Ecoethics

András Lányi

The Philosophy of Eco-Politics

L'Harmattan

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Politikaelmélet / Political theory (12887), Filozófia, tudománytörténet és tudományfilozófia / Philosophy, History and philosophy of science and technology (13031), Etika (kivéve szakmai etikák) / Ethics (except ethics related to specific subfields) (13035)

ökofilozófia, környezeti etika, társadalomelmélet

eco-philosophy, environmental ethics, social theory

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Series Editor: András Lányi

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L'Harmattan
Budapest – Paris
2022

This publication is supported within project No. 141306 financed in the 2021 Science Patronage Programme from the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund by the Ministry for Innovation and Technology of Hungary.

PROJECT
FINANCED FROM
THE NRDI FUND

Translated from the Hungarian by John Pontifex

ISBN 978-2-14-031161-1
ISSN: 1786-7479

https://doi.org/10.56037/978-2-14-031161-1

Volumes may be ordered at a discount from
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Table of Contents

Introduction

Does Eco-Politics Exist and Does it Have Need of a Philosophy?

1. Why do we fail to notice the great changes?

I read somewhere that when Captain Cook's ship first approached the shores of Australia in 1770, his passengers were wondering with great curiosity how the natives living in Stone Age conditions would react to their appearance. To their great surprise they did not react at all; they stared straight through the three-masted barque. It was too big to be real. They scattered in headlong flight only when the rowboats were lowered and armed sailors started to row ashore. Of this they could guess the meaning.

We fail to notice the great changes, because they are too great to be comprehended. We experience them from within and change together with them. Thus, we do not perceive the rotation of the Earth. At the same time, they are too small and slow to be noticed. The level of the warming of the Earth's surface from year to year can barely be measured. The destruction or drying out of the topsoil and the pollution of the waters takes decades and by the time this process has been brought to completion, the generation into whose life it brought change has died out. Its descendants are already born into the changed circumstances and find those natural. The changes of planetary significance cannot be linked to notable dates or significant events. They lack immediate relevance and therefore cannot expect the attention of the public, especially in the age of sensation-driven mass media on the hunt for daily sensational stories. The stir caused by the "accidents" of Chernobyl or Fukushima merely reminds us of the unmanageable and immeasurable risk represented by spent radioactive fuel, nuclear experiments and outmoded nuclear submarines peacefully rusting at the bottom of the ocean – not at some point in the distant future but already for quite a while now.

When I was born – nigh on 74 years ago – two and a half billion people lived on Earth. Today there are more than seven and a half billion of us. At that time, in the mid-twentieth century, there was at least this comfort in the fight to the death being engaged in by people-groups and worldviews: that whatever we humans do to each other is only irreparable in a moral sense. It is not irreversible, because since the resources of the planet are inexhaustible, how we manage them depends upon our ingenuity alone. Thus, the damning consequences of our actions may yet be reversed by a wiser generation. After the horrors of two world wars, the survivors still had ground to believe that if the nations were not striving to subjugate and pillage one another, but instead were to compete in mining the resources of nature, then they could create a more peaceful and happier world for themselves. The breath-taking development of technology fuelled this hope and the disappearance of the rich variety of lifeforms, even if perceived, seemed for a long time an acceptable price in the eyes of the millions who shared the spoils of the total war on nature. As for those who were left out of the spoils, whose pre-existing way of life, livelihood, health and integrity of environment crossed the path of triumphant progress and suddenly vanished, they demanded for themselves the right to turn from victims into perpetrators all the more (let us admit that they did not have much choice left).

Thus could it happen that humanity did not attempt to leave the path leading to foreseeable destruction even when more than scientific predictions testified to its unviability. Climate change, soil degradation, the scarcity of drinking water, new types of diseases and new types of war (for the remaining resources) have become part of our everyday experience, as has the new migration: the mass arrival on the wealthier continents of the victims of overpopulation, desertification and spreading violence. The number of our species has tripled during the lifespan of a single generation and the vegetation has suddenly disappeared from the greater part of the surface of the planet. The wild has been replaced by agricultural monocultures unsustainable without continuous human intervention. Today man and his livestock make up 95% of the total body weight of all terrestrial vertebrates. This means that the sixth great mass extinction in the life of our planet has effectively come to a close. This one differs from its predecessors in that it is happening as the consequence of the population explosion of one single invasive species, homo sapiens, with unprecedented speed and on a planetary scale in the blink of an eye. It could also be put by saying that the time of history has just met the

time of evolution. This is an unparalleled event in the history of our species, but it is not at all certain that it is a survivable one.

We deceived ourselves to the last second. We applied the term "production" to the consumption of our natural and cultural heritage, i.e., its mass transformation into waste; "prosperity" to joyless, compulsive squandering; "rational resource management" to the chase of profits; "progress" to man's ever-growing dependence on technological systems and logistical considerations. Since we have brought up our children in this spirit for generations, they cannot even imagine how they could live any other way. We have not changed our suicidal habits, because we feared lest everything collapse, should we change. We preferred to subjugate ourselves to the logic of the industrial system and attempted, with even more production, with the introduction of even cruder technologies with an even greater mass effect, stricter regulation and ever more aggressive methods to keep everything just how it currently is, even though we sensed that it cannot remain thus. With this we squandered years irrecoverable from the perspective of the survival of humanity.

All this sounds like an explanation intended for posterity, as though I believed that there will still be a posterity that will be interested in our explanations. However, to be honest, I do not have much faith in this. Every year we consume about one and a half times the natural resources and the capacity of sinks available to us. From where do we take the rest? From our descendants. We are dissipating their future; we are doing everything in our power that they not be able to live a life worthy of man. Therefore, it is increasingly improbable that they will have the patience, knowledge, free time, freedom and other luxuries requisite for the study of lengthy linear texts. If they do, then they will take notice of the documents from the final days of Western civilisation as incriminating evidence at most.

This text is therefore addressed to those alive today and contains ideas related to the unavoidable and already fatally overdue transformation of the order of social coexistence. It takes as its starting point that the ecological crisis threatening our world cannot be prevented or alleviated based on the established wisdom of political philosophy – apart from anything else, because the crisis itself is not "ecological – the collapse of the Earth's ecosystem is not the cause but the consequence of the crisis of modern Western civilisation. It merely indicates the untenability of the assumptions on the basis of which we have formed our conceptions of true knowledge and the good life throughout a long

era. The current world order is not unsustainable, because it comes up against the limits of nature's carrying capacity. Rather, it reaches the limits of nature, because it is unsustainable: its contradictions within the logic of the given system are irresolvable. In other words, any suggestions for the survival and renewal of our civilisation must of necessity come from outside the system (and this determines their reception).

But is there still an "outside"? Does the success of globalism not entail the spread of the patterns of one single civilisation across the globe, absorbing into themselves or destroying every other pattern? We are faced, in radical Islam or the heirs of Mao-ce tung who have transformed from communists into capitalists, with the same totalitarian technocratic mentality that the modern industrial state forced onto its subjects and enemies.

Still, it is worth knowing that the pursuit of empire-building and the consequent hybridisation of cultural patterns does not characterise our time alone. Thus has ended so far every civilisation that has passed its sell-by date, exchanging its remaining energies for empire-building, seemingly at the peak of its strength. The final days of Antiquity were set in motion by the expansion of the Roman Empire which conquered the known world and those of the feudal system by the development of absolute monarchies and colonial empires. They are not swept away by class struggle, not by external attack and not even by bloody revolutions! They collapse under their own weight, when their internal contradictions have become unsupportable.

And while the dinosaurs, consuming their environment and doomed to destruction, are still fighting their murderous battles with each other, terrified little beings are experimenting with survival under their feet, the so-called mammals. They inherit the Earth. It should be noticed that the new cultural patterns, which serve as the starting-point for changes of historical proportions, emerge in like manner, usually from the initiatives of small local communities who till them and keep them, while fighting for their survival in faraway provinces and within the walls of monasteries. Or, as was the case at the dawn of the Modern Era, they rise from the tough everydays of urban communities independent from the prevailing regime, gradually and at first almost unnoticeably.

2. What is happening with us?

We do not have a clue what is happening with us. I mean this literally: the store of expressions with the aid of which we were able to share our experiences with one another as reality has suddenly become obsolete. The last Great Narrative, within the framework of which the self-representation of the West formed a connected, coherent whole– was about the triumph of truth – like every Great Narrative. (You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.) In this case the finding of the truth was hoped for from the application of the method of scientific investigation and liberation from the achievements of technological progress, which – as the fruit of ever-growing knowledge – gifts humanity with the endless plenty of produced goods. This plenty was identified with general prosperity, which some hoped would result from the invisible hand regulating market processes, while others believed it would come precisely from scientific planning, which in the future would, so to speak, end the vulnerability of our species to the blind necessity of nature as well as to coercive social conditions. All men will become brothers and, in a society organised according to the impartial rules of pure reason, the liberated individuals can finally get down to the satisfaction of all their needs. With this, according to the concurrent promises of Karl Marx and Francis Fukuyama, history will come to an end.

Without a doubt, this narrative has made possible several ideas that are mutually exclusive from the perspective of good government. These differed from each other primarily regarding the way in which they sought to solve the tension between the demands of the individual for freedom and truth. They extended from the justification of the absolute power of the state through the glorification of the competition of the free market to the demand for communities without governance. But whether they appealed to the rationality of their laws or to the inalienable rights of the individual, they all agreed in deriving the legitimacy of a political system not from the prestige of titles of power, whether of supernatural or earthly origin, but from the mandate gained from the members of the political community. From the will of people who accept the necessity of cooperation, but who seek to limit their responsibilities arising therefrom, so that these should restrict them as little as possible in anything that they deem, according to their individual convictions, to serve their own good. The role of governance is therefore not the identification of the right goals and the enforcement of their observance,

but rather merely the furtherance of the growth of production capacity and the regulation of the distribution of produced goods.

This system was struck by three fatal blows by the end of the 20th century. It became clear that the multiplication of goods does not necessarily lead to wellbeing. The further increase of production capacity has become pointless, even outright dangerous. And the principle of popular sovereignty has become an empty formality.

The destruction of the natural world has not only not freed us from deprivation, but has rather acquainted us with new forms of poverty: hundreds of millions of people no longer have access to clean drinking water and sufficient nutrition. Maybe they can acquire a smartphone, firearm, antibiotics and chainsaw, but they have lost their security and self-respect together with their untouched natural surroundings. The multiplication of goods no longer results in an increase in the quality of life even in rich countries: we have entered the age of wasteful compulsive growth that destroys our health, relationships and environment and offends our taste and sense of justice. We have found a solution for the problem of subsistence that, as Thoreau already noticed, is more complicated than the problem itself.

The collapse of the ecosystems and the climate catastrophe has made irrational that which until now has been called rational husbandry: the increase of yields with no regard to anything else. Nevertheless, the logic of the reproduction of capital continues to extort the expansion of production capacity despite the fact that the environmental and social costs of increasing the circulation of goods and energy (and which societies are forced to cover) are today greater than the expected profit. The mass production of our goods has been revealed to come at the cost of the exhaustion and irreparable pollution of our natural resources. Science, pressed into the service of the technological-industrial complex, has turned from the benefactor of humanity into the greatest source of the threats it faces. As our ancestors trembled from the unpredictable blind forces of nature, so do we tremble today from the unforeseeable consequences of scientific discovery and make sacrifices at the altar of the inevitable and almighty economic necessity – even human sacrifices.

Finally, as regards the political consequences of the matter, the program of enlightenment hoped that the victory over nature would lead to the liberation of humanity. However, what has been built on the ruins of vanquished nature is the hitherto most effective system of total surveillance and suppression. Most countries have failed to keep even the appearance of the self-determination of the political community

vis-à-vis the power which is currently concentrated in the hands of states operating on the principle of profit and capital groups behaving like expanding empires. The dissatisfied citizens no longer have any chance to change the way power is exercised. Their votes merely operate the mechanism that ensures the rotation of the characters. They no longer shape the conditions of power but rather endure them.

If the goal that justifies the existing social order – the multiplication of goods – is proved meaningless and the principle that entitles one to hold power – popular sovereignty – no longer prevails, then we can declare that the given political system has lost its legitimacy. In reality, it is the inexorable logic of raw power that dominates, which is mediated by algorithms and enforced by impersonal automatisms.

3. What is ecological politics?

Ecology has become the rallying cry of the radical critique of the late modern industrial mass societies in the last few decades, perhaps not without grounds. The Greek word oikos means house, household, home and is familiar from scientific fields related to associations and livelihood and which study the connection between the two: the interdependence of living beings and the order of their coexistence, whether in nature or in society. The period of civilisation currently ending can be characterised chiefly by the fatal self-conceit with which it sought to invalidate this order. Our efforts in this area met with astounding success, the oikos, our earthly home, has by now become practically speaking uninhabitable and man homeless. The next era will be, if not about destruction and the decay of civilisation, then about the attempt to restore the ecological balance.

From now on we have to base our livelihood not on the exhaustion and ruination of natural resources but instead on the wiser use of human abilities. This turn will no doubt affect the hitherto existing division of labour, order of governance and way of evaluating human performance. Political wisdom can no longer content itself with automatically supporting the way of life and procedures of resource management which fit the logic of industrial society, under the guise of neutrality. The admission of our global interdependence and the unfolding ecological catastrophe render unavoidable the justification of individual goals and of the goodness of particular ways of life as well as the rethinking of the institutional framework of the public debate on these

issues. This is exactly what the ideologues of free or open society, appealing to the equality of freedoms tried to avoid with good reason and at all cost.

However, on no account do ecological considerations lead to the rejection of the achievements of enlightened modernity. The greens do not wish to either destroy from its foundations or bring back the past; they share neither the utopias of left-wing radicalism or the nostalgias of right-wing populism. They have vowed to remove the obstacles forced onto society by the anti-life logic of the technological-economic world order, making it impossible for people to decide freely about their own fate. Therefore, in politics the greens aim to create the conditions for decision-making based on responsible participation and joint deliberation. They know full well that this has a realistic chance only if the human scale of things can be restored. It is primarily this that separates them from the neoliberal adherents of economic globalism on the one hand and the technocrats, fundamentalists, socialists or national socialists hoping for provision by the state and centralisation on the other.

The first task of an ecological party, on coming to power, would probably be to examine how it can free itself from the aspects of power which do not belong to the state – and even less to supranational organisations – and return it to those concerned. For the protection of biological diversity, the moderation of air pollution emissions, the transition to matter- and energy-saving benign technologies or conscious family planning mostly require measures which can be accomplished at a local level. The neglect of these considerations in our times is due mostly to decision-making processes and mechanisms separated from local interests. For imagine if the countries, regions and cities, having had enough of their dependence on world-economics, were to decide, one after the other, that they wish to consistently apply the sanctions protecting their health, environment and social security. The chief global polluters, the industries, companies and technologies that pose a deadly threat to humanity would then lose their right to exist and would soon disappear of their own accord.

