

COVID-19

As the coronavirus from Wuhan, China, continues to spread across the globe, many more are becoming infected and many are even dying. According to the World Health Organisation, on the 18th of March there were 207'855 confirmed cases, 8'646 deaths and 166 countries affected, but the numbers are still exponentially rising. In fact, the differences between the 18th of March and only the previous day were 10'380 confirmed cases, 784 deaths and 2 countries. This has lead the WHO to declare the spread a global pandemic, a public health emergency of international concern.

Coronaviridae are actually an entire family of viruses that cause diseases that vary from the common cold to more severe illnesses in mammals and birds. SARS, for example, was also a coronavirus. It is not clear whether viruses are living and non living: they are not made of cells - they are actually much smaller than these - but they do have the ability to replicate, just in a different way to other organism. The virus carries genetic information, such as RNA, necessary to replicate, but it does not carry ribosomes which are responsible for the production of proteins. Cells, on the contrary, do have these macromolecular machines. Therefore, in order to survive, a virus needs a cell. Once it has entered in the cell, it borrows the ribosomes which start producing proteins according to the virus' RNA. In this way, the cell becomes a virus making machine until it dies, but the viruses will then move on to another cell to repeat the process. As the cells begin to get damaged and die, the body will sense this and start to react with an immune response: temperature increases as it helps the immune system function better and makes it a hostile environment for the virus, phlegm and mucus increase as they make it harder for the virus to attach to the cells and help to get rid of dead viruses and cells, bones start to ache due to the increased production of white blood cells and overall the body feels fatigued. A healthy immune systems should be able to fight off the illness with no serious complications in a few weeks. But as age increases, immune systems become less effective and slow down, making it harder for elderly people to fight off the infections. As the virus continues to replicate itself in the body and cells continue to die, the immune system might start to activate chemicals which can cause the leaking of fluid into the lungs, adding a further stress to the body and, in extreme cases, leading it to organ failure.

The symptoms that the body generates when fighting the virus are very common and it is part of the reason why it has been so hard to detect the coronavirus. Only medical professionals are able to understand if the symptoms are generated by the Wuhan virus through analysis of respiratory specimens in laboratories. Moreover, the virus is easily spreading from human to human with very little contact. Therefore, governments have started to take action in many different ways to cope with the emergency but this process has not been straight forward. China, for example, realised right away the severity of the situation and imposed a quarantine to all its citizens but states such as Italy, Great Britain and the United States initially tried to keep the country going by sending people to work and letting them continue with their normal lives, until the virus had eventually spread too much.

As Geoffrey Chaucer once said: "April is the sweetest month". But in a time in which humanity is approaching spring, it is facing very hard times too: an invisible enemy is attacking us and we do not have any weapons to fight it. In a world in which our daily routines were given for granted, in which the light and warmth of the sun and the delicate breeze of the wind had become invisible to the constantly busy men and women, in which the possibility to love without complication was certain and illnesses and deaths were not contemplated, instability and worries are rising. We have

probably been very selfish by not appreciating what we were able to experience and share with other people before this situation due to the effort of our ancestors, who bravely fought for us to have them. Today we are facing the same atrocities our ancestors grew up with and made them the men and women that fought for our rights, our well-being and our future. This situation is inevitably having an effect on human minds all over the world, but it is an important time to reflect on the road we have conducted our world to travel on, analyse it and underline its serious faults.

We are locked in a condition of uncertainty in which it is hard to see clearly, but suddenly all the pages of history we learned at school seem to have a meaning. History is not only about events but it is mainly about people: people who think, feel emotions and are deeply affected by what happens around them. We have never had to experience such disruption: wars have always been distant to us and we felt invincible, so much that we allowed ourselves to underestimate the real values of life which we are taking into consideration again today. Before the Coronavirus attacked us all, we were all certain that we would have been able to go to school the following day and the day after that, in order to study, take exams and slowly build the future that we always dreamed about. But, in January schools were closed in China, towards the end of February schools started to close in the North of Italy and eventually in the whole country on the 4th of March, while schools in Great Britain have closed their gates on the 20th of March. What happens next?

The Age of Anxiety was exactly characterised by this same uncertainty. The end of the Victorian Age had people wondering about their future: what values were there going to be? How was everything going to change? Today, as in the early 20th century, people do not have any answers and now, more than ever, life looks like the *luminous halo* that Virginia Woolf felt surrounded by and struggled to understand and define. Virginia Woolf is also the demonstration of how much events are able to define us: the bombing she experienced in London during the Second World War definitely put an ending to her mental well being. In the same way, the First World War generated a new mental disease in soldiers called *shell-shock*.

