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[https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Papanikos\(2020\)-coronavirus.pdf](https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Papanikos(2020)-coronavirus.pdf)

Kind comments are more than welcomed. They would be treated as panacea.

Bad comments will be treated as being infected with coronavirus.

## Influenza, Traffic Accidents and Coronavirus in Greece

*By Gregory T. Papanikos\**

### ABSTRACT

It is not the first time that the ecumene suffers from a plague. Since Ancient Athens of BCE430 plagues appear and disappear. What it remains constant is people's reactions to them. In all but all cases, the barbarians are blamed by the members of the demos who are led by ochlocratic politicians. Barbarophones (a word used by Homer in *Iliad*) are to be blamed for the cause of any plague and keeping them out is a panacea. Logical and epistemic gnosis cannot win over the phobia, hysteria and paranoia of the demos without pedagogy. Pedagogy means paideia with ethos and this is what is lacking today. Academics have gnosis but not paideia. The coronavirus is just the excuse to highlight the ignorance not only of the demos and their ochlocratic politicians but of those who claim that have gnosis. Some confuse gnosis with sophia (sage). This note is cynical. It is Aristophanist and provides an anti-sophist approach to the current issue of coronavirus. The Chinese based on their experience with the coronavirus have added another Greek word to the English language: Pan-Panic. This note is based on anti-pan-panic (Thucydidian) approach to gnosis. It is based on common sense and some data. The first draft was written on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 and all-important additions are dated. After the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, many authors wrote on coronavirus using an approach analogous to mine. I use an eclectic approach in citing a few of these studies.

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## Phobia and Hysteria

The Great Plague of Athens in 430 BCE killed 25% of the population of the time. Thucydides, who survived even though he was infected, gave us an excellent description of the nosology and its symptoms but most importantly narrated for the eternal human race to learn the social reactions and implications. His description of the plague starts in Book B, Chapter 2, Paragraph 1 and ends in Book B, Chapter 54, Paragraph 5. What Thucydides tell us is relevant to similar situations today. In the beginning, the Athenians blamed the Barbarians-Foreigners coming from Africa (Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt<sup>1</sup> and Libya). Then they blamed it on Spartans who poisoned the wells of Piraeus but Piraeus had no wells. And then he concluded that everybody had an opinion. Both doctors and ignorant idiots alike expressed their strong beliefs as to what caused the plague as they do today. Especially when they speak to the idiot demos through the social and mass media. This is best depicted by a cartoon reproduced here in the Appendix (see Cartoon 1). Finally, a metaphysical explanation was given. A proverb which old people used to say went like this “A Dorian war would come bringing a plague (λοιμός)”. Spartans were Dorians. But Thucydides pointed out that the proverb was talking about a famine (λιμός) which in ancient and modern Greek sounds the same as pestilence (λοιμός). Gods had warned the Athenians through the Delphi Oracle that they are not going to win the war against Sparta. Presumably because Athenians were faithless and sinful. For a synchronous application of this “theory” see Cartoon 2 in the Appendix<sup>2</sup>.

Thucydides made a number of interesting and painstaking observations which they apply to the case of coronavirus today. Firstly, those who had a history of bad health

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<sup>1</sup>Apart from technology nothing has changed in people's ontological paranoia. The Greek mass media report (8 March 2020) that from the 66 cases of the Greeks who have been infected with the coronavirus 51 came from Egypt-Israel and the rest from Italy. Again, the barbarians appear. Thus, the barbarophone must be blamed. The fact that these people did not take the simple and normal prophylaxes of personal hygiene is immaterial. Xenophobia, as in the past, characterizes the modern world which is intensified in periods of crises. According to the international mass media (8 March 2020), the Czech Prime Minister said Italy should ban all citizens from traveling to Europe. I guess this xenophobic idiot speaks on behalf of all Europeans! And of course, he means all Italians; young and old, healthy and ill. The European Civilization and Culture at its best. I am sure Homer had him in mind when he talked about a barbarophone. He is a typical example of a barbarian. He lacks pedagogy.

<sup>2</sup>I do believe in Divine Providence. Unfortunately, many religious leaders do not believe in it. They are non-believers. God made humans with nous so they can produce gnosis which will be used not only to protect the human race from extinction but also to propagate it. This God-sent gnosis has been used to reduce the infanticide and produced medicine to cure many diseases. In the Greek Media there was a Bishop of the Greek Orthodox Church who argued contrary to God's given gnosis. He is an atheist. For example, if you get the Greek Orthodox Holy Communion (a liquid made of bread and wine) which all share with a common spoon, it does not contain the virus. This is an atheist argument because God gave humans the gnosis and if you do not use it, you go against God. God teaches us that if there is an epidemic of influenza, we should not go to crowded places like churches which are usually frequented by old and people with chronic diseases. God has sent us the correct messages by empowering the human beings with nous, logic and gnosis. Because of God we mortals have the ability to protect ourselves. After writing this the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Church issued an ultimatum: The coronavirus is not transmitted through the Holy Communion. Man-made stupidity against the God's given gnosis. Thanks God after that, the Ecumenical Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church said that we should follow the guidelines of the World Health Organization. The same said the Greek Orthodox Archbishop of North America. I guess they read correctly God's evangelical message. Others do not.

were dying from the plague. This is similar to today's impact of influenza and coronavirus. I provide some evidence on this below. The group mostly affected were doctors and nurses. Secondly, nobody found the nature of the virus which mysteriously disappeared. Scientists from all disciplines still debate today what was it. Thirdly, no medicine was found which could have cured the virus. Fourthly, people who survived the plague rarely were infected second time and even then, this did not lead to their death. Fifthly, the concentration of the population in the center of the city from the countryside due to the war made things worse and more people were dying as a result. Sixthly, the social implications were dramatic. Gods were not respected because both the sinful and devout people died from the virus. The usual socially accepted rituals of burying their dead were not followed. Sixthly, many people violated the law because death would come sooner than the court punishment of their crime. Of course, there are substantial differences. In the synchronous cosmos the fear manifests itself in buying tons of toilet paper<sup>3</sup>.

Since Thucydides many others<sup>4</sup> wrote about plagues but I will refer to one of my favorites: the plague in 1347 in Florence of Italy known today as the "Great Plague" which lasted for few years. Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375) gave us a superb description in his masterpiece "The Decameron". In the introduction, Boccaccio gave an excellent narrative of the plague. Similar to Thucydides narrative, Boccaccio mentioned that the plague was blamed on the people of the East<sup>5</sup>. The plague changed dramatically people's private and social behavior. As in Athens, in Florence people violated God's and anthropogenic laws. They had no respect for life. In such an environment, Boccaccio sets up the scenery of his 100 stories told in 10 days by 7 young girls and 3 young boys who moved from the city to the countryside to avoid the catastrophe of the plague in Florence. I reproduce the appropriate excerpt from "The Decameron" in the Appendix. The idea of organizing such dialogues was identical with the Aristotelian Peripatetic School.

Decameron is a Greek word meaning ten days. Many Greek words were introduced to describe such unfortunate situations; examples are (in alphabetical order): apocalypse, antidote, cataclysm, catastrophe, chaos, clinical, crisis, draconian, drastic, endemic, epicenter, epidemic, epidemiological, hecatomb, hysteria, nosology, pandemic<sup>6</sup>,

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<sup>3</sup>See <https://atiner.gr/docs/bloomberg.pdf>. I had written that when I found a book which explains why people buy toilet paper during pandemics; see Steven Taylor (2019) *The Psychology of Pandemics: Preparing for the Next Global Outbreak of Infectious Disease* UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

<sup>4</sup>The best in this list includes works written by Albert Camus, Michael Crichton, Daniel Defoe, Thomas Mann, Alessandro Manzoni, Samuel Pepys, Phillip Roth, and Mary Shelley.

<sup>5</sup>Daniel Defoe, in his book *A Journal of the Plague Year* published in 1722 and which refers to the Plague of 1665 in London, mentioned the barbarians "...it was brought, some said from Italy, others from the Levant, among some goods which were brought home by their Turkey fleet; others said it was brought from Candia; others from Cyprus. It mattered not from whence it came; but all agreed it was come into Holland again".

<sup>6</sup>The Greek word pandemic is the one that brings fear because by its definition is a case where disease has spread all over the world. The threat remains the same as if it were an epidemic. For example, influenza is a pandemic. A pandemic does not necessarily imply less or more cases and deaths. The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Adhanom emphasized this at a press conference in Switzerland (11<sup>th</sup> of March 2020). He said that using the word pandemic to describe COVID-19 does not change the threat level. Infamous examples of pandemics are the

panic (pan-panic)<sup>7</sup>, paradigmatic, paralysis, paranoia, pathogens, pathologies, phobia, phrenic, prophylaxis, strategic, systemic, tactic, tragedy (or comedy), traumatic, xenophobia and many others. I do not think these Greek words need to be translated into English. With coronavirus, these words became again very popular in the Mass and Social Media which use pseudo-news to appease the demos (become demophiles) and of course make profits<sup>8</sup>. Nothing wrong in making profits. What is rare in the media are other Greek words such as logic, nous, ortholog, philoxenia, pragmatism, (critical) skepticism, stoicism and many others.

