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## ***Pandemic as Polemic: Free Will in an Age of Restrictions?***

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**Abstract.** Inserting the discourse within an existentialist framework, this paper examines our existence of interrupted realities through the lens of Kierkegaardian thoughts and also draws on Simone de Beauvoir's "Qu'est-ce que l'existentialisme?" (1947). As we navigate a surrealist time of COVID-19 (ab)normal, the lingering pandemic has left an impact on a both societal and psychosocial level. With societies across the globe facing continuous restrictions, what happens to free will? De Beauvoir defines our *raison d'être* as the individual having reality "only through his engagement in the world". In this period of limited individual freedom, can we still talk of free will and how shall we engage with this all-pervasive, rule-changing pandemic 'New Normal'?

**Keywords:** *Kierkegaard, De Beauvoir, existentialism, Covid-19 pandemic, free will*

### **Focus and theoretical framework: Initial reflections**

At this time of interrupted realities when we strive to regain some kind of control during a still uncertain pandemic situation, ours is a cinematic reality, or 'surreality' where we live under new conditions. It appears we have lost touch with what came before – a past where the world was moving fast and travel and connection across borders were seen as a given. There is a sense of loss of this past as we have now entered a precarious and unpredictable new era, unprecedented in many ways even if the world has battled viruses, epidemics, and pandemics many times before. In our still unstable collective Covid-19 existence where we navigate rudderless towards an uncertain future we are, to paraphrase Zygmunt Bauman, "members, or denizens, of a postmodern habitat" (Smith 1999: 150) where we lead an ambivalent existence in an apparent utopia that is far from as utopic as one would have hoped for. We dwell in a lingering and ambivalent state of in-betweenness, a liquid society where everything seems to be in a disconcerting state of flux, a "perpetuum mobile" (Bauman 2011: 19) or a never standing still. We are generally engaged in a postmodern hunt; members of a society of hunters where we seek a sense of self-realisation, but where in our individual strive to remain strong and detached from the collective, we are often as lonely as ever. As Bauman wrote, lucidly, already in 2005, "We are all hunters now, or told to be hunters and compelled to act like hunters, on the penalty of eviction from hunting – if not of relegation to the ranks of the game"<sup>i</sup>. It appears this current virus-ridden chapter of our collective existence has further heightened and exacerbated our feelings of loneliness – despite some of us living in highly populated societies. Being surrounded by people in the same situation as us does not necessarily mean we

can connect with them, and the loneliness felt in isolation while we are aware that there are people all around gives rise to surreal feelings of detachment from reality.

In the existentialist times we now live in, heavily impacted by a pandemic that may, or not, have entered its shape-shifting, vaccination-reinforced, more manoeuvrable 'final' stages (Astra Zeneca, Modena, BioNTech, Pfizer, Sputnik, and other vaccines now provide us with a protective shield that may help carry us over to safety), Bauman's aforementioned words take on a new meaning. Instead of being in control, we lack clear direction as we face new challenges; including what role we should, or are able to, play in a volatile and unpredictable society where Covid-19 dictates the rules and changes the gameplan. These are both confronting and illuminating times, or as Simone De Beauvoir puts it in a different context, yet her words still resonate with us today: "in France and all across Europe the individual is seeking with anguish to find his place in a world turned upside down" (De Beauvoir 2020, orig. 1947: 4).

Today, our individual fears are likewise collective as we are thrown into a situation where we are no longer sole operators in control of our own destiny. We face a lingering trauma that unites us across borders. If we are fortunate enough to have survived the ordeal physically intact and unscathed, our jobs still safe and with a home to come home to (or, rather, one to remain in as many people have been locked down across the world), we adopt the role of observers and chroniclers of a bewildering yet at the same time enlightening time period where we look within, begin to reflect, come up for air, and gain important new insights<sup>ii</sup>.

