

Diari de les idees 18 - Special issue on coronavirus



Given the magnitude of the Covid-19 pandemic that is ravaging the world, from the Centre d'Estudis de Temes Contemporanis (CETC) we have considered appropriate to dedicate a special issue of the *Diari de les Idees* to the coronavirus and its impact. This dossier has been made from a selection of articles published, mainly, in international, Spanish and Catalan media. The content of this edition of the *Diari de les idees* has been prepared entirely and for the first time in telework mode by the different members of the CETC team.

The expansion of Covid-19 throughout the planet has revealed the deficiencies in front of a pandemic of the multilateral health system redesigned after the outbreak of SARS in 2005, insofar as the number of victims do not stop growing day after day. According to the count (updated every day) of the Center for Systems Science and Engineering of the [John Hopkins University](#), yesterday the total number of infected people was of 215,001, the number of healed 83,313 and the number of deaths 8,849. The same source reveals that the average mortality rate is of 4.12% and the healing rate 38.75%, while the rate of people still infected is 57.13%. The incidence of the virus, however, presents significant differences, especially regarding the mortality rate. Thus, and by limiting ourselves to some European countries, we see how at one extreme we have Italy with 35,713 cases and 2,978 deaths, which supposes a mortality rate of 8.34% and in the other one Germany that has 12,327 cases but with a mortality rate of 0.23% while Spain is at an intermediate point with 13,910 cases and a mortality rate of 4.48% (much higher however than in France, where the number of cases is 9,134 and the mortality rate 1.64%). As for Spain, the Community of

Madrid is the one with the most patients with 5,637 positive cases and 390 deaths, while in Catalonia there are 2,076 infected people and 55 deaths. Those interested can follow the evolution of the pandemic in real time in *Politico* magazine.

Thomas J. Bollyky and Yanzhong Huang write in *Foreign Policy* that the coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the weaknesses of an international system built around the World Health Organization (WHO). An institution of the United Nations System that responds to the interests of the Member States and that has failed in leading the fight against the virus and coordinating efficiently the international system against the pandemic. WHO has the capacity to criticize and compel States to act to take efficient measures to stop proliferation, but so far, its inoperativeness and passivity has been resounding. Therefore, once this crisis is overcome, it will be to analyze and reformulate the role of WHO and transform the institution to make it more efficient in the face of future similar global health crises. From the political point of view and in the absence of an international and coordinated response, one of the most relevant aspects of the impact of the pandemic is the relevance and the new role of the nation-state in responding to the health crisis. Citizens throughout the world look to the State for measures, guidance, protection and salvation in the face of a viral emergency. Whether through the health system, guaranteeing supplies, or through coercive and restrictive measures of individual liberties like compulsory confinement, the State as modern Leviathan appears again as the repository of all power and as the only essential structure to guarantee our security. In this sense, the weakness of the neoliberal discourse calling for market validity is appalling when a crisis of these characteristics breaks out, as pointed out in this article in *The Atlantic* and how all eyes are turned into the public services at the same time as they deal with this systemic and global crisis..

By the same token, Stephen M. Walt writes in *Foreign Policy* that the current health emergency reminds us that states continue to be the main actors in global politics, and that although the more structural versions of realism tend to relativize differences between states, responses to the coronavirus outbreak so far expose the strengths and weaknesses of the different types of regimes. Moreover, in the pages of *The Independent*, Kerry Brown warns that with the excuse of maintaining security during the crisis, the surveillance and social control technologies used in China are also a way to guarantee the stability, control and power of the Communist Party, and yet they have popular acceptance as long as these measures are efficient.

The coronavirus pandemic is undoubtedly a litmus test for the different political models and systems at play. From the pages of *El País*, Mária Martínez-Bascuñán points out that one of the key elements is the battle between political orders and their internal reorganization. We thus find ourselves in front of an important geopolitical crossroad conditioned by the competition between the US and China, the two superpowers that exemplify antagonistic models of social and political organization. The battle against the pandemic will also condition the self-esteem of the liberal democracies of the West and their role in the world, in contrast to the authoritarian and centralized political system of the People's Republic of China. In an interview in *La Vanguardia*, the researcher from the London School of Economics Yu Jie hammers the point and stresses that the Chinese believe more in the

heavy-handed approach than in freedom, so they prefer an authoritarian state that is capable of controlling the virus. She also emphasizes “*that maybe the issue at stake is that maybe democracy does not generate prosperity but prosperity is generated in spite of democracy.*” A provocative statement that exemplifies the conflict between the two political models in this context of crisis..

Natália Faria in the Portuguese newspaper *Público* points out that the idea that the complexity of relations and social and political problems requires a strong government is beginning to take root and that the national-populist critique of the functioning of democracy revives ancient fears. The Covid-19 can ultimately reinforce narratives of a messianic or autarchic nature. In *El País* Lluís Bassets also warns that when the crisis is over, there will be a comparison between the results obtained by everyone, from decentralized and democratic governments to authoritarian and centralized ones to see which one managed best the crisis. This diagnosis is shared by *Josep Ramoneda* who expresses his fear that the coronavirus episode could have already reinforced the seductive capacity of authoritarianism in front of fear. If this model has the upper hand, the big loser will be democracy, as the Chinese model will appear to everyone as the only reliable one.

