

# INITIAL REFLECTIONS ON MAN IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## THE REALITY THAT IS AND IS NOT THE SAME REALITY

Jarosław GARA

The Maria Grzegorzewska University, Institute of Special Education,  
Szczęśliwicka Street 40, 02-353 Warsaw, Poland

*[jgara@aps.edu.pl](mailto:jgara@aps.edu.pl)*

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*Abstract*

The paper discusses the problem of the specificity of experience of the life-world by man of the “COVID-19 era.” This experience should be considered in terms of the universal participation in times of the pandemic, the individual and collective experience of crisis and existential disintegration, as well as the consequences of the pandemic in the form of social restrictions and limitations related to counteracting this global threat. In this context, the contribution refers to the inspirations connected

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with the anecdote about the ship of Theseus, and selected elements of Jan Patočka's phenomenology of the life-world. Therefore, the text attempts to prove the fundamental thesis that man of the "COVID-19 era" experiences reality that is and at the same time is no longer known to him. The life-world in the experience of man in the "COVID-19 era" is a world, in which many changes have taken place and are still taking place, which fundamentally changes the situation of man in the various dimensions of everyday life as well as the experiences of time, carnality, home, and work.

*Keywords:* life-world, existential experience, existential paradoxes, COVID-19.

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### **Začetna razmišljanja o človeku v pandemiji COVID-19. Resničnost, ki je in ni enaka resničnost**

#### *Povzetek*

62 Članek obravnava problem specifičnosti izkustva življenjskega sveta, kakršna opredeljuje človeka v »dobi COVID-19«. To izkustvo je potrebno premisliti z vidikov univerzalnega sodelovanja v času pandemije, individualnega in kolektivnega izkustva krize ter eksistencialne dezintegracije in posledic pandemije v obliki družbenih omejitev, ki so povezane s preprečevanjem globalne nevarnosti. V tem kontekstu prispevek črpa navdih iz anekdote o Tezejevi ladji in izbranih elementov fenomenologije življenjskega sveta pri Janu Patočki. Besedilo potemtakem skuša dokazati osrednjo tezo, da človek »dobe COVID-19« izkuša resničnost, kakršna mu hkrati je in ni več znana. Življenjski svet v izkustvu človeka »dobe COVID-19« je svet, v katerem so nastopile in še vedno nastopajo številne spremembe, ki bistveno spreminja situacijo človeka v različnih razsežnostih njegovega vsakdanjega življenja in njegovega izkustva časa, telesnosti, doma in dela.

*Ključne besede:* življenjski svet, eksistencialno izkustvo, eksistencialni paradoksi, COVID-19.

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*“From the standpoint of natural experience, the subject is always bound to a body, dependent on the givenness of realities outside it, and hence finite; it is a person.” (Patočka 2016, 36–37)*

*“Humans offer existents the occasion for manifesting themselves as they are because it is only in their being-here that an understanding of what it means to be is present—and so a possibility which things of themselves lack and which has no meaning for them—the possibility of coming to their own being, that is, of becoming phenomena, of manifesting themselves.” (Patočka 1996, 6)*

## **Introduction**

The subject of my interest is the specificity of experience of the life-world by man of the “COVID-19 era.” However, the following is only the indication of a possible direction for further in-depth studies on the issue. In the light of the adopted cognitive perspective, the discussed problem is presented through the prism of already known ways and categories that describe the aporetic dimensions of human existence.

The very term “COVID-19 era” is justified by its special character due to the universality of both individual as well as collective experiences of limitations and effects of the pandemic on the global scale. And although the term is conventional, it undoubtedly refers to the real state of things that have in this form not yet been experienced by man within the contemporary configurations of social life organization. Thus, in a globalized world, man of the “COVID-19 era” not only experiences a multitude of risks and uncertainties, but also experiences them with the consequences of globalization previously unknown on such a scale. In this peculiar and boundary situation, which not only poses a threat to health and life, but also—and perhaps above all—generates unpredictability of events, which all the same disorganize or even render impossible the daily functioning in all the spheres of social life.

