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report

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R. Michael Fisher

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Technical Paper No. 92

In Search of Fearlessness Research Institute

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The In Search of Fearlessness Institute is dedicated to research and publishing on fear, fearlessness and emotions and motivational forces, in general, as well as critical reviews of such works. Preference is given to works with an integral theoretical perspective.

Coronavirus & Marianne Williamson: Teaching for Fear Management Education

R. Michael Fisher,¹ Ph.D.

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Abstract

The author, an internationally recognized fearologist and educator of fear management/education, shares his ‘big story’ that he believes needs to be understood to make sense of the current Coronavirus (Covid-19) tragedy on planet earth. He argues that we can turn this crisis into a great learning opportunity—especially, as a means to finally upgrading the quality of our fear management/education everywhere and thus to improve and mature our fearfulness. He introduces playfully, two characters that are key players in this ‘big story’: (1) Marianne Williamson, x-presidential hopeful in 2020 in U.S. politics and (2) Covid-19 itself. These are two great teachers available for our advancing our cultural evolution in a good way.

My Brief Background in Fear Management Education

Before introducing the two characters of the plot (Covid-19 or coronavirus *and* U.S. x-presidential hopeful Marianne Williamson), and before introducing the setting of the ‘big story’ I wish to share in this Technical Paper No. 92, a setting beset as tragic sign of the times (I write this on March 12, 2020) with cascading health, environmental, economic and social collapsing very evident to most everyone paying attention globally and locally—let me first briefly set forth the overall theme of my life-project.

The focused research study of *fear and fearlessness* and the teaching about fear management/education (FME) have a 31 year history in my life and began in Calgary, AB, Canada. There are several other publications you can access on what the nature of the In Search of Fearlessness Project (1989-) and Fearlessness Movement are about, and their role today in a world more and more controlled by excess (toxic) fear(ism)². I won’t repeat those details here but to merely summarize a few points as context to

the ‘big story’ of what is happening (i.e., tragedy) and what is potentially an outcome (i.e., opportunity from crisis)—i.e., what can we *learn* from all this seeming chaos and fear. I am a critical educator with a mission and I invite you to create a revision of our current knowledge-base and practices of FME.

My life experience has told me that the Fear Problem needs to be named and needs to be understood from a transdisciplinary perspective (i.e., not merely from a biopscho-medical model of knowing)—that is, a holistic-integral and critical perspective. I adopted ‘fear’ as a new dynamic morphing “fear” concept and phenomenon³ that has in many ways acted as a virus (i.e., ‘fear’ pattern virus = FPV+) which I framed analogously to the HIV+ historical legacy of the 1980s-90s epidemic in North America that traumatized and killed so many people before a cure was found, and even today HIV+ is a massive disease in countries in their early and struggling developmental conditions. The notion of a “virus of fear” (and/or “fear virus”) was not started by me and has its own interesting history because fear can become a social contagion and grow into fear-panic on mass scale as we see today with the coronavirus pandemic.

Whatever the spread of fear (and ‘fear’) may be, my basic premise for going full-time as life-project to discover the relationship between *fear and fearlessness* (and love), brought me to realize that humanity as a whole, evolutionary wise, is far behind in their development of good fear education (where, I use fear education positively by connotation much like sex education or moral education). I argued that humans have and develop their “fearuality” with the same importance as “sexuality” or “spirituality”—and, thus, we require mindful scrutiny of how that is done best and what educational resources can help that development. To date, I am critical of most incomplete, reductionistic, and often distorted, forms of fear education (i.e., FME) that exist on this planet. My work, and some others of late, is dedicated to this improvement. Unfortunately, no one developing this has had any funding or been seen as credible in the eyes of their governments or universities or other organizations and the battle to keep this In Search of Fearlessness Project going (i.e., improving FME) is a long uphill and underfunded and under supported project. It moves very slow, and yet that is part of the very Fear Problem that humanity has got itself into. Which, I conclude, comes down to us having a poorly developed fearuality, quite immature, and quite destructive in many ways because it is not being encourage to develop to its highest potential and wisdom. I labeled all this aspect of human (and non-human) reality Defense Intelligence System development.

I believe one of my most important, really basic, discoveries that underlies all my FME work is that of a dictum: *When fear appears, so then does fearlessness*. This is naturally part of self-system regulation in all living organisms and it applies in principle to all systems from micro- to macro, from ancient to brand new. It is foundational to a good fear education and the encouragement ethically to follow the *path of fearlessness* towards the ‘correction of course’ that humanity requires and that has an ultimate ideal of living in a love-based way individually, in groups and as nations and a global village.

