁵ Cara Anna, “Protest against Africa’s 1st Covid-19 vaccine test shows fear,” accessed July 1, 2021, <https://pulitzercenter.org/people/cara-anna>.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Then the idea sinks. What is going to happen to dry wood? Who will be there for me, when the time comes? The alarming speed of attack – you are with someone who is not complaining about anything – within no time he cannot breathe and dies. The invisibility of the virus scares most. How can you be sure it is not you, next? How can you be sure of whoever you meet? Unrealistic ideas, such as keeping a distance, become ridiculous. They sound like a rude joke in congested places where people squeeze together in tiny spaces, without an alternative. If they walk away from each other during the day, what happens at night? Where do they go to sleep? Washing hands and sanitising, too, sound strange. Water and soap are not available to all. What are sanitisers? And, if you clean your hands, who cleans the air? Wearing a mask is a farfetched luxury, too. No wonder many think COVID-19 is fake news till it catches up with them.

Fear in Africa is not only part of life but is also multi-dimensional. COVID-19 is an added item. Unlike the rest of the world, Africans, everywhere, endure untold suffering and brutality. They have cause to live in fear. The racism that started in Europe ended up turning whites into being worse than beasts against their fellow human beings simply because they were of a different color. Through lynching¹⁴⁷ alone, according to Tuskegee, 4,743 black people were killed between 1881 and 1968. Tuskegee, in Macon County, Alabama was founded in 1833 by General Thomas Simpson Woodward, a Greek war veteran under Andrew Jackson, and made the County seat that year. It was incorporated in 1843. In 1881 Tuskegee College for the Blacks was founded and on 4th July, Booker T. Washington became its first black Principle. Today, it is a university for 100% minority groups, mainly Blacks with some Asians. While statistics based there tell us about the past, today we see those shot on a daily basis, even knelt on the neck till they cannot breathe and die. Vivid Movements like Black Lives Matter are in vogue. When COVID-19 erupted, there were stories of neglected Africans, even in hospitals, till they died. There were also stories of deliberately smearing the virus on the door lock knobs to infect whoever opened the door. More heinous acts included abandoning black patients till they died, including a doctor who had saved other people's life. It was due to such open racist attitude that

¹⁴⁷ Lynchings were violent public acts that white people used to terrorize and control black people in the 19th and 20th centuries. They entailed hangings from trees, torture, mutilation, decapitation, desecration, burning alive in celebration of white supremacy.

many doubted the origin of COVID-19, questioned the genuineness of the vaccine, and feared both.

It is important to note that there was, and still is, a vigorous campaign against allegations to reduce the world population. Campaigns against the COVID-19 vaccination claim that the infusion is not intended to protect but to kill. Many thinkers, regardless of country of origin, faith, and any other differences have vehemently argued against the COVID-19 vaccination. They have also argued that COVID-19 itself is man-made. There is a master plan and hidden agenda, similar to HIV-AIDS. Naturally, these have instilled fear and delivered weakness, uncertainty, anxiety.

As a result, in Africa, the scare was not taken lightly. Rasha, who organised the protest against the vaccine trials at the University of Witwatersrand trials, could have demanded that those interested in the vaccine first ensure the vaccine works elsewhere before bringing it to Africa due to the Guinea pig idea. However, the protest could also have been out of fear that the whole exercise was intended to kill the innocent and unsuspecting people.

In Eastern Africa, the late President Magufuri of Tanzania, a Chemist, seriously doubted COVID-19. He went ahead to organise the testing of a variety of things, including animals, birds, and plants and, surprisingly, some were found to be positive and others negative. Yet others produced undecided results. How a fruit like a pawpaw could test positive with COVID-19 was a big puzzle. Tanzania rejected the virus saga. There have not been any statistics of the infected, the cured, and the dead from that country, although neighboring countries, like Uganda, claim to have had COVID-19 cases from the country. Some deaths also have been reported there, and protective measures are practiced, but not as rigorously as in neighboring countries like Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. Burundi, too, is relaxed.

These various national responses to COVID-19 remain at the level of ideology. An ideology is a belief system that underpins a political or economic theory. Ideologies form the operating principles for running a society. However, fear is personal. Whenever there is an alarming situation, people become anxious. Anxiety feelings are natural, but stress can exacerbate the feelings. Although one can feel anxious without anxiety, being anxious is different from the occasional worries and can lead to a mental illness. I narrowly escaped such anxiety when the epidemic erupted. We had successfully completed our international conference at Wuhan, where I had delivered a key-note speech. It had been a pleasure meeting academics from all over the world, and students, including three from home. I enjoyed the company and the

encouraging reactions to my presentation. Before flying back, a young Chinese, who was part of the organising team, offered to take some of us around Wuhan.

The original target was the great museum, but the lines were too long. He then took us to the famous market. I have not seen a bigger one elsewhere. Seeing streams of people alone is captivating enough. The shops and all manner of goods cannot be exhaustively toured in one visit. I admired the order all around, bought traditional tea and some souvenirs before returning to the hotel, where vehicles to take us to the airport were lining up. No sooner had I arrived home than the terrible news about COVID-19 in Wuhan went viral. This was the very place where I had just been. The market – the allegedly real source of the virus – was where I bought the things still parked in my bags. Was I safe? I reflected on the matter and decided not to share my anxiety with anyone. How could I be sure I would not be quarantined, if the scared people learnt about what I could have brought along? If I was scared of myself, what about them? But, hiding the ‘truth’ would not save me, anyway, let alone those I would infect. The wisest thing was to keep quiet, but keep a distance from others. The information I had carefully followed revealed that within two weeks one would know one’s fate. I followed mass-media daily reports and watched out for symptoms. Even when I saw none, I was not sure till I joined my family in Europe where the usual general examination revealed nothing to worry about. Before then, however, I had suffered the ordeal of a 14-day quarantine before I could greet my family. But this was nothing in comparison with a later experience that I regard as the worst. It has left an indissoluble mark on me. This was the closure of borders just after I had crossed from Uganda to neighboring Kenya. There was no money on my bank account and I could not return home.

