

booklets

VULNERABLE BODIES

Caring as a Political Horizon



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José Laguna

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“We are all born poor and naked; we are all subject to disease and misery of every type, and finally we are condemned to death. The sight of these common miseries can, therefore, carry our hearts to humanity if we live in a society that encourages us to imagine the life of others.”

MARTHA NUSSBAUM, *Los límites del patriotismo. Identidad, pertenencia y “ciudadanía mundial”*.

José Laguna is a theologian, a musician, and a member of the theological area of Cristianisme i Justícia. His earlier contributions to this collection are: *And if God were not perfect?* (Booklet no. 99); *Taking stock of reality, taking responsibility for reality, and taking charge of reality* (Booklet no. 143); *Evangelical Dystopias* (Booklet no. 148); *Stepping on the Moon: Eschatology and Politics* (Booklet no. 162); *Seeking Sanctuary: The Political Construction of Habitable Places* (Booklet no. 174).

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet was written a year ago, before COVID-19 abruptly confronted us with evidence of our vulnerable condition, before we as a society became conscious of the centrality of the countless tasks that involve in caring for others.

We feel ever more impelled to call for a changed paradigm of civilization so that vulnerability and caring become society's fundamental pillars. A year ago, thinking about a society of care was utopian; today, in times of coronavirus, it has become utterly urgent and necessary.

The West has been constructed on the fiction of self-sufficiency. The ideal of western *man*¹ is that of the sovereign individual who has absolute control over his life and his property. Western man is a self-sufficient being who decides, along with other subjects as independent as he is, to form a preventive pact of non-aggression, thus creating the myth of the social contract that grounds the educational, juridical, and political institutions of our liberal democracies.

In this paradigm of self-sufficiency, growing and maturing are synonyms for continually expanding the spac-

es and times of one's independence. Childhood, old age, or sickness are considered defective moments to be overcome or combated since they presume situations of special vulnerability and dependency on others. In paradoxical contrast, those scarce biographical moments when we phantasize that we don't need anybody or anything are held up as the ideal model for a fully realized life.

The moral version of self-sufficiency, called "autonomy," suffers from the same individualistic bias. In its Kantian formulation, autonomy assumes that all persons possess in themselves the

sources of morality. In other words, our personal conscience dictates to us the moral imperatives that should regulate our behavior, apart our social relations.

The West has been
constructed on the fiction
of self-sufficiency.

However, as soon as the narrative of self-sufficiency comes up against reality, the fissures of its inconsistency appear. To begin with, we human beings have never been self-sufficient; we exist and we develop thanks to the help of other humans; we are an especially fragile animal species, condemned to non-existence whenever we lack the care given by others. As regards our supposed ability to conduct ourselves autonomously for rational and/or moral ends, there are abundant examples of persons who lack the freedom of judgment or action that define us as human beings according to Western norms. How is it, then, that such a fragile and questionable foundation succeeded in becoming the prevailing narrative in what we are accustomed to calling Western culture? Or conversely, why do the obviousness and the universality of our shared vulnerability, interdependence, and need for care not form part of the basic narratives of our social institutions? Care has never formed part of western political discourse. To take a classic example, not one of the 30 articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights alludes to vulnerability, fragility, dependence,

or care; the one possible exception is article 25, which refers tangentially to the need of care in the stages of maternity and childhood.

The exhaustion of the paradigm of self-sufficiency

Until a few decades ago, the narrative of self-sufficiency may have responded satisfactorily to the demands for recognition and protection made by autonomous individuals who join together with others through freely accepted pacts of non-aggression, but such is not the case in the epochal shift that has characterized change in the present millennium. We see the emergence of “new subjects” who are vulnerable, but there is no juridical or political discourse with which they can articulate their demands. We see voiceless, ignored collectivities such as the impoverished majorities, which are excluded from the community of dialogue where the joint criteria of justice and the common good are decided. We see the non-rational animals, which are incapable of arguing any moral end beyond their instinctive responses. We see the “planetary subject,” which is suffering the exploitation of its resources and the extinction of its biodiversity and yet has no voice with which to demand help from humanity. And we see the identities hidden by the dominant hetero-patriarchal discourse, which denies recognition and rights to those who do not fit the hegemonic pattern of normative gender. All these subjects move in a sphere of vulnerability that cries out for care. However, since they are not free and conscious parts of any

existing moral and political community, they cannot demand their rights, at least not according to the canonical discourse of dignity.

While based on the power of the human species, the “androcentric dignity” that has served as the foundation for the rights of “free men and citizens” has shown its limits in the face of the silent demands of vulnerable subjects, for these subjects aspire to recognition by virtue of the “cosmocentric dignity” that is based on the ethical principle of responsibility and the political imperative of care.

The cries of a planet on the verge of collapse, united to those of millions of migrants who roam through the world in search of welcoming countries, have woken us from the narcissistic slumber of senseless individualism. Mother Earth confronts us with a responsibility that is urgent and radical: if she does not survive, we do not exist. At the same time, the migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons make plain the fragility of an “immunological social contract”² that is incapable of establishing universal and effective rights of citizenry. These two realities, among many others, provide us with a diagnosis of the terminal state of the paradigm of autonomy that is epitomized most notably in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Political rights or private care?

Vulnerability, interdependence, care, and responsibility are the key term of a newly emerging paradigm. A new cosmivision is seeking to place on the public political agenda these vi-

tal dimensions which the former paradigm relegated to the private sphere of personal motivations or virtuous actions. In the paradigm of self-sufficiency, care operates in the context of so-called “imperfect duties” such as compassion, almsgiving, philanthropy, and hospitality. Such voluntary actions encourage us to help others, but there is no political or juridical channel through which they can be claimed strictly as rights. In a world of self-sufficient beings, no institution can oblige me to care for another, and no “other” can demand my care.

If we want to include care in the political sphere and make it a structuring principle of social institutions, then it must be removed from the sphere of voluntary benevolence and made to operate in the realm of demandable rights. Such a transfer would not be the result of lengthening the list of human rights; it would come about only through a change of cosmivision: it would require that we pass from the paradigm of autonomy and rights to that of vulnerability and care.

Like Boaventura de Sousa, we believe that the discourse of human rights has entered an inflationary stage. The steady increase in the panoply of rights (of first, second, third, fourth generations) has ended up producing low-intensity democracies:

We frequently hear commentary warning us against overloading the politics of human rights with new, more advanced rights or with different, broader conceptions of human rights. Such commentary is a belated manifestation of how the emancipatory claims of Western modernity

have been reduced to the lowest level of emancipation that worldwide capitalism enables or tolerates. Low-intensity human rights are the other face of low-intensity democracy.³

From the rights of a universal being to the care of a corporal being

The absence of a language of vulnerability in our juridical and political culture is not an accident. It is the final outcome of a hegemonic discourse that has systematically disparaged the accounts of human fragility throughout its historical development. These alternative accounts have always been present in the culture, but they have been consistently ignored in favor of an essentialist discourse that prefers to affirm an ethereal universal subject with bonding responsibilities.

