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**Rethinking Humanities
for a Post-Pandemic World**

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Preface

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to unprecedented global challenges and uncovered weaknesses in the ability of governments, the private sector, & local & international actors to deliver services and resources across many systems.

This has been true in food and agriculture, healthcare, and education, among other sectors. However, the pandemic also has inspired innovation in areas such as digital technology and social organization, and there are many examples of countries or communities effectively coordinating to confront this threat.

At the same time, we have witnessed a forceful generosity during this crisis and incredible solidarity across countries, communities, and sectors. This crisis has showed that the world can come together when faced with enormous common challenges.

The pandemic has changed our lives and the way we connect and interact with others.

Lately in September 2021, UNESCO warned that 117 million students around the world were still out of school worldwide!

Our students have consequently changed -- they are more familiar with online platforms and see the world at their fingertips.

The COVID-19 pandemic has recognized our paralysis and collective failure to decide together for the common good in the face of an immediate and common global threat. It has taught us that a global pandemic is not simply a health crisis, but it is an economic crisis, an education crisis, a political crisis, an environment crisis leading to social injustice, food insecurity, and inequalities. A global crisis creating fragilities and affecting us all. The common aspect of many of these challenges was one of *humanity*.

The pandemic has set back human development by as much as 20 years

(according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020). Yet it has shown how important they are and how interconnected our challenges are. We therefore need to accelerate the progress towards achieving these Sustainable Development Goals.

Hence, it is fundamental to rethink humanities and to identify the means of crossing into a new world that safeguards the HUMAN.

This symposium will allow us to Rethink Humanities for a Post-Pandemic World focusing on different areas and sectors:

- Education
- Women and gender
- Public health
- Environmental humanities
- Music and Arts

Allow me here to congratulate UNESCO for approving the Recommendation document on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence at the General Conference.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us together rethink humanities, tell its story, understand it, celebrate it. Let us be *human!*

I sincerely hope you will enjoy these two days of exchange, debate and networking. Thank you all for your participation!

Dr. Darina Saliba Abi Chedid
Director of the International Center for Human Sciences

**The COVID-19 Pandemic:
A Wider Portal for Health Humanities**

Dr. Diala El Khoury

Abstract

Health humanities is the interdisciplinary approach to study and ameliorate aspects of the human condition in terms of health and medicine by drawing on perspectives offered by the humanities, social sciences, and creative arts.

The significance of health humanities was further evidenced after humanity's experience in one of the hardest trials in modern times: the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has been a powerful aide-mémoire that health is far more than just a medical matter, as it is embedded within a complex set of social, economic, and political factors. In this context, COVID-19 should not be interpreted as an isolated, "extra-terrestrial" event. Rather, it should be perceived as a wake-up call toward more sustainable living. For health humanities: the focus should be on promoting planetary health and well-being.

The world cannot have a one-size-fits-all pandemic response. This is where health humanities and medical education and awareness may join for a common cause. It is strongly recommended to assign humanities and health sciences similar value and resource allocation to ensure sustainable global development. While waiting for all stakeholders to perceive the pandemic as a portal for sustainable living, health humanities and public health should lay the foundations and good practices for new ways of living.

Keywords: health, humanities, public health, pandemic, health equity, sustainable living.

What are Health Humanities?

Over the past four decades, health humanities, previously referred to with the narrower scope of "medical humanities", has emerged as one of the most intriguing fields for interdisciplinary research, expanding humanistic inquiry into bioethics, human rights, health care, and well-being. Health humanities broadly link both health and social care with the arts and humanities. It is an interdisciplinary field of study that draws on aspects of the arts and humanities in its approach to health while encompassing all biomedical, philosophical, historical, artistic, literary, anthropological, and sociological facets [1].

According to the Literature Arts Medicine Database, "The humanities and arts provide insight into the human condition, suffering, personhood, and our responsibility to each other. They also offer a historical perspective on healthcare... [and help] to develop and nurture skills of observation, analysis, empathy, and self-reflection — skills that are essential for humane healthcare."

The social sciences help us to understand how bioscience and medicine take place within cultural and social contexts and how culture interacts with the individual experience of illness."

Nevertheless, the designation of health humanities is extensively discussed in the literature and continues to evolve [1-5]; as it most clearly expands beyond clinical training to include health awareness, activism as well as mental health and well-being [5].

Many universities around the world have started offering a range of undergraduate and graduate programs in health humanities with a high placement rate for jobs or graduate schools upon graduation (The University of Pittsburg, Boston University, Misericordia University...).

