



# After the End of the World: How to Orient Yourself in Thinking and in Life from Now On?

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*In memory of those who have gone  
when they could still be here with us.*

1. The most immediate and manifest characterization of the present conditions is given by the biological, sanitary, and worldwide crisis: the Covid-19 pandemic, caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Identified in Wuhan in November 2019, officially declared a pandemic by the WHO on March 11, 2020, it continues in progress today (May 2021), a year and a half later, giving way to new viral variants.

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It implies a general disorder, disorganizing down to the detail of the so-called Western way of life, with its usual “values” of competition, performance, acceleration, profitability, growth, governed by the rule of economic exchange, extended now to all aspects of life (nature, body, knowledge, language, affects). And therefore health, as well as education, also reduced to the status of merchandise.

And suddenly, this machine—the neoliberal system—confronted with the coronavirus that he did not know, not could or not want to foresee, is obliged to do what all managers and decision-makers said was impossible: *to interrupt* its work.

Suddenly it was possible to discover—not only, but *also*—the reverse of the catastrophe: the purification of the air, the revitalization of animals, the virtues of calm, of silence, and even of the rapprochement of oneself with oneself (with all the consequences that this meeting with oneself can entail).

Would this mean that, after the pandemic, there will no longer be a “return to normal,” to the “normality” of the neoliberal world order and its forms of life, as the most lucid ecological and emancipation movements now desire and proclaim ?

Nothing is more uncertain. The dynamics of the system are programmed precisely to reproduce without limit, feeding on its own crises. The exponential enrichment, with the pandemic, of the largest companies on the Web and the pharmaceutical industry, along with the continued prosperity of oil companies and agro-business, already illustrates this dialectic of capital. As always, any change in the status quo will depend on the relationship of forces, on the fronts of struggle.

2. The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic sets the tone for the present condition. But it is “only” the ultimate revealer of the failure of modern civilization.

It is from within this general bankruptcy that we endeavor to outline here an answer to the question, henceforth: How to continue? (Beckettian question *par excellence* (1949), as shown by Theodor Adorno (1995)).

The current pandemic is not strictly biological, of course. On the contrary, it is a “total fact,” a “disease of the Anthropocene” as has already been said (Philippe Sansonetti (2020)), inseparable from the industrial and social conditions of the civilization of “development”—neoliberal health management included—in which the emergence of new virus and its dazzling way of planetary diffusion could happen.

The malaise of this civilization, even its failure—the “crisis of neoliberalism”—has been getting worse for some time, long before the advent of the pandemic, and clearly since the financial crisis of 2007–2008.

The “developed” world, insofar as it prioritized the operativeness of the system, had already abandoned the term “progress” and the idea of emancipation that it connotes. In particular, since the beginning of the second decade of this century, it has been facing an unprecedented *regressive* turn: “death of democracy,” “stealthy authoritarianism,” and “democratic fascism”—whatever the name given to the deep political, ethical, logical, cultural, and civilizational setback that we are suffering. To the technological and neoliberal “dehumanization” in progress. The destruction of the human in us (and the inhuman element that, although beyond oneself, the human contains within itself).

This is what shows, among others, the general picture of the current state of the “organization of hatred” and of “small anxieties” of neo-obscurantism in the world of “microfascism” that surrounds us (as Gilles Deleuze (2003) would say). For example: the “climate-negacionismo,” financed by Silicon Valley’s tech billionaires, oil companies, and agro-business.

Then the figure, almost unimaginable 200 years after the century of Enlightenment, is installed, of a neo-fascinating obscurantism, openly ignoring, without complexes, the elementary moral imperative (which founds the discernment between good and evil), natural rights, fundamental freedoms, until the last pretensions of legitimacy of the so-called liberal democracies.

3. A finished expression of obscurantism, the contemporary terraplanism postulates a relativism: everything is opinion. Science would be an opinion among others, the moral imperative as well, and all opinions are relative and are equivalent, they have the same value. The conflict of opinions could therefore never be decided by a higher level than the level of opinions—an instance of argument, a court of reason. Hence the contempt for the debate, for the free and public use of reason. (Evidently, this postulation is a blatant imposture: because every time the terraplanist enters at the hospital to do exams or get on a plane, he betrays that, in the right time, he trusts fundamentally in science. All negacionism is a quackery.)

What then makes an opinion able to beat its opponent and prevail? In the absence of argumentative confrontation, only force decides: violence, power, weapons.

Terraplanism demands a world without truth, without reason or right, governed only by the law of the strongest. (Such is the ultimate meaning of the abject insolence of the head of the Brazilian state: when asked about the slaughter taking place in the country, he replied: “So what?” “You may even be telling the truth, I may even be responsible for these deaths, so what? The master is me!”)

