

Call for contributions

Reimagining the Cosmopolis: living in a post-lockdown humanity/Living as a Pandemic Humanity

Aim and scope

Some authors have described the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 as a ‘cosmopolitan virus’ (Koopmans, 2020). At the end of August 2020, there were more than 23 million cases worldwide and more than 80,000 deaths due to this infectious disease. New waves of contamination are reappearing in some countries, such as Spain, France, and Germany, Israel, or Australia, which seemed to have contained the pandemic. If the situation seems to have calmed down in other European countries, it is still dramatic in the United States, in Brazil and Latin America, Mexico, and India. Because of this pandemic, the moment we are living through can be interpreted as a ‘cosmopolitan moment’, following the meaning given by Ulrich Beck to characterize modern societies exposed to the risk of climate change, which it is difficult not to think of today as the world is facing the current risk of a pandemic (see, in particular, Beck, 1996; 2012).

Even in the heart of our confined lives, withdrawn into ourselves, facing the pandemic, our fears have not erased the sense of belonging to the same humanity, not only by virtue of the moral obligations that lead us to see in every other human being another ourself, but also through the almost carnal awareness that we are all fragile and vulnerable. If the virus does not strike at random by attacking primarily the oldest, the weakest, and also the most deprived, we all run the risk of being contaminated and infecting others. It is precisely this universality of risk that leads to the idea of belonging to the same humanity through the idea of a shared vulnerability and that allows us to interpret the moment we are living in as properly cosmopolitan. However, no global response, not even the slightest bit coordinated, has been made to the worldwide threat created by this pandemic. Instead of cooperation, mutual aid or concerted action, we have witnessed, at least at the beginning of the crisis, a disorderly and hasty return of borders and the strengthening of the State, now understood as the only effective defense in the face of the invisible but imminent danger threatening the security of citizens. Although necessary, but fraught with psychological, ethical, political, and economic consequences, the containment measures strengthen the feeling that withdrawal and closure were the only way to salvation. They reinforce the conviction that the reign of ‘every man for himself’ was now at hand, for collective and individual destinies alike.

In this unprecedented context, many voices have been raised against globalization to denounce in the health crisis both an effect and a powerful revelation of its contradictions as well as its failures. As a result, some have considered cosmopolitanism as a ‘post-ideological ideology’ (McCrae & Smith, May 2020, 50) at the service of a global elite, indifferent or blind to the world's difficulties: This ideology would overlook the fact that, by defending worldwide governance and promoting international institutions as vectors of this governance, it gave free rein to China's hegemonic ambitions to infiltrate these organizations and to impose its version of multilateralism and undermine the liberal values of the West.

The accusation is grave vis-à-vis cosmopolitanism, whose main representatives have always defended a critical approach to globalization, but it is not without foundation: What should we think of the WHO's procrastination when, under China's influence, it was late in declaring the health crisis a global threat? How can we respond, in fact, to those who underline the paralysis and impotence of the major international organizations, the decline of multilateralism as it was constituted at the end of the Second World War, the end of international cooperation based on common rules? A defense of the cosmopolitan values of solidarity and cooperation to counter the threat of generalized conflicts cannot henceforth ignore such questions.

Indeed, the time seems favorable to the affirmation of sovereignism, and, at the very moment when the virus continues its progression throughout the planet, we begin to imagine another world. This post-COVID world would take the form of deglobalization and, on the economic level, of de commodification. Is this possible? Is it desirable? In any case, the embedded questions of decoupling economies and relocating production are considered pivotal for restoring national sovereignty. The same applies to the question concerning revisiting the geopolitical balance between the major powers to loosen the grip of excessive external dependence. This issue is particularly visible with regard to China, whose hegemonic ambition was fully unmasked by the aggressiveness of 'mask diplomacy' and by the enactment of the national security law targeting Hong Kong (Couturier, 2020). Times are difficult for thinking cosmopolitanism today.

In terms of ideas, the debate rages between those who believe that only a global approach can solve a problem that no single state alone can control, and therefore that only better-regulated globalization will be able to master the problems it generates, and the advocates of sovereignism for whom national solidarity must take priority over any other form of solidarity beyond national borders. Thus, Pierre-André Taguieff, well known in France for defending a nationalistic approach, can write that 'national solidarity then regains its full meaning, so to speak, 'from below,' silencing utopians and merchants of illusions, as well as the followers of a harmful individualism - individualistic and competitive - who sanctify the disaffiliation and disintegration of ties under the mask of openness' (2020: 5). While, according to him, sovereignism must be detached from any xenophobic nationalism and be reinstated in the glorious French Republican tradition, the rise in power of such a position is symptomatic. More worryingly, the new journal 'Front Populaire' (that saw the light of day in early July 2020) openly aims 'to build a populist war machine capable of being opposed to a populicide war machine,' as stated by its co-founder Michel Onfray. It is therefore not surprising that the first issue is devoted to sovereignism, with 'the pandemic' as the first item to be questioned.¹ Faced with the unexpected and worrying event of COVID-19, there is thus a deep divide between those who disagree with globalization and those who call for another globalization. In any case, the health crisis is interpreted as a pivotal moment from which lessons should be learned.