Medical humanities have also become part of the curriculum in medical education in North America, the United Kingdom, and are currently integrated into many medical programs in Australia [6].

This program revision originated from the observation that excluding

humanities from medical schools is preventing most medical caregivers from having an understanding of the cultural background of their patients concerning the notion of health and illness, and promote the patient's well-being from both the physical and psychological perspectives.

In sum, health humanities goal is to understand the synergy of how humanities can significantly compliment the health sciences to achieve better healthcare and health outcomes.

Health Humanities during COVID Times

The COVID-19 pandemic has deeply altered how we live. It is as much a medical and public health crisis as it is a cultural and ethical one, pushing us to ask new questions about how we should relate to one another, how and where to work, and how to socialize. The pandemic disproportionately affected some communities over others, and it was striking to see the significant role of political decisions in matters of international health.

Many studies reported the importance of health humanities during the pandemic. Several research centers and universities launched specific health humanities projects such as Boston University and Rice University in Houston or offered adequate resources for coping and understanding the pandemic. Moreover, several platforms were launched in order to find the support and solace provided through the health humanities such as The University of Pittsburg, Toronto, etc.).

Consequently, an ethical agenda can be developed by giving value to human diversity in order to foster societal resilience. This approach would help put forward a unified response to global commons challenges (like pandemics) whose impacts are less immediate, but no less dreadful for humanity [7]. A study has in fact shown the pivotal role health humanities can have in times of uncertainty such as emerging infectious disease outbreaks by providing timely education and supporting reflective learning [8].

The contemporary contributions of comics to the outbreak narrative is

also an important historical visual documentation of the way we deal with such crises which have a multifaceted impact [9]. A recent study observed graphic medicine illustrating the pandemic and attempted to show how different cultures perceive the virus [10].

Another study reflected on running an International Public Health Film Competition during the COVID-19 pandemic and its implications for future film festivals, seeking to understand life during these rare public health events [11].

Acknowledging human diversity and the different forms of perception of the pandemic was an indispensable means in controlling it, in addition to the medical and health measures. The coronavirus pandemic has devastated our world with increased mortality and personal suffering, and highlighted hidden but long known social and health inequalities [12].

This pandemic has been a powerful wake-up call that health is far more than just a medical matter, as it is embedded within a complex set of social, economic, and political factors. The world cannot have a one-size-fits-all pandemic response. Studies are organizing information on racial health disparities [13, 14] and their impact on social aspects and responsibilities [16]. Accordingly, a multidisciplinary approach is required. In addition to such reports and epidemiological studies documenting inequalities, in-depth qualitative and ethical research are needed to determine the complex pathways that lead to health inequity.

This is where health humanities and medical education may join forces for a common cause. It is strongly recommended to assign humanities and health sciences a similar value and resource equal allocation to ensure sustainable global development for the post-pandemic world [17].

Post-Pandemic: Health Humanities and Public Health

Countries are still in a race for protective medical equipment, PCR testing, vaccination shots, and boosters. Now more than ever, the pursuit of health equity should remain the top priority in global health. The pandemic could be perceived as an opportunity and a portal for rethinking global health equity and fair access to healthcare, and reclaiming it as part of the struggle for social, economic, and political justice.

The well-being and mental health of individuals are critical for sustainable communities, and the role of health humanities amid these viral times is indispensable in supporting global health and community well-being.

Research is also focusing on ethics in the time of pandemics, where the slogan should change from “Live free or die” to “Live free without forgetting the lives of others” [18]. Empathy has been shown to be an effective tool in building trust between the patient and doctor, alleviating anxiety, and leading to better health outcomes [19].

Technology was expected to be the ultimate force that would improve population health and well-being. The pandemic has also highlighted the role of health humanities, in combination with technology, to ensure a more successful future for science and public health as critical for the well-being of societies. As the pandemic unravels, health humanities may help us find some instructions on how to care for our shared and scarce resources and social health [20].

Recommendations

Scholars from the humanities and social sciences have the skills, knowledge, and methods to assist front-line healthcare workers to cope, process, and continue in helping improving health.

Academics and scientists must be encouraged to work closely with public health and clinical practitioners. A “Translational Humanities” approach, as suggested by Rice University can be thus adopted, by which scientific observations are turned into interventions that improve

the health of individuals and the public.

An ethical agenda should be developed by giving value to human diversity in order to promote societal resilience. For the health humanities, the focus should be on promoting planetary health and well-being [5].

