Social Distancing

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COVID-19.
There will be no more
Wisdom, integrity, and compassion
Among us, and only through
Self-centeredness
We will overcome this
Calamity
We are eager to end our
Responsibilities to one another
We have
Our own needs to fulfill
We are looking beyond the fact that we have
People who are dying
Families who are hurting
Neighbors who are lacking
Friends who are crying
So I choose to consider
My freedom
Is more urgent than
Your safety
And I tell you
Fend for yourself
May you never need to
Ask for my help
We are in this together
What a lie!
COVID-19 turns us all inward.

Poet's Statement This is a reverse poem, meant to be read first in the forward direction (top-to-bottom), then in the reverse direction (bottom-to-top). Read in the forward direction, the poem depicts a mindset centered on one's self-interests during the present pandemic. In the reverse direction, the poem rebuffs and reimagines this way of thinking, transforming it into a benevolent posture that considers the needs of others who are suffering.

This piece emerged from my reflection on the different decisions that people are making amidst the ever-present threat of this virus. I see a primary tension existing between the notions of freedom and social responsibility. The poem is not intended to criticize freedom of movement, particularly when livelihoods rest upon it. Rather, it urges us to examine whether we are misusing freedom to prioritize our comfort at the expense of another's health and wellbeing. Such misuses are avoidable, just as the mindset contributing to them is "reversible."

Recently, some have advocated using and practicing the concept of "physical distancing" rather than "social distancing." The idea is to remain socially connected but physically apart in order to protect both mental and physical health. One who maintains the posture represented in the reverse reading of the poem understands that physical and not social distancing is our present moral imperative. This person is in no way "social distancing" but, in fact, helping to bridge the distance between us by their kindness, understanding, and willing self-sacrifice. In our present times, this is needed now more than ever.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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