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Where Are We Now?
The Epidemic as Politics

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What colour is the night?

The criterion set by the Government to determine the colour of our lives is 50 cases out of 100,000 people per week. From a statistical point of view, this is an extremely low risk rate of 0.5 per thousand. How is it possible that men, for a risk that remains low, even when projected over the whole year, agree to renounce not only their freedom, but also everything that makes life worth living: contact with other human beings; the gaze laid on their faces; all the memories and the holidays joyfully celebrated together? Watchman, what colour is the night?

January 25, 2021

A Lichtenberg Prophecy

“Our world will become so civilized that it will then be ridiculous to believe in God, as it is today to believe in ghosts. Then, after a time, the world will become even more civilized. And the process that will bring it to the supreme summit of civilization will continue faster and faster. Upon reaching its climax, expert judgment will once again be reversed and knowledge will reach its extreme transformation. Then - and this will really be the end - we will only believe in ghosts.”

January 20, 2021

The Philosophy of Contact

Two bodies are in contact when they touch each other. But what does it mean to touch? What is a contact? Giorgio Colli gave an acute definition of it by stating that two points are in contact when they are separated only by a vacuum of representation. Contact does not occur at a point of contact, which in itself cannot exist, because any continuous quantity can be divided. Two bodies are said to be in contact when no medium can be inserted between them, that is, when they are immediate. If there is a relationship of representation between two things (for example, subject-object; husband-wife; master-servant; distance-proximity), they will not be said to be in contact: but if every such representation fails, if there is nothing between them, then and only then can they be said to be in contact. This can also be expressed by saying that contact is unrepresentable, that it is not possible to make a representation of the relationship in question here; or, as Colli writes, that “contact is therefore the indication of a representative nothing, of a metaphysical interstice”.

The shortcoming of this definition is that, insofar as it must resort to purely negative expressions, such as “nothing” and “unrepresentable”, it risks fading into mysticism. Colli himself points out that contact can be said to be immediate only approximately, that representation can never be completely eliminated. To avoid abstraction, it will then be useful to go back to the starting point and ask ourselves again what it means to “touch” - that is, to question that most humble and earthly of the senses, which is touch.

Aristotle reflected on the particular nature of touch, which differentiates it from the other senses. For every sense there is a medium (*metaxy*), which performs a determining function: for sight, the medium is the diaphanous, which, illuminated by color, acts on the eyes; for hearing it is the air, which, moved by a sound, strikes the ear. What distinguishes touch from the other senses is that we perceive the tangible “not because the medium exerts an action upon us, but in touch we are affected together with (*ama*) the medium”. This medium, which is not external to us, but within us, is the flesh (*sarx*). But this means that not only the external object is touched, but also the flesh that is moved or moved by it. In other words, in contact we touch our own sensibility; we are affected by our own receptivity. While in sight we cannot see our eyes, and in hearing we cannot perceive our ability to hear, in touch we touch our own ability to touch and be touched. That is, contact with another body is together with, and above all, contact with ourselves. Touch, which seems inferior to the other senses, is then somehow the first, because it is in touch that something is generated as a subject, which in sight and in the other senses is somehow abstractly presupposed. We have an experience of ourselves for the first time when, touching another body, we touch together with it our own flesh.

If, as we are perversely trying to do today, we were to abolish every contact, if everything and everyone were kept at a distance, then we would lose not only the experience of other bodies but, above all, every immediate experience of ourselves, that is, we would lose purely and simply our flesh.

January 5, 2021

Gaia and Chthonia

I.

In classical Greek, the earth has two names, which correspond to two distinct if not opposite realities: *ge* (or *gaia*) and *chthon*. Contrary to a popular theory today, men not only inhabit *gaia*, but first of all have to do with *chthon*, which in some mythical narratives takes the form of a goddess, whose name is *Chthoniè*, Ctonia. Thus the theology of Pherecides of Siro lists at the outset three deities: Zeus, Chronos and Chthoniè, and adds that “Chthoniè took on the name of Ge, after Zeus gave her the earth (*gen*) as a gift”. Although the goddess' identity remains undefined, Ge appears here as an accessory figure, almost an alternative name for Chthoniè. No less significant is that, in Homer, humans are defined by the adjective *epichthonioi* (*ctonii*, which derives from *chthon*), while the adjective *epigaios* or *epigeios* refers only to plants and animals.

The fact is that *chton* and *ge* name two aspects of the earth that are, so to speak, geologically antithetical: *chton* is the outer face of the underworld, the earth viewed from the surface downwards, and *ge* is the earth from from the surface upwards, the face that the earth turns towards the sky. This stratigraphic diversity corresponds to differences in their practices and functions: *chthon* cannot be cultivated nor can it be nourished, escaping the city/countryside opposition, and is not a good that can be possessed; *ge*, conversely, as the eponymous Homeric hymn emphatically recalls, “nourishes all that is on *chthon*” (*epi chthoni*) and produces the crops and goods that enrich men. For those whom he honors with his benevolence, “the furrows of the land that give life are laden with fruit, in the fields the cattle thrive and the house is filled with riches and they govern with just laws the cities of beautiful women.” (v.9-11).

Pherecides' theogony contains the earliest evidence of the relationship between *Ge* and *Chthon*, between Gaia and Ctonia. A fragment preserved for us by Clement of Alexandria defines the nature of their bond by specifying that Zeus is married to Chthoniè and when, according to the wedding rite of the *anakalypteria*, the bride takes off her veil and appears naked to the groom, Zeus covers her with “A large and beautiful cloak” on which “he embroidered *Ge* and *Ogeno* (Ocean) with many colors”. *Chthon*, the underworld, is therefore something abysmal, which cannot show herself in her nakedness, and the garment with which the god covers her is none other than Gaia, the upper-world. A passage from Porphyry's *Cave of the Nymphs* informs us that Pherecides characterized the chthonic dimension as depth, “speaking of recesses (*mychous*), ditches (*bothrous*), caverns (*antra*)”, conceived as doors (*thyras*, *pylas*) that souls pass through in birth and death. The earth is a double reality: Ctonia is the shapeless and hidden ground that Gaia covers with its variegated embroidery of hills, flowery countryside, villages, woods and flocks.

Even in Hesiod's *Theogony* the earth has two faces. There Gaia, “the firm basis of all things”, is the first creature of Chaos, but the chthonic element is evoked immediately afterwards and, as in Pherecides, it is defined by the term *mychos*: “the dark Tartarus deep in the earth by the wide ways (*mychoi chthonos euryodeies*)”. Where the stratigraphic difference between the two

aspects of the earth appears most clearly is in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter. Already at the beginning, when the poet describes the scene of the rape of Persephone while picking flowers, Gaia is evoked twice, in both cases as the flowery surface that the earth turns towards the sky: “the roses, the crocuses, the beautiful violets in a tender meadow and the irises, hyacinths and daffodils that Gaia makes grow according to the will of the god, ... at the perfume of the flower all the sky above and the earth smiled”. But, just then, “*chthon* from the vast paths opened wide (*chane*) in the plain of Nisio and the lord of the many guests came out (*orosen*) with his immortal horses. That this is a movement from the bottom towards the surface is underlined by the verb *ornymi*, which means “rise, rise”, as if rising from the chthonic depth of the earth the god emerged on Gaia, the face of the earth that looks towards the sky. Later, when it is Persephone herself who tells Demeter about her abduction, this movement is reversed and instead Gaia (*gaia d'enerthe koresen*) opens up, so that “the lord of the many guests” could drag her underground with his golden chariot (vv. 429-31). It is as if the earth had two doors or openings: one that opens from the depths towards Ge, and one that leads from Ge into the abyss of Chthonia.

In reality, it is not two doors, but a single threshold that belongs entirely to *chthon*. The verb that the hymn uses in reference to Gaia is not *chaino*, to open wide, but *choreo*, which simply means “to make room”. Gaia does not “open”, but “makes room” for Proserpina's transit; the very idea of a passage between the top and the bottom, of a depth (*profundus: altus et fundus*) is intimately chthonic and, as the Sibyl reminds Aeneas, the gate of Dis is first of all turned towards hell (*facilis descensus Averno: “the descent into hell is easy”*). The Latin term corresponding to *chthon* is not *tellus*, which designates a horizontal extension, but *humus*, which implies a downward direction (cf. *humare*, to bury), and it is significant that the name for man derives from it (*hominem appellari quia sit humo natus*). The fact that man is “human”, that is, terrestrial, in the classical world does not imply a link with Gaia, with the surface of the earth that looks up at the sky, but above all an intimate connection with the chthonic sphere of depth.

That *chthon* evokes the idea of an opening and a passage is evident in the adjective that in Homer and Hesiod constantly accompanies the term: *eyryodeia*, which can be translated as “from the wide way” only if one does not forget that *odos* implies the idea of the transit towards a destination, in this case toward the world of the dead, a journey that everyone is destined to make. (It is possible that Virgil, in writing *facilis descensus* – the descent is easy – remembered the Homeric formula).

In Rome, a circular opening called *mundus*, which according to legend was excavated by Romulus at the time of the city's foundation, put the world of the living in communication with the chthonic world of the dead. This opening, sealed off by a stone called *manalis lapis*, was opened three times a year, and on those days, during which it was said that *mundus patet*, “the world is open”, and “the occult and hidden things of the religion of mani were brought to light and revealed”, almost all public activities were suspended. In an exemplary article, Vendryes showed that the original meaning of our term “world” is not, as had always been argued, a translation of the Greek *kosmos*; rather, it derives precisely from the circular threshold (*mundus*) that opened up the “world” of the dead. The ancient city is founded on the “world” because men dwell in this opening that unites the celestial world and the underworld, the world of the living and that of

the dead, the present and the past, and it is through the relationship between these two worlds that it becomes possible for them to direct their actions and find inspiration for the future.

Not only is man bound in his own name to the chthonic sphere, but also his world and the very horizon of his existence border on the recesses of Chthonia. Man is, in the literal sense of the term, a being of the deep.

II.

A chthonic culture par excellence is that of the Etruscans. Those who walk through the necropolises scattered throughout the countryside of Tuscia immediately perceive that the Etruscans lived in Chthonia and not Gaia, not only because they left behind essentially that which had to do with the dead, but also and above all because the sites they chose for their dwellings—calling them “cities” is perhaps improper—even if they are apparently on the surface of Gaia, are in reality *epichthonioi*, at home in the vertical depths of *chthon*. Hence their taste for caverns and recesses carved into the stone, their preference for high cliffs and gorges, for steep walls that plummet towards a river or a stream. Anyone who has suddenly found himself standing in front of Cava Buia near Blera, or in the streets sunken into the rock at S. Giuliano, knows that he is no longer standing on the surface of Gaia, but is certainly *ad portam inferi*, in one of the passages that penetrate the slopes of Chthonia.

