

# **Ethical Values and Principles for Healing Society in Light of the COVID-19 Crisis**

*Statement of the World Emergency COVID19 Pandemic Ethics (WeCope) Committee (22 January 2021)*

## **1. Preamble**

As an independent, multidisciplinary, and cross-cultural committee, comprised of ethicists from cultures and nations across the world, in the context of our previous statements, we offer the following statement and recommendations on Ethical Values and Principles for Healing Society in Light of the COVID-19 Crisis.<sup>1</sup>

We hope that this joint statement will widen the scope of reflections both within and between communities and nations and will help share a mutual vision for a healing society by elucidating ethical values and principles that can assist in making better societies. The possibility of better societies can be achieved through the participation of all people to consider what would be “better”, and through the transformative potential of what every person on the planet has learned from COVID-19.

Areas of potential transformation include both individual and societal development, including but not limited to public health, education pathways, economic flows, institutional dynamism, hierarchical systems, authoritative relationships and broader issues of social conventions. In the context of earlier WeCope Statements on Autonomy and Responsibility, State and Governance, and the Environmental Implications of COVID-19, we need to broaden our conception of a healing society taking into account bioethical consideration for all spheres of life. Other potential transformation points relate to identifying tensions and the dynamics of unsustainable or asymmetric inputs and outputs, fragile structures, or contexts that demonstrate imperatives that are counter to common perceptions of morality such as non-beneficence, maleficence, unjustness, irresponsibility, or non-autonomy. Ethical visions related to these themes may aid in increasing awareness, and herein we discuss some of the applicable principles and humbly issue recommendations.

## **2. Healing Society**

The term “healing society” suggests that humanity is injured which marks the cycle of evolution of all life forms wherein injuries are perceived as new challenges and often lead to paradigm shifts. This is precisely why global society adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) followed 15 years later by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this statement we add another new dimension that plays an important role in the healing of an injured world which centers on the ethos of interrelationships between living beings wherever and whoever they are.

To begin healing society, one may focus on its basic component, the human person, upholding the individual’s dignity, rights, values, and humanity. Perhaps this would manifest statecraft and social conventions built on trust, rather than coercion

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backed by a monopoly on legal violence. By social conventions we mean more than social agreements or social contracts; the structuring of society should be based on effective practices that allow the construction of a new ethic in which the rules and ideas enable people to articulate their differences as individuals and social beings. The common human good can withstand a reasonable asymmetry of ownership, of information, but not privileges and rights, especially pertaining to the right to use violence as a means.

To solve the challenges wrought by the past cycle of domination and inequality creating dynamics, those with the most shall no longer be granted unfair privilege and rights to shape society through policy or brute force. Legal systems should be secondary to other normative systems such as those of morality or ethics. The curative society invites us to forge our social relationships based on ethics, rather than merely law.

It is not naïve utopianism to recognize that a foundational agreement of non-violence allows for coexistence and cooperation to develop into universal co-evolution. This co-evolution not only allows peaceful co-existence of peoples, cultures and nations, but also of humans, non-humans and natural systems. Humanity has so far survived the tension and balance of mutually assured destruction (MAD), of a prolonged acceptance of inequality enforced by systemic privilege, and the right to use violence. By recognizing the violent path we have travelled (e.g., by acknowledging the resources spent on weapons development, of profit from suffering, and the very mechanisms of violence), we may integrate the knowledge we learned into a broadening universal awareness of the devastation such a path incurs.

We may heal, with awareness and loving compassion, senseless suffering, and achieve the goal of preventing future suffering or cycles of systemic violence. Policies of domination, forceful coercion, and extraction of common resources should become disincentivized until they cease. One should recognize that an absolutely broad definition of violence, may become violent itself. Some attempts to solve violence may lead to institutionally mandated structures that are accompanied by the blind force of law on citizens and in that sense, the purpose of non-violence can be distorted by itself. Our common humanity has become more evident because of living through a global pandemic, where no nation is immune to the virus.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**Adopt the principle of non-violence (*ahimsa*). Achieve that principle while broadening the definition, not weakening it. Attempt to move towards increasing levels of universality of that broadening definition. This could be formalized in a universal agreement on non-violent means to competition and dispute resolution.**

### **3. Education**

Post-COVID educational opportunities should emphasize inquiry-based learning, which in addition to other curricula, integrates cross-cultural bioethical themes. Education should develop the synthetic capabilities of the senses, including observing, understanding and listening. Adopting experiential and outcomes-based educational methods and frameworks may build the knowledge, attitudes, skills and ethical habits of learners,<sup>2</sup> with an additional focus on reflection, in order to develop critical thinking and

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<sup>2</sup> WeCope Committee (2021), Implications of COVID-19 for Education.

ethical capacity of students, and with the goal of increased participation and contribution towards betterment of themselves and their communities.

