BE KIND, STAY CALM: THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON MEANING OF LIFE: BETWEEN FREE WILL AND NIHILISM

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Abstract
A plague has spread across the world and half the human population have temporarily retreated to their ‘caves’ to escape its reach. People have foregone their freedom with little to no resistance. With the plague came anxiety and boredom and a rapid increase in mental health issues. Free will has been curtailed and there is a potential rise in thoughts of nihilism. But the plague has also brought the opportunity to reshape society in a positive way, and rather than fear dystopia, the path is open to create a shift towards a utopia.

Key Words: Free will, Mortality, Society, Attunements

1. Introduction
May be all men and women ponder the meaning of life; but some, for good historical reasons, are driven to ponder it more urgently than others. (Eagleton, p. 18) This is especially the case when freedom is denied. Arguments of Heidegger’s Being and Time were written in a period of historical tumult, appearing in the wake of the First World War. Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness, and Camus’s The Myth of Sisyphus, were published in the midst of Second World War, while existentialism in general, with its sense of the absurdity of human life, flourished in the decades which followed it.

The new reason to ponder the meaning life is fortunately not due to man’s inhumanity through war but through the natural threat of a virus referred to as Covid 19 or Coronavirus. While viruses, plague or pestilence are not new to human beings there are several aspects of global reactions to Coronavirus which make it specifically align with the concepts of free will and nihilism.

In addition there is growing concern globally about the amount of power parliaments and police are claiming in their countries to enforce rules and lockdown procedures. As up to
50% of the world’s population is experiencing some form of lock down it is remarkable to witness the willingness of so many citizens to sacrifice their personal conveniences for the greater health of society. However, this rise of a widespread state of emergency is seen by many as an excuse to justify all manner of government controls in the so called name of the pandemic. There are emerging concerns that post-virus the new surveillance and control measures will not be scaled back and the virus will have long term impacts on the freedom of society.

While the virus may raise questions about the social and state responsibility, it is also potentially accelerating two expanding forces which may result in change of the meaning of human life. The first force results in the removal of reliance on natural evolution through a shift to genetic enhancements to produce a ‘better’ human artefact and the possible digital enhancement of humans. The second force is the creation of A-life which is smarter, faster, stronger and less perishable than human beings.

Given the combination of these three forces it is possible that society is about to undergo a step change, while effectively being rendered powerless with the instruction to stay at home.

The foundation of this paper is that life arose from a combination of atoms producing an entity which sought to survive and replicate, life is monist and is a purely physical construct. This monist existence is not completely governed by scientific laws predetermining every single event, thought or action of human beings. There is no foundational meaning of life which the entity sought to satisfy. As a species Humans have the ability to greatly influence the life they have. It is proposed that the meaning of life is significantly influenced by social responsibility, mortality and the attunements for nihilism being despair and anxiety. Each of which is being brought into question by this, once in a generation pathogen. As a basis for discussion this paper adopts the position that complete freedom includes inner freedom of the will and the external freedom of the environment, such that a person’s plans and deliberations are not arbitrarily thwarted by either themselves or some other agent.

2. Social responsibility

As the human life form evolved it under went significant changes and its functions grew increasingly complex. Its drive to survive has served it well, to the point that most natural threats to its existence are now largely under control. A core strategy for survival has been the creation of social structures to gain strength in numbers and specialisation in the delivery of core
commodities such as food, housing and security. To accomplish this individuals have been required to reduce their individual freedom and conform to the rules of the society they are a part of. This raises the challenge that while the human species may be absolutely free to determine its existence, this is not necessarily true for the subset of tribes, with different cultures, and individuals of differing gender, skin colour and beliefs. This raises the question to what extent has an individual a truly free will. Coronavirus has no impact on the free will of the human beings as a species, only on how the freedom to act by a few may influence the free will experience of large sections of the population.

As Owen notes, never before has such a large proportion of the world’s population experienced the same crisis at the same time. (Owen, 2020) Billions of people are experiencing a radical shift in their privileges simultaneously. They are all being asked to sacrifice individual freedom for a collective wellbeing, regardless of the ideological disposition of their society. The present crisis demonstrates clearly how global solidarity and co-operation is in the interest of the survival of each and every one of us. While the virus attacks each human being individually, citizens are quarantined collectively in their suburbs and social niches. Revealing that the virus is the concern of all.