Conclusion

Health humanities is the interdisciplinary approach to study aspects of the human condition in terms of health and medicine by drawing on perspectives offered by humanities, social sciences, and the creative arts.

It aims to ameliorate medical research and practice by utilizing the knowledge offered by humanities, in addition to its broader scope of understanding the cultural, ethical, and religious aspects of human health.

The significance of health humanities was further evidenced after humanity’s experience in one of the hardest trials in modern times: the COVID-19 pandemic.

The global pandemic has been perceived as a medical and public health crisis. In this context, COVID-19 should not be interpreted as an isolated and “extra-terrestrial” event. Rather, it should be perceived as a wake-up call toward more sustainable living.

Consistent with human nature, we understand our mistakes and learn from them for a sustainable community. While waiting for all stakeholders to perceive the pandemic as a portal for sustainable living, health humanities and public health should lay the foundations and good practices for new ways of living.

“ Wherever the art of medicine is loved, there is also a love of humanity.”,
Hippocrates

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**Language, Teaching, and Distance Learning:
Will the Standards of Language Teaching Be Elevated?**

Dr. Maya El Hajj

Abstract

As the symposium suggests, the Covid-19 pandemic has simultaneously uncovered our educational institutions' weaknesses and inspired innovations. The question, however, that begs itself is: What happened to the state of academic education in the post-pandemic era? This paper thus explores case studies presented by various institutions and summarized personal observations regarding this matter, concluding that exhaustive efforts of academic institutions and professors alike ameliorated our standards of teaching through the online experience. In the light of this analysis, this paper will also advance recommendations that would prove beneficial for the implementation of online teaching in the post-pandemic era.

Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, online teaching, innovations, language teaching, higher education in Lebanon.

To begin with, I am honored to be here among you today to share my experience in a world that is suffering from Covid-19 pandemic, at the global level and in a country which is bleeding due to problems of all kinds and at all levels. I am here in this international symposium to raise my voice as an educator, who cares about the future of education in my country, Lebanon, which was and still is an educational beacon in which our children and youth are privileged to have the best education and can speak at least three languages fluently. Rethinking Humanities in a Post-Pandemic World is a wonderful initiative that sheds light on the future of education as it is our vision and mission to aim at reshaping the world properly and against all odds. Thank you again!

As Dr. Darina Saliba Abi Chedid stated in the introductory part of this symposium, the pandemic has uncovered weaknesses, yet it has inspired innovation. Innovation is the New Era... Our future era is innovative at all levels, and we are all aware of this... The educational system post Covid-19 should be radically reshuffled through the integration of innovative tools, ideas, and initiatives. It is simply a must to start thinking and planning through ground-breaking ways to reshape our new Post Pandemic world.

“Shall the World get back to normal? Which wasn't really normal in terms of Human and Basic rights?” That is the symposium's main question. No! We should not go back but follow visions redefining and refining a future to our young generations that respects basic human's necessities and fundamental human rights.

My talk is divided into three parts:

- The first part will expose some studies conducted throughout the world regarding the experience of online education versus standards of education in terms of learning outcomes which employed in measuring student learning in a private higher educational institution in Lebanon that follows the American system of education.

- In the second part, I will focus on my personal experience in the field of language teaching and Translation Studies as a university professor.

My experience is further augmented by anecdotes being a mother of two children who have passed through what I call here the transition online saga. In this intervention, I consider personal experience as a rich source of knowledge worth sharing.

- And finally, the third part will offer recommendations for consideration and further discussion in post pandemic era education.

Part I

As a first step, I would like to mention some studies that traced the advantages and hurdles of distant learning and advanced some solutions and recommendations: A study in 2021 entitled “The Transformation of Higher Education After the COVID Disruption: Emerging Challenges in an Online Learning Scenario,” focuses on the field of education. They claim: “Higher education institutions are undergoing radical transformations driven by the need to digitalize education and training processes in record time with academics who lack innate technological capabilities for online teaching”.¹(García-Morales et al. 2021).

At this level, it is important to note that the core problem higher education institutions faced a paradigm shift in educational methods, to which academia must respond efficiently, especially to the fields of Humanities. Coming from a humanities background, my research is mainly to diagnose the efficiency of education during and post the pandemic and to assess the future of education. I aim at giving answers to one question: “Would distant learning elevate the standard of learning and teaching or not?”

