Cosmopolitan ethics

Ética cosmopolita

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Cortina A. (2021). *Cosmopolitan Ethics*. Mexico: Paidós. 2021; 206 pp.

In this book Adela Cortina explores some implications that the COVID-19 pandemic has generated in the world. She begins by analyzing and interpreting human reality with different categories such as care, fragility, interdependence, democracy, among others. She insists that what are often presented as dilemmas generated by the pandemic –such as choosing between security and freedom– are not real dilemmas, but problems to which we can find solutions. The book, in my view, seeks (as he points out at the end of the first chapter): *Design an ethic from sanity, from the sense of justice, prudent and lucid; from the indeclinable aspiration to freedom and from compassion, which is the true path of the human heart. And in a global world, that path points, like a compass, towards the construction of a cosmopolitan society, in which all human beings are citizens without exclusion* (p. 26).

Chapter I (pp. 19-26), «From death to the care of life», points out the importance of ethics, which deals with the ends of human life and serves to overcome instrumental reason. The need arises

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for the design of local and global institutions to confront pandemics, since the COVID-19 pandemic will not be the last. Fragility, suffering and death must be recognized as part of human reality. In the current pandemic situation, the need for an *ethos* and the presence of ethical virtues, together with the State and the economy, are the keys to overcoming the contemporary challenges that the pandemic has brought to the forefront.

In «The experience of vulnerability» (pp. 27-40), Dr. Cortina shows that vulnerability, understood as the capacity to be morally or physically wounded, is constitutive of human beings and that the pandemic has clearly demonstrated this. This vulnerability must be assumed, rather than avoided, as part of a good life project. She insists that, from the ethics of care, responsibility and cordiality, it is a matter of justice to care for the most vulnerable. The ethics of care shows us that humans are collaborative and cooperative beings par excellence. The ethics of responsibility emphasizes care, not only for those close to us by kinship, but for all vulnerable people. And the ethics of cordiality insists on the ethics of dialogue. This dialogue is not only rational in the sense that the interlocutors put forward reasons to seek agreement: *The communicative bond discovers not only an argumentative dimension, but also a cordial and compassionate dimension...; the human virtue par excellence is sanity, in which prudence, justice and «kardia», the virtue of the lucid heart, come together* (p. 40).

In the third chapter, «Caring for democracy, the weight of the intangible» (pp. 41-52), Dr. Cortina discusses the crisis of democracies or, as she puts it, the «democratic recession». The solution, or at least part of it, consists in strengthening the «ethical capital of democratic societies» (p. 42). Democracy, or the best type of it, social democracy, must not only address political rights, such as freedom, but also economic, social and cultural demands. Ethics must permeate democracies: there must be a civic ethic that goes beyond the legal sphere. The democratic *ethos*, in her opinion, must be worked on at three levels: a) The people who constitute the po-

litical parties must commit themselves to protect the basic institutions of the State; b) The second level consists of fostering a mature citizenship with the capacity for discernment, and c) the third level must create civic friendship and a common project to generate it.

In the chapter on «Security versus freedom?» (pp. 53-66), Cortina argues that this is not a real dilemma, but a problem in which new paths can be creatively generated that contain part of the two previous options, but overcoming them. In our world today, the tendency to prioritize security over freedom has grown, and this has manifested itself in the various nationalist populisms that have emerged in recent years, even in democratic countries. The author questions the effectiveness of totalitarian regimes or authoritarian measures to control the COVID-19 pandemic: *...to take care of life it might seem that authoritarianism is more efficient than democracy.... However, the truth is that authoritarianism is not only illiberal, not only infringes on freedom..., but it is also inefficient in saving lives: it conceals deaths and abandons the vulnerable to their fate, to their bad luck* (pp. 60-61). The solutions to the problem posed in the chapter can be delimited in four steps: a) strengthening democracies; b) eliminating the political use of the pandemic; c) attending to the development of peoples that gives authentic security, and c) promoting a mature and co-responsible citizenship. Another problem that arises with the pandemic is the preservation of privacy versus the need to monitor people in order to control or reduce contagion. If you attend to ethical principles such as voluntariness, temporality and reversibility, among others, you can overcome the false dilemma between security and privacy. A distinction must also be made between privacy and intimacy: privacy is of an ethical-legal nature, whereas the latter is more of an anthropological concept (intimacy is what is most proper to a person). The main danger for the individual is to renounce intimacy and live in «extimacy»; in other words, to be governed by what is transmitted on social networks and in the media.

In chapter 5, «No life without good economics» (pp. 67-88), the apparent dilemma of «saving lives or saving the economy» is po-

sed. There is no dilemma, as both health and the economy need to be taken care of simultaneously. The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity for companies to reinforce their ethical values. Business and society must understand that the generation of goods is crucial for a just society. Businesses, by fighting poverty and seeking to eliminate it, become promoters of justice. Once again, the synergy of the State, citizens and the business world is necessary to combat the injustice that the pandemic has brought to light.

How can we act? Adela Cortina points out that it is necessary to sustain (guarantee the activity of companies), recover the path of economic growth and transform companies from within; for example, by investing in research and development. She also points out the role of the European Union, where identity is given in a political social democracy. A certain self-sufficiency of Europe and the strengthening of its links with Latin America are crucial to achieve identity. Cortina points out that it is essential for Europe to take care of the most vulnerable, such as immigrants. Later, in the same chapter, the importance of cities in the development of nations is studied, cities being the most affected by the pandemic. It is necessary to construct an ethical discourse on the city. The reconstruction of cities is not only material, but must also take place in building just cities. Cities not only have exchange value, but also use value. In morally pluralistic cities, the just and the felicitous (different proposals for being happy) coexist. The former implies a minimum of justice that everyone must share in order to allow the construction of the city. The pandemic revealed several pending issues to be addressed in cities: lack of infrastructure and health personnel, poor care for the elderly, inequality in the quality of spaces in housing and neighborhoods, the problem of employment, homelessness, the need for a minimum income to survive, the empowerment of people and the need for hospitality. The chapter closes with some reflections on the «tele life» that was generated and increased in the pandemic. It points out its usefulness as well as its limitations, recognizing that there is no way to com-

pletely replace the personal encounter since: *...we are a dialogue and we cannot renounce the cordial relationship without losing human quality* (p. 88).

In the chapter «Gerontophobia: a suicidal attack on human dignity» (pp. 89-103), first of all, «gerontophobia» or discrimination based on age («ageism») is discussed. This phenomenon has been expressed, among other things, in the criteria for the selection of persons in intensive care units. The elderly are forgotten and their dignity is violated. The use of words such as «old» illustrates this discrimination. The elderly have been scorned in these pandemic times for three supposed reasons: a) because they are considered unproductive; b) because the world is aging enormously, affecting everyone; and c) because the disappearance of the elderly would rejuvenate societies. Cortina shows that none of these ideas is correct. She then discusses the difficulties of delimiting people's ages; that is, the arbitrary nature of when to consider a person as old, for example, with retirement age. Increased longevity is a good thing, as it makes it possible to extend people's life projects and active lives. A bioethical problem pointed out in the chapter is «triage», i.e., selecting access to health resources when it is not possible to provide them to everyone, as is the case with mechanical ventilators. The pandemic has shown the inadequacy of healthcare resources. However, it is crucial to plan proactively by scaling up resources and exhausting all possibilities to save lives. In the event that triage is reached, ageism or age discrimination must be avoided and prioritization according to *...the highest quality life expectancy* (p. 100). Assessment, in short, should be individualized and not consider the elderly as irrecoverable. The pandemic has also shown, in Spain, the inadequacy of nursing homes or care centers for the elderly. It should be understood that the centers are homes and not health centers.

Chapter 7, «Humanities and techno sciences: positive-sum games» (pp. 105-116), analyzes the role of the humanities and the sciences in shaping a political culture. Arguments for the alleged decline of the humanities are analyzed. C. P. Snow's observations

on the difficulty in the relationship between the sciences and the humanities are analyzed. Dr. Cortina summarizes Jerome Kagan's objections about the weaknesses of the humanities as follows: *they have fallen into disrepute because they have facts, but do not describe them, and explain by causes, therefore they do not allow predicting future phenomena and applying knowledge to solve problems; they do not resort to a controllable method… nor do they express their results by means of an objective and univocal language* (p. 108). Furthermore, according to this author, the practice of the humanities by minorities and women is a sign of decadence. Adela Cortina shows that the alleged reasons given are not true. She points out that a common objection is that the humanities do not increase GDP and, therefore, do not influence the development of nations and are useless knowledge. She analyzes the validity of the idea that the uselessness of the humanities makes them valuable disciplines, since they are not sought after for other things, but for the value of themselves. The author makes a distinction between utility and fecundity. Fecundity makes the humanities *permeate the character of individuals and peoples, making them grow* (p. 111). The humanities are useful insofar as they provide economic benefit, and they are also fruitful because *they design frameworks of meaning that allow societies to understand themselves…* (p. 112). The humanities can help to generate a cosmopolitan society where peace can be generated. The humanities make possible diverse actions such as fostering creative research or overcoming the trap of individualism and, thus, recognizing ourselves as persons.

In the following chapter, «Taking care of the word» (pp. 117-126), it is pointed out that the word serves to build bridges between people (speakers and listeners), but it must have four claims to validity (in the pragmatic dimension of language): a) intelligibility; b) the truthfulness of the speaker; c) the truth, and d) the justice of the norms. Attitudes such as post-truth and the ideological construction of reality are simplifications of reality, where simple «either/or» options are put forward, and words devoid of content, but emotionally attractive to listeners, are used. At the end of the

20th century, the need for an ethical journalism with goals that would give it social legitimacy had been raised. The goal was ...*to help increase people's freedom by offering contrasted information, reasonable opinions and plausible interpretations* (p. 121). In short, journalism had to be a professional activity that possessed responsibility in its contents in order to generate trust. The current century has seen the digital revolution, which has generated a «citizen journalism», due to the participation of citizens in social networks. Social networks play an important role in politics as, for example, in the 2016 US elections. There must be a regulation of the information circulating in the networks, without falling into censorship, but what is more important is the promotion and existence of civic ethics, to avoid abuses in the management and dissemination of information. Social media, which in theory are a means of strengthening democracy, in practice, harm it. The news they make available is often distorted or false. According to Adela Cortina, four measures should be implemented to consolidate democracy: a) promote professional journalism; b) cultivate media polyarchy so that *citizens can choose from among offers whose ideological affiliation is known* (p. 126); c) create regulations to defend digital rights; and d) educate citizens for the world of communication, so that they are lucid and responsible.

Chapter 9, «Democratic citizenship: reasons and emotions» (pp. 127-141), studies the role of emotions in shaping a democratic citizen. Four models are analyzed that can help to delimit the role of emotions in citizens: a) the classical liberal model; b) romantic nationalism; c) populism, and c) radical democracy, which, according to Adela Cortina, is the most appropriate response. This radical democracy allows for the recognition of emotions and reason. *I believe that an ethics of cordial reason, rooted in the cordial recognition of the interlocutors in a dialogue, could carry out this task to the extent that it would not only refer to formal logical mutual recognition, nor only to emotional recognition* (p. 141).

In chapter 10, «Cosmopolitan Ethics. The Kantian Moment» (pp. 143-157), Cortina argues that a cosmopolitan ethic is required to face the current globalizing challenge. She reviews some conceptions for and against cosmopolitanism. But what does this term mean? *...it refers to the idea that human beings belong to a single community, in which all must be included and which must be cultivated* (p. 146). Cosmopolitanism, although it varies according to the philosophical current that proposes it, has four common features: a) it is global; b) it includes elements of a normative universalism; c) it focuses on people rather than on nations, and c*) the global community must be cultivated by trying to understand cultures different from one's own and to co-exist with them, embracing a cultural cosmopolitanism* (p. 147). According to Adela Cortina, the best cosmopolitan proposal is the Kantian one, which fosters an enlightenment, more necessary than ever in our post-truth era.

Chapter 11, «A rooted and cordial cosmopolitanism» (pp. 159-172), puts forward the proposal that has been pointed out before: an ethics in accordance with our times of globalization. Proposing global governance and a cosmopolitan society is the ideal response to the globalized world. Cortina points out that there are already elements that support the creation of a cosmopolitan society. First, an epistemological cosmopolitanism; that is, having a sense of the world and what a cosmopolitan society should be like. Secondly, the Declaration of Human Rights is already an element of cosmopolitanism, although global governance must be created for its implementation in the world. Thirdly, civil society and business have built organizations that go beyond a State, such as the Red Cross or Amnesty International. Fourth, layered and shared sovereignties are already part of human reality. The European Union is an example of this. Fifth *...a group of thinkers is developing the political project of a cosmopolitan democracy that globalizes democracys* (p. 164). Sixth, from a legal point of view, elements have been taking shape that not only belong to states, but are supranational and protect indivi-

duals beyond a specific nation. A cosmopolitan constitutionalism is emerging. A seventh element is the goal of not only avoiding war and seeking peace, but also of generating conditions for the human development of all nations. As an eighth element, the need to build a cosmopolitan society implies accepting the principle of hospitality applied to the migration crisis. And, finally, an intercultural cosmopolitanism is emerging, which does not consist of imposing one culture on another, but which springs from hybrid cultures; that is to say, ...*with different cultural backgrounds* (p.165).

Different theories have tried to support cosmopolitan ethics. Dr. Cortina states that the *theory most faithful to what really happens is the one that realizes that decisions about problems that affect everyone should be taken dialogically by those affected, bringing into play their capacity to argue and to «com-passionate»* (p. 168). Thus, human beings are constituted through dialogue, without neglecting non-human life, which also has a value.

Although multilateralism has not been fully realized in today's world, it must be sought or encouraged. A common narrative must be developed. At the end of the book, Cortina points out ...*precisely because the challenges are planetary, the answers must come from those affected by them. Strengthening democracy in democratic countries, promoting it in non-democratic countries and laying the foundations of a cosmopolitan liberal-social democracy is the most appropriate way to face planetary challenges with human stature* (p. 172). This constitutes, according to Adela Cortina, a secular hope.

The book is rich in literary references and allusions that enrich and strengthen the author's discourse. Likewise, she exposes an enormous number of authors with whom she qualifies, corrects and reworks her ideas, relying on a very extensive bibliography in each topic addressed. The method proceeds in a spiral: concepts are continually used and reused, such as the concept of «democracy», adjusting them to the various situations raised by the author. It is true that the book does not add many new elements to the

debate, but it does exploit the concepts to the full, showing how fruitful and fertile the ethical categories continue to be in the current circumstances of pandemic and, as she calls it, of «post this pandemic».