

FEATURED ARTICLE: JULIA WRIGHT

Her paper: "The Animal Rights Movement in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic"

LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

Elizabeth Zhu, Editor-in-Chief
Jeffrey Senese, Head Adjudicator

Dialexicon

FALL 2020 VOLUME: ISSUE 1



Issue 1. December 2020. Copyright of Dialexicon Journal | dialexicon.org

Sponsored by



The Philosophy
Foundation
THINKING CHANGES

THE CANADIAN
PHILOSOPHICAL
ASSOCIATION



L'ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE
DE PHILOSOPHIE

TABLE OF Contents

- 03** Letters from the Editors
- 04** Julia Wright: "The Animal Rights Movement in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic"
- 07** Kiki Ajayi: "Does Violence Have a Place in Politics?"
- 10** Dimitrios Kouvaras: "COVID-19: A Lesson of Freedom and Citizenship"
- 13** Sophie Nadalini: "A Call for Nonviolent Protest"
- 16** Daniel Xu: "The Rebel in Black: A Black Existentialist Approach to the George Floyd Protests"
- 19** Emma Mészáros: "How Viktor Orbán's Hungary is Heading Towards Dictatorship during COVID-19?"

Letters from the Editors

Dialexicon began as a late-night question: why were there so many opportunities for high-school students interested in STEM but so few for youth interested in philosophy? A quick Google search confirmed my suspicions. So, I fired up my laptop and immediately sent an email to Petra Dreiser, the Communications Officer at the University of Toronto Philosophy Department. She put me in contact with Jeffrey Senese, and Dialexicon emerged as the result.

Dialexicon is a merger of two words: dialectic and lexicon. The first is a nod to Plato and Hegel, meaning discourse between opposing sides. The second means vocabulary, but in this context, broadly represents the use of language for a specific end. The purpose of Dialexicon is to promote writing that reflects on current events through the lens of philosophy. This year, we invited youth around the world to write an argumentative paper on four prompts on current events, or respond to one of their own creation!

Thank you to everyone who has been involved with the publication of the journal - especially Petra, Miha, and Jeff. Above all, thank you to our adjudicators from The Philosophy Foundation and the University of Toronto Philosophy Department who made the journal possible.

A final thank you to all of you who submitted to Dialexicon Fall 2020! It was a pleasure to read all the cogent and wide-ranging perspectives on the events of 2020. The Fall 2020 Dialexicon Journal received 85 submissions from 12 countries, from Mexico to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Elizabeth Zhu
Editor-in-Chief of Dialexicon

Serving as Head Adjudicator was an extremely rewarding experience. Evaluating papers whose topics range from the practical and immediate to the theoretical and abstract is not an easy task. One paper would analyze specific COVID-19 policies within a particular country, while another would invoke the 19th century philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, within the context of propaganda and free speech laws.

The best papers found ways to apply abstract philosophical positions to concrete and pressing contemporary issues. The extent to which students understood this focus and applied it in ways that surprised even the judges is itself worthy of philosophical investigation.

To objectively adjudicate such an eclectic mix of papers, we consulted several style guides and university rubrics. It became clear that a successful paper would demonstrate (i) a strong deductive argument (ii) originality and (iii) clear and concise prose. Our team of experienced readers consistently agreed that the papers published in this journal excelled in the three aforementioned categories. In fact, I personally discussed the arguments found in these papers with colleagues, some of whom found them a source of inspiration for future projects. Wow!

Thank you to the students who submitted, the teacher-supervisors, and the adjudicators who donated valuable time. We look forward to publishing work from more brilliant young minds in our second issue.

Jeffrey Senese
Head Adjudicator of Dialexicon

The Animal Rights Movement in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic

BY JULIA WRIGHT, CANADA

Jeremy Bentham once commented “it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong” (pp. 94). In our quotidian lives, we generally follow this principle, yet we are ignorant of the billions upon billions of non-human animals living on our planet. I will utilize this essay to argue that humans must fulfill their neglected obligations towards non-human animals, and that preserving some of the restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 is an opportune way to do so. Throughout, I will acknowledge and critique philosophical arguments against the animal rights movement.

To prove that select COVID-19 restrictions should remain in place to benefit non-human animals, I must first analyze our obligation to the wellbeing of such animals. Critics of the animal rights movement assert that the wellbeing of non-human animals is irrelevant because these animals are not nearly as developed as humans. However, this argument is not persuasive.

While for some, intellect may be a valid criterion for the worth of a being, the presence of intellect should not be necessary to be considered on an ethical basis. To illustrate this principle, I posit the following thought experiment: a child is born with severe mental deficiencies. She will never be capable of living independently and will likely struggle with basic tasks, such as talking and eating. Should one disregard the needs of this child and abandon her to die?

Most would intuitively respond that it would be immoral to commit such an act. They may

respond that whilst she may never achieve a stereotypically “successful” life, it does not render this girl’s needs and wants irrelevant. This immediate response occurs because intellect is not a relevant moral criterion upon which to base our obligations towards a being. Rather one’s ability to savour happiness and suffer through pain is what is relevant. The girl mentioned may not have the capacity to eat independently, but she can be happy when surrounded by her loving family, frustrated when she is unable to grasp her toy, and experience hunger, thus creating a moral obligation to ensure her happiness. Likewise, many non-human animals experience emotions parallel to those of humans, regardless of their intellectual capacity. Therefore, we still have a duty to minimize the suffering of many non-human animals when it outweighs the pleasure we may gain from a particular action.

Having proved our obligation to many non-human animals, I now turn to animal ethics in the context of COVID-19 restrictions. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on the lives of many, but one unintended consequence of governmental restrictions has been the improvement to numerous non-human animals’ lives.