In this paper, we let existentialist thoughts drive the main argument and seek to provide a snapshot into the main tenets of the existentialist movement. Yet at the same time we aim to demystify and uncomplicate the philosophical inquiry that is existentialism by applying it, rather naturally, to an interpretation of the pandemic situation that we now find ourselves in. Simone De Beauvoir the more contemporary of the two scholars whose thoughts we draw from, provides a both novel and hands-on approach to existentialism. As we address issues that both concern and unite us, we return to the question of free will in our contemporary context. We ask if we can find our way back to becoming somewhat free agents in a Western world grappling with new complexities where we have been stripped of our freedom to move – also in an abstract sense. We stress 'Western world' as in the often comparatively liberalised West we have grown accustomed to free movement of body and, likewise, of thought. In this part of the world, pandemic restrictions have largely come across as an affront on our human rights and an infringement on our many civil liberties. This, in stark contrast to populations in politically far more regimented societies across the globe, where freedom has never been taken for granted – and, thus, being restricted in movement may not have been as hard to accept as for citizens in more affluent, democratic, societies<sup>iii</sup>.

Something that does indeed connect people in East and West, North and South on an individual, human-to-human level, is a number of existentialist concerns. This paper draws on insights from Søren Kierkegaard and Simone De Beauvoir, both astutely aware of their own realities and what lies beneath – of that which is unaddressed, but which concerns and is felt by people around the world, irrespective of where we come from, of our social status, our ethnic background or religious beliefs. Their words gain new significance for us today, their texts resonate with us and are applicable to today's both dystopic and illuminating new reality. Kierkegaard and De Beauvoir show us the way when we are in dire need of words to guide us. In terms of Kierkegaard, this paper strikes a chord for one text in particular – a book which also due to its sheer brevity reinforces the value of 'less is more'. This book is poetic *The Lily*

*of the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses* (1849) which – although it has not attracted as widespread critical attention as some of his major works like *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), or *The Sickness unto Death* (1849) – contains important insights and nuggets of wisdom that feel particularly relatable to us from the perspective of today. The book comes recommended by Clare Carlisle, author of *Philosopher of the Heart: The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard* (2019). She writes:

In Kierkegaard's hands, the lily and the bird are a kind of foil to the human experience, which is far from carefree—it's actually an experience full of anxiety and self-consciousness and that sense of being seen and judged by others. He saw being human as kind of like a task that everyone has to learn, and he's really exploring this question of how to be human in these discourses in a very beautiful, poetic way. I would recommend this book as an entry point into Kierkegaard's thinking<sup>iv</sup>.

In her important book which inserts itself well into the wider Kierkegaardian referential scholarship, Carlisle provides valuable insights into the life and mind of the ruminating Danish philosopher, poet and ponderer. Carlisle's recommendations shed new light on *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air* which, when re-read in the context of the 2019-2022 pandemic, becomes a simple yet profound manual about what we must value and prioritise in our transformative new existence. Specifically, Kierkegaard recommends an attitude of stillness, of contemplation, of Godly reverence and obedience. But he also talks of joy – a joy stemming from happiness found in nature, in learning from the bird and the lily, in us being content with the small things that turn out not to be that small after all. We realise that the expression 'less is more' represents an attitude or approach to life that has been adhered to by wise men and women throughout time. It has now become a motto for all of us; guidelines to hold on to as we embrace a new lifestyle and existence where, instead of hunting aimlessly and never standing still, we would be wise to stop to reflect, and reassess what really matters.

The freedom that comes from reflection and stillness, and that comes promoted by Kierkegaard, coincides with Beauvoirian thoughts. In her, at first look unassuming *What is Existentialism?* (published in *Philosophical Writings*, 1947), she gives us food for thought. De Beauvoir makes references to Voltaire's *Candide*, she speaks of the need for us to cultivate our garden, and to reflect:

The object is sufficient as long as it is sufficient to me, but reflection is one of the forms that transcendence spontaneously takes on, and, in the eyes of reflection, the object is there, without reason. A man alone in the world would be paralyzed by the manifest vision of the vanity of all his goals. He would undoubtedly not be able to stand living (De Beauvoir 2020, orig. 1947: 62-63).

In her cross-referential writings and ponderings, where reflection enables us to distinguish that which is often overlooked unless we stop and close our ears to external chaos and noise, De Beauvoir finds her own voice still within the existentialist tradition. Sharing common ground with Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir was a thinker-philosopher in her own right, and she may well have influenced Sartre equally much as he inspired and informed her. She did not immediately defend an agnostic stance like the former but pioneered feminist thoughts while she maintained a "belief in absolute freedom of choice and the consequent responsibility that such freedom entails, by emphasizing that one's projects must spring from individual spontaneity and not from an external institution, authority, or person"<sup>v</sup>.

