

Population Confused and Paralyzed by Coronavirus: Psychological Remarks on the All Too Human Reflex of Obedience: “Silence Is Not Philosophical”

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Theme: [History](#)

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At the moment large parts of the population are confused and paralyzed by the declared coronavirus pandemic and its serious social and economic consequences. Are they quickly prepared to accept the very drastic, sometimes questionable restrictions of basic rights guaranteed by the state without contradiction as necessary and without alternative? These include the fundamental right of personal freedom and the right to physical integrity.

What is the cause of this unrestrained reflex of obedience?

And how are citizens supposed to arrange their lives after this break – this current haunting?

Where are the “free thinkers”, the philosophers and other intellectuals who are in nobody’s service, who strive on their own to know the truth and who are ready and able to think for all of us alone?

Their task would be to teach “us others” what the task of our time is – and what should be in the future. On the facade of the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade hangs a large banner with the inscription “NIJE FILOZOFSKI CUTATI” – “To be silent is not philosophical”.

Naomi Klein’s “shock strategy”

If you look at the current horror scenario worldwide, the daily bad news of the mass media, the identical announcements and restrictive activities of governments and the immense damage to the global economy while enriching “global players” as well as the panic and shock-induced paralysis of the affected citizens, you are involuntarily reminded of the socially critical bestseller “The Shock Strategy” by the Canadian scientist Naomi Klein.

In it she tries to prove that neoliberal governments have single-mindedly exploited the confusion and paralysis of people after political or economic crises or natural disasters. In these phases of crisis, the capitalist economic system is quickly crammed through in its purest form. It is a “shock treatment” before the population has the strength again to resist.

To what extent the current global crisis is a natural disaster or a man-made catastrophe, that remains to be seen.

Education to Obedience

A psychologically interesting question is why most people subordinate themselves

reflexively and without contradiction to the will of authority – in this case the governments – and accept serious sometimes highly controversial and questionable restrictions of their fundamental rights. Freedom of movement is massively restricted, even to the point of isolation despite unforeseeable health risks and negative social concomitants. Supposedly threatened sections of the population, such as older citizens, may even be forced to take part in protective vaccinations or other specific prophylactic measures, which constitutes a restriction of the right to physical integrity.

Now it is a finding of scientific psychology that we adults, by and large, have at our disposal only what we have been taught by the educators during our childhood. This deep psychological insight has made it clear to us what a tremendous impact education has.

So if the highest principle of education at home and at school is still the education to obedience, it is not surprising that we as adults obey politicians and self-proclaimed experts – so-called authorities – reflexively and nip in the bud any doubts that may arise about the measures ordered, or even prevent them from arising in the first place.

The autobiographical notes of Rudolf Höß “Commander in Auschwitz” – written down during his remand in Krakow in 1946 – are a psychological document of exemplary historical significance. They show us the connection between Höß’ authoritarian upbringing according to strictly military principles and his later absolute obedience to the murderous orders of his “Führer”. The seemingly incomprehensible is thus made comprehensible. (See “NRhZ” No. 507 of 22.04.2015 “Psyche of Commander Rudolf Höß”)

If we do not want people to show this reflex of obedience in the future, then pedagogy in the home and school must renounce the authoritarian principle – which for centuries was considered the unquestionably valid basis of educational behaviour – and the use of violence. Educators must adapt themselves to the child’s spiritual life with true understanding, respect the child’s personality and turn to him or her in a friendly manner. Such an education will produce a type of person who has no “subject mentality” and will therefore no longer be a docile tool for those in power in our world.

The task of the philosopher and other intellectuals

We are all called upon to make our contribution to solving the great task of the future. Philosophers and other intellectuals have a special responsibility in this respect. They should be those people who (thinking) take responsibility for themselves and all other people, “if need be, stands alone within all, think alone for all” (Romain Rolland). This requires a fighting spirit that does not get lost, even if it contradicts the prevailing opinion. Intellectuals should also be honest, because a lack of honesty has already led to many errors, of which the theories are full of. Such independent, courageous and honourable thinkers would be an example for our youth, just as countless thinkers and humanists have been in the past centuries.

Philosophers and other intellectuals as representatives of various disciplines have the noble task of passing on to their fellow citizens what they have acquired in their studies, what their science has worked out to solve the problems of humanity. When they use their intellectual abilities, their research and their struggle for truth for the benefit of those through whom they became what they are, they make a valuable contribution to the common good. The future of our culture will depend largely on whether there are enough “enlighteners”. More than ever, we need “free spirits” to teach us what is truth and what is

a lie. The purpose of the Enlightenment effort is above all to purify human consciousness of individual and collective prejudices. The enlightened mind is capable of considering healthy goals in life. (See "NRhZ" No. 424 of 18.09.2013 "Tasks of intellectuals in uncertain times")

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