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Monthly Motivation: Why we believe in a better world



Equality, diversity and equitability have become synonyms for a fair society. But not everything good automatically leads to a better world where justice reigns, says Philosopher Jörg Bernardy in the latest issue of our "[Monthly Motivation](#) " Or to put it another way: justice is an illusion, but we should strive for it anyway.

A lesson for life

Recently I came across an interesting story about the childhood of the bestselling Swiss author Rolf Dobelli. One of his grammar school teachers had the habit of distributing grades randomly instead of according to performance. The pupils felt this was unfair, but although they protested and complained to the headmaster they ultimately had to accept this act of arbitrariness. Only afterwards did the teacher explain that it was supposed to teach the pupils a life lesson: 'Life is unfair. The sooner you understand this the better!' According to Dobelli, it was one of the most important lessons he learned during his grammar school years.

Life isn't always fair

This key scene in the life of a Swiss youth – which could just as well have come from a film or a novel – ultimately applies to us all. Just think of your own childhood and youth: can you remember the moment when you first realised how unfair the world can be? When you began to understand that justice is not a given and not everything in life follows the rules of fairness?

Karma rules the world?

Whether we like it or not, at times we all want to believe there is justice in this world. Deep within us lies an instinctive longing to be rewarded for our good deeds and punished for our bad ones. Researchers call this tendency the 'just-world hypothesis'. Though we may laugh wearily at naïve happy endings in Hollywood movies, we secretly wish real life were the same as we cling to the idea of a just-world plan. In psychological terms, we might call this an ideal coping strategy for coming to terms with the misery in the world.

No guarantee of a happy ending

But the sad truth is: there is no such just-world plan. There isn't even an unjust-world plan. Most likely, there is no world plan at all. Or as the English philosopher John Gray once said: 'To the ancient Greeks it was clear that everyone's life is governed by blind fate and chance. Though ethics were a matter of virtue, wisdom and bravery, even the bravest and wisest men met with ruin and perdition. We prefer to pretend – at least in public – that good deeds eventually pay off, but we don't really believe it. We ultimately know there is nothing that can protect us from chance.'

Why equality is an illusion...

Our belief in a 'just world' often goes hand in hand with the idea that we can change the world accordingly. Take for example the current notions of 'equality' and 'diversity'. Of course we're not equal: the belief in equality, like that in justice, is an illusion. And even diversity, much-hailed as it is, does not automatically make the world at large a better place or society any fairer. And yet, studies suggest that companies with diverse teams are on average more innovative and success-ful. Diversity empowers

previously less visible minorities, making our society as a whole a little more equal – so there are good reasons to promote more diversity in business and society.

...but nevertheless worth the effort

But what can we do in the face of an unjust world and socio-economic inequality that is growing rapidly, especially now during the corona crisis? The best response is to bear it stoically and continue to do what we think is just and fair. 'Joy is a form of resistance,' singer Alicia Keys stated last year before an appearance by Kamala Harris. In other words: go ahead and stand up for equal rights, justice and equality if you can, but don't let your personal happiness depend on it. In the face of the world's injustice, remain confident and stay focused on your joy.

'Optimism is the fuel driving every fight I've been in.' (Kamala Harris)

This article was originally posted in our blog:

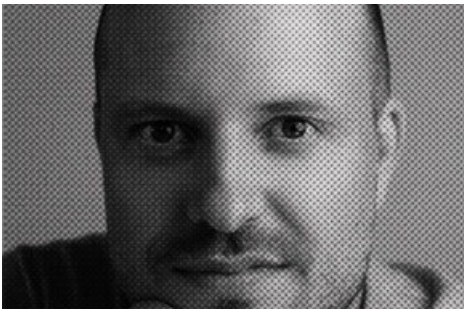
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Dr. Jörg Bernardy, Autor, Philosoph und Dozent.

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