



INFECTION

A
LEWANIAAN
MINI-ZINE
ON THE
COVID-19
PANDEMIC

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We acknowledge the theory enunciated and written down by Democritus and his followers that it is the influx of alien atoms from the infinity of space, following the destruction of worlds out there, that causes plagues and unusual diseases to arise and assail us.

-Plutarch

Against Social Distancing

A Critique of the Ideology of Isolation

* *

By Dabtara

As of now, multiple states and cities have been put into what amounts to near-complete lockdown. Most of the East Coast of the U.S. has prohibited mass gatherings of people and forced restaurants to stop serving people in the building. Some states have even started to enforce curfews and travel restrictions.

At this point, the speculation is not when this will abide, but how much worse it is going to get.

These measures have been based around a general preventative principle: social distancing. Social distancing has, in the span of a month, gone from tactic to unquestionable dogma, and I believe it is worthwhile to unpack how it functions ideologically and why it needs to be subjected to a critique.

Shame is not epidemiology

In a distinctly American way, our crises have brought out the Puritan core of our national psyche.

Social distancing has been predictably utilized as a form of control and shunning; you are a *bad person* if you go out or meet other people because you are putting *your needs* above that of the group. You are being *bad* because you are helping spread the disease. Good people stay inside and follow orders.

Trying to shame people for going outside is more pathological than the disease itself because it completely fails to grasp the current situation. As hard as it is for some people to hear this, diseases aren't spread by *bad people*. Anyone can get sick and

there are going to be a large number of people who, despite practicing social isolation, will contract the disease and there will be an even larger number who, despite venturing outside and coming into contact with others, will emerge completely unscathed.

Diseases infect people, no matter how self-righteous they are.

The elevation of social isolation into a dogmatic belief in part stems from fear. People seek to perform certain self-congratulating rituals in order to protect themselves from contagion, sealing themselves away in hermetically sealed apartment units from the contagion of selfish and bad people on the outside. The underlying Protestantism of it all shines through as people care more about shaming those they see as disobedient or lazy, trying to berate others into submitting to their personal rituals *because they identify personal moral failure with biological contagion*. This was true long before any disease broke out; this crisis just helped make this all the more explicit.

They break rules, don't they?

The leadup to the full lockdown saw the scolds and fear mongers pulling out their hair in panic at the sight of people eating at restaurants, going to the gym, clubbing at bars, going to church, etc. Rideshare drivers breaking down in tears at the idea of dropping someone off at a club, how could they be so *selfish*? Why aren't they locking themselves in their panic rooms at the first sign of danger?

Liberated from the obligation of hours of commutes and direct supervision, God forbid people want to take advantage of their time while they still have it.

People were going out to eat or drinking in bars because they knew their time was limited. Shutdown was imminent and in many ways this last gasp only accelerated the perception of doomsday. The worst is assumed: the person at the gym only cares about their own health (an unforgivable crime) and needs to be stopped for their own good. Contemporary ideology is entirely convinced that people are not making calculations or being strategic when they go out to a club full of healthy young people or seeing friends one last time before they close ranks among their family; no, they're just being hedonistic pleasure-seekers and for this they need to have their movement restricted, activities monitored, and behavior castigated in public.

The reaction against social isolation is a reaction against social control.

The state steps in

At the time of writing, more than a fifth of Americans are under orders to stay home by the state.¹ Social isolation is now no longer a suggestion, but a mandate. Puritanical ethos is law.

Faith in the state, of course, is poorly placed. Its goal at the moment is to preserve two things: its image and the economy. Your health, which *will get worse* if you're forced to stay in a 30 square foot apartment for months at a time, is not the concern. You as an obedient citizen are expected to make sacrifices for the greater good and let the authorities make all the decisions about where you're allowed to go and who you're allowed to see.

¹CNN, "75 million Americans told to stay home as testing reveals more coronavirus cases"
<https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/21/health/us-coronavirus-wrap-saturday/index.html>

No good crisis isn't going to be taken advantage of.

