

COSMOETHICS AND COVID-19 VACCINES: BEYOND THE COSMOPOLITICAL PROPOSAL

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COSMOÉTICA Y VACUNAS CONTRA LA COVID-19. MÁS ALLÁ DE LA PROPUESTA COSMOPOLÍTICA

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ABSTRACT: Management of the COVID-19 pandemic by Western countries is one of the most controversial topics in social studies today. One of the central concepts for analysing the organisation of pandemic management is that of Cosmopolitics, as it allows us to broaden the understanding of politics to include citizens, non-human living beings, terrestrial elements and SARS-CoV-2 itself. But as we argue in this article, cosmopolitics needs prior power, a generative potentia that emanates from the arrangement of the aforementioned actors. Based on the example of the months when the COVID-19 vaccine was developed and started to be inoculated, we will illustrate the cosmoethical proposal: an affirmative ethic that tinges and permeates arrangement of the actors who enact the vaccine, allowing its deployment for a later cosmopolitical opportunity. In this way, we conclude that pandemic management not only needs to pay attention to non-expert citizens or non-human actors, but also must tend to the emergence of new realities, times and spaces.

KEYWORDS: cosmopolitics; COVID-19; pandemic management; communicable diseases, affirmative ethics.

RESUMEN: La gestión de la pandemia de COVID-19 por parte de los países occidentales es uno de los temas más controvertidos de los estudios sociales actuales. Uno de los conceptos centrales para analizar la ordenación de la gestión de la pandemia es el de Cosmopolítica, ya que nos permite ampliar la comprensión de la política para incluir a los ciudadanos, a los seres vivos no humanos, a los elementos terrestres y al propio SARS-CoV-2. Pero como argumentamos en este artículo, la cosmopolítica necesita un poder previo, una potentia generativa que emana de la disposición de los actores mencionados. A partir del ejemplo de los meses en que se desarrolló y comenzó a inocularse la vacuna contra la COVID-19, ilustraremos la propuesta cosmoética: una ética afirmativa que tiñe y permea el agenciamiento de actores que constituyen la vacuna, permitiendo su despliegue para un posterior momento cosmopolítico. De este modo, concluimos que la gestión de la pandemia necesita no sólo atender a los ciudadanos no expertos o a los actores no humanos, sino también atender a la emergencia de nuevas realidades, tiempos y espacios.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Cosmopolítica; COVID-19; gestión de la pandemia; enfermedades infecciosas; ética afirmativa.

1. INTRODUCTION

As many analyses have pointed out (Bethune and Korinek, 2020; Žižek, 2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has had a multitude of effects in our daily lives that have generated various scientific, political, economic and socio-cultural changes. However, one of these phenomena has received little attention in the Social Sciences: the speed with which the vaccine was developed. SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, was first identified in December 2019. One year later, by December 11, the Pfizer vaccine became the first to receive emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This marked a scientific milestone and put us in front of the question: how did we develop a COVID-19 vaccine so quickly? Clearly, the answer has a technical component, but also a social and ethical dimension that is worth exploring.

The political management of coronavirus and the subsequent development of a vaccine share several elements in Europe (Wang *et al.*, 2020). First, the approach to combating the pandemic resembles those taken against other respiratory virus pandemics with SARS-Cov-2-like transmission pathways during the 20th century. Good historical examples are the Spanish influenza pandemic of the early 20th century or more recently the epidemics of Ebola, Avian Flu or SARS-CoV-1. As in all these cases, this management has focused on the pursuit of the virus, waiting until the outbreaks are detected and try to trace their connections (Goniewicz *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, society has always been a step behind the virus, which has forced to restrict movement, close economic sectors involving the agglomeration of large numbers of people or curtail freedom of movement between different territories. Secondly, state of emergency has been used as the general measure to coordinate different local and global administrations under the same command of action. Thus, legitimizing the restriction in rights mentioned above and create the image that a last strategic resource was available that could be used against the virus when everything else could fail (Gjerde, 2021). Third, the above measures have focused on the human population and have had strong social implications, the most visible of which have been the protests against the restriction of rights, the emergence of negationist movements and the increase of poverty and social exclusion in certain groups and collectives (Imhoff and Lamberty, 2020). Finally, those actions have been presented as endorsed by groups of experts whose existence and identity has been questioned in countries such as Spain, where the government explicitly refused to disclose the identity of its members on grounds of security and respect for their privacy (Calvo, 2020).

This kind of management has created two paradoxical effects. The first is that, while on the one hand it seemed that governments had a very controlled situation, the figures regarding contagion, fatal incidence of the virus, occupation of hospitals, etc., showed citizens that the measures implemented were not working, especially since the second and third waves, in late 2020 and early 2021. The second is that, now that the pandemic seems to be losing strength in Europe, it is noted that there are actors and organizations that seem to have increased their economic, symbolic and social resources (e.g., large companies or banks), while the ordinary citizen has observed, day by day, that they have lost precisely all these resources. Such paradoxes show that the management of the pandemic, at least in Europe, needed to pay attention to the diversity of actors affected by it, the recognition of the different political, social and economic situations in each country, and the role that each actor must play (King, Crossley and Smith, 2021; Yaesoubi *et al.*, 2021;).