All this naturally leads quite far from the daily practice of the protection of nature and the environment. Not for nothing did the booted and check-shirted environmental activists protest for so long against being drawn into politics. It has become evident, however, that the environment qua environment is by definition indefensible. The opposition between man and nature already presupposes the absolute

subjection of an environment that is distinguished from and set against man to the interests of man, whatever those may be. Man, however, has no "environment". He has a world, the world of language and reason, of which he is at once creator and creation. This world is not merely an inseparable part of man's being, but also fully and clearly belongs to him: he is responsible for it. (This will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter of the book)

Responsible care or practical use? These are two mutually exclusive descriptions of our relation to the world. Behind them lie two types of understanding of knowledge itself. Is knowledge power, as proclaimed by the modernity which celebrated its triumph over nature, following Francis Bacon? Or is it the exact opposite of power: a sympathetic participation in the lives of others? Whether this question is a more epistemological or a fundamentally ethical one is itself the subject of debate. However, without resolving it we cannot even begin to take account of our opportunities and tasks. How can we know what truth is if we have realised that it is precisely the knowledge that we relied on which has let us down? On what basis, then, can we decide what to do, where to seek the way out of the crisis of our civilisation and what future we can hope for ourselves?

What can I know – if the trust in knowledge has been lost? *What should I do* – and why me? *What can I hope for* – from politics? The three questions which Immanuel Kant sought at the end of the 18th century to answer once and for all, relying on the universal laws of the right use of reason, have remained questions. They gain new meaning in our times. I do not believe that I have found an answer to any of them. My undertaking promised to be more modest and practical. While I sought the theoretical foundations of ecopolitics, I repeatedly came up against the fundamental philosophical questions of modernity – the chapter titles, with some self-irony, allude to this.

May it serve as my excuse that the task, the execution of which exceeds my capacity, is not of my choosing. The task found me, who wished to occupy himself with something quite different, but who was born in the wrong era. Or the contrary. As Simone Weil noted during the darkest hours of World War II, "You could not be born at a better period than the present, when we have lost everything".

When everything goes dark, we become aware of even the smallest ray of light.

What can I know (if trust in knowledge has been lost)?

1. From development to sustainability

I believe that it is with good reason that we use the term development for the changes in living systems if, as a result, they can, with time, provide an ever more complex, flexible and diverse answer to the challenge of the environment, thus increasing their independence and improving their chances of survival and reproduction. It follows from this that we can talk about development only if the improvement of performance goes together with an increase in the available resources. If the improvement of performance goes hand in hand with the consumption of the resources integral to the renewal of the system, or if those become inaccessible for further use, then we should not talk about development, but rather of a loss of balance, crisis or decline. The expression "sustainable development" was born of the ideologically driven muddling together of two terms that are meaningful in themselves. It was meant to fill the mental vacuum created by the collapse of faith in the development of civilisation and the admission of the alarming signs of decline and is intended to delay recognition of the latter.

The expression[1] that spread following the Brundtland Report became the slogan of the relativisation of the ecological crisis. It suggests that saving the planet ("environmental protection") is reconcilable with the continuance of the current social order, one based on waste and the

[1] The word sustainability within its current context was first used by the Meadows couple in their 1972 Report *The Limits to Growth*, written for the Club of Rome. It was presumably due to its influence that the expression "sustainable development" found its way into the title of a 1980 document of the World Conservation Union and hence into the *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*. This was presented to the UN General Assembly by a committee led by former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Bruntland and was then published in 1987.

despoiling of nature. But it was not the concept of sustainability they abused, but rather that of development itself. Whoever speaks of sustainable development claims that the development is undiminished; it is merely its continuance that causes some problems amidst the difficulties that have arisen. It automatically rules out the possibility that what we have is not development but decline, which must not and also cannot be sustained. One cannot speak of an accidental or innocent slip of the tongue when the pretext of sustainable development is used to speak ever more bravely of sustainable economic growth (which is an absurdity), sustainable consumption (under which must be understood the justification of a hopeless, degrading way of life) or sustainable wellbeing (forestalling the question as to whether being is good at all and what would make it so).

The dramatic decline in the rich variety and versatility of the natural world in the wake of human intervention signifies a historical dead end. It bears witness to the predominance of self-destructive tendencies in our civilisation. As proof of this, the following are often mentioned as examples of the destructive behaviour irreconcilable with the concept of development, *i.e.*, sustainability: : the irresponsible use and misuse of chemicals, synthetic materials, nuclear power, nanotechnology, gene manipulation and fossil fuels; radical change in our way of life induced by artificial intelligence – as well as the predominance of the methods of social organisation that warrant and require the application of the listed technologies: the overcentralisation of control, the depersonalisation of communication, the growing impossibility of communal self-organisation, the atomisation of society, the cult of wasteful consumption and extreme ethical relativism.

Why should this state of affairs be sustained?

Whether the motivation be innocent goodwill or intentional deception, to speak of sustainable development in the shadow of the impending catastrophe is an error with serious consequences: it prevents the search for a way out, the mobilisation of the resources of survival. It is a fact that our planet is not capable of supporting 7-8 billion or even more humans without the serious and irreversible decrease of its biological capacities, the collapse of the ecosystems. The decrease in the human population will in all likelihood be achieved by the wars and pandemics caused by extreme forms of want as well as natural disasters (species extinctions, climate change), because a global agreement on intentional self-limitation currently seems unobtainable. As for the techno-optimist fantasises about the

unlimited replaceability of dwindling natural resources, the less said about them, the better.

Confusing questions, arise, however, even regarding the common concept of development itself. The above-mentioned criteria of development fit the history of the cultures familiar to us: their pattern differentiates as they move forward in time. It enables the given people – or even several successive peoples – to reach ever more complex and particular achievements. But what explains their decline, the process of disintegration and collapse? Why should internal tensions and external effects, which until that point had acted in one way or another as a stimulus to the development of the given civilisation, lead beyond that point to the collapse of the seemingly solid structures, exposing their inability to renew themselves? The examination of this exciting question would lead us far from our subject, but it is perhaps obvious that decline and destruction are just as much a part of the life of civilisations as of living organisms. Take modern Europe and the current Cosmopolis built on the European pattern (the monumental second flowering of the ancient civilisation that developed around the Eastern Mediterranean Basin). Despite its relatively young age, has it not already reached the stage of decadence? Must it not collapse under the weight of the internal contradictions precipitated by its unprecedentedly rapid development and aggressive expansion?

We can avoid the troublesome question in two ways. We can say, first of all, that our knowledge is superior and our achievement is of a higher order than that of the others, which is why we were able to defeat and incorporate all other civilisations. The problem with this answer is that we lack the outside perspective and unit of measurement which would enable us to compare the performance of the various civilisations. We can be sure that the sages of the Egyptian New Kingdom or of the Golden Age of Athens could bring up several points that prove the paltriness of our knowledge and the lowliness of our way of life compared to theirs. Confucius and Lao-Tse would note in despair that everything from which they tried to protect the people has come to pass. We might find their reasoning risible, but this is exactly what I am talking about: every great civilisation is superior to the others in its own ways, according to its own system of values. As for our global expansion, that is not exactly proof of success. It is not only the common destiny of invasive species and rapidly disappearing empires that make me say this, but rather the aforementioned destructive processes that have already escaped from our control, such

as the ecological crisis and the experience of the new Great Migration ready to sweep Europe away.

Let us rather say that mortality applies only to the development of closed, local civilisations in the past and that with us something quite new has started, because we are not merely one finite civilisation among many, but rather the collective future of humanity. As we will see, it is precisely this conviction that filled our immediate predecessors, the humanist thinkers of the twentieth century (and its imperialist politicians) with a confidence that not even the horrors of two world wars could shake. Otherwise, how could Julian Huxley, a well-intentioned scientist, have written the following lines in 1946, one year after Hiroshima and the death camps in his famous text *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Philosophy*? *"The more united man's tradition becomes, the more rapid will be the possibility of progress: several separate or competing or even mutually hostile pools of tradition cannot possibly be so efficient as a single pool common to all mankind…the best and only certain way of securing this will be through political unification."*[2]

In any case, the above statement is based on a factual error. The greatest periods of cultural development, as is common knowledge, are connected to great empires that seclude themselves from their neighbours (China, Egypt), the closed, privileged world of city states engaged in a life and death struggle with their neighbours (Hellas, European Middle Ages) or small religious communities living in the knowledge of their chosen status (Old Testament Jewry, Early Christianity), which were held together by a thorough knowledge of their common tradition and where the successive generations had decades to perfect their habits, ideas and procedures. The historian of ideas, Leo Strauss, is undoubtedly closer to the truth: *"Man cannot reach his perfection except in society or, more precisely, in civil society. Civil society, or the city as the classics conceived of it, is a closed society and is, in addition, what today would be called a "small society." … A society meant to make man's perfection possible must be kept together by mutual trust, and trust presupposes acquaintance. … An open or all-comprehensive society will exist on a lower level of humanity than a closed society, which, through generations, has made a supreme effort toward human perfection. The prospects for the existence of a good society are therefore greater if there is a multitude of independent societies than if there is only one independent society. If the society in which*

[2] Julien Huxley: *UNESCO – Its Purpose and Its Philosophy*. The Preparatory Comission of the UN Educational, Social and Cultural Organization, 1946, p.11.

man can reach the perfection of his nature is necessarily a closed society, the distinction of the human race into a number of independent groups is according to nature."[3] All historians are aware of this: the development of culture goes together with the deepening of differences – as the distinctive character of individual communities evolves – and it is not unity, but the differences which explain the spread of the great cultural achievements, the ever livelier dialogue of competing civilisations.

The above-quoted Huxley, however, was a biologist, the typical representative of the belief in progress based purely on the foundations of natural science. Similarly to many other modern thinkers, when he talks about development, he blithely employs the concept of development used in evolutionary biology for changes occurring in society. He does not take into account the decisive role of the units of population (cultures) below the level of the species. While natural selection works with individuals capable of reproduction and singular variants, cultural development works with communities, with members that understand each other, form common norms and pass on their knowledge as advice to succeeding generations. The process bears not even a passing resemblance to the biological mechanism of successful mutations becoming widespread. Communities themselves are nothing other than a continuous and regular effort to create a mutual meaning that can be shared with companions. They are the creation of communication, a kind of spiritual reality. It seems that Huxley, in common with many other modern thinkers, viewed scientific progress as the direct continuation of biological evolution and that he confused the social individual, the ethical subject, with the individual of the species homo sapiens.

Following the successful expansion of Western civilisation, two mutually contradictory convictions took root among enlightened minds. They proclaimed the universality of humanity and the superiority of European civilisation with equally genuine enthusiasm. The gentler souls explained the subjugation of their fellow human beings with their civilising mission, while the more practically minded found justifications in social Darwinism which (groundlessly) appealed to Darwin. The historical necessity of the progress of the absolute spirit and the mission of the Christian peoples was also mentioned. In the ideology of progress all this forms a unity (or becomes mixed together). If we remove the

[3] Leo Strauss: *Natural Right and History*. Chicago, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1953, p.150-151.

beginning and end of the linear time of Christian salvation history, i.e., creation and the Day of Judgment (after which, as is well-known, there will be no time), the straight and irreversible chronological perspective of endless progress stretches before us. Only the initial, providential meaning is missing. This is what the this-worldly salvation history of historical progress was designed to replace. The faith in progress has spread like a new religion throughout the civilised world. The role of redeemer is played here by scientific knowledge, which serves the rise of man through the defeat of nature.

In the Early Modern period, the mysterious creative power attributed to knowledge, namely that it will create something hitherto non-existent in the world, was linked to the very much tangible concept of power. The ambition of the experimenting alchemist or natural scientist was to rule over the elements, much as a ruler and his wise advisors rule over the people. This is a knowledge that grants its possessor the power necessary to carry something out. The natural sciences ultimately serve the exploitation of the natural resources, i.e., production, while the social sciences serve the direction of social processes, i.e., the reproduction of social conditions. The two are clearly connected, since the application of scientific technology leads to the plenty of produced goods and plenty is needed for people to be able to freely follow their goals independently from each other. The established anthropological understanding identified these with the satisfaction of various needs and chose as its concept of freedom the undisturbed satisfaction of needs, for everyone and ad infinitum. This is ensured by the scientific organisation of society. All this takes place in front of the (rather depressing) horizon of an infinite future. Therefore, the increase of knowledge, the power attained by knowledge and the good deeds of this power must likewise be infinite.

Among these dogmas of belief in progress there is not one which has not been shown to be untenable, yet these stale tenets are being taught in schools even today, they are appealed to during political decisions and they are the consolation of the media consumer (who is not even aware that knowledge is not something that can even be "consumed" and that therefore what they is really consuming is by definition Ignorance itself). Briefly put, this is why we are rushing unstoppably into destruction. Never has the prevarication, irresponsibility and cowardice of the learned had such fatal consequences as in our times.

So, let us see what is really happening.

– Science "rules" over vanquished nature, resulting in the destruction and exhaustion of natural resources.

– Knowledge has degraded into knowing how to use: into objective data and instructions on how to perform operations with them. It makes us less capable of understanding others or ourselves, of enquiring after the meaning of things and imagining that what is in reality could be otherwise.[4]

– Our ability to act in all areas of life is being increasingly limited to the operation of technological services. This increases our vulnerability to technology and the uncontrollable apparatus invoking their special expertise"?

– Under the guise of a rational organisation of society, the system of efficiency known as economic reason – in reality the profit principle and aggressive political centralisation – has subjugated to itself all other goals, thus rendering impossible communities' self-determination.

– The gulf separating the stupefyingly rich from the intolerably poor has widened worldwide and has become practically unbridgeable – to the greater glory of the rational organisation of our societies.

– In the society of prosperity identified with wasteful consumption, the only legitimate goal of all efforts is to use up the world as rapidly as possible – in other words, to transform things into waste. "Production" is the only purpose of work; that of freedom is "consumption" and satiation. The means has become the end.

– After the world of goals and interests was privatised and relativised, and thus became everyone's private affair, politics retained no meaning apart from seizing the means of power.

– Not incidentally, the triumphal path of progress is lined by mountains of rubbish of unprecedented size and accompanied by the uncheckable spread of aggression.

