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CONSEQUENCES OF A HEALTH CRISIS. IDEAS KIT FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CORONAVIRUS AND ITS INFORMATIONAL TECHNO-PANDEMIC

Consecuencias de una crisis sanitaria. Botiquín de ideas para comprender el coronavirus y su tecno-pandemia informacional

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Abstract

The SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, which causes the disease COVID-19, has generated an unprecedented health crisis, the first universal pandemic in history. This phenomenon is gradually being explained by science. But it is not enough to *explain*, it is also necessary to *understand*. The main objective pursued here, from the methodological perspective of philosophical hermeneutics, is to understand the pandemic crisis. We analyze the metamorphosis that this crisis is producing in the notions of "reality" and "subjectivity" and its repercussion on Communication. There are two main vectors that convey the results of this reflection: 1) the pandemic and the new normality make the exception the rule; 2) this has been possible because what was initially a biological mutation has become a series of conflictive disruptive innovations, which governments are controlling by means of technopolitical measures of social discipline such as domestic confinement. Thus, the coronavirus mutates into an *informational techno-virus* that is transmitted through the *mass media* and social networks, infecting human brains and provoking new ways of thinking, acting and living. The pandemic is accompanied by an *infopandemic*, the mental damage of which is expected to exceed the organic damage. It is therefore concluded that it is not the viral health crisis that is transforming the normality of life in the street, but the techno-political actions taken to deal with it, even when a previously techno-personified coronavirus is blamed for it. We will surely overcome the pandemic, but perhaps it will be at the expense of the info-pandemic has definitely overcome us.

Keywords: biopolitics, communication, techno-COVID-19, exception, philosophy (hermeneutics), info-pandemic, new normal, public health, SARS-CoV-2, techno-politics.

Resumen

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El coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, causante de la enfermedad COVID-19, ha generado una crisis sanitaria sin precedentes, la primera pandemia universal de la historia. Este fenómeno poco a poco está siendo explicado por la Ciencia. Pero no basta con *explicar*, también es preciso *comprender*. El objetivo principal perseguido aquí, desde la perspectiva metodológica de la Hermenéutica filosófica, es la comprensión de la crisis pandémica. Se analiza la metamorfosis que esta crisis está produciendo en las nociones de "realidad" y "subjetividad" y su repercusión en la Comunicación. Dos son los vectores destacados que vehiculan los resultados de esta reflexión: 1) la pandemia y la nueva normalidad hacen de la excepción la regla; 2) ello ha sido posible porque lo que inicialmente fue una mutación biológica se ha convertido en serie de conflictivas innovaciones disruptivas, que los gobiernos están controlando mediante medidas tecnopolíticas de disciplina social como el confinamiento doméstico. Así el coronavirus muta en *tecno-virus informacional* que se trasmite a través de los *mass media* y las redes sociales, infectando los cerebros humanos y provocando nuevos modos de pensar, actuar y vivir. A la pandemia se le solapa una *infopandemia*, cuyos daños mentales previsiblemente superarán los orgánicos. Se concluye entonces que no es la crisis sanitaria vírica la que está transformando la normalidad de la vida en la calle, sino las acciones tecno-políticas tomadas para afrontarla, aun cuando el reproche se lo lleve un coronavirus previamente tecno-personificado. Seguramente superaremos la pandemia, pero a costa quizá de que la info-pandemia definitivamente nos haya superado.

Palabras clave: biopolítica, comunicación, tecno-COVID-19, excepción, filosofía (hermenéutica), info-pandemia, nueva normalidad, salud pública, SARS-CoV-2, tecno-política.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the winter months of 2020, the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the cause of the COVID-19 disease, spread from Wuhan in China to the whole world triggering the first literal pandemic in history, both in terms of health and information. The governments of numerous states reacted with extreme measures, decreeing the domestic confinement of almost all citizens to a greater or lesser degree, suspending freedoms more or less restrictively and implementing social control measures of a more or less authoritarian nature. Other governments, on the contrary, renounced the imposition of measures

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limiting individual autonomy, which was understood by the population and global public opinion as a lack of protection and a lack of political responsibility.

This first global confinement in history, or, in an almost literal sense, the universal domestication of humanity, has caused an economic and social crisis that could dwarf the Great Depression that followed the Crash of 1929. And this, leaving aside the fact that, as so many influential voices have proclaimed, this global disease should be inscribed in an even broader context, as one other effect of the "great acceleration" of the Anthropocene, that new geological period, of intrinsic human technological mediation, characterized by such an enormous degradation of the biosphere that it leads us to an exponentially probable collapse not only of civilization, but even of Humanity itself as a whole.

It is more than a commonplace that the COVID-19 pandemic has humanity on edge, to the point that, even if it is overcome, human life on the entire planet will never be the same again. It will be a qualitative leap for the community. In fact, the goal being pursued now is to achieve the oxymoron, popularized by Justin Trudeau, of the "new normal". The coronavirus has surprised us with lowered defenses, or rather, without sufficient immunity, and we will only be safe when, whether or not catalyzed by a vaccine, community, group or horde immunity (*herd immunity*) is achieved.

