



Article

Embodied Presence, COVID-19 and the Transcendence of ITopian Fear

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Abstract

The arrival of the COVID-19 virus has led to an acceleration of four trends in our modern, technology-focused societies: the development of ITopia (a dystopian future where technology undermines our humanity) with its imbalanced computational rationality; the collapse of sensemaking; the spread of a culture of pessimism and misanthropy; and the denial of death. This article makes the case for the practice of embodied presence (mindfulness) and cognitive responsibility as means to return to a more grounded experience of life, consciousness and self amongst modern populations, and thus to help resolve these four problems.

Keywords

COVID-19, Mindfulness, Consciousness, Denial of Death, the War on Sensemaking, Other Ways of Knowing, Intuitive Intelligence, Rationality, Embodiment, Spirituality, Cognitive Responsibility, Conspiracy Theories

Introduction

The experience of embodied presence (EP) invites a return to greater embodiment, mindfulness and cognitive responsibility. This paper will make the case for remaining grounded during times of disruption, and specifically during and beyond the time of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.¹ By implication, deliberately facilitating embodied presence potentially brings a shift in a person's relationship with their mind and its experiences and narratives. This includes broader societal information streams and especially that mediated by Information Technology (IT) (the internet, gaming, media, social media and so on). Embodied presence may also help shift one's relationship with the physical world of people, material objects and the biosphere. I shall argue below that Information Technology has played a key role in trapping populations in fear-centered, memetic worlds (ITopia); and that the levels of fear and distrust we are witnessing at the time of writing with the COVID-19 pandemic represents an acceleration of trends which have been apparent for some time.

“Cognitive responsibility” (CR), is the attitudinal and behavioral decision to witness one's internal and external experience and to accept them without judgment, and without projecting them onto an external target. CR is possible because all that arises in the mind, whether it be internal or external, can ultimately be owned as being within oneself. Even sensory experience of the external world is registered via our sensory organs and ultimately by the brain. Given this, the feelings and attitudes towards what one is perceiving can readily be witnessed.²

The Covid-19 Issues

There are multiple possible pandemic-related issues that could be identified here, but I have settled upon just four: the emergence of ITopia (and the associated disembodiment and loss of introspective intelligence); the collapse of sensemaking and trust; the endemic culture of pessimism and grievance; and the denial of death and impermanence. Each of these issues is playing a seminal role in the current COVID-19 social, political and psycho-spiritual environment.

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A prime focus of this paper will thus be upon how embodied presence can assist in creating an alternative Deep Future (Anthony, 2012, 2014) for the individual and for greater society, and to help reestablish a more embodied cognition which assists individuals to reclaim their power from the hegemony of techno-utopian materialism.

Issue 1: The acceleration of ITopia and computational rationality

The virus situation has likely resulted in the acceleration of the long-standing trend of disembodiment and dissociation that IT-based modern societies have wrought upon populations, firstly via an imbalanced emphasis upon mathematical/linguistic cognition (Anthony, 2008a; Goleman, 2005), and computational rationality (Anthony, 2008a)³. This in turn has led to a loss in capacity for introspection, responsible cognition and intuitive intelligence. The shift is part of the movement towards “ITopia” and what I call Money and Machines Futures (Anthony, 2012, 2014), as I shall outline below.

ITopia⁴ is a utopian vision of the future built upon the insistence that technology is going to solve most human problems, and where technological innovation is the central theme and aim. Such an ideal is roughly consistent with what I have termed Money and Machines Futures (M&MF) (Anthony, 2012, 2014), whereby material wealth, science and technology become the overriding values of the future vision (e.g. Goertzel, 2016; Kaku, 1998). I contrast M&MF with Deep Futures (DF) (Anthony, 2012). Deep Futures do not deny the importance of technology, nor of material well-being, but follow Antoine de Saint-Exupery’s (1943) aphorism that, “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” The founding values of Deep Futures include: deep respect for nature; for justice and compassion (the founding values of liberalism. Haidt, 2012); as well as the valorisation of introspective wisdom and other ways of knowing.⁵ While technocratic rationalism tends to valorise a rationality which is exercised in ordinary states of consciousness, Deep Futures as I have posited, permits meditative mindfulness, stillness and the facilitation of integrated intelligence (Anthony, 2012). The latter are strongly correlated with embodied presence and cognitive responsibility.