The other major finding (and theory still in progress) behind my research since 1989, has been that *what will unite the world will be Fear, not Love*. A very controversial subject, which I have made various arguments about for three decades but most recently in a journal rebuttal of a colleague who believes quite differently than I do (of which his view is that Love will unite the world).⁴

Big Story: Introducing the 2 Main ‘Characters’ of our Times

Character 1: Coronavirus Phenomenon

So, when coronavirus (Covid-19) shows up in 2020 (starting in China) and takes the world by its tail and spins us all around, one is seeing just what a small (virtually invisible) organism can do to make humans change (if not transform) their ways. It sure looks to me like Fear is way more effective than Love (of Nature) to bring about the massive changes to get the world back-in-order and working for all Life not just human life. Thank you coronavirus for teaching me this truth. No other mechanism, not caring for Earth, or for each other, has made that caring and love effective enough to ‘turn this world’ into a mass “shut down”—hey, something is seriously wrong here, we better change everything and now. This is an emergency! No, we would not make that change. Not since the beginning of Earth Day celebration and activism in 1970, not since we were told that CO₂ outputs by human activity are way beyond our sustainable ecological balance. No, nothing has worked to ‘stop us’ in our tracks and slow down and be more mindful of what we are doing by habit—and what we are doing to destroy Life. It took one virus and our reaction to it—based on Fear, not Love. Albeit, of course, one could say love is always part of that, and I would agree—it is just that Fear has proved it is more powerful to change our environment and ways of living globally—incredibly quickly. Thank you coronavirus and thank you for the humans who have taken it seriously, not

that those humans in power and shutting down things (creating isolation so the spread of the virus is slowed down)—always have the best intention for the longer term of our ecological systems on earth BUT that doesn't mean they won't shift their destructive values and stop their economic greed and excessive production—maybe they will and maybe they won't after things settle down with the pandemic and it is more or less controlled and a vaccine is invented, etc.

It has become very evident that Covid-19, which I prefer to call coronavirus, in order to keep us aware it is part of Nature (like we are too) and not some abstract scientific label (i.e., Covid-19)—that this creature, entity, life-form is part of Nature, not some flawed and evil thing to be deleted (or as Marianne Williamson has said recently in a prayer in a public video: go back from whence you came—to “nothing”). Coronavirus, like any virus, can be potentially or really damaging yes indeed; but so can other parts of Nature, like a tornado or any other disease-causing organism like parasites, bacteria or poisonous agents in Nature or in our bodies. Yet, I am interested in what *lessons we can learn from Nature*,⁵ and thus, I mean all parts of Nature, not just the good parts that serve us as a species well. Nature is much more interested in Life than in just catering to the wishes of our species.

On that note then, I have been asking people to “take a break” from their ordinary crazy-busy worlds, and study coronavirus ecology and its intersection with human cultural and psychological development, for a starter. Learn from Nature as wise-teacher: especially, in this particular time of so much terror and panic—and, with this particular teacher coronavirus that has emerged and taken center stage to bring about good changes that need to happen—and, yes, unfortunately with death and suffering as well.

Humans badly needed a serious ‘course correction’ based on the insanity of how we were living. With human population way too high, our species’ mega-carbon-footprint was way too high—the many scientists and others have already informed us prior to arrival of coronaviruses in humans, that IF WE do not drastically alter our life-styles of massive consumption, over population growth, over economic growth, and massive pollution left behind from capitalism and agriculture, etc., THEN the planet will not likely be sustainable to human life by the end of the 21st century, or a lot sooner as some predict. Global Warming crisis has been going on for many decades and especially prominent in the news and in social discourse in the

last five years. My point: study coronavirus not just as biological but as a cultural (if not spiritual) phenomenon, as a great teaching; so check it out.⁶

And, most importantly, check out how coronavirus has a ‘message’ or two about how we humans manage fear—e.g., fear of coronavirus, fear of death, fear of fear itself. Be very critical, although open-minded for the most part, about the ‘good’ knowledge and ‘good’ advice and how to be a ‘good’ conformist under the emergency policies, laws and “education” re: how to keep healthy and not spread coronavirus so as not to overwhelm our health care systems, etc. Now, on this last point, I am asking you to be very aware of emergency-based, fear-based, controlling technologies of information that spread like memes and can make individual human rights less important because authorities are telling us what to do and what makes a good citizen. They don’t exactly, you may have noticed, ask us for inputs much and they don’t want criticism, and they really just want to take-over and reshape society and our very subjectivities under their image of the best way to be, under these conditions. I say, no one is going to tell me what to do without my input, if I can help it. I will listen to their views of what is ‘good’ health care and so on, but *I am not a victim* or slave to their authority (power/knowledge productions)—especially, when they use fear-appeal means (i.e., gross or subtle fearmongering) to get their message out there and to try to control. Oh, not just authorities in official places can fall susceptible to fearmongering, as you may have noticed; just about anyone anywhere who spreads information about coronavirus can also be a participant in this dynamic, best to be called as many scholars have: “a culture of fear.”⁷