During the shift to online learning, the main difficulties professors faced were the high demand for specific skills such as proficient

¹ V. J. GARCIA-MORALES, R. MARTIN-ROJAS, “The Transformation of Higher Education after the COVID Disruption: Emerging Challenges in an Online Learning Scenario”, *Frontiers in Psychology*, 2021, p. 12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.616059>

computer knowledge, communication abilities for an online setting, proper handling of diverse teaching and learning tools, and the need to solve specific problems quickly during online sessions. However, after the initial difficulties, professors created their own modus operandi to which the students were quick to adapt. The internet being as pervasive as it is in our modern world, we can safely claim that online learning will now be a common teaching method in academic institutions. Online learning is not merely about delivering content online by distance, neither is it a tool used apart from styles of pedagogy. Online learning has been conceived as an art that requires skills and competencies in teaching and learning (BRANCH & DOUSAY, 2015)² with an eye to 21st century skills including critical thinking, problem-solving, and deliberation.

In another study entitled “How Americans experienced the shift to remote instruction” published in 2021, Mark A. Elgart focuses on “four R’s,” rigor, routines, relationships, and resources. Elgart emphasizes the importance of the four R’s, as they can help adjust to the challenges of the shift to online learning:

Rigor:

Rigor emphasizes the efforts of teachers who have been fully consumed in creating new activities and assignments for students to include independent projects, group inquiry, and problem-based learning, in order to render their courses more interactive.

Relationships:

The survey Elgart conducted revealed the level of support shown to teachers. Students and parents reported that teachers were extremely caring throughout the shift to online learning...

²R. BRANCH, T. DOUSAY, *Survey of Instructional Design Models*, Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT), 2015

Routines:

Elgart stresses the importance of regular routines, as they guide student behavior, help them focus, and create the intellectual structures in which rigorous teaching and learning can take place. That is no less true in an online environment.

Resources:

Elgart reports that many school districts in the USA have made remarkable efforts to provide internet access to students who need it. Still, any gap in access is unacceptable, as it will curtail the learning process of lower-class income students. Human rights are to be watched thoroughly at this level.³ (Elgart, 2021)

Contextualizing the COVID-19 Pandemic in Lebanon:

In Lebanon, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) has launched National Distance Learning projects to provide e-learning services for schools and universities via a range of online platforms including YouTube, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. Despite the MEHE efforts to ease the shift online, Lebanon's decrepit infrastructure aggravated by the unprecedented economic collapse has rendered distance education and its derivatives dysfunctional.

For instance, in a study about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education in Lebanon, Maha Mouchantaf explores that the country is currently facing its worse financial and banking crisis since the Civil War of 1975. As per the MEHE, 39 out of 189 students switched from private to public schools during the current academic year. Mouchantaf also observes the large number of private schools are also facing delayed payments from parents, and some parents' committees are refusing to pay tuition fees. These factors are pushing

³ M.A. Elgart, Learning upended: How Americans experienced the shift to remote instruction. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 102(5), 2021, p. 58–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721721992566>

many students to drop out and seek employment early to help provide for their respective families.⁴(Mouchantaf, 2020).

Furthermore, the initial process of adapting to online teaching was encumbered by Lebanon's lacking infrastructure. According to Kamal Abou Chedid online sessions were frequently disrupted by power outages, poor connectivity, and limited bandwidth. The complex situation thus necessitated the use of asynchronous teaching methods, such as pre-recorded sessions and Learning Management System tools, such as Blackboard or Moodle.⁵ Therefore, technology has provided professors opportunities to overcome debilitating hurdles, there by enriching the teaching and learning experience. Once the novelty of online learning subsided, and particularly after receiving the appropriate training, teachers were satisfied with classes, and mainly reported problems such as student absenteeism and the aforementioned technical complications.

Despite online learning's forced and sudden shift, and the various economic and political difficulties countries such as Lebanon were facing, the result of the various institutional and teachers' efforts elevated the standards of teaching. From asynchronous, pre-recorded lessons, to live classrooms and independent projects, the current teaching curriculum has now acquired diverse teaching methods that may have existed beforehand but were simply not implemented.

Nevertheless, institutions must still seek to assess and ameliorate their standards of online teaching, and doing so would necessitate ongoing trainings assuring the proficiency of their staff with the adopted technological tools and revising policies and curricula to incorporate the new teaching methods available.

⁴ M. MOUCHANTAF, "The COVID-19 Pandemic: Challenges Faced and Lessons Learned Regarding Distance Learning in Lebanese Higher Education Institutions", *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2020, 10(10), p. 1259–1266. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1010.11>

⁵ K. ABOUCHEDID, "Rethinking Education Post COVID-19: Are schools equipped for this change of format?" *The Peace Building in Lebanon*, 2020.

