

**1. Platz**

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**II. "Die Wahrheit ist dem Menschen zumutbar."**

**"Man is expected to face truth. / Truth is reasonable for man."**

**- Ingeborg Bachmann**

Right outside of the city walls, they found a man-made hell: Buchenwald. The seemingly upright citizens of Weimar could not believe the horror that had taken place so close to their doorsteps. As historians point out, almost none of them had known everything about the concentration camp – yet, no one had known nothing, either. After the fall of the "Third Reich," the Allied troops saw it as part of their mission to confront the German population with the factual truth of the Holocaust. The Germans were expected to face it, as a shock therapy, which would be the basis for a future that would not be built on propagandist lies or ideological schemes. Self-knowledge, in this case the knowledge about the deeds of their fellow Germans, should pave the way for self-improvement. Battles over truth are still taking place across the globe. WikiLeaks leader Julian Assange is under house arrest, whereas "whistleblower" Bradley Manning, an American soldier who illegally opened secret U.S. military files to the public, has been waiting for his military trial for months. As a member of the army, he had access to documents verifying flagrant violations of human rights committed by U.S. troops in Iraq. He saw it as his duty not to stick to the literal meaning of his oath as a soldier but to serve his country and certain values in an inconvenient way – inconvenient for himself as well as society. His case shows exemplary what Ingeborg Bachmann referred to in 1959, when she talked about truth being "zumutbar," i.e. reasonable, for man. Bachmann's statement can be read in two different ways, as its English translations show: man has a duty to face truth but also truth in itself is "reasonable," i.e. bearable, for man. Bradley Manning acted upon both ideas Bachmann expressed in her statement fifty years earlier – he found his imprisonment bearable just because his conscience made him aware of the moral duty to face truth.

But what "truth" did Manning face? Certainly the historical truth of past war crimes about which he learned from the documents he came across. Nonetheless, he would not have risked his entire career for just any piece of history writing. His intention was not to complete future history books with previously unknown facts but, rather, to live up to a moral standard. He served the victims of the war crimes he uncovered as well his own conscience – but also, one is inclined to think, a "truth" larger than himself, a sort of metaphysical truth that made it bearable ("zumutbar") for him to lose everything and that makes him a modern-age hero for his supporters. Therefore, the question is raised whether there is an absolute truth which must be revealed or strived for (in the sense of a duty) and if so, if this truth can always be seen as "bearable" for man.

The search for truth has always been part of the human experience. The philosophical tradition of Ancient Greece, which proclaims the existence of one absolute truth, however, has changed the course of cultural history immensely. Since the days of the Athenian Academy, we cannot entirely get rid of the feeling that we as human beings inhabit a cave, which we must leave behind in order to discover the "actual reality," the eternal truth hidden behind the shadows we can perceive with our senses. Although the Greek tradition, especially Aristotle, sees truth-seeking as the highest and, therefore, also most enjoyable form of all human activities, Plato, in his cave parable, also realizes that truth is a burden.

When the courageous man, who had gone up to see the truth of the eternal ideas, returns to the cave to liberate the others, they cannot make sense of his message and kill him. Therefore, "truth," in the eyes of this metaphysical school of thought, has nothing to do with majorities. "A man who is more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one," John Stuart Mill argues, following the same train of thought as Ingeborg Bachmann. The concept of any metaphysical "truth" beyond the sensually perceivable world necessarily includes a normative aspect – the murdered liberator of the cave inhabitants is a martyr for truth because the reason he was killed lies in the fact that he lived up to a moral imperative. "Man is expected to face truth," although, one would have to add, it can lead to personal unhappiness, imprisonment or even death.

This argument, however, does not clearly separate between factual knowledge, e.g. obtained from scientific inquiry, and the absolute truth – two different forms of "truth," in the colloquial sense, which can easily get in conflict with each other. Could the scientists who developed the nuclear bomb honestly be called seekers of "truth"? In their case, Bachmann's statement that "truth" is "bearable" ("zumutbar") for man leaves a bad aftertaste, at the least. One should, therefore, recognize this as an argument for the interpretation of her statement as a reference to an absolute truth, which lies beyond so-called scientific "truths." Those, as we know from living in the nuclear age, do not have to be universally "bearable" at all – knowledge can be dangerous not only when a conflicting normative truth asks for it to be spread among others (as in the case of Bradley Manning) but it can also be dangerous when it is entirely separated from truth. Not only can knowledge become a means of active destruction in such a case but it can also distract attention from issues that would have to be addressed if one would stick to Bachmann's idea that man has a duty to face truth. "At certain times, it can be a crime to talk about trees," as Bertolt Brecht reminds us. The area of descriptive scientific knowledge, therefore, falls under the same normative expectations as any other human activity and should always remind itself that its pursuit of knowledge is, in fact, not the equivalent of a search for truth.

