

THERE IS A TOMORROW

In the feuilleton of my favourite newspaper – the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" – when times were still halfway normal, there was once some speculation about whether our universe might be an object created by higher artificial intelligence. In this case, we humans would be digitally functioning creatures, highly complex assembled things, equipped with a little autonomous (also artificial) intelligence, trapped in a huge hamster wheel spinning frantically. In the background of this universe would be computers of unimaginable size. These ultra-powerful machines would occasionally find ordinary human activity too monotonous, so they would send the busy little humans a surprise or two and then watch with interest and amusement how the earthlings would come to terms with them.

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Now I personally am sceptical about such a mechanistic idea of metaphysics. And certainly in the case of the corona crisis, the word "amusement" is inappropriate in view of the number of victims and the extensive economic damage. Nevertheless, the question of the arrangement, that is, what the post-corona world will look like, is the crucial one. It is of course still too early to assess the extent and nature of the fall-out. But one thing already appears clear: it will be some time before the global economy is back in sync again. The main problem is not the immediately apparent effects such as closed restaurants and shops – after all, these qualify for the not insignificant fiscal aid measures. More threatening are the countless

secondary effects that will follow the imposed respiratory failure. Here a build-up of goods, there shortages, in many places production by government decree, and everywhere demand for state funds, since regaining the pre-crisis level will not be a rapid process.

But where lies the greatest danger? We have suddenly been caught up in a regime of directives. We must obey – and rightly so. This is a world of black and white. Right and wrong, good and evil, are sharply delineated. Real life, though, is colourful, the transitions between the shades are blurred, the good always contains a hint of evil – and vice versa. We must return to that life-affirming state as quickly as possible! And we must put this proxy regime, driven by virologists, behind us again, depose the well-meaning regents. The planned economy, enthusiastically applauded by certain media, is already gazing around the corner. The road to servitude is paved with gifts and promises for which no one has paid.

There is no question that we have just slipped into a recession. There is equally no doubt that the world has suddenly become poorer, that we have to pick ourselves up again from a lower speed. But people, and the economy, are more resilient than is generally assumed and more than the well-meaning regents believe. Let us produce once more, when the process no longer makes us ill! And let each of us who can bring fuel to the economic cycle, with our creative power or our capital, search with a free spirit for ways and means to be useful. Stagnation is a question of mind. So is an upswing. A free spirit is not controlled by a superior artificial intelligence, but neither does it serve a dirigiste authority.

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