

# SOME CONTRADICTIONS ON COVID-19

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## Abstract

*Aristotle identifies the principle of non-contradiction as a principle of scientific inquiry, reasoning and communication. To address some of the problems entailed in the issue of COVID-19, it is important that the reasoning and communication entailed in the inquiry is devoid of contradictions. This is because, philosophically, if any issue is to be addressed convincingly, it must be such that does not entail contradiction. This paper identifies and examines some of the major contradictions entailed in the COVID-19 inquiry and projects that if they are properly identified, some of the major problems involved in the inquiry will be easily resolved. The paper adopts critical analysis and reflective argumentation to pursue its aim.*

**Keywords:** Contradiction, Covid-19, Pandemic, Inquiry, Reasoning

## Introduction

A contradiction is a combination of statements, ideas, or features which are opposed to one another. COVID-19 pandemic issue entails situation and circumstances which are opposed to one another. Discusses on COVID-19 present inconsistent elements. From a philosophical perspective, if any issue is to be addressed correctly and from the right perspective, it must be such that does not entail contradiction. This is one of the reasons why the laws of correct reasoning in logic includes the law of non-contradiction which holds that contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time. This law is a general principle derived from how things are in the world, apart from being a logical law of thought. As a perennial discuss at the moment, the contradictory issues entailed in COVID-19 discuss are both metaphysical (about how things are in reality) as well as semantical (about the language use or the model). COVID-19 has been one major problematic discuss that has affected (and is still affecting) all areas of the human existence for the past two years without a major solution yet to be provided as a response to its effects. At the moment, covid-19 becomes one of the problems in philosophy because it is still a perennial problem as there is still no solution to it, once there is a solution to it, then, it may be seen as outside the scope of philosophical inquiry and subsequently be regarded as a subject of discuss for purely medical, health or any other discipline in its entirety. In the quest for truth and the attempt to proffer solution to the issues surrounding COVID-19 discusses, philosophers have been able to identify a key issue as regards why the Pandemic issue remains knotty. This paper identifies and analyses some of the contradictory issues entailed in the COVID-19 discusses projecting them as reason why the problem cannot be easily solved.

## What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is the disease caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. World Health Organisation (WHO) first learned of this new virus on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2019, following a report of a cluster of cases of 'viral pneumonia' in Wuhan, People's Republic of China (WHO-Coronavirus Disease-Answers). On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 a global health emergency and in March 2020, it was declared by WHO as a global pandemic. COVID-19 represents one of the first unanticipated and unexpected lethal risks that Western population and the whole world at large have had to deal with. With COVID-19, a newly found fear surrounding risk and death arose because a virus began spreading that which was not treatable with any known vaccine and no proven widely accessible medicine could reduce the likelihood of it producing serious complications.

In order to fight against the virus, several attempts were made to proffer solution to the disease. On Feb., 15, 2020, the Director of WHO (General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, at the early days of the pandemic 'we're not fighting against epidemic we're fighting against info-demic' (Zarocostas 2020) he was referring to the various conflicting rumour and misinformation being spread across the globe regarding coronavirus diseases on social media and other spaces which facilitated the misunderstanding and controversies about the virus, its origin and decision making about the virus among the populace.

Since the outbreak of this novel virus, there have been arguments on the origin of COVID-19, globally and even locally. The spread of COVID-19 in Nigeria bear a resemblance to the spread of misinformation and disinformation, this has led to contradictory issues about the novel corona virus. On the issue about the existence of COVID-19, there have been several arguments and contradictions about whether, the virus existed or otherwise. In Nigeria, information casting doubt on the existence of the coronavirus is spread especially through social media channels like twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, etc. and also through other informal channels. Even some top celebrities and few religious leaders with considerable influence have doubted the existence of the virus, and shared conspiracy theories on its origins and the interventions instituted to prevent further spread of the virus.

On the argument about its existence, some contradictions further manifest themselves. Some researchers believe that the epidemic is merely as a result of natural contingency and that humans, in the larger order of things, are just a specie with no special importance whereas others holds that the coronavirus changed its genetic make-up and gave rise to a new strain of virus and perhaps originated in bats or pangolin. Some said the virus escaped in the laboratory during a random experiment by a group of world class scientists. While another school of thought has it that it was made from the new 5G technology mixed with certain inorganic chemicals in order to control the world population and that a group of world power has the cure (Zizek 2020: 14). The diversities in the spread of the information about the existence of the coronavirus is the origin of the several contradictions which are entailed in the COVID-19 discuses.