As we revisit existentialism in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and apply existentialist theories and values as expressed by Kierkegaard and De Beauvoir to our rocky 2022 reality of stagnation, slow recovery, renewed setbacks, isolation, and faint hope while we are externally dependant on authorities to tell us what we can and cannot do, we still have the freedom to look within and find an individual escape – no matter if we keep facing restrictions on a societal level. While it is not our purpose in this paper to be overly ambitious or come up with groundbreaking new discoveries we, rather, propose a call for reflection at a time of interrupted realities when the two philosophers whose ideas we fall back upon become more pertinent than ever and they inspire others to follow their lead – as seen in articles that proliferate both online and in print and that are informed by existentialist thoughts, including Kierkegaardian and Beauvoirian insights.

Søren Kierkegaard and Simone de Beauvoir, of different generations and eras and writing within different social contexts, nevertheless have much in common. Timeless in feel, they pondered their own troubled contemporary times and suggested ways to break away from and adopt a critical stance to limiting social doctrines and structures. Kierkegaard was working within the context of a conservative and strictly Lutheran 1840s-1850s Copenhagen and his life path followed a trajectory different from the urban and societal norm. Faced with private tragedies, he later rejected set conventions; questioning and distancing himself from public expectations. As has been noted, Kierkegaard went as far as to attack “the literary, philosophical, and ecclesiastical establishments of his day for misrepresenting the highest task of human existence – namely, becoming oneself in an ethical and religious sense – as something so easy that it could seem already accomplished even when it had not even been undertaken”<sup>vi</sup>. An ever-querying soul who resisted the status quo and was reluctant to conform to ‘the system’, Kierkegaard not only questioned the powers that be but, likewise, the passive and obedient collective that blindly obeyed (and still does) rules and obligations and uncritically abided by public expectations. At one stage during his intense literary career, he wrote:

In order for leveling really to occur, first it is necessary to bring a phantom into existence, a spirit of leveling, a huge abstraction, an all-embracing something that is nothing, an illusion – the phantom of the public [...]. The public is the real Leveling-Master, rather than the leveler itself, for leveling is done by something, and the public is a huge nothing<sup>vii</sup>.

Kierkegaard demonstrated to the public of his day and likewise to our contemporary readers that it is possible (even if it means subjecting ourselves to public pressure; even ridicule) to break free while we still outwardly move within certain parameters. A critical and controversial figure, Kierkegaard adopted an ambivalent attitude to life and is considered a theologian even if he argued that God could “only be known through subjective and personal experience and never objectively”<sup>viii</sup> – contrary to what appears to be stipulated by religious institutions. By going against the norm, he simultaneously stepped up to the occasion. Kierkegaard keeps demonstrating to us that the occasion we must embrace is one where we remain God-fearing while we go our own way and find our own truth – a truth that is subjective and highly individualistic.

Fast-forward to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and Simone De Beauvoir was born in France 1908, more than five decades after the (physical but not spiritual) passing of Kierkegaard whose words still resonate with us today and leave a lasting impact. Like her existentialist forerunner, De Beauvoir was an observant writer and critic. She was informed by contemporary existentialist thought but approached the philosophical concerns of this movement differently. De Beauvoir emphasised the individual’s absolute freedom of choice at a time when we tend to passively

follow authoritarian directives. Additionally questioning and ultimately upsetting prevailing gender doctrines, she called attention to the relegation of women in societies across the globe to a secondary status to their male counterpart and speculated at length on the very essence of what it means to be a woman. She proposed that “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” – a controversial thesis that challenged the very notion of women seen as ‘the Other’; someone both in opposition to and oppressed by men who, in turn, move to centre stage and take on the role of ‘self’ or ‘subject’. As regards the objective of her instrumental book “*The Second Sex* (1949), it “argues against the either/or frame of the woman question (either women and men are equal or they are different). It argues for women’s equality, while insisting on the reality of the sexual difference”<sup>ix</sup>.

Her words forever relevant, Simone De Beauvoir’s book in two volumes “radically challenged political and existential theory, but its most enduring impact is on how women understand themselves, their relationships, their place in society, and the construction of gender”<sup>x</sup>. The book maintained the “fundamental existentialist belief that each individual, regardless of sex, class or age, should be encouraged to define him or herself and to take on the individual responsibility that comes with freedom”<sup>xi</sup>.

