WELFARE IN THE 21\textsuperscript{ST} CENTURY - THE PATHOLOGY OF TOOMUCHNESS

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This is medicine’s theory of relativity:

\[ h = b \times (c + p)^t \]

claiming that health is an ever changing product of biology and culture plus politics raised to the power of time and place.

\textbf{Wealth}

In by-gone times Scandinavia and Europe were characterized by common poverty. But so it is not today. We are now embedded in common wealth. We still do have enclaves of poverty that need to be addressed. But social medicine will make itself irrelevant if it leaves mainstream society, and seeks cover among Les miserables. A potent and timely social medicine must do both:

1. Be a strong medical advocate for the underprivileged.
2. Confront the values of the content majority, the culture of toomuchness.

“To every thing there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven,” states Ecclesiastes. Today the Nordic countries constitute one of the wealthiest and healthiest habitats in the world. So when we consider health and factor c and p raised to Scandinavia year 2003, we must change analytical perspective from poverty to wealth, from starvation to abundance, from nothingness to toomuchness. Therefore my research questions in this lecture will be:

- Given abundance: What are the influences on people’s health?
- Given abundance: What are the challenges to public health?

\textbf{Mind}
Wealth is the first, mind is the second opening keyword for this lecture. Abundance can, like poverty, change cells, destroy organs, ruin bodies. But I will not focus on materia medica in this lecture. On the contrary I will give priority to how wealth influences our thoughts, feelings, concepts - our minds.

Health and disease are to a considerable extent mental, cultural constructions. Mind moves matter, states Virgil. That holds true for medicine too. “It is not insignificant what theories man gets inscribed into mind”, states the Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim. Poverty inscribes one, wealth inscribes another story of health and disease into man’s mind. It is the mind-shaping, narrative power of riches, I want to examine in this lecture.

So this lecture will be enlightened by two analytical flash words: Wealth and Mind. The light from these words overlap in a zone we may explore as:

**Nimietiy**

In ancient Greece they had a specific word for the insatiability of riches: Nimietiy. Individuals and societies living in excess demand more, with no limits. They claim more money, more adventures, more safety, more health – and no risk, no sickness, no death. People and cultures infected with this attitude become, according to Greek wisdom, distressed, dangerous and sick. My hypothesis is that present Scandinavia is entering the trance of Nimietiy. The mentality of toomuchness reveals itself through a postmodern metaphor: The Zero-vision.

The Zero-vision will purify life and society, remove stains, defects and risks. The Zero-vision springs from a firm conviction: If we invest sufficient billions Euro and brain cells, man can design life, format society, manage nature – so why should we accept risk, accident, pain, disease, ageing, death?

The Zero-vision has a Siamese twin: The vision of 100% perfection. When the Zero-vision requires zero error, zero weakness, zero sin, zero malfunction – it evolves into a culture of extreme perfection and performance.

Jesus, guide my thoughts, we beg in the psalm. But in Europe 2003 our thoughts, norms and longings are directed by the political elites, the expert systems, the moneymakers and the media dramatists. My tentative diagnosis presumes that these political, cultural and economical capitalists suffer from eine Übermensch-neurosis that they try to communicate to the people. They have formulated a modern secular Decalogue, commanding ten golden virtues:

- Ambition
- Productivity
- Cleverness
- Tidiness
- Diligence
- Obedience
- Safety
- Purity
- Strength of will
- Health

In front of these holy substantives stands not sufficient, not moderate, but ABSOLUTE.

The pathologies of toomuchness
Colleagues, - I have now stated the reasons for my two analytical perspectives, wealth and mind, and defined their meeting point: Nimiety, the mentality of toomuchness, or The Zero-vision.

Time has come to hunt high and low for answers to the question: How does The Zero-vision affect people’s health. What are the pathologies of toomuchness?
Here is my autopsy report:
- To generate fear
- To create fatigue
- To make us sad
- To give rise to sickness inflation
- To bring about healthism
- To generate a demanding attitude
- To transform us into weaklings
- To promote monoculture
- To make us strict
- To generate injustice

To generate fear
The Zero-vision results in an obsessive preoccupation with risk. The risk epidemic has infected us from the United States. I was a guest researcher at University of California, Berkeley, in 2000. It was like an Odyssey in a laboratory of fear. There is adrenaline in the air all the time. The suprarenal glands are on red alert, all the time. People are acutely and chronically frightened:
- of the children becoming victims of a school massacre
- of data viruses transforming and infecting you from the pc
of Saddam Hussein smuggling anthrax bacteria into the Coca Cola reservoir in Atlanta City.