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The paradoxicality of the situation experienced by man in the “COVID-19 era” lies in the fact that what has so far been an unquestionable determinant of high status, prestige, and life opportunities in modern, affluent, and economically as well as infrastructurally developed societies, has suddenly become the main carrier of risks and uncertainties related to the extent and intensity of the spread of the coronavirus. Consequently, what in the globalized world defines the mainstream style and way of social functioning, suddenly shook its foundations, and further reinforced the threat and unpredictability. Such achievements, which in the “COVID-19 era” became the main source of risk and unpredictability, undoubtedly include for example: 1) mass mobility means that allow for quick and comfortable movement on national, continental, and intercontinental distances; 2) architecturally modern economic and agglomeration zones that focus on a small area of representation, headquarters of companies as well as large commercial and residential zones; 3) modern ways of the logistic organization of production and services on the market, i.e., industrial, transport, construction, educational, artistic, entertainment, catering, tourism, or medical services, etc. For this reason, the situation of humankind in the “COVID-19 era” should be considered in terms of the general experience of collective participation in the times of the pandemic, in terms of individual manifestations of the experiences of existential disintegration, as well as in the context of the consequences of the pandemic and social strategies (supervision and punishment) that counter this threat. Social strategies increasingly and unconditionally bring man of the “COVID-19 era” closer to the experience of social reality as a panopticon (cf. Bauman 2000, 48–54; Žižek 2020, 73–81): “Things we were used to as part of our daily life will no longer be taken for granted, we will have to learn to live a much more fragile life with constant threats.” (Žižek 2020, 78)

The attempt, here, to refer to the title problem of the reality of the “COVID-19 era” as experienced by man, i.e., a reality, which is and at the same time is not yet known (cf. Žižek 2020, 85–86), will be set in the context of two fundamental heuristic inspirations. On the one hand, certain inspirations will be found in an anecdote related to the ancient paradox of the ship of Theseus, and, on the other hand, some inspirations will be based on the selected motifs deriving from the 20<sup>th</sup>-century phenomenology of life-world as conceived by

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Jan Patočka.<sup>1</sup> Thus, the initial reflections related to the human experience of the “COVID-19 era” will be formulated by referring to certain selected areas of the paradoxicality of social conditions and consequences of living “in a state of the pandemic.”

### **The paradox of the ship of Theseus and the experience of the life-world in the “COVID-19 era”**

The paradox of Theseus’ ship is based on the aporia of the problem of identity of something that seems to be “the same,” but, at the same time, is something “totally different.” This paradox is related to the anecdote about the gradual replacement of individual elements of the ship until all its parts were entirely replaced by completely new ones; the planks, from which the ship was built, when they corroded and got rotten, were being constantly replaced by new planks. Therefore, after some time, the ship of Theseus, preserved by the Athenians after his return to Athens, was and was not the same ship. The realization of this fact made the issue of the ship forever unobvious, for some claimed that it is, and others claimed that it is not the ship of Theseus.<sup>2</sup> The paradoxicality of this problem is, therefore, expressed in the question of what kind of ship we are *de facto* dealing with when all its elements were gradually replaced with new ones, so that there are no longer any original elements of the old ship. Still, the question remains: is it the same ship, because all the time the Athenians could have it in front of their eyes, and the gradual changes made upon it were almost unnoticeable; or is it a completely new ship that has nothing in common with the ship once commanded by Theseus. In this paradox, therefore, the issue of ambiguity

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1 In this respect, I will refer to the selected inspirations from two works by the Czech phenomenologist: from the early period of his work—*The Natural World as a Philosophical Problem (Přirozený svět jako filosofický problem; 1936)*—and from the late period—*Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History (Kacířské eseje o filosofii dějin; 1975)*.

2 “They took away the old timbers from time to time—as Plutarch described this—and put new and sound ones in their places, so that the vessel became a standing illustration for the philosophers in the mooted question of growth, some declaring that it remained the same, others that it was not the same vessel.” (Plutarch 1959, 49; cf. Chisholm 2002, 89)

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and problematicity of what is old and new, as well as what is the same and different, becomes apparent. Moreover, another problem is also revealed, namely the one related to the extent, to which what is new and different is completely different, as well as to the extent, to which it contains an element of identity of what is old and the same.

