

Researchers' lives and Covid

Interview with Pierre Tap (29 July 2021)

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Question 1. Pierre Tap, an intellectual with an incredible track record in the field of psychology, with unique reflexive intellectual skills, how did you live and are you living this period of pandemic. Your own experience, what has marked you the most during the events?

1A About your compliments?

Thank you for your compliments, but they are exaggerated! My "track record" as you call it is only 19.14 according to Researchgate, which is "very average"! This figure is calculated from publications in peer-reviewed journals, preferably in English. I have published little in English during my 60 years of work (1961-2021).

The Researchgate logo, featuring the word "Researchgate" in a dark blue, sans-serif font, with a light blue circular graphic element to the left.

This "schooling of researchers" worries me a lot. I was one of those who (in psychology) created (or helped to create) these peer-reviewed journals in France, but I have the feeling that this accentuates conformity at the expense of creativity.

On the other hand, I think that what characterises my work is the effort to collectively articulate Knowledge (scientific research) with Know-How (educational, health and social action) and with Doing-

Knowledge (conferences, books, contracts or joint activities with public services, associations, professional groups) .

It is also clear that the installation of my Official Website (www.pierretap.com) (with the help of my son Michel Tap, webmaster), a site containing almost all my publications, which can be downloaded, has undoubtedly been decisive in making them known

www.pierretap.com

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1B. Experience during confinement?

Of course, I am a privileged person, I have learned to live well what can be a problem for others: managing solitude, living as a couple in a positive context (families, friends, neighbours).

B1 Loneliness and its links with what I have called "working with limits": the will to do or not to do, to say or not to say ... the way I manage the limits that others impose on me, that nature or illness impose on me, my relationship to death.

Since I was a teenager, I have learned to live many situations in solitude, out of professional necessity, but by seeing its usefulness through the quality of the work provided

For example: in 1979-1980 I spent 10 days a month in a monastery in order to finish my State thesis, leaving my wife to manage the family and our 3 children, leaving my colleagues to manage the Lab, the team, the UFR. So I did not have to suffer from loneliness, like many people during the confinement .

B2 ... especially as I live serenely as a couple, in a quiet town in the Aveyron, in a house that allows my partner and I to go about our own business and to meet up at various ritualised times (at 84 years of age each, rituals are useful!) Furthermore, members of the family or friends and neighbours have helped us by doing

some of the shopping for us. The possibility of ordering from home has been very useful!

In the small flats, family or couple life caused many problems for others during the confinement.

B 3 In fact **my occupations between 2019 and 2021** are the continuation of the work of researcher in relation to education, health, work, social action.

The co-direction (with Jacques Curie) of a CNRS Laboratory entitled "Personalisation and social changes" (1978-1991) obliged us to constantly articulate the sub-disciplines of psychology. During the pandemic we published (with Nathalie Oubrayrie-Roussel, Professor at Toulouse-Jean Jaurès) a book entitled "Personalisation and relational dynamics" in which we defended "personalisation" as the development and fulfilment of the person (in social interactions), and not as confused today with "mass personalisation" (I personalise my purchases, my possessions).

The fact that this book has been translated (without our agreement) into 8 languages by Amazon, has made us aware of the certain advantages but also (real) disadvantages Artificial Intelligenc type automatic translators.

1C **What has affected me the most during the events? (The negative but also the positive)**

- - Injustice in the effects of the pandemic, in the face of death
- - The massive increase in psychological disorders up to and including depression and suicide, especially among students
- - The massive increase in domestic violence (more than 50% in one study in Italy), violence against women ...
- - The inability of psychiatric services to meet demand
- The importance of psychologists to meet this influx of demand

- - The inadequate way in which the state has responded to the need for psychologists
- - The emergence of anti-everything health: from conspiracists to the horrific "health Shoah" (using the yellow star in a shameful way)
- + solidarity of the population towards the carers, students
- + the historic mobilisation of psychologists to defend their profession and their competences
- the importance of the scientific research being undertaken on containment and the effects of the pandemic

Question 2. What parallels do you see between this pandemic and other pests and diseases of the past?

There are some differences between these past events: viruses causing the pandemics, geographical extent of the epidemic (global or at least continental pandemics, national or regional epidemics, differences in the place of emergence of the disease).

2A Differences linked to the type of virus or disease: Black Death, Yellow Fever, Cholera (1926) Influenza (Spanish, 1918 Asian), Typhoid Fever (in Athens, 430 BC, 25% of the inhabitants died), Smallpox (Antonine Plague was in fact a smallpox epidemic: 166 AD 10 million dead)... AIDS and its origin (HIV or Human Immunodeficiency Virus (1980..) global pandemic (cf. theses in Toulouse): one million people still die of AIDS every year (WHO).

