The lessons we learned from the tiny coronavirus SARS-CoV-2
Some perhaps not trivial words by Piero P. Giorgi (April 2020) about yesterday, today and tomorrow

Preamble
During the Second World War the population spent hours in air raid shelters; some people prayed, others complained, some played the harmonica. And everyone thought: we will do it, and after this great fear everything will return as before.
And so it did.
That was bad, very bad.
Such a tragedy (millions of dead and injured people, a world to be rebuilt) should have made them think. Who or what triggered this monster? What responsibility did we little ants have? ¹ What should we change to prevent it from happening again?
No, there was no such public consultation. The winners (those who wanted the war, financed it and earned from it) decide what they want and the little ants, distracted and happy, enjoy the Peace and accept everything as before, even more than before.
It is not a novelty. We have done it for about 7,000 years (a very recent phenomenon of our existence), modifying and worsening social relations in an inhuman way since the late Neolithic period and the Bronze Age, an excellent metal alloy for making swords, not suitable for hunting but excellent for killing each other. ² The minority at the top of the social pyramid, realizing that their own advantages (based on violence and social injustice) entailed terrible things for the little ants, thought it well to camouflage the tragedy by calling it "Civilization" and teaching it at school in the subject called "History", a list of cases of violence and technological progress accompanied by a progressive loss of humanity. ³ There was also

¹ We will use this term to refer to the mass of the population that during the last few thousand years has been controlled from above through ignorance, fake news (later the mass media), violence and fear. Of course the term is not used in a pejorative sense, but it seems to us quantitatively significant. In fact, people who exercise power (not the Service as they should, see note 14) are always a small minority. Those who suffer as a result of the badly exercised power represent a very large number, the little ants. Well, it is precisely in too large human settlements (no longer a human community) that violence has found its origin and the ideal environment to develop (see note 2).
progress in aesthetics (art) and knowledge of the world (science), but without discussing their social implications and understanding the socio-political mechanisms that promoted them (e.g. Fascism in favour of Marinetti and futurism) or prohibited them (e.g. the Church against Galilei and the heliocentric theory).

Now let's see the radically new lessons revealed by our little schoolteacher.
A virus (Latin term meaning 'poison') is not even a cell, not even a living form: only a nucleic acid molecule (DNA or RNA) with a protein jacket and a lipid coat, therefore very small, a fraction of a micron, which in turn is a thousandth of a millimetre. It can only exist inside an infected cell (forced parasitism), from which it borrows biochemical mechanisms to duplicate itself and infect other cells. In doing so, it causes diseases in plants and animals, but it doesn't know. 4

Where did the little agent responsible for COVID-19 syndrome come from? The answer immediately takes us to the first group of lessons.

Men, plants and animals
Only a few millennia ago human beings began to consider themselves masters of the world, who can literally change and exploit plants and animals, change and pollute waters and soils without restraint. More recently, the environmental damage / public benefit ratio has become enormous, unsustainable, with very few who noticed it and screamed in anger. For example, in order to earn more money, farmers have crammed meat animals (chickens, pigs, etc.) into very tight spaces, causing them stress and disease; they then stuffed the poor animals with antibiotics and among the buyers of meat the first pathogenic bacteria appeared that were resistant to all antibiotics (evolution by natural selection), very dangerous. 5

Against this general background of ignorance and disinterest, in China people were allowed to eat sick stray dogs, bats and badly kept fish in the markets. 6 Our little SARS-CoV-2 was born in the Huanan region, probably in the fish and animal market of his capital Wuhan, around November 2019. It was just over two months old and already appeared in various countries of the world; a smart kid, very transmissible but not very deadly.

version is on its way (check first page of www.pierogiorgi.org, where you can also download previous publications on the same topic.


6 These are not our small insectivorous bats that fly at sunset (Microchiroptera), but those large as little dogs of warm climates that eat fruit, often live in numerous tree communities and fly at night (Macrochiroptera). The latter seem to have an excellent immune system and can afford to host many viruses without being disturbed by them. So they become a dangerous food.
Lesson 1 - For effective democracy it is not enough to hold elections every five years. It is also necessary to provide Civic Education at all school levels, have a critical and independent press, organise well-directed political discussions, without overlapping voices and aggression, with documented declarations and logical reasoning. And then, in a truly democratic country, public administration interventions must also be transparent and motivated. In such a situation, with education and information, problems could be prevented (pandemics, in our case, see note 12), not just resorting to drastic repressive measures after they have appeared. Covid-19 is not just a medical problem. Once the pandemic has passed, we must not go back to "everything as before".

