

PHILOSOPHY OF DEATH AND THE NEW HUMANISM IN THE POST COVID-19 SOCIETY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dr. Nizamuddin Ahmed

Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Haldia Govt. College, Purba Medinipur, West Bengal, India

Abstract

Our relation to death is mediated by the phenomenon and our own reflection, it is individual and intimate, and at the same time, it is shaped by our condition as social beings. That is why, before trying to unveil in which way philosophy can help us in understanding death, it is desirable to start from a common place, belonging to the present, in the attempt to answer this question: "How is social shaping today in this post COVID-19 society, the way we perceive death?. The question is not about the semantics of the word 'death', but it is rather trying to highlight a few phenomena that express ways to address the philosophy of death in this post COVID-19 society. In this study, an attempt has been made to explore the philosophy of death and the new humanism in the post COVID-19 society by applying the phenomenological methodology. The information and data for this study have been collected from two sources i.e., Primary and Secondary. As a primary source of data, direct close and insightful observation of the society and experienced shared by different age groups of individuals have been recorded and analyzed qualitatively based on the phenomenological research methodology. Besides that, the secondary data have been collected from different books, journals, research articles, internet-based different social media, and websites. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, death is generally treated as uncertain and unpredictable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fear of death trapped us and we seemed death is very much predictable in the post COVID-19 society most individuals are trapped by this thought process and they cannot escape themselves from this thought of

death. In this post COVID-19 world human beings may be trapped by COVID-19 pandemic protocol especially the maintaining of physical distance practised for a prolonged time, compelling themselves towards a new humanism i.e. live at any cost by ignoring togetherness, social bonding, interaction with community people etc. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic triggers a self-centred attitude more and more among the people in the post COVID-19 society.

Keyword: Philosophy of Death, New Humanism, Phenomenology, Post COVID-19 Society

1.INTRODUCTION

One of the worst outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic is the psychological stress and anxiety caused among millions of people resulting from uncertainty, which destabilises sustainable and comfortable living. As a result, a substantial number of people are affected to a degree and manner that their lives and thinking processes are altered irreversibly. This altered thinking process at a larger scale of human society resulted from the harsh impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that one and all exposed a fault line in our approaches, the way we learn, think about our life and death; handle our lives in society and show our culture in the post COVID-19 society. Our relation to death is mediated by the phenomenon and our own reflection, it is individual and intimate, and at the same time, it is shaped by our condition as social beings. Because we are social animals, we are characteristically involved in a host of different, criss-crossing and overlapping relationships with other people, some intimate and private, others more impersonal and public. When we die, our death disrupts this extensive set of relationships, forcing a

greater or lesser reconstruction of the social web. That is why, before trying to unveil in which way philosophy can help us in understanding death, it is desirable to start from a common place, belonging to the present, in the attempt to answer this question: "How is social shaping today in this post COVID-19 society, the way we perceive death?. The question is not about the semantics of the word 'death', but it is rather trying to highlight a few phenomena that express ways to address the philosophy of death in this post COVID-19 society. In parallel, life is not a narrative sequence of events, one single narrative from birth to death. Different versions and interpretations of the life and death of a person are continuously written from different points of view; there is never a definitive history or point of view. Stories about life,

and the philosophy of death are always fragmentary, and partial, and they cannot be told but from a certain perspective, depending on the intended emphasis. They do not guarantee wholeness among our several dimensions. One of the utmost burning questions with which philosophy always remains searched is about death. Socrates' characterization of the philosophical enterprise as 'practising dying' epitomizes a major way of understanding the phenomenon of death. The Greek philosopher Plato defines philosophy as the preparation for death. For the later period of philosophical development contributed by the different schools of western philosophy, especially for the existentialists, death becomes the core part of philosophising. It is death which makes existence a philosophical issue. Thus, for philosophy, death is not an intangible likelihood but rather a living phenomenon inextricably correlated with existence. Like 'left and right' or 'up and down', life and death are correlative categories which depend upon each other for an explanation. They are thus merely explanatory rather than ontological categories required to describe a relative persistence within an unrelenting process of transformation. The formal aspect of an order does not depend upon or appeal to metaphysical assumptions, but is discernable as the continuous patterns in the everyday world around us.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made the uncertainty of life more explicit than ever in recent times, though death is the inevitable part of life and it can reach every human being at any time; whoever is born, must die. Any individual can not exactly know his or her time, place, and cause of death but certainly, death reach everyone