In Scandinavia too, life is surrounded by dangers that the Zero-missionaries will rescue us from: Tobacco, fat, sugar, alcohol, sofa, exuberant sex.

It is fascinating to note how the sinister hazards are connected to pleasure. The bright sides of life are transformed into warning triangles by the modern Princes of darkness: Researchers, public health professionals and journalists. Let me bring you some fresh summer memories from Norway:

1. Sunny summer time becomes the melanoma season and carcinogenic molecules are identified in sun tans for children.
2. Strawberries may increase the risk of testicular cancer, and Behold:
3. Your gas-filled jogging shoes may suddenly explode!

The Zero-vision redefines life from well-being to failure to thrive, from delight to plight. Hazards and prevention colonize mind.

Neither person nor society gain health in the landscape of fear. Fear and suspicion create excessive needs for protection. Protection can soon advance into fortification. People hide from imaginary dangers and hallucinatory enemies. The society fragments into isolated ghettos - golden ghettos and ghettos of misery and despair.

To create fatigue
The Zero-vision insists on too much. To belong to the winners, you are expected to be productive, efficient, innovative, creative and positive – all the time. All the qualities of person and life must be refined ad maximum. Created by God or Darwin, man is not made to be all-time-high, - all the time. The Zero-vision forbids us to repose with enough. Therefore modern man burns slowly out.

To make us sad
The Zero-vision makes us sad. It blinds us to the sinful joys and unhealthy delights of life. It magnifies the nano-monsters and sinister omens. Thereby The Zero-vision transforms life into a medical combat zone where we suffer from chronic Weltschmertz. “Slaves, let us not curse life,” commands Arthur Rimbaud in his novel “A season in hell”. The Zero-vision curses life.

To give rise to sickness inflation
The Zero-vision demands not merely zero risk, it desires zero deviation from the ideal state of mind and body. Consequently, The Zero-vision expands the concept of disease. Before The Zero-vision a wise furrow, a sorrow, a shyness, a big bottom, a falling penis, - were regarded as natural phenomena belonging to the mixed state of being human. In the light of The Zero-vision these occurrences become medical deviations, claiming restoration by hormones, drugs, knives.

To bring about healthism
The Zero-vision’s imperative demand for no risk, no disease makes health the one and only gold of life. All appraisals and all acts are subordinated to the holy service of health. Research demonstrates the cardiological benefits of poems, in particular love poems. Therefore you ought to write or read love poems – three times daily. The latest research news highlight the multiple, salutogenic effects of marching in processions of demonstration:

- you get exercise
- you channel off aggression and anger
- you get a feeling of community
- you experience meaning.

To generate a demanding attitude
The Zero-vision is inscribed into our brains and hearts, first as dreams, then hopes, then expectations, then as demands. A new heart becomes a trade union right. Some years ago, in Sweden, a 52 year old man was examined with regard to heart transplantation. He suffered from severe myocarditis as well as chronic diseases in other vital organs. The medical investigation advised against heart transplantation. The patient would not survive the operation. Confronted with this decision, the patient came in great anger and exclaimed: “This is a provocation! I have been member of my Union for 34 years!”

To transform us into weaklings
The Zero-vision reduces man’s ability to cope. It wraps us up in cotton wool already in utero. We are watched and protected to an extent that robs us of desired dangers. Practice makes master, asserts an old saying. We can never be Masters of life if we are prevented from experimenting in The danger zone.

To promote monoculture
The Zero-vision can transform us into pillars of salt by stealing what Paul Tillich calls our “Courage to be”. The Zero-vision degrades our desire to
change. Therefore it reduces manifold and promotes monoculture. Researchers agree that the reduction in biological diversity threatens the health of man and the health of The Patient Earth. Perhaps we should be concerned about the decline in social and cultural diversity brought upon the human species by The Zero-vision? Perhaps we should support a World Wildlife Fund aimed at protecting human wildlife from the mighty forces of socio-cultural standardisation? Perhaps social medicine should swear in the public health church and suggest that a rich variety of human lifeforms and lifestyles, included the unhealthy and damned, may be favourable to man and society in the long term? Man’s freedom to “experiment in life” requires that society to some extent remains a jungle and not in toto is regulated into a park.