The description, judgment and apology of rational rule plays a central role in the political philosophy of the twentieth century. Perhaps it was

[4] The clarification of the difference between knowing and understanding in the "information society" has become an existential question. Knowledge is here understood as instrumental knowledge, know-how. "Adam knew his wife, Eve, and she conceived" (Gen 4:1) – the correctness of the knowing is verified by the result: she conceived, i.e., Adam used his wife in the appropriate way. Whether he understood her is of course another question. Understanding is a relationship between two people. Jesus understood the adulterous woman; he knew what it means to sin and judge. He understood the intention of his accusers as well. Thus could he say, "He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone at her" (John 8:7)

the theories developed by the neo- and post-Marxist thinkers of the Frankfurt school that had the greatest effect on their contemporaries. In their works they unmasked the knowledge embodied in the form of bureaucratic rule and technological systems as an oppressive power alienated from man. The existing order of society is harder to untangle than ever, since it no longer serves this or that goal, but quite the contrary: it emphasises its independence from particular interests and worldviews. The expert and decision-making bodies henceforth prove the legitimacy of their proceedings with reference to their scientific objectivity, for one cannot argue with the facts. "The actual is validated, knowledge confines itself to repeating it, thought makes itself mere tautology. The more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it. ... Justified in the guise of brutal facts as something eternally immune to intervention, the social injustice from which those facts arise is as sacrosanct today as the medicine man once was under the protection of his gods."[5] This critique, formulated in Dialectic of Enlightenment is not directed against scientific reason. On the contrary, it seeks an explanation for the later developments which rendered impossible the achievement of the Enlightenment, rational life management based on a mutual understanding among the actors. Jürgen Habermas describes this situation as the conflict between system and lifeworld – instrumental and communicative rationality: instrumental (economic, administrative) rationality takes over the role of a dialogue directed towards mutual understanding and agreement within the area of cultural contact and social integration.[6]

Other critics of knowledge-as-power are occupied instead with the effect of the scientific-technological revolution on the everydays, especially its direct effect on the world of work: how man becomes, to use the expression of Jacques Ellul, the king of the slaves of technology. Their forerunner is Lewis Mumford, who wrote the cultural history of the development of the giant machine, i.e., the modern social machine from the Egyptian pyramid-builders through the era of machines to the age of scientific planning.[7] The prophecy of Ellul[8] has come fully

[5] Max Horkheimer – Theodor W. Adorno: *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, p.50-51. Stanford CA, The Stanford University Press, 2002.

[6] Jürgen Habermas: *The Theory of Communicative Action.* Wiley, 1986.

[7] Lewis Mumford: *The Myth of the Machine,* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1967.

[8] Jacques Ellul: *The Technological Society.* A. A. Knopf, New York, 1964.

true by today: life adapts to the closed logic of the operation and running of technology, since the reverse is not possible: the technological systems do not suffer the influence of external factors independent from their own logic. The machines have in many respects acquired an intelligence surpassing man's and do everything better than us. Man becomes a source of errors; his participation has to be limited in the interest of the effective operation of the system. Technological requirements arbitrate over good and evil; they rule out all ethical considerations: either technology works or free conscience does. What cannot be mechanised (digitalised), has to die. Technological civilisation is indispensable: one cannot turn one's back on it; there is no life outside the technological complex. Technological necessity itself replaces that of nature.

Ulrich Beck goes so far as to say that science is not reasonable. It cannot be reasonable, since it has created a world in which "...the sources of danger are no longer ignorance but knowledge; not a deficient but a perfected mastery over nature; not that which eludes the human grasp but the system of norms and objective constraints established with the industrial epoch."[9] This is the society of risks, where, according to Beck, social conflicts no longer revolve around the satisfaction of needs but instead around the evaluation of risks, since the hope of well-being is no longer able to vanquish the fear of risks. The most serious political decisions touch upon scientific questions that politicians are not competent to judge, such as nuclear power, climate change, emission limits, the biological consequences and ethical judgement of genetic modification, etc. Thus, political institutions, Beck claims, become the guardians of a development that they neither planned nor are able to influence. All this makes unavoidable the close intertwining of politics, science and business, in a way that is impenetrable from the outside. It makes popular representation an empty formality and leaves the political parties themselves at the mercy of their own apparatuses. They justify political decisions on the basis of scientific expertise, while science is financed by megacompanies and politics serves their interests.

According to Hans Jonas, classical civilisations reach the state of technological maturity gradually; as a result of slow and more or less accidental changes, their ends and means become balanced. There is no such balance in modernity; continual innovation becomes a compulsion. Its cause is the competition for the maximalisation of economic and

[9] Ullrich Beck: *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity,* p.183. SAGE Publications, London, 1992.

political power; the goal is opaque. The process is not reminiscent of the classic dynamic of the perfection of cultural achievements, because scientific-technological progress itself creates the problems it solves – and does so continuously.[10] Elsewhere Jonas describes the selfishness of technological progress thus: "Then, so we found, techné was a measured tribute to necessity, not the road to mankind's chosen goal, a means with a finite measure of adequacy to well-defined proximate ends. Now techné in the form of modern technology has turned to an infinite forward-thrust of the race, its most significant enterprise in whose permanent self-transcending advance to ever greater things the vocation of man tends to be seen, and whose success of maximal control over things and himself appears as the consummation of his destiny. Thus the triumph of homo faber over his external object means also his triumph in the internal constitution of homo sapiens of whom they used to be a subsidiary part."[11]

2. Farewell from the nineteenth century

The myth of progress was not created by the self-satisfaction of European man, however, but rather by determined, impatient hope. This word, future, never had such a tangible reality as in the eyes of our nineteenth century forebears. Never did humanity prepare itself with such expectation and excitement for what was to come than they did. This pervades their greatest intellectual achievements; they denounced their own era and rejected it as void in the name of the imagined future. Their fantastic achievements, the train, the telegraph, electric lighting, the flush toilet, the photograph and the cinema brought this future ever nearer. In the nineteenth century it was exactly the future that was most typically nineteenth century. Whoever explains this era without this, understands nothing of it. Destitute exiles, revolutionaries, scientists and conspirators planned the future of humanity throughout Europe, a future which must occur according to the historical, economic or biological necessity correctly recognised by them. It is after us, who in the future live a more meaningful, busy life, after us that the heroes of Chekhov yearn; it is for us that the revolutionaries sacrifice their young

[10] Hans Jonas: *Towards a Philosophy of Technology.* In: Larry Hickman ed.: *Technology as a Human Affair.* McGrow & Hill, New York, 1990.

[11] Hans Jonas: *The Imperative of Responsibility: in Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, p.17. The University of Chicago Press 1984.

lives on the barricades. We were the future of the nineteenth century. This is why we have no future; we were the future.

We have become and stayed what they invented us to be. The three fulfilled wishes from that evil story. Fevered brainchild, negative utopia: with phalansteries, death camps, clairvoyance, gas attacks, carpet bombing, voyages to the moon, children generated in test tubes, intelligent machines, copies that can be made in infinite number that have no original. With all its seeming eventfulness, the twentieth century was nothing other than the realisation of the dominant ideas of the nineteenth century, with final consistency, right up until the point of self-liquidation.

What were these? (For now, I am talking about what they believed, not what they did; not about the extent of the cruelty and misery which are practically speaking a constant factor in history, but about the concepts we inherited from them and their hopes, of which today so few are left).

- *The right of the heart.* The freedom of individual choice, which means above all else the freedom of choosing one's love – the freedom of self-giving.

- *The law of reason.* The deduction of the criteria of true knowledge from the universal and necessary laws of reason based solely on itself. And what follows directly from this: the theoretical equality of every person in the court of reason, which henceforth is alone competent to judge in our affairs.

- *The principle of historical progress.* From this follow not only the necessity of the direction and "substance" of development, but also for all time the unconditional primacy of the historical community over the individual, be it nation, class, culture or humanity itself, depending on which one believes happens to embody the Spirit of Progress at the moment.

The irreconcilable contradiction of the basic principles was already noticed by the contemporaries, who thought up various systems for their reconciliation. What proved fatal was not the fact of the contradictions in themselves, but rather the repeated attempts at regime-construction; even more so, the attempt – under the thrall of the universality of thought; see the second fundamental principle – to carry the theoretical attempts over into the field of practice.

Kant sought to convince his contemporaries that the individual will, if it is free, can only will the universal law. (This is not true, but regardless, guillotining was futile, and this is not Kant's fault.) Hegel

about the reason of history and the historicity of reason. (We even had to cheer at the scaffold.) Marx and the pragmatists that freedom is produced by history: man creates ever more perfect weapons for the defeat of necessity, *i.e.*, for the "increase" of his freedom, *i.e.*, for the satisfaction of his needs. (This is a double distortion, but never mind; as Burke writes, *"In the groves of their academy, at the end of every vista, you see nothing but the gallows."*)

The "resolution" of the contradictions has in practice always meant the violent suppression of one – or all – of the three fundamental principles. For instance, the consequence of the mediation between the right of the heart and the law of reason has made desirable the universal commensurability of the possible objects of individual choice (refusing necessarily incommensurable qualitative differences). The basis of the conversion, for lack of a better alternative, became the suitability of individual goods for enjoyment by "anyone": ordinariness became value. And demand presented itself as the unit of measurement: the extent of the expectation awakened by the public promise of pleasure (the prostitution).

This goes together with tracing back the subject of freedom, i.e., the conscious personality, to the subject of lust and the fear of death (both ultimately irrational unshareable experiences). Here the emphasis of interpersonal communication had to be shifted from the evaluation of the ends to the marketing of the means. So, after the individual now bore direct responsibility for his own wellbeing only, the automatic self-regulation of the communicative systems had to take over responsibility for the maintenance of the cooperation expedient for the community. Thus did man become ignorant and knowledge inhuman. The choice is free, but the heart is empty.

Finally, critical thought tore its own foundations to shreds, but could no longer put them together again. It cites history before the court of reason, but the trial never took place: the judges are still unable to agree upon the basis of judgement. The point they reached is that the truth of the judgment depends on the chosen laws of language use, the choice of which is embedded in the life stories of the language users. Therefore, they can only hold a meaningful dialogue about the validity of their stories if they have previously come to an agreement about the rules of authentic narration. The snake of cognition bites into its own tail. Its bite is fatal.

What has remained are raw relations of power. With the general triumph of technological reason, an entirely new era of industrial mass societies has begun. The essence of this turn of events has however

remained unspoken and the store of expressions of the past century – enlightened, romantic, liberal – continue to be employed to justify the operation. *The magician's apprentice continued his concoctions in the belief that he was the Faustian man.*

Paul Valery noticed already in the thirties that the problem, so to speak, with our era is that not even our future is what it once was. Yet around him the various scientific, artistic and political avant-gardes were practically luxuriating in the frenzied rush of the realisation of the promised future.

Ignoring the original architecture, we incorporated what remained of the program of the Enlightenment, then its ruins, into the concrete foundations of the late modern welfare state, a framework which has proved to be rigid and fragile, rather than enduring.

Time, however, moved inexorably on with us – backwards. It is as though Late Moderns were starting to resemble Early Moderns. If we ourselves were not, everyone in their own way, incurably nineteenth-century, we might see that after two or three hundred frantic years of experimentation we have left the historical world (let us not even talk about nature) roughly in its pre-Enlightenment state.

In the last few years, as a suddenly emerging pandemic ran rampant across the Earth, life stopped and we, avoiding our fellow human beings as a deadly threat, cowered in our homes as we followed the news of the spread of the disease. We had the opportunity to think of the meaning of the victory over nature. What victory? Our vulnerability to nature is more oppressive and obvious today than it was before the Industrial Revolution.

The population catastrophe is washing away the marks of the conquest of European civilisation like a sea. The West is pressed back within its own borders and settles in for defence, probably too late. The victims of world poverty, the ecological catastrophe and the population explosion are pouring towards Europe en masse. The new migration, just like the previous ones, spells the end of an era of civilisation.

The life and death struggle for the insufficient means of survival distances the continents from each other again and turns them against one another. The cosmopolitans, internationalists and globalists pontificating about a united humanity are drowned out by the noise of gunfire. Expanding empires threaten one another; rules and diplomats parcel out the world.

The importance of the concept of nations, which once united civil society, is undermined by the new means and institutions of

communication which can no longer be tied to a place: these simply take no notice of the existence of nations. How dare a political community living within borders of one kind or another limit the right of a (corporate) empire or an (informational) camarilla to dispose as it sees fit of the land of others, the treasures of the soil and people's desires, convictions and labour? In the eyes of the technocrats and cosmopolitans of our age, this idea seems just as absurd as it once did to the jurists of absolute monarchy. The great invention of enlightened modernity, the nation, no longer unites the heirs of the common historical fate: the supporters of free trade and the prophets of world revolution would both gladly throw it as outdated tripe on the rubbish heap of history. National belonging no longer provides the frame of reference for self-identification. It does not help bridge the gap between people who live together but speak many languages, belong to various ethnicities and live in different social situations. This revives the importance of such premodern markers of identity as skin colour, origin and religion, while livelihood and asserting oneself in society often depend more on success in transnational networks. Citizenship, place of residence and work and nationality diverge for an increasing number of people: they live in communities divided along multiple lines, with multiple identities. The local knowledge which hitherto united cultural communities has become folklore: possibly worthy of respect but a useless antique nonetheless, in contrast with the knowledge of the educated, which is effectively the same at any point of the world (as was once the knowledge of Christianity and the Early Modern humanists) and can be shared with anyone who speaks the Latin of our age, English.

The world works according to predictable laws. Whoever makes his calculations correctly, has power over things. This is the great recognition of the age of Descartes, Bacon, Kepler and Spinoza, that knowledge is power. The relation of knowledge and power is today seen in a new (but nonetheless suspiciously familiar) light, thanks to postmodern philosophy, which emphasises the impossibility of giving scientific statements an ultimate foundation. In the opinion of Jean-Francois Lyotard, the mutually incomparable language games (previously: "truths") will be judged by their own performance.[12] This is a valid truth, which increases the performance of the given system (theory, economic system, government). The program of the Enlightenment, that truth

[12] Jean-Francios Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge.* Manchester University Press, Manchester 1984.

legitimates power, has therefore failed: it is again power – i.e., operability, effectivity, saleability, being known, etc. – that legitimates truth. The Late Modern – postmodern – state of our civilisation bears a striking resemblance in this as well to that of the Early Modern period: if truth is not the final source of the legitimacy of power, then power has to again be the final argument in the matter of truth.

And what of power itself? On what does it rely? The personality cult of uncontrollable authorities again replaces power justified by its supposed reasonableness. Their unworldly legitimation is ensured by the media, which "builds up" their personality and generates a religious devotion towards them. The transcendent (i.e., unchangeable by human will) state of affairs is visualised by an electronic stage world of baroque pomp that creates the illusion of boundlessness. The deceptive appearance of interactivity promises a total identification with the spectacle, but we can only reach the world of virtual beings one hundred times as real as the spectator via extasy and self-surrender.

This too is baroque: the "true" postmodern artist, when they is not striving to make an impression that tempts man and God in its extremities, is bombarding the limits of what can even be said with self-torturing consistency. Sensuality and iconoclasm, overdriven speculation and calculated technological trickery – all the excuses and artifices of the new avant-garde which proclaims itself as after-modern, beyond-artistic and even post-humanist are mannerist to their core. And does not the triumphal path of all-defeating but self-contradictory reason relate the whole spirit of our age to the seventeenth century?