### **Salient Contradictory Issues on COVID-19**

The law of non-contradiction rules out certain circumstances as impossible- circumstances in which a statement is both true and false (Varzi 2014). The contradictory issues entailed in

COVID-19 discuss are both metaphysical (about how things are in reality) (Tahko 2009: 31-42) as well as semantical (about the language use or the model) (Mares 2004: 270). This implies first that, the contradictions which can be identified with the COVID-19 discusses are such that are traceable to the way we see or interpret the world, pre- COVID-19 and given the 'new-normal'. And next, to the way we use or model our language as well as the way we are being interpreted while we speak about COVID-19. This is part of what Black (Black 2020: 2) meant when he holds; "...but COVID-19 arises as a pandemic that plunges us into unknown and breaks into each and every one of us. COVID-19 breathes on the entire world. The same phenomenon for everyone, but to which everyone reacts differently starting from their own singularity. Each with their own point of attachment which crystallizes in a unique and unpredictable way."

As a discussion within the context of philosophy at the moment, it is of importance to note that it is not the case that there are neither epistemological nor ethical issues entailed in the contradictory discuss about COVID-19, there are, but such has been subsumed within the metaphysical and semantical discourse in this paper.

The contradictions entailed in COVID-19 is the reason Black approaches it as an inherently antagonistic phenomenon which reflects in our social, political, economic and linguistic relation. It is however of importance to acknowledge that COVID-19 did not create these contradictions itself but with its effects at the moment, there remains no suggestion that these difficulties will be surpassed even 'after the pandemic'. This is because the effects of the virus and its social, cultural, economic, linguistic and political impact will, if anything, remains a prescient force. Viewed in this light, there is the need to begin to identify as well as confront these antagonisms as we encounter them (Sharpe and Boucher 2010: 106-109, such that we can gradually begin to surpass them in bits. If the identified contradictions are well understood and addressed, it may provide a kind of right perspective for addressing some of the problems as regards COVID-19 through informative and instructional function in the fight against COVID-19 as well as guarantee effective and targeted public health enlightenment on covid - 19.

The first major contradiction is about the existence of the pandemic. Though the word 'coronavirus' was largely unheard of before the start of 2020, it now reveals a 'new reality', one that can allow us to access the inherent failure, limitation and contradiction of our social, economic, linguistic and political orders. COVID-19 pandemic reveals something that we had previously considered 'impossible' now an 'actuality'. It can therefore be referred to as 'the possibility of the impossible'. According to some conspiracy theories, COVID-19 does not exist but it is a plot by the globalist elite to take away our freedoms hence they hold that it was made from the new 5G technology mixed with certain inorganic chemicals in order to control the world population and that a group of world power has the cure. Some other theorists see it as biological weapon and propose that it SARS-COVID2 escaped from a lab in Wuhan China resulting in the COVID-19 pandemic while genetic sequencing has it that the virus has entirely natural origins as a zoonotic virus originating in bats.

These contradictory interpretations about the origin of the coronavirus are such that if they are

not properly managed, they can actually lead to people's carefree attitude in the way they take to precautions about the virus and subsequently can lead to the infection of many, if the virus actually exists.

Aside the diverse accounts about the origin of the 'coronavirus', situations in the world at large and in Nigeria in particular shows contradictions about its existence. For instance, while there was total lockdown of schools, markets and offices by the Government to avoid the 'spread' of the said virus and prevent people from being infected, there were freedom of movement for political campaigns, rallies and elections in the same state and at the same time in some of the states in the same country. With this kind of development, one could attempt to find a new word probably to help frame the various ways in which the virus serves to entangle itself, not just in our biological make-up, but also in our social and political relations. Another contradiction reflects in the way the Nigerian government wants us to believe that there is COVID-19, so they ask us to stay away from basic things of life and daily living that could make us gather, such as going to the places of work, markets and religious gatherings yet, they allowed things that were of lesser value that would make us gather. Their expression is really a contradiction to their action. In one of the social media memes which came up during the lockdown for instance, there was this inscription that 'if government say stay at home, I will obey. If hunger say go out, I will obey... they are both leaders'. The meme identifies government and hunger as 'leaders' who should both be obeyed. This meme reveals the government one sided approach to issues which contradicts what their roles to their citizens should be. There was news about how government in developed states took care of people in their states using various interventionist programme but the opposite was the case here in Nigeria. Rather, than taking care of the people, they took care of themselves and their pockets while claiming that they had done the needful.

Still on the issue of existence, Adebomi (2021) observes that apart from the health challenge which COVID-19 had posed, a large number of contradictions were also placed as linguistic burdens on the populace through the efforts being made by stakeholders to appropriately represent and convey the manifestations of the disease in unambiguous ways and in understandable terms. At times, communicators' intentions also pose contradictions in the new COVID-19 era.