In short: obscurantism is hatred for culture and for all knowledge, for the knowledge of science as well as the knowledge of spirituality, the “care of the self” (*cura sui*) Prado (2018).

Above all, it means forgetting the anamnesis work (the Freud’s *Durcharbeitung*), surrendering intimacies, renouncing the practice of oneself and of thinking for oneself—and therefore, the elimination of teaching and the “teaching relationship”—and dismantling of research and of the university.

(Obscurantism is profoundly immoral, in the strict sense that Clarice Lispector (1964) gave to that term, in a letter to her sister, which should be understood in light of this condition of general dismissal: “What is truly immoral is to have given up on yourself.”)

Obscurantism leads to its ultimate consequences and testifies, in a blatant way, to the failure of modern civilization. Bankruptcy of which—we insist—the current global health crisis, its possibility, as well as its catastrophic management in general, constitute, in several aspects, the most recent revealing.

This disaster of civilization attests definitively to the obsolescence of man and humanisms.

Baudelaire (1975–1976) had anticipated all this, in his visionary way, in a famous page in his diary (that inspired the title of these remarks): “*Le monde va finir...*”

Hence the question, on which we will return: How to orient oneself in thought and in life henceforth, after the ruin of faith in man postulated by humanisms? (Cf. Lyotard (1988, 1993), Lyotard & Prado (2018), Prado (2019), Sloterdijk (2013))

4. It is in this general conjuncture that Brazil elected in 2018, and maintains in the presidency of the Republic, a notorious imbalance, involved with local organized crime and the American extreme right.

Along with a troupe of ministers of rare incompetence, the current head of government commits crimes against the country almost every day. But the main crime, so to speak, his emblematic crime, consisted and

consists (since it is still ongoing) in applying to intentionally spread the SARS-CoV-2 virus among the Brazilian population.

Strategy responsible for the exorbitant slaughter by Covid-19 in Brazil—it is estimated that three out of every four deaths from coronaviruses were *preventable* —, not to mention its incalculable health, psychological, social, economic consequences for millions of Brazilians.

A crime against public health, therefore, under the alibi of applying the thesis of herd immunity by contagion. However, this thesis is known to be unfeasible in practice (the possibility of cases of reinfection already invalidates it), and it is criminal from an ethical and penal point of view: it kills massively. As *Imperial College* of London has demonstrated to Boris Johnson since March 2020, it would involve the infection of about 70% of the population, with an invaluable cost of loss of lives.

But all of this was manifestly never a problem for Jair Bolsonaro and his government—on the contrary.

Herd immunity by contagion, formulated by epidemiologists of a libertarian think tank of the American Institute for Economic Research, is an “epidemiological neoliberalism” (Isabel Frey (2020)). It is the transposition to the pandemic, to the circulation of the virus, of the principles of deregulation and flexibility applied to the economy. Thus, the economy’s *laissez-faire* corresponds to *letting itself become infected* and *letting die* of this epidemiological management.

In doing so, it is the most vulnerable, the “weakest,” who are affected. The management of the spread of the virus—the use, by the government of “good citizens,” of the pandemic as a weapon—works as a “selection,” a social Darwinism.

This therefore provided the Bolsonaro government with the opportunity to “take advantage of the pandemic,” according to the government’s slogan (*see* ministerial meeting of April 22, 2020).

Using the pandemic as a weapon, two converging objectives were pursued: (1) the deliberate extermination of entire fractions of the Brazilian population, the most vulnerable, precisely: poor, blacks, indigenous populations, and quilombolas, and (2) to foment health and social chaos, which should create the conditions serving as a pretext for the only project of the captain of the Palácio do Planalto, his obsession since always: the military coup, the control of the fundamental institutions of the Republic.

The use of the pandemic as a weapon of extermination is a crime that we can call *pandemicide* (at the cost of an alteration of the etymology). It constitutes a characterized genocide (whatever may be its technical legal

expression in the Criminal Court: crime of genocide, of extermination or against humanity).

5. This drift from a large country (sixth largest economy in the world in 2011), precipitated in a few years on the edge of the abyss, has the sad “advantage” of wide open the truth of neoliberalism. It shows, in a brutal way, that under the “liberal democratic” facade, neoliberalism, through its figures (elites, bankers, businessmen, politicians, judges, journalists), not only can comply with delinquency of State, but it demands this law-breaking. This essential pact of contemporary neoliberalism with barbarism presages the dark times that are coming and not just on the periphery of the system (see the fascisation underway in France today, in May 2021).

It is an “advantage” that has a very high, unaffordable cost (at the time I am writing these lines, the Brazilian “pandemicide”—more correctly: the deliberate use of the pandemic for the purpose of a planned massacre in the name of both business and Darwinist-social “selection”—is approaching half a million deaths, apart from underreporting).

