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The Failure of Schools under Covid-19 Policies in Germany – what it means and how it could happen. A social-hermeneutical ethics perspective

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Abstract

This essay describes the impact of COVID-19 related policies on the democratic fabric of German society, focusing the situation of children. It applies a methodology of ethics for salutogenesis, exploring, how policies and underlying motifs align with *doing the right things for the right reasons*. Five key areas are analyzed in the social-political specter of power of health-related judgement, connecting psychology, politics, economy, academia and culture. The discussion finds that the crisis reveals grave and basic flaws in the texture of democratic culture that could be healed by serious measures to reinvigorate the spirit of the German Constitution.

Keywords:

Covid-19, Ethics, Philosophy of Culture, Children's Health, Salutogenesis, Democracy.

*Children are not future people,
because they are people already...
whose souls contain the seeds
of all those thoughts
and emotions that we possess ...
[and] as [they] develop,
their growth must be gently directed.*
Janusz Korczak¹

1 Introduction of methodology and scope

With the pronouncement of a Novel Coronavirus Thread by the ECDC on January 9, 2020, and the WHO declaring the nCoV-2019 outbreak, as a 'public health emergency of international concern' (PHEIC), on January 30, 2020, a cascade of virus – and policy-related events hit societies globally, that is still gathering momentum (CDN 2021). The impact on health characteristics permeates all areas of social life and individual well-being, on global and local levels. Whereas it is far too early for a conclusive analysis of the correlations between interventions and outcomes, in medical, political, economic or cultural terms, the ubiquitous attention to the phenomenon is already exhibiting patterns of evidence, to support hypothetical exploration and preliminary observations.

In this article, the focus is on schools, in their role as social competence building spheres, from the view of the German capital, Berlin. The chosen approach is a social-hermeneutical ethics perspective. This methodology enquires, how to systematically *do the right things for the right reasons* (Döring 2019). Health and dignity are regarded as phenomenal expression and the corresponding transcendental condition,

respectively. They delineate one holistic continuum of reason-based human value deliberation and Covid-19 policies assessment that presents humanity with a universal ethical challenge. *Doing the right thing* engages the proportional evaluation of all relevant facts in light of the *right reasoning*, that is, considering the connectivity of dignity and health. The related operation of practical judgement regarding presumed health measures is the variable that directly depends on education and the sincerity of policies and communication in the public sphere.

Hermeneutics explores the capacities for purpose-building transactions across social systems, including (sub-)cultures, epistemic (sciences) and social practice (governance, discourse). Regarding health events, *ethics demands coherence* in aligning all purpose-driven efforts, which builds its connection with pragmatic rationales, economic incentives and governance measures. The teleologic continuum permeating the subjective and objective quality building process, supporting health potency, that is, salutogenesis (Mittelmark, 2017), can be captured in the descriptive, normative and expressive characteristics, by means of hermeneutics, that exhibits the symbolic forms and languages informing health policies and philosophy as cultural text (Posner 2003, Lorusso 2015), so as to weave them into a coherent holistic methodology for health theory and practice, in the context of Global Health (Bonk 2021, Döring 2020).

In this context, schools can serve as protected root spaces to learn human faculties, for reading, calculating and writing, in a constructive cultural and social sense. This is intrinsically connected with health maturity and workplace quality, pinpointing the ultimate value base of all social goods. As such, schools are tasked to contribute to health literacy and civil responsibility, cultivating individual personalities. Sound reasoning proposes that

coherent national health policies would, first, sustain generous funds for a state-of-art public health infrastructure and, second, implement health literacy as a mandatory baseline for mature citizenship, marking children and work space as primary health objectives and critical units for cultivating social goods. As for Germany, the character of a solidarity based social market economy and healthy democracy approach summarizes the common spirit regarding health policies, until the 1990s.