This unmistakably underground character of Etruscan sites, when compared to other districts of Italy, can also be expressed by saying that what we are looking at is not really a landscape. The affable, usual landscape that serenely embraces the gaze and crosses the horizon belongs to Gaia: in the chthonic verticality, however, every landscape disappears, every horizon disappears and gives way to the brutal and never seen face of nature. And here, in the rebellious canals and chasms, we would not know what to do with the landscape; the land is more tenacious and inflexible than any pious landscape—at the gate of Dis the god has become so close and resolute as to no longer require religion.

It is for this unshakable chthonic dedication that the Etruscans built and watched over the homes of their dead with such diligence: not, as one might think, the other way around. It is not that they loved death more than life, but for them life was inseparable from the depth of Chthonia. They could inhabit the valleys of Gaia and cultivate the countryside only if they never forgot their true, vertical home. For this reason, in the tombs embedded in the rock or in the burial mounds we do not only have to deal with the dead, we not only imagine the bodies lying on the empty sarcophagi, but we perceive together the movements, gestures and desires of the living ones who built them. That life is all the more lovable the more tenderly it keeps within itself the memory of Chthonia, that it is possible to build a civilization without ever excluding the sphere of the dead, that there is, between the present and the past, and between the living and the dead, an intense community and uninterrupted continuity - this is the legacy that this people has passed on to humanity.

III.

In 1979, James E. Lovelock, an English chemist who had actively collaborated on NASA's space exploration programs, published *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*. At the center of the book is a hypothesis that an article written with Lynn Margulis five years earlier in the journal *Tellus* had anticipated in these terms: "the set of living organisms that make up the biosphere can act as a single entity to regulate the chemical composition, the superficial pH and perhaps also the climate. We call the 'Gaia hypothesis' the conception of the biosphere as an active system of control and adaptation, capable of keeping the earth in homeostasis". The choice of the term Gaia, which was suggested to Lovelock by William Golding—a writer who had masterfully described the perverse vocation of humanity in the novel *Lord of the Flies*—is certainly not accidental: as the article states, the authors identified the limits of life in the atmosphere and were interested "only to a lesser extent in the internal limits constituted by the interface between the internal parts of the earth, which are not subject to the influence of surface processes" (p. 4). No less significant, however, is a fact that the authors do not seem - at least at that time - to have considered, that is, that the devastation and pollution of Gaia reached their maximum level just when the inhabitants of Gaia decided to draw the energy necessary for their new and growing needs from the depths of Chthonia, in the form of that fossil remnant of millions of living beings in the distant past, which we call oil.

According to all evidence, this identification of the limits of the biosphere with the surface of the earth and with the atmosphere cannot be maintained: the biosphere cannot exist without the exchange and "interface" with the chthonic *thanatosphere*, Gaia and Chthonia; the living and the dead must be thought together.

What has happened in modernity is, in fact, that men have forgotten and eliminated their relationship with the chthonic sphere; they no longer inhabit Chthonia, but only Gaia. But the more they removed the sphere of death from their life, the more their existence became unliveable, the more they lost all familiarity with the depths of Chthonia, reducing her like everything else to an object of exploitation, and the more the lovely surface of Gaia was progressively poisoned and destroyed. And what we have before our eyes today is the extreme drift of this removal of death: to save their lives from a supposed, confused threat, men renounce everything that makes their lives worth living. And in the end Gaia, the earth without depth, which has lost all memory of the subterranean abode of the dead, is now entirely at the mercy of fear and death. From this fear only those who can recover the memory of their dual abode will be able to heal, those who remember that the "human" is only that life in which Gaia and Chthonia remain inseparable and united.

December 28, 2020

Communist Capitalism

The capitalism that is consolidating on a global scale is not capitalism in the form it took in the West: it is, rather, capitalism in its communist variant, which combined an extremely rapid development of production with a totalitarian political regime. This is the historical significance of the leading role that China is assuming, not only in the economy in the strict sense, but also, as the political use of the pandemic has eloquently shown, as a paradigm of human governance. That the regimes established in the self-styled 'communist' countries have been a particular form of capitalism, especially suited to economically backward countries, and are to be classified for this reason as 'state capitalism', is perfectly known to those who can read history. It was quite unexpected, however, that this form of capitalism, which seemed to have exhausted its task and therefore becoming obsolete, was destined to become, in a technologically updated configuration, the dominant principle in the current phase of globalized capitalism. It is possible, in fact, that we are today witnessing a conflict between Western capitalism, which coexisted with the rule of law and bourgeois democracies, and a new communist capitalism, from which the latter seems to be emerging victorious. What is certain, however, is that this new regime will unite the most inhuman aspect of capitalism with the most atrocious aspect of statist communism, combining the extreme alienation of relations between men with an unprecedented social control.

December 15, 2020

On the Time to Come

What is happening on a planetary scale today is certainly the end of a world. But not - as for those who try to govern it according to their interests - in the sense of a transition to a world more suited to the new needs of the human consortium. The age of bourgeois democracies is over, with its rights, its constitutions and its parliaments; but, beyond the juridical rind, which is certainly not insignificant, the world that began with the industrial revolution and grew up to the two or three world wars and the totalitarianisms - tyrannical or democratic - that accompanied them ends.

If the powers that govern the world felt they had to resort to such extreme measures and devices as biosecurity and sanitation terror, which they instigated everywhere and without reservation, but which now threaten to get out of hand, this is because they feared according to every evidence of having no other choice to survive. And if people have accepted the despotic measures and unprecedented constraints they have been subjected to without any guarantee, it is not only because of the fear of the pandemic, but presumably because, more or less unconsciously, they knew that the world in which they had lived until then could not continue; it was too unfair and inhuman. It goes without saying that governments are preparing a world even more inhuman, even more unjust; but in any case, on both sides, it was somehow presaged that the former world - as it is now beginning to be called - could not continue. There is certainly in this, as in every dark presentiment, a religious element. Health has replaced salvation, biological life has taken the place of eternal life and the Church, which has long been accustomed to compromising itself with worldly needs, has more or less explicitly consented to this replacement.

We do not regret this world that ends, we have no nostalgia for the idea of the human and the divine that the relentless waves of time are erasing like a face of sand on the shore of history. But with equal determination we reject the naked, mute and faceless life and the religion of health that governments propose to us. We are not expecting either a new god or a new man - rather we seek here and now, among the ruins that surround us, a humble, simpler form of life, which is not a mirage because we have memory and experience of it; even if, in us and outside of us, adverse powers reject it every time in forgetfulness.

November 23, 2020

Love Has Been Abolished

Love has been abolished
in the name of health
then health will be abolished.

Freedom has been abolished
in the name of medicine
then medicine will be abolished.

God has been abolished
in the name of reason
then reason will be abolished.

Man has been abolished
in the name of life
then life will be abolished.

The truth has been abolished
in the name of information
but information will not be abolished.

The constitution was abolished
in the name of the emergency
but the emergency will not be abolished.

November 6, 2020

Some Data

According to official press releases, the positive cases of COVID-19 in Italy as of October 28th totaled 617,000, of which 279,000 were recovered. The deaths are 38,127 (this figure refers to the number of those who tested positive, regardless of the actual cause of their death). The positives are, in the great majority, those who once defined themselves as healthy carriers (now curiously called "asymptomatic patients").

The Italian population is 60,391,000. In 2017, 650,614 people died in Italy (in 2019, 647,000). Deaths from respiratory diseases in 2017 were 53,372. Those for cardiovascular diseases 230,283 (ISTAT data).

According to scientific studies, the IFR (infection fatality rate, or mortality rate) for COVID-19 is around 0.6% (see "Organisms, Journal of biological Sciences", vol. 4, no. 1, 2020, p. 6).

It is on the basis of these data that our constitutional freedoms have been suspended, the population has been terrorized, social life canceled, the mental and physical health of the people seriously threatened.

October 30, 2020

The Face and the Mask

*What is called a face cannot exist in any animal /
if not in man, and it expresses character.*

- Cicero

All living beings are in the open, they show themselves and communicate to each other, but only man has a face; only man makes his appearance and his communication to other men his fundamental experience; only man makes the face the place of his own truth.

What the face exposes and reveals is not something that can be said in words, formulated in this or that significant proposition. In his own face man unknowingly puts himself at stake. It is in the face, before the word, that he expresses himself and reveals himself. And what the face expresses is not only the state of mind of an individual; it is first of all his openness, his exposure and communication to other men.

That is why the face is the place of politics. If there is no animal politics, it is only because animals, which are already in the open, do not make their exposure a problem. They simply dwell in it without caring about it. That is why they are not interested in mirrors, in the image as image. Man, on the other hand, wants to recognize himself and be recognized, wants to appropriate his own image and seeks his own truth in it. In this way he transforms the open into a world, in the field of incessant political dialectic.

If men had to communicate always and only information, always this or that thing, there would never be proper politics, but only exchange of messages. But since men have first of all to communicate their openness, that is, their pure communicability, the face is the very condition of politics, on which is based everything that men say and exchange. In this sense, the face is the true city of men, the political element par excellence. It is by looking into each other's faces that men recognize each other and become passionate about each other, that they perceive similarity and diversity, distance and proximity.

A country that decides to give up its face, to cover the faces of its citizens in masks immediately is, then, a country that has erased all political dimension in itself. In this empty space, subjected at all times to an unbounded control, now move individuals isolated from each other, who have lost the immediate and sensitive foundation of their community and can only exchange messages directed to a name without a face. To a faceless name.

October 8, 2020

When the House Burns

'Everything I do makes no sense if the house burns.' Yet even as the house is burning, it is necessary to continue as always, to do everything with care and precision, perhaps even more studiously — even if no one should notice. It may be that life disappears from the earth, that no memory remains of what has been done, for better or for worse. But you continue as before, it is too late to change, there is no more time.

'What's happening around you / is no longer your business.' Like the geography of a country that you have to leave forever. Yet how does it still affect you? Right now, when it's no longer your business, when everything seems over, everything and every place appear in their truest guise, somehow touch you more closely, just as they are: splendour and misery.

Philosophy, a dead language. "The language of poets is always a dead language ... Curious to say: a dead language that is used to give more life to thought." Maybe not a dead language, but a dialect. That philosophy and poetry speak in a language that is less than language, this is the measure of their rank, of their special vitality. Weighing, judging the world by the measure of a dialect, of a language that is dead and yet springs anew, in which not even a comma can be changed. Keep speaking this dialect, now that the house is burning.

