

Michael Opielka

What is new through Corona?

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"But where there is danger, / That which saves also grows." („Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch.") Lines three and four of *Patmos*, the post-Pietist hymn by Friedrich Hölderlin, completed in 1803 and dedicated to Frederick V, Landgrave of Homburg, point, like the entire text, beyond its origins. John's Gospel and Enlightenment as self-knowledge meet and find each other. Martin Heidegger, the godless word-stealer, took these lines in *Die Technik und die Kehre* as the occasion for his dull critique of technology. Rudolf Steiner probably did not comment directly on that long poem, but he spoke indirectly with the esoteric thoughts of Hölderlin condensed in it, as Peter Selg showed several times.¹ What do these sentences do with us during and after the Corona pandemic and what do we do with them? How do we allow saving futures to grow?

I was asked, before I wrote down these thoughts, to report also from me, not only to speak "about", but "from". How exactly are we allowed to do that in public, how much protection does our soul and the circle of souls of our neighbors need, which we interpret as "the private"? This is not a new question; for Goethe it was essential, from the Italian Journey to Poetry and Truth and the Conversations with Eckermann, but perhaps in everything he wrote because his ego was reflected in it, up to the obvious alter ego Wilhelm Meister. For the emerging Romantics of the time, the question of authenticity was central and has remained so to this day. For Steiner and almost all scholars with him, the answer is clear. The private remains private, the person disappears behind thoughts. It was not that they did not report on their deeds, but that they were to be recognized by them: Publication lists, lists of works, account balances, number of children, evaluation results. But the soul should be allowed to hide.

But she can't hide. After all, we see them. In Zoom conferences and other video platforms, students prefer to turn off their cameras, technical full-face veils. They suspect that their souls might be seen. It's easier when they reveal their world in the back-ground, unmade beds, uncleaned rooms, all the things I see as a university teacher and scientist. The Corona year was going to be a big one for me before we knew about it. The "Future Lab" of the Jamaica coalition in Kiel, which I headed, would have brought spectacular proposals and simulations on basic income to the public in 2020. But after Robert Habeck, who essentially pushed through the Future Lab, politically left the small Nordland for big Berlin, those who consider a discussion on basic income dangerous were more powerful in power, the FDP-led Ministry of Social Affairs cancelled the Future Lab and is now fighting me in the Flensburg Regional Court.² So instead of future, corona, soul stress, body stress, eye stress.

¹ Selg 2009, p. 14

² <https://www.isoe.org/aktuelles/news/erst-einmal-keine-zukunft-fuer-das-zukunftslabor-zlabsh/>

But as Hölderlin knew, in the danger, awake experienced, comes the saving. The Carl Zeiss Foundation gave me and a colleague from Jena twice the amount of the North Prize, not for basic income, but for an exciting project in which prefabricated buildings are being renovated and new forms of community for and with the elderly are being developed using digital tools and participatory processes.³ I was lucky, in the Corona autumn I caught the travel gap to Rome for two weeks, Dolce Vita, Hertziana library, Vatican, Cinecittà, Naples, Goethe's journey, Pompeii, so many great images that illuminated the Corona winter.

Already the classical period with Goethe, but unmistakably Romanticism, reflected the uplifting as well as oppressive double relationship between nature and the social on the one hand, the individual and society on the other hand, what we have to fight for scientifically and politically today as sustainability and social sustainability.⁴ We can use the Corona pandemic as a burning glass to sense and think about the need for Social Sustainability.