Lesson 2 - One of the most harmful scourges in complex societies (those of the past 5,000 years) is corruption (a form of violence). The causes of the pandemic and the not rare examples of delays in applying remedies concern not only incompetence but also corruption, e.g. when protecting certain categories more than others during drastic measures to slow Covid-19. Corruption cannot be reduced and eliminated without good social ethics. There is a clear geographical distribution in the levels of global corruption. Let's stop considering the USA as a model of society to admire (as presented by the mass media) and let's find out about the countries (e.g. Scandinavian) that appear at the top of the charts with the lowest levels of corruption. Then we should imitate them, not the false models imposed on us. Italy also has a big problem to solve regarding the phenomenon of criminal networks (mafia, camorra, 'ndrangheta and the so-called Nigerian mafia). Once the pandemic has passed, we must not go back to "everything as before".

Lesson 3 – Today the little ants know everything about cell phones. They learned it after a blanket advertising campaign (ten pages of the daily Corriere della Sera were bought by Vodafone on the day of the release of their first smart phone for sale) and after severe exclusions (a smart phone is required to access normal administrative functions). At the same time, the little ants have a medieval knowledge of biomedicine. That's okay, because if they knew how their bodies work it would be very difficult to sell them all those unhealthy products or hide the corrupt choices sometime made by governments regarding health. Speaking of the so-called "political struggles", it is more effective to offer civic education and scientific preparation to the little ants that vote (conscious democracy), rather than

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7 Switzerland, for example, begins civic education in primary school, normally as the main subject and taught by the school director.

8 Italy has an excellent Constitution, with high ethical values, which are often ignored by public administrators. Italy also has good rules on mutual relations of independence between legislative bodies (parliament), executive bodies (government) and judicial bodies (tribunals), but these rules are often overlooked. The fact is that social ethics must also exist in people's culture. A country with a majority of "sly people" does not go far.

9 See the CPI (perceived corruption index) values produced each year by the website of Transparency International.

10 The two most demonstrative phenomena are a) The use that the Italian governments have made of the South, already soon after national unity, as a source of votes in exchange for favours, through agreements with the various mafias and b) the famous, but officially denied, agreement between the state and the mafia, immediately after the maxiprocesso of Palermo, a Court case against 460 members of Cosa Nostra (1986-92), followed by the end of the anti-mafia legal procedure and the assassination of the famous judges Falcone and Borsellino. Now that the mafias have integrated well in the North, it is no longer a geographical problem, but a State tragedy, or rather, a serious dysfunction of Italian politics. For a critical view on this topic see Mack Smith, D. (1997) Modern Italy – A political history. University of Michigan Press, Ann Harbor.
organizing a protest movement against a wrong policy after it has been approved by Parliament. For example, after the cases of infection caused by the other two corona viruses, SARS (in 2003) and MARS (in 2012), the funds destined to study them were very few. For information on democracy, see Lesson 1. For political inadequacy, see Lessons 1 and 2. If we had studied well similar infectious agents ten years earlier and had had governments more interested in disease prevention than finance, we would have saved many lives. This has been proven by two countries, South Korea and Taiwan, which had treasured the experience of their SARS epidemic (in 2002). Examples of countries that exhibited criminal inaction at the start of the Covid19 pandemic are France, England and the United States (in alphabetical order), with arrogant heads of government. They were then woken up by the World Health Organization, but the damage, still to be ascertained, it has been done. Once the pandemic has passed, we must not go back to "everything as before".

**Dismantling Public Health**

If we consider in particular the current European countries and USA, with a pronounced social stratification (a rich minority and a majority moving toward poverty) and with a decreasing bourgeoisie, we note that this trend is also reflected in the health system. About thirty years ago the disease industry (called however "health industry") began to divide into two strands: Medicine for the rich and medicine for the poor (called however "private" and "public"). The latter one has much less resources and is much slower. This advancing inequality happened in silence, without a preliminary public debate, like all the changes that favour the interests of large investments, while the little ants are distracted by TV and mass media.

Unfortunately, the health intervention necessary for a pandemic infection is the public one. Moreover, on this occasion the right attitude of politicians should have been that of those who manage Services for citizens, not that of those interested only in political power.

11 See the article "We were warned, so why couldn’t we prevent it?", *New Scientist*, March 7, 2020, p. 9.

12 Iceland has behaved like an exemplary country. Already at the end of January 2020, without any obvious case of infection, a preliminary campaign began (identification of infected people), thus saving many lives. This information appeared in the Belgian newspaper *La Libre*, editorial of 15 April 2020, based on an article in the important medical periodical *New England Journal of Medicine* of 14 April, signed by several researchers from Icelandic universities, funded by the company deCode Genetics.

13 This is an old problem. Complex societies began to stratify already in the Bronze Age, due to the emerging professional specialization and the consequent advantage of some trades in bartering (Giorgi, 2008, cited in note 2, pp. 82-94). The pyramidal social model, with nobility and priests at the top and peasants and slaves at the bottom, became then the rule for a few thousand years, until the Middle Ages, when a capable and industrious (later educated) bourgeoisie wedged itself in the middle and began to disturb the balance of exploitation from above, then creating (in the nineteenth century) pressure to obtain more social justice. After the Second World War, the lack of institutional powers for the former privileged categories, the weakening of the creative bourgeoisie and the terror of Communism justified illegal "undercover" political projects using "deviated elements", often with the collaboration of foreign governments. This led, from the 70s, to the current crisis of democracy in European countries.