Both the Greek and the international media use the first group of Greek words to describe coronavirus. They sell hyper-phobia to ecumenical demos who unfortunately suffers from “hyperphagia” of pseudo-news<sup>9</sup>. Regrettably, as in Ancient Athens, similarly in the synchronous cosmos there is no democracy but ochlocracy<sup>10</sup>. Such an ecumene becomes demagogues’ triumph. One is willing to accept that demos lacks paideia and therefore behaves hysterically. But how could one explain the paranoia of that small part of demos who has diplomas and gnosis? This is another falsification of Plato’s thesis of the Philosopher King. Most of synchronous academics cannot stand up to the standards of a Philosopher King or Queen. My opinion is that some of them the best they can achieve is to become equerries in the royal kingdom of gnosis. The rest they should be degraded to Plato’s artisans which includes charlatans.

I am going to discuss this question but no answer is given because as an economist I cannot explain psychopathic nous. I base my monologue with the readers of this note on my 25-years’ experience with the Athens Institute for Education and Research and the many dialogues (mostly parallel monologues) I had with my Polites of the

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Black Death (killed 30% to 60% of population in Europe). In the so-called Spanish Flu around 500 million people died. In contrast the swine flu in 2009 and 2010 and HIV have killed about 35 million people and this is drawn from much larger population than today’s population of 8 billion. In 1918 the population was 1.8 billion.

<sup>7</sup>The first time I saw the word pan-panic mentioned was in commentary of the Chinese News Agency <https://www.atiner.gr/docs/xinhuanet.pdf>

<sup>8</sup>Theophrastus (BCE371–287), who became the Head of the Aristotle Lyceum after Aristotle fled Athens, wrote a well-known book on *Characters*. In his book, he defines fake news. It is the best definition of the synchronous fake news I have ever read. He calls fake news *λογοποιία* a compound word from logos and make (ποιώ). In his own words fake news (*λογοποιία*) is the synthesis of pseudo logos and praxis, which the disseminator wants to become believable. In his own beautiful ancient Greek words: *Ἡ δὲ λογοποιία ἐστὶ σύνθεσις ψευδῶν λόγων καὶ πράξεων, ὧν [πιστεύεσθαι] βούλεται ὁ λογοποιῶν.* I translated the sentence keeping the same words of ancient Greek (synthesis–σύνθεσις, pseudo–ψευδῶν logos–λόγων praxis–πράξεων) which are used in modern English. I could not find a better word for the disseminator but in Ancient Greek not only they had a word for the concept of fake news *λογοποιία* but from the same word they produced a specific word to describe the disseminator (ὁ λογοποιῶν). ATINER has organized many roundtable symposiums on Fake News and I am surprised that so many academics of mass media and communications ignore the deep history of the concept of fake news.

<sup>9</sup>That was written on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, Kaletsy concluded that “Callous as it may sound, the economic and political impact of the coronavirus pandemic will ultimately be determined by the epidemiological and clinical data. Fortunately, in this case, the relevant statistical trends are developing in a much less alarming way than panicked media headlines might suggest”. ([https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Kaletsy\(2020\).pdf](https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Kaletsy(2020).pdf))

<sup>10</sup>This might explain the various rumours such as in countries like China and Iran the number of deaths and cases are in the millions but because they do not have democracy, they hide it. One of the first readers of this note pointed out to me that this is because people do not trust institution and governments in general. There might be another reason which relates to medicine and not to politics. People may have coronavirus without any symptoms.

Ecumenical Academic Politeia. It also includes another 20 years of teaching experience with British, Canadian and Greek Academic Institutes. It also includes 14 years as a top policy maker in Greece where we used academics as “technocrats”. I relate this experience to the synchronous hysteria of coronavirus which (the hysteria) has infected many academics<sup>11</sup>. I will present the stylized facts (pragmatic data) on the risk that the ecumenical academic demos face when they visit Athens for an academic meeting<sup>12</sup>. My motivation to write this piece was to respond to the psychotic and maniac hysteria which can be summarized in the following idiot question:

“Is it safe to come to Athens?”

Since the established of ATINER in 1995, this question has been asked almost every year. Sometimes asking the question was like an epidemic (i.e., only those who come from USA<sup>13</sup> or any other country asked this question) but some years became a pandemic (i.e., academics from many countries and continents were asking the same question). This endemic is very difficult to cure with epistemic gnosis. The majority of the ecumenical academic demos accepts metaphysical exegeses which are fired up with the uncertainty of an event such as the coronavirus.

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<sup>11</sup>Another reader has pointed out that my note underestimates the real threat of coronavirus and the symptoms which she claimed are worse than influenza. I must make clear that as far as I am concerned all unintentional (smoking is intentional) cases that affect health are very important but not of equal importance. More important are the ones which result to deaths especially if young and healthy people are dying. Traffic accidents is an example as discussed below. The academic community has an ethical responsibility to respect the hierarchy of the seriousness of tragedies ignoring what is fashionable. Ignoring what pleases the demos. And so far, coronavirus is less important than influenza and traffic accidents. But coronavirus pleases the demos. If we really want to measure all these, one must evaluate every death according to the Quality-Adjusted Life-Year (QALY) measurement. One year is equated to perfect health. This year in Greece a young man (25 years old) with perfect health was killed in the notorious Greek Roads because of a traffic accident. If his life expectancy was 82 years, with the last twenty evaluated as half of a year due to bad health, then the loss of the society is 47 years. The first woman who died from coronavirus at the age of 93 years with a chronic disease what would be the loss in terms of QALYs? The 93-year-old made headlines in the Greek press. Nobody cared about the 25 years old. Similar should be the evaluations of all deaths from coronavirus.

<sup>12</sup>It is not an accident that the incident of coronavirus mostly affected academic and professional conferences. It shows something that I leave it for another paper to discuss it. They are though notable exceptions.

<sup>13</sup>In May of 2010 a Professor from a respected USA University asked me that I must be ashamed that Greeks with hoods go around in the Center of Athens and burn many tourists alive. He told me that he read this in the (social) media. Of course, the problem is not that something like this was written in the media but that this idiot with good academic gnosis and zero paideia believed it. I told him to forget about the “many” and name only “one”. He disappeared from the stratosphere. He never responded to me. A simple phone call to the USA embassy in Athens would have confirmed the opposite. Instead not only he accepted the pseudo-news but he felt obliged to do something about it and wrote to me a despicable xenophobic email. He never apologized which shows that he is barbarophone! Of course, this was an extreme but many other USA Professors were asking whether it was safe to come to Athens. And not only from the USA. I had once a South African Professor coming from an area that holds the world record in criminal activities asking whether it was safe to come to Athens because he read there was a crime in Athens. These people have gnosis. Another idiot Professor from Italy asked me on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 2015 when Greece held a referendum that he read that on Monday there will be an (armed) civil war in Greece and the Italian Foreign Ministry warn the Italians not to travel to Athens. I asked her to send me the announcement of the Italian Foreign Ministry. She disappeared from the Stratosphere. She is a professor with gnosis but not paideia. I have hundreds such examples as I have thousands of examples of academics with gnosis and paideia.

Of course, the logical answer to the above question is a mega no but the reason is not the coronavirus. At least till now. In what follows, an attempt is made to explain it. From my epistemological point of view (meaning my process of acquiring gnosis), this is the easiest test of a hypothesis (question) that I ever had to deal with in all my long professional and academic career.

## The Mission of ATINER

ATINER is a World Association of Academics and Researchers based in Athens. It is an independent association (meaning no money are accepted from government organizations or private companies) with a mission to become a forum where members of the ecumenical academic demos can meet in Athens in small groups like in ancient Athenian symposiums, exchange ideas on their research and discuss future developments in their disciplines, as well as engage with academics from other fields. ATINER's 25-years existence has been characterized by non-Euclidean improvement. ATINER's mission is not so much to promote gnosis but to promote pedagogy.

Athens was chosen because of its long history of academic symposiums, which goes back thousands of years to Plato's Academy, Aristotle's Lyceum and many others. Once I counted forty such schools. Since antiquity, Athens was an open city. In the words of Pericles, Athens "...is open to the world, we never expel a foreigner from learning or seeing". The biggest test to this thesis is when a foreigner comes from a country in which the probability of dying from coronavirus is higher than in Athens. It happened to ATINER when during the symposium of Philoxenia which took place on Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 some wanted to practice xenelasia to a foreigner who came from a country which at the time had the highest probability of dying from coronavirus. As in Aeschylus Ikettes (Suppliants), ATINER welcomed the foreigner; he presented and he left. Many other academics from the same country did not come because of their phobia that they would not be welcomed.