66 In the anecdote related to Theseus' ship paradox, three basic dimensions of the existential paradox can be exposed: 1) the ship was in terms of appearance (materially) perceived/recognized (due to the fact that it was at the same place where Theseus' ship had been left, it was made in the same way and it looked the same), and, at the same time, in terms of origin (symbolically), it was not perceived/recognized as Theseus' ship (because it did not have any original parts, of which Theseus' ship was originally made; on the boards of this ship, Theseus did not make sea voyages and nothing connected it with the original ship); 2) what was presented as the ship of Theseus hid a mystery that was visible only from the perspective of historical memory and the knowledge related to the lot of the renovation of the ship; 3) the gradual replacement of individual parts of the ship led imperceptibly to the replacement of all the elements, of which the ship was originally built, and, eventually, to the replacement of the whole ship. The first of these dimensions can also be described as the paradox of *recognition*, the second—the paradox of *memory*, and the third—the paradox of *noticeability*.

That is why the anecdote about the ship of Theseus can be treated as a suggestive illustration of the open and changeable, but also multilayered and approximative nature of life-world. The life-world confronts us with the paradoxical structure of reality we experience; it appears to be the same and different at the same time, close and at the same time completely distant. This reality also becomes the source of the sense both of collective participation as well as individual alienation.

The common and direct experience of social strategies, restrictions, and the very consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic also confront the contemporary man and his life-world with a particular purport of Theseus' ship paradox. In this sense, as it can be assumed, the validity of the meaning of the ship paradox can be shown by referring to certain selected motives and characteristics, with which the Czech phenomenologist described the specificity of the experience of everyday life.

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The life-world, both in Jan Patočka's view as well as according to the original intention of phenomenology by Edmund Husserl, is given "directly." It is a subjective world, "lived in its concrete whole" as a world of concrete existence "here" and "now." Thus, it is a world of everyday situations and practical action, a world, in which people meet, are born and die, learn and work (Patočka 1993, 42–44). This is a world, in which man is a "neighbor of man" (Leško 2012, 33). And, in this sense, it is a nonproblematic world based on primary obviousness.

Consequently, the life-world is always given to us in a way that both precedes our theoretical thought about it and our practical interventions in its construction. In this meaning, our attitude to this primary world of experience is natural and naive (Patočka 2016, 7, 21). Man as a subject is dependent on the world of his daily life, because this world is the substrate of all initial (naive and natural) existential experiences and unconditional beliefs, opinions, and habits that belong to them (Patočka 2016, 49, 51). Such a world is, therefore, always experienced in its original temporality as (being) "here" (Patočka 2016, 28, 116; Landgrebe 2016, xxvii).

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According to Patočka, it is also possible to talk about fundamental phenomenological moments in the life-world as well as make attempts at a structural description of its elements (parts), as well as the relations and relationships that exist there (Patočka 2016, 64, 70, 84). In this way, it is possible to point out primary components of the universal structure of the world of everyday life that are present in human experience, namely time, carnality, home, or work. Man of the "COVID-19 era," in a special way, as I will try to demonstrate, also experiences specific forms of risk and uncertainty, insofar as the indicated components of the experience of life-world are taken into account.

### **Man as a person of time—*homo temporalis*—in the "COVID-19 era"**

The original temporality of experience is expressed in the naive and thoughtless, i.e., nonproblematic, attitude of man to the surrounding world (Patočka 2016, 119). Primary time is an opening of the horizon that "events in the world are only just making possible": "Time in the original sense is a unitary function of expectation, perception, and retention of what is." (Patočka

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2016, 69) Within this relationship, man perceives himself as an integral part of the natural world of life, which is taken as an obvious horizon of existence and participation in what is intersubjectively experienced as common. The original structure of experience is expressed in a peculiar openness to the potential possibility of discovering and cognitive objectification of one's own world of life. Thus, primary temporality of human experience does not relate to everything that exists, but only to what exists in a particular place and time, and belongs to his own life-world (Patočka 1996, 7–8).