Chief among these improvements is the reduction of daily global carbon dioxide emissions by 17% by April 2020 compared to the 2019 mean average (Le Quéré et al., 2020), thus reducing the warming of non-human animals’ habitats. Another benefit is the reduction of water pollution in numerous water bodies

(Rume & Didar Ui-Islam, 2020), allowing for more non-human animals to lead fulfilling lives. Nevertheless, these benefits are temporary and will not last should humans revert to their habits prior to the pandemic.

It is therefore ethically essential for governing structures to continue limited COVID-19 related restrictions beyond the lifespan of the virus. Select policies are exclusive to a pandemic, but other policies are beneficial beyond the prevention of COVID-19. Examples include disincentivizing transportation which emits large quantities of carbon dioxide and limiting visitors to environmentally important tourist destinations. Determining the level of restrictions that can be justifiably imposed upon humans requires considerably more analysis than can be provided in this essay. However, there is an undeniable obligation we as humans face towards our companions on this planet.

Detractors of this position may posit that the burdens imposed by the restrictions I support are too onerous to be condoned through a utilitarian framework, yet across the world, non-human animals experience life-threatening changes to their environment due to anthropogenic global warming. This is exemplified by the three billion non-human animals who perished in the 2020 Australian Bushfires (Vernick, 2020), polar bears who die after swimming for hundreds of miles in search of food (Polar Bears International), and numerous other examples. Compared to the immense suffering of these non-human animals, restrictions on travelling to a beach appear trivial.

Humans may experience psychological suffering when they cannot see their relatives or may be inconvenienced when they must take public transit, but there are adaptations which can minimize disturbance to their lives. For example, the advent of the digital age has facilitated communication amongst relatives without the need for travel, and investment in transportation can limit the inconvenience to passengers.

Others argue that one must consider the gratification all parties can experience in addition to their suffering, and that humans will experience higher levels of gratification when these restrictions are not imposed than non-human animals would if they suffer less from global warming. However, one can refute this premise by considering the many non-human animals who die each day due to anthropogenic global warming.



"It is therefore ethically essential for governing structures to continue limited COVID-19 related restrictions beyond the lifespan of the virus"

These non-human animals are deprived of the ability to feel any pleasure for the years they would have lived if their life was not cut short. This is likely a greater net quantity of pleasure than the marginal increase in happiness humans might gain from taking a flight to a resort or enjoying other luxuries. Thus, even when considering the metric of overall pleasure, we are still morally obliged to continue select COVID-19 related restrictions until environmentally safe alternatives can be developed.

Lastly, even if I do concede that, on average, the loss of pleasure to a human due to continuing COVID-19 restrictions is greater than the reduction of pain to a non-human animal, the number of non-human animals is many times greater than the human population. Granted, many of these non-human animals may have

an underdeveloped central nervous system and brain, limiting their ability to experience pain and pleasure. However, there are significant numbers of non-human animals who do carry this capacity. For example, there are up to one trillion mammals (Matheny & Chan, 2005), the vast majority of whom have the capacity to experience variations of both pain and pleasure. Therefore, even if only mammals are considered morally relevant to this argument, non-human mammals can individually experience a fraction of the pain and pleasure that a human does and create a greater net quantity of utility when they no longer suffer to the same extent from anthropogenic global warming.

To many humans, the continuation of COVID-19 restrictions may seem arduous. However, it is a small penance when compared to the myriad non-human animals who will not be burnt alive by a heat-induced wildfire or the numerous non-human animals who will not die a slow death of dehydration because their water sources have dried up. Non-human animals experience many of the emotions and desires we do, and therefore demand a similar level of concern to our human peers.

One appropriate way to demonstrate this concern would be to put the needs of non-human animals above ours and live under a revised set of COVID-19 restrictions.

Bibliography

Bentham, J. (1891). *A Fragment on Government* (F.C. Montague, Ed.). Oxford University Press

Le Quéré et al (2020). Temporary Reduction in Daily CO₂ Emissions During the COVID-19 Forced Confinement. *Nature Climate Change* 10, 647-653. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-020-0797-x>

Matheny, G. & Chan, K.M.A. (2005). Human Diets and Animal Welfare: the Illogic of the Larder. *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*, 18, 579-594. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-005-1805-x>

Polar Bears International (n.d.). *Hunting & Ecosystem*. <https://polarbearsinternational.org/climate-change/hunting-ecosystem/>.

Rume, T. & Didar-Ui Islam, S.M. (2020). Environmental Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic and Potential Strategies of Sustainability. *Heliyon*, 6(9). <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016%2Fj.heliyon.2020.e04965>

Vernick, D. (2020 July 28). 3 Billion Animals Harmed by Australia's Fires. World Wildlife Foundation. <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/3-billion-animals-harmed-by-australia-s-fires>



JULIA WRIGHT
King's View Academy, Canada

Does Violence Have a Place in Politics?

BY KIKI AJAYI, ENGLAND

Subsequent to the violent protests and riots - which have sparked in both the US and Nigeria in response to police brutality¹ - those philosophical and political questions which are indispensable to any theoretical analysis of civil disobedience have reemerged as pertinent. Perhaps the most salient question is whether it is ever acceptable to use violence to achieve political ends. This paper will argue that violence is essential to politics, and thus explain why the question of which political ends are just is a more useful question than whether it is legitimate to use violence to uphold political ends.

Politics is the study of power. More specifically, it analyses the mechanisms and institutions through which power is exercised - via political science - and also where the expression of power is legitimate, and hence where power should be exercised - via political philosophy. As explained in 'Community, Anarchy and Liberty' (Taylor, 2009), power is the ability to alter someone's range of available actions - expanding or limiting somebody's range of available opportunities. A father exercises power over his son when he enforces a set of household rules (limiting his range of available actions), and also when he removes rules, or grants him privileges - widening his range of available actions.

Thereupon, the inextricable link between power and violence becomes clear; every political limitation on somebody's actions must be accompanied by the ultimate threat of violence.

