

**IANUS BIFRONS
AND THE NECESSITY OF UNDERSTANDING
WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH OUR WORLD**

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Abstract

This paper's intention is to highlight the importance to know the effects of the pandemics during history and, at the same time, to predict the possible future diseases, or their variants, their impact and instruments/tools to minimize the dreadful social and economic effects.

Therefore, we have to read, to be informed, about what is happening around us in the world and to be prepared to take prompt measures in such cases as pandemics, or when the specialists sound the alarm in different areas. The characteristic of nowadays is that we are facing with a huge amount of information, through media, social media, Internet, different points of view, even from specialists in the respective domain and we are entering in a state of confusion, stress, even fear.

The conclusion is that we have to overpass the difficulties and make the right decision, despite other opinions and to support the recovery of the normal activities and, by consequence, the economic and social activities.

Keywords: *diseases; information; psychological decision; lessons of the past.*

I. First face: learning from the past major pandemics (diseases)

I.1 The possible cycles of the important diseases of the world

Everything starts from the Roman God, Ianus, who was supposed to have two faces in opposite sides: one towards past and one towards future. Hence, his name in history: Ianus Bifrons.

What we are intending to highlight is the fact that, as in the case of life cycles, businesses cycles, products life cycles, even in this case, we are facing with pandemics of the important diseases for the last three hundred years, for example, that have manifested themselves at a distance of 100 years, in a manner considered to be a "cleaning" of the earth.

Thus, we have in mind *the Plague of 1720, the Cholera of 1820, the Spanish Flu of 1920*. From the beginning, we think that it is not a coincidence, but exactly a manifestation of a cycle in this respect.

The first one, was the last major outbreak considered of bubonic plague in West Europe, actioning in the French port of Marseille (see Duchêne and Contrucci, 2004). The death tolls were around 100.000 persons and the economic recovery took only few years. The scenario is well-known today: the quarantine imposed to the ships came in Marseille, sanitation rules and when the plague exploded in the town, the hospitals were overwhelmed. The contagion transportation vehicle was a vessel that came from Levant with several dead persons, even until arriving in Livorno (Italy). A single example of how local authorities tried to stop the spread of the disease was the erection of a wall between Marseille and the countryside (2 m high, 70 cm thick, with guards posted along it).

The second event was that one starting in 1817, which emerged out from the Gange Delta, near the city of Calcutta (now Kolkata), in India and spread out in Burma (now Myanmar), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) and it was *the first cholera pandemic* (History.com Editors, www.history.com/topics). By 1820 this pandemic had spread to Thailand, Indonesia (about 100.000 death only in the island of Java), Philippines and then to China and Japan.

Due to the British troops dislocated from India, the disease spread out to Oman and, step by step to Europe and, starting from ports as Liverpool, cholera arrived in America and Canada. The total deaths from this first cholera pandemic remains still unknown.

But, the third pandemic mentioned, *the Spanish Flu* (H1N1 virus as it was known) was the most severe pandemic in the recent history. Lasting from the debut in 1918, until 1920, it infected 500 million people (about a third of the world's population at that time) and the death toll estimated as a level of 100 million people, making it one of the most, or even the most deadliest pandemics in the human history (Rosenwald, 2020).

The basic measures taken to stop the spread of this disease was again the same as in the history and, even, during this pandemic: isolation, quarantine, good personal hygiene, limitations of public gatherings, in a word, *non-pharmaceutical measures*. Why? Because, there was no vaccine to protect against this influenza and no antibiotics to treat the secondary possible manifestations of H1N1 infection, and thus, *non-pharmaceutical measures* were used.

1.2 Some literature review in this respect

Now, speaking about some illustrative books on diseases/pandemics during the last centuries, we think that, along with the some media representatives, such as the book entitled *Pandemics: A Very Short Introduction* (2016), written by Christian W. McMillen, historian and professor at the University of Virginia, is educative and easy understandable for the topic we are dealing with in these lines.

In the book are analyzed the main diseases (leading in some cases to pandemics), such as: plague, smallpox, malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, influenza.

Furthermore, the author analyses some books regarding past pandemics, in order to put at the public disposal understandable and easy to read books about the topic in discussion.

Thus, in this paper, the reading presentation from McMillen's book narrowed to three (from five described in the book). The first one, *Faith, Reason, and the Plague in the*

Seventeenth- Century Tuscany, by the Italian historian Carlo M. Cipolla. It is about a couple of visitations of the plague in a small town of Tuscany, during the time when the opinions about the clergy influence beyond the church doors were changing. In fact, the response to these plague visitations in Tuscany came from the new class of medical professionals and administrators of the town, urging the population to self-quarantine and other sanitary methods to avoid the spread out of the disease. Exactly like today, there were two two opposite forces: one progressive, suggesting, on empirical evidence, that people need to be separated, the other one saying that people come and praise God in order to stop the plague.

The second book is focused on malaria. It is entitled *The Making of a Tropical Disease*, by Randall M. Packard and describes the origins of Malaria in Africa, when people began to settle around water sources, forests began to be cleared and the land began to be worked. These agricultural activities, along with the migration phenomenon fostered the spread out of malaria, especially through mosquitoes as "vehicles".

Unfortunately, malaria is a disease that is impossible to get rid of. The first activity in the eradication of malaria is the elimination, as much as possible, of mosquitoes. In this respect, the famous Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation sustains the efforts to eradicate malaria in the developing world.