Part II

It is worth mentioning that as an educator and a parent, I cannot but talk about my experience and that of my children. We are living in a country exposed daily to various threats. Our kids and youth had to live through the August 4th blast in Beirut, and then they were asked to join online classes whereby their instructors are behind the screen and interact with them properly without missing any assignment. I witness some of my students who had psychological problems due to the tough effect of the loss they have gone through: Their houses, belonging, laptops, etc. not to mention those who are literally lonely left to their fate, with the absence of both parents, were struggling for their lives and the lives of their kids. From that perspective, I can guarantee that it was tough on me as a mother seeing how my little ones are struggling behind the screen and the same with my own grown-up students.

The educational system in Lebanon was strained and facing challenges before the COVID-19 outbreak. Multiple schools were shutting down and families were struggling to afford private schooling while public schools were becoming overcrowded with Lebanese students and Syrian refugees having access to only limited educational resources ⁶ (Abu Habib, 2020).

I am sure that this is a global issue, yet what our country is going through is somehow unique: It had to face financial hurdles, losses at all levels, psychological issues, cold international and national wars, in addition to the global pandemic. All these allowed me to come to one certain conclusion. Despite all odds, and everything we have gone through and still are, the standard of teaching could but be elevated when we rethink education, and highlight the positive consequences the pandemic called for, such as the reduced amount of consumed paperwork and the

⁶ L. ABU HABIB, “2020 Outlook: Lebanon between the economic crisis and the aspirations of the October uprising”. American University of Beirut Outlook. 2020. <https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/news/Pages/20200217-lebanon-outlook-2020.aspx>

collective collaborations concerning the use of electronic versions of books. We also ‘witnessed the increasing use of OER and digital free resources accessible to everyone, which showcases the strength of humanity and its ability to communicate and help each other during times of distress.

Language teaching, in particular, has seen divisive results concerning online teaching: While face-to-face interactions are still a necessity to learning languages, translation techniques, and interpretations, online learning has added value to technological tools and highlighted their efficiency in broaching distance. Whether it is during language lessons or a translation and interpretation labs, students were participating face-to-face as well as on Zoom and Microsoft Teams to solve uniquely attributed problems. For instance, one particular exercise that received much success is when class sessions were split into rooms, with each team tasked to collaborate and finish an assignment within a time limit. Students available on campus collaborated with their online classmates in order to finish their task, thereby teaching them the importance of communication skills, adapting to rapid changes of environment, and how to maintain their status as team players amidst a mixed digital and analog environment.

Part III: Recommendations

- a. Universities in Lebanon must collaborate to mobilize resources, while exacting attention to the digitalize the learning processes and offer specialized technical trainings to professors, administrative staff, students, and parents, who take part in children’s education. Efforts to build capacity for online teaching need to be initiated by the MEHE for school and university instructors as the foundation of the future of education.
- b. The private sector must closely work with UN institutions and the Ministries of Culture in order to promote human resources and protect the educated youth from immigrating. One way for doing this is to screen student’s extra potentials from an early age and by investing in them and granting them security and assurance to stay in Lebanon.

c. Universities must create a smart hybridity of face-to-face and online learning to benefit from the potentials of technological tools available to meet students' expectations and enhance their learning experience in the current digital era.

d. Curricula revisions in all fields, specifically during the pandemic period, are urgently needed.

e. The creation of staff development strategies and programs by focusing on educating staff, and developing their skills and knowledge concerning online teaching.

f. The inclusion of innovative strategies based on instructional design skills in order to enhance face-to-face interaction with supplemental online modalities.

g. Policies and regulations concerning online teaching in Lebanon must be promulgated to be on par with international pedagogical trends regulated by quality assurance standards and procedures.

Conclusion

It is an educator's responsibility to integrate tools, activities, and experiences that would better students' understanding of the material given. The virtual world has now dynamically broached barriers even in academic institutions, and we are definitely not allowed to go below this level. However, we must not forget to look backward as we go forward towards a future with more certainty and efficiency in our educational programs. The future generation depends on our critical initiatives to grant them an ameliorated educational system or else we are at a risk of failing their potential, their skills, and their ambitions. The choice is in the hands of the current academics to overcome the difficulties of the pandemic and to seize whatever positive consequences it has brought.

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Rethinking Intercultural Philosophy for a Post- Pandemic World

Dr. Bahaa Darwish⁷

Abstract

Philosophy has never been just a method of contemplating the world but it was also a guide towards, and a justification of, the principles that it sees necessary to guide life such as justice, equality, wellbeing and happiness. With the rise of the pandemic, many intellectuals and philosophers predicted a new world, a new life, and drastic changes in the various aspects of life. If there are some signs of a shift of paradigm, then we need to rethink philosophy for such a new world.

