



A VIRTUOUS PANDEMIC? (IM)MORAL RESPONSES TO BLACK DEATH IN DANIEL DEFOE'S A JOURNAL OF THE PLAGUE YEAR*

ERDEMLİ BİR PANDEMİ Mİ? DANIEL DEFOE'NUN VEBA YILI GÜNLÜĞÜ'NDE KARA ÖLÜME KARŞI AHLAKİ (OLMAYAN) TEPKİLER

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Abstract

Throughout the history, humanity has suffered many pandemics which people have responded to in various ways, struggled to cope with, and ultimately survived. As the history has made humanity witness, there is not even one pandemic until now which humanity has not come through. However, to survive a pandemic requires multiple capabilities, not only physical, social, and financial, but most importantly a moral capability. In this sense, the narratives of pandemic are stimulating to discern how moral and immoral attitudes are adopted while going through hard times. In the light of it, Daniel Defoe's A Journal of the Plague Year published in 1722 sheds light on the Great Plague of London in 1665 by using a rationalist point of view which places the novel among realist historical narratives. However, Defoe's documentation of the 1665 plague is also a narrative of morality that depicts and gives insight into how people behave in the times of a pandemic and respond to them morally or immorally. Considering Defoe's range of people—the wealthiest people running away from the city at once, the governors who quarantine houses leaving people to death, the ignorant infectious people spreading the plague, the fraud ecclesiastics, physicians, and magicians who exploit people; and the ones who prefer to survive by taking care of each other—A Journal signs how the people who are suffering and the others who take advantage of their suffering give moral or immoral responses to a fatal pandemic. To provide an insight into the current (im)moral responses to today's Covid-19 pandemic, this study is an effort to make the place of moral philosophy, and specifically virtue ethics, visible in the narrative of Defoe which could be accepted as a call from over the centuries.

Öz

Tarih boyunca insanlık, insanların farklı şekillerde karşılık verdiği, baş etmek için mücadele ettiği ve nihayetinde onları alt ettiği birçok pandemiden mustarip olmuştur. Tarihin insanlığı şahit kıldığı gibi, şu ana kadar insanlığın atlatamadığı tek bir pandemi yoktur. Bununla birlikte bir pandemide hayatta kalmak, sadece fiziksel, sosyal ve finansal değil, en önemlisi ahlaki olan birçok yetenek gerektirir. Bu anlamda, pandemi anlatıları zor zamanlardan geçerken ahlaki ve ahlak dışı tutumların nasıl benimsendiğini kavramak için ilham vericidir. Bunun ışığında, Daniel Defoe'nun 1722'de yayımlanan A Journal of the Plague Year [Veba Yılı Günlüğü] adlı eseri, bu romanı gerçekçi bir tarihsel anlatı kategorisine dahil eden rasyonalist bir bakış açısıyla 1665 Londra Büyük Veba salgınına ışık tutar. Bununla birlikte, Defoe'nun 1665 veba salgınına belgelemesi, aynı zamanda insanların pandemi zamanlarında nasıl davrandıklarını ve pandemiye ahlaki veya ahlak dışı olarak nasıl tepki verdiklerini tasvir eden ve bunu açığa çıkaran ahlaki bir anlatıdır. Defoe'nun insan yelpazesi göz önüne alındığında—şehirden derhal kaçan önde gelen zenginler, insanları ölüme terk ederek evleri karantinaya alan valiler, vebaı yayan cahil insanlar, sahtekar din adamları, doktorlar ve insanları sömüren sihirbazlar; ve birbirlerini kollayarak hayatta kalmayı tercih edenler—A Journal, acı çeken insanların ve onların acılarından faydalanan diğerlerinin ölümcül bir salgına nasıl ahlaki ya da ahlak dışı tepkiler verdiğine işaret etmektedir. Bu çalışma, günümüz Covid-19 pandemisine verilen mevcut ahlaki (olmayan) tepkilere ışık tutmak için, yüzyıllarca öteden gelen bir çağrı olarak kabul edilebilecek Defoe'nun bu anlatısında ahlak felsefesinin, özellikle erdem etiğinin, yerini görünür kılmaya çabasıdır.

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Introduction

It has been three hundred and fifty-five years since London's Great Plague of 1665 which has taken the attention of many writers including Daniel Defoe, who gave a post-writing about what happened during the outbreak of the plague having taken more than 100,000 lives. As a journalist as well as a novelist, Defoe's story-telling that is combined with official information and statistics makes his work, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (henceforth *A Journal*), a guide to support Londoners for the coming of a possible plague outbreak. Daniel Defoe was a five-year-old survivor of the Great Plague of 1665; however, a rumor about the coming of the plague in Marseilles in 1772 that could arrive in London prompted him to tell the stories of the Great Plague, as a warning, via his narrator H.F.—a wealthy saddle maker “stepping into the role of a reporter and historian” (Kelly, 2013, p. 53). H.F. aims, in the first place, to give trustable information about the plague and plague statistics since other sources of information like gossip and oral reports were also infectious and were “mimicking the contagion and the hazards of the plague” (Loar, 2019, p. 50). To prevent the “overhasty orality [which] causes further spreading of the contagion” (McDowell, 2006, p. 96), H.F. has the intention to tell the “truth” as he frequently states. However, this survivor who is fictionalized as a reporter and trustworthy narrator appears also as a moralist informing the future readers or future sufferers about what should be done besides what happens in the middle of such a kind of catastrophe. While the dos and don'ts H.F. strongly notifies were extremely substantial for the reader of the eighteenth century as they were mostly intending to inform them about the practical behaviours or avoidances in case of a plague, they are noteworthy for us today, especially in terms of our moral behaviours, as we are suffering another deadly pandemic which resounds the dictum of “memento mori” at any moment. In this sense, reading *A Journal* in the fatal atmosphere of Covid-19, the twenty first century equivalent of the Great Plague of 1665, would surprise, accompany, and console us in terms of discovering what is right and wrong for not only to survive but also to survive as moral agents against such a life-threatening invisible enemy.