If one follows Ingeborg Bachmann in her notion that truth is "bearable" for man without any prior knowledge of the quote's post-World War II background, one could see it as yet one more expression of the Platonic concept of an absolute "truth" waiting to be discovered like a sunken treasure. Philosophy, for Plato, is always an elite's endeavor – an activity for audacious treasure-hunters of reason. Although he praises the search for truth as a universal human objective, he also points out clearly that not all human beings are well-suited for philosophical thought. Reason, for him, is not a universal component of all human existence, as it is for Kant, but a gift of nature that is distributed rather unequally among us. Therefore, society should be structured in a way that helps to implement the absolute truth as revealed by philosophers in the factual world. The privileged access to reason that Plato's philosopher kings claim for themselves justifies their position as rulers of an ideal state, as elaborated in *Politeia*. If one imagined Bachmann's quote coming out of the mouth of one of these aristocrats of philosophy, its meaning would change entirely again. "Truth is bearable ('zumutbar') for man" – the lower castes have to "face" the truth of their inferiority (discovered by a reasonable elite) and accept their position at the other end of the social ladder.

The broad phrasing of Bachmann's statement, although one would have to acknowledge her anti-totalitarian intention, does not clearly distinguish itself from such an authoritarian thought. Just like the separation of knowledge from a normative "truth" can bring horrendous results (e.g. regarding nuclear physics), the implementation of a proclaimed "absolute truth" also includes an enormous danger. Instead of having to deal with nihilism, society finds itself threatened by a totalitarian value-monism, which does not leave any room for freedom. When the man "who is more right than his neighbors" seizes power, "truth" becomes a tool of domination and is easily switched to its own opposite – lies. If the concept of an absolute truth leaves its secure space

in a philosopher's parlor and enters society, it can lead to the degradation of democratic discourse by means of authoritarian domination. Bachmann seems not to recognize this danger since she speaks of "man" and "truth" in the singular form. "Man," however, does not exist – there are human beings but no abstract collectivism such as "man" or "humanity." Tolstoy points out that "everyone wants to change humanity but no one wants to change himself." Bachmann runs into the same trap of a misled normative universalism that is only applied to a philosophical abstraction while remaining vague when it comes to the reality of diversity among actual human beings.

The concept of an absolute truth can justify a reason-based moral, such as Kant's categorical imperative – if one would read Bachmann's quote in a benevolent way, one could simply regard it as a reference to the claim that there is an absolute truth in a universal reason-based moral. Nonetheless, Hannah Arendt, one of her contemporaries, emphasizes that the same concept of an absolute truth has brought at least as much suffering into the world as it intended to prevent: through centuries of inter-religious wars and crusades fought in the name of "truth", injustice caused by social hierarchies justified as a divine order, and, in the modern age, through the idea of a mechanization of history. Strictly speaking, and although it might seem distasteful or absurd to argue in such a way at first sight, Bachmann's quote could also come from Robespierre or Stalin – and that is its most abysmal dimension. "Man is expected to face truth" and truth is universally "bearable" – what "truth" is meant here remains unclear but its character is absolute and can, therefore, also be understood as the truth that a revolutionary elite implements in a violent way, justified by the prophetic belief in the necessity of a certain historical development, which can be accelerated by the right measures taken by an authoritarian regime.

However, one should not comfort oneself with the false perception that this fabrication of the world based on a certain "truth" to which a group of people claims privileged access is a thing of the past or of ideologies remote to our Western societies. Even here, the authoritarian note in Bachmann's statement resounds in politics and the media on a daily basis because the prevalent ideology of neo-liberalism plays in the same key. Just like Leibniz set out to use reason-based philosophy to construct a "theodicy," arguing for the existence of God, we are now experiencing the use of self-proclaimed scientific knowledge in order to justify a deregulated financial market. The suffering of the Third World as well as of the poor in struggling Western countries such as Greece is easily accepted when it is seen through the lens of neo-liberal economics – the "invisible hand" (Adam Smith) will take care of the problem and, eventually, result in a universally "just" distribution of wealth. Policies of further deregulation and drastic austerity measures are declared to be "without alternatives." Therefore, it is reasonable to speak of the domination of contemporary Western thought by an "Oikodicy". Ingeborg Bachmann's idea that "Man is expected to face truth" and truth is "reasonable for man" can also be used as an expression of neo-liberal thought that shuts its eyes in front of suffering, claiming that it is a necessary part if one "faces" the "truth" of a globalized free market. "Truth," in any case, is placed above non-abstract concerns about actual suffering and the irrational moment of empathy that is also a necessary part of human existence. "The poor can bear it", Bachmann seems to imply (unwillingly).

Overall, one has to notice that Ingeborg Bachmann's statement, although one definitely has to admit that she probably only had the best (i.e. anti-totalitarian) intentions, opens all gates for any sort of ideological domination of a democratic discourse. She did not see that "truth" can only exist in the plural form, since every human being has a unique and, thus, necessary, perspective on the world. "Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia" – I am myself and my circumstances, as the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset put it. For him, we cannot claim a superior knowledge of an absolute "truth" since all human perspectives are uniquely defined by the differing circumstances (such as place, physical senses, historical situation, values etc.) of each person. "Truth," for Ortega y Gasset in contrast to Plato, is not a sunken treasure one could find with one's own reason but a puzzle, which is completed by the sum of all human perspectives that exist. Each perspective reaches another facet of existence like its own "tentacle."

If one understands "truth" in the sense of Ortega y Gasset's "perspectivismo," Bachmann's quote can be interpreted in yet another way - this time a fundamentally democratic one. "Man is expected to face truth" and "truth is bearable for man" – each human being has the duty to use his or her "vital reason" to understand the piece of truth his or her existence holds in store and communicate it with others in order to come closer to a "global" truth (rather than one "absolute" truth) combined

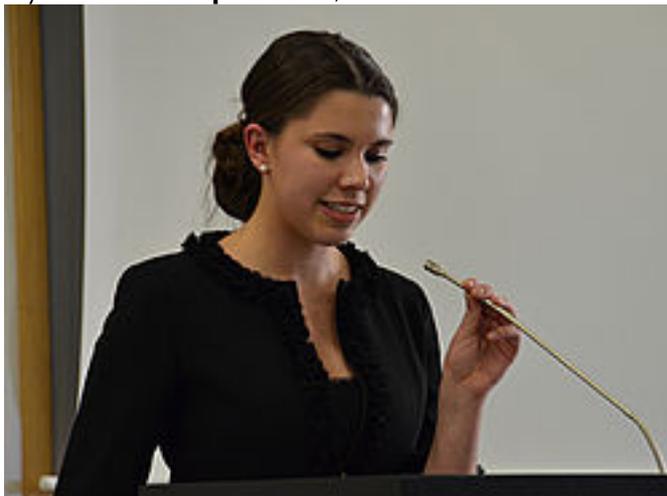
through the discourse among many equally valuable perspectives. The absolute truth, however, i.e. the knowledge about all possible human perspectives, will always remain a utopian vision, which should not mingle with political ideologies that try to escape human diversity.

With her quote, Bachmann has failed in her approach to help overcome the authoritarian heritage of the first half of the 20th century, while falling back behind the thought of her contemporaries, who had already abandoned the notion of one absolute truth. In his book "Man in Revolt," Albert Camus criticizes most "philosophers and prophets" for simply inventing new "theories of alienation from who I am." Unfortunately, without any further knowledge of Bachmann's work, one would have to put her in the very same category. Her quote ignores the diversity among human perspectives and is, thus, implicitly anti-democratic. Nonetheless, it can still be seen as a laudable contribution to the development of a democratic post-war Europe if one subjects one's interpretation to a sort of metaphysical disarmament. What remains is not a highbrow reference to an absolute and, therefore, dangerous "truth" but the mere call for an honest examination of the "historical truths," i.e. the crimes of the past. Understood this way, Ingeborg Bachmann does not immerse herself as deeply in philosophical thought as one could otherwise think but her message would not become less important – the factual "truths" of history are "bearable" ("zumutbar") and there is a moral imperative not to ignore them. We need history to understand our own perspectives on existence and to uphold the principle of accountability for committed crimes. A universal truth, however, is different to mere "historical facts" and can be the opposite of "bearable" – a threat to human dignity.

