

ETHICS OF ANTI-COVID VACCINES

Posted on January 1, 2022 by Fulvio Di Blasi



We are so very pleased to present this excerpt from [*The Death of the Phronimos: Faith and Truth of Anti-Covid Vaccines*](#), the recent book by Fulvio Di Blasi.

The great importance of this book lies in the many and essential questions that it raises about our current crisis. Questions such as:

- *Are vaccines a safe and effective remedy against Covid-19?*
- *Are Covid Passports useful tools for pandemic prevention, or are they rather instruments of torture and the basis of social conflict in the service of political power?*
- *Are agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA) credible?*
- *Can mainstream journalism be trusted?*
- *What about pharmaceutical companies? Can we trust them?*
- *And hat about "science?" What is to be understood by this term?*

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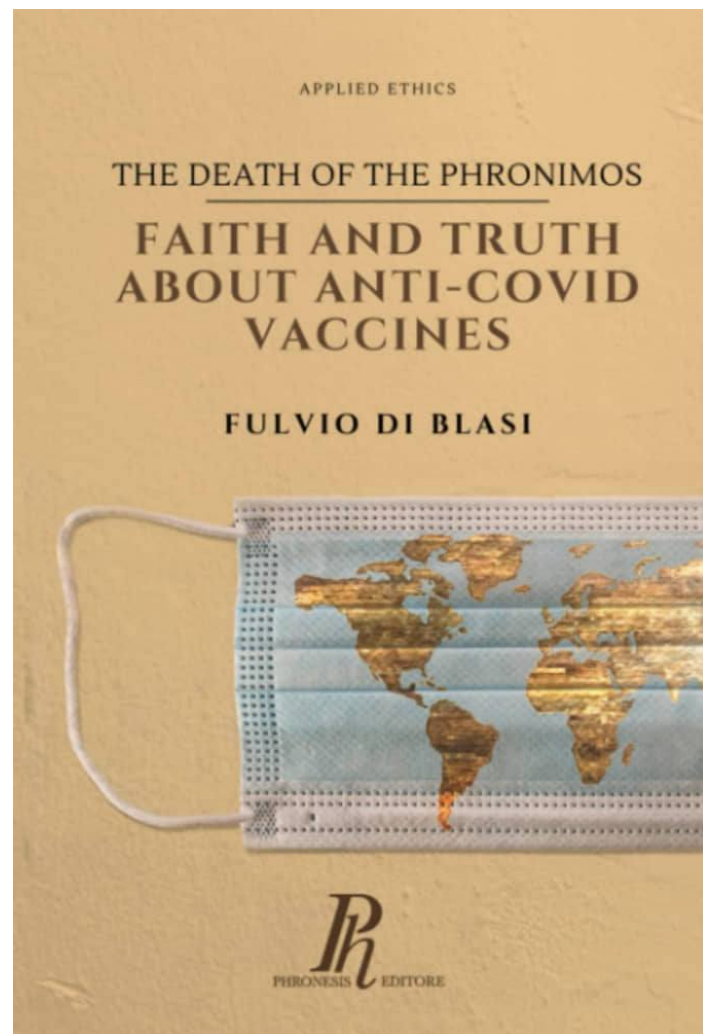
He has taught, and carried out research, at various universities, including the University of Notre Dame (USA), The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (Poland), the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross (Rome), the Internationale Akademie fuer Philosophie in the Principality of Liechtenstein, and the Libera Università Maria Santissima Assunta (Palermo-Rome). He was also Research Fellow for the Italian National Council of Research (CNR), the highest governmental research institution in Italy, Research Associate at the Jacques Maritain Center (University of Notre Dame, USA), and Director of both the Thomas International Center (USA) and the Centro Ricerche Tommaso d'Aquino (Collegio Universitario ARCES, Palermo). He has also served as contributor, reviewer, editor, and board member for several philosophical, legal, and bioethical journals and book series.

He has over 200 publications, including God and the Natural Law, John Finnis, [Ritorno al diritto](#), [Questioni di legge naturale](#), [Ancient Wisdom and Thomistic Wit: Happiness and the Good Life, From Aristotle to Thomas Aquinas](#), [Vaccination as an Act of Love? The Epistemology of Ethical Choice in Times of](#)

Pandemic.