I always use this personal experience to ponder the plight of helpless people. When we are overwhelmed by fear of the unknown, we feel as if we are groping in the dark where anything can happen anytime. We can easily fall in the pit we do not see, or bang something. Ironically, even when there is nothing at all, we do not know, and so remain tensed up. It is no wonder, therefore that the COVID-19 scare has resulted into mental health issues. People are not only anxious about falling sick and dying, but also about the future which is threatened by disruption of institutions, systems. In order to stop, or at least, control the spread of the pandemic, specific areas, or even whole countries have been shut down. This has affected important areas like the economy. In a society, people depend on one another. One’s work facilitates the work of the

others. This intertwinement can be exemplified by transport which facilitates all movements. But transport relies on stations for fuel and garages for mechanics. Schools and institutions of higher learning need transport. Employees need such transport to get to their places of work and back home. All these need materials for their work. Those who supply goods need transport. Tourism and other forms of tax base need transport. All these converge at eating and drinking places together with places of relaxing entertainment. COVID-19 has defied the traditional belief that no man is an island. Everyone is isolated from everyone else. Restrictions range from national boundaries to regions, districts, till families and social distances of mere meters.

The worst fear of COVID-19 is not only the mysterious nature of the virus, the strange way it attacks, and the speed at which it kills, but also its sudden appearance and quick spread. It is due to these factors that governments were forced to enforce the lockdowns that made all public activities shut down. These sudden changes are a real scare. Due to the changes, people's means of livelihood dwindle and slow down, slowly but steadily, till society tilts to a halt. The people, mainly in urban areas, who depend on market places as sources of food are bound to starve to death, unless special intervention takes place. The sick cannot access medical services. Pregnant women deliver without assistance. It is difficult to comprehend the fear experienced by such desperate people. The educational system becomes chaotic. The same society ends up being divided into the facilitated who continue studying either abroad or through online learning and those who forget all about school. Social relations change or even sour. Some families have one bread earner who moves from home to home with assistance. The pandemic imprisons such a person in one place, thus causing untold suffering and anxiety. But those who stick together are not free of conflicts. The African idea that *omujumbi gutasyaire gurugamu ninkwosya*, i.e., when heavy rains that curtail people's movements take long to stop, the huddled together peaceful people fight. Indeed, unexpected domestic violence, due to the pandemic, has been reported in many places.

The worst hit and the most scared, therefore, appear to be business people, particularly those who secured bank loans to construct buildings and run businesses that have shut down. Some constructed big malls with big bank loans and fully stocked them using more loans. They may not even know the fate of the buildings and their contents, as they are restricted in their homes. Others put up big hotels and expensively equipped them in anticipation of tourists and local revelers that are no longer available. Some, in the

tourism industry, invested in vehicles that can no longer move to take anyone anywhere. Many others invested in education by building schools and other institutions that have become closed and redundant. Recently, videos revealed how of them having been reclaimed by nature. Many of the redundant and unpaid teachers have changed profession, and will no longer go to class. After such a long time at home – without the strict control offered by schools – some students, particularly girls, have succumbed to misconduct. Many pregnancies have been reported, throwing society into panic about the future of these young girls and the baby boom. Certain experiences, or deep thinking can reveal fear, in advance, and lead to fear of this fear. When people attend funerals, or when they see what their neighbors are going through, or when they watch TV, listen to radios, read papers, or even hear rumors, they see their eventual turn and die a hundred times before their death. Some fear the mortuary coldness, forgetting bodies are cold. They fear the soil thrown into the grave. Forgetting the dead are dead. COVID-19 has exacerbated this fear of fear, or phobophobia.

The Most Affected Countries in Africa

The widely held view that COVID-19 was mainly spread through movements like air traffic appears to be true of Northern Africa. By October, 2021 Egypt had 881 new infections and 45 deaths per day, followed by Libya with 520 infections and 16 deaths, then Ethiopia with 480 infections and 19 deaths, South Africa with 408 infections and 45 deaths, and Morocco with 289 infections. The Republic of Congo and Somalia, too, have high rates of infections. Uganda is rated the most successful in controlling COVID-19, but there are complaints about the shutdown that has affected, education, business and the economy, general social life, among other things.

WHO Vaccination Set Target and Its Results

On 25th May, 2021, Jenny Lei Ravelo quoted WHO Director General, Tedros Adhanon Ghebreyesus address to the 74th World Health Assembly, calling upon countries to support a set vaccination push, “I am calling on member states to support a massive push to vaccinate at least 10% of the population of every country by September, and a drive to December to achieve our goal of vaccinating at least 30% by the end of the year.”

The WHO goal of vaccinating 250 million people on four months, 40% of the world population by the end of 2021, and 70% of

the same population by mid-2022 was tried by some countries, but became a problem for others. Part of the problem was Covax falling short of the targets. Only 311 million doses were delivered to about 140 countries. Successful ones included Portugal with 84% of the population vaccinated, followed by Canada with 71%, UK with 67%, and USA with 56%.

By 30th September, however, 50 countries, world-wide, had missed the target. Of these, the surprise was Taiwan, which is wealthy, the delayed delivery program placed the country among those who had not met the! 0% of the population vaccination. The others failed due to the prevailing wars. These include Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Myanmar. In Africa, only 15 out of the 54 countries, met the target. Worse still, half the Continent has less than 02% of its population vaccinated. Even big ones like are lagging behind. Egypt has only about 05% of the population vaccinated, and both Ethiopia and Nigeria have less than 03% of their population vaccinated. Worst of all, Burundi and Eritrea have not yet rolled out the vaccination program.

The 15 successful countries in Africa include Seychelles, 72%, Mauritius, 62%, Morocco, 48%, Tunisia, 28%, Cape Verde, 23%, Comoros, 20%, Eswatini, 18%, Lesotho, 15%, Zimbabwe, 14%, Botswana, 14%, South Africa, 14%, Rwanda, 13%, Mauritania, 12%, Equatorial Guinea, 11%, and Sao Tome and Principe, 11%.

Weakness and Uncertainty

Fear, weakness, and uncertainty are intertwined. One who is weak tends to be uncertain. One who is uncertain is prone to being scared. Weakness can be physical, intellectual, and spiritual. Weak species naturally shy away from strong ones. Once beaten, twice shy. An African saying brings out this very strongly, *okukira aita sho ahungura nyoko*, i.e., someone stronger can kill your father and get married to your mother. But this is not to celebrate brute force. The same African setting cautions the would-be brutes through revenge and avenge successes, such as when the bereaved and forced into marriage woman eventually eliminates the murderer. The woman's endurance and subsequent plotting demonstrate mental and spiritual strength. The eventual execution of the plot demonstrates the weakness of the perceived strong bully. Practically, the combination of fear, weakness and uncertainty can be demonstrated in the act of a coward killing a snake, using a heavy object and all his strength, even when poor reptile is tiny, with eyes closed, and missing the target, destroying objects, like expensive China, as he jumps and dances around, as if the snake is

about to bite him. This type of weakness, uncertainty and fear is a big problem in society. A coward who suspects a neighbor will do anything before the non-existent plot is executed. Coward leaders spare no perceived enemy.