Then, I say *rebel*, as needed, and *ask* seriously when the coronavirus ‘experts’ and government and health educators are really serving fearlessness, and when are they too easily just serving survival fear alone. As Marianne Williamson has said throughout her career, ‘survival is not all or enough to make humanity, we need to thrive.’ Again, that’s a much larger topic, because my point is that coronavirus is a phenomenon, complex, biological-cultural, real-and-constructed... and, in that latter case, ‘fear’ (and emergency crisis) is being *constructed* rapidly, as I see it, and as it was done so just after 9/11 (2001) by U.S. administration and elites—and, that is common after any major crisis, anywhere—“shock” and “awe” techniques and propaganda (what Naomi Klien called “shock doctrine” political policy) are saturated everywhere in these moments of vulnerability and high quantum fear levels.

Simply, be smart and cautious, stay with your own power of discernment, your own learning from your sources and ways of knowing, and challenge those who ask you to be cautious (or afraid). And, yes, and that includes me. Everyone ought to be critiqued, respectfully. Everything ought to be open to be critiqued in these times, or any times. That's educative, and that's the very ground condition of preventing fear-based propaganda spreading like a virus. The *coronavirus of fear*, I would argue, is a much more severe problem than coronavirus. We'll learn this as the days and months go by. It's a good time for upgrading our fear education.

Character 2: Marianne Williamson's Leadership

Not only [is she, Marianne Williamson] interesting but you [Marianne] take politics to the level of the heart. You are so authentic....⁸

I have written a major technical paper introducing Williamson to my readers and linking her leadership (e.g., her politics in running for leader of the Democratic party in 2020, of which she dropped out of that race on Jan. 10, 2020) to Fear, to Love and to Fearlessness. I highly recommend reading that document⁹ as a complementary pair with this current technical paper.

Briefly, Marianne Williamson is a complex figure in history and politics today—and, more importantly, I believe she is a very critical popular adult educator.¹⁰ For a good summary of her biographical details (before 1993) read Elena Oumano's book (the only biography) on Williamson.¹¹ My current book in progress, to be published this late summer 2020, is called *The Marianne Williamson Presidential Phenomenon: Cultural (R)Evolution in Danger Times* (Peter Lang Publ., NY). This will be biographical but more a journalistic inquiry and case study of what happens when you take someone like Williamson, of a higher consciousness and transformative leadership (and spirituality) and drop that into the center of the American political landscape-mindscape? I won't say more about that work, but you are likely to hear a lot more from me on this topic. So, that all said, I will not give more bio background on Williamson, much of it is available on Wikipedia, etc.

To say the least, what I have learned is that she is one empowered spiritual woman leader who believes America is worth fighting for, especially under the decay she sees in her country over the decades and peaking in its decline with the election of now President Donald Trump in 2016.

Trump could win in 2020. Williamson decided to run for President because of that situation and that she argues that he operates from a “politics of fear”—of which I agree, for the most part, and she, operates from a “politics of love” (title of her 2019 book, is worth a read¹²).

Politically a “leftist” of the progressive (somewhat socialist) Democratic kind, Williamson is currently running a series of teaching videos in the last week on coronavirus. I recommend them. Not that I agree with them *per se*. They are interesting: (a) video on Coronavirus Meditation, and (b) video on politics of health care system in America.¹³ The first meditation video has ‘gone viral’ on the Internet. People are looking for guidance and relief from someone (a woman?) they can trust. But of course there are many many who don’t trust her and have chosen not to back her to be successful in politics since her first run for Congress in California in 2014. Still, she persists on the margins, behind the scenes, to “operate” in the political sphere without the official political title or experience. She’s a social-political activist in that sense but is having great impact as an educator for popular culture.

Thus, my ‘big story’ here (in brief) is that coronavirus + Williamson are making an interesting character *pair of teachers* for humanity right now—and, especially Americans, who are all mostly freaked-out by the crises of health and economy for starters.