The third book recommended by Christian W. McMillen is entitled *Epidemic Invasions*, by Mariola Espinosa and it's dealing with the problem of the yellow fever. This disease is considered, for centuries, the true American epidemic. Also, this book is very appreciated by the students and those who want to know more in the field. It presented the manner in which the yellow fever affect the United States in the mid-to-late 19th century, with the origins tracked back to Cuba.

Very important is that the author, Mariola Espinosa, shows that the pandemics economic and political events, trade and diplomatic relations between countries. Does it look like what is happening today?

And, in the final, a book regarding the the terrible *Black Death of the 14th century*, a landmark in the long series of pandemics from the dark Middle Age until today. It is not a waste of time this activity to know more about those devastating diseases that have struck humanity. Philip Ziegler and its *The Black Death* (1969) presents this catastrophic period in the middle of the 14th century, with plague came from Orient and quickly spread out in Europe. It killed over one-third of the Europe population at the time, during three years and hastened the disintegration of the age.

II. Methodology

Starting with the literature review, materials on the Internet and even social media, knowing the past of the topic and the future prospects, passing through each and every person's peronality, beliefs and perceptions, we can *synthesize all this information* and state our own opinion, make a decision, about the topic in discussion, problem which affect our lives and activities.

III. Second face: that towards the future

We will focus on the presentation of the movie *Contagion* (2011) and its remarkable similarities with what has happened in the last eight months. Many people remembered the film and TV channels proceeded to re-broadcast it. This film was directed by Steven Soderbergh, but the key in making analogies with what is happening in our days is the screenwriter, Scott Z. Burns. He consulted the representatives of WHO (World Health Organization) and medical experts of the time, in order to present as truthfully as possible the chosen subject. And, another important aspect to be highlighted: critics praised the film for its narrative and the performances, as did scientists for its accuracy. It returned to public attention this year, with the manifestation of SARS COV-2 pandemic.

Watching the film and knowing the manifestations of the new coronavirus, but also based on written opinions on the Internet or social media, such as Filip (2020), we can make some pertinent statements about the similarities revealed and, by consequence, what to do next. Of course, we need to get over what many doctors say about the diseases in which high fever manifests itself: the disease will follow its natural course/cycle and the pharmaceutical instruments used will shorten the period and flatten it.

What can we say about this prospect from 2011 and the realities of today? We can say that we are in the middle of rough debates, even manifestations and confrontations, of some theories of conspiracy, to a such degree that each and every person to make his own decision, based on both reading and understanding the messages from media and his own beliefs and perceptions: the virus exists? Is it natural or produced in the lab? The masks are, indeed, protection against the coronavirus? For the second question, for example, the majority of specialists consider that SARS COV-2 is a natural virus, which surpassed all transmission records. But, if people read what the Chinese researcher dr. Li-Meng Yan said about the creation (or the possibility of creation) in a laboratory of this virus, because SARS COV-2 has biological characteristics which are not compatible with a virus transmitted from animals to humans (Dumitru, 2020), what to think about it? And, in this manner, confusion, fear, nervousness become more present in society.

In the spirit of these lines, we assist in a short period, exactly to the appearance of *a new variant* of SARS COV-2 in UK which, based on the latest WHO information, spreads out rapidly all over the world. Again, what to do? It is necessary that the most important pharmaceutical labs in the world to continue to research and, if it's possible, to anticipate the variants, or other types of viruses. The miraculous solution for this new coronavirus and its variant is an efficient vaccine, which we all dreamed of.

Still based on the above-mentioned film, it appears the problem of diagnosis the disease: the fiction and the reality affirm that the disease, SARS COV-2, comes from the bat and from China. And this assumption, due to the fact that the new coronavirus is 80 % similar with a natural bat virus. And, don't forget a characteristic of our times: mutations and jumps from one species to another are much more common. Exactly as in the film, as we already saw, it exists the risk that the "freshly tamed" virus to undergo mutations (to have variants) that increase its virulence.

A very significant partial conclusion of the analyzed topic is that one of the famous Scot-American historian professor, Niall Ferguson who, in an interview with the German journal *Handelsblatt* (December 17, 2020), has sustained the idea that the economic recovery will be very fast BUT, after the end or minimization of SARS-COV 2 pandemic, people will be overwhelmed by a shopping euphoria and, thus, the economic growth will be ensured by the increase of consumption. In fact, Niall Ferguson speaks about installation of *collective amnesia*, through which we forget everything that was ugly, painful in past pandemics.

We are facing again with the psychological domain aspect, because people seek to forget pandemic periods, the lockdowns/quarantine and other negative effects regarding their lives and activities (apud www.hotnews.ro December 18, 2020).

Conclusions

The main problem/question is, however, how long we'll continue to use centuries instruments/measures, even policies, efficient in a manner and not to be prepared with other developed devices, vaccines in the first place, in order to stop/block, from the early stages of the possible pandemic the spread out of the disease and to prevent the social and economic damages?

We hope that, following the recommendations from this material, based also on the fact that the historical consciousness is very shallow, the next pandemic, disease, or unexpected event challenging our lives, to find us more informed and less vulnerable to various conspiracy theories (including, for example, those regarding the development of 5G technology).

But, it seems, now, that similar mistakes are still being made in societies. That's why we insist in considering the two faces of the analysis, past and future, because knowing the lessons of the past are very useful, in the first place, for those handling the pandemic, but also for the people.

Even in many cases, today, we can say the famous Socrates' words "I know that I don't know anything", it is mandatory to say "*but I have to know*" about the realities and challenges that surround us and the the spirit of Ianus Bifrons may last forever.

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