> Life, whether individual or biological, whether social or cultural, life, whether natural or historical, can be considered as the success of an immune system. This is the major premise of general immunology. An immune system is an institutionalized defense against an expectation of damage over time. Ontogenetically, biological immunity protects the organism from the threat of pathological microbiotic iniquity. However, "immunity" is not a concept originating in medicine. It is a metaphorical borrowing of juridical-political etiology. Already in Roman Law, the strict interconnection between *communio* and *immunitas* was recognized: immunity refers to the legal protection of those who exercise significant community roles. Before biological immunity, there is social immunity: without immunity there is no community.

Symbolic immunity is decisive for the human animal as a human. Perhaps it constitutes its specific difference. Symbols have a purely intersubjective reality and even, in the democratic symbolism, they allow to immunize humans from the attempts of some fellow humans to impose a symbolic system, always cultural, and therefore contingent and symptomatic, as if it were natural and therefore necessary and automatic. Law is always the expression of the level of immunity that a society reaches against "injustice", the social formalization of use against abuse, the degree of solidarity or mutual support against moral evil. Another usual symbolic immune system is Religion, the traditional historical channel for compensatory compensation for the damages of death.

Immune systems, both biological and symbolic, have a clear division between inside and outside in common, between vulnerable intimacy and public threat. It is true that

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natural immunities differentiate the self from the stranger in an intrinsically "selfish" way, they serve individualities, while social immunities make this differentiation in a definite "altruistic" way, they serve communities. Both systems aim to defer damage as much as possible over time, in order to protect the individual and social organism from the elements. Human societies can only be maintained over time if individuals assume that the private immunity of their biology can only be won within an effective social co-immunity.

Nowadays, with the pandemic, *homo sapiens* is experiencing a historical event of unusual singularity, a great experiential challenge in which its entire ecosocial system is being subjected to *experimentum crucis*. It is the testing of the *normality* of the species: all our political, economic, social and cultural institutions are challenged by the disease: the COVID-19 coronavirus has subjected all spheres and scales of human life to a crisis without exception. The exceptional nature of the moment, the unique nature of the global health alert calls for the prudent exercise of philosophical calm in the face of the greatest endurance test ever endured by the human species. The harsh time calls for slow and calm thinking that will allow us both to morosely rethink categories and inherited certainties and to forge notions and open paths that will help us, alongside the necessary scientific explanations, to freely *understand* what is happening and to face the future of humanity with clarity. It is a matter, within the hermeneutic *koinetic* characteristic of current philosophical reflection, of interpreting the "new normality" (the new world *mainstream* term), of equipping ourselves with the intellectual tools that will allow us to make the transition from judging the "old normality" as a pleonasm to no longer considering the "new normality" as an oxymoron (if not as a euphemism).

There is an abundance of professional philosophers who, from different points of view, have begun to publish articles, books and videograms, through which they try to analyze the novelty of the event. Online philosophical colloquiums and debates on the global disease have been held virtually. The unprecedented fact of the global plague is being matched by an *awareness* of the fact that it is also global. This is the opportunity to share concerns and suspicions, doubts and perplexities, as well as ideas and beliefs, on telematic networks. The global disease means that we need new instruments of reflection, a laboratory of thought and communication, or more modestly, a conceptual first-aid kit in order to begin to redefine our relations with the biosphere, with the anthroposphere, with the technosphere and even with our own body and what remains of our "soul", with life and its health. The new normality forces us to definitively abandon the natural paradigm (nature does not suit us). If normality can be new, it is not natural, but cultural. "Normality" is old, it is historical and technical, set in time, made. It is the time for the new normality to make normality.

The arch of practical rationality is opened here in all its breadth and in maximum tension. Indeed, as far as *homo sapiens* is concerned, "normal" can no longer be, in the first meaning of the DRAE, that which "is in its natural state". On the contrary, in the second meaning of the DRAE, it is that which conforms to certain norms fixed in advance. In "the norms fixed in advance" resonates, in the key of practical reason, the social construction of normality. Socioconstructivism supports this theory by

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understanding that all knowledge is constructed through the interaction of the individual with society and his or her environment and, therefore, normality would be another idea that is constructed within the framework of this interaction. In this way, it will not be possible to speak of normality in general but of normality within a particular society and context. It can be said, therefore, that normality is a social construct that encompasses behaviors, ideas and characteristics that are adapted to life in society. A sort of social *self-regulation.*

The crisis, initially a health crisis, also has a philosophical dimension which can be omitted to explain it, but not understand it. Understanding the pandemic requires awareness of the varied panoply of its ontological, gnoseological (including rhetorical-discursive) and axiological (ethical-political and, ultimately, anthropological) implications. And this can only be so, since never before has a natural event, including the Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, shaken the Europeans' conscience but the worlds' as well. In fact, all the classical specialties of philosophy are now challenged by the coronavirus and are compelled to conceptually confront the "new normality" demanded by its pandemic.

