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An account of the Impacts of Covid-19 on Personal and Societal Life

In light of the last 5-6 months, I've decided to write on my experience and perception pandemic on a personal level and a perceived wider one. My name is Wolfgang Beutel, I am a first-year transfer at UCLA (junior by accumulated college years) and a history major with the intention of pursuing further education in law once I am done with my BA.

When reflecting upon the last 6 months especially closer to the present, I came to the conclusion that in order to write the most accurate account, I would need to start briefly on when the virus first came into my perception. I will then follow with the growing impact the virus has had on the world and the region I live, as a Southern Californian resident. I will briefly relate my experience to the similar but also vastly different experiences of indigenous people who experienced a new wave of diseases when the Europeans made it to the new world. Then I will conclude with my thoughts on the actions taken by people and the governments representing them including my hopes and thoughts on what the future has in store for us all.

As I ponder the events that recently precipitated in the past six months it sometimes seems as if it has happened incredibly quickly, in some ways it did as the nature of exponential growth in viruses such as Covid-19 dictates. However, in other ways, it happened slowly. In the grand scheme of things, 6 months is a very short amount of time. Within that time there has been ample room for action at every level. Action that could have drastically changed the impact the virus has had thus far and the impact it will continue to have in the future. Winter break was

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the first time I heard of Covid-19, like many others, I saw news articles about a new disease appearing in Wuhan, China. While the disease prompted speculation, the virus was perceived by me and those around as an abstract thing. It was a virus that despite warnings and understanding that viruses can travel quickly, did not phase my life. I was caught up in winter break celebrations, excitement for returning back to university, and all in all something not worthy of too much concern. Come January, I was back in the dorms continuing life as normal, no one had altered anything about their life since the news over winter. At this point, the perception was the virus could not harm us, as more news articles circulated on the feed of my friends and my phone we would discuss whether this was a large concern or something that will pass quickly in a few months. By the end of January, Covid-19 had spread across multiple countries, there was a confirmed case of it in the US, and Wuhan province was in quarantine. Despite this rapid spread across the globe, I personally didn't see much of a reason to be concerned at the time, many of my peers and my family shared my thoughts as it was still primarily an issue in other parts of the world and midterms were coming up which was more of an immediate threat to me.

February was the month when this spread across the globe increased in many orders of magnitude. While the United States, until the end of the month wasn't experiencing a rapid increase in the spread of Covid-19, constant news updates over the weeks lead to a heightened awareness, due to death tolls in Asia and Europe that climbed rapidly. Covid-19 was now brought up in conversations more and more frequently and my peers and I began to worry about what this would mean for us in the United States. My friends, especially my international ones, broadened the concern to those across the world as this was now clearly a global pandemic.

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Despite the growth of the disease and the ever-climbing infected rates, UCLA continued to carry on as life did, parties, study groups, trips to Santa Monica with friends, and all things I enjoyed carried on because the issue, despite being closer and larger, had not yet impacted us.

The month of March was when everything in my personal and community life changed. Within three weeks of my winter quarter being over, UCLA sent out an email regarding the possibility that three students may have had Covid-19, this brought forth a deluge of concerns and questions from my peers and I considering now the disease had made its way to my school and it seemed that things would go on as normal. However, within these three weeks, the landscape of everything in Southern California changed rapidly. First, UCLA decided to make school online until mid-April, while some students were happy about this extended break, people were worried about what did come to pass which was the entire spring semester being moved online. This announcement was made within a week of the quarter being over which forced students to pack up their dorms and prepare to move home. This was dire news for international students especially since there was growing concern over countries locking their borders due to the rapidly escalating infected numbers. By this time as well, cases began to appear all across California and the deaths from Covid-19 lead to me realizing how serious this world pandemic was. It was incredibly difficult to shift that quickly to moving out rather than going home for a week while dealing with the academic stress of finals and saying goodbye to friends because dorm life that year had officially ended. This pushed people to the limit of their capabilities as I saw many of my friends' breakdown in tears at the thought of leaving school so abruptly. This

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was probably the hardest part of quarantine for me personally as I had fallen in love with the campus and the community that I found there.