Weakness, uncertainty, and the associated fear can, universally, be demonstrated by death - the equaliser. The African wisdom on this is that *tihabaho omereera*, i.e., no one can live forever. *Tihabaho otumayo ondiyo*, i.e., no one can send *their* someone else. True. Many kills. But when it is their turn to go, they simply go. The pandemic has shown many that this is true. Similar events, particularly WWI and WWII, destroyed life and property. Many were killed and others maimed. Strange diseases, destruction of economies, and other humiliations reduced big and small to desperation. There are life time lessons taught by such episodes as the Canossa Walk during the 1077 Investiture Controversy. If freely climbing those steep steps on one's feet is a scare, one can imagine the ordeal of the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (11.11.1050 – 07.08.1106) on his knees, seeking absolution and the revocation of his excommunication. What would one see if one were to look through the feelings of Pope Gregory VII (Ca. 1015 – 25.05.1085) and Pope Francis? There are also lessons from the humiliating and most fatal pandemic recorded in history, i.e., the Bubonic Plague, Pestilence, or Black Death that killed 75 – 200 million people (1346 – 1353). Like our COVID-19, Black Death affected all members of society. Near Canossa, there is a huge Cathedral with moving historical records like the vanity of an Italian painter who included himself in the Lust Super Painting, the tragic fall of a girl who released doves at Pentecost. Next to it is the place where whoever suffered from Black Death was thrown and locked, as there was no cure and no hope for survival. Food, drink, and the Holy Sacrament were served using a long shovel-like tool to avoid contact. There is a moving story of a member of the royal family contracted the deadly disease and was hidden, till she was surrendered as there was no royal cure.

Despite these life lessons, Nazism emerged in the 1930s, amidst similar fear, disease, uncertainty, suffering, and humiliation brought about by wars. Nazism created the racism that has bedeviled the world. This shows how weakness and uncertainty can lead to falsehoods for fortification, in the absence of true faith in God. I use the idea of fortification here, because I believe that such extremes would not have happened, if the European society still anchored itself in the Supernatural which it had dismissed as superstition. This, I argue, is the biggest source of human weakness and uncertainty. Great lessons include avoiding building on the

sand and investing where there is no moth (Job 4:19, 13:28; Isaiah 50:9, 51:8; Hosea 5:12). These have been neglected to the detriment of individual culprits and society as a whole. Greed for property soon shows anyone that however much you grab, you cannot own everything. Yet, it goes on unabated. Worst of all, you cannot be satisfied. Appearance deceives. The stronger we may appear, due to material things surrounding us, the weaker we really are. This weakness is demonstrated, almost on the daily basis, by multi-billionaires, and similar 'haves', who jump to their death, from the top of their own skyscrapers, while elsewhere, would be negligible riff-raffs happily make love in their, *apparently*, miserable huts. Conceptually, we can visualize the results if the strengths and weaknesses of these two were to be placed on a weighing machine, and if the certainty and the uncertainty, too, were to be weighed.

I have often referred to the case I witnessed at the University of Zurich, that could elaborate on this fortification. I had won a writing scholarship from that University. While I carried out research and wrote my subsequent publication, *African Underdevelopment Root Causes and Lasting Solutions*, part of my contractual duties was to give seminars. At one of these seminars, a participating lady challenged me on the meaning of life in Africa. She had seen many Africans suffer, and, to her surprise, continue living as if the situation were normal. In her own words, she would kill herself immediately, if she were subjected to such humiliation. This is, precisely, what I call weakness, in this argument. The lady went on to ask, what keeps the suffering people living? And the answer is what I call strength. The answer is given by a young girl – a victim of rape – in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The yet to be explained wars in Congo paint a negative picture, not only of the suffering Africa, but also of the silent world community, if at all it exists. There was no doubt that the Zurich lady referred to the rampant rape cases in this Congo televised to the whole world. The strangest part of these rapes is the shooting of the victim, right in the private parts, after the act. There is a general consolation that there is life after rape – which the Zurich lady would not buy – but the shooting, with a wrong gun, is incomprehensible. The relevant message to this discussion emerges from a video in which the doctor, specialised in operating and treating these victims, exposes the heinous acts. The message is delivered by a victim of the ordeal – a young lady – raped and shot but able to face the camera and talk. Her moving, but quite significant words are that the perpetrators of the hell on earth can only kill her body, but not her soul. Such life, built on a rock of faith, is unshakeable.

If death has no sting, nothing else has. This suggests to one a Christian attitude, reminding one of incidents when people have died for their faith, like the Uganda Martyrs. It is important to note, however, that some Christian ideas and tenets took root in Africa fast because of the already existing similar world views, human values, and mind-sets. There are stories of Western Missionaries who resigned and returned home after finding Africa more religious than their Europe that purported to take the true religion to other continents. As regards faith, there is a deep African belief that *akaahangire omutwe niko kagwata*, literally meaning that a head is broken by its creator, i.e., people exist under the Creator's protection. Faith is the real source of confidence of an African. Building on this, many see the hand of God in their continued existence, after so many attempts to wipe them off the earth. God who protected them yesterday cannot sleep, forget, or ignore them. Were they to be at the mercy of fellow human beings, not even one – *for medicine* – would be seen. Only recently, the only people one could see crying openly on TV and other forms of mass-media were Blacks. Today, every one, everywhere, man and woman, young and old cries, sharing his or her anguish with the rest of the world. No one can laugh or cry in the imaginary *black, red, white, or yellow* style. Suffering, just like joy, is felt by all. This rampant and universal fact can no longer be hidden from the public eye. The only thing yet to overwhelmingly go round is affluence.

Existentialism

Human beings, by nature, are inquisitive. They are not satisfied with the is. They ask *What. Who. When. How. Why.* They even get beyond the is to the ought. In the above discussion, life and its meaning are assumed to be settled issues. Elsewhere, however, there are other people who question these assumptions, and, therefore, approach life differently. One of these different approaches ensues from Existentialism. Existentialism is an outlook, or a perspective, on life that pursues the question of the meaning of life or the meaning of existence. One position arrived at through such an inquiry is the belief that through a combination of awareness, free will, and personality, one can construct their own meaning within a world that intrinsically has none of its own. Such constructionism undermines the foundation of the African and Christian meaning of life, i.e., religion, as argued above. Due to some differences among Christians, some Christians also reject religion. Such rejection of religion is nihilism. Nihilism rejects religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless.

