

03.05.2021 – 15:59 Uhr

## Monthly Motivation: Humour as a survival advantage



Perhaps you've noticed it too, in yourself and in others, that we've all become more thin-skinned since the pandemic. That we tend to react more sensitively than usual and have become more receptive to negative news. Philosopher Jörg Bernardy argues in this issue of the "[Monthly Motivation](#)": That's hardly a surprise, since every crisis first and foremost appeals to two instincts we all share – that of fear and that of negativity.

### From fear and negativity to the mega-fallacy

With the fear instinct we mean our tendency to focus predominantly on the things that scare us. The negativity instinct, in turn, refers to our tendency to be more receptive to the bad than to the good. Both these instincts interfere with our critical thinking and eventually lead to what scientist Hans Rosling calls the 'mega-fallacy'. As Rosling argues in his book *Factfulness*: 'Most people believe that conditions in the world are getting ever worse. No wonder that we all feel so stressed out.'

### The world is bad and getting better

'But, dear colleagues, we won't achieve anything either as long as we only see the negative,' said Angela Merkel in her policy statement of 25 March 2021. With these words, Merkel didn't intend to gloss over the weaknesses of her government or ignore the mistakes made here in Germany and at the European level – rather, they were intended as a warning not to let negativity get the better of us but to learn to see the world as it really is instead.

According to Hans Rosling, the world is both bad and better. Anyone who takes a proper look at the statistics and facts of the last decades will realise: the world is bad and getting better at the same time. This paradoxical formula perfectly sums up Rosling's pervasive optimism. For him, statistics have a therapeutic effect on a negative outlook and unpleasant news.

### The crying and the laughing philosopher

If you find this statistical path too complicated, perhaps a story that people liked to tell in ancient Greece and Rome can inspire you. It concerns the two philosophers Heraclitus and Democritus, who are said to have responded very differently to the suffering in this world. As the famous Stoic author Seneca wrote in the 1st century AD: 'Heraclitus shed tears whenever he was in public, whereas Democritus laughed. The one saw only a parade of misery, and the other nothing but folly. We too should approach things more light-heartedly and bear them with a cheerful disposition, for it is more human to laugh at life than always to lament.'

### Humour as a special form of optimism

For the Stoics, laughter was an important exercise for greater resilience in dealing with difficult situations and crises. Martha C. Nussbaum, one of the most influential and important philosophers of our time, shares Seneca's opinion. In her book *Anger and Forgiveness*, Nussbaum argues that laughter is an effective medicine against anger and too much negativity – and that apart from this, it's better to be sad than angry or self-pitying. So there you have it: humor is a special form of optimism, and always has been.

### Humour as a wonder weapon

Laughter is considered something of a miracle weapon in medicine and science too. Laughter triggers a sensation of happiness. That is to say it releases endorphins, which produce a better mood and can even relieve pain. Laughing together has a bonding effect and can defuse conflicts. It's plain to see therefore why many therapists swear by laughter, as it creates a healing distance and can bring us short-term relief from anxiety, stress and negativity.

### Daily laughter for more lightness

There is even a special kind of yoga that involves laughing together. Maybe we should all just practice this laughter yoga once in a while and learn how to laugh deeply from the belly at least once a day. If humour is a proven form of optimism, then every laugh is a step on the way to a playful and better way of dealing with crisis situations. And, as Seneca would add, a very human one to boot.

'I am happy when it rains. For if I weren't, it would still be raining.' (Karl Valentin)

This article was originally posted in our blog:

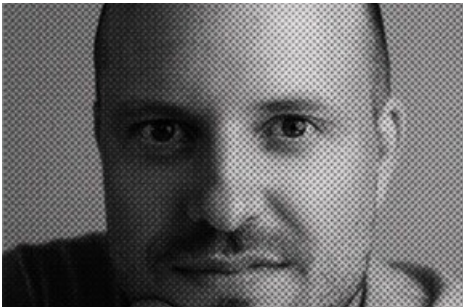
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### Medieninhalte



*news aktuell: Impuls des Monats: Humor als Überlebensvorteil*



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