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Anti-Covid vaccines and the pandemic are issues that now completely permeate our entire existence both as individuals and as citizens of single states and the whole world. They are complex issues, with a thousand facets, which are dealt with by many public and private subjects, parliaments and rulers, research agencies and institutes, the press, the media, scientists, and experts from various disciplines. It is impossible for the individual to form an adequate reference framework without learning to conveniently move between the various sources of information, clearly understanding their differences both regarding the specific competence of each source and regarding its quality and reliability. From whom should we learn the truth about vaccines and the pandemic? How exactly should we compare the numerous individuals providing information in the media and political market? What value should we give to the statements of the various people and institutions that tell us about these truths?



It is essential that we learn to answer these questions in a sufficient and reasonable way, because from the information that is transmitted to us depend, not just opinions on who will win a championship or on what will be the next seasonal fashion or on which are the most popular places for the holidays, but crucial decisions that each of us must make: decisions about our own health and that of our loved ones, about the common good, and about the fundamental rights and freedoms of the society in which we live.

The underlying theme of this text, which unifies and delimits all the topics addressed, is the way in which we acquire the truths and certainties that guide our choices concerning vaccines and the pandemic. And, since these truths come indirectly or directly from other people, we need to ask ourselves specifically who are the people to turn to and what exactly they can tell us.

The epistemological analysis of individual sources of information will lead us more and more towards the need for the deepening of another philosophical topic, this time related to so-called "virtue ethics". In fact, the study of the reliability of the various individuals who talk to us about vaccines reveals, on the one hand, the many shortcomings and critical or problematic issues that characterize these people and, on the other hand, the profile of the ideal witness who, from my point of view, is glaringly absent in the current public debate on vaccines and the pandemic. I am referring to the Aristotelian *phronimos*, a mysterious character to most, but whom I hope my readers will eventually learn to know and appreciate and, why not, also love.

For reasons that will become increasingly clear, this text, not only in the opening chapter, but also in the discussion of the individual subsequent chapters, methodically uses the legal science of witnesses in a court trial. This choice moves in parallel with the analysis of faith as a form of knowledge, which, as mentioned, I am about to explain in the first chapter. A correct epistemology of the way we relate to witnesses is essential to understand how to make ethical decisions in areas where our knowledge of the relevant factors depends on other people or institutions. In this book, all the most important sources of information on vaccines that we have will appear as if they were called or summoned by a judge, who, as the first formal act of his procedural science, must assess their reliability and their ability to testify.

The activity of the judge is epistemologically analogous to the activity of the moral conscience, which is in fact traditionally compared precisely to a judge. Many think that this is just a metaphor. It is not so. Conscience really works through a symmetrical rational path similar to that of a judge in a trial. The best way to visualize or analyze the path that rationally leads us to good decisions is therefore exactly to imagine ourselves as judges sitting in a courtroom where we find ourselves having to listen to witnesses and acquire all relevant documents and evidence.

Among the witnesses that will successively appear in our courtroom are pharmaceutical companies and drug agencies (Chapter 2), Science (Chapter 3), public authorities and the mass media (Chapter 4). Of all these witnesses, we will have to ask ourselves about which facts they can testify, or what they can actually tell us about vaccines. However, we will also have to ask ourselves about their reliability and credibility. We will do this by observing their criminal record and conflicts of interest, or their curriculum and *modus operandi*. When you have a possible witness in the courtroom, you need to understand as much as possible about who he is and how much we can trust him. In some cases, such as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the World Health Organization (WHO), or even the current functioning of medical science, this will give rise to various ideas regarding hypotheses for reforming some systems or some institutions.

This phase of our trial activity, so to speak, will also be a valuable opportunity to retrace together some very important and interesting judicial, political, or journalistic cases. However, it must always be borne in mind that when I refer to court cases or some specific issues of the vaccine debate of the past months or weeks I will only do so as an example and to the extent that this helps to evaluate the witnesses. My goal is not to offer an exhaustive treatment of single cases or events but to use elements of them exclusively for the specific purpose of evaluating the witnesses.

It should also be remembered that the activity of the judge who assesses the reliability of the witnesses is different from that of the judge who assesses the guilt of a defendant. In the second case, precise and consistent evidence is needed to reach a decision. In the first, a generic criterion of reasonableness is sufficient. It is the same with all the rules on conflict of interest. Those in conflict of interest may not have done anything wrong and could also, if called upon to testify (against their wives or against the company that pays them), tell the truth and nothing but the truth. It is best not to take risks, however, or not to put the person in a conflict of interest situation, or in a situation where he may be tempted to lie or to alter the truth. Nothing I will say in this book about the possible unreliability of some witnesses can be interpreted as an accusation of their having committed crimes or wrongdoing of any kind. An accusation of this type is not up to me, but to prosecutors. The case is different for offenses of a moral nature, which fall under my jurisdiction and on which I will not make allowances for anyone.