Wealth has utterly broken away from the economy, i.e., from the production of goods. Let us finally admit that the putative connection between the two was merely the short-lived selfish dream of the Third Order! Today only formally speaking can one call "financial" the transactions of pure power, which form the one source of true wealth (and which nullify the activity of the "producers" with a stroke of the pen): the owner of the greater fortune prevails over the lesser. Here too, the ultima ratio regnum, of course, only surfaces if absolutely necessary, for instance if someone is unable to rationally comprehend the expediency of the rules of the game, which automatically and effortlessly guarantee the impoverishment of the poor and the enrichment of the rich. The ruling elite enforces its abstract superiority in by no means bloodless number wars. This superiority ensures their right to the exclusive enjoyment of the entirety of the goods of the world. Power is the sole source of wealth: free disposal over the service, bodies and souls

of others. Wealth is the plenty of sensual delights, which power is capable of ensuring. The senseless prodigality, the ostentatious and joyless sensuality – noblesse oblige. (This situation would be familiar to the courtiers of the Early Modern period.)

Finally, the favourite and most sacred idea of the poets and philosophers of the nineteenth century, freedom, cannot avoid its fate either. The scientific organisation of society gives it short shrift in true seventeenth century fashion – more geometrico – when it restricts the freedom of the individual to the maintenance and useful operation of the biological machinery conditionally placed at its disposal. However, even in this area it "rationalises" its free choices: from the moment of its conception until its death the individual is supplied by science with the information and experiences desirable from the perspective of optimal adaptation.

The meeting of Calculating Lust and Anti-life Science in the service of corrupt power – yet this description does not fit the society of consumers the most. The three main agents of the Modern Period first appear together in the courts of the absolute monarchs of the 16-17th centuries. Maybe we never even left this cold, violent, deceptive and disappointed world.

3. The process of globalisation

The golden age of the Ancient Civilisation that developed in the Mediterranean basin can be connected to a few small Greek city states; its terminal stage and fall to the united and huge Roman Empire. From the Middle Ages onwards, Western civilisation found itself in several stages: this time too, the intellectual and social rebirth took place within the conditions of political fragmentation, within well-defined areas (Italy, the Low Countries, etc.). Enlightened civil society was to build upon these local achievements on both sides of the Atlantic. Its triumphal patterns spread across the world in the twentieth century. The end result of this historical process was again a unification unprecedentedly broad and deep compared to its antecedents. The new empire is not organised around a single centre of power, but the community of knowledge and communicative systems, the oneness of the productive and destructive technologies brings the peoples – this time all the peoples of the Earth – into a union stronger than all previous ones. Except that the more forceful the necessity of unified

operation is and the more it excludes the peaceful coexistence of alternative explanations of the world, ways of life and technologies, the more vulnerable the system proves itself to be: its chance of adaptation to changing circumstances decreases. Aggressive expansion, the push for homogenisation and the lack of flexibility are hallmarks of the desperate struggle for survival of every declining civilisation.

By the end of the twentieth century, the Western models of modernisation had spread across the world; we call this difficult and by no means linear process globalisation. Its historical roots are contradictory. They are about not only conquest, expansion and the subjugation and despoiling of the defeated peoples, but also the universalistic nature of European thought. This is reflected in the development of the scientific concept of truth as much as in the teachings of the Christian religion. The disappearance of the intellectual and physical limits led in the Age of Enlightenment to the great success of a unified world history and the concept of endless historical progress, with a cosmopolitan self-awareness, an imperialist sense of mission and freedoms extending to all human beings (and with – optional – ambitions of world revolution as well). This complex and contradictory cultural formula explains the determined efforts of the white man to explore, survey and transform the world. It is in this that he finds justification for the relentless exploitation of the Earth's resources, for the aggressive spread of the achievements of his civilisation, for the organisation of colonial empires – and eventually for their dissolution, once he possesses the technologies in the areas of transport, telecommunication, credit and warfare which make the stationing of armies, missionaries and officials in distant lands superfluous. In the postcolonial age, greater integration has become possible – and more or less necessary. They strove to achieve it with supposedly peaceful, purely economic methods (in the shadow of constant military threat, of course). These, however, are no longer the instruments of trade. In contrast with the free trade system that flourished before World War I, at the end of the twentieth century it was not exchange but production itself that became international: the production of goods and knowledge. This could not have happened without the successes in defeating distance, if anything had not become reachable from anywhere with the aid of the worldwide web, satellite transmissions, supersonic rockets, jet planes and other technological marvels. The world of globalisation is the world of technological systems and networks, but the institutions and motifs which operate them are primarily of an economic nature. Globalised humanity speaks the language of the competitive market economy. Be it the success

of a film, a natural disaster, a new scientific discovery or a military loss, they all have worth and matter to the extent that they can be expressed in money, profit or loss that can be compared with others. It is to this extent and to this extent only that it can be justified to begin the overview of the global processes of our time within the system's own frame of reference – i.e., with the critique of the functioning of the economy, even if we attribute greater explanatory significance to cultural, ecological, demographic or technological changes.

The superpowers victorious in two (or, if one prefers, three) world wars, relying on the seemingly unsurmountable advantage they had achieved in the technological race, reversed their previous strictly protectionist behaviour and established principles of economic association contrary to the previous ones: they enforced the removal of all obstacles standing in the way of the movement of capital. The equality of freedoms of course created an inordinately unequal situation. On the one hand, it ensured unlimited power for the owners of the information and money that can be moved with the speed of thought over the difficult factors of the real economy. On the other hand, it triggered the migration of the labour force between poor and rich countries on a previously unimaginable scale. There is no need to detail these oft-described processes here: the competition of national economies for the inclination of investors and creditors commenced, this being the only way to become competitive on the global market and to preserve their populations (or to attract new arrivals in the place of the emigrants).

But why did they not instead aim to stay out of it? The answer is common knowledge: in previous centuries, the "opening" of the local markets took place by armed force, followed by the collapse of the local culture and the reproductive systems. In economic terms this means that the peoples of the world "realised" that they can no longer live without the products and services that they themselves were incapable of producing. To acquire these, they had to trade and to have something to trade with, they needed to develop. To develop, they needed credit and to be able to repay their loans, they have to submit for sale whatever they have on the world market, competing with each other, at whatever cost and in as large a quantity as possible.

The result became the devaluation of labour, raw materials and physical infrastructure on the one hand and, on the other, the previously unimaginable growth of the share of the monetary sphere, which takes the form of the amassing of a fictitious quantity of money forty times

the value of the world's GNP. From now on, the ability of the economy to generate income depends much less on the effectivity of production than on financial speculation, the fluctuations in exchange rates and the conditions of credit (and let there be no more talk of quality or utility) – all things which cannot be influenced by the local producers and consumers. The production and use of goods and services has become an indispensable but subordinate aspect of the operation of the system. The real decisions (the purchase of corporate empires, the establishment of interest rates, the influencing of conjectural fluctuations, the granting of loans, etc.) are made far from the real economy, in the negotiations of global finance and the superpowers.

A strange change of place occurred in the meantime. The traditional institutions of power, the states, at least those which followed the recipe of the IMF in privatising, liberalising and deregulating, lost their monitoring influence on the basis of their power: the local resources. They were no longer able to look after the wellbeing of their subjects or other public goals with social, cultural or environmental measures. Yet the result of liberalisation was not the prevailing of spontaneous market processes. Quite the contrary, economic competition lost its spontaneous – i.e., market – aspect as decisions increasingly came to be made by prior political deals (planning, blackmail, compromise) between the leading actors of the global market and states. The novelty is merely that the majority of the negotiating parties do not represent countries or peoples even on paper, but rather sources of money and economic corporations, the size and power of which sometimes easily surpass those of a state. These corporations operating on purely business principles already exercise multiple functions of the state: they provide work and a living to millions of people, conduct scientific research, hold trainings and possess a secret service, media, private army and social politics. The decisive difference between the old and the new political actors is merely that while the conduct of nation states is legitimated and sanctioned by public law, that of businessmen and business states is legitimated and sanctioned by private law, primarily commercial law. The problem of the new international regime is therefore not that the states have surrendered a significant part of their sovereignty to various supranational organisations. Rather, it is that among these, the purely political organisations, the UN, NATO, the European Union and the like barely hold any real power, because they are not able to enforce the implementation of their decisions. Meanwhile, the true power over the world's resources has fallen into the hands of organisations and networks

which primarily represent companies and investors. These do not bear responsibility even on paper, unlike governments, to local societies – perhaps only to their stockholders.

The principle of the free movement of capital, since it has been prevailing consistently in international relations, goes together with the grave limitation of the principle of public freedom and deprives local societies of the opportunity for self-defence. The restructuring of the power dynamic is evidenced by the fact that even treaties among states are mostly about the removal of obstacles from the path of free trade. Governments stand shoulder to shoulder in seeking the favour of multinational corporations and financial investors through depriving themselves of what little influence they have left over the regulation of economic activity. They resign their basic duties towards their citizens: they give up their right to make demands regarding healthcare, security and work protection of the international companies arriving in their country. If by chance they do, they authorise the latter to demand compensation for their lost profit at the taxpayers' expense. They go so far as to remove such conflicts from the jurisdiction of the ordinary courts and to entrust special international commercial tribunals with the protection of the rights of investors.

The left-wing anti-globalisation movements have also become enthusiastic though involuntary advocates of multinational capital in our times when they engage in antinationalist propaganda with vast media support. Perhaps they do not notice that while they work on discrediting and depriving of rights the nation states they accuse of xenophobia and chauvinism, they are in actual fact smoothing the way of the international investors and business empires.

The theory of the comparative advantages arising from the system of free trade was developed in the early nineteenth century and perhaps this is the greatest problem with it. For David Ricardo still had right to assume that every country would benefit from concentrating on the product it could produce most efficiently. For the sources of efficiency – those comparative advantages – were, in his time, the resources of nature, deemed to be constant, and local knowledge (technology and work culture). His theory cannot be applied if efficiency depends predominantly on conditions no longer tied to place, such as technological know-how and the investment of capital. He did not reckon with the depletion of raw materials in the wake of the economy of the ruthless exploitation of nature either. Yet the current global economic processes are no longer determined by the competition of

goods produced with varying levels of efficiency. Rather, on one side are information and money that can be marketed anywhere for great profit, while on the other are the owners of "local capacities", who are able to maintain their competitiveness only by pushing down their costs. The surest way of keeping costs down is to not pay them or to make others pay them: the costs of the pollution of the environment, the direct and indirect costs of the exhaustion of natural resources, the costs of the restoration of education and work capacity and employees' cost of living. Classical economics could also not have reckoned with the mass migration of the workforce from their homeland to countries promising a higher wage. And thus regions struggling with depopulation and natural disasters evolve on the periphery, while the centre struggles with the difficulties of overpopulation and the integration of the newcomers. It is not possible to exit the competition, however, because in the meantime the "developing" countries have completely lost their self-sufficiency: their national income and subsistence depend increasingly on the sectors integrated into the multinational, export-driven network. As for the "developed", they would not survive a minute without the food, raw materials and utility items.

Not without reason do the critics of the system of free trade appeal to John Maynard Keynes, who, in an article that appeared in 1933, presented the most apt summary of what could be the credo of a green economic policy: "It is my central contention that there is no prospect for the next generation of a uniformity of economic system throughout the world, such as existed, broadly speaking, during the nineteenth century, that *we all need to be as free as possible of interference from economic changes elsewhere, in order to make our own favorite experiments towards the ideal social republic of the future*, and that a deliberate movement towards greater national self-sufficiency and economic isolation will make our task easier, in so far as it can be accomplished without excessive economic cost. I sympathize, therefore, with those who would minimize, rather than with those who would maximize economic entanglement among nations. Ideas, knowledge, science, hospitality, travel – these are the things which should of their nature be international. But let goods to be homespun whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible, and above all, let finance be primarily national."[13] Keynes' expectation was not fulfilled. What happened was exactly the opposite of what he held desirable. The consequences, however, fully justify his prophetic words.

[13] John Maynard Keynes: National Self-Sufficiency. *The Yale Review* 22.4. (June 1933).

The defenders of the free trade system view this differently. In their opinion, reality proves the critics of economic globalisation wrong, since in the last few decades the average difference between the performance of the rich and poor countries has decreased and, for a while now, it is exactly those who are successfully closing the gap who boast the most spectacular growth indicators.[14] These data cannot be interpreted on their own, however. The fact that a significant part of investors' money does not generate a return in the wealthy countries does not necessarily mean an increase in prosperity of the countries they have been favouring of late. The favourable growth indicators come at a terrible cost: the overburdening of nature, the drastic decline of indispensable natural facilities, poverty, hunger, untreatable public health issues, dissatisfaction that explodes into bloody civil wars, etc. But even if set all this aside, we must still see that the benefits of growth are divided extremely unequally within the individual countries, thus exacerbating social tensions.[15] The whirlwind increase of the wealth of the old and new elites of the poor countries stands in sharp contrast with the impoverishment of the farming population and the catastrophic situation of the inhabitants of the big city slums that are sprouting up like weeds, where they live in their millions in previously unimaginable poverty and overcrowding. In the meantime, income and cultural differences are increasing in similar fashion in the rich countries as well, where capital is flowing out of the country, the bargaining position of employees is weakening, some of them do not have work and the social state is forced to reign in its welfare expenditures. It seems that what Susan George established with regard to international aid applies to economic globalisation in its entirety as well: the free trade world order finances the enrichment of the poor countries' rich at the expense of the rich countries' poor.[16]

[14] The picture would be significantly modified if from these successful countries China were omitted, where behind the economic miracle lies a civilization at least as old and of equal value to that of the West and which has as its immediate prelude the most successful and most ruthless attempt at the totalitarian organisation of the industrial state. The statistic is also improved by the atypical case of a few oil-rich Arab countries: their prosperity is due not to the dynamics of the global economy, but to a monopoly over the most important energy resource.

[15] Giovanni Arrighi – Beverley Silver – Benjamin Brewer: *Industrial Convergence, Globalization and the Persistence of the North – South Divide.* Studies in Comparative International Development 38.1. 2003.

[16] Susan George: *The Debt Boomerang.* Pluto Press, London, 1992.

This does not prevent the majority of political and economic analysts from talking about the success of globalisation and the equalisation of economic performance. The development indicators clearly support their claims, so we have to recognise that these countries stand to win, at least according to the rules of the global game of capitaly. What they leave out is that this game is being played in a packed hospital ward and that success in the game does not have much bearing on the survival of the players.

Among the incidental effects of globalisation, one should be highlighted: worldwide economic integration led to an exponential increase in the demand for the transport of goods and long-distance travel. A significant part of the burnt fossil fuels drives airplanes, automobiles, trucks and ocean liners or serves the automotive industry that manufactures them and the construction of roads and motorways. Furthermore, humanity, accustomed to constant mobility, has been seized with a veritable travel frenzy and the victims of mass tourism do their best even in their free time to facilitate global warming. The astounding increase in traffic is a major factor of climate change, but is in large part responsible for the pollution of the air and water as well. As for the motorways, they eliminate the connection among habitats and cut off routes of reproduction, thus exercising a fatal impact on biological diversity.