Which house is burning? The country where you live, or Europe, or the whole world? Perhaps the houses, the cities have already burned down — we do not know for how long — in a single huge funeral pyre, which we pretended not to see. In some, only fragments of the house remain, a frescoed wall, a fragment of the roof, some names — many names, already devoured by the fire. And yet we cover them so carefully with white plaster and false words that they seem to be intact. We live in houses, in cities, that are burning from bottom to top, as if they were still standing; people pretend to live there and go out into the street, masked among the ruins, as if they were still the familiar neighbourhoods of the past.

And now the flame has changed its shape and nature, having become digital, invisible and cold; but, precisely for this reason, it is even closer, it is upon us and surrounds us at every moment.

That a civilisation — a barbarism — collapses so as not to rise again: this has already happened, and historians are accustomed to marking and dating ruptures and ruins. But how can we bear witness to a world that is going to ruin with eyes blindfolded and face covered, to a republic that collapses without its sanity or pride, in abjection and fear? The blindness is all the more desperate because the survivors demand they govern their own ruin, and swear that everything can be controlled technically, that there is no need for a new god or a new sky — only regulations, experts and doctors. Panic and deceit.

What would a God be to whom neither prayers nor sacrifices were offered? And what would a law be that knew neither command nor execution? And what is a word that has neither meaning nor command, but is truly held 'in the beginning' — indeed before it?

A culture that in the end feels lifeless tries to govern its ruin as best it can through a state of permanent exception. The total mobilisation in which Ernst Jünger saw the essential character of our time must be seen from this perspective. Men must be mobilised — must feel in a state of emergency at every moment, regulated in detail by those who have the power to declare it. But while mobilisation was in the past meant to bring men closer, now it aims to isolate and distance them from each other.

How long has the house been burning? How long has it been burning? Certainly a century ago, between 1914 and 1918, something happened in Europe that threw everything that appeared to still be intact and alive into the flames and madness; then once again, thirty years later, the fires broke out everywhere, and since then the house has never ceased to burn, without respite, subdued, and barely visible under the ashes. But perhaps the fire began much earlier, when humanity's blind impulse towards salvation and progress joined the power of fire and machines. All this is known and need not be repeated. Instead, we need to ask ourselves how we could continue to live and think while everything burned, what somehow remained intact in the middle of the pyre or on its edges. How did we manage to breathe in the flames, what did we lose, and to what ruin — or to what imposture — did we cling? And now, when there are no more flames, but only numbers, figures and lies, we are certainly weaker and more alone, but without possible compromises, lucid as never before.

If the fundamental architectural problem only becomes visible when the house is in flames, then you can see now what is at stake in the history of the West, what it has tried at all costs to grasp, and why it could only fail.

It is as if power were trying to grasp, whatever the cost, the bare life it produced, and yet — no matter how hard it tries to appropriate and control that life with every possible device, no longer just the police but also medical and technological — bare life cannot but escape it, because it is by definition elusive. Governing bare life is the madness of our time. Men reduced to their pure biological existence, when the government of men and the government of things merge, are no longer human.

The other house, the one in which I will never be able to live but which is my real home; the other life, the one I did not live while I thought I was living it; the other language, which I spelled syllable by syllable without ever being able to speak it — so much mine that I can never have them...

When thought and language divide, one believes that one can speak while forgetting that one is speaking. Poetry and philosophy, when they speak, do not forget that they are speaking — they remember their language. If we remember our language, if we do not forget that we can speak, then we are freer, we are not forced into things and rules. Language is not a tool: it is our face, the openness in which we are.

The face is the most human of things. Man has a face and not simply a muzzle or a front, because he dwells in openness, because in his face he exposes himself and communicates. This is why the

face is the place of politics. Our unpolitical time does not want to see its own face, it keeps it at a distance, masks and covers it. There must be no more faces, but only numbers and figures. The tyrant, too, is faceless.

Feeling alive: being affected by one's own sensibilities, being delicately assigned to one's gesture without being able either to assume or avoid it. Feeling myself alive makes life possible for me, even if I were locked in a cage. And nothing is as real as this possibility.

In the years to come, there will only be monks and criminals. And yet, it is not possible simply to step aside, to believe that one can scramble free of the rubble of the world that has collapsed around us. Because the collapse affects us and addresses us, because we too are rubble. And we will have to learn carefully how to work with them in a fairer way, without being noticed.

Ageing: *'growing only in the roots, no longer in the branches'*. Sink into the roots, no more flowers or leaves. Or, rather, like a drunken butterfly flying over what has been lived. There are still branches and flowers in the past. And you can still draw honey from them.

The face is in God, but the bones are atheist. Outside, everything pushes us towards God; inside, the stubborn, mocking atheism of the skeleton.

That the soul and the body are indissolubly linked — this is spiritual. The spirit is not a third between the soul and the body: it is only their helpless, wonderful coincidence. Biological life is an abstraction, and it is this abstraction that power claims to govern and cure.

For us, alone, there can be no salvation: there is salvation because there are others. And this is not for moral reasons, because I should act for their good. Only because I am not alone is there salvation: I can only save myself as one among many, as another among others. Alone — and this is the special truth of loneliness — I do not need salvation; indeed, I am truly unsavable. Salvation is the dimension that opens up because I am not alone, because there is plurality and multitude. God, incarnate, has ceased to be unique, has become one man among many. Because of this, Christianity has had to bind itself to history and follow its fate to the end; and when history, as appears to happen today, fades and rots, then Christianity too is approaching its sunset. Its irreversible contradiction is that Christianity sought, in history and through history, a salvation beyond history, and when that history ends the ground beneath its feet is missing. The Church was actually in solidarity not with salvation but with the history of salvation, and since it sought salvation through history it could only end in medicine. And when the time came, the Church did not hesitate to sacrifice salvation to medicine.

Salvation must be torn from its historical context, and a non-historical plurality must be found, a plurality as a way out of history.

Escaping a place or situation without entering other territories; leaving an identity and a name without adopting others.

We can only regress towards the present, while in the past we advanced in a straight line. What we call the past is merely our long regression to the present. Separating us from our past is the first resource of power.

What frees us from the burden is our breath. In our breath we are weightless, we are propelled as if in flight beyond the force of gravity.

We will have to learn again from the beginning how to judge, but with a judgement that neither punishes nor rewards, neither absolves nor condemns. An act without purpose, that removes existence from any purpose, necessarily unjust and false. Merely an interruption, an instant poised between time and eternity, in which the image of a life without end or projects, without name or memory — because it saves itself, not in eternity, but in a 'kind of eternity'. A judgment without pre-established criteria, and yet precisely because of this political, because it restores life to its naturalness.

Feeling and to feel, sensation and self-affection, are contemporaries. In every sensation there is a feeling of feeling, in every sensation of oneself a feeling of otherness, a friendship and a face.

Reality is the veil through which we perceive what is possible, what we can or cannot do.

Knowing which of our childhood wishes have been fulfilled is not easy. Above all, if the part of the fulfilled that borders on what can't be granted is enough to make us accept going on living. One is afraid of death because the part of the unfulfilled desires has grown without any possible measure.

'Buffaloes and horses have four legs: that's what I call Heaven. Haltering the horses, piercing the buffalo's nostrils: that's what I call human. This is why I say: take care that the human does not destroy Heaven within you, take care the intentional does not destroy the celestial.'

Language remains in the burning house. Not language, but the immemorial, prehistoric, weak forces that guard and remember it: philosophy and poetry. And what do they keep, what do they remember of language? Not this or that meaningful proposition, not this or that article of faith or bad faith. Rather, the very fact that there is language, that without a name we are open in the name, and that in this openness, in a gesture, in a face, we are unknowable and exposed.

Poetry: the word is the only thing we have left from when we still didn't know how to speak, an obscure song within the language, a dialect or an idiom which we cannot fully understand, but to which we cannot help but listen — even if the house burns, even if in their burning language men continue to talk nonsense.

But is there a language of philosophy, just as there is a language of poetry? Like poetry, philosophy dwells in language as a part of it, and only the manner of this dwelling distinguishes it from poetry. Two tensions in the field of language, which intersect at one point and then tirelessly separate. And whoever says a right word, a simple word that springs anew, abides in

this tension.

Whoever realises that the house is burning can be tempted to look with disdain and contempt at his fellow men, who appear not to notice the flames. Yet is it not these men, who do not see and do not think, that will be the lemurs to whom you will have to give an account on the final day? Realising that the house is on fire does not raise you above the others; on the contrary, it is with them that you will have to exchange a last look as the flames get closer. What can you say to justify your claims of conscience to these men who are so unaware that they seem almost innocent?

In the burning house you continue to do what you did before — but you cannot help but see that the flames show you naked now. Something has changed, not in what you do, but in the way you let it go into the world. A poem written in the burning house is more just and true, because no one will be able to listen to it, because nothing guarantees that it will escape the flames. But if, by chance, it finds a reader, then he will in no way escape the address that calls him from that helpless, inexplicable, subdued shouting.

Only those who have no chance of being heard can tell the truth; only those who speak from a house relentlessly consumed by the flames surrounding them.

Man disappears today, like a face in the sand erased on the shore. But what takes its place no longer has a world, only a naked life, silent and without history, at the mercy of the calculations of power and science. But perhaps it is only starting from this destruction that something else may one day slowly or suddenly appear — not a god, of course, but not even another man — a new animal, perhaps, an otherwise living soul.

October 5, 2020

State of Exception and State of Emergency

A jurist, whom I once held in esteem, in an article just published in an aligned newspaper, tries to justify with arguments that attempt to be legal the state of exception declared by the government for the umpteenth time. Taking up again, without admitting it, the Schmittian distinction between the commissary dictatorship, which aims to preserve or restore the current Constitution, and the sovereign dictatorship, which aims instead to establish a new order, this jurist distinguishes between emergency and exception (or, as it would be more precise, between state of emergency and state of exception). The argument actually has no basis in law, since no Constitution can foresee its own legitimate subversion. For this reason, in his essay on Political Theology, which contains the famous definition of the sovereign as one "who decides on the state of exception", Schmitt speaks simply of *Ausnahmezustand*, the "state of exception", which, in the German doctrine and also outside it, has imposed itself as a technical term to define this 'no man's land' between the juridical order and the political fact, and between the law and its suspension.

Tracing the first Schmittian distinction, the jurist states that the emergency is conservative, while the exception is innovative: "The emergency is used to return to normality as soon as possible; the exception is instead used to break the rule and impose a new order". The state of emergency "presupposes the stability of a system"; "the exception, on the contrary, its undoing, which opens the way to a different system".