In this semi-fictional, semi-documentary narrative, the reader is given a moral point of view that is based on virtue ethics. Defoe's depiction of people and their responses to the pandemic clearly reveals whether they adopt virtues or vices, and behave in accordance with them. While the conditions during a pandemic are tried to be regulated by a ruled-based morality, those rules are also possible to be

violated because of the chaos and the strong fear of death as observed in *A Journal*. In this respect, Defoe's emphasis on the vitality of virtues that should be adopted during a pandemic is a conscious perspective. Virtue ethics is not "*narrowly act-centered [...], and in this respect, it takes seriously the issue of what a well-lived life is*" (Halwani, 2003, p. 169). Within this context, Defoe's claim of flourishing life during the pandemic is based on being virtuous, and living well not only individually but also collectively. The portrayal of people in *A Journal* is mostly related to their manners which emerge as a result of their moral predispositions. Thus, Defoe's characters are the representatives of virtuous or vicious people in the society whose representation would contribute, as the narrator claims, to the moral responses during a possible pandemic. In accordance with the claims of virtue ethics that "*virtue of character (ethos) is a result of habituation*" (Aristotle, II.1,1103a) and only this habituation brings flourishing and happiness, Defoe's narrative deserves to be evaluated as an embodiment of virtue ethics. Although *A Journal* has been addressed in terms of its moral perspective by some critics (Sinha, 2020), an analysis based on virtue ethics is missing; thus, this study points out how *A Journal* proposes the claims of virtue ethicists.

In *A Journal*, Defoe gives many stories that "*tell of big issues [and] malevolent or benevolent human nature*" (Seager, 2008, p. 651). Considering the life and death struggle, it is not surprising that this bilateral nature of human being reflects itself much keener than ever before. In such a chaotic atmosphere, Defoe's narrator H.F gives "*observations or memorials of the most remarkable occurrences, as well public as private*" by mirroring not only what "*happened in London during the last great visitation in 1665*" (AJ, 4) but also how the Londoners morally or immorally responded to those events. The (im)moral responses of the Londoners are depicted as the consequences of their virtuous or vicious dispositions, which are "*engendered in us through practice or habituation*" (II.2, 1104a) as Aristotle claims. In this sense, in Defoe's narrative, the reader is presented the portrayal of (im)moral dispositions which recommend to refrain from the vices and habituate virtues in life, in general, and during a pandemic, in particular.

Thus, *A Journal* adopts the moral function of literature which would transform both the individual and the society. "*Raymond Stephenson argues, even visual signs are cast in vocal terms in A Journal as sights which speak to the observer and convey a moral lesson*" (qtd. in Degabriele, 2010, p. 9). In this sense, morally doing the right or the wrong thing is given as a core dilemma from the beginning of the

narration when H.F. faces to make a choice between “*to stay in London, or shut up [his] House and flee, as many of [his] neighbours did*” (AJ, 15). Though he is wealthy enough to leave the city and move to a safer place, our narrator is quite filled with “*very serious Thoughts of the Misery that was coming upon the City, and the unhappy Condition of those that would be left in it*” (AJ, 14). Seriously considering his “own Case” and how he should “dispose of” his self, his moral dilemma lies before him: “*I had two important things before me; the one was; the carrying on my Business and Shop; ... and the other was the Preservation of my Life in so dismal a Calamity*” (AJ, 15). H.F.’s moral dilemma is resolved in relation to his Christian faith which requires an absolute trust in God in any condition: He thinks the plague is really from God and he should stay to see and narrate what is happening because God will preserve him “*in the midst of all the death and danger*” (AJ, 18). Revealing his dilemma about choosing the right thing in the middle of such a calamity, H.F. clarifies that he is trying to advise people what kind of actions

to take in such a case, especially if he be one that makes conscience of his duty, and would be directed what to do in it, namely, that he should keep his eye upon the particular providences which occur at that time, and look upon them complexly, as they regard one another, and as all together regard the question before him: and then, I think, he may safely take them for intimations from Heaven of what is his unquestioned duty to do in such a case; I mean as to going away from, or staying in the place where we dwell, when visited with an infectious distemper (AJ, 18).

H.F.’s insistence on staying in London by justifying his choice with the “*will of Heaven*” (AJ, 18)—against his brother’s warnings who believes it would be the choice of “*foolhardy people*” (AJ, 19)—includes a subtle kind of morality in itself. Though he justifies his moral choice with the “*goodness and protection of the Almighty*” (AJ, 22) and claims it is his duty to God, he seems to believe in his duty to people as well. First of all, staying in the city would make him a witness of a historical incident which should be transmitted to other people to take precautions in potential future cases. Secondly, as frequently stated, leaving any place with even one sign of plague means spreading it to other places and people, which is more than being an act of great ignorance, but an unforgivable immoral act. When they are all considered, H.F.’s choice is not only a religious obligation, but also a virtuous response to the plague. *A Journal*, starting with the moral dilemma of its narrator, continues with the stories of the (im)moral acts of people who either experience such a moral

dilemma or ignore even to question the options in front of them, and thus, behave viciously. In this sense, it is vital to examine how virtue ethics is adopted or ignored by the sufferers of the plague in *A Journal*, which is also a response to the reality of death people are facing in the name of today's Covid-19 pandemic.

The Appearance of Vice During the Black Death

The history has witnessed many catastrophes that resulted in chaos among people. In a chaotic atmosphere, many immoral actions are highly observed, and the categories such as justice, freedom, solidarity, and progress look discredited and outmoded (Schäbler, 1987). As a reporter, H.F. mirrors how the disease makes many of them cruel and rigorous to each other because people rapaciously try make use of the situation, and thus, respond to the deadly plague in an extremely vicious way:

The power of avarice was so strong in some that they would run any hazard to steal and to plunder; [...] without regard to the danger of infection, take even the clothes off the dead bodies and the bed-clothes from others where they lay dead. [...] the women [...] committed a great many petty thieveries in the houses where they were employed. [...] They did tell me, indeed, of a nurse in one place that laid a wet cloth upon the face of a dying patient whom she tended, and so put an end to his life (AJ, 125-126).