Veritably, the very concept of Westphalian sovereignty is defined as a monopoly on the legitimate use of violence. When a state creates a law, it is enforced with violence or the threat of it. After breaking the law, one is confronted by law enforcement officers - who are granted the ability to use violence. If one is in debt, bailiffs - who in Britain are now known as 'enforcement agents'² - have the ability to violently seize property.

Accordingly, while some claim 'violence has no place in politics', violence is essential to at least half of politics - the part which limits one's range of available actions, rather than expanding them. Consequently, unless one is an anarchist - which ironically, is the ideology portrayed as essentially violent (exemplified by President Trump's designation of anarchist group ANTIFA as a terrorist organisation³) despite wanting to dismantle all forms of coercive power - the question of politics is not whether there should be violence; but what 'flavour' of violence one wants. As Foucault put it in 'Society Must be Defended' (Foucault, 2003), 'politics is just the continuation of war by other means'. Quite frankly, to say that one is not willing to use violence for political ends, is equivalent to saying that one is not willing to consume food to satisfy their hunger.

In fact, a necessary feature of a political ideology is to highlight who the acceptable targets of violence are. An ideology is best understood as a theoretical framework which determines which facts are important, and what actions are acceptable due to

¹(2020, August 23). Nigerians push to end police brutality after global George Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/nigerians-push-end-police-brutality-after-global-george-floyd-protests-n1237629>

²(n.d.). Bailiff powers when they visit your home - GOV.UK. Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <https://www.gov.uk/your-rights-bailiffs>

³(2020, May 31). Antifa: Trump says group will be designated 'terrorist' - BBC. Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-52868295>



"it does not follow that all political violence is legitimate."

such facts. For instance, 'humans are diverse' is a fact, and a fascist ideology takes such a fact to be important, concluding that those outside of certain ethnic categories should be discriminated against. An ideology then - upon the basis of what actions are deemed acceptable - derives foundational principles which are enforced - by the real threat of violence. To illustrate, Liberalism's foundational principle is that we are 'rational'; Locke asserts that pure reason can teach us the 'natural law' which is consistent with divine law⁴. Thus, as God gives each individual the natural right to 'life, liberty and property' a state must exist to protect these rights, violently if necessary - hence the need for a police force and judiciary.

It must be pointed out that just because violence is essential to politics, it does not follow that all political violence is legitimate. As elucidated earlier, the key is in who is the target of such violence, for what reason, and the mechanisms through which such violence is expressed. The fascist violence that Jews were subjected to in 1930s-40s Germany⁵ is significantly different to the violence used by law enforcement in order to protect private property in a liberal state. However, fascist and liberal ideologies do not differ in the presence of violence, merely in their distribution and management of it. So, the question is whether the ends that violence upholds are justified, not whether there should be violence at all. This question is an ethical one, which this descriptive thesis is not in the business of answering.

Hence, any objections arguing that concurring with this thesis commit one to legitimising all forms of political violence are invalid. Rather, agreement with this thesis means that one must accept violence as an acceptable means to achieve political ends - provided such ends are just. For instance, if one disagrees with violent BLM protests, one must demonstrate why their political ends are unjust, or why other means are more efficient at achieving such ends.

⁴(n.d.). Locke's Political Philosophy (Stanford Encyclopedia of Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/locke-political/>

⁵(n.d.). The Nazi Party and its Violence Against the Jews, 1933-1939 Retrieved November 1, 2020, from <https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/academic/nazi-party-and-violence-against-jews.html>

Ergo, if it is determined that the sovereign configuration of power, who has a monopoly on violence, has political ends diametrically opposed to those of a particular group, an incommensurable conflict of interest emerges.

Assuming the group whose ends are subjugated wish to be able to expand their range of opportunities on their own terms, they have two options:

1. Change the current structures of power using violence, or its threat.
2. Leave, and create one's own (or join another) power base elsewhere.

The recognition of this reality does not mean that one is compelled to endorse violence whenever they do not get their way. For example, one may disagree with current laws but think the configuration of power - for instance liberal democracy - allows them scope to change such laws within its bounds. Only when the configuration of power itself is what denies one power over themselves, does the aforementioned dichotomy materialise.

Similarly, one may assert that (with Hobbesian undertones⁶) the cost of attaining power (either through leaving or forcibly changing the status quo) is too high - while acknowledging that the status quo denies them power over themselves. One may deem the death toll and chaos of a revolution as too great a price for the reward of power. Here, the end of the preservation of human life and peace is prioritised over power, and thus there is no reason for violence to be considered as a mechanism to effectuate political change. Thus, agreeing with this thesis does not commit one to supporting violence, even if the status quo does not grant them autonomy - provided power is not their desired end. Any

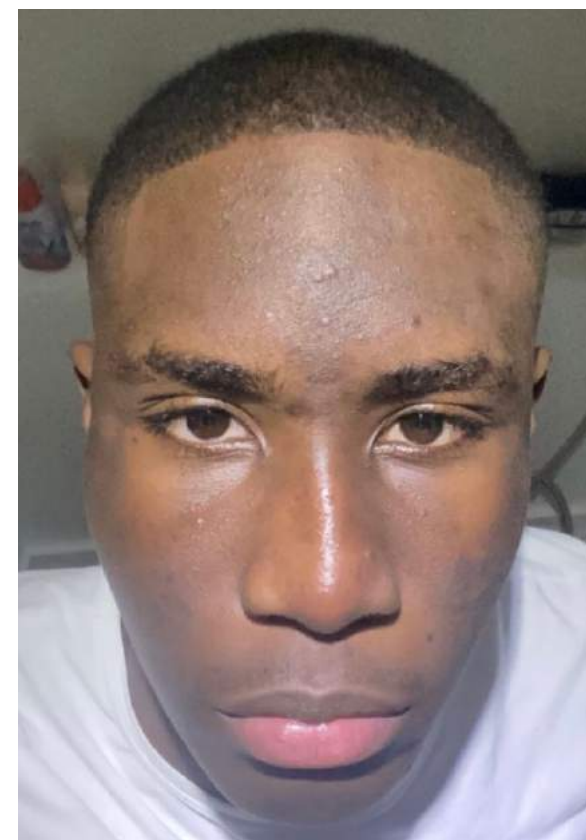
rebuttals which imply that this thesis does otherwise are invalid.

