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## Role of philosophy in the time of crisis (with special reference to Covid pandemic)

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### **Abstract:**

This article attempts to give an opinion on why is it that the question of “role” is being asked particularly of philosophy as this precedes the question of role of philosophy in crisis. And in doing so, we will come across three factors although no exhaustively to be among the salient factors for the question of role with respect to philosophy. Despite those factors being the case philosophy in itself plays an essential role and especially in crisis no matter in what context you put philosophy into, it always thrives in such situation of chaos. And the pandemic of Covid is no less than a chaos where I will show how at the deepest level of the issues in the pandemic are more serious philosophical problems to deal. Thus, Philosophy does act in a very subtle and at the deepest level that its role is undisputed in crisis especially.

**Keywords:** First person perspective, metaphysics, contextualized, coherentism, personhood

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**Introduction:**

Prior to the effort of giving an answer to the above main question although whose semantic and syntactic structure is that of a subordinate clause, which could be interpreted both to form an interrogative remark as well as an assertion. But since one has to make the above topic as its theme it is more appropriate to consider that in the interrogative form i.e. "what is the role of philosophy in the time of crisis (with special reference to Covid pandemic)?" we must first ask ourselves one more question in general and that is why is it the case that such question of "role" is only asked with respect to the discipline of philosophy. And then we will deal with the main theme of the topic in the context mentioned above because the question that I am about to tackle first seems to be the reason why is that we have such themes for philosophers to write on. For that we must need to know the term "role", what does it mean when people use it in such contexts. Both lexical and contextual meaning of the term "role" are with respect to its functioning, so to ask one's role is to ask what does it/one do? And this contextual as well as

lexical meaning is true for every discipline and questions of such kind are never asked to other disciplines other than philosophy.

**Role of philosophy:**

The reason that role-oriented question is never asked of other disciplines be it physics, biology, mathematic and even literature or any other interdisciplinary one is because of their respective realm being clearly specified and very well demarcated. And no problems in one discipline is capable of shacking the foundations of the other discipline even though they could amend or clarify their work citing works of other disciplines (especially in interdisciplinary courses) in a way that their work does not transcend their respective realm. Despite this being the case a third person (who is not acquainted with the discipline) could still ask a role-oriented question due to its ignorance but in the discipline of philosophy even the first person (philosopher) him/herself asks the role oriented question despite being so acquainted with philosophy. Along with experts in other disciplines with the connotation of existential one and such is the issue at hand that we need

to address and elucidate to proceed further in this article. The very fact that philosophers and students of philosophy are asked to write an essay on the role of philosophy in the time of crisis in the context of Covid pandemic substantiates the point of asking role-oriented question from first person perspective. Now let us try to understand the salient factors associated with such kind of inquiry from both experts in other disciplines or from the first-person perspective itself. There seems to be three important factors in determining even a philosopher to ask the role question, first, unavailability of a definition of philosophy. The question of role itself has to do with the definition of philosophy or to ask that what it is that philosophy does is also to ask what the definition of philosophy is to a certain extent. And any philosophers would agree that it is quite to a certain extent impossible to confine the definition of philosophy although we could agree on certain characteristics like philosophy being a Meta account, a foundational one etc. but these characteristics are far from the conception of a definition. As a result, there is always in the non-philosophical world a misconception of

baptizing an act or term or entity as either philosophical or philosophizing in a demeaning sense. Second, the underlying potential in its subfield of becoming an independent discipline or specialized field in itself, when we look at the history of philosophy especially in western this tendency of an offshoot of philosophy becoming an independent or specialized field is quite evident. The topics concerned to Thales, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Descartes, Hume etc were related to making sense about their surrounding by trying to know the origin of the world, the fundamental particles, the conception of God, the process of knowing something, mathematics etc. And now when today we look at these questions or disciplines or terms they all in themselves are looked either by different discipline or are in themselves different discipline. And they no longer form any sort of relation to philosophy as such although philosophy does attach its relation to any discipline it wants because of its Meta characterization. And such tendency allows the discipline of philosophy itself to be looked as once a means to achieve something and not relevant

