

Ignorance, the Hidden Epidemic Habits, Addiction and COVID 19

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Opinion

Humanity suffers from epidemics dating back at least 428 BC, where Thucydides describes for the first time and in detail a plague that struck Athens. For multiple reasons, infectious epidemics have raged since Greek times, generating more concern and more attention than other non- infectious but far more deadly epidemics. Perhaps the suddenness of its onset, the fear of the invisible germ, added to the apocalyptic tone shown by the media and the confusion of governments when managing infectious epidemics, contribute to this effect. The COVID 19 epidemic is an excellent sample. However, statistics show that contrary to popular beliefs, the number of deaths does not place COVID 19 in the number one fatality position. Even more paradoxical is that the same citizens who are distressed by the epidemic infection of the moment, completely ignore the non-infectious epidemics they suffer, that are much more lethal [1] and that we have suffered for decades.

It is often said that the flapping of a butterfly over time can generate a tsunami. Similar consequences occur with those addictions that begin as a tiny gesture of rebellion [2] Adolescents and young adults generally exhibit higher rates of experimental use and substance use disorders than older adults [3]. Those excesses or transgressions, which seem to have no prima facie harmful consequences. Or a mere harmful habit that, because it has very long-term consequences, we do not have the ability to accurately measure those future consequences. Nietzsche says that at a certain age man is responsible even for his own face. This means that bad habits such as excessive alcohol consumption [4], inadequate diet that leads to obesity, harmful habits such as smoking [5] that lead to COPD, and overweight that generates hypertension [6] are modifiable risk factors. It is those bad decisions from years ago, even decades ago, taken with the lightness of butterfly flapping, which end up being predictive factors of a higher risk of mortality [7,8] when affected by SARS COV2 and its fearsome disease COVID 19. On the other hand, we have our states spending huge sums to stop its spread. Economies are bankrupt [9,10], healthcare systems collapse [11] and the death toll continues to grow. We are in a boat, with a rusty hull, leaks everywhere. And now we see that our hands are not enough to cover the holes. How different would our society be, if our educational and health systems work with more clarity and intensity to seriously educate our children and adolescents, effectively teaching how to correctly quantify the future weight of their current decisions. Perhaps we could prevent or mitigate these epidemics of obesity, hypertension, diabetes, COPD, and addictions. But not. Our states decide not to educate seriously, not innovatively, much less, in depth. Like Gatopardo, they change some things, so as not to change anything. It seems that for the state (and also for some citizens) it is better to cure than to prevent, notoriously visible in the absurd position of the anti-vaccines.

Our states and their health systems appear on the scene to place patients with severe COVID in mechanical ventilation. When we find out, it is too late. Forever. Let's admit that our society (state and citizens), glorifies the culture of sports, music, social media, or film success. Superficiality prevails over substantiality. We live in a society that encourages appearance, the visible, the aesthetic, the instantaneous. A thousand photos and no books. We dedicate hundreds of hours of effort to improve our physical appearance, even with anabolics and harmful supplements for a good selfie, we invest money and time in our aesthetics to win the approval of others, we eagerly seek jobs and more jobs, which liquefy our mental health, but we benefit from the means to possess this or that material good. Accumulation is the goal. Frustration is the majority result. Depression is the consequence. Addictions are the quick way out. And there, the circle of life is over, because death appears. Game over. And with the epidemic of illicit addictions out of control, the state appears again, but now to repress, judge, and condemn.

The impression remains that stimulating intellectual development, valuing the cultivation of the mind, critical thinking, educating the care of physical and mental health, are tasks ignored or directly despised by citizens, society, and the state itself. Why? Why does our society ignore what the Greeks busily cultivated 2,500 years ago? It is true that the adult citizen should be free to choose what to do with his body and mind. But there is no freedom, if previously there is no full education, which allows one to enjoy that freedom of choice. Whoever makes crucial decisions in the middle of adolescence, without the anticipated and sufficient information required, does not do so from freedom, they do so from the vulnerability of the ignorant. The question that arises then is, if this COVID 19 epidemic may serve to show what is hidden under the rug, given the incessant growth of harmful habits and addictions that are epidemic and increasingly lethal. Will it serve to show us that we are living an epidemic of ignorance?

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