As an eye-witness, H.F. is startled how people have hearts “*so hardened, in the midst of such a calamity, as to rob and steal [and] all sorts of villainies [...] practiced in the town*” (AJ, 25) when “*the dead-cart might stop at their doors in a few hours to carry them to their graves*” (AJ, 132). The rapid spreading of the plague parallels the spreading of “wizards and cunning people” attracting people who are captivated by the “*prophecies and astrological conjurations, dreams, and old wives' tales*” (AJ, 33). Defoe likens “*the clamour to a type of mass hysteria*” (Kavanagh, 2012) that makes people behave incredibly weirdly. The people are in such a lunacy and delusion that “*printing predictions,*” “*prognostications,*” “*dreams of old women,*” or “*the interpretation of old women upon other people's dreams*” are all expected to be a remedy for them (AJ, 33-34). By using people's worries and desperations, not only the pretenders of magic and black art, but also of medicine open up a great trade which results in robbing and cheating those miserable people of their money, but even worse, their health by poisoning their bodies “*with odious and fatal preparations*” (AJ, 47).

The Londoners are so scared that they do harm to animals by killing about forty thousand dogs, and five times as many cats (*AJ*, 180) since the animals are suspected to spread the contagion like humans. When the things seem dire, many of the Londoners would not think twice to do the same thing to other humans, in the middle of the life and death struggle, which is the point where people show their tendencies to be virtuous or vicious agents. Although the Londoners had still hope at the beginning of the spring, the increasing number of the deaths triggers fear and helplessness which results in sharp splits in the society. While the wealthiest people—the Nobility and Gentry—flee from the city with their servants to take refuge in safer places in the country, the poor in the populous out-parishes are *shut up* by the magistrates as a caution. In this respect, the moral duties of administrators are discussed by H.F., who appreciates the Lord Mayor of London and other magistrates in terms of their efforts to support the poor, by sending officers to buy food and some other needs for them while they are kept indoors, and so, to cope with the plague. In this respect, by going beyond the sphere of the personal, Defoe proposes a moral response of the magistrates, which includes the virtues of justice, care, and compassion; and thus, he raises a wide range of questions about the ethical responsibilities of social and political institutions. In *A Journal*, the members of the Court do not hold either rightful or moral responsibility for the Londoners as they fly out of the city for Oxford as early as possible, which is identified by H.F. as “*crying of vices*” and “*breach of charity*” (*AJ*, 26). The Court’s response to the plague is a total isolation, even escape, from the rest of the society by abandoning their legal and moral responsibilities. Pollitt defines the Court’s escape to Oxford to continue their hedonistic and profligate ways as the “fecklessness” and “selfishness” of the rich, which is another human constant (2020, p. 11).

The degree of the flight from the city, or the degree of the possibility of the quarantine, increases or decreases in accordance with the degree of poorness. The rumors which spread in the city faster than the plague—though mostly not having any foundation—opens the survival gaps between the classes, even within the same class. While the Crown totally leaves the city immediately, the richer sort gets into the ships waiting for a relaxation. While the lower rank gets into “*hoys, smacks, lighters, and fishing-boats; and many, especially watermen, lay in their boats*” (*AJ*, 170), there are many people left who do not have even the opportunity to escape, but contrarily do the hardest jobs at the heart of the plague—men are mostly hired as watchmen, grave diggers, cart-holders, and women as nurses taking care of the wealthy sick. “*As the poor cannot keep in safe as the rich are able to do [...] they*

went at all hazards” (AJ, 118). The case of poor servants is very miserable as they are

obliged to send up and down the streets for necessaries; that is to say, for food or physic, to bakehouses, brew-houses, shops, &c.; and who going necessarily through the streets into shops, markets, ... meet with distempered people, who conveyed the fatal breath into them, and they brought it home to the families to which they belonged (AJ, 111).

The worst is that they are accused of transmitting the infection as a result of their own recklessness; thus, they are dismissed and sent back to the town. Obviously, they are left to death as they are put out of their business by their employers. Throughout *A Journal*, H.F. particularly focuses on the misery of the poor laboring class who have to provide the most fatal services. When they are infected, they have “*neither food or physic, neither physician or apothecary to assist them, or nurse to attend them,*” thus, they die “*calling for help, and even for sustenance, out at their windows in a most miserable and deplorable manner [...]*” (AJ, 127-128).

The more the pandemic comes to its height, the more vicious acts are to be seen in the society. As it is nearly impossible to prevent the spreading, the magistrates have to take some strict precautions which have the worst impact on the poor once again. The shutting up the houses is accepted as cruel, though vital, because the closure of the social areas such as the taverns, play houses, ale-houses, and coffee-houses is not enough. However, the infected poor families who are strictly confined by the magistrates are “*terrified and even frightened to death by the sight of the condition of their dearest relations, and by the terror of being imprisoned as they were*” (AJ, 85). Leaving people to death by locking them down, which is evidently an immoral act, results in some other responsive immoralities on behalf of the people who are facing immorality. Many armed watchmen or nurses assigned by the magistrates to accompany the infected ones either leave them to die or kill them intentionally. However, on the part of the confined people who are infected, so many vicious fatal acts against the watchmen and nurses appear as well. While many infected people try to escape either by deceiving the watchmen in some different ways or incredibly blowing up the watchman with gunpowder which is totally inhuman, they display an immoral act not only against the watchmen or the magistrates but also against the whole society as they are a great threat in terms of infecting many others. Those who are viciously deaf to the “*hideous cries*”

of the burning watchmen or of their own relatives that are “*left sick calling for help*” (AJ, 82) are careless of infecting other people. The intentional infecting is a common phenomenon in the society for which H.F. has difficulty in explaining in any way. Some people who are infected—and know they are infected—carry the disease into the houses of the families showing hospitality by accepting them. This “cruel and ungrateful” deed, according to H.F., “*cannot be reconciled to religion and principle any more than it can be to generosity and Humanity*” (AJ, 84). The intended infecting is an obvious vicious act, which should be accepted as killing intentionally whatever the reason or motivation is—sometimes because of desperation, some other times because of an evil wish to hurt others. The wish to infect other people is observed in a great deal that it is accepted as “*natural to the infected people to desire to infect others*” (AJ, 106). As an extreme example, a man who has the plague infects a woman by kissing her—like “*a mad dog runs on and bites at every one he meets*” (AJ, 240)—and claims why she should not have the plague as well as him (AJ, 238). This *wicked inclination* needs to be explained because it is a very clear act of hatred, wish to harm other people, or avenge for the person’s own despair. As a nearly incredible event for the readers of the journal, H.F. focuses on the great debates about the reason of that inclination among the physicians in those days. While some of the physicians would find the reason

[...] in the nature of the disease [...] with a kind of a rage, and a hatred against their own kind [...] Others placed it to the account of the corruption of human nature, who cannot bear to see itself more miserable than others of its own species, and has a kind of involuntary wish that all men were as unhappy or in as bad a condition as itself. Others say it was only a kind of desperation, not knowing or regarding what they did, and consequently unconcerned at the danger or safety not only of anybody near them, but even of themselves also (AJ, 229).