With large segments of populations in information societies already spending much of their days in front of electronic screens, and with the Internet of Things and 5G already being well established (Schwab, 2016), the ITopian vision is accelerating. Daniel Schmachtenberger (in Rebel Wisdom, 2019b) argues that humans are increasingly subject to misinformation and manipulation via media and social media, as reality assumes the memetic mode. There is also a tendency for netizens to become trapped in e-bubbles (Eady, Nagler, Guess, Zilinsky, & Tucker, 2019). Further, the estrangement from nature and death which arguably underpins much of the fear that we are witnessing with COVID-19 (Charles Eisenstein, in Rebel Wisdom, 2020a) is a predictable result of an ITopian society. The lockdowns and restrictions of personal freedoms that many countries have implemented have almost certainly resulted in many people spending even more time in front of screens, and far less with other people and with nature.

In recent years there is evidence that overexposure to the internet has led to increased rates of anxiety and depression in the young (Haidt & Lukianoff, 2018; Haidt, 2012), and it is logical to consider the possibility that a similar increased anxiety is occurring during the present COVID-19 situation, for that same reason. Therefore, it can be argued that the virus has given us a taste of a more extreme version of ITopia, and some of the negative effects of the Money and Machines Futures which represent a probable future for many of us.

Issue 2: The collapse of sensemaking

The Covid-19 situation has observably highlighted and accelerated what is perhaps the salient issue of our time: the collapse of sensemaking (Rebel Wisdom, 2019a, 2019b; Anthony, 2020a, 2020b).

Sensemaking is essentially a function of rational-linguistic processing. It arguably emerges from a desire to “know” the world through the “rational” mind⁶, through modeling our experience of the world in meaningful ways. When such maps of reality begin to destabilize, as in the current pandemic, many are left in a state of cognitive flux. It adds to the general sense of stress and uncertainty about life and the future.

This may lead to a closing of minds and hearts. As has been noted by Murray (2019), numerous netizens and “experts” have decided that the COVID-19 situation has validated their one true reading of history. A common theme in the mainstream media and educated classes is that the world is in a state of ecological and moral decay, and that we now more than ever need to implement solutions based along their preferred political lines; typically

meaning more government regulation and control of our behavior and economic activity. Charles Eisenstein (in Rebel Wisdom, 2020a) sees the situation as vindication that we have alienated ourselves from death. David Icke finds that the arrival of the virus confirms his thirty years of conspiracy theorising, including his belief that the erection of 5G masts is correlated with virus hotspots, and part of a grand plan to set up a new world order and wipe out large portions of the human race (Rebel Wisdom, 2020b). While clearly not all of these conclusions lack merit, COVID-19 has nonetheless become a kind of Rorschach ink blot test, where there is a tendency to project our own worldview and preferred narrative of the future onto the world, and where our cognitive dissonance sweeps aside much contradictory data and opinion.

As certainty has waned during the pandemic, so the spread of misinformation has risen. Several tech platforms such as YouTube, Twitter and FaceBook have decided that the best way to respond is to either disincentivize such channels (demonise), to censor specific posts, or even remove the voices altogether. Two prominent relevant cases during the virus situation have involved interviews between Brian Rose and conspiracy theorist David Icke on YouTube's London Real channel (Rebel Wisdom, 2020b), and the short documentary *Plandemic* (Wilson, 2020). Both of these sources put forth narratives which involve the typical features of conspiracy theories: the weaving of some facts with much unsupported speculation, hostility towards conventional sources of information, a lack of critical thinking, and most notably the absence of deep introspection (Goreis & Voracek, 2019). In turn, this situation can be seen as an extension on the broader collapse of sensemaking in the twenty-first century (Anthony, 2020a, 2020b; Rebel Wisdom, 2019b).

An immediate issue we see here is that many if not all of these criteria now often apply to stories on so-called "mainstream media" platforms. Perhaps the most salient example in recent years has been the "Russiagate" affair after Donald Trump assumed office after the 2016 US election. At least ten of the major Russiagate stories published in the mainstream media after the election were found to have serious errors, and many were completely debunked (Greenwald, 2019). Further, investigative journalism has declined to be replaced by the clickbait culture and the tribal partisanship of much modern media and social media. There has been a concurrent massive collapse in media trust (Brenan, 2019).

