

Vol. 15/ Issue: 36/ Autumn 2021

Coronavirus Crisis and Philosophizing



Hamidreza Ayatollahy

Emeritus Professor of philosophy, University of Allameh Tabataba'i, Tehran, Iran

hamidayat@gmail.com

Abstract

The mind prepares for questioning during fundamental transformation in the course of human life. The Coronavirus Crisis brought about a fundamental change in human life that had not happened in the world for decades. In order to deal philosophically with this crisis, new questions must be hunted down. In this paper, I enumerate some of these challenges. Some of emerging questions from those challenges is explained. It is shown that their analysis causes philosophical creativity and in the face of them we will find the success of philosophizing. Some of these challenges is discussed in the following field of philosophy: phenomenological questions about Corona, the new challenges in philosophy of science, political challenges, moral philosophy and norms in ethics, philosophy of religion, the growth of existentialistic attitudes to human beings, highlighting the issue of the meaning of life and the need for a philosophical answer, Corona Crisis and globalization.

Keywords: Coronavirus, philosophizing, existentialism, meaning of life, globalization

Received date: 2021.7.7

Accepted date: 2021.10.6

DOI: [10.22034/jpiut.2021.46876.2893](https://doi.org/10.22034/jpiut.2021.46876.2893)

Journal ISSN (print): 2251-7960 ISSN (online): 2423-4419

Journal Homepage: www.philosophy.tabrizu.ac.ir

Introduction

Philosophical questions are a pre-requirement for any philosophizing: In the initial view, apparently, we cannot find a relationship between the types of famous philosophers' thoughts and the Coronavirus Crisis. It is true that there is no clear relationship between famous philosophers' opinions about the Corona Crisis and philosophy, which on the one hand is the principality of existence in Islamic philosophy, and on the other hand, Kantian subjectivism, but if we are to think, we can present new philosophical perspectives with our previous philosophical achievements. But thinking begins with the question. The necessary condition for any philosophizing is to face a question and problem, the kind of issues with which Hume woke Kant from a dogmatic dream. One of the reasons that Descartes's philosophy became important was that it led to the emergence of various philosophical questions (such as dualism, subjectivism, humanism, materialism, empiricism, idealism) and from the heart of those challenges, many philosophical views emerged.

If the current of global society and thinking is a continuing monotonous current, it will be less successful to face new questions. But with a fundamental transformation in the course of human life, the mind prepares for questioning. Especially if this change occurs in the lives of all the people of the world, many questions will be asked. The Coronavirus Crisis brought about a fundamental change in human life that had not happened in the world for decades. In order to deal philosophically with this Crisis, new questions must be hunted down.

Questions create a new context for thinking, because "good questioning is half of knowledge". So, before we have a philosophical view of Corona, we have to do our best to see what new ambiguities and challenges can emerge. It is to enumerate these challenges and analyze them that cause philosophical creativity and in the face of them we will find the success of philosophizing.

Philosophical Challenges to the Coronavirus Crisis

Explorer mind can find potential challenges and issues in the Corona Crisis that must be stepped up by philosophy for analyzing them. Therefore, before any philosophical theorizing, it is better to address the intellectual challenges facing the global transformations by the Coronavirus Crisis. These challenges can show themselves in different philosophical spheres and branches. For this reason, I refer to some of these challenges that philosophers must attempt to solve them:

1- Phenomenological Descriptions about Corona

The current literature of these world days about Corona, especially at the beginning of the crisis, speaks of two apparently the same things, while a profound difference can be seen between them. Covid-19 appears to be the same as corona, but covid-19 seems to refer to a viral being that has its own structures, but Corona examines the

virus in its collection of works that it has created. The most widely used terms "Post-Corona" or "life in corona situation" or "Corona era" or "theology of Corona", and many new terms in this limited period of time, have constituted a large part of today's human speech. It is clear that these terms cannot be used as post-Covid-19 or the life in Covid-19 situation or the Covid-19 era or the theology of Covid-19. With this explanation, the phenomenological description of Corona is very different from the phenomenon of Covid-19. Corona creates new appearances during its presence, which humans are faced with. The issues we present from now on can be considered part of the coronavirus phenomenon. So far, we have not seen a phenomenon that has so many and pervasive effects. So, Corona shows us the need for a more expanded form of phenomenology in which all the new emerging ones that arise must be addressed.