The paradigm of vulnerability that is currently being constructed with the help of critical theories and subaltern epistemologies seeks to impugn the essentialist models of modernity. To affirm the universality of our constitutive vulnerability and interdependence is to recognize ourselves primarily as corporal beings because the basis of our identity, our fragility, and our need of care resides in our physical bodies. In contrast to an “abstract universal subject” that neither suffers nor grows hungry nor gets tired nor dies, every person without exception experiences the fragility and the inescapable limits of the body.

Critical feminist theory has observed and denounced the political

consequences of forgetfulness of the body on the part of substantialist patriarchal philosophy, which generates a discourse promoting eco-social irresponsibility. As Seyla Benhabib states, without “body” there is neither care nor justice:

Universalist moral philosophy, and concretely the universalist theories of justice, have accentuated our value as moral persons at the cost of forgetting and repressing our vulnerability and dependency as corporal beings. The networks of dependency and the fabric of human affairs in which we find ourselves immersed are bonds that unite us; they mold our moral needs, our identities, and our conceptions of the good life. The autonomous self is not a disincarnate self. Universal moral philosophy must recognize the profound experience that is the formation of the human being, which requires care and justice.⁴

The “substantializing” of the subject not only affects the philosophical definition of same; it also has ethical, juridical, and political consequences of great scope, because an incorporeal being automatically becomes a responsibility-free individual. Philosophy still has pending the challenge of conceiving universality from the perspective of vulnerability, care, and responsibility. “This point is important,” says Reyes Mate, “because universality is the touchstone of any rationality worthy of the name. Philosophy has not succeeded in thinking this way, either because it aims high and builds an abstract universality (as concepts do), because it conceives of universality as the expan-

sion of particularity (as empires do), or because it conceives of universality as only the sum of the elements actually present (thus excluding those that are absent).”⁵ The politics of care takes up the challenge of conceiving universality from the perspective of vulnerable and wounded singularities.

The paradigm of vulnerability seeks to impugn the essentialist models of modernity.

Our contribution to the elaboration of the new paradigm of vulnerability is situated among other analyses criticizing the narratives that have shaped the Western worldview of self-sufficiency and forgetfulness of the body. Starting with a prior deconstructive moment, we will strive to create a “so-

mato-political” discourse which, by drawing on the universal language of vulnerability, places at the center of social praxis the ethical demand for exercising responsibility and political concern regarding care.

In order to elaborate the political narrative of care, I propose that we consider the two key stories that have helped to shape the foundational myths of the West: “Adam and Eve” and “Vitruvian Man.” Analyzing these myths will help us to understand how irresponsibility and neglect of the body ended up crystalized in the model of the Western *man*. Deconstructive analysis of these stories will place us on the threshold on a new paradigm in which the icon of “Benjamina”—the name given to “cranium 14” found at the “Pit of Bones” deposit in Atapuerca (Spain)—will provide us with keys to elaborate a new social-origin myth, one in which vulnerability and care define us and determine us as the human species.

1. ADAM AND EVE (HIDDEN BODIES)

Along with other philosophical, scientific, and literary accounts, the myth of Genesis is part of the DNA of our Western culture. It captures the moment when Adam and Eve, after eating the forbidden fruit, suddenly become aware of their nakedness; they feel shame and cover their bodies with fig leaves (cf. Gen 3,7). There are countless interpretations of this passage, and most of them reflect on the motifs of transgression, guilt, sexual desire, or modesty. For our purposes it is sufficient to consider only the element of hiding. From the very beginning of creation, the human body abandons the scene: our first parents hide their bodies from the gaze of others, even from the eyes of God: "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked" (Gen 3,10).

Although in the cited passage both Adam and Eve hide their bodies, the cultural appraisal of masculine and feminine bodies will develop along divergent paths. The human male, in the wake of Platonism, will become progressively free of his body since its conditions and limits qualities such as reason, freedom, and will. In contrast, the human female will remain "bound to nature," the prisoner of a sinful body that is the source of passions and a weapon of seduction. The hiding of Adam's body will be accompanied

by his spiritualization or divinization, while Eve's body, in contrast, will be hidden under the weight of contempt.

Adam and Eve both feel the same shame, and they cover themselves with the same fig leaves, but it is Eve, according to the erroneous and prejudicial patriarchal interpretation of the biblical text, who with her body seduces and deceives the ingenuous Adam. We should notice, however, that despite all the efforts of artistic portrayal and theological tradition to present Eve as the voluptuous woman who befogs

the mind of Adam with her “feminine charms,” not one verse in Genesis describes the feminine body as an instrument of deceit or seduction. As feminist theology stresses quite rightly, Eve’s transgressive proposal is not of a sexual nature but operates rather at an intellectual and moral level; she invites the man to enter into the realm of moral knowledge of which she is the precursor. It is Eve who enables the first man to leave behind his childish moral heteronomy and set out on the adult path of free and responsible choice. She is the first human being who dares to think, reflect, and decide for herself, thus inaugurating the path that Kant praises as the apex of human autonomy. This narrative of feminine preeminence is immediately obscured, however, when they are expelled from paradise and Eve’s activity is restricted to the domestic sphere of maternity. She becomes a prisoner of her unbridled body, a body dominated by desire and submitted to the control of males (Gen 3,16: “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”). Adam, for his part, is “condemned” to labor in the public sphere (Gen 3,23: “The Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken”). We cannot, in the space of this booklet, investigate the genesis of these hetero-patriarchal narratives that confine women to the reproductive space of their bodies—and therefore to the domestic sphere—while they liberate masculine souls from the strictures of matter so that they can dedicate themselves to the noble art of governing the

polis. What we want to highlight here is the mythical origin of this dynamic that limits women to the sphere of vulnerability (body, fragility, suffering, death, sin, voluptuousness, seduction, vice, maternity, etc.) while it launches men into an essentialist orbit and makes the incorporeal, irresponsible male the prototype of humanity.

Eve’s transgressive proposal is not of a sexual nature but operates rather at an intellectual and moral level.

Despite their subjection, women became the repositories of a tradition of care that they have transmitted from generation to generation. Present-day feminism is now restoring that tradition to the public sphere, from which it never should have been separated. By neutralizing the cultural attribution that links women with caring, critical feminism seeks to give new political meaning to the practices of care, establishing them as actions that are essential for every social institution and every sexual condition.

1.1. The rupture of essential bonds

The myth of Genesis not only marked the beginning of the slide toward “incorporeality” that culminates in the Western metaphysics constructed at the cost of vulnerability; it also paved

the way for the rupture of two very basic human relations: the bond with nature and the bond with the other.

As is well known, the book of Genesis contains two creation stories. In the first, which comes from the Yahwist tradition, God-Yahweh creates Adam from the clay of the earth and then creates Eve from the rib of that creature of clay. In the creation story from the Elohist tradition, which is more primitive, God-Elohim creates man and woman simultaneously in his own image and likeness (Gen 1,27). Despite their differences, both myths communicate the same divine mandate regarding responsibility for creation. The Elohist story expresses it through the commands to dominate and subdue: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen 1,28), whereas the Yahwist account expresses the responsibility for creation in terms of labor: “The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (Gen 2,15). Assuming the benevolent interpretation of the creation stories proposed by Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, we will take these narratives as a divine invitation “to work and to care for” the garden of the world.