To conclude, as politics concerns the distribution of power - which is inseparable from violence - violence is essential to politics. As Abraham Joshua Heschel once said, 'Philosophy may be defined as the art of asking the right question'⁷ and, along these lines, this thesis' goal is to divert attention away from the question of whether it is legitimate to use violence to uphold political ends, to the question of which political ends are just. While this ethical question is more philosophically taxing, it allows for discourse around civil disobedience and political ideology that is fruitful and rooted in political reality.

Bibliography

Foucault, M. (2003). *Society Must be Defended* (6th ed.). London: Penguin.

Taylor, M. (2009). *Community, Anarchy and Liberty*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511607875>



KIKI AJAYI
St. Paul's School, England

⁶(2002, February 12). Hobbes's Moral and Political Philosophy (Stanford Retrieved November 1, 2020, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hobbes-moral/>

⁷(2016, August 10). Abraham Joshua Heschel on thinking, questions and answers Retrieved October 31, 2020, from <https://raymondsuttner.com/2016/08/10/abraham-joshua-heschel-on-thinking-questions-and-answers-i-n-philosophy-and-religion/>

COVID-19: A Lesson of Freedom and Citizenship



BY DIMITRIOS KOUVARAS,
GREECE

"the essence and the limits of citizens' freedom"

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global event that has provoked radical changes in the everyday lives of millions of people. The rapid spread of the fatal virus amongst the world population has forced governments to assume drastic measures and impose restrictions on many freedoms citizens would otherwise enjoy, while citizens themselves have been called to conform to the former. Consequently, a sense of coercion and lack of freedom has arisen in the public conscience, enhanced by the extensive insecurity which the pandemic caused.

This "marginal" situation invokes philosophical questions about the essence and the limits of citizens' freedom, the boundaries of state intervention and the role modern citizens should assume. In this essay I will support that democratic governments not only have the right but also the duty to assume measures to protect the goods of health and freedom, which should not however be arbitrary. I will also conclude that people should act responsibly as proper citizens.

Firstly, every individual is to be considered free, because they are rational beings, conscious of themselves, their beliefs and their choices, which they can shape and make based on their autonomous judgement. Thus, freedom is a result of the human condition, or at least it is a prerequisite as Immanuel Kant (2011) maintained¹.

On the political level, however, freedom should be redefined, because people are not only individuals, but also citizens; equal members of the political society². The latter is founded on the consent of all people in coexisting organized under the law. For John Locke (2008) the law is no confinement but a direction of intelligent agents to their proper interests that serves freedom³. Based on this frame of reference, I argue that political freedom stems from the interdependence of citizens as members of the whole. It, therefore, lays essentially in the commitment of each citizen to the common life, which requires them to recognize other citizens as equally free and commit themselves to protecting their freedom and rights by adhering to the law, while exercising their political rights. Hence, it is the duty of citizens and that of the executive (whose members are also citizens) to act lawfully to ensure the fundamental freedom of all, because every act that deprives others of their freedom violates the principles of political society. Consequently, I argue that lawful restrictions imposed by democratic governments to curb the spread of the virus are justified, since they aim at ensuring that all citizens remain in essence politically free; committed to the law and others, thus actively protecting them, while being protected themselves by irresponsible acts that could endanger their right to health.

However, an objection to the above conclusion would be that citizens would potentially have to obey to excessively strict measures, because of the vague notion of political freedom, a philosophical construction seemingly so disconnected from reality. Furthermore, they could be made passive against governmental authority and incapacitated to react to potential arbitrariness, which undermines democratic principles and favours totalitarian solutions.

In my argument, I maintained that the foundation of the political society lay on its organic members: citizens. Now, let us consider how governmental authority is justified in democratic states. A democratic government can impose restrictions because of the right given to it by the free political decision of citizens to elect it. Citizens do not cede their freedoms to the executive, they empower the executive according to the principle of popular sovereignty. Hence, my argument does not allow for arbitrariness that defies peoples' freedom, because that would violate my view of political society. The latter requires that some freedoms on which democracy is based should remain unalienable from state intervention, even during the pandemic. In my opinion the most important besides health are the freedoms of conscience, of thinking, of expression (even if one disagrees with the restrictions), of legal treatment, and, especially, of political participation. Citizens should exercise their constitutional role as electors and actors of political control no matter the circumstances, for that ensures democracy and combats totalitarianism. In the US, for example, the presidential elections will take place despite the Covid-19 crisis. Still, other secondary freedoms, such as that of gathering in large numbers, can be adjusted or temporarily suspended.

¹Kant, I. (2011). Frontmatter. In M. Gregor & J. Timmermann (Eds.), *Immanuel Kant: Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals: A German-English edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.125,127

²Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a1, Aristotle. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, Vol. 21, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1944.

³John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* Copyright © Jonathan Bennett 2017. First launched: January 2005 Last amended: March 2008 para. 57, page 20 <https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf>

However, since restrictions are to serve political freedom, they cannot be excessive without deviating from that objective. Contrarily, they should be reduced to the minimal necessary extent. Any exaggeration would not defend freedom; it would undermine it. Therefore, governmental authority is limited to the application of the minimum necessary restrictions that protect public health. This, however, begs the question of who estimates where those limits are set.