Zygmunt Bauman asks who would not wish to live among a friendly and well-wishing community of people whom one could trust and on whose words and deeds one could rely. Unfortunately Bauman suggests this form of community stands for a lost ideal. He proposes that such a community is now a days another name for paradise lost – but one which we hope to create (Bauman, p. 2). Similarly in The Elements of Social Organisation it is held that persons acted according to their own will, chose their acts and thereby were able to modify social structure. (Eriksen, p. 65) This leads to the proposition that our concept of what it means to be human determines fundamentally what kind of a technical, social, cultural situation people will be producing. (Braman, p. 54) If they are correct then collectively we are responsible for the societies and culture the majority have created and are now on the verge of changing.

In her novel, Year of Wonders, Brooks describes the extraordinary action taken by the villagers of Eyam. At the onset of a plague in 1665, the inhabitants of this tiny English village decided to voluntarily quarantine their town, keeping the plague inside. The cost was horrendous as two thirds of the villagers perished suffering ghastly deaths. However they were successful in preventing the spread of the plague and undoubtedly saved thousands of people.
from suffering and death. Now as the Coronavirus pandemic rages, Brooks finds herself asking this question; who will I be? (Block, 2020) This is a question for all of us, as our potential to find meaning in life is being tested. Will we be the great humanitarian, the socially responsible, the revolutionary, the absurd hero or whatever else we might choose? What role will we adopt in the evolution of society?

Camus points that that while the plague through its impartial ministration should have promoted equality among society, it tends to have the opposite effect and exacerbates a sense of injustice rankling in men’s heart. (Camus, p. 120)

One major area of inequality is with regard to the poor. For the average semi-skilled and unskilled worker lockdown equates to job and income loss. While governments create massive social welfare packages to alleviate this hardship the bureaucratic process takes lengthy periods to become active and in the meantime poor families are forced to go without food and basic amenities. In contrast the rich go short of practically nothing. Poverty shows itself as a stronger stimulus than fear and leads to defying isolation in order to obtain money for food.

Another aspect of inequality is the necessity for health care professionals to initiate medical triage to optimise the application of available resources (in this case ventilators) resulting in minimum of care for ill and elderly people. Effectively, society abandons the weak.

A third form of inequality is the perceived creation of a new social grouping, the essential worker. While everyone else is confined to their homes, government creates a new class of citizen who is exempt from the rules. These people become differentiated by their indispensable services which require exemption from the lockdown laws. However differentiation gives rise to resentment, especially the concept of essential versus non-essential. One human being cannot be more essential than another. Alternatively why should the essential worker be deemed disposable and asked to put themselves in harm’s way while others get to undertake isolation to keep themselves safe. Few seem to consider that this is what society is based on, the division of duties between members for the maximum advantage of society as a whole.

In many ways Camus warns against the undermining concept of the ‘essential worker’ Doubtless today many of our fellow citizens are apt to yield to the temptation of exaggerating the service they rendered, but the narrator is inclined to think that by attributing over importance to praise worthy actions one may, by implication be paying
indirect but potent homage to the worse side of human nature. For this attitude implies that such action are rare exceptions, while callousness and apathy are the general rule. (Camus, p. 119)

While portions of society fear contact with others in case of contagion and even fear the essential workers as potential carriers, there are others who step in and assume a social obligation. For Levinas the responsibility to the Face of others overcomes personal concerns.

Metz argues that “a man’s life is of some use, if and only if the intrinsic value of the universe as a whole (including past present and future) is greater, owing to the existence of his actions and experiences, than it would have been if, other things being equal, those actions and experiences had never existed?” (Metz, 2013) Such a view heightens the concern re the designation of essential and non-essential, when many people are observing that the truth is, most of people will stay at home and not do all that much work and their society and the planet as a whole will actually be better for it. This is reminiscent of the Russian literary concept of the superfluous man in the mid-eighteen hundreds.