In her debut novel *She Came Here to Stay* (commenced in 1937 and completed during the German occupation of Paris in 1941), De Beauvoir ponders existentialism from a complex societal perspective – as seen in her comments on our innate fear of change, the unforeseen and the unknown which relates to the individual both challenged and oppressed by external pressures in general:

Everything is a threat to him, since the thing which he has set up as an idol is an externality and is thus in relationship with the whole universe; and since, despite all precautions, he will never be the master of this exterior world to which he has consented to submit, he will be constantly upset by the uncontrollable course of events<sup>xii</sup>.

De Beauvoir and Kierkegaard both ultimately emphasise, in their own – yet often interconnected – ways our inability to control forces that are beyond our human capacity. They proposed, more or less directly, that we look beyond social institutions and step away from the norm. While an increasingly agnostic Simone De Beauvoir came from a bourgeoisie background and was raised Catholic, Kierkegaard received a strict Protestant upbringing. Having a complex relationship with his father, and his family haunted by a series of tragedies, Kierkegaard would not live past age 42. Nevertheless, during his short lifetime he delved profoundly into matters of heart and soul; ruminating on the meaning of our existence and the normative role we tend to play. Consumed before his time, he wrote and produced all the more fervently; long, theological ponderings where he often adopted a position secondary to his characters and wrote under pseudonyms like Johannes de Silentio, Victor Eremita (‘Victorious hermit’ in Latin), and Anti-Climacus. They became Kierkegaard’s respective alter egos and apparent writers of his own texts. These alter egos or symbolic characters that channelled the thoughts of their own creator, would also have enabled the Danish philosopher to detach himself from his own persona as a writer and, instead, take on parallel identities where he was able to express himself through alternative voices that all speak their own truths and therefore also speak on behalf of all of us.

Influenced, at first, by Hegelian theories, Kierkegaard would later abandon this line of thought. Instead, he carved a space for himself as a liberal existentialist scholar who questioned norms and conventions. He left a legacy as a thinker ahead of his time; bold enough to go his own way and proposing that we have the option to choose our own path, defy traditions and seek a

more individualistic road forward while at the same time we realise that we are responsible for our own destiny and should not look to others for guidance. The future is open, we are in command, and we have the choice to act as free agents – not as constrained by societal norms as we are often led to believe.

In her aforementioned critically acclaimed book on Kierkegaard, Carlisle writes that he “criticized the abstractions of modern philosophy, insisting that we must work out who we are, and how to live, right in the middle of life itself, with an open future ahead of us” (Carlisle 2019: xiii). Kierkegaard broke away from traditional beliefs, reaching his own conclusions relating to the reason why we are here, what role we should play, and where we are headed. Not confined to or governed by dogmatic ideas or seeking to slot into an already pre-existing scholarship, he proposed the duality of the ‘either/or’ first introduced as an alternative concept in his major work with the same title from 1843, and which consisted of two parts. The book argues for a life of dualities, of alternatives, of choices we have and paths we decide to take. It speaks of ambivalence and anguish but ultimately of a life where we have the option to head down a more individualistic or independent route – even if the society we live in dictates otherwise and expects us to be good members of the collective and to abide by traditional institutions like the Church and conventional norms relating to marriage, family, and social structures.

The first part of *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* (*Enten – Eller* in its original Danish) begins with the editor – i.e., the author – addressing the reader directly: “Perhaps it has sometimes occurred to you, dear reader, to doubt the correctness of the familiar philosophical proposition that the outward is the inward, the inward the outward” (Kierkegaard 2004, orig. 1843: 27). Ever the realist while he delved into matters of heart and soul, Søren Kierkegaard was a man ahead of his time who realised that nothing is black and white and that in order to be considered a citizen of a truly democratic society, a life of alternatives and opting for unconventional outcomes sometimes makes for a more balanced and authentic life journey – one where we decide for ourselves and are aware of a potentially higher purpose for our existence.