According to Plato, responsible for each matter is the specialist, whose opinion should be respected (Crito, 47b-48a)⁴. Thus, in this case it is scientists that can ensure that no unnecessary measures are imposed, for they have the knowledge and tools to estimate the effectiveness of each action against the virus and the danger it poses in each case. Science is objective, contrarily to politics, as it concerns the unbiased analysis of data. Hence, only the former can propose the most effective measures. However, it is the executive that shoulders the responsibility of applying the proposed measures, for it is the only institution empowered by citizens to do so. Consequently, politicians should follow the scientific guidelines, yet the final application of policies depends on them. Lastly, citizens should abide by the governmental decisions, but they still have the right to appeal to the independent judiciary to challenge their legitimacy. The indisputable constitutional principle of the separation of powers is therefore another safety valve against arbitrariness.

Considering this essay so far, two notions are most prominent: that of freedom and that of the citizen. In this period of crisis, I believe these notions can make a difference, if properly applied. Covid-19 may have challenged peoples' relation with the state, but it can provide a lesson about how a democratic society should function. Besides governments, the burden of applying the restrictions for the sake of the whole rests on every citizen. Therefore, if our efforts against

the virus are to succeed, people are called to be true citizens, not individualists. Greek historian Thucydides, referring to an epidemic of the time, exalts the virtues of responsible citizens: concern for the interests of the polis (2.40.2) and humanity (2.51.2)⁵. Every citizen should therefore embody the commitment to the state and others to ensure their freedom through a responsible stance. At present, political freedom lay in self-control, in limiting our endeavours for the greater good as proper citizens, while remaining politically active and informed. Accordingly, members of the governments' duty is to commit themselves to ensuring public welfare with respect to the people.

Jean Paul Sartre (1944), in *Paris Alive* wrote: "Never were we freer than under the German occupation", thereby asserting that a crisis allows people to be authentically free⁶. More than half a century later, amidst this "biological" conflict, I believe these words are very opportune. Indeed, Covid-19 requires everyone (officials and members of the public alike) to reimagine the notion of political freedom and act on its command, as proper citizens.



DIMITRIOS KOUVARAS
1st Senior High School of Aghios Dimitrios, Greece

A Call for Nonviolent Protest

BY SOPHIE NADALINI, CANADA

Mass protests and acts of civil disobedience have been a part of many major movements seeking social justice and change throughout history. If Black people in the United States had not sat on stools not intended for them, or refused to sit at the back of the bus, the civil rights movement would not have been what it was. If Gandhi had not called the people of India to unite against the unjust rule of the British government, nothing would have changed for the people of India. Civil disobedience does result in change. However, change does not come easy. Those in power rarely want to give it up. In the United States, one issue that has led to so much unrest is the power that police have. Police brutality would not exist if the police didn't feel they had the power to brutalize. The protests taking place now stem from a desperate desire to transform a system of policing rooted in discrimination and racism. The protests, while mostly peaceful, have also involved looting, rioting, and the setting of cars and businesses on fire. This leads to the question, how much violence and destruction is acceptable in a fight for change? In a movement that seeks to end unjust discrimination and violence against Black people, there is no room for violence on the part of the protestors as such actions are distracting, divisive, and ultimately counterproductive.

When a protest turns violent, it is often the violence itself that draws the most attention and the power of the protest is stolen. The issue at its core, the injustice, is lost and the focus becomes the violence and destruction. Throughout the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr. was “convinced that nonviolence [was] the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom and justice” (Wright, 2020).



To make any impact, the spotlight should remain on the cause at hand; the racism that allows police brutality to continue. If the media only focuses on the riots that take place during a protest, the attention is no longer on the injustice being fought. While it may be true that protests which “sometimes lead to looting and property damage [are] a natural and logical response to decades of police brutality and impunity” (Love, 2020), when the focus is only on destructive acts taking place, it takes away from the real issue.

There is, however, one form of violence brought to these protests that does not distract from the cause, but shines a light on it. This is the excessive force and acts of violence that police inflict on protestors who are protesting this exact issue. When police become involved in a violent or threatening manner, their actions often “escalate tensions and increase the risk of violence” (Kaur, 2020) and become a focus of attention. When “authorities intervene [using] tear gas, rubber bullets or pepper spray” (Kaur, 2020), their attacks are a vivid reminder of the core injustice being fought.

If the point of a protest is to unite people in a movement to bring about change, then one goal should be to create an experience people actually want to take part in. A protest that allows for violence and destruction is not a safe space for people to express their support, or even their desperate longing for change. Martin Luther King Jr. saw riots as “socially destructive and self-defeating” (Wright, 2020). Research conducted into public support for violent protest provides evidence that he was right. One Stanford University study proves that violence from protestors “increase[s] support for the very people they’re protesting against” (Witte, 2018). The same study states “violence by anti-racists protestors... [led] people to view them as unreasonable” (Witte, 2018). Beyond this, the violence led people to identify less with the group protesting injustice than with the perpetrators (Witte, 2018). This is reason alone to ensure protests remain peaceful. If there is any possibility that protestors’ actions are going to prevent people from siding with them, or understanding what is at stake, every effort should be made to keep the peace. A protest against police brutality should not allow for any brutality. As Martin Luther King Jr. taught “returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars” (Wright, 2020).

Violent protests are not as effective as peaceful ones. Protesters who condone violence run the risk of scaring away potential allies. There is an abundance of evidence that “peaceful protests are more successful because they build a wider coalition” (Arntsen, 2020). Protesters need to unify the public around their cause to effectively make change happen. In order for a movement to gain widespread support, and to inspire real and lasting progress, peace is essential. In arguing for peace in protests and other acts of civil disobedience, Martin Luther King Jr. stresses that “riots are counterproductive” (Wright, 2020). The goal is to unite, not divide. After decades of systemic racism, prejudicial treatment and even acts of violence, peace can seem too much to ask. For people who experience or witness mistreatment by police, the people meant to protect them, it is often seen as an issue of “if they use violence, why shouldn’t we use violence” (Arntsen, 2020). This is not the answer. Protesters need people to join them in their fight for justice, and the best way to do this is nonviolently. It is so important that protests against police brutality and lack of accountability be as effective as possible. Too many lives have been taken, too many innocent people killed, and too few police officers punished. If a tactic is not effective, or worse, counterproductive to the effort, the tactic must be avoided at all costs.