Still, human beings are meaning makers and seek to imbue sense upon the worlds they live in. The internet represents a vast and murky sea of data, information, opinion and propaganda. Yet personal preferences – concretised by revenue-driven personalization algorithms – permit that ocean of uncertainty to be collapsed into more sensible pools of "news" (the feed). This creates the illusion of "knowing" the world. Yet a simple but discomfiting journey beyond the e-bubble reveals there are multiple such worlds, often with vastly different representations of "the real," parallel universes peopled by unknown heroes and demons, and where the sacred and the demonic are writ large in confusing script over alien landscapes.

Even beyond this problem, it has to be acknowledged that no amount of censorship of web content is likely to fundamentally shift the consciousness of the system. The cognitive modalities remain the same regardless of censorship. The disembodiment remains, focus upon electronic screens persists, as does dissociation from inner worlds, intuitive wisdom and the psyche.

Finally, I believe that at a civilizational level, and in terms of the expression of human consciousness, we need to consider the possibility that a fundamental error has occurred in our reading of the nature of consciousness, one that has left our species floating in a chronically dissociated state. It may also be severely retarding our capacity for genuine sensemaking. As I have argued extensively elsewhere (Anthony, 2008a, 2020b, 2020c, 2017), we have fallen under a pervasive delusion that consciousness is generated by, and confined only to, the brain. Yet there is a great deal of empirical and report-based evidence and historical narrative which indicates that consciousness is non-local, and connects us all to other times, people and places, including "spiritual" realms (Grof, Grof, & Kornfield, 2020; Sheldrake, 2012). I call the deliberate employment of this cognitive potential Integrated Intelligence, or INI (Anthony, 2008a, 2020b, 2020c, 2014). The dissociation from this innate intelligence may be a key driver of the apparent increase in the sense of alienation and dissociation in modern developed societies. While there is no direct evidence that there has been any impact on this situation during the pandemic, the alienation from the intuitive mind and its expanded sense of self and life may be a backdrop which is exacerbating the civilizational malaise which the virus appears to be exposing.

Issue 3: The culture of pessimism and misanthropy

Much of the culture of today's political and social discourse is deeply pessimistic, fixated primarily with what is wrong with the world, and especially with human beings. It is not uncommon to find the expression that the planet would be better off without humans. Perhaps the most extreme example is the Voluntary Human Extinction Movement (2020). In the COVID-19 era a common theme has been that *we* are the virus that needs to be eliminated (Kahn, 2020).

This same deep pessimism exists in symbiotic relationship with much of modern education systems, media and social media, which often mirror a similar narrative.

Haidt and Lukianoff (2018) find that a measured increase in exposure to social media is one of the prime reasons for the marked increase in anxiety and depression in today's young. It is reasonable to assume that the pessimistic nature of much of its content contributes to this.

Critique of this culture or its dominant narratives has become increasingly difficult. Optimistic takes on the future, such as those put forward by Steven Pinker (2019) and Diamandis (2012) have often been met not merely with criticism (some of it certainly valid), but outright hostility. Stephen Pinker has retorted that "There is nothing that progressives hate more than progress" (Why do progressives, 2017).⁷

Beyond the cultures driving the pessimistic narratives, we may note a probable biological influence, namely negativity bias, which is a well-established principle in psychology (Tierney & Baumeister, 2019). Human beings pay far more attention to bad news than to good news, to criticism than to compliments, to threats than to benevolent entities.

Social media, mainstream media and the internet in general have been the sites whereby much of this culture has permeated. One result has been the evolution of what Venkatesh Rao (2020) calls the "Internet of Beefs," where attention is focused upon grievances and the moral denunciation of non-aligned parties. Even noble ideals are now routinely weaponized to bludgeon political agendas and overpower perceived opponents (Rebel Wisdom, 2019b). Although precise quantification is not possible at present, it appears that the recent pandemic has exacerbated the problem.

Issue 4: Coronaphobia and the denial of death

There is much evidence of a mental health crisis stemming from the pandemic. In the American context, this includes data from a Kaiser Family Foundation poll, from mental health hotlines and from an analysis of text messages to online therapy company Talkspace (Wan, 2020). It is reasonable to assume that an increased sense of vulnerability and mortality is a major factor at play for those living in more affluent and peaceful cultures, such as those in the West and much of East Asia.⁸

Death is in the news, with several months of daily updates of Covid-19 mortality figures displayed on numerous news and social media sites. At the time of writing (October 2020), around 1.17 million people have died from the Covid-19 virus over a period of approximately ten months (China coronavirus cases, 2020). At first glance this appears to be a disaster of catastrophic magnitude. But it can be put into greater perspective by comparing COVID-19 fatalities to other ways humans today typically die. In China, less than 5000 people (officially) have succumbed to COVID-19 (China coronavirus cases, 2020). But even if the true figure is ten times that, it still pales next to the 840 000 Chinese who died of diabetes in 2017 (Cheung, 2020). A comparable 1.3 million humans die each year in car accidents, with another 50 million seriously injured (Road traffic injuries, 2019). Worldwide, around nine million die of malnourishment every year (Malnutrition is a world health crisis, 2019). Yet we typically pay almost no attention to such evidence of human fragility, nor does such data take up many inches of typeface on news sites.