Among the social consequences, I would like first of all to mention the fundamental transformation of the nature of political rule. This has an extremely close connection with the transformation of the social sphere. The decisions that determine the fate of humanity are no longer made in one country or another but instead far from all local societies, in a previously non-existent environment, often characterised as non-place, since it cannot be placed in physical space. This environment (virtual space) was created by the contact between the most influential actors who transcend local control, in the areas of the economy, science, culture and politics (taken in a stricter sense) alike. No country can back out anymore from the effect of the interests and power relations being developed in the global networks and transnational organisations, from the opinions being formed there and from the information being transmitted there. The new situation could be briefly characterised thus: the deepening and extension of horizontal communicative connections has come at the cost of vertical communication: the connection between the social elites and the lower classes, which but recently was known as social control, responsible government and the accountability of power,

in other words, democracy. The members of the new elite, as many have pointed out since Christopher Lasch's book *The Revolt of the Elites,* depend only on each other and move within their own communicative network, which is independent of physical distance and any local environment. They represent no-one and feel solidarity with no-one. The arenas of their life and the stages of their career develop according to the inner laws of a world limitlessly broad but carefully concealed from outsiders.

These changes are concealed by the processes taking place in the particular local societies. The great losers of these are the middle classes. The small and mid-size enterprises are destroyed by the unequal competition and bought up by the international networks that rule the market. Similar processes occur within the sphere of intellectual as well. A tiny fraction of scientists, artists, doctors, lawyers, engineers and media experts acquire a previously unimaginable fame, standing and wealth and become part of the local and global elite. Meanwhile, the majority of white-collar occupations lose the majority of their independence and prestige and become ever more vulnerable to the business ventures and business attitude (suffice it to mention the well-documented changes in the mass media) which swallow up the intellectual career-paths as well – or less commonly to the aggressively centralising state bureaucracy, perhaps both. This change does not necessarily affect their income, but instead the independence, creativity and social standing of their work and, above all, their social status. But the middle class or bourgeoisie is not usually defined primarily in financial terms. The groups that belong here possess sufficient intellectual and financial independence to influence and exercise control over the operation of the government. In this respect, globalisation means not only the decline of the privileged position, independence and influence of the middle classes, but also that something similar is happening to governments and even to nation states themselves. As we have seen, their political room for manoeuvre has in reality become even more restricted than could be supposed from the limitation of their sovereignty.

The paradox of globalisation is that while the civilisational patterns that have risen to dominance originate from Western democracy, it is exactly these changed political conditions which have placed seemingly insurmountable obstacles in the path of democratic governance. In economic terms, democracy has actually become a comparative disadvantage. For a dictatorship does not have to concern itself with the

dissatisfaction of its own subjects, with the nuisance of environmental activists, with the protests of human rights and peace movements or with the expositions of investigative journalists as long as it is able to securely hold the judiciary and the armed forces. This comes with significant competitive advantages – not for nothing do investors favour authoritarian countries. The cessation of the dominant role of Western democracies can be seen in the restructuring of the international balance of power as well. The majority of newly emerging great and middling powers are characterised by authoritarian rule, which fits their historical traditions better as well. The expansion of openly or veiled – i.e., maintaining a parliamentarian exterior – totalitarian systems is not in itself a sign of a crisis of democracy. It merely shows that in the countries that have not previously undergone the process of the development of the middle classes and the path of social modernisation that the Western style societies did, the adoption of certain elements of modern technology, the market economy and the Western way of life do not necessarily entail the presence of a constitutional democratic state.

When evaluating the global phenomena of our age, we need to take account of the incredible proliferation of the researchers, commentators and think tanks studying and interpreting the changes. Further, the pressure to publish, as well as the competition for public attention appreciates, overanalyses and overvalues all novelty. This applies also to the theories which conclude from the phenomena of global integration to the development of some kind of global society. For the moment, it appears that the border-transcending flow of information, money and goods has truly effected such a fundamental change only in the life of the elites and in the way that power is exercised. Though the borders between local societies have indeed thankfully become permeable, the overwhelming majority of the peoples of the world still experience the frantic transformation of the physical and cultural environment in one place, in their own way and respond to these challenges as the local conditions allow. The hundreds of millions of immigrants and guest workers actually conserve the social conditions of their countries of origin: they relieve the insupportable internal tension arising from the overpopulation or impoverishment that triggered the migration. Moreover, migration removes exactly the mobile, enterprising people who could be the motor of the rejuvenation of local society. (The effects of this are felt strongly in Hungary, where this migration-induced adverse selection has decimated every generation in the past hundred years.) As regards the host countries – especially the European ones –

there the mass migration is currently causing a crisis with an unforeseeable outcome, because integration has not been successful – contrary to the predictions of global social unification. The drastic increase of the number of arrivals has, with time, almost everywhere halted and rendered impossible the initial noteworthy results.

We could not speak, however, of a global elite and globalisation only with severe constraints if the resounding success of this project were not visible in the changes in the life and thought of people worldwide and if these did not all point in the same direction. But what we experience is that there is something missing from the lives of their ancestors that unites the computer scientists of Silicon Valley, the warriors of Jihad, Japanese tourists, Nepalese sherpas and French peasants, no matter how different their views and education. Whether they see it as consolation or threat, they all experience the presence of the same unavoidable challenge that crushes their traditional world and questions their inherited notions. This challenge is none other than that to achieve their goals – whatever those may be – they need to use certain new tools that are identical worldwide. These are IT devices, weapons, medicines, clothing and vehicles and the knowledge necessary to use and, to an extent, produce them. It is somewhat deceptive to talk about cultural globalisation in this regard; instrumental globalisation would be a better term. The particularity of the situation lies in that the mass spread of these technological novelties creates a profound change in the everydays without demanding a unification of worldviews, values and explanatory frameworks. We are performing ever more similar physical activities with a basically identical technological toolbox against the background of horizons of reality no less different than before. The peoples of the world are on the road to becoming replaceable without needing to understand one another.

The spokespeople of cultural globalisation speak of the fusion of cultures and expect the emergence of an effectively united global culture. Opinions differ as to what this means, for the essence of a culture are its differences: the way it differentiates between good and bad, true and false, beautiful and ugly and ours and theirs. It is not as though the system of values within each culture were homogenous. The members of a cultural community do not have to agree on what truth is, but instead on what the question is to which they seek the answer: what they have to solve, the decision in which is essential to them. So far in history the transformation (e.g., the adoption of Christianity, the triumph of the scientific worldview or modernisation) or expansion (for

instance the spread of Buddhism, Islam or the Enlightenment) of a culture has been thought to occur when a people's topics of cultural dialogue and the symbolic frames of interpretation determining possible topics changes. Yet nothing characterises the current – mostly Western – proponents and ideologues of multiculturalism less than the desire to spread Western values. The politically correct way of speaking compulsory at universities and in the media expressly forbids anyone to claim priority for these. The only idea of European origin that they demand from everyone is the extreme relativism of values (falsely) derived from the equality of freedoms and which in reality renders dialogue among cultures impossible. For substantive dialogue and mutual respect are only possible in knowledge of the differences, between parties who are equally convinced of the meaning and importance of the differences they argue for. As for "fusion", cultures are not capable of this within a short space of time any more than languages are: a series of sounds only possesses an identifiable meaning in one particular language. The fusion of dictionaries and grammars takes centuries at the least, yet currently it appears that there is no serious attempt at either the meaningful dialogue or the unification of the various cultures. In contrast with the centuries of cultural imperialism, it seems that we do not want to baptise, secularise, democratise or enlighten the peoples whom we have convinced to adopt our way of life and technological achievements. So, what do we want from them?

The ruling culture is always the culture of the rulers, the connected system of certain interpretations of the world which sanction the given mode of power. In this there is no change. Multiculturalism – in contrast with its historical antecedents – is the ideology of a power which is not legitimised by an interpretation of the world but rather by the application of the means and procedures upon which the survival of the system stands or falls. The new world order and its beneficiaries are not interested in gaining acceptance for a particular cultural software, but rather merely in selling the hardware. This is most likely the explanation for globalisation's particular nature.

4. Ecology and economy

A significant part of the dominant ideas of our time are related, in one way or another, to the economy. The market is the place where social achievements are compared: either they prove competitive, i.e., saleable, or not. The indicator of good governance is the growth of the economy, whatever that may mean. Science is explicitly or implicitly identified with research and innovation that serve the goals of the economy; the schools provide the economy with a trained, competitive workforce; welfare is the state where the consumer can satisfy his needs for various products. Culture is consumed; politics is sold; the human being is a resource. Everyone buys or sells. To become the object of a sale, they first has to become property: the various forms of life are patented, climate pollution or the ecological performance of the forest is "priced" and what cannot be owned, loses its value. This is the fate of the forms of knowledge that cannot be sold as information and the human abilities not justified by market performance. Human coexistence has been successfully confined within the rules of a single abstract, utterly simplified role-playing game in a way that is unparalleled in history: this is effectively the explanation of the civilisational catastrophe that triggered the ecocide. The ecological worldview is the rejection of this completely anti-life way of thinking.

Ecological economics questions the attempt to detach the working of the economy from its social connections and explain it with its own perennial laws, with some kind of economic necessity. As a first step, it aims to disprove the anthropological bases of this approach. In this area it can rely primarily on the views expressed by Karl Polányi in his work *The Great Transformation*. Polányi emphasises that profit-based market exchange does not arise from unchanging human nature and is not the cause but the effect of the capital-based economy. He examines historical forms of exchange to prove that the motive behind the exchange is usually not the desire for profit and that society usually punishes, not rewards profit-maximalising behaviour. He writes that "...man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships. He does not act so as to safeguard his individual interest in the possession of material goods; he acts so as to safeguard his social standing, his social claims, his social assets. He values material goods only in so far as they serve this end. Neither the process of production, nor that of distribution is linked to specific economic interests attached to the possession of goods, but every single step of that process is geared to a number of social

interests which eventually ensure that the required step be taken."[17] There is therefore no economic rationality separate from circumstance because economic activity takes place within the framework of social institutions. These determine in each era what counts as reasonable activity. The economic order depends on the social order. A self-regulating market is possible only if this relation is reversed and the entire society is subjected to the logic of the operation of the market and all relations become relations of products. This, however, would lead to impossibilities. According to Polányi, modern market-centred economic theory can only provide a realistic picture of economic processes if we assume

- that everything is produced so as to be sold on the market, according to the changes in supply and demand
- and that the factors of the economic process are universally comparable and theoretically interchangeable with one another; therefore, the spontaneously developing rates can ensure the dynamic balance of market processes by themselves.

Polányi proves that both suppositions are untenable. The two most important conditions of production, human work capacity and natural resources, are not capable of following the fluctuations of supply and demand, because they exist not for the purpose of sale, but according to the order of life – the order of culture and nature. "To allow the market mechanism to be the sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment, even in the amount and use of purchasing power would result in the demolition of society... Robbed of the protecting covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure; they would die as the victims of acute social dislocation through vice, perversion, crime and starvation. Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighbourhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed."[18] In the meantime the use of the conditional has become superfluous. Since the time of Polányi, a multitude of species and habitats have been destroyed by the economically completely reasonable and wonderfully profitable exploitation and, sure enough, the market rates have not reflected the value of lost raw materials and poisoned ecosystems. But this is not due to prices but to the fact that nature is incapable of behaving like a

[17] *Karl Polanyi: The Great Transformation,* p.46. Octagon Books, New York, 1975.
[18] *Ibid.* p.107.

product: it dwindles or multiplies independently of changes in demand. The value of nature is reflected all the less by prices, since according to the predominant economic approach, the services of nature are free and have no economic value of their own. Only the cost of their extraction needs to be taken into account.

We must also agree with the author of *The Great Transformation* that even the human workforce itself is not capable of consistently reasonable behaviour in economic terms, since it is neither product nor resource. For instance, it multiplies even if there is no demand for it; in fact, it is "produced" in the largest quantities precisely where the labour market needs it the least, though the maintenance in storage of the surplus supply of humans comes with a huge social cost. And yet its destruction, however reasonable it may seem from an economic perspective, is for the moment still rendered extremely tricky by our ethical prejudices.

Polányi recognises the paradox of industrial societies: the all-overpowering free competition of the market would destroy its own social foundations, if an ever-more extensive and complex system of bureaucratic regulation were not to emerge in parallel to counter-balance its operation. This is the modern industrial state. "State or market?" – the question is meaningless: the market economy's need for expansion and the totalitarian aspirations of state power mutually presuppose one another, even when they happen to be in conflict. For the workforce and raw materials – i.e., man and nature – are not products. Their subordination to the logic of the profit-based competitive market economy is possible only if the state compensates people for the immeasurable harm caused to them through means outside the markets (welfare state) or suppresses social protest in the most brutal fashion (fascist and communist dictatorships) or deprives the subjects of the ability to think for themselves (electronic mass culture). All three are tasks of the state.

Nature does not protest but it cannot adapt to the rules of market economy either. It exposes the absurdity of an economy-centred social order, but sadly at a terrible cost. Why are modern societies with their boasts of scientific foresight not capable of reasonable self-correction? Because economic competition is war and the market is the battlefield. This war is not fought for land, slaves or holy relics but for pure abstract power itself, which takes form between cost and profit in a formal quantitative connection: these are the so-called gains. The established surplus turns from fiction into reality when as investment it can actually be turned back into the system. Market-society can survive as long as

it can expand and grow and for this it constantly needs to extend its power over new resources.

How can sustained growth be managed in a sane way on a planet with a limited capacity to support, in the knowledge of the alarming decrease of essential natural resources? The secret of the mystery of sustainable growth is contained in the dogma of universal replaceability. Technology takes the place of nature and of human nature as well. As imagined by the technophiles, this characteristically end-of-the-world sect in wait of a miracle, not only will digitalisation, gene technology and the other technical miracles save the human race from its original imperfections, but the self-programming information systems can even take over man's governing role if needs be. According to the trans-humanists, the computer is the summit of creation, the goal and purpose of evolution, the clear intellect liberated from its mortal shell. It is no wonder that faith in the digital afterlife is spreading rapidly among the youth, since their lives already revolve around the computer, which fulfils their imagination and desires. They do not even notice the ecological catastrophe, despotism or the collapse of society. So long as there is a network connection.

For an ecological economy, as already shown, taking into account the natural limits of economic growth is an unavoidable starting point. Herman Daly seeks to console his colleagues who have grown up in the belief of indefinite growth by showing that the market indicators of economic performance have long since become detached from reality; they indicate not the enrichment of society but rather potentially the exact opposite, for they do not include the serious but not directly demonstrable or priceable natural and social costs of growth. This growth exacerbates social injustice, destroys nature, damages health and creates unemployment and inhuman conditions of life and work. It is caused by a purposeless and joyless wastefulness. The increased traffic of war materials or medicine in times of war or epidemics does not produce an increase in wellbeing, security or satisfaction; it is useless. In the original sense of the word "economy", we might even term it uneconomical.[19] In his work, *For the Common Good*, Daly draws attention to the fact that the principle of "the more, the better" only applies to the economics of profit (what Aristotle terms chrematistics), while the economics of subsistence (oikonomia) seeks right measure: what is just

[19] Herman Daly: *Uneconomic Growth: in theory, in fact, in history and in relation to globalization.* In Herman Daly, Edgar Elgar eds: *Ecological Economics and the Ecology of Economics.* Edgar Elgar, Cheltenham 1999.

enough. The concept of optimal measure, writes Daly, is not unknown in corporate economics. If a company has a size beyond which further growth would be uneconomical in the given circumstances, why not introduce the concept of optimal size as regards national or world economy as well?[20] If we can shake off the fixation that the development of society depends on the increased traffic of goods, then there is no barrier to concluding from the indicators of real prosperity to the state of society and to evaluating the national economy according to whether its performance increases the improvement of these indicators. (These indicators can be quite variable. The data most often considered is connected to the population's education and health, the quality of the environment, social security and equity.)