While there is much evidence to keep violence out of protests, some still believe it is an acceptable, or even necessary, component of such a desperate cry for change. Alicia Garza, co founder of Black Lives Matter, argues that it is wrong “to call for peace and calm but direct it in the wrong places” (Bassett, 2020). It is the violence of the police that should be condemned, not violence among the victims. However, how much easier would it be to focus on the violence of the police, if the police were the only violent actors. During the civil rights

movement, “peace was strategically used... to emphasize the violence Black people in the U.S endured.” Protesters were intentionally peaceful, knowing the police would not be, and the results were “inarguable visuals of peaceful black protesters being attacked by dogs and beaten by police” (Arnstsen, 2020). The issue of police brutality could not be denied or overshadowed by any story about violent protesters.

Nonviolent protests keep the focus on the injustice being fought, unify supporters of the cause, and are ultimately effective tools for change. One act of protest seen recently that might just be the perfect example of peaceful protest is the act of taking a knee during the national anthem. Sports teams, musicians, and even political figures have all quietly but powerfully taken a knee during the national anthem to stand united against police brutality. This quiet act of protest is not as loud as a march, nor does it risk violence like a riot, but it is just as powerful of a call for change.



SOPHIE NADALINI
St. Augustine Catholic High School, Canada

Bibliography

Arntsen, Emily, and Emily Arntsen. “Are Peaceful Protests More Effective than Violent Ones?” News Northeastern Are Peaceful Protests More Effective than Violent Ones Comments, 10 June 2020, news.northeastern.edu/2020/06/10/are-peaceful-protests-more-effective-than-violent-ones/

Bassett, Laura. “Why Violent Protests Work.” GQ, 2 June 2020, www.gq.com/story/why-violent-protests-work.

Kaur, Harmeet. “About 93% of Racial Justice Protests in the US Have Been Peaceful, a New Report Finds.” CNN, Cable News Network, 4 Sept. 2020, www.cnn.com/2020/09/04/us/blm-protests-peaceful-report-trnd/index.html

Love, David A. “Violent Protest Reflects the Violence of the System.” US & Canada | Al Jazeera, Al Jazeera, 10 June 2020, www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/6/10/violent-protest-reflects-the-violence-of-the-system/

Witte, Melissa. “How Violent Protests Can Backfire.” Stanford News, 15 Oct. 2018, news.stanford.edu/2018/10/12/how-violent-protest-can-backfire/

Wright, Kai M. “George Floyd and What Martin Luther King Jr. Really Said about Riots and ‘the Language of the Unheard’.” FEE Freeman Article, Foundation for Economic Education, 6 June 2020, fee.org/articles/george-floyd-and-what-martin-luther-king-jr-really-said-about-riots-and-the-language-of-the-unheard/

The Rebel in Black: A Black Existentialist Approach to the George Floyd Protests

BY DANIEL XU, USA

With recent developments in the United States in terms of race, a series of protests concerning institutionalized racism have followed. Prompted by a history of violence against Black individuals, these protests were made in response to a trend of police brutality and killings, which erupted with the murder of George Floyd. Such movements elicited both criticism and support, most often questioning the violent methods that the protests had taken. Using a Black Existentialist lens, the protests are understood as necessary and justified, while the criticism can be understood as biting into the reason why European Existentialism is inapplicable to racialized bodies.

The existentialist tradition is well acquainted with the concept of revolt. From Albert Camus' *The Rebel* to Jean-Paul Sartre's backing of Communist Revolution, the (anti-)backing and analysis of revolt is well known. The application of existential/absurdist thought to revolution is understood, from the lens of Camus, as a refusal of the pre-given purpose, a purpose that surrenders the mind to the universal that cannot hope to overcome the absurdity of individuality in an act of philosophical suicide (Camus 1942).

For Sartre, no universal system could guide us, as shown by his famous example about his student choosing between helping his elderly mother and fighting for the Free French Forces (Sartre 2007). Revolt, therefore, could be understood as a rejection of the universal that inevitably culminates in an inauthentic life, and instead opts for an individualistic understanding of existence to find one's own meaning.

What is lacking, however, is a lens of the racialized, marginalized, and critical that affords race minorities a guide to liberation and meaning. European Existentialism has been criticized for an evasive nature that ignores the nuanced conditions of Black individuals, and instead relies upon the humanistic philosophy of those such as Sartre, Kierkegaard, and Camus, all grounded in whiteness (Vereen et al 17).

Where European Existentialism ignores the racialized in its theorization, Black Existentialism starts from the lasting material impact of violence, from which slave traders infringed on physical ownership, missionaries transgressed on religious freedom, and modern day capitalism has caused economic hardship for Black individuals. What Black Existentialism affords is an analysis that is able to actualize liberation that starts from an understanding of the unagency that Black individuals are offered, as opposed to the color-evasive lens that presupposes the agency and free will that are inaccessible to the lives of the racialized and the marginalized (Bassegy 2007). Where European Existentialism may start from the ability for self-actualization, Black Existentialism understands the conditions that Black individuals may not begin with the agency given to whiteness, and instead of the resiliency that is necessary for Black liberation. Alternative criticisms of European Existentialism stems from the criticism of humanism that existential agency is often based upon. Franz Fanon writes that, "not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man" (Fanon 1959).



Thus, such an understanding of humanistic agency for European Existentialism is inapplicable for Black individuals, who begin existence not as agential, but already oppressed through historical racism, whose individuality is denied, invisibilized, and, as Fanon writes again, as, “an object in the midst of other objects” (Fanon 1952). Therefore, like existence, revolt must be understood through a lens by which the racialized context is centered.

With the role of race through existentialism understood, the race riots following George Floyd’s murder can be understood as justified and the criticism that relies upon the alternative of peaceful protests as an exercise in the color-evasiveness of European Existentialism.