As we will illustrate below, our proposal is that in Europe, this acknowledgement was considered with the management of vaccination and that is why this process has been successful, in contrast to the blurred success of containment measures. Thus, our aim is to answer the question that opens this paper under this new understanding. In concrete, we will consider that first and foremost, in addition to a technical and political reconsideration, an ethical response is needed. And more specifically, it should respond to an affirmative ethics.

With the purpose of reconstructing the path that led to the development of the first anti-covid vaccines in Spain and other European countries, we propose an update of the concept of cosmopolitics proposed by Latour (2004) or Stengers (2005). While this notion implies a questioning the traditional conceptions of politics taking this type of actions out of parliaments and expanding the type of actors with a defining political role (Latour, 2004; Simons, 2017); the COVID-19 pandemic has clearly shown that the composition of a common and shared cosmos is a necessary but not sufficient condition for contingent intervention in the way of managing pandemics. In this sense, we will propose that the rapid connection between countries around the world through planes and

airports, apps that detect in real time whether someone has been in contact with an infected person, the rapid collapse of the tourist industry in countries such as Spain, or the cohabitation paradigm of the living together (Wilson and Wilson, 2021), are events that point to the creation of what Barad has called entanglements (2007), which, among other things, prefigure an ethical sensitivity prior to that political cosmos of actors that is shaped.

We have called this ethical moment cosmoethics. This vision points to the demand for another type of management, another type of policy, and other relationships between humans, non-humans and material agents. In the pages that follow, we will illustrate the cosmoethics optic by analysing the case of the development of the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine over the past year.

To support the proposal, first, we will detail what a cosmopolitical perspective implies and how a vision from an affirmative ethics standpoint can enrich that perspective and point out in the direction of the neologism we propose. Next, we will construct the path to the cosmoethical proposal. Immediately, methodology is presented. Then, with our empirical material, showing the research efforts to create and inoculate a vaccine, we will give content and form to this novelty. We will conclude by pointing out how the cosmoethical worldview is installed at a time prior to any cosmopolitical consideration and how addressing it can offer new ways of thinking about phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. THE COSMOPOLITICAL PROPOSAL

One of Isabelle Stengers' best-known works is that of the relationships that human and non-human actors establish and the effects that emerge from these associations. To this end, one of the concepts she developed is cosmopolitics. This concept completely redefines the politics. In the face of the traditional activities carried out by parliamentarians, ministers or presidents; cosmopolitics understands politics as a composition of a cosmos in which parliamentarians and ministers participate, but also patients, scientists, technicians, non-expert citizens, or non-human actors such as a budget, the emergency room of a hospital, the course of a river or a virus. A cosmos that opens up, and reinvents the actions and possibilities that all these actors can perform from a common solidarity; with the horizon of consensually finding a design or solution of their own to the tensions that challenge them all (Hendrickx and Van Hoyweghen, 2020).

But that composition cannot be carried out haphazardly. Despite the urgency that any controversy demands, the cosmos to be composed must be analysed slowly, with idiotic thinking (Stengers, 2002). This implies a resistance to hasty consensus, a questioning of the assertions made, a departure from the assurances generated by our immediate experience, and openness to «response-ability» (Haraway, 2012). That is, the ability to manoeuvre by generating novel and unexpected responses that must be assumed by all actors involved in the controversy. This is important, since it requires that idiotic thinking ensure special attention to the deployment of the controversy, to the emergence of unforeseen actors and to the mutual associations that ultimately compose the design and outcome of the problem (Stengers, 2002).

Latour (2004) has taken the cosmopolitical proposal and enriched it by emphasizing the particularity that each arranged cosmos must face, avoiding generalist actions. Cosmopolitics needs the heterogeneous arrangement of actors and the concrete actions they carry out under that particular controversy in order to understand the deployment process and, therefore, the particular cosmos at stake. Thus, there would not be a single cosmos, but different planetary regimes in which the same controversy is not only observed in different ways, but just as celestial objects, are born and die, are attracted, subsumed or orbiting each other depending on the people, other living beings, and the heterogeneous material multiplicity that inhabits it at a given time. (Latour and Chakrabarty, 2020).