To make us strict
The Zero-vision makes us strict. It seduces us to accept nothing but a silvery picture of man and life. Ahead of the National day in Norway, the 17th of May, there is a tradition of a spring-clean-up in the gardens and in the cities. This year the rightist City Council of Oslo included junkies in their spring-clean-up. Arguing that the drug addicts represented “a visual pollution”, an attempt was made to remove them forcefully from their habitat close to the Central station.

The Zero-vision induces a kind of cultural allergy. We develop antibodies against otherness. We become hypersensitive to different lifestyles, alien Gods, strange bodies, foreign smells in the staircase. We become preoccupied by cleaning and correcting in The House of Superhumans. This obsessive cleaning neurosis manifests itself particularly in The House of Health. Here, stern epidemiologists and busybody public health professionals have designed The Idealman. With invasive education, scare tactics, prohibitions and rewards, the 23.532.213 distinguished, enigmatic, unique individuals in Scandinavia are committed into the straitjacket of health.

Ricoeur is right when he claims that: Medicine is our new tribunal.

To generate injustice
The final evil act of The Zero-vision is to generate injustice. The Zero-vision invites to egotism. The Zero-vision echoes Margaret Thatcher’s notorious maxim: There is no such thing as society. It is you, the one and lonely individual, who shall strive for the utmost safety, the perfect lifestyle, the optimal health, the maximum comfort for yourself. The Zero-vision cultivates the winner. It divides and rules society on behalf of the politico-economical elite.
It is not accidental who assumes the power to define the golden standards of human life and health and to point derisively at what we will not endure and whom we will not tolerate. It is a well-educated, privileged elite who constructs the ideals and norms for lifestyle, body, health, virtues, manners, life values, social acceptance and rejection. Thus the welfare state gradually may be replaced by a medical sorting society where:

- The ugly bodies are humiliated
- Those who lack willpower are subjected to blame and shame
- The unwholesome lifestyles are condemned.

The more aggressively the superhuman concept is advertised, the more attenuated becomes the self-esteem of people who, in the mirror of the silver glossed human ideal, perceive themselves as failures:
- the people with chronic illnesses
- the disabled
- the old in need of nursing
- the junkies
- the fat ones
- the immigrants
- the smokers
- the asylum seekers
- the drinkers
- the unemployed
- the people on social welfare
- the unhappy.

Colleagues,- this is the Writing on the Wall – warning us against the pathologies of toomuchness. This is the diagnosis. To find a cure we need to ask:

- How can social medicine contribute to the reversal of Nimiety?
- How shall public health respond to The Zero-vision?

**A New Deal for Public Health**

Here is my prescription:

- Poverty → Wealth
- Numbers → Words
- Omnipotence → Moderation
- Nihilism → Political values
- The epidemiology → The democracy
- model → model
First and foremost we must change scope from poverty to wealth. By moving attention from toolittleness to toomuchness, we get:

- A current public health, synchronized with today, not lost in yesterday.
- A courageous public health confronting the power holders, instead of humiliating the silent minorities.

The paradox of social medicine states that sustainable poverty alleviation can only be obtained by addressing and attacking the wealthy classes. It is here, in the mentality of toomuchness, inequity rises.

The next arrow of change must fly from numbers to words. Public health has a tradition for squeezing human beings into arithmetical tables. The Norwegian philosopher Hans Skjervheim states: "The essential difference arises among those who count people and those who count on people." Public health must fly from the park of numbers to the jungle of words. Man is not made of stone and numbers. Man is made of protoplasm and words. Man is a living, loving, trembling, amoeboid organism responsive to environmental pressure.

Health, perception of illness and tolerance for risk are now moulded by:

- The sentimentalisation and dramatisation of the media.
- The medico-industrial profit-makers’ speculation in low threshold for illness and high alert for risk.
- The tyranny of normalisation craving correction for not being angels.
- The industrialisation of medicine expelling health and illness as personalised experiences.
- The utopian scientists who, in technological ecstasy, abandon moral inhibitions and humanistic obligations.