A pandemic that has its epicenter now in Europe with an exponential growth of infections in Italy and in Spain reveals the continent is again subjected to a difficult test and doomed to a permanent crisis. In this sense, the impact of Covid-19 on the European project has revealed the lack of coordinated response from the different member states. The closure of the EU’s external borders, the re-establishment of border controls within the Schengen area and the lack of synchronization in measures such as the confinement of the population are signs of the lack of European leadership. This is stated in *Politico* by Matthew Karnitschnig where he denounces that the coronavirus crisis has caught Europe off guard since European leaders did not expect an impact of this magnitude. European institutions, such as the Commission, are not empowered to act on issues that directly affect the health of citizens or their safety, and an institution such as the European Central Bank is poorly equipped to respond to problems arising from the decrease in the supply that the European economy will suffer due to the expansion of the coronavirus. Merkel’s leadership once again, setting an example of public response and guaranteeing the necessary financial means, beyond deficits, has set the way for the other countries.

Centralization of power to respond to the health emergency is also the recipe that the Spanish government of Pedro Sánchez has activated to cope with the exponential growth of infected people throughout the country. The declaration of the state of alarm, recentralizing the main competences and ignoring that matters such as health or security are the responsibility of the autonomous regions, in this case of the *Generalitat*, once again reveals a political culture obsessed with a unitary, uniform and homogenizing conception of the state that does not respect the principles of self-government or the efficiency of subsidiarity and that evades any principle of loyalty and federal or regional cooperation. As Joan Ramon Resina argues in *Vilaweb*, with this decision that *de facto* suspends constitutional guarantees and definitively erases the fiction of Spain as the state of the autonomies, Sánchez simulates an energy that he has been lacking that he borrows from the rancid Spanish tradition. There will be time to analyze and criticize these measures, not for being

but for being inadequate, and which deserve to be questioned.

According to the signs of the times, this global health crisis also does not escape from false rumors and *fake news*. As Yanzhon Huang relates in *Foreign Affairs*, or Carme Colomina in a CIDOB note the impact of the virus's eruption has caused the proliferation of theories that attribute the appearance of the virus to the growing tension between the US and China. This climate of uncertainty and mistrust between the two superpowers has caused crossed accusations from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs or from President Trump himself who have contributed to create the appearance of a biological warfare orchestrated by military laboratories. For this reason, it is important to highlight the contribution of the prestigious journal *Nature* which publishes an article refuting any conspiracy theory about the alleged artificial origin of the coronavirus. This text describes that the genomic evidence of SARS-CoV2 and the study of its components, such as proteins, are the result of natural selection processes and that in no case it has been artificially created in a laboratory. Most likely, it has an animal origin (bat or pangolin) and has been transmitted to humans in the Wuhan market.

The global health emergency such as the one we are experiencing also has social and human repercussions, while the fear of contagion and the drastic decrease in direct personal relationships due to confinement measures, affect us considerably as individuals and as a society. Angelo Orsi analyzes in *MicroMega* the current crisis and stresses two aspects of human behavior: on the one hand, we are witnessing an increase in altruism, dedication to the common good and solidarity, but on the other hand we are seeing scenes of individualism and selfishness or in some cases explicit manifestations of racism. Teresa Simeone stresses that this virus tests us as individuals and as a society and affirms that Covid-19 is also an ethical and existential challenge insofar as its diffusion is capable of radically modifying human relationships, which are always paradoxical. This is a founding moment where uncertainty becomes a breeding ground for both the great virtues of human genius, solidarity, and for the most extreme individualism.

Another very relevant aspect of the Covid-19 is the enormous impact it is already having on the global economy, as shown by the fact that a few days after the epidemic hit Italy, the Frankfurt Stock Exchange experienced the biggest drop since the attacks of September 11 and lost a 7.94%, while those of London and Paris respectively lost 7.69% and 8.39%. Foreseeing this scenario in early March the United States Federal Reserve lowered interest rates before its annual meeting on monetary policy, as have the central banks of Australia, Canada and Indonesia and it is expected that the Bank of England and the European Central Bank will soon join the initiative. However, according to *The Economist* monetary policy cannot repair broken supply chains or encourage companies and individuals to start new projects. These obvious limitations help to explain why the stock markets have not improved their results after the lowering of interest rates decreed by the Fed. The same newspaper also points out that in rich countries most of the economic effort is been directed at calming the financial markets. There are also several articles that point to the growing tension between health policy and economic policy, while the first aims to reduce the peak of the epidemic the second wants to minimize the time factories will be closed sick leaves. The debate on how to find a balance point is played out by most European

governments.

In the French magazine *Marianne*, Gaël Giraud, economist and research director at the French CNRS warns that the pandemic is paralyzing a large part of the world economy, including the Chinese, which represents 20% of world GDP, the north of Italy, which is one of the richest regions in the world, the Spanish economy and increasingly also the economy of France. Considering the massive asset sales that are taking place and the oil price war that has started in Saudi Arabia, he considers that a new financial crisis is likely to occur with a direct impact on world GDP. Financial markets should be very resilient and very cautious, waiting to see how the crisis evolves and prevent panic from causing a much more serious aggravation. The concern about the impact of Covid-19 on the economy is shared by Frédéric Lordon que en un llarg article publicat a *Le Monde Diplomatique*, significantly entitled "Coronakrach", warns that if up to now financial crises have been unique events restricted to their own sphere (the sphere of markets, banks, etc.) now the current situation offers as a remarkable and unprecedented feature that the financial crisis is not isolated, but is presented as the metonymy of a multitude of sectorial crises that are synchronized: the crises of neoliberalism in the process of fusion-totalization; the climate and energy crisis or the construction around the Chinese syndrome. Hospitals, schools, research: as in the case of finances, we can say that the virus is the last straw for institutions already very weakened by neoliberalism and that an additional tension would lead to its collapse. Ultimately, he warns that the coronakrach will not be simply a financial meltdown but a general shock: everything that was about to break could finally collapse.