The distinction is, according to all evidence, a political and sociological one. It refers to a judgment of personal valuation on the state of affairs of the system in question, on its stability or on its disintegration, and on the intentions of those who have the power to decree a suspension of the law, which suspension, from a juridical point of view, is substantially identical in both cases, because in both it is resolved in the pure and simple suspension of constitutional guarantees. Whatever its purposes, which no one can claim to assess with certainty, the state of exception is a single event and, once declared, no circumstance is envisaged that will have the power to verify the reality or gravity of the conditions that have determined it. It is no coincidence that the jurist has to write at a certain point: "That today we are facing a health emergency seems indubitable to me". A subjective judgment, curiously issued by someone who cannot claim any medical authority, and to which it is possible to oppose others certainly more authoritative, especially since he admits that "discordant voices come from the scientific community", and that therefore it is ultimately those who have the power to decree the emergency. The state of emergency, he continues, unlike that of exception, which includes indeterminate powers, "includes only the powers aimed at the predetermined goal of returning to normality" and yet, he immediately concedes, such powers "cannot be specified in advance". A great legal education is not required to realize that, from the point of view of the suspension of constitutional guarantees, which should be the only relevant point of view, there is no difference between these two states.

The jurist's argument is doubly specious, because not only does he introduce as juridical a

distinction that is not such, but, in order to justify at all costs the state of exception decreed by the government, he is forced to resort to factual and questionable arguments that go beyond his competence. And this is all the more surprising, since he should know that, in what is for him only a state of emergency, constitutional rights and guarantees have been suspended and violated that had never before been questioned, not even during the two world wars and fascism; and that this is not a temporary situation is strongly affirmed by the rulers themselves, who never tire of repeating that the virus not only has not disappeared, but can reappear at any moment.

It is perhaps because of a residue of intellectual honesty that, at the end of the article, the jurist mentions the opinion of those who "not without good arguments, argue that, regardless of the virus, the whole world still lives more or less permanently in a state of exception" and that "the socio-economic system of capitalism" is unable to face its crises with the apparatus of the rule of law. From this perspective, he concedes that "the pandemic viral infection that holds entire societies in check is a coincidence and an unforeseen opportunity, to be seized to keep the submissive population under control". We should ask him to think more carefully about the state of the society in which he lives and to remember that lawyers are not merely, as they have unfortunately been for some time now, bureaucrats who are solely responsible for justifying the system in which they live.

June 30, 2020

What is Fear?

What is fear, into which men today seem to have fallen to the point of forgetting their own ethical, political and religious convictions? It is something familiar, of course. Yet, if we try to define it, it stubbornly seems to withdraw from understanding.

Of fear as an emotional tonality, Heidegger gave an exemplary treatment in par. 30 of *Being and Time*. It can only be understood if we do not forget that Being (this is the term that designates the existential structure of man) is always already arranged in an emotional tone, which constitutes its original opening to the world. Precisely because in the emotional situation the original discovery of the world is in question, consciousness is always already anticipated by it and therefore cannot dispose of it or believe that it can be mastered at will. In fact, emotional tonality should not be confused in any way with a psychological state, but has the ontological meaning of an openness that has always already opened man in his being to the world, and only out of which experiences, affections and knowledge are possible. "Reflection can encounter experiences only because the emotional tonality has already opened Being". It assaults us, but "it comes neither from outside nor from within: it arises in being-in-the-world itself as its modality". On the other hand, this opening does not imply that what it opens to is recognized as such. On the contrary, it manifests only a naked facticity: "the pure Being shows itself; the 'from where' and 'to where' remain hidden". For this, Heidegger can say that the emotional situation opens up Being-There in "being-thrown" and "delivered" to one's own "there". The opening that takes place in the emotional tonality has, that is, the form of Being returned to something that cannot be assumed and from which one tries - without success - to escape.

This is evident in moodiness, boredom or depression, which, like any emotional tonality, open Being "more originally than any perception of oneself", but also close it "more firmly than any non-perception". Thus in depression "Being becomes blind to itself; the environmental world it is concerned with is veiled, the environmental forecast is obscured "; and, however, here too Being is delivered to an opening from which it cannot in any way free itself.

It is against the background of this ontology of emotional tones that the treatment of fear must be situated. Heidegger begins by examining three aspects of the phenomenon: the "before which" (*wovor*) of fear, the "being afraid" (*Furchten*) and the "why" (*Worum*) of fear. The "before which", the object of fear, is always an intraworldly entity. What is frightening is always - whatever its nature - something that gives itself in the world and which, as such, has the character of being threatening and harmful. It is more or less known, "but not for this reason reassuring" and, whatever the distance from which it comes, it is situated in a determined proximity. "The harmful and threatening entity is not yet at a controllable distance, but it is approaching. As it approaches, the harmfulness intensifies and thus produces the threat... As it approaches, the harmful becomes threatening, and we can be affected or not. As it gets closer, this "it is possible but perhaps not" increases... The approach of what is harmful makes us discover the possibility of being spared, of passing on, but this does not suppress or diminish the fear; rather it increases it" (pp. 140-41). (This character, so to speak, of "certain uncertainty" that

characterizes fear is also evident in the definition that Spinoza gives it: an "inconstant sadness", in which "one doubts the happening of something one hates").

As for the second characteristic of fear, fear itself ("being afraid"), Heidegger states that a future evil is not first rationally predicted, which is then feared later on: from the very beginning, rather, the approaching thing is discovered as fearsome. "Only by being afraid can fear, by observing expressly, realize what is frightening. We realize what is frightening because we are already in the emotional situation of fear. As a latent possibility of emotionally disposed being-in-the-world, 'being afraid' has already discovered the world in such a way that something frightening can approach it" (p. 141). Fearfulness, as the original opening of Being-There, always precedes any determinable fear.

Finally, as for the "why" - the "for whom and for what" fear is afraid - in question is always the entity itself that is afraid, the Being, this determined man. "Only a being for whom, in its own existence, that very existence itself is at stake, can be frightened. Fear opens this being to its being in danger, to its being abandoned to itself" (*ibid.*). The fact that sometimes one feels fear for one's home, for one's possessions or for others is not an objection to this diagnosis: one can say that one is "afraid" for another, without really being afraid and, if we actually feel fear, it is for ourselves, as we fear that the other will be torn from us.

Fear is, in this sense, a fundamental mode of emotional disposition, which opens the human being to its being always already exposed and threatened. Of this threat there are naturally various degrees and measures: if something threatening, which stands before us with its "not yet, but nevertheless at any moment", suddenly falls upon this being, fear becomes fright (*Erschrecken*); if the threat is not already known, but has the character of the most profound strangeness, fear becomes horror (*Grauen*). If it combines both of these aspects in itself, then fear becomes terror (*Entsetzen*). In any case, all the different forms of this emotional tonality show that man, in his very openness to the world, is constitutively "afraid".

The only other emotional tonality that Heidegger examines in *Being and Time* is anxiety and it is to anxiety - not to fear - that the rank of fundamental emotional tonality is attributed. But, however, it is precisely in relation to fear that Heidegger can define its nature, distinguishing first of all "that before which anxiety is anxiety from that before which fear is fear" (p. 186). While fear always has to do with something, the "'before which' of anxiety is never an intraworldly entity". Not only does the threat produced here not have the character of a possible harm by a threatening thing, but "the 'before which' of anxiety is completely indeterminate. This indeterminacy not only leaves completely undecided from what worldly entity the threat comes, but it means that, in general, the worldly entity is itself "irrelevant" "(*ibid.*). The "before which" of anxiety is not an entity, but the world as such. That is, anxiety is the original opening of the world as a world (p. 187) and "only because anxiety always latently determines man's being-in-the-world, he [...] can feel fear. Fear is an anxiety that has fallen into the world, inauthentic and hidden from itself" (p. 189).

It has not without reason been observed that the primacy of anxiety over fear, which Heidegger claims, can be easily reversed: instead of defining fear as an anxiety diminished and fallen into an object, one can just as legitimately define anxiety as a fear deprived of its object. If fear is taken away from its object, it turns into anxiety. In this sense, fear would be the fundamental emotional tonality, into which man is always already at risk of falling. Hence its essential political meaning, which constitutes it as that in which power, at least since Hobbes, has sought its foundation and justification.

Let us try to carry out and continue Heidegger's analysis. In the perspective that interests us here, it is significant that fear always refers to a "thing", to an intrawordly entity (in the present case, to the smallest of entities, a virus). 'Intrawordly' means that it has lost any relationship with the opening of the world and exists factitiously and inexorably, without any possible transcendence. If the structure of Being-in-the-world implies for Heidegger a transcendence and an openness, it is precisely this very transcendence that consigns Being to the sphere of thing-ness. Being-in-the-world in fact means being co-originally referred to the things that the opening of the world reveals and makes appear. While the animal, devoid of a world, cannot perceive an object as an object, man, as he opens himself to a world, can be assigned without escape to a thing as a thing.

Hence the original possibility of fear: it is the emotional tonality that opens up when man, losing the link between the world and things, finds himself irremediably consigned to worldly entities and cannot overcome his relationship with a "thing", which now becomes threatening. Once its relationship to the world is lost, the "thing" itself is terrifying. Fear is the dimension into which humanity falls when it is delivered, as happens in modernity, to a thing without escape. The frightening being, that "thing" that assaults and threatens men in horror films, is in this sense only an incarnation of this unavoidable thing-ness.

Hence also the feeling of helplessness that defines fear. Those who feel fear try to protect themselves in every way and with every possible precaution from the thing that threatens them - for example, by wearing a mask or locking themselves up at home - but this does not reassure them in any way; rather, it makes their impotence in facing the "thing" even more evident and constant. In this sense, fear can be defined as the inverse of the will to power: the essential character of fear is a will to impotence, the will-to-be-powerless in the face of the thing that causes fear. Similarly, to reassure oneself one can rely on someone who has some authority on the matter - for example, a doctor or public health officials - but this in no way abolishes the feeling of insecurity that accompanies fear, which is constitutively a will to insecurity, a will-to-be-insecure. And this is so true that the same people who should be reassuring us instead entertain insecurity and never tire of reminding us, for the sake of the frightened, that what is frightening cannot ever be overcome and eliminated once and for all.

How to come to grips with this fundamental emotional tonality, into which man always seems to be constitutively in the act of falling? Since fear precedes and anticipates knowledge and reflection, it is useless to try to convince the frightened with rational evidence and arguments: fear is above all the impossibility of accessing a reasoning that is not suggested by fear itself. As

Heidegger writes, fear "paralyzes and makes you lose your head" (p. 141). Thus, faced with the epidemic, it was seen that the publication of reliable data and opinions from authoritative sources was systematically ignored and cast aside, in the name of other data and opinions that did not even try to be scientifically reliable.

