

What about Trust in Dignity?

What about *Dignism*?

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The Value of Values: Trust

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When I am in Germany, I regularly interview people in their eighties who still experienced Nazi Germany. Just recently, a man explained to me the depth of trust he felt for Adolf Hitler. In 1945, he was 17 years old, and he was ready to sacrifice his life for the unshakable faith he had in the *final victory (Endsieg)*. When he learned of Hitler's death, he was unable to believe it. If given the chance, he would have shot any defector who "cowardly" fled from approaching enemy troops. "Meine Ehre heißt Treue" or "my honor is loyalty" was the German motto, faithful loyalty to the "Führer's" trusted vision of a world of Aryan *Übermenschen*.

At the same time, one of this man's comrades told me that he felt completely differently at that time: he felt like being in the wrong film. For him, it was painfully clear that Hitler's ideology humiliated the humanity of all involved, and more even, that Aryan actions proved the opposite of Aryan superiority—Hitler's war was not only criminally homicidal, but also hopelessly suicidal.

Why do I share this piece of history here? Because I want to illustrate that trust and faith can be misinvested.

Today, it is me who feels like living in the wrong film. Only that today, there is no place to emigrate to, since misguided trust and faith dominate all cultures of this Earth. It is the trust in the wisdom of unbridled "market forces." It is the faith that, if we all maximize profit, this will serve the common good. It is the faith that we have to do everything so that the markets can trust us, rather than the other way round, namely that the markets have to show us why we should trust them. It is the faith that if only we can calm down "the markets" to the extent that they trust our ability to service our/their debts—if only we are avid racers for consumerism, yet, stopping short of defaulting—everything will be well. It is the trust that, since "investors invest only if they can expect profit and wealth protection is no charity," it is equivalent to a natural law that the world has to dance to investors' interests. It is the trust that we will be able to collect enough not-for-profit charity funds to undo the harm we cause by our faith in the priority of for-profit enterprises. It is the faith that money should be more than a measuring unit of value for material redemption, like minutes, meters and tons, but a scarce commodity controlled by those who have the most of it.

From my point of view, the way we allocate trust and faith is suicidal. It is damaging all of us now, particularly our children, since pillaging the resources of our planet, in the service of today's rat race, will undermine sustainability for our human family in the

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future. And more even, what is most ironic is that trust in the wisdom of unbridled market forces not only destroys our resource bases, it also undermines the trust between all of us. Nobody can have faith in anybody anymore. Why am I surrounded by traps? Glossy baits seduce me into buying products and services that disclose their hazards only in small print, if at all. Who is my doctor working for? Do I really need this medical treatment or drug, and is it really safe? How can I be sure that she does not put profit first? And, does my spouse love me, or does she value only the advantages from my success in personal branding? The list of sensible distrust is very long and permeates all walks of life. A prudent person pays a good lawyer and a private eye to get by in this world full of snares.

Why do so few people question the medical community's enthusiasm for pathologizing entirely natural emotional responses to unhealthy contexts? Is it not an ultimate irony that the pharmaceutical industry maximizes profit by feeding on the damages that flow from a culture that gives priority to maximizing profit. Indignity and humiliation is compounded by bandages that deepen it. "The Illusions of Psychiatry," is a recent title of the New York Review of Books.

In a setting that allots principal trust to the profit maximization motive, distrust among fellow humans is called for, systemically. A culture that gives primacy to maximizing profit, undermines ethical behavior. It erodes the very reason for trust. And it does this systemically. If maximizing profit is given priority in a culture, everybody is encouraged to try to get ahead of everybody else, and this leads to freedom for a few, coupled with dependence for the rest. In a setting where "freedom" for market forces is defined as absence of boundaries, profit compounds profit, inequality ensues, and majorities get trapped in the power games of the few. When only profit counts, when only money measures value, greedy free-riding on everybody else's trust is the smartest game in town. And when free-riding is accepted as smart, why should not our "best and brightest" go for it? Then, trusting fellow humans transmutes into outright stupidity.

Living in a world that forces mutual distrust upon its citizens by design is an inhumane and humiliating world. It is destructive for the present and the future, not least since social trust is directly linked to health. Research shows that as the Western world has become wealthier, instances of clinical or major depression have grown. Not to speak of the so-called developing world and the price they have to pay. And how can we be astonished when violence is on the rise, when "we against them" heats up among those who get squeezed by that race? A culture of faith in the ruthless and reductionist model of a self-serving *homo economicus*, produces more than economic bubbles that burst.

Here is how I feel, and I quote from my book *Gender, Humiliation, and Global Security*, that was published in 2010, see p. xxiv:

People say that nobody would work if not pushed or pulled—either humiliated into compliance or rewarded with incentives. This attitude, from my point of view, degrades the humanity of all involved. I feel personally humiliated when I am expected to draw my motivation for what makes my life meaningful from status or monetary remuneration. I am motivated by *stature*—my pro-social contributions—rather than *status*, social rank, or class. I work very hard, day and night, seven days a week. I receive neither traditional status nor salary for my efforts. My motivation is entirely independent from such rewards, and if it were otherwise, I would find the degradation and humiliation unbearable. Therefore, my path is not altruistic or

egoistic; it is both, because I would not survive the humiliation of having to define myself as a status- or salary-making machine that endangers the common good. I am not a Pavlovian dog who needs status or monetary remuneration as incentives to work. I would not survive such emptiness of meaning and such poverty of spirit. If I accepted to merely exist as the supplier or target of the sales of products and services, be it expensive or discounted, I would get severely depressed. If I reduced my creativity to serve “personal branding” so as to become a product myself, I would feel like I were in *Pleasantville*. Allowing myself to feel deficient lest I buy or sell something, would humiliate my humanity at its core. Cleverness is repulsive to me—nothing of what I do is done because it is smart—and I draw no satisfaction from petty power games. I only engage in activities that are profoundly meaningful to me. I respond to the fact that I have to eat, clothe myself, and have a roof over my head in ways that do not require me to compromise what I regard as meaningful, on the contrary, they contribute. I do not wish to have a job, I want to have a life. I am profoundly selfish in this point because I could not live otherwise.

Here is my challenge for you: Can we transcend the old -isms, can we transcend oppressive communism and divisive casino capitalism? What about *dignism*? What about trust in dignity and the dignity of trust? What about trust in *unity in diversity* instead of *uniformity without diversity* or *division without unity*? What about trust in mutuality? In shared humanity? In relationships of love and care, for each other and our biosphere? Can we create institutional frames for our world that will bestow a world to our children that will be worth living in, a world, where they can lead dignified lives? A world where mutual trust among people is something we have faith in to the extent that we take it as measurement of the quality of our institutions?