The aim of this paper is to show that rethinking philosophy is a meta- philosophy that philosophers ought to practice regularly whether there is evidence of a shift in paradigm or not. I will start with précising the meanings and objectives of “rethinking”, then explain what intercultural philosophy is and the role intercultural philosophy from an Arab Perspective ought to have played since the emergence of COVID-19. The paper will also attempt to refute the unwarranted claim that we will see a new international world order, and the attribution of the changes we see in the world now, such as world automation and increased international cooperation, to the rise of Corona.

What is Rethinking?

“Rethinking” can sometimes, as used here in this symposium, be taken to mean “correcting” تصويب Tasweeb. Rethinking cannot be تصويب Tasweeb in any way. Of course, I do not intend to give a correction of a literal mistake, I am reflecting on the concept itself. previously re-

⁷ Professor of Philosophy, Minia University. International Bioethics Committee Member, UNESCO, Paris

wrong, was wrong in its context. a literal mistake, I am reflecting on the concept itself. If we mean by “rethinking” “correcting”, which is the English meaning of تصويب Tasweeb, then this means that whatever we “rethink” was previously wrong, was wrong in its context.

However, when during a certain era of history, we think there is a shift in paradigm, we rethink in the knowledge what needs to be adapted to fit the new historic era, or paradigm. Such process can be a good step towards better objectives, or towards a better way of achieving objectives of a certain “province of knowledge”. When we find that the “province of knowledge” that fitted its era according to the data of the stages of civilization we were living in does not fit any more, we think how to change it. And this is the first meaning of “rethinking”. If it turned out that the evidence was not enough to justify a shift in paradigm, we “rethink” that certain province of knowledge as well, i.e. we revise its content to decide what part we need to change. This is the second meaning.

Before the advent of Christianity, during the Roman Empire, to give an example of the first meaning, philosophy was a human theoretical activity that contemplates the world. The bodily strength was the dominating value. After the spread of Christianity, philosophers had to contemplate whether this is the philosophy needed. It turned that the philosophy needed was a compromise between philosophy and religion. The values philosophy needed to spread were mercy, justice, etc. As an example of the second meaning, when rethinking a certain knowledge turns out that we need just a partial change, educationalists, before the use of internet as a tool of learning, used to regard the one who knows the more, the better. After the spread of internet used as a tool for education, educationalists do not consider the one who knows the more, the “excellent learner”. The “excellent learner” is the one who knows how to use knowledge. The shift is from quantity to quality of knowledge.

The third meaning of “Rethinking” is that “rethinking” is a meta-knowledge: rethinking philosophy is a meta-philosophy, rethinking

think humanities is meta-humanities, etc. such activity ought to happen continuously, not only because of a certain incidence, however big it is, such as the pandemic. I can give an example from sociology to show how the increasing spread of digital technologies led sociologists to rethink sociology, and discuss the social transformations that information and communication technologies may cause. Digital sociology emerged out of the questions whether the traditional prevailing sociological concepts are enough and fit analysing the social relationships in the digital age or not. This example can be an example of the third meaning of “rethinking” since it is the role of humanities to reflect on itself from time to time without waiting for a large incident, such as corona virus to happen, and can also be an example of “rethinking” in the first meaning, since the wide spread of technologies and their apparent impact in every aspect of life led sociologists to rethink sociology.

Does the Emergence of Pandemic necessitate “rethinking” Philosophy?

Some intellectuals, all over the world, see that the outbreak and continuity of the COVID- 19 coronavirus justify our thinking of a Post-Pandemic World. The COVID- 19 corona virus crossed all geographical borders, turning into a pandemic and affecting many people all over the world, specifically vulnerable ones. Drastic changes in every aspect of life have already taken place. This justifies our thinking that there is evidence of a shift in paradigm.

We need to rethink philosophy to see whether it should have a new role in such a world or not. According to the meaning we set for the verb “rethink”, whether there is enough evidence that justifies a new world, or the evidence is not enough that there will be a new world, rethinking philosophy is required.

Intercultural philosophy means to contemplate global challenges in different cultures with the recognition of proponents of each culture that they do not possess the final word or opinion but that their opinion may need to be revised or rearticulated by proponents of other cultures. It can also mean to contemplate a global issue in a certain

country giving opinions that reflect foreigner as well as indigenous influences.