Plato observed that humans are beings in search of meaning. To resolve this search people automatically coax meaning from their experiences, including the experience of life itself. Being non-essential does not fit this objective. The point is that for a variety of reasons, we have evolved to make caring for each other a central purpose of life, and a purpose that goes beyond ourselves (Aron, 2017). If we are to find we have no role in this activity, what is our meaning?

While in theory the isolation driven by the lockdowns is spatial to prevent contagion it is proving to be significantly social isolation. Millions of people in cities across the world are learning the same thing: the primal importance of fellowship. In theory this should create new forms of local and global solidarity. But this will require a lot of work as it not obvious to all. When the authorities impose segregation, certain particularly affected dwellers cannot help regarding these regulations as a sort of alienation, specially directed at themselves. This combined with fear of death causes them to envy residents in other areas of freedom. Unfortunately language and cultural barriers mean that not all sections of society are hearing the same official guidance, when the fundamental rights and liberties have been curtailed in order to assist in suppressing the virus. Various sub groups often feel the lockdown
discriminates against them particularly and unfortunately makes them harden their hearts to one another.

This is further reinforced by other government actions. Those without the contagion are obsessed with not getting it and do their best to practice cleanliness. They’re also obsessed about their need for sterilization and seek to place their own safety above that of others. They fight for scarce resources, but achieve nothing. The frantic desire for life that thrives in the heart of every great calamity drives people to actions previously deemed immoral. The government accentuates the alienation by turning neighbours and community members against one another by encouraging the reporting of individuals who residents consider are putting them in danger by not complying with the isolation instructions as they understand them. Individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean of norm are alienated and imprisoned.

It is important to overlook individual cases of abhorrent behaviour and through this pandemic note Camus’s view that through a plague we are reminded there are more things to admire in men than to despise (Camus, p. 120)

3. State responsibility

Novelists have always been interested in epidemics exposing the frailty of mankind, Daniel Defoe published A Journal of the plague year in 1772. Mary Shelly’s The Last Man and Boccaccio’s Decameron which is a composite of stories told by a group of young people sheltering from the plague. They tell the tales of the Black Death which killed 50 million people in Europe in the 14th century; the Italian plague of 1629 killed 280,000 people and many other plagues which were significant influences on societies and human evolution. Sales of The Plague by Albert Camus have skyrocketed in Europe as Melissa Block suggests people search for meaning in the midst of the outbreak.

Apart from great literature these plagues left a second significant impact on continental society. Many Western governments have laws in their statutes that give them extraordinary powers to step in and order quarantines, detain those refusing to self-isolated and effectively seize control of communities. Many liberal and leftist commentators have noted how the coronavirus epidemic is being used to justify and legitimise measures of control and regulation of the people that had been till now unthinkable in a Western democratic society. While China’s
draconian response was in keeping with its perceived authoritarian nature, quarantining entire cities seemed positively dystopian for many Westerners. Then within weeks it was the Western norm, without challenge.

The first thing a disaster represents is a failure of authorities to protect their people, it’s a sense that the people in charge aren’t really in charge because crisis has outstripped their capacity to respond. While newspapers rally the populace with news that the pestilence is under control when it is not (China, USA, UK, Japan) they are simply trying to buy time to prepare. According to the former president of the UK Faculty of Public Health, at the moment a lot of what’s going into public briefings in the UK is coming very close to lies. (Crawford, 2020) The clearest example which is occurring in many countries is suppressing the rate of death by limiting the source of data to hospitals only, making sure the world does not discover the true deadly inefficiency of their systems. (Thiessen, 2020)

The authorities have been caught off guard, with little or no contingency for the events being played out. Unfortunately the Governments display the behaviours of totalitarian regimes of lying to themselves about the seriousness of the situation, and then lying to the world. Accordingly the virus can be used as an expedient excuse for deepening totalitarian control, via tracking systems, and suppressing further the limited free will within the state. This is how freedom dies, when society ignores the creation of community alienation and stand idly bye as rights dwindle away. Our temporary acceptance of more chains of servitude to the state pass into accepted routine and many years hence a new generation will wonder how did this happen.