With the so-called "Corona deniers" one must deal on anthroposophical occasions, usually a quotation is enough, here one from the youth-critical "info3", where a reader letter writer with "critical people" worries: "about the liberties, which stand in our Basic Law and are just, as never before, restricted".⁵ As never before. The lack of scale justifies and explains the zeal. She probably knows nothing of the Nazi system, nothing of the GDR, of Belarus or Syria. These people are numerous. We have to talk to them, also because they don't like to do it, because talking to each other involves listening.⁶

The Corona pandemic reflects in the double relationship of man to the natural world and to the social world, in the "ecosocial question" of the present⁷, the question of social sustainability, what shimmers in the social sciences of the present: the individual, the ego. In the human-nature-relationship, zoonoses, virus jumps between animals and humans, enormous pandemic dangers, and climate crisis as well as loss of biodiversity show the price of a freedom that transforms nature into commodities. Against this egoistic conception of freedom the sustainability movement up to Fridays-for-Future stands up and demands public spirit, community, commons.

More than one year of Corona pandemic shows the crisis of the egoistic conception of freedom also in the social part of the ecosocial question. It is not new; the social question of capitalism, new in the 19th century, indicted the egoism of capital and the owners of capital. Its answer was civic compassion and the welfare state, the institutionalization of solidarity. Today, the class question, which became confusing for many reasons, from individualization to globalization, is no longer simply capital versus labor.

³ <https://www.eah-jena.de/mgesc0>

⁴ Opielka 2006, 2017

⁵ Margarete Jäckel, Lebendige Demokratie. Letter to the editor, in: info3, 3, 2021, p. 6. More competent: Kersten/Rixen 2021.

⁶ Pörksen/Schulz von Thun 2020

⁷ It has become increasingly conscious since the 1970s: Opielka 1985

But the problem of selfish freedom remains. In the Corona pandemic, some care about and for the weak, the old, the poor, the disabled, the marginalized, and demand that the stronger look and sacrifice. The others want to lock up the weak and open up public spaces for the strong, incidence rates or not. In the polarization of welfare state and common goods on the one hand, economic freedom plus nation-state size on the other, public protagonists come to mind. Anthroposophical social science and its political arm, the threefold movement, oscillate in this polarity, a positive understanding of the state is rare, a liberal to libertarian view of society dominates. Disruption and pattern breaking are rightly held in high esteem. But where to?

The world community has given a broad, in a certain way anthroposophical answer to the ecosocial question with the sustainability goals of the "Agenda 2030" of the United Nations from 2015, the "Sustainable Development Goals": we must see everything, ecological and social, we must involve everyone, from the small community to the world society. The anthroposophical, Goethean spiritual contribution is: to appreciate the I just as holistically and to take it into responsibility.

Without trust there is no community, without community there is no conscious shaping of the future. How can trust be created and constantly rebuilt? The Corona pandemic was and is a huge stress test for society's trust, for its social capital. I have the impression that our modern societies emerge stronger from this stress test. Trump has been voted out of office, the EU is pursuing a Green Deal and supporting its South and East, vaccine skepticism is turning into vaccine pushback, and everyone is looking forward to the return of a social past that will never be the same again. Climate protection will win. Videoconferencing. Mindfulness exercises. We will flock to concert halls and theaters, churches and clubs, and we will remember, at least unconsciously, that none of this can be taken for granted. Will this newness last long after Corona? We humans tend to forget the bad, and that's fine as long as we don't exaggerate. Perhaps the spiritual energy of remembrance will pave the way for a basic income, lead to more community, also with nature. Corona shows us the danger and the saving, too.

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Prof. Dr. Michael Opielka is Scientific Director and Managing Director of ISÖ - Institut für Sozialökologie gemeinnützige GmbH in Siegburg and Professor of Social Policy at Ernst Abbe University in Jena. From 1997 to 2000, he was Managing Director and Rec- tor of Alanus University of Applied Sciences Alfter, now Alanus University of Arts and Social Sciences. He initiated the state recognition of the university. 2012 to 2016 he also directed the IZT - Institute for Futures Studies and Technology Assessment in Berlin. 2015 Visiting Professor for Social Sustainability at the University of Leipzig. Visiting Scholar UC Berkeley (1990-1, 2005-6). PhD (HU Berlin 1996) and Habilitation (Univ. Hamburg 2008) in sociology.
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