Although some of the physicians try to justify the intentionally infecting as a psychological motivation of desperate people, it is obvious that they are not insane but wicked in terms of their vicious responses to the plague. The existence of many others who refrain from infecting not only their relatives but also distant others by waiting for their death alone at their home demonstrates that it is possible to have a virtuous responsibility for other people. Considered within this scope, the significance of predisposition as claimed in virtue ethics appears. Despite the rules or strict laws, there are still many people behaving in accordance with an evil

intention. Defoe does not depict evilness in terms of a cause-effect logic because the only cause, that is pandemic, results in different ethical responses. In this sense, rather than the rules in deontological ethics, a virtuous character predisposition proposed in virtue ethics is revealed as the proper solution to the vices observed in the society.

Then, the vital question appears: What is the motivation of many people to do even the worst vicious acts when a pandemic is on the stage? What is the main motivation for people—not only ordinary people but also the Court—to leave their moral responsibilities behaving with unforgivable vices? Christopher Loar remarks how “*anthropogenic and non-human atmospheric pollutants work conjointly with discourse and human emotions to shape and propagate epidemic illness*” (2019, p. 39). In this respect, the plague is intensified by “fear” in *A Journal*, in which H.F. strongly reflects the atmosphere of “fear” very frequently within his discourse. H.F.’s frequent statements of “*my fears,*” “*their fears,*” “*fear of the poison of the infection,*” “*fear of the plague,*” “*fear of the distemper,*” (AJ, 15, 43, 46, 130, 10) and so on, reflects the total atmosphere of fear which lies beneath the conscious or unconscious motivations of people. As soon as the fear rages without the control of common sense—just as the rage of the plague spreads— it is not possible to stop it; because “*nobody can account for the possession of fear when it takes hold of the mind*” (AJ, 353). Peter Degabriele, by examining intimacy and survival in *A Journal*, emphasizes how fear is the basic nature of humankind in Defoe’s writing and how it is “*extraordinary and less recognized, though, is that civil society does not change this*” (2010, p. 1). To understand the fear that *takes hold of the mind*, it is necessary to go in deep and find there the latent fear of humankind: the fear of death. Basically, the fear that directs people to extremities, including vicious ones, is mostly grounded on the fear of death. In this sense, the vicious responses are better to be analyzed in terms of people’s vicious responses to death.

In *A Journal*, death prowls around in such a grievous way that many people have the tendency to act without any commonsense. The Londoners who witness death at first hand, and are also “led by their fright to extremes of folly,” such as running to “*conjurers and witches, and all sorts of deceivers*” for remedies, poison their bodies with pills and preservations “*beforehand for fear of the poison of the infection*” (AJ, 45-46). When death is before their eyes, when they are the eyewitnesses of the mass graves, when the grave diggers as “*a common image of these epidemics [are] wandering through the streets in order to gather the dead*”

bodies to bury them" (Jeican, Botis, & Gheban, 2014, p. 127), when there is no more tolling the bells, no more coffins, no more weeping or wearing blacks as funerals come like beads-on-a-string; people begin to feel not only despair but a huge fury. H.F. remarks: "*In a word, people began to give up themselves to their fears and to think that all regulations and methods were in vain, and that there was nothing to be hoped for but a universal desolation*" (AJ, 253). The fear and fury are the psychological responses to the inevitability of a coming death, and what is worse, the fear and fury increase in a great deal as they are not responses to an individual death, but to a collective one which threatens the end of civilization. In "Pandemic Fear and Literature: Observations from Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague*," it is stated that in *The Scarlet Plague*, "*as in reality, human reactions to plague can vary greatly, but still all share a terrible fear, the fear of death—both as the end of one's life and as the end of civilization*" (Riva, Benedetti & Cesane, 2014, p. 1755). Their reading of pandemic literature in terms of the fear of death, not only of the individual but also of the humanity, is well received in *A Journal* especially when the responses of the Londoners are regarded.

The fear of death becomes the most prominent determinant that the primary tendency appears as a vicious solipsism as it is stated in *A Journal*: "*[T]his was a time when every one's private safety lay so near them that they had no room to pity the distresses of others [...] for the danger of immediate death to ourselves took away all bowels of love, all concern for one another*" (AJ, 171). When death fear prevails, even in families, the family members lose their sense of care, love, and intimacy as they focus on their individual survival. Thus, the peak of the pandemic which drives people to despair results in a blind ignorance of moral rules in *A Journal*. H.F. states that "*nothing was more fatal to the inhabitants of this city than the supine negligence of the people themselves*" (AJ, 113). It has been a paradoxical issue in the history of the pandemics that people tend to exhibit vicious behaviours though they relate the reason of the pandemics mostly to the dialectic of a theological crime and punishment. Either in monotheistic holy books—such as in the Bible and Koran— or in ancient literary texts—such as Homer's *Iliad* and Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*—, the plague is given as the gods' punishment for the earlier sins of that society and a warning for their forthcoming immorality. What is paradoxical is that this assumed warning of the divine does not mostly result in the favour of moral behaviours, but "*the uncontrolled fear of contagion [and death] among the public*" brings about "*the loss of all social conventions and a rise in selfishness and avarice*" (Riva, Benedetti, & Cesane, 2014, p. 1753).