The other sacred cow of the ruling economic school of thought is the theory of rational decisions. This holds that if the economic actors possess the requisite information (which of course is contained in the prices), then they will most likely favour the solution most cost-effective for them. This benefits not only them in the short and long run, for the selfishness (profit-maximalising behaviour) of the mutually competing individuals is also the most suitable means for keeping the national economy in balance. Garret Hardin's model known as the tragedy of the commons thoroughly disproves this theory. It proves that choosing the solution that brings them the most short-term profit can actually be reasonable for competing individuals under certain circumstances, since foresight and self-control would merely give their competitors the advantage. If, however, every individual were to behave in this way separately (i.e., make decisions that are rational from their own point of view), then the foreseeable yet unavoidable result is a common catastrophe: the destruction of the indispensable public goods.

The opinion that the driving force behind economic development is individual selfishness is as old as the competitive market economy itself. Bernard Mandeville was the first to say, in *The Fable of the Bees* at the beginning of the eighteenth century, that general economic growth is best served by concupiscence, envy, miserliness and greed, giving these qualities a positive ethical value.[21] Even if one sets ethical reservations

[20] Herman Daly – John B. Cobb: *For the Common Good.* Beacon Press, Boston 1989.

[21] And temp'rance with sobriety,
Serve drunkenness and gluttony.
The root of evil, avarice,
That damn'd ill-natur'd baneful vice,
Was slave to prodigality,
That noble sin; whilst luxury

aside, one must still note that this connection between individual selfishness (maximalisation of profit) and public welfare stands only so long as the participants increase cost effectiveness with the application of technology that either improves the quality (usability) of produced goods or increases their quantity without simultaneously increasing the externals (e.g. the burden placed upon nature, unemployment, etc.). It is much more common, however, to knock down wage costs, decrease quality, pass on the environmental and social costs or simply increase the amount spent on marketing (convincing or deceiving the consumer), since the latter yields the greatest return in most cases.

Most of the business arguments aiming to reconcile the market economy with environmental protection claim that competition leads to greater cost effectivity, thus encouraging thrift with natural resources. As has been seen, however, the participants have many ways of gaining a competitive advantage. As regards the more efficient use of natural resources, it has already been shown that, in line with the Jevons-paradox, the end result will be their increased, not decreased use, since cost-reduction leads to increased traffic. Cheaper products are bought more, thus increasing the demand for the resources necessary for their production.

One of the slogans dear to the liberal and conservative protectors of the environment is "let the prices tell the truth!" They believe that if state bans and support did not exempt economic actors from responsibility and help them to pass on the true environmental costs, then these costs would be properly reflected in the prices. The popular story about truth-telling prices comes in handy for Roger Scruton, for instance, who devotes a separate chapter of *Green Philosophy* to the self-regulating nature of spontaneous market processes and to proving that if they are not disturbed, they will take care of the exchange rate appropriate to the real costs by themselves. This is an illusion, however, for there is no such thing as "real" costs. Only on the basis of a Marxist or other substantive value theory could one be held accountable for the

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Employ'd a million of the poor,
And odious pride a million more:
Envy itself, and vanity,
Were ministers of industry;
Their darling folly, fickleness,
In diet, furniture, and dress,
That strange ridic'lous vice, was made
The very wheel that turn'd the trade.

"real" cost of production factors.[22] Whoever does not agree with this should at least accept that the real price is what is paid on the market – and the measure of pay depends primarily on the balance of power between the partners. In certain cases, it depends on whether they are able to persuade governments to allow the most blatantly polluting sectors to acquire profit through various open or veiled price subsidies, tax evasion and other means of "boosting the economy". Or it depends on whether the elites of the indebted and overpopulated "developing" countries can be sufficiently intimidated, corrupted or played off against each other so as to keep the price of the raw materials and labour available to them at the desired low level. However uncomfortable this is to hear for market-friendly green ears (greenhorn friends of the market), the truth is that not only do power relations not distort prices, but it is exactly through them that they are expressed the most clearly. In other words, prices reflect political, social, cultural and even military strength. Exploitation definitely exists, but it is not a matter of economics, but rather directly of politics, viz. power. This fact is merely hidden by abstract economic argumentation, which considers market conditions in isolation from their connection to society.

This connection is thematised by the mainstream as the relation between supply and demand and immediately turned upside down as though the increase of supply were induced by the increase of demand and not the other way round. Even if it is proved that the need to grow is not due to the unquenchable greed of consumers (people degraded into consumers), but to the logic of the cycle of capital, they still maintain that what drives the progress of humanity is the increase of economic performance, which is also the essential condition for the increase of prosperity and the defeat of poverty. The latter statement has a section of this book devoted to it (*The Ecology of Poverty*). As regards the connection between growth and development, it is worth clarifying that ecological considerations render impossible only the growth of the

[22] György Bencze, János Kis and György Márkus prove the untenability of the Marxist value theory of labour in their book *Is a Critical Economics Possible?* (T-Twins – Lukács Archive, Budapest, 1992.). If the "necessary social working hours" cannot be established, then labour has no substantive value independent of the fluctuation of market exchange, which the capitalist either rewards with an honest wage or pockets. The source of its gains therefore lies not in the production process but in market transactions, not least through keeping labour costs down, which is made possible for the employer – be it the state or an individual – by the power imbalance between the negotiating parties. This imbalance, the vulnerability of the employee, is only increased if a system of state redistribution takes the place of market deals.

flow of energy and materials, due to the limitations of nature. And terming the unscrupulous wasting of the resources of the planet as development is by no means self-evident. The green economists arguing for a stable economy prove exactly its opposite. Yet I quote not them, but instead the words of their great forebear, the classic of utilitarian liberalism John Stuart Mill: "It is scarcely necessary to remark that a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement. There would be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture and moral and social progress; as much room to improve the art of living and much more likelihood of being improved, when minds ceased to be engrossed by the art of getting on. Even the industrial arts might be as earnestly and as successfully cultivated, with this sole difference, that instead of serving no purpose but the increase of wealth, industrial improvements would produce their legitimate effect, that of abridging labour."[23]

The fact that economic growth not only does not serve cultural development but in fact stands in irreconcilable contradiction to it, can remain hidden only so long as the availability of material goods and services remain, explicitly or implicitly, at the centre of concepts of the good life. In consumer society, wellbeing is nothing other than being solvent: the ability to satisfy one's needs – as defined by the system – through using up more goods and services than one's jealous neighbours.

Consumer society – a society in which consumer is a synonym for person – revolves around the satisfaction of needs: it devotes a historically unparalleled amount of energy to the discovery, awareness and satisfaction of needs – and their creation. Before the age of industrial societies, the word "need" did not exist in its current usage, as some objective connection between man and certain goods that exists independently of us. Only recently has consumer society managed to detach from man first his labour – in the form of wage labour – and then even his "needs", which he can only satisfy through the possession of goods and services that he can purchase on the market. The Meadows couple, Ivan Illich, Manfred Max-Neef and others warn society in vain that man has no need for a vehicle, for instance, or even for transportation. In reality these are merely tools which he is forced to use through the transformation of the social space. Vehicles bridge the gap they themselves create. "They create distances for all and shrink them only for a few," Illich explains. "Everywhere in the world after

[23] John Stuart Mill: *Principles of Political Economy*. Book 4, Chapter 6.

some vehicle broke the speed barrier of 15 mph, time scarcity related to traffic began to grow. After industry has reached this per capita output, transport made of man a new kind of waif: a being constantly absent from a destination he cannot reach on his own but must attain within the day."[24] But the forced growth of production actually does satisfy a need: the need of an economic system in which gains are only gains while they can be realised in new profitable investments. This is the simple and well-known explanation of the necessity of growth. The competition favours whoever can keep his specific production costs lower through more effective technology, production in greater quantity and convincing advertising and marketing activity. As a result of all this, the main problem of the global economy is no longer shortage but surplus, not the increase of production but of consumption, of so-called solvent demand – or demand capable of further indebtedness.

Thomas Princen points out that production thus understood is, if anything, primarily consumption: it literally consumes human abilities and the natural environment as pure resources. And consumption is production: the production of needs. According to him, of true needs here on Earth there are but two kinds: what nature needs for the maintenance of the circle of life and the needs of the people who need help. This should be the true demand.[25] But neither is solvent. Consumer society works counter to true needs; it increases deprivation. At most it modernises poverty, for the poor are no longer excluded from the market economy. Quite the contrary: they become poor through losing their independence, together with the knowledge and creativity that previously provided them with a sufficient living. This, claims Ivan Illich, makes them the scum of the market economy. They lose faith in their own abilities and become dependent on the paid services of professionals in all areas of life. All the new needs planted in us by the pressure coming from the side of demand – be it smartphones, overseas travel or even organic food – create new dimensions of inequality among those who can afford them and those who can only desire them. These people, warns Illich, no longer demand participation for themselves in politics, but rather better provision.[26]

It is typical of the narrow economy-centred worldview of our times that the spread of environmentally conscious thought is often connected to the oil crisis of the seventies. According to the mainstream view, the

[24] Ivan Illich: *Towards a History of Needs,* p.127, Heyday Books, New York, 1978.
[25] Thomas Princen: *Treading Softly,* p.71. The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2010.
[26] Ivan Illich *Ibid.*

rise of oil prices made people aware of the danger of the exhaustion of fossil fuel sources. They put two and two together and realised that this could be detrimental to their future; this made them receptive to green views. In other words, they thought as could be expected from a businessman. However, it is not this that happened; quite the contrary. People became conscious of environmental issues in the last third of the past century as part of a new form of social discontent, which had nothing to do with economic trends. The children of the society of plenty, who were able to enjoy the blessings of consumer mass culture and experience the positive effects of a growing redistribution of wealth by the state and strong trade unions, started to feel increasingly ill at ease in the world of abundance imagined by their parents – and this has lasted ever since. Not the plenty, but the dissatisfaction.

The complaints of the alternative movements, counter- and sub-cultures, dissatisfaction and civil disobedience that have developed from the sixties have been directed not against the quantity of the produced and consumable goods, but against the quality of life. Far from demanding a higher share of the spoils for themselves, they rejected everything the system had to offer in the areas of work, politics, their physical environment and consumption. Their anti-system desires – that questioned the reason for existence of the conditions of power – were called "radical" needs. The documents of the contemporary counter-culture – including green parties' founding documents – gave equal weight to the soullessness of work and the inhumanity of working conditions as the destruction of the environment and the rejection of the consumerist way of life. Jonathon Porritt, founder of the English Green Party, explains why. The majority of critics of industrial society had yet to realise that "It is not alienation from the means of production or even from the fruits of production that really matters, but alienation from the process of the production that really matters. The left has simply got hooked on the wrong thing. The socialization of the means of production is all but irrelevant if the process remains unchanged. This alienation, characteristic of all industrial systems, capitalist or communist, is the key to understanding the kind of changes we are going to have to make."[27] In my opinion, Porritt has captured the heart of ecological politics, which is regularly missed by those who create a philosophy for the protection of the environment. The environment cannot be protected while for most people work remains a

[27] Jonathon Porritt: *Seeing Green: The Politics of Ecology Explained*, p.81. Wiley – Blackwell, Oxford, 1984.

sacrifice for the sake of making a living and the only purpose of life is free time, which has to be spent with the consumption of the mass of produced goods. An effective critique of the society of plenty cannot begin with anything other than demanding the first condition of a good life, good work. Work has ultimately become meaningless for most people because at their workplace they are not producing "something", but anything anywhere: replaceable goods in plastic packaging, while as consumers they have to consume this anything that is the same the world over in such quantities that the batch size should minimise the costs of production.

From an ecological perspective, the main characteristic of the society of plenty is wastefulness ad absurdum: planned obsolescence, the mass of throwaway items and the determined effort to transform the material world into rubbish in the shortest possible time. Our descendants will most likely deem waste to be the most characteristic creation of the global age of the consumer; this is finally something which in this form was practically unknown to previous generations. All the efforts of civilisations so far have been against entropy: people aimed to turn processed material into some kind of complicated, high energy-content state and keep it there as long as possible. In a way, our throwaway society is attempting the opposite: the increase of entropy. However, the attempt can only meet with partial success, but not because this society too is transient, but because its waste is very much permanent. Our concrete buildings, radioactive fuel rods, metal alloys, giant machines and the nanoparticles released by plastics will survive us. They are turning the Earth into a cemetery of rubbish, a desolate and dangerous place for all those who will try to live on it hereafter.

5. The ecology of poverty

Poverty is usually taken to mean the scarcity of the basic physical and cultural conditions fundamental to a life worthy of a human being. Most of those who have addressed the subject until the past few centuries agreed that these conditions – goods and abilities – are always available in limited amounts. They therefore held their temporary or sustained lack as the normal concomitant of the human condition. The opposite was held to be true only in the prehistoric mythical times (before original sin) or in a utopia. Their historical experience convinced them that scarcity is unavoidable and that the unequal distribution of goods

available in limited quantities, that spares some people from want, is desirable and just (it stemmed from the divine will, was the reward of excellence or was the driving force behind social progress). The raison d'être of the prevailing institutional order of power was to sanction this asymmetrical arrangement.

Since the Age of Enlightenment, however, new views in contrast with the above, have gradually taken root in Europe. Since then, ever more people think that poverty is an eradicable anomaly, for the existence of which the individual or society can justly be condemned. They usually hope that the liberation from poverty – which is usually seen as part of emancipation – will result from two procedures: one is the increased production of lacking goods; the other is the fair distribution of produced things. These two will create the economic conditions for the satisfaction of the basic needs, i.e., for the eradication of poverty; all that is needed today is to want this. However, I will argue below that neither path is tenable and I will seek to draw constructive conclusions from this. I claim

1. that a priori no authentic description of poverty is possible within the scope of the satisfaction of needs;

2. that the increase of production can actually exacerbate poverty and currently is doing just this;

3. and finally, that the expectations of fair distribution are based on the false belief that goods can be distributed in several ways within a given social system without running into an irresolvable contradiction with the logic of the system's operation.

I have to support my position in opposition to the abstract understanding of poverty in the first case, an economy-centred understanding in the second and a socialist understanding in the third.