In this regard, during the first confinement in spring 2020, Latour reminded us that the cosmos that was being arranged at that time was alienating people from private and public transport, that the skies cleared, traffic jams disappeared, animals ventured into many cities and reoccupied habitats that they had lost centuries ago due to the push of humans. The planet, in short, moved at another rhythm (Latour, 2020). This new configuration highlights questions such as: what can we do to save the planet and ourselves? what have we done wrong to get to this point? what new and different cosmos do we want to compose for the coming decades and that our children

can inherit? (Blaser, 2016). Faced with the paradoxical proposal of the Western governments to live with the virus enemy and wait for a vaccine to immunize the whole society, the cosmopolitical proposal places us before a problem that challenges all humans, all living beings, their relationships, their means of transportation, the atmosphere, laboratories, the destruction of ecosystems and even to the global GDP. Thus, Latour and Stengers point out that the solution to COVID-19 can only be through the recognition of a cosmopolitical design that does not curtail the different components of a biological, healthcare, social, ecological and collective problem.

These questions imply a paradigmatic shift that was quickly diluted with new normality. With this expression, Spanish and European politicians appealed to measures that evoke something like a return to a point similar to what existed before the appearance of SARS-CoV-2. It seemed, for a short period of time, that COVID-19 had only meant a strange parenthesis in our usual way of living and understanding the world. The invitation from Stengers (2002) and Latour (2004) is extremely interesting and more complex than that of traditional political management. Nevertheless, as we will show in the results section, if the creation of this new common cosmos did not make way forcefully, despite the many voices that vindicated it with different arguments (Leotti, 2021; Žižek, 2020), was due to two main reasons: 1) its definition as obvious and mechanical composition and 2) to its lack of a central force to directly and affectively challenge us as part of a cosmos in mutual construction. That absent element was an ethics, an affirmative ethics.

3. ETHICS, THE POWER OF BEING ALL TOGETHER

But what do we mean when we talk about ethics? Nussbaum (2000) defined it as a set of explicitly articulated reasons and arguments with some degree of generality that gives direction and purpose to behaviour and thought. In her opinion, all ethical theories consist of six components: a) they offer recommendations for practical problems; b) they show how the credibility of believers, rules and principles can be verified; c) they systematise beliefs; d) they have a degree of generality; e) they tend toward universality; and f) they are explicit. For this author, ethics is always an empirical notion. In the opinion of some authors there are two major approaches in empirical ethics.

In recent years, empirical ethics is gaining ground in the social sciences (Lehnert et al., 2015; Pols, 2017; Etheredge *et al.*, 2018). These authors emphasize the emergence of a collective agency, that, vindicate a continuum that encompasses biological, planetary and technological scales, where humans are a more immanent element in the joint action of other humans, other living beings and of an entire arrangement of terrestrial and material agents.

In it, the notion of post-human emerges as a central element (Braidotti, 2013). It is based on the acceptance that all these entanglements (Barad, 2007) are crossed by a central tension, a «positive zoe» that offers immanent cohesion to all this heterogenous entanglement. Braidotti gives to this concept a vital and essential meaning, something that is present in the relationship between all living beings, with the Earth, with tectonic plates, with deforestation, genetically modified organisms or epidemics. That positive zoe remind us that we-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-convergence-together (Braidotti, 2019), or as Ang (2021) points out, the organic crisis in which we live currently. For this reason, the problems linked to the atmosphere, arable land, rivers, and, ultimately to the situation called Anthropocene or Capitalocene (Haraway, 2016), require a response that articulates a new collective subject that understands their interpenetration alongside other beings and material agents. It assumes, as well, that it is multi-scale, that is, that the technical, social, geological and biological dimensions cannot be differentiated. The emergence of disputes and their resolution require a sensitivity and an emphasis on the emerging relationships between humans, other living beings, technical means and the Earth. In this ethics, life is something more or something less than the purely biological aspect. It is always an immanent composition of affections that surrounds many entities of all kinds and is crossed by intensities that give it the capacity for action, creation and production or, on the contrary, subtract such capacities (Jun, 2011).

But the important thing is that, unlike the cosmopolitical proposal, this view is situated in a previous moment the effective and material creation of any cosmopolitical deployment. It assumes that the creative exercise, through the inevitable affections and associations that different entities carry out, such as an ecologist collective that every

weekend collects the garbage that the sea spits out, or the restructurings that cities carried out during confinement, when all kinds of wild animals appeared in cities, it is always preceded by a power, an ethical position (Negri, 2000). For Braidotti this position is always affirmative. This does not mean that relationships of slavery, oppression, sexism, segregation or destruction of materials or other living beings are made invisible. Quite the contrary. From their recognition, from the acceptance that the pain and suffering that all these injustices produce exists, it is assumed that generating powers and forces can emerge. There also lies a radical difference with the previously mentioned empirical ethics. Positive zoe does not offer a clear nor a priori-defined rules. It is not a learning that a rational actor performs in a conscious and premeditated way. The zoe/geo/technological entanglement is an agency capacity that is not understandable from the simplistic Western and rational anthropocentric explanation. It opens and deploys in a multitude of unexpected and unpredictable directions. It is installed in a way that precedes and directs politics.