Philosophically, nihilism is the belief that nothing in the world has a real existence. It rejects general or fundamental aspects of human existence, such as objective truth, knowledge, morality, values, or meaning. Historically, nihilism arises from nominalism, skepticism, and philosophical pessimism. It was the negation of specific hegemonies of social, moral, political, and aesthetic thought. Politically, nihilism was adopted by an extreme party in 19th century Russia which found nothing to approve of in the established social order.

One can observe that with the removal of the foundation of life, as it were, human beings enter a bottomless existence. The perceived pointlessness of existence or arbitrariness of human principles and social institutions leads to the general mood of despair. Thus, the modernism or scientism that negate religious principles and the subsequent postmodernism represent nihilism. Postmodernism is characterised, by some thinkers, as a nihilistic epoch.

Existential nihilism is the doctrine that life has no intrinsic value and meaning or purpose. Moral nihilism is the rejection of all normative and ethical views. Political nihilism is the rejection of social and political institutions. Epistemological nihilism is the stance that no knowledge can or does exist. Metaphysical nihilism comprises of a number of positions which assert that non-abstract objects do not exist. Mereological nihilism holds that composite objects do not exist, or even that life does not exist. The contemporary understanding of nihilism stems largely from the Nietzschean 'crisis of nihilism', from which is derived the two central aspects, i.e., the destruction of the higher values and the opposition to the affirmation of life.

Africans are realists. Such constructs simply remain in the academic realm and play little role in real life. The Bantu African philosophy has been narrowed down, by some thinkers, to social life. So, to some, it simply refers to communal life. Some others associate it with the wrong idea that we are, therefore, I am. Both views were propounded by non-philosophers, similar to Max Weber. The Western categorisation of Africans into *Bantu* speaking, *Kalenjin*, was based on their ear. For example, they heard a language dominated by 'ntu' and dubbed the speakers 'Bantu'. The reality is that *Bantu* simply means people. All the people in the world, you inclusive, are *Bantu*. But some express more *Buntu* than others. It is the plural of *Muntu*, a person. Buntu is the qualitative form of the two i.e., the value that makes a person a person, the quality of a human being or the 'whatness' of a human being. One can compare this with other terms, e.g., *Mwegyesa*, a teacher, and

Bwegyese, the quality of the teacher. There is a sense in which to be *muntu* does not simply mean to be a person, but to be humane. Having *Buntu* means having or showing compassion or benevolence. Having *Buntu* is interchangeably used as being *Muntu*. Both mean to be civilised. Currently, some people hide their crudeness in the 'doctored' meaning of civilisation as an advanced stage of social and cultural advancement. However, it is hard to detect 'civilisation', or *Buntu* in the mass-destruction-weapons, the broad-day robbery of other people's property, telling lies, and all manner of dishonesty for material and monetary gain.

Buntu has little to do with the misconception that 'I am, therefore, we are'. Africans know that 'I must be before we are'. This was a concoction to demonstrate the perceived difference between African and Western thought, mistaking the Cartesian 'Cogito, ergo sum' to be Western thought. The misconception that spread like fire was that while the Europeans say, 'I am', the Africans say, 'we are'.¹⁴⁸ The perusal of the book, '*African Religions and Philosophy*', reveals that 'philosophy' is in the title, but hardly in the content. The idea of 'African philosophy' to the uncritical is related to the stereotype of 'individualism' and 'communalism'. Otherwise, philosophers are aware that *Cogito, ergo sum* is a well-known specific philosopher's personal position, or conclusion, and not the Western or European idea of individualism. Actually, many have criticised Descartes for this personal conclusion. The conclusion is not cultural view. Non-philosopher Western people may have nothing to with Descartes and his 'I think, therefore, I am'. Philosophers know that '*I think, therefore, I am*' could also be '*I do not know... I dream... I am deceived.... therefore, I am*'. Descartes wanted proof that he 'was', or existed, and that he knew. Perhaps, the current view that life is a 'construct' could shed light on this philosophical argument that has nothing to do with the individualism generalisation that deceived, and still deceives, many. Similarly, the communal idea is not restricted to Africa but is a stage of social development. Everywhere in the world, including the capitalistic West, the communal stage was gone through or still exists. In Africa, today, many are more capitalistic than some Westerners. This leads to a major and loud call to Africa to jealously guard human values. Life in the West has radically changed. The traditionally highly valued elderly people in Africa are of little value, because 'value' is attached to material things. Either you are 'productive' or of no 'value'. Serving or living for things is strange

¹⁴⁸ John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: Heinmann, 1969).

to Africa where, even God is conceived to be at the people's service. Sometimes you do not see the true 'value' of what you have till you have lost it. Africa, stand warned.

Collective Memory

Collective memory refers to how groups remember their past. Free groups are characterised by organising themselves and remembering certain striking events in their lives. For example, WWI and WWII atrocities are remembered by many countries. Similarly, China remembers the intervention and subjugation of the Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China by Western powers and Japan from 1839 to 1949, and call this the Century of Humiliation or the Hundred Years of National Humiliation. Today, Americans remember 11.09. It is in this light that I consider COVID-19 whose occurrence and effects have created a collective memory for the whole world. People are united both either good or bad things. The bad tend to be more memorable due to the fear and uncertainty that strongly engage the mind. Imagination produces constructs that can be globally effective. The constructs concocted elsewhere easily spill over. Africa is connected with the rest of the world through colonial languages. English, French, Portuguese, and Spanish are still very strong on the continent. Science and technology help to globalise things, including the COVID-19 pandemic, making all share how it has affected the whole world: The mass-media communication has become a collective memory, characterised by fear, weakness, uncertainty. According to Susana Araújo,¹⁴⁹ in the globalised world natural, political, and economic disaster together with the words used, the ideas expressed, the images painted and their association with crisis and catastrophes shape a collective memory and imagination.

Similarly, David Leheny¹⁵⁰ shows how global norms are transmitted in Japan by officials in the law enforcement and security fields who seek expanded state powers to target national problems and offer credible solutions. He reveals how broadly accepted global norms against child prostitution and terrorism get transformed by anxiety-ridden Japanese policy makers into powerful weapons used to attack peripheral but vexing domestic demons. His analysis reveals the cultural politics through which

¹⁴⁹ Susana Araújo, Marta Pacheco Pinto and Sandra Bettencourt, eds., *Fear and Fantasy in a Global World* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

¹⁵⁰ David Leheny, *Think Global, Fear Local* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2009).

solutions resonate with and amplify local constructions of threats, anxieties, villains, and scapegoats.