In this regard, I must also clarify that, on an ethical level, I must always save the "internal forum." I will often be very hard on sin but nothing I say will imply a judgment on the sinner, except in hypothetical

terms. I could say, for example, that a certain person's actions or statements are false or that they objectively generate hatred and violence. Yet the person may have acted in good faith, without realizing what he was doing, or out of ignorance.

I will be especially hard on the overall behavior of professional classes or sectors of society, which of course does not imply that there are no good people in those classes or sectors. Often, a wrong or corrupt system unknowingly makes even good people bad, which is all the more reason to express the condemnation of that system clearly. The harshness of moral condemnation is directly proportional to the corruption of the system and serves precisely to awaken the dormant consciences of good people. Analogically, it is the same positive rhetoric as the prophetic spirit of the Bible. The prophet must condemn with clarity and harshness proportional to the corruption of society, or the people of that society will not wake up from their ethical slumber. Applied moral philosophy, from my point of view, can never lose, at least in the most serious cases of social torpor, a certain prophetic spirit.

In my condemnations of the system (and never of individuals) I will often use biblical language and the image of the great prostitute. This is not meant as a personal insult to anyone. It is a strong prophetic moral condemnation with a precise conceptual connotation. The Apocalypse announces the fall of Babylon the great, which *"has become a haunt for demons. She is a cage for every unclean spirit, a cage for every unclean bird, (a cage for every unclean) and disgusting (beast). For all the nations have drunk the wine of her licentious passion. The kings of the earth had intercourse with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her drive for luxury"* (Rev 18:2-3). In the Apocalypse, however, Jesus fights with the double-edged sword of His mouth, with the truth (Rev 1:16). From this point of view, the great prostitute is society or that part of it which, in view of some advantage, fear, or vice, corrupts the truth and prostitutes itself to the falsehoods of the world.

Some people, because of their role or their profession, have a special duty to testify to the truth, or to speak with the double-edged sword of the Apocalypse. Towards these people, when they prostitute themselves, the prophetic condemnation is worse and more resounding. In many ways, at the intellectual level, the great prostitute coincides with the sophistry against which Plato lashes out through the mouth of Socrates. The Sophists are the experts, not of true argument, but of the winning one. They are the ones who return home in the evening happy, not because whoever listened to them learned something true and good, but because whoever listened to them was convinced that they were right.

Sophists are concerned with winning (in politics, with the audience, in commerce, in advertising), not in learning or teaching. They prostitute the truth for their own profit. There are, however, people who have drunk so much of the wine of Babylon that being called Sophists might even please them; it could give them the idea that deep down they are good at something: that is, at convincing and manipulating people. Biblical terminology, on the other hand, could create that positive discomfort that leads to a possible ethical conversion. Better therefore, at least in some cases, not to condemn the sophistication but the prostitution. And I will proceed accordingly.

This book is part of a larger work in several volumes aimed at addressing the problem of anti-Covid vaccines as an object of moral choice, both individual and collective. The first volume, which also includes the plan of the entire work, is *Vaccine as an Act of Love? Epistemology of Ethical Choice in Times of Pandemics*.

The overall architectural structure of this larger work is based on the analysis of ethical choices regarding vaccines in terms of object, circumstances, and end. As I explained in the introduction to the first volume, this type of analysis originates in Greek philosophy, develops above all in the tradition of Christian thought (also through canon law), and is now part of the fundamental structure of both civil and criminal Western law. In fact, the responsibility of the person in front of the law is measured on the basis of the identification of a human act defined objectively (will, theft, parking offense, etc.), of the assessment of the circumstances that influence in various ways the choice of that act, and of the analysis of subjective responsibility based on the intent of the agent (which can also be more or less serious depending on the circumstances).

For the purposes of this overall analysis, I had to distinguish between internal circumstances and external circumstances with respect to the "vaccine" object. In fact, there may be elements that influence the ethical choice to get vaccinated or not to get vaccinated, but which do not relate to the characteristics of the vaccine as such. The present book concerns precisely these latter circumstances, the ones external to the so-called anti-Covid vaccines. These circumstances do not concern the vaccine or drug as such or its characteristics with respect to the good of health, but affect the ethical choice to get vaccinated or not to get vaccinated—or to take this new drug or not, in whatever way it is defined and by any term it is referred to—based on other considerations.

