

THE FRAGILITY OF VIRALITY | THE VIRALITY OF FRAGILITY

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The present issue of the *Phainomena* journal is in its entirety dedicated to the pandemic of the rapidly and rabidly spreading novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 (and of its miscellaneous aggressive variants), which has during the last year engulfed the world as a whole, and fundamentally—not only through the staggering rise of its death toll, but also through the strict measures undertaken for its containment—encroached upon the life of humanity, locally and globally affecting all—individual as well as communal, private as well as professional—aspects of (contemporary) co-existence. Insofar as such a—thus almost unprecedented—situation calls for a thorough, cautious, and serious consideration of the problems, which have brought forth the best—selfless solidarity—and the worst—opportunist profiteering—in humankind, the editors, therefore, wanted—and felt compelled—to provide scholars working in the domains of phenomenological and hermeneutic research, as well as in the related realms of the humanities, with a forum for a philosophically

engaging discussion of social, political, economic, medical, educational, and cultural exigencies and consequences of the current COVID-19 crisis.

6 The pandemic has both directly as well as indirectly essentially influenced—and will, it seems, for years to come, continue to influence—all the dimensions of human sociality. Whereas various healthcare structures and, by them, personnel participating in preserving the effectiveness of their functioning—from the medical workers, treating severely stricken patients, to natural scientists, seeking to secure a comprehensive explanation of the disease, from the management officials, ensuring controllable operational conditions, to government representatives, bringing about relevant and supportive decisions to avert the threat—bore the immediate, the imminent brunt of combating the exceptionally infectious and surprisingly resilient virus, the implemented provisions, the necessary requirements, and the proposed recommendations for the suppression of its ruthless onslaught—such as, e.g., decrees with regard to the imposing of statewide lockdowns, the banning of travel, the closing of certain services, the wearing of protective facemasks, the sanitizing of hands, or the keeping of physical distance, etc.—have in a crucial—if (not) im-palpable, mediate(d)—manner marked not only economic matters, pedagogical processes, and artistic activities, but also, first and foremost, the regular course(s) of (our) daily lives, of life, in particular as well as in general: the often frustrating effects of pandemic circumstances—fueling (maybe) the obstinate denial of denialist non-believers among the, as ever, fervently ruminant conspiracy theorists—cannot be denied: denial, should it suggest nothing other than its own negativity, by virtue and by virtuosity of (a mere, a sheer) re-flex(ion), remains—granted: distorted—re-affirmation.

Although it is at the moment of the rampant pandemic, before the end of the crisis, impossible to measure out the complexity of short- and long-term reverberations of the outbreak of COVID-19 for interpersonal relationships, for the multi-spectral state of (people's as well as peoples') affairs, and for humanity as such, a successful outcome and a secure outlook for the world (of an) "afterwards" can only be—in an inter- and a transdisciplinary fashion—occasioned by a mutually respectful conversation among different fields and faculties of knowledge, especially if account is also to be rendered of the concern that the coronavirus pandemic is solely one of the several profound

crises denoting the recent development of the so-called post-modern, globalized civilization, the preponderance of which has to a specific extent at once obscured and aggravated precarious predicaments connected with dilemmas of—to mention but a few:—environment pollution and ecological devastation, constitutional rights and authoritarian oppression, war zones and migrant flows. If, naturally, the leading role in the overcoming of the—not only health, but human (well-)being endangering—menace must be, and has been, assumed by branches of (biological, epidemiological, and medical) sciences associated with investigating the characteristics of the virus as well as with establishing the counteractions against it, other—otherwise predispos(ition)ed—capacities circumscribing the—always accomplishment-worthy—in-completeness of our worldly dwelling can, and also do, nonetheless, offer in-valuable insights with regard perhaps predominantly to the potential implications that supersede, sur-pass (through) the COVID-19 crisis itself. Since its commencement, and throughout, the pandemic has—beside the regularly updated information on cases reported at home and abroad—stimulated—as the ample media coverage bears witness—a broad public debate, through which the sometimes opposing—both practical as well as theoretical—standpoints have been given the opportunity to be deliberated upon: in it, not only economists or politicians have taken part, but also social scientists and humanists, activists and intellectuals of heterogenous provenances, not only decision-makers justifying choices accepted and enforced, but also the ones who are, through their agency, (simply) attempting to make sense of—and find firm footing within—the f-actuality of (more or less) co-incident, yet (by the same token) fatefully significant occurrences. Thus, in the abundant disputes of convoluted, periodically contradicting, frequently irreconcilable opinions, philosophers likewise—quite literally from A to Z, from Giorgio Agamben to Slavoj Žižek—, have voiced views on diverse questions related to the abrupt emergence, the overwhelming emergency of COVID-19. The monothematic, multifaceted publication of *Phainomena* was born out of the conviction that the phenomenologically and hermeneutically oriented philosophical perspective is capable of attentively addressing important and imperative, previously perchance scarcely scrutinized problems and, therefore, of productively contributing to the dialogue, wherein we have found, wherein