In the globalised world, Africa shares the collective memory of COVID-19 characterised by fear, weakness, uncertainty. However, given the special mistreatment that Africa has been subjected to, the collective memory means more, as certain messages may bear and transmit more or deeper meaning to the Africans than the rest of the world.

Collective Memory, Meaning of Life, and Fear

Collective memory, belief systems, and psychological disposition exist in different categories of people. We live in a world where narrow interests like individualism, selfishness, consumerism, prevail. At a higher level, semblance of unity is similarly narrow. We unite as families, ethnic groups, members of religions and even internal religious groups and sects, clubs, movements, and the like. Narrow personal united groups also include partnerships in businesses enterprises, law firms. At national level we live in ideological belief systems, or operating principles for running society. Thus, people mentalities and attitudes differ depending on ideologies like liberalism, conservatism, socialism, communism, theocracy, agrarianism, totalitarianism, democracy, colonialism, globalism. Furthermore, we live in intergovernmental organisations, or supranationalities whose successes or failures create legacies to be proud of or regret, whose policies and activities impact our lives positively or negatively, and whose behavior makes us feel confident or scared. Beyond regional integration is the international order, UN and International Organisations, one of which has guided our discussion on COVID-19, i.e., WHO. A problem that arises out of this complexity the overwhelming of individuals and their sovereign states. The innumerable international, global or multi-national organisations and groups make the economic system works for some, while others are condemned to poverty. The political system works for some while others grope in the dark. There is real concern, and the handling of the pandemic testify to it. There are calls for global governance, but who will be at the steering wheel, and where to?

These calls are also invited by threats such as infectious diseases –our concern right now, terrorism, new generation of global challenges including climate change, energy security, food and water security, international immigration flow, new technologies, among others. In the case of COVID-19, while many

have questioned the origin of the virus, and vehemently argue against the vaccine, asserting that there is a secret agenda to radically reduce the world population, many others are convinced that the pandemic is real and that vaccination is required to control and contain it. It is these positive thinking people that are of my interest, right now. Successful campaigns, like those of President Biden of USA and Dr. Anthony Fauci, among others, are well documented. Hard work leaders like the 34 member WHO Executive Board, directed by Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, from Eritrea, and chaired by Dr. Patrick Amoth from Kenya are admirable.

However, there are disconcerting issues raised by some African fighters against the pandemic. These include public complaints that concerned African governments raised enough money for the required vaccines but those in charge were not compliant. What is absurd about it all is that some countries produced more vaccines than they could use, and hooded them, while those who could have been saved continued to die. The world is not short of the sad stories about the expiry of the excess vaccines. Some countries have vaccinated their willing people twice and are readying themselves for a booster, while others are still waiting for vaccines to arrive. There were utterances by some world leaders that lack of vaccinations in Africa is a global shame. But mere words add insult to injury.

If, indeed, the virus is airborne, and if everyone is a candidate for its attack, how come some people are vaccinated and others left free to contract the virus and spread it? True, the virus cannot fly anywhere, but one carrying it can. At this juncture, collective memory comes in handy. According to what the world knows, and remembers, about disastrous COVID-19, all should join hands to defeat it. What sense does it make to finish it here, and keep it alive there? Does this contradict or confirm the claims that the virus is man-made for population reduction?

The idea of inconsistency takes us back to global issues. According to Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, and co-founder, along with Robert Keohane, of international relations theory of neoliberalism, ¹⁵¹ globalism is used to describe attempts to understand all the interconnections of the modern world – and to highlight patterns that underlie and explain them. Globalism, therefore, refers to various systems with scope beyond the merely international. We have just seen such systems under global

¹⁵¹ Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977).

governance, supra. The issue is how people can 'understand all the interconnections of the modern world – and highlight patterns that underlie and explain them', if they are fundamentally divided about issues like 'collective memory, life issues, and the fear' engendered by COVID-19.

We began by looking at death as an equaliser, and, indeed, it is. However, it should not unite the people only with the realisation that no one can escape it, but also in the effort to keep it at bay, particularly in times like these, when COVID-19 has come for everyone. I hasten to add that what, actually, unites people is neither their physical, nor their intellectual life – both of which are widely diverse – but their spiritual life, which defines their true essence. Today, the world is concerned about the various ways of looking at things, the needs associated with these things, and the innumerable organisations that have mushroomed. The idea of world governance is mooted as a solution. The world easily forgets that the problem is not the uncontrivable differences – which are bound to ever increase. Neglecting 'Truth' and emphasising 'truths' is the real issue. The explosion of knowledge is bound to bear fruit. People must fail to meet because they face different directions in their new life of 'specialisation'. The only way they can meet is at 'Truth'. This does not, in any way, interfere with the necessary acquisition of 'truths'. There is a dire need for scientific and technological development. There is a dire need for trade and commerce. There is a dire need for material and monetary development. But, any of these without moral values, is total disaster. We may fail to meet at these variations, and we do not need to, but at human values we can and we must converge.

The global order is a human construct that cannot mean the same thing everywhere and to everyone. World governance is following suit. Democracy refers to people organising themselves. Yet, the disorganised call the organised undemocratic. Civility means being considerate of others. Yet the truly uncivilized rubbish the civilised and kick them around. Modernism or scientism has equipped them with means of doing a good job as they display their uncivility. They need to return to the past to pick threads from where they broke ties with civilisation. But their return to the past is sheer concoction – display of lack of material development. Yet, the people are not as polished as their posh structures. They are not as developed as the well-developed environment. They sing human rights, meaning the right to commit suicide. Those scared of sluiced dress-up and calmly go to their slaughter houses, as if going to church. What, to the civilised, is anathema, to them is a must do, the uncivilised people who live in materially developed places and affluence fail to enjoy

the affluence because they are ill-developed, as human beings. This is the tragedy of nihilism. The Western world threw away the treasure of values, thus plunging society into the misery of fear, weakness, and uncertainty. The denial of values by thinkers like F. W. Nietzsche who distinguished between Master and Slave morality, valuing pride, wealth, fame, prestige, and power at the expense of kindness, empathy, compassion, led to rejecting judging actions as good or bad and upholding classical virtues of a noble man against vices of mob. Slave morality is dismissed as judging by the standard of good or evil influence e.g., Christian virtues and vices, and Kant's Deontology. Nietzsche reduced morality to culture, arguing that Slave and Master morality shape language, codes, practices, narratives, and institutions. As all people abhor subjugation and submission. Nietzsche has had great influence on society.