Driven by similar queries, De Beauvoir would form a spiritual bond with Kierkegaard through the very essence of her writings. Working alongside reputable existentialists like her long-term partner Jean-Paul Sartre as well as Albert Camus, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, she would, as highlighted earlier, step into the picture as a woman who left her own mark by revising existentialism from a feminist and at times also hyper-realist perspective. In contrast to Kierkegaard, De Beauvoir would openly acknowledge her prominent status within the existentialist tradition. A questioning soul, she saw existentialism as something organic that moves with the times. It is, indeed, a movement or attitude and approach to life that can now be continuously embraced as we proceed into a future impacted by the long shadow of our disconcerting pandemic present. De Beauvoir defines existentialism as a movement or school of thought that claims to be “a practical and living attitude toward the problems posed by the world today. It is a philosophy yet does not want to stay enclosed in books and schools; it intends to revive the great tradition of ancient wisdom that also involved difficult physics and logic, yet proposed a concrete human attitude to all men” (De Beauvoir 2004, orig. 1947: 3).

As suggested by the name, existentialism is concerned with the very essence of human existence and what matters at the core, what influences us to adhere to certain ideals and choose specific lifestyles. The individual is both in symbiosis and conflict with society, is encouraged to query and divert from the rules imposed by social and religious institutions, and to seek new experiences that take us off the beaten track. Kierkegaard sees authenticity and the freedom to

seek alternatives, as core elements of a life lived more fully and completely, despite the many inherent complexities that individuals must deal with as we move within a rigid set of social structures and parameters. Likewise, if we seek a path away from authoritarian rule, we must be ready to accept that the individual freedom we are striving for comes with its own anguish, or what Kierkegaard has defined as “the dizziness of freedom” (Kierkegaard 2014, p. 188). In his study on existentialism, Kevin Aho writes that:

Although existentialism cannot be reduced to a unified doctrine or school of thought and its major representatives differ widely in their views, the common thread that ties these thinkers together is their concern for the human situation as it is lived. This is a situation that cannot be reasoned about or captured in an abstract system; it can only be felt and be made meaningful by concrete choices and actions of the existing individual (Aho 2020: xi).

He further notes, with regard to the inherent applicability of existentialist thoughts in response to global (un)developments today, that existentialism “[i]s an ‘ism’ that gives the misleading impression of a coherent and unified philosophical doctrine – or, worse, school” (Aho 2020: x) – and, along similar lines he writes, “Existentialism does not require adherence to any normative moral principle” (Aho 2020: xiii). Austin Cline, in turn, defines the inherently mouldable existentialist movement as follows:

Existentialism puts the emphasis on moral individualism [...] There is no basis and given human nature that is common to all people and so each person must define what humanity means to them and what values or purpose will dominate in their lives ... Rather than seeking the highest good that would be universal, existentialists have sought means for each individual to find the highest good *for them*, regardless of whether it might ever apply to anyone else at any other time<sup>xiii</sup>.

In what could have been a modern, liberal, and progressive 2022 we now, rather, find ourselves all the more constrained and no longer the free agents we may once have appeared to be. A flurry of articles now pay renewed attention to Kierkegaardian and Beauvoirian thoughts, in their efforts to interpret our perplexing times. Thus, Patrick Stokes, writing for Melbourne-based outlet “The Conversation” under strict state lockdown, constructs an important argument around Kierkegaard’s “‘uncertain-certainty’ of death”<sup>xiv</sup>. He proposes that the philosopher’s calm but curious approach to the very real, ever-present possibility of death may, when applied to our own Corona virus-ridden times, help us adopt a more balanced approach to the situation. Brian Nosner of the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation), in turn, puts forward four lessons to be learnt from Kierkegaard. They can be summarised as follows: our age of anxiety is not unusual in history, we must live in the moment and, similarly, we must strive to find joy in the midst of anxiety, and view anxiety as an opportunity for us to gain faith<sup>xv</sup>. Correspondingly, with reference to Simone De Beauvoir, Associate Professor Jennifer McWeeny’s *Europe Now* article “A New Existentialism for Pandemic Times” calls existentialism a philosophy born out of the desire to give meaning to one’s life “within the trembling softness and vulnerability of the human condition that come to light in times of global crisis”. Drawing a direct link between existentialism and Covid-19, McWeeny writes:

The coronavirus pandemic [...] allows us to enter the historical experience of these French thinkers more deeply than we have before. More importantly, it shows how existentialism can empower us at the very moment when we feel most helpless and passive, when we are waiting uneasily for an outcome that we cannot know in advance<sup>xvi</sup>.



If we turn to Kierkegaard and De Beauvoir at our times of suspended reality, we find that they can guide us through these times of suspense, flux and turmoil all rolled into one – a moment in history that is, indeed, more existentialist than ever.

