



Covid-19 As Metaphor and the Illusion of Human Significance

Olajide Wale¹, Owoyemi, Deborah Oluwasola²

¹ Professor, Department of Philosophy, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

² Department of Philosophy, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Email: ashaolu@yahoo.co.uk, owoyemi.deborah@eksu.edu.ng

Abstract:

Beyond the debate of which is superior and dominant, nature or nurture is the fundamental claim that nature is not only first and supreme, it is ontologically distinct and separate from all existent that draws of it including man. It is free and disinterested. The Covid virus is of nature and with its ravaging effect as it impacts all facets of human life; it throws human significance into reverse and disrepute. The plea is to give nature its due respect not only as source of support for human life but to continue to uphold its proposed superiority against any claim or suggestion of an overriding human significance. This study opines that the lessons of climate change and the doom it portends for mankind should make this too obvious as the entire human race must now urgently and frantically reverse the devastating consequences already at play as a result of the reckless treatments being meted out to the environment, before he is scorched to death and finally erased.

Keywords:

corona virus; separateness; nature and existence; philosophy; illusion

I. Introduction

Every community or settlement that involves the presence of humans is prone to being exposed to one or two diseases or ailments at any one time. This is also the case with the coronavirus covid 19 pandemic, which was first detected in China Wuhan in December of year 2019 before spreading to every corner of the globe. It was widely regarded as a communicable and infectious sickness that impacted many aspects of people's lives, including health, mobility, economics, and social life, resulting in a series of lockdowns of all types. Thousands of lives were lost, regardless of their calibre or age.

Beyond the argument over which is superior and dominating, nature or nurture, there is the basic assertion that nature is not only first and supreme, but it is also ontologically different and apart from all other existents, including man. It is unattached and uninterested. The Covid virus is a product of nature, and its devouring influence, which affects all aspects of human existence, casts human meaning into question. The argument is that nature should be respected not merely as a source of life for humans, but also for its claimed supremacy over any claim or indication of overpowering human significance. The lessons of climate change and the doom it portends for mankind, according to this study, should make this all too obvious, as the entire human race must now urgently and frantically reverse the devastating consequences already in play as a result of the reckless treatment of the environment, before he is scorched to death and finally erased.

II. Review of Literatures

Adopting the existential concept of separateness as clearly outlined by Jean-Paul Sartre, we shall in this paper highlight how coronavirus and its omicron variant, a mere occurrence in nature brings to fore man's generic misreading of his status as a special creature that is rational and inferring from these that he is therefore significant and superior to all others, a unique species that as some religions teach, merits a life after the present for measure trivializing and ignoring his natural impotence and annihilation at death. It is never incorrect to label man a special species of some kind that is different from all others because, essentially, he is different by the size of his brain, his evolutionary developmental history, of what he has so far made of civilization and the sophistication that now defines world economics, commerce, information sharing, education, politics, science and technology, transforming his society with a promise of a stunning future still.

Besides at the ontological level, and in the company of all other beings, man's status is again unique. Jean Paul Sartre separates man, being-for-itself, who is not only conscious of the world but also conscious of himself, from the being-in-itself which is devoid of consciousness. According to Sartre,

Being is. Being is in itself. Being is what it is. It is itself. It is an immanence nothing secrete. It is solid, the most indissoluble of all: the synthesis of itself with which cannot realize itself, an affirmation which cannot affirm itself, an activity which cannot act because it is glued to itself. Being-in-itself has no within which is opposed to a without and which is analogous to a ... a consciousness of itself. The in-itself has itself ... without any connection with another being, being-in-itself is de trop for eternity. (Sartre, 1958)

This is a fundamental mode of being in total contrast to being-for-itself which is characterized by consciousness which grounds man in possibilities. Because consciousness is essentially temporal in its intentionality and varied tendencies, it is essentially free and thus, man is never fixed in the present. As Garry Cox explains

Only a temporal being can be free because to be free is to have possibilities and genuine alternatives in the future. We are our future possibilities and our freedom consists in being free towards the future. (Cox, 2009: 55)

Consequent on this ontological distinction, coronavirus we shall categorize as a being-in-itself, solid mass, opaque, lacking consciousness, a being that is simply what it is in itself and man as a being-for-itself, fully conscious to name himself as a subject that is fullness of possibilities, the judge and jury of his thoughts and actions, creating himself moment by moment through the choices that he makes.

Both coronavirus and man are appearances, phenomena informed by being, with nature serving as their base and vital source. Essentially however, by the dictates of its mode of being, coronavirus remains what it is, a product of nature totally contented with what it is.

