



9-2020

Comment by David Rosner

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Recommended Citation

Rosner, David (2020) "Comment by David Rosner," *Comparative Civilizations Review*. Vol. 83 : No. 83 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol83/iss83/4>

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Prof. David Rosner, president of the ISCSC from 2013 to 2016, has weighed in on how humanity adjusts to pandemics from the philosophical perspective:

Human beings need to “make sense” out of the world, but our world is sometimes unintelligible.

We “make sense” out of the world through holding certain fundamental assumptions, based on past experiences, which help us both navigate the present and predict the future. Psychologists have discussed this as “the assumptive world.”¹

Catastrophes such as pandemics suddenly upend these very presuppositions. When our basic presuppositions about reality are abruptly challenged, civilizations (and especially their leaders) need to exhibit the following two qualities (though there may be more):

1. The humility to understand that the human race is ultimately a blip on the screen in an infinite universe, and that our lives are fundamentally contingent and uncertain. We are not always in control of reality and we will need to find ways to adjust when our lives change in a sudden and radical way.
2. The flexibility to try to find new ways of seeing and being (e.g., the positing of new assumptions) with which to reorient ourselves (individually and collectively) to the new, often painful, realities. Civilizations that can do this endure, while those that cannot collapse.

¹ See Jeffrey Kauffman (ed.), *The Loss of the Assumptive World: A Theory of Trauma and Loss* (NY: Brunner-Routledge 2002) and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, *Shattered Assumptions* (NY: Free Press, 2002).