It is ATINER's mission to revive the glory of Ancient Athens by inviting the ecumenical academic politeia to the polis of sophia (wisdom), to learn from each other in an environment of freedom and respect of other people's opinions and beliefs. After all, the free expression of one's opinion formed the basis for the development of democracy, and Athens was its cradle. As it turned out, the Golden Age of Athens was in fact, the Golden Age of Western Civilization. Education and (Re)searching for the 'truth' are the pillars of any free (democratic) society. This is the reason why Education and Research are the two core words in ATINER's name.

It is this ATINER's invitation to all members of the ecumenical academic politeia that creates the problem and raises the question "Is it safe to come to Athens?" In the next section, I make a risk assessment of 2020 Athens in terms of three threats: influenza,

traffic accidents and the “cataclysmic” coronavirus. A similar approach appeared on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 by Gigerenzer. It is worth citing some evidence-based paragraphs:

“The 2009 swine flu epidemic killed [hundreds of thousands](#), mostly in Africa and Southeast Asia. But in Europe, where the threat was comparatively small, the media updated the death toll and the number of suspected cases on a daily basis. In the United Kingdom, the government [predicted](#) that as many as 65,000 citizens might die from the disease. In the end, [fewer than 500](#) died. Predictably, such daily accounting triggered fear and led politicians to make hasty, ill-advised decisions – such as stockpiling medication – without examining the evidence. All eyes were focused on the new, unknown virus, and not on protecting people from more lethal threats, such as seasonal influenza, which in 2009 killed orders of magnitude more people than swine flu. It still does – as would be clear if the media bombarded us with hourly updates of the flu-related death toll. Similarly, millions of people, particularly in developing countries, [die from malaria and tuberculosis](#) each year. And in the United States alone, hospital-acquired infections kill some [99,000 patients](#) annually. Yet, these unlucky people get next to no attention. The psychological principle that makes us fear swine flu, avian flu, or COVID-19, but not the common flu is called *fear of dread risks*. It is easy to elicit fear of episodes in which many people die within a short interval, such as plane crashes or epidemics. But when just as many or more people die over a longer period – as with car accidents or the seasonal flu – it is difficult to scare the public into wearing seatbelts or getting vaccinated. Consider the paradigmatic millennial “virus”: terrorism. After the traumatic events of September 11, 2001, many Americans stopped flying and drove instead. It has been [estimated](#) that in the 12 months following the attacks, an additional 1,500 people lost their lives on the road while trying to avoid the risk of flying – far more than the total number of passengers who died on the four planes”. ([https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Gigerenzer\(2020\).pdf](https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Gigerenzer(2020).pdf)).

In what it follows is another case which supports the above arguments. I applied it to Athens and Greece.

## How Fatal is the Coronavirus?

ATINER organizes small academic events at an increasing rate every year. Since 1995 it has organized more than one thousand events with the participation of more than 30,000 academics and researchers coming from almost all the countries of the world. In all these twenty-five years, Athens has faced many troublesome situations which temporarily scared away many academics. Without a single exception, every year there was a small or a big “threat”. ATINER had to respond to the same question “Is it safe to come to Athens?” However, some years the situation was agonising, e.g., SARS in

2002/2013, the street violence in 2010, the MERS in 2012. One is surprised by the academic lack of gnosis of simple things which should have been common sense for a Philosopher King as most of them claim to be.

This year ATINER is facing the same problem. Coronavirus is the new “threat”. Despite my efforts to explain to the world academic community that so far and unless you have a serious chronic disease, the risk of dying from the coronavirus is zero, I am not persuasive. Many risks exist but do not relate to coronavirus. After all, Thucydides was right. People tend to believe whatever lie is served to them and they have difficulty believing the truth. Even worse when you confront them with the data, then it is data’s fault if they do not support their demonic gnosis which is worse than the dogmatic metaphysical theories based on dogma, e.g., million have died from coronavirus but they keep it secret.

It was pointed out by one of the readers of this paper that one explanation might be the uncertainty that the unknown aspects of coronavirus has created. This is true but as we progress with this epidemic we know more, e.g., it infects the elderly who have health problems as did the ancient plague in Athens while many young and healthy people carry the virus without symptoms or very mild ones. Another aspect of uncertainty is how contagious it is and whether the rate of growth of cases and deaths over time is increasing (bad scenario), remain stable (neutral scenario) or decreasing (good scenario).

It is early to tell (7<sup>th</sup> of March 2020) but, in the Appendix, I reproduce the graph of Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by Johns Hopkins CSSE (in logarithms) as Graph A1. Three lines are depicted: the cases in mainland China (orange bullets), the total cases of people recovered (green bullets) and the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world (yellow bullets). It is obvious the rate of growth is declining in China but not declining in the rest of the world. Impressive is the number of people recovered which it approaches the number infected in China. If the Chinese trajectory is used to predict what would happen to the rest of the world then one should expect that the rate of growth of cases will go down.

This was written on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, Kaletsky looking at the same data correctly concluded that:

“In every affected region, the spread of the virus, shown here on a logarithmic scale (as is appropriate for any exponential contagion process), is slowing almost to a standstill, roughly in line with the experience of Hubei. The media predictably prefer the sensational-looking linear story that extrapolates the Hubei experience into a global apocalypse with millions or billions of victims. More surprising is that many politicians and healthcare professionals are also promoting this misleading view”.

But even the linear data show the same picture as well in China. Figure 1 shows the number of people infected in China. The cases have almost disappeared. It took them



less than two months and one month from the peak. Zhong Nanshan, a senior medical adviser for the Chinese government, told reporters on 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 that by June (in 2-3 months) the pandemic will be over. This was the case in China.

Figure 1. Number of People Infected in China

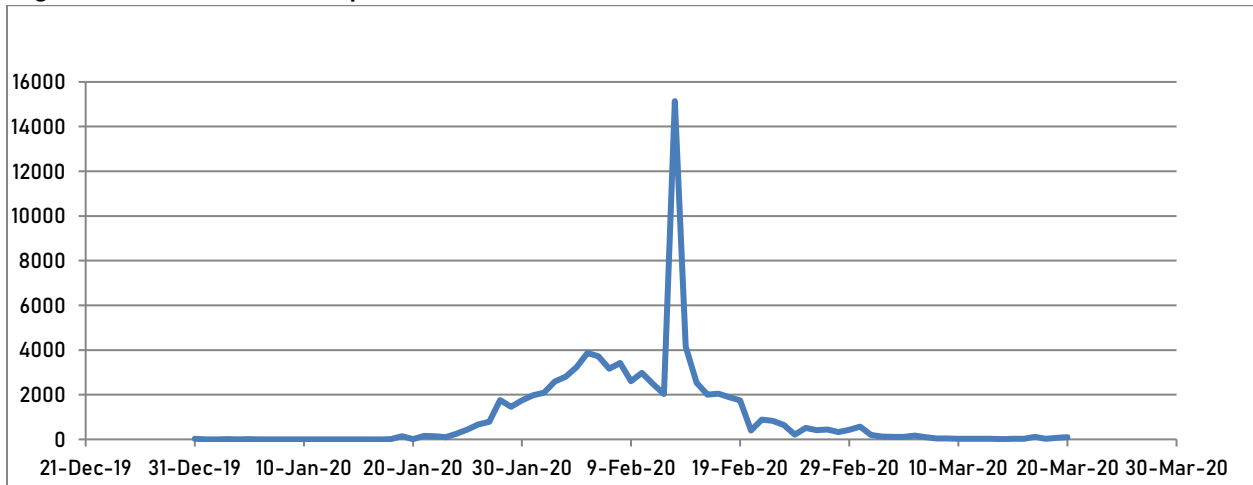
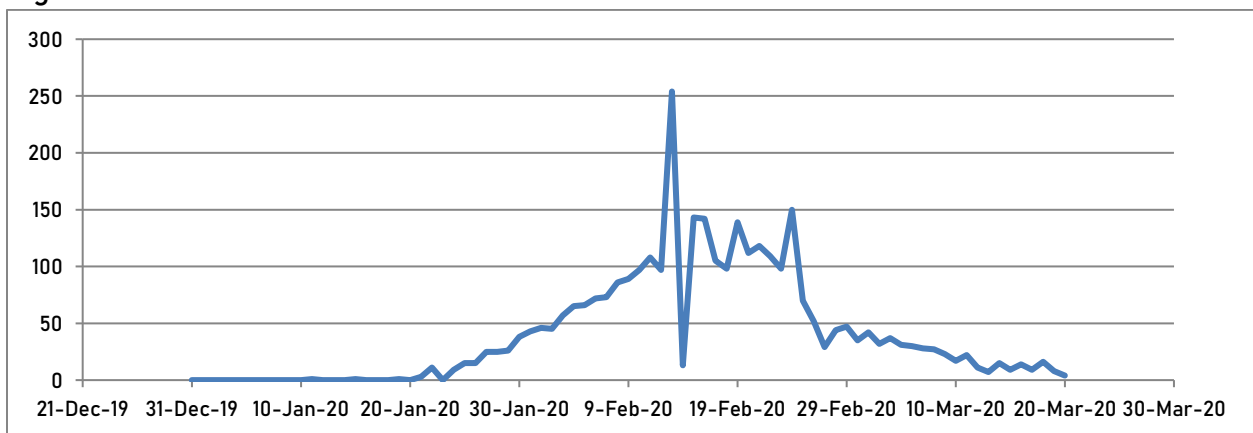


Figure 2 shows the number of people who died from coronavirus in China. The results are different. The cases of infection can be approximated by the normal curve. The number of deaths shows that a second wave of deaths occurred after the great peak of 254 deaths on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 2020. Eventually the deaths are declining.

