

Mechanic

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Today, the first person I meet in real life is the mechanic who comes to fix our extractor hood, luckily within the warranty period. We chat and it soon turns to corona policy. (The Netherlands is still in lockdown). At the same time, four big themes come to my mind, which I wrote down because I think they really matter to our world: One - Necessary transitions to secure our survival on the planet. Two - Decreasing confidence in political will/ability to do what is necessary. Three - Structural undermining of the working class through continuous technological development and its uncritical acceptance by political and educational institutions. Four - The rise of an increasingly radical underclass (conspiracy theories).

The mechanic immediately says that politics has completely lost him. Recently he buried two of his best friends, both pub owners (suicide, they had lost faith in the future; point 2). Meanwhile, without any investigation, he determines that the motor needs to be replaced. When I ask if the problem is not in the control panel, he immediately orders it too and the purchase price has already been exceeded (point 1).

Due to understaffing, the mechanic can finish the job at the end of February. Although annoyed - we've been waiting since the end of November - I decide that the hard-working mechanic deserves my appreciation instead of my irritation with the system (point 3). The mechanic says he thinks the politicians have other - secret - goals in mind with their corona policy. "Meanwhile," he says, "more people like my friends are dying from the effects of the policy, or from the effects of delayed care, than from Corona" (point 4, radical thoughts).

Policy makers should be cautious

Fortunately, the mechanic listens to reason. I answer that if corona patients with acute respiratory distress can no longer go to the ICU, the policymakers will be booed. So of course policy makers should be cautious, even too careful. But the real problem is that there is not just one truth, any more than there is just one science. Suppose at some point that more people die from delayed care than from Corona, and that policymakers radically reverse the policy on that basis: patients who need ICU care for non-Corona related conditions are given priority. As long as Corona still reigns, this would certainly quickly turn into a disaster, with terrible and inexplicable scenes (people choking in the hallways)... Neither politicians, virologists, nor others deserve the blame for this nasty pandemic. There is even not just one problem, let alone one solution. Perhaps the biggest "mistake" is that "we" (politics, science, media) communicate too much implicitly that there is.

The mechanic thinks there should be many more ICU beds. "But that's expensive and probably completely unnecessary when the pandemic is over," I object. "Less system connectivity?" "We cannot go back to living as hunter-gatherers with eight billion people." He looks sad, I don't want to talk him into depression!

I step into my role as a teacher. "Many instances in our world seem to monopolize the truth, while there is neither one truth nor one science. Every conceivable perspective yields a (slightly) different truth, e.g. of the spread of a virus, or of maintaining happiness in life (psychology), etc. But multinationals (Big-tech companies), politics and science wrongly appropriate "progress" as the future direction they envisioned, which led to decline in (bio-, neuro- and cultural) diversity, climate change, pandemics ,etc." (point 1).

Now the mechanic comes with a surprising insight: "Maybe we should save the future from this kind of forced progress". He gets up, grabs his bag and walks to the door. Meanwhile, I feel he has a point; the ideology of technological "progress" - control and domination, infinite growth from finite resources - may in his eyes be a secret conspiracy, denying him and his friends in practically all important aspects of their existence! Aren't "we" (scientists, politicians, etc.) the real conspiracy theorists with our belief in one truth/science/progress/future?