When many behaviours of the Londoners in *A Journal* are considered in this sense, it is apparent that the idea of the inevitability of death is commonly responded immorally because people are not only plagued, but they are also plagued by the fear of death. This human attitude is observed in many earlier works such as *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio and *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, who emphasized that “*the fear of contagion increased vices such as avarice, greed, and corruption, which paradoxically led to infection and thus to both moral and physical death*” (Riva, Benedetti, & Cesane, 2014, p. 1753). Many of those vices appeared in the name of saving one’s individual good while the collective good was disregarded. In this sense, those people who contributed to the spread of the pandemic, or in many vicious ways to the death or suffering of other people, destroyed the possibility of not only a collective salvation but also an individual one in terms of surviving, more importantly surviving morally. However, living in the end times requires a collective stance operating with morality because death is the only reality in the end times; however, good death is hard to achieve. Thus, the motto of “die well” is the general moral response when the whole society is threatened by death. This motto stands against the fear of death since it is a moral response to the spiritual and corporeal corruption, which regards the benevolence of the society as well as the individual. In *A Journal*, H.F. is aware of such a kind of moral response and necessity which could save humanity not only from corporeal but also moral death. As a consequence, his narration does not exclude some unique people who give a moral response to the plague, in other words, to death.

The Possibility of Moral Responses When Living in the End times

Although H.F. portrays a great deal of vicious people who violate their moral duties with “*some stupidity and dullness of the mind,*” (AJ, 51) he depicts how some others followed their conscience and moral duties in spite of the harsh reality of death. In this sense, their response to the plague, or in other words to death, was shaped by the virtues they adopted. Whether by taking an action or not taking any action, to be virtuous appears as the main identifying feature of a pandemic. H.F. mentions many several cases “*of good, pious, and religious people who, when they have had the distemper, have been so far from being forward to infect others that they have forbid their own family to come near them, in hopes of their being preserved, and have even died without seeing their nearest relations*” (AJ, 107). In this sense, they welcome their death in contrast to above mentioned ignorant people, who infected the others with a vicious intention. H.F. clarifies that if people

do not behave virtuously, namely caring for other people and refraining from harming them in any way, the governmental rules would not be sufficient to protect people from each other in the time of a plague, or in any pandemic. Thus, he clearly problematizes the deontological point of view which bases the right action upon the established rules. For instance, related to the example above, he believes that “*the shutting up houses thus by force was of little or no service in the whole*” (AJ, 107) as far as people did not care for and show compassion to the other people. Defoe gives the idea that the rules do not work as people do not adopt virtues as predisposition.

In terms of virtue ethics, care is a noteworthy virtue which “*respects rather than removes itself from the claims of particular others with whom we share actual relationships*” (Held, 2006, p. 11). In this sense, care and compassion appear as significant virtues that should be adopted in the time of a pandemic both by ordinary people and by the paid-workers who take part in healthcare and any other social work. Besides some vicious watchmen, nurse-keepers, and buriers, H.F. portrays some others who work with a virtuous care and compassion at the cost of their lives: the examiners who are appointed in every parish looking for sick people, the watchmen who watch the infected houses, the searchers and surgeons who are responsible to offer a true report on the bodies of the dead, and nurse-keepers who care for the person dying of the infection. Their duty demands more than doing a paid social work as their work requires sharing the pain and suffering of other people. While “*no neighbours nor friends suffer to accompany the corpse to church, or to enter the house visited*” (AJ, 64), they do it. Behaving in accordance with compassion, which is a significant virtue especially in agent-based virtue ethics, requires responding to the suffering of other human beings (Van Zyl, 2018, p. 200). In this sense, the people H.F. portrays are motivated by compassion—an inner state and trait that the virtue ethicists find sentimental in a positive way (Frazer and Slote, 2015, p. 197). Similarly, Collins and Garlington, the academics of social welfare policy who research on “*a more moral coronavirus response*” during today’s Covid-19 period, state that compassion is “*the core virtue especially in healthcare and social work [whose] distinguishing characteristic is shared suffering*” (2020). While the social workers during the death process of the sufferers show a great compassion, the workers who serve after the death process relieve the suffering of the survivors by holding their responsibilities to the corpses, and thus, share the sufferings of their families.

It is possible to deduce from *A Journal* that living in the end times also requires what is labeled as care ethics in contemporary ethics, which is significant in terms of healthcare and death care in case of a pandemic. According to that, “*society should be reorganized to be hospitable to care, rather than continuing to marginalize it*” (Held, 2006, p. 18). WHO (2016) states that “*an important ethical issue regards the scope and limits of healthcare workers’ obligations to provide care during a pandemic; thus, they are accepted as bound by an ethic of care*” (qtd. in Smith & Upshur, 2019, p. 801). In this respect, although Defoe does not consciously use philosophical theories of ethics, he obviously reveals the virtues related to them, which are required to survive a pandemic in a moral way. In this respect, similar to the contemporary theorists, H.F. reveals how compassion is a vital virtue to be adopted not only by social workers but also by the clergy. H.F. is aware of the fact that “*a plague is a formidable enemy, and is armed with terrors that every man is not sufficiently fortified to resist or prepared to stand the shock against*”; thus, it was not a surprise to him that a great many of the clergy “*withdrew and fled for the safety of their lives; but ‘tis true also that a great many of them stayed, and many of them fell in the calamity and in the discharge of their duty*” (AJ, 344). It is apparent that although their work requires the duty to care for people by showing compassion, no rule or law could force them to do their duty in real sense if they do not embrace those virtues willingly. H.F. records in his journal that “*the courage and religious zeal*” of those people who risked themselves “*for the service of the poor people in their distress*” without boasting of themselves and blaming the others by “*branding them with cowardice*” were showing an unordinary strength (AJ, 345). The strength they hold is a moral strength that is taken as a weapon against death. H.F. states that their response to the pandemic is vital as “*it was not like appearing in the head of an army or charging a body of horse in the field, but it was charging Death itself on his pale horse; to stay was indeed to die*” (AJ, 345). This moral attitude that is appreciated by H.F. is also significant because it collaborates with other virtues such as humility and gratitude, which are the core Christian virtues. Thus, according to H.F., if some people have more moral strength than the others, rather than boasting of “*their ability to abide the stroke*” and upbraiding “*those that had not the same gift and support,*” they should be humble and thankful as they are “*rendered more useful than their brethren*” (AJ, 345). In this sense, although H.F. accepts morality as an innate faculty that is bestowed to some people more than the others, he apparently illuminates the way of the reader

that should be directed to a moral attitude operating with virtues, in case of the plague, or any threat of a collective death.