So also has Kantian whose thought makes the human Mind source of everything, thus getting in the way to spirituality and dangerously limiting human beings. In the same vain, Max Weber who could have done better with more philosophical analysis, puts more emphasis on human constructs, like hierarchical order, almighty state, and social science. His uncritical presentation of the protestant ethic lacks the metaphysical muscle it needs to realise that the protestant materialistic attitude stems from their belief in predestination, according to which there is heaven and hell, not either one or the other. There is no choice. No alternative. The die is cast. You can only guess your determined position through God's favors in earthly successes. Material contribution is your only possibility. Personal effort or intercession are ridiculous. Weber's attempt to explain social phenomena in a similar manner that physical sciences had explained natural reality and other approaches undermine Idealism.

We need to note that lack of balanced thought leads to extremes that eventually reflect on society and individual life. This is also evident in the British Empiricism, continental Positivism, among other trends of thought that dismiss speculation as superstition and specialise in narrow methods of thought and practice e.g., systematic analysis and other limitations. Human experience has proved that extremes are dangerous, and need to be corrected. This was realised when the scientific method in vogue could not prove in a laboratory phenomenon like love. Cold water was thrown into the faces of the highly expectant when science and technology produced weapons of mass destruction, among other life-threatening tools. In daily life, people are left agape when medical doctors – experts in saving life – become expert agents of death instead. It is lawyers

who twist the law. Better ones do it better. This anomaly covers all specialisations where technical know-how overshadows human feelings, and obliterates the moral compass. The situation becomes ridiculously worse in areas where even man-made laws do not work. This leads us to the fear and uncertainty created when unscrupulous experts take advantage of the pandemic to cash in, among other types of disconcerting misconduct.

Scandals in the Time of COVID-19

The already referred to cases e.g., the powerful denying the weak access to vaccines, the racial discrimination of the COVID-19 victims, the huge commercial gains made by vaccine manufacturers, handlers, and other beneficiaries, Covax falling short of its targets and, worst of all the really feared alleged hidden agenda to target certain peoples and to reduce world populations are more than sinful and scandalous. This, of course, entails the different types of colonisation that have disabled and weakened certain people mainly, in Africa, and getting in the way of the people's shaping their own destiny, including developing their own vaccines. However, in this paper, I narrow down the scope to realistic and practical cases of the virus in everyday life, beginning with my own case. I was planning to travel when someone alerted me about where I could be tested for COVID-19, as the airlines would need a certificate. The contact had already been tested, alone and free of charge, at this government installed place. When I arrived, I was told how tests were carried out after enough people to be tested had registered. Samples could even be collected from my residence to the laboratory. Charges covered transport and laboratory work. This was in March, 2020, right at the beginning of the pandemic and the related panic. Given what eventually came to pass, everywhere in the world, I had seen nothing to be talked about. Subsequent stories indicate not only the rise of fees, but also uncertainty as one test showed negative and the other positive, leaving you wondering about your status – a real source of fear. One would also be forced to wonder whether those testing really knew what they were doing, or whether they had the right equipment. But the worst fear was contracting the virus through this confusion, which you entered when you were safe and sound.

This fear is extended to the places of quarantine, but is not limited to hygiene. These were hotels where one was forced to be accommodated, at an unnegotiated fee, for two weeks. Fear of contracting the virus and stigma was increased by that of expenses. This last bit became real when those who were admitted had to sell

property before they were released. Worst of all, bodies were detained till exorbitant prices were paid. Those who were still free looked for ways and means of skipping hotels and similar detection centers. While these mitigated their personal fear and anxiety, they unleashed the same on the communities that eventually discovered their behavior. But the most dramatic scenarios were the cases of those found sick, treated and released. It appeared as if looking at them alone was enough to inject you. People ran at their sight.

The biggest local scandals are connected with accountably. Many secured public funds under the pretext of buying and delivering – urgently – a variety of requirements for handling or keeping COVID-19 at bay, but found better and more urgent things to do with the money. There are also questions about activities such as testing the vaccinated, and at a fee. Other questions are about cases of the vaccinated dying of the virus, thus giving people sleepless nights by adding fear to fear. In the uncertain circumstances, the creative, the well-intentioned, and the unscrupulous have reason to continue activities.

Conclusion

Fear is natural and normal. Watchful people see it coming and prepare themselves. Failure to avoid or manage fear, when fear comes, is neither natural nor normal. Fear kills. The fact that the world is teeming with people who face fear and those who succumb under fear is cause for alarm and calls for scrutiny. Time of COVID-19 has exposed the reality of fear and its effects on people, the worst fear being of not disease, or natural catastrophe, but of fellow human beings. While a pandemic like COVID-19 attacks whoever is in its way, people plan. They plot. Thus, even those who would easily escape the pandemic perish. This is the key source of fear. So, since fear emanates from nature and fellow human beings, it is quite a force to reckon with. This is made even emphatic by the fear of fear itself - phobophobia. The reality of fear, therefore, is totally devastating, if no safety volves exist.

All over the world, today, COVID-19 has been a humbling, or even a humiliating experience. We who observe and write have no capacity to enter persons and feel what they go through. We can only guess, basing ourselves on what we see and how we feel about it. Cases of piling bodies outside full mortuaries in affluent Europe are only what we observe. What the people go through is imprisoned within themselves. Memorable scenes of the puzzled and confused faces of the 'Red Indians' sitting along the dead infectious bodies in their huts – face to face with the deadly virus can suggest the hell

these people went through, but it remains they who silently absorb the suffering. Bodies scuttered on the streets in Brazil must forever haunt the people. Resorting to burials in India, when there was no more firewood tampered with culture and world views. Blank faces in Africa where the virus slowly but steadily descends reveal helpless, and fear for the future. Inconsolable personal losses of loved ones, in all corners of mother earth, remain deeply buried in people's hearts.

Despite the untold suffering and sudden confusion into which the world has been thrown, frantic efforts to help here and there leave humanity with positive narratives and good lessons learnt from the pandemic. The suffering is not totally alone. There is a very big sense of relief when one's problem is shared with others, even when it is only at the level of feeling sorry and saying or showing it. It is also significant to note that the pandemic has aroused the philosophical man in people. People's philosophical views of life, suffering, fear, and related ideas reveal that fear is aggravated by helplessness and hopelessness. There is a big difference between a man of faith and a non-believer, when the two face death. The discussion of fear by Existentialists sheds light on this difference. The same thing applies to Africa, where faith has sustained the people who have faced all manner of suffering. In a nut-shell, the time of COVID-19 is characterised by great suffering, weakness, and uncertainty, but the different societies' world views and individual persons' psychological dispositions make a big difference in facing the pandemic.

