

What I'm Reading (Mar. 26)



By *Chuck Dinerstein, MD, MBA* — March 26, 2020

On tap this time: Why coronavirus containment failed, learning from history, and how COVID-19 hijacks your body. Also, a ritual in troubled times ... giving moss the attention it deserves ... and finally, the reason to slack off. (There had to be a good reason, right?)



Man and woman keeping warm while reading the bible, painting by Jan Steen [1]

It has been a busy week, and my newsfeeds, like yours and well everyone's, is Covid-19 day in and day out. Some of the articles I thought I would use on Monday are out of date on Wednesday, interesting times.

I think the current narrative was that the Chinese government was slow to recognize their problem. As with all failures, this one has multiple "causes," small and large. Two that played a synergistic role were the upcoming New Year's holiday in China, creating a large population on the move, and the destinations those large number chose. One of the best infographics I have seen is this on the Covid-19 early days from the NYT [How the virus got out](#) [2].

For those with an inclination towards history, you have to begin to ask about that 1918 pandemic. I always felt that some of that mortality was due to the increasingly susceptible population that had been engaged in a world war for some time, with its associated stress, economic compromise, and malnutrition.

"In the pandemic of 1918, between 50 and 100 million people are thought to have died, representing as much as 5% of the world's population. Half a billion people were infected.

Especially remarkable was the 1918 flu's predilection for taking the lives of otherwise healthy young adults, as opposed to children and the elderly, who usually suffer most. Some have called it the greatest pandemic in history.

The 1918 flu pandemic has been a regular subject of speculation over the last century. Historians and scientists have advanced numerous hypotheses regarding its origin, spread and consequences. As a result, many harbor misconceptions about it."

From The Conversation, [10 misconceptions about the 1918 flu, the 'greatest pandemic in history'](#) [3]

I wanted to write this week about how Covid-19 infects you, but NY Magazine beat me to the punch, with a great piece of writing.

"You call a friend and arrange to meet for lunch. It's unseasonably springlike, so you choose a place with outdoor seating, which seems like it should be safer. As usual, you take all reasonable precautions: You use hand sanitizer, sit a good distance from other customers, and try to avoid touching your face, though that last part is hard. A part of you suspects that this whole thing might be overblown.

What you don't know is that ten days ago, your friend's father was a guest of his business partner at the University Club, where he caught the novel coronavirus from the wife of a cryptocurrency speculator."

From NY Magazine, [How the Coronavirus Could Take Over Your Body \(Before You Ever Feel It\)](#) [4]

"Ritual is an ancient and inextricable part of human nature. And while it may take many forms, it remains a powerful tool for promoting resilience and solidarity. In a world full of ever-changing variables, ritual is a much-needed constant."

From the Conversation, [Why people need rituals, especially in times of uncertainty](#) [5]

Using that article on ritual as a point of inflection, consider two additional articles that, like the individual, diligently practicing hand washing and social distancing, is Covid-19 free.

"Like an undisturbed treasure from another era, the moss seemed to be everywhere at once. It had completely covered the trees, the boulders, and even the ground, wrapping the entire forest in its luminous green fur... This, you might say, was the beginning of my love affair with moss."

Again from the Conversation, [What's behind Japan's moss obsession?](#) [6] And if that short article ignites a desire to know more about moss, let me humbly suggest a wonderful book by Robin Wall Kimmerer, [Gathering Moss](#). Her writing is so engaging, endearing, and informative. She is, for me, an aspirational writer.

A lot of us have some new time on our hands and earlier this week, I wrote about making use of the current disruption of our lives by flipping the script and trying something new. As is usually the case, I am a bit late to the party. Many creatives have been taking time to play around for years; they didn't need a nudge or shove.

“They figured out early that rest is important, that some of our most creative work happens when we take the kinds of breaks that allow our unconscious minds to keep plugging away, and that we can learn how to rest better. In the conservatory, deliberate rest is the partner of deliberate practice. It is in the studio and laboratory and publishing house, too. As Dickens and Poincaré and Darwin discovered, each is necessary. Each is half of a creative life. Together they form a whole.”

From Nautil.us, [Darwin Was a Slacker and You Should Be Too](#) [7]

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Links

[1]

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:A_Couple_Warming_Themselves_and_Reading_the_Bible_by_Jan_Steen.jpg

[2] <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/03/22/world/coronavirus-spread.html?referringSource=articleShare>

[3] https://theconversation.com/10-misconceptions-about-the-1918-flu-the-greatest-pandemic-in-history-133994?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20March%2019%201567614998&utm_content=Latest%20from%20The%20Conversation%20for%20March%2019%202020%20-%201567614998+Version+A+CID_1f6e5926aaa58e5b5264b601d25da475&utm_source=campaign_monitor_us&

[4] https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2020/03/the-story-of-a-coronavirus-infection.html?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=wired&utm_mailing=WIR_Science_032020&utm_campaign=dev&utm_medium=email&bxid=5cec24283f92a45b30e252f4&cndid=31806738&esrc=profile-page&source=EDT_WIR_NEWSLETTER_0_SCIENCE_ZZ&utm_term=WIR_Science

[5] <https://theconversation.com/why-people-need-rituals-especially-in-times-of-uncertainty-134321>

[6] <https://theconversation.com/whats-behind-japans-moss-obsession-50500>

[7] <http://nautil.us/issue/46/balance/darwin-was-a-slacker-and-you-should-be-too>