It can thus be no other because it is opaque lacking possibilities. Man in total contrast is ruled by consciousness, the base of his dynamism as he determines himself. Yet remaining as a product of nature, it is much more. He is conscious rational and moral, superior to all other existence. As elements in the world with nature acting as source from which they draw their being, they are nevertheless separate and distinct, with nature running its course on the one hand out of which coronavirus crawled out and man serving the human mandate.

From culture to culture, every creation myth puts man at the top of the pyramid superlatively describing him as a rare finished product. Maybe because man himself was the storyteller, the narrative had to be so. Cultural narratives embellish the highlights of the narrative as man not only is portrayed as king but a privileged creature that names other existing beings who by the way were benevolently created for his use. Human history has vividly shown that man has moved from naming and tending nature to abusing and desecrating it. There is besides a fundamental deductive error or what Frederick Nietzsche called a congenital defect in the thinking of man. Philosophers he specifically would name as major culprits particularly when the latter saw human nature as an *aeterna veritas*, “an eternal truth”, that man is a significant superior necessary being. The so-called eternal truth will however be reversed mainly by existential philosophers, as they deductively argue ontologically from man’s existence that man’s nature is to have no nature; that for a fact, there is no *a priori* human nature because there is no God to hand one over to man. Man remains therefore a mere creature, contingent, arbitrary and finite. He must by the dictate of his ontological-existential status generate his values and then invent himself through his personal choices. The error of a reified human nature would of course persist for years until its explicit reversal when the history of philosophy through the effort of its preachers is seen as being no more than a statement about man observed within the bracket of a very limited time span. The appearance of homo sapiens can at least now safely be dated. Man has evolved and is evolving. It is only through his prism as an ever-changing element would the world as he fashioned it be known. It is therefore not just that there are no eternal truths, it is that there are no unchanging absolute truths. It is also that human efforts are limited and futile to that which man constantly crafts as these are ever fleeting, ever changing. “None of us are fixed entities like chairs or stones but indeterminate ambiguous beings in consistent process of becoming and changing”. (Cox, 2009: 14)

The birth of consciousness as man evolved would set the stage for the awareness of not just the self as a mere finite creature but the self as separateness. I exist for me, even when there exists no necessary reason for my being in the world, with me in this aloneness, man is in the grip of dread, he feels uncomfortable. The stretching out of his hand for companionship underscores the loneliness forcing a being-with-others that is ruled by anxiety. Notwithstanding, man’s singleness is what it is, even among his own species regardless of the heard, crowd, community or the collective, he remains a single subjective entity. I live as a unit; I am a unit.

This unit self even as the German neuro-philosopher Thomas Metzinger explains is no-self, an illusion, all thanks to the brain that manufactures and forces the subjective sense of our existence as discrete selves. It is, he contends a bogging useless passion for man to create the illusion of being someone. According to Metzinger, a human being is indeed not a person. He is rather a mechanistically functioning phenomenal self-model that simulates a person. Difficult and strange as this may seem, he explains that,

The reason we cannot detect these models (created by the brain) is that we see through them and so we cannot see the processes of the models themselves. If we could, we would know there is nothing to us but these (brain) models... You cannot know what you really are because then you would know there is nothing to know and nothing to know it. So rather than be know-nothings, we exist in a condition of ... naïve realism, with things not being knowable as they really are in themselves. (Metzinger, 2009: 47)

This exactly is what produces the denial of death that essentially, we are worms and food for worms. The truth is that the prospect of death wonderfully concentrates human mind and as Ernest Becker explains

The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else, it is a mainspring of human activity, the activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man. (Becker, 1973)

Yet we go on as humans refusing the paradox that confronts us. We are at once as Erich Fromm points out individuals within finitude. Man, first as a symbolic self, a creation with a mind that can think the unthinkable, contemplate as a tiny god his own planet and within it the entire universe and at the same time a finite creature ever physical soon to vanish. The gist of these submissions is that man is just another existent amidst other existents, unique and distinct, bearing the yoke of consciousness deluded into living with the overriding belief that there is more to him than his mere creatureliness which irreversibly confers on him finitude. The albatross of consciousness is of course to blame. (Bara et al, 2021) With no self-consciousness nor awareness, there is no death. Animals, whatever their stories of survival and procreation have no comparable structure because they have no self-consciousness and awareness of death. Paraphrasing Soren Kierkegaard, one never does find dread in the beast precisely for the simple reason that by nature the beast is not qualified by the spirit. The beast has none. It is ignorant, and it is therefore innocent. All other creatures except man is devoid of reflective consciousness.