Within a context that can lead to a severe recession the board of the European Central Bank has met urgently and has approved to expand on 750,000 million euros the purchase of public and private debt until the end of year to ease the economic and financial impact of the crisis. To measure the importance of the decision, it is enough to emphasize that this figure is to be added to the 120,000 million approved just a week ago and the 240,000 million that the ECB had already planned to buy during the year before the pandemic broke out. In total, then, the purchase of debt rises to 1.11 billion, the highest amount ever reached by the institution.

As for Spain, Pedro Sánchez has announced that 117,000 million of public money and 83,000 million from the private sector will be mobilized as a first step to create a protective shield for the economy. In the absence of further details, it seems that the measures approved by the Government to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the economy will fall short. Logically, Sánchez already knows this, and in *CTXT* Emilio de la Peña states that the head of the Spanish government may not have said all the truth, on the one hand so as not to upset the European Commission and the markets, and on the other, due to the position of his economic vice president, Nadia Calviño, who fiercely defends the orthodoxy of not increasing the deficit.

Finally, it should also be mentioned that some authors see this crisis as an opportunity to try to change the socioeconomic model. In *Nueva Tribuna* Juan Antonio Molina asserts that time has come for the reduction to absurd of capitalism in its neoliberal version and of postmodernism as its metaphysical support. The coronavirus crisis puts everyone in

trouble. It seriously affects the health of all citizens, the lives of companies, precarious workers and the poorest ... In this context, from the pages of *Open Democracy* Laurie Macfarlane suggests that although it is essential to fight to keep jobs, the crisis should serve to mobilize resources to transform the energy, transport, housing and agriculture sectors, decarbonize production and consumption, and restore natural ecosystems.

The possible consequences of Covid-19 on climate change are also very worrying. James Taylor in *MIT Technology Review* writes that even if this outbreak will likely to reduce greenhouse gas emissions this year it would be a mistake to assume that it will significantly reduce the dangers of climate change. Furthermore, if the virus causes a serious global economic recession, this will surely lead to less funding to fight climate change. Likewise, in *Time* Justin Worland warns that the coronavirus crisis represents a triple threat that could derail the Paris Agreement against global warming since, on the one hand, it has interrupted the negotiations that were taking place for the COP26 and, on the other hand, the accelerated spread of the disease may lead to a change in the population's priorities and leave the concern for climate change as secondary. Finally, once the health crisis is over, the large-scale use of fossil fuels may well be favored in order to speed the recovery of the world economy.

Finally, in the field of new technologies, in Forbes magazine, Simon Chandler reveals that Artificial Intelligence detected the coronavirus long before the world population really got news of it. On December 31, a Toronto startup named BlueDot identified the outbreak in Wuhan, just a few hours after local authorities diagnosed the first cases. He also says that AI will become a huge firewall against infectious diseases and pandemics, not only thanks to assisted screening and diagnosis techniques, but also because it will be essential to identify possible vaccines and treatments for the next coronavirus crisis. In the scientific journal *A mela di Newton*, Andrea Meneganzin writes that due to this health emergency the scientific community cannot afford to continue with its usual mechanisms and points out that one of the aspects of the scientific culture that is changing is access to data. Many voices therefore warn of the need for data to be openly available to promote cross-sectional collective responsibility in the production, use, and dissemination of information.

Diari de les IDEES

International politics and globalisation

Thomas J. Bollyky i Vin Gupta What the World Can Learn From China's Experience With Coronavirus

China still has 92 percent of the world's cases of the novel coronavirus known as COVID-19, and all but 118 of the nearly 3,000 deaths from the virus have occurred within its borders. But the events of the last few days have shown that COVID-19 will not remain a primarily Chinese story for long. The number of new cases of COVID-19 reported daily outside China now exceeds the number of new cases inside China for the first time. In the last week (since February 24), more than 30 new countries have reported their first COVID-19 cases, including Brazil in South America, Afghanistan in South Asia, and Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. Almost none of these countries' cases came directly from China. Over the weekend, Washington State reported the first death in the United States from COVID-19, the first health-care worker to be infected with the disease, and, most worrying, the first known outbreak of the disease in a long-term care facility for the elderly. Other nations should take careful note of China's experience with the demands of a COVID-19 outbreak on the national health-care system. Here, the grim likelihood is that many countries may fare worse. This novel coronavirus has so overwhelmed the health-care system in Hubei Province, which includes Wuhan and is the epicenter of the outbreak, that it is killing people there at a rate four to six times greater than that in the rest of China. There are reports that doctors are donning diapers because they have no time for breaks and that thousands of volunteer nurses are working around the clock with shaved heads and insufficient supplies of masks. Meanwhile, patients with other conditions, such as cancer, are complaining of neglect. This shortage of care is occurring even though China is constructing new hospitals, taking whole hospitals out of general service and devoting them to COVID-19 response, and mobilizing thousands of respirators and other pneumonia-support equipment.