To understand the race riots as justified, the Black Existential Tradition understands racism as needing a response, and such response as necessarily violent. From an existential paradigm, either in the European or Black tradition, the racism, systemic or not, necessitates a response.

The police brutality and racially biased criminal justice system- exemplified such that Black individuals are more likely to be arrested, convicted, and assigned longer sentences- can be understood as symptomatic of rampant racism (The Sentencing Project 2018). Such trends can be understood as the impressment of an inauthentic understanding upon others for Sartre, and a repression of Black expression and culture for Black Existentialism. Therefore, the protests that followed the murder of George Floyd, violent or not, are a justified response for any existential criterion, as a method of rejecting the pre-given expectations of a certain race that are based upon the mistaken, essentialist, and racially charged bias against Black individuals. Such domination, especially through the state, is something that denies the meaning-seeking life that is stressed in existential thought, instead repressing the individual in favor of condemnation. Thus, such oppression is fit to be rejected, though the method of action is a more controversial issue.

The controversy on violence versus peaceful protest boils down into a debate on what methods are afforded to the Black community and what works. The most common answer to the race riots can be found in the call for peaceful protests, which finds its support from the humanistic and European understanding of agency. The call for peaceful protests stays ignorant to the agency that is often stripped from Black individuals. Much like European Existentialism, this criticism relies on the conception that Black liberation is formed through choice and epistemic resistance, that stays ignorant to the marginalization of Black communities and the complex tides of racialization. Such understanding relies on an equal conception of the human, that freedom is afforded to all and unalienable, yet forgets the history of a country marked by slavery and systematic racism, a history that, more often than not, did not offer Black individuals the choice of free will that peaceful protests necessitates. Such an understanding of the equal human, grounded in the color-evasive lens of European humanism, marks the rhetoric of All Lives Matter in response to the call that Black Lives Matter or the accusation of rampant white supremacy.

Thus, violent protests are the only survival strategies for Black communities, whose identities are constrained by racialized circumstances, and invisibilized such that peaceful protests are not a viable solution. Many calls for peaceful protests cite the example of Colin Kaepernick, but forget the invisibilization of his activism. Therefore, racial progress and the challenge of white supremacy is only possible through a method that cannot be ignored by society, and must be through the method of violence. When peaceful protest is invisibilized, the only method of action is through violence.

Bibliography

Bassey, Magnus O. "What Is Africana Critical Theory or Black Existential Philosophy?" *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 37, no. 6, 2007, pp. 914–935., doi:10.1177/0021934705285563.

Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Hamish Hamilton, 1942.

Fanon, Franz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, 1952.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Yale University Press, 2007.

Uggen, Chris. "Report to the United Nations on Racial Disparities in the U.S. Criminal Justice System." *The Sentencing Project*, The Sentencing Project, 19 Apr. 2018, www.sentencingproject.org/publications/un-report-on-racial-disparities/.

Vereen, Linwood G. et al. "Black Existentialism: Extending the Discourse on Meaning and Existence." *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*, The American Counseling Association, 10 Apr. 2017, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/johc.12045.



DANIEL XU
Memorial Senior High School, USA

How Victor Orbán's Hungary is heading towards dictatorship during Covid-19

BY EMMA MÉSZÁROS, HUNGARY

The 21st Century's populist politicians have never had such prominent opportunity before to seize more power, as the era of the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of them take advantage of their already vulnerable countries and try to use the epidemic as a political tool. The state of emergency is enabling 'strongmen', for example, Hungary's Viktor Orbán, to do so. During the pandemic, Orbán got the official permission to rule his country as a dictator. The parliament passed the 'Enabling Act', which grants him to govern by decree, without a definite end date. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. By enacting the Enabling Act, or the Coronavirus Act, Orbán accepted that Hungary's already false democratic image would be shattered, for the sake of his additional manoeuvres. The European Union could prevent political moves, similar to Orbán's, by 'continuously monitoring and reporting on the crisis-related government measures' (Skoric, 2020).

First, I will elaborate that the plague can be used as a political tool. Second, I will argue that the state of emergency is dangerous to democracy, with the support of Michel Foucault's and Giorgio Agamben's works. Third, I will present how Viktor Orbán is playing with the situation caused by the coronavirus, and how he is seizing more power with the help of it. In conclusion, I would like to explain how the state of emergency can lead to dictatorship during an epidemic with the example of Hungary.

The handling of the coronavirus by populist politicians resembles the 17th Century's era of the plague. People are confined in their homes and are being watched by government officials. The pandemic was and is used to accomplish political aspirations. Leaders take advantage of the circumstances and use the pandemic as a political tool. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault stated in his work, *Discipline and Punish*, that 'the plague gave rise to disciplinary projects' (Foucault, 1975). Besides declaring that an epidemic opens up opportunities for politicians, he also presented his notion of panopticism. The English philosopher Jeremy Bentham designed the panopticon, which is a construction within a prison, which allows one guard to observe the prisoners, without them knowing if they are being watched at one moment or not (Beauchamp, 2020). It is used for external surveillance of the inmates. "He is seen, but he does not see; he is an object of information, never a subject in communication" (Foucault, 1975). In panopticism, there is internal surveillance, but since the observed does not know when he is being watched, it produces constant fear and anxiety. Foucault stated that panopticism could pave the way for a new form of government, biopolitics. It is a system in which society is under constant monitoring, and where the government has the right to interfere even in the physical life of its citizens, which can go against the fundamentals of democracy. Still, in a time where the pandemic



concerns everyone, a minimal level of surveillance is needed. During a state of emergency, lawmakers have a clean slate where they can introduce any new regulation, which is a political dream for many leaders. Certain laws allow the authorities to take away people's freedom. For this reason, many philosophers, such as the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben believe that the state of danger can lead to the fall of democracy.