Charles Eisenstein (Rebel Wisdom, 2020a) has argued that the widespread panic caused by the COVID-19 virus is symptomatic of modern society's alienation from, and denial of death. As panic spread regarding the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, Eisenstein asked his own mother what she had experienced during the outbreak of the far deadlier Hong Kong flu of the 1960s, as a young woman. His mother's response was that she could not even remember it. Eisenstein uses this anecdote to highlight how differently we view uncertainty and death today, and how in modern developed societies we have lost the realization that life is often fragile and uncertain. Indeed, this has been one of Pinker's (2019) primary concerns. We have forgotten what comfortable lives most of us live in developed societies today. As little as two centuries ago around 40 percent of the human population died before the age of five, and a woman giving birth had about a one in one hundred chance of dying (Pinker, 2019).

Yet clearly a fear of death is not something new to the human species. Thanatophobia has been discussed in relatively recent times by such thinkers as Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004), Albert Camus (2012) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1992). Yet the arrival of ITopian societies may be exacerbating the estrangement from the body, and thus from death. The arrival of the transhuman movement has been made possible only by the development of computers, while the apparent inability for many techno-utopians like Michio Kaku (Anthony, 2003; Kaku, 1998) and Ray Kurzweil (2005) to find significant qualitative differences between human and machine intelligence is suggestive of a broader estrangement from nature and the body.

I have thus far outlined four salient issues that are emerging as a direct result of the COVID-19 situation. Each of these has existed well before the current pandemic, but has observably been exacerbated by the circumstances we are now facing. I now move on to addressing how these problems might be alleviated by the facilitation of embodied presence and greater cognitive responsibility.

Embodied Presence as a Preferred Future and Part of the Solution

In this article I am positing the potential benefits of one kind of approach to building the post-COVID-19 world, namely how enhancing the population-wide experience of embodied presence and associated cognitive responsibility might help. To my knowledge, no modern economically developed society has made any sustained attempt to encourage its population to be more mindful and to promote cognitive responsibility, which may be suggestive of an innate human incapacity for truly novel thinking (Henneberg & Saniotis, 2017). Still, it is true that there are numerous examples of sporadic related trends and initiatives that have arisen in recent decades. These include the mindfulness movement; the presence of meditation and yoga institutions; alternative spiritual cultures, and so on. Each of these has had certain successes, as well as having demonstrated limitations.

What I am suggesting here is thus a broader civilizational exploration of embodied presence in a way that is yet to be fully “tested” in today’s context.

The potential benefits of a broader embodied presence and enhanced cognitive responsibility in the context of the post-COVID context are likely to be as follows.

- Reduced identification with the mind, and increased capacity to be the “witness.”
- Reduced identification with personal and group identities.
- Increased capacity to be present with others without judgment, and thus for enhanced empathy and deep listening.
- The individual’s locus of power will become more internalised, increasing one’s sense of empowerment.
- A decrease in desire to control others and the world; including the expectation that the world and those in it must conform to our expectations, beliefs and opinions.
- Less blame and projection at others, society and leaders.

In the following section I identify specific benefits in regard to all four of the COVID-19 issues outlined above.

Beyond ITopia

Embodied presence, by its nature, necessitates regularly checking one’s relationship to the body. In the modern context this requires moving attention away from screens and auditory stimulation, and onto the body.⁹ This may mean focusing upon the breath, some part of the body, one’s emotions, the heart, the “third eye” or whatever is appropriate according to one’s culture or worldview.

Nir Eyal (2019) examines related issues through the prism of “distraction.” As a first step to remaining present, he advises observing the internal trigger (physiological) which precedes the decision to shift attention away from what we wish to focus upon, then “reimagining” a more appropriate response to that trigger. In this way, we can become more familiar with how we become distracted, and also have a ready-made strategy at hand to address the habit. Eyal (2019) identifies a second important part of reclaiming personal power from electronic distraction: deciding who we want to be, and what we want to do with our lives. “Distraction” is a misnomer if we do not have something of greater value to be distracted from.