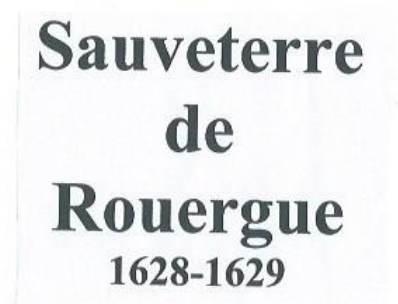
Science can sometimes discover the origin of an epidemic that has killed millions of people:

Between 1545 and 1550, 15 million Aztecs died from the so-called cocoliztli disease. Two researchers from the Max Planck Institute analysed the DNA of 24 victims of this epidemic. They discovered that 10 of these DNAs contained traces of salmonellosis, a disease that was probably brought by the conquistadores (no traces in the DNAs before 1520 Hernan Cortes).

(but problem: how to assess the number of deaths associated with salmonellosis alone?)

2B differences associated with the spread of the disease (pandemic: global or at least continental, epidemic: national, regional).

Example: Focused epidemics in a region of Aveyron (France):



On March 24, 1628, the widow of Garrelou (the lame man) introduced the plague in the royal bastide of Sauveterre (de Rouergue), 800 people died (in 3 months!). Promiscuity is responsible for this hecatomb. The wealthy stratum of the city went quite soon to entrench itself in the isolated farmhouses and provided with good provisions.

No satisfactory decisions, disorder . Class hatred then manifested itself violently (famine having succeeded the plague). Croquants revolt in 1643 (leaders: Bernard Calmels, Jean Petit and Guillaume Bras, who were beaten alive!)

It should be noted that the plague was endemic in this region: seven epidemics occurred in two centuries (between 1348 and 1557)! This was also true for Paris and other cities!

2 C Differences by geographical origin of the pandemic :

For example, the **great European plague of 1347-1352**. It also came from China, brought by the Tatars (Turco-Mongols) in the port of Caffa, then India, and as far as Messina (Sicily) by several ships, then Marseille. 200 million deaths out of 400 million inhabitants in the world! Highly contagious, the Black Death was supposed to strike rich and poor alike.

Grande Peste 1347 – 1352

Two particular effects:

- The "macabre dances" and the drawings, above the mass graves . Emperors, popes, kings and bishops can die: we are all equal before death! Each drawing represents death dancing with everyone regardless of their social position!) many miniatures will appear in the manuscripts afterwards. However, Alfonso XI of Castile is the only monarch who died of the plague (1350). On the other hand, 37% of the bishops of the Iberian Peninsula died. Epidemics, however, have been associated with famines (as causes or effects), and thus with poverty .



- Poets and painters will show the importance of the ethical and cultural consequences of the pandemic. For example, in Italy, Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio (author of the Decameron), highlight the flaws in the culture and the need for change... cf. the story of the Decameron: 7 women and 3 men flee the plague in Florence and gather in a country house. Each of them will have to tell 10 stories of life at that

time. The 100 stories make up the Decameron. But Bocaccio will understand the importance of History to better understand what the future should be... cf. his work on *Illustrious Men*, then another work on the importance of illustrious women...

- Note that many painters died of the plague (especially in Italy) Ambroise and Pierre Lorenzetti, Andrea Pisano, Maso di Banco... between 1347 and 1349



In the context of defence against the plague, the Venetians invented the **system of quarantine which** is still in force today

2.D The negative psychological effects of **quarantine** (in particular the Covid 1 pandemic of 2004) have recently been highlighted.

Mises en quarantaine
Samantha Brooks
(King's College, London)

According to the meta-analysis of 24 recent quarantines by Samantha Brooks and her team at King's College of London, all the research points to negative psychological effects (post-traumatic stress, depression, suicides); advice is given for caregivers .

Question 3. What marks will the pandemic leave on our society?

I had the opportunity to write in the 2021 book, "that we should (rightly) move from masks to brands". But society is already well into all kinds of branding: identity branding, financial and economic branding (with mass customisation, companies are using the customised diversification of brands and products to stand out!)

Furthermore, we need to differentiate between individual, family, associative, societal and institutional markings.

- **Individual and family markers: Post-traumatic stress, various traumas caused by the multiple events experienced by the person. Much has already been said about the consequences of the pandemic on mental health, on the way people experience changes in work style and experience, on the re-launch of school and professional learning, on family and marital experience, etc.**
These effects will persist, and sometimes become chronic difficulties.
- **Prolonged confinement has greatly disrupted the functioning of sports groups, cultural associations and shows, and friendly or festive meetings. One can expect reactions of exaggeration and exasperation of compensatory behaviours (fear exasperates sexuality).**
- **But we could also see the positive emergence of artistic productions, the revival of aid and solidarity relations.**
- **This being said, scientific psychology always tries to anticipate in order to improve the help to people in difficulty, to understand the aspirations, the hopes of people.**
- **.. But where does the anticipation end, where does the dream or utopia of a brighter tomorrow and a paradise for all begin?**

- Let's take an example: Yuval Noah Harari's two titanic books: "Sapiens" a brief history of humanity (500 pp) and "Homo deus" a brief history of the future (450 pp) .



