

How Should We Feel?

PHIL 334: Pandemic Ethics

Contents: How Should We Feel Guilt & Wrongdoing

How Should We Feel?

Ben
Bramble



“COVID-19 HAS CAUSED widespread hardship. Many people have become severely ill or died. Many more have lost their jobs. Many more still have had to endure the deprivations of lockdown.

But for some fortunate people COVID-19 has involved none of these costs. They have been able to work from home in nice environments—or are wealthy enough that they do not have to work at all during this time—and have never really been in danger of catching the virus. ...

The question I want to ask in this chapter is: **how should onlookers live and feel during the pandemic?**”

How Should We Feel?

- Is it wrong to have *fun* during a pandemic? Or should we relish the opportunity to enjoy ourselves?
- When is it appropriate to feel guilty?
- Should we feel survivor's guilt?
- What about Schadenfreude?



Ben
Bramble



Is it wrong to have fun during a pandemic?

How Should We Feel?

- Is it wrong to have *fun* during a pandemic? Or should we relish the opportunity to enjoy ourselves?

"[Having too much fun] suggests **they do not sufficiently understand or care about the suffering that is going on around them at this time.**

Somebody who truly understood what is happening in the world right now and how bad it is, and who was appropriately moved or concerned by it, would not want to party like this, in such a flashy or ostentatious fashion."

Ben Bramble <



How Should We Feel?

- Is it wrong to have *fun* during a pandemic? Or should we relish the opportunity to enjoy ourselves?

"This suggests a way of answering the question of how onlookers, more generally, should live and feel during the pandemic. To answer it, we should turn our minds to what those who properly understand what is going on in this crisis, and are appropriately moved or concerned by it, would be **able** to enjoy, and to what they would **want** to do."

Ben Bramble <



How Should We Feel?

- Is it wrong to have *fun* during a pandemic? Or should we relish the opportunity to enjoy ourselves?

"Here is one possible answer: Not much of anything right now. Knowing of others' suffering, these people could take little or no pleasure in food, family, books, music, films, exercise, the beauties of nature, and so on. They might feel gloomy or solemn a lot of the time. They might even want to fast or deprive themselves of the basic comforts of life."

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How Should We Feel?

- Is it wrong to have *fun* during a pandemic? Or should we relish the opportunity to enjoy ourselves?

Bramble:

This doesn't seem right!

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"On the contrary, such understanding and concern is compatible with continuing to take joy in many parts of one's life, including food, family, natural beauty, etc.

It's just that these enjoyments would be **different** during this time—not necessarily reduced in pleasurable-ness, but at least coloured in some way by one's awareness of the pandemic, and one's concern for those who are suffering."

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"An onlooker who truly understands what is happening in the world right now, and is appropriately moved by it, and who happens to, say, live by a lovely beach in a remote location, might well take a stroll along that beach each day and take pleasure in that. But **it wouldn't be the same sort of fully relaxed or carefree pleasure they might feel in normal times.** It would be a mixed pleasure, one in some sense backgrounded by an awareness of the dire state of things elsewhere, pain at these far off events, and a sense of humility at themselves having been spared the worst of it."

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Bramble <



What Do You Think?



How Should We Feel?

- Is it wrong to have *fun* during a pandemic? Or should we relish the opportunity to enjoy ourselves?
- **When is it appropriate to feel guilty?**
- Should we feel survivor's guilt?
- What about Schadenfreude?



Ben Bramble



When Is It Appropriate to Feel Guilty?

Truck driver:

A truck driver, through no fault of his own, hits and kills a child who has run onto the road.

Elvis:

Elvis was born with a stillborn twin. As an adult, he confided to a friend that he thought that he had caused his twin to die while in the womb, by absorbing more than his share of nutrients.

Rescuer:

A man was driving to work when his car unexpectedly hit an icy patch on a bridge and flipped over. Local firefighters were sent to pull him out from the wreckage. In the process of reaching him, one of the firefighters slipped and fell through a gap in the roadway, plummeting to his death.

The Received Account of Guilt:

Feeling guilty represents the self as morally responsible for doing something wrong.

(‘Should’ vs ‘fitting’)



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But is that right?
Can’t you feel guilty without holding yourself morally responsible for it?



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You don't have to regard yourself as morally responsible.

When *is* it appropriate to feel guilty?



COVID-19 & Guilt

Coronavirus stigma and guilt – about getting sick or getting others sick – hurts everyone

When an illness is viewed as something shameful or somehow "your fault," the risk of self-stigmatization is considerably higher.



COVID-19 Survivor's Guilt Is Real – Here's How to Cope With It

Feel Pandemic Guilt? You're Not Alone. Here's How to Overcome It.

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- What about Schadenfreude?
- When is it appropriate to feel guilty?



Ben Bramble



Survivor's Guilt



Survivor's Guilt

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“These feelings of guilt, I think, are mostly inappropriate. If one isn’t emotionally affected by the thought of what others are enduring, then it isn’t guilt one should be feeling, but rather concern about one’s own capacity to flourish. And if one is suitably emotionally affected by the thought of others’ suffering, then one shouldn’t feel guilt at all.”

What is Bramble’s idea here? Do you agree or disagree?

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Having Fun?

Schadenfreude

It goes without saying that onlookers who understand what is going on right now, and care, would not experience *schadenfreude*—i.e., pleasure taken in the suffering of others. But might they still find what is happening right now in some sense fun or exciting? Josh Wilbur writes:

Having Fun?

Is it wrong to have
fun during a
pandemic?



Even if it's okay to have fun *in spite* of the pandemic, what about having fun (in part) *because* of the pandemic?

JOSH WILBUR CULTURE 03.29.2020 07:00 AM

This Is the 'Cozy Catastrophe' Americans Have Always Wanted

No commitments! No commutes! No cares! Admit it: The coronavirus apocalypse is actually kind of fun for you.

HERE'S A LITTLE secret about the coronavirus crisis: If you and your loved ones are healthy and financially secure—for now—then some not-so-small part of you might just be *enjoying* this whole thing. Lazy days at home, ALL CAPS headlines, desolate parking lots, that warm-and-fuzzy-end-of-the-world feeling. The turmoil is thrilling from afar. The internet works just fine. And, let's be honest, you needed a break from the daily grind.

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These pandemic days flow by in waves of exhilaration and stillness. Who knew a trip to the grocery store could be so exciting? Bread-and-milk runs have become surgical raids: Sterilize the grocery cart with a disinfectant wipe, scout out the TP aisle, exchange sideways glances with the could-be infected, grab the essentials, and get the hell out of there. Later, as another news alert interrupts the Netflix stream, the group text explodes: "This is crazy," everyone says from their respective couches. Few hasten to add that crazy is also sort of fun.

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In spite of our physical isolation, there's something nice about everyone paying attention to the same thing for once. Typically fractured into dozens of "national conversations," American public discourse is now rallied against a common, nonhuman enemy. It's the most coherent that our gossip and smalltalk has been in years. And the feeling of being in the midst of a real historical event is exhilarating. You'll tell your grandkids with pride, "I was there. I lived it. It was *terrible*." That you ate frozen pizzas for six weeks straight won't be mentioned.

**What Do You
Think?**