In terms of the administrative field, compassion appears as a significant virtue to be used to “*recognize suffering and take actions to alleviate it*” (Collins & Garlington, 2020). In *A journal*, H.F.’s focus on the Lord Mayor’s response to the plague, whose management is appreciated by him, reveals how compassion is a vital virtue to be approved by administrators and officers. He portrays how “*the civil officers, such as constables, head-boroughs, Lord Mayor's and sheriffs'- men, as also parish officers, whose business it was to take charge of the poor, did their duties in general with as much courage as any, and perhaps with more*” (AJ, 347). To H.F., any public work during the plague includes more hazards because those people are subject to be infected much more than the others. H.F. depicts how a part of the people doing a public work from head to foots adopt a highly moral attitude to other people as a result of their sense of duty and conscience despite the high probability of infection and death. As they risk their lives to serve mostly poor districts, they reveal another core virtue that should be embraced, especially on administrative level: justice.

During the plague, or in any pandemic, chaos is inevitable as people are deeply concerned about the access to resources they will survive on as well as to social services that will keep them alive. In this sense, “*the fair distribution of resources and the social structures that enable what the Dutch philosopher Patrick Loobuyck has called a ‘condition of equality’*” (Collins & Garlington, 2020) is based on the core virtue of justice on behalf of the administrators. A contemporary researcher Ruth Faden asserts in her contribution to “Ethical Issues in Pandemic Planning and Response” that “*the greatest moral challenge posed by a pandemic is how to respect commitments to social justice in the face of the overwhelming and entrenched inequalities*” (2007). In this sense, *A Journal* discusses whether social justice as a moral challenge is applied or not during the plague of 1665. H.F. frequently makes a remark on the Lord Mayor– “*a very sober and religious gentleman*”– indicating how he cared for his society with compassion and justice by appointing physicians to examine people and prepare cheap remedies to relieve the diseased poor “*in all the circumstances of the distemper*” (AJ, 53). H.F. indicates that contrary to the ignorance of the Court; Lord Mayor, other magistrates, and sheriffs work hard for all sorts of people either by wandering in threatening streets or accepting people in emergent cases and hearing their complaints and grievances;

thus, justice is “*executed in all cases without interruption*” (AJ, 272). However, when *A Journal* is read between the lines, there appears a gap about the real intention of the magistrates. Although H.F. praises the magistrates of London for their devoted service, his statement of how “*the good management of the Lord Mayor and justices did much to prevent the rage and desperation of the people from breaking out in rabbles and tumults, and in short from the poor plundering the rich*” (AJ, 191) brings in mind whether the real intention and motivation of the magistrates is to behave in a pure moral way or to prevent any chaos that would come from the rage of the poor and be directed to the rich. When H.F.’s comments on the shutting up of the houses—certainly by magistrates—are considered, it is realized that he does not approve it; however, he does not relate it to the misgovernment either.

H.F. mentions the shutting of houses constitutes the melancholic and “*the most grievous story*” in the history of the plague (AJ, 55). The law requires to confine the sound and the sick in the same house in spite of the grievous complaints of people. H.F. narrates the horrible stories related to this rule which is regarded as necessary for preventing the spread of the plague but not applied in a moral way as it should be. The houses strictly shut up mostly belong to the poor while the rich take shelter either in the country houses or ships. Thus, the moral attitude of the administrators is problematized since the shutting up of the sound with the infected disregards the virtues of justice, compassion, and care. In *A Journal*, H.F. insistently laments for those people who are subject to the viciousness of the compulsory quarantine which is implied, though not stated directly, to be a precaution for saving the established social system rather than the lives of the people. In terms of the lack of the medical houses—which could be augmented if the earlier plagues had been taken into consideration—and the unreliability of the bills announced by the government, a defect in the moral attitudes of the administration is also mentioned in *A Journal*. Christopher F. Loar states that “*bad politics produce dangerous bodies*” (2019, p. 41), especially during a pandemic. In a similar way, H.F. observes some incidents related to bad politics which are also immoral. He narrates how healthcare services were lacking because “[i]t was a great mistake that such a great city as this had but one pest-house” (AJ, 111). As stated above, in terms of “*the lack of credibility of the printed bills*”, H.F. receives it as a moral fault and “*repeatedly underscores the problem of uncertainty and bad information*” (Loar, 2019, p. 51); he “*laments the inaccuracy of the bills at least thirteen times*” (qtd. in McDowell, 2006, p. 92). This vicious attitude of the magistrates creates a public distrust, and this is more openly revealed in Defoe’s *Due Preparations* by

commenting “on the *'Fraud used by the Parish Clerks, in forming the Weekly Bills'* (p. 146), and [notifying] that searchers enter plague deaths as spotted fever so that houses and shops are not quarantined (pp. 176-77)” (Seager, 2008, p. 646). In this sense, Defoe obviously depicts the role of administrators who should be moral agents during the plague; and if not, how the society loses the mutual trust, thus, the possibility of mutual survival. He reflects Aristotelian virtue politics which deals with the knowledge of the good—“*the highest master science*” (Aristotle, 1094b)—that would result in a virtuous life of both an individual and the political community.