So, intercultural philosophy means to philosophize from within a certain culture, noting that opinions from other cultures ought not to be excluded, but respected and borne in mind, while philosophizing, as ideas that are to complete one’s own ideas. Intercultural philosophy in the Arab region means to look at the global problems, such as COVID-19, from inside: and inside combines indigenous elements of the Arab as well as elements inherited from the western philosophy.

Reflecting upon the current political and economic events, I think that the post COVID 19 World will remain as the world is now with all its deficiencies. It will not turn into a different world with different characteristic as some optimistic intellectuals think. Whatever change will happen, or happens, will happen because of reasons other than the rise of CORONA. The only role pandemic can play is aa wake up, or a hurry up of what was to happen but later. Let us take some examples that can justify my opinion.

The World Will Witness a New World Order

Sfetcu is one of those who think that we will witness a new international order that is not very orderly⁸. Against such opinion, I think that though we are witnessing changes in the world, I do not think that we will witness a new international order. Some intellectuals do agree with me about that. Bhusal predicts that the United States and China will isolate themselves to serve their own interests, and trade wars and the race for supremacy will intensify. Bremmer agrees that once the world emerges from the current pandemic, we will be plunged into a new cold war,

⁸N.SFETCU, “TheworldaftertheCOVID-19pandemic”, PhilPapers, November 7, 2020. <https://philpapers.org/rec/NICTWA-2>

this time between the United States and China. New world order or not, some things just do not change.⁹

“COVID-19 has exposed the fragility of nations States and indeed the existing world order. However, it hasn’t brought about anything new”, says Lord Holmes of Richmond, sitting member of the house of lords, the upper chamber of the UK parliament. (Wintermeyer, Sep, 2020)¹⁰ and I do not think it will bring anything new. The new world order requires readiness of a new superpower or a group of smaller powers to take over: a condition that does not seem to be fulfilled.

World Automation will be the Normal Activities

Since the beginning of the “quarantine” period, the practice adopted was to replace work, schools and traditional medicine with (telework, online school and telemedicine). The prediction is that these activities will, from now on, be the normal activities. “The digital world and automation in the production and services sector will develop exponentially, redefining consumer behavior.”¹¹

World automation was decided as one of the means to accelerate Sustainable Development Goals of 2030 before Corona took off. So digitalizing activities cannot be attributed to corona. It is only that CORONA accelerated its execution.

In 2015, all united nations Member States adopted was is known as The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development considered as a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At the heart of this agenda are what is called the 17

⁹ I. BREMMER, “How will the world be different after COVID- 19?”, Finance and Development, June 2020, p. 29 <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2020/06/pdf/how-will-the-world-be-different-after-COVID-19.pdf>

¹⁰ L. WINTERMEYER, “COVID-19 Economic Stimulus: Get Money to People Faster with Digital Dollars”, Forbes, March 30 2020

¹¹ N. SFETCU, op. cit, p. 8

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are an urgent call for action by all developed and developing countries.¹² In order to achieve SDGs, digital transformation strategy was seen by many as the key to accelerate our progress towards SDGs: the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), which is the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies, for instance, explains this clearly by showing how digital transformation can help accelerate achieving each goal. The fourth goal “quality education” for instance can be achieved in a quicker way if we adopt e-learning: which means access to all knowledge to all people no matter where they live or how much they earn. The third goal “good health and well-being” can be quicker achieved by adopting the e-health system. E-health is the use of information and communication technology to support health and healthcare .¹³

National strategies for inclusive digital societies were launched by many states all over the world of which the Arab states are some. The African continent also has launched a digital transformation strategy (2020 – 2030) early before Corona started, acknowledging that digital transformation is a driving force for innovative, inclusive and sustainable growth. Innovations and digitalization are stimulating jobcreationandcontributingtoaddressingpoverty,reducinginequalityand contributing to the achievement of Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁴

International Cooperation, we see now, will be the practice

Though we have witnessed some actions of international cooperation since the emergence of COVID-19, it is doubtful whether such

¹² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs webpage , in <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

¹³ Asia- Pacific Information Superhighway Steering Committee and WSIS Regional Review. Slide, no.4 ITU Asia Pacific Regional Office