in its own way and time as fixed by The Almighty Allah. No one can escape from death. The dimension of unpredictability makes it the singular inescapable event of human life. No wonder, philosophy and religion across the culture reflect on death and dying. Almost all of the philosophical reflections on death conclude it as an individual phenomenon signifying the end of a particular life. Henceforth, an individual expounds on death as a singular phenomenon of his or her life which makes one conscious of the importance of life. Philosophically, death has been explained more in terms of an individual encounter, as something that happens with respect to that person. Here the meaning of death cannot be blown by its public explanation but by the signification given by the person. As a species in the evolutionary stairway, humans have consummated the genetically embedded aspiration in them to escape or defeat predators and protect their life at any cost by escaping death.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a fundamental shift in the world view of death and as well as new humanism has been generated in the post COVID-19 society which needs philosophical analysis. In this study, an attempt has been made to explore the philosophy of death and the new humanism in the post COVID-19 society by applying the phenomenological methodology.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This paper is an attempt to explore, highlight and analyze phenomenologically based on the following objectives:

1. To explore the philosophy of death in the post COVID-19 society.
2. To highlight the new humanism in the post COVID-19 society.

3.METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

Phenomenology is a philosophical method or approach that puts theoretical emphasis on experience and its systematic expression. Therefore, all theoretical knowledge is always bound to experience and the subject of experience. Insofar as phenomenology puts its methodological importance on experience as the transcendental condition of possibility of philosophical knowledge, it proves itself to be first and foremost an

exploration of human perception and its possibilities of experience. Such detailed study often requires understanding the experiences of others so that we can glean new insights about a particular phenomenon. Overall, phenomenology is perceived as a "way of thinking about knowledge – a philosophical and theoretical viewpoint – how do we know what we know" (Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010, p.5), and as a methodological approach to studying human phenomena at a deeper level of consciousness to understand lived experiences.

Accordingly, in the phenomenological tradition, phenomenology is given a much wider range, addressing the meaning things have in our experience, notably, the significance of objects, events, tools, the flow of time, the self, and others, as these things arise and are experienced in our 'life-world'.

The information and data for this study have been collected from two sources i.e., Primary and Secondary. As a primary source of data, direct close and insightful observation of the society and experienced shared by different age groups of individuals have been recorded and analyzed qualitatively based on the phenomenological research methodology. Besides that, the secondary data have been collected from different books, journals, research articles, internet-based different social media, and websites.

4.FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

The Objective wise findings along with the discussion of this study have been given below:

Any discussion of the 'death of philosophy' and the 'new humanism' in the post COVID-19 society as a viewpoint of the perspectives of phenomenology, probably, needs to begin with a definition of what the word 'phenomenology' stands in any particular discussion. This is especially necessary because the meanings of words change over time and within different contexts and situations and contemporary times, and phenomenology has been used in a variety of ways that have generated considerable controversy. The word phenomenon (plural, phenomena) derives from Greek and refers to outward appearances. In Martin Heidegger, Husserl, and Jaspers, phenomena were understood in terms of internal subjective experiences. In this discussion, the term phenomenology is used in

this contemporary post COVID-19 world to explore the philosophy of death and highlight the new humanism in the post COVID-19 society.

In his *Being and Time*, Heidegger argued that the experience of mortality has a crucial role in our self-understanding: by facing the possibility of death and by grasping the limits of our existence and its historical-situational character, we become conscious of our own possibilities as such, i.e. as our own in distinction from the general possibilities of human beings. In the pre COVID-19 pandemic society, death could become the moment to reflect philosophically and present us with the absurdity of human life. Questions associated with the mass death are now magnified by the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). This has caused global panic and created unpredictability at all levels of society and culture. This sudden global threat of death makes it timely to re-examine our values, our beliefs (secular or religious), and the meaning of life.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the speedy and huge scale of the infection hardly leaves anytime to reflect and reason out as the very basis of social and biological life like touching, talking, interaction, and hugging becomes liable to the virus. From this fear psychology, most individuals distance themselves from others as this is the inborn instinct of human beings i.e. fear of death and anyway exists in this materialistic world. It is also a matter of concern that due to maintaining COVID-19 pandemic protocol as envisaged by state authorities for a prolonged time, the absence of embodied social interaction could lead to social amnesia regarding values and togetherness, and might high the danger of becoming a monadic and alienated self. In this post COVID-19 world human beings may be trapped by those COVID-19 pandemic protocols practised for a prolonged time, compel themselves towards a new humanism i.e. live at any cost by ignoring togetherness, social bonding, interaction with community people etc. Thus it may be said that the COVID-19 pandemic triggers the self-centred attitude more and more among the people in the post COVID-19 society.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, death is generally treated as uncertain and unpredictable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fear of death trapped us and we seemed death is very much predictable in the post COVID-19 society most individuals are trapped by this thought process and they cannot escape themselves from this thought of death. In addition to that, the World