### **How Can We Embrace Free Will in a Covid-19 Pandemic Where We Lack Free Movement?**

Søren Kierkegaard's firm religious convictions, with an unwavering belief in God – at one stage during his brief but intense scholarly career he writes that “it is so impossible for the world to exist without God that if God could *forget it*, it would instantly cease to be” (Søren Kierkegaard, *Journals*, 1837) – did not come with an abandonment of the simultaneous belief in free will. While in his mind it would appear that some external events are predestined to happen, falling under the higher order and power of God, Kierkegaard was not a determinist; with soft determinism described as “[t]he philosophical view that all physical events are caused, but some mental processes might not be caused. Rather, in Kierkegaard's view, our choices only involve mental processes and have no actual effect in the external world” (Archie 2003: 63).

In *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*, as our predilect text by Kierkegaard, he crafts a reflective and serene narrative where the presence of God is very much felt in nature. Kierkegaard proposes and recommends, metaphorically and without being prescriptive, that we learn from the flower and the bird, flora and fauna – and strive for a more symbiotic relationship with nature. With that he promotes freedom and free will as values to adhere to for us to feel complete as human beings. He likewise recommends silence as part of the interconnected gift to be still, to reflect, and to be closer to God<sup>xvii</sup>. The simultaneous ability of the bird to detach itself from worldly sorrows, take flight and find an escape route could when applied to our own existence be seen as our need for a mental escape. Kierkegaard writes: “Oh would that I were a bird, or would that I were like a bird that, higher than all earthly burdens, soars into the air, lighter than air – oh would that I were like that light bird that, when it seeks a foothold, even builds its nest upon the surface of the sea [...]”. A few lines further down he continues: “Oh would that I were [...] like that flower in the meadow: happily enamoured of myself”<sup>xviii</sup>. Me myself and I. Søren Kierkegaard had the strength and presence of mind to realise what was his own truth and purpose. And with that he expresses a desire shared by many of us.

Kierkegaard refrained from entering into marital commitments and although conflicted and torn – perhaps most acutely after a failed love affair that would forever affect him but also inspire him – as he opted for the solitary existence of the eternal scholar, he remained undistracted, productive, anxious and ambivalent yet convinced that we have the choice to walk alone while we can still reach a high standing in society. And according to fellow philosopher Simone De Beauvoir (had they met they might have become confidantes and would surely have had plenty to converse about), “[o]ne cannot start by saying that our earthly destiny has or has not importance, for it depends upon us to give it importance. It is up to man to make it important to be a man, and he alone can feel his success or failure”<sup>xix</sup>. De Beauvoir likewise “asserts that man is fundamentally free, a freedom that comes from ‘nothingness’, which is an essential aspect of this ability to be self-aware, to be conscious of himself”<sup>xx</sup>. With that she both understood and deviated slightly from Sartre's idea of the individual being “condemned to be free” (as expressed in a lecture held in 1946)<sup>xxi</sup>.

Fast-forward to today, and Sarb Johal importantly notes that “Covid is an existential crisis that comes with an awareness of our own freedoms”<sup>xxii</sup>. In saying that, he highlights the need for us to revise what we mean by personal freedoms and suggests that we can still be free despite strict limitations.

### **Pandemic Escapism and Existentialist Queries: Final Reflections**

All things considered and on final reflection, there is no doubt that pandemics come and go in a cyclical manner. Existentialist issues will always be present in our mind, as they encapsulate the very essence of what it means to be human – with all which that entails of suffering and despair, anguish and anxiety, solitude and freedom, responsibility, and life choices. Existentialist queries likewise serve to remind us of the need for us to rely first and foremost on ourselves: ‘me, myself, and I’ with no one to fall back upon. Strength in solitude. The Covid-19 pandemic has both exacerbated our fears – not so much of being alone as of feeling lonely. But at the same time the pandemic has taught us to rely on ourselves, to explore our own potential and to believe, undeterred, in the power of free will and the ability for us to conquer our fears during challenging times when the external has become also very much the internal.

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*the Global Healthcare Sector* (Brill 2018). Her black and white photographs feature on the cover pages of three Brill volumes. In 2022 she was conferred the International Award for Excellence from *The International Journal of Technology, Knowledge, and Society*, in recognition of her article “Our Pandemic 2021 Versus 1984 – Technology, Interconnectedness, and Social Ineptitude: A Case of History Repeating Itself”. This was ‘one of the highest-ranked articles emerging from the peer-review process according to the selection criteria outlined in the peer-review guidelines’.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.respekt.cz/respekt-in-english/living-in-utopia> (consulted on 1/11/2021).