Thomas J. Bollyky i Yanzhong Huang The Multilateral Health System Failed to Stop the Coronavirus

[This summary is not available in English]

Yanzhon Huang U.S.-Chinese Distrust Is Inviting Dangerous Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories

The virus's novelty leaves many unknowns. We still don't have a clear idea of its transmissibility and virulence. We do not have a clear idea of the incubation period, which could last up to 24 days. We also don't know how infectious people are before their

symptoms manifest and why some cases suddenly become severe. We also don't understand why some patients tested positive a second time even after they seemingly recovered. Rumors thrive on fear and uncertainty, and the outbreak of the novel coronavirus offers plenty of both. Within weeks of the pathogen's appearance, social media lit up with suggestions that the virus was a biological weapon—either a Chinese one that had escaped from a laboratory in Wuhan or an American one inflicted on Wuhan. While such rumors are not credible, given that neither the United States nor China has incentive to develop biological weapons, they are difficult to dispel, because military officials on both sides still view with suspicion each other's motives in building biosecurity programs. Loopholes in China's biosafety regulations only allow the rumors to gain more currency. And the lack of trust between the two nations—as evidenced by China's initial refusal to allow U.S. disease experts to visit Wuhan—is undermining efforts to contain the virus's global spread.

Rachel Donadio Italy Shut Down. Which Country Will Be Next?

"We are out of time," Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said yesterday evening. "We have to stay home." With those words, he announced the most stringent restrictions on freedom of movement imposed in Europe since the Second World War: 60 million Italians can now move around only for pressing reasons of work, health, or other extenuating necessity—and then only with written permission. Conte's announcement was a nationwide extension of measures unveiled the day before for swaths of Italy's north. And it was nothing less than a game changer. Italy, Europe's fourth-largest economy, has the highest number of cases of the novel coronavirus outside of China, a figure that is rising sharply. These restrictions are an attempt to combat the outbreak, to help the Italian health-care sector grapple with the virus's growth. Yet they are also an illustration of the test to democracy that this crisis now poses. What kinds of restrictions can governments reasonably impose on citizens? Who will enforce the new rules? When does denial give way to realism? What types of compromises will countries, and their leaders, be prepared to make? Soon, the rest of the West, the United States included, may have to ask precisely these questions. Italy may not be abnormal here; it may just be first.

Robin Wright How Much of the World Will Be Quarantined by the Coronavirus?

China was the first country to forcibly restrict the personal movements, public events, and business activities of its people—eleven million in Wuhan, the megacity and global epicenter of the *covid-19* coronavirus. On January 23rd, soldiers wearing black masks deployed along barricades at the train station. The government requisitioned stadiums, exhibition halls, and other large venues as quarantine centers; the rows of beds set up inside looked more like military barracks than hospital wards. To contain the largest outbreak in Asia, Chinese health and security officials went door-to-door—checking for people with symptoms. The lockdown was later widened to more than a dozen other cities in Hubei Province, constraining the daily lives of sixty million people. It's the largest quarantine in human history.

Benjamin Cowling Controlling Coronavirus Will Mean Keeping People Apart

In late January and early February 2020, China embarked on the most drastic social-distancing measures ever seen, confining hundreds of millions of people to their homes. This approach has been successful in reducing the transmission of the “SARS 2” coronavirus to the extent that daily case numbers have declined throughout China in February. Outside of China, however, such sweeping social controls will not be possible. The virus is spreading. As of this writing, nearly 30 countries worldwide have reported cases, and local transmission has been reported in new areas almost every day. A brief window of time remains for health authorities around the world to consider what measures they can take to reduce the transmission of the virus and slow its spread—once they acknowledge that containment efforts are futile.

Ravi Agrawal How Will South Asia Deal With the Coronavirus?

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Sue Mi Terry Can North Korea Cope With the Coronavirus?

As the coronavirus spreads around the globe, infecting more than 92,000 people and killing at least 3,125 to date, it raises an unsettling question: Will the outbreak spread to North Korea? And if it does, will the famously insular and impoverished state be able to cope? North Korea is uniquely unprepared for a medical emergency of this magnitude. With a crumbling health-care system that is starved of public investment, it is arguably more vulnerable to a viral outbreak of this kind than any other country in the world. Pyongyang is well aware of this. It has hermetically sealed its borders, suspended all tourism, quarantined all foreign nationals, shut down many public sites, and closed all schools for a month. So far, these measures have kept the number of infections in North Korea at zero, at least if the government’s official figures are to be believed. (Both the South Korean and the U.S. news media have reported on multiple suspected cases in the country.) If the virus does gain a foothold in the country, or indeed if it already has, the humanitarian consequences will likely be severe. But even if Pyongyang manages to prevent an outbreak, doing so will have second-order economic effects that will prove extremely damaging—and could weaken the regime’s hold on power.