## 2. Platz

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Marie-Luise Goldmann 2. Platz

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**III. "The man who finds his homeland sweet is still a tender beginner; he to whom every soil is as his native one is already strong; but he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land."**

**- Hugh of St. Victor-**

Sweet homeland world

Nationalflag turns into a world- map marked with all the countries where you have been; love for nation turns into an obsession with new, extravagant experiences in foreign countries; and children having been taught to fight for their nation turn into adults who teach their youngsters to study abroad, to go for exchange, to get as many impressions of the big wide world as possible.

Globalisation is no secret nor is it an overwhelming inspiration of mine that a phenomenon like this exists and that due to its influences on our every-day-life it becomes more actual with every hour that passes.

But the interesting aspect I would like to illuminate in this essay is the thesis of Hugh of St. Victor who says that the abolition of national feelings would lead to perfection. Instead of insisting in our nationality and therefore feeling mental shackles and prisons he suggests humans to see world with a certain kind of distance as a result of – and this is my interpretation of his comment, since he

does not give us any reasons or arguments for his thoughts – rationality finding more and more its way into human mentality. That is to say, Hugh of St. Victor wants us to give up our sentimental values like nationality that have reached our minds on the historical and empirical way, not by rational thoughts. Because how could we ever find a consistent argument for melancholy and restriction concerning our homeland? Though Hugh of St. Victor lived nearly 900 years ago, however, what is cited above seems to be a pretty adequate analysis of our modern age- at least from society's point of view.

According to actual society – and to Hugh of St. Victor – the one is "strong" "to whom every soil is as his native one". Maybe they are right, maybe it is good to be tolerant, maybe we have to be more objective, and maybe we become more perfect the more we forget about our irrational feelings and instead face the cruel truth, the senselessness of fanaticism and the holding up to arbitrary, earthly goods and opinions.

If we read him like this, Hugh of St. Victor suddenly seems to be a modern, critical rationalist, who is convinced of the methods of science- of the methods of objectivity, theories, trial and error (see Karl Popper). If we accept the dynamic progress of our world of theories, theories that have to ignore "tender" feelings and have got the goal to falsificate and modificate, that is to say, making and matching, we make it more rational. We make our world by inventing strong theories about natural laws and we match it by modifacating these laws if they result to be wrong. By this attempt to explain the world we make it more and more rational and we can only do so by understanding it as a "foreign land". Only if we are not tied up to special beliefs and irrational opinions we are open to the methods of this kind of rationalism.

But considering my first statement that society wants rationality and rationality wants denationalisation, there has to be made a difference between true rationality in the methods of critical science and some kind of what I call pseudo- rationality that can be diagnosed in the mentality of the modern- age- society. You could say that people today think more rational, because they are not tied up any more to earthly frontiers made by humans thousands of years ago, instead they are free, free to move wherever they want to. But in fact this kind of freedom exists only in the superficial world of actual body- movements, in the physical world, but does this freedom truly reach people's minds?

I think it is more about transformation of mental prisons than about elimination. Of course there can be diagnosed an overwhelming openness to new, foreign countries, but this apparent tolerance and breaking off with physical "determinism" goes along with tourism of the masses resulting in fast adopting vacation destinies that nearly reach European standards. That is why people nowadays search for great experiences everywhere but surprisingly do not recognize that this kind of setting their goals is an overestimation of superficial experiences and this does not turn them into special individuals. Not the person is "strong" as H.V. suggests, who has come to know a great diversity of countries and places, who has travelled around the earth, spoken to Indios and swam in the Atlantic. Not the person is an individual who has experienced a lot of different life- styles and seen a great variety of cultures, but the person who has got a true goal, who can put himself limits as far as the reaching of this goal is concerned, and the person who lives with all passion for his self chosen object, being some kind of arts or science ( see Max Weber, Science as a profession).