III. Discussion

Coronavirus

The name coronavirus rudely shows up in man's world affirming majorly two things: one, that there is nature which precedes man's appearance and makes very little of the four thousand years with which he is more or less familiar, crafting his structures and naming his civilizations; and two, that nature is totally oblivious of man. In other words, he might as well not be. Whatever else exists in the world affirms this salient truth. What man calls civilization and advancement is simply adaptation to hurdles nature poses as the former tries to settle down and enjoy his brief stay in the sun. It has never been the other way round. Indeed, it is the environment that is represented by nature that names man, insisting through a policy of non-interference to live and let live. Hence, my persuaded submission that

Man's relationship to his environment (and nature) as regards safeguarding it is therefore not a pledging concern. It is rather an unconditional generic mandate without which man fails to name himself or authenticate his existence as man. In the end, he commits an existential hara-kiri or class suicide by negating that which enables him to be (truly) subjectified. (Becker, 1973)

The coronavirus and now its variant, Omicron, had always existed, only that man was oblivious of it. When finally, it showed up in its majestic maturity, man in his illusion of grandeur had to bow in reverence. The course of social-existential profile was changed forever. All nations of the world and leaders of nations that hitherto played ostrich had in the end to swallow their pride, acknowledge their pompous stupidity as they lost count of horrible fatalities. What is commonly paraded as normal human existence literally ceased as man watched helplessly deaths of millions. Human existence took a new turn as the language of the 'new normal' was born. It can and would no longer be business as usual anywhere and everywhere. It has never been since the emergence of corona virus attaining the status of pandemic. At first, it was stunned helplessness before gradual birth of measures to reduce the fatalities, invent the vaccines and count the losses. A classic case of man reacting and adapting to the imperatives of nature, a rhythm that had always been since the advent of homo erectus. (Ferdinand et al, 2020)

Beyond coronavirus however, more was yet to come of nature reemphasizing its singular superior status to that of man on the one hand and underscoring its passivity to whatever man felt in his world, insisting with records of human fatalities that man in his pride should be still and listen. It was clear that nature or the environment and appearances and elements within it are oblivious of man and of his efforts. So too of his sufferings commonly referred to as disaster or tragedy. These however are strange imperceptible concepts to the corona virus, that is, if they even exist at all.

The Cumbre Vieja volcano in La Palma in Spain started erupting two months ago. As its lava flowed, millions of deaths were recorded, villages were washed away. It is still throwing up its hot lava as man stands in awe with head helplessly bowed before a majestic independent display. Nothing is amiss here. There are indeed no strange happenings. Nature must be itself as naturally as rain follows condensation. Mudslides and flash floods will occur so would earthquakes and forest fires oblivious of what in those moments man preoccupied himself with and where he stood, for the sole reason that both nature and man are distinct separate entities. In matters of relationship, it is man that needs nature to survive. It is man that has so far been meddling and messing with the normal course of nature. Before man, nature has always been and will continue to be on its course indifferent to man's state of being. The latter might in fact not have existed, but nature will continue to be. Human relationship with nature is thus contingent essentially on matters of survival. Sue Prideaux cautions, X-raying Frederick Nietzsche in what she calls "anthropocentric fallacy" that natural phenomena should never be viewed from a short-sighted narrowly human perspective because it is not only a display of congenital defect in human thinking, it is self-deceit. (Prideaux, 2018)

Perhaps because of the dull realization by man that indeed his fate is cast, that his existence is vacuous, absurd and finite, he invented religion, the higher swindle to prospect another life in some place outside of earth. I concur with the submission that metaphysical assumptions are passionate errors of delusion, a disposition with its origin in dreams where

the primordial man thought he could come to know a second real world and find rest. The separation into body and soul is connected to ancient beliefs about dreams, so is the assumption of a spiritual apparition, belief in ghosts, spirits, demons and gods. Again, these are survival existential props about which nature is totally oblivious and unconcerned.

IV. Conclusion

Coronavirus has matured and suspectedly so ready to mutate as its variant Omicron continues to suggest. Man has found it as it roams exterminating the high and low, the genius and the stupid in their helpless vulnerability. The lesson then is for man, first, to be reconciled to his ontological separateness alongside nature's distant supremacy and second, to come to grips with the simple truth that it is not enough just to give nature its due; it is foolish indeed to treat it with mindlessness and contempt. The lessons of climate change and the doom it portends for mankind should make this too obvious as the entire human race must now urgently and frantically reverse the devastating consequences already at play as a result of the reckless treatments being meted out to the environment, before he is scorched to death and finally erased.

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