

## NURSES' VOICE FROM THE FIELD

# MAKING SENSE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: RETHINKING THE ROLE OF REASON

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**A**s nurses, we are called to be reasonable, i.e., being critical thinkers at all times. We do not just utilize generic nursing care plans but we consider the different cases of our patients. Also, we do not just administer drugs without carefully assessing how our patients respond to pharmacologic interventions and the like. To be reasonable seems a part of our life and discipline. Being reasonable, in addition, appear to be a trait we share with other practitioners in other disciplines to make the world a better place. However, there seems to be a dimension of reason that do not adhere to notions like rationality and morality as evinced by the tensions brought to the fore by the COVID-19 crisis. This paper attempts to unpack the concept of reason, from a philosophical and anthropological perspective in such a way that it can inform the health sciences.

In his book *Pandemic! COVID-19 Shakes the World*, the philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2020, p.39-40) presented an allusion to a scene in the 2004 film *Kill Bill: Volume 2* where “Beatrix disables the evil Bill and strikes him with the “Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique,” the deadliest blow in all of the martial arts.” According to the film, “a combination of five strikes with one’s fingertips to five different pressure points on the target’s body” would result in the death of one’s opponent as soon as he walks away. For Žižek, the COVID-19 pandemic “is a kind of ‘Five Point Palm Exploding Heart Technique’ on the global capitalist system” (Žižek, 2020, p.39-41) for the reason that we cannot go on with the way things are at the moment for the crises of the present regime can very well spell the likely collapse of humankind in the future. This makes the conception of the ‘new normal’ more challenging in the sense that pre-existing issues of social inequality and injustice need to be first addressed if we want to embark a sustainable future. Towards the end of his analysis, Žižek (2020, p.102) recommends that:

we should follow Immanuel Kant here who wrote with regard to the laws of the state: “Obey, but think, maintain the freedom of thought!” Today we need more than ever what Kant called the “public use of reason.”

This Kantian notion of using reason in the midst of this pandemic, however, is not an easy task. While the maximal use of reason can be actualized, it must be noted that a confluence of factors prevents its realization. In his essay *Why do some societies make disastrous decisions?* Jared Diamond (2011) clearly outlined the reasons why some pre-industrial societies have collapsed. For Diamond, “groups may do disastrous things because they didn’t anticipate a problem before it arrived” (Diamond, 2011, p.30) or “it may have had prior experience but that prior experience has been forgotten (Diamond 2011, p.31).” In 2007, Cheng et al., said that “[t]he presence of a large reservoir of SARS-CoV-like viruses in horseshoe bats, together with the culture of eating exotic mammals in southern China, is a time bomb (p.683).” In this regard, it is but valid to question the extent to which policymakers utilize the contributions of the scientific community in crafting plans that promote health and prevent diseases. In the context of COVID-19, it can be said that it was already ‘anticipated.’ As to experiences that have been forgotten, it must be emphasized that the lessons of recent disease outbreaks in history need to instill lessons and institutional memories that are vital for survival.

Another reason why societies collapse, Diamond continues, “involves reasoning by false analogy (Diamond, 2011, p.32).” In the implementation of the community quarantines in the Philippines, numerous lockdown violators were arrested (Talabong, 2020). While past situations have made it reasonable to arrest people who violate the law, the plight of people who earn a meager income by working has to be reconsidered. By limiting the mobility of informal sector workers, for example, they become less able to provide the basic needs of their families, especially in developing countries. Diamond also adds the tendency of a problem to “take the form of a slow trend concealed by wide up-and-down fluctuations (Diamond, 2011, p.33).” This dimension is exemplified by events that do not always reach the spotlight of most news coverage. Cases of domestic violence, for instance, are not always reported for reasons like “privacy concerns, [...] fear of reprisal, and [the victim’s] desire to protect [their] offenders (Felson, et al., 2002, p.617).” Then, the

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implementation of global lockdowns to control the spread of the virus placed these victims in closer proximity to their offenders, thereby, increasing the occurrence of abuse (Taub, 2020). Another reason why societies collapse can be traced “from clashes of interest between people (Diamond, 2011, p.35)”, i.e., the advancement of seemingly rational actions even if it imposes harm to other people. This has become evident on the easing of lockdowns not because the pandemic has ended but because markets needed to be revived, despite the plea of health workers for a timeout (Bonquin, 2020).

The construction of a post-COVID-19 society demands that we rethink the place of reason in all of our deliberations. While the contributions of science have to be valued in the realm of policy-making, it is also imperative to consider its unintended consequences. Reason, in this vein, calls for our attention to details and critically weigh the voices or contributions of various sectors.

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