2. THE ONTOLOGICAL INTERPELLATION

Markus Gabriel, argues that "The world order prior to the pandemic was not normal, but lethal" (ASPO, 2020, p. 133), our century was already a pandemic, resulting from globalization. The "pandemic", etymologically, affects all the peoples. All the peoples is the whole of humanity without distinction of borders, hence the absurdity of national confinements. It is not, therefore, just any infectious disease. The question is whether it is not "an immune response of the planet to the insolence of the human being, who destroys infinite living beings out of greed" (p. 131). This approach, besides allowing the author to make us aware, as a good *Linker*, of the fact that the infectious chain of global capitalism "destroys our nature and dumbs down the citizens of nation states so that we become professional tourists and consumers of goods whose production will eventually cause more deaths than all the viruses put together" (p. 134), allows him to denounce the ideology that associates techno-scientific progress and socio-moral progress as an automatism. Therefore, "We need a new Enlightenment, everyone must receive an ethical education so that we recognize the enormous danger of blindly following science and technology" (p. 133). A "philosophical conscience" is therefore essential to get out of the crisis, making us "cosmopolitans of a metaphysical pandemic" (p. 134).

Certainly, viruses pose a metaphysical problem. We do not even know for sure what they are, what their ontological status is. Viruses compromise the very notion of life, which is plural, since it cannot be affirmed or denied categorically that they are living beings. Of course, this is a problem of Biology, but beyond the solution that this science can provide, the coronavirus brings us back to the metaphysical problem of omnipotence, or as Hans Blumenberg would say, of the "absolutism of reality". We seemed to have forgotten that reality *is*, that there is reality and that humans are bound to it, no matter how much they try to suppress it in order to make a world to suit themselves, as certain delusions of the impenitent *wishful thinking* wing of constructivism predicted.

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Of course, reality is a construction. The notion of reality will be told to us shortly in the interest of precision. It is. But we humans never live in reality but in a description of reality. We do not inhabit the world point black but an *understood* world, in a certain *interpretation* of the world. This datum of the contemporary philosophical *koine*, this datum that philosophers tend to share today has led many, in hyperbolic constructivist naivety, to preterit the *out-there*. It is true that the *neo-tech* impact on what is real has materialized the twilight Nietzschean *dictum* according to which "the true world has finally become a fable". But one thing is to make it problematic, like Nietzsche, the metaphysical distinction between truth and fable, it is to fabricate the truth, and quite another thing is to put the fable in the place of truth and to maintain the strong characteristics of that truth, "verifying" the fable.

Indeed, it is not the same thing to characterize the ontological effect of the new technologies, which makes the analogical real subordinate or functional to the digital virtual, as we ourselves have often done, as it is to attribute the predicates of the old reality to the virtual, going so far as to simply suppress the "external world", from the Cartesian *res extensa* to the Popperian *world 1.* And so, when it was taken for granted that the virtual was already what was really real, a virus arrives with its "nature" and knocks at the door to remind us with its knocks that it exists, depowered and vulnerable, yes, but nature. To the philosophical "pride", the experience of the pandemic comes as a *memento mori* of the intellectual confusion between thought according to desire and reality, a reminder of our impotence and finiteness, of our contingency.

Reality manifests itself to us subliterally under the species of an unknown pathogenic agent. Its microscopic smallness, which makes it undetectable to human senses, paradoxically exhibits the greatness of nature's resistance to the experiments of the human sorcerer's apprentice. Byun-Chul Han, in "The Viral Emergency and the World of Tomorrow" (ASPO, 2020, pp. 97-111). It also appeals to the old concept of "resistance" when he remarks on the metaphysical dimension of the pandemic, on the "apathy towards reality". The digitalization of society had given us the impression of having cancelled the resistance offered by reality. It is as if, thanks to the virus, whose pandemic would make us guilty since "it is the result of human cruelty", that "we intervene mercilessly in the sensitive ecosystem", we suddenly discovered that "the outside" exists, external to ourselves and external to the digitally alienated worlds we inhabited, which resists our aggression.

In order to "rethink and radically restrict destructive capitalism, and also our unlimited and destructive mobility, to save us, to save the climate and our beautiful planet" (p. 111), an almost indispensable tribute to the publishing industry in order to publish, Han appeals to his thesis of the excess of positivity of Western societies and their globalized world without borders. This bad Western habit, which has dispensed with external enemies in its imaginary, could not have feared the contagion of a pathogen such as the coronavirus. The West had believed itself invulnerable by eliminating from our lives the negativity of the real, just what the resistant virus rescues: the excessive panic to the virus "is a social and even global immune reaction to the new enemy. The immune

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reaction is so violent because we have lived for so long in a society without enemies, in a society of positivity, and now the virus is perceived as a permanent terror" (p. 108).

