

Autonomous perspectives on economy, state, coronavirus

**On the relationship between state – corona – economy and something about
autonomous health care**

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“What use is health if you are otherwise an idiot” – Adorno

Introduction

The coronavirus and the lung disease Covid-19 it causes plunge people all over the world into chaos and misfortune. Never before have so many people suffered from contact-bans and curfews at the same time as at the moment – at the moment it is probably about 25% of the world population – and the trend is rising. It is also probably quite a while ago that in the centres of the so-called Western world sick and needy people were no longer able to get a place in hospital, that their surgeries were delayed and that a disease infected a considerable part of hospital staff, thus further worsening the health care situation. The worldwide death figures may be frightening in permanently updated body counts on the Internet, but the Covid19 pandemic still is on the lower ranks of the pandemics; about as many people have died worldwide as in one of the worse flu years, such as 2017/2018 only in Germany, a flu wave that killed between 300,000 and 600,000 people worldwide, without attracting much attention at all, unless the deaths were in personal surroundings. But it is not at all a question of relativizing Covid-19 and the horror that the disease spreads by comparing it with the annual influenza, the deaths from starvation, the deaths from road traffic, the annual suicides, or any other terrible count of extinguished human life that comes to mind. Rather, the issue here is why the state is taking such an interest in the health of people in society at this particular time, when it normally takes little or no interest in the death of people, whether it be avoidable misfortunes such as disease, war, starvation, suicide and road traffic deaths or dying in unavoidable natural disasters.

To this end, we look at the relationship between the state and the health of the people on the one hand, and in connection with this the relationship between the state and the economy on the other. It should be said that we are looking at the state, society and the economy in their structural relationship to each other, and thus not at the actual governments and companies that fill the structures, nor at the subjective perspectives of people in positions of power, unless they contribute to the structural clarification.

Subsequently, we want to make a small contribution to autonomous health care. It will certainly not be about how and how often to wash your hands or anything like that; general hygiene rules on this have been more than adequately on the table since the beginning of the pandemic. Rather, it is a question of counteracting the health mutilation currently being caused by the authoritarian advance and also of revealing that the constant repetition of health warnings is by no means conducive to health, but rather an expression of the necessary stultification of society by the state in the interests of maintaining its power.

State and economy

To make a long story short: the relationship between the state and the economy is characterized by help to maintain mutual power. The state creates the best possible conditions for the economy to make profits, and in return the economy makes money and goods available so that the state retains its power over society. Society sells its labour to both and receives money in return, with which it can buy the consumer goods it produces itself.

The task of the state is to tune the people in society into this “trade”. The instruments for this are the current pedagogy, sociology and psychology (which are then expressed in education, advertising, urban planning, psychotherapy, etc.); they provide the tools that the state needs to distract people in society from their subjective interests even as children, to make them insecure and isolate them from each other, so that they subsequently consider the interests of the state and the economy to be their own interests and carry out the sale of their labour in exchange for money and consumer goods “voluntarily”, i.e. without much opposition. If there is any contradiction, the state has to regulate the contradiction, which means that it has to find any measures that restore satisfaction in society without causing significant losses to the economy. Satisfaction is usually established in such a way that those parts of society that complain are satisfied by means of a more participatory approach to the distribution of money and, subsequently, more consumption. The basic relationship is not affected by all of these kinds of changes, i.e. the people in society must continue to sell their labour to the state and the economy and in return receive a certain amount of consumer goods.

It is not important for the individual whether someone in an employment relationship sells his labour to an employer or whether he sells his labour directly to a customer in the form of a consumer good, like in self-employment. The most important thing is the exchange of labour for money and the subsequent exchange of money for consumer goods and a general satisfaction with it.