Since then, three decades of neo-liberal patchworking have left their marks on the health and education sectors in particular, but also on academia, the media and jurisdiction – which notably are expressly privileged in their freedom, by the German Constitution. The impact of the structural revolution can be gathered from random examples, such as the following. The last published brochure on 'In-School Health Education and Promotion' by the Federal Agency for Health Promotion (*Bundeszentrale für Gesundheitliche Aufklärung, BZGA*) dates back to the year 2000 (BZGA 2000). The slim, 36 pages volume has never been updated in response to the ongoing globalization of health issues and in particular the lessons learned from SARS 1, MERS, Ebola etc. The German National Academy of Science, Leopoldina, published their last 'Framework for Health Promotion in Schools' in 2008 (BZGA 2008). Federal structures that would connect regional capacities in the event of crisis or emergency where either degraded or not capacitated. The groundbreaking policy impact of the HIV/AIDS response, in a nutshell, appears as a solitary incident, for all the knowledge it has generated about the dependence of peace, stability, justice and political legitimacy on sound holistic health policy and related education and risk assessment. Initiatives, to address the conceptual, governance and infrastructure building needs for pandemic prevention and intervention across

Eurasia were left unheeded across the board of ministerial compartments (Döring 2020a).

Ad hoc resolutions to fill the gap by spontaneous initiative and alliances operated erratic and below due procedure standards. In early 2021, a set of guidelines, purportedly intended to prevent and control SARS-CoV-2 transmission in schools, was announced by an array of self-appointed interest groups, who mustered support from federal policies, for renouncing public health standards, especially the prospect for healthy normality. The document was published by the German Ministry of Science and Technology, wrongly suggesting a federal mandate (BMBF 2021). The pre-selection of participants had precluded transparency and diversity of critical scientific and social representation. The outcome builds a connection, between the confirmed finding of low or no scientific evidence base supporting the health impact of state-ordained measures, on one hand, and positive recommendations of the same measures that were deemed not evident but still meaningful in some big picture. The BMBF, at the same time, found that children cannot be positively seen as pandemic drivers (BMBF 2021a) This self-contradicting political line was not explained. The (up to now) last school, 'lock-down' was maintained until early June 2021.

Such measures continue a series of premature, implausible and counterproductive communications and policies that inspired Federal Minister of Health, Jens Spahn, as early as in April 2020 to foresee that there was going to be, 'a lot to forgive', considering the mismanagement of the crisis. Health statistician Gerd Antes called, 'the fact that the relevant data needed here for assessment has not been collected (...an...) unbelievable neglect', and demanded immediate action, 'to collect data systematically and really pro-actively' (Deutschlandfunk 2021). The continuing observation of the inadequacy of the authorities

¹ Janusz Korczak (1878–1942), a Polish paediatrician and educator, pen name of Dr Henryk Goldszmit. (Korczak 2018, Molloy 2019).

has gradually affected the public sentiment (Kauermann 2021), which had been tolerant, optimistic and compliant over most of 2020. Increasingly, mainstream media have begun to relieve the small number of critical civil society outlets from their oddity, in 2021, and responsible academics are beginning to organize expression of scientific dissent, to counter the confused narrative and eroded trust for the benefit of wider populations, to criticize and restore the sanity of political, scientific, public and medical elites.

2 Social-political specters of power of health-related judgement

The crisis is a symptom of the demise of excellent social medicine, public health and solidarity standards that defined a political consensus of Germany's social market economy until the beginning of the 1990s. The blurring of the conceptual foundations of this model and the physical deterioration of public infrastructures, such as schools and health institutions, owing to public non-investment in the maintenance or modernization and the draining of profits into the private sector, for example through shareholder benefits, since then, has taken its toll. Typically, the onset of the crisis meant that restoring basic sanitary conditions, air filters, communication and documentation technologies, had to compete over resources with the imagined standards of data protection and shareholder interests or life style privileges. The quality of training of teachers and nurses and their respective workplace conditions was favored less than other political priorities. It is common knowledge that performance of digital literacy and technology has not yet entered the public sphere in 21st century Germany, in spite of feasibility, leaving schools ever more disadvantaged. On the other hand the income and education gaps across social strata continue to widen in the private sphere,

leaving disadvantaged populations, especially children, behind and unprotected from the mental health hazards of consumerism, especially when exposed to global digital products. Even in their currently feeble and unequal condition, schools could have offered some degree of human learning, solidarity and awareness building. The closing of schools amounts to a submission of social capacity building for democratic culture to powers with different interests.

