how are we still alive? what about there? - performance script

How do we stay alive? Or shall we even try?

I have forgotten since when I started thinking about death a lot, suicide to be specific. Yes it is all the same cliché, thinking what it would be like if I jump out of the window, walk straight into the busy traffic, slit my wrist in a tub of warm water, take tons of pills or the latest one, die from covid. But these ideas do not bother me so much, what bothers me is how I see myself completely useless and think I don't deserve to live. I know it sounds more like I need to see a psychiatrist rather than being here talking to you. But I guess it's fine, I haven't taken the leap. Yet.

For one thing I am afraid of pain. The dying moment seems not only painful but also mysterious. I don't know whether dying or living is more intolerable.
Razors pain you
Rivers are damp
Acids stain you
And drugs cause cramp.
Guns aren't lawful
Ropes tend to give
Gas smells awful
You might as well live.
by Dorothy Parker, an American poet.
but mostly I am worried about the sadness and shame I would bring upon my family. That's how I realised, my life doesn't completely belong to myself. As I tried to understand suicide and the taboo along with it, I came across the book of Simon Critchley who tried to open up a space for talking about suicide.When he talks about non-religious arguments on suicide, our mind would quickly go to the straightforward libertarian argument that I should be free to choose the time, space and means of my death as I wish. But the major premise of this claim is that I enjoy complete self-ownership or sovereignty over myself. Do I? Do I really own myself like I own this piece of clothes? This "self" is more likely to be partially owned by me and partially by others, we are dependent creatures and our ownership towards ourselves is shared alongside "others".

In the past 2 years, I have learnt one thing: my life does not belong to me.
I learned it from my hard-to-explain resistance in taking my own life and another global issue - the covid-19 pandemic.

In the realm of infectious diseases, a pandemic is the worst case scenario. As human civilization rose, these diseases struck us down. The earliest record of pandemic can be traced back to 430 BC in Athens during the Great Peloponnesian War. Two-thirds of the Athenian population died, which not only contributed to their final defeat by the Spartans, but also marked the end of the Golden Era of Greece.

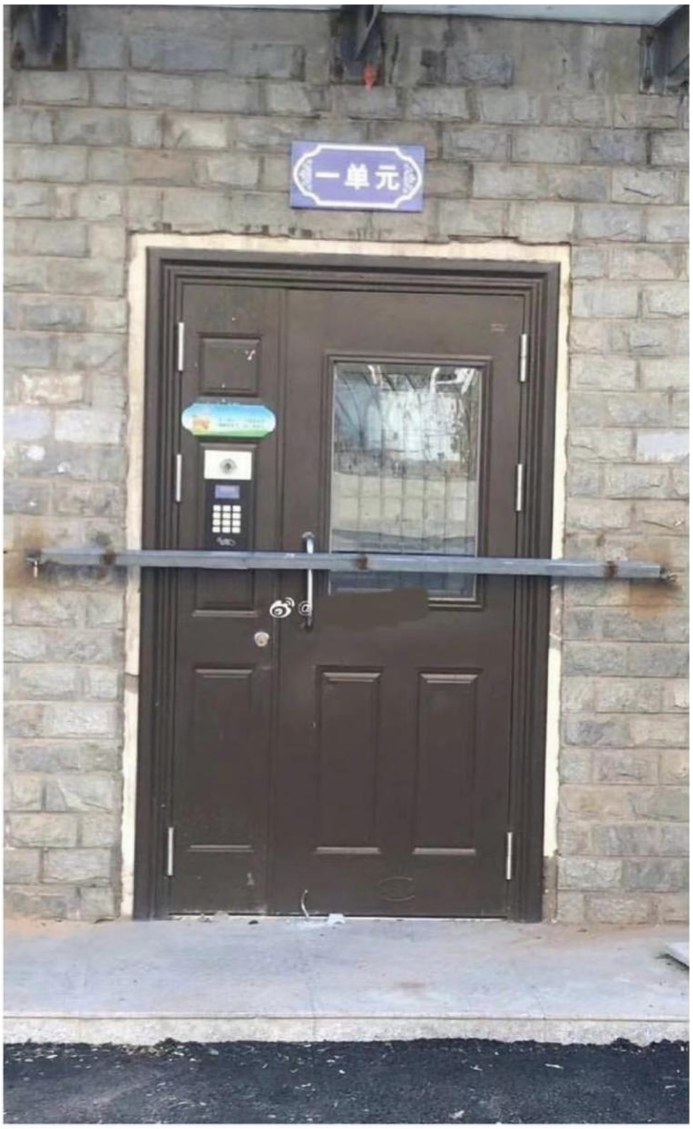
“Connection” is what speeds up and scales up the spread of diseases. The voyages of Christopher Columbus, not only opened the way for the widespread European exploration and colonisation of the Americas, but at the same time brought along new diseases, which were passed along to the native populations by the Europeans. With no previous exposure, these diseases devastated indigenous people, with as many as 90 percent dying throughout the north and south continents. In the face of the pandemics, the indigenous people stood no chance against their colonisers.
Large-scale pandemics do not only have the potential to wipe out whole populations, but then as now had and have an enormous impact on geopolitical power relations.

Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus. No, not covid-19. I am talking about the one that happened in 2003, SARS(SARS-CoV-1). I guess not everyone is aware of how it happened before. I was in grade 3 of primary school, it was pretty cool that we didn't have to go to school and my brother and I could stay home and play around. But my parents became so strange and distant, they would not give us a big hug when they came back from work. My mum works in a medical laboratory, where they provide chest X-rays. Which means she might encounter people with SARS at any time. The first thing my mum did when she came back from work was to take a long shower and change all her clothes before she would even talk to me. It was stressful for her, what she’s afraid of the most is not getting infected but spreading the disease to me and my brother. Yes, she is responsible not only for her life, but also mine. In recent years, I started to feel her. My life, or my choices, do not only affect me, but those I share my life with. Before I flew back to Helsinki, I visited my grandma, she has been quite ill and struggled for some time and I wanted to visit her as much as I could. The next day after the visit I had a fever and I realised I was already not feeling well when I visited her, I instantly thought ”what if I have Covid, what if she got Covid from me, she’s not vaccinated at all and what if she dies”(no need to be dramatic) She always says that the life she has now is a suffering and she’d gladly be rid of it, but the thought that I am the one causing her death is simply devastating.

Now I want to focus on Covid-19, severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the cousin of SARS. Being struck by this new unknown highly-infectious disease, I have come to learn a few things. For example, that the advanced technologies that we are so proud of, are pretty useless in face of a rapid pandemic spread of disease. Technological and scientific innovations alone will not solve the problem, not to mention the politics of interest that accompany them.

In a ted talk in April 2022, Bill Gates put forth suggestions to prevent future pandemic saying that “We can make covid-19 the last pandemic”. Yes I totally appreciate his enthusiasm, but it sounds more like empty words to me. What he suggests is basically putting more money into things that are already there. A specialist team to detect outbreaks, research and development of diagnostic tools and improving the health care system. When the host asked Gates for more details of the plan, the answer is like “the rich countries need to initiate this.” Would they do it? I doubt that. Covid-19 has highlighted the health inequity between the rich and the poor, worldwide vaccine equity has still not been achieved at the moment. Diseases are fair in a sense that they affect us all, we’re equally fragile in face of them, but the resources are not.

