



Season1-Episode2

Values and Compassion in 2023

Journey to the future

Saturday morning. Thomas leaves with his two daughters Melanie and Christie to do shopping for next week. It is April 2023, flu season is not over yet, and many people still wear masks on public transport like back in 2020 during Covid-19. It became clear how much this helps during flu season, and many people stuck to it. Thomas and the girls also wear masks, anything else would be irresponsible. When Thomas forgets to put on his mask at the bus stop, Melanie immediately gives a nudge: Daddy please, put on your mask!

Their shopping habits have changed. Meat is rarely added to the shopping cart, its neither environmentally friendly nor fair to the animals. However, if you look around, not much has changed in the shop compared to the time before Covid19. One sees colored boards around indicating special offers. People have to cut on expenses, as the economy is not particularly thriving and concerns about unemployment are still high.

Thursday is Christie's birthday party. Christie asked for a big portion of ice cream for everyone at her party. Melanie heads to the shelf with organic ice cream. Thomas is looking at the price tags. I think we can't afford that. Then let's skip it, Melanie says. I don't eat ice cream for which folks have been exploited on cocoa plantations. Christie starts to tear up quietly. Thomas and Melanie look at each other. Melanie says, what kind of ice cream would you like? Christie's eyes lighten up: Salted Caramel Brownie, Lemon Cheesecake and Chocolate Cookie. Thomas shakes his head: what about chocolate and vanilla it's on special offer? Christie reaches spontaneously into the freezer, maybe we should take 3 packs of each kind, not that we run out of one sort at my party

Agnes Kunkel: Hello I am Agnes Kunkel, your host in 2023, your window to the world beyond Covid-19. Today we have 7.1 million infected and 400 000 people have been confirmed to have died from Covid-19. New hotspots for the disease are Pakistan, Indonesia and South Africa. On the other side 10,000 tourists from Germany are now allowed to fly to Mallorca, Spain as a pilot project. Today is 10th of June 2020. Our guest today is Stefan Hock. Stefan Hock, you are a studied economist, work as consultant and trainer in the field of leadership and communication. As I have heard, your personal interest is philosophy, cooking, rock music and motorbikes. Hello Stefan, welcome to our podcast!

Stefan Hock: Hello Agnes, thank you very much for inviting me and hello everybody who is listening. Thanks a lot for this wonderful introduction. True, I do not only love cooking, but also philosophy. I think this is a topic we have to talk about today.

Agnes Kunkel: Great to have you here. In the introduction we heard the story about Christy, who is planning to have a birthday party in 2023 and to the family is not very clear what to do; buying ice cream which is very expensive, but ecological and fair trade or maybe no ice cream at all, or maybe ice cream which is on sale, but in this case no one knows if it is from exploited cacao plantations. What is the philosopher's answers to this ethical dilemma?

Stefan Hock: The story is very interesting and describes the dilemma well we are in in this moment. I am not sure a philosopher can give you a definite answer, but we can at least raise some questions which we consider crucial to this topic. I have a couple of them, which I want to outline today. First one, Corona is not only a health issue, it is also an ethical issue. These are the questions: *Can it be treated?* Even severe cases can obtain some relief to the world rate, but the emergency care is expensive, not only the treatments itself, but holding the capacities ready not for standard loads, but for big loads. In non-pandemic times huge rooms make it seem as luxury or even a waste of money and space but in pandemic times, they quickly become rare and all of the sudden emergency staff had to decide who to treat and whom not, which is a death sentence in the worst case. Military medical staff is trained in this kind of decisions called triage, but civil medical staff rarely. There is also another decision to be made: prevention. Curfews, shutdowns etc. all are made to maintain health, but are inefficient as the disease spreads fast and the mortality is moderate compared to other plagues. But again, it would imply that there is an atrocious death toll, especially among higher risk groups such as elderly, socially or economically underprivileged. We daily see casualty numbers, and are able to compare where prevention has worked and where it failed

Agnes Kunkel: Yes, Covid-19 is a special and severe disease. But a hundred years ago when we had the Hong Kong flu, we would not have the scientific insight in the disease and the economic power to stop the economy and to go into curfew in order to save groups of our society. This is a great step ahead as we are now in a position to take care for the groups at risk.

Stefan Hock: It is a giant step. We can do a lot, but we have to decide what to do, and what not to do. Of course, there are different opinions on that: Sweden for example took a different way than Germany. China took a different turn than US and UK. We see different results.