Following the papal hermeneutic of these first chapters of Genesis, we find the semantics of care and responsibility expressed in the divine mandate to protect, preserve, and guard the creation.⁶ We humans are responsible for a creation to which we are intimately connected (ultimately, all things and all human beings are made of the same

earth and shaped by the same Potter), but that essential link was dramatically broken with the expulsion from paradise. From that point on, the accursed earth will offer its fruit only after hard struggle with it: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3,17-19). Moreover, the enmity established with the seducing serpent marks the origin of the hostility between human beings and the rest of the animals (Gen 3,14-15).

1.2. The rupture of fraternity

According to the account of Genesis, the rupture of the bonds with nature leads to the dissolution of social bonds. Cain’s disturbing response to God’s question about the fate of his brother Abel, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4,9), presages the question that runs through all human history. In the context of the narrative, the divine question is rhetorical, and Cain’s answer is a delaying tactic; both God and the readers of the story are aware of the fratricide that occurred. The myth seeks not to resolve the enigma of Abel’s death but rather to establish definitively the transcultural question that throbs in the heart of every society: why should we be concerned about the fate of our brothers and sisters? Can it be true, as Zygmunt Bauman provocatively states, that there is no

“good reason” why we should be our brothers’ keepers or why we should show moral concern for others? Expelled from paradise, we human beings wander through history trying to hide from the divine gaze that reminds us again and again of the eco-social responsibility that derives from our primordial bonds: before being self-sufficient individuals, we are carers and brothers and sisters.

1.3. Orphans?

The ecologist Jorge Reichmann is right to characterize our age as one of existential “orphanhood.” Anthropocentric humanism has placed us outside and above nature, thus breaking the essential bond with nature that ecological praxis seeks to restore.

One of the fundamental principles of the brilliant humanism of the European Renaissance was precisely “a rediscovery of the unity of human beings with nature,” but the objection has often been raised that humanism is precisely what separates human beings from nature. What we need is a de-centered humanism, a humanism of orphanhood. Such a non-anthropocentric humanism is not the humanism of persons who feel outside of nature and above it; rather, it is the humanism of those who feel that they are within nature and are symbiotically building with nature.⁷

We agree with the diagnosis of Reichmann, although it seems to us his proposal of symbiosis with nature does not respond satisfactorily to the radical

question posed by orphanhood. We believe that the isolation produced by orphanhood needs to be resolved through the bond of filiation, not through some type of oceanic fusion. But apart from the terminological dispute, we agree with him in affirming that the new politics of an orphaned world requires the help of narratives of bonding.

Before being self-sufficient individuals, we are carers and brothers and sisters. How are we to carry out our fraternal obligations in a situation of orphanhood?

We need narratives which, as Adela Cortina writes, remind us that others are for us “flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood” and that that is very reason we have mutual *obligations*.⁸ What is at stake in the sociopolitical semantics of vulnerability and care is precisely our ability to reconstruct the vital filial relationships that the discourse of Western modernity has broken, ignored, or diluted. How are we to carry out our fraternal obligations in a situation of orphanhood? How can we treat one another as sisters and brothers if we don’t recognize that we are all offspring of a common Mother-Father (beyond the religious expression of this essential link)?

It could happen that Nietzsche’s superman, who in his bid for freedom proclaimed the death of the Father, will end up living under the progeny

of Cain in a society where a shapeless conglomerate of orphaned supermen neither need one another nor care for one another. I do not think I am exaggerating if I state that our neoliberal societies are not too far from the Cainite scenario.

One of the best contributions that religions can offer to the shaping of a new eco-social narrative is keeping alive their narratives and their traditions of fraternity, care, and vulnerability. Modernity has taught us that, in the absence of narrative of care, the only social myth available is that of the “contract,” but it is clear that “contract” and “care” establish very different social bonds and political practices.

1.4. Christianity: body and fraternity

As we will explain below, Christianity is one of the religious traditions that can make a significant contribution to the elaboration of a new somato-political narrative of care. It can do this, though, only insofar as it frees itself from the essentialist readings imposed by the theological discourse of modernity.

Christianity makes two basic affirmations about divinity: God takes on flesh, and God is Father. The gospel of John grounds divine incarnation in “historical corporality” by affirming that the *Logos* became *sarx* (John 1,14). The statement “the Word was made flesh” means that the Word became “vulnerability” because that is the radical meaning of the Greek word “flesh.”⁹ Considering the model of fatherhood with which Jesus pre-

sents God, Yahweh of the Covenant and Lord of the hosts, we are powerfully struck by the way it portrays an alternative masculinity that contrasts sharply with the patriarchal discourse of that time. Jesus presents God as a “dad” (*Abba*) who is concerned about feeding his children (“give us this day our daily bread,” Luke 11,1-4) and is almost obsessively worried about the fate of a prodigal son (Luke 15,11-34).

The hymn in Paul’s letter to the Philippians insists on the “corporal rootedness” of the primitive christologies when it affirms that Jesus relinquished his equality with God in order to take on the condition of a slave (Philippians 2,5-7). Before there existed essentialist christologies that proclaimed universal dogmas about a God who was Father, Man, and Omnipotent (all with upper-case letters), the theologies of the New Testament were offering “bodily stories” about a God who was a slave and a vulnerable dad (in lower-case letters).

If, as we have been arguing, body and fraternity are two of the conditions of possibility for constructing the political discourse of care, then Christianity offers itself as a privileged ally since it is able to recover the corporeal-historical rootedness that later theological reflection transformed into universalist dogmatics. The God who became a “poor man,” who walked along the dusty roads of Palestine, who was thirsty, who cured the possessed, and who touched lepers should not end up becoming, through theological reflection, a universal reference point for a “divinized human nature.” Also, the fraternity constructed around the precarious situation of

the prodigal son who squandered his inheritance living riotously should not be uncritically equated with a modern egalitarianism that boasts of making no distinction between Jew and Greek, free and slave, male and female (Gal 3,28). There is no need to change Jesus Christ, God become flesh and blood, into a metaphysical hero who is the bearer of a universal salvation valid

for every time and every place, even for non-existent, a-historical beings. There is no need for such a metaphysical christology, which presents Jesus as a man of the Enlightenment, more concerned about defending the modern principle of equality than about announcing the Kingdom of a politically incorrect God, where the last will be first and the first will be last.

2. THE VITRUVIAN MAN (DISPENSABLE BODY)

The Vitruvian Man drawn by Leonardo da Vinci around 1490 is one of the most significant graphic expressions of the process of *essentializing humanity* that we have been describing in these pages. Using the texts of Vitruvius, an architect of ancient Rome, da Vinci proposed a harmonious model of the perfectly proportioned human being, but we should not forget that it is a model of humanity that excludes women.