At that point, the virtue of solidarity, another core virtue during a pandemic, is presented as a counter weapon both on the individual and collective level against the vices of ignorance and greed. Solidarity is given as a must-be moral response during the plague though it is sometimes adopted and some other times rejected in the society. For instance, on the administrative level, some regulations and measures to relieve the poor are sometimes ignored; while on the social level, the absent citizens who flee from the city ignore their responsibility to “*contribute to the relief of the poor*” (AJ, 138). In regards to the ministers, some of them refrain from comforting those who lament miserably; thus, they show an immoral ignorance to “*poor dying creatures calling out for ministers to comfort them and pray with them, to counsel them and to direct them, calling out to God for pardon and mercy, and confessing aloud their past sins*” (AJ, 154). In this sense, solidarity is related to spiritual support for the other as well as to the material charity—which is also appreciated by H.F. stating that it was so great both in the city and country that “*a prodigious number of people who must otherwise inevitably have perished for want as well as sickness were supported and subsisted by it*” (AJ, 309-310). The reciprocal obligations and collective responsibility in the society are revealed to be very vital though they are not recognized at the beginning of the plague, but mostly realized towards the end as H.F. lets the reader acknowledge. H.F. relates this illumination to a better understanding of “*a near view of death [which] would soon reconcile men of good principles one to another*” (AJ, 259). Thus, it is observed by H.F. that when people have a real understanding of death—a real awareness of the finiteness of life reminded them by the inevitable plague—, “*ill blood, prejudices, breach of charity and of Christian union*” that were put far from them are rediscovered (AJ, 259). In this context, H.F. clearly states the fear of death—a metaphor of pharmakon, both the poison and the remedy—should be turned into a new understanding of it:

Another plague year would reconcile all these differences; a dose conversing with death, or with diseases that threaten death, would scum off the gall from our tempers, remove the animosities among us, and bring us to see with differing eyes than those which we looked on things with before (*AJ*, 259).

It could be commented while the fear of death had created immoral responses in the society before, the real understanding of an evident death functions as a unifier and “*a moral educator*” that reconcile people “*in the sense of exposing the folly of thinking that the kinds of preferences which result from a utilitarian calculus could make life meaningful*” (Sansom, 2009, p. 336-7). H.F.’s claim is that it would be the unique solution against the fear of death to behave in accordance with solidarity and “*to go hand in hand [...] with the most complete harmony and affection*” by disregarding “*prejudice or scruple*” (*AJ*, 260). At that point, H.F.’s main intention to write *A Journal* that is to prepare people for an oncoming pandemic, especially to prepare them morally, is strengthened. H.F. makes it clear that reconsidering how immoral behaviours bring worse consequences would guide people in case of another pandemic which has the potential to create a chaos in the society. However, to take a moral stance—namely behaving in terms of the core virtues of compassion, care, justice, and solidarity as an umbrella virtue—would be the unique way of surmounting the difficulties mostly stemming from the fear of death.

The importance of solidarity should also be considered in terms of individual rights and collective good. Collins and Garlington state as “*[i]n a global pandemic, the actions people do or don’t take affect*” each other, “*the shared emergencies require solidarity, which recognizes both the inherent dignity of each individual person and the interdependence of all people*” (2020). The conflict between being an individual and being a society is an inherent struggle in any pandemic because individualism and collectivity operate in any case of survival. As also revealed in *A Journal*, individualism, and a step further solipsism, prevent people to behave collectively for the collective good in the times of survival because the human being tends to survive at any cost. However, H.F. propounds how individual wellbeing is not possible to achieve without the collective good, and how interdependency is so crucial to achieve wellbeing of communes and survive a pandemic. In this respect, his metaphorical story of the three men indicates that individual rights and collective responsibility should not clash with each other in order to survive as both an individual and a community at the same time. He distinctly elucidates the three

men's story "has a moral in every part of it, and their whole conduct, and that of some whom they joined with, is a pattern for all poor men to follow, or women either, if ever such a time comes again" (AJ, 180-181). According to the story, those three men have at first the same conflict with H.F., whether to leave their town "to get out of the reach of the dreadful infection" (AJ, 186) or to stay where they were born even if they will die. However, contrary to H.F., they leave and begin a journey to survive believing that they could be self-sufficient because John is a soldier with a gun, Richard does the public work for them, and Thomas is a sail-maker and treasurer. After they depart with a gun, a horse, and a tent, they settle down in the country in isolation; and later on, another group joins their core community near Epping. At that point, the commune of the three men and the people of Epping have to make an agreement that is based on interdependency and mutual trust. As the people of Epping have worries about those newcomers who have the potential of spreading the infection and the commune of the three men is also suspicious about the trustability of townspeople, the agreement is based on a mutual wellbeing of those two communities. However, the probability of death is not weak that they have to arrange their contract regarding the possibility of death. John, as the leader of the commune, puts agreement as follows:

[...] if you will relieve us with provisions for our present necessity, we will be very thankful [...] we will oblige ourselves fully to repay you, if God pleases to bring us back to our own families and houses in safety [...]. As to our dying here: we assure you, if any of us die, we that survive will bury them, and put you to no expense, except it should be that we should all die; and then, indeed, the last man, not being able to bury himself, would put you to that single expense which I am persuaded [...] he would leave enough behind him to pay you for the expense of (AJ, 213).

This contract, here again, brings the mutual responsibility and interdependency in case of death, once more as a crucial fact during a pandemic. Even death is not an individual phenomenon as burial requires the existence of the other. "The self-sufficiency of the group thus reaches an absolute limit at the point at which, no matter how isolated they are, they must rely on the unguaranteeable charity of an other to bury their dead" (Degabriele, 2010, p. 15). In this sense, the individual right to be isolated for one's self-security is interrupted with an individual need to be buried. It indicates that the individual is not self-sufficient if s/he considers to be buried essential. Besides, Peter Degabriele considers this story

as an instance of the survival of an intimacy, as well as “the care for the others” which is “a manifestation of intimacy”. Thus, the novel claims that “*neither the social contract as the prescribed form of public relations, nor the withdrawal into privacy and self-sufficiency from all social relations can eliminate the necessity of an intimate and unguaranteeable encounter with an other*” (Degabriele, 2010, pp. 15-16). In a similar way, Caitlin L. Kelly states that even in the narrative construction of the story of the three men, “*H.F. acknowledges that the struggle they all face is not for food or life but rather for a sense of belonging and communal response*” (2013, p. 54).