Works and plagues

“This Strife is good for mortals”

-Hesiod, *Works and Days*

This contracting loss of physical freedom has come with a strange kind of liberation from white collar work. The digital economy has turned everyone's bedroom into their office and, essentially their whole world (unless, of course, you're working in any kind of job that actually matters for social reproduction).

The divide, now more explicit than ever, is between “survival jobs,” consisting of a hodgepodge mix of Uber Eats drivers, supermarket workers, retail employees, bus drivers, and medics, now is faced with the endless task of making society run despite being exposed to the worst pandemic of their lifetime. Most of these jobs, especially in food service, have no benefits or job protection, revealing again the class stratification inherent in the service economy.

The ideal worker in the eyes of the state now is not the “survival worker,” despite the allowances they are given to travel relatively freely (provided it is during working hours). In fact, the perfect worker is the one working from home, hidden from everyone else and slowly losing their mind to cabin fever and lack of face to face social contact. This is the upstanding citizen, one whose whole life can be reduced to a single room: “put your head down and work away, just wait for things to blow over, don't do anything that might make things more difficult for us.”

Technocracy and obedience

The widespread and near-universal adoption (at least among the well-meaning) of social isolation in many ways speaks to the wholly technocratic and elitist way in which crisis is still being handled in the present world.

There is no concept of community solutions, but rather a top-down command economy of disaster capitalism with UBI characteristics. Failures of the centralized state are taken to be a lack of strong leadership or lack of obedience by the populace. People just need to listen to the experts, damn it!

Social isolation is a catechism and public health experts are its clergy. Their word here is law and ordinary people apparently have no idea that *coming into contact with sick people spreads disease*. Young Americans are medieval peasants ignorant of modern medicine, rather than people taking calculated risks about exposure and treatment. It is up to the quarantine state apparatus to make these decisions for them.

There is no room for debate or discussion, only obedience. Don't think, just act; otherwise people will die.

Christ among the lepers

“Now on his way to Sacramento, Jesus traveled along the border between Stockton and Modesto. As he was going into an encampment, ten men who had breathing difficulties met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a hoarse voice, ‘Jesus, Master, have pity on us!’

When he saw them, he said, ‘Go, show yourselves to your family.’ And as they went, they were cured.”

-Luke 17:11-14

The isolationist impulse produces scared, obedient, and atomized individuals. Freedom is selfish, autonomy is a contagion.

Healing doesn’t happen through isolation; isolation is a way to shut off and hide away the sick and dying. Rather than threaten the already buckling and incompetent health infrastructure, the contagious are told to stay home or risk being shipped off to somewhere even more isolated and inhospitable.

Our collective imagination is itself diseased. In the face of chaos we wait for a savior to swoop in from the outside and solve this problem for us. We felt disempowered before this crisis even began and now that what remains of society has ground to a halt we are even less capable of imagining ourselves as playing any role in our own salvation.

Never forget that the state and its legion of Ivy-certified experts are more than willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives to Mammon to preserve itself. Ask yourself, is the remedy to be christs among the lepers, or the city on the hill?

From crisis to community and back again

In their commentary on the pandemic, CrimethInc. made a series of comments that I think are deeply relevant here:

We won’t be safer if our society is reduced to a bunch of atomized individuals. That would neither protect us from the virus nor from the

stress of this situation nor from the power grabs that capitalists and state authorities are preparing to carry out. As much as the elderly are at risk from the virus, for example, older people are already dangerously isolated in this society; cutting them off from all contact with others will not preserve their physical or mental health. All of us need to be embedded in tight-knit groups in a way that maximizes both our safety and our collective capacity to enjoy life and take action...Within your group, as long as no one has the virus, you can still hug, kiss, make food together, touch the same surfaces—as long as you agree about the level of risk you are collectively ready to tolerate and communicate about it when a new risk factor arises.²

The ideology of isolation is a presumption of guilt before innocence, of a hidden sin that you carry with you that can unknowingly seep into the ones you live and drain them of life before your very eyes. The point of social isolation is to make you fear yourself as a carrier, one with an impure seed that you cannot know until it's too late.