Figure 2. Number of Deaths in China



Are these patterns to be followed by other countries as well? It is early to call that the war is over and that the rest of the world will follow the same pattern. We do know,

as of 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, that the number of identified (the actual must be much higher) were 245,484, the number of deaths 10,031 (which is the actual) and the number of recovered 86,035 (the actual is higher). If I were to put a headline in my newspaper, I would put that “86 thousand people were saved so far and many more are expected”. And a subtitle “The actual number is much higher because people are affected without any symptoms”. Unfortunately, such headlines do not sell! Dead people sell. By the way it makes no sense to report number of people infected and the number of people recovered because most probably these numbers are much higher if it is true that many people and infected and recover with no or very mild symptoms. The only way to find this out is if a representative sample of the entire population is taken, say 10,000 people. Then this people are examined if they have been infected. Assume 1,000 have been infected. Then those infected are followed for 2-3 weeks and assume that 5 died. Now we can say that 10% of the entire population has been infected (the cases), 0.05% died (fatality rate) and 99.95% recovered. If we assume the Greek population, then 1,000,000 will be infected, 999,500 will recover and 500 will die. All other approaches are infected with the selection bias virus.

## Banning International Travel is a Pharaonic Policy

I must make a note on international travelling. Banning travelling is an idiot idea. By definition a pandemic implies the same or similar probability (if it is equally distributed) of getting infected independently of the country. If the probability of getting infected in an airport or inside an airplane is the same<sup>14</sup>, then banning international travel can be explained only as a policy of paranoia and hysteria. Another Greek word that can be used is Xenophobia which in many cases leads to *Xenelasia*. All foreigners (those with a Xenolalia) are barbarians who many other maladies they spread diseases and viruses. The xenos is a barbarophone (a word used by Homer in *Iliad*). Barbarians spread the coronavirus. We should ban them from entering our country. If needed we will practice Xenelasia (expel the barbarophones by beating them).

But according to news report (13<sup>th</sup> of March 2020)<sup>15</sup>, Bruce Aylward, who led a World Health Organization crew in China during the coronavirus epidemic, said travel bans “generally aren't part of the armamentarium you bring to bear on something like this. What we found, as a general principle - not a general principle, a pretty robust principle - is that it doesn't help to restrict movement”. Since then and following his recommendation all countries did exactly the antithetical, i.e., they closed their borders!

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<sup>14</sup>I do not have any data to support my thesis but from what I read the probability to get coronavirus if you are a pilot, an air stewardess or a worker in an airport is not higher than in any other place or profession. Actually, it might be lower because of the air inside an airplane. The only place that this probability is higher is in a hospital setting. Nurses and doctors are hit hard by an epidemic as was first mentioned by the Great Thucydides.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.euronews.com/2020/03/13/world-health-organization-don-t-expect-travel-bans-to-beat-coronavirus>.

But keeping the barbarians out is not a solution<sup>16</sup>. What a pity. Barbarians were a short of solution. What are we going to do without them? This is taken from a poem written by a famous Greek Poet Constantinos P. Cavafy entitled “Waiting for the Barbarians” which is reproduced in the Appendix. Irresponsible politicians in ochlocracies always used pandemics and epidemics to blame it on the barbarians. Voices of the synchronous people with paideia cannot penetrate the walls which are built inside people’s ears. Just one of many examples is the voice (twitter) of Yuval Noah Harari who on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 wrote that “to defeat epidemics we need to trust science and countries need to trust each other. Irresponsible politicians undermined this trust. We need to regain it. You can’t defeat a pandemic with propaganda and isolation. The real antidote is scientific knowledge and global cooperation”. It is exactly the antithetical of what the ecumene is doing today! On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, I read a piece by the Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz ([https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Stiglitz\(2020\).pdf](https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/Stiglitz(2020).pdf)) which had appeared on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. He highlighted the obvious: “The COVID-19 crisis is rich in lessons, especially for the United States. One takeaway is that viruses do not carry passports; in fact, they don’t observe national borders – or nationalist rhetoric – at all. In our closely integrated world, a contagious disease originating in one country can and will go global”. And if I may add as it always did in history.

## Is it Safe to Come to Athens in 2020?

Let me repeat the question “Is then Athens a safe place to come in 2020?” The answer is no. It is not safe. But this is not because of the coronavirus. Athens, as any other place in the modern world, was never risk free. I define risk as the probability someone dies in Athens-Greece from an unfortunate incidence which could have been avoided if someone were not in Athens-Greece at the given time. Technically from this probability one must subtract the probability of dying because one would have been in another place. I disregard this but it is very important. To give an example. The probability of dying from coronavirus because one travels to Athens is equal to the probability of someone dying from coronavirus in Athens minus the probability of dying from coronavirus in his/her home place or any other place one happened to be. In this case, if the difference in probabilities is negative, it implies that if one (not suffering from paranoia) wants to save his/her life from coronavirus attacks he/she should come and stay permanently in Athens or till the epidemic is over. Given that the current probability of dying in Athens from coronavirus is almost zero (for healthy people at least), then the difference is definitely nonpositive and absolutely there are some probability differences that are negative.

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<sup>16</sup>If one wants to play with the data, then the number of deaths increase after a country closes its borders. A good example is USA. Its barbarophones were inside their country.

I define the probability as the relative frequency (the absolute frequency of deaths divided by the total population of Greece plus its visitors). Since this can be approximated by 10 million, the absolute frequency can be interpreted as a relative frequency or the number of deaths per 10 million people. The higher the relative frequency (probability), the higher the risk.

I examine three risk factors coming from: influenza, traffic accidents and coronavirus. Other factors could have been added (a) terrorist attacks (zero in Greece)<sup>17</sup>, (b) natural disasters, e.g., earthquakes (nonzero in Greece), (c) crime (nonzero in Greece but very small), (d) Poseidon's Trident (positive in Greece) and (e) Zeus thunderbolts (positive in Greece) etc.

Table 1 reports the total number of deaths per month in the 2019-2020 period due to the three causes. Traffic accidents are reported for Athens and total Greece. The latter data are provisional. Based on the evidence of Table 1 (i.e., as things stand now), the following conclusions emerge:

- The probability of someone dying from coronavirus is so far close to zero (only ten deaths) in 2020. On the other hand, the probability of dying from influenza<sup>18</sup> is so far 9 times higher as is the number of people who died from influenza in Greece in 2020.
- The influenza has a higher probability of occurrence only during the winter months because in the end of May-December period the impact is zero.
- Traffic accidents have a higher probability of occurrence during the summer months.
- The total numbers show that the probability of traffic accidents is half of that of influenza for Athens but more than double for all Greece.

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<sup>17</sup>A few years back, ATINER organized a small symposium as part of a joint project on Evidence Based Policy (<http://www.eippee.eu/cms/Default.aspx?tabid=3411>) with one of the best Universities in Europe being the leader. Participants in the project were from 18 countries. All of them wanted the symposium to take place in Athens. Our Partners from London had some questions about the safety of Athens and particularly terrorism. London has been the theatre of many terrorist activities with many innocent victims. So they were speaking out of experience! I assured my partners from London that Athens does not present any risk coming from terrorism but I cannot guarantee anything about the traffic accidents. I did not mention the influenza because it was early September. As it happened during that September, London had a serious terrorist attack. As a matter of fact, terrorists seem to love London and the entire U.K. but their Government stills warns their tourists that in Greece there is a nonzero probability of a terrorist attack. The question is whether the British are safer in Greece or in U.K. I would suggest to my academic friends from U.K. if they are risk averse to terrorist attacks, then they should come and live permanent in Greece.

