

The world of Tomorrow, but Today

By Philippe T Georgel

So, COVID-19, it is... Darn thing, why us, why now? Every single day, I curse that virus which decided that the world was not chaotic enough, that we needed one more plague to render our lives more miserable.

Mentioning plagues automatically makes me think of the endemic political diseases, human-driven greed, and sense of self-entitlement. As is often time the case, crises tend to bring the best and the worst of mankind to the forefront. On the one hand, the rush of people attempting to contribute positively, manufacturing masks, volunteering to join medical staff, and even making financial donations. On the other hand, the protests to end social distancing and stay at home orders with “good citizens” showing up at State Capitol Buildings, wearing camouflage and, as it is fully necessary, armed with fully automatic weapons (one of these “patriots” went even to the level of bringing a rocket launcher to indicate his support to other “good citizens”). Just to make sure that we do understand each other, your standard RNA virus is totally vulnerable to automatic weapons.

And, then, came the controversy about face masks. How having to wear personal protection is now infringing on one’s rights as citizen and freedom... Personal opinion: I find a face mask a far more efficient preventive and protective method than your average automatic AR-15 rifle... Must be my training as a scientist and memories from courses in virology that I took years ago. Maybe to better understand this mind set, I should start a dietary regimen based on bleach and Lysol™. It would likely resolve all my issues, and quite possibly in a definitive manner. That brings me full circle on this matter: **political diseases.**

By now, you have likely reached the proper conclusion, I do indeed live in the United-States. For better or worse, I have been living there for the last 32 years. I saw it politically yo-yo, from becoming a better place with a potential for integrating different elements of the population, to returning to a dark ages mentality and displaying a severely increasing lack of civility (maybe something driven by electronic media). To be fair, one has to admit that this is unfortunately not unique to the USA. A large number of countries have undergone a similar transformation.

Now, superimpose this increasing nombrilistic approach to life with an international crisis, and observe the nationalistic sentiments rise from the political fringes. Extremists, libertarians of all shapes and colors will now tell

you that the cause of COVID-19 is the “OTHERS”. We can now play the “blame game” in all impunity, as obviously the “OTHERS” have to be responsible. The ones wearing masks are, in all logic, pushing their liberal political agenda to save... the whales, the spotted owl, or safely hug trees. On the flip side, the groups refusing to comply with the use of face masks or other preventive measures want to make sure that one’s **freedom** is preserved. The question becomes: whose freedom and freedom to do what? Die when they so decide? No argument from my side: your decision. Though, I may have a slight problem when your decision to get infected by COVID-19 and succumb from it will affect all people surrounding you: family, friends, and innocent by-passers. Your freedom, to die when you do wish, encroaches with OTHERS’ freedom to decide that they would prefer to live and to NOT propagate a potentially lethal disease to my immediate or extended surrounding. But to keep my logical argument, it matters NOT: “OTHERS” caused the initial problem.

So, as a race, the human race, what do we decide to do? Focus on ourselves at the most individual level or consider that there may be a larger picture to consider? There is probably a middle of the road to be found. But, facing reality, we are and will all be affected directly or indirectly by this modern plague. The next year or two will be challenging in ways that we may not even have fully grasped and envisioned. Are we going to use this challenge as a positive learning tool or will be instead venture deeper into self-importance? I always would like to hope that common sense and logic will prevail, but every day events lead me to somewhat lose faith in civility and our overall will to understand OTHERS. We are all on the same boat/planet, and if we lose it, we ALL sink and drown.

This short essay is expected to be published by “PRé” as an “opinion letter”. Let’s make something abundantly clear, it is indeed an opinion and nothing but. The last few years have given rise to the concept of “fake news”, a concept that has been conveyed and amplified by a well-orchestrated use of the internet and has been developed as a powerful political tool. Having been teaching courses listed as “critical thinking”, I have spent years attempting to get students to develop the ability to differentiate facts, scientific facts, from opinions or flat out unedulcorated disinformation. Scientific facts span from research, which may take years to generate, which can be verified, which have been peer-reviewed, and are expected to be repeatable. Opinions can be generated spontaneously, do not require to be based on any fact, do not need to be verified, and come from sources that do not involve any sort of critical thinking. Disinformation can be fabricated to accommodate any specific agenda. COVID-19 has been the source of an enormous amount of information, real or not, floating around on the internet (Facebook™ and Twiter™), spanning from scientific peer-reviewed to statements supporting the use of herbal

supplement to prevent COVID-19 infection or even using bleach and/or Lysol™ treatment as a cure (sources including the White House). This is all part of our current world, COVID-19, unruly behaviors, and fake news included.

BUT: I have picked my side, I will do my best to remain informed, I will be inconvenienced, I will wear a mask when needed, I will not be able to get my usual drink with my friends when I wish I could. I will likely suffer financial consequences (reduction in salary, hopefully not a complete loss of employment as others may have experienced). But I will also try to ensure that “OTHERS”, who, for no blame of their own, are suffering significantly worse consequences than my minor inconveniences, are supported and protected. I want to make sure that I continue to care for them, directly and indirectly.

From an **ecological perspective**, the COVID-19 crisis will also, and unfortunately, leave its mark on our environment. The use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in addition to affecting the general population’s health status, has already started to impact our eco-system. Large numbers of floating face masks have been spotted in our water ways and seas and oceans. Single-use gloves are following the same trend... The temporary ecological benefit of the “stay at home” and quarantine policies on the overall air quality in urban areas has been almost immediately counterbalanced by the careless increase in disposal of various plastic-based PPEs. As the facemask requirements, or its suggested use, is expected to last for an extended period, (and that despite having some individual denying its benefits) I am wondering how various governments are going to address and possibly regulate the disposal of gloves and masks.

In conclusion, it looks like, once again, our own fate is in our hands, strongly depending on science, our sense of civic duty, respect for others, and of our natural surroundings. Can we pass the test?

Disclaimer: This document is based on my personal opinion and perception of the world. Feel free to criticize and disagree.

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