It is my preference to spend regular periods away from computers and smart phones, and especially away from

the internet, media and social media sources. Embodied presence invites the realisation that abstract conceptual information (which also includes books, newspapers and magazines, movies, documentaries and so on) is not actually “real.” It is a representation of the world, or at least one part of it. Just as the ancient aphorism states that one should not confuse the finger pointing at the moon for the moon, the deeply embodied individual does not mistake the screen for the world. Detaching from online spaces allows an individual to decouple their emotional life from screen life.

Clearly, mindfulness and abstinence from excessive time spent online will not eliminate many of the complex and multiple drivers of tribalism and conflict: including the biological, imposed dominator worldviews (Bateson & Montuori, 2002; Wilber, 2001) and human exceptionalism (religious, philosophical, economic or scientific). Yet the witnessing effect entailed in cognitive responsibility may be able assist in reducing the rampant tribalism and culture of blame and projection that is now an obvious expression of online environments - Rao’s (2020) Internet of Beefs. Such a positive effect may in part emerge from a reduced attachment to identity (self and tribe).

Beyond the Culture of Pessimism and Misanthropy

If we assume that overexposure to social media and memetic reality is a significant driver of the ontological malaise that appears to be rising across our civilization, as argued above, then we might expect that disengaging from the sources which promote such a worldview will permit a reestablishment with the “real” world, including nature. As Leonard Jacobson (2009) has stated, in deep presence there is a natural flourishing of gratitude and peace.

Beyond the Collapse of Sensemaking

It is wise to be cautious and aware of how our thinking patterns may be closed and inflexible. Indeed, it may be foolish to believe that our personally preferred version of Eisenstein’s (2015) “more beautiful world our hearts know is possible” is guaranteed to manifest itself after the virus has gone, given that the virus itself has been weaponized by much of the media and across social media, observably exacerbating tribal divisions. This appears to be more pronounced in the United States than many locales, probably because the US was already more politically divided than most countries. Unless competing stakeholders engage each other, introspect and acknowledge their part in the current state of society, the most likely outcome will be a return to business as usual.

As I employ it, the term “business-as-usual” is not merely applicable to the world of capitalists and libertarians. It incorporates the idea of “used futures” (Inayatullah, 2018), and is relevant to all ideologically-driven histories and futures. So, there are several questions that we must all ask. What is missing from my own understanding? How is my understanding being influenced by the information sources I frequent? Am I being responsible for the judgments and projections which arise in my own mind? How can I regularly stop and bring myself present with those whom I find hold different understandings?

It may be a mistake to believe that imposing forceful strategies (censorship, indoctrination, punishments) and moralising ideologies upon populations is the ideal or only solution to the breakdown in sensemaking. This is especially true in an era where governments and leaders are required to respond more quickly and nimbly to populations, and who are less inclined to unquestioningly obey them (Schwab, 2016). This is particularly applicable to ideologies which have till this point either failed to unite the populace, or indeed have created greater divisions amongst us (Anthony, 2020a, 2020b).

Given this, one possibility to be explored is how embodied presence (and in particular its capacity for witnessing of the mind, its thoughts and feelings) might engender a higher level of cognitive responsibility, one that encourages the individual to introspect. This approach can be contrasted with initiatives which merely attempt to control that individual via external regulation.

Lastly, embodied presence is a key aspect of developing Integrated Intelligence (Anthony, 2008a, b, c, 2014). INI re-situates the individual within an expanded experience of self, and with a vastly different sense of humanity’s place in nature and the cosmos. Integrated Intelligence is an alternative way of knowing, one that is key to Deep Futures, yet largely forgotten in the ITopian vision (Anthony, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2012). It is through paying mindful attention to inner worlds via mediation and prayer, and noticing subtle feelings, dreams, visions and facilitating non-ordinary states of consciousness that we can access this intelligence (Anthony, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c,

2014).

The return to a more internal yet transcendent sense of self, including a more internal locus of control may be powerful catalysts to rediscovering a meaningful sense of life for those currently enmeshed in ITopian memetic worlds.

Beyond the Denial of Death

It may be argued that the fear of death is not merely genetically wired into us, but is also a function of attachment to identity and experience (Jacobson, 2009; Tolle, 2009).