That said, one question remains open and immense, which will nevertheless remain pending here: that of the incredible impunity of the Palácio do Planalto tenant, today and throughout his career.

He who is primarily responsible for the biggest death toll in history of Brazil, in addition to dozens of daily crimes of responsibility and various threats, both larval and open, of coup to the Republic.

He just won’t have gone any further because of his worst enemy, which is “interior”: himself. In contrast, the institutions of the New Republic, as well as the so-called democratic, progressive, cultural, university, student, opposition, and left-wing forces, have so far shown themselves to be intriguing and troubling ineffectiveness and have not really constituted themselves in practice as a resistance vector.

Rather, there is a general tendency (in Brazil, but not only), diffuse and permanent, to trivialize evil, to minimize, in this case, the conduct of an unbalanced person responsible for a crime against humanity, in the hands of whom the elites deemed it opportune (for their interests) to hand over the government of the country.

What to conclude from this ineffectiveness of institutions and progressive forces, from this trivialization of crime, from this accommodation, and from this lack of real and consequent indignation?

That in Brazil the sense of principles and rights, the sense of absolute respect for pain of the other and death demanded by civilization, the feeling of social responsibility, the feeling of solidarity with the excluded and

oppressed, and the culture of argued debate, democratic dispositions, are not values really consolidated?

What, then, is missing a true “culture work” (in the Freudian sense of the *Kulturarbeit*)? A lack that made possible the advent of current barbarism: cult of death and hate, banality of evil, conformism, resignation, and so on.

Does this mean that, as a result, we have failed or are we effectively failing as a country, as a national community?

In any case, the loss of self-esteem is noticeable in the country, and the generalized depression is observable.

The maxim of ethics according to Jacques Lacan (1986), “Do not give in to your desire!”, refers to the imperative: do not give in to the reason for living.

Lacan quotes the Juvenal (1996) *Satires*: the greatest infamy is to prefer life to honor; it is to give up the reason for living to save your life, to *survive*, simply serving the “service of goods” (including desire for wealth, commodities, power, and so on).

And when you live endorsing what you condemn, notes Henry-David Thoreau (2018), the feeling of self-deprecation is inevitable.

6. I think that all these themes, mentioned above, are present in the correspondence between Freud and Einstein regarding the question “Why war?” (Einstein & Freud (1932)).

In the discussion that we had at Sedes Sapientiae, in September last year<sup>1</sup>, the accent was placed on the “work of culture,” on *Kulturarbeit* precisely, and in particular the work of Eros in the construction of the link to the other, of a sharing in commun or a *sensus communis*, a community that passes through affect, identification, and empathy.

This civilizing work constitutes in itself (Freud underlined it together with Einstein) an elaboration that opposes war and the constellation of inclinations linked to it: hatred, reification of the other, destruction, the cult of death.

I recall only the two major axes that make up the civilizing pact here.

On the one hand, the axis of the *relationship* to the other, of *communitas*, the “We,” demanding an internal regulation: morality, ethics, law,

<sup>1</sup>“The work of culture against the cult of war” lecture at the Department of Psychoanalysis of the Sedes Sapientiae Institute, September 24, 2019 (available online). This talk was part of a cycle of conferences in Brazil held in September 2019, six months before the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic.

politics, On the other hand, the objectifying relationship to “reality, to nature (external or internal), a relationship established and governed by scientific knowledge, giving rise to the technical or technological transformation of its object.

It would be tempting to say: on the one hand, the Hebrew legacy of ethics (the psychoanalytic ethics of listening and anamnesis, *Durcharbeit*, included); on the other hand, the Greek tradition of knowledge and science.

Freud has always entertained an *Aufklärer* dimension, even if the thinker of the deep unconscious could not be reduced to it.

Note, by the way, how the barbarity, in progress in Brazil (to stay in this exemplary case), breaks with these two axes of civilization.

On the first side, through the ubiquitous cult of hatred and death; it is the denial or the negation of all otherness. On the second, through the insane and irresponsible promotion of obscurantism and the destruction in particular of the entire culture of argumentation and debate (in favor of opinion forged without question in the so-called social networking).

Note that hatred is the common denominator of this double break with the civilizing pact: hatred of the other and hatred of knowledge.

Just as national-socialism would not have been possible without the media, in particular radio and cinema (Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe (1988)), neo-fascism would not have been possible without Twitter and fake news, resulting from the combination of the economic power of financial empires with the technological power of “networking.” Neo-fascism is a “falsism” (as the Jean-Pierre Vernant group wrote). A *fascisme* of falsehood that remains unpunished.