State, economy and health

The people that the state forms in order to pass them on to the economy need certain qualities. These are, on the one hand, very concrete professional qualities (such as being able to read, calculate, write), and on the other hand very general qualities (such as punctuality, honesty, etc.), so that the labour process in which they have to work runs smoothly. Health is one of these qualities, which means that the people that the state prepares for the economy to pass on to it are at best “healthy”. To be healthy in the perspective of the state and the economy means that someone is able to carry out the demands placed on him as smoothly as possible, i.e. is not too weak, too clumsy or restricted, as well as that this can be carried out as free of breaks as possible, i.e. someone appears at his work without interruption. The time someone does not work should at best be sufficient to solve all the problems a person has in body and mind. There is no direct interest in the health of people in society beyond this. As a result, the state has largely handed over the health system to the economy, which in turn has transformed health into a consumer good, i.e. health is something that can be bought and usually gets better when someone can spend more money on it.

In addition, the interest in healthy people has to be determined in figures from an economic point of view. It is related to the amount of manpower needed at all. So if a specific number of hours is needed to work, the economy needs healthy people who can work exactly that number of hours; usually this number is increased by other people who could do the work as well, these are the threat to the people already working that they could be replaced at any time. If there are too many people who could theoretically work but are not needed by the economy (not even to scare others), an imbalance arises. The state would have to provide fewer people, but this has nothing to do with how many people actually live in society and have the expectation, generated

by the state itself, that they will now get a job. This gives rise to the structural, rather terrible interest on the part of business and government that human life should pass away instead of being lived in a healthy way, unless there is a trend towards more and more hours of work being required of people.

A further interest on the part of the state and society in the life and health of people is to be found in the duration of life; if a person retires from working life, he receives a pension. The longer this period lasts, the longer money normally has to be spent on this person, without, however, bringing his labour to market. Therefore, there is no direct interest in the economy in high age of people, on the part of the state only to the extent that a long life expectancy consolidates its role as a state vis-à-vis society. Apart from that, old people only cause trouble, as can be seen from the ongoing debates on pension funding and age under the heading “ageing society” (or let’s say “was” for now, because the corona crisis overshadows everything).

In addition, there is currently a new problem, namely the climate: the production of goods for consumption has reached such a dimension that the world’s climate is suffering as a result. If there would be only a fraction of the amount of people, with the same level of consumption worldwide, much less damage would be done to the climate. If only a fraction of people were alive, the previous structure of economy, state and society could be preserved.

So we can see that the state and the economy have an interest in healthy people who sell their labour, but that they do not have a general interest in people’s health, or, as in the present time, may even have a contrary interest.

State, Economy, Covid-19

From this perspective, the question arises as to whether the state and the economy currently have any structural interest at all in preventing the spread of Covid-19 or in limiting the effects of Covid-19 on society. Covid-19 seems to have the potential to kill many people without having to wage war, and it is mainly old people who are affected. But why is the economy currently suffering and why is the state taking measures to prevent or slow down the spread of Covid-19?

Let us first answer the question about the economy: If the death of many people is not a general damage to the economy, why is there such a panic mood on stock markets worldwide at the moment? The reason is that the structural interest of the economy in its own preservation and the concrete interest of the actors in the economy fall apart. If the number of consumers is suddenly reduced, there will be an “oversaturation” of the market, which usually leads to massive losses (an oversaturation of the market has been observed by a number of economists anyway, so the Covid 19 pandemic has only accelerated this). We already see the problem for the concrete economy, the consumers are temporarily reduced, that alone is enough for trillions of losses. So while it makes relatively little difference to the structure of the economy whether companies are currently making losses en masse or are even closing down, the actual companies are of course fighting it tooth and nail. It can be seen that there are a number of companies that are pressing for a speedy resumption of operations as well as of public life, i.e. want to get the machinery of production and consumption up and running again, since every day that passes makes it less likely that a resumption will happen at all. Alternatively, the state is being asked to bear the costs incurred by the authoritarian measures, in other words to provide companies with proper finances. The economy thus shows that it is not concerned with the lives or survival of people,

but merely with their own survival and the continued existence of their production conditions. In addition, there are even some advantages for the economy in the area of digitalisation. Given the actual technical possibilities, there is a de facto backwardness in many areas. This backwardness is disruptive to the economy in that it means that certain saving potentials have to be foregone, such as rent for offices and conference rooms, if employees could just as easily work at home and hold the necessary meetings in digital rooms, or the abolition of cash, which as a means of payment has, among other things, some consumption-inhibiting effects and creates unnecessary administrative problems; in addition, the data generated by digital payment transactions can be much better exploited than with relatively anonymous cash. Apart from this, it is difficult for business representatives to predict the current situation, but in general it is assumed that production and consumption will pick up again significantly after the Corona crisis, which is why the main concern for the specific companies is to survive and get through the crisis period as unscathed (i.e. without losses) as possible.