now. Even today when we look at reality and bring forth the metaphysics of Leibnitz with respect to reality and the conception of fundamental particles, these are no more considered substantial enough to be considered although not conclusively refuted either. And it is rather looked as if it is a romantic intellectual output of someone endeavoring to make sense of reality which now is being catered by physics in a very detailed and independent way. Third, both third and second is kind of linked together, reducibility of any philosophical inquiry into a kind which is catered by non-philosophical discipline. Consider the inquiry with respect to how the mind works today although this field is being explored at a much larger level these days but within it so many inquiries are catered by neuroscience, psychology as well as cognitive science. And in the same respect metaphysical inquiries related to fundamental particles are now being investigated by physics, inquiry regarding human beings are also being reduced to an inquiry by biology although not all of them. But such trends are allowing philosophers to speculate or even to ask whether any inquiry of philosophy

would remain as philosophical at all or could it again be reduced to inquiries catered by other non-philosophical disciplines. This third aspect is also highlighted by experts in other fields of discipline. Based on these three factors, both a philosopher and an expert in other discipline might wonder whether philosophy is just a romantic intellectual rigor or activity that one is unconsciously addicted and to keep the rigor alive philosophers problematize it in a way that no other discipline is able to handle such problems. Well these are although speculations from philosopher sides and allegation from other experts, that is allowing both philosophers and non-philosophers to ask the question related to role with respect to philosophy.

### **Role of philosophy re-established and the notion of crisis:**

Despite the above factors being the case there is still a significant role of philosophy and in time of crises the need is exacerbated further. Now to get hold of this sentence one needs to know what it means by the term "crises" and when do we consider a situation as a crisis. The situation could be both concrete like hunger, etc as well as

abstract like that of a mathematical one. So that means we need an account of the notion of crisis and this will allow us to get back our lost confidence due to above paragraph on the role of philosophy. Crisis here is equivalent to problems in philosophy and as well as in other disciplines which philosophy is capable of handling due to its dynamicity. Due to philosophies non-confinement in terms of a definition, its dynamicity allows itself to be rejuvenated in what a way it wants be it in the form of philosophy of science, philosophy of mathematics, virtue epistemology, philosophy of mind, Metaethics etc. and in terms of crises it allows the kind of analysis that no other discipline is capable of. The role of philosophy personally I would say is incommensurable because of its pervasiveness in other discipline and the amount of impact it had in changing the views of other discipline as well as its own purely philosophical problems like problems in metaphysics with respect to ontology, the issues of possible world in logic, the objectivity of moral principles in ethics and so on. No other discipline has this much of dynamicity in terms of both its pervasive nature as well as its own

significant philosophical problems. So it could be said that philosophy does thrive in crisis as one of my professor used to say that “philosophy always thrives in strife” in whatever context you would like to put it. The notion of crisis in itself is very general and as mentioned at the outset of this paragraph it varies from concrete to abstract so any role in terms of crisis must first contextualize the crisis itself to give an account of the role in that particular crisis. And this allows us to get to the issue of the crisis contextualized in the Covid pandemic where we have to identify the role of philosophy

### **Role of philosophy in the crisis of Covid pandemic :**

The Covid pandemic unveiled to us that we have come so far and yet we are so behind in every aspect be it life itself, science, society, polity etc. It was among those crisis for whom the question of where do we locate the crisis of this pandemic is inappropriate. But rather the question should have been where the crisis of pandemic cannot be found, and the answer is more likely to be nowhere and that is how it has been its influence for more

than a year. Now what is there for philosophy to offer in such conditions where it seems the pandemic itself has rendered many disciplines to a certain extent for the time being practically irrelevant? To look at the role of philosophy in the pandemic crisis one must give an account of the crisis that is prevalent in the pandemic despite being the fact that it has left every aspect in chaos under its influence. So let us look at few crises that are left unchecked by many and yet are having the most underlying and overarching influence on the whole human population and which on analyzing seem to have philosophical problems at its core. But before that one must keep in mind that in the Indian context philosophy is about how to live a life so there the very notion of philosophy having any role is inappropriate because of the intrinsic nature in which they let their philosophy to determine their way of living be it the orthodox or unorthodox school of thoughts.