Agnes Kunkel: Yes, I guess we are quite happy as we are both living in Germany and we had a comfortable way going ahead with this tricky disease.

Stefan Hock: We are lucky to the extent that we have a low death toll. We can congratulate ourselves, even though we still have to keep in mind every single person who has died. We complain about values we have

to abandon and give up. More and more people are going on the streets and demand: *End the curfews now! Free us from the mask!* What we do is a triage among values, not only about freedom; which values to maintain now and which values to suspend for a certain time? Most countries choose prevention, imposing severe restrictions for public life, considered by many as a stranglehold to our civil liberties. It is, but it is triage: the freedom to go anywhere and anytime or the protection of the frail, the right to party or the protection of the life of a few retirees. The crucial question is, when do those restrictions end? Will we retain democratic control over this, or do we have to succumb to the verdict of the scientist, or the verdict and ideas of some politicians, who might not listen to scientists?

Agnes Kunkel: If we now make the jump to the year 2023. Even here in Germany we had problems. In the beginning we did not understand the dimension of the disease; we acted late and it was a problematic issue. We were not prepared. It was not the question of buying masks, but the organization of prevention. If you remember, there had been a study of pandemics around 2013 some taskforces made plans on what to do in a pandemic. But in the health organizations, even in countries like Germany, these were not implemented. What do you think about this? Will it be better in 3-4 years? Will they be implemented then?

Stefan Hock: You are entirely right. In 2019 we have not been prepared. We had some kind of naive disbelief that Covid-19 would not happen. We ignored all the warnings from scientists, WHO and other organizations of health, and we did not prepare. Neither medically, politically, socially, economically nor ethically. It is to be observed that scientists, politicians and those in charge of the economy adapted fast to the situation, and this adoption will continue. I am optimistic on that it will continue, maybe not in giant steps but in small steps. Some of it may be forgotten in a year or two years from now. But even if we forget 80%, at least 20% of the knowledge will stay with us.

Agnes Kunkel: If I understand you correctly, you think the handling of pandemics, readiness of protection, equipment, readiness of mathematical modeling, and capacities will be there when the next pandemic starts. We will be better equipped in several health aspects and processes, maybe? What will we forget in the next two to four years?

Stefan Hock: It comes again down to values. What we will forget, is that we have to make sacrifices; liberties, wealth and well-being have to be sacrificed for the benefit of others. Our medical equipment is excellent, but we need to buy it and this money is lacking somewhere else. In human nature it is a common phenomenon to forget about bad things, as a protective mechanism. It is healthy otherwise we would go crazy. This protective mechanism will let us forget a few things about the negative sides of Covid-19, but remaining will be the technical progress, statistical data, political manuals and guidelines on what-to-do-when, which will not be discarded from our assessors. We might develop a vaccine, maybe some virus statics. The next pandemic will not be Covid-19, it will be something else and we will need to start a new war, but maybe we have better technology to fight the next pandemic.

Agnes Kunkel: When we're turning to the story in the beginning, it describes the dilemma of satisfaction. We have Christie's dilemma, who wants to have enough ice cream at her birthday party. She is thinking about the fancy assertions fudge cake and cheesecakes, but when she has to trade it off for vanilla and chocolate, she wants at least more ice cream. That is why she wants three packages of vanilla and chocolate ice cream. That's one aspect and the other, the eldest sister Melanie and her father are trading their ideas of being responsible for a cheaper price. The older girl is thinking about exploited cacao farm workers, but on the other hand we have her sister crying. People are being exploited a thousand kilometers away, and standing nearby her crying sister. Also, the father is making up his own mindset. He has to carefully spend

every penny and euro, and cannot spend much money on ice cream. What do you think we can learn from this example?

Stefan Hock: This example is showing something tricky. You leave the most abstract decision to the youngest girl in the story. The positive point here is, the elder girl is already thinking about these aspects of responsibility. Let the young girl grow a bit older, and allow her the ice cream this time.

Agnes Kunkel: May it be possible that you like ice cream yourself?

Stefan Hock: Yes, it may. I really do adore chocolate, hazelnut and I really quality ice creams.

Agnes Kunkel: When we have a look at these wordmap dashboards, maybe from the Jones Hopkins University, where I always pick the information from, I provide in the beginning of the podcast, it will change something? It started red in China, Italy, France, Spain and in USA and now it is in Africa. Do you think people understand or have a more open view of the world when they see the map? I am convinced that visuals can affect your way of thinking. When we see the visual maps, that we might get more responsible and connected to these people who are suffering, for instance in Peru, which was hit very hard by Covid-19. Do we get more connected to these people?