We may conclude by wrapping up the characteristics of COVID-19 in phobophobia. This fear of fear emerged from China towards the end of October, 2021. China is well-known for having used massive lockdowns to control the spread of the pandemic, and has achieved plausible results. Out of the Chinese population of 1.3 billion, only 126,078 cases and 4636 deaths have been reported. This is in sharp contrast, for example, with tiny Switzerland with a population of 8.637m., 877, 095 cases, and 11,257 deaths. To the world great surprise and added fear, however, the Chinese leadership has stated it categorically that COVID-19 real crisis is yet to come. This revelation has prompted Bloomberg to comment that this 'Chinese fear that the COVID-19 real crisis is yet to come is something to fear'. Fear is positive, in many ways. We fear repercussions and, therefore, watch out for danger. We do not hurt others, well-knowing possible reactions. Careful life is healthy, peaceful and long. We do things properly as shoddy work boomerangs. All these are thanks to fear. Fear, therefore, is a positive control device in people's life. The problem is the cliché that

too much of anything is bad. Thus, fear created by COVID-19 is negative, to the extreme. The added phobophobia makes the bad situation even worse.

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Reflections in a Time of Crisis

Time of Pandemic

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Let me start with sharing one of my mails to a friend of mine on May 4, 2021:

"It was a great relief to get your mail in the middle of all the terrible things I was going through with my family. My mother, 86, my brother 61, and my sister-in-law 60, all were detected Covid-positive two weeks back. All three had their first dose of the Covi-shield vaccine. My mother's oxygen level went down to 77, and we felt helpless with no bed available in any of the hospitals in the capital city of Jaipur, no oxygen cylinder, and no injection that was prescribed by the doctor. Three days, my brother and sister-in-law who were detected as Covid-positive were standing in a queue to get the injection that was supposed to be provided for critical patients by the Govt. health department from 10 am to 6 pm with no consequence. Then my sister-in-law who worked in Delhi Fortis hospital as manager earlier, somehow managed to get a bed in Fortis Jaipur, and my mother was admitted. Just after a day, she was shifted to ICU due to her deteriorating condition, and you can imagine our situation, the fear of death, anxiety, helplessness, and suffering. But after three days she started improving and finally yesterday she is back home after spending ten days in the hospital, with the blessings of God, all our family members, and friends.

But let me share the ground reality- as we ourselves have seen so closely.

At present, it is getting worse, and people are dying everywhere like ants. One cannot even think that such things can happen to human beings- no infrastructure for medical treatment, no hospital beds, no vaccines, no hope in the near future. People are either so desperate that they do not care, as they know they will have to die anyway or they are so scared that they do not care for their own near and dear ones, their own friends, their own neighbours. In cities, it is very difficult as there is hardly any space,

families after families are getting infected and dying. The Governments are just busy with their votes and elections, spending all public money in conducting public meetings of the parties and buying votes. The civil society that was functional in the last phase has just disappeared this time.

Our country that was claimed as "Atma Nirbhar" (self-reliant) is now "Paramatma Nirbhar" (God-reliant).

Only God can save people. We have to PRAY and Pray!

I am so sorry to vent my emotions as almost every day we are losing our close friends, colleagues, and neighbours"

This has been a ground reality in India for the last two months. All of us lost friends, relatives, and neighbours; 3.77 lakh people lost their lives. Most of you must have seen the dead bodies floating in the Ganges that were reported by the media. The second wave caught the country unaware and unprepared. The result was a 60 day long non-stop horror movie that is still continuing. Just yesterday, we lost a very young and promising school principal who was taken to Kolkata hospital.

The Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, in a letter to all Chief Ministers in India, wrote on June 4 2021:

"After the second wave, people are very scared about future waves and variants. Every citizen in India has been affected by this pandemic in one way or the other. It could be losing a loved one or losing a job or losing in business, or just the mental trauma because of the present situation. None has been spared by this pandemic ... The only way to protect our people against future waves and provide them with a hope of survival is vaccination. Countries which have focused on vaccination programme have seen remarkable improvement in their Covid-19 situation. We have to provide this healing touch to our people," he said.

No one can predict that it will go away anytime soon. And there would always be a threat of an epidemic like Covid in India. The population of the country is very high; people are careless, unaware, uneducated. India's public health system is very weak and complex. Vaccination drive, infrastructure, right treatment, availability of beds at all times will not make the third wave so painful as the second one.

Nandini Sen Mehra poet and author, in a poem May 4 2021, expressed that

The storm of Covid has approached, oxygen cylinders are not available, black marketing of the medicines and oxygen cylinders, people are dying due to lack of infrastructure, and hospitals increased the bed charges, all with political support. It is due to politicians not improving the health infrastructure, dividing

the society into "we" and "the other," and losing faith in humanity and love that is the last hope that can save our spirit to help each other, including 'stranger':

And night has come upon my land,
the carrion birds encircling
and prayers ascend on pyres lit,
the shadows fast descending

And leaders know not how to lead,
they gape, they watch in silence
while each new day brings grief afresh,
no help, no rest, no guidance

And those who come with sturdier boats,
will row perhaps to safety,
but most, will flay, in desperate need,
expendable humanity

What will remain, when the storm has passed,
when many so loved are lost,
what will be changed, within our hearts
what will this time exhaust

May then we not allow ourselves
to be led by those inept,
for want of air while many died,
unmoved, while many wept

May we never again be fooled,
by words, by power, by greed,
put not our faith in men of stone
who use us for their need

And know that when the night was dark,
who came to hold our hand,
it was the stranger, the ones unknown,
who share this wounded land

It was the one you did not trust,
the ones who were the other,
and when the leaders all had fled,
in him you found a brother

So let no powers again succeed,
to divide us at their will,
let love remain in our battered hearts,
the hope they could not kill.

At an individual level, clean nutrition and nurturing one's mental and spiritual self to deal with the crisis may help for the time being, but how long? But is the virus is to be gone forever?

The basic questions are:

How do we respond to its challenges internally?

How we do so socially?

How we do so as members of particular cultures?

How we do so as members of particular religious traditions?

How we do so as a citizen of a country?

What are the hopes of survival under the available medical sciences?

How can healing touch to the people be provided?

How the public and private policies for vaccination affect a layperson in a country?