The state of emergency, or in the words of Agamben, the permanent state of exception is a danger to democracy. If a society sacrifices its freedom in order to feel secure, it will slowly drift apart from democracy. Friedrich Hayek's words also support this claim, by stating that "emergencies have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have been eroded". Agamben claimed in an interview in August 2020, that "the state of emergency is the mechanism, history teaches us, by which democracies become totalitarian states".

The state of danger enables politicians and lawmakers to assert their interests through decrees, in any way they would like, because people in vulnerable states are easily manipulated. They would sacrifice their freedom to avoid being in constant fear. Agamben's most significant concern is how the state of emergency became the new norm. People living under the hand of populist politicians are kept under continuous intimidation. He believes that people now do not even notice that they live under such conditions. During the state of emergency, illiberal democracies, which are under the mask of being a liberal one, start to reveal their true colours. Our alarming problem is that what Agamben fears, is happening in Hungary right now, during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Hungarian Parliament passed the 'Enabling Act', on 30 March 2020, which enables Viktor Orbán, and the executive to rule by decree, without a definite end date. The pass of this act is the first

concerns everyone, a minimal level of surveillance is needed. During a state of emergency, lawmakers have a clean slate where they can introduce any new regulation, which is a political dream for many leaders. Certain laws allow the authorities to take away people's freedom. For this reason, many philosophers, such as the Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben believe that the state of danger can lead to the fall of democracy.

The state of emergency, or in the words of Agamben, the permanent state of exception is a danger to democracy. If a society sacrifices its freedom in order to feel secure, it will slowly drift apart from democracy. Friedrich Hayek's words also support this claim, by stating that "emergencies have always been the pretext on which the safeguards of individual liberty have been eroded". Agamben claimed in an interview in August 2020, that "the state of emergency is the mechanism, history teaches us, by which democracies become totalitarian states". The state of danger enables politicians and lawmakers to assert their interests through decrees, in any way they would like, because people in vulnerable states are easily manipulated. They would sacrifice their freedom to avoid being in constant fear. Agamben's most significant concern is how the state of emergency became the new norm. People living under the hand of populist politicians are kept under continuous intimidation. He believes that people now do not even notice that they live under such conditions. During the state of emergency, illiberal democracies, which are under the mask of being a liberal one, start to reveal their true colours. Our alarming problem is that what Agamben fears, is happening in Hungary right now, during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Hungarian Parliament passed the 'Enabling Act', on 30 March 2020, which enables Viktor Orbán, and the executive to rule by decree, without a definite end date. The pass of this act is the first

sign, for how Orbán is using the pandemic as a political tool to seize more power. Hungary has not been a liberal democracy for years now, since Orbán got elected, but he is still trying to maintain the image of a perfect country, which in reality, is an illiberal democracy. By governing with the help of the Enabling Act, Orbán starts to make it seem more and more apparent that he does not even want to bother with keeping the vision of a liberal democratic country. However, he is still working smartly in order to gain more control. During the state of emergency, if a Hungarian citizen is allegedly spreading false information about the virus, they are committing a criminal offence, which is "punishable by one to five years of prison" (Beauchamp, 2020). The government has full control over what is considered as a "distorted truth". Orbán is even demolishing free press, by buying up independent media companies. Nevertheless, the main goal is not the arrest of reporters but keeping the constant fear in them, that the possibility is still there; this way, Orbán can still keep the democratic image.

To sum up, one can see how the pandemic is creating new chances for power-seeking politicians. Michel Foucault asserts that by using the epidemic as a political tool, we can create new political systems, but Giorgio Agamben demands that our freedom is not worth sacrificing for the sake of security. He believes that the permanent state of exception is a threat to democracy. In practice, we can see how a populist politician, Viktor Orbán is controlling his country, with a way that Agamben feared the most. Orbán is using the Covid-19 era, to make Hungary act in his favour, and to wreck its democracy.

Bibliography

Beauchamp, Z., 2020. Hungary's "Coronavirus Coup," Explained. [online] Vox. Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/4/15/21193960/coronavirus-covid-19-hungary-orban-trump-populism>> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

Berge, L., 2020. Biopolitics and the Coronavirus. Netherlands Journal of Legal Philosophy, 49(1), pp.3-6.

Bottoni, S., 2020. A Crown For The King? How Did Viktor Orbán Turn COVID-19 Into A Political Weapon. [online] Institut Montaigne. Available at: <<https://www.institutmontaigne.org/en/blog/crown-king-how-did-viktor-orban-turn-covid-19-political-weapon>> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

Delanty, G., 2020. Six political philosophies in search of a virus: Critical perspectives on the coronavirus pandemic. LSE 'Europe in Question' Discussion Paper Series, [online] Available at: <<https://www.lse.ac.uk/european-institute/Assets/Documents/LEQS-Discussion-Papers/LEQSPaper156.pdf>> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

Foucault, M., 1975. DISCIPLINE AND PUNISH. [S.I.]: PENGUIN BOOKS, pp.195-228.

Journal-psychoanalysis.eu. 2020. Coronavirus And Philosophers | European Journal Of Psychoanalysis. [online] Available at: <<https://www.journal-psychoanalysis.eu/coronavirus-and-philosophers/>> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

McMullan, T., 2015. What Does The Panopticon Mean In The Age Of Digital Surveillance?. [online] the Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jul/23/panopticon-digital-surveillance-jeremy-bentham>> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

Skoric, T., 2020. Is The State Of Emergency In Hungary Really Over?. [online] Friedrich Naumann Stiftung für die Freiheit Brüssel - Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom Brussels. Available at: <<https://fnf-europe.org/2020/06/29/is-the-state-of-emergency-in-hungary-really-over/>> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

Twist, 2020. Interview With Giorgio Agamben, August 2020. [image] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=867_5upU55o> [Accessed 28 October 2020].



EMMA MILÉNA MÉSZÁROS
Milestone Institute, Hungary

Dialexicon Journal

Fall 2020

www.dialexicon.org/submit