The “work of culture,” evoked in Freud’s letter, sends us back to his essays prior to correspondence, in particular *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (Freud (1921)), *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (Freud (1927)), and *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (Freud (1930)).

And above all, to the decisive text of 1920, concerning the work or drive regime of “unbinding” (*Entbindung*), of disruption “beyond the pleasure principle,” called “death drive” (see *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*) (Freud (1920)).

The point is crucial, as it is here that Freud separates himself from Einstein, subtly indicates a criticism of the easy humanism of the physicist of relativity, and opens the way for what concerns us and really interests us from now on: a thought after humanism, a thought of the *after-humanism*.



7. In his response to Einstein, Freud takes a disconcerting view at first glance, in contrast to the usual criticisms of war. He also dismantles what common sense (and sometimes even psychoanalysts themselves) believes to mean “death drive” (*Todestriebe*, not “death instinct,” as all translations say), because *it also has a role in culture work*.

War is not a “death drive,” contrary to what psychoanalytic journalism says. It is the encounter of the drive of hatred and destruction (*Trieb zum Hassen und Vernichtert*), focused on an external object, *with* the violence inherent in the law and the central power of the community.

If we did not understand this categorical difference between *Todestrieb* and “hate drive” (*Hasstrieb*), we would not be able to make the radical and decisive distinction between, for example, the libidinal economy of the *avant-garde* works of art of the last century (e.g., futurism), exposed to the occurrence of the unexpected, and the libidinal economy of totalitarianisms (e.g., Italian fascism), which instead aim to control every occurrence.

(And if we want to investigate the so-called Office of Hate installed in the center of the Brazilian Presidential Palace, which coordinates the communication strategy in the “networking,” it is in reference to this *Trieb*, the “drive of hatred and destruction,” that it is convenient to place it.)

Freud still questions the very concept of *Kultur*, and the malaise that is *consubstantial* with it, and that increases as it develops.

In doing all this, he interrogates the humanistic faith and the simple pacifist desire (which Einstein still seems to embody). Affirming himself at the same time “viscerally” against the war. Freud outlines, in short, an anamnesis of the assumptions involved in humanism.

The human can only be placed as a supreme value, on condition that it projects outside itself—as a product of external conditions, which should be transformed—the *excess* that surpasses it and that it carries however *in* itself. In the wake of the Greek Tragedies, Freud shows that what surpasses or transcends the human, this inhuman excess, is paradoxically constitutive of the human. It would be vain to want to eliminate it. If you persist in suppressing it, it would be tantamount to aggravating it. This error has engendered all fascisms and totalitarianisms.

The *excess* in question is what in us suffers and makes us suffer *in* civilization and *from* civilization. Our constitutive malaise. It may occasionally manifest itself under the regime of the drive of hatred and destruction (and directed against this very excess and its projections in the outside

world), but this is obviously not its only destiny. It is also what makes us think and write, love, and resist (ethically, politically).

And it is here that this letter from 1932 supports our thesis: claiming that the human constitutively carries *in* itself something that *exceeds* it; this thesis resolutely assumes, in its own way, the after-humanism.

*Avant la lettre* by Heidegger (1947) on “humanism,” before the text by Adorno and Horkheimer (1947), and announcing the Lacan’s seminar(1959-1960).

Such is the task, what remains to be thought, from now on.

8. Let us return to our initial question: How to orient ourselves in thinking and in life from now on?

The disaster outlined here, that of the failure of modern civilization, bequeaths to thought its task henceforth, more clearly than ever, which is to continue to think after human and after humanisms. Beyond all anthropomorphic horizon.

And it is there that we find Lacan’s seminar devoted to the “Ethics of Psychoanalysis,” built around the figure of Antigone—one that does not give in to his desire, which is faithful to unconditional desire (Sophocle (1989)). Tragic conception of ethics, which can occasionally call for civil disobedience (Thoreau (2018)).

The elaboration of a tragic ethics is precious and decisive today, under the conditions of contemporary nihilism (what we usually call “neoliberalism”).

It testifies to the courage to cross the line of humanist philosophical ethics, placing the inhuman *thing*, foreign and intimate, “extimate” (*extime*), at the heart of ethics.

At the same time, making of it, of this inhuman, what is at stake, *par excellence*, in the work of art itself (“There is ethics only supported by an aesthetic,” writes Lacan).

This converges admirably with the axiom that Adorno (1995) draws from the artistic and literary *avant-gardes* of the twentieth century: “[Art] is *loyal* to humanity *only* through *inhumanity towards it*.”

What *in* the human, however, *exceeds* it, this is precisely the nucleus, *la chose*, the *thing* that must be taken care of from now on.

Such is the last instruction that humanisms bequeath to us in its downfall.

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