



## OP-ED: Corona and the story of humanity

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What is the meaning of any of this? BIGSTOCK

What is the virus trying to tell us?

It is generally agreed by evolutionary biologists that 99.9% of all species that ever existed have gone extinct. This does not mean humanity is destined to share the same fate in the near future — especially due to this pandemic — but the issue does make us accept the fragilities that are associated with life and survival.

Hence, it is not surprising that the ego of humanity as a whole has taken a hit after the pandemic brought the world to its knees. Our faith in global institutions, be it WHO, EU, UN, or whatever we took pride in, is fractured after we witnessed their inability to stop this invisible beast from taking hundreds and thousands of innocent lives.

But what is innocence to a virus? It operates without any intelligence — guided by laws of evolution; telling it to survive and reproduce, as we have since the first sapiens opened eyes and often at the cost of slaughtering members of our species for a bit more land and power.

However, unlike us, the virus is simply living by the basic laws of organic life and we are trying to defeat it so that we too can conform to those same laws that have created this virus. Man, throughout its different forms of transformation from one species to another, was once subjected to these same forces — perhaps for billions of years — without knowing where it will end up.

It did not know that it could one day harness a biological system that can support a cognitive capacity that will guide humanity to not just survive and reproduce, but also create new purpose(s) for its own existence. Yet, this virus is an irritant to humanity as a whole.

For those of us who were consumed by survival, love, lust, and the pursuit of comfort and power — it is a distraction and an annoyance to the ways of life we have known and often cherished. And for those who kept themselves busy pondering how to make sense of the world that we have inherited, it brings the problematic notion of death very close to our curious minds.

After all, if death is the grand finale that awaits all existence, what purpose does any life carry? A morbid thought, but an important one nonetheless. Why bother with what work and

passion occupy us all the time — often creating anxieties and depression — if a small microscopic organism can bring an end to even the most beautiful and smartest mind? An unsettling thought.

Throughout our lives, we are told that human beings are special — and that it inherited this beautiful universe to accomplish wonderful things. Even though no serious entity should take such a conjecture or story seriously, but the thought itself carries a vulgar temptation.

That is, somehow, we are all very special in our own unique way and we hold a distinct place in this grand universe. And why not get seduced by such thoughts that fuel our ego? Man's own history of its own growth as a species sounds like an epic journey, where it navigated tremendous natural forces to stand where it collectively stands.

There are those who are gifted to create new cultures, new rules for society, and new movements in future history through their determination, genius, and chance. And then there are those who we think are driving us — but are in turn driven by the conditions of history to which they are unconsciously subjected to — like an apple and gravity.

Finally, there are those who see the entire process of change and simply try to make sense of it by being a keen observant. Their judgments and understanding of the causes of things are often wrong or partially correct, but they leave behind for the species an explanation of who they are and why they endured what they have endured.

One can call them a story-teller or scientist — but it is their collective endeavour that has allowed humanity to understand itself rightly or wrongly. Yet, that very scope for generating that understanding — irrespective of how flawed it is — separates us from all other species, even this deadly virus.

However, this virus too carries a special place for the human story. It tells us how fragile and resilient we are at once. It makes us retreat to our innermost mental space so that we can re-ask why we are here and what meaning does life carry? And it is in these thoughts, humanity as a whole can find some degree of spiritual cleansing that it might need to navigate what looks like an industrious, atomized, and extremely noisy 21st century.

The question is: Are we ready to seriously reflect and introspect? What is meaningful? What is worthless? Or, like this virus, we will remain committed to the basic laws of organic life and view survival and endurance as the most essential aim of human existence. Perhaps, knowing the answer to such an existential question remains beyond the limits of our intellect. But knowing that such unknowns still delight and unsettle the human mind should remain a source of pride — for humans as a species.

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