

## **TRANSCRIPT**

### **Biodiversity, corona and other health risks**

From Corona to Common Good - Episode #4

Thoughts and lessons from the crisis

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#### **1. Zoonoses**

In the last video, I introduced a number of new terms, including "phobocracy": domination by fear. This term will surely keep us busy for a while.

I would also like to start this video with a new term, namely zoonosis. This means infectious diseases that occur simultaneously in humans and vertebrates - and can spread in one direction or the other. Around 200 zoonoses are currently known worldwide.

When an illness spreads from humans to animals, one speaks of anthroozoonosis and in the opposite direction of zooanthroponosis - this also includes the coronavirus.

The phenomenon itself is not new, for example tuberculosis and measles originally came from cows, whooping cough from pigs or the flu from ducks. Only about a third of all skipping diseases come from pets, and a good two thirds from wild animals. A first wave of skipping diseases took place in the course of colonization. For example, the bacterium that triggers cholera comes from the swamps of Bangladesh.

A second wave, after some doctors believed in the end of infectious diseases, has recently started and has brought us very dangerous diseases such as HIV / AIDS, Ebola, Mers and Sars1 or even Sars2 (or Covid-19). The common cause of these zooanthroponoses is the increasing environmental pressure of human civilization on the habitats of these wild animals, e.g. by hunting, deforestation or intensive livestock farming. In other words, the increasing consumption of space, materials and energy by mankind.

The connection is scientifically proven: the greater the environmental pressure of humans, the greater the stress in wild animals, the higher the likelihood of further zoonoses.

According to the current state of science, the corona virus originally comes from wild bats and came to humans via the intermediate host of the pangolin. It is interesting to know that countless microbes live in bats without being harmed by them. But when the stress on bats increases, so does their infectivity. And humans should never come into contact with pangolins anyways because they are strictly protected.

According to experts, many thousands of other viruses live in wild animals that can potentially skip. The less mankind is concerned with ecological balance; and the less we humans respect the limits of wildlife habitats, the harder limits nature will set us in the form of further pandemics. Some are already talking about Covid 20, 21, etc.

So if we really care about health - public health - the first step would be to drastically reduce mankind's ecological footprint and to protect wildlife habitats and biodiversity and the biosphere in general much more strictly.

#### **2. Planetary boundaries**

We actually knew this before Corona: In the past few years I have started almost every one of my public lectures with the fact that climate change is not only not the greatest global ecological threat to humanity, but also not the most dangerous. Although dangerous, it can cost the lives of hundreds of millions of people, and even more health, and is therefore more dangerous than a single corona virus.

But the greatest ecological threat to humanity is the loss of biodiversity. On the one hand, because humans are at the end of many food chains and tearing them off in the middle of a chain can lead to the breaking off of part of the human nutritional basis. On the other hand, many species within complex ecosystems perform sensitive key functions for the stability and functionality of these ecosystems - and their extinction can lead to the

overturning of these ecosystems and thus prove to be even more dangerous for mankind than climate change.

According to a long-term study in Germany, the biomass of insects in 63 protected regions has decreased by over three quarters in the past 20 years. Nobody can predict where that will lead. Therefore, the popular protection request in Bavaria, which came from the population, was just right. On the other hand, economists' forecast models, which do not even include biodiversity, endanger the future of humanity.

The protection of biodiversity must become the highest political priority!

The so-called planetary boundaries to the bottom-line of economic policy, world domestic policy and the survival strategy of humans - and thus also to the limits of economic and consumer freedom.

In order to achieve this goal, I have developed a personal implementation proposal, which I call "ecological human rights".

The starting point is the enormous gift that planet earth makes available to human beings year after year without the stability of the ecosystems declining. This huge gift is more than what eight billion people need to meet their basic needs, but it is less than what humanity as a whole is consuming today because a small minority of mankind is in extreme overuse, including the average person in Germany and Austria. If every human being received an eight billionth of what the earth made available to humanity as a whole, that could be seen as an ecological consumption right on the front of the medal and on the back of the medal it would be a protective right of the planet because if all ecological human rights were consumed humanity would remain within the ecological limits of the planet. And thus provide our children and grandchildren with the same right to live, the same opportunities and freedoms as we do. The technical implementation could be done by giving everyone a so-called ecological or environmental account, on which this annual consumption right is booked. Of course not in monetary units, but in physical quantities. The most common form at present is the so-called ecological footprint, which is measured in so-called "global hectares" and amounts to 1.7 global hectares per person in a globally sustainable and fair distribution. If the eco account is empty, the same would happen as it does today if the financial account is empty. The purchasing power would have gone out. A possible "add on" would be that, in addition to the amount that people need to meet their basic needs, this consumption right, there is still a small surplus according to current estimates by science, will be tradable so that the poorest, those who lack the financial purchasing power to consume their ecological consumption rights could sell this surplus to the wealthiest, who have sufficient financial purchasing power but not the sufficient ecological purchasing power to satisfy all of their consumption expectations. This would allow the richest to land a little more gently and the poorer to have a higher financial income - that would be a global social-ecological win-win situation. Even in this stage of expansion, humanity as a whole would remain within the planetary limits. And these 1.7 global hectares could become a vital indicator for government action!