So: Man is a never ending story – of words. For the time being the power of persuasion remains with the market forces. Money is their one and only value. Traditionally doctors and medicine are conveyors of other values: Compassion, care, justice. Heavily armed, with words, public health ought to join the eternal battle for man’s heart and brain. We have to go out there, in the jungle, and create images of health and disease in congruence with medicine’s value foundation, in accordance with clinical wisdom.
The third mindwalk must go from omnipotence to moderation. Medicine has God-like ambitions and transplants delusions of grandeur into peoples’ minds. The medical Heaven on Earth Annunciation has two gloomy side effects:

- When the bluff is seen through, people get angry and frustrated. They blame medicine and curse life.
- The megalomanic expectations drive people into an obsessional health cult, what Skrabanek calls ”Healthism”.

This graph illustrates The Law of Diminishing Returns, a well known phenomenon in the science of economy.

It demonstrates that in the beginning of a project aimed at, for example, improving health, the returns for the investments are considerable. But then, approaching the maximum level, the profit becomes minimal. The last one, two, three percent improvement are extremely costly. In the field of health, it is even possible that the curve may break at a certain point near the top – that further screening programs, further preventive medicalisation, further frightening campaigns may bring the the health into steep decline. There may be a turning point where further strenuous efforts result in the renouncing of pleasures essential to health – a critical point where the crusade for health takes its toll of essential values like freedom and courage to be.

Instead of forcing this curve ad absurdum, infinitum – public health should titrate the point of reversal and advocate sobriety in the striving for health. 2000 years ago Seneca, the Stoic, prescribed the cure for medical Nimietry: Man must be reconciled with risk, failures, malfunction and non-perfection. Instead of over-selling no risk, no pain, honest doctors must ask: How much trouble and
hardship is good for your health? And answer: Man and society gain health and safety by:

- Accepting certain risks
- Tolerating some violence
- Coexisting with a dose of terror
- Finding peace with some milligrams Sin
- Loving five ton reprehensible lifestyles

We must not be ravenously hungry for health, nor ravenously greedy for safety, because those two ravens of Nimiety will fly away with our peace of mind and our joy of life.

Nihilism → Political values
The fourth transmigration of souls must go from nihilism to political engagement. Today medicine and public health is fancied a-political. The individuals’ insufficient capacity to comply with lifestyle standards are constantly challenged. The society’s feeble will to redress unemployment, poverty and racism is seldomly challenged. Social medicine and public health must choose sides: Shall our solidarity primarily be with our fellow human beings, or shall we give our loyalty to political and economical power holders who may want to use the public health apparatus:

- To keep people and lifestyles in order
- To optimize the collective body (der Volkkörper) as a factor of production
- To distribute health services in a way that preserves the medical class society.

As public health professionals we ought to change from obedient servants to strong-willed advocates for the underprivileged. Primary political prevention should be our new marching order.

The epidemiology model → The democracy model
Now, let us do the final escape - from the prison of epidemiology to the freedom of democracy. In my opinion, the relationship between public health and the public is deadlocked in a fossilized epidemiology model that:

- Blames the victims
- Brings darkness to health
- Deletes the holy individual
- Imposes expert rule
To bring public health on line with the future, to enable us to dance with enlightened wolves, to contribute to freedom of health – we must exchange the epidemiology model with a new democracy model. We must move again:

From | To
--- | ---
The Epidemiology Model | The Democracy Model
Lifestyle | Living conditions
Medical coercion | Freedom of health
Designerhealth | Commonhealth
Melancholy health | Happy health
Statistical clone | Holy individual
Expert rule | The people-centred method

From lifestyle to living conditions
"You are your own Minister of Health”, is the favourite slogan of the Norwegian Minister of Health. Individual lifestyle is in focus, politically determined living conditions are blurred.

Priority to lifestyle is convenient for the power holders. Attention is shifted from social injustice to individual insufficiency, from political failures to personal defectiveness. The lifestyle explanatory model functions as a lightening conductor for political morbidity and mortality. In Europe today, the major threats against public health are:

- Unemployment
- Social inequity
- Poverty
- Racism
- The efficiency fury
- The culture of perfection

Public health should formulate a red prescription against political, economical and ethnic suppression, instead of writing signs of stigma into the lowbrows in Healthland.