2- The new challenges in philosophy of science

The Coronavirus Crisis created scientific challenges in the treatment of corona. The protests suddenly questioned the crisis of legitimacy and acceptability of dominant medical sciences. This paradigm shift was not taken seriously in the new scientific academies (because the dominant paradigm always conflicts with new theories), but the belief of the masses of people in traditional medicine increased so that it led to a shortage of academic medical sciences in front of traditional medicine. During the Corona era, when all the shops were closed and only grocery stores were open, we see that the business of the traditional pharmacies based on ancient medicine were so thriving that many of them were open from early morning to late evening, meeting the needs of people for traditional medicine, while ordinary pharmacies did not provide any special medicines except disinfectants, masks and gloves. Such tendencies in traditional medicine increased its credibility and provided the ground for the increased dominance of the traditional medicine paradigm, and the new medicine was neglected by the public, all of which claimed to promise to obtain the coronavirus vaccine but could not do it. Here I am not trying to judge between these two types of scientific attitudes, but I have done a description of these evolutions. It seems that traditional medicine has been able to surpass its competitor at least as an efficient medicine in some areas of treatment and gain a higher position scientifically.

3- Political challenges

Traditionally, there has always been a main duality in political philosophy, where there have been different theories, called "justice" and "freedom" (Fact Sheet on the European Union, 2021). The two categories of freedom and justice constituted a spectrum in which political decisions and political systems (such as socialism, liberalism and liberal democracy and communism) were established based on the choice between the two or the fusion of them. Coronavirus Crisis forced man to

temporary restriction of freedom so that perhaps it had no precedent in any dictatorial system, and people accepted it because of the corona threats.

But political decision-making in the Coronavirus Crisis is no longer based on the duality of justice and freedom. A new double was created for politicians called dual **health** and **economics** (Welfens, 2020, 295).

Integrating the health care sector into macroeconomics, which should include growth analysis, is an important task.

Politicians would face a business stop if they went into quarantine to ensure the health of the people and fulfill their responsibility to the people, resulting in an economic crisis. If they allowed businesses to establish their country's economy and the economic turnaround of society, and they downsided quarantine, then the number of people infected and dead would have increased and a health crisis would happen. Politicians were obliged to decide between the two conflicting measures in such a way that they could create the best for their society. Therefore, corona led the political basis of society from choosing between the two mutual bases of freedom and justice, to a choice between two conflicting bases of health and economics, and to defend a political theory that could address these two conflicting sides well in a political decision and resolve the conflict.

4- **Moral Philosophy and Norms in Ethics.**

Many ethical norms in the conditions of stability and tranquility of society seem to have a good function, so their foundations are defended in the philosophy of ethics, but when people's lives are at risk, then these functions lose their colors.

From resource allocation and priority-setting, physical distancing, public health surveillance, health-care worker's rights and obligations to conduct of clinical trials, the COVID-19 pandemic presents serious ethical challenges. These in turn are complicated by the diverse health systems and unique cultural and socio-economic contexts of countries. Consequently, there is a great need for guidance to ensure ethical conduct of research, decision making in clinical care, and public health policymaking at every level of the global COVID-19 response (WHO declaration, 2020).

For example, those who have their morals based on utilitarianism and profitability and personal gain of the major part of the society, as criteria for good and bad, in the corona situation, give up all their moral human slogans and become wolves of each other according to Hobbes. The theft of one country's sanitary items from the other no longer finds any ugliness, and institutionalized profit-making in liberalism completely excludes any ethics based on transcendent moral values. In other moral views, such as religious ethics, it can be seen that the ethics of empathy and helping each other, rather than selfish quarrels, appear to benefit the most. When there are only governmental and organizational mechanisms in the liberal system to solve the problems of hunger and lack of sanitary equipment, and human empathy does not

have a distinct definition of society's profits, in a crisis like Corona, these hidden norms are selfishly revealed.

Moral theories have beautiful justifications as theoretical descriptions and ideas, and in colorful formats they present themselves as the best moral theory, but they show their true manifestation in moral strictness.