Under this conception, the existence of a creative and generative force that pre-exists the factual ordination of reality is recognized. However, affirmative ethics is not content with just pointing out the helplessness and exhaustion of oppression, or which is either right or not. On the contrary, it insists on aiming toward collective and horizontal practices that respond to the conditions of power and injustice that surround we-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-convergence-together and that are able to deploy all their *potentia*, their ability to affect (Braidotti, 2019) and propose solutions even if they are procedural, precarious and tentative. And that *potentia* is always installed since it is the result of an affirmative zoe, immanent to all kinds of relationships. As we will see in the results section, this notion of ethics is fundamental to understand how the rapid deployment of vaccination has been possible during the management of the pandemic.

4. METHODOLOGY

This paper is the result of a research that lasted 2 years. It has been carried out by means of a virtual ethnography (Markham, 2016) with the aim of analysing the events that have occurred in Europe since the beginning of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic with the first restrictive measures imposed in March 2020 until the present day.

Its approach was qualitative (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018) and consisted of a case analysis that collected information on such measures in several European countries, comparing them with the aim of establishing similarities and differences. In this regard, the sample is composed of press material and several audio-visual media, government documents, statements by politicians, health-care workers and citizens. The investigation is still ongoing and will not be closed until the Spanish government and World Health Organization (WHO) officially declare the COVID-19 pandemic controlled.

The analysis was carried out by means of a content analysis (Cáceres, 2008) of the material collected, considering the path taken by the Spanish management of the pandemic up to the appearance of the first vaccines (very similar across Europe). Thus, we have considered the emerging information in order to establish the categories and the intelligibility plots that give meaning to the path taken by the European management of the pandemic until the appearance of the first vaccines.

We observed that the process of pandemic management could not be explained exclusively by the relationships between political actors, scientific experts and lay citizens and the political cosmos they enacted (Stengers, 2010). Across the material analysed, we found an ethical sensibility overlaying this political management. This phenomenon, which we have called *cosmoethics*, is what we will try to develop in this article through the rapid deployment of vaccination strategy.

5. RESULTS

5.1. Spanish (and European) management of the COVID-19 pandemic

February 3, 2021, Wednesday. Europe and virtually the whole globe are plunged into the so-called third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the specific case of Spain, the director of the Centre for Coordination of Health Alerts and Emergencies, Fernando Simón, announces in a press conference that the evolution of the pandemic in the country is good: data from the previous day announce an incidence rate over 14 days of 865

versus 886 the previous week. With more than 60,000 deaths and more than 2,000,000 people infected in that moment, Spain is the seventh most infected country in the world and one of the most affected in the European context. In some areas of the country the incidence has soared to 1,000 points:

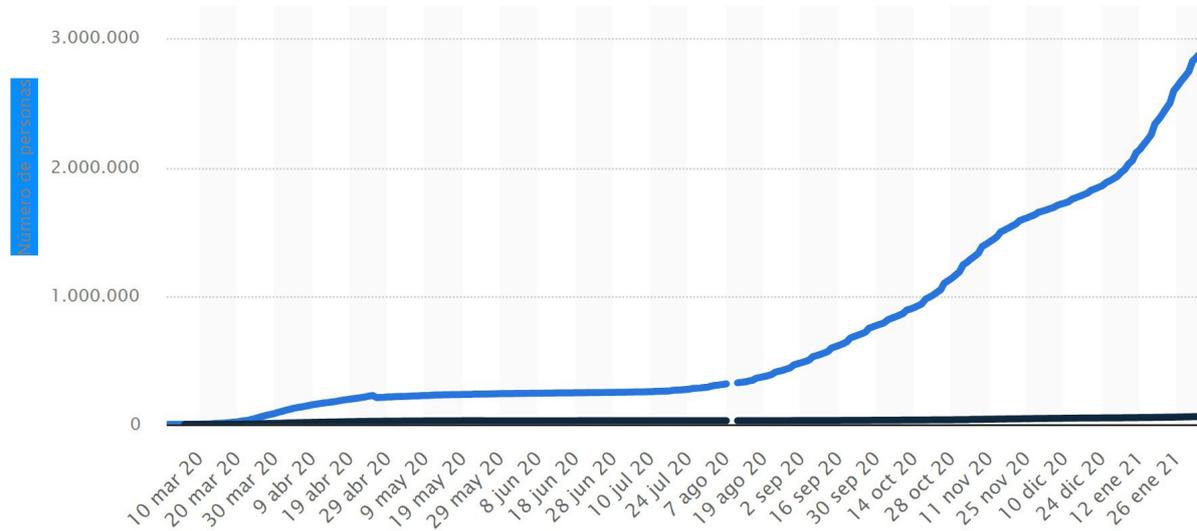


Chart 1: SARS-CoV-2 accumulated cases and deaths in Spain, 03/02/2021.

Source: Statista (2021).