It is true that the *process* of death is always with us, because all biological organisms are slowly dying. Yet as presence teacher Leonard Jacobson (2009) states, in the present moment death is either our experience, or it is not. Mindful attention enables one to shift attention away from ruminations upon unproductive thoughts (such as death) and onto more desirable cognitions. Further, cognitive responsibility entails that when the *fear* of death arises, we do not repress it. We simply sit with it, or allow it healthy expression. The fear of death may arise quite consciously, or it may arise subtly or semi-consciously. In deep states of presence and meditation, the ego or sense of self tends to be greatly diminished, and with it the fear of death (Jacobson, 2009; Tolle, 2009).

The deep experience of the present moment, when made a primary foundation of life, can help individuals be more resilient amidst the external perturbations of life (Jacobson, 2009; Tolle, 2009). As many spiritual traditions have taught, and as evidenced by a reading of history, all things pass: including loved ones, political ideals, political parties, tribes, countries, civilizations, and eventually even anthropological and geological eras. Cognitive responsibility permits us to release attachment to any of these things where necessary, grieve for that which passes, and to allow the next experience to emerge.

Conclusion

In this paper I have made a broad case for the role that embodied presence and associated cognitive responsibility might play in the post-virus world. I have argued that the pandemic has exacerbated several defining qualities of an emerging ITopian society: IT-centrism, the collapse of sensemaking, an increased pessimism, and an increased anxiety related to the fear of death and impermanence. A return to a more grounded experience of life, consciousness and self amongst populations may help play a role in the correction of these problems. To what extent this may play out, via what action and policies, and to what effect remains to be seen.

Notes

- 1- In this paper, due to lack of space, I will not detail the means by which such embodiment is to be achieved. But meditative and mindfulness practice, coupled with facilitation of intuitive intelligence lie at the heart of my preferred initiative. I outline several such approaches in Anthony (2014, 2015, 2017, 2020b.)
- 2- These kinds of introspective processes have long been advocated by many meditative and spiritual traditions including the Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Sufi (Anthony, 2008b); as well as many similar contemporary thinkers (e.g. Jacobson, 2009; Tolle, 2009).
- 3- Computational rationality is what I previously called “computer rationality” (Anthony, 2008). This is the cognitive mode of employing primarily IT-based sources of information to make sense of the world, within a worldview that often empahsises disembodied rationality. Since I first introduced this term in 2008, under the sway of progressivism there has been a greater emphasis upon “lived experience” and personal feelings in the education systems of the west, and this has seeped into corporations and broader culture. Still, this recent shift has not included an equal emphasis on introspection, mindfulness and accessing the intuitive mind.
- 4- This is my own term, and is not to be confused with the American software company, Itopia.
- 5- I define “other ways of knowing” as the non-dominant cognitive modes of today’s developed societies. These include kinesthesia, synesthesia, intuition, and integrated intelligence (Anthony, 2008, 2015, 2017).
- 6- What constitutes the “rational” is debatable. Here the term “rational” is employed to mean the cognitive functionality which typically occurs in ordinary states of consciousness and via the commonly approved

“western” worldview which has emerged from the scientific enlightenment of the seventeenth century and beyond. It is nonetheless true that the “ways of knowing” employed therein may contain strong elements of emotionality or even “irrational” cognition. In the case of the recognition of integrated intelligence, thinkers like Sheldrake (2012) and Stan Grof (Grof, Grof, & Kornfield, 2020) have long argued that the “sceptical” rejection of the non-local mind typically denies both the empirical and report-based evidence of that cognitive modality (which in turn can be considered “irrational”).

- 7- This point is not to uncritically endorse arguments such as Pinker’s, which tend to be simplistic and western-centric. I cite them here as examples of one end of a continuum of optimistic versus pessimistic takes on the future.
- 8- The argument which follows is most relevant to the economically developed world where ITopian cultures have become common. How citizens in these locations might compare in terms of their psychological response to COVID-19 with populations in less affluent and unstable countries (where death may be more commonly witnessed) is beyond the scope of this paper.
- 9- I have not addressed the possible biological and physiological impacts of spending too much time in front of screens, and in particular overstimulation. Still, regardless of this effect, the processes which I suggest here are simple and should be able to be applied fairly easily by most people. Whether they have the motivation to do so is another question, one that has always been central to the practice of mindfulness and meditation (Jacobson, 2009).

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