The echoic as well as the direct nature of some of the COVID-19 related social media memes as used by Nigerians further establish the greater possibility for a language utterance to have more meanings than what is stated or that of an interpretation beyond the spoken words, which are contradictory (Ambrose, C.L. and Idegbekwe, D.I. 2020). For instance, in another meme with the inscription 'stay at home or dance with us' alongside the pictures of four men whose image and outfit portrays the dressing pattern of undertakers in Nigeria during burial processions and their performances further shows some contradictions. 'Staying at home' here connotes 'living if not infected' while 'dance with us' implies becoming a dead body to be carried by undertakers if infected. If viewed side by side with some other inscriptions such as 'COVID-19 is not a death sentence' which means you may be infected by the coronavirus and not become dead, further portrays some contradictions.

Another contradiction was on the issue of the NCDC Report on COVID-19. In the developed countries daily reports were given which tallied with the reality obtainable in actuality. However, in the case of Nigeria what we had were reports of figures which were contrary to the actual reality. There were cases heard about the attachment of benefits for whoever allows records in his state to be inflated. We even had a case where a Governor on his Facebook said 'Ninety per cent of the noise about COVID-19 is for political, economic, financial, or material gain. The other 10 per cent relates to ordinary flu, like the common colds Nigerians generally suffer,' Onyeji (2020)

Another contradiction on COVID-19 is on the issue of the vaccine. Apart from the contradictory reports on the effects of the vaccine on the people, there are contradictions inherently identified with the vaccine itself. Initially, the vaccine was said to be cure for the coronavirus, but later on, it was identified as a protective measure. The vaccine is neither curative nor fully protective as one can still be infected even after taking the vaccine. Now, like every other vaccine that we have ever had, if COVID-19 vaccine do not provide a hundred percent protection, then, what is the essence of mandating the public to take it? This seems to be contradictory

Pre-COVID-19, the dominating idea was that of globalization which promotes bonding, closeness, togetherness, etc., but given the COVID-19 development, all these became things that were to be avoided as we take up the new normal. This in reality poses a contradiction to our ways of living as humans in the society. For instance, ordinarily speaking, the norm in our society is that the husband and wife are supposed to be one body, doing things together, an interpretation of that is that husband and wife are supposed to be sleeping together on the same bed, but COVID-19 has designed life so much that once a person is affected or infected with the virus, regardless of the person's status, husband or wife, one has to keep a distance from such infected individual, even if you want to be a caregiver to such infected person, it should still be at a distance. This kind of contradiction entailed in reality in our world has been further buttressed by some of the social media memes to buttress the fact that these contradictions are real. For instance, in a social media meme a so-called 'asunder bed' was humorously drawn in two with the write up 'social-distance beds now available for couples'. This really portrayed one of the contradictions that are obvious in our society given the rise of the pandemic.

As far as the COVID-19 pandemic is concerned, there seems a major and natural contradiction which nobody as at now have been able to explain. Ordinarily speaking, the effect of the pandemic should have been felt more in the less-technologically advanced part of the world, say Africa for instance. Several scenarios in Africa as a result of our people's reaction to the pandemic explain why Bill Gates said that the impact of the pandemic in Nigeria would be grave to the extent that dead bodies would litter the streets. But to the contrary, this less-technologically advanced part of the world experienced lesser records of deaths than what was recorded in the technologically advanced part of the world, in spite of the advanced technology. This is indeed a contradiction in reality.

Another major contradictory issue on the COVID-19 pandemic is about the statistics made by

the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) on the number of infected people, number of discharged patients, and mortality rate. Numerous questions were raised from different angles by people who were skeptical about the true existence of the virus viz a viz the validity or correctness of the data provided versus the obtainable reality and the transparency of the Nigerian government.

Among other things, the use of face mask has been largely contradictory. There were contradictions on the issue of wearing the nose masks. In the first days of the pandemic, the WHO made statements that healthy people do not need to wear mask. Later as the pandemic continues, WHO advises that cloth masks are not recommended under any circumstance. This warning is perhaps based on the results of a trial comparing cloth masks with medical masks for health care staff.

### Conclusion

As a perennial discuss, most of the problems identified with COVID -19 discusses has been knotty. This paper examined some of the contradictions which are responsible for the inability to proffer solutions to most of the problems identified with COVID-19 discusses. Given the variety of contradictory statements which were found on various social media platform which gives conflicting ideas to people about how they should handle issues pertaining to the pandemic. This paper identifies and analysis some of the contradictory issues entailed in the COVID-19 discusses projecting them as reason why the problem cannot be easily solved. The paper submits that if these contradictions are addressed properly, the indeterminacy associated with language use will be clarified. As such the right perspective for addressing some of the problems as regards COVID-19 through informative and instructional function in the fight against COVID-19 will be provided and it will guarantee effective and targeted public health enlightenment on COVID -19.

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