Stephen M. Walt The Realist’s Guide to the Coronavirus Outbreak

The realist approach to international politics and foreign policy does not devote much, if any, attention to the issue of potential pandemics like the COVID-19 outbreak. No theory explains everything, of course, and realism focuses primarily on the constraining effects of

anarchy, the reasons why great powers compete for advantage, and the enduring obstacles to effective cooperation among states. It has little to say about interspecies viral transmission, epidemiology, or public health best practices, so you shouldn't ask a realist to tell you whether you should start working from home. Despite these obvious limitations, realism can still offer useful insights into some of the issues that the new coronavirus outbreak has raised. It is worth remembering, for example, that a central event in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War (one of the founding texts in the realist tradition) is the plague that struck Athens in 430 B.C. and persisted for more than three years. Historians believe the plague may have killed about a third of Athens' population—including prominent leaders such as Pericles—and it had obvious negative effects on Athens' long-term power potential. Might realism have something to say about the situation we find ourselves in today?

Tom McTague The Coronavirus Makes Politics Look Small

The human ego is programmed to believe that today's moment is of historic importance—because that makes the people living through it important too. We are constantly experiencing changes that feel significant at the time, but that shrink from the collective view the further we pull away from the immediate drama, as we navigate new crises and challenges. In fact, moments of genuine historic change happen rarely, and most of us will exist during periods of time that future historians will ignore.

Still, as the world starts to recognize the scale of the challenge posed by the coronavirus outbreak, the most immediate sensation one has is that this might be a moment that does not fade, but instead *grows* in importance, putting recent events—particularly those here in Britain—into perspective. For starters, it's hard not to feel like the coronavirus has exposed the utter smallness of Brexit. With the global economy heading for potentially the greatest shock since the supposedly once-in-a-century crash of 2008, the costs and opportunities of Britain's exit from the European Union boggle the mind—not because of their enormity, but because of their lack of it. In Britain, we have spent four years arguing about this issue, whether and how to Brexit, for what purpose and what price. Real understanding, however, comes with perspective. And now, as the outbreak spreads, one could be forgiven for asking: What was all the Brexit fuss about?

Peter Nicholas There Are No Libertarians in an Epidemic

"America vs. Socialism" was the theme of the Conservative Political Action Conference last month, though as fights go this one was pretty one-sided. An anti-socialist message thrummed through the halls while the crowds celebrated free-market capitalism over \$4 cups of coffee and \$20 chicken-salad sandwiches wrapped in cellophane. As the panelists likened socialism to a disease, an actual disease, the coronavirus, shadowed the gathering. One participant would later test positive for the pathogen, touching off a scramble that sent four lawmakers (and counting) who attended into precautionary self-quarantine.

Kerry Brown The legacy of coronavirus in China? A more invasive state machinery

For the Chinese Communist Party, the shift online by the vast majority of its citizens over the last decade has been the gift that keeps on giving. Once upon a time, the inner lives of its own people were as much as enigma to it as the outside world. Now they are increasingly available for scrutiny, correction, and in some cases, punishment. The use of vast amounts of surveillance in the Xinjiang region of north west China is the climax of this. Almost nothing could happen, and no one could move, without the potential of being observed, and, where it was deemed appropriate, intervention taking place. With the onset of the coronavirus earlier this year, such technology spread across many other areas of the country where it had never been seen in before. The justification for this was a national crisis, with the public able to grasp the reasons for the action. Movements have been monitored, and information about people's health and their personal lives scrutinised with far more intensity. Ways of detecting potential health risks from individuals using face recognition have been experimented with.

Manuel Loff A Peste

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Catalonia, Spain and Europe

Antonia Williams-Annunziata Italy: the epidemic vs. democracy

For an open society, Italy's new restrictions are without recent precedent and are similar only to periods during World War II. As such, Italy is in the forefront of open democratic countries fighting the virus. European countries are watching closely. The continent will have to adopt containment measures like Italy's, said Austria's president Sebastian Kurz. "It will be important to decide which steps to take when," he said. "You can close schools for one or two weeks... It will happen in other European countries. The decisive question is when to do it." The outbreak of coronavirus in Italy was always likely to be a challenge for the country's sometimes dysfunctional democracy. The semi-bans, rather than a full lockdown, reflect both the nature of Italy's society and democracy, where politics is freewheeling, where open debate is endemic and people are reluctant to be told what to do.

Sarah Wheaton How coronavirus will test the European Union

Coronavirus is catching up with Europe. For months, the Chinese epidemic seemed like something that could never happen here — neither the potential cause (contact with pangolins) nor the putative cure (an authoritarian anvil). For all the clichés about viruses not respecting borders, other scary diseases like Zika and Ebola have mostly stuck to the poor countries from which they came.

By contrast, the coronavirus crisis has started to look more like the European migration and financial crises: a symptom of globalization that can't be held back where it started. The exploding outbreak around the Continent — officially declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization on Wednesday — highlights both the promises and limitations of the European Union: a single, largely borderless market made up of 27 countries, each with their own governments, electorates, bureaucracies, health care systems and, as has become painfully obvious, national interests. For weeks, officials in Brussels and national capitals have called for pan-European coordination. Yet even as Italy, the bloc's third largest economy, embraces a made-in-China solution — putting the entire country under preventative lockdown — the *modus operandi* across the EU remains fragmented and reactive.