Utilitarian ethics theories in liberal systems showed the same manifestations as:

- People's quarrels in accessing essential goods and emptying store shelves
- Abandoning the elderly
- Government theft of countries to gain sanitary and sanitary facilities
- Concerns raised by people in family life as domestic violence increases and even wives kill
- Inferiority in long queues to get a mouthful of bread to survive
- Growing anxiety over fate
- Disintegration of utilitarianistic alliances such as the European Union
- Feelings of nihilism to the rise of suicides
- Gun sales increase due to feelings of insecurity and imposing the views of a group

On the contrary, the morality of living according to Divine moral virtues or religious ethics also presented its beautiful manifestations in such a way as follows:

- Sacrifice-based activities of medical staff based on religious values
- Collective and mobilizational cooperation to meet the country's needs for urgent hygiene items
- Types of public support for medical staff
- The self-sacrifice of volunteers, especially clerics, in hospitals to compensate for the cross-sectional shortage of nurses
- Feelings of social security
- Cash and goods donations to the dignitaries who suffered in the Corona Crisis
- Researchers work around the clock to meet the urgent medical needs of the country

The Corona Crisis was able to show the practical results of theoretical discussions in the philosophy of ethics. And the most important confrontation that occurred was the confrontation between a profit-oriented and liberal attitude to ethics with a virtuous religious ethics.

Faith communities can readily engage in acts of solidarity that build community resilience. They can easily identify vulnerable community members and quickly mobilize to provide support (Andrea Paras, April 9, 2020).

5- Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology

The Corona Crisis led to the reproduction of philosophical questions about religious teachings, on the one hand, in old challenges such as the question of evil, the way of divine agency, and the question of the fruits of religiosity in religious societies compared to secular societies, and philosophers of religion were forced to step in these issues. On the other hand, paying attention to God and understanding human helplessness in front of the powerfulness of God, created a philosophical need for the question of promoting religious faith and strengthening human relationship with God. Religious teachings became a concern for some human beings who wanted an appropriate response from theologians and philosophers of religion. Some religious teachings interpret some emerging human sufferings as divine punishment, while others consider these sufferings as divine tests. Philosophically, these doctrines cannot be justified by these seemingly conflicting views. Philosophers of religion must analyze the Divine agency according to religious teachings that seems antithetical. Theists must bring good explanation to remove these seemingly contradictions. Corona situations needs some philosophical efforts to answer the new questions that emerge. One of the answers is (Ayatollahy, 2020, 299-310):

- Not every calamity is caused by divine punishment for disbelievers or the test and exelling of believers, but sometimes it is.
- Some hardships and calamities can be caused by divine punishment or the exaltation of believers.
- Not every blessing is for the believers because of God's grace, and there is no blessing to make the disbelievers more miserable. Some of them are due to the mercy of God and have nothing to do with faith and disbelief, and some are due to the mercy that this mercy is attracted by believers and the disbelievers are deprived of it.
- So, some of the blessings are due to God's special attention, and some of them are His mercy.

This answer is supported by some philosophical reasons in a paper in philosophy of religion.

6- The growth of existentialistic attitudes to human beings

John Kaag says:

When people are in crisis or are deeply unsettled, they tend to ask existential questions — like, why am I here? Where did I come from? (Paulson, 2020).

Existentialism seeks to abandon general and metaphysical interpretations of the world and human beings and show existential awareness as the most fundamental concern of human beings. Existentialist philosophers such as Heidegger show that human amusing to issues like epistemology distances him from his fundamentally existential concern. Heidegger tries to show that the history of philosophy is the

history of encountering the existent being and not the human existence in itself. In order to bring the face of existence to the field, he can no longer use metaphysical and inclusive teachings to do so. Existential awareness is a kind of encounter not knowledge. For this kind of encountering, he brings non-existence in the core. In confrontation with non-existence, and in that perspective, with the awe and astonishment that we gain from existence versus non-existence, we will find the self of existence. But how is this exposure to non-existence can be achieved? Heidegger considers death as our way of understanding human existence. A person who has a deep understanding of death and considers constant death-thinking to be the basis of his trueness is who that he finds his existence. Obviously, in normal living conditions, there will be no opportunity for death thinking. Daily life puts us in the forgetfulness of death, and everyday activities provide no room for reflection on human existence. But at a time when human beings are still and in a position to contemplate death and find themselves facing it, it is then that finds its existence.