<sup>18</sup>According to WHO ([https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-\(seasonal\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/influenza-(seasonal))), the influenza "Illnesses range from mild to severe and even death. Hospitalization and death occur mainly among high risk groups. Worldwide, these annual epidemics are estimated to result in about 3 to 5 million cases of severe illness, and about 290 000 to 650 000 respiratory deaths". Compare these data with as of the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 with less than One million cases and less than 100,000 deaths. The deaths from influenza do not create pan-panic and hysteria but the deaths from coronavirus do. Why?

**Table 1. Number of Deaths from Influenza, Traffic Accidents and Coronavirus**

Month	Influenza	Traffic Accidents Athens	Traffic Accidents Greece	Coronavirus Athens	Coronavirus Greece
Jan-19	36	19	45	0	0
Feb-19	75	14	41	0	0
Mar-19	55	15	45	0	0
Apr-19	91	14	47	0	0
*May-19	63	10	63	0	0
Jun-19	0	18	73	0	0
Jul-19	0	9	68	0	0
Aug-19	0	20	83	0	0
Sep-19	0	18	71	0	0
Oct-19	0	17	63	0	0
Nov-19	0	13	45	0	0
Dec-19	1	20	55	0	0
Total 2019	321	187	699	0	0
Jan-20	37	9	26	0	0
Feb-20	46	9	17	0	0
1-18 Mar-20	11*	0	8*	2	11
Total 2020-so far	94	18	50	2	13

\*Till 15 of March 2020.

Note: By mid-May 2019 influenza disappeared. Traffic accidents 2020 data for all Greece are provisional.

Source: [EOΔΥ](#) for influenza and coronavirus and [Greek Police](#) for the Traffic Accidents.

A comparison must be made at this point. The difference of probabilities of dying from coronavirus in Greece and USA is negative. If USA residents are risk averse, they should, under panic (urgently), take the next plane and come to Athens. According to CDC estimates (<https://www.atiner.gr/docs/burden.pdf>), in the USA from October 1, 2019, through February 29, 2020, there have been 34–49 million flu illnesses, 16–23 million flu medical visits, 350,000–620,000 flu hospitalizations and 20,000–52,000 flu deaths. Compare these figures with the coronavirus which including the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 (11.33 a.m. Athens Local Time) the cases of coronavirus were in the USA 755 and the number of deaths 28 and 8 fully recovered<sup>19</sup>. Now if someone counts the mass media references

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<sup>19</sup>I had written this on the 7 March 2020. Two days later the President of the USA said exactly the same thing. He said or rather he twitted that "So last year 37,000 Americans died from the common Flu. It averages between 27,000 and 70,000 per year. Nothing is shut down; life & the economy go on. At this moment there are 546 confirmed cases of Coronavirus, with 22 deaths. Think about that!" (<https://www.atiner.gr/docs/Trump-tweet.pdf>). I care about the absolute number (how many died) and not the mortality rate, i.e. the percentage of those died to total infected. On the 12 March 2020, the President of the USA took an "historic" political decision which affects the flights of Europe (Schengen area) to USA but it does not apply to Great Britain with 8 deaths but it applies to Germany with 3 deaths. The apotheosis of the idiocy. Two days later (14 March 2020) the President of the USA extended the ban to Great Britain and Ireland. Presumably he wanted to protect the British and the Irish because the probability to get infected and die

to coronavirus and compares them with those of the flu, the former would be much higher than the latter. This is what I mean by a hierarchy according to pragmatism (data-based).

I should point out that traffic accidents have some additional non-fatal but very serious risks. In 2019, Athens (total Greece) had 6351 (10,762) cases of traffic accidents which resulted to 187 (699) deaths. 195 (636) were seriously injured meaning permanent inabilities of movement and other serious health problems and 6351 (12,059) were slightly injured. A real serial killer. Police has not been able to arrest him. The rumour that Thanatos bribes Greek Police officials has not be verified. It is pseudo-news. Police is never bribed by mythological figures. They prefer non-mythological figures. This is the way they work. It is their methodology.

Can someone predict what would happen to the cases of coronavirus and the number of deaths because of this disease? As is well known the Oracle of Delphi has stopped its operation long time ago. I am alone but given what data we have so far (9<sup>th</sup> of March 2020), I may prophesise that in Greece the number of cases may exceed 1,000 and the number of deaths most likely will be less than 100 which is lower than the number of deaths of influenza. The most important determinants are age, gender and previous health status. Most (if not all) of them belong to a very old age group and/or with a history of chronic incurable diseases such as cardiovascular, diabetes, high blood pressure, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancer. I base this on my reading of the data that we have so far and nothing else.

The first death in Greece occurred on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. He was a 66-years old male with chronic cardiovascular problems. The first Greeks infected had no chronic health problems and are now fully recovered. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, two more died from coronavirus one 67 years old and the other 90 years old with previous health problems. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 the fourth death occurred of 53 years old with cardiovascular problems. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 the fifth death, on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 the sixth death and on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2002 the seventh and the eighth occurred; all very old with chronic health problems. The average age is over 70 years old. The 10<sup>th</sup> was a woman of 93 years old. It is really stupid to ask the question whether she had chronic illness. I never met someone over 80 years old who did not. and two more followed one male and one female with similar characteristics. Thus, the hypothesis that

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in the USA is higher than in Great Britain and Ireland. A useful comparison must be made. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020, in the USA we had 57 deaths, i.e. 1.72 per 10 million people. In Germany we had 1.1 per 10 million people. If you were a USA citizen where would you want to be to avoid a death from coronavirus? The argument of the risk of travelling is not valid because USA citizens who were in Germany on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 were desperately looking for a ticket to fly back to the USA where the probability of dying from coronavirus is higher. Singapore which has a very good health system as of 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 nobody had died from coronavirus. Coronavirus deaths per population might be a good indicator of the quality of the Health System of a country. So, if one wants to follow Daniel Defoe's recommendation, in his book *A Journal of the Plague Year*, "... that the best preparation for the plague was to run away from it", then one should run away from the USA where the probability of dying is high and the health system is in a very bad shape. The most powerful nation in the world cannot deal with an illness and plays a blame game.

coronavirus and to that extent influenza fatally infects very old and/or sick people cannot be rejected. An additional supporting datum is that friends and relatives were infected but they survived. The first deaths have something in common apart from the age and the chronic illnesses. Firstly, most of them (90% so far) were men. Secondly, most of them (80%) were from the countryside where the Health System is not as good as in Athens. Even the third largest city of Greece, Patra, did not have the necessary labs to test for coronavirus. Now they have. Another interesting hypothesis to be tested is whether the number of deaths depend negatively on the quality of the health system. As of the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2020, 166 countries/regions reported cases of coronavirus which form a data base of cross section data to test this hypothesis. This is not done here.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

As things stand now, if someone wants to come to Athens (pending that the pharaonic politicians permit it) in order to attend the May-July 2020 academic events organized by the Athens Institute for Education and Research there is zero probability to die from influenza, zero (?) from coronavirus but there is a positive probability to be killed or injured in a traffic accident. This was always the case since the invention of cars.

My recommendations are based on an Aristophanist methodology. If the readers do not like this approach, they may as well stop their reading here. The first to notice and write about mortality was my favored poet Hesiod in his *Works and Days*. Human beings, said Hesiod, are mortals, academics included. Only Gods are immortals. The fact that humans are mortals may not be a bad thing after all because it is a natural mechanism to protect the physical environment. An automatic ecological policy. But this is a different story and is not analyzed here.

Given that all humans will die one day -sooner or later- the probability of mortality increases with age. This was always the case. As my beloved Hesiod pointed out in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BCE only wars reverse this trend and people die young, i.e., they are killed in a war. Cars did not exist then otherwise he would add traffic accidents. Put it differently, the older one gets, the higher the probability of leaving this cosmos temporarily till the second resurrection. Based on the pragmatic evidence I presented above and given one's age, I would like to make the following recommendations to the cosmic academic demos:

1. If you want to die from coronavirus and as another Achilles remain in history as the victim of this famous disease, please do not waste your money in buying air tickets to come to Athens because the probability of dying from coronavirus is zero if you are young and/or healthy. If it becomes significantly positive, I will inform the galaxy of the academic demos. All galaxies have stars. And of course, some academics behave

like hyper (super)-stars. Usually these are the ones that start with the phrase “Socrates or Aristotle said that, but I have a different opinion”.