Alternatively this proposed ‘disproportionate response’ by the state may be more a result of desperation. Few members of authority in any country have experience or competence in managing the welfare of the society for which they are responsible in the face of a pandemic. However most have probably read of the trail of destruction of the Spanish Influenza in 1919 and are desperate to prevent such damage to their societies. They have fallen back on preventative measures that hardly worked when the population was smaller and less well connected. What the authorities lack now is imagination and the ability to counteract one of mankind’s oldest enemies.

So while the authorities are being accused of creating a state of ‘big data totalitarianism’ or what has been called the ‘data Leviathan’ people should be conscious of the fact that they are fulfilling their obligations to do everything they can to protect the society which has asked
them to govern. It is mistake to reflexively interpret all forms of sensing and modelling as ‘surveillance’ and active governance as social control. They is general acceptance of a need for a different and more nuanced vocabulary of intervention.

4. Revolt

Since the Coronavirus emerged in China late last year, it has gone on the march, invading more than a hundred countries, panicking populations and financial markets and putting cities, regions and entire countries under quarantine. Social gatherings have been banned and schools universities and work places have all been closed or if possible moved on line. Yet the population cannot see what is endangering them as the virus is invisible. They feel the need for a physical representation of the threat and that often takes the form of government or a fringe community.

So while the majority of people have adapted themselves to their confinement and to a new episode of their humdrum lives as before, there are others who cannot settle so easily. They rebel that their homes and towns have become prisons. This feeling of loss of free will and of being locked in like criminals prompts them sometimes to fool hardy acts. These feelings are nothing new, in 1841 The Lancet medical journal was noted for its anti-contagionist fervour “the quarantine laws derive their enforcement either in political motives or from despotic feelings.” (Ling, 2020)

When the anti-contagionist behaviour is deviant in relation to the required social norm they are outcasts to be despised and imprisoned. Governments generate this social pressure by encouraging the reporting and denouncing of isolation breakers. Fearful people are reporting on strangers, neighbours, previous friends, and even family members which is unfortunately is all too common in Human history. The fear of the unseen killer creates a culture of fear, not of the virus, but of each other as in most dystopian societies. The fanatical need to be part of the ‘in group’, to be the model citizen, enables those in power to redefine the workings of society.

In Camus’s tale The Plague his true subject lies outside of time and place. His intent is metaphorical. He addresses any contagion that might overtake any society; from a disease like cholera, the Spanish Influenza, and the coronavirus to a corrosive ideology like fascism or totalitarianism which can infect a whole population. For Camus, it is his deep sense of the absurd which urges us to action. The fact of absurd powerlessness is no reason not to act. He
talks of resistance and how people can come together in a situation to resist. So are the isolation breakers a scourge on society, carelessly putting everyone else’s lives at risk or are they Camus’s rebels seeking to maximise their life in the event of sudden death and refusing to hide away in their homes in the hope they will emerge in a brighter safer world? Are they the cowards who refuse to sacrifice so that others may live, or some form of absurd hero who is resisting the loss of free will while others cannot see the threat. The rebels may not be resisting isolation but resisting government control and the creation of a world which could be less open and less free.

Sitting imprisoned in their own homes there is nothing they can do to influence the outcome. Many feel dissatisfied and anxious about the present, and cheated of their planned future. Camus suggests that from individual defiance or revolt in the face of the absurdity of existence, society can derive a collective solidarity.

5. Mortality

Even after warnings going back thousands of years that plague represents a threat to human existence it was only when the first people died of Coronavirus, that mankind acknowledged the danger still remained fantastically real.

The fact that we exist and know that death is inevitable, and its shortening is within our control, means that this knowledge changes our awareness of various things in the world, and the significance of those things. A person who has free will would not deny or disregard the fact, but would embrace and react to the fact of mortality. Our limited life span provides time with a significance which necessitates our taking personal responsibility as early as possible. Death does not bring meaning to a life, nor does it value nihilism, but when embraced at an individual’s discretion indicates maximum self-determinism and freedom. With death, this life ends and we cease to exist. There is nothing to fear, because there is nothing.