On the part of state and political leadership, wrong judgements effected premature, disproportional and counter-effective policies, that came to terms in irrational narratives of fear and warfare instead of reasonable confidence. They are rooted in poor power of quality judgement that may be connected with politicians' biographies lack of world experience, also expressing loss of historical memory and moral compass, and an inability to make sense of the existing good knowledge about public health: society's faculties for health were further underappreciated, marginalized and invalidated. Policy coherence was subverted due to incompetent organization of trans-disciplinary interaction between sectors, departments and disciplines that would otherwise mobilize salutogenesis. Such decisions were made, in spite of the substantial hard knowledge and soft skills available. Late in the crisis, leading politicians discovered the need for integrated knowledge and collaborating capacities they had ignored before (Ärzteblatt 2021).

This description is further corroborated when we look at the schools' officially defined social role. In 2015, the BZGA still confidently set the standard thus, „In schools, students, parents and teachers and other staff enter into a partnership for health and well-being at school. There, they jointly consider what it means, when, how and where health should be promoted at school, and also actively

cooperate in the joint implementation“ (BZGA 2015). The evident rational course of action, when faced with a pandemic development, would have been, to utilize knowledge and skills generated within this potential social salutogenic sphere, effectively and efficiently, and engage schools as a core network of competence centers. This never happened. The public health service doctors and nurses are notoriously under-funded, under-equipped, under-appreciated and overaged. They simply lack the means to be present in schools, and, to communicate empirical health data that routinely inform state policy, such as through the Robert Koch Institute. Very early in the face of the pandemic, health monitoring agencies decidedly hesitated to implement an effective protocol, that would have started with a clear gradation of the pathology of Covid-19 and aligned with the appropriate measures. Rather, testing was refused, medical masks were disputed, data were dispatched erratically, by fax and not over weekends, experts of various provenance entertained a Babylonian cacophony of opinions, interpretations and offered problems instead of orientation. No plausible narrative was formed to guide the discourse and exercise leadership.

One year ago, President of the Bundestag, Wolfgang Schäuble, reminded German society that our constitution demands that the state protect human dignity, while leaving life-related judgements to moral discourse, to no avail. Rationales quoted to explain the inconsistencies within the ‚life-saving‘ frenzy and rhetorics of warfare, were, technical reliability deficits, data protection and saving lives claims. Evidence indicates, however, that poor preparedness, dysfunction of logistics and infrastructures were the actual deciding factors. The commonly established disregard for actual lives owing to the pathology-based health economy design, exemplified in morbidity patterns such as death and disease from tobacco

consumption or harmful diets, indicate the entrenchment of state policies with support for preventable non-communicable morbidities,.

Likewise, an example of misjudgment on the scale of grand infrastructures is the case of the incapacitated Federal Office for Civil Protection and Disaster Relief. This office had been set up to respond to major health crisis, to organize crisis management and coordinate disaster relief, through its Joint Reporting and Situation Centre. The tasks included health protection, specifying determination of research needs and development of framework plans, NBC protection and prevention in the scientific – technical and medical field, logistics, infrastructure services such as the design and procurement of supplementary civil protection-related equipment for the federal states, scientific and technical advice, such as by risk analysis. This much needed facility to manage large federal health threats for the entire population was first marginalized and then overruled by informal agents close to political process. Even after its former president was sacked in November 2020, this core institution assumed no visible role.