Wherever possible, the components of the five human values of love, truth, peace, right conduct and non-violence should be considered and implemented. To achieve these values, teaching methodologies may adopt mindfulness and awareness, as an integrated approach to learning. Along with inspiration based upon modelled examples of concepts, it can provide students the support they need for the integration of affective domains (feelings, attitude and beliefs), and allows for a true love of life celebrating all individuals and an integrated community.

Additionally, in terms of the implementation of education by means of online technology, extra effort should be made to demonstrate the principle of “education for humanness” through critical thinking. Critical thought has two aspects: one, the analytic function, which refers to the competence of learners to examine the content of learning and understand the concrete application of concepts in real life and context, and two, the integrative function, which addresses the formative aspect of learning with respect to human values, attitudes, and openness to reality.

Increasing the creative, adaptive resilience of students is paramount. Education opportunities should be abundant and have a clear aim to support individual and communal wellbeing. Education should multiply opportunities, while providing support for those who choose to target specific goals. Policy and research should also counter negative effects of commercial advertising on students, especially those lacking the cognitive ability and/or bioethical maturity to understand the persuasive content of the material. Education should be consistent with the self and scientific evidence.

The curriculum should balance subjective force and objective reality, the contradictions of which can be replaced by the idea of intersubjectivity. The relativism of the subjective in the face of doubts about objectivity in some philosophical conceptions such as contemporary pragmatism, can be included in the concept of intersubjectivity. This social concept highlights the articulation between the individual reality of each subject which can be understood as a social construction based on language. What lies at the basis of communication is not necessarily mutual agreement but mutual understanding. Perhaps what is considered true is a shared world that the speaker and the interpreter share.

### **Recommendation 2:**

**Society should strive to create an educational experience consistent with not only a social or cultural epistemology, but based on self-directed and scientific evidence, which elicits intellectual leaps, matching independent imagination and a strong creative power, with the best knowledge of the given facts.**

### **Recommendation 3:**

**In order to foster solid ethical values, the curriculum should equip students to:**

- a) Appreciate the human and ecological conditions around them and personally interpret their experiences through critical ethical reflection, and think of innovative, ethical, and creative solutions to problems they encounter.**
- b) Recognize the intersubjectivity that allows an increase in the scope of consciousness, individually and collectively.**
- c) Balance subjective force and objective reality as experienced by students towards an increase of the boundaries of awareness, both individually and collectively.**

**d) Promote organic educational development pathways, which support the mental and physical wellbeing of learners.**

**4. Economics**

It is possible to transition the economy using the challenges of COVID-19, towards healthier and resilient dynamics, which support the wellbeing of all members of society. The primary dynamic that must change is the coercive and deceptive extraction of wealth from public resources (e.g., the “commons”), internally and externally. Current power politics needs to be restructured to better represent the people, and to provide more methods for consensus building. It is not necessary to tax all financial activities or redistribute private wealth. However, it is necessary to acknowledge and correct the inappropriate loss of land, water and property as a result of colonization and other financial privileges that have led to severe inequality, as well as a divergent decoupling of financial markets from real economic facts. It does require drastically supporting those with the least wealth, and limiting the moral hazard perpetrated by those with the most, as well as some creative ideas that are grounded in both fact and necessity.

The response by economic authorities to COVID-19 demonstrated the fragility of the economic structures at the start of 2020. It was not a new or creative response, rather it was only different in the quantity of money created and delivered. This situation is unprecedented because it is clear that a repeat of past strategies (that coincidentally benefit an increasingly smaller and wealthier group), can no longer save the broader economic system. If it continues like this, the final break can be dramatic. It is not enough to simply save the smallest percentage and expect the unproven trickle down to increase to a rate that can revive the economic growth.

Because the system failed to reform until the very last minute, a dilemma of ‘too little too late’ is overcome using the dynamics of weekly or bi-weekly injections of public funds, to the public itself. This has saved lives and has forestalled the nearly inevitable structural collapse. In theory, gradually increasing the frequency and amplitude of the handouts can synchronize economic activity and create a new rhythmic engine of growth, even in the midst of the economic chaos at present.