This is a kind of original sin where we are contaminated from the start. But this is not who we are. Community lets us be giving and healing and protective in a way that grants us agency rather than submission. We need mutual aid now more than ever.

The Faustian bargain we are each presented with is that it is better to be safe in Hell than sick in Heaven.

2CrimethInc. “Surviving the Virus: An Anarchist Guide”
<https://crimethinc.com/2020/03/18/surviving-the-virus-an-anarchist-guide-capitalism-in-crisis-rising-totalitarianism-strategies-of-resistance>

Conclusions

Every crisis in the 21st century plays itself out the same as before. Experts, despite being completely unprepared for what's happening and offering solutions arguably as calamitous as their problem, are elevated to the positions of unquestionable authority in the discourse and dissent is treated as yet another contagion to be sanitized.

My advice to the reader is the following:

1. Be critical, even of well meaning and justifiable disease containment measures.
2. Every crisis is an opportunity. Don't be afraid to take advantage of this one.
3. All measures can become a new normal. If the state has its way, the pandemic will never break.

Remember, *Sloboda se ne prodaje za sve kuga maske svijeta; Liberty is not sold for all the plague masks in the world.*

Appendix: Some points of clarification

After circulating my first draft of this piece, less than a week had gone by before there have been some radical shifts in the current social climate that need to be addressed. We are living in tumultuous times and anything written runs the risk of undoing itself before it can even be published.

First, let me reiterate that the object of critique here is not the practice of social distancing itself, but rather its position in the contemporary discourse around the COVID-19 pandemic. Social distancing does save lives (when done sensibly), but the problem is how this act of potential solidarity is

being transmuted into a double-edged sword of alienation and distrust.

“Social distancing” as it stands is being conflated with social isolation, turning the jogger on the street into a potential carrier and your neighbor into Typhoid Mary. Paranoia leads to messianism at a time when it should be clear that the state cannot (nor wants to) save us. Hucksters and cultists can look to gurus and prayer for solutions, but radicals need to recognize the danger of idolizing isolation and start working toward providing concrete and material aid in the face of imminent crisis.

It should be clear to us by now that we need mutual aid. It is going to be quite literally a matter of life or death. This is not a call to play doctor for the sake of boosting one’s ego, but if you believe collapse is coming then you better start brushing up on basic first aid skills. For your own sake, don’t let yourself be in the position where something goes wrong when all the beds in the hospital are full.

Finally, as much as I would like to be optimistic at a time like this, I know the hopes of this opening up anything but fragmentation are slim. We need to be in it for the long haul and it’s going to be rough for the foreseeable future. Take care of yourself and take care of the ones you love, and most importantly, be ready for the worst. There will be moments of genuine compassion and solidarity that will give you hope, and now is not the time for self-flagellating pessimism.

Even with sober senses, the best we can say is that the future is deeply uncertain. I still have hope that between system collapse and dystopia, we might be able to crack open history and claim a little freedom for ourselves.

*Corpses should be disposed of more readily than
dung.*

-Heraclitus

Phenomenopower, Ordinary Life Philosophy, and Covid-19

* *

By Oedipus Europa

The existence of Covid-19 has done many things to the structure of our society. By harming global normality, it has exposed it for what it is in reality: both its strengths and its weaknesses. The crisis of the Covid-19 offers a glimpse of the Superstructure, or, namely, the combination of all smaller, fundamental workings of the global system. This glimpse entails a call to ethical action; but, it simultaneously provides a glimpse of human ontology amid its Heideggerian technological trappings. Finally, the argument calls for a Philosophy of Ordinary Life, and, presenting a possible structure of one, concludes that Ordinary Life has not itself been disturbed, despite all of the chaos caused by the Covid-19.