Given the originary character of fear, it could only be understood if it were possible to access an equally originary dimension. Such a dimension exists and it is that same opening to the world, in which alone things can appear and threaten us. Things become frightening because we forget their co-belonging to the world that transcends them and, at the same time, makes them present. The only possibility of severing the "thing" from the fear, from which it seems inseparable, is to remember the opening in which it is always already exposed and revealed. Not reasoning, but memory - remembering ourselves and our being in the world - can return to us access to a fear-free thing. The "thing" that terrifies me, however invisible to the eye, is, like all other worldly entities - like this tree, this stream, this man - open in its pure existence. Just because I am in the world, things can appear to me and possibly scare me. They are part of my being-in-the-world, and this - not an abstractly separate thing-ness that is unduly erected as sovereign - dictates the ethical and political rules of my behaviour.

Of course, the tree can break and fall on me, the stream may overflow and flood the town, and this man may suddenly hit me: if this possibility suddenly becomes real, a just fear suggests the appropriate precautions without falling into panic and without losing my head, without letting others base their power on my fear and, transforming the emergency into a stable norm, decide at their own will what I can or cannot do and cancel the rules that guaranteed my freedom.

June 13, 2020

Two Infamous Words

In the controversy during the health emergency, two infamous words appeared, which were clearly intended solely to discredit those who, in the face of the fear that had paralysed minds, still persisted in thinking: 'denialist' and 'conspiracy'.

On the first, it is not worth spending too many words, since, by irresponsibly putting the extermination of Jews and the epidemic on an equal footing, those who use it show that they are consciously or unconsciously participating in the anti-Semitism that is still so widespread both on the right and on the left of our culture. As rightly offended Jewish friends suggest, it would be appropriate for the Jewish community to comment on this unworthy abuse of terminology.

Instead, it is worth dwelling on the second term, which testifies to a truly surprising ignorance of history. Those familiar with historical research know well how the events that historians reconstruct and recount are necessarily the result of plans and actions that are very often concerted by individuals, groups and factions, who pursue their aims by all means.

Take three examples among a thousand other possible ones, each of which marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new historical period.

In 415 BC, Alcibiades puts at stake his prestige, his riches and every possible expedient to convince the Athenians to carry out an expedition to Sicily that will later prove disastrous and coincide with the end of the power of Athens. For their part, his opponents, taking advantage of the mutilation of the statues of Hermes a few days before the expedition's departure, hire false witnesses and conjure up a case against him to have him sentenced to death for impiety.

On 18 February 1799, Napoleon Bonaparte declares his allegiance to the constitution of the republic, and in a coup d'état overthrows the Directory and proclaims himself first consul with full powers, ending the Revolution. In the previous days, Napoleon had met with Sieyès, Fouché and Luciano Bonaparte, to develop the strategy that would overcome the expected opposition of the council of five hundred.

On October 28, 1922, about 25,000 fascists marched on Rome. In the months leading up to the event, Mussolini, who had prepared it with the future triumvirs De Vecchi, De Bono and Bianchi, made contact with the president of the Facta council, with D'Annunzio, and representatives of the business world (according to some he would even meet secretly with the King) to test possible alliances and possible reactions. In a sort of general rehearsal, on August 2, the fascists occupied Ancona militarily.

In all three of these events, individuals in groups or parties acted decisively to achieve the aims they set themselves, measuring themselves from time to time under more or less predictable circumstances and adapting their strategy to them. Of course, as in any human story, chance plays its part, but explaining the history of men with chance alone makes no sense and no serious historian has ever done so. It is not necessary to speak of a "conspiracy" for this, but it is

certain that those who define 'conspiracy theorists' as the historians who have tried to reconstruct these plots and their execution in detail would demonstrate ignorance, if not idiocy.

It is therefore all the more astonishing that we persist in doing so in a country, such as Italy, whose recent history is so much the result of secret intrigues and societies, manoeuvres and conspiracies of all kinds, that historians still cannot come to terms with many of the decisive events of the last fifty years, from the bombs in Piazza Fontana to the Moro crime. This is so true that the President of the Republic, Mr Cossiga, himself stated at the time that he was actively part of one of these secret societies, known as Gladio.

As far as the pandemic is concerned, reliable research shows that it has certainly not come unexpectedly. As the book by Patrick Zylberman, 'Tempêtes microbiennes' (Gallimard, 2013) effectively documents, the World Health Organization had already suggested a scenario such as the present one in 2005, proposing it to governments as a way of securing the unconditional support of citizens. Bill Gates, who is the organization's main financier, has on several occasions made known his ideas about the risks of a pandemic, which, in his predictions, would have caused millions of deaths and against which he had to prepare. So in 2019, the American Johns Hopkins Center, in research funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, organized an exercise to simulate the coronavirus pandemic, called "Event 201", bringing together experts and epidemiologists, to prepare a coordinated response in case of the appearance of a new virus.

As always in history, here too there are men and organisations who pursue their unlawful or illegal objectives and try by every means to achieve them, and it is important that those who want to understand what is happening know them and take them into account. Talking about a conspiracy does not add anything to the reality of the situation. But to label as 'conspiracy theorists' those who seek to know historical events for what they are is simply villainous.

June 10, 2020

Requiem for the Students

(Published [on the blog *Diario della crisi*](#) by the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici)

We are not so much interested here in the consequent transformation of teaching, in which the element of physical presence (always so important in the relationship between students and teachers) disappears definitively, as we are in the disappearance of collective discussion in seminars, which was the liveliest part of instruction. Part of the technological barbarism that we are currently living through is the cancellation from life of any experience of the senses and the loss of the gaze, as we are permanently imprisoned in a spectral screen.

Far more decisive in what is happening is something that, significantly, is not being spoken of at all: namely, the end of studenthood as a form of life. Universities were born in Europe out of student associations — *universitates* — and they owe their name to them. To be a student entailed, first of all, a form of life in which studying and listening to lectures were certainly crucial features, but no less important were the encounters and constant exchanges with other scholars, who often came from remote places and who gathered together according to their place of origin in nations. This form of life has evolved in various ways over the centuries, but, from the clerici vagantes of the Middle Ages to the student movements of the twentieth century, the social dimension of the phenomenon has remained constant. Anyone who has taught in a university classroom knows well how, before one's very eyes, friendships are made, and, according to their cultural and political interests, small study and research groups are formed that continue even after classes have ended.

All of this, which has lasted for almost ten centuries, now ends forever. Students will no longer live in the cities where their university is located. Instead, they will listen to lectures while locked up in their rooms and sometimes separated by hundreds of kilometers from those who were formerly their classmates. Small towns that were once prestigious university towns will now see their communities of students, who frequently formed their liveliest part, disappear from their streets.

About every social phenomenon that dies it can be said that, in a certain sense, it deserved its end; it is certain that our universities have reached such a degree of corruption and specialist ignorance that it is not possible to mourn them, and the form of life of students, consequently, has been equally impoverished. Two points, however, must remain firm:

1. The professors who agree — as they are doing en masse — to submit to this new dictatorship of telematics and to hold their courses only online are the perfect equivalent of the university professors who in 1931 swore allegiance to the Fascist regime. As happened then, it is likely that only fifteen out of a thousand will refuse, but their names will surely be remembered alongside those of the fifteen who did not take the oath.
2. Students who truly love to study will have to refuse to enroll in the universities thus transformed and, as in the beginning, constitute themselves into new universitates; it is only

within these, in the face of technological barbarism, the word of the past might remain alive and
- if it is born at all - something like a new culture will be born.

May 23, 2020

Biosecurity and Politics

What is striking in the reactions to the mechanisms of exception that have been put in place in our country (and not only in this country) is the inability to observe them beyond the immediate context in which they seem to operate. Rare are those who try instead, as a serious political analysis would require, to interpret them as symptoms and signs of a larger experiment, in which a new paradigm of government of men and things is at stake. Already, in a book published seven years ago, which is now worth rereading carefully (*Tempêtes microbiennes*, Gallimard 2013), Patrick Zylberman has described the process by which health security, which had hitherto remained on the sidelines of political calculations, was becoming an essential component of state and international political strategies. In question here is nothing less than the creation of a sort of "health terror", as a tool to govern against what is defined as the worst case scenario. It is according to this logic of the worst case scenario that, already in 2005, the World Health Organization had announced "two to 150 million deaths from avian flu are on the way", suggesting a political strategy that states at that time were not yet prepared to accept. Zylberman shows that this proposed device was divided into three points: (1) construction, on the basis of a possible risk, of a fictitious scenario, in which the data are presented in such a way as to favour behaviours that allow one to govern an extreme situation; (2) adoption of the 'logic of the worst' as a regime of political rationality; and (3) the integral organization of the body of citizens to maximize adhesion to government institutions, producing a sort of superlative civility in which the obligations imposed are presented as proofs of altruism; the citizen no longer has a "right to health" (health safety), but instead becomes legally obliged to health (biosecurity).

What Zylberman described in 2013 has now promptly occurred. It is evident that, beyond the emergency situation linked to a particular virus, which may in the future give way to another, in question is the design of a governance paradigm whose effectiveness far exceeds that of all forms of government that the political history of the West has so far known. If, in the progressive decline of ideologies and political faiths, the logic of security had already allowed citizens to accept limitations on their freedoms that they were not previously willing to accept, the logic of biosecurity has proved capable of presenting the absolute cessation of all political activity and of any social relationship as the highest form of civic participation. It is thus possible to witness the paradox of left-wing organizations, traditionally accustomed to asserting rights and denouncing violations of the Constitution, now accepting unreservedly limitations of their freedoms decided by ministerial decrees that are devoid of any legality and that not even fascism had ever dreamed of being able to impose.

It is evident - and the government authorities themselves do not cease to remind us - that this so-called "social distancing" will become the model of the politics that awaits us. It is also evident that (like the representatives of a so-called "task force" they announced, whose members are in clear conflict of interest with the very function they must exercise), they will take advantage of this "distancing" to replace everywhere with digital technological devices all human relationships in their physicality, which have become suspected of contagion (political contagion, of course). University lectures, as the Ministry of Education has already recommended, will be held permanently online from next year. You will no longer be recognized

by being viewed in the face, which must be covered by a mask, but through digital devices, which will recognize the biological data that are compulsorily collected. Any "mass gathering", whether for political reasons or simply for friendship, will continue to be prohibited.

At issue here is an entire conception of the destinies of human society, from a perspective that in many respects seems to have assumed the apocalyptic idea of an end of the world from religions that are now at their sunset. After politics had been replaced by economics, now this too, in order to govern, must be integrated with the new paradigm of biosecurity, to which all other needs must now be sacrificed. It is legitimate to ask whether such a society can still define itself as human, or whether the loss of sensitive relationships, of the face, of friendship, of love, can be truly compensated for by an abstract (and presumably completely fictitious) health security.

