

The Virus harms Western Democracies

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The combination of "monocausal narratives" and "virologically based data sovereignty" has created an "age of total certainty", writes the political scientist Regula Stämpfli. This means the loss of human judgement, political understanding and a social media discourse that is open rather than politicised.

Some may remember Plato's famous struggle against the Sophists. He accused them of "bewitching the mind with arguments" that did not serve the truth but aimed at creating mere opinions, belief systems and look alike truths. As long as these opinions appear plausible, "the power of conviction lies within them".

Hannah Arendt calls this the "temporary victory of arguments at the expense of truth". In my book «Trumpism. A phenomenon that is changing the world» I trace how postmodern narratives ultimately win monocausal arguments over reality through data-supported truths, social media

correlations, polls and speech acts clouding the gap between story and real life.



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The new digital masters, including their instruments as "platform capitalisms" and "digital surveillance state", are destroying empirical realities by means of the "algorithmizing the world" with such precisely calculated

conclusiveness that the difference between fiction and reality is no longer recognizable for most of us.

The deceptive data package

This also puts the existence of historical realities, such as those manifested in democratic decision-making processes, at risk. Data packets "prove" some opinions, sometimes others, in relation to reality, so that they often no longer "really" explain anything. All of this makes our existence as citizens extremely fragile, since, as cosmopolitans of an opaque data-based system, we cannot interact free and equal with each other but are forced to communicate through data-based systems, which on their account are biased.

There is no longer a "new normal" for democracies, even after a possible corona vaccine.

"How are you supposed to sort out the chaos of transmitted facts when the tradition of "how to" is no longer valid?" Hannah Arendt asks in her study of totalitarianism. I ask the same: "How are you

supposed to sort out the chaos of transmitted data when there is no tradition of how to understand data in relationship to the real world? Hannah Arendt explains in her study on totalitarianism how ideologies aim to "replace fully the no longer valid rules of common sense". A common sense which Arendt defines as "common understanding, communicating as common among equals" – through which we can experience a common world we all share, because we have words, discourse, explanation, stories that bind us together rather than break us apart through "higher causes". In the pandemic all these communications, even among the scientists have been raptured for weeks because of Corona and have been polarised through coded incentives that do not strengthen understanding but emotions, opinions and scandals.

This combination of monocausal narratives, including virologically based data sovereignty, constructs an "age of total certainty" that leads to the almost complete disappearance of classic judgments about right and wrong. That's why conspiracy theories are springing up like Twitter mushrooms in virtual space.

This "conquest of the world as a code" has been on my mind since 2003, but I had no idea that I would have the misfortune of having to experience one of my greatest fears about the state of the world on my own body, namely that codes, data, algorithms, calculated risks have the power not only to deprive us from all the life we have known before but are also capable to suppress all open discussion about the sanity of all regulations being issued.

The fragility of human beings

This is no coincidence, but the result of political sleepwalkers combined with Chinese people's broadcast violence and Western democratic impotence. Anyone who wants to understand how even Swiss democracy was able to plunge hundreds of thousands of people into misery overnight without resistance, cushioned by the immeasurable wealth of this country, whose federal councilors are constantly boasting of new

aid packages, must come to terms with the global trend that has been going on for a decade: humanity, yes, to hurt the essence of man/woman/* him/her/*self.

The western democracies have been plunged into the abyss physically and politically by the Chinese virus. They will stay there if they do not counteract the asymmetry between the People's Republic of China and the rest of the world, if they do not counteract the imbalance of global digital platforms, the data-tyranny and surveillance capitalism (believe me, in Bavaria you had scenes in the lockdowns which reminded of long totalitarian times: the police hunting down teenagers who met in the free air to chat with each other after having been locked up for weeks in their apartments) with an active democratization program.

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Misanthropes everywhere?

The paternalistic way of governments, that the state praises or blames and determines how the citizens have to behave, the violation of fundamental rights, for example in the canton of Ticino imposing a "ban on going out" for all over 65-year-olds; further the expropriation of self-employed, of small and medium-sized companies with the indication that they will operate the debt economy for the next thirty years as a kind of solidarity surcharge based on the German model - slap all democracies and dismiss all liberal freedoms and do so unconstitutionally.

Science and Data determined emergency governments everywhere, served by thousands of willing intellectuals and media giving up all democratic freedom for "the greater good" and calling all critics of the measures taken as misanthropes, as conspiracy followers, as crazy – until today. The effect of this enormous failure of the elite will haunt us for decades to come.

The first exit strategy must therefore be: Let's practice parrhesia, in contradiction, in diversity, in mutual acceptance and tolerance while at the same time maintaining the applicable regulations.

And clear alternatives are urgently needed, because: Who wants to let virologists decide on the future of democracy?

Post-Corona will only be post when we, the survivors of western democracies, ring in the zero hour. We need an extraordinary economic miracle. At the same time, we as fighters for all western democracies, must recognize that a policy that turns people into isolated individuals overnight, who cannot bind themselves to family, friends, acquaintances, jobs, educational institutions, clubs, associations, parties, but only to their own self and who are collectively bound to serve data, experts and emergency regimes, has to be radically changed and democratized much better. The pandemic should bring to all of us a new start because what happened in the first months was a total disaster: Yes, we did prevent maybe millions of deaths and yes, the first lockdown was important because nobody had a clue what was happening since the Chinese did not inform us properly about what exactly the virus was about but to uphold and to restrict any discourse on the measures afterwards, the polarization in the social media immediately when discussing the origin of the virus and its effect on democracies, has been

devasting for our functioning human judgment and living together peacefully in our Western democracies. To train each individual to sacrifice everything and everyone for a greater good is a very dangerous path which has to halt.

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