For millennia, buddhist theology has posited the existence of Maya, or the *great illusion*. The apologists claim that aspects of ordinary human life are in fact empty, or hollow. Heidegger similarly points to the existence of so-called “*Nothing-Noths*” that, in their status as being nothing nevertheless are granted the status of something by entities with the power to do so; not to speak here of material creationism, but instead to speak of the creation of the unreal imagined as real. What Covid-19 has done, during this time of so-called crisis, is made these obscure philosophical points so glaringly apparent. As we are forced to step back from our jobs, machinery, and positions, we come to see to what extent they are traps of a technological kind. Everyday certain forms of technology pervade our existence, and over time, we grow to assume that these are important and here to stay. Yet, so many of

these so-called important features of society have withered away as a result of Covid-19.

To draw up Luhmann's Systems Theory, any system is not immune from change or disruption. In moments of disruptions, the cogs of the machine begin to show more apparently. In this way, Covid-19 has allowed us to see which cogs have fallen to the wayside, during this time of so-called crisis, and which, on the other hand, pervade within the system as if unaffected. This accidental disruption allows us to see that rent prices may be lowered, that the production of necessary resources does not require the entire workforce to produce, and also that funding for social needs is always claimed to be unavailable, while a two trillion dollar bailout bill for hundreds of businesses was passed through congress within two weeks. Coincidentally, Covid-19 has also allowed us to look to presidential candidates and see how they would respond to a social situation such as this one. Some have shown more leadership than others. At any rate, Covid-19 has shown us that, because of the persistence of Ordinary Living despite this social situation, that alternative lifestyles and economic realities are possible.

How could it be that an entity could imagine another entity into existence? The answer might be found in Marx and the tradition of German Idealism. Kant argued that the phenomenological, or the perceptual, is itself distinct from the real, or the actual fundamentals of existence. Hegel concentrated on his theory of will that maintained that humans specifically could assert their will by modeling their environment and its materials according to their own imagination of how said environment ought to look. Karl Marx honed the Hegelian theory of the will to assert that through production and imagination, humans have the chance to get to know themselves,

others, and the nature of the world around them. Importantly, all of these philosophers come together to assert that the phenomenological imagination is quite powerful.

Covid-19 and its effects on global normalcy can be seen all over the place. Workers who imagined their jobs to be essential are surprised to see the world reasonably going on without them. Landlords are posting questions online, asking, "if I could only get 15% of the rent from my renters, that would cover utilities, upkeep, and the taxes... but I wouldn't want them to get used to those prices..." And yet, despite this so-called crisis, Ordinary Life continues on. Folks still have needs, friends, and responsibilities. These take up the bulk of the human imagination; usually people are too caught up in their own lives to be getting into normally obscure and unfriendly reading material. The point is twofold: on the one hand, the world ought be subjected to *the Imaginary Hypothesis*, stating, that a serious amount of things in the human geosphere are imaginary; the second point is that human issues ought to be investigated on human terms, and on ordinary human times, such is the call for a *Philosophy of Ordinary Life*.

If so many things in society are imaginary, such as jobs, rent payments, and so on, it means that Maya is playing a role in keeping human beings confused and in the dark. A demystification of social structures here might follow Michel Foucault's in his critique of biopower. Foucault argued that no one thing could be blamed for oppression, and rather called for an investigation of power itself. Foucault argued that following the power trail would lead to startling conclusions; and, indeed, it does. Instead of following Foucault in his critique of biopower, or control over living beings, it seems better to pursue a course that focuses on *phenomenopower*, or power

over the imaginations and lived experiences of human beings. For, is it really true that society has radically changed during this so-called crisis, or, instead, has the capacity for radical social change been immanent within society the whole time? The only thing that has changed has been our imaginations of how things could and ought to go. Thus, the focus on power over imagination looms over this discussion. In that way, a critique of Phenomenopower ought to be a more permanent fixture in critical discourse.