However, in spite of all, we will continue to assume that the *factum* of our time is the neotechnological fact and its "abolition" of (the notion of) nature (absolute or unconditioned and necessary, omnipotent and invulnerable, insurmountable horizon of human action). So the answer to the question of whether nature is taking revenge on cheap intellectuals is no. And the reason is easy to explain. Indeed, leaving aside the fact that it is unavoidable that the coronavirus crisis has put a mask over the mouths of us more or less pretentious loudmouths who pontificate happily and lightly on the divine and the human, a moral lesson that we will not forget so easily, and independently from the crazy-looking hypothesis that this virus has been created in a laboratory with malicious intent according to the version of *The Washington Post*, or without such intent, by mere accident, according to the version of the Prince of Asturias and Nobel Prize winner Luc-Antoine Montaignier, that is, even assuming the total *naturalness* of the emergence of the coronavirus, the fact is that in the materialization of its potential harmfulness, *technological mediation* is unavoidable. Without mass society and planetary globalization, both of which result from the technical system that gives supersonic wings to the transport of goods and people, the coronavirus would not have been able to become the pandemic scourge it is today.

Pandemic damage necessarily requires technological "prosthesis" for its operational effectiveness. And it is a conspicuous sign of the ontological fact on which the so-called "end of history" is based: the suppression of the limit. When there was still history (time with meaning, *consented* by and for a purpose) there was a limit, a limit that was considered "natural" and before which all human action, whether theoretical, practical or technical, bounced, like an unbreakable vertical wall. It was discussed *what* limit there was, whether the limit was cosmological, theological, or anthropological, but it was not discussed the fact that there was a limit, there was a limit. Today, on the other hand, what does not admit discussion is the *suppression of the limit*. The Earth appears as an unlimited reservoir of technical action. That is why the way out of the pandemic crisis, if there is one, does not lie in re-entering a history that can no longer exist without a natural limit, but in post-historical *self-limitation*, technological *self-regulation.*

In the new normality, time is no longer experienced as natural (cyclical or cosmological) or historical (linear or anthropotheological) since it is no longer normal that the new life, digital or numerical, presents a qualitative profile. A merely quantitative time is observed as an "insignificant" flow of instantaneous *quanta*, without a horizon that integrates them into a historical plot of meaning. The new normality does not seem to have History: "normal" memory today is external and the individual increasingly lacks the ability to concentrate. In the imaginary of human self-understanding, the (new) Technology has absorbed History, which in its "normal" time would had absorbed, in turn, in the intentional project of humanity, the "normality" of Nature. The new normality is *anthropocentric.*

3. THE GNOSEOLOGICAL INTERPELLATION

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Consequences of a health crisis. Ideas kit for the understanding of the coronavirus and
its informational techno-pandemic

A couple of years ago a book which title has contributed to prepare the "new
normality" appeared, *El fin de la normalidad. La gran crisis y el futuro del crecimiento.*
*[*The end of normality. The Great Crisis and the Future of Growth]. Its author was John
Kenneth Galbraith's son, James K. Galbraith. As if it was an awakening from a long
sleep, the crisis that began in 2008 confronted us with a situation of uncertainty, which
seems to have become permanent. Although politicians and experts continue with their
litany of a return to normality, the world of abundant and cheap resources, of sustained
and regular growth that we knew, has been left behind with no signs of returning.
Economic science and its naturalized ideas of equilibrium and growth can no longer
account for an economy subjected to systematic financial plundering and a fixed cost
structure inherited from the days of cheap energy. This thesis of the book is repeated in
2020 in "The mobilization that must begin now".   Although the focus is still on
economics, Galbraith starts from an observation that we could say compromises what
we could call the future of knowledge and it is the *conceptual catastrophe*: "A whole
world of illusions, self-deceptions and sophistry is dead".

Regardless of the interventionist enthusiasm with which Galbraith seems not to want
to return to normality because normality is the problem, the fact is that, from the
epistemological point of view, a new reality requires a new set of categories with which
to conceive it. Concepts are there to categorize experience and it turns out that, as
Emilio Lledó has said, referring to the current situation, this is a situation that was
previously "inexperienced". Interviewed, he explains that the crisis of the coronavirus is
a great opportunity to get out of Plato's cave, for the cultivation of critical intelligence.
Like the prisoner in the cave, in the face of the pandemic we can ask ourselves: "who is
telling us the truth, who is deceiving us, who wants to manipulate us". Critical thinking is
ideal to prevent other pandemic threats such as "the deterioration of education, culture
and knowledge". Always knowledge.

Beyond the problems that virological, biological and medical knowledge may
encounter in relation to the old taxonomic question of the nature of viruses in general
and that of SARS-CoV-2 in particular, questions that are in principle "scientific", the
current crisis confronts us with gnoseological problems related to communication and
health concerning the veracity of information, the question of infoxication and post-truth.
Philosophical authors such as Žižek in "The coronavirus is a Kill Bill-like blow to
capitalism and could lead to the reinvention of communism" (ASPO, 2020, pp. 21-28) or
Badiou in "On the epidemic situation" (ASPO, 2020, pp. 67-78), as if they were
answering Lledó's question, launch themselves into the critique of social networks to
vindicate the polar orientation of science in these hard times. Žižek himself greens the
Marxian question about where facts end and ideology begin. With a more critical
interest, however, there are the minority positions of reservation to the opinion of
scientific experts and their committees.