2. If influenza is what your psych desires (to paraphrase Hesiod), then come to Athens during the winter months. Please do not waste your money to come during the end of May-December period because nobody dies from influenza then. By the way, I should warn my cosmic academic demos that the probability to die is drastically affected by one’s age and chronic nosology. If one is healthy, he/she should not come to Athens to die from influenza during any month. But if you are old and with bad health history with chronic diseases and you want to die from influenza, then you have a non-zero probability to die in the glorious Athens. However, there is an alert. Dying from influenza will not give the doxa (fame) of Achilles because nobody cares. The mass media demand deaths from coronavirus. And of course, to play it on the safe side in order to increase the probability of dying from coronavirus one should be very old with serious health problems. Preferably over 80 years old. The older, the better. According to mass media reports of the worst hit European country, Italy, the average person who died from coronavirus is 81.4 years old with chronic illnesses (see <https://www.atiner.gr/docs/Coronavirus-Italy.pdf>). The average age of those infected was 61 years old (<https://www.atiner.gr/docs/Messaggero.pdf>). Also 99.2% of the people died had a serious health problem before they were infected by coronavirus. If this changes tomorrow, the probabilities will change.
3. If one wants to die from traffic accidents or want to experience the excitement of being injured in an Athenian traffic accident, then one should come to Athens during the summer months when the probabilities and the heat are at their highest level. Of course, if one travels outside Athens to explore the countryside of Greece and other cities, then the probability triples. The probability of dying from a traffic accident is independent of one’s age and health status. In this case, Thanatos (the personification of death in Greek mythology) does not look at age and health (and of course beauty). Traffic accidents is the most democratic of all the three causes of death examined here. It is non-discriminatory.

Now nobody can claim that he was not warned. It is up to the individual academic to take the dread risk and come to an ATINER event. If one is extremely risk averse (because e.g., one suffers from schizophrenic agoraphobia), Athens should be avoided. The best solution is to put oneself in a permanent self-quarantine made of glass. This is not difficult for many academics. I met many from this stratospheric academic demo who would have no problem with that. All their bios was in isolation and solitude in a very sterile environment. It is called tenure. Some Universities threatened their academic staff and students that if they travel abroad and come back, they must be put in quarantine for 14 days before they appear on campus. Note that the personification of the word “Universities” are senior academics who have a long experience with tenure



as this was defined above. These people are the archons of epistemes. Most of them they lack pedagogy and there is no worse thing for the ecumenical demos to have such archons of gnosis without ethos; without pedagogy.

If you are an academic who dares not be overwhelmed by phobia, I will be more than glad to see you in Athens in one of the many small ATINER's academic symposiums! Stay healthy. Do practice the protocols which are well known by now in order to avoid all types of causes of death. By doing so, you protect yourself, your children and the rest of the world. Always think egoistically. If everybody is seriously affected by these three causes, there will be less hospital beds available to you. By decreasing the spread, you serve your own self-interest. This is a language that most academics understand because their egoism and atomism energize their praxes. Once you have it, don't spread it for your own good. Stay home and not run around spreading the virus to others. You will have a better treatment in a less crowded hospital if needed. At a macro chronic level, don't worry. One day all we will die. And as Xerxes said it for his one million soldiers and cited by the Father of History Herodotus: "... independently of the battle with Greeks, none of my soldiers would be alive in one 100 years". He forgot to add himself. Enjoy whatever time is left to you. Unless one suffers from chronic phobia, fear of coronavirus is worse than the virus itself! It can be described as a dead psych inside a biotic soma.

## APPENDIX

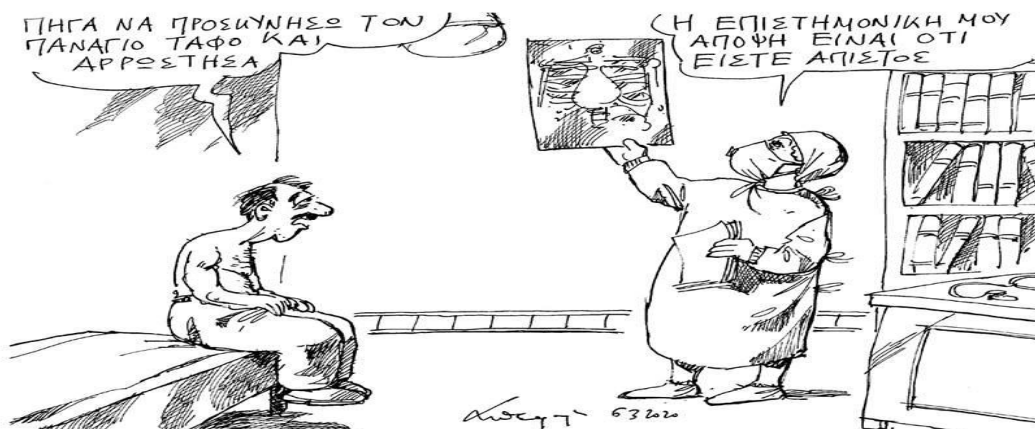
Cartoon 1. *Both doctors and ignorant idiots alike expressed their strong beliefs as to what caused the plague (Thucydides 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE).*



"THAT'S ODD: MY FACEBOOK FRIENDS WHO WERE CONSTITUTIONAL SCHOLARS JUST A MONTH AGO ARE NOW INFECTIOUS DISEASE EXPERTS...."

Source: First published in Counterpoint, U.S., 4 March 2020 By Rick McKee

Cartoon 2. *Theocratic Explanations by Mortal Doctors*



Source: Kathimerini, Greece, 7 March 2020 by Andreas Petroulakis.

Note: Most of Greek cases as of 7 of March 2020 (51 out of 66) were from a group of Greeks who visited the Christian Sacred Places in Egypt and Israel. In the Cartoon, the sick worshiper tells the doctor that he went to the Holy Places in Egypt and Israel. And the doctor responds by looking at the X-ray that his scientific medical opinion is that he is a non-believer.

*"The Decameron"*  
By Giovanni Boccaccio  
Published in 1335

<https://www.atiner.gr/gtp/The-Decameron-of-Giovanni-Boccaccio.pdf>

... I say, then, that the years [of the era] of the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God had attained to the number of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when into the notable city of Florence, fair over every other of Italy, there came the death-dealing pestilence, which, through the operation of the heavenly bodies or of our own iniquitous dealings, being sent down upon mankind for our correction by the just wrath of God, had some years before appeared in the parts of the East and after having bereft these latter of an innumerable number of inhabitants, extending without cease from one place to another, had now unhappily spread towards the West.

And there against no wisdom availing nor human foresight (whereby the city was purged of many impurities by officers deputed to that end and it was forbidden unto any sick person to enter therein and many were the counsels given<sup>20</sup> for the preservation of health) nor yet humble supplications, not once but many times both in ordered processions and on other wise made unto God by devout persons, --about the coming in of the Spring of the aforesaid year, it began on horrible and miraculous wise to show forth its dolorous effects.

Yet not as it had done in the East, where, if any bled at the nose, it was a manifest sign of inevitable death; nay, but in men and women alike there appeared, at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits, whereof some waxed of the bigness of a common apple, others like unto an egg, some more and some less, and these the vulgar named plague-boils. From these two parts the aforesaid death-bearing plague-boils proceeded, in brief space, to appear and come indifferently in every part of the body; wherefrom, after a while, the fashion of the contagion began to change into black or livid blotches, which showed themselves in many [first] on the arms and about the thighs and [after spread to] every other part of the person, in some large and sparse and in others small and thick-sown; and like as the plague-boils had been first (and yet were) a very certain token of coming death, even so were these for everyone to whom they came.

To the cure of these maladies nor counsel<sup>21</sup> of physician nor virtue of any medicine appeared to avail or profit aught; on the contrary, --whether it was that the nature of the infection suffered it not or that the ignorance of the physicians (of whom, over and above the men of art, the number, both men and women, who had never had any teaching of medicine, was become exceeding great,) availed not to know whence it arose and consequently, took not due measures there against, --not only did few recover thereof, but well-nigh all died within the third day from the appearance of the aforesaid signs, this sooner and that later, and for the most part without fever or other accident<sup>22</sup>. And this pestilence was the more virulent for that, by communication with those who were sick thereof, it gat hold upon the sound, no otherwise than fire upon things dry or greasy, when as they are brought very near thereunto.

Nay, the mischief was yet greater; for that not only did converse and consortion with the sick give to the sound infection of cause of common death, but the mere touching of the clothes or of whatsoever other thing had been touched or used of the sick appeared of itself to communicate the malady to the toucher. A marvelous thing to hear is that which I have to tell and one which, had it not been seen of many men's eyes and of mine own, I had scarce dared credit, much less set down in writing, though I had heard it from one worthy of belief. I say, then, that of such effieience was the nature of the pestilence in question in communicating itself from one to another, that, not only did it pass from man to man, but this, which is much more, it many times visibly did; --to wit, a thing which had pertained to a man sick or dead of the aforesaid sickness, being touched by an animal foreign to the human species,

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<sup>20</sup>Syn. provisions made or means taken (*consigli dati*). Boccaccio constantly uses *consiglio* in this latter sense.

<sup>21</sup>Syn. help, remedy.