after the drastic shaking by the COVID-19 pandemic humans feels absolutely helpless in the face of the pandemic despite its claims of superiority over nature. The whole world saw that modern medical sciences and technologies cannot give the actually proven safeguard against the coronavirus i.e. more categorically SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic has made the Anthropocene a lived reality and a never forgetting memory to the whole society of our planet earth. As a result, the post COVID-19 society turns to a new humanism which is more self-centric as the fear of new pathogens like the virus of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are now very much worried about own-self existence in the materialistic world. At present, most people cannot attend funeral procession even their relatives and also try to avoid seeing and caring for their relatives or even their older family members during their any kind of illness. It has also been seen in this post COVID-19 society that humanity is replaced very much with technology. Technology is seen as a tool in this quest. We are now going to a virtual world where we very much feel easy to share our emotions, care, and social bonding with others.

5.CONCLUSION:

During the COVID-19 pandemic period, socially, psychologically, and individually we are pushed to the utmost levels to think, behave, and act in ways never imagined before the COVID-19 pandemic. Death in a pandemic has been understood as the collective experience which does not happen to the specific individual but to a large number of people who are unrelated to each other, though grappling with insecurity and uncertainty, caused by the enclosure and isolation of different degrees, can give rise to different ways of acceptance or submission leading to new kind of psychological challenges, post-traumatic distress, and other kinds of social disorder which have a long term effect in our mind in this post COVID-19 time. Those types of long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will be made in the post COVID-19 world to bring humanities and social sciences into the framework of thought and trans-disciplinary thinking. Uncertainty is also a trigger for the philosophical opening up of the mind and thus aiding healing through acceptance and inclusion- a philosophical worldview that inspires

inclusion of the other. A major tenet of the human mind is to conceive of a Utopia and believe in its possibility at least remotely. Thus the focus should be on the inclusive self as the healer and not persuaded by fear of threat to life in the post COVID-19 world for the greater benefit of society.

REFERENCES:

- [1]. Ahmed, N. (2022). The Psychosocial Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic in India: A Situational Analysis. In N. Ahmed (Ed.) Education, Society and Culture: COVID-19 Pandemic, 1-11. New Delhi: Kunal Books.
- [2]. Ames, R.T. (1998). Death as Transformation in Classical Daoism. In Malpas, J. and Solomon, R.C. Death and Philosophy, 51-62. London: Routledge.
- [3]. Andreasen, N. C. (2007). DSM and the Death of Phenomenology in America: An Example of Unintended Consequences. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 33(1), 108-112. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2632284/> on August 21, 2022 at 23:56 IST.
- [4]. Andreasen, N. C. (1991). Reply to "Phenomenology or Physicalism?". *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 17(2), 187-189. Retrieved from <https://academic.oup.com/schizophreniabulletin/article/17/2/187/1873575> on August 20, 2022 at 23:02 IST.
- [5]. Arendt, H. (1981). *The Life of the Mind*. New York: Harcourt Books.
- [6]. Derrida, J. (1989). *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [7]. Goodall, J. (2020). COVID-19 is a product of our unhealthy relationship with animals and the environment (commentary). Retrieved from <https://news.mongabay.com/2020/05/jane-goodall-covid-19-is-a-product-of-our-unhealthy-relationship-with-animals-and-the-environment/> on August 15, 2022 at 16:44 IST.
- [8]. Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. New York: Harper and Row.
- [9]. Heidegger, M. (1995). *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- [10]. Kokosalakis, N. (2020). Reflections on Death in Philosophical/Existential Context. *Society*, 57,402-409. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s12>

115-020-00503-5.pdf on August 22, 2022 at 22:30 IST.

- [11]. Menon, S. et al. (2021). Post-Covid World and New Humanism. In Kant, R. (Ed.), COVID-19 Pandemic (History, Science & Society), 147-150. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
- [12]. Mortari, L. & Tarozzi, M. (2010). Phenomenology as philosophy of research: An introductory essay. Phenomenology and human science research today, 9-54.
- [13]. Petitot, J., Varela, F. J., Pachoud, B., and Roy, J.-M. (Eds.). (1999). Naturalizing Phenomenology: Issues in Contemporary Phenomenology and Cognitive Science. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press (in collaboration with Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York).
- [14]. Rogers, J.P. et al. (2020). Psychiatric and neuropsychiatric presentations associated with severe coronavirus infections: A systematic review and meta-analysis with comparison to the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Lancet: Psychiatry*, 7(7), 611-627.
- [15]. Rousseau, P. (1998). Further reflections on dying. *Academic Medicine*, 73, 221-222.
- [16]. Sartre, J.P. (1971). *Being and Nothingness*. Washington: Pocket Books.
- [17]. Zahavi, D. (2003). *Husserl's Phenomenology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press