The course of human life is, therefore, entirely periodized according to the principle of elapsing or separating time intervals. This applies both to the experience of time in its natural dimension, e.g., time of day, time of year, periods of life (childhood, adulthood, old age), as well as to time encountered in social practices, e.g., rest time, working time, meal time, or play time (Patočka 2016, 58). The experience of the temporality of life perceived in this way is something obvious and nonproblematic for a person who expresses one's "holistic attitude" to the surrounding reality (world, life, people) in specific feelings and moods that are closely related to time (Patočka 2016, 8).

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The human experience of time in the "COVID-19 era" is paradoxical; man experiences the passage of time, while at the same time is also being immobilized by it. This is an experience of time that, in its extreme forms of intensified risk and uncertainty, completely closes the individual and the social horizon of expectations and events. Paradoxically, however, the very intensity of risks and uncertainties experienced is not, as it seems, the result of the intensity of the spread of the pandemic itself, but rather of the social restrictions established and implemented (by law), as well as restrictions of the nature of isolation and abstinence from certain life activities. Man as an individual experiences these restrictions and limitations in the very center of his own life-world and his own everyday matters.

The biological dimension of the pandemic should be combined with the category of time that one experiences in its natural dimension. Getting ill as a result of the spread of the virus primarily changes the way one perceives, values, and experiences time that becomes simply the time of biologically (physically and mentally) experienced illness, healing, or death. It is, however, the social dimension of time associated with certain forms of social participation and

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social practices that plays a key role in the constitution of the peculiarity of the human experience of time in the “COVID-19 era.” This is because the virus threat and social restrictions enforce a complete reorganization or suspension of the current forms of rest time, working time, mealtime, fun time, etc. Therefore, man of the “COVID-19 era” not only experiences disintegration, but often a kind of time blockade in the social dimension of life. This determines a specific way of being human, and is connected to the habits, practices, and specific needs of the social forms of participation. During the pandemic, they are subject to disorganization or blockade, while the experience of time in the social dimension loses its existential horizon of expectations and predictability. In this way, the social dimension of the time of work, meal, rest, or play has lost its obviousness and has become problematic. The prevailing mood of time of the pandemic has become the feeling of risk and uncertainty.

### **Man as a subject of carnality—*homo corpus*—in the “COVID-19 era”**

Man’s position in the world of everyday life is corporeal, which is why man as a person is always “bodily connected” with the surrounding world. “I cannot think—wrote Patočka—a human being without embodiment and bodily communication with the surrounding world.” (Patočka 2016, 53) Corporeality emphasizes non-reducible determinants of the human condition as conditioned by nature. It is the human body that first and foremost decides about its connections with the surrounding world and the specific relationships it establishes with other people. In general, the entire contact between man and the surrounding world has a corporeal character (Patočka 2016, 76). All physical or subjective interactions with the surrounding world take place through and in the context of the corporeal dimension of human life. Through the senses, the world originally appears to man and lets itself be known to him.

Thanks to his corporeality, man finds himself in this naively shared world, and experiences the influence of the world, which, in an intersubjective way, is equally or similarly accessible to other people as subjects of corporeality (Patočka 2016, 55). Human corporeality, as understood in natural terms, is, thus, an irreducible and “fundamental part of the relationship” that defines its belongingness to the surrounding world.

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Therefore, it can be said that the global crisis that has disorganized and shaken the foundations of all, macrosocial as well as microsocial areas of human existence is taking place in the context of the main problem related to the natural condition of man, i.e., the corporeal dimension of human life and interpersonal contacts. It is the human organism that actively carries the biological threat, the coronavirus, the easy spreading of which has caused the global crisis. The physical dimension of human contact in the postmodern world has overnight become a source of risk and uncertainty.

70 Thus, man of the “COVID-19 era,” as a subject who is “bodily connected” with the surrounding world, has been put in a situation of the necessity for a long-term isolation from other people. And since the threat is global, the choice or order of social isolation is universal and global. This new and specific situation, on the other hand, gives rise to a whole series of more or less visible consequences for the everyday functioning and the quality of life of both individual people and entire communities. Although isolation from other people can be an expression of a voluntary choice by individuals, in connection with conscious prevention and care for their own health, as well as with socially obligatory orders, it does not affect the perception of the very consequences that such a massive and long-term isolation brings with it. The consequences undoubtedly include at least two types of circumstances. On the macro-social scale, these consist of the procedures and social restrictions, which make it either very difficult or even impossible to carry out a whole range of activities in public space that previously seemed completely natural or simply standard. On the micro-social scale, on the other hand, they can cause a reflex fear and mistrust in the physical relations with other people, which, instead of directness, establish ubiquitous spatial distance in the various areas of social *praxis*.