May 11, 2020

Medicine as Religion

That science has become the religion of our time, that in which men believe, has long been evident. In the modern West, three great belief systems have coexisted and, to some extent, still coexist: Christianity, capitalism and science. In the history of modernity, these three "religions" have necessarily crossed paths several times, entering into conflict from time to time, and then in various ways reconciling, until they progressively reach a sort of peaceful, articulated coexistence, if not a real collaboration in the name of common interest.

The new fact is that, between science and the other two religions, an underground and relentless conflict has reignited without us even realizing it, the victorious results of which for science are today laid before our eyes and now determine in an unprecedented way all aspects of our existence. This new conflict does not concern, as in the past, theory and general principles, but, so to speak, the practice of worship. In fact, like every religion, science too knows different forms and levels through which it organizes and orders its own structure: the elaboration of a subtle and rigorous dogmatics corresponds in practice to an extremely broad and widespread sphere of worship that coincides with what we call technology.

It is not surprising that the protagonist of this new religious war is that part of science where dogmatics is less rigorous and the pragmatic aspect is stronger: namely medicine, whose immediate object is the living body of human beings. Let us try to establish the essential characteristics of this victorious faith with which we will increasingly have to deal.

1) The first feature is that medicine, like capitalism, does not require any special dogmatics, but merely borrows its fundamental concepts from biology. Unlike biology, however, it articulates these concepts in a Gnostic-Manichean sense, that is, according to an exasperated dualistic opposition. There is a god or an evil principle, the disease, whose specific agents are bacteria and viruses, and a god or a beneficent principle, which is not health, but healing, whose cultic agents are doctors and their therapies. As in any Gnostic faith, the two principles are clearly separated, but in practice they can become contaminated. The beneficence principle and the doctor who represents it can err and unwittingly collaborate with their enemy, without this invalidating in any way the dualist reality and the necessity of the cult through which the beneficent principle fights its battle. And it is significant that the theologians who must establish the cultic strategy are the representatives of a particular science, virology, which has no place of its own, but is situated on the border between biology and medicine.

2) If this cultic practice was, up to now, like every liturgy, episodic and limited in time, the unexpected phenomenon we are witnessing is that it has now become permanent and all-pervasive. It is no longer a question of simply taking medicines or undergoing a medical examination or surgery when necessary: rather, the whole life of human beings must now become the place of an uninterrupted cultic celebration at every moment. The enemy, the virus, is always present and must be fought incessantly and without possible respite. The Christian religion also knew similar totalitarian tendencies, but they concerned only a few individuals - in particular the monks - who chose to place their entire existence under the banner of "pray

incessantly". Medicine as a religion takes up this Pauline precept and, at the same time, overturns it: whereas monks gathered in convents to pray together, now the cultic worship must be practiced just as assiduously, but while keeping separate and at a distance.

3) The practice of worship is now no longer free and voluntary, exposed only to sanctions of a spiritual nature, but must be made mandatory by law. The collusion between religion and profane power is certainly not a new fact. It is entirely new, however, that it no longer concerns the profession of dogmas, as was the case with heresies, but exclusively the cultic celebration. The profane power must ensure that the liturgy of the medical religion, which now coincides with the whole of life, is duly observed in practice. That this is a cultic practice, and not a rational scientific requirement, is immediately evident. By far the most frequent cause of mortality in our country are cardio-vascular diseases and it is known that these could decrease if we were to practice a healthier way of life and adhere to a particular diet. But it had never occurred to any doctor that this form of life and nutrition, which they advise to patients, would become the subject of legal regulation, which decreed *ex lege* what one should eat and how one should live, transforming the whole of human existence into a health obligation. But this is precisely what has been done and, at least for now, people have accepted it as if it were obvious and given up their freedom of movement, work, friendships, loves and social relations, as well as their religious and political beliefs.

Here we measure how the two other religions of the West, the religion of Christ and the religion of money, have given primacy, apparently without even a fight, to medicine and science. The Church has purely and simply denied its own principles, forgetting that the saint whose name was taken by the current pope embraced the lepers, that one of the works of mercy is to visit the sick, that the sacraments can only be administered in physical presence. Capitalism, for its part, albeit with some protest, has accepted losses in productivity that it had never dared to consider, probably hoping to later find an agreement with the new religion, which on this point seems willing to compromise.

4) The medical religion has unreservedly taken up from Christianity the eschatological posture that it had dropped. Capitalism, by secularizing the theological paradigm of salvation, had already eliminated the idea of an end of time, replacing it with a state of permanent crisis, without redemption or end. 'Krisis' is originally a medical concept, which designated in the Hippocratic corpus the moment when the doctor decided whether the patient would survive the disease. Theologians took up the term to indicate the Final Judgment which takes place on the Last Day. If we observe the state of exception we are now experiencing, we could say that the medical religion combines the perpetual crisis of capitalism with the Christian idea of an ultimate time, of an eschaton in which the extreme decision is always in progress and the end arrives, both precipitated and delayed, in the incessant attempt to try to govern it; without, however, ever resolving it once and for all. This is the religion of a world that feels itself to be at an end and yet is unable, like the Hippocratic physician, to decide whether it will survive or die.

5) Like capitalism and unlike Christianity, the medical religion does not offer prospects of salvation and redemption. On the contrary, the healing at which it aims can only be provisional,

since its evil god, the virus, cannot be eliminated once and for all. On the contrary, it constantly changes and always takes on new forms, presumably more risky. The epidemic, as the etymology of the term suggests (*demos* is in Greek 'the people' as a political body, and *polemos epidemios* is in Homer the term for a civil war) is above all a political concept, which is about to become the new terrain of global politics - or non-politics. Indeed, it is possible that the epidemic we are experiencing is in fact the realization of the global civil war which, according to the most attentive political scientists, has taken the place of the traditional world wars. All nations and peoples are now permanently at war with themselves, because the invisible and elusive enemy with which they are struggling is within us.

As has happened several times before throughout history, philosophers now will again have to enter into conflict with religion, which is no longer Christianity but science, or that part of science that has taken on the form of a religion. I do not know if the fires will be lit again and books will be put on the index, but certainly the thought of those who continue to seek the truth and reject the dominant lies will be, as is already happening before our eyes, excluded and accused of promoting "fake news" ("news", not "ideas", since "news" is more important than reality!). As in all moments of emergency, real or simulated, the ignorant will again be seen slandering the philosophers, and rogues will try to profit from the disasters they themselves have caused. All of this has already happened, and will continue to happen, but those who testify to the truth will not cease to do so, because no one else can testify for the witness.

May 2, 2020

On the True and the False

As was taken for granted, Phase 2 confirms, by ministerial decree, more or less the same curtailments of constitutional freedoms that can only be limited by law. But no less important is the limitation of a human right that is not enshrined in any constitution: the right to truth; the need for a true speech.

What we are experiencing, before being an unprecedented manipulation of everyone's freedoms, is, in fact, a gigantic operation of falsification of the truth. If people are agreeing to limit their personal freedom, this is happening, in fact, because they accept the data and opinions that the media provide them without subjecting them to any verification. Advertising has long since accustomed us to a speech that acts all the more effectively because it does not pretend to be true. And for some time, even political consensus has rendered itself without any deep conviction, somehow taking it for granted that the truth is not even in question in electoral speeches. But what is happening now before our eyes is, however, something new, if only because what is at stake in the truth or in the falsity of the discourse that is being passively accepted is our very way of living, our entire daily existence. For this reason, it is urgent that each person try to submit what is proposed to him to the scrutiny of at least elementary verification.

I was not the only one to note that the data on the epidemic are being provided in a generic way and not against any scientific criteria. From an epistemological point of view, it is obvious, for example, that giving a death figure without relating it to the annual mortality in the same period, and without specifying the actual primary cause of death, has no meaning. Yet this is exactly what we continue to do every day without anyone seeming to notice. This is all the more surprising since the data that would allow for verification are available to anyone who wants to access them. I have already mentioned in this column the report by the ISTAT president Gian Carlo Blangiardo, in which it is shown that the number of deaths due to COVID-19 is lower than that of deaths from respiratory diseases in the previous two years. Yet, however unequivocal, it is as if this relationship did not even exist, just as no account is taken of the fact, although it has been admitted, that even a positive patient who died of a heart attack or any other cause is counted as having died from COVID-19. Why, even if this falsehood is documented, is it still believed? It seems that the lie is treated as true because, like in advertising, it does not even bother to hide its falsity. As was the case in the First World War, the war against this virus can only be based on false motivations.

Humanity is entering a phase of its history in which truth is being reduced to a moment in the movement of the false. False speech must be maintained as true, even when its untruth is proven. But in this way it is language itself as the place for the manifestation of truth that is being confiscated from human beings. They can now only silently observe the movement - true because real - of the lie. For this reason, to stop this movement, everyone must have the courage to seek without compromise the most precious good: true speech.

April 28, 2020

New Reflections

From an interview published in an Italian newspaper

Q: Are we living, with this forced confinement, a new totalitarianism?

A: The hypothesis is now being formulated from many quarters that in reality we are experiencing the end of a world, that of bourgeois democracies, founded on rights, parliaments and the division of powers, which is giving way to a new despotism that, as regards the pervasiveness of control and the cessation of all political activity, will be worse than the totalitarianisms we have known so far. American political scientists call this the Security State, that is, a state in which "for security reasons" (in this case "public health", a term that makes one think of the notorious "public health committees" during the Reign of Terror) any limits can be imposed on individual freedoms. In Italy, moreover, we have long been accustomed to legislation for emergency decrees by the executive power, which in this way replaces the legislative power and effectively abolishes the principle of division of powers on which democracy is based. And the control that is exercised through video surveillance and now, as proposed, through mobile phones, far exceeds any form of control exercised under totalitarian regimes, such as fascism or Nazism.

Q: Regarding data, in addition to those that will be collected via mobile phones, a reflection should also be made on the data disseminated in these numerous press conferences, which is often incomplete or misinterpreted.

A: This is an important point, because it touches the root of the phenomenon. Anyone with some knowledge of epistemology cannot fail to be surprised by the fact that the media for all these months have disseminated figures without any scientific criteria, not only without relating them to the annual mortality for the same period, but without even specifying the causes of death. I am not a virologist or a doctor, but I limit myself to quoting reliable official sources verbatim. 21,000 deaths from COVID-19 certainly seems and is an impressive figure. But if you compare this with the annual statistical data, things, as is proper, take on a different aspect. The president of ISTAT, Dr. Gian Carlo Blangiardo, announced a few weeks ago the mortality numbers from last year: 647,000 deaths (thus 1,772 deaths per day). If we analyze the causes in detail, we see that the latest data available for 2017 record 230,000 deaths from cardiovascular diseases, 180,000 deaths from cancer, at least 53,000 deaths from respiratory diseases. But one point is particularly important and concerns us closely.