After moving out of school and going home I had to adjust to living back at home for an extended period of time. Within a week of getting home, California issued its stay at home order and all nonessential businesses closed, we couldn't go out to do anything, and quickly the culture of SoCal including all of my friends from home was that we could not see each other. This shift to constantly seeing people to not seeing anyone except family was incredibly difficult. It didn't only affect me but my family as well. Both my mom and stepdad are police officers, fortunately, they have job security, but the demands and shifts in policy came abruptly as the state tried to rapidly contain a growing issue. Like many first responders, they had to all get PPE and the policy on law enforcement changed as they worked with the CDC. Minor infractions were ignored for a period of time and instead focused on major crimes and assisting those most impacted by Covid-19. Aside from my parents, my brother who is high functioning autistic and a senior at high school had to cope with the loss of his prom, graduation, and college tours he planned for the spring. These shifts in academics and social change were incredibly hard for him, leaving him incredibly depressed and like many students, struggling to adjust to the online academic system that had never really been done before especially at a primary education level. Over the months since the shift to quarantine my family and I have grown accustomed to the change and are much more relaxed in the isolation that everyone knows. As time has progressed many of my family members including myself have become weary of this isolation and hope to return to normalcy as soon as possible.

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Within the last month, as people have been adjusting to quarantine more and more. I've begun to feel normalcy in this abnormal world we live in. Not only have I found outlets for the restless energy I have at home such as hiking with a friend or learning a new instrument. But my family has adjusted better to the stresses as we have grown accustomed to being in each others space. Finding joy in board games together or movie nights has helped shift this pressure into cherished time that you don't get as much of in normal life. My friends from school went through the same cycle as me. At first living with parents was incredibly difficult but over time we have fought less and instead found harmony and a new balance and are striving and hoping to be able to appreciate places we love outside of home life once quarantine is over.

Outside of my personal life, I believe the monumental changes Covid-19 has caused will have long-lasting implications on domestic and world politics. It is clear that our system was not built for something of this magnitude to strike so quickly, economically, businesses had outsourced themselves to other countries. Increased globalization leads to the entire world suffering if one place like Chinese manufacturing shutdown, but when the whole world gets put on pause like it never has been before the recession that will continue to worsen in the future and it will be devastating. As over 30 million Americans were left unemployed by Covid-19 the question of what purpose the state has to play has been put in greater question. Many people support the growing welfare systems to mitigate the damage but many also believe that the debt the country is being put into is not worth the lives it would save now. From a culture where everyone supported "flattening the curve" to now where protests are happening in every city. Americans especially are growing impatient and concerned about what the world will lead to if

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jobs and salaries are put on hold for increasing amounts of time. This challenge is something we haven't ever seen in modern times and it's forcing us to question how we could have done things differently in the past so we could have been more prepared now. Whether its a shift in business culture to save money so the first loss of business doesn't bankrupt these big corporations or disaster mapping so we have a better plan of attack for when it happens again it is clear that in a world that is getting smaller through technology and better means of travel it also means the shockwaves of a disaster spread faster as well. It disheartens me to see some politicians value the economy over human lives and I hope the majority will see that the money in the market is not the primary concern of the world. One benefit I see that has been gained from this tragedy is the marked effect reduced human action has had on the environment. With carbon emissions down and travel reduced water in places like Venice are getting cleaner and the climate seems to be doing better than it had previously. I hope this real-life example will lead to people seeing the benefits of being more eco-conscious in their day to day life.

In history, the world has faced many different pandemics but none have been this far-reaching. When Europeans traveled to the new world they brought diseases with them on their boats which lead to the decimation of indigenous populations across the new world. These people had no idea what happened until it was clear that the change must have been brought by the colonizers, by the time they could react to the threat it was already too late especially with the lack of knowledge in virology at the time. The benefits of the modern age have given us life-saving medical technology, and instant information across the globe thanks to internet. But these benefits of the modern age also have their detriments as fast travel and higher population

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densities have lead to the disease spreading worldwide in a matter of months. Due to a global pandemic of this magnitude not happening in recent memory, many people including myself had underestimated the disease and let it go rampant for a period that shouldn't have occurred if we took the wisdom from what happened in prior pandemics such as the Spanish flu. Due to short memories and a growth mindset we endangered and lost lives that could have been saved if we respected the threat when it first appeared.

Hopefully, after a vaccine is created and people can return to a normal life, people will remember the detriments imposed by our callous approach to the disease in the beginning and will stop it when the next viral disease comes around. This experience has made me reconcile all the things I took for granted in life such as the wonderful school and friends I got to see every day and when the dust settles I hope to cherish them with a renewed level of gratitude.