we are losing ourselves as a (planetary) society of (dif-fused) communities and (dis-joined) individuals, (but) through which we can strive to search for an illumination and an alleviation of the still ongoing, still impending crisis.*

8 A synoptic recapitulation of papers, presented in the journal issue at hand, divulges a vast variety of reciprocally complementing approaches to an extraordinarily puzzling phenomenon that, as an always already separate, but at once collective, as an already always general, but at once singular experience, simultaneously gives itself to (each of) us to be comprehended, yet also eludes the grasp of our understanding. The movement of the dialectical inter-play of mis-understanding, which is as much revealing as it is concealing, since it can submit (to) merely particular glimpses at the nonetheless intended totality of conceptualization, un-folds itself as an opulently differentiated texture of the con-textual inter-weaving of common contents, abiding topics, recurring notions, and diverging elucidations. Whilst the initial articles, upon the basis of an effort to procure an adequately detailed description of pandemic conditions concerning both, on the one hand, the individuality of human beings as well as, on the other hand, the communality of humanity, emphasize the pivotal impact, the changes COVID-19 has provoked with respect to the perception of reality and the relation towards it, subsequent essays exert to explore the manifold narrative modalities motivated by the confrontation with the coronavirus that can (or, rather, could)—through corresponding non-lingual expression—tread the path towards embodied, lived solidarity, whereby not only the underlying and overarching ethical im-pulse of theoretical contemplation becomes manifest, but also the hazardous and harmful resistances, such as “coronationalism” or fear of facemasks, receive a counterbalancing exposition. The radically paradoxical repercussions of the struggle against the plaguing disease are further enlighteningly demonstrated

* The publisher of the *Phainomena* journal, the Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities, invited members of the international Forum for the Humanities (FORhUM), which operates under its auspices, to participate in a discussion by sharing their thoughts and their judgments, their experiences and their concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The contributions to the debate, wherein also numerous distinguished philosophers took part (e.g.: B. Babich, J. Grondin, and B. Waldenfels), have been published and are freely accessible on the website of the FORhUM: <http://www.forhum.com/humanistic-discussion/>.

with the help of characteristic case studies devoting focus to the treatment of healthcare workers in Poland or to the challenges of tourism in Slovenia. If the fortunately fast development and the regrettably retardant distribution of the vaccine(s) seem to direct our timidly trusting glances towards a conclusive, a concluding re-resolution of the COVID-19 crisis, its many-sided aftermaths, the mitigation of which art(ist)s alike—as all—pursue, are yet to be gradually realized to the consummate degree: (for) now, at least, we are, whilst trying to take responsibility for our comportment, whilst therethrough trying to maintain our dignity, if not anymore in the eerily silenced un-safety of “the eye,” however still “in the midst of the storm.”