In this way, the physical (bodily) dimension of the human way of life and activity in contact with other people, contrary to the contemporary affirmation of the body and its location at the very center of the social perception of human subjectivity and human need for physical closeness as well as direct, face-to-face relations, has become an essential source of the widespread sense of threat and uncertainty. Although the threat itself, as should also be emphasized, is often exaggerated in the media or used for political purposes. Therefore, the physical dimension of human activity that until now was completely natural and obvious,

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in the human consciousness of the “COVID-19 era,” has on the global scale in the blink of an eye become something problematic. Human ties and relationships in the layer of social practices and contacts have necessarily been weakened and loosened. Interpersonal openness in different social practices has been replaced by instructive and methodically recommended or required attitudes of distance and isolation. The naively shared life-world in the dimension of its spontaneous or organized interpersonal contacts is, therefore, subject to specific and not always fully visible forms of transformation and reorganization.

### **Man as a subject of domestication—*homo domesticus*—in the “COVID-19 era”**

Home is a special place that defines our own location and position in the surrounding world (Patočka 2016, 56). Home is also a place of refuge, although it is not a material place, because its basic feature is to provide a sense of familiarity and closeness. “We can say that home is the place of normal satisfaction of normal needs, a place where we are safe, the masters (in various modalities), i.e., a place at our disposal.” (Patočka 2016, 78)

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However, the human experience of possessing a home shows us different shades and degrees of the phenomenon of being settled. Home has both its particular (individual) and general (communal) dimension. For this reason, we can perceive home either in a “narrow” or in a “broad” sense. In the first case, it will be a family home with “its vital functions of daily contact and order.” Whereas in the second case, it will be “home” in the sense of belonging and attachment to a particular place, society, or tradition (Patočka 2016, 56). Therefore, the space of home includes both the “private sphere” as well as the “public sphere.”

Home as a place of refuge with its basic functions occupies a specific place in the context of the human experience of the “COVID-19 era.” The private home, although primarily a physical space, has become a socially recommended refuge from the invisible threat of the pandemic. Paradoxically, however, home as a shelter and a natural place, in which the basic needs of life are usually secured, has become for many people a place of a long-term, physically and emotionally oppressive social isolation. In this way, home has become a kind of an unexpected trap for many people. Also, the home as a private space has been separated by a wall of prescribed or recommended social isolation

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from the home as a public space. In the broad sense, the home as a common space of everyday life and a “common household,” connected by specific social traditions and practices, has become a place of anticipated danger. Contrary to the basic reflex of daily entry into, and presence in, the public space, responsible participation and involvement in public affairs (the “common household”), due to the pandemic, paradoxically revealed the necessity of physical withdrawal and actual refraining from direct social contacts.

72 In addition to its natural functions, home, in the narrow sense, i.e., as an intimate space, has also taken over, on an unprecedented scale in the modern world, the functions that have thus far been essentially fulfilled in the public sphere as a “common household.” For many people, the private space of the home has become a place of socially ordered isolation and fulfilment of professional obligations in the form of remote work. Thus, the home as a private space of shelter and realization of life needs has potentially become a space subject to social rules that have thus far been applied in public space. In the case of compulsory home isolation, people are forced to submit to the control and supervision of social services, and in the case of remote work in the form of video conferences or on-line transmission in real time, they are necessarily forced to respect certain conventions of behavior or ways of dressing in their own home, etc., which have thus far been reserved for the general social space. In this way, the “private space” of home, in its various dimensions, has out of necessity been introduced, with its various consequences, into the “public space,” and vice versa: the “public space” has been introduced into the “private space.”

