



Morality and politics in times of pandemic

The world is facing its worst situation since the Second World War. And Spain since the civil war. The comparisons are therefore bellicose. The primary duty is to recognize the gravity of the tragedy and the crisis that is coming, which is already here. Suddenly, nothing is the same anymore. Everything's got dislocated. The world will probably never be the same again. And all in a sudden, unpredictable way, like a treacherous death blow. Nor should it be forgotten that the victims of wars and famines in recent decades have far outnumbered those of the pandemic.

The first attack has targeted, well beyond the fatalities, our long-standing assurances, our naive confidence in the limitless power of scientific technique. When some thought we were knocking on the gates of paradise, we were met with horror.

But man, if he has not entirely succumbed to foolishness, learns from all situations, even more so from the worst of them. The fool, does not. As Ortega y Gasset said, "The fool is a fool for life; he is devoid of pores." Misfortunes may be immense but they are never absolute. Pain is an evil but not an absolute evil. And it can also be an opportunity for good, greatness and heroism. C. S. Lewis said of pain that it was God's cry to awaken man's slumbering conscience. Henri Bergson states that "our pain is indefinitely protracted and multiplied by brooding over it." Then we can mitigate it. He adds that there is an empirical optimism that is proven by two facts: "Firstly, that humanity considers life as a whole to be good, since it clings to it; secondly, that there is a joy without mixture, situated beyond pleasure and sorrow, which is the definitive state of soul of the mystic."

It also allows us to observe the suffering of the smallness of the "superman" without God, the "The Drama of Atheist Humanism" (Henri de Lubac), the agonizing loneliness of the man without faith. The meaning of life is not possible without the Absolute, or, at



least, without its painstaking search. The dignity of man and the spiritual strength of the wise emerge from the miseries of the pandemic. Also intellectual and moral destitution. But a prudent man takes advantage of the harsh opportunity to reflect on the meaning of his life, on his vocation, on what really matters, on time wasted, on death, on the moral therapy of pain in the face of “The painless ethics of the new democratic times” (Gilles Lipovetsky), on good and evil.

The terrible developments have given rise to compassion and generosity. The case of health care professionals is not the only, but it is one of the most visible: But there is one aspect to which I would like to draw attention. They have all thrown themselves into saving lives, putting their own at risk. Many people had forgotten that this was the *raison d'être* of their work: healing, alleviating suffering and saving lives, and nothing else. On the contrary, this does not prevent situations from arising that contain serious moral dilemmas, such as, ultimately, the choice of which lives take precedence over others in the face of scarce health resources. But what is (or should be) beyond debate is that this is about life and not death.

It is stated that life and health are the most important. However, in the proper hierarchy of values, based on the criterion proposed by Max Scheler, the lower level represents pleasure. And immediately above this, to core values such as strength, health or vitality. We're looking at the second lowest level. Above them are spiritual values (aesthetic, legal and scientific) and, at the very top, religious values. Another thing is that the lower values be the most fundamental and indispensable for the accomplishment of the higher ones. Therefore, one can, and must, give one's life or health to beauty, justice, truth and the sacred. Neither life nor health are the most important thing. The difference is that without a minimum of health it is not possible to enjoy or accomplish the higher values. Hartmann believes that, in view of the social order in which values are achieved, we must start with the lower ones and reverse Scheler's order. Neither pain is the worst nor health the highest.

The pandemic has also dealt a mortal blow to the mass-man that Ortega dissected in *The Revolt of the Masses*. Among the features of this rebellious mass-man, who took over Europe in the first third of the last century and still reigns today, is the psychology of the



spoilt child and the satisfied master. The psychological diagram of the mass-man boasts two main features: “the free expansion of his vital desires, and therefore of his personality; and his radical ingratitude towards all that has made possible the ease of his existence.” This new type of mass-man holds a native and radical impression that life is easy, overpowering, without tragic limitations, which invites him to affirm himself as he is, to take his moral and intellectual patrimony for granted. Perhaps this is one of the positive outcomes of the current tragedy: the collapse of the "satisfied master." Life has always, almost always, been difficult, restricted, and difficult. The European development of the last centuries generated an unprecedented situation in history: the feeling that progress and well-being had no limits. The current Spanish generations, except for a few long-lived ones, have not known the great belligerent and economic disasters. Perhaps now they wake up from this unreal dream, enhanced by the immense historical ignorance suffered by modern man.

Finally, politics. Our democracy is also under quarantine.

The terrible pandemic has surprised us with a popular-front government with separatists, perhaps the worst of the possible alternatives. As far as we can see, democracy only works in good times. In times of crisis, this must be put on hold. The current government is now calling for a unity that it once set out to destroy. Much unity, but what it does not offer is a constitutionalist government of national concentration. The political management of the crisis is being shameful, the lies, swings and concealment have been abundant, numbers of people infected are being published while there are no tests available, the masks have gone from being superfluous to being indispensable, the defence of the most vulnerable and of equality is being proclaimed while the health privileges of the powerful are abundant.

The declaration of the state of emergency is provided for in the Constitution, but its implementation is diluting our democracy. Our system of civil rights is also under quarantine. Intimacy and privacy are invaded and fade away. Private initiative exhibits its achievements but everything seems to lead to the politicization of life and state interventionism. Everything leads to state dependence of the citizens and to the decline



of private initiative. If we do not remain vigilant, they will lead us into tyranny, misery and barbarism. The triumph of communism requires the apotheosis of misery. To take advantage of chaos you have to provoke it or maintain it and make it worse. We know how democracies end. There is no shortage of examples of this. The virus also has its political consequences.

Another effect of the current crisis is that the physical virus prevents us from seeing the moral virus even more, the effects of which we have been suffering for decades, perhaps centuries. We pay much more attention to what kills the body than to what destroys the spirit. The Evangelist Luke says, "fear not them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do." What kills the spirit is far more terrible than what kills the body. This is what Kierkegaard says in *The Works of Love*: "Well, they put up barriers against the plague, but against the plague of murmuring, worse than the Asian one, the one that corrupts the soul, all the houses are opened, they pay money to be infected, they greet and welcome in whoever brings the contagion!"

There is another virus, lethal and silent, which passes through without harming the bodies and directly infects the souls. The difficulty of defeating it is proportional to the ignorance of its existence. Here the contagion is voluntary and there is no recognition of its reality or the need for diagnosis and treatment. There's only a few of us left who are immune. Most are happily infected. And, perhaps, though it is not certain, the elimination of the moral virus is the best therapy to confront the other virus, physically and morally, and, along the way, to save the Nation and its democracy.

The crisis is profound because it is moral. Ortega diagnosed: "Europe has run out of morals" and human life is not possible if it is not subject to a higher authority. Today, he said, the average man wants nothing to do with the spirit. The European crisis affects its main spiritual principles: philosophy, law, Christianity, science and liberal democracy. His symptoms manifest themselves, amongst other places, at the University. Husserl linked the European crisis to the philosophical crisis of the sciences. That's why Ortega stated: "The day when a genuine philosophy once more holds sway in Europe— it is the



one thing that can save her—that day she will once again realise that man, whether he like it or no, is a being forced by his nature to seek some higher authority. If he succeeds in finding it of himself, he is a superior man; if not, he is a mass-man and must receive it from his superiors.”

It should not be forgotten that before the arrival of the virus, Spain was suffering a serious moral, national, political and economic crisis. This last one was starting to get intense. We must not attribute to the virus what cannot be attributed. If anything, it will aggravate the quadruple crisis. But it's up to us, all of us. We are faced with the following alternative. On the one side, populist totalitarianism and nihilism. On the other, freedom and overcoming the moral crisis.

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