Those changes must be done soon and undertaken with unparalleled commitment, and they should be directed at those who are most vulnerable and in dire need of economic help. This will subsidize the wellbeing of the public as a whole. It must not be used as a tool of inflation only, but first as a source of protection for those worst affected by COVID-19, and secondly as a tool of demand creation for economic stimulation. It is also an opportunity to reflect on the thesis of inflation as a source of extraction and power. It is also a chance to build new economic infrastructures, and rollback the extractive and unproductive forces that have thrived until now.

Novel redistributive dynamics may support both resilient wellbeing and public health. Since financial markets have decoupled from real economics, there is less hazard in adopting certain non-counterparty bound mechanisms, as the fallacious and fictitious nature of wealth may allow for the directed altering of financial ratios and direct the flow towards a common goal. The same loopholes and mechanisms of extraction that were once realized without zero-sum linear constrictions can easily be used as a source of funding for the public good. This is a temporary ability, as the financial markets must also eventually return to reality, but a great opportunity, nonetheless. Such an action combined with simultaneously increasing the distribution of ownership businesses via various creative means can ultimately result in the re-coupling of financial and real economics circles; even if it does not create equality in the rates of wealth increasing, it

will create equality in direction. Some ships will rise faster than others, but we can support all ships.

A precursor to such a transition, as well as an inevitable by-product of attempts to make such change, will likely involve vast debt restructuring and relief, and possible debt jubilees, as well as eliminating individuals' income and purchase taxes. Economics should no longer be structurally violent, via coercive or punitive paternal models of authority. Relaxation of the fortified gatekeeping of economic activity will allow micro-currents of transactional economic energy to stimulate and reshape economic processes. Allowing abundant economic activity to take place and the wealth of profit to sink through distribution helps free capitalism for all and secure socialism for those who need it.

#### **Recommendation 4:**

**Develop an economy that structurally supports vulnerable members of society and all others. Decree and adopt for them the same monetary and financial mottos such as: 'something from nothing', 'whatever it takes' and, central bank policy backing, which are currently afforded only to the privileged few. This may include a basic universal income, which should increase in line with a global price inflation tracker that follows rates of change in cost of living, including food and energy, as well a basket of commodities to maintain relative purchasing power.**

#### **Recommendation 5:**

**Embark on a public awareness program for transparent formal and informal economic education, at all levels, that explains how universal basic income works. Where it is not possible due to indebtedness or fiscal mismanagement, or lack of transparency or political will, alternative schemes involving a combination of redistributed public land and productive resources, combined with conditional but universal access to needed low interest loans may suffice.**

## **5. Rights**

International society is, in good measure, founded on mutual respect and adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The governing statutes of all countries enshrine human rights in law, although it is true that not everyone can celebrate their full human rights. A healing society is one in which there is self-determination and respect for human rights and responsibilities of all persons.

During the quarantine and lockdowns, most directives dictated as a response to COVID-19 have been coercive and forceful, and yet have been impossible to effectively enforce. They have commonly been damaging to attempts to self-organize by individuals, at grassroots, or to locally decided community responses to the situation. The absence of consistent scientific facts, and abundant fearmongering, has made the situation more perverse and ritualistic. Healing from this mindless mentality will require concerted effort of research-policy evaluation.

Human security means people must have what they need and have freedom from fear. It depends on resilience and resilience depends on the freedom for individual moral agents to make decisions that increase their wellbeing. The reflexive lockdown response has ensured that the pandemic's health effects were not limited to the direct effects of the virus but multiplied the suffering indirectly and in more complex ways.

There was a wide range of styles of lockdowns and other measures that could be a simple approach but were often mismanaged. Analysis of the impacts reveal the complexity of myriad other public health issues. Estimated deaths related to a broad range of issues, from malnutrition in children, to missed treatments and diagnosis of non-COVID-19 diseases, to long-term poverty, to breakdowns in food supplies, and rising prices, were some of direct consequences still being experienced.

Instead of choosing modulated or tempered democratic responses, some policy makers over-reacted without considering the long-term effects. By decimating social and economic systems, 'the cure may be worse than the disease', collective resilience is lower as a result, should there be a continued crisis.