<sup>22</sup>*Accidente*, what a modern physician would call "complication." "Symptom" does not express the whole meaning of the Italian word.

not only infected this latter with the plague, but in a very brief space of time killed it. Of this mine own eyes (as hath a little before been said) had one day, among others, experience on this wise; to wit, that the rags of a poor man, who had died of the plague, being cast out into the public way, two hogs came up to them and having first, after their wont, rooted amain among them with their snouts, took them in their mouths and tossed them about their jaws; then, in a little while, after turning round and round, they both, as if they had taken poison, fell down dead upon the rags with which they had in an ill hour intermeddled.

From these things and many others like unto them or yet stranger divers fears and conceits were begotten in those who abode alive, which well-nigh all tended to a very barbarous conclusion, namely, to shun and flee from the sick and all that pertained to them, and thus doing, each thought to secure immunity for himself. Some there were who conceived that to live moderately and keep oneself from all excess was the best defence against such a danger; wherefore, making up their company, they lived removed from every other and shut themselves up in those houses where none had been sick and where living was best; and there, using very temperately of the most delicate viands and the finest wines and eschewing all incontinence, they abode with music and such other diversions as they might have, never suffering themselves to speak with any nor choosing to hear any news from without of death or sick folk. Others, inclining to the contrary opinion, maintained that to carouse and make merry and go about singing and frolicking and satisfy the appetite in everything possible and laugh and scoff at whatsoever befell was a very certain remedy for such an ill. That which they said they put in practice as best they might, going about day and night, now to this tavern, now to that, drinking without stint or measure; and on this wise they did yet more freely in other folk's houses, so but they scented there aught that liked or tempted them, as they might lightly do, for that everyone, --as he were to live no longer--had abandoned all care of his possessions, as of himself, wherefore the most part of the houses were become common good and strangers used them, when as they happened upon them, like as the very owner might have done; and with all this bestial preoccupation, they still shunned the sick to the best of their power.

In this sore affliction and misery of our city, the reverend authority of the laws, both human and divine, was all in a manner dissolved and fallen into decay, for [lack of] the ministers and executors thereof, who, like other men, were all either dead or sick or else left so destitute of followers that they were unable to exercise any office, wherefore everyone had license to do whatsoever pleased him. Many others held a middle course between the two aforesaid, not straitening themselves so exactly in the matter of diet as the first neither allowing themselves such license in drinking and other debauchery as the second, but using things in sufficiency, according to their appetites; nor did they seclude themselves, but went about, carrying in their hands, some flowers, some odoriferous herbs and other some divers kinds of spiceries<sup>23</sup>, which they set often to their noses, accounting it an excellent thing to fortify the brain with such odours, more by token that the air seemed all heavy and attainted with the stench of the dead bodies and that of the sick and of the remedies used.

Some were of a more barbarous, though, peradventure, a surer way of thinking, avouching that there was no remedy against pestilences better than--no, nor any so good as--to flee before them; wherefore, moved by this reasoning and recking of nought but themselves, very many, both men and women, abandoned their own city, their own houses and homes, their kinsfolk and possessions, and sought the country seats of others, or, at the least, their own, as if the wrath of God, being moved to punish the iniquity of mankind, would not proceed to do so wheresoever they might be, but would content itself with afflicting those only who were found within the walls of their city, or as if they were persuaded that no person was to remain therein and that its last hour was come. And albeit these, who opined thus variously, died not all, yet neither did they all escape; nay, many of each way of thinking and in every place sickened of the plague and languished on all sides, well-nigh abandoned, having themselves, what while they were whole, set the example to those who abode in health.

Indeed, leaving be that townsman avoided townsman and that well-nigh no neighbour took thought unto other and that kinsfolk seldom or never visited one another and held no converse together save from afar, this tribulation had stricken such terror to the hearts of all, men and women alike, that brother

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<sup>23</sup>*i.e.* aromatic drugs.

forsook brother, uncle nephew and sister brother and oftentimes wife husband; nay (what is yet more extraordinary and well-nigh incredible) fathers and mothers refused to visit or tend their very children, as they had not been theirs. By reason whereof there remained unto those (and the number of them, both males and females, was incalculable) who fell sick, none other succour than that which they owed either to the charity of friends (and of these there were few) or the greed of servants, who tended them, allured by high and extravagant wage; albeit, for all this, these latter were not grown many, and those men and women of mean understanding and for the most part unused to such offices, who served for well-nigh nought but to reach things called for by the sick or to note when they died; and in the doing of these services many of them perished with their gain.

Of this abandonment of the sick by neighbours, kinsfolk and friends and of the scarcity of servants arose an usage before well-nigh unheard, to wit, that no woman, how fair or lovable or well-born soever she might be, once fallen sick, recked aught of having a man to tend her, whatever he might be, or young or old, and without any shame discovered to him every part of her body, no otherwise than she would have done to a woman, so but the necessity of her sickness required it; the which belike, in those who recovered, was the occasion of lesser modesty in time to come. Moreover, there ensued of this abandonment the death of many who peradventure, had they been succoured, would have escaped alive; wherefore, as well for the lack of the opportune services which the sick availed not to have as for the virulence of the plague, such was the multitude of those who died in the city by day and by night that it was an astonishment to hear tell thereof, much more to see it; and thence, as it were of necessity, there sprang up among those who abode alive things contrary to the pristine manners of the townsfolk.

It was then (even as we yet see it used) a custom that the kinswomen and she-neighbours of the dead should assemble in his house and there condole with those who more nearly pertained unto him, whilst his neighbours and many other citizens foregathered with his next of kin before his house, whither, according to the dead man's quality, came the clergy, and he with funeral pomp of chants and candles was borne on the shoulders of his peers to the church chosen by himself before his death; which usages, after the virulence of the plague began to increase, were either altogether or for the most part laid aside, and other and strange customs sprang up in their stead. For that, not only did folk die without having a multitude of women about them, but many there were who departed this life without witness and few indeed were they to whom the pious plaints and bitter tears of their kinsfolk were vouchsafed; nay, in lieu of these things there obtained, for the most part, laughter and jests and gibes and feasting and merrymaking in company; which usance women, laying aside womanly pitifulness, had right well learned for their own safety.

Few, again, were they whose bodies were accompanied to the church by more than half a score or a dozen of their neighbours, and of these no worshipful and illustrious citizens, but a sort of blood-suckers, sprung from the dregs of the people, who styled themselves *pickmen*<sup>24</sup> and did such offices for hire, shouldered the bier and bore it with hurried steps, not to that church which the dead man had chosen before his death, but most times to the nearest, behind five or six<sup>25</sup> priests, with little light<sup>26</sup> and whiles none at all, which latter, with the aid of the said pick men, thrust him into what grave soever they first found unoccupied, without troubling themselves with too long or too formal a service. The condition of the common people (and be like, in great part, of the middle class also) was yet more pitiable to behold, for that these, for the most part retained by hope<sup>27</sup> or poverty in their houses and abiding in their own quarters, sickened by the thousand daily and being altogether untended and unsuccoured, died well-nigh all without recourse. Many breathed their last in the open street, whilst other many, for all they died in their houses, made it known to the neighbours that they were dead rather by the stench of their rotting bodies than otherwise; and of these and others who died all about the whole city was full.

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<sup>24</sup>*i.e.*, gravediggers (*becchin*).

<sup>25</sup>Lit. *four* or six. This is the equivalent Italian idiom.

<sup>26</sup>*i.e.*, but few tapers.

<sup>27</sup>*i.e.*, expectation of gain from acting as tenders of the sick, gravediggers, etc. The word *Speranza* is, however, constantly used by Dante and his follower Boccaccio in the contrary sense of "fear," and may be so meant in the present instance.

For the most part one same usance was observed by the neighbours, moved more by fear lest the corruption of the dead bodies should imperil themselves than by any charity they had for the departed; to wit, that either with their own hands or with the aid of certain bearers, when as they might have any, they brought the bodies of those who had died forth of their houses and laid them before their doors, where, especially in the morning, those who went about might see corpses without number; then they fetched biers and some, in default thereof, they laid upon some board or other. Nor was it only one bier that carried two or three corpses, nor did this happen but once; nay, many might have been counted which contained husband and wife, two or three brothers, father and son or the like. And an infinite number of times it befell that, two priests going with one cross for someone, three or four biers, borne by bearers, ranged themselves behind the latter<sup>28</sup>, and whereas the priests thought to have but one dead man to bury, they had six or eight, and whiles more. Nor therefore were the dead honoured with aught of tears or candles or funeral train; nay, the thing was come to such a pass that folk recked no more of men that died than nowadays they would of goats; whereby it very manifestly appeared that that which the natural course of things had not availed, by dint of small and infrequent harms, to teach the wise to endure with patience, the very greatness of their ills had brought even the simple to expect and make no account of.