Gabriel's reservation which has already been briefly presented: science alone cannot
overcome the crisis, both that of the coronavirus, in particular, and, in general, that of a
lethal world order of which the pandemic itself is an expression. Let us take a closer look
at the reticence of Giorgio Agamben, author of another "prophetic" book too, *The*
Coming Community, who maintains that, since the beginnings of Western civilization,

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the source of the sovereignty of political power is to be found in a double movement that makes it possible to exclude biological life from the law and at the same time to introduce it through the state of exception. Just as in 1986 we argued "the myth of science", Agamben maintains today that science is the religion of our time. And so still in February, on the 26th, he came to write the title of his text, on "The invention of an epidemic" (ASPO, 2020, pp. 17-19). To consider the viral phenomenon that is sweeping mankind, which not even a biblical plague could have been worse, as a kind of flu, may be a typical intellectual blunder, a sadly ridiculous philosophical hyperbole. However, it touches the raw nerve of the fact that science and politics form an inextricable intertwining, that, as we have known since at least Bacon, knowledge is power, because it is functional to it, a function of power. Therefore, gnoseological problems are also political. And their resolution is a political act. In this sense, the fact that the epidemic is an "invention" does not mean that it does not exist, but that its definition is political. Let us use the crude example of the obligation to cover oneself with a mask every other day, every other day, every other day. After midnight the environmental viral load is not significantly more or less onerous than a minute earlier, but the fine that can be received is.

Agamben denounced the "frantic, irrational and completely unjustified" measures being taken by the Italian government in response to the "climate of panic" fomented by the government itself and the media sounding board. However hasty and inopportune his article might have been, and leaving behind the Italian peninsular framework, it is still philosophically relevant to point out the tendency of certain governmental bodies to make the state of exception, under the guise of the coronavirus exception, the "normal paradigm of government". This in turn feeds the fact that we are getting used to living in fear. We need "collective states of panic". The logic is diabolically perverse: "the limitation of freedom imposed by governments is accepted in the name of a desire for security that has been induced by the same governments that now intervene to satisfy it" (p. 19).

Having brought up this first text by Agamben (two more would follow) on the crisis of the coronavirus serves not only to critically highlight the epistemological limits of the latent cryptopositivism or patent posivitivism in which elpidologically place the longed-for salvation from evil in science, but also serves as an exponent of another great gnoseological effect of the pandemic that can be much worse than it: the *infodemic.* Indeed, more dilated than the pandemic, the new normality faces a techno-pandemic of increasing incidence (Echeverría and Sánchez Almendros, 2020, pp. 443-454). The techno-virus is an ideal techno-person. It is a techno-person who is not flesh and blood, but a pure technological and media representation. This techno-person has installed itself virally and deeply in the social imaginary of our time, from which it will not be evacuated, no matter how much the pandemic is controlled and even exterminated. Techno-COVID-19 already shapes the memory - and the exercise of power - of our time.

Indeed, the techno-person has characteristics shared with viruses already. The techno-virus hypertrophies these characteristics and, as an info-virus, pandemics them. Just as viruses are not individuals, but strains, like bacteria, and depend completely on

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the environment and to adapt to it and reproduce, they mutate genetically generating new strains, and just as they lack consciousness and, consequently, also intentions, they are not even semoving subjects, but they are moved by other agents, such as the people who are their vehicles and take them from one place to another, rooted in means of transport, both private and collective, in a massive but random way, without intentionality and much less moral conscience, so it happens with the techno-persons. The techno-person has nothing to do with the technologized person as one might commonly believe, because from the outset, the techno-person, unlike the person, has no conscience. The techno-person, for Echeverría and Almendros (2020, pp. 81-132) is, on the contrary, a general philosophical concept, to designate informational entities, more or less linked to the human or corporate persons from which they arise, housed in the various digital "clouds", which are data storage and management centers with computer ships of superlative capacity. Even at the risk of oversimplification, techno-persons are conceived as data systems, which conveniently processed, under a given techno-logical application, present simulated human form on the monitors of the various computerized electronic devices. Any *smartphone* user who enters the nefelibata digital social networks already generates, since in the digital world or third environment identity is changeable and plural, several techno-personas. The "clouds", mainly the four richest in the world in terms of stock market capitalization, Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon, have played a very important role in the spread of the techno-virus associated with COVID-19, which Echeverría and Almendros call techno-COVID-19 (p. 443). The industrial-era media (press, radio, television, etc.) have also played a major role in spreading it, especially given the mandatory home confinement.