At this time, action measures against the pandemic operate under a co-governance paradigm of sharing responsibility for action between the Central State and regional governments. There is a state of emergency that provides a general framework of restrictions and prohibitions on citizenship. In turn, regional governments apply the specificity of these measures in their territories depending on the incidence rate. These measures go from curfew timetables, closing times for businesses, or remote-working recommendations.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, all these measures have focused the political management of the population: Confinement, restrictions to carry out certain group or mass activities, closure of certain economic sectors, limitation of movement between regions, etc. (Gjerde, 2021). Unlike strategies adopted in other countries such as Australia or China, based on the near-zero reduction of transmission through a powerful tracking system and strong restrictions such as partial confinements (Chang *et al.*, 2020; Sun *et al.*, 2020); the type of Spanish policies are based on the classic principles of disease control and emergency government: lockdown, isolation, state intervention in the economic field or social surveillance and control (Collier and Lakoff, 2015; Foucault, 2012;). However, Spain is not the only European country to implement these measures. France, Italy, the United Kingdom or Germany, under the declaration that there is a fight against an invisible enemy, will establish similar measures: 1) perform statistical juggling to balance the number of deaths that can be assumed without halting the national economy (Bethune and Korinek, 2020) and 2) bet everything on waiting for a vaccine that allows for mass inoculation (Meier *et al.*, 2020; Sjödin *et al.*, 2020). In the Spanish case, the situation was announced as follows by the government president and his ministerial team:

The new outbreaks show us several things. The first is that there will be no zero risk until we know and have the contribution of Science to the vaccine or therapeutic remedy. So we have to learn to live with the virus, to 'cohabit' with the virus¹. (Pedro Sánchez, President of the Government of Spain, 2nd July 2020)

1 Available here: https://www.antena3.com/noticias/espana/pedro-sanchez-hace-un-llamamiento_202007015efc77bf0e00b000010c2fc9.html

*We need to be clear. We have to vaccinate, vaccinate and vaccinate. It is the most crucial question for defeating the virus and achieving that collective immunization as soon as possible*². (Minister of Territorial Policy and Public Service of the Government of Spain, 8th January 2021).

These fragments show the strategic bet was clear: restrict contacts as much as possible, while learning to (co)live with the virus, until a vaccine arrives that allows its quasi-total eradication. However, the approach did not lack social response in both Spain and other European countries. Thus, news and mediatic shows about demonstrations for the curtailment of freedoms developed, the anti-vaccine, conspiratorial and negationist movements grew (Romer and Jamieson, 2020). And, of course, an economic crisis was pictured on the horizon that threatened to greatly surpass the 2008 financial crisis (Spatt, 2020). Similarly, populist and far-right speeches gained strength in many parts of Spanish territory.

*It is possible to take partial victories against the virus by means of the collective effort ... six weeks later (from the beginning of the confinement), thanks to the collective effort of the whole of the Spanish citizenship, the increase in daily infections has been reduced to 1.5%, that is, every infected person doesn't pass the virus on to another*³. (President of the Government of Spain, 25th April 2020)

*We have seen for the first time today that the number of people cured exceeds the number of people infected. By having more people being cured than infected, this time we actually are turning the curve*⁴. (Minister of Health of the Government of Spain, 24th April 2020).

From a sociological and psychosocial point of view it can be said that the controversy was on the table: people against viruses, freedom against responsibility and community care, health against the economy, past versus future. These dichotomies have marked the politics of the past year in many Western countries. In them, the virus is constantly reduced to a simple microbe or biological entity, society to a sum of individuals, the economy to the wage that is received every month and politics is reduced to the writing of rules of coercion that are drawn up by the few that are elected every four years. As Venturini (2010) points out, such reductionisms are caricatures or simplifications that hide that a controversy is always a complex phenomenon, populated by a multitude of actors that are related, affecting and being affected, transforming themselves into that exercise and changing the game of relationships that they are able to establish or endure. Analysing and understanding what some authors have called the syndemic of COVID-19 (Horton, 2020) demands to flee from the former and adopt this polyhedral look where pathogens intermingle with politicians, incidence statistics live with unemployment statistics, and protesters reject containment measures against the virus. The cosmopolitical proposal developed by Stengers (2010) and Latour (2004), at first glance, could serve to capture this complexity. Below, we describe it and show that it is not the most complete because it lacks previous affirmative ethical optics.

5.2. (Cosmo)Ethical before (Cosmo)political: the first step towards vaccination

On January 30th, 2020, The Lancet published the complete genome sequencing of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, barely a month after the first cases were officially declared (Lu *et al.*, 2020). This was one of the most important milestones in pandemic management. There was publicly available information that any scientist or laboratory in the world could use to find solutions to the effects of the virus or in the creation of vaccines based on different biotechnologies (Moorthy *et al.*, 2020). This event, although reported on at the time, has garnered less scientific and social visibility than it deserves. Its lack of visibility was due to news of the increase in infections or deaths and the change of priorities in bio-economic debates. Notwithstanding, it is interesting to rescue it because of its ethical dimension beyond the cosmopolitical process.