From medical coercion to freedom of health
Doctors emerge as a lifestyle clergy demanding everybody to obey the Commandments the epidemiologists descend with from the Mountain of Data, from their Tower of Babel, confounding and confusion. We have patented The Good Life. We know what is best for you. Public health according to the epidemiology model stands for supression. Public health, fuelled by the noble intention: Health for all, may deprive people of the most essential prerequisite for health: FREEDOM.

Colleagues,- we are perceived as Stardust in the postmodern Universe: Cloudy, distant, close to censorious God. We will never, ever engage people in health if we pursue them with fundamentalist answers, regulations, warnings, prohibitions. The market, the politicians, the media, the sophisticated consumers do not want orders. They demand evidence, but also doubts and alternatives that enable them to make qualified, personal choices.

From designerhealth to commonhealth
The epidemiology model professes an ideal concept of health presupposing total absence of disease, total presence of well-being. This golden standard blinds man into The Zero-vision. The picture of health is so brightened, that everybody get spots. Designerhealth is located so high in the blue sky, that nobody can reach it. To move health back to the people, we have to humanise and realise the concept. Phantom health should be replaced by our new ideal: Commonhealth, a generous and roomy concept of health including misery, affliction, pain and disease – because such is commonplace life.

From melancholy health to happy health
The epidemiological apparatus transforms health into a melancholy project. It accounts nothing but the minuses in The book of health. It brands health with the trademarks: Struggle and Renunciation. Thou shallst mortify thy flesh to earn health. Thou shallst honour thy sad doctor, thy severe researcher, thy strict Minister of Health – and thou shallst live 2,3 years longer on Earth.

Medicine has misused its power of cultural construction to create feelings of Apocalypsis instead of Joie de vivre. A New Deal for Public Health must give preference to the bright sides of health. Health as a happy, effortless, matter of course should be our new bestseller.

From statistical clone to the holy individual
The epidemiology model dishonour health as a personal, existentialist project. Centralized, standardised public health will probably meet growing resistance. The modern mentality worships ”I”. The refrain in The Internationale of today
sounds: ”Do it my way”. Modern man is selfconfident and demanding in the search for service that is tuned to me.

In the democracy model we must respect health as personal property. We must acknowledge the individual as the one and only right master builder of own health. Our mission as health professionals is to provide the box of bricks, not the architectural drawing.

From expert rule to the people-centred method
The epidemiology model is operated by the central powers of public health:
- The Ministries of Health
- The Directorates of Public Health
- The National Institutes of Public Health

In his book, ”Our contempt for weakness”, the Norwegian philosopher Harald Ofstad, introduces the concept: ”Distance to the concrete”. He claims that the danger for infringement increases with the distance between the power holders and the victims. The Zero-vision and fundamentalistic principles thrive on distance from real life. It is difficult to maintain dogma and doctrines, also in the medical field, when you live close to people on a Wednesday.

Therefore public health needs to get hold of a people. We need to get close to a people we can have a patient-doctor-relationship with, a people we can communicate with, see happy and hear cry, a patient we can learn from. Like the clinician becomes wise from interacting with individual patients, we, the public health professionals, need to share understanding, values, experiences, defeats and victories with our patient: The people or a group of people.

Clinical medicine is now vitalised and democratised by the so-called patient-centred method, giving validity to the patient’s personal illness experience and healing potential. Public health should learn from clinical medicine and develop a people-centred method recognising peoples’ own values, perceptions, meanings, experiences and potentials for preventing disease and promoting health.

The end?
Colleagues,- public health (perhaps it is only me?) is in an existential crisis.

I believe public health can get new fighting spirit, new meaning, new dignity by mind-walking:
- From poverty to wealth
• From numbers to words
• From omnipotence to moderation
• From nihilism to political values
• From lifestyle to living conditions
• From medical coercion to freedom of health
• From designer health to common health
• From melancholy health to happy health
• From statistical clone to the holy individual
• From expert rule to the people-centred method

Such a movement may restore:
• The freedom we lost when we were encapsulated within epidemiology
• The pride we lost when we sought refuge in political nothingness
• The courage we lost when we pupated in bureaucracy

150 years ago Rudolf Ludwig Karl Virchow, the founding father of social medicine, saw public health dwindle in bureaucratic formalism. His calling to the colleagues in Bismarck’s Prussia, has not expired:

”Medicine will never lose dignity by taking off the high shoes and walking with the people, because from the people it will gain new strength.”