Yet the average person fears catching the virus and its consequences. They willingly embrace self-imprisonment, monitoring, family separation and loss of livelihood in order to avoid illness and death. There are few people looking forward to an early transcendence or a passage to oblivion. The prospect of diet and healthy regimes managing to hold death at bay are overwhelmed with a sudden realisation the end may not be as far away some had hoped for.

Few books described man’s confrontation and cohabitation with death so vividly as The Plague. Camus captures this clearly “There was no room in any heart but for a very old gray...
hope, that hope which keeps men form letting themselves drift into death and is nothing but a
dogged will to live”. (Camus, p. 236)

Plague is one of our most primal fears as human beings, the idea of this silent killer,
once again stalking the land in search of new victims brings mortality to the forefront of
people’s minds. A transformed internal sense where people feel closer to mortality, their own
and others mortality, in the ways that can make them feel it’s more urgent to lead life according
to their values, according to what really matters. Each trying to prolong a day that might well
be their last.

6. Attunements

For Heidegger within a level of anxiety, freedom becomes visible and in the associated
boredom we become sensitive to the fact that the activities we preoccupy ourselves with serve
no overall purpose. Anxiety and boredom are attunements, rather than simple moods, because
they are not responses to particular and changeable circumstances, but rather the human
condition as a whole. Although Heidegger sees that there is no externally imposed point to life,
he thinks that it is possible to provide our existence with an overall purpose, by authentically
choosing a way of being through an autonomous act of self-creation. This is why the
withdrawals brought about by anxiety and boredom are mainly of importance to Heidegger for
the call to action they provide; they jolt us out of inauthentic complacency to provoke an
authentic choice. Tartaglia agrees that the strategic importance of the attunements is that they
act as a kind of alarm bell, waking us from our immersion within the projects we have
haphazardly found ourselves engaged in. (Tartaglia, p. 29)

For some people, the coronavirus pandemic will have created an upheaval of a sense of
normality, exposing its construction on chaotic underpinnings, forcing them to recognise the
fundamental randomness of their environment. This contradiction between individual purpose
and chaotic reality can lead to an inertia from which boredom with everyday life is a by-product.
Ordinary activities lose their stimulatory appeal, as we can no longer find meaning in them.

In this way the Coronavirus has sounded the alarm bell. The suffering, which crushes
human beings both physically and spiritually, is the central theme of Camus’s plague novel. He
describes the plague as an irrational force and a depersonalised evil, which is the main cause of
the suffering. Camus’s absurd is often encountered when one is suddenly aware that habits have
strangled natural responses and reactions. Coronavirus brings into sharp awareness our susceptibility to sudden death, an event that can render our lives instantaneously meaningless. Those that have drifted through life rather than lived, suddenly see the emptiness of their existence.

**Anxiety**

Accompanying the fear of death, is serious reflection. Human beings must reconcile the urge to find purpose in their existence, with the seeming indifference of the world around them. That inherent contradiction is the cause of anxiety. For many this pandemic is a new kind of ambiguity and being anxious about it is understandable: millions of lives are being unexpectedly disrupted; disinformation, disbelief and denial are a global phenomenon and all the time the death toll is rising. The key is to recognise that to be human is to live in ambiguity and the solution isn’t to eliminate uncertainty, but to recognise it as the condition of existence.

Due to the lockdown people are experiencing the sense of being abandoned, which is sapping them to the point of futility. They are coming to know what Camus described as “the incorrigible sorrow of all prisoners and exiles, which is live in company with a memory that serves no purpose“. (Camus, p. 66) The current situation re-enforces Heidegger’s view that we have all become isolated individuals who are subject to impersonal, abstract notions, and no longer feel any strong need for anything, or for doing anything essential.