In this sense, solidarity appears more than a favour, but a necessity of interdependence. Living in the end times is based on survival of the individual with the other people within a mutual interdependency. Thus, in the light of the story of the three men, “[*w*]hat survives the plague is neither the public (the English nation or the city of London) nor the private individual, but an intimate social bond which is resistant to inscription in either the public or private spheres” (Degabriele, 2010, p. 9). This story of moral persuasion is significant when the strategy that should be adopted during a pandemic is considered. Collins and Garlington claim the acts of solidarity rely primarily on “*moral persuasion, not threats of punishment*” by giving the government of New Zealand during the pandemic of Covid-19 as a good example of this attitude (2020). In a similar way, H.F. frequently states that the punishments and precautions, however strict they are, are not sufficient to put people under obligation during a pandemic. In this sense, he does not propose a deontological moral point of view, contrarily, he supports that ethical awareness should be internalized by adopting the required virtues as predispositions. For instance, during the plague, “*it was not in the power of the magistrates or of any human methods of policy, to prevent the spreading the infection*” because people did not inform about their condition when they were infected but they preferred to run away which was useless (AJ, 246). In this sense, only a virtuous moral approach towards what should be done is capable of helping people survive individually as well as collectively.

Conclusion

Paula Backscheider emphasizes in her preface to the Norton Critical Edition of *A Journal* that the novel proposes the plague “*allows no individuals,*” but “*makes all people a community and emphasizes human relationships*” (1992, p. ix). Backscheider’s comment clarifies how Defoe intends to depict the survival of the

individual, significantly within her/his relation to the society during the pandemic. Defoe's emphasis on mutual relationships and interdependency to survive both physically and morally requires moral responses to the plague. While Defoe constitutes a moral framework, he wishes to leave a kind of document that would guide people in case of future pandemics. In this respect, though it looks on the surface that H.F. constrains the sufferers of the pandemic into the bills of death, what he does is actually revealing moral stories as the remnants of such a calamity. The numbers are soulless, as we experience today; however, the story of each unique number will give us a soul. Thus, rather than being a historical writing, his stories that are mostly based on moral perspectives reveal how story-telling, in particular, and literature in general, could function as a warning.

Smith and Upshur, in their article focusing on contemporary pandemics that should be analyzed for pandemic preparedness and response, emphasize how we are "*ill-prepared to prevent and respond to pandemics*" (2019, p. 807). Considering the numerous infectious diseases that have appeared since the turn of the millennium as wake-up calls, they strongly recommend to learn from the past outbreaks and pandemics, which is an ethical requirement whereas the inability to learn is an "*ethical failure*" (Smith & Upshur, 2019, p. 807). While the ethical focus is mostly on health-care services and governmental managements in terms of the studies of pandemic preparedness and response, on the societal level, literature will be a strong weapon to prepare people for the future pandemics, which has been anticipated by Daniel Defoe more than three hundred years ago. By revealing how people are inclined to behave viciously out of the fear of death, Defoe displays how the vices of avarice, ignorance, greed, corruption, and injustice spread as infectiously as the pandemic. However, his realist portrayal of the society suffering from the pandemic also depicts the moral acts of virtuous people who try to survive morally by considering the vitality of behaving with the virtues of compassion, solidarity, care, gratitude, and justice. In this respect, analyzing the virtuous and vicious responses to pandemic in relation to virtue ethics in *A Journal of the Plague Year* would lead us to get a moral pandemic preparedness, as Defoe had also intended, if the desire is to pursue the existence of life.

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Summary

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* (1722), which documents the Great Plague of London in 1665, was published with an intention to warn and prepare English people for another pandemic that was expected to arrive in London spreading from Marseilles. By documenting both the statistics and the stories from the Great Plague of London, Defoe tried to give a very detailed outlook of the society by including various people from different ranks who respond to the Black Death in different ways. In this book, Defoe's narration focuses on how the morality people adopt or ignore alters in the times of a pandemic as the society is threatened by a collective fear of death. In this respect, the responses to a fatal pandemic are actually the responses to the fear of death which would, in the first place, result in vicious acts and the loss of common sense. Defoe portrays many Londoners who are inclined to behave in accordance with vices during the Black Death. Defoe's vicious people—the ignorant and cruel governors who do not take precautions and leave many infected people dead; the fraud ecclesiastics, physicians, and magicians who deceive people in the name of treatment; malevolent people who consciously spread the plague or kill the watchmen to escape from the quarantine—behave out of vices and harm not only the society but also themselves because survival is not possible without mutual concern. To remind people the significance of interdependency during the end times, Defoe critically narrates

the stories of vicious people and how it is still possible to give a virtuous response contrary to them.

In *A Journal of the Plague Year*, H.F., the survivor-narrator, portrays a great deal of vicious people who violate their moral duties driven by the vices of avarice, greed, solipsism, corruption, and ignorance. However, H.F. depicts how some others hold on to their conscience and moral duties in spite of the harsh reality of death. In this sense, their response to the plague, or in other words to death, is shaped by the virtues of compassion, care, solidarity, gratitude, and justice they adapt “to live well” in the end times. Thus, *A Journal of the Plague Year* clarifies the idea of giving a moral response to a pandemic, which regards the benevolence of the society as well as the individual. In this context, the survivor-narrator of the Great Plague, H.F., who is fictionalized as a trustworthy narrator, appears as a moralist proposing a moral response and necessity which should be considered by the administrators as well as ordinary people. H.F.’s portrayal of (im)moral attitudes on administrative level calls for a systematic moral approach to the pandemic, which requires the virtues of compassion, justice, and solidarity that would lead people to mutual survival. In this sense, he proposes virtue ethics as the right moral response to the pandemic.

In this respect, *A Journal of the Plague Year* depicts how mutual trust and interdependency operating with the preferred virtues are required in case of a pandemic in order to eliminate the undesired vices. While Defoe constitutes a moral framework, he wishes to leave a kind of document that would guide people in case of future pandemics. Thus, rather than being a historical writing, the stories that reflect various moral perspectives reveal how story-telling and literature could function as a warning and a wake-up call recommending to learn from the past outbreaks and pandemics, which is a moral requirement for us.

The advice Daniel Defoe proposed, via his narrator H.F., about adopting the required virtues in case of a plague were extremely vital for the reader of the eighteenth century. Today, the virtues he advices and the vices he warns against are still remarkable to be highlighted since the world has been suffering the Covid-19 pandemic, which opens moral issues up for discussion. In this sense, this study aims to revisit *A Journal of the Plague Year* and analyze the (im)moral responses which would accompany and console us in terms of discovering what is right and wrong for not only to survive but also to survive as moral agents by getting a moral understanding of a pandemic.