I am not interested in further debating on the safety or side effects of the vaccines (even if these debates are totally legitimate and very much needed). Rather, I would like to talk about the non-pharmaceutical interventions. What are non-pharmaceutical interventions?
Early detection, Travel restriction, social distancing and isolation. Analysis of how the outbreak emerged in China suggests that without such measures, mainland China could have seen a 67-fold increase in the number of people infected. China’s ability to initiate mass screening and quick reaction to quarantine is indeed impressive. But is this the way to do it?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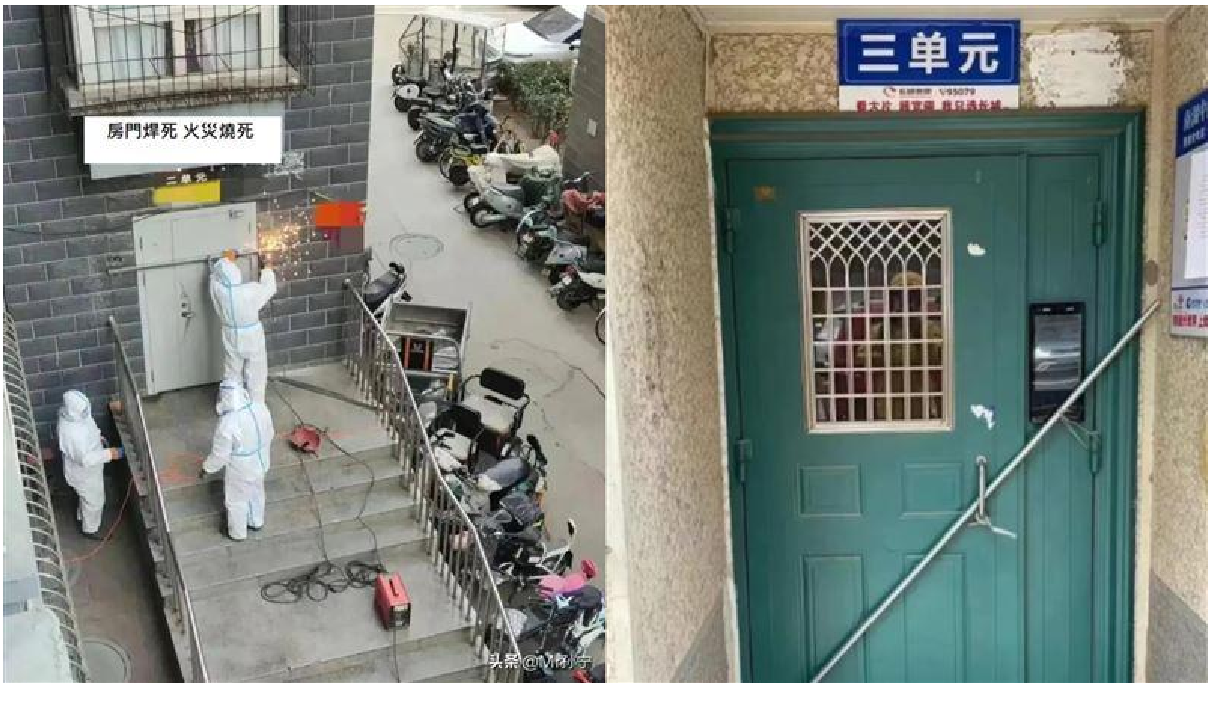
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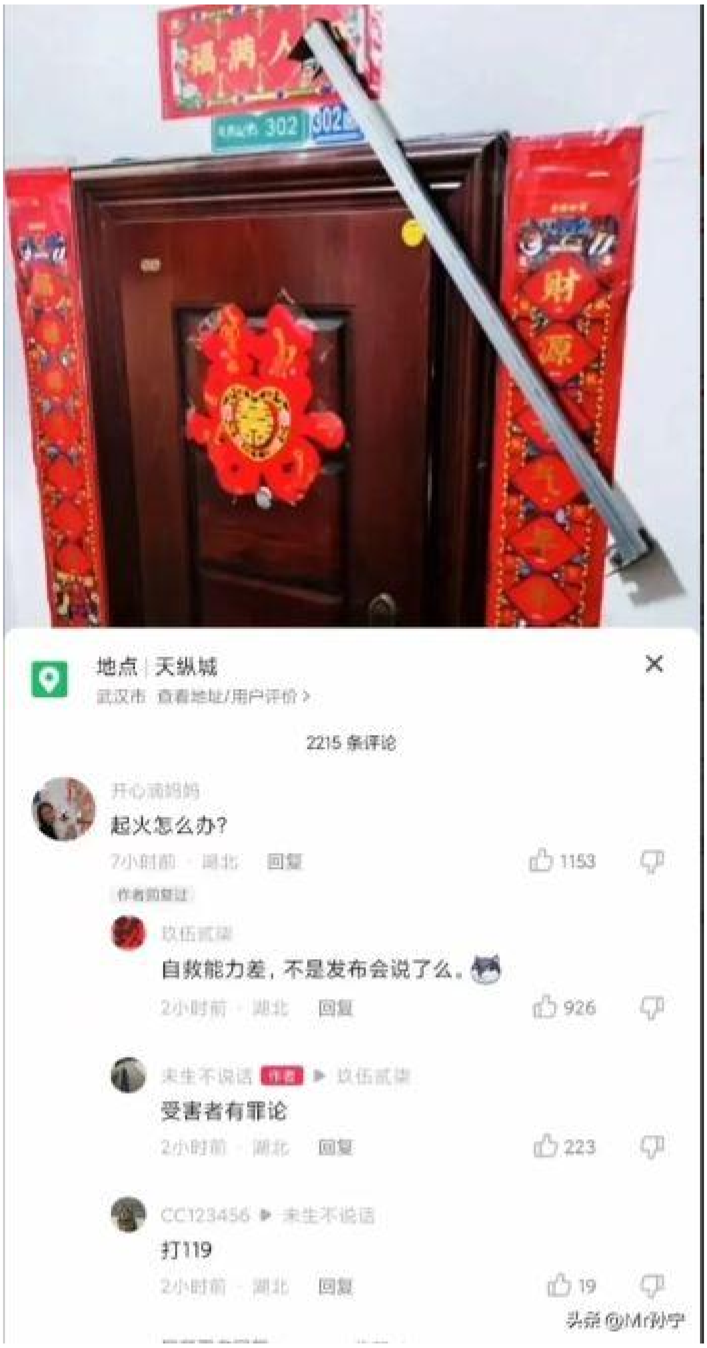
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受害者有罪论
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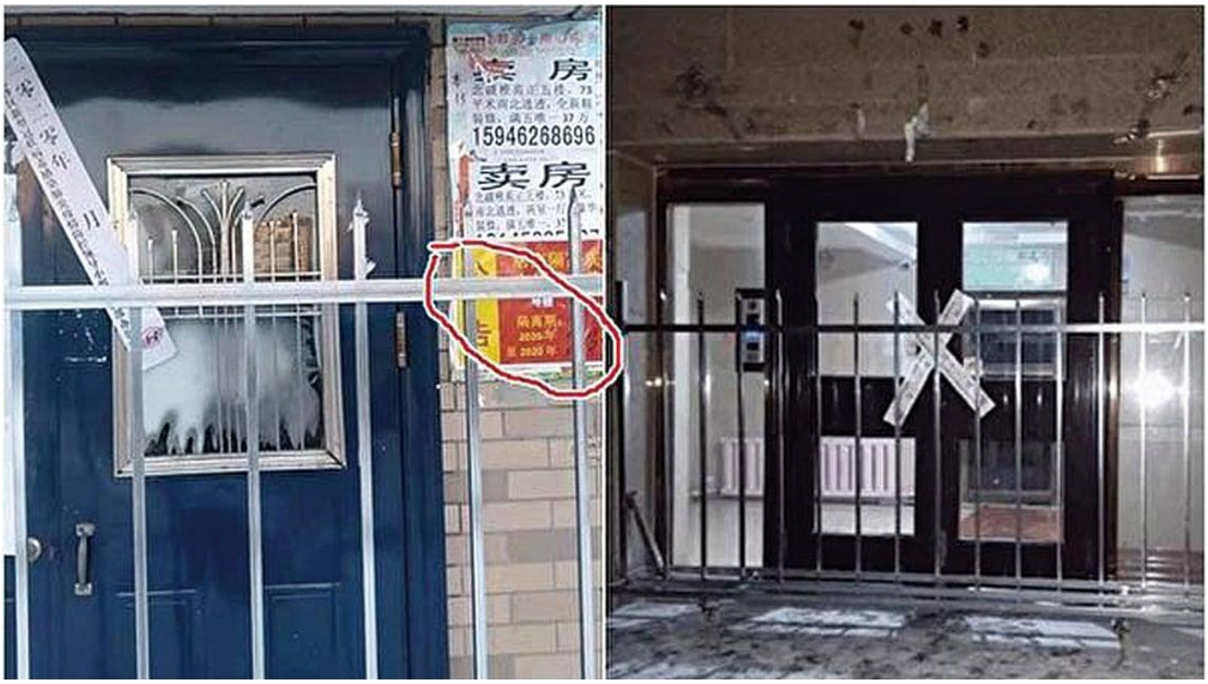
头条 @Mr孙宁