### 3. Health risks

In previous corona crisis management there was a key figure that put everything else in the shade: the replication factor 1. No one should infect more than one other person. Everything else - from compulsory schooling to fundamental rights - was subordinated to this top government guideline. Even GDP growth suddenly became a relative minor issue. The aim of protecting public health is behind the indicator.

But is replication factor 1 really the most effective measure to achieve this goal? If the government's goal is to protect public health, then it should - in a fact-based manner - summarize all the threats to public health in order to take more consistent measures, the greater the individual risk.

We currently have slightly more than 250,000 Corona deaths worldwide.

Hunger kills 9 million people every year, including 3 million children under the age of 5.

How much are governments doing to save these people from starvation?

Perhaps some people are now thinking that this is not the best example of the European Union because few or no people are starving here.

But it is certainly a very good example for the whole world. Because currently 370 million children who are not allowed to go to school are cut off from school lunches. And just imagine one child who doesn't get the expected and legitimate food. 370 million of them! The United Nations World Food Program currently provides 100 million of the 870 million malnourished people with daily emergency meals. If these care measures are prevented with corona measures, the director of the program says - more people could starve to death every day in the next 3 months - namely 300,000 - than have died so far on Covid-19 worldwide.

The World Labor Organization (ILO), in turn, points out that the corona measures currently pose a threat to 435 million companies and, now, 1.7 billion people who work in the so-called informal sector, that is living from "hand to mouth". They lost an average of 60% of their income in the first month of the crisis.

"Without alternative sources of income," writes the ILO, these people have no survival resources.

With each lockdown that is getting longer every day, we are producing a humanitarian disaster without comparison.

#### 4. Air pollution

Fortunately, there is comparatively little hunger in the European Union and only a small informal sector. So I'm going to choose an example that applies to the EU:

Air pollution costs 4.2 million lives a year, according to the WHO. According to the European Environment Agency, there are 450,000 people who die prematurely in the EU each year due to fine dust, nitrogen oxides and ground-level ozone.

By comparison, I wonder why the governments that justify the corona measures with their responsibility for our health do so much less here!

Given these facts, it is completely disproportionate how much is done against Corona and how little is done against air pollution.

In other words, we are disproportionately afraid of corona - phobocracy - and proportionately less afraid of air pollution. Here the governments play down in comparison. Why don't we get the latest figures on air pollution, like number of hospitalized and intensified people, as well as premature deaths every day - until this public figure reaches 450,000 deaths in the EU at the end of the year?

#### 5. Traffic accidents

The last example: The number of people killed in traffic accidents is 1.35 million annually worldwide. Traffic accidents are the number one cause of death worldwide for 5 to 29 year olds! In addition, there are 50 million injuries, often with permanent health problems such as crutches, prostheses or wheelchairs.

In the EU, there are "only" 25,000 deaths from road accidents every year - but there are also 135,000 seriously injured, which is a total of 160,000 deplorable victims.

Preventing this would not require a shutdown, as with Corona, but a consequent expansion of public transport and the consolidation of settlement structures.

In a public text in 1996, out of concern for health and the environment, I described motorized private transport as a "silent war" due to the millions of people injured and killed in recent years and asked why little or too little is being done about it. Angela Merkel literally describes Corona as "the greatest challenge since World War II" - and at the same time continues to subsidize the car industry.

The Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz said literally that in Austria "soon everyone would know someone who died of Corona." Given the current number of cases, this would only work out if everyone in Austria actually knew everyone, as we like to say. On the other hand, everyone in Austria probably knows a person who was injured or even killed in a traffic accident.