Therefore, we refer readers to the recommendations of our **Autonomy and Responsibility Statement:**

*Recommendation 1: The concepts of autonomy and of responsibility should be considered in their broad moral meaning (and not in a narrow legal meaning), and in the cultural context to understand the different ways they can be expressed and the specific meaning they can acquire. In the current pandemic individual autonomy must be balanced with social responsibility to control the spread of the infection.*

*Recommendation 2: The exercise of autonomy and of responsibility require some basic political, economic, social, and educational conditions to be truly and effectively developed. Otherwise, people can neither be recognized as autonomous, nor can they be held morally responsible. In the current pandemic, basic conditions for the exercise of autonomy and responsibility should be assured.*

*Recommendation 5: Moral legitimacy of individual autonomous decisions depends on their universal potential to be adopted by all. Therefore, they ought to be altruistic, cooperative, and helping to strengthen solidarity and equality. These general requirements for moral behavior become even more important in exceptionally vulnerable and demanding situations such as the current pandemic.*

And we refer readers to the recommendations of our **State and Governance Statement:**

*Recommendation 5: Human rights and fundamental freedoms are not to be unwittingly and unnecessary compromised by the State in its COVID-19 management.*

*Recommendation 1: State policies and regulations promulgated for the prevention and control of COVID-19 need to be just, compassionate and humane, science-based, and truly responsive, non-discriminatory and equitable. This time of global health emergency is an opportunity, as well as a challenge, for governments around the world to prove themselves as resilient, cohesive, trustworthy, credible, and legitimate institutions capable of creating and implementing laws and policies that build resilient, cohesive, and trusting communities.*

## **6. Well-being**

Well-being is being comfortable, healthy and happy. The long-term damages of our responses to COVID-19 are still unknown and have not fully realized but they have the potential to cause the worst public health effects by an order of magnitude. The devastating response to COVID-19 has failed by not recognizing the duality of security

against insecurity, and seeking total security against a specific threat, which created the opposite in a multiplied fashion. In reflection it is worth considering Karl Popper's words, "... *only freedom can make security secure.*"

Currently, there are different degrees of social chaos in most countries' politics, as they respond to outbreaks and new mutations of the virus. Healing from chaos is achieved by way of synchronization and dampening of extreme actions on all sides. The many facets of human security in a new world order can only be addressed with the willing participation of individuals who have the audacity to hope for increasing their wellbeing, and to achieve that a better balance between freedom and security must be reached.

Traditional models of social contracts point out the difficulty to fully balance equality and freedom because state models choose to privilege one or the other. Social justice starts from the deconstruction of the opposite relationship between freedom and equality and the redefinition of solidarity as a unifying element. Solidarity allows the compatibility of individualism and private freedom, with life in society, identifying the similarities of the people who are part of a group. Thus, solidarity is the recognition that differences with other people are less important than the desire to avoid pain and suffering. Utilitarianism can also achieve a connection between freedom and equality, which has been taken advantage of by the use of economic analysis in law, through the concept of "prospective responsibility", which aims at efficiency.

The most sustainably secure social systems are those which are not paternalistically and coercively enforced by centralized dictates of law or a top-down ideology, rather security comes from the willing participation and mutual interdependencies which arise from, and are inherent to, healthy self-organization of moral agents. One half should not dominate the other, nor can a select few effectively dictate to the many. A thorough analysis of different systems of government and democracy needs to be conducted to examine the balance between the common good and individual self-determination.

#### **Recommendation 6:**

**We may promote well-being by:**

- a) Enacting policies which recognize that security requires mutual participation, and that pursuing a policy of an absolute form of security results in insecurity of other forms.**
- b) Enacting policies which engage the public are necessary to negotiating common security. This may be achieved by providing a range of options, and outcomes, and recognizing the freedom individual moral agents have to decide over the best outcome, as well as developing new options based on feedback.**
- c) Developing channels to negotiate with the public on a case-by-case basis, to defuse tensions and dampen any chaotic potentials, and to offer reasonable conditions to opt in or out of decrees.**
- d) All countries should transparently evaluate the impacts of policies that include restricted movement, mask mandates, and heightened surveillance, and the benefits and liabilities of individual agency. The assessment may include analysis of the misery that resulted from the policies, the lives saved, and the enhancements in the maturity of health-minded and loving citizens.**

## **7. Lessons Learnt on Ethical Policy**

The essence of cross-cultural bioethics is to increase and serve the well-being of all beings, and to increase their maturity to discuss policies and to make informed decisions. The pandemic has provided many opportunities for reflection on the efficacy of response towards bioethical imperatives. It has not been easy to face the challenges. From a dynamic perspective, one of the consistent aspects of policy response has been the application of simple responses to complex issues, as well as short-term appearance versus long-term effects.

