

## Book Review

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**Slavoj Žižek. *Pandemic! 2: Chronicles of a Lost Time*. OR Books, 2020. (191 Pages, paperback ISBN 978-1-68219-409-6, ebook ISBN 978-1-68219-252-8)**

As a sequel to the previous book on Covid-19, philosopher Slavoj Žižek has published another more comprehensive and insightful work. Capturing the imagination of academic philosophers and critical thinkers it is a prolific inquiry into the eventful time and crisis of Covid-19. In his usual psychoanalytic and philosophical lenses, the author reflects on some key overarching themes such as ecological crisis elongated by a permanent wave of pandemic, the need for economic solidarity on a global level, the problem of populist and PC (political correctness) regimes of truth, and among other themes, the psycho-sexual implications of the disease. Interestingly, he not only critically conceptualizes the current events, but also develops a vibrant discussion with many people on how to think about this abnormal situation in a meaningful and rational term.

The author begins with a discussion on the concept of geo-social class<sup>1</sup> while describing the endangered and tragic life of workers and nurses during this crisis. Moving on to the other issues the author explores that how in the panic of pandemic the lives of people who are having other diseases are ignored. And thus he refers to the problem raised by Philosopher Giorgio Agamben over the issue of abolishing lockdowns. The author tries to question Agamben's critique of the lockdowns and social distancing but at the same time critically exposes the strategies and policies of various governments. While commenting on the current uprisings and protests, he not only questions the protests against lockdowns (in Stuttgart and other places) but also rejects the advocacy of destroying the old monuments in order to end racism. Therefore he questions thought policing in leftist politics and an anti-science campaign in the populist camp.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, a larger part of the book covers many complex issues related to idea of social distancing and our connection to the virtual spaces. Firstly he targets the fragile nature of sexuality in digital spaces, he argues that the social isolation has left us to be highly dependent on the screens and to search for reality in fantasy.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, he considers the Cartesian dualism and ‘cogito ergo sum’, as the prime movers behind the virtual technological race. Therefore, he moves on to problematize the ‘wired brain’ project (known as Neuralink) which is under development by Elon Musk.<sup>4</sup> He argues that this digital technology is a question mark on our definition of being human. In this context he is also deeply suspicious of new class exploitation regarding the ‘No touch’ digital future and ‘Screen New Deal’ as advocated by the government and corporate-cum-virtual elite.<sup>5</sup>

One of the fascinating thought reoccurring several times in the book is the narrative of ‘normality’ (let’s go back to normal), which he questions out rightly. Arguably, for him the problem with normality is that it eclipses the real problems in the system. He maintains that this pandemic is a final blow to the two ongoing problems (he calls ‘storms’) in the world, international conflicts and mental health, which are often neglected. Meanwhile, he criticizes Agamben’s insistence<sup>6</sup> on abolishing the lockdowns as he says, “We live in a mad world in which nobody seems ready to do the rational thing and adopt a truce for the duration of the pandemic.”<sup>7</sup> And the way out for him, “gathering the strength to confront the threat of these storms.”<sup>8</sup>

Later on, launching a psychoanalytic and philosophical inquiry on the mentality of “normality” the author remarks in Lacanian sense that it is a collective sign of madness.<sup>9</sup> Also engaging Hegelian pessimism, he remarks that avoiding and mourning a catastrophe leads to the emergence of another and new catastrophe.<sup>10</sup> Therefore he suggests that the current pandemic should be followed like “*Kairos*” which has the double aspect of ‘threat’ (to the current system) and ‘promise’ (for the new system). Taking insights from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic approach he hindsight the pandemic, like an intruder which comes from the external reality, disturbs our

smooth ideological sleep and consequently triggers a traumatic awareness of global crisis. However, the problem is that the current ideological mode of capitalism would try to return to normality as a false awakening.<sup>11</sup>

The final part of the book is a psychoanalytic examination into ideal of self-transparency in our current political culture. The author provides a devastating critique of political correctness and Trump's shameful obscene politics by arguing that the former's puritan moralism is complementing the obscenity of the latter.<sup>12</sup> The book ends with Mike Davis' insights that our current politics should concentrate on the ethics of economic solidarity and preventing ecological crisis. I think it is a rich and comprehensive note over the lessons one can learn from this pandemic. The argument against the psychopathology of 'normality' is also quite interesting and thoughtful. On a final note, the author has conspicuously argued in favor 'lockdowns' and 'social distancing', however, I think the overarching problem of emerging authoritarian politics (as Agamben implies) is still an unavoidable threat for the upcoming time.

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<sup>1</sup> Žižek, PANDEMIC! 2, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 35, 36, 38.

<sup>3</sup> Noting on the comment of Eva Wiseman, who said, "Something is rotten in the state of sex.", Ibid., 52.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>6</sup> Recalling Agamben's extreme position, "Professors who agree to submit to the new dictatorship of telematics and to hold their courses only online are the perfect equivalent of the university teachers who in 1931 swore allegiance to the Fascist regime." Ibid., 100.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>9</sup> As Lacan said, "normality is a version of psychosis". Ibid., 110.

<sup>10</sup> Citing the myth of Oedipus wherein the catastrophe occurred simply because they tried to avoid it. Ibid., 122.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 135–37.

<sup>12</sup> As Shuja Haider commented, "It should go without saying that Left-liberal identity politics and Alt-right white nationalism are not comparable. The problem is that they are compatible." Ibid., 177.