Susan Wolf suggests that a meaningful life must satisfy two criteria concurrently. First there must be active engagement and second it must be engagement in (or with) projects of worth. (Wolf, 2018) A life is meaningless if it lacks either component. In the age of the coronavirus most lives lack both. The human brain cannot sustain purposeless living. Is systems are designed for purposive action. When that is blocked, its systems deteriorate, and the emotional feedback from idling these systems signals extreme discomfort and motivates the search for renewed purpose, renewed meaning. This process Frankl observes as a ‘will to meaning’. (Klinger, 2017)

A core issue now is that anxiety is more contagious than the coronavirus and could cause a lot more damage to existing societies. After all as Epictetus notes “Man the rational animal, can put up with anything except what seems to him irrational: whatever is rational is tolerable” (Epictetus, p. 5). So our danger is we rationalise ourselves into the point of non-existence.
Boredom

Existential theories argue that boredom is caused by a lack of life meaning or purpose: boredom ensues when an individual gives up on or fails to articulate and participate in activities that are consistent with his values. Eastwood describes existential boredom as: a sense of emptiness, meaningfulness and a paralysis of agency. The bored individual is unable to find impetus for action. (Eastwood, 2020) Boredom is at once objective and subjective, emotion and intellectualization –not just a response to the modern world but also a historically constituted strategy for coping with its discontents. Boredom has to do fundamentally with an experience of time and problems of meaning.

Even pre-viruses there already existed a trend of increased loneliness in the population. Further social isolation can compound feelings of depression because staying at home robs people of distractions they might otherwise enjoy. Without stimulus or focus, the individual is confronted with nothingness, the meaninglessness of existence. Coronavirus related lockdowns have restricted our stimulatory environments to our homes and social media. Put simply, we feel the urge to be stimulated but our environment is not able to satisfy that need.

Doing nothing means that you withdraw your involvement with what is happening around you, that you are not engaged. Coronavirus has allowed many to create the habit of despair which is worse than the despair itself. A problem for many people is that are not experiencing anxiety or boredom, but both.

Nihilism

The consequences of boredom are not trivial. While social responsibility is essential to human well-being a failure to find meaning within the society can be serious. It is often linked to the development of harmful habits, such as binge eating and substance abuse and a heightened risk of developing depression. At the extreme it means a call to death. Depression leading to suicide kills over 800,000 a year, while drug overdose and obesity kill many more. In avoiding the direct impact of the virus, many more individuals are potentially exposed to equally threatening conditions.

Some people think they are bored of life or people, when in fact they are just bored of themselves, of what is happening to them. They lose touch with the value of human life.
Benatar notes that failed social belonging is the most important factor in predicting suicide. It is one consequence of perceiving one’s life to have no meaning from the perspective of some other humans. (Benatar, p. 61)

The New Zealand call to ‘be kind, stay calm’ is a worthwhile message, unfortunately not everyone is able to sustain this in other countries. In one part of the US, calls reporting threats or attempts of suicide have jumped 41% over the same period last year. We could all take a core message from Metz when he suggests that while “Sisyphus’s life could be meaningful merely for having fulfilled a desire to roll a stone, it would also entail that a person’s existence could become significant by merely; staying alive”. (Metz, p. 175)

7. A Non-Natural Solution

It is the aspiration of many of the scientists working in the field of genetic engineering that one day soon they will be able to improve genome sequences which will strengthen an individual’s immune system. While this is becoming increasingly likely in the laboratory, in practice it will require an intervention in natural evolution. Mankind will effectively take control of some of the core levers in determining the human fit with the environment. Within society there will become two grouping of individuals, pure breeds (natural humans) and artificial breeds (genetically enhanced). Given the level of fear and anxiety displayed across the world at this point it would not be surprising if a large portion of the population would willingly agree to a permanent alteration of their DNA if it meant a freedom from all current and future virus, regardless of the longer term consequences.

Kurzweil in his book The Singularity is Near suggests that Artificial General Intelligence will be achieved by the year 2045 at which point he believes we will have defeated war, disease, poverty, and personal death. Few would disagree that the removal of the pain and suffering from these causes would be a great thing. However, most would give no thought to what it really means to be immune to sickness and how this would alter the lives we lead, and the meaning we seek each day. In addition, few would also give any thought to the growth in the population if disease no longer thinned our ranks or the fact that one major aspect of humanity is the caring for others. If we no longer have the necessity to care for the ill, what form will our social obligation take?
Artificial intelligence is growing in its application and utilisation during the crisis. Even the essential workers are being replaced by this advanced technology. Engineers are accelerating their efforts to provide AI solutions to avoid the need for human contact and socialisation. Robotic solutions are already in place for food distribution and routine medical checks in isolation wards. Police or army are no longer required to have a physical presence on the streets, robots are already patrolling the streets of China and Italy equipped with facial recognition software and multi-language capability. They can advise of lockdown rules, can scan crowds for the absence of face masks and elevating body temperatures and check identities and addresses. For a faster response drones are now deployed by countries to track and trace lockdown offenders. The essential workers of the future will be AI technicians, as every effort is made to isolated humans from the threat. The great human strength of adaptability to different and changing environments is on the verge of removing humans from any and all hostile environments.

