

# Does Covid-19 Rupture Theodicy? Theophilosophical Musings

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## Abstract

When Covid-19 first broke out in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, no one suspected it would go beyond an epidemic. Within less than three months it had become a worldwide pandemic. In the first 15 months since it broke out in Wuhan, the disease grew exponentially, manifesting itself in different variants: *Alpha* (UK); *Beta* (South Africa); *Gamma* (Japan and Brazil); and *Delta* (India). In August 2021, confirmed cases were 204 million people worldwide, with about 4 million people deceased. Although the mortality rate has halted in China and slightly abated in continental Europe, Canada, Asia and South America, due to medical and social intervention strategies, it is steadily climbing in the USA and Africa. The first vaccine was ready only 12 months after the pandemic broke out, making it one of the quickest manufactured vaccines. For those who operate within a theistic framework, an avalanche of existential questions surfaced: Is this the end of the world? If so, does God, the omnipotent, omniscient and loving Divine being, not care about what seems to be the decimation of human beings on Planet Earth? If the Divine being cares, has it lost its power perhaps? Or, if it is still powerful, has it lost its affectivity? This article gives a theophilosophical exploration of these questions to make “sense” of what seems like God’s silence amid the loud noise of the Corona virus. The article asks whether God could be blamed in what may seem like silence, and argues on the meaning of God’s “silence.” It then constructs a theodicy that dispenses God of any wrongdoing in the current pandemic.

**Keywords:** Covid-19; evil; God; human suffering; theism; theodicy; virus

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed a serious challenge to many religious and faith communities. However, I will pursue my disquisition within the parameters of a Judeo-Christian sphere of rationalisation. The challenge posed has to do with the conception



Phronimon  
<https://upjournals.co.za/index.php/Phronimon>  
 Volume 22 | 2021 | #8551 | 14 pages

<https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/8551>  
 ISSN 2413-3086 (Online) ISSN 1516-4018 Print  
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of God (and evil) within the Judeo Christian tradition and whether such a conception of God can coexist within the prevailing pandemic. But, first let me premise my discussion with some bold and daring presuppositions, which have become normative within the Judeo Christian religion. Throughout the history of Western theology, various proofs for the existence of God—from the ontological, the cosmological, the teleological, to the moral argument, have been proffered. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to prove the rationality of God’s existence. The presuppositions I am premising my paper on, are part of a Judeo-Christian worldview and can be summed up as follows (Hick 1983, 5–14):

- That there exists a God;
- Who is loving (benevolent) and caring to human beings and nature;
- And who is at the same time all-powerful (omnipotent), and all-knowing (omniscient);
- And is a creator and sustainer of the universe.
- Furthermore, there exists evil in the world, whether moral or natural; and
- That human beings are entitled to a better and comfortable world.

Following these presuppositions, it is logically admissible for those inhabiting and subscribing to the theistic world that there should be “good” reasons why an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly benevolent God would allow evil (or what seems like evil) to prevail in the world. The existence of such evil, the paper will argue, does not nullify the existence of God nor take away from God his or her ontological perfection. For some, the presence of the Coronavirus, with its continuing ravaging effects on human beings, undermines the belief in the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God. The argument of the sceptic in this case is that if God exists and he or she is what conventional theology argues that God is, namely, the creator and upholder of the universe, and that he or she is a loving God, why does he/she not use their power to prevent this disease from spreading and decimating people? The sceptic’s argument continues: If God has the power but does not use it in the face of such a pandemic, then we cannot help but conclude that God does not care about the annihilation of people. If this conclusion is true, then it contradicts the claim that God is benevolent. For this reason, the Covid-19 pandemic seems to rupture theodicy. By theodicy, I understand a set of propositions that explain the reality of God’s coexistence with evil, without the latter taking anything away from God or making God anything less than a God. The purpose of this paper is to reflect critically on the nature of Covid-19 as an evil, and the role that a theistic God plays amid such perceived evil. The paper asks whether God could be blamed for what may seem like silence on his or her part, and argues carefully on the meaning of God’s “silence.” The paper constructs a theodicy that dispenses God of any wrongdoing in the current pandemic.