“Dasein”, according to Heidegger, is a being for whom being is a question. Dasein is a being who is aware of his existence. His awareness of himself depends to the awareness of existence, and the existence needs human for its appearance. Dasein is a temporal being and his characteristic feature is being-in-the-world. According to Heidegger, Dasein becomes aware of his being, then comprehends that his being after a while will be transformed to nonbeing (i.e., death), Thereby, a distance between this being and nonbeing is defined as “time”. So, with understanding of being, Dasein notices nonbeing and time, and the consequence of all these understandings, could induce a mental rummage known as the “existential anxiety”. (Farnam and Deljou, 2020, 31-50)

The Corona Crisis created a situation where all people saw death very closely, and the fear of death caused them to face their existence. During the Corona Crisis, the perception of existence among many human beings deepened and the concern of existence were stepped into the context of human life. It is here that the presence of philosophical attitudes comes in the context and unconscious philosophical meditation becomes part of our lives.

Existentialism places a primacy upon the individual and the existential self that is continually being formed within the workplace. (MacMillan and others, 2012, 27-46).

7- Highlighting the issue of the meaning of life and the need for a philosophical answer

The question of the meaning of life, which has become the focus of many philosophical or religious issues in recent years, is re-highlighted by the Coronavirus Crisis, and the thirst for an answer to it in the corona pandemic increases.

Focusing on meaning in life, it is quite common to maintain that it is conceptually something good for its own sake or, relatedly, something that provides a basic reason for action (Metz, 2021) (on which see Visak 2017).

For some people, the question of the meaning of life is lost either in their everyday life, or they have tried to choose the path of change by entertaining themselves with other aspects of life. Corona, unlike many other diseases, is stepping into human life from a place that is not guessed and quickly engages human beings one by one that everyone suspects everything for fear of it and lives in a constant panic.

There are reports that over 45 percent of Americans feel that the coronavirus has negatively affected their mental well-being. Is there anything one can do to cope with the emotional fallout during this challenging time? (Falcone, April 28, 2020)

Social relationships, recreations, active presence in a business that could have created an excuse for the meaning of life disappear. Human remains and itself and the question of how else can even falsely find an excuse to live. In societies where empathy and compassion exist for each other, there is no longer a sense of emptiness that can find a place to rot and deplete human beings from within. But perhaps in societies where these life motives do not exist, people feel they have nothing to do but wait for death. They don't have an excuse to hide this question or to negligence themselves or to avoid thinking about it. They are confined to their closed house and inevitably face this question constantly. The Coronavirus Crisis has given a lot of attention to the question of the meaning of life. Recently, some realized that whatever they hoped for so far was a contentless response to it. The increase in suicide rates caused by nihilistic feelings indicates an inability to respond to it.

8- Corona Crisis and Globalization; the possibility of utilization of exceptional opportunities in the global community.

Twenty years ago, "globalization" had become the centerpiece of many of the world's research activities, especially as it was expanding from an economic aspect to other aspects of human life, such as culture.

Some countries passively provided themselves with this process, but the colonial countries did their best to ride the wave of this global changes. These societies tried to push "the process of globalization" into "the project of globalism" and thus to "westernizing all societies". United States, too, used all its tools to change violently it to the "Americanization" of the entire world. Whoever, globalization could have provided opportunities for other nations. Some of activities, among Iranians, Chinese and Russians, take advantage of this opportunity despite the serious possible threat by the United States.

Over the past 20 years, the United States and its allies have used surfing the globalized world in the place of civilization, culture and the global economy, and have been able to make a large number of people from other countries as their followers with tools such as movies, computer games, news media, social networks and cyberspace. Although the Chinese in the economy took advantage of this opportunity and took over the global flow of the economy and tried to prevent the expansion of

Americanization with their own hardware in the world and native software in China, this cancer has become so rooted that others could not find a greater presence on the global field.

All these networks of American activity and influence were deeply rooted in all aspects of the lives of other nations, and if they wanted to eradicate this interconnected chain of influence, they would have faced regional and global crises.

In these corona conditions of the world, all of a sudden, this chain and the network of influence have been downed, and it seems that the whole chain has been torn apart. The clearest and most widespread manifestation of globalization was international communication, especially in business travel and global tourism, which has been completely halted.

If this situation continues in a few years, other aspects of globalization, such as the global economy, will change drastically and economic chains will be torn down. The current situation in the world is similar to that of a post-revolutionary country, where the previous system of government falls apart. Since no one could ever have the possibility of this rupture, no other set-up system has been designed. In these circumstances, as in the circumstances after the revolutions, cause chaos. In this situation, any group other than the previous ruling groups hopes that can take power and try to establish its own alternative system.