It is apparent, how Public Health had been politically weakened, from root to the branches, when Covid-19 hit. Then, on Friday, April 13, 2020, the regional and federal education authorities implemented a helter-skelter maize of inadequate measures in the name of pandemic containment, that preliminarily ended on June 9, 2021 (Deutschlandfunk 2021a). This was euphemistically called school-lockdown. Doing wrong things for confused reasons is groundwork for failure.

2.1 The psychological specter shows: the acting generation of policy makers are unprepared to face real responsibility on a global scale

As sketched above, in connection with the Covid-19 crisis, basic rules of good governance were ignored, such as, to regulate only what the authorities are prepared to control. The subsidiarity principle, to delegate responsibility to the lowest competent unit was blurred. In public assertions, state and pundits pretended to be in charge of everything, ranging from morality to health and truth, but neglected the relevant infrastructures and logistics, that would organize relevant soft and hard power skills and transactions, and could implement and monitor the necessary measures. On the other hand, they argued with unclear facts when it suited the need to remain vague and opportunistically avoided commitment to standards for appropriateness (March 2011). Citizens were put into a position, either of obedience or as zealots when they demanded clarification of ill explained or perceived unreasonable measures. Responsibility was then assumed arbitrarily, where state had withdrawn from its social functions, such as in public transportation, informal public gatherings, or at the workplace. This baffling performance of a state disengaging from social service, compromised the thin layer of constitutional patriotism. All sorts of dissenting voices compete for dominion over the disoriented public sphere, while a healthy society demands competence and leadership.

In order to render power of judgement decisive and balance it with the bigger social picture, an adequate understanding of existential suffering and personal maturity is required, as a soft skill foundation. To make it legitimate and not merely legal, this personal real life experience is needed on a higher level

than most acting officers can be expected to have, considering their biographies.

Not only frustration, confusion and quarrels have grown from this grand failure. It also obstructed initiatives and pro-active self management capacities at lower levels. Schools in particular stood stunned and shocked, while their masters awaited senate orders that scarcely brought empowerment, whereas knowledge and engagement among students, parents and staff was not even considered as a resource for collaborative salutogenic strategies. What could have become a model project of disciplined democratic citizen participation was sacrificed at the altar of over-protectionism and blind fear, unequal to a risk-mature society (Beck 1992). Instead of confidently harvesting the fruits of the dividend of three generations of peace and prosperity, honoring the value of underlying knowledge about education, health and economy, compartmentalized timidity ruled the German minds.

The apparent explanation lies in the systematic and ongoing policy of starving social grassroots, public infrastructures and a humanistic discourse, combined with the 'outsourcing' of basic services to the private for-profit sector, while depriving the traditionally strong private non-profit sector of viable business models. This decline of political culture goes hand in hand with an inability to balance the structural costs of abstraction of power and responsibility, by means of credible narratives and leadership. Accountability attached to individuals and the standards for reading normative frameworks, such as the Constitution, according to purpose, are delegated to impersonal agencies or processes. Even the political parties, in their campaigns, have exchanged the crooked timber of human faces for smart advertisement campaigns. Real debate is marked as inconvenient. This is registered with frustration among constituencies.

Not to know what we are doing while being unable to explain the reasons, generates mistrust and irresponsibility. Not to be pro-actively interested in all relevant evidence indicates inconsistent reasoning.

This psychological backdrop helps to contextualise the other three areas of the specter of the crisis of power of judgement in Germany.

2.2 The political specter shows: social discourse tends to deteriorated into Twitter-Darwinism, without champions to defend standards and offer wholesome prospect for democratic culture