Stefan Hock: In my opinion these representations are still abstract and not easy to understand. Even highly educated people do not understand what they see. If you look back, you had these phenomena: Spain and Italy were already suffering hard from the pandemic, while countries like USA still did not want to start prevention. This shows me we should not believe too much in abstract understanding.

Agnes Kunkel: Nowadays we have the possibility of connecting easily via video conferencing. It is cheap and owning a mobile phone is sufficient for this way of communication. Does this make it easier to see possibilities and connect people working all around the world for our products from clothing to food? Could this create more intense links to these people? Remember this case from Bangladesh. The women working in the clothing industry were going to the streets and fighting for their rights, as they were not paid anymore due the big companies cancelled the working contracts. When these pictures became public, the big companies revised their decision and paid the people in Bangladesh. There is another story about a sporting equipment companies. They wanted to review rents for their stores, and everyone in the public immediately assumed they have enough capital, but still did not want to pay rent for their stores. The company declared a few days later the news became public that popular brand would pay the rent of the stores. Thus, I guess there is an impact.

Stefan Hock: There will be impact. There is this old saying: Pictures speak louder than words. Also, actions speak louder than words. And I think, the modern integrative communication will bring the world closer together. I am a strong believer of global integration and cooperation. What we need is better global coordination as this is crucial to tackle phenomena like pandemics. As well it is necessary to defend a kind of equilibrium in global economy. Learning what happens in fabrics in Bangladesh or in workshops for clothing from pictures makes us aware of the things we buy. Nevertheless, we are greedy, we will continue and look for the inexpensive t-shirt. Maybe, it would help already not to pay 5 Euro, but 6.5 Euro. The story of the sports clothing producer lets us also raise the question about equal distribution of the burden of this pandemic. It is unequal, as people are hit differently: Some lose their jobs, some lose their lives, and others are not affected at all. We have to ask the question to what extent relief in paying rent may equalize the distribution of the burden between Lessor and Lessee. Why should the Lessor be free of the financial burden and leave it entirely to the Lessee? This is not to be decided on the individual case, this is decided on the global, socially

and worldwide scale. We distribute the burden through equalization, like Germany did after World War II with the Lastenausgleich. Those who had been hit by the bombs received some substitute from those who had not been hit by the bombs.

Agnes Kunkel: If we look from a global perspective, the company who has rented the shops should distribute some of their resources to people producing the shoes and sports clothing that is sold in the shops. Because these people are severely hit from the situation, more than the multinational company and the property owner.

Stefan Hock: Sure, it cannot be a microeconomic issue, but a macroeconomic. It has to be globally, from the last consumer to the producer making cotton in Egypt or United States.

Agnes Kunkel: In order to reach final conclusions for this episode of our podcast, from a point of the family in 2 to 3 years from now, will you expect to see more discussions about the distribution of burdens and the impacts?

Stefan Hock: This happened even before the pandemics. This is an old discussion and I am not a Keynesian, or a Marxist. I am in favor of market liberalism, but it needs some checks and balances. These checks and balances will prove crucial, whether we can live freely or be tied to the committees, who say that the distribution and production must be this and that. I am optimistic that these discussions will continue and even be intensified in the future.

Agnes Kunkel: That is a very optimistic view. When we talk about ice cream, chocolate and all the responsibility aspects, do you think will draw personal consequences for you own behavior? Having in mind that we take advantage of the work from other people in other parts of the world, who are not privileged this way?

Stefan Hock: I think I will.

Agnes Kunkel: When it comes to chocolate ice cream, it is a very difficult decision.

Stefan Hock: I think I would eat only fair-trade chocolate and I love fair trade tea and fish, which is not endangered and certified. With respect to clothing, I am not sure. I need bigger sized t-shirts, but I will try to keep this in mind. I can manage to some extent.

Agnes Kunkel: I think we will stick to the fair-trade chocolate.

Stefan Hock: Yes, and also organic wine, which is fair trade. I'm even one of the people who started making bread at home, which is with organic grains and I even managed to get yeast.

Agnes Kunkel: So, let's hope that your optimistic outlook for 2023 will come true. Thank you very much Stefan. Maybe in a few months we will do a follow-up and see which of your ideas have come true.

Stefan Hock: Yes, I would love to. Thanks, and bye to everybody, who is listening. Take care and stay healthy.

Agnes Kunkel: Bye bye.