Opportunities Arising from a Pandemic Crisis: A Challenge for Humanity Driven by Science, Solidarity, and Cultural Change

George A. Pantazopoulos¹

Published online: 9 June 2020
© ASM International 2020

At the moment of writing this editorial, hundreds of thousands of COVID-19 cases and thousands of deaths constitute the tragic account of this pandemic crisis. It is an invisible and unprecedented enemy which still rises, stretching the limits of healthcare facilities and putting millions of people under high risk. The results of the economy are heavily affected, and the consequences would be comparable with those of a World War!

Human life is threatened so violently and insidiously, and the prevention of the spread of this disease requires the deployment of strict measures, such as scholastic hygiene actions, business activity limitations, social distancing, isolation, etc.; the illness needs to be “attacked” by the first frontline fighters, i.e. doctors and healthcare personnel. A battle is waged in science and research labs, which are running hectically to study, analyze, and model the virus in order to formulate potential therapies, through the development of new medicines and vaccines. The shocking experience of this pandemic could have serious and hidden negative consequences, even affecting the psychological conditions of people, especially those living alone or forced to leave their jobs, or even to work remotely.

The social aspects of society are seriously attacked. However, the physical distance created is not always proportional to the emotional distance. Sometimes human bonds can become even stronger in light of the enforced “physical distance.” If there is the deep background of a human relationship, no distance can stop it! A close friend of mine reminded me of Aristotle’s definition of friendship: “A single soul dwelling in two bodies.” In spite of physical distances, the solidarity of humanity against a common enemy is intensified.

Even in this dystopic situation, there are opportunities to explore and try to face the reality, becoming more conscious and socially responsible, getting valuable lessons:

1. *Accept the “reality” of current conditions and try to maintain courage and strength.* Adopt the *Stoic Philosophy principles* [1] and change your viewpoint, keeping control of your judgment and assign responsibilities only in cases where you can do so. An attitude of blame is not at all helpful. Trying to exorcise the past is futile. It is worthwhile to transform this difficulty into a valuable training experience, and to explore the benefits of staying healthy and becoming wise and knowledgeable from this unbelievable crisis.
2. *Appreciate simple daily moments.* Take a few minutes to recognize the value of many simple everyday moments that are now put “on hold.” It is now time to do so, making a simple list and prioritizing the value of these moments and events.
3. *Take advantage of learning opportunities.* Becoming more familiar with “distance communication” tools. There are plenty of interesting webinars and e-learning opportunities, which can be not only a friendly companion, but also an important supporter of your skills towards knowledge improvement. ASM International

✉ George A. Pantazopoulos
gpantaz@elkeme.vionet.gr

¹ ELKEME Hellenic Research Centre for Metals S.A., 61st km Athens – Lamia National Road, 32011 Oinofyta, Viotias, Greece

and its affiliate societies organize numerous such courses and seminars in diverse fields, including metallography and failure analysis, in specific alloys, metallurgy, and materials testing. Digital content and Industry 4.0 tools are available to be utilized and serve us. As a researcher, it is the right time to think, plan, and design carefully future research. There are also opportunities to write, review, and edit technical papers, assisting those who are working to get published, and continuing the scientific activities of the community.

4. *Have a period of self-assessment.* This period can be used constructively to re-discover ourselves, to make a “pause” and see our weaknesses and our strengths, more quietly and diligently. Re-assess, review, revise, and reload, in order to be prepared and begin again strongly and consistently. For many of us, it could be a “fresh start.”

The aftermath of this pandemic wave may profusely offer the opportunity to change our life perspective and this change could motivate a cultural movement, promoting solidarity toward a common target. Science and research constitute strong foundations of society, as we struggle against a common enemy.

Freeman Dyson, a pioneer theoretical physicist who passed away on February 28, 2020, stressed that the driving force for evolution has changed from biology to culture. Science is the vehicle to drive our culture. “Science is the international enterprise that brings us together most powerfully in a common purpose, requiring us to share ideas and tools, economic resources and material benefits. The task of East and West in this century will be to work together as friends in science and technology, while respecting our differences in politics and culture” [2].

Reference

1. J. Sellars, *Lessons in Stoicism* (Penguin, London, 2019)
2. https://www.edge.org/conversation/freeman_dyson-biological-and-cultural-evolution. Accessed 7 Apr 2020

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.