Covid-19, in upsetting the system, has allowed many of us to blatantly see the effects of the imagination: many of society's chief components are totally imaginary, but also superfluous. for the functioning of Ordinary Life. Many of these social components actually detract from Ordinary Life, and in so doing may be considered morally improper. What will happen, though, when Covid-19 ceases to be a sensation? Many of us will return to the way things were beforehand. Here, there is an ethical call to action: *sapere aude!* Dare to know, asserts Immanuel Kant, for to do so is to work toward. To critique through the lens of the Imaginary Hypothesis is to sift through hindering irrealities. To fight for the right to live an Ordinary Life, and more, is to look out for one's own best interests. After Covid-19 declines in prominence, will you return to accepting life hindering duties, responsibilities, and requirements? The answer should be: no way!

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As for diseases, [Philolaus of Croton] says that they arise as a result of bile, blood and phlegm, which are the sources of diseases. He says that blood is thickened when the flesh is compressed internally, and thinned when the vessels in the flesh are dilated.

-Anonymus Londinensis

“I don't have a title or a stimulus check”

By Sherine

There is NO way POCs will EVER "correctly" social distance. I don't say this as a critique, but as someone who speaks from personal experience and from the experiences of my friends. Inherently, a lot of the things people are most worried about regarding self isolation during the pandemic are issues POC contend with directly on a day to day basis. How can I find work? Am I going to be able to provide for my family when what's available pays so little? Who's going to watch my kids while I'm at work anyway? A lot of POC, myself included, find themselves in positions as “unskilled laborers.” Now, these same “unskilled laborers” are single handedly carrying the American consumer class on their back with little to no difference in their treatment as “essential workers.”

While now, everyone is worrying about how to handle childcare, most POC have always had this issue, unable to afford adequate childcare while they're off working odd hours for whatever position they could get. As a result, for most POC, the nuclear family is your childcare, with your “nuclear” family often extending to grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and “aunts, uncles, and cousins” who live with you or live within your vicinity. So it is INEVITABLE that if you are a POC and still are working in some way, you can't socially distance.

We see my grandparents

every

single

day.

My friend? Watches his niece every single day.

My sister's boyfriend is still seeing his parents and cousins every other day to check up on them.

And does that make us selfish? For “putting ourselves first” before the needs of the community?

No.

For POC, there is no way to socially distance the way that is prescribed because our lives have always functioned by a kind of mutual aid amongst your extended family. I wrote my senior thesis on how the city of Tampa only came to be because folk magic and mutual aid societies were available to provide healthcare to the community at large and then underserved POC communities when the available infrastructure (brothels and bars and gambling houses) did not cut it. Who is going to give support to POC? No one but other POC. Mutual aid has been and is so important to support one another because time and time again, the government has proved that they don't give a shit, first and foremost to POC, and as it has made abundantly clear by now, to everyone else who isn't included in the 1%.

My grandparents watch my baby sister while my mother, my stepfather, and myself are at work. Their help has been especially necessary while my mother and stepfather work from home and cannot do said work with a rambunctious four year old around. My grandpa quit his job to protect the rest of us. As a bus driver, he was promised a protective plastic partition and masks to protect him as he worked... up to three months from the end of March. Soon after my grandpa quit, I saw a clip of a POC bus driver on the

news who had uploaded a video complaining about people coughing in his face all day every day without the decency to even turn away from him.

He died from coronavirus the very next day.

That could have been my grandpa.

Like what the fuck?

POC especially are getting fucked right now (even more so than usual).