- In 'Sapiens', page 321, Harari rightly points out that 'science, by definition, makes no claim to know what is to be in the future. Only religions and ideologies seek to answer these questions.
- In the 11th page of "Homo deus" (of the future) the author states: "In recent decades we have succeeded in mastering famine, epidemics and war. Of course these problems have not been completely solved (but it is possible to meet the challenges of Nature). In the face of notable failures, we set up a commission of enquiry to find out "who" has "screwed up" (the person responsible) and how to reduce the disorder! and "it works"! But what are we going to do with our immense powers (biotechnologies, information technology...)?

Question 4. What do you think about the origin of Covid and the studies carried out to discover it?

On 23 July, China announced that it had suspended the World Health Organisation (WHO) investigation taking place on its soil.

This is because two assumptions have been made:

- Covid is said to be a "zoonosis", i.e. a disease originating from animals and transmitted to humans (cf. avian flu)
- Or the result of an accidental leak of the virus manipulated in the laboratory

China made a giant publicity campaign to "prove" that the virus (reported in Wohan) was in fact of foreign origin (through frozen fish). Scientists have refuted this hypothesis. In any case, the revival of the virus in the Chinese regions not much affected by the influence of the fish markets, forces them to remain silent. However, Chinese researchers are active. For example, they have informed the world that the virus is contagious 48 hours before symptoms appear.

The hypothesis retained today is of the "zoonosis" type, the virus is associated with bats. They have had the virus "dormant" in their bodies for decades. But the virus cannot be transmitted directly to humans. It would be necessary to find the intermediary (another animal) that could have served as a transmitter (between 2013 and 2019).

Can the virus disappear? Only the smallpox virus has disappeared. However, it is possible for **Sras-Cov 2**. A lot of research has been done on the survival of the virus once it is released into the air. This research shows the need for great caution!

Question 5: Which Great Old Scholars/Universities can you talk to about Covid, life and death?

Before paying tribute to three great researchers, two of whom died in 2021 and the third of whom is still with us, having become a centenarian this month, I would like to raise the general question of the Covid's dead.

On 21 July, 111,576 people died of Covid in France. 73% were aged 75 and over, 58% were men (2% were 44 or younger).

In another study comparing 4 European countries, the rate of people dying from Covid aged 70 or more was 84% in France, 87% in Spain, 86% in Italy and 86% in Germany.

Of course, we can see the danger of misusing these figures: the dead are equal before death, whatever their age, their sex or their place in society (danse macabre!)

I am lucky to be alive at 83. But last April I was hospitalised for "heart failure" (when I thought I had a good heart!) and I now have a

pacemaker. "They saved my life", which will now run its course! (I made a somewhat humorous account of this hospitalization, see my official website!)

On the other hand, our friend **Romain Gaignard** died of Covid at the age of 85 (1936-2021), (February 2021).



President of the University of Toulouse Le Mirail (1996-2001) then Honorary President, former Director of Cooperation and International Relations at the Ministry of Education, Romain died of Covid on 14 February 2021. The Institut des Amériques (GIS. scientific

interest group, CNRS, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle), of which he was one of the co-creators, has just paid him a vibrant tribute "in memoriam" for his activities as a geographer/latin Americanist.

Our friend **Axel Kahn** passed away on July 6th, after sending a letter to his Internet friends to inform them that he would die soon.



**Axel Kahn (1944-2021) ex-Président de la Sorbonne.
Président de la Ligue contre le cancer**

He was diagnosed with cancer and became President of the Ligue contre le cancer. He says that he did not have far to go from his office as President to his room (in palliative care)!

He had been President of the University of Paris V. Descartes University. A doctor, Director of Research at Inserm, a specialist in genetics and immunology, he has also developed research on ethics and humanistic values.

I will end the trilogy with a tribute to my friend **Edgar Morin, who** was born on 8 July 1921 and who therefore became a centenarian on 8 July!

I had the opportunity to make friends with him during meetings at the Piaget Institute in Portugal. He had also agreed to participate in a thesis jury in Toulouse...



1.

I have admired his ideas and work since the 1960s. He was the first author quoted in my first research on cinema (Ikon, revue

internationale de Filmologie, 1963) in connection with an article published in Esprit!

Like him, I believe that **“reliance”**, mutual aid, cooperation and love must become the driving force behind a change of civilisation and a fight for the defence of our planet.

Beyond conviction, we need to find the collective know-how to promote changes in this direction!