It is the primary function of democratic politics, to engender social conditions and conceptual frameworks for trust and cooperation across all groups and strata, so that everyone can reasonably assume their due role in society, respecting others' freedom. Knowledge management is a key factor. Early on in the pandemic, WHO chief Dr. Tedros had warned about the real substantial threat of an 'infodemic', for the management of the crisis. The interface of responsibility, critique (for checks and balances) and authority, that would drive the selection of leaders according to their merits and the release of information according to due process was blurred, because equal freedom to express a considered opinion, was confused with the liberty of anarchic access to public power owing to ownership of information technologies. Basic requirements, to legitimize the actual expression of opinion, where marginalized, trivialized and vulgarized, so that populism and control over algorithms called the shots. Particularism triumphed, as common political language among citizens deteriorated into a Babylonian confusion of sub-cultures, so did coherence of society. The

unwillingness among the public, to continue to justify authority, resulted in an inability to act responsibly, that would infest micro-, meso – and macro-spheres of governance. They are now organized in ways that euphemistically 'socialise' infrastructures of public service, delegating or deferring responsibility, while profits are privatized.

The resulting inconclusiveness proves fatal for the stability of social goods, as a unifying policy objective. It is now getting more difficult to hedge the libertarian comfort zones, to balance, mend and learn from the results of poor judgement. Under the protective umbrella of the Western Allies during the Cold War period, Germany had first benefited from eminent knowledge and experience rooted in the first seven decades of the 20th century. Then, Germany arranged its conscience as an accomplice of the powerful colonial heritage and finally abandoned the domestic means to cultivate lessons learned, to emancipate from 'Uncle Sam's' unilateralism. The latter's monoculture ominously spread in the education sector, disintegrating the holistic culture of knowledge, and discrediting the solidarity core of social economy. (Döring 2018)

In the absence of robust and honest sovereignty, pundits have begun to respond to moderate criticism against state measures indiscriminately, with a strategy of aligning power, morality and truth. The need to repair fundamental political flaws, as it had been moral sense when regarding global justice, for a century, considering unsustainable lifestyles for decades, and considering health and education for over a generation, has not been received with mature deliberation and explorative interest. Rather, opinions are spun like as by spoiled children deprived of their sense of entitlement. Political parties, unions and churches joined the ranks of this privileged reaction, rather than becoming a vanguard of reform. Current leaders and dominant parts

of society nurture the assumption, that we are the good guys“, as a socio-political strategy for accommodation under the economic requirements of consumerism. Arguably, in the absence of open racist chauvinism in Germany, exploitation of the larger parts of global populations, including future generations, works best, under the shared self-image of entitlement, accompanied by symbolic acts of charity or assumed solidarity, when they do not require some sacrifice. Investment in justice-based Global Health (Bonk and Döring 2020) and holistic education, then, might effect disruption instead of complacency.

With no champions to defend standards of reasoning and means to do the right things right, governance cannot support democratic culture.

2.3 The economic specter shows: structurally devalued sectors of education and health cannot benefit health resilience or healthy policies

Economy means proper housekeeping, comprising the organizational and motivational motives of generating and sharing value, material and intangible, while using resources effectively and efficiently. Over 50 years, Germany's model was successfully developed under the frame of a *ordo-liberal* social market economy. Unification after 1989 marked a turning point towards a mix of neo-liberal and commercialism models, carrying the psychological momentum of the 'End of History' as a torch of entitlement and failing to continue disciplined work on the deliberative democracy project. The plea for a stronger entrepreneurial ethos, by Federal President Roman Herzog in 1997, passed unheeded. In 2005, eminent journalist Ulrich Wickert published an essay entitled, 'When honesty is stupid. Losing our value base' (Wickert 2005),

where he expressed a fatalist attitude that was widely spread and would be a wake-up call for democratic conscience, had it survived the news circle. Instead, the 'us below and them above' – outlook gained momentum, in the absence of a social economic culture. Building the re-unified nation, the complicit majority became used to leaving the design with 'them above'. Sophisticated incentives for rational but unhealthy behavior, such as the framing of health services not in terms of medical needs but as business plans, (for example, the 'Diagnosis Related Group' policy standardizing and overruling the individual case in order to weaken the economic self-determination of physicians, Jürges 2013), invited smart schemes, to play the system instead of serving its purpose. Notably this went against the constitutional design of the solidarity-based system, but prevented sanctions because it acquired legal form. On the other side, poor incentives were provided for reasonable, such as healthy, behavior. The pathogenic economy design took over the management of the salutogenic value chain and corrupted the means to achieve social goods. (Unschuld 2009) Earlier cases of large scale mismanagement of public funds that had persuaded society to accept this development since the beginning of the 2000s, now look unsubstantial, in the face of the historic misappropriation of care-giving capacities and of the implementation of aid for economic grassroots arbitrarily deprived of their work.