Francesc de Carreras Frente al coronavirus: colaborar

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The Observer view Coronavirus crisis shows how much we need experts

This government is not a fan of experts. For months, it has repeatedly ignored warnings from scientists, trade experts and economists about the impact of a hard Brexit on the country's economic wellbeing and security. It has implicitly declared war on the civil service: aides and advisers liberally brief against "the blob" and its perceived resistance to ripping up a supposedly pointless rulebook. But thankfully — perhaps with as much a view to protecting its own political fortunes as well as public health — ministers have temporarily put their hostility towards experts and civil servants aside. Last week, we criticised the government's slow response to the crisis: holding back ministers from news programmes that had caused it offence; taking days to call a meeting of Cobra chaired by the PM. But as the government has moved from the "contain" to the "delay" phase of its response, there has been a marked improvement.

Matthew Karnitschnig The end of Europe's corona denial

What happens when you subject a flagging economy to a cocktail of geopolitical crisis, a pandemic scare and investor flight? Europe is about to find out. Financial markets have been roiled for weeks as investors tried to gauge the impact that coronavirus will have on the global economy. Those worries morphed into outright panic early Monday. The dual blow of a collapse in the price of oil — triggered by a dispute between Russia and Saudi Arabia over production cuts — and Italy's decision to seal off swaths of its north due to coronavirus triggered a broader selloff, the magnitude of which the world hasn't seen since the global financial crisis.

José Antonio Zarzalejos Fuenteovejuna nacional

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Antoni Puigverd Histeria y tiranía

[This summary is not available in English]

Le Monde Contre le coronavirus, l'UE doit agir vite et fort

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Sean O'Grady Greece was one thing - Italy may be too big for the EU to save

Over the past decade or so we've become used to Italy being in meltdown - now it is in lockdown, too. Together, these evil twins, represent a threat of potentially enormous consequence - for Italy, for Europe and for the world. The immediate news is that the Italian government has made the bold decision to suspend mortgage repayments because of the coronavirus outbreak. Italy's banking industry group, ABI, which represents some 90 per cent of total banking assets, said that its members would offer debt moratoriums to small firms and households struggling with the fallout of the virus. And what a fallout it is. All public gatherings cancelled, universities and schools are closed until next month. Everyone in Italy confined to the area where they live, unless they are able to demonstrate a need to travel elsewhere. The head of Italy's Democratic Party, Nicola Zingaretti, has tested positive for Covid-19. With over 10,000 infections and 631 deaths (at the time of writing), Italy currently has the world's second-largest number of coronavirus infections after China, and by far the largest in the west. Prime minister Giuseppe Conte has promised "massive shock therapy" to bring the economy back to life. He may be overdoing it.

Josep Ramoneda Salud y política

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Matthew Karnitschnig The incompetence pandemic

If the coronavirus outbreak has taught us anything beyond the necessity of careful hygiene, it's that the first victim of a pandemic is leadership. At no time in the past 75 years has the world been in more need of a "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself" moment; and at no time have global leaders so utterly failed to deliver. From Beijing to Brussels, from Rome to Washington, London and beyond, politicians haven't just failed to rise to the occasion,

they've engaged in a dangerous game of parsing, obfuscation and reality-denial that has cost lives and delayed a resolute response. Even though virologists have been warning for weeks that the outbreak could explode, political leaders, particularly in the West, did little to halt its advance.

Democracy, diversity and culture

Joan Benach El relato oficial del coronavirus oculta una crisis sistémica

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Marciano Sánchez Bayle Los medios, la epidemia y el miedo

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Santiago Alba Rico Apología del contagio

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Teresa Simeone L'umanesimo ai tempi del coronavirus. Rileggendo "La peste" di Camus

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Vasco Santos A biopolítica e o apocalipse em câmara lenta

[This summary is not available in English]

Lluís Bassets No es un virus, es una época

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Jonathan Tepperman Why Are We So Scared of the Coronavirus?

Feelings are, by definition, hard to put into words. So to accurately describe the anxiety now gripping the world is extremely challenging. Still, to say that people are merely scared of the novel coronavirus storming around the globe doesn't do it justice. "Scared" isn't strong or nuanced enough to capture the kind of fear so many people seem to be feeling.

The signs of alarm are everywhere, both big and small. You can see them in the faces of subway riders when someone coughs or in the eyes of an Uber driver peering above her face mask in the rearview mirror. And you can see them in the massive, disproportionate, and self-destructive responses some societies have taken—more on those below.

Adam Gopnik The Coronavirus, and Why Humans Feel a Need to Moralize Epidemics

Every plague must have its point. That's been more or less the universal human response to sudden or unexpected bursts of pestilence, of the kind that seem to put not just individuals but entire societies at risk, for as long as we have kept records, literary and narrative, of what happens when these things happen. The truth that there is a constant, unending, and unpredictable warfare between human and bug, which takes place in a state of moral indifference, at least on the bug's side, is somehow profoundly counterintuitive. This war, of course, takes place not just between human and microbe but engages all life on earth, with each living thing in a constant state of unequal warfare with microscopic bugs of all kinds, parasites and bacteria and viruses. In the face of that unending and often frightening cycle, we seek not merely material cause but moral purpose—a price paid or a lesson learned from sickness. When bad things happen to good people, we seek a cause; when bad things happen to everyone, we seek a reason, and it had better be a very good reason, on a par with the pain that it inflicts.