## Covid-19 Pandemic

The coronavirus disease is not new. Until now, we have seen three varieties of the coronavirus disease. *The first outbreak* occurred in 2002 in the Guangdong province of China. It manifested as a severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) with symptoms ranging from fever, dry cough, headache, muscle aches and breathing difficulties. For this reason, it was known as *SARS-Cov* (Lvov and Alkhovsky 2020, 65). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) the epidemic spread through 26 countries and infected nearly 8 000 people worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

*The second outbreak* followed in 2012 in Saudi Arabia. It received the medical name, “Middle East Respiratory Syndrome” (MERS), denoted in medical language as *MERS-Cov* for short. This coronavirus, like *SARS-Cov*, also manifested in its victims through fever, cough, pneumonia, diarrhoea and other flu-like symptoms. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reported that the disease may have originated in bats and was later transmitted to camels.<sup>2</sup> The infected camels are said to have transmitted the disease to humans. According to WHO, 27 countries were infected, of which 80% of reported cases were from Saudi Arabia. The virus claimed 858 human lives worldwide.<sup>3</sup>

*The third outbreak*, which is current and is also the subject matter of this paper, is known as Covid-19 (short for the coronavirus disease of 2019) because it belongs to the family of coronaviruses, like *SARS-Cov* and *MERS-Cov*. In fact, the three have a close genetic resemblance. However, Covid-19 surfaced in December 2019 in the city of Wuhan in the Chinese province of Hubei. The disease is claimed to be caused by the *SARS-Cov2* virus (Lvov and Alkhovsky 2020, 65). Although Covid-19 presents with the same symptoms as *SARS-Cov* and *MERS-Cov*, it is more devastating than these. Its transmission mode is via two basic routes (Bhowmick et al. 2020, 1). The first mode of transmission is through respiratory droplets from the infected person’s mouth or nose, which can remain in the air or on surfaces for an extended period of time. The second mode of transmission is through physical contact, especially with hands that may have been contaminated with the infected person’s respiratory droplets. Already in the first week of August 2021, it was reported that there were 204 million positive cases worldwide.<sup>4</sup> This number is significantly higher than the 8 000 cases of *SARS-Cov* in 2002. Again, in the same period, over 4 million people are confirmed dead globally as

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1 WHO International Travel and Health, <https://www.who.int/ith/diseases/sars/en/>.

2 WHO Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-mers>.

3 <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/health-topics/middle-east-respiratory-syndrome-coronavirus-mers>.

4 WHO, Coronavirus Disease Pandemic, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

a result of Covid-19.<sup>5</sup> These fatalities are much higher in comparison to the 858 lives claimed by *MERS-Cov* in 2012. Notably, Covid-19 has affected 235 countries or territories as of 7 October 2020.<sup>6</sup> This is 10 times more than the number of countries affected and infected by *SARS-Cov* and *MERS-Cov*. Thus, *SARS-Cov2* (Covid-19) spread throughout the world far more rapidly and wider than the other two coronaviruses.

Covid-19 can be compared to the Spanish Flu, which broke out in 1918 (Woodward 2020). Both pandemics are characterised by attacking the respiratory system of their victims and accordingly, strategies for mitigation against them involve the wearing of masks, self-quarantining, social distancing and the regular washing of hands. Back then, the Spanish Flu was regarded as the deadliest pandemic in Modern History, with a fatality rate of 20 to 50 million people.<sup>7</sup> The two diseases seem to have been contracted from animals and subsequently spread from one person to another through human droplets. One of the most notable differences between them is that the Spanish Flu struck down those who were previously healthy, including young people. Covid-19, on the other hand, attacks mostly the elderly and those who are vulnerable, with underlying health conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, asthma, lung and heart diseases.

