

Truthful Hope

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Wherever we look these days too little is happening too late although it is utterly clear what needs to be done.

Despite the facts presented by both scientists and activists, the recent Glasgow Climate Change Conference ended with empty proclamations and promises that will hardly change the alarming speed of the climate change on planet earth. Similarly, the pandemic, which is not yet over, has made it very clear that it is the poorly-paid jobs related to reproduction and care that are the most essential ones; jobs that are executed by people on whom we all depend. However, reproductive work is as belittled and under- or unpaid as ever since the onslaught of capitalism. The worlds of so-called professional caregiving, meatpacking, or logistics, are still the very hells of exploitation and exhaustion as those which have been identified in earlier phases of the current pandemic. Against all evidence that zoonotic diseases (like covid-19) have everything to do with human practices of ever-more cruel encroachment into the habitats of animals, for example by way deforestation, monocultures, or the sealing of soils, such practices are intensified by the hour. Also, there is ample evidence that all of these and many other global challenges cannot be met within the borders of nation-states. Nevertheless, national borders are more than ever protected, if not militarized, and new border walls are erected. “Westernized” (Ramón Grosfoguel) humans in particular seem to be attracted to the illusion that they can rescue themselves by denying vaccines no less than denying breathable air, non-toxic soil, regions of bearable temperatures, and much more, to others, although there is plenty of evidence to suggest that isolated solutions are a part of the problems we are facing. The brutalizing tendency of acting with reckless disregard to the deaths of millions on the shores of rising seas, in deserts, war-, border- or otherwise toxic zones, takes its toll even on those (mainly inhabiting the global north) who profit from this neglect; what is more, we know it.

The blame for us northerners’ inability to act in light of what is knowable, if not blatantly obvious, cannot solely lie with the defenders of post-truth or alternative truth, although neither their existence nor the powerful networks and unsocial media associated with them can be denied. Such enemies of truth are too easy a target for those who see themselves as representatives of enlightenment and the search for truth. The failure of the Glasgow Climate Change Conference is a very good case in point. It made room for impressive and moving speeches by scientists, activists, and politicians (particularly from the global south) whose findings and warnings were not denied but, worse, simply ignored, and therefore remained without consequence. Of course, there are the myriads of vested (class) interests that are always present at conferences like this one which recently ended in Glasgow, but there has to be more than the blatant incapability of acting in accordance with what is obviously known; more than the unwillingness to sacrifice egoistic profits and privileges that are so clearly tied to the ruin of the earth as we know it. It can’t be the vastness of the relations and networks of a globalized world that keep humans from acting in accordance with what they know. For there are fascinating stories, animated statistics, and what have you... that bring

us closer to the devastating and excruciating facts than we seem to be able to digest. What is missing in even the most compelling evidence and the most obvious truths is hope. Truth alone seems to not be enough. Or, according to Theodor W. Adorno, truth alone is not even fully true. This is so because mere truth ties us, today more than ever, to a cluster of disastrous barbarities that are obviously wrong even if their depiction is correct. Therefore, Adorno writes in his reflections upon the damaged life: “In the end hope, wrested from reality by negating it, is the only form in which truth appears. Without hope, the idea of truth would be scarcely even thinkable, and it is the cardinal untruth, having recognized existence to be bad, to present it as truth simply because it has been recognized.” (§ 61).

Such Adornian hope cannot be reduced to empty wishes. Much rather it is the art of imagining and improvising an alternative to the facts that need to be researched, talked about, and circulated as meticulously as possible and fought against as hopefully as we can. However, only the fiercest and most negative critics seem to be able to practice such hope; critics such as, for instance, Asad Rehman, who spoke on behalf of the “black, brown and indigenous people” of the global south at COP26. His closing speech addressed the rich who offered nothing but “more empty words”. And he continued: “You’re not keeping 1.5 alive. You are setting us on a pathway to 2.5 degrees, you’re setting the planet on fire while claiming to act. Your greenwashing kills [...] but we are not without hope. It just will not rest with you but with us and we don’t compromise on justice.”¹

Notes

1 “‘Blackness Itself Is the Crime’: Bishop William Barber on Racism in the Ahmaud Arbery Murder Trial,” Democracy Now!, accessed November 17, 2021, cf. min15:06–16:28. https://www.democracynow.org/2021/11/15/rev_dr_william_barber_ahmaud_arbery.

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Biography

Ruth Sonderegger (1967) is Professor of Philosophy and Aesthetic Theory at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria. She completed her PhD in Philosophy at the Free University Berlin. From 2001 to 2009 she worked at the Philosophy Department of the University of Amsterdam. Currently, she researches the history and systematics of the concept of critique as well as (everyday) practices of critique; her second research focus is on the history of aesthetics and its entanglements with the history of colonial capitalism. Since 2004 she has been a member of the editorial staff of *Krisis: Tijdschrift voor actuele filosofie* [Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy].