

PREFACE

The Colloquia were held from September 13 to 15, 2022. This year, the biggest challenge for Brazilians was to rescue democracy, which would restore dignity, recognize citizenship, reduce inequalities and guarantee social well-being. It is a practical task to which critical thinking can contribute a lot. The central theme of the Colloquia was “Solidarity, public policies and democracy”.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the global health emergency situation proclaimed by the World Health Organization since the beginning of 2020 have aggravated and exacerbated chronic problems of unemployment, extreme poverty and hunger, while at the same time bringing enormous pressure on health systems. . The school system suffered a strong setback, with the suspension of classes as a strategy to prevent the incidence of cases.

All of this took on the appearance of a tragedy because it happened when the Brazilian government was in the hands of the extreme right. The execution of its neoliberal agenda attacked and reduced the social security system, with disregard for human and social rights. The pandemic found the health system in full dismantling of its primary care network. The end of the Mais Médicos program was just a visible part of this process.

What happened to the Brazilian school system from the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic was terrible. Millions of children and adolescents were left without face-to-face classes, and most of them did not have effective conditions to seek distance learning. Education implies socialization and two years of reduced interactions certainly have strong consequences for learning and sociocultural development.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the federal government's perversion of wanting to impose public policies without rational bases was evident. With each advance of the pandemic, disastrous actions emerged, denying the seriousness of the situation and refusing to fulfill the role of national command of the Unified Health System. This is not the place to enumerate this long list of deliberations and actions, but his contempt for scientific reason should be highlighted.

Another dramatic aspect of this contempt was the growing reduction of minimum resources for maintenance and investments in scientific and technological production. This at a time when the demand for the national production of technologies, such as vaccines and specific medicines, was imperative and notorious.

The Covid-19 pandemic also brought tensions and conflicts around the production, circulation and use of information. The dissemination of fraudulent news in the public sphere was one of the articulated actions of a federal government that refused to take its place in the national command of the Unified Health System and to develop public policies based on scientific evidence.

It is within the framework of the crisis of capitalist accumulation, with the global advance of the extreme right and the health emergency with the Covid-19 pandemic, that we can position the tasks of critical thinking. It is from this diagnosis that one can think and outline rational and democratic solutions, both with reference to the ideas of the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas and to the Philosophy of Information.

When Habermas published Knowledge and Interest in 1968, criticizing scientism, namely the conviction that the knowledge produced by the natural sciences is not one of the sources of human knowledge, but the only source worthy of such a designation, he probably could not have imagined that at the beginning of the 21st century the world would experience a vertiginous growth of denialism in science and that the refusal to accept the elementary bases of experimental knowledge could have political, social and health impacts.

Furthermore, when he published Between naturalism and religion in 2005, Habermas devoted himself to the need to respect the contribution of followers of religious beliefs in political participation in the public sphere of society, in a type of continuation of the debate undertaken earlier regarding the work of John Rawls political liberalism.



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Rawls argues that religious people can use arguments arising from religious beliefs in political debates, as long as they are committed to presenting a defended version based on arguments acceptable to all in the formal spaces of political participation. Habermas considers this an imposition of asymmetric burden on the political participation of citizens with religious beliefs, and therefore defended a distribution of the burden of translatability between religious and non-religious citizens.

It is important to remember these two moments of Habermas' thought because they are related to phenomena in today's global society. Habermas was concerned with the rise of logical positivism and its reductionist conception of science and its refusal to consider as worthy of consideration the contribution of thinkers, scientists and researchers who did not strictly follow what was considered the only correct way of doing science: the model based on formal and natural sciences.

Interpretive approaches that include emancipatory interests cannot be considered second-rate. After the debate with Rawls about normative conceptions, the problem of the contribution of religious citizens in the political sphere arises. Habermas recognizes that the contributions of religious people in the history of political thought cannot be ignored.

However, the ghost that affronts current democratic societies has other aspects, since the threat did not arise from scientism, but from its opposite, the open refusal of scientific knowledge. A major problem in today's society is denial of established scientific knowledge, with all the risks that this type of attitude can bring to the public interest. It is visible and noisy the group of people who refuse to recognize evident facts of science.

The antiscience group mobilized by the extreme right, although not restricted to it, has refused to take vaccines for social protection against the disease, to maintain isolation even when this seems the only way to reduce new cases, and even goes so far as to deny that there is a Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, they invest in delusional theses about the origin of the pandemic, and advocate that it is professional medical freedom to be able to prescribe drugs that are not effective. The issue is not so much the intolerance of religious in politics, but the massive presence of far-right religious in the political public space and their attacks on the essential premises of democratic society.

Some other combined phenomena should be noted. Firstly, the application of 10 billion doses of vaccine against Covid-19 globally by the first month of 2022 and its effects on the spread of the disease. Second, the Democratic victory, with the defeat of Donald Trump, in the US presidential elections at the end of 2020, which weakened the global extreme right. Furthermore, in Latin America 11 of the 12 presidential elections held since 2019 (except Nicaragua) the majority vote has gone to change the parties in government.

We are experiencing a crisis that is also an opportunity to discuss solidarity, public policies and democracy. Habermas said at the start of the pandemic: "Solidarity is the only answer and the solidarity response needs to be built through democratic decision-making procedures open to all concerned."

It is in this changing world that we invite philosophers, information scientists, researchers, educators and students to present their points of view with arguments in works that gravitate freely around the central theme of the Colloquia. It is not a question of constructing great totalizing idealizations, but of articulating mosaics of readings about current situations and problems. The pandemic, the economic crisis and social inequalities impose the need for rational, solidary and democratic responses and propositions.

André Coelho

Charles Feldhaus

Clovis Montenegro de Lima



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