### **On the Origin of Covid-19**

The actual cause of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic is still a subject of investigation. However, there are several hypotheses that have gained currency since the emergence of Covid-19. I will discuss only three that have enjoyed prominence.

#### *Live Animal Market Trading*

There are some research works that have identified the likely origin of the coronavirus to bats and pangolins that are sold in live animal markets in China, for their use in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM). Among those who have recently supported this theory are Wassenaar and Zou (2020); Turcio-Casco and Gatti (2020); and Salzberg (2020). According to this theory, the handling of bats and pangolins at these markets poses a risk of contracting the coronavirus disease, as these animals are the primary hosts of the virus (Wassenaar and Zou 2020, 343). Bats, in particular, are highly sought after for reasons revealed by Turcios-Casca and Gatti (2020, 2):

... a bat genus supposedly responsible for previous epidemic viruses, are captured in China and sold in wet markets because their dried body parts are added to wines or powders to detoxicate the body. Moreover, in some regions of Asia, many people

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5 WHO, Coronavirus Disease Pandemic, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

6 WHO, Coronavirus Disease Pandemic, <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

7 History.com. <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i/1918-flu-pandemic>.

continue to eat bats' flesh because it is considered a delicacy, and in China it is believed to have medicinal qualities.

On the medicinal use of bats, Wassenaar and Zou (2020, 346) concur with the above that "... bats and their excrements are often used in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), which may be a reason for their legal or illegal trading." Interestingly, some animal rights groups and vegans condemn the Chinese practice of traditional medicine, not only for its link with the emergence of Covid-19, but also for acts of animal cruelty that are purported to be taking place in these markets. These groups have made vociferous calls on the World Health Organisation (WHO) to withdraw China's licence to trade in traditional medicine. Salzberg, a professor of biomedical engineering at John Hopkins University, in a magazine, *Forbes* (Salzberg 2020), expresses his objection to TCM as follows:

TCM is not medicine. It's little more than a set of traditional beliefs (or a philosophy, as Nature called it) about various concoctions and their effect on one's health. Most of these beliefs have no evidence whatsoever that they provide any health benefits. Many of them derive from a pre-scientific view (which is not at all unique to China) that eating an animal gives one some of the properties of that animal. This is utter nonsense, of course.

The remarks in the quote above border on ethnocentrism and cultural insensitivity. TCM has proven over the years to be a "cheap" alternative to the so-called "real" medicine for many people. Nonetheless, there is a cumulative effect to the opposition of TCM. In other words, not only does the practice of traditional medicine in China open up the space for animal cruelty, but it also occasions the risk of contracting Covid-19. There is a need for further research to establish the veracity of the theory of bats and pangolins as the cause of Covid-19.

#### *Viral Leakage from Wuhan Institute of Virology*

The second theory propounded in an effort to trace the origin of Covid-19, reveals that this virus was genetically engineered by scientists (who are not named) in a laboratory in Wuhan.<sup>8</sup> Another version of the same theory, which is perhaps more charitable to China, claims that the coronavirus was created (by mistake) possibly in the process of seeking an AIDS vaccine (Ando 2020). This theory was corroborated, among others, by a French virologist, one of the Nobel laureates responsible for discovering HIV, namely Luc Montagnier (Ando 2020). The virologist and his US supporters allege that the coronavirus escaped from a laboratory, possibly by mistake.

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8 *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/heres-how-scientists-know-the-coronavirus-came-from-bats-and-wasnt-made-in-a-lab-14185>.