The iconic image of a *man* inscribed within the contours of a square and a circle spontaneously suggests two readings. The first stresses the isolation imposed by the limits of the geometrical figures framing the man. The drawing conveys the Renaissance vision of *man* as the center of the world. It is this perspective, says Gregorio Peces-Barba, that gave rise to the modernity that has elaborated the principles of human dignity and human rights.¹⁰ The isolated, solitary Renaissance *man* acts as a self-sufficient microcosm that contains in itself all the elements that constitute the universe.

The second reading considers the set of proportions that establish the

model of the ideal *man*. Their geometrical balance evokes a vocation of universality: the proposed model of *man* serves for all time and for every place. But universality carries with it a great risk: to the extent that it works with general abstractions that pretend to represent all humanity, it fails to define any particular, real human being. The idealistic philosophies that ground our social myths exceed the reasonable limits of generalization and so end up falling into an incorporeal universalism that defines a being that is as perfect as it is non-existent.

In their more extreme expressions, the theories about a universal *man* developed by the fathers of modern

thought would continue to be valid even in the hypothesis that no human being ever existed on the face of the earth. Such is the case with the epistemology of Descartes and the moral theory of Kant. For Descartes the *a priori* that is the basis of his methodical doubt continues to “function” even in the absence of the body: “Next I examined attentively what I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist.”¹¹ Kant, for his part, did not consider the uniqueness of historical corporality relevant for the elaboration of his moral system; moreover, he held that anything empirical could contaminate the universal reason that precedes the moral subject as a categorical legislator.¹² Joan-Carles Mèlich rightly criticizes Kant for believing that “ethics is harmed when it takes into account contingency, emotions, body, and finitude. Even if no human being existed in the world, even if nobody was moral, [Kant’s] ethics would continue to be absolutely true and universally valid since it never depends on empirical factors.”¹³

2.1. Without a body there is no suffering

As we observed above, the process of de-corporalizing *man* in favor of universalizing postulates has made a decisive impact on the ethical, juridical, and political systems that structure our daily lives. When a social system is constructed on the basis of a general “All,” it becomes immune to suffering and ul-

timately to death. “Philosophy,” writes Reyes Mate, “has not had the courage to look death in the face because it has been interested only in what is abstract and essential, that is, in the ‘All,’ and the ‘All’ does not die. It is the individual who dies, but the individual is of no interest to philosophy.”¹⁴ Western thought has been built at the expense of suffering, pain, finitude, death, and most definitely vulnerability. Both metaphysics (Kant, Hegel) and formal ethics (Habermas, Rawls) exclude concrete individuals from history, subsuming them in a universal subject that views its ultimate significance and its ethical duties from the vantage point of universal principles or according to neutrality-game rules that refuse to be affected by suffering. In contrast to such idealist abstraction, the somato-political semantics of care make the reality of vulnerability an essential part of the definition of human being. The wound of vulnerability closes the door to all philosophical escapism. The question of what the human being is must ultimately be answered by looking death in the face (the limit expression of vulnerability):

It is necessary for a man, once in his life, to go out of himself. He must one day, entirely recollected, take in his hand the precious fishbowl. He must for one time experience his fearful poverty, solitude, and detachment from the entire world, and he must sustain for a whole night the contemplation of nothingness. But the Earth lays claim on him again. He should not drink the dark juice that night. He is destined for another escape from the narrow passage of nothingness, so as not to fall

into the jaws of the abyss. Man should not cast away from himself the anguish of earthly reality: he should remain in the fear of death.

There is an urgent need
to recover narratives of
vulnerability in order to
neutralize the monocultural
neoliberal discourse.

... If philosophy did not cover its ears against the cry of anguished humanity, it would have to admit—and to do so with conscience—that the nothingness of death is something and that each new nothingness of death is something new, always newly vaporous, and should not be put aside either with words or with silence. And while the one universal nothingness sticks its head in the sand before the anguished cry of death, the only desire of a philosophy that proceeds from the one universal knowledge, have the courage to hear that cry, and refuse to close your eyes before the atrocious reality.¹⁵

2.2. Vitruvius, a man without brothers?

The self-sufficiency of the Vitruvian Man prompts us to ask how he can be drawn out of his self-absorption in order to take the path toward caring for others. As a self-sufficient microcosm, Vitruvius possesses within himself the sources of morality and sociability; he knows what he should do even when

nobody tells him to do it. That solipsistic autonomy is at the root of the ethico-political weakness of our current social systems. We have created moral, juridical, and political institutions that define and protect the individual duties and rights of the “Vitruvian Men” who claim they do not need one another. They are identity circles impervious to the suffering of others, the ones who ultimately call out for care.

Let us admit for a moment the veracity of the biopolitical fiction that all human beings are born free and have equal dignity and rights, and that we are gifted with reason and conscience, as is solemnly stated in the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. What happens when what is proposed there as an imperative becomes a question? That is, why does the premise of being born free oblige us to treat one another in a fraternal manner? Why does believing that we are all equal necessarily mean that we should practice solidarity? This naturalist fallacy (connecting “being” with “duty”) is the foundation of a large part of ethical, juridical, and political thought in the West. It is a fragile discourse that is beginning to show signs of exhaustion. The cracks now threatening the social contract that supports the edifice of our welfare states are evidence that the foundation was deficient from the start. Although the revolutionary triad—liberty, equality, fraternity—is presented as a solid system of bonding, the significant development of the values of freedom and equality have not carried over into greater doses of fraternity, for the simple reason that fraternity has a very different foundation.

As much as the West may seek to derive duties from an apparently objective human nature, we should observe that ethics arises wherever the suffering of others demands my response; it arises when the circumference and the square establishing the borders of predictable morality are broken. The elaboration of the politics of care arises as a response to God's question about the fate of Abel: "Where is your brother?" That is a question that the "Vitruvius Man," educated as an only son, cannot even hear.

2.3. The collapse of universality

We do not deny that juridical and political gains have been achieved by the discourse of universality. The generalization of individual rights benefits society, but we should not ignore the ideological inversion now taking place with regard to human rights. A per-

verse ideology is using the proclamation of the universal rights of human beings as an excuse for violating the real rights of concrete individuals. Is it necessary to recall that thousands of bodies of "free" persons, possessing "equal dignity and rights," now lie at the bottom of the Mediterranean, which has become a common grave?

The neoliberal market also uses the discourse of universality to justify financial practices that theoretically benefit a global planetary subject while ignoring the concrete individuals who are suffering in their flesh the effects of a predatory economy.

There is an urgent need to recover and restore narratives of vulnerability in order to neutralize the monocultural neoliberal discourse, which, while appealing to principles of solidarity and universal egalitarianism, ignores the de facto historical suffering of concrete individuals and peoples, and the planet itself.

3. BENJAMINA (VULNERABLE BODY)

In the year 2001 a group of paleoanthropologists found part of a very fractured skull at the Pit of Bones in Atapuerca, Spain; it was called “cranium 14.” The following year they found more fragments that allowed them to reconstruct almost completely that anomalous head. Cranium 14 presented a deformity that experts identified as cranio-synostosis, a rare disease that involves premature fusion of the head bones and that in modern times affects fewer than three persons out of every 100,000. After the researchers determined that the asymmetrical skull was that of a preadolescent girl, they baptized her “Benjamina.” The girl with the deadly disease lived a half million years ago; what is surprising is that she lived to ten years of age.