Let us first consider the issue of different theories purported with respect to certain events regarding Covid and with respect to Covid itself especially in India that had no relation with truth in colloquial sense. Not only

during pandemic but generally the issue of fake news is of a huge concern and especially such news exacerbate the crisis undermining the efforts to curb the pandemic spread. And it is this issue that I will cater to which I believe that at the very root of such issue is a problem purely philosophical in nature. The issue with fake news is that large section of the population sometimes believes in it which has repercussion of great significance. Now to handle this issue one must ask oneself why is that people believe in such fake news and on analyzing in depth one would realize that the issue is purely epistemological where the general question that incorporates the above mentioned question is, when is it justified for one to hold onto a belief? and this is precisely the issue of believing fake news because the other set of beliefs that a person holds seem to be in coherence with the fake news as a result one believes that to be the case and that brings us to the problems or issues related to coherentism in epistemology which says that one is justified in holding a particular belief if it coheres with the rest of the set of beliefs. And to counter such fake news we have fact checker in place which

looks at the correspondence of the alleged fake news with the facts and this would make one understand that the issue at the very core is a confrontation between foundationalism and coherentism. Where the very possibility of believing in fake news is stipulated and felicitated by the principles of coherentism and foundationalism acts as an anti thesis to such approach.

Another issue at the core of pandemic which is of huge importance is the very issue in biology or medical science and that is the probabilistic and statistical nature of medical science. It is a general information in the public domain that the nature of treating Covid patient and the drugs given to them have changed over the period of time and more and more changes are being considered based on the efficacy of the treatment. Here this variation in treatment is very peculiar to biology or medical science and at its core is a simple philosophical problem to consider and that is absence of laws in biology or medical science which otherwise allows science to be conclusive to a large extent despite the syntactic form of such laws having contingent statement characteristics.

And these issues are considered not by biologist or medical scientist but by philosophers who deal with philosophy of biology. And their main concern is always to know how is it that biology being incapable of having laws is yet alleged to have explanation and where would one determine and demarcate the correlation from causation, the coincidence form causation etc. And the pandemic has again reinforced these questions to be prioritized for the philosophers working in the realm of biology and these are issues by no means small in such crisis.

Although there are issues within the crisis of pandemic where philosophy is deeply ingrained but due to the succinctness of this article I will consider one more issue as a concluding remark for this article and that is the issue of subjecthood or personhood. The pandemic has unfortunately taken lives in great numbers and those who succumbed to Covid were registered as number in the records of government data as if their whole personhood or subjecthood was squeezed and confined to a mere abstract number in a record book. The number in the data could not

incorporate the kind of person that human being was and the emotional toll his/her family faced when death devoured him/her. As a result numbers were being recorded incessantly and insensitivity was percolating in the society as if we do not participate in the personhood and subjecthood of each and every human being due to our commonness of being human. Such issues are very philosophical in nature to deal with and of great importance to allow individuals to understand that the personhood and subjecthood is not confined to a body of someone who died but rather it is a shared one with no boundaries. And we must acknowledge it to have a society which is more empathetic than sympathetic and thus more sensitive to each other. So one could say philosophy despite having no confined space being very pervasive and as a result having identity issues also allows it to be dynamic to play a central role in transcending the limited boundaries of other disciplines to look at the underlying issues. Thus in that sense philosophy's role is and shall always be of great importance.