The viral leakage theory has been rejected by some researchers, who argue that the virus has evolved naturally from animals such as bats and pangolins and then crossed into human species.<sup>9</sup> They further argue that, had the coronavirus been engineered in a lab, there would have been signs of manipulations in the genetic makeup of the virus.<sup>10</sup> For instance, researchers from France's *Institut Pasteur* and the National centre for Scientific Research, point out that a virus of this nature requires animal hosts to grow and to spread to human beings (Ando 2020). This theory seems to have strained diplomatic relations between the US and China. These strenuous relations were exacerbated further by the former US President, Mr Donald Trump, who consistently referred derogatively to the coronavirus as the "Chinese virus" (*The Indian Express*, 11 October 2020; *The Conversation*, 21 April 2020; *The Washington Post*, 16 September 2020). More research must still be undertaken to establish conclusively if indeed this virus was engineered in the laboratory in China.

### *The Fifth-generation (5G) Technology*

Another theory was postulated in an attempt to explain the origin of Covid-19. The theory suggests that there is a causal link between Covid-19 disease and the fifth generation (5G) technology. 5G is the latest wireless mobile phone technology that operates through higher radio frequencies that deliver data more quickly and can also support a bigger capacity of cellular connectivity. According to Morgan (in *Euro News*, 15 May 2020), there is a widespread conjecture that 5G might have adverse effects on human health as it exposes human beings to more radiation than the body can handle. According to the theory, radiation from 5G technology causes Covid-19 disease (Van Prooijen 2020). Notably, there are three variations of the 5G technology theory. The first one is the most radical one as it suggests that Covid-19 is directly caused by harmful radiation from 5G networks. The second variation claims that 5G networks have lowered people's immune response to the virus, thereby enabling the virus to dis-ease and eventually kill those infected. The third variation of the 5G technology theory claims that although radiation from 5G networks does not cause Covid-19, it facilitates the rapid spread of the virus. This implies that the coronavirus is air-borne through these radio-active waves. However, no details are provided on how exactly this takes place.

The 5G theory was so widespread that it influenced the behaviour of people in some quarters of the world to do something about the 5G transmitters. For instance, in the UK and the Netherlands, 5G network transmitters and masts were destroyed by protesters, and workers in those networks were threatened if they did not abandon their work (Van Prooijen 2020).

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9 *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/heres-how-scientists-know-the-coronavirus-came-from-bats-and-wasnt-made-in-a-lab-14185>.

10 *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/heres-how-scientists-know-the-coronavirus-came-from-bats-and-wasnt-made-in-a-lab-14185>.

Despite its widespread occurrence, the 5G theory is opposed by some who regard it as a conspiracy theory that has no scientific basis. Alexander Morgan (2020), for instance, is one such critic. He maintains that the 5G technology cannot be behind the pandemic, either by spreading the virus or by compromising human beings' immune systems. For him, Covid-19 is transmitted via respiratory droplets as one coughs or sneezes. He dismisses the view that radio-active waves can transmit the virus. Van Prooijen supports Morgan in the rejection of the 5G theory (Van Prooijen 2020). He argues that Covid-19 outbreaks have reached even those parts of the world that are still without the 5G networks. He cites Iran as one of those countries and presents the following Covid-19 statistics: Iran, as of 5 October 2020, had nearly half a million confirmed cases and 25 000 fatalities, and yet it has no 5G cellular networks.

Although the three theories above are not conclusive, they shed some light on the complexity of the genesis of this virus. Thus, we cannot dismiss them outrightly.

### **The Effects of Covid-19**

Covid-19 has brought much pain and suffering to the world community. Among the 4 million that lost their lives (following recent statistics), someone was deprived of parents, or children, or spouse, or relatives and or friends. While death is one of the human eventualities, dying from Covid-19 is the most dreadful thing as the victims of this virus die a lonely death, without the support of family and friends for fear of further transmission of the virus on the surviving members of the human species.