1. I call the approach abstract which tries to conceive of man independently of his natural and social environment and abstracted from the organic unity of life processes and which tries to do so, moreover, in opposition to these. In this arrangement, the starting point is the individual, the subject suffering from hunger or others' contempt, on the one hand; on the other, the thing capable of alleviating his suffering: food, recognition, etc. "Need" thus understood and its object are, however, far from qualities of objects existing independently of each other: food and appetite both depend on the historically changing ways of nourishment. This connection is even more obvious in the case of social needs taken in the strictest sense of the word. What treatment

we desire and receive and what we even mean by, say, recognition and contempt, are integral parts of the social order and cultural heritage, within the framework of which we are even capable of imagining ourselves as someone: as master or servant, parent or child, an individual fulfilling a given role successfully or not. Deprivation and satisfaction, poverty and wealth are therefore concepts that can only be interpreted within a given system, for who lacks and what they lacks are both creations of the network of connections that shape them.

This system-based approach leads not to the relativisation of the issue of poverty. On the contrary, it helps one discuss the issue in the real context of the of the social situation of the individual and, even more so, of the group. This situation does not necessarily correlate with the possession of goods and the indicators of consumption. Man does not have a fundamental need of something that could even be measured with such indicators. What he needs is 1. to be understood, recognised, treated with respect and helped by his peers, because in this case 2. he can feel secure and develop his abilities unhindered. 3. Consequently, he acquires the food, shelter, work and familial connections deemed appropriate in his social environment. 4. Therefore, he will probably continue to live and enjoy better health than someone who lacks these things. The causal relation between these four groups of the conditions of a good human life is empirically proven. Their lack makes life miserable. I use the word misery, because poor material conditions, in the everyday use of the term, do not in themselves necessarily impede welfare or a sufficient quality of life. On the other hand, vulnerability, exclusion, humiliation or the contempt of one's peers can, in itself and its consequences alike, make anyone miserable.

2. The above view of poverty – that it is nothing else than the unsatisfied need for certain products – is ideological to the extreme: it makes possible the handling of poverty as an economical issue, as an anomaly that can be remedied by more production and/or a more just distribution. (According to this economy-centred approach, politics is in effect nothing else than the influence exercised by the holders of public power on the distribution of resources, i.e., on the economy.) It is an increasingly accepted assumption in late modernity that the social conflicts arising from the distribution are avoidable or will become so, as soon as the development of production technologies can ensure the unlimitedly bountiful production of goods and services, thus finally ensuring enough of everything for everyone. For the source of radical

dissatisfaction was never the existence of differences in wealth in general, but rather the want of the lower classes. This can be eradicated by technical progress and by the growth of the economy's production capacity and must in fact be eradicated, when the difficulties in the path of accumulating profit no longer concern production of the mass of goods, but rather its sale.

The identification of poverty with the lack of goods is not a harmless theoretical error; it has fatal practical consequences. Curiously, for a long time hardly anyone noticed that the number of people in serious want has, far from decreasing, actually increased in both a relative and an absolute sense in the age of successive technological revolutions and soaring economic achievements. Maybe this is because poverty was measured according to the indicators of mainstream economics: by the development of national income per capita or by the data of the consumption of products and services. Thus, could it occur that this process clearly appeared to be one of development, closing the gap and modernisation, as a result of which globally, on average, the populace shops more, travels more, uses more power, has more electronics for entertainment, takes more medicine, etc. than before. This applies to the poor countries as well, to the lower classes as well, to the humiliated and distressed. It is just to poverty that this does not have a necessary connection.

And here I am not referring to the fact that never has such a great proportion of humanity suffered from the terrible lack of nutrition and drinking water, though all public remarks on this topic should probably begin with this sentence. One must know, however, that their unbearable situation, their hellish suffering and early deaths are not only the consequences of social injustice in the traditional sense of the word. Rather, the fact that the basic maintenance of life causes difficulty for many hundreds of millions of people is a public manifestation of a constantly growing poverty that effects *all* humanity. (In past centuries, this occurred only in times of war, plague or drought. It is also true that then there was usually war, plague or drought.)

Yes, we inhabitants of Earth are growing poorer together and the key reason for our impoverishment is exactly what is called economic growth. As long as we fail to understand this, we will be unable to comprehend the horrors that are occurring at the extremes, in the sub-social populace and in the hunger belts that are turning into deserts.

Let us therefore take the components of our poverty one by one. We must start with the impoverishment of knowledge, not because of

our values, but because of the logic of events. The global expansion of the patterns of aggressive modernisation have destroyed or rendered obsolete the local knowledge with which various cultures were able, in their own way, to maintain some kind of dynamic balance between population reproduction, the qualities of nature, the technologies that ensure a living and the institutions maintaining the order of society, which they are no longer capable of doing. The final collapse of the delicate balance among the four listed factors has precipitated the explosion of the population. Its consequences led to the exhaustion of the irreplaceable natural resources, which causes a constant state of war and finally forces a part of the population to emigrate. That these processes strengthen each other needs no explanation. It is also evident that the continents able to adapt, relatively speaking, most successfully – Europe and North America – to the new patterns (industrial mass society, mass culture, mass democracy), are those which had the most time to do so. Here, in one way or another, the drastic changes realised the possibilities contained within their own cultural heritage and, what is even more important, took place gradually. (The joint characteristic of biological and social systems is that they can adapt with incredible flexibility to slow, gradual changes, but sudden, aggressive intervention can easily lead to chaos and the collapse of the system. All this bears no relation to so-called sustainability and even less to the political statements on the needs of future generations.) The deluge of information on the internet does not necessarily make up for the loss of knowledge. Neither do the international educational assistance programs, which provide the recipients with tools for adaptation rather than the restoration of local cultural identities. The parrot who has forgotten how to fly in his cage is not compensated by learning to say a word or two in the meantime.

If one then approaches the issue of impoverishment from the perspective of institutional and technological changes, one notices that the scientific-technological revolution made possible the unparalleled speeding up the circulation of goods and energy in societies. This promised to solve all the troubles of society purely through the increase of economic performance. It provides everyone with a living and satiates and reconciles the nations and social groups previously hostile towards one other. Henceforward they will no longer war against each other, but instead set to the exploitation of nature together and in competition with one another. This latter is well underway but it has brought no social peace, but has instead become a source of new animosity,

inequalities and dissatisfaction. Such gaping holes have appeared between the successful and unsuccessful participants in the global economic competition (between the centre and the periphery, monetary and real economy, the price of cutting-edge technology and that of raw materials, etc.) as have not been previously seen in the history of humanity. The leaders of a few hundred corporate empires and financial networks possess the lion's share of the wealth of humanity. They control public discourse, direct our desires and decide about our wellbeing. The power needed for true rule has however slipped from their hands as well. They are not masters but merely beneficiaries of the processes directed mostly by impersonal automatisms and computer programs and held together by the force of helplessness. All this means that on the other side not only those became much poorer who, as the victims of this competition, lost their living, property and security, but also those in whose lives the ever more ruthless economic competition, the growing concentration of capital and the total dependence on technological systems "only" meant that they had to forgo individual enterprise, meaningful work done with professional pride and self-respect, a long-term life strategy, workplace security or the "competitiveness" of their native tongue and cultural heritage. In other words, almost all of us.

Another, sadly well-known, effect of economic growth is the slow collapse of the ecosystems. As a direct consequence of this, the most basic services of nature are harder to obtain and of deteriorating quality. This would make us pitiable in the eyes of the generations before us. For them access to clean drinking water purified of toxins, nano-particles and toxic residues, good air, a clean calm environment, birdsong and beautiful landscapes was yet to become an insoluble problem. Their lives depended much less on technological services and products without which we can barely move. They spent more time in each other's company, with activity requiring cooperation of body and soul, which fits human nature much more than computer games and internet connection. They probably could not even have been able to imagine a vulnerability like ours and this extent of the deterioration of the quality of the natural environment. And they would listen in disbelief to the explanation that we make all these sacrifices in the interest of our wellbeing. For what could be well with such being?

And in the meantime, we have lost a whole host of our relatives: the earth, the air, the waters and the majority of the creatures that inhabit the earth, great and small. We are still at the beginning of the mass

extinction of species; however, the number of members in almost all animal and plant populations has shrunk to a fraction to what they were previously. And we are beginning to suspect how much poorer our life has become without them.

3. The failure of left-wing or critical social theory is that it did not recognise that the crisis of our civilisation – which is usually called an environmental crisis based on its symptoms, as if the crisis were affecting the "environment" and not ourselves – is not due to the unequal distribution of goods and therefore cannot be resolved with the change of the bases of distribution. Neither within the framework of the current global order, nor according to the more radical program of the left-wing critics of the system. It is not as though the existence of political suppression, technological vulnerability and indefensible differences in wealth were not unbearable or unjust. I claim, however, that the ecological catastrophe which is destroying our world, impoverishing those of us alive today and destining our descendants to misery is not due to that in which the political players disagree. It is not the unfair distribution of goods and rights between rich and poor, masters and servants (let us dare to use this old-fashioned expression, since we are in fact servants), but rather to that in which they agree. This something is the Great Narrative that truly legitimates the operation of the modern industrial societies and conditions of power. It has linked the improvement of humanity with the defeat of nature and has measured the success of scientific-technological progress by the increase of the mass of produced and consumed goods (i.e., resources transformed into waste). This is what the majority of Marxists, social democrats, liberals and conservatives have hitherto agreed upon. Whether they entrust the market or the state with the distribution of the means, i.e., the evaluation of social performances and whether they see private property as theft or the basis of ethics, their practical goal is the same: the satisfaction of "needs" with the multiplication of produced material goods and services. Those who even care about such things call this wellbeing and view it as the condition and goal of existence alike of free society. Now it is this narrative that has become invalid by today. For if anyone still seriously thinks that the blessings of consumerist wellbeing should be distributed more equally among Earth's inhabitants, must also wish that the 85% of humanity currently controlling only 20% of the available resources, raise its consumption to the level enjoyed by the 15% who control 80% of the resources. How many planets' worth of resources would be

required? (We are talking here of resources which are, moreover, ever harder to obtain here on Earth. And the possibility of interstellar travel continues to exist only in the minds of the fans of fantasy films.)

There is of course the theoretical possibility of the more radical solution of depriving the 15% of the means of excessive wellbeing. However, some basic calculations reveal that this would not change much, either. Not to even speak of the little detail of who should decide for us what excessive wellbeing means and how we should take away what we think they do not deserve. There is also a "silent" version of Plan B of this revolution – celebrated by the liberal left, encouraged by the multinational companies and conducted by the organised underworld – that several hundred million people leave their country of origin and migrate to the wealthy countries. This is a true egalitarian solution: the islands of wellbeing and culture will disappear in a couple of decades in the ocean of global poverty.

The current system is at most capable of measures for alleviating destitution. Their effect is sadly doubly limited. On the one hand, the proportion of the poor in comparison to the rich is growing steadily, because most children are born in the lower classes and the poorest countries. Moreover, it is these poor countries that have to face the most serious direct effects of global climate change (desertification; lack of drinking water). Their main source of subsistence is the exploitation of their natural resources, i.e., the destruction of the environment, on which their future dependence will increase in direct correspondence with the increase of destitution. On the other hand, we must acknowledge that the unequal distribution of military, political and economic power is an integral part of the order of modern industrial society. This takes form in the extremely asymmetric division of possessed goods. Whether the competition is between states or individuals – in reality, the two spheres never fully separated – whether they happen to be engaged in trade or war, their efforts are directed towards the concentration of power and capital within the ever-diminishing circle of winners. The latter are forced into ever greater expenditures in the interest of seizing or maintaining hegemony, above all in the arena of military – understood in the broadest sense – and logistic developments. The conflicts induced by the global crisis and the sense of increased threat merely intensifies their competition and their interest in maintaining the inequalities. All this significantly limits the willingness of the rich and powerful to share. It is neither capitalism or socialism, but the logic of the operation of modern industrial society in

general which compels the concentration of capital and which, under the guise of efficiency, ensures that the interest of the participants is in the maximal exploitation of resources and their increasingly unequal distribution. Modern industrial societies are incapable of overcoming intolerable inequalities, because these are due not to the productive relations but to the nature of productive forces.

Competition can naturally be eliminated from human contact. In theory, even the increase of the circulation of goods could be limited in the relation of nature and society, but only in small communities could it be achieved as a result of peaceful agreement. In contrast, the forceful government intervention that has aimed to make economic competition impossible has been accompanied by brutal violence in every known case, while failing to question forced, inhuman, destructive growth itself as the main goal of society. On such occasions governments aim to eliminate the democratic and market obstacles to growth instead, invariably justifying this with an external threat or the wellbeing of their subjects. Meanwhile, the promise of a more equitable distribution was not kept. The old inequalities were merely replaced by new ones. One could suppose that a power endowed with global sovereignty would have no further need of growth, but the rule of such a competitionless and therefore limitless and uncontrollable world government is the darkest negative utopia imaginable. The best that can be said of it is that it is practically impossible to realise.

Our claim is therefore that the expanded reproduction of destitution today and its perpetuation down the generations is a direct consequence of the social order that wastes resources and takes no account of ecological realities. We deplete the fundamental resources needed for life, thereby constantly increasing our impoverishment. What is called economic growth is in reality the concentration of power on one side and of destitution on the other. We argued that this is the consequence not of the conditions of distribution or even of some kind of exploitation (as long as by exploitation we mean the "unpaid value" of work, because that is an effect rather than a cause of the existing power relations), but rather arises from the way of organisation of production and traffic. We have counted our losses as gains for a long time now and this lie has become the guarantee of social peace. Now that the lie is starting to be revealed, we can pose the question: how can we be rid of the growth that oppresses humanity? (By growth I still mean the growth of the quantity of used-up material and energy, not the growth of knowledge, nor that of satisfaction.)

This is a political issue, by which I would like to emphasise that

- it is not a technological issue, for we are already in possession of the necessary environmentally friendly, material- and power-saving technologies;

- nor is it an issue of economics, because the literature of the economics of non-growth has proved from many angles that the decreased use of natural resources is not an obstacle to social development, the improvement of the quality of life or sufficient employment. According to many, it is actually their unavoidable precondition. At the same time, it does not make impossible the (fair and proportional) increase in prosperity of those concerned. At most the indicators of economic performance would have to be swapped for new ones;

- finally, it is not an ethical issue, because it is not true that it would entail the limitation of human freedom. On the contrary, the strategies of non-growth promise the opportunity of liberation from the slavery of the way of life and work dependent on technological systems and on consumption.

If the issue is political, it could also be phrased thus: what is needed for good decisions to be made? (I term good the management capable of preserving and increasing humanity's physical and mental resources in the long term, i.e., something which goes against the currently still dominant economic point of view in several ways. That is why I do not speak of sustainability, because the current system should not be sustained, but renewed – or destroyed, so that something completely different could be built in its place, but for this there is quite simply no time. If acknowledge this, we save ourselves much futile philosophical debate.)