Q: Which point?

A: I quote the words of Dr. Blangiardo: "In March 2019, there were 15,189 deaths from respiratory diseases and the year before there were 16,220. Incidentally, it is noted that this is more than the corresponding number of Covid deaths (12,352) declared in March 2020". But if this is true, and we have no reason to doubt it, without wanting to minimize the importance of the epidemic, we must however ask ourselves whether it can justify measures to limit freedom that have never before been taken in the history of our country, not even during the two world

wars. There is a legitimate doubt that, by spreading panic and isolating people in their homes, we wanted to pass on to the population the very serious responsibilities of the governments that had first dismantled the national health service and then, in Lombardy, made a series of no less serious mistakes in dealing with the epidemic.

Q: Even the scientists, in reality, did not put on a good show. It appears that they have not been able to provide the answers expected of them. What do you think?

A: It is always dangerous to entrust doctors and scientists with decisions that are ultimately ethical and political. You see, scientists, rightly or wrongly, pursue their reasons in good faith, which are identified with the interest of science and in the name of which - history amply demonstrates this - they are willing to sacrifice any scruple of a moral nature. I need not mention that highly respected scientists under Nazism led eugenicist politics and did not hesitate to take advantage of the concentration camps to carry out lethal experiments which they considered useful for the advancement of science and for the treatment of German soldiers. In the present case, the spectacle is particularly disconcerting, because in reality, even if the media hide this, there is in fact no agreement among the scientists and some of the most illustrious among them, such as Didier Raoult, perhaps the greatest French virologist, have different opinions on the seriousness of the epidemic and the effectiveness of the isolation measures, which in an interview Raoult defined as a medieval superstition. I have written elsewhere that science has become the religion of our time. This analogy with religion must be taken literally: theologians declared that they could not clearly define what God is, but in his name they dictated rules of conduct to men and did not hesitate to burn heretics; virologists admit that they do not know exactly what a virus is, but in its name they claim to decide how human beings should live.

Q: We are told - as has often happened in the past - that nothing will ever be the same again and that our life must change. What do you think will happen?

A: I have already tried to describe the form of despotism which we must expect and against which we must not tire of keeping our guard. But if, for once, we leave the realm of current events and try to consider things from the point of view of the fate of the human species on Earth, the considerations of a great Dutch scientist, Louis Bolk, come to mind. According to Bolk, the human species is characterized by a progressive inhibition of the natural vital processes of adaptation to the environment, which are replaced by a hypertrophic growth of technological devices to adapt the environment to man. When this process passes a certain limit, it reaches a point where it becomes counterproductive and turns into the self-destruction of the species. Phenomena like the one we are experiencing seem to show me that that point has now been reached, and that the medicine that was supposed to cure our ills risks producing an even greater evil. Against this risk we must resist by all means.

April 22, 2020

Phase 2

Predictably, and as we tried to remind those who preferred to close their eyes and ears, the so-called Phase 2 or the 'return to normal' will be even worse than what we have experienced so far. Two points among those that are being prepared are particularly odious and in clear violation of the principles of the Constitution: freedom of movement being limited by age groups, that is, with the obligation for those over seventy to remain indoors, and mandatory serological mapping for the entire population. As has been pointedly observed in an appeal that is now circulating in Italy, this discrimination is unconstitutional as it creates a band of second-class citizens, while all citizens must be equal before the law, and it effectively deprives them of their freedom with a totally unjustified imposition from above, which risks harming the health of the people in question and not protecting it. The recent news of the suicide of two people over seventy, who could no longer live in isolation, bears witness to this. Equally illegitimate is the obligation of a serological mapping, since article 32 of the Constitution states that no one can be subjected to a medical examination except by law, while once again, as has happened so far, these measures would be established by Government decree.

There are also limitations concerning the distances to be maintained and the prohibitions on gathering, which means the exclusion of any possibility of real political activity.

It is necessary to express unreservedly one's dissent to this model of society based on social distancing and to the unlimited control that they want to impose.

April 20, 2020

A Question

The plague marked for the city the beginning of corruption... No one was any longer disposed to persevere in what he had previously judged to be the good, because he believed that perhaps he would die before achieving it.

- Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War, II.53

I would like to share with whoever wants it a question, which for over a month now I have not ceased to reflect upon. How could it happen that an entire country has, without noticing it, politically and ethically collapsed in the face of an illness? The words that I have used to formulate this question have been carefully considered, one by one. The measure of the abdication of our own ethical and political principles is, in fact, very simple. It is a matter of asking ourselves: what is the limit beyond which we are not prepared to renounce them? I believe that the reader who takes the trouble to consider the points that follow will not be able to disagree with me that — without noticing it, or by pretending not to notice it — the threshold that separates humanity from barbarism has now been crossed.

1) The first point, perhaps the most serious, concerns the bodies of dead persons. How could we have accepted, solely in the name of a risk that it was not possible to even specify, that persons who are dear to us and human beings in general should not only die alone, but — something that has never happened before in history, from Antigone to today — that their cadavers should be burned without a funeral?

2) We then accepted without too much trouble, and solely in the name of a risk that it was not possible to specify, limiting our freedom of movement to an extent that has never happened before in the history of the country, not even during the Second World War (the curfew during the war was limited to certain hours). We consequently accepted, solely in the name of a risk that it was not possible to specify, the de facto suspension of our relationships of friendship and love, because our neighbour had become a possible source of contagion.

3) This was able to happen — and here we hit on the root of the phenomenon — because we have split the unity of our vital experience, which is always inseparably both bodily and spiritual, into a purely biological entity, on one the hand, and an affective and cultural life on the other. Ivan Illich demonstrated, and David Cayley has recalled recently, the responsibility of modern medicine for this split, which is today taken for granted but is actually the greatest of abstractions. I am well aware that this abstraction has been realized in modern science through resuscitation devices, which can maintain a body in a state of pure vegetative life.

But if this condition is extended beyond the spatial and temporal confines that are proper to it, as we are today seeking to do, and it becomes a sort of principle of social behavior, we fall into contradictions from which there is no way out.

I know that someone will hasten to respond that we are dealing with a condition that is limited in time, after which everything will return to how it was before. It is truly strange that this can be

repeated other than in bad faith, since the same authorities who proclaimed the emergency never stop reminding us that even when the emergency has been overcome, we will have to continue to observe the same directives and that "social distancing," as it has been called with a significant euphemism, will be society's new organizing principle. And, in any case, what we have accepted submission to, whether in good or bad faith, cannot be canceled.

At this point, because I have accused the responsibilities of each of us, I cannot fail to mention the even more serious responsibility of those who had the duty to keep watch over human dignity. The Church above all, which, in making itself the handmaid of science, which has now become the true religion of our time, has radically repudiated its most essential principles. The Church, under a Pope who calls himself Francis, has forgotten that Francis embraced lepers. It has forgotten that one of the works of mercy is that of visiting the sick. It has forgotten that the martyrs teach that we must be prepared to sacrifice our life rather than our faith, and that renouncing our neighbour means renouncing our faith.

Another category that has failed in their duties is that of the jurists. For some time we have been habituated to the rash use of emergency decrees, by means of which the executive power is *de facto* substituted for the legislative, abolishing that very principle of the separation of powers that defines democracy. But in this case, every limit has now been surpassed, and one has the impression that the words of the Prime Minister and of the head of Public Health, as was said of those of the Führer, immediately have the force of law. And it is not clear how, once we have exhausted the temporal limits of validity of these emergency decrees, the limitations of freedom can, as is foretold, be maintained. With what legal instruments? With a permanent state of exception? It is the duty of jurists to verify that the rules of the Constitution are respected, but the jurists are silent. *Quare silete iuristae in munere vestro?*

I know that there will inevitably be someone who will respond that a serious sacrifice has been made in the name of moral principles. I would like to remind them that Eichmann, apparently in good faith, never tired of repeating that he had done what he had done according to his conscience, to obey what he believed to be the precepts of Kantian morality. A norm which states that one must renounce the good to save the good is just as false and contradictory as that which, to protect freedom, orders us to renounce freedom.

April 13, 2020

Social Distancing

We do not know where death awaits us; so let us wait for him everywhere. Meditation on death is meditation on freedom; he who has learned how to die has unlearned how to serve. Knowing how to die frees us from all subjection and from all constraints.

- Michel de Montaigne

Since history teaches us that every social phenomenon has or may have political implications, it is appropriate to carefully record the new concept that has recently made its entry into the political lexicon of the West: "social distancing". Although the term was probably produced as a euphemism, to substitute for the crudeness of the term "confinement" used so far, one must ask oneself what a political order based on it might be. This is all the more urgent, as it concerns not only a theoretical hypothesis if it is true, as many are saying, that the current health emergency can be considered as the laboratory in which new political and social structures that await humanity are being prepared.

Although there are, as always, fools who suggest that such a situation can certainly be considered positive, and that these new digital technologies have long allowed people to happily communicate from a distance, I do not believe that a community founded on "social distancing" is humanly and politically viable. In any case, whatever the perspective, it seems to me that it is on this issue that we should reflect.

A first consideration concerns the truly singular nature of the phenomenon that the measures of "social distancing" have produced. In Elias Canetti's masterpiece, *Crowds and Power*, he defines the crowd, or the mass on which power is based, as the inversion of the fear of being touched. While men usually fear being touched by strangers, and all the distances that men establish around themselves arise from this fear, the mass is the only situation in which this fear is overturned to become its opposite: "It is only in the mass that man can become free of this fear of being touched... From the moment we surrender ourselves to the mass, we cease to fear its touch... The person pressed against one is the same as oneself. One feels him as one feels oneself. Suddenly, it is as though everything were happening within one and the same body... This reversal of the fear of being touched is peculiar to the mass. The more dense the crowd, the greater the feeling of relief that spreads in it."

I do not know what Canetti would have thought of the new phenomenology of the mass that we now have before us: what the measures of social distancing and panic have created is certainly a mass – but an inverted mass, so to speak, made up of individuals who at all costs keep each other at a distance. A mass, therefore, that lacks any density, that is rarefied and which, however, is still a mass, if this, as Canetti clarifies shortly after, is defined by its compactness and its passivity, in the sense that "truly free movement is impossible for it,... it awaits. It awaits a leader, who must be shown to it".

A few pages later, Canetti describes the mass that is formed by means of a prohibition, in which "a large number of people gathered together no longer want to do what, up until that moment, they had done as individuals. This prohibition is sudden and self-imposed... in every case it strikes with enormous power. It is as categorical as a command, but its negative character is decisive."

It is important not to overlook that a community founded on social distancing would not be one, as could be naively believed, characterised by an extreme individualism: it would be, precisely to the contrary, like the one we see around us today, a rarefied mass founded on a prohibition, but, precisely for this reason, particularly compact and passive.