«Nature and its publisher Springer Nature have now signed a joint statement with other publishers, funders and scientific societies to ensure the rapid sharing of research data and findings relevant to the coronavirus. In the statement, we commit to working together to help ensure that:

2 Available here: <https://www.ultimahora.es/noticias/nacional/2021/01/08/1228299/gobierno-augura-semanas-duras-llama-vacunar-vacunar.html>

3 Available here: https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/presidente/actividades/Paginas/2020/25042020_deporte.aspx

4 Available here: https://www.rtpa.es/noticias-nacional:llla-%22Esta-vez-si-que-estamos-doblegando-la-curva%22-de-la-pandemia_111587738512.html

- All peer-reviewed research publications relevant to the outbreak are made immediately open access, or freely available at least for the duration of the outbreak. ...
- Researchers share interim and final research data relating to the outbreak, together with protocols and standards used to collect the data, as rapidly and widely as possible — including with public health and research communities and the WHO» (Nature, 2020).

As this fragment shows, that month, more than 100 organisms, including academic journals, laboratories or health institutions, signed a manifesto to share, without restriction and freely, all the results of their research concerning the new coronavirus (Wellcome.org, 2020). Other related initiatives, such as the creation of the Data Sharing Group (COVID-19 Clinical Research Coalition 2020) or the Virus Outbreak Data Network (VODAN, 2020), emerged with the aim of sharing information among scientists, laboratories and institutions around the world. Only in the first four months of 2020, over 5,000 articles were published on PubMed relating to COVID-19, 97.4% of them are open and free (Arrizabalaga *et al.*, 2020).

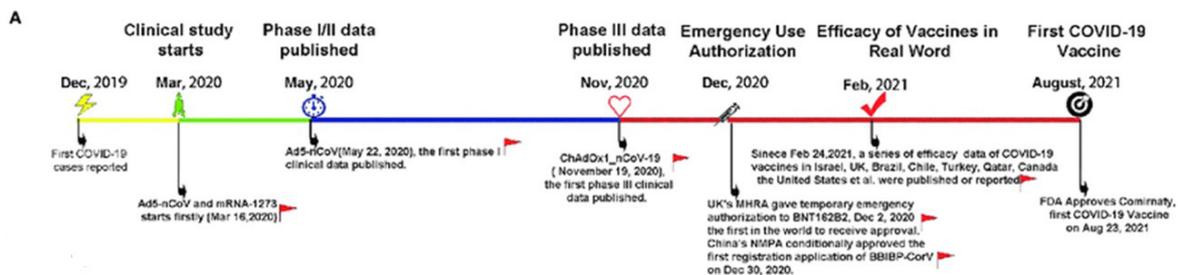


Figure 1: Key milestones in COVID-19 vaccine vs cases

Source: Liu *et al.* (2020).

All these research and proposals coincide with one goal: to have more tools and information to enable the rapid and effective development of a vaccine that ends the pandemic as soon as possible. The results are palpable at this very moment: Europe has so far approved several vaccines (Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Janssen-Johnson and Johnson, NOVAVAX) whose development processes have lasted no more than ten months (when a vaccine typically takes 10 years to develop in the 21st century, with a minimum development time of 5 years) and millions of doses are produced every day to vaccinate (with profound differences) the entire world population, reaching 90% of the population in different European countries.

«At 07:29 a.m. on Saturday, the truck transporting them (the vaccines) from Belgium arrived at the Guadalajara warehouse ... These are batches of vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech laboratories, intended for the countries of the European Union ... The European Union will thus begin vaccination on Sunday, 27 December, in a coordinated and agreed strategy between the Member states following the joint acquisition of vaccines against the virus⁵.» (Government of Spain, 26th December 2020)

These events point out that hundreds of scientists, research-funding governments, private companies, universities, and laboratories around the world built a common space while publishing their research with open access and creating the different vaccines. Scientists from China, the United States, Israel, or Russia stood on the same plane to put their data and research above any kind of academic competition, the business of scientific journals, and some of their historical enemies. A cosmos appeared in which, besides science, local and national

5 Available here: <https://www.alamy.com/one-of-the-boxes-in-which-the-first-doses-of-COVID-19-vaccine-arrive-in-spain-in-guadalajara-castilla-la-mancha-spain-on-december-26-2020-the-truck-transporting-them-from-belgium-arrived-at-the-guadalajara-warehouse-at-0729-this-saturday-26-december-2020COVID-19coronaviruspandemic-moncloa-12252020-europa-press-via-ap-image529941030.html>

governments, the WHO or the European Union, laboratory mice, hospitals built in a few days, public-private funding or volunteers to be vaccinated; the motto save the world emerged:

«No one is safe until everyone is safe ... People in rich countries tend to dismiss such pieties. We've learnt from experience that we can be safe even while pandemics decimate the world's poor. For once, this may no longer be true» (Financial Times, 3rd February, 2021).