Both in the case of the institution of compulsory isolation as well as in the case of remote work in the form of videoconferencing or on-line real-time transmission home as a private space loses its basic dimension of the broadly understood intimacy and security. Indeed, the privacy and intimacy of home as a space of refuge has been fundamentally affected. Therefore, when on the private space of home there are imposed the obligations, which have thus far been binding in the public space (in the street, in the park, in the offices, at work, at school, or at a university) as a “common household,” home, metaphorically speaking, more or less loses its “protective walls,” ceases to be a shelter, loses its unconditional intimacy of private space that man has full control of.

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## Man as a subject of work—*homo laborans*—in the “COVID-19 era”

The human world is a world marked by hardship and work. Work is an expression of the openness of human nature, and becomes the basic relationship that defines human existence in the world. The world of work becomes the source of man’s self-awareness, and distinguishes him from animal forms of life because animals do not have the ability to organize, transmit, or cede their own “world of work” (Patočka 1996, 14–18). The purposefulness of the “world of work” makes man “a citizen of our human world” as opposed to animals that are driven by simple and direct instincts to satisfy their needs. The world of work becomes a component of the experience of time itself, because human activity, among other things, takes the form of the time of work (Patočka 2016, 72–73).

Work also reveals the problematic nature of the natural world, because work serves life as well as “obscures the view of life and obstructs life.” Human work is an existential paradox. Work as a necessity and as a possibility is an expression of man’s disposition of space and time (Patočka 1996, 21–25, 29), but, all the same, work is also the “self-disposal of ourselves as being at the disposal of others” (Patočka 1996, 31). This “constraint on life” is, specifically, the human production and productivity, i.e., the “world of work.” The primary cell and model of such a “world of work” is “the household that provides for life’s needs; as protection against its own inner trend to rest, routine, and relaxation it has the stimulus of the public openness” (Patočka 1996, 38).

The threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic generated widespread risks and uncertainties on a scale unprecedented in modern societies; in addition to health and life dimensions, the pandemic has had serious consequences for the labor market and employment. Both aspects, the medical aspect (the threat and health of citizens) as well as the economic aspect of the situation (labor market and the level of employment), should also be considered in terms of problems that require socially systemic solutions. However, problems on the labor market and problems with work are fully conditioned by the state of the epidemiological threat and its unpredictability. Thus, during the pandemic, many people, on the global scale, lose their jobs, and cannot temporarily perform their professional duties, or have to perform them in

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diverse conditions and to a different extent. Undoubtedly, this situation also, to a greater or lesser degree, affects individuals, entire regions of the world, or specific sectors of the labor market.

Carrying out work in most forms of social organization, requires leaving one's own home and staying in a particular place of work. The modern, professional, and institutionalized employment relationship (i.e., subject to labor law, guarantees, and obligations as well as supervision of social institutions) in most sectors assumes leaving the private space of everyday life. In this way, doing one's work always becomes a way of being present in the surrounding world, which allows man to be present in the world as *homo laborans*. Social ways of responding to the crisis of the pandemic and the systemic strategies for the prevention of uncontrolled transmission of the coronavirus (based on obligatory decisions of the state administration at various levels) fundamentally change this situation. The crisis on the labor market is a result of the widespread and administratively ordered lockdowns, and takes three basic forms: suspension, restriction, or change of work form. Each of these forms result in productivity deficits, and, inevitably, productivity is a crucial determinant of the value of work. Also, these three forms have other specific consequences: they intensify the risk and unpredictability experienced by people in connection with the work they have done thus far.

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It seems to be completely obvious that, however dramatic, the disintegration of human work in the event of its suspension or reduction has negative consequences (e.g., loss of job, reduction of salary, change of employment conditions, etc.). By contrast, the change of the form of work entails various consequences that are not fully perceived. In many sectors of the labor market, the change in the form of work from on-site to fully or partially remote (e.g., work in corporations, banking, education, universities, public offices, or healthcare, etc.) is a completely new phenomenon that has emerged in the context of human work. This phenomenon can also be considered both positively and negatively. In the positive aspect, it can be said that the change in the form of work fully "serves life," because it allows to maintain the continuity of work and income when many people do not have any possibility of doing work or have to do it in a limited way. Changing the form of work to remote mode also contributes to the implementation of various innovations in the way work is organized and performed.