Substituting constitutionally qualified reasons (such as defining health through dignity) with other goods (such as life or wellness), is not the same as, but a violation of, legitimate purpose and cannot inform doing the economically right thing.

2.4 The academic specter shows: science lost her detached authority position

Structural political decisions that would marginalize the impact of humanistic quality sciences („Geisteswissenschaften“) in favor of the rationality of empirical-metrical research („Naturwissenschaften“) have taken over the structural design of the academia. In the European Union, the Bologna Process, initiated in 1988, gradually got administered in a corporate spirit, working against the cultural core of science in continental Europe, following the Anglo-Saxon 'Two Cultures' doctrine (Baker 2009). After the collapse of the Wall that had protected the cultural bubble over Germany in the 'West', this monoculture proved to be shortsighted. It produced a decline of innovative soft skills and related soft powers, that would have helped to reconfigure the world according to changing global realities.

Namely the sprouts of interpretive faculties of Philosophy, History and Mathematics in Public Health matters were asphyxiated, while the foundational methodology of Hermeneutics was discredited rather than boosted in order to cater for the complex knowledge needs of the 21. Century. The interdisciplinary balance of the interface-connecting Social Sciences was nudged, to tip over toward theoretical or empirical silos. The focus now lies on counting rather than accounting for, on describing rather than contextualizing, on deciphering rather than reading, on publishing rather than writing – on research production rather than understanding knowledge (*Wissenschaft*). Algorithms take over the role of reason. As a consequence, organization and interpretation of relevant knowledge, according to public health purposes, was not improved but skewed. On the other hand, this reductionist twist enabled administrators to put forward their kind of planning economy and allowed

the migration of political, strategic and power rationales into the academic system.

In effect, open discourse beyond the specialties was stymied, so that, for example, virology competed with immunology, instead cooperating with risk communicators and holistic technology assessment experts. This was possible only with the academic bodies accepting their role as accomplices facilitating the power alliances between corporate academics, media and politics. As of today, no comprehensive panel for continuous monitoring of the reasonability of measures and no related infrastructure has been installed that would bring together the relevant scientific excellence effectively (Deutschlandfunk 2021). After an initial call in the Spring of 2020, to mobilize a public discourse over the lessons to be learned from Covid-19 policies in our societies, the National Ethics Council dropped this line of engagement and joined the course of moral opinion making.

From a detached view, the meek, opportunistic and divided position of the academia has undermined the authority of reason. The coherence of science, truth, and individual accountability is substantially damaged, honesty of leaders discredited. Opinion polls and media trends seem to confirm a rising discontent, mistrust and sense of declining freedom in German society, owing to a perceived rule of moral censorship and hegemonism of sub-cultures identifying themselves as vanguard, with the power to express and frame language and ('alternative') facts according to their world view.

Authority in doing the right things for the right reasons in the areas of health and education depends on full economic, administrative and political freedom to gather relevant interdisciplinary knowledge into holistic and sustainable policy perspectives, so as to make it available for trans-disciplinary competence.

2.5 The cultural specter shows: an unexplained desire for (perceived) ‚Chineseness‘

The German media stage China's image in a language of drama, oscillating between fascination and fear, with a distinct bias towards US-favoring confrontation. Pragmatic positions among the industry and independent social surveys show a different picture among the population. There it is inclining towards respect and critical open-mindedness. The coincidence of failed Covid-policies and president Trump's disastrous foreign politics made it easy to admire China's comparatively firm, constructive and successful course that applied the conventional basics of traditional Public Health measures, learned from SARS 1, upgrading the means. China took advantage of the lack of leadership in Global Health and the deteriorating role of the USA as paragon for ‚Western values‘. China's image was boosted, as a responsible Public Health actor, with an integrated approach connecting industries, research and technology development, the ‚Belt and Road‘ infrastructures and aid campaigns, focusing on cooperation and connectivity, targeting the Global South.