The question immediately asked by the team of paleoanthropologists was whether such an individual could have survived on her own strength in a nomadic group of hunter-gatherers. The answer was obviously negative. If Benjamina had survived for ten years, it was because the group had cared for her: they had fed her, they had carried her from one place to another, they had provided her shelter and clothing, etc. The case of Benjamina is not unique in Atapuerca. A hominid

called “Miguelón” suffered a dental infection that would have prevented him from eating unless another person pre-chewed the food for him; he lived to around age 35. A hominid called “Elvis” had a degenerative hip disease that would have prevented him from hunting, walking long distances, or even standing by himself; amazingly, he died an old man at age 45.

Benjamina, Miguelón and Elvis are palpable evidence of a strong bond of compassion in our human nature;

they show that interdependence and mutual care define us as a species. Our humanity is built on vulnerability, the first “social contract” in a “pact of caring.” If this is so, we repeat our questions: why is it that vulnerability, interdependence, compassion, and caring do not form part of our founding myths? Why have we decided to define ourselves as autonomous rather than vulnerable beings? Why does the fiction of autonomy obscure the universal truth of vulnerability?

I am not naïve. I do not want to paint an idyllic paradise of compassionate hominids ruled exclusively by the principle of care, nor do I seek to rework the myth of the “good savage.” Paleoanthropology also provides examples of aggression, cannibalism, and violent defensive alliances, but we can still wonder at—and be surprised by—the bias that exists in the selection of narratives that found our social myths. Why do we choose to keep constructing our sociopolitical fictions on a defensive necropolitics and not on the biopolitics of care?

3.1. Building the politics of care: narratives and practices

All political practices are sustained by a narrative of meaning: we build our social, juridical, and political institutions on the evidence provided by well-defined philosophical, epistemological, ethical, and cultural concepts. It is what Edgar Morin calls the “noosphere,”¹⁶ that is, the atmosphere of beliefs that envelops us and that attempts to make sense of the world. So if we want caring to be one of the consti-

tutive elements of political practice, then the narrative of vulnerability must enter as a Trojan horse into that noosphere where our beliefs are woven.

Why do we choose to keep constructing our sociopolitical fictions on a defensive necropolitics and not on the biopolitics of care?

Vulnerability, care, and interdependence are not simply nuances or sensibilities to be added to some socially accepted political practice. “Care” should not be just an adjective used to modify well-established nouns (such as rights, justice, democracy, equality). Care must occupy a central place among them so as to give new meaning to culture and politics. Care seeks to penetrate into the very heart of democracy in order to transform it from within. We agree with Joan C. Tronto when he states that the time has arrived for care to enter into the shaping of democratic citizenship: “The inclusion of care in the activities, interests, and lives of democratic citizens truly represents the next frontier (perhaps the last) to be crossed by the theory of democracy.”¹⁷ We propose to replace the “paradigm of Vitruvius” with the “paradigm of Benjamina” in order to derail the hegemonic narrative of self-sufficiency and recover the peripheral narratives of interdependence. Our self-definition and our social and

political organization must be based on the vulnerable, dependent body of Benjamina, not on the pure, responsibility-free spirit of Vitruvius.

For this narrative that is still being developed, it is important to nourish the semantic field that provides it with content. Out of a desire to bolster the significance of the politics of care, I propose to consider some of the political signifiers that are hidden behind the concept of vulnerability.

3.2. We are vulnerable

Vulnerability is not an accident, something that happens only occasionally to an otherwise immune, self-sufficient being. At certain critical moments in life we may be especially conscious of our fragility, but the truth is that at every moment of life we are entangled in an unseen web of relations of interdependence and care that constantly remind us of our constitutive vulnerability. We can argue about whether we are born free and equal, whether we possess a common human nature, or what is the meaning of the dignity we share, but what is beyond any doubt is that all of us as living beings are vulnerable:

It can be discussed, and in fact it is discussed philosophically, whether human beings enjoy a special dignity in the realm of nature. It is discussed whether their preeminent place in the cosmos is authentic or is simply a biased assertion, but what does not enter into the arena of discussion is their radical vulnerability. What unites us human beings, beyond our evident differences, is vulnerability.”¹⁸

Vulnerability, says Judith Butler, is a condition that cannot be ignored, overcome, or reversed: “By virtue of our bodily experience, we are from the beginning, even before individuation, handed over to others: this makes us vulnerable to violence but also to other types of contacts, contacts that range from the extreme of eradication of ourselves to the other extreme of physical maintenance of our lives. We cannot ‘rectify’ this situation, nor can we recover the origin of this vulnerability since it precedes the formation of ‘self.’ We cannot effectively contend with this condition of being ‘exposed’ from the start, dependent on persons we do not know. We come into the world ignorant and dependent, and up to a certain point we remain that way.”¹⁹

To build any social institution without taking into consideration our fragile human condition is to lay its foundations on quicksand.

A society founded on the fiction that we are the authors of ourselves and the absolute proprietors of our ideas, works, and lives will resist accepting vulnerability as the keystone for constructing policies and will consider such policies weak. In the face of such resistance, we should recognize that to build any social institution without taking into consideration our fragile human condition is to lay its foundations on quicksand.

In fact, our present-day “liquid society” is wallowing in the sludge of old ways of self-sufficiency.

3.3. Vulnerability and ecosocial interdependence

To say vulnerability is to say interdependence, and therefore relation. To define human beings as vulnerable is to recognize them as open to dialogue rather than to the monologue of self-sufficient individualism. While the paradigm of autonomy would “function” even in the absence of human beings, the paradigm of vulnerability makes sense only with the radical affirmation of sociability. Alluding to the thought of Judith Butler on vulnerability, Joan-Carles Mèlich insists on the social character of our corporality: “The body is mortality, vulnerability, fragility, heteronomy, ambiguity. Skin, flesh, senses, memory, desire—they all expose us, taking us out of ourselves and placing us before others. That is why our body is not completely ours; it is not something private but public. My life is not exclusively mine. We come into the world in need of hospitality, and this vulnerable condition cannot be avoided or overcome.”²⁰

The sociability inherent in our vulnerable condition signifies responsibility. Levinas is the writer who most forcefully expresses the responsive condition of every person. We are not born free and equal; we are born responsible, responsive to the call of the suffering Other. The divine question about the fate of our sisters and brothers pierces into the depths of every person.