Isaac Chotiner How Pandemics Changes History

In his new book, "Epidemics and Society: From the Black Death to the Present," Frank M. Snowden, a professor emeritus of history and the history of medicine at Yale, examines the ways in which disease outbreaks have shaped politics, crushed revolutions, and entrenched racial and economic discrimination. Epidemics have also altered the societies they have spread through, affecting personal relationships, the work of artists and intellectuals, and the man-made and natural environments. Gigantic in scope, stretching across centuries and continents, Snowden's account seeks to explain, too, the ways in which social structures have allowed diseases to flourish. "Epidemic diseases are not random events that afflict societies capriciously and without warning," he writes. "On the contrary, every society produces its own specific vulnerabilities. To study them is to understand that society's structure, its standard of living, and its political priorities."

Máriam Martínez-Bascuñán La vuelta al Leviatán

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Yu Jie China cree más en la mano dura que en la libertad

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Milagros Pérez Oliva El món que treu el cap amb el coronavirus

[This summary is not available in English]

Angelo d'Orsi Lo shock (anti)democratico del virus

[This summary is not available in English]

Paola Tamma i Christian Oliver Literature for a lockdown

If you're in angst-ridden quarantine, you'll probably be finding it hard to take your mind off things. One high-risk strategy — not for those of a nervous disposition — is to dive headlong into some of literature's most horrific plagues, from Sophocles to Camus, to put things in perspective. There's some solace in the unity of human experience over the centuries. Big themes — terrifying incomprehension, the vulnerability of doctors and the emergence of cynical profiteers — recur throughout the years. Do you feel guilty about your obsessive addiction to the daily tolls of infections and deaths? Well, the English writers Samuel Pepys and Daniel Defoe shared exactly the same fascination. If you are ever feeling really down, remember Giovanni Boccaccio's cheery observation from the 14th century that in plague-infested days "a dead man was then of no more account than a dead goat." See, you must be feeling better already...

Natália Faria O vírus do medo já contagiou as democracias

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Economy, welfare and equality

Gaël Giraud Risque de crise financière liée au coronavirus : "Il y a 2 chances sur 3 que l'on vive une répétition de 2008"

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Branko Milanovic A great equaliser

Economic history shows epidemics are great equalisers. The most cited example (for which we also have most data) is still the Black Death, which hit Europe around the mid-14th century. In some places, it killed up to one third of the population. But by reducing

population, it made labour more scarce, increased wages, reduced inequality and led to institutional changes which—for some economic historians, such as Guido Alfano, Mattia Fochesato and Samuel Bowles—had long-term implications for European economic growth.

The Economist The right medicine for the world economy

It is not a fair fight, but it is a fight that many countries will face all the same. Left to itself, the covid-19 pandemic doubles every five to six days. When you get your next issue of *The Economist* the outbreak could in theory have infected twice as many people as today. Governments can slow that ferocious pace, but bureaucratic time is not the same as virus time. And at the moment governments across the world are being left flat-footed. The disease is in 85 countries and territories, up from 50 a week earlier. Over 95,000 cases and 3,200 deaths have been recorded. Yet our analysis, based on patterns of travel to and from China, suggests that many countries which have spotted tens of cases have hundreds more circulating undetected (see Graphic detail). Iran, South Korea and Italy are exporting the virus. America has registered 159 cases in 14 states but as of March 1st it had, indefensibly, tested just 472 people when South Korea was testing 10,000 a day. Now that America is looking, it is sure to find scores of infections—and possibly unearth a runaway epidemic.

The New York Times Editorial Board We Are Ignoring One Obvious Way to Fight the Coronavirus

At this point, the crisis also demands unorthodox solutions. To restrict the spread of the coronavirus, the government needs to put limits on commerce. The best way to protect people, and the economy, is to limit economic activity. That is an unfortunate but inescapable truth. Public health officials will need to impose quarantines, businesses will need to cancel meetings. And most of all, the problem now and going forward is making sure that sick workers stay home. That means not forcing employees to choose between penury and working while coughing. Congress can help by mandating that workers receive paid time off if they fall ill, or if they need to care for an ailing family member. Such a policy is necessary both to impede the spread of the virus and its economic harm. Roughly one-quarter of workers in the private sector — about 32 million people — are not entitled to any paid sick days. Absent legislation, they face a choice between endangering the health of co-workers and customers and calling in sick and losing their wages and perhaps also their jobs.

Guillermo Vega Teletreball pel coronavirus? Aspectes que cal tenir en compte

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Frédéric Lordon Coronakrach

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Simon Wren-Lewis The economic effects of a pandemic

The current coronavirus outbreak will have different characteristics to the pandemic we studied, and hopefully it will not become a pandemic at all. (In terms of mortality it seems to be somewhere in between the 'base case' and 'severe case' we looked at in our work.) But I think there were some general lessons from the exercise we did that will be relevant if this particular coronavirus does become a global pandemic. One proviso is that a key assumption we made about the pandemic is that it was mainly a three-month affair, and obviously what I have to say is dependent on it being short-lived. The bottom line of all this for me is that the economics are secondary to the health consequences for any pandemic that has a significant fatality rate (as coronavirus so far appears to have). The economics are important in their own right and as a warning to avoid drastic measures that do not influence the number of deaths, but beyond that there is no meaningful trade-off between preventing deaths and losing some percentage of gross domestic product for less than half the year.