Compared to the economy, the state has completely different interests in a mild outcome of the corona crisis. It is completely indifferent to the dying of the people in the broadest sense, as long as it is a dying that on the one hand does not harm the economy too much and on the other hand is a dying that takes place in silence, i.e. without any major complaints from society, such as the worse waves of flu or dying of tuberculosis and the like, or the starving of people in exploited regions of the world. If dying is socially accepted, the extinguishing life is not worth a cent to the state. The only problem is that dying is given too much social attention, and this has happened with regard to the Corona crisis. This brings the state into a problem of legitimacy: Since the state combines all kinds of competences in its ministries and makes a promise to society that it will take care of everything properly, the dying of people which society experiences as problematic is something that the state has to prevent. How many people die from the concrete corona pandemic in Germany is therefore only important for the state to the extent that the body count is in a negative relationship to the efforts of the state that are received in society. For him, it is sufficient if at the end of the crisis the impression has been created that the state has not omitted any measure to reduce the number of deaths, that it has spared neither costs nor efforts, that it has not bowed its head, that it has taken responsibility. However, this is a relative problem for the current state, since it has taken numerous steps in recent years that prove the opposite, i.e. it has shied away from costs and efforts, bowed its head and handed over responsibility for maintaining health in society to the economy, i.e. it has transformed health into a consumer good. So far, this has led to a whole series of negative consequences, such as the excessive workload of nursing staff and the associated illnesses, the abolition of unprofitable hospital beds, the deterioration of the nursing key, and so on, but so far it has been possible to conceal this misery to a large extent. However, the current completely predictable corona crisis (which has been known for years through simulations) means that the negative consequences can no longer be concealed.

The state reacts to this on the one hand by temporarily reducing (the state pays for each hospital bed) the commercialization of hospitals (good care is given to those who pay well for it). On the other hand, however, it has come up with a special trick, namely to blame society for the problems with the Corona crisis. This is done by creating an image that the problem is that parts of society would not comply with the authoritarian measures initiated in the interests of health. Thus, the problem is no longer that sick people cannot get the treatment they need, but that healthy people advance the spread of the virus. As a result, every person in society who does

not comply with the measures is partly to blame for the death of sick fellow human beings. At the same time, this creates the impression that all people could “actively” do something against the corona crisis, whereby they should actually be urged to absolute passivity. Activism in the corona crisis consists of staying at home and encouraging others to do the same. For this, on the one hand, the image of health had to be submitted in the sense that “sick is whoever carries a virus – regardless of the symptoms one suffers from or not”, as opposed to the idea that “sick is whoever carries a virus and whose immune system is not strong enough to deal with a virus”. With the shift in the general (non-medical) concept of illness, the ban on contacts and meetings can be justified with continued regularity in the future.

So the state, with its authoritarian measures, is not really concerned with the health of society, it is concerned with buying itself time so that it can solve the problems it has caused itself, without having too much anger about it, which could lead to a legitimacy crisis.

Apart from the central problem of its legitimacy, the state can use the current crisis to secure its position in relation to society for future crises. All its measures must be viewed from this perspective; although the restructuring of society is concealed as health care, in fact the state is only using the current “crisis management” as a cover to enforce authoritarian interests that already exist, without society being able to react to them with resistance. Just like the economy, it is profiting from the digitalization push, as is the broad acceptance of curfews, social control and surveillance measures. As long as the state gets away with making people so insecure that they say yes to all this, the state will emerge from the crisis as a profiteer, but society will by no means become healthier as a result, but will have to live with the loss of freedom as a consequence.