Vulnerability is the obsession with the other or the drawing close of the other. It is *for the other* from behind the *other* who stirs one. It is a drawing close that is not reducible either to the representation of the other or to the awareness of proximity. To suffer for others is to hold them in care, support them, be in their place, be consumed by them. All love or all hate of the neighbor reflects and supposes that prior vulnerability: mercy, “being viscerally moved.” Through sensibility the subject is *for the other*: substitution, responsibility, expiation. But it is a responsibility that I have not assumed at any moment, at no present time. Nothing is more passive than this judgment prior to my freedom, than this pre-original judgment, than this frankness. It is the passivity of what is vulnerable, the condition (or non-condition) by which being shows itself to be creature.²¹

We are vulnerable beings called to respond to the demand for care by the vulnerability of others. Today the “Other” is planetary. I stated above, quite intentionally, that all living beings are vulnerable, thus breaking through the barrier of the human in order to place myself in a holistic paradigm in which animals and ecosystems also demand recognition and care. Vulnerability unites us with all living beings (human and non-human) in the horizon of “multi-species communities” that require us to deconstruct our concept of being-in-the-world. The semantics of vulnerability refers us to a holocentric paradigm that place the “unified-us” before the “autonomous-I” of modernity.

Advancing toward a civilization of Holo-
s is not only an option; it is essential
for survival. Fortunately, it is not im-
possible, nor is it unprecedented. The
type of change involved forms part of
the evolution of human societies, an
evolution that began with the mythical
civilizations of the Stone Age, contin-
ued with the theocratic civilizations
and archaic empires, and subsequent-
ly produced the human civilizations
based on reason inaugurated by the
ancient Greeks. Now the reign of Lo-
gos is reaching its end: the short-term
rationality that underlies the presently
dominant form of civilization produces
more heat than light—more negative
social, economic, and ecological con-
sequences than positive and humanly
desirable results. The time has arrived
for one more change: advancing from a
civilization of Logos to one of Holo-²²

3.4. Vulnerability: singular wounded bodies

The politics of care is somato-politics;
it is built on particular bodies and,
more specifically, on always vulnera-
ble bodies. It is the “wounded” body
of Benjamina that unleashes the ethical
dynamic from which flows the political
action of care. Such benevolence is not
some asymmetrical action that takes
pity on the deficiency of the other; it is
rather an egalitarian decision that ac-
knowledges our shared vulnerability.
It is true that some lives are subject to
an extreme level of vulnerability and
are therefore in need of greater care.
(Isabell Lorey distinguishes between
precariousness as shared vulnerability
and precarity as unequal political dis-

tribution of vulnerability.²³) However,
without denying the need to attend dif-
ferently to these especially precarious
situations, somato-politics affirms that
every body has scars and that the ide-
alized body of Vitruvius does not exist.
Although our utopian nature constant-
ly projects ideal models of life, we
should not build our social existence
on the tales of immortal heroes.

In contrast to the
self-sufficient aura of
heroes, “the peculiar beauty
of the human condition
resides precisely in its
fragility and vulnerability.”

We have never been heroes be-
cause heroes do not live in the *po-
lis*. To be citizens we must renounce
self-sufficiency, recognize the singu-
larity of our bodies, and assume our
mortal condition. This is the decision
made by the classical heroes, accord-
ing to Javier Gomá. Achilles, the son
of the goddess Thetis, had to make a
choice: he could embrace vulnerability
and form part of the human polis, or
he could maintain his immortality by
remaining in the gynoeceum where his
mother had hidden him.

Being a citizen of the polis is to be
mortal because we must renounce
our own self-divinization in order
to enter the city. When we do so,
however, we paradoxically find our
authentic individuality in the world.

That is shown mythically in the story of Achilles, who is born of Zeus and the goddess Thetis and so must first learn to die—not desiring to die but wanting to experience social mortality as the inescapable prior requirement to become the hero he is. And after his death the hero leaves an example which the city blesses.²⁴

In contrast to the self-sufficient aura of heroes, “the *peculiar beauty* of the human condition resides precisely in its *fragility* and *vulnerability*. We are *the children of time*. We are born and we die in provisionality, in deficiency, and in dissatisfaction.”²⁵ If such is our condition, why not begin to build a polis according to the measure of fragile and vulnerable citizens?

3.5. Vulnerability and autonomy

Defining ourselves as vulnerable beings does not mean renouncing autonomy. We human beings are different from animals, though we do not want to deny the singularity of each member of the different species. We humans are not predetermined to reproduce instinctive routines or defensive reactions of survival; our field of decision is infinitely more extensive. There are as many life horizons as there are individuals. The plasticity of our ability to “construct ourselves” shapes us as autonomous beings who can project our own life goals. But our projection toward autonomy always happens in relation to our constitutive vulnerability. Lydia Feito makes this clear: “Autonomy is a task, something to be earned. We must seek to be autonomous pre-

cisely because we are vulnerable; our horizon, our objective, is the search for that autonomy. Our intrinsic anthropological vulnerability is thus not so much recognition of our weakness as it is affirmation of our life as project, as something to be built out of our radical finitude.”²⁶ Progressing from what we are to what we desire to be is the vital itinerary of every human life, and that “from what we are” is also called vulnerability.

Vulnerability has a
structural preeminence
over autonomy.

Autonomy, independence, and self-sufficiency are not starting-points but arrival destinations. The duality of vulnerable beings aspiring to be autonomous is what establishes the necessary relation between both terms. Adela Cortina, in her proposal for “cordial citizenship,” recognizes that the human desire for a life guided by universalizable moral ends is a final goal that acknowledges the unquestionable fact of vulnerability:

What exists is not independence, the watchword of atomist theories, but interdependence of equals. Human persons, *vulnerable in fact and autonomous in project*, need one another mutually in the fabric of the city in order to achieve their dominion.²⁷

Vulnerability has a structural preeminence over autonomy. Autono-

my does not remedy or overcome an initial vulnerability; it is not the case that once we reach autonomy (if that were possible) we cease to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is present and accompanies each and every one moment of autonomy's ongoing maturation process, so that we never stop being vulnerable.

Vulnerability puts autonomy in its place, removing it from the realm of a natural law that pretends to dictate what we are and transferring it to the horizon of an ethics that ideally expresses what we should be. This transference, according to Paul Ricoeur, places both vulnerability and autonomy in the terrain of paradox:

The human being is both the one and the other [autonomous and vulnerable], from two different points of view. Moreover, the two terms are not content with being opposed to one another but bond together: the autonomy is that of a fragile, vulnerable being. Such fragility is thus no longer pathological but is the fragility of a being called to achieve autonomy, because in a certain manner that is what it always is. This is the difficulty with which we are faced.²⁸

3.6. The “somato-politics” of the Kingdom of God

We were anticipating it from the first pages of this booklet: once it is able to understand the true value of its narratives of vulnerability Christianity can be a privileged ally in the construction of a new political paradigm of care. I

propose some intuitive points that will help future developments.

Prostitutes, demoniacs, lepers, the blind, the lame, the hungry—these are all part of the variegated mosaic of wounded and vulnerable bodies presented in the gospels. The New Testament also shows us, in intimate relation with these bodies, a large collection of practices of care, narratives of filiation, and experiences of fraternity. These narratives and practices depict a prototypical politics of care that is as novel as it is unsettling. Given the perspective presented in this booklet, it is not preposterous to refer to the Kingdom of God as the concrete expression of what we have been calling the somato-politics of care. The charismatic-political community gathered around Jesus was an amalgam of dissident bodies declared impure by the official hegemonic discourse, but they were bodies bound together by common filiation in a caring *Abba* and so were committed to fraternal egalitarian practices based on service. They formed a community in which Benjamina not only would have survived but, given her especially precarious state, would have occupied a place of honor.