Mariasole Garacci Dall'overtourism al deserto da coronavirus, gli estremi che si toccano

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Juan Antonio Molina El coronavirus y el fin del neoliberalismo postmoderno

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Laurie Macfarlane Governments must act to stop the coronavirus - but we can't return to business as usual

For the first time in eleven years, the World Health Organization has declared a pandemic. At the time of writing the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19, has spread to at least 114 countries and killed more than 4,000 people. Around the world businesses have been shut down, events have been cancelled, and economic activity has ground to a halt. Some countries have placed entire populations under quarantine, while others have advised people to stay at home and 'self-isolate'. The pandemic poses a number of challenges for the global economy. Without access to adequate healthcare or sick pay, many people have little choice but to put others at risk or face economic hardship. Declining revenues risk

creating potentially fatal cashflow problems for small and medium sized businesses. As with all crises, it will be those who can afford it least who will suffer the most.

Climate change and sustainability

Jonathan Watts Coronavirus could cause fall in global CO2 emissions

Governments should act with the same urgency on climate as on the coronavirus, leading campaigners say, as evidence mounts that the health crisis is reducing carbon emissions more than any policy. The deadly virus outbreak, which has killed more than 4,000 people and infected more than 116,000, has caused alarm around the world. However, unlike the response to global heating, it has shown how political and corporate leaders can take radical emergency action on the advice of scientists to protect human wellbeing. In China - the source of the disease and the world's largest carbon emitter - the actions taken by authorities have inadvertently demonstrated that hefty 25% carbon dioxide cuts can bring less traffic and cleaner air with only a small reduction in economic growth, according to a [study by Carbon Brief](#). If this trend continues, analysts say it is possible this will lead to the first fall in global emissions since the 2008-09 financial crisis. Even a slowdown in CO₂ could buy time for climate action and, more importantly, inspire long-term behavioural changes - particularly in travel.

James Temple Why the coronavirus outbreak is terrible news for climate change

It appears increasingly likely that the global coronavirus outbreak will [cut greenhouse-gas emissions](#) this year, as deepening public health concerns ground planes and squeeze international trade. But it would be a mistake to assume that the rapidly spreading virus, which has already killed thousands and forced millions into quarantine, will meaningfully reduce the dangers of climate change. As with the rare instances when worldwide [carbon pollution dipped in the past](#), driven by earlier economic shocks, diseases, and wars, emissions are likely to rise again as soon as the economy bounces back. In the meantime, if the virus leads to a full-blown global pandemic and economic crash, it could easily drain money and political will from climate efforts.

Justin Worland How Coronavirus Could Set Back the Fight Against Climate Change

This year was supposed to be a big one in the international fight against climate change. But the fast spreading new coronavirus disease, COVID-19, is posing a triple-threat to action that could derail the Paris Agreement effort to combat global warming, worried experts say. The disease is a challenge for climate change action on multiple fronts. COVID-19 has already disrupted crucial negotiations ahead of a November conference in

Glasgow that could determine the Paris Agreement's success in reducing emissions. The outbreak may supplant climate concerns in the minds of the public, weakening political will at a key moment. And it may encourage burning fossil fuels in hopes of restarting the global economy.

Frédéric Lewino Coronavirus : le réchauffement climatique a-t-il favorisé l'épidémie ?

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Yayo Herrero En guerra con la vida

[This summary is not available in English]

Innovation, science and technology

Dean Baker Las patentes ralentizan la vacuna del coronavirus

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Vincent Manancourt Coronavirus tests Europe's resolve on privacy

As governments around the world turn to tech to track the spread of coronavirus, some people are finding out the hard way that tracking tools can expose their private lives. In South Korea — where the state pings people's phones about the location of infected patients — one man was publicly pinpointed at a class about sexual harassment. In another case, an infected man was located in an area renowned for prostitution, according to the Guardian — leading to a hail of online jeers about his behavior. Think this could never happen in privacy-conscious Europe?

Javier Padilla Bernáldez Las epidemias no solo entienden de salud

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Karla Pequenino Google e Apple restringem apps sobre o novo coronavírus para combater desinformação

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Simon Chandler How AI May Prevent The Next Coronavirus Outbreak

AI detected the coronavirus long before the world's population really knew what it was. On December 31st, a Toronto-based startup called BlueDot identified the outbreak in Wuhan, several hours after the first cases were diagnosed by local authorities. The BlueDot team confirmed the info its system had relayed and informed their clients that very day, nearly a week before Chinese and international health organisations made official announcements. Thanks to the speed and scale of AI, BlueDot was able to get a head start over everyone else. If nothing else, this reveals that AI will be key in forestalling the next coronavirus-like outbreak (...)

Andrea Meneganzin Coronavirus: quando l'emergenza sanitaria promuove una nuova cultura della ricerca

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Kristian G. Andersen et al. The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2

SARS-CoV-2 is the seventh coronavirus known to infect humans; SARS-CoV, MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2 can cause severe disease, whereas HKU1, NL63, OC43 and 229E are associated with mild symptoms⁶. Here we review what can be deduced about the origin of SARS-CoV-2 from comparative analysis of genomic data. We offer a perspective on the notable features of the SARS-CoV-2 genome and discuss scenarios by which they could have arisen. Our analyses clearly show that SARS-CoV-2 is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus (...)