Much faster than the corona virus, the fear of it spreads. This is a natural reaction that can sometimes save lives, sometimes endanger lives.

To prevent panic damage, the Creator or evolution has equipped us with a relatively large brain. Philosophers see this organ (especially the forebrain, which occupies the largest space in the skull) as the seat of reason, psychologists see it as the seat of the ability to solve problems by thinking and discussing, or simply as moral competence.

Panic can itself become a pathological plague and cause greater damage than that of which one is afraid. It is pathological when it disables any ability to think and discuss in humans. It can affect everyone, including politicians and other opinion leaders. In such cases the danger of panic increases. A lemming effect is created.

Panic can basically be triggered in two ways: directly and indirectly. Directly it is triggered in us when we feel directly threatened, for example by a snake that we think is poisonous or a person pointing a gun at us. Indirectly, panic is usually triggered by authorities and their multipliers (media) who declare that we are at war or in a deadly pandemic.

In case panic triggers there are three different types of human reaction. The first two increase the panic, the third can mitigate it and limit its damage:

1. Refusal, because authority is fundamentally mistrusted. Its arguments are not convincing or it has acquired a bad reputation. This also applies to the direct triggering of panic: one refuses to react to one's own panic feelings because one distrusts them fundamentally.

2. Blind obedience, because one does not feel able to question orders or simply because one is afraid of power. One does everything one is told. It is not your fault if you let things happen that cause harm (see the Milgram experiments).

3. Thoughtful obedience (I found this term in a 2005 ruling of the Federal Administrative Court on the right of soldiers to refuse orders when they are contrary to reason). Orders are obeyed, but also critically questioned, because it is considered the duty of citizens in a democracy to prevent themselves and the authorities from making wrong decisions and to protect human rights.

Symptoms of pathological panic

There are a number of definite signs of a pathological panic state:

- Rejection of all counter-arguments ("I beg you!" This and other quotes come from journalists)

- Prohibition of discussions ("You can't discuss this away")
- look and listen

- devaluation of established facts (such as the European Union statistics on mortality rates, EuroMOMO, which do not show any epidemic)

- Calls for "solidarity", i.e. obedience instead of factual information

- Attribution error: "We can't handle them all because we have too many cases." The correct answer would be: "... because we have not properly prepared for such foreseeable cases, because we have closed too many hospitals, trained too few nurses and bought too few oxygen equipment...".

- Wrong measures: WHO urges all governments to school closures, house arrest, cancellation of sporting events and all other measures to isolate people are not enough and would not be necessary if governments had started earlier to test all suspects and if they still did not provide enough tests. In its analysis of the epidemic in China, the World-Pop research group of the British University of Southampton found that the early detection and isolation of cases (as with any flu!) "prevented more cases of infection than the travel restrictions and contact reductions" (taz, 17.3.2020, p. 11).

- To perceive the catastrophic consequences of defensive measures as being trivial ("It is good to calm down for once". "Those fools who have to travel all the time")

- Refusal to learn from experience: On 3.1.2020, Die WELT reported on the unfounded panic over swine flu: "The enormous damage of the pandemic, which was not one. The BILD newspaper of 16.2.2020 reported on the "bird flu pandemic": "No bird flu (avian influenza) cases have been reported in humans in Germany to date. According to the RKI influenza report in the BILD, however, around 25,000 people died in Germany in the severe wave of influenza in 2017/2018 - the highest number of deaths in the past 30 years.

- Exaggeration of the danger: To date, 17 people have died of the corona virus in Germany (Mitteldeutsche Zeitung, 17.3.2020). In contrast, the much larger number of flu deaths is not worth reporting to most of the media. The official statistics of the European Union on the number of deaths (EuroMOMO) in the member states do not show any increase so far. On the contrary, this winter the number of deaths has been slightly lower than usual and has been decreasing.

- Other dangers (influenza, collapse of the food supply, domestic violence, destructiveness out of boredom, shops with hoarded goods ...), which cause disproportionately greater damage, have been ignored.

- Arbitrary extrapolation of trends ("exponential development") without considering alternative trends.

- Panic journalism: Many journalists intensify the panic. The quotes (*) above are from journalists. Another example: Instead of reporting that a positively tested teacher is doing well, a newspaper writes that he or she is "not bad".
- Exaggerated advices/orders: "Stay at home", where staying in fresh air and sunshine is very important for the formation of vitamin D by the body and thus for stabilisation of the immune system.

- Panic as a pretext for political repression (there is no positive tested case of corona infection in Niger yet, but the government bans all demonstrations with reference to corona. All other mass events are allowed to take place against it (taz, 17.3.2020).

- Pretext for complete electronic surveillance of citizens (see China).

- Panic accelerators: Under the pretext of not panicking people, no statistics are published on the damage caused by measures to contain the expected pandemic. However, this means that people lack an important basis for reflection and enquiry. What else can the panic threaten us?

- In the case of the refugee crisis, the democratic governments of supposedly highly civilised Europe have already suspended human rights. Corona could be the next occasion to reduce the protection against state aggression that has been so laboriously fought for.

- Some countries are already under house arrest. Here too, politicians are already talking about it. Our country is becoming a single prison.

- In China, all internet traffic is controlled for critical opinions. E-mails like this one are intercepted. Soon here too?

- The work of the parliaments is already being severely restricted. Sessions are cancelled. The government must soon govern with emergency decrees, like at the end of the Weimar Republic.

What to do?

A well-tried, effective antidote to pathological panic: Sapere aude! Dare to think! (Immanuel Kant)

Effective prevention

Against panic-epidemic:

Promoting the ability of people (especially in schools and universities) to think and discuss, even when fear threatens to paralyse them.

Against corona:

- Keep a distance of one meter from other people;
- Do not shake hands;
- Wear washable gloves outside the home;
- Wash hands thoroughly;
- Do not put your hands in your eyes, nose or mouth;
- Do not touch food in shops and markets,
- Do not sneeze or cough on anyone
- Contact a doctor or the health Authorities when you have symptoms occur and
- Avoid contact with people, disinfect all objects which other people might touch, best stay at home if you are tested positive.

According to my reading of scientific literature in Virology these measures are as effective as total isolation of people. Most measures beyond this are not covered by any science, but are pure panic measures (see above).

These effective precautionary measures cost only a little practice, but not billions Euros or Dollars like the current panic measures of many governments. In the past we had a couple of such epidemics which caused great over-reactions. They all have caused huge expenditures of money and big reductions of basic human rights like the freedom to move and the freedom of speech, and they all turned out to be an unnecessary panic reaction.

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Translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version)