Despite their politico-theological potential, the narratives and the practices of evangelical care were very quickly discarded in favor of salvific and therapeutic interpretations. In fact, the theological transmission of the contents of that primitive somato-political community could not bear for long the sight of suffering; it converted vulnerable bodies into mere occasions for the “shining forth” of divine power. Impure bodies were deprived of their political potential for bonding and

were enrolled instead in the standard narrative of salvific power. What got transmitted to the following generations of Christians were narratives of ex-prostitutes, ex-lepers, ex-demoniacs, persons who had been freed from their vulnerable condition by a powerful Jesus modeled on the immortal classical heroes. If the Christian narrative of vulnerability, filiation, and fraternity is to make a contribution to the emerging paradigm of care, we must deconstruct our theology of universal principles and recover the narratives of silenced bodies. The construction of the politics of care needs to rescue the somato-political narratives that have been obscured by heroic, heteropatriarchal theological discourse. Fortunately, some critical feminist theologians are already at work on it.

Somato-political reading of the gospels is especially necessary when trying to understand the stories protagonized by women.

Somato-political reading of the gospels is especially necessary when trying to understand the stories protagonized by women. Many biased interpretations allow women to be included in the dynamic of the Kingdom but require them to divest themselves of their bodies. According to Luke, the group of women who followed Jesus, had “fortunately” been “cured of evil spirits and sicknesses” (cf. Luke 8,1-3). Why this strong emphasis on

the purification of feminine bodies? Would it not be equally Good News if that sisterhood formed around Jesus proudly defied the impurity imposed by society? Is not the somato-political challenge of impure bodies, joined with male disciples in equality of conditions, just as disruptive as the divine power to expel evil spirits?

Another instance of recovering feminine bodies in the theological narrative is offered by mathematician and philosopher Esther M. Pericás. Drawing on solid exegetical studies, she defends an unsettling interpretation of the episode in which a public sinner washes the feet of Jesus and dries them with her hair while the Pharisee Simon looks on in astonishment (Luke 7,36-50). According to Pericás, the evangelist Luke is uncomfortable with the received tradition referring to this scandalous encounter between an erotically attentive prostitute and Jesus, who allows himself to be caressed with no hint of criticism; Luke therefore transforms the event into a story of repentance, adding “tears” even though there were none in the original version of the story (verses 38 and 44).²⁹ Since it lacked the motifs of weeping, repentance, and pardon, that primitive story was too carnal and politically incorrect for the evangelist. But is it not precisely *there*, in the political incorrectness of this unconditional, non-judgmental encounter between the Jewish Messiah and a grateful prostitute, that the kernel of the somato-political alternative of the Kingdom of God resides? Somato-politics causes disruption by proclaiming that the publicans and the prostitutes will enter first into the Kingdom of God (Matt 12,31). Mean-

while, imperial politics tones down the provocation and twists its meaning, making it clear that only “converted publicans” and “repentant prostitutes” will enter first into the Kingdom. That timid reading leads to a different politics and, I fear, to a different kingdom. There is no question here of denying the transformation brought about in the lives of sinners by the encounter with Jesus, but it is important to make clear that their conversion was a consequence of following Jesus, not a condition for it.

Somato-politics causes disruption by proclaiming that the publicans and the prostitutes will enter first into the Kingdom of God.

A somato-political reading of the gospels breaks with inclusive interpretations and normative determinations. From the perspective of the politics of care, the gospel narratives do not reinforce the prevailing political status quo; rather, they open up cracks that give rise to new hermeneutics, new practices, and new habitable political spaces. Recall the passage about the leper Jesus cured and sent to the priest so that he could “offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them” (Matt 8,1-3). A therapeutic-normative reading of this text would highlight the healing power of Jesus, which brings about the inclusion of an ex-leper who, once cured, can be incorporated into the normative system

from which he had previously been excluded. But does not this interpretation end up justifying the exclusionary religious-political system?

According to the somato-political interpretation, the offering that the ex-leper places before the priest does not function as a key that opens the door for the reintegration of the expelled one; rather, it testifies that his body, thanks to another place and other practices, has been recognized and integrated into a non-exclusionary community. His offering bears witness to the existence of an alternative politics not ruled by the discourse and the practices of the Temple. If people have benefited from the liberating narrative of a caring praxis that is inclusive and symmetrical (remember that Jesus “touches” lepers and so shares in their impurity), why would they want to return to the normative sheepfold of the hegemonic discourse of pure and impure? Would it not be better to join a community of vulnerable bodies that are able to generate knowledge and produce narratives that dissent from the existing imperial epistemology?

Vitruvius offered all types of reasons to excuse himself from the banquet; in response, the indignant host ordered that all the poor Benjaminas be invited: the blind, the lame, the infirm, all those who were hungering for care in the streets and the plazas (cf. Luke 14,16-24). At no point are the invited Benjaminas required to put aside their poverty, their blindness, their lameness, or their infirmity before entering the banquet hall. Interpretation of this text has until now stressed the insensitivity of the rich, the magnanimity of the host, the eagerness of

those invited from the streets, or an allegorical understanding whereby the guests represent Jews and Gentiles. All these readings have good reason and basis, but is this not the time to undertake a somato-political reading that places value on the alternative heresy produced by vulnerable bodies sharing food, stories, and dreams as they sit around the banquet table of the Kingdom?

Dissident bodies welcomed as guests with full rights at the banquet table of the Kingdom express and enact by anticipation the already operative salvific reality. As Judith Butler states:

We see above all that it is important that bodies meet and that they bring into play political signifiers that go beyond either written or oral discourse. In all their extension, corporeal actions have different signifiers that are not, in a strict sense, discursive or prediscursive. In other words, these forms of meeting are already signifiers, even before (and apart from) the claims they make. Silent protests, even vigils or funerals, often signify more than the simple written or oral account of the reasons for convoking them.³⁰

3.7. The slow rhythm of caring

We end our brief somato-political approach to the gospels by referring to the unhurried pace of caring as opposed to classical theology's rush for resolution. We have no objection to the theological-political project which seeks to "take the crucified peoples

down from their cross." Insecurity is not a state that should be considered sacred or natural; it is an unjust situation that must be fought constantly. Even so, the politics of care reasserts the salvific and revolutionary value of the slow mediations of caring. On the level of theology and politics, the resolute decision of Joseph of Arimathea to take Jesus' body down from the cross (Matt 27,57-60) was just as efficacious as the silent accompaniment of his agony by the women who remained at the foot of the cross (John 19,25). And the surprising narrative of the resurrection also included the "useless" act of caring for the corpse by embalming it with aromatic spices (Luke 24,1).

The politics of care
reasserts the salvific and
revolutionary value of the
slow mediations of caring.

