



COVID-19: Global Health Crisis or Crisis of Global Ideals?

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From Wuhan to Santiago de Chile, all human beings have been touched by this great humanitarian health crisis. Somehow, nature seems to observe as an immune witness a process of consciousness that travels from the east to the west. It has been 4 months since this journey began and the world is still groping for an understanding of this great crisis. Thousands of human beings are trying to discern what all this means, others are collaborating with the most needy, others are trying to survive, while several million are meditating on the relevance of the measures put in place by all governments and how it will be to get out of the great economic crisis that this “virus” has brought. The streets are empty, and in a multitude of images this can be seen all over the world. Where before there was noise, movement, material transformation, today there is loneliness, silence and perhaps the right atmosphere for a great transformation. What is it that humanity must learn?

The social distancing imposed by multiple governments to avoid contagion at an exponential level, and saturation of national health systems, exerts an obvious condition on the world economy. Social distancing is synonymous with excluding from the economic process, at least at first sight, millions of people in the world who need daily economic movement to live. Gardeners, construction workers, shopkeepers, independent professionals, street vendors, domestic service, self-employed, professionals, all share the same thing – home quarantine produces an absence of economic activity and therefore difficulties in living day-to-day. However, as humanity is all within the economic process, soon, another group of human beings will be touched by the economic crisis because the first group will not be able to afford their financial commitments. School fees, loans, taxes, expenses, will soon stop being paid on time, and at that point, teachers, employees, and multiple state and private agencies will no longer have the resources to meet their own commitments.

In the face of this dramatic effect on the regional, national and global payment chain, many leaders are beginning to think that facing a health crisis, with a lack of beds, respirators, etc., is relatively less serious by comparison to the secondary economic crisis that is approaching. Leaders from all over the world, when sending people home, have concluded that “flattening the curve of new cases” will prevent us from having to live through a painful health crisis, as was already observed, and unfortunately continues to live in countries like China, Italy, Spain, and now Ecuador and the United States. But even so, there is no certainty about the economic future and speculation is beginning to germinate.

The process of contagion of COVID-19 seems to follow the same journey as the historical journey of human consciousness, namely from east to west. Whether we are suffering from COVID-19 or not, humanity as a whole is going through a process that reveals our unhealthy conditions. Reports are coming in from all over the world of how the planet is changing and can change if we just stop doing what we do every day. Multiple reports of reduced pollution in many cities around the world are ‘viralized’ by the networks. The transparent canals of Venice, the animals return to the cities, nature seems to appreciate this pause we have taken.

Reaching this point speaks simply of a great crisis of global consciousness, hence having a great illness. Perhaps like John 11's Lazarus, who fell ill and died before Easter, we are facing a global process of illness and death, in which we can "come forth" only when we have made the change in consciousness that this requires.

The term "globalization" has never been so current and yet still hides a great lie. If we were to use instead the phrase "the world as one economy", it would perhaps clarify, at least conceptually, a fundamental truth: however much we put geographical limits on the various countries, what happens in Wuhan sooner or later ends up impacting the whole world. Seeing the world as one economy is analogous to understanding that in the human being if the lungs get sick, the whole body becomes sick. It is also analogous to understanding that if any human being is affected economically by some crisis, it is the same as having some part of one's body affected by some ailment. If this is so, when there is some sick or affected part of the body, the rest of the body simply tries to provide what the affected part cannot fulfill. Thus, if we see the world as one economy, we should be able to 'cover' other 'members' or human beings on the planet as if we are all siblings, which in a larger sense we are, of course. One way to consider disease is that it reaches the physical body as a reflection of a spiritual/soul process that comes before. The disease reveals and so makes us conscious of processes and imbalances that are already present but that we cannot understand or heal. What does this global disease make manifest?

In the era of information, when it seems that we are all brought closer due to the vertigo of communications, this event corresponds historically to the presence of greater economic inequalities, selfishness and "economic social distance". Curiously enough, COVID-19 has led us to distance ourselves socially even more, cutting off the economic process. This will inevitably provoke, especially so in Argentina, a more serious economic crisis than we are used to. What does this disease want to show us? Will human beings be ready to face the consequences of this social distancing? Will we make the right decisions in the face of the approaching economic deficiencies? Will we remain unmoved by the needs of many? What ethos will prevail? Will we decide to solve the world economic crisis with the same criteria of 'sanitary fraternity' that we have implemented by staying at home? Or will we be swayed by the political interest of winning the next elections, or the individual selfishness advocated in Adam Smith's economics that has characterized the last centuries, coined in the famous theory of the invisible hand?¹ According to the latter, while individuals seek their own benefit, an invisible hand ensures maximum social welfare much more effectively than if we were to promote it deliberately. It is clear that, although society has been positively transformed since Adam Smith's day, the world economy must be observed as part of a historical process. As in any process, there are moments of making transformations. Today the invisible hand seems to have no effect and a visible, real and fraternal hand becomes necessary – one that reaches out through individual economic acts that truly include the entire human family.

¹ *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. A. Smith, 1776.

In 1922, Rudolf Steiner introduced what has come to be known as associative economics in a course in economics that consisted of 14 lectures and evening seminars,² in which Steiner mentions the nature of the economic process as a historical and dynamic process in which humanity is situated. He also methodically considers the subjects of finance, true price theory, and accounting as the true and future form of money, fundamentally describing practical ways to transform the economic system from competition to association. In almost 100 years, little has been mentioned of Steiner's contribution to economics, perhaps because we human beings have not been ready to listen to what was expected of us. As it happens, in the individual human being, one often needs a process of development and maturity to understand reality – what happens to us and above all, how to incorporate it in our daily actions. Sometimes, we even need to get sick for all that to happen. In this sense, associative economics can be seen as the remedy for excessive capitalism, the antidote to selfishness and the way to true altruism.

Without a doubt, as individual human beings we can make a difference, think ‘outside of the box’³, try to get out of this health crisis by changing our consciousness and creating new ideals and attitudes. Instead of waiting for governments or authorities to show us the way, we can look inwardly for the motivation to create bridges rather than social distances. We can begin to think that obviously we are much more than intelligent monkeys, capable of ideas that transcend matter and modify it, and that somehow, we are connected, between us, and with our planet. Today more than ever, we can each seek internally the divine spark that calls on us permanently, like Lazarus, to “come forth”, finally to be born as new human beings, capable of acting as brothers and sisters with a common purpose.

² *Economics. The World as One Economy*, R. Steiner, [1922]. (GA 340) New Economy Publications, Canterbury, 1996.

³ If the box is understood as the brain, this soundbite means to think beyond the limits of sense-bound thinking on which, in theory, modern science is predicated. This is exactly how Rudolf Steiner begins his lectures, when he says that in order to understand economics we need to think with ‘that which flies away from the earth.’