In any case, techno-persons do not move by themselves, but are moved by other agents, either through instructions on how to behave and what gestures to make in front of the cameras, or through computer programs that transmit digitally, whether we realize it or not, given the many hidden cameras, *cookies* or geolocation systems that send all our data to the clouds, for safekeeping and processing. Similarly, epidemiologists proceed with COVID-19 data, without the virus being aware of it. Just as the Lords of the Air or now Lords of the Clouds can foresee our behaviors, epidemiologists predict the eventual evolution of the coronavirus. This is how techno-personas are constructed, be they political, social or viral. Global information and data networks generate millions of possible techno-personas every day, including those assigned to us as users. These technologies have been massively applied to COVID-19, which has become the most mentioned informational entity in the "traditional" *mass media* and in the "new" global social networks, going viral immediately, an infovirus. It has been the most relevant techno-person of the third environment for some time now. Techno-personas, like Agamben's epidemic, can be fictions, they almost always are, but they generate realities like money, the greatest fiction! Techno-personas mediate between electronic and organic brains. When they enter people's eyes through digitized screens they permeate human minds. They almost always contaminate them. This is how an informational techno-virus has been generated from the coronavirus. Echeverría and Almendros (2020) maintain the hypothesis that the current pandemic has been superimposed on an infodemic, that is, an informational epidemic that intensely affects millions of humans. And he also predicts that the mental damage is and will be greater than the organic ills

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caused by the coronavirus, however dramatic they may be. Apart from the health crisis, there are profound economic, social and political crises, which together shape the techno-COVID-19 imaginary.

The enormous mass of data, whether true or not, arising from the virus, like Agamben's own article, has created a viral techno-persona, which has a name and a global image, with millions of impacts. The informational implementation of COVID-19 by various technoscientific organizations, such as the WHO itself, has turned a biological entity into a complex informational and technological strain: techno-COVID-19. Echeverría and S. Almendros describe it as a viral techno-persona (p. 453), because it has a virus as its origin, but because of its structure and functioning it is very similar to the rest of the techno-personas of our time. In fact, like the techno-personas, it is plural: it is not one, but many variants of itself. It forms informational techno-viruses that are transmitted through the *mass media* and social networks, almost always with the result of influencing and transforming the way of thinking and behaving of people, both physical and legal. This is why it is a techno-person, a techno-nature that generates various types of ills, apart from the physical and organic ones that, in accordance with its plural nature, the virus itself generates. It nests in human brains and transfigures them, generating new modes of thought, action and life. Its incidence is growing, to the point that the infodemic is more widespread than the epidemic. In addition to a pandemic, we are also suffering from a techno-pandemic.

Infodemia highlights the problem of the communication of information, since variants of the informational techno-virus have been mentally very toxic, given that they have generated highly irrational beliefs and behaviors in broad social sectors. The epistemological question of language as a vehicle of knowledge is hypertrophied and we are forced to realize, as the linguistic turn of thought discovered, that there is no neutral language from which to communicate facts, since language itself intervenes in the constitution of facts. What we call "reality" is the result of linguistically die-cutting the *out-there*: language cuts out the facts, which for that very reason are not given (passively), but facts (actively): the "data" are "facts". And if this is so, then rhetoric ceases to be something adjective, to acquire a substantive peralte.

The rhetoric of communication appears as a field of Mars in the battle of public opinion, and never better said, given the preference of governments and social agents, such as employers and trade unions, for the use of war metaphor when it comes to communicating the human health crisis: "we are at war against the coronavirus", taking a step forward in the social techno-prosopopeia of the coronavirus, presented as the common *hostis*, public enemy number one, whose techno-image of social undesirable, by the way, is clearly inspired by the hackneyed iconography of aliens (the Martians of the cold war years!). Let us recall Jemad Villaroya techno-commanding at the cameras that, in the face of the coronavirus, "we are all soldiers". This was an act of techno-political communication in which the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus was being conceived as a techno-person who would have to go through the techno-weapons. The state of alarm was thus becoming a "state of war". And with this *hashtag* calling for general mobilization #EsteVirusLoParamosUnidos on the governmental Twitter, the state of war

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has become a state of propaganda to standardize the population, more subject than citizen, given the suspension of rights validated in a parliament, that is to say, dysphonic, and send it confined to home, a paradigmatic case of techno-political action of total authoritarian social effect. One might wonder whether the war language is just an innocent metaphor to illustrate the situation or whether it faithfully describes reality. The point, however, is that there is neither "innocent metaphor" nor "faithful description of reality", since it is the metaphor that conveys the (so-called) "reality".

This explains why the points of view differ among the different authors here; the general use of the language of war does not obey the same reasons. For example, for Agamben this language would be given by a state of exception decreed without justification by the State, so that, if we had to speak of war, it would be of a civil war, where the enemy, absurdly invisible, would now be within ourselves, while for Badiou (ASPO, 2020, p. 74), by analogizing epidemic and war, the rhetoric of war corresponds perfectly to a deadly process of crossroads between nature (the virus) and society (the national state). But not everything is a struggle between two armies: a horde of tiny and slippery pathogens, popularly known as coronaviruses, and a sublime legion of cells and molecules specialized in exterminating the invaders, the immune system, which will end up winning with the "morale of victory" invoked by President Pedro Sanchez, because, in addition to the war, we also have a metaphorical one specifically of immunity. Roberto Esposito has been talking for many years about the fact that we live under an immunological paradigm, and in relation to the coronavirus he has extended his thesis in several articles published so far during the pandemic. Thus, in *Immunitas*, he had in fact referred to the fight against an epidemic outbreak as an event, among others, that should be understood as a protective response to a danger. In an article on Biopolitics and coronavirus, Esposito (2020a) refers to the "prophylactic practices" that are highlighting both "the real immune syndrome" of the new biopolitical regime and the very strength of society's immune system. The immunological paradigm shows its validity also in the opposition to illegal immigration or in the measures to neutralize the latest computer virus.