It would therefore be proportionate here for us to find out daily in the evening news how many people have been injured in road accidents this year, have been hospitalized, received a prosthesis, had to go to the wheelchair or were even killed. And then it would be up to the government to act and prevent these unnecessary casualties if it is concerned about public health as it is at Corona.

#### 6. Which key indicators?

What I want to ask with these examples is whether the subordination of everything else to replication factor 1 is really "evidence-based policy".

I think it would be more important, more human and more ethical, to do everything to

- to reduce world hunger by 10% annually

- reduce death by air pollution by 10% annually

- and to reduce the number of people injured and killed in traffic by 10% annually

and at the same time:

- proclaim the 1.5 degree target as the maximum warming of the earth's atmosphere to the top political key figure, no matter what percentage of economic growth it would cost;

- together with a maximum of 1.7 global hectares of ecological footprint per person, in the form of the proclamation and allocation of ecological human rights;

- thirdly, I would limit income inequality to a factor of 10, 20 or maybe 30 - and set an upper limit for private wealth at 10, 20 or 30 million euros.

These three measures could make an extremely important contribution to protecting the health and life of millions, maybe even billions, of people! The same applies to people living today as to our children and grandchildren.

#### 7. The role of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

An asset cap would also affect Bill Gates. Instead of 90 billion, it could only have 30 million, for example. According to scientific studies, this would not affect his personal happiness in life. On the other hand, it would probably be a greater happiness for all of humanity.

There are currently wild conspiracy fantasies surrounding the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation (BMGF). I cannot and will not judge whether there is anything in them - the presumption of innocence applies.

However, what should not be the case is that the BMGF is the second largest funding body of the WHO. According to its own statements, the U.S. paid \$ 280 million in 2018, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) \$ 230 million, Germany \$ 150 million and the EU Commission \$ 75 million.

If, as announced, the United States now withdraws from WHO funding, the BMGF would be the largest donor to this organization - and that would be no less a scandal than the privatization of global health policy.

This example shows how democracies abolish themselves by tolerating boundless inequality. First of all, mostly millionaires make it to the political offices, there they mostly make politics for millionaires, for example, they withdraw the states from the financing of public goods such as health, and then the private billionaires step in patronizingly!

This is not altruism because there is participation in the money - Bill Gates sets the priorities. What bothers me in this context is that Bill Gates was allowed to dream for a quarter of an hour in the German Tagesschau to vaccinate all living people around the

world against Covid-19. He said literally: "This is a vaccination that we will give 7 billion people" in an indicative manner and with a grin on his face - what exactly gives him pleasure at this idea was not clear from the content.

A vaccination fan whose foundation had invested nearly \$ 3 billion in Exxon, Coca-Cola and McDonald's stocks by 2014, becoming rich in climate change, tooth decay, and diabetes - how credible is that?

What basically bothers me here is that individual people can become so rich and powerful. Our democracies still have a lot to learn to limit the power of individuals. Incidentally, this is called separation of powers - a very liberal principle.

What billions are spent on should be decided democratically, I have a few ideas:

- end world hunger;
- stop air pollution;
- protect biodiversity;
- stop climate change.

#### 8. Sacrifices and loss of freedom?

In the first video, I argued that governments are happy to hide behind people when it comes to protecting the earth and health: They are not ready to give anything up, so there is nothing you can do.

With the measures against Corona up to the lockdown, they have impressively demonstrated that they have no problem whatsoever in forcing us to renounce all the way to fundamental rights!

But that makes its argument untrustworthy.

And it is also not convincing in terms of content: Because if we protect the planet, we have to do without much less in the overall picture than if we ruin it. And we lose much more of our freedoms we love when we heat the climate and decimate biodiversity instead of maintaining the ecological balance of the biosphere.

Specifically, this means that we have to do without NOW in global consumer and growth capitalism: drinkable rivers, edible fish, clean air and healthy airways, deep restful sleep, green cities, successful relationships, social trust, functioning democracy and - free of life of serial zoonoses.

We would gain all of this in reverse if we instead strive for ecological balance as our top priority!

Perhaps you will make your personal list of what you now have to do without - in global growth, financial and consumer capitalism.

And what you would gain in an ecological balance economy.

If we do business and live in such a way that we do not destroy the planet, we will be in connection with the earth that nourishes us, gives us energy and makes us happy.

Reconnecting to the earth - deep ecology - would be a radical health measure, equally for individual and public health, which would also cost nothing. I hope that the number of people who gain this insight or - even better - experience increases with a replication factor > 1. Also in circles of governors and billionaires.