Further, in many countries the pandemic has laid bare long ignored risks such as inadequate health systems; gaps in social protection and structural inequalities (United Nations, Policy Brief on Universal Health Coverage, October 2020). The pandemic has also underlined the significance of basic public health; strong health systems and emergency preparedness, of which most countries were unfortunately found wanting in relation to these measures. According to the United Nations Policy Brief on Universal Health Coverage (October 2020), Covid-19 clearly shows that "at least half of the world's population still do not have full coverage of essential health services." A majority of these populations are from the developing world. The UN Policy Brief observes further that "the virus poses the greatest risk to those groups that were already in situations of great vulnerability: those living in poverty, older people, those with pre-existing health conditions, women, children, migrants, and those who have been forcibly displaced."

Not only does the coronavirus destroy lives. It also destroys the livelihoods of people. The virus has also caused disruptions in trade and value chain systems, including capital flow from one country to another, which was caused by containment and mitigation measures against the virus, such as lockdowns and state of health emergencies (*Africa Pulse*, April 2020). It is becoming more and more clear that all of these disruptions have

unleashed a global economic recession of an unparalleled nature that has already started to push 70 to 100 million people into adverse poverty (*Africa Pulse*, April 2020).

More drastic effects of the pandemic are still evolving, and they will surely be incomparable to what I have already captured above, as more waves and variants of the pandemic are anticipated.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the above description of the effects of Covid-19 does still characterise the pandemic as evil and something undesirable.

### **Theodicy: Is there a (benevolent) God despite Covid-19?**

Having established that Covid-19 is an evil of sort, it remains to be argued what sort of an evil it is. Is it a natural (impersonal blind force) or a moral (personal) evil? It is important to answer this question, as from the answer we can determine the extent to which moral responsibility for Covid-19 can be allotted to God and or to moral agents. More often, human beings do not accept the responsibility for natural evils such as earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions and many others. However, more research is revealing how humans precipitate these natural forces (see Richard Swinburne's [1999, 210–222] chapter on “Natural Evil and the Possibility of Knowledge”). The blame is often wrongly apportioned to God alone for such evils.

Covid-19, in my view, inhabits both spaces of evil, the natural and the moral categories of evil. From the point of view that it manifests as a callous force that does not discriminate between the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the Believers and the non-Believers, and that it annihilates people on such a mass scale, it may be categorised as natural evil. But, from the point of view that its origin can also be traced back to acts of commissions or omissions by individuals and groups of people, it can be categorised as a moral evil. This means that human beings have played a role in the outbreak of this pandemic.

Theologians and theistic philosophers have over the years developed theodicies to defend God amidst situations of human suffering. Covid-19 in my view has occasioned such a situation of human suffering. Theodicy can, therefore, be understood as a set of systematic and logical explanations put together in an attempt to defend God's goodness and omnipotence in relation to human suffering (Losada-Sierra 2019, 2); especially in situations of human helplessness where God's intervention is anticipated. Theodicy is a justification, so to say, of human suffering from the perspective of God (if such a perspective exists). In the situation where God seems to have failed, as some argue to be the case with Covid-19, are we then justified to blame God? If we are not, then we are doing *theodicy*. But Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995), a Franco-Jewish philosopher, has already warned us about the entrapment of theodicy. For him, “theodicy is a temptation of man, which helps to maintain a certain tranquillity despite the helplessness

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11 WHO Tracking SARS-CoV Variants, <https://www.who.int/en/activities/tracking-SARS-CoV-2-variants?>



of life and saves people from dealing with the abyss of suffering by justifying the unjustifiable” (quoted in Losada-Sierra 2019, 1). I hope as I attempt to enunciate a theodicy that absolves God from the blame of Covid-19, I will not fall into potential traps that Levinas is referring to, namely, one in which one can easily be complacent and in support of inactivity in the midst of human suffering. This kind of indifference to suffering and the justification of a passive God was seen in many accounts of history. The following are classic examples: *Apartheid* in South Africa; the *trans-Atlantic* slavery; the *Jewish Holocaust*, which Levinas refers to in the quote above, and many others. In the historical accounts above, perpetrators of violence and hate constructed theologies that supported the suffering of the *Other*. I hope the theodicy I wish to defend herein will not justify nor ascribe passivity to God amidst the suffering of the *Other*.