Under this slogan, it is key that we talk about saving the world rather than saving humanity, or the population. This places us directly on the cosmoethical plane that we vindicate. Here, the creation of the aforementioned political cosmos is preceded by a moment of ethical deployment that heralds the path for a new common reality. This cosmopolitical creation is not made up of a heterogeneous multiplicity of actors challenged by a problem to propose a common solution, but also, following the Greek root of the word cosmo-ethics (α κόσμος -υκος, cosmoethics), a whole reconfiguration of the appearance and directionality of that cosmos emerges. This reconfiguration requires a creative, productive act, which opens up the new arrangement to make possible the political design.

This element is often understated in canonical works on cosmopolitics (Archibugi, 2003; Latour, 2004) and yet, it has a paramount role. In the case of the current pandemic, this is reflected in the free access to information about the virus through the initiatives already discussed. The vaccine has only been possible thanks to the deployment of a power that has never been seen before in the neoliberal and competitive field of academia, a generative power in which a zoe/geo/technological entanglement is involved (one that has been, until now, considered quasi-antagonistic). The vaccine is a first step of an immanent and placed ethics (which continues until now) in which more than a definitive result, we find processes and relationships continually modified by the situation and agency of the actors involved, interests, events, or by the enrolment of new actors, but always under a sensitivity that directs all these actors.

Cosmoethics, in this sense, assumes that any cosmos built by a heterogeneous arrangement of actors needs an affirmative and generating ethics that allows its deployment and its immanent cohesion. To point out that politics without citizens, laws, sanctions, or planet Earth, is an incomplete vision of politics (Stengers, 2005; Callon, Lascoumes and Barthe, 2011; Simons, 2017), is as important as pointing out that politics per se is not deployed locally nor does it contain a generating capacity of transforming reality. Politics needs an affirmative ethics:

«Margaret Keenan, who turns 91 next week, said the injection she received at 06:31 GMT was the “best early birthday present”. It was the first of 800,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine that will be dispensed in the coming weeks. Up to four million more are expected by the end of the month. Hubs in the UK are starting the rollout by vaccinating the over-80s and some health and care staff⁶» (BBC, 8th December 2020).

«Araceli Rosario Hidalgo, aged 96, and the oldest resident in Los Olmos senior home in Guadalajara, on Sunday became the first person in Spain to receive a vaccine against COVID-19. “Let's see if we can get rid of this virus”.» (El País, 27th December 2020).

The first vaccines administered to Margaret or Araceli are key examples of this cosmoethical exercise in two ways. On the one hand, they are the first people worldwide or nationally to receive the tool that will allow them to not die from a SARS-CoV-2 infection., being an icon of the hope for all citizens and opening the horizon to the composition of a world in which a new disease is eradicated. But in addition, the zoe/geo/technological entanglement mentioned at the beginning of this subsection that arranges the cosmos of scientists, mice, budgets or governments around the world is encapsulated in and by the vaccine. It is in this way that the vaccine-political-cosmos has needed an ethical-affirmative-cosmos so that the lives of all of us can be saved.

Vaccine management regarding the pandemic is not only a new political cosmos. First, it is an ethical cosmos: a relationship in which the arm of an older person, an international policy or the efforts of laboratories all over the planet are bound on the same immanent level under the affirmative force that generates the principle of sharing information freely to quickly create the vaccine. Following Braidotti, here lies the positive and immanent

6 Available here: <https://www.miretarquitectos.com/2020/12/08/5238/>

zoe and to the technical, geological and biological scales that SARS-CoV-2 has put in the foreground. Within these scales, different relationship velocities are drawn. Capacities and affections also emerge that empower the entire entanglement to act without each element losing its particularity. For instance, with unusual speed, different vaccines against the coronavirus have been created, each in different countries, with different biotechnologies and opening up distinct contexts of research with a same objective. Thanks to this, Margaret or Araceli will be able to embrace their grandchildren; the Spanish government sees the decline in the numbers of infections and deaths; and open science will never be the same worldwide again. In this sense, movements against closed and private publishing platforms have already begun to gain academic visibility. All this generative potentia will crystallize in traditional political forms and, without a doubt, in cosmopolitical arrangements. However, as we illustrate with the case of the first people vaccinated, we should highlight that the ethical element is there before the cosmos, marking the direction, cohesion, meaning and tension of the cosmos.

