

# Consider Dogs...

Manuel Trajtenberg

March 31, 2020

Consider dogs – after long years of seclusion in small apartments, exploding bladders, and unbearable boredom, they now enjoy more outings than they can take, they visit every tree just in case but they don't have enough urine to honor them all, and they retire from time to a time to a safe corner indoors to take a break from the unending caresses and overbearing expressions of love.

Consider young children – they discovered that there is such a thing as a father (if at all) not long ago, about the time they turned two, as this imposing tall person started to reveal his presence mostly by setting limits and tough rules, and yes, from time to time by attempting to play games, particularly over weekends, that often turned out to be off sync with the toddlers' desires. Now this big guy is around most of the time, mostly glued to one of the many screens, but gradually discovering that his cute child can be more than a nuisance, a big expense and a source of discord with the frustrated spouse. This career-driven hunk coercively turned *paterfamilias* suddenly finds out that his little girl can actually be very entertaining, warm, funny, even witty in innocently startling ways. It is actually fun to be able to go out with her around the corner, all due precautions taken, and to have 3 meals together day after day, even if that entails doing dishes time and again.

Consider delivery workers, those intrepid bottom-of-the-economic-ladder youngsters that risk their lives speeding on bikes and motorcycles in the midst of the fumes of aggressive traffic, just to make sure you get your pizza or your fancy meal or your supermarket order just in time. They are absolutely transparent, non-entities, just a humanoid extension of the bikes, an unfortunate necessity till the autonomous vehicles or the drones will do away with them. Now they are the brave soldiers in the "salvation army", the apostles who help us believe that there is still a semblance of normalcy (you can still have your gourmet meal...), the absolutely essential workers on a similar footing as the doctors in overwhelmed hospitals, almost the only real people that we are so delighted to see face to face (or mask to mask) even if at a safe distance.

Now flip the page and consider also...

Consider Hassidic Jews from Brooklyn, New York – from cradle to grave living in a tightly held and supporting community, always crowding in the “yeshiva”, the “kolel”, and of course the synagogue. Home is also jam-packed with lots of children and relatives, but most of the waking hours they are not there – after all their all-consuming mission in life is to grasp the vast ocean of Judaic erudition developed over millennia. They recognize only one type of authority: Rabbis that earned their status due to their superior knowledge of the Torah, and serve as guides for absolutely everything in life, the rest of the world around is just the unavoidable scenography to be feared and avoided. Now togetherness is most dangerous, confinement to the overcrowded home is the dreadful dictum, the lack of TV and internet access (or knowledge of how to navigate it) a dire impediment, and worse of all, the Rabbis are no better than the guy next door in providing guidance in view of the engulfing epidemic. In fact they did worse, at least at first: they told followers to keep with routine prayers and learning in the public spaces, then to do so but keeping some “social distancing”, and only when victims piled up in their midst, to comply fully with quarantine.

The coronavirus will eventually subside, at least for a while, and then most of us will eagerly burst out of confinement and try to resume the old (?) ways of life...Necessity will do the job for most, but also fear of change, lack of alternatives, the angst of the unknown.

What about dogs? If they had a voice they would complain loudly, they will feel deceived, betrayed, abandoned – for them it would have been better never to enjoy such a wonderful intermezzo, better not know that it could be otherwise.

What about children, would they experience the same fate of dogs? And what about their fathers? Would they go back to business as usual, as if they did not discover that these little human-like beings at home are, well, amazing creatures that need fathers no less than mothers (yes, the very fact that the asymmetry is still there in full force is truly stunning for the 21<sup>st</sup> century), and that maybe, just maybe, fathers need them as much?

And what about delivery workers, will they return to the fumes of traffic just to languish in the minimum-wage glory of glaring anonymity?

And what about the Hassidic Jews mourning the victims of the plague that this time was inflicted on them rather than on the Egyptians of Pharaoh's times, would they keep blindly following their elder Rabbis detached from this world? Would they keep accepting their self-imposed poverty and crowdedness for the sake of a life-long devotion to learning the past?

Will our societies keep putting up with the devastating "side effects" of unbridled globalization and narrowly-defined economic growth, greatly magnified by the coronavirus-turned-messenger? Will western democracies recognize the cracks in a system smartly designed centuries past, that clamors for fresh thinking? Would economies policies drawn under the euphoria of the "Great Moderation" and not really reformed in the wake of the 2008 fiasco, still prevail? Perhaps observing dogs enjoying now these precious fleeting moments of joy, will give us pause to ponder these fateful questions – better now than during the rush to the day after...