However, Han (2012, p. 18), who denies Esposito's ideas, considers that "the immunological paradigm is not compatible with the process of globalization". The immunological otherness has been replaced by the postmodern difference, which "no longer generates any disease". He thus sustains the thesis of the substitution of the viral era by a neuronal era. With the outbreak of the pandemic, Han has explained the violent immunological reaction aroused (to Žižek's mockery, 2020b) as the confirmation that we had become accustomed to living in a world without serious external threats, in a society of positivity. Western societies are overreacting because they were getting used to living without open and tolerant enemies, without immunity mechanisms, so when a real threat emerged they panicked, so "the virus is perceived as a permanent terror".

Emotions flourish as never before with the pandemic and with emotions, which for many, followers, perhaps unknowingly, of Socrates, must be rationally subdued for there to be a criterion of truth, the most classic of gnoseological problems, which in terms of Communication is posed today as the problem of post-truth. Post-truth is the

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contemporary form of truth. The COVID-19 crisis has brought, forever and ever, the crisis of truth, for it has become definitively clear how truth cannot be established outside of power. The pandemic has made it clear that truth today is intrinsically hypermediated: there is no truth apart from the media that communicate it and its code effect. That truth is mediated by the *media*, never better said, indicates that no matter how great the pretension of separating science from power, knowledge from power, it is genuinely naïve to preterit that those who claim to be dedicated to seeing the order of things, "normality", knowledge, are rather dedicated (to seeing) how to put order into things, the "new normality", power. Perhaps it is the merit of the coronavirus to have unmasked how humanity in its daily praxis has always preferred to change reality, that is, power, rather than to know it, that is, the truth. And if humanity, when it devotes itself to understanding things, does so in the hope of controlling them, then there is no difference, nor can there be, between truth and post-truth. Truth after the pandemic disruption is more intersubjective than ever, neither objective nor subjective, political. Therefore, in the "new normal" truth will be rhetorical or it will not be.

4. THE AXIOLOGICAL INTERPELLATION

Leaving aside the pandemic "good moralism", the moralism that has proliferated and spread along with the coronavirus, both with stale *flower power* appeals to "good vibes", to use the colloquialism of the expression, and also with its serious version, which makes the philosopher a kind of moral functionary of humanity, the lay version of the Western saint and the Eastern saint, the fact is that we can no longer postpone, as the very issue of post-truth urged us to do, the practical-rational dimension of the world health crisis, its ethical-political, axiological implications, where the ontological and gnoseological ones seen so far lead to. In fact, almost all the authors who have pronounced themselves on the plague have ended up making considerations within the field of Ethics and Moral and Political Philosophy, leaving their moral lesson taught.

We have already seen that Markus Gabriel called for an ethical education to avoid the harmful automatism of identifying moral progress and techno-scientific progress and to achieve a one moral conscience for a one humanity. "The virus tells us then - Morin would complement, 2020 - that this interdependence must give rise to human solidarity in the awareness of our common destiny." Žižek's position is perhaps the most moralistic and, at least, we have to thank him for his sincerity and frankness in the approach and vindication of a communism whose only alternative, so he believes, is barbarism, since we need "total unconditional solidarity and a globally coordinated response, a new form of what was once called communism" (2020a). Žižek forgets that before calling for global cooperative solidarity a community is needed, which in turn requires coimmunity. Before communism there must be, to use Sloterdijk's term, *co-immunism*.

More profound is Agamben's reflection in "Contagion" (ASPO, 2020, pp. 31-33), which sees the suppression of otherness as a moral implication of confinement: "Our neighbor has been abolished" (p. 33). Or pathologized (Croatian Horvart (2020) speaks of the other as ideologically constructed as a disease). Or criminalized (Dario

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Sztajnszrajber (2020) points out that the police mentality induced in the citizen leads to transform the other into an agent of permanent contagion: the suspect of being infected is criminalized). The fear of the generalized other, in short. With the irruption of the COVID-19 and the digitalization of confined life, the body is universally considered as a potential pathogenic agent and is broken. Broken bodies" appear (Puig Punyet, 2020). An anthropological derivation of this phobia of otherness that is radicalized by the crisis of the coronavirus consists in making one's own body an alterity. Treating one's own body as "other", as a potentially pathological otherness. Fear thus spreads and goes from being held by others to being held by oneself. The digitalization of life contributes to this suspicion of oneself in the new normality: techno-bodies displace the flesh, as if we were only consciousness always remotely available for contact without body, contact (*contagium*) without contact, without contagion (*contagium*), tele-contact, without official hours of rest, without weekends, without vacations. The "new" "normal" human relates, rather through screens than through the body, as if he lacked a body. His potential illness turns the body into an almost hindrance to life. A life that paradoxically is no longer one's own, that of each one, but the naked life. This is the value that is enhanced in the new axiology, health, a health that is merely animal, simple survival, to which individual freedom or intimacy are subordinated. And when what survives is life without human qualification, one could think with Agamben: nude life, null life.

