

The Redefinition of Casual Normative Ethics through Empathetic Choice Under COVID-19

Kay Wagg

March 31, 2021

As a result of COVID-19 it is feasible that everyday engagement with normative ethics will shift the average view of what our duty as humans is. Largely, the restrictions and obligations of COVID-19 have challenged how we engage with the world and each other. For some people, just wearing a mask to help protect others has been a challenge to navigate morally. But others have donated money they can barely afford to help human rights groups fight against oppression while also balancing their own job insecurity. In the pandemic there have been numerous efforts from people, acting as simple reminders that we are not alone in the world that seems so terrifying right now. Early in the pandemic, people shouted from balconies, honked horns and banged pots and pans to remind each other that despite our isolation and grief, we still have something to offer each other; empathy. Despite the fact that the world seems quieter in comparison now, that idea is still true.

There are certainly practical ways to help amid a pandemic which is continued by government struggle to choose between capitalism and human life, but for those who have little say in state action, acts of kindness have remained our moral duty to one another when we are left with little else to offer. Everyday people making the decision to be kind because that is what they can do and not what they must do, have been accentuated by restrictions. There are absolutely those who have been selfish or cruel amid the pandemic, but they have often been met with criticism.

Recently casual normative ethics, in the sense of what attitudes or responsibilities we have to each other in everyday life as a facet of our humanity, have been made unclear by social polarity and modern life, which requires diligence that does not always seem to allow the time to be kind or reflect on what we can do for strangers. It's possible

that the forced slow-down that COVID-19 has offered through isolation and lower populations in public spaces might also be forcing us to actively reflect on what we are doing when we make choices. Giving change to a homeless person you might interact with might mean the difference between them contracting a fatal disease where before it might have seemed like nothing.

There seems to be hope that the empathy that we do find for each other within the constraints of a pandemic-ridden world will outweigh the demonstrations of apathy and will leave room for a more widespread understanding of life as a work of kindness for other humans. Apathy is the easiest to notice when we can see it on people's faces and there are lives that will never be regained due to its prevalence. But we also have empathy, and those who choose to use it encourage its continued use by others. Hopefully, the unfortunate circumstances which bred practice grounds of empathy will inform a post-COVID world which maintains that same level of empathy.