Several of the above mentioned flaws of German policies are alien to China's political culture, such as the dominance of data protection over people protection instead of integrated strategies, the decoupling of power from quality and office from responsibility. Submission of social goods under individual interests is not an accepted social narrative, nor ‚pro-life‘ over dignity. In spite of pundits' phantasies, however, German society is profoundly conservative, cherishing a relaxed appreciation for traditional values, including family and social stability.

Tentatively, the German public seems set on a combined rational respect and irrational admiration regarding China, as an oddly related

culture. Knowledge of the ancient history and sympathy for China's splendid return as a global player engender a spirit of openness rather than negative prejudice, awe rather than rejection, in the ambiguous German mind. On the other hand, this ambiguity can be interpreted as a disturbed democratic culture that is challenged by opportunism. While the democratic substance dissolves, a strategy of procedural formalism and normative narration is gaining momentum, that confuses lifestyle preferences with free opinion and puts utilitarian calculation in the place of dignity and human rights reasoning. The revival of lifestyle Jacobinism is an expression of the crisis of political orientation and common sense that leaves the vulnerable behind first. (Wagenknecht 2021).

The outcome of such an emerging crisis cannot be predicted. However, here is a plausible scenario. Hypothetically, when confronted with an ultimate decision, between either supporting a decaying trajectory of dignity as a society, declining standards of living, confusion over basic truth and values, or, on the other hand, the promise of stability, security, prosperity and belonging, increases the odds for populism and authoritarianism. This has to do with ‚China‘ only as a mirage. The inability to formulate concepts and strategies for negotiating friendly cohabitation with the most powerful nation of the 21st century manifests a lack of self-confidence and engagement. Fatigue beyond Covid-19 leaves Germany ill prepared for the challenges, to rebuild society and muster the courage to use each individual's reason and solidarity, for the sake of democratic Constitutional Patriotism (Sternberger 1990) as a political project. It might once more appeal to a majority, to elect a path of convenience and to surrender responsibility in the face of confusion.

Doing the right thing in education and health care would depend upon the proper

political reasoning, getting the normative baseline straight.

3 Blurred judgement erodes the basic values of a democratic system

The desire to escape the burdens of responsible citizenship is obvious. An example is the immediate response to the ‚regained freedom‘, after – or in between – ‚lock-down‘ measures, in June 2021. Spontaneously crowds set out, not to restore social allegiance, health and education, but flying out to holiday islands or escaping to circus events such as soccer championship. The frenzy of ‚Bread and Games‘ belies the modesty of humanism and decency of cultivation.

Again, we are forgetting about the children. The arguable medical purpose of locking down schools and depriving children of exercise and social contact, forced them to wear unfit masks, isolated and disoriented pupils in Kindergarden and Primary School. Now it is used as a means for social participation, so that large populations of parents contemplate prudential vaccination instead of health. The next challenge is, to protect children and other vulnerable populations from strategic nudging for vaccinations without medical indication. In May 2021, the German Federal Vaccination Commission (STIKO) expressly warned about the high risks and breach of ethics standards in such politics. Only unjust, sick and cruel societies require that social participation depend on non-medical physical intervention under the name of health.