Echeverría and S. Almendros (2020, p. 447) note that the technological and epidemiological implementation of coronavirus evolution became not only a major issue, but also a techno-political one. An eventual health management crisis suddenly became a public health crisis. Thus, to address the problem, it was necessary not only to generate obedience, but also hope. To this end, without questioning the techno-scientific "solutionist" support, techno-health goals were set: for example, avoiding the collapse of the hospital system (particularly the ICUs) and then reaching the inflection point of the infection and death curves, which became the authentic techno-scientific representation of the virus and its spread: the ultimate goal was to "reach the peak of the curve". As COVID-19 provoked the health crisis with increasing virulence, social control became the target objective, as well as preventing a wave of uncontrollable social panic (such as the fear of shortages). And all this to achieve a strategic objective: to generate a controlled social alarm, which became techno-COVID-19 as part of the aforementioned infodemic.

It is not surprising that, starting from depersonalized life as a common value and greater than individual values, philosophers see occasion to proclaim the failure of free trade or market, holding techno-liberal capitalism responsible for the evils of the pandemic, from Žižek, who reinvents communism as the only way out of the health crisis, or Badiou, who claims that the spread of the virus is due to the elevation of Chinese state capitalism to imperial status and yearns for a third stage communism, to Han, who, in "The Viral Emergency and the World of Tomorrow," fears the establishment of a digital police state in the West (ASPO, 2020, p. 110), or Harari, who fears the techno-political shift from "epidermal" to "hypodermic" surveillance, or Gabriel, for whom the world order prior to the virus was already lethal, passing through Horvat, who sees in the virus a product of global capitalism, through Gray, who announces that neoliberal

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globalization has come to an end and that the time has come for national states and the beginning of a new world.

From a philosophical point of view, much more interesting than the nostalgic appeals to communism, however different they may be, are the observations of Agamben when he considers that the coronavirus has only served to decree an unjustified state of exception, and the biopolitical theses of Esposito (2005, 2020b, 2020c), who wants to go further by pointing out how with the pandemic the roles are reversed and we have politicians playing doctors and doctors playing politicians (2020a), and the psychopolitical theses of Han (2014), since what is sought today is not to discipline the body, but the mind. The fact is that both one position and the other, however much they may more or less purposely rival over the best approach to the situation, are in fact emphasizing how the COVID-19 health crisis evidences the intervention of power (of the power of the State, political power, but techno-scientifically founded, which, although increasingly less in the face of the techno-powers, which are economic powers, has nevertheless resurfaced and in a manifestly authoritarian way, regardless of parliamentary endorsement or not) in human life. And on its other side: death. The normal state of exception or biopolitics or psychopolitics entail the power to give death, thanatopolitics (Fernández Vítores, 2015) or "necropolitics" (Mbembe, 2003). And as all these policies are implemented today through these new ways of exercising social control by extending the digital domain over the offline world, which are ICTs, they are all surpassed by technopolitics, which is the political-social form of the practice of power in the new pandemic time and which uses techno-persons, who are not only not individuals, but also not political subjects, to control and subjugate people. In the techno-hospitals they have been deciding on the life or death of people, prioritizing the salvation of the young to the detriment of the old. This is power and its oldest prerogative: that of giving death. In the coronavirus crisis, death wears a mask, it is put on by the governments that technically administer it.

5. CONCLUSIONS

A final reflection is in order: with normal "reality" vanished [Epigraph 2], with "subjectivity" fainted (diminution of the epistemic subject [Epigraph 3], as well as the political subject [Epigraph 4]), in the form of the techno-person, the virus, both in its natural and, above all, techno-natural version, configures the exercise of life in the era of infopandemia and the "new normality". Techno-COVID-19 has validated the conversion of the politico-social (governance and administration, work, education and even health) into techno-politico-social, turning the exception, the *onlife*, into the norm (governance and administration, work, education and even health are remote). The agents and patients of the political-social hodiernos become to function as techno-agents and techno-patients, techno-persons of techno-viral etiology. The viral activity has as scenarios the buildings of public use, the streets and squares, the beaches and parks, the collective means of transport. This activity at the limit tends to zero, through the application by governmental agents of biopolitical technologies of social discipline, of domestic confinement, above all, with legal instruments of exception

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penalizing any disobedience, being absorbed by the techno-viral activity, which tends to infinity, in its own techno-scenarios, mostly *online, through* the nefelibate information and communication technologies, which put pressure on the minds to internalize the data and the discreet official explanations and of scientific appearance about the evolution and the harmfulness of the coronavirus, which lower the rational defenses at the same time as they hit the emotional ones. It is not the viral health crisis that is transforming the normality of life in the street, but the techno-political actions taken to deal with it, even if the blame is taken by the previously techno-personified virus. In fact, the COVID-19 coronavirus may pass, but it will do so leaving behind a good example of what will be the social-political (techno)-social in the years to come. We will surely overcome the pandemic, but perhaps it will be at the expense of the informational techno-pandemic definitely overtaking us.

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