I understand these photos can be quite shocking.

When it comes to situations like this, there are these questions constantly echoing in my mind.

To what extent should one follow or obey pandemic prevention measures? Given that we actually have a choice in following or not following them. But do we? Do we have a choice?

I actually looked up the online news blog of Practical Ethics by University of Oxford to understand the justification of these measures through a philosophical lens. Now you can see how desperate I am. But even after going through all these ethical guidelines for decision-makers to consider, it still didn’t get me any closer to clarifying my own moral standpoint towards pandemic prevention measures.

To what extent should I follow these pandemic prevention measures? Or not follow? Do I have the choice of not following them? Does my individual moral standpoint even matter in such a complex, local and global crisis? Well, probably not. But then that means I have to put my faith in the government, hoping that, in taking these measures, they have the well-being and interest of the people in mind, and not their own political agenda. What. if. I. don’t. trust. the. government? What then? Are there any other options?

Here's one example from Hong Kong: In 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic outbreak, as other countries were rapidly closing their national borders to stop the spread of the disease, this did not happen in Hong Kong. It was so urgent that the medical sector even gathered to protest for closing the border of Hong Kong, but our government decided that they would rather overload our healthcare system than stop business. Can I trust a government like this?

After the tough lesson of SARS, Hong Kong people are trained to protect themselves. We wear our masks properly, sanitise everything, without anyone telling us to do so and these measures have proven to be effective. We're also well-trained to be sceptical of what the government says. We've managed to survive very well without vaccinations in the beginning of the pandemic. To us, the side effects and safety issues of the vaccination have always seemed more dangerous than getting infected. But what's maybe the most dangerous, is how ridiculous the pandemic prevention measures can become. The Hong Kong government used to say that we could dine in restaurants before 6pm but not after that. Probably because the virus is more infectious in the evening.

Does the government really know better what and how to do than we do? Why do we not have the power to make decisions for ourselves? Endless vaccinations, masks and even welding bars on our doors? **Is it moral or just to follow whatever the government asked us to do in the name of the benefits and safety of the majority?**
To mask or not to mask?

As we have the privilege to gather here without masks in these post-pandemic times, that is not the reality in Hong Kong, life is not back to normal, wearing a mask is still mandatory. I came back to Helsinki in January 2023, literally last month and I still feel so strange when I walk out of my apartment without wearing a mask. In Hong Kong, even if I manage to not get caught and fined for not wearing a mask, I would still get the looks from others, blaming me for not wearing a mask.
To me, the ethical/philosophical dilemma of wearing a mask is similar to that of suicidal thoughts. In a sense, they are both a taboo, not wearing a mask and suicide. Ultimately it depends on geography and politics, it depends on if the countries allow you to do or think so. Rules by the country against self-sovereignty. To mask or not to mask?

Does my life belong to myself, my friends and family whom I choose to share my life with, whom I love, or the country which I am “born with”?
Wait, which country? Which country?

I was born in 1994, at that time Hong Kong was still a British colony. Three years later in 1997 was the Handover. Sovereignty of Hong Kong was transferred from the United Kingdom to the People’s Republic of China, ending the 156 years of British rule. During colonial times, Hong Kong has developed a vastly different political and economic system from China’s authoritarian one-party rule. So, to ensure a smooth transition, a treaty called the Sino-British Joint Declaration was signed before the handover setting the conditions for the return of Hong Kong. Hong Kong then became a Special Administrative Region under the principle of “one country, two systems” where we would enjoy “a high degree of autonomy” for 50 years, including an independent judiciary system, maintaining multiple political parties and freedom of assembly and speech. At least that was what I’ve learnt from school. But that is gone already, no more independent judiciary system, everything becomes one party, no more freedom of assembly and speech. It feels like the government is just playing with us with all these mask mandates and assembly ban. It feels like these measures are not only there to protect the public from the pandemic, but also a very convenient way to stop people from forming a mass protest.

My life does not belong to myself. I don’t have absolute sovereignty over my life.

The promised “One country, two systems” will end in 2047. In 24 years from now on Hong Kong - my home - will eventually be “just another city in China”, the clock is ticking. If I choose to stay in Hong Kong, eventually I must become or admit that I am already a Chinese national. Do I have to? By then, it will probably be a taboo to call myself a Hong Konger.

But taboo or not, in the end even the government cannot forbid me to kill myself, perhaps the least sovereignty I can have.