With respect to the overall work, this book represents a part that conceptually and chronologically follows both the general explanation on the structure of the moral act (first part), the detailed explanation of the internal circumstances of the anti-Covid vaccines that I call structural and institutional (second part), and the explanation, in general terms, of all the epistemological issues involved in the whole question (which I also deal with in the second part). This book is partially independent of the analysis of other types of circumstances that I tackle in other volumes, but with which it is still intertwined in various ways. None of these volumes can be completely isolated from the others even if each volume maintains its own methodological and conceptual autonomy. This volume, however, precedes the last on the ends of the action, which, for various reasons, presupposes all prior analyses of the object and circumstances.

As I explain in the first volume, almost all the external circumstances that affect the choice to get vaccinated fall within the order of ends. That is, they concern the assessments of the good of health compared to different goods or ends. In the context of the analysis of the human act, the distinction between circumstances and ends is difficult, largely useless, and should in any case be delayed to a specific discussion of the agent's intentionality and of the ends to which it aims. In the previous parts of the work included in the first volume, I made some hypothetical examples centered on the role of the Pope or other characters with public responsibilities who decide not to get vaccinated, or not to get vaccinated immediately, to convey or testify to a certain ethical message. In these cases, we could speak, from a third person point of view, of an external subjective circumstance that pertains to the role or office of a certain person. However, from the point of view of the agent, the choice indicates the preference for a certain hierarchy among the goods involved in the action: a hierarchy such that a higher good (such as that of faith) leads to overshadowing, at least temporarily, the good of health. It is therefore a topic that belongs to the analysis of the ends and intentionality rather than to the analysis of the circumstances as such.

With regard to anti-Covid vaccines, the only relevant external circumstances that I believe should be identified regardless of the analysis of the ends pertain, for the gnoseological reasons that I am about to explain, to faith. It is this, therefore, the strain of circumstances that will be the specific subject of this volume. Each of the following chapters is about individuals or institutions who in one way or another are or should be witnesses to the truth about vaccines for us.

Before leaving the reader to the individual chapters, I further clarify that, from my point of view, what I am talking about here is not enough for a prudent person, the *phronimos* (to put it in Aristotelian terms),

to make a rational and good choice concerning the anti-Covid vaccines. The reason is precisely what I have just mentioned: that is, that the ethical choice implies the evaluation of both the object, the ends, and all the relevant circumstances, and not just of those (external) circumstances discussed in this volume. However, the themes developed here play a crucial role in enabling the ethical subject to rationally address the relevant sources of information to be used to form his own conviction. From this point of view, the volume holds a special methodological autonomy, and is perhaps the most essential for building the adequate framework within which to approach one's choices wisely.

As always, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to make another small contribution in this world with the time and the talents that have been given to me. I thank my wife Francesca for the patience, support, encouragement, and enthusiasm with which she always deals with the things that concern our cultural commitments for the common good. With respect to the specific issue of anti-Covid vaccines and pandemic management, it was initially she who stimulated my critical approach and prompted me to study the relevant issues more in depth. I also thank my children, Riccardo and Ottavia, because their cheerful presence alone, even if it makes it difficult to concentrate, gives a joy and hope capable of overcoming any obstacle and fatigue. The other day I found Riccardo, five years old, drawing in a notebook while sitting on the sofa and who, as soon as he saw me, immediately told me that he too was writing a book. Ottavia (two years old) is at this moment on my lap, between me and the computer, enjoying herself while listening to kids' songs on television and while I stretch my arms around her trying to reach the keyboard and finish this introduction. *Deo gratias!*

I thank my friend Mauro Ghilardini who was one of the immediate causes of this work because, since he decided to publish some of my posts on a blog, so many comments and requests for clarifications or insights followed that it was easier for me to think of writing a book than responding to a thousand posts online. I thank Francesco Zambon for the useful discussions on WHO and the management of the pandemic. I thank Marisa Gatti-Taylor Ph.D. and Steven Millen Taylor PhD—as well as a friend who needs to remain anonymous to avoid possible negative employment repercussions—for their precious editorial help and for their encouragement. Of course, I am solely responsible for errors and opinions expressed in the text. I thank all the friends, colleagues, physicians, and scientists who maintain rationality, integrity, and serenity in these times of collective panic and madness. I thank all the people of good will who do not give in to violence, insult, and social hatred and who never tire of demonstrating publicly for the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of the human person.

Finally, I thank all the bishops and priests who continue to preach the Gospel of Christ instead of the new vaccine and Green Pass religion.

Featured image: breaking of the sixth seal (Rev. 6), the Douce Apocalypse, ca. 1272.