This situation, that is gradually involving the whole world, constantly recalls many elements of the dystopian novels written by Orwell, Huxley and Golding as if it is a dystopian novel of its own: a world that is going to destroy itself. Firstly, the coronavirus could be associated to Emmanuel Goldstein in "1984": the external enemy against which all of our forces are gathered together. Our forces are represented by our nurses and doctors, powerful men and women who are afraid, but who work fearlessly and have to say goodbye to too many victims. The *two minutes of hate* could be the minutes spent on the balconies of our homes all over Italy and Spain, singing, dancing and thanking our soldiers. Our lives revolve around hospitals, clinics and lab reports as the whole of London revolved around the conditioning centre in "Brave New World" and our behaviours could be associated to Mustafa Mond: crucial in determining our future. As such, the behaviour of many people that still have not acknowledged the severity of the disease and indulge their desire to go out into the fresh air demonstrates the necessity of a figure similar to the one of the naval officer in "Lord of the Flies", who needs to remind us that we need to let reason prevail over impulses. Our movements are limited by the decisions - or in some countries suggestions - of our governments and at times controlled anonymously through our phones as if "The Big Brother" was watching us. But needless to say that it is exclusively for our protection. Another difference is that access to art and culture remains unlimited at any time. It is, in fact, probably the only thing that is able to relief our souls at this moment in time as writing soothed Huxley during his period of depression.

Not only Italy, but the whole world is suffering from the loss of men and women who are mothers, dads, grandparents but also young boys and children. In this situation, our worries and difficulties seem to find answers mostly in the words of our prime ministers who are guiding us to overcome this emergency. It is very similar to when the president of the United States, Roosevelt, helped its population overcome the Great Depression: his warming voice, the speeches he recorded while sitting in front of a fire in the peaceful environment of his living room and his attention to every

social class - towards which he made an effort to feel close to - made people in poverty gain hope again. On the contrary, it was actually very upsetting to see Great Britain and its prime minister Boris Johnson initially not care about its population by placing the wealth of the economy prior to the lives of its citizens and disguising it with the slogan “doing things at the right time”. The risk of propaganda is a theme that has, in fact, been touched during this period: English citizens, who did not have the knowledge to compare how the British government was handling the situation to, for example, the strategy Italy was adopting, truly believed that England was facing the virus in the right way. This was evident not only by contacting relatives and friends who live in the UK, but also through public figures on the internet such as influencers and YouTubers. In Italy, Chiara Ferragni has involuntarily demonstrated the strong woman she is by using her platform - which she has created through fashion and hard work - to spread awareness, valid information and encourage people to stay in their homes, becoming a “woman speaking to women and men”. In England, many influencers prefer not to give advice and are redirecting their followers to the prime minister’s words. Apparently, this is not an unprofessional behaviour, but in front of so much disruption and most importantly deaths, it seems absurd that not everyone desires to unify against this enemy in every possible way. Our unique individualities are able to influence a great number of people and could contribute to build a weapon that we are missing to fight against the coronavirus. We must, therefore, demonstrate that we are stronger than superficiality and that we are capable of reasoning. We must acknowledge that every action has a consequence that may affect someone else, especially in these delicate times. Moreover, there will be the need of everyone's efforts to help our countries and economies recover.

Carl Gustav Jung noticed that every symbol can be analysed in different ways. Our task right now is not only to act responsibly, but also to construct something positive from this situation. Firstly, we must discover the real meaning of life which men and women have lost sight of since the birth of the industry of culture in the Second World War. This industry has directed its consumers towards a mass society and towards a certain type of thought and activities. The worst effects of this process have pushed us to aim only to material and futile pleasures, penalising nature and the environment. We must, therefore acknowledge the “Laudato Si” by the Holy Father Francis and take it as an example in our daily lives. The environment and nature need collaboration between its entities in order to remain in harmony and in this paradoxical situation, the world is already seeing evidence of this: the lockdown of many countries has caused a noticeable decrease in the amount of pollution in the air. Nature has this magical way through which it balances itself constantly. Let's hope that once this emergency will be over, we will be able to prioritise a glance at someone else’s eyes or a blooming flower to our phones, discover the beauty of nature all over again and respect it. Because if there is one thing that this situation is teaching us, is that men and women build their memories on spaces and time they physically occupy and interact with, so let's not destroy them.