One can suggest ways answering to the above questions at the individual level, social level, and as a responsible citizen as well as a religious, spiritual person. But the strong Vaccination drive, improvement of health infrastructure, right treatment, availability of beds at all times, availability of oxygen in every hospital and also for home isolated patients are some of the measures along with a sincere political will to fight the pandemic can make the living of the people with less fear and less anxiety, less suffering and with some hope and confidence.

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Pandemics: Wisdom Anti Fear. On the Role of Philosophy in Empowerment of Intellectual Courage.

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Threat of Pandemics

In the face of pandemics humanity unexpectedly appeared to be in front of two dilemmas: either to be isolated, even separated from each other in fear to be in the risk of getting terribly sick or even dead, or to be in search of possible ways to escape of the above, survive and even to be re-united.

If we consider the first case of fear producing inter individual or inter social isolation then we can make far going conclusions of strong possibilities of easier ways of being manipulated by the government. Fear is right that instrument which can be used in the interest of a small, but very rich top of influential people of the world.

Pandemics as an artificial but powerful world project

To control growth of demography, to minimize rapidly occurring strikes for better life among youth and people from developing countries – these are said to be the last but not least goals of the above-mentioned top. Pandemics is considered in some public talks as an artificially raised giant project to keep humanity in fear.

Isolation as an opportunity to re-organize one's life

In the second case of fear resulted isolation we can assume that in such a case people have the opportunity and time to think over the meaning of life. Fear here has its positive manifestation to re-organize one's life, control and manage in its new way.

What is fear?

What is fear? There are a lot of psychological, psychiatric, medical consideration of fear. It is often conceptualized as “a

natural, powerful, and primitive human emotion. It involves a universal biochemical response as well as a high individual emotional response. Fear alerts us to the presence of danger or the threat of harm, whether that danger is physical or psychological.”

Differences of fear

Fear differs. It is to be differentiated according to its strength, level, and its object. For example: Fear of darkness. Fear of snakes. Fear of dogs. Terrible fear. Strong fear. Light fear. Fear to do any harm. Fear to speak in front of the crowd. Fear to be happy, to enjoy. Fear of military persons. Fear of God.

Mass fear

Fear refers only to a person. It is a personal affair. But there are cases of mass fear. Mass fear of some leader in some country. As in known cases of terrible dictatorship or authoritarian regimes.

How to overcome fear?

Among our Kyrgyz people they say: If you hide the decease, the death may occur. If we hide the fear, it can provoke deceases or even deviant behavior.

How to overcome fear?

That is why when we today are talking of mass fear of pandemics, we are contributing in overcoming this quite a negative state of soul and mind, and can possibly turn it into its non-being.

Positive sides of fear

Fear cannot be interpreted as an only negative phenomenon. It has positive functions. It leads to obeying the societal rules. It controls the behavior. It minimizes possible harms for oneself and society. Fear teaches to be patient. It may become as a self-regulating inner power of a human being.

Fear and reason

It might be fear that teaches us to be wise. In certain conditions fear transforms into wisdom.

There may be a just question here: Is fear not mixed with reason? Yes, it may be so. But in its light, not panic manifestation fear may be in the cord with human reason.

What type of fear does pandemics produce?

What kind of fear is displayed by people in the time of pandemics? Is it a panic fear or reasonable fear? Is this fear not

dangerous to turn into stable phobia in front of any other human? We are to investigate these issues, openly and honestly.

Mission of philosophers in the time of pandemics

It is our mission, of philosophers, and all honest people whether this pandemic is real, true, not artificial, not for frightening people. Even more dangerous deceases occurred for example, during Soviet times. But never it was allowed to invoke panic mood among people.

Pandemics and informational technologies.

There existed a special strong medical service to organize limitations of communication among sick people. But now pandemics is more and more feared because of informational technologies.

Teaching wisdom against fear

We as philosophers are to teach people wisdom against fear. Only through teaching of practicing expanded mind, humanized heart, love, altruism we will be able to help ourselves as well as our people. Transcendental meditation, yoga system, breathing exercises, pranayama are the ways or instruments to reach the above state of mind. Thus, being intellectual, psychological even physical mechanisms of lessening fear, weaknesses in the time of pandemics.

Cultivation of vital code of life

Through the above instruments – to realize the vital code of happy life: to practice transformation of Egoism to Altruism. For fear is born from egoism. It is high time to understand it. We, philosophers, are to help people to cultivate this vital code of life if we want to survive.

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Crossing Borders in the Sky: Reflections on the Vertical Frontiers of Cultures

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One interesting definition for culture is culture is the ground on which we walk.¹⁵² The idea of ground or geography brings immediately the idea of diversity, pluralism and interculturality.

The need to reach out to the other even to recognize our own selves is becoming increasingly clear. Horizontal transcendence, therefore, has a definite role to play in any intercultural encounter.

But for a fruitful encounter, there is a need to recognize more the vertical transcendence. There is something in human being that goes beyond him/her, and yet takes place within him/her. There is something in human cultures that has come from the stars, as it were, revealing constantly the human contingency. As we can never set our foot on sky, we will be slow to assert our certitude and instead be ready to place more confidence in our common search.

The culture of the other may determine horizontal boundaries for us. But the vertical frontier is not determined by the other. However, both the frontiers spring from the same human condition. And yet, it is our inability to touch or cross the vertical frontier that will immediately remind us of our contingency and insufficiency.

Every building that we raise, for example, represents our effort as well as our failure to reach the sky, and ceiling is indeed the symbol of our limit.

The intercultural encounter may end up in a horizontal duel if the vertical function of every culture is either forgotten or

¹⁵² I owe most ideas in this brief article to Raimon Panikkar's Inaugural Address to the II international Congress of Intercultural Philosophy held in Sao Leopoldo (Brazil) in April 1997 and published in the Acts of the Congress, edited by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, *Unterwegs zur interkulturellen Philosophie* (Frankfurt: IKO-Verlag für Interkulturellen Kommunikation, 1998), 20-42.

neglected. The horizontal frontier will not show another way of exit than the defeat of the other. It is the vertical frontier that provides another way out.

To be sure, the vertical boundaries and horizontal do not partake same kind of limitations. The horizontal frontiers may be built by customs or economic fences out of stone or border wire. But the vertical frontier is encountered more in terms of human recognition of contingency and insufficiency to set foot in the limitless.

All this implies that every dialogue has, wittingly or not, a religious aspect. We find ourselves more united in our common search rather than in our individual findings, and the sky is indeed a symbol of and an invitation for this common search!

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