The political practices of care move with the rhythm of accompaniment. The hero savior magically cures the wounds of the man beaten and left for dead, whereas the Samaritan uses the unhurried mediations of care: binding wounds, anointing them with oil and wine, lifting the man onto his own mount, taking him to an inn, paying two denarii so that they continue to care for him (Luke 10,34-35). The hero has the power to combat hunger instantaneously, but the somato-politics of care resists the temptation to change stones into bread (Matt 4,3); instead, it asks everyone to share what they have,

even it is only five loaves and two fishes (Matt 14,17). The rhythm of sharing is also the cadence of care.

The faux-leather chairs in hospitals lobbies are mute witnesses to the thousands of sleepless nights and the millions of hours of care that many persons, especially women, dedicate to their most vulnerable loved ones. Those hours are not rung up on the cash register of the neoliberal market, but in the somato-politics of care they are counted as revolutionary surplus value.

It is not a question of putting efficacy and care in opposition. We are not proposing a retreat toward a type of “charity” that is oblivious to the unavoidable revolutionary struggles against unacceptable forms of vulnerability. We are only trying to rescue from oblivion the revolutionary practices of care that the perfectionist discourse of Vitruvius discounts as irrelevant.

3.8. Vulnerable persons of the world, unite!

Pope Francis protests that in our throwaway society the excluded are not exploited; they are treated simply as waste products.³¹ Their lives are so precarious that they are not even worth exploiting. Their bodies are invisible and useless, condemned to wandering on the margins of society with no hope of ever exercising political clout. They are the miserably poor, the lumpen despised even by classical Marxism,

which considered the proletarians (but not the lumpen) to be revolutionary political subjects. What revolution can be brought about by subjects whose only political power is their impotent bodies?

We are only trying to rescue from oblivion the revolutionary practices of care that the perfectionist discourse of Vitruvius discounts as irrelevant.

Is vulnerability nothing more than the precarious situation of those begging for help from a hero? Or is it rather the somato-political fabric that can engender a new hope? Is the power of self-sufficient individualism the only force able to construct politics? Or can we conceive and build the *polis* starting from the “impotence” of vulnerable bodies? Paul B. Preciado, a gender dissident who has made his body into a political banner, calls for a somato-political International that weaves together vulnerable bodies that are able to decolonize the world and transform “Terrapolitics.” It may be that today his proposal is nothing more than a provocative assertion, but in the depths of his convocation can be heard the echo of a new politics of vulnerability and care that is already gestating on the margins of the politics of empire.³²

1. Unless otherwise indicated, I will use the term “man” in its more restrictive sense of male, white, wealthy, adult, and heterosexual.
 2. Cf. ESPOSITO, Roberto (2005). *Immunitas. Protección y negación de la vida*, Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, p. 9.
 3. SANTOS, Boaventura de Sousa (2002). «Hacia una concepción multicultural de los derechos humanos», *El otro derecho*, no. 28, Bogotá: ILSA, pp. 68-69.
 4. BENHABIB, Seyla (1992). «Una revisión del debate sobre las mujeres y la teoría moral», *Isegoría*, no. 6 (1992), pp. 49-50.
 5. MATE, Reyes (2018). *El tiempo, tribunal de la historia*, Madrid: Trotta, p. 146.
 6. POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical *Laudato si'*, no. 67.
 7. RIECHMANN, Jorge (2018). “Ecohumanism In The Century of the Great Test”, in *¡Wake Up! Proposals for a Decentred Humanism*, Barcelona: Cristianisme i Justícia, Booklets no. 172, p. 5.
 8. CORTINA, Adela (2005). *Alianza y Contrato. Política, ética y religión*, Madrid: Trotta, p. 171.
 9. The androcentric versions that translate *sarx* as “man” (“the Word was made man”) would come closer to the original sense of the statement if they read “the Word was made a poor man.” The incarnational hymn of the letter to the Philippians points to the same meaning when it states that “Christ did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” (cf. Philippians 2,6-7).
 10. PECES-BARBA, Gregorio (2003). *La dignidad de la persona desde la Filosofía del Derecho*, Madrid: Dykinson, p. 21.
 11. DESCARTES, René (1980). *Discurso del método*, Madrid: Espasa Calpe, p. 62.
 12. KANT, Immanuel. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*: “But I only ask here whether the nature of science does not require that we should always carefully separate the empirical from the rational part, and prefix to Physics proper (or empirical physics) a metaphysic of nature, and to practical anthropology a metaphysic of morals, which must be carefully cleared of everything empirical. ... Everyone must admit that if a law is to have moral force, i.e., to be the basis of an obligation, it must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the precept, ‘Thou shalt not lie,’ is not valid for men alone, as if other rational beings had no need to observe it; and so with all the other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the basis of obligation must not be sought in the nature of man, or in the circumstances in the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in the conception of pure reason; and although any other precept which is founded on principles of mere experience may be in certain respects universal, yet in as far as it rests even in the least degree on an empirical basis, perhaps only as to a motive, such a precept, while it may be a practical rule, can never be called a moral law.”.
 13. MÈLICH, Joan-Carles (2010). *Ética de la compasión*, Barcelona: Herder, p. 143.
 14. MATES, Reyes (2013). *La piedra desechada*, Madrid: Trotta, p. 29.
 15. ROSENZWEIG, Franz (1997). *La estrella de la redención*, Salamanca: Sigueme, pp. 44-45.
 16. Cfr. MORIN, Edgar (1998). *El Método IV. Las ideas*, Madrid: Cátedra, p. 117: “We should remember that we live in a universe of signs, symbols, messages, images, ideas, and imaginings that designate for us things, factual states, phenomena, and problems but that are therefore mediators in the relations of individuals among themselves, with society, and with the world. The noosphere is in this sense present in every visión, every conception, and every transaction of every human persons with the external world, with other human subjects, and finally with himself. It is true that the noosphere has a subjective entryway, an intersubjective function, and a transsubjective misión, but it is an objective constituent of reality.
- This sphere is like a médium, in the mediating sense of the term, that places itself

between us and the exterior world so that we can communicate with it. It is the conducting médium of human knowledge. Moreover, it envelops us as a properly anthroposocial atmosphere. In the same way that plants have produced the oxygen of the atmosphere, which from that moment was indispensable for terrestrial life, so human cultures have produced symbols, ideas, and myths that have become indispensable for our social lives. The symbols, ideas, and myths have created the universe in which our spirits dwell.”

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19. BUTLER, Judith (2006). *Deshacer el género*, Barcelona: Paidós, pp. 43-44.
20. MÈLICH, Joan-Carles (2014), “La condición vulnerable (Una lectura de Emmanuel Levinas, Judith Butler y Adriana Cavarero)”, *Ars Brevis*, Barcelona: Càtedra Ramon Llull Blanquerna, p. 324.
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28. RICOEUR, Paul (2008). *Lo justo II*. Estudios, lecturas y ejercicios de ética aplicada, Madrid: Trotta.
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30. BUTLER, Judith (2017). *Cuerpos aliados y lucha política: hacia una teoría performativa de la asamblea*, Barcelona: Paidós, p. 15.
31. POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53.
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Roger de Llúria, 13
08010 Barcelona (Spain)
T. +34 933 172 338
info@fespinal.com
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