The post-Corona situation and the rupture of globalization are the best position for those in the international arena to establish their own systems with different values than before. It is true that all the executive power of countries has been mobilized to fight the coronavirus, and there is no room for philosophical theorists and system makers to help the country in this comprehensive mobilization, but, it is suggested that the theorists of the country, system designer, international relations thinkers, strategists of the country and people at this level and in all related disciplines, instead of passively presenting the existing conditions, set up think-in-the-room in cyberspace and, with foresight, try to draw up a variety of active global presence and present plans for different conditions after corona crisis.

In the presence of again in the global space, the sooner he has such a round of thought, will be ahead. This is an exceptional situation for all countries. It is hoped that they can build the ground for the emergence of a new civilization in the world.

So, rise up thinkers! and use these unrepeatably conditions to dominate transcendental values

Conclusion

As it can be seen, the Coronavirus Crisis brought many questions in its challenges that need philosophical answers. It can pave the way for philosophy on many fundamental human issues. Philosophizing must extract and reveal these questions in order to provide an opportunity to analyze them and provide appropriate answers to them by philosophers. There are many challenges in different fields of philosophy that must

be analyzed by experts in those field of philosophy like: phenomenology, philosophy of science, philosophy of ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of religion, existentialism, meaning of life, theory of globalization.

References:

- Ayatollahy, Hamidreza (2020) "Fe'le khodavand va balaye corona (Divine Action and Corona Disaster)" in Azmoune Corona, Didgahha va Rahbordha (Corona Examination: Views and Strategies), University of Imam Sadegh (pbuh) Publication, 2020; 299-310
- Fact Sheet on the European Union (2021), "An Area of freedom, Security and Justice: General Aspect", www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en
- Falcone, Alissa (April 28, 2020) "Are You Happy? The Meaning of Life During COVID-19", Interview with Professor of Neuropsychology Eric Zillmer, Drexel Now, April 28, 2020, <https://drexel.edu/now/archive/2020/April/Are-You-Happy-The-Meaning-of-Life-During-COVID-19/>
- Farnam, Alireza, Deljou, Bahareh. (2020). "To Be or not to Be: COVID-19 Pandemic, a Time for Activation of Dasein's most Fundamental Conflicts". *Journal of Philosophical Investigations*, (University of Tabriz, Summer 2020) 14(31), 31-50. doi:10.22034/jpiut.2020.40400.2598.
- MacMillan S, Yue AR, Mills AJ (2012). "Both how and why: Considering existentialism as a philosophy of work and management". *Philosophy of Management*. 2012; 11:27–46. doi: 10.5840/pom201211318.
- Metz, Thaddeus (2021), "The Meaning of Life", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), forthcoming URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/life-meaning/> .
- Paras, Andrea (April 9, 2020) "How faith communities are responding to the coronavirus pandemic", *The Conversations*, April 9, 2020 4.51pm BST <https://theconversation.com/how-faith-communities-are-responding-to-the-coronavirus-pandemic-135281>
- Paulson Steve (May 22, 2020) "Philosopher John Kaag Explains Why Philosophy Can Help Us Through the Coronavirus Pandemic", *Kaag On Life Lessons From 19th Century Thinker William James*, Viscon Public Radio, May 22, 2020, 7:20 pm <https://www.wpr.org/philosopher-john-kaag-explains-why-philosophy-can-help-us-through-coronavirus-pandemic>
- Reddy SG (2020), "Population health, economics and ethics in the age of COVID-19", *BMJ Global Health* 2020;5: e003259. <https://gh.bmj.com/content/5/7/e003259>
- Vandekerckhove, Wim (2020); "COVID, Existentialism and Crisis Philosophy", *Philosophy of Management*. 2020 Jun 2: 1–6. doi:10.1007/s40926-020-00140-2
- Visak, T., (2017), "Understanding 'Meaning of Life' in Terms of Reasons for Action", *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, 51: 507–30.
- Welfens, P.J.J. (2020) "Macroeconomic and health care aspects of the coronavirus epidemic: EU, US and global perspectives" *International Economy Policy* 17, 295–362 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10368-020-00465-3>
- WHO declaration about "Ethics and COVID-19" (2021), <https://www.who.int/teams/health-ethics-governance/diseases/covid-19>