The diagnoses of a systemic governance failure in response to Covid-19 in Germany might be difficult to appreciate for foreign observers, who are used to an image of Germany as an economic and cultural power house. However, there is a pattern. Not only the children and elderly patients are victims of neglect and

incompetence, in the area of health and social security, as well as of failed federal disaster management infrastructures. The systemic dimension is further illustrated, by the ‚Wire Card scandal‘ that shows complicity of monitoring authorities in an international plot, by the refusal to learn from the Western Financial crisis in 2008, the inability to honor the EU's Dublin Regulation of 2013 for an orderly treatment of refugees, or by the intensifying tensions among EU member states. In Germany, just in 2021, federal associations for Childhood Protection and for Agriculture demanded that among the hectic measures against climate change the care for children and the security of food provisions should not be forgotten, since they never made it expressly into the national Constitution. As context, these events illustrate the need for honesty, for a social historical memory, for a renewed democratic agenda and to revive Constitutional Patriotism as the conceptual groundwork for solidarity and responsibility.

Instead of taking on these tasks, we witness an inversion of shame. Formally, it is a truism in a representative democracy, that the people make their politicians and are ultimately responsible for the quality of governments. However, in Germany, representation is in effect organized through the political parties, whose genuine task is thus defined, according to the Constitution, article 21 (1), „The parties participate in the formation of the political will of the people“. In reality, parties have firmly assumed an unquestioned role as major power broker, acting on behalf of the people and controlling parliamentary work as well as government. Meanwhile, those responsible for the deterioration of the social, education and health sector, at the top of the political hierarchy, have suggested there would be much that ‚we‘ shall have to forgive, ‚after‘ the pandemic. This is tantamount to reversing accountability. When it comes to bearing the

material and moral costs, citizens are left to their own devices, to make sense of shame and atonement. Hopefully, next generations will not inherit additional burdens of blame, discord and corruption.

Germany may be measured against the standard of a sovereign, competent and wealthy country, when considering the ability to afford enormous amounts of domestic aid, to subsidize the freezing of economic activities, to impair future generations, to waste material and humanistic resources and forgo soft power investment. However, the Bundestag chose to extend the controversial legal status of an ‘epidemic situation of national scope’, first determined on 25 March 2020, until after the next round of federal elections, to September 30, 2021. The resolution of 11 June 2021 is the fourth extension.

Considering that the Covid-19 outbreak is just one in a plethora of pathogenic conditions caused by human lifestyles on our planet, it is clear how great the need for better, more precise, intelligent faculties for management of risks (Gigerenzer 2020) in all areas of global human activity has become. Ironically, our policies make it even more difficult to get back onto the right footing, because they impair children, childhood and education, that is, our hopes for future learning.


4 Conclusion

In July 2021, the president of Germany’s child protection agency called the impact of Covid measures on children a tragedy (*Trauerspiel*), just after a teachers’ association had criticized Covid-19 school policy as a tragic. The philologists’ association in Rhineland-Palatinate criticized the state government’s handling of the corona crisis with regard to schools as, ‘essentially a tragedy’, adding that the ‘demonstrably wrong Corona school policy’ has fatal consequences for the health of teachers, students and families (PHV 2021). Damage assessment

remains difficult for the time being, yet the dimensions are clear.

The Covid-19 crisis for the first time exposes unified Germany’s neglect of salutogenic capabilities, the poor resilience and vulnerability beyond medical health threats, adversely affecting the democratic solidarity culture. Instead of preparing for global responsibility by building a good example, Germany was busy surrendering to short-sighted commercialism, partisan politics, unsustainable lifestyles and unjust economics. Competence for reasonable attitudes and coherent policies towards health under conditions of globalized modern risk-societies has been defined clearly but was not utilized. The potency of Germany’s holistic science and education system could not take effect.

The blatant failures and misjudgments apparent in Covid-19 politics indicate the need for German society to arrive at a decision: make serious policy changes, to turn soft power of social virtues into soft capital for social well-being and dignity, in order to resist both, authoritarian temptations and the sell-out of humanity for commodification.

The ways in which we capacitate schools to create salutogenic citizenship will provide the objective answer, not political framing of narratives. This litmus test will mark the resilience of democratic culture in Germany, for the next global challenges, in and beyond health. 

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