¹⁴ African Union. Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa 2020- 2030. p. 1. <https://au.int/en/documents/20200518/digital-transformation-strategy-africa2020-2030>

actions will be the practice. Solidarity and help appear only when there is a common enemy or a common interest. Examples of international cooperation when there is a common interest are shown in the European Union, the Union of South American Nations, and the Trade Union in Asia, to mention just a few unions. To combat the pandemic, seen as a common enemy, world leaders announced solidarity and cooperation to combat it. To commemorate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the United Nations, the Heads of States and Governments representing the peoples of the world, gathered on September 21, 2020 and acknowledged the COVID-19 pandemic to be the largest global challenge in the history of the United Nations. They have also agreed, in the declaration, that “solidarity and cooperation is the only way for defeating the virus and achieving recovery” (Wang Yi (2020)¹⁵. This is a clear example of international cooperation to fight a common enemy. Another example of a call for international cooperation to combat a common enemy is the WHO motto “Nobody is safe until everyone is safe”. This motto was interpreted by SHS IBC and COMEST that it “ means only when safe and effective vaccines are made available, at affordable prices and widely distributed, will it be possible to really confront and mitigate the unacceptable social, health and economic crises, which were accentuated by COVID-19”¹⁶. For me, though this motto emerges out of ethical considerations towards others, it reflects the same way of capitalism’s thinking. It shows how ONE can be safe, it encourages finding ways to save everybody only through the saving of others. So it starts from finding ways of saving the ego, not ways of saving others

¹⁵ B. DARWISH, “COVID 19: International Cooperation and Solidarity: A point where ethics and politics can intersect”, IBC Newsletter, COVID-19 Vaccines as global public goods, June 2021, p. 39.

<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378406>

¹⁶ SHS/IBC-COMEST Joint Statement of UNESCO’s Ethics Commissions On Ensuring Equal Access for All to Vaccines and Therapeutics Developed to Confront COVID-19 21 September 2021, p. 3

for their own sake, but links saving others to saving oneself.

What is next?

What is next is that since intercultural philosophy is to philosophize from within a certain culture, noting that opinions from other cultures ought not to be excluded, but respected and borne in mind, while philosophizing, as ideas that are to complete one’s own ideas, then what is left is to rethink philosophy from an Arab perspective, i.e. to revise philosophy, giving regard to the religious, secular, as well as to the foreign, elements.

Religion, in the Arab world, is a necessary component of the contemporary Arab world culture since it is an element of the Arab identity in addition to language, customs and traditions. This is evident in the people’s everyday life vocabulary expressing their thoughts and behaviour. Though the Arab cannot dispense with religion in their thoughts and behaviour, they cannot also ignore the modern civilization, with its principles and products, which dominates the whole world and which the Arab world is part of, affected by its modes and values, and applying in most of their countries, some of its theories- like socialism and capitalism - and harvesting wholly the modern civilization’s products.

Arab philosophers and intellectuals, whether secular or religious intellectuals, ought to have reflected on the life situation since COVID started and recheck the principles that ought to have govern the Arab world. This is what they ought to do from time to time to make sure whether current philosophy is fit for the current situation or not. Since COVID-19 emerged, Arab philosophers and intellectuals do not seem to have done so with the exception of a few. They ought to instruct politicians on what to do, not vice versa. Religious intellectuals ought to tell politicians to close the mosques and churches, not vice versa. Intellectuals ought to show how to apply ethical norms to fit with the COVID-19 era. Philosophers ought to explain the values and principles that are to be reflected in actions.

In order not to charge philosophers with not having done their job well,

if politicians and policymakers listened to them: to intellectuals and bodies like UNESCO who continuously fought for the call for giving weight to human dignity, justice, equality and applying them, inside communities and between societies, we would have saved ourselves a lot of problems we are facing today such as condemning the health systems with not being sufficient to give whatever healthcare needed, and capitalism that it failed as an economic and political system.

If intellectuals, and specifically religious ones, say that they do advise everyone on how to behave but they are not listened to, the question will remain: why do common people not listen to them, specifically not listen to religious intellectuals, why are religious intellectuals not convincing to the common people? If it is said that this is due to the media that focuses on the government messages, I would answer saying intellectuals ought to continue fighting for their own conviction till they are heard.

The pandemic is supposed to have made us, we philosophers, reflect on how important life is: life is our existence; it is the beginning and the end, our ambitions, our hopes, our conception of future lies in it, without it, there are no ambitions, hopes or future. In short: there is no existence. And if life is so important, then philosophy ought to direct us towards how to make our life a better future, or how to make our future a better life.

Arab philosophers will definitely differ in their contemplation from Asian or western philosophers for the different cultural elements that will affect their thoughts. Arab philosophers will differ regarding the value of life: some will see it lies in this life, others will see it lies in the life-after. And here is the merit of intercultural philosophy.

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