The consecrated ground sufficing not to the burial of the vast multitude of corpses aforesaid, which daily and well-nigh hourly came carried in crowds to every church, --especially if it were sought to give each his own place, according to ancient usance, --there were made throughout the churchyards, after every other part was full, vast trenches, wherein those who came after were laid by the hundred and being heaped up therein by layers, as goods are stowed aboard ship, were covered with a little earth, till such time as they reached the top of the trench.

Moreover, --not to go longer searching out and recalling every particular of our past miseries, as they befell throughout the city, --I say that, whilst so sinister a time prevailed in the latter, on no wise therefor was the surrounding country spared, wherein, (letting be the castles<sup>29</sup>, which in their littleness<sup>30</sup>[14] were like unto the city,) throughout the scattered villages and in the fields, the poor and miserable husbandmen and their families, without succour of physician or aid of servitor, died, not like men, but well-nigh like beasts, by the ways or in their tillages or about the houses, indifferently by day and night. By reason whereof, growing lax like the townsfolk in their manners and customs, they recked not of anything or business of theirs; nay, all, as if they looked for death that very day, studied with all their wit, not to help to maturity the future produce of their cattle and their fields and the fruits of their own past toils, but to consume those which were ready to hand. Thus, it came to pass that the oxen, the asses, the sheep, the goats, the swine, the fowls, nay, the very dogs, so faithful to mankind, being driven forth of their own houses, went straying at their pleasure about the fields, where the very corn was abandoned, without being cut, much less gathered in; and many, well-nigh like reasonable creatures, after grazing all day, returned at night, glutted, to their houses, without the constraint of any herdsman.

To leave the country and return to the city, what more can be said save that such and so great was the cruelty of heaven (and in part, peradventure, that of men) that, between March and the following July, what with the virulence of that pestiferous sickness and the number of sick folk ill tended or forsaken in their need, through the fearfulness of those who were whole, it is believed for certain that upward of an hundred thousand human beings perished within the walls of the city of Florence, which, peradventure, before the advent of that death-dealing calamity, had not been accounted to hold so many? Alas, how many great palaces, how many goodly houses, how many noble mansions, once full of families, of lords and of ladies, abode empty even to the meanest servant! How many memorable families, how many ample heritages, how many famous fortunes were seen to remain without lawful heir! How many valiant men, how many fair ladies, how many sprightly youths, whom, not others only, but Galen, Hippocrates or Æsculapius themselves would have judged most hale, breakfasted in the morning with their kinsfolk, comrades and friends and that same night supped with their ancestors in the other world!

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<sup>28</sup> *i.e.*, the cross.

<sup>29</sup> *i.e.* walled burghs.

<sup>30</sup> *i.e.* in miniature.

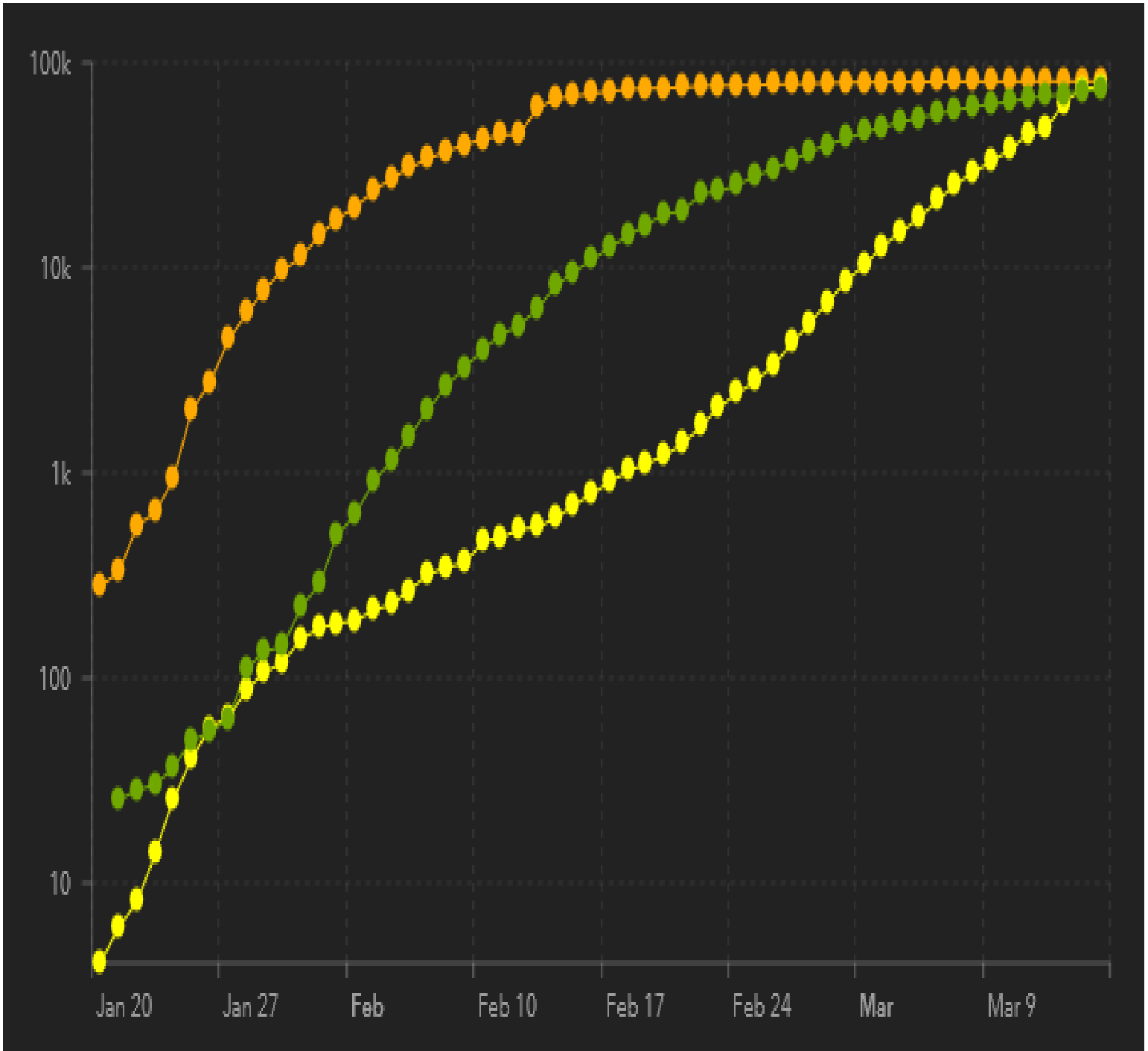
I am myself weary of going wandering so long among such miseries; wherefore, purposing henceforth to leave such part thereof as I can fitly, I say that,--our city being at this pass, well-nigh void of inhabitants,--it chanced (as I afterward heard from a person worthy of credit) that there foregathered in the venerable church of Santa Maria Novella, one Tuesday morning when there was well-nigh none else there, seven young ladies, all knit one to another by friendship or neighbourhood or kinship, who had heard divine service in mourning attire, as sorted with such a season. Not one of them had passed her eight-and-twentieth year nor was less than eighteen years old, and each was discreet and of noble blood, fair of favour and well-mannered and full of honest sprightliness. The names of these ladies I would in proper terms set out, did not just cause forbid me, to wit, that I would not have it possible that, in time to come, any of them should take shame by reason of the things hereinafter related as being told or hearkened by them, the laws of disport being nowadays somewhat straitened, which at that time, for the reasons above shown, were of the largest, not only for persons of their years, but for those of a much riper age; nor yet would I give occasion to the envious, who are still ready to carp at every praiseworthy life, on anywise to disparage the fair fame of these honourable ladies with unseemly talk.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* by [C. P. Cavafy](#)  
Translated by Edmund Keeley

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum? The barbarians are due here today. Why isn't anything going on in the senate? Why are the senators sitting there without legislating? Because the barbarians are coming today. What's the point of senators making laws now? Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating. Why did our emperor get up so early, and why is he sitting enthroned at the city's main gate, in state, wearing the crown? Because the barbarians are coming today and the emperor's waiting to receive their leader. He's even got a scroll to give him, loaded with titles, with imposing names. Why have our two consuls and praetors come out today wearing their embroidered, their scarlet togas? Why have they put on bracelets with so many amethysts, rings sparkling with magnificent emeralds? Why are they carrying elegant canes beautifully worked in silver and gold? Because the barbarians are coming today and things like that dazzle the barbarians. Why don't our distinguished orators turn up as usual to make their speeches, say what they have to say? Because the barbarians are coming today and they're bored by rhetoric and public speaking. Why this sudden bewilderment, this confusion? (How serious people's faces have become.) Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly, everyone going home lost in thought? Because night has fallen and the barbarians haven't come. And some of our men just in from the border say there are no barbarians any longer. Now what's going to happen to us without barbarians? Those people were a kind of solution.



Diagram A1. Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by Johns Hopkins CSSE (in logarithms which is the correct way of depicting exponential functions such as a contagion)



Source: <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>