Things are not looking good and will get a lot worse in that country quickly before they get better. Even election campaign rallies of the current top Democratic candidates to go up against Trump in the election in Nov. are having to cancel their rallies because of health risks. Sounds sort of like having to cancel big crowd events when “terrorists” were abundant, and especially after 9/11. Safety and security is trumping all other things, so it seems. And, that is not always a good thing when you look deeper at the totalitarian like State that is being constructed in these fearful times—under fearism regimes of emotions, actions and policies. *Fearism* is the subtle underbelly of *terrorism*, it is the more unseen compared to terrorism but still fear-terror-anxiety creeps into a society’s blood stream and infects nearly everyone and everything, and yet people are not aware of fearism, only of terrorism.¹⁴

For sake of keeping this technical paper short, I decided to do a little bit of a quick educational (pedagogical) critique of her third video in the coronavirus series, which mentions the virus crisis but her third video is about socialism and capitalism.¹⁵ All three of these videos she is putting

out to public during the early peaking of the coronavirus phenomenon of fear. That's why I tie them all together. My critiques are several of all three but overall, good on her to lead this way of educating the public, despite her political mixing of healing and spirituality with partisan politics—even though, she repeatedly says things like 'this is not a Left or Right issue, it is a human issue'—that said, her actual discourse and teaching is not so 'neutral' and focused on humanity over partisanship—just watch her videos stumping for Bernie Sanders and her put down comments on other Democrat leaders which she has fallen into in her activist role. That her problem, she carries many hats and roles and identities and 'mixes' them and 'flips' from one to another like an actress. She is an actress, just check out her biographical info.

So, to the third video of the trio I mentioned above, here she is the one who is always saying we need to 'respect the voters' and the 'common people' and all her democracy talk is about the power to 'the People' and so on and so on. That said, listening to her video on public policy and such she gets warmed up and angry and is going to mock in her gestures and tone of voice all those 'guys' of the political establishment but also of patriarchy and makes them out to caricatures so she can construct her binary, her set of oppositions, of 'good' and 'bad' (her moralism not far away in everything she teaches)—and, she then goes deeper to be insulting of the whole population of America—which she critiques the Establishment and elites for doing.

Her contradiction of behavior and words and her dramatic acting out come as she says, now to the "hot topic today" that is, "capitalism vs. socialism" and she preaches:

The way we're talking about it is so childish [with a grin on her face], it's like we're having a high school conversation....So, I want to introduce into your thinking a far more sophisticated understanding of what all that means.... Hello? [she repeats this "hello?" several times in this video]

She may be one of the best of the inspirational speakers (in certain human potential and wellness circles)—but as a pedagogue, that is no way to talk to your audience or learners. You may feel that way inside about the situation, about the ignore-ance or arrogance of people and learners; but to address them with such slangish and sloppy delivery tells me she doesn't really care about people and learners and she is going to 'correct' them and "introduce" into their minds/thinking the right way. Truly, she shows no

remorse or subtlety of doubt that maybe her way is not the only or right way to understand what socialism is or capitalism. The video teaching, more like preaching, is virtually 19th century pedagogy by transmission and authority. This goes against all that she promotes in her 21st century politics of love and respect for ‘the People.’ It is an astounding contradiction. So why is this an issue today, with coronavirus and the phenomenon of fear spreading?

Take that pedagogical attitude and superiority (righteousness) she confidently carries and delivers to the public en masse, and I immediately would warn all people listening to her coronavirus videos to be cautious of her pedagogical methods and her near-hypnotic trance-based teaching (charisma)—because, there is not too many educators trained like I am that would see her pedagogy as 21st century, nor holistic nor healthy when you take it apart and find out her means are inconsistent with her ends of ‘good education’ for adults in this society—in these dangerous times. It is authoritarian-moralism that is pushing her agenda outward, and she’ll clearly use the coronavirus to push her way of ‘telling people’ what is the truth (if not, telling them who they should vote for, not far away).

So, I appreciate her for stepping up and trying to help, and surely, it will be helpful to many—more or less. My point, is not to demean her teaching or her followers, rather it behooves me as a fear educator to challenge her potential fear-based ways of doing pedagogy, and point to directions and resources (see References) for a fearlessness pedagogy.¹⁶ To be clear, her and I would disagree a good deal on what is a 21st century holistic and/or integrative ‘best’ FME. I leave that up to you readers to check it out and compare for yourself.