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On the other hand, taking into consideration the negative aspect of the change of the form of work, it should be noted that work performed in this way still “hides the view on life.” The change of the form of work from on-site to remote constitutes an additional and often significant physical and psychological burden. In the context of professional duties, there are at least two circumstances that can be pointed out. Firstly, the employees who perform remote work from home have to reconcile professional activities with the activities of other home dwellers, which can cause both a sense of discomfort and various types of awkwardness as a result of being seen by colleagues (e.g., during videoconferences or on-line transmissions). In this way, not only do private homes host professional activities, but they also host the looks of outsiders. People, as if by chance, can take a look into someone else’s home and witness what is happening there at a given time, which may happen thanks to the image or sound mode during an on-line transmission. Secondly, it should be pointed out that much greater working time or, to put it more closely, much greater workload is necessary to perform the same or similar professional tasks in remote conditions. In this way, the workspace has not only been linked to private life at the expense of the latter, but also the limits of working time were extended at the expense of private time. Therefore, it can be said that in such a situation the “constraint of time” has been intensified by work. The subjective proportions of “self-disposal” and “being at other’s disposal” are disturbed, and so is the autonomy of the man as *homo laborans*, insofar as disposition over workspace and working time are concerned.

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## Conclusions

Analogously to the meaning of the paradox of Theseus’s ship, the life-world in the human experience of the “COVID-19 era” in many respects is and is no longer the same reality. It is a world that still looks the same, even though the basis is no longer the same. It is also a world, in which many changes have taken place overnight, and are still taking place. This fundamentally alters the situation of man in various dimensions of his daily life and things that he experiences: time, carnality, home, or work. By presenting the nature of these changes in the context of the selected aspects of Jan Patočka’s philosophy of the life-world, it is

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possible to discern how much the natural and obvious foundations of everyday existence of the contemporary man have been violated. In various dimensions of everyday life, man as *homo temporalis*, *homo corpus*, *homo domesticus*, or *homo laborans* paradoxically experiences that the surrounding world still is and is no longer the same world. In the “COVID-19 era,” the change in the way such fundamental components of everyday existence as time, body, home, or work are experienced and perceived seems to go unnoticed and is burdened with various far-reaching consequences. Everything takes place in the atmosphere of a paradox, analogous to the paradox of the ship of Theseus as described by Plutarch, and in accordance with the interpretation, as adopted here, of the three fundamental moments, in which this paradox is experienced: recognition, memory, noticeability.

76 Man of the “COVID-19 era” lives in a globalized world, and is, therefore, exposed to a kind of paradoxical risk and uncertainty. Furthermore, the foundations of his modern way of life, his sense of security, and his belief in his own infinite agency have been enduringly violated. In this context, the anthropological status of man as *animal insecurem*, as described by Peter Wust, becomes meaningful as it expresses man’s primary existential condition, i.e., the *insecuritas humana* (Wust 1995, 18–19). Additionally, since this experience is not only universal, but also shared by humanity on a global scale at the same time, it takes on a special meaning, namely: this experience becomes a peculiar and individually shared “boundary situation” that entails a “shock” and is “inevitable” (Jaspers 1999, 407).

According to the first moment of an interpretation of the paradox of reality (the paradox of *recognition*), which is and at the same time is not the same reality, some recognize that nothing great has happened in the world, in which they live, while others point to the changes that occurred on the structural basis of everyday existence. The second moment (the paradox of *memory*) indicates that the misunderstanding of the nature of the phenomena and changes that are taking place, *hic et nunc*, is always a reflection of the level of a reliable memory of past experiences. Man is subject to the pressures of the so-called instant culture and the domination of pop-culture media, and that is why he often loses the critical ability to remember the past. Consequently, man also loses the ability to understand

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what is happening in the present. Finally, the moment of unnoticeability (the paradox of *noticeability*) is linked to the paradoxicality of a situation, in which the life-world is changing fundamentally or completely, but this happens gradually or in a dispersed way, and, therefore, remains largely unnoticed. That is why the vast majority of the participants of social life get used to the new situation of the life-world that is conditioned by the implementation of certain norms of organization and supervision of social life, while at the same time people believe that the surrounding life-world is still based on the same implicit basis and obviousness.

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