At the other extreme is Tegmark’s consideration that for some of A-Life’s most ardent supporters is the life extending possibilities of cyborgs and uploads which hold a promise of techno-bliss that enables a life extension for all. Indeed, the prospect of getting uploaded in the future has motivated over a hundred people to have their brains posthumously frozen by the Arizona based company Alcor. (Tegmark, p. 167) The human body will be a thing of the past. No longer will mankind have to rely on a perishable fragile biological frame. Our minds will be housed in a state of the art high performing highly resilient armoured mobility device.

The change in social culture required to enable the roll out of increasingly sophisticated robotics has been massively accelerated by the state and company responses to the virus. For the ‘accelerationists’ the crisis is being welcomed and celebrated. Technology adoption which would pre-virus have taken years is now in place. It is only the post pandemic world that the real impact of this change will be known.

8. The Return

For the present many people do not consider themselves as unemployed, merely on holiday. However most people are now beginning to realise that commerce too has died of the virus and that this no holiday. Unlike an individual recovering from the flu and returning to the same working and social environment from which they had a temporary leave of absence,
returning to a post coronavirus world will be vastly different for millions of people. The truly unfortunate may never return to overall position in life they once held.

It is hard to imagine a crisis of this magnitude not altering our societies in significant ways. Fortunately as Solnit observes civilisation is resilient, what makes it strong is not massive institutions nor strong leaders it is just ordinary people not heroes, not super humans, but every day people who notice that something need doing and then do it.

In antiquity, epidemics often brought societies together rather than dividing them as happened with some modern diseases such as influenza in modern times. In *A Paradise Built in Hell; The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster*, Solnit describes how disasters sweep away the barriers that isolate people from each other under normal times. The co-operative life affirming social experiences in ‘a period when everyone transcends their daily troubles and comes together, finding their true values and living them out’ (Sonit, 2009) Suddenly all have something in common, some of the real and some of the arbitrary walls between us fall away.

The world will look different after the current pandemic, but not unrecognisably so, and our task is going to be to reshape it and make it better. Ideas aren’t enough, but you can’t build something if you can’t imagine it first. So to create a better society we should first decide what it is we value most and what we want from life. We know we don’t want nihilism, but how much free will is essential before the individual is forced into a choice?

The pandemic might conceivably teach us that separateness, is an illusion and that free will is socially based. It is at this point that some individuals should revolt against a previously stultifying pattern of living and avoid the despair when established institutions of government and social patterns of behaviour eventually seek to return to the past.

**9. Conclusion**

Kierkegaard holds that the meaning we find in life is not something that simply comes to us, but is something we attain through struggle, delivered by our choices and commitments. In which case the Coronavirus and its impact on the societies of the world will produce a range of opportunities to live for a purpose with a profound meaning.
Any rush to embrace authoritarianism in our response to this crisis could cast a much longer shadow. Whatever might happen in the weeks and months ahead, we need to make sure that we still have a free society. One casualty of Coronavirus should not be free will.

To build a better future we need to ‘be kind’ to each other and to ‘stay calm’ and not succumb to anxiety of individuals as they struggle to determine what sort of norms they should follow. The apparent need to believe in ourselves, which can cause despair when the meaning seems evasive or beyond access, must have its purpose made clear.

Things we were used to as part of or daily life should no longer be taken for granted. We will need to learn to live a much more fragile life and to recognise that no one will ever be free as long as there is plague, pestilence and famine.

Be Kind, stay calm.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