<sup>ii</sup> In what Zygmunt Bauman might have called a postmodern hunt for an uncertain and undefined future, the past vanishes into a misty haze, the present is in a state of suspension, and the future is indeed both uncertain and unpredictable as we are now forced to accept a loss of control as a strange new force takes over.

<sup>iii</sup> In his new publication *Pandemic Ethics: 8 New Questions of Covid-19* (2020), Ben Bramble writes that “We all need to do a much better job of listening to and heeding the advice of experts, and erring on the side of caution in the face of existential threats” (Bramble 2020: 125).

<sup>iv</sup> <https://fivebooks.com/book/the-lily-of-the-field-and-the-bird-of-the-air-three-godly-discourses/> (consulted on 1/11/2021).

<sup>v</sup> <https://iep.utm.edu/beauvoir/> (consulted on 23/10/2021).

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Soren-Kierkegaard> (consulted on 23/10/2021).

<sup>vii</sup> Kierkegaard in the essay “The Present Age”: <https://biblioklept.org/2014/05/28/the-public-is-a-huge-nothing-kierkegaard/> (consulted on 9/05/2022).

<sup>viii</sup> <https://www.123helpme.com/essay/Kierkegaards-Argument-For-The-Existence-Of-God-FCZQ5L2TT> (consulted on 23/10/2021).

<sup>ix</sup> <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/beauvoir/> (consulted on 1/12/2021).

<sup>x</sup> [https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/The\\_Second\\_Sex](https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/The_Second_Sex) (consulted on 5/12/2021).

<sup>xi</sup> <https://iep.utm.edu/simone-de-beauvoir/> (consulted on 5/5/2022).

<sup>xii</sup> <https://fs.blog/simone-de-beauvoir-ethics-freedom/> (consulted on 5/12/2021).

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.learnreligions.com/ethical-individualism-249957> (consulted on 10/10/2021).

<sup>xiv</sup> <https://theconversation.com/struggling-with-the-uncertainty-of-life-under-coronavirus-how-kierkegaards-philosophy-can-help-144671> (consulted on 10/10/2021).

<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/kierkegaard-and-coping-with-coronavirus-anxiety/12203806> (consulted on 10/10/2021).

<sup>xvi</sup> <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2020/04/27/a-new-existentialism-for-infectious-times/> (consulted on 10/10/2021).

<sup>xvii</sup> In an article from 2018, Wesley Walker ponders Kierkegaardian discourses and asks, with regard to *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air*: “Why is this silence essential? Because it is in silence that all our wishes, desires, and thoughts yield to the fear of God. Silence is the highest form of prayer because ‘to pray is not to listen to oneself speak, but it is to come to keep silent, and to continue keeping silent, to wait, until the person who prays hears God’”: <https://conciliarpost.com/theology-spirituality/learning-from-kierkegaards-three-godly-discourses-on-the-lily-of-the-field-and-the-bird-of-the-air/> (consulted on 12/10/2021). Note that Walker here refers to Søren Kierkegaard’s *The Lily of the Field and the Bird of the Air: Three Godly Discourses*, trans. and ed. Bruce H. Kirmmse (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016 ed.), 19-20.

<sup>xviii</sup> <https://conciliarpost.com/theology-spirituality/learning-from-kierkegaards-three-godly-discourses-on-the-lily-of-the-field-and-the-bird-of-the-air/> (consulted 10/12/2021).

<sup>xix</sup> Simone De Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947):

<https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/ethics/de-beauvoir/ambiguity/ch01.htm> (consulted on 12/10/2021).

<sup>xx</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>xxi</sup> "Man is Condemned to Be Free" by Jean-Paul Sartre, from the lecture, "Existentialism is a Humanism" (1946) translated by Philip Mairet (1948).

<sup>xxii</sup> Sarb Johal. 2021: "Covid is an existential crisis that comes from an awareness of your own freedoms". The Guardian: News, New Zealand. 30 Jan. 2021:  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/30/covid-is-an-existential-crisis-that-comes-from-an-awareness-of-your-own-freedoms> (consulted on 10/10/2021).