End Notes

¹ Fisher is an Adjunct Faculty member of the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, AB, Canada. He is an educator and fearologist and co-founder of In Search of Fearlessness Project (1989-) and Research Institute (1991-) and lead initiator of the Fearlessness Movement (2015-). The Fearology Institute was created by him recently to teach international students about fearology as a legitimate field of studies and profession. He is also founder of the Center for Spiritual Inquiry & Integral Education and is Department Head at CSIE of Integral & ‘Fear’ Studies. Fisher is an independent scholar, public intellectual and pedagogue, lecturer, author, consultant, researcher, coach, artist and Principal of his own company (<http://loveandfearsolutions.com>). He has four leading-edge books: *The World’s Fearlessness Teachings: A critical integral approach to fear management/education for the 21st century* (University Press of America/Rowman & Littlefield),

Philosophy of fearism: A first East-West dialogue (Xlibris) and *Fearless engagement of Four Arrows: The true story of an Indigenous-based social transformer* (Peter Lang), *Fear, law and criminology: Critical issues in applying the philosophy of fearism* (Xlibris); *India, a Nation of Fear and Prejudice* (Xlibris) Currently, he is developing The Fearology Institute to teach courses. He can be reached at: r.michaelfisher52@gmail.com

² Resources, as a start: Fisher (2019), “In Search of Fearlessness Project,” Fisher (2018) “‘Fear’ Studies” and Fisher (2018) “The Fearlessness Movement.” See also my overall methodology, research and theory of fear management/education in Fisher (2010), and for updated work and a community of people interested in my work go to <https://fearlessnessmovement.ning.com/>; for the best summary of my concept of *fearism* and Desh Subba’s concept of fearism and how we entered in late 2014 into an East-West dialogue on the topic, go to Fisher & Subba (2016).

³ ‘Fear’ is many things in my theory, but most simply it asks us to be aware that when (‘) marks are used this means we have to deconstruct normal ways of defining and knowing fear. Then, from that deconstruction and re-imagining process we can begin somewhat freshly to better understand a reconstruction of fear and what the Fear Problem is. See, for e.g., Fisher (1995) for my early writing on this approach.

⁴ See Fisher (2020).

⁵ Long ago, I have dedicated myself to learn from Nature and equally important to learn from cultural systems that have evolved that are intimately respectful and attuned to Nature (i.e., Indigenous pre-industrial and pre-agricultural societies and their worldviews—e.g., see Four Arrows, 2016 and Fisher, 2018). I am convinced, as is my colleague Four Arrows that this is foundational to revisioning education everywhere in the 21st century—because the Indigenous worldview is non-fear-based, meaning it is an ethical guidance system to fearlessness (and fearlessnessizing, like Indigenizing) and sane, healthy, sustainable human activity (Fisher & Four Arrows, 2020).

⁶ I’ve recently created a teaching video on how to appreciate the coronavirus as a phenomenon, both naturally real and socially constructed *via* culture and *via* panic-fear patterning. Fisher, 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpIhhZYPlv8&t=4s>

⁷ Look on the Internet, “culture of fear” (a much more rigorous research term than “climate of fear”)—I also have written tonnes on this, but the most basic good background to study the culture of fear phenomenon go to Gardner (2009), Glassner (2009) or Furedi (2006), Giroux (2003) for starters in your basic critical approach to self-study re: *fear education* curriculum.

⁸ An internet follower (Anna S., Aug. 16, 2019) (from Cillizza, 2019).

⁹ Fisher (2019). Briefly in that paper: I argue that as much as Williamson is a major leader on the *role of Love* (and secondarily, Fear) in politics and life itself re: human potential, there is a shadow-side to her philosophy and teaching. Unfortunately, her teaching fails to comply and align with the wisest fearlessness teachings (and pedagogy). That deficit will unravel her leadership and effectiveness, in my view.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, the field of adult/popular education, and researchers and practitioners in Education generally, have not taken Williamson seriously and so I have recently begun a paper for publication showing this role (Fisher, in prep.).

¹¹ Oumano (1992).

¹² Williamson (2019).

¹³ This is the coronavirus meditation:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9eIryM3wbE>. For some reason the second video on the virus and her critique of the health care system and Trump and the Establishment in general is missing today on the Internet and is not on her website? I wonder why?

¹⁴ I have always been a critic of “safety” and “security” and “risk” discourses created and distributed by power-elites forces in a society; for my take on *fearism-t* (toxic form) see Fisher & Subba (2016).

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eyCUFSothJs>

¹⁶ E.g, Fisher (2011).

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