The notion of affirmative ethics is not a naïve proposal that denies obvious problems of vaccine distribution, injustices, or conditions of oppression that emerge in that we-who-are-not-one-and-the-same-but-are-in-this-convergence-together (Braidotti, 2019) or the greed that great pharmaceutical companies show in the fight against the pandemic. Not to mention the abuse and exploitation that Western and Northern countries have done over Southern countries (especially the African ones) in the vaccine trials, or in the prioritization of countries that could be vaccinated (Hassoun, 2021). Quite the contrary. It recognizes the primacy of the economic factor over health on many occasions and circumstances, the existence of lobbies determining scientific research or the fact that there are countries that do not have access to resources with the same ease. In other words, it recognizes the multiscale tensions that we inhabit. The utility of the cosmoethics proposal is to show that, in certain heterogeneous configurations of relations - each cosmopolitics - the seeds of something that can be otherwise, which can change at any time, appear. Thus, the encapsulation of the vaccine has opened up possibilities that did not exist before and that will continue to sediment on changes that will shape a new world. One where instead of winners (mainly Western humans, from the northern hemisphere, and in rich countries) and losers (the virus, poor countries, or populations unable to pay for a vaccine), we stay with the problem (Haraway, 2016) and a new horizon of relationships is created. One in which, instead of standing in the pessimism and helplessness generated by the finding of the increase in the aforementioned inequalities (Žižek, 2020), or in the burnout that its permanent vision produces in us (Han, 2015), lines of flight are established that point toward other possible orders.

The vaccines against COVID-19 have been a historic milestone between pandemic management, possible due to the combination of technical, biological, planetary elements and to the constitution of an affirmative ethics that ordered and intensified those elements, opening a cosmoethics. So, what would it mean to look at the pandemic management from this angle? First of all, it means denouncing government arguments in Spain and other European countries that called for a return to community work or joint efforts during the months of restrictions. However, as the results show, the state has adopted a neo-authoritarian role that explicitly dictates what the population can or cannot do (go to a bar, how what time they can be outside until, how many days they must remain isolated), establishing a single, narrow path for the development of this collective and unitary effort (Gjerde, 2021). And, more forcefully, by dictating the conditions for the possibility of citizens acting during the pandemic in subtle and quasi-desired ways for the citizenry. Second, it means to open up this imperative of everyone together on behalf of Western governments, to observe that there is only one reality underneath: the search for disciplined and obedient individuals in the face of the emergency (Fraser, 2003; Foucault, 2008). Third, it implies proof that in such an imperative there is no trace of the agency of other living beings or of other material agents with which we compose ourselves in our daily life, and when they made their appearance, they did so from a negative and threatening representation. For example, the role given to bats as a reservoir of coronavirus and a major threat to the future of humanity. Finally, and most importantly, it assumes that despite all the critical and negative elements mentioned, a possible new world is outlined, one that is perhaps better and fairer.

6. CONCLUSIONS: THE COSMOETHICS PROPOSAL

The cosmoethical worldview extends beyond and closer to the traditional ethical view and even the popular concept of cosmopolitics. how did we develop a COVID-19 vaccine so quickly? Answering the question posed at the beginning of this article, we proposed that cosmopolitics needs a previous moment: cosmoeth-

ics. In this sense, cosmoethics assumes that the cosmopolitical enactment of a vaccine that encapsulates the design and agreement of a heterogeneous entanglement of politicians, citizens and scientists, is possible because a potentia -that Braidotti calls *positive zoe*- is previously established.

Hence, the cosmoethics proposal is inevitable, it appears whenever relationships are established between any type of entities and scales. It is a *zoe/geo/biological* tension that leads the actors of a possible cosmopolitical reality in the sense that it flags the movement of those actors that are about to be articulated. This shaping closely resembles the notion of a plane of imminence developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1987). However, there would be two differences. Firstly, affirmative ethics insists on the moment of openness, of change toward a new situation, which will happen or fail, but which manifests itself in any articulation regardless of the axiological value that it acquires. Second, it is multiscale. This refers to individual, biological or material, planetary and technological components. We have added the *cosmo-* prefix, drawing on examples from the COVID-19 pandemic, to indicate that Braidotti forgets that the redirection of these relations is itself the threshold of a new world. It is generative, it is then an ethical-affirmative-cosmos.

Based on this notion, the situation on the management of the COVID-19 vaccine opens up different possibilities. On the one hand, it allows re-evaluation of the pandemic management in terms of the deployment of intervention measures from different states and Governments. It allows to compare them, even to state that we have perhaps faced different pandemics, since the deployment carried out in Europe and the results obtained have nothing to do with the deployment and results of Asian countries. In addition, it offers the opportunity to incorporate new entities into its analysis (ecological systems, technologies, popular traditions, economic interests...). It thus includes the possibility of a cosmopolitical approach.

However, it insists on something more important. This is the fact that while recognizing that the pandemic is a tragedy, that it has brought pain, despair, death and poverty; it has been possible to distinguish the articulation of a new, different world made by certain practices and discourses, entities and materials, times and spaces. The vaccine has shown that we can cooperate, that data can circulate freely, that trying to protect the entire population of the planet and the planet itself is possible and can be a common and shared goal. It has underscored the fact that, as Heidegger (1977, p.28) quoted Holderlin as saying, "but where the danger is, grows the saving power also" Even in the face of disaster, an affirmative ethics is installed that outlines a new reality. We call that moment in time cosmoethics.

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