Insofar as neither the pandemic itself nor the integrality of significance it entails for humankind can at this instant—due to the contiguosness of the (ap)proximate—be examined with the distance of spacial and temporal detachment that would allow (for) an appurtenant panoramic, analytically or synthetically critical re-view over the situation, every and all—kind(s) of—consideration of questions (internally and externally) coupled with COVID-19—regardless of the compulsion of methodological and systematic, “scientific” stringency—spontaneously conveys—through its (at times vexatious) “speculative core”—the for-ever un-mistakable indebtedness to historicity, which co-constitutes being-in-the-world, its embeddedness, its situatedness in the im-possible de-termination of history. Notwithstanding the admirable—if also audacious—courage—confirmed by herein encompassed contributions—to con-front, to con-test—amid duration—the encountered crisis with the principal purpose of attaining its definition and, thereby, its defeat, (particularly) the incongruous and incompatible controversies surrounding the pandemic—hauntingly inhabiting primarily the popular portions of the (supposedly social) media—dis-close historical inter-(im)mediacy, which encircles the horizons of comprehension, which outlines their limitations and their limitedness, (but) which, in its re-turn, accords to all (probable and plausible) answers the mid-air of the un-decidable question: the in-between of in-decision.

The brief—nearly unknown, accessibly authored—essay by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) entitled “Was ist der Mensch?”—republished in the “Documents” section of this issue in the original German language and

accompanied by the English as well as the Slovenian translation of the text—appeared in print for the first time during the Second World War, in December 1944, in the separate cultural edition *Der europäische Mensch (The European Man)* of the *Illustrierte Zeitung Leipzig (Illustrated Magazine Leipzig)*, whereas, thereafter, the essay was reproduced only once, in 1947, in an assortment of articles from the same magazine under the title *Vom Wahren, Schönen, Guten. Aus dem Schatz europäischer Kunst und Kultur (On the True, the Beautiful, the Good. From the Treasury of European Art and Culture)*; it namely never achieved addition to any other of its creator's books of selected or collected writings. The central reason for the incorporation of the famous hermeneutic philosopher's nigh forgotten work into a publication on the pandemic of COVID-19 lies, however, neither (just) in the historiographical interest of re-discovery, which could both clarify anew the author's aims and claims of the period as well as enrich the consciousness of his life's scholarly labors, nor (just) in the contemporary intention of re-actualization, which today's perplexing plight repeatedly parallelizes with war and could ensure an auxiliary amplification of its assertions, but—above all—in Gadamer's convincing re-cognition that—at a time of an utterly distressing crisis of humankind—through a sketch of chronological trans-formations of (occidental) thought about man's appointment on earth, upon its basis, on the one hand, acknowledges the urgency of devising answers and the burden of discerning between them, yet, on the other hand, nonetheless, un-ambiguously accentuates the (historical) open(-ended)ness—the beginning—of the question(ing) itself: "What is man?"

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Might we, therefore, taking (in) inspiration from Gadamer's essay, from meticulously composed and polyphonically meaningful submissions to the readership of *Phainomena*, from in-numerable myriads of further pertinent, non-literarily safe-guarded meditations drawing (us) near and drawing (us) far from—and to—tradition, (not)—in the end, in the beginning—feel compassionately con-strained to ask ourselves, to ask our selves, whether the COVID-19 crisis, which we endeavor to endure, yet again, epochally, (al)locates humanity before the question of its own (non-?)sense? And: if the pandemic has, by its "abnormality," drastically obtruded and obstructed the effectuation of our habits, of our co-habitation with others, can "normality" we eagerly chase to re-instate within the vaguely envisioned "after" become enlarged

enough to take heed and hearken (also) to the dilemmas of the deprived, the degraded, and the desolate? And: if the pandemic has, by its virality, laid bare the rudimentary fragility residing within our in-corporeal, our intangible institutions, can (also) the steps be re-traced towards the flowering (of an) awareness of the ephemeral transitoriness of (all) being(s)? Can the rift be bridged between the (hostile?) fragility of virality and the (hospitable?) virality of fragility? How do we respond? How are we responding? How *are* we? We, as what? We, as who?

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In the sincere hope that the journal enables a fruitful and prolific continuation of discussions regarding the pandemic of COVID-19, the Editorial Board of *Phainomena*—and I myself personally—would like to cordially thank all authors of the published contributions for attentiveness of their participation and professionalism of their cooperation in the preparation of the present issue. We would likewise like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Dr. Facundo Bey for the gracious and generous suggestion to edit the German original and to provide the English translation of Hans-Georg Gadamer's essay, and to Dr. Aleš Košar for kindly translating the text into Slovenian language.

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