In the depths of the crisis, the need to meditate on what has been simplistically referred to as 'the post-crisis world' - a post-COVID world taking back the reins of its destiny - has thus arisen. Certainly, such an imaginary of tomorrow's world has millenarian overtones, referring to the idea that it would be possible, on the day after a great night, to wipe out the past and rebuild everything. The past has shown that the remedies that this kind of illusion brings are sometimes more dangerous than the ills it claims to relieve. The magnitude of the health crisis, which some propose to interpret as a 'pathology of globalization' (Taguieff, 2020), but which we sense in any case will have major geo-political and geo-economic

¹ <https://frontpopulaire.fr/p/la-revue>

consequences, obliges us to re-arm intellectually in the face of future challenges that are still difficult to decipher. How can we imagine cosmopolitanism in times of withdrawal and isolation, and especially when difficult times lead to a confined humanity? Anti-universalist, anti-rationalist and anti-democratic movements are coming back in force after a relative erasure since the Second World War that made us believe that they had been definitively defeated. This return of counter-Enlightenment ideas (Sternhell, 2009) - an expression that designates this heteroclit set of forces as fighting against any form of universalist project - is accompanied by anger, resentment, and fears that seem to be spreading throughout the peoples of Europe, who are confronted with an unprecedented wave of sovereignism, populism, and xenophobia.

Cosmopolitanism in *Very Hard Times*

This new book, which intends to update and achieve the project started with *Cosmopolitanism in Hard Times* (Cicchelli and Mesure, 2020), is therefore justified by the ambition to continue the debate on the power of these anti-universalist tendencies in the prism of this highly globalized event that is the pandemic, tendencies that are exacerbating the trends observed in recent years. We wish to direct our thinking to the long term so as not to let ourselves be blinded by the evidence of an event as traumatic as it may be. By countering the discourse that has been circulating since COVID-19 was clearly identified as a global threat to many affected societies and makes abundant use of expressions such as 'the world after', tinged with millenarianism and with apocalyptic and dystopian overtones, this project puts forward the thesis that this crisis should be considered as a privileged observatory for revealing the older trends that the pandemic magnifies and makes visible. Starting from the pandemic as a metaphor of closure, we will consider it as a *litmus test*, as an event pushing to paroxysm the striking return of counter-Enlightenment ideas.

Such a book would like to provide new insights through short and incisive texts written in the mode of argumentative essays and give a number of answers to such questions as: What will be the faces of this post-COVID world? Will we witness the reign of savage capitalism (Milanovic, 2019), the confrontation of the most powerful in a weakened world, a confrontation that will take the form, in particular, of a conflict between China and the United States (Allison, 2017)? Will we experience a more unequal, more divided, more closed world? Will we see a strengthening of the nationalist, populist, and xenophobic tendencies that are at work everywhere today, so that the 'next world' should be thought of as one in which existing trends will be hardened rather than as one of upheaval and renewal? Or, on the contrary, will we be audacious enough to invent new forms of solidarity that will make it possible to better confront the crises that await us and that we already know will be not only health crises, but also ecological, economic, political, as well as social crises?

Of course, no one can claim to predict this today. We are, however, at a crossroads, as we wrote in the preface to *Cosmopolitanism in Hard Times*. Indeed, one thing is sure: The idea of happy globalization is now definitely behind us. The optimism of Fukuyama predicting the end of history in the 1990s has become foreign to us. In the late summer of 2020, *History is more than ever on the move*.

Timeline

Submission of proposals (300 words maximum): end of November 2020

Answer to the authors: mid-December 2020

First versions of the chapters (3500/4000 words maximum): end of April 2021

Remarks to the authors: end of May 2021

Second versions of the chapters: end of June 2021

Submission of the manuscript to Brill: end of July 2021

Date of publication: December 2021

Please send your email to

Vincenzo Cicchelli (Vincenzo.cicchelli@msh-paris.fr)

AND

Sylvie Mesure (mesure.sylvie@wanadoo.fr)

References

Allison Graham T. (2017), *Destined for War. Can America and China Escape Thucydides's Trap?* Boston, New York : Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Beck Ulrich (1996), « World Risk Society als Cosmopolitan Society? Ecological Questions in a Framework of Manufactured Uncertainties », *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 13(4), 1-32;

Beck Ulrich, « Une sociologie cosmopolitique: esquisse d'un changement paradigmatique », *Nouvelles perspectives en sciences sociales*, Volume 8, Numéro 1, novembre 2012, p. 161-190.

Cicchelli Vincenzo and Mesure Sylvie (eds), *Cosmopolitanism in Hard Times*, Leiden/Boston, 2020.

Couturier Brice (2020), *Après L'épidémie. Un moment chinois ?* Paris : Éditions de l'Observatoire.

Koopmans Ruud (2020), "The cosmopolitan Virus. Covid-19 Does not Strike Randomly".

<https://www.wzb.eu/en/news/the-cosmopolitan-virus>.

McCrae Niall & Smith M.L.R (2020), *The year of the Bat. Globalization, China, and the Coronavirus*, London: Civitas.

Milanovic Branko (2019), *Capitalism, alone. The Future of the System that Rules the World*. Cambridge, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Sternhell Zeev (2009). *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Taguieff Pierre-André (2020), *La pandémie par-delà les peurs. Réinventer L'État-Nation*, Paris : Éditions de l'Observatoire.