**Lesson 4.** Here is how the small virus exposed the inefficiency of the two stranded medicine (causing the easy spread of the infection), as well as demonstrating its fundamental unjust nature (higher percentage of deaths among the poor). Was there really a need for a pandemic to make us understand that a *just health regime* is available for everyone and is well subsidized by the State? Let’s wonder why President Obama’s plan for national medical care has been opposed so strongly by the US conservative party. To understand the US mentality, let’s imagine that there were two levels in the military defence system: a ramshackle army that defends the poor and a very technological one to defend only the rich. It would make us laugh, perhaps it would seem logical to US conservatives. A recent article by Gael Giraud has discussed how our health systems should change for the future viral pandemics, very likely to occur considering the changes in the environment caused by human interference. Good idea. *Once the pandemic has passed, we must not go back to "everything as before".*

**Finally, a question: why being so scared of the virus, when ...**

A good Italian Franciscan friar and missionary in China, Luigino Belloli, has released a text on the pandemic with an original approach in one sense, but worrying in another. In short, he asks himself: why be so scared of the small virus when in the last centuries much worse has happened and this has never frightened us? And he reminds us of terrible things to the detriment of people and the environment.

In the framed paragraph below we briefly see these tragedies, starting with the one for which there may be an explanation of our insensitivity and continuing with those that demonstrate, instead, how unaware and oblivious (or distracted by those who do not want us to think) we are about a disastrous trend. Catastrophic attitude? No, just look at changing social statistics and changing climatic patterns. Facts speak.

For years, we have been told that around **10%** of the world’s population consumes around **90%** of the goods and services produced in the world. Other data: the properties of the few existing billionaires (only **2,000** people) correspond to the properties of **4,5 billion** people of the about 7 billion living on Earth (*Oxfam annual report* 2019). Although the news is impressive, it may not disturb the *average little ant* that probably still has enough resources to live decently. But this extreme difference between a few very wealthy consumers and a great many needy poor people is not only immoral. It also creates the environmental and social crisis that kills about **8 million** people a year, not every now and then like a virus, it kills them regularly every year. This begins to worry anyone who has a minimum of ethical sense or is capable of imagining even worse future imbalances. Then there are the **25 wars** currently going on in the world with their dead, their homeless people, their migrants, their military spending. And with the **UNs unable to stop** them, because the superpowers, always involved in one way or another in these wars, have the right of **veto** in the Security Council that should intervene.

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16 This UN rule is incredible and against the true ideal of this tormented institution. Already the League of Nations, commissioned by US President Woodrow Wilson, began in 1920 but failed due to opposition from the US Republican party itself. No one in the international arena dares to discuss about the veto or want to eliminate it. What are they afraid of? The answer is in the air … the main nuclear powers are the only ones to hold permanent membership in the
Then there are the multinational corporations of minerals, agriculture, chemicals and pharmaceuticals that cause countless damage to humans and the environment in order to earn more and more again.

Then there are thousands of atomic bombs in military warehouses around the world, while the use, even by mistake, of only a dozen would be enough to cause a "nuclear winter" (a barrier of smoke and dust shading the sun's rays) that would extinguish all complex forms of life on Earth. They are not used for defence, not even as deterrents. Italy and many other States, shame on them, has not yet signed and ratified the recent UN Treaty to eliminate atomic weapons.

An obvious environmental alteration, climate changes, those yes have already scared people, but democratic mechanisms to protest and force governments to take serious measures are lacking (or are not yet allowed). What global tragedy (like Covid19) must take place before emergency measures (already out of time) are taken to protect the environment?

All these tragedies seem to have one common political problem, an incomplete democratic system, and one common anthropological problem, an almost total loss of human characteristics.  

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**Conclusion**

In short, here is the cause of these severe problems in the so-called democratic countries: the veneration of the two divinities of Money and Power. The consequence: the extinction of our species in a short time unless we follow the main lesson of the small virus: once the pandemic has passed, we must not go back to "everything as before".

So, what to do: rebuild local communities (in small municipalities and in the neighbourhoods of cities), reintroduce nonviolence and thus recover our humanity (all slowly, it will take 2-3 generations, but we have to start immediately). See Giorgi (2019, cited in note 3, Chapter 10).

This text can be freely circulated as you wish.

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Security Council and the only one with the right of veto. Shame on all UN members, who accept those conditions just to sit quietly on a useless chair.


18 see Giorgi, (2019), cited in note 3, pp. 102-109