What we have seen now is that society is not strong by travelling and elimination their national feelings. But maybe that is exactly what H.V. wanted to say: That we do not need extraordinary physical experiences in our lives, that we must learn to be truly free from sentimental values given by habit. But coming to this conclusion it is clear that we as a society have to turn into exactly the opposite direction than we are doing now. We do not have to know "every soil", we just have to take Kant as an example, the great philosopher of rationalism, who found his freedom in his thoughts and therefore spent all his life in the small village Königsberg. We can also cite Koeppen, who returned to Germany after having spent some year in Netherlands saying, that he had come to the conclusion, that a German writer can only seek happiness in Germany.

So we see, there are intellectual persons who negate the appell of totally making yourself free of earthly given prisons and only transcending into a reasonable world of thoughts and theories. But maybe the solution to this dilemma is to be sought in the analysis of the last part of H.V.s quote that regards only these persons as perfect who not only eliminate national borders out of their minds but as well see the world from a distant, objective perspective, similar to the scientific me-

thods of critical rationalism I had explained before. By seeing the entire world from the scientific point of view we make it explainable, objective and maybe we fill our minds every day with more knowledge. And that is the only way we have as far as science is concerned. We need the distance, we need to see the "foreign land".

If we take a look at how politics should be organized we sure have to come to the same conclusion. According to Rawls, we need reason to create a society everyone can be happy with, tender national feelings as "sweet homeland Germany" should not take place in any rational discourse because probably not everyone could understand this argument since there could be a lot of critical views concerning the national thought.

Ever since Kant there have been plenty of politicians who have appealed to reason being the only adequate method to create governmental laws (Kant, Habermas) and especially Rawls showed us how important it is to keep distance, to avoid integrating all our personal, maybe religious, metaphysical beliefs into the public use of reason, that is to say the rational discourse about certain laws. Insofar they all agree with our quote, that distance is needed and only the distant viewer can reach perfection.

But does it not make our world colder? If we see everything by rationalising it of course we systematize it, we control it, we construct laws and theories, we make it more structured.

But more understandable? Is the one who sees world grey stronger than the one who sees it black-red-golden, is the one who feels world cold more perfect than the one who feels it coloured, smelling the spring, hearing it living instead of measuring the pitch of the sound?

In this point I have got a very different opinion than H.V. about what perfection or strongness is. (In the following I will ignore the fact that he gives us a method to reach perfection, which from my point of view no one can ever reach, but maybe he neither thinks that anyone could ever see the entire world as a foreign land.) How can he dare to tell us, that we could reach perfection by turning into foreigners, into persons who do not understand what holds world together? Maybe he wants resignation. Maybe he wants rational robots. But then he degrades us to simple objects that do not have anything in common with the world they live in, he negates our feelings, our will to live, to laugh, to love.

And this is my solution to the problem of rational globalisation and sentimental nationality: We do have to be rational, objective persons of distance if we deal with sciences or politics. Then we cannot support any national, tender feelings of few. But we have got the liberty to understand the world by listening to music, reading great literature or going to theatre.

Arts gives us the sense we miss in the scientific point of view, it lets us express our feelings and get confronted with other feelings and by doing this we are able to understand (see Dilthey). In this moment of understanding we do not consider world as a "foreign land" but as a part of us, we feel unity between subject and object, world and us, homeland and foreign countries.

That is why we are free to say "I love to live in Germany because it is the only right place for a German author", we do not have to negate these feelings for being irrational and old-fashioned, because there is plenty of room in our world where we do not have to be rational.

Hans Castorp, in Thomas Manns great travel- and education- novel "Der Zauberberg", says when he had already spent seven years in his new "home"town, that the only thing he got accustomed to is that he does not get accustomed. Maybe this is another form of understanding the distance, the seeing of world as "foreign". But why do we have to get accustomed to the world? Through arts we understand and feel and every time new.

So we can surmount the distance we sometimes feel when we realize like Castorp that we never got accustomed to the place we live in or the people that surround us - by reading about Castorp and - by doing this - we understand that we feel like him, we feel understood and we equally understand.

And maybe these moments of full understanding are the most perfect moments we can ever experience. So due to my ability of distant, rational criticism I would like to modificate Hugh of St. Victor's statement: "He to whom the entire world is a foreign land is maybe a lost, pitiful sheep in the sweet homeland world."