I therefore wish to construct two arguments in defence of God despite the Covid-19 pandemic. The first argument I shall describe as *Teleological*, and the second as *Free Will* argument.

### *The Teleological Argument*

The *teleological* argument I wish to discuss is not the common “Teleological Argument” or “Design Argument” for proving the existence of God, which was first developed by Plato and restated by Thomas Aquinas, and subsequently improved by William Paley in modern times (Hick 1983, 23–26). My argument is intended to show that in Judaic-Christian theism, God is conceived as a being that can turn any morally evil situation to serve a morally good purpose, or *telos*.

Since the emergence of Covid-19, quite a good number of people have been led to believe that the pandemic commands an evil of a gigantic magnitude. Evil, to be sure, is anything that causes intense human and animal suffering in the world on a daily basis, in great plenitude and for a prolonged period of time (Rowe 1999, 157). As can be expected, evil is one of the factors that justify atheism (Rowe 1999, 157). Thus, Covid-19 has led to serious questioning of the justification of God’s existence in the world. But further, if God exists at all, then Covid-19 calls into question the efficacy of his power (potency). The *theist* who may want to insist that God indeed exists and is indeed all-powerful, will lead the *sceptic* to conclude that this may very well be the case, but perhaps what is at stake here, and indeed what is questionable, is God’s benevolence and not his existence. In other words, this suggests that although God is *able* to save us from the coronavirus, he/she is not, however *willing* to save us. If God is able and willing to save us, why does Covid-19 seem to have the upper hand? Simply put, why does it seem that the coronavirus is winning?

The teleological argument seeks to answer the question above. The answer can be framed as follows: God does not cause but permits certain evils, for instance, Covid-19, in order to accomplish a goal that is morally good. Thus, from a moral point of view, we could say certain evils serve a good and noble purpose (*telos*). However, this does

not mean that the suffering caused by Covid-19 is something good, which must be appraised and justified in and of itself. On that score, I concur with Rowe (1999, 158) that “intense human or animal suffering is in itself bad and evil, even though it may sometimes be justified by virtue of being part of or leading to some good which isn’t obtainable without it.” Following the reasoning above, namely, that “good” may issue out of evil, I wish to add that such “good” must surely surpass or outweigh the amount of evil inflicted by the pandemic. Conversely, should God intervene and stop the pandemic, as seems to be desired by many, then more suffering should be caused by this act of God—more than by the pandemic itself. This means that God’s non-intervention in the pandemic should be accepted on the condition that his intervention can be shown to cause more harm than the pandemic itself. Thus, the teleology argument advances a conception of God who is a figure that uses pain and suffering to influence human beings to freely perform the right actions in order to advance morality (Draper 1999, 170). Although Covid-19 hits us and continues to hit us hard, there seems to be some measure of good repercussions on different fronts of our experiences in this pandemic. cursory observation informs us that in some parts of the world, especially the developing world, rendition of some social services was jerked up. For instance, the building of hospitals and clinics; provision of many schools with water and other sanitary equipment; the provision of some relief grants and goods; and some infrastructural development that is sure to benefit people post-Covid-19, can be seen.

Another area wherein a lot of good things seem to have happened, is in the natural environment. During the lockdown, carbon emissions and other forms of pollution were reduced dramatically. These are “benefits” of the pandemic which for some, may be seen as unintended consequences of the pandemic. It would seem then that God used the pandemic to aid the resolution of some issues of service delivery. Further, the pandemic could also be seen as an enabler of the natural environment to recuperate from the damaging acts of human beings. It seems that the pandemic inadvertently effected some measures of social and natural justice.