Autonomous health care

Health is not a specific content of autonomous politics and it is not a common practice to maintain it, but regularly it is a matter of identifying the conditions for a lack of health and attacking its actors. In addition, health as a topic is also suspended in the more basic approach of creating conditions in which it is possible for people’s lives to unfold freely, which perhaps more than anything else is the basis of profound health in general. Furthermore, measures to maintain physical health are something that as a value can only be determined subjectively, i.e. it is something that can only be decided by each individual. To ruin one’s body or to expose it to great dangers can be an expression of freedom, as well as of not doing it and instead to direct one’s life towards the longest possible preservation of one’s own body.

What is happening now is much more than preventing the spread of a lung disease, it is the intensification of isolation and loneliness between people, which was already the case before the Corona crisis. The means of intensification, which is used by the state against the people, is fear. Fear, however, is sometimes a poor advisor, and in this case it leads to the fact that far into the radical left movement, the effect of compliance is not really tangible. Which measure is sensible and how, is evaluated differently, even among experts, and even by a single person, sometimes completely different over time; moreover, their connection to the state puts their statements in a bad light – despite all the changes, their respective current view is regarded by many as the only correct one. This view is then not only represented as a possible medical view on a problem, from which every person can now derive what he or she wants, but from these views the general rules of conduct are derived and these are then made a moral imperative in the name of the weakest.

It is not a question of castigating this approach as a wrong way of dealing with the corona crisis. It is born of fear and no argument can be found against it; it is often caused by the aforementioned strangeness and isolation between people. It is probably at this level that an approach would be most likely to be found to counteract it, but in the special situation where nearness no longer offers security but is seen as a risk of infection, this hardly seems possible without further ado.

In our view, the approach to autonomous health care nevertheless consists of trying to break through the isolation, both in fact and in substance. This means that we want to create a substantive counter-perspective to state health propaganda, which refers to the aspect already mentioned that health cannot be separated from freedom. With regard to the prisons, this fact is to a certain extent known in radical left-wing circles, but now it is a matter of making it comprehensible that a ban on going out and contact destroys this basis for health just as much as the prison concept does. A meaningful debate on what measures are sensible for health care in general can only be conducted on the basis of freedom; anything else is at risk of degenerating into a sham debate.

In addition, it seems to make sense to investigate the causes of the general fear for the virus beyond the danger that actually emanates from it, and to make it tangible. For the presentation of the virus determines its reception much more than the virus itself. The same applies to the ongoing implementation and intensification of authoritarian measures – perhaps it is useful to look at them after they have been freed from their superficial appearance of health care, and also to consider the orchestration of the appearance.

A further aspect is to counteract, or at least to disclose, the advances in digital surveillance and alienation technologies. In any case, self-digitisation is also supported and promoted in countless left-wing groups (above all the hipster left of the IL). But the curfews and contact restrictions are exacerbating this trend, all to the applause and recommendations of the German government to do just that. It is to be hoped that the hostility towards the trend towards the digitalisation of everything and the associated disintegration of substance in real life will continue to keep a home in autonomous circles. Amazingly enough, the idea of online demonstration has been revived, since its autonomous version, which aimed at paralyzing corporate servers (a kind of Ddos attack) was already a failure. But the fact that parts of the left are so stupid that they confuse digitally provided server space of private companies (nothing else are broken down in twitter, facebook and co) for storing and retrieving files with the public space, or consider both to be identical, is a sign of the importance of keeping technology-critical positions alive and spreading them, explicitly and precisely where the public space is to be blocked for us.

Finally, we think that the propagation of the slogan “Health only exists in freedom” and ”Get rid of prisons, contact bans and curfews” should be spread as much as possible, even if it is currently associated with an increased health risk. As long as we do not defend ourselves and our scarce freedoms, all demonstrations and similar things are only a right which the state can give and take away at will – with the general ban on all assemblies it has now shown this. To all comrades who continue the struggle and have not retreated to wash their hands in isolation, we wish good luck for everything, and to the others that they take courage again and find their readiness to fight again.

Health only exists in freedom!

Get rid of prisons, contact bans and curfews!

Take the streets – because they belong to us!

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