My parents, who are notoriously obsessed with the idea that if you're not working, you're not productive, ergo, you are not useful, have wholeheartedly agreed with me that if they were to reopen the local economy tomorrow, there's no fucking way you could get me to go back to work. Not with all the old people at my restaurant who very openly do not care and do not believe the virus is real or as much of a threat as the media has claimed. I am not going to be some expendable "essential worker" so Jeannie can cough in my face while she pays for her fucking pasta dinner. The government KNOWS people would rather risk their lives as "essential workers" than be forced into poverty once again, so of course they're reopening certain areas. There are HORDES of people willing to get back out there and die for the chance to avoid falling back on their bills. Because what choice do they have? The cold calculus of war on this "invisible enemy" doesn't have to worry about these people because they are expendable, not essential. We're painfully aware that this country is going to sacrifice the lower class so that nothing has to change for the middle and upper class. Business as usual.

My stepfather is gainfully employed, working from home, and is getting the \$1200 stipend.

Me?

Who is unemployed?

Who was going to use that money to finally pay off my credit card and get a laptop to work from home?

I got fucked over. And unemployment? What a fucking joke. My sister and I were laughing over the fact that we're probably not going to get anything til October. The systems that are in place to aid "the regular folk" during this time were always so bullshit to begin with that there was never a hope in the world a nation wide crisis would result in people like us ever getting any help at all.

The power of the spoken word bears the same relation to the arrangement of the mind as that of drugs does to the constitution of bodies. For just as various drugs expel various humors from the body, and some put an end to illness while others put an end to life, so some words cause distress, others pleasure, and others fear, while some arouse courage in those who hear them, and others drug and bewitch the mind by some evil persuasion.

-Gorgias of Leontini

A Medical Worker's Perspective on the Situation

By Steve

I have noticed in American media nurses and doctors are shown with minimal garb and at best some basic face shielding. Not all are given respirators, but I believe that those that are directly making contact with positive patients should be supported with the most PPE. In other countries I have noticed that all personnel are given the same protections. If an EMT has to go to a patient's home to respond to a SARS episode, they must have a full hazard suit. Those in the New York Epicenter must be given these because of the density of cases, but at the hospital I have been working at, it seems less likely to be circulated through the air, and more likely to be transmitted through droplets.

There are many things I have learned about the current situation. For the most part, hospitals are losing money due to the expenditure of resources on the pandemic. In other years, health systems might have generated more profit from insurance companies and medical bills, but in this landscape, even doctors have been laid off due to the special needs of coronavirus patients. The struggle truly shows when we examine it in terms of labor, with a higher load of patients being undertaken by each technician, nurse, and doctor. Certain metropolitan health systems have even sourced nurses from areas like Texas to keep up with demand. I can safely say these nurses are being paid extra, however for those that are "unskilled laborers", there might not be a silver lining to working during the pandemic. Masks are distributed daily to all workers at my health center, but I can see nurses unknowingly spreading the virus through touch.

I agree with certain memes or moral cartoons depicting healthcare workers as heroes against coronavirus. Though, just like those serving in armed forces, some members have been sacrificed to the pandemic. Had global travel been restricting a month or two earlier, the death toll and suffering from the disease would have been mitigated. I spoke to a critical care unit nurse who told me two of her coworkers and friends are sick, and one is seriously ill. To die to a bug due to weak public health protections would be infuriating, especially as a healthcare professional who has trained for most of their life.

So far, social distancing seems to have slowed the exponential spread of the disease. Despite this, it is still spreading at the same rate daily, and will continue unless people strictly isolate and distance themselves from others, which may not even be possible. Right now, people are still getting contact from going to Walmarts or grocery stores. I can infer a large portion of the public does not follow basic sanitary procedure when going to shop for essentials, or on other out of the home trips.

To summarize the state of things: those that run the government as well as the largest corporations in America have used this pandemic to consolidate their own wealth and image.

ABOUT US

Lewaniaan arose out of a desire to express somewhat marginalized anarchist views within the context of a semi-regular, relatively low-tech, and more personal zine. Thus, long before being produced as a physical and digital publication, this project came out of concerns and affinities shared and developed over years. The hope is that such sensitivities can be translated here faithfully, that continued publishing will encourage a more creative anarchist thought, and new accomplices may be discovered along the way.

Much love, stay strong in these tough times.



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