The hard truth is that many of the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated unhealthy conditions. This may have been a result of misunderstanding, mal-intent, fear of the pandemic, and/or an opaque vision of society. Together, it has resulted in dilemmas far beyond the biological effects of the virus. Attempts to influence health and well-being are essentially futile, if applied without holistic facts. There may be fractal logical fractures, repeating at scales and causing more fractures and fragility, rather than providing solutions. Simple solutions, which ignore these facts, create dislocations that damage the whole.

There are plenty of negative situations arising from misunderstanding, mal-intent, and/or opaque visions, including foremost the discounting of myriad health problems other than COVID-19, discounting of social and political grievances, and economic realities. These have all been rolled up into the container labeled Sars-Cov-2, and summarily made worse, rather than better for the mass majority of humans.

The cumulative result is that unsustainable extremes that will repeat ad-infinitum, ad-nauseum must be reconciled. The failures of policy to this point can still be remedied if the right lessons are learnt and responses applied. The big challenges are economic, psychosocial, and structural, and may impact all facets of life. Structurally, society must not simply be thought of as gears and cogs moving in a direction, or its antithesis regarding any opposition or resistance. Rather, we must integrate an understanding of energetic dynamism and non-directional pathways, which balances the benefits of lower dimensional chaos with the divergent risks of higher dimensional chaos, with the caveat of quantum absoluteness. Achieving this awareness in society will require that past assumptions and expectations continually face re-evaluation with evolving awareness.

Psychosocially, dissonance is prevalent as a result of fractured order, best described as an independent divergent localized perspective which is made worse as the coercive dominant fill the narrative vacuum; it is a form of chaotic dislocation. In some cases, dampening those voices will be beneficial and in others, elevating the quiet will be the best option. Discourse in the public sphere can be a healing force. Tolerance of divergent views is where the society begins healing.

The challenge of holism is to acknowledge the repeating fractal aspects of an ideology, for better and for worse. It is easy to promote holism, but it is the most difficult to enact it. This is most true in the economic sphere of life. One example for the need to correct simple responses to complex issues and the failure to do so can be found in tax receipts. Governments knowingly or unknowingly created a Faustian dilemma once they arbitrarily judged some businesses as essential and others as non-essential, thus placing themselves as the determiner of values beyond their capability, morally or legally, to calculate. It is a new twist on the classical dilemma whereby picking up the tool forces them into an impossible role to play. It is detrimental to the populace as they become dependent on such subject arbitrations that cannot meet the necessary demands. Overall, it ensures entropic reification in a dynamic whereby the lower path becomes



the only path, as higher-awareness and higher-complexity balances are traded for overly simple energetic balances.

In each society, and at each lockdown, the definitions of essential have shifted. Inadvertently the rule-makers used their position to pick losers and winners in society. This economic suppression has and will continue to hurt the governments and the citizens which trust them. Inclusive capitalism it is not, it is the very definition of exclusive privilege, and it repeats at scales and function.

If we are to enact inclusive capitalism, which is not corrupted from the inception, we must end the artificially imposed scarcity, and its counterpart of manipulated demand. The goal becomes one of sustainable abundance that repeats at all scales, allowing for the beneficial distribution of resources and the moral agency needed to sustain a higher complexity of homeostasis without the suffering caused by disproportionate inflationary effects. The creation of a reflective index that is a non-linear calculation of connectivity and distribution ratios, and growth curves of local resources, will be helpful. The diversity of homeostasis on a directionally non-binary index, once achieved, will provide a dynamic map that will correlate with inflationary and deflationary pressures integration into classical accounting systems, with the caveat of incentivizing the non-exploitation of nature.

#### **Recommendation 7:**

**Create an index that in essence is an anti-misery index, perhaps called the 'Potential Abundance Index'. It should account for the connectivity, and potential for access of individuals to the totality of resources in the locality of the measurement, the growth of resources, and the score made relative to other localities, without a singular point of reference, but a dynamic floating score, in a floating continuum. It should also incorporate other factors of importance including the hurdles to connection, such as gatekeeping functions, and entropic costs as a score detractor.**

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