April 6, 2020

Reflections on the Plague

The following considerations are not about this epidemic, but about what we can understand from the reactions that it causes in people. It is, therefore, a matter of reflecting on the ease with which an entire society has resigned itself to feeling plagued, to isolating themselves at home and suspending their normal living conditions, their working relationships, their friendships, their loves and even their religious and political beliefs. Why were there no protests and resistance, as was conceivable and as usually happens in such cases? The hypothesis I would like to propose is that somehow, albeit unconsciously, the plague was already there, that people's living conditions had obviously become such that a sudden sign was enough to make them appear for what they were, namely unbearable, like a plague. In a sense, this is the only positive thing that can be gleaned from the present situation: it is possible that later on people start to ask themselves whether their mode of life was the right one.

And what is no less worth reflecting on is the fact that the situation clearly shows the need for religion. One indication of this can be found in the pounding discourse of the media: the borrowing from eschatological vocabulary, especially in the American media, which obsessively uses the word "apocalypse" to describe the phenomenon and often explicitly evokes the end of the world. It is as if the religious need, which the Church is no longer able to satisfy, was groping for another place to live and found it in what has become the religion of our time: science.

This, like any religion, can cause superstition and fear, or at least can be used to spread it. Never before have we been able to observe so clearly the typical spectacle of religions in moments of crisis: different and contradictory opinions and prescriptions, ranging from the heretical minority position (although represented by prestigious scientists) of those who deny the gravity of the phenomenon, to the dominant orthodox discourse, which affirms the phenomenon and yet often radically diverges as to how to deal with it. And, as always in such cases, some experts (or self-proclaimed experts) manage to secure the favour of the monarch, who, as in the days of the religious disputes that divided Christianity, takes sides with one or the other tendency in accordance with his own interests and imposes his measures.

Another thought-provoking fact is the apparent collapse of all common convictions and beliefs. It seems as if people no longer believe in anything – except their bare biological existence, which must be saved at all costs. But only a tyranny can be founded on the fear of losing one's life, only that monstrous Leviathan with his sword drawn.

That is why I do not believe that once the emergency, this plague, is declared to be over - when it is over – at least for those who have maintained a minimum of clarity, it will be possible to return to their former lives. And this is undoubtedly the most desperate thing, even if, as has already been said [by Walter Benjamin], "it is only to those who have lost hope that hope is given."

March 27, 2020

Clarifications

In keeping with the customary practices of his profession, an Italian journalist recently attempted to distort and falsify my recent remarks on the ethical confusion into which the present epidemic is throwing this country, where no regard is now shown even for the dead. Since he did not even bother signing his name, it is not worth the trouble to correct his obvious manipulations. Anyone who wants to read my piece, "Contagion" can find it on the website of the Quodlibet publishing house. Instead, I will add a few additional reflections, which, despite their clarity, will presumably also be falsified.

Fear is a poor advisor, but it causes many things to appear that one pretends not to see. The first thing that the wave of panic, which has paralyzed the country, obviously shows is that our society no longer believes in anything but bare life. It is obvious that Italians are willing to sacrifice practically everything — their normal conditions of life, social relationships, work, even friendships, affections, and religious and political convictions — to the risk of getting sick. Bare life — and the danger of losing it — is not something that unites people, but blinds and separates them. Other human beings, just as in the plague described in Alessandro Manzoni's novel, are now seen solely as possible spreaders of a plague, whom one must avoid at all costs and from whom one needs to keep oneself at a distance of at least one metre. The dead — our dead — are not entitled to a funeral and it is not even clear what will happen to the bodies of our loved ones. Our neighbour has been cancelled and it is curious that churches remain silent on this subject. What do human relationships become in a country that habituates itself to live in this way for who knows how long? And what is a society that values nothing other than survival?

The other thing that the epidemic has caused to appear with clarity, no less disquieting than the first, is that the state of exception to which governments have habituated us for some time has now truly become the norm. There have been more serious epidemics than this in the past, but no one ever thought for that reason to declare a state of emergency like the current one, which prevents us even from moving. People have been so habituated to live in conditions of perennial crisis and perennial emergency that they don't seem to notice that their life has been reduced to a purely biological condition and has lost all its dimensions, not only social and political but even human and emotional as well. A society that lives in a perennial state of emergency cannot be a free society. We in fact live in a society that has sacrificed its freedom to so-called "reasons of security" and has therefore condemned itself to live in a perennial state of fear and insecurity.

It is not surprising that, with respect to the virus, one speaks of war. The emergency measures actually obligate us to live our lives under curfew conditions. But a war with an invisible enemy, who can lurk in every other person, is the most absurd of wars. It is, in truth, a civil war. The enemy is not outside, it is within us.

What is worrisome is not so much (or not only) the present, but what comes after. Just as wars have bequeathed to peace a series of inauspicious technologies, from barbed wire to nuclear power plants, so it is also very likely that we will seek to continue, even after the health emergency, the experiments that governments did not manage to bring into reality before:

closing universities and schools and doing lessons only online, putting a stop once and for all to meeting together and speaking for political or cultural reasons, and exchanging only digital messages with each other, wherever possible substituting machines for every contact — every contagion — between human beings.

March 17, 2020

Contagion

The infector! Get him! Get him! Get the infector!

- Alessandro Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi*

One of the most inhuman consequences of the panic that they are attempting to spread in Italy, on the occasion of this so-called coronavirus epidemic, is the contagion theory itself, which is what grounds the exceptional emergency measures that have been adopted by the government. This idea, which was foreign to Hippocratic medicine, has its first unwitting precursor in the context of the plagues that devastated some Italian cities between 1500 and 1600. This is the figure of the "infector" (untore), immortalized by Manzoni both in his novel and in the essay on the Storia della Colonna Infame. A Milanese "announcement", published during the 1576 plague, describes the infectors in this way, inviting citizens to report them:

Having heard from the governor that some people — guided by a fake zeal of charity, and with the aim of terrorizing and frightening the people and inhabitants of our city of Milan and to excite them into some turmoil — are anointing with ants (which they say carry the plague and are contagious) both people and the doors and bolts of houses and the corners of the districts of this city and other places in the state, under the pretext of bringing the plague into private and public places, something which results in many inconveniences, as well as significant disruption among the people, mostly among those who are easily persuaded to believe such things, it is hereby decreed that any person of any status and condition who, within forty days from this announcement, will denounce the person or persons who have favored, helped, or known about this insolence, will be awarded five hundred scuti...

Mutatis mutandis, the recent provisions (taken by the Italian government with decrees that we would like to hope –although this is nothing but an illusion – will not be confirmed by Parliament and turned into laws) actually transform every individual into a potential infector, in exactly the same way as the laws on terrorism considered, de facto and de jure, every citizen to be a potential terrorist. The analogy is indeed so clear that the potential infector who does not comply with the prescriptions will be punished with imprisonment. Particularly hated is the figure of the healthy or unwitting carrier, who infects a multiplicity of individuals who are unable to defend themselves from him, as if one could defend oneself from the infector.

Even sadder than the curtailing of freedom implied by these measures is, in my opinion, the degeneration of the relations between men engendered by them. The other, whoever he may be, even a loved one, must not be approached or touched — and indeed a distance must be put between us and him. According to some this distance should be one metre, but according to the latest suggestions of the so-called experts it should be 4.5 meters (interesting, those fifty centimetres!). Our neighbour has been abolished. It is possible, given the ethical inconsistency of our political leaders, that these provisions may derive, in the minds of those who made them, from the same fear that they intend to provoke. But it is difficult not to think that the situation

they will end up creating is exactly that which our leaders have often before tried to achieve: to finally close universities and schools and transfer all lessons online, to make sure we stop encountering each other and to speak about politics or culture, pushing us to the mere exchange of digital messages so that, wherever possible, machines may replace every contact — every contagion — between human beings.

March 11, 2020

The Invention of an Epidemic

Faced with these frenetic, irrational and completely unjustified emergency measures for a supposed epidemic due to the coronavirus, it is necessary to start from the declarations of the CNR, according to which not only is there "no SARS-CoV-2 epidemic in Italy", but, "the infection, from the epidemiological data available today on tens of thousands of cases, causes mild / moderate symptoms (a kind of flu) in 80-90% of cases. In 10-15% pneumonia can develop, the course of which is however benign in the absolute majority. It is estimated that only 4% of patients require hospitalization in intensive care."

If this is the real situation, why are the media and the authorities working to spread a climate of panic, creating a real state of exception, with serious limitations on movements and suspension of the normal functioning of living and working conditions in entire regions?

Two factors can help explain such disproportionate behavior. First of all, there is once again the growing tendency to use the state of exception as a normal paradigm of government. The decree-law immediately approved by the government "for reasons of hygiene and public safety" results in a real militarization "of the municipalities and areas in which at least one person has tested positive and for whom the source of transmission is not known, or in any case in which there is a case not attributable to a person coming from an area already affected by the virus infection". Such a vague and indeterminate formula will make it possible to rapidly extend the state of exception into all regions, since it is almost impossible that other cases will not occur elsewhere.

Consider the serious limitations of freedom provided for by the decree: a) prohibition from leaving the municipality or the affected area by all individuals who are present in the municipality or in the area; b) prohibition of access to the municipality or the area concerned; c) suspension of all demonstrations or initiatives of any kind, of events and any form of meeting in a public or private place, including those of a cultural, recreational, sporting and religious nature, even if held in enclosed places open to the public; d) suspension of educational services for children and schools at all levels, as well as attendance at school and higher education activities, except for distance learning activities; e) suspension of public services of museums and other cultural institutes and places referred to in Article 101 of the Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, pursuant to Legislative Decree 22 January 2004, no. 42, as well as the effectiveness of the regulatory provisions on open and free access to such institutions and places; f) suspension of any educational trips, both nationally and abroad; g) suspension of bankruptcy procedures and public office activities, without prejudice to the provision of essential and public utility services; h) application of quarantine measures with active surveillance among individuals who have had close contact with confirmed cases of a widespread infectious disease.

The disproportion in the face of what, according to the CNR, is a normal influenza not all that dissimilar from those that recur every year, is eye-popping. It seems that, now that terrorism has been exhausted as the cause of exceptional measures, the invention of an epidemic can offer the ideal pretext for expanding them beyond all limits.

The other factor, no less disturbing, is the state of fear which in recent years has evidently spread into the consciences of individuals and which translates into a real need on the part of states for collective panic, for which the epidemic once again offers an ideal pretext. Thus, in a perverse vicious circle, the limitation of freedom imposed by governments is accepted in the name of a desire for security, which has been induced by the same governments that are now intervening to satisfy it.

February 26, 2020