### *The Free Will Argument*

It is commonly accepted in Judaic-Christian religion, that God, out of his or her free will, has endowed human beings with free-will (Draper 1999, 170). This seems to be consistent with God’s benevolence. In other words, a puppet master-like God is not a perfect idea of God. But since God is perfect and wholly good, he or she lets human beings be free. Following this argument then, I concur with Draper (1999, 170) that “since it is logically impossible to force a person to freely perform a right action instead of a wrong one, God cannot give humans freedom and ensure that humans will never perform morally wrong actions.” Simply put, for respect of our freedom God will allow human beings to do all sorts of things, including committing errors. Thus, God does not determine what we should do or not do. But Draper goes even further in underlining the importance of a human free will. He suggests that “... a world in which humans freely perform both right and wrong actions is (provided that the balance of right over wrong

actions or of morally good humans over morally bad humans is sufficiently favourable) better than a world in which immorality is prevented by withholding freedom from humans” (Draper 1999, 170).

From our exploration of some hypotheses on the origin of Covid-19, it would seem that human agency cannot be ruled out in determining what could have caused the outbreak of the coronavirus. Since there are pointers to China’s wild animal markets as a possible source of Covid-19—even though inconclusive at this stage—all those involved ought to ask serious questions about these markets. Can we continue to handle and or continue to consume certain meats which have the potential to cause diseases such as Covid-19? If indeed, bats and pangolins are carriers of the coronavirus, there is a need to take more appropriate and responsible action to desist from handling or eating these products. I think it is within human beings’ freedom and power to stop future coronavirus outbreaks. As free human beings surely, we don’t have to eat or handle food products that have the potential to endanger our health and life. The natural environment has provided a wide range of food. If we must cross oceans, mountains and deserts to access food and medicine that are safer, the world is undoubtedly within our reach thanks to our developed and sophisticated mode of transport and technology. Thus, it does not make sense to blame God for acts that human beings chose freely—acts such as choosing which food to eat or not to eat.

As far as 5G technology is concerned, the innovation in this regard is laudable and more resources should be set apart for further research and development in this technology. However, care should be taken to ensure that the amount of radiation emitted by these networks is of safe human standards. There are credible quality assurance bodies worldwide, which can be used to ensure compliance with health and safety standards. Honest and open competition among different cellular networks should also be encouraged. Thus, responsible usage of technology is required. Irresponsible acts, driven by profit motives, as when we develop products that endanger our health and lives, cannot be blamed on God.

The leaked virus theory is a more challenging theory to prove. Researchers should be supported to exercise great caution in handling viruses that are potentially dangerous. Laboratory experiments and work in general are necessary to enable us to make inroads into medical science and technology. But all of these should not be done at the expense of our health and life.

From the above, it is clear that Covid-19 can be regarded as a natural as well as a moral evil. This implies that human beings are equally responsible for the cause and curb of the pandemic. Further, Covid-19 does not disprove the existence of God. To believe otherwise, would imply that we relinquish and absolve ourselves from all forms of responsibility, and as we do that, we shift blame for our misfortunes to God and the natural environment. This is tantamount to refusing to be agents of our lives.

## Conclusion

This paper presented Covid-19 as a pandemic that disrupted the lives of human beings in so many ways. The pandemic is experienced as an evil that threatens human beings' very existence. The paper showed that there is an intersection between moral and natural evil in this pandemic. It has argued that the pandemic is more than an impersonal force that seeks to annihilate human beings from the face of the earth. The pandemic can also be seen as something that was brought about by human beings' wrong or mistaken choices. Because of its dual habitation, Covid-19 is a complex disease that requires personal commitment on the part of all who seek to control its mode of spread. The paper dealt specifically with the question of whether the presence of this disease compromises God's power and benevolence. The pandemic has challenged our conception of God, wherein God is seen as a freedom-giver and does not control the world as the puppet-master does. The paper concluded by arguing that Covid-19 does not dispense with the conception of God, who is described as all-powerful, all-knowing and wholly good.

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