We know of no regime realising global justice – i.e., the fair sharing among nations or continents – in a peaceful fashion. The world order of free trade, together with the international treaties created to uphold and limit it, are not suitable for this; those who invented it did not even do so for this purpose. And violent solutions only increase destitution and people's vulnerability. Therefore, instead of the global application of the principle of equality we should choose the principle of solidarity, which can only be applied locally – in political communities whose members are induced by common interests (interdependence), common knowledge (of togetherness) and the commonness of the physical environment to cooperate for the preservation of the fundamental resources needed for life, in the interest of the improvement of their quality of life. The third chapter of this book will explore this possibility.

What must I do *(and why me)*?

1. The changing nature of human activity

The task of the archaeologists of the future will be difficult. When they start to dig to get to the so-called cultural layers, which preserve traces of bygone civilisations from the Stone Age to the Modern Age, first they will have to fight their way through the thick, mixed, impenetrable residue of the 20th and 21st centuries. The Waste Age; that is how we will be remembered. Or, in Latin: homo ignorans; we will be the ignorant man, who forced the species homo sapiens out of its habitat. Who thought that what he hides in the earth, pours away or burns, vanishes. Who believed that there can be limitless growth on a planet of limited size. Our civilisation is fleeting, but our waste is enduring; this is the biggest problem with us. Acidifying oceans with islands of PET-bottles in place of coral reefs; infertile, desiccated soil with the remains of poisonous chemicals, greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, the radioactive waste of nuclear power plants, the concrete of council estates, the shells of our machine monstrosities in the junkyards – all this will outlive us. This is our inheritance to posterity. They can no longer choose a way of life for themselves independently of ours. They cannot learn from our sorry case to seek their happiness in harmony with the benevolent forces of nature, for that nature already belongs to the past and they – like it or not – will have to adapt to the limited possibilities of life on a wounded planet.

Never has the responsibility for the survival of humanity and the future of the planet weighed as heavily on a single generation as on us who live today. And never can an individual have felt it so impossible to measure up to this responsibility, to influence or even see clearly the processes of which they is a part. The functioning of industrial mass

societies is based on the application of technologies of social organisation and transformation of nature which effectively direct people's behaviour independently of their individual convictions and choices. The individual can only really choose between cooperation – the acceptance of the logic of the system – and complete rejection. Exiting society, however, requires sacrifices such as very few are willing to make. The rest of us, as beneficiaries of this system, share in the aforementioned sins: the destruction of the natural (and cultural) conditions of a life worthy of man. This sinful behaviour can be unintentional from our part, the poor choice can be impersonal and automatic and the connection between act and consequences can be impenetrably complicated, but all this does not change the fact that the individual bears responsibility for his own actions and cannot henceforth pass it on to anyone else. We are responsible for what, strictly speaking, we "cannot help".

What should I do (me, personally), in the knowledge of my responsibility for the preservation of the conditions worthy of human life? Thoreau's axiomatic observation still holds true regarding the responsibility of civil disobedience: "It is not a man's duty, as a matter of course, to devote himself to the eradication of any, even the most enormous wrong; he may still properly have other concerns to engage him; but it is his duty at least, to wash his hands of it, and, if he gives it no thought longer, not to give it practically his support."[28] But how can we satisfy this requirement? How could I refuse cooperation with the sinful structures, if without them I cannot fulfil my basic duties, such as taking care of my descendants or even acquiring the knowledge needed for telling between right and wrong?

The thinkers of the Enlightenment tied man's ethical dignity to the freedom of conscience, to which he is in all circumstances entitled. They hoped that the conditions of an autonomous moral existence would be created for everyone by the scientific-technological achievements getting the upper hand over natural necessity and by a political system that eases social pressure to the point of being tolerable. Later developments did not meet their expectations. The new technologies in service of mass production and the organisational and communicative procedures enabling their application created a closed system. Its operation requires strict conformity from the members of society in all areas of life and renders the autonomy of the individual illusory. If possible, the total

[28] Henry David Thoreau: *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, p.10. Libertas Institute, Salt Lake City UT, 2014.

war against nature and the inordinate destruction of living beings has had even graver consequences.

Not for nothing does Hans Jonas describe the new situation by means of the changed role of technology. "... techne", he writes, "was a measured tribute to necessity, not the road to mankind's chosen role – a means with a finite nature of adequacy to well-defined proximate ends. Now, techne in the form of modern technology has turned into an infinite forward-thrust of the race, its most significant enterprise, in whose permanent, self-transcending advance to ever greater things the vocation of man tends to be seen, and whose success of maximal control over things and himself appears as the consummation of his destiny-" Jonas uses this to conclude that the sphere of ethics should be extended to activities previously considered neutral and purely instrumental from an ethical standpoint. "If the realm of making has invaded the space of essential action, then morality must invade the realm of making, from which it has formerly stayed aloof and must do in the form of public policy. Public policy has never had to deal before with issues of such inclusiveness and such lengths of anticipation. In fact, the changed nature of human action changes the very nature of politics."[29]

How does politics relate to this? The nature of technological systems makes it impossible for us as individuals to influence their operation. Insofar as the restoration of moral autonomy is not possible without retaking control over the technological (economic and communicative) systems, this has to happen through politics. A moral obligation has formed that can only be met by those involved in the management of public affairs, politics. This recognition, let us say, is not in the least new. However, the majority of modern authors have insisted on the separation of the spheres of ethics and politics. Jonas' arguments prove that this position has become untenable in the age of technical civilisation.

The decisive change has taken place in the relation of man and nature, however: this has turned from a purely technical issue into the gravest ethical problem. As it turns out, nature is not invulnerable and its treasures are not inexhaustible: they are not available to each new generation as hitherto. Therefore, technology and what it produces – in brief, what we are doing to nature – can no longer be indifferent in an ethical sense, but rather qualifies as good or bad. According to Jonas, however, the good and bad deeds related to this differ in several

[29] Hans Jonas: *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Ibid. p.9.

important respects from what we knew or thought we knew in regard to the ethical judgement of actions.

- Firstly, the *radius of action* of our changed acts: the difference in time and space between an act and its consequences has increased to an astonishing extent. Carbon dioxide released into the air now will affect the planet's climate in the following century as well. The product sold in a nearby shopping centre was produced in a distant land, possibly in inhuman conditions or with a technology that seriously pollutes the environment, but the buyer has no real insight into this anymore.

- Secondly, the authorship of acts has come into question: to what extent are we the cause of the unknown and unwilled consequences of our acts? To what extent are the leaders of a company responsible for an industrial catastrophe and to what extent the architect who planned the plant, the competent authority or even I myself, who buy the company's products?

- Thirdly, good intention and a healthy sense of ethics are no longer sufficient for correct behaviour, because we no longer experience the suffering or see the damage we have caused. At most, we can learn of it indirectly. To understand whether we have decided well or badly, we need to acquire increasingly complicated knowledge. In brief, knowledge has become for us an ethical responsibility!

These realisations have convinced ever more thinkers that a fundamental transformation of our way of life and the political-economic system, made unavoidable by the challenge of the global ecological crisis, cannot be justified with reference to the existing ethical consensus. Ethical considerations have demanded the re-examination of the prevalent value-system and the extension of the limits of the ethical universe: the application to man's nature-transforming activities of moral considerations and the consideration of the interests of our fellow living beings. Without this, we cannot justify the prohibition of the destruction of nature. For if we rely on the assertion of human interests, we can be sure that an aggressive minority – those who happen to live in the present – will appropriate their representation again and again and replace it with own momentary, seeming interests. (The dangers threatening humanity in the future always seem too remote.) Ecological politics invariably proves to be alien to the current system, because it follows goals that cannot be met under the present circumstances. It cannot expect its goals to be seen as good as long as it cannot justify the validity of the moral principles on which they are based. This is what the various schools of eco-ethics attempt.

2. Back, but where to?

For the first representatives of radical or deep ecology, it seemed obvious that the expansion of the range of actions falling under ethical judgment goes together with the denial of the special role of human beings. The rules of the republic of nature apply to our species just as much as to anyone else and the privilege of self-awareness, if anything, obliges homo sapiens to behave in accord with these laws.

The philosophers aiming to create the ideological basis for the *animal liberation* movement thoroughly scandalised their contemporaries when they dismissed as speciesist prejudice the traditional position of humanism, according to which the only inhabitant of the ethical universe is man.[30] But why should the capacity for rational thought entitle our species to privileges over other beings, whose other good qualities place them far above man, such as flying, climbing trees, running or the capacity to communicate with their fellows at long distance? From a neutral, i.e., inter-species standpoint, this approach can by no means be called ethical or just. It rather indicates that we are not superior to our fellow beings. That only man knows good and evil – i.e., only he possesses ethical self-awareness – does not excuse him from taking the interests of other beings into consideration. If we want to be consistent, claims Singer, we cannot present a single criterion of moral considerability that would apply to all humans and that would not thereby also apply to other beings besides us. (Ethical self-awareness itself is by no means the possession of every human: for instance, no-one has it in the first year of his/her life, i.e., it is not born with us. This is nevertheless no obstacle to including infants or the mentally disabled under ethical accountability.)

Whose wellbeing matters, therefore? Whose good should we will? The adherents of various schools of ethics offer varying answers to this question (also). If, as the utilitarians claim, the ethical good can be identified with the greatest happiness of the greatest number and evil with causing suffering, then it follows that we have to take into account the interests of all those capable of joy and suffering, according to their level of sentience. Those with a central nervous system are placed in front and even within this group the hierarchy is determined by the development of the brain functions enabling the experience of pleasure

[30] Peter Singer: *Animal Liberation. A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals.* Harper Collins, 1975.

and pain. For the question is not whether they can speak but whether they can suffer, as Peter Singer argues with reference to the position of the Enlightenment-era moral philosopher and advocate of animal rights, Jeremy Bentham.[31] The pathocentrists, such as Richard Ryder, naturally condemn the experiments conducted on live animals for the purpose of scientific research or finding a cure.[32] They drew attention to the terrible fate of the livestock languishing in the hell of industrial biomass-production. In their opinion, the wellbeing or health of man cannot justify the suffering inflicted upon other beings. To the common objection that suffering belongs to the order of nature and is therefore unavoidable, the thinkers defending animal wellbeing had an easy answer: it is not for us to interfere in the order of nature, but merely to at least not cause suffering to other beings intentionally in the service of our own human interests. We should at any rate to attempt to minimise the suffering caused to them.

Serious counter-arguments have also been raised by other extensionists against the argument from suffering, however. The bio-egalitarians, such as Kenneth Goodpaster, find the newly demarcated borders of the ethical universe just as arbitrary as the old ones, claiming that suffering is not necessarily bad and pleasure is not necessarily good and that what is good or bad in a given case depends on whether it serves the maintenance of life.[33] What is unequivocally good for living beings - regardless of whether they can experience joy or suffering – is life itself, in the interest of the maintenance and renewal of which they are capable of astonishing and inventive efforts. Their behaviour proves that what happens to them matters to them: things can have a good or bad outcome for them. Insofar as the chief characteristic of living systems is distinguishing between good and bad, then (according to the bioegalitarian point of view), the ethical law can be none other than respect of life. We, who are capable of recognising the will to life working in every living thing, should see it as our duty to act with this in mind. Such is one of Paul Taylor's final conclusions.[34] Taylor effectively proceeds according to the spirit of the Kantian ethics of duty, with the not inconsiderable difference that while Kant reserved the ability for autonomous action and the corresponding respect solely for beings

31 Peter Singer: *All Animals Are Equal!* Philosophical Exchange 1.5., 1974.

32 Richard Ryder: *Victims of Science: The Use of Animals in Research*. Davis-Poynter Ltd. 1975.

33 Kenneth Goodpaster: On Being Morally Considerable. *Journal of Philosophy* 75, 1978.

34 Paul Taylor: The ethics of respect for nature. *Environmental Ethics* 3(3), 1981.

capable of rational decisions, the bioegalitarians also list *autopoiesis*, the self-organisation characteristic of living systems, among the forms of autonomous behaviour. On this basis they extend to them too the validity of the categorical imperative: never consider living beings as means, but only as the ends of our decisions. Does what we do under the imperative of biological necessity, e.g., eating them, form an exception? The bioegalitarians are happy to start a debate on this issue. Their starting point is usually that a being with ethical self-awareness has good reason not to behave according to the pressure of biological necessity, but instead in the spirit of the unconditional respect of life.

Yet many claim that the bioegalitarian position leads to impossible conclusions. It is the environmentalists themselves who hurry to draw attention to this. For the adherents of the school called Land ethics by Aldo Leopold, it is obvious that for environmentally conscious thinkers, i.e., those who wish to preserve the unity, wholeness and beauty of life on Earth, the utmost ethical value cannot reside in living individuals, but only in their associations or the entirety of the living world itself.[35] For the condition of the continuation and flourishing of life on Earth is not the wellbeing or survival of individual organisms, but rather the endurance of the spontaneous order of coexistence. The coexistence of the species is determined by their place in the food chain, i.e., by how they devour each other. Life does not respect life but rather ceaselessly destroys and creates it. If the interests of the ecosystem come into conflict with those of a living being or even a species, the former has absolute priority, even if a multitude of individuals have to perish for it.[36] Bioegalitarians and ecocentrists are in heated debate on the issue of hunting, for instance. The former condemn it as a sinful passion, while the latter believe it to be not only part of man's natural behaviour; it is also indispensable from the perspective of maintaining the balance of the ecosystem. Where man has remained the only apex predator, there he has to intervene to, where necessary, thin or deplete an overgrown population. In contrast, where spontaneous natural self-correction is functioning, human measures in service of the wellbeing of individuals is forbidden. The decisions of the ethical committee of Yellowstone Park are a good example of this approach: they prohibit the rescue of a bison fallen into a ravine or the curing of the eye disease decimating the wild

[35] Aldo Leopold: Land Ethics. In: Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac.* Oxford University Press, 1949.

[36] Mark Sagoff: *Animal liberation and environmental ethics: bad marriage, quick divorce.* Osgoode Hall Law Journal 22.2. 1985.

goat population and even protect forest fires from the fire brigade, claiming that periodic fires are actively useful from the perspective of the renewal of the ecosystem.[37]

J. Baird Callicot took on the task of founding in a pragmatic spirit the environmental-ethics school that had developed following the initiative of Aldo Leopold.[38] Callicot's argumentation relates to the Humean tradition of moral psychology, according to which the development and mastery of ethical feelings serves the survival of society. The culturally inherited altruist patterns of behaviour force the individual to limit his freedom in the struggle for existence, for the benefit of his peers or the community. The ethical value of selfless behaviour is due to its evolutionary success: the community that does not pass down patterns of solidarity is not capable of survival and perishes sooner or later, together with the unsuccessful patterns of antisocial behaviour. (According to Konrad Lorenz and others, this is probably the fate awaiting our own civilisation as well.[39]) Biosocial environmental ethics extends this altruistic model to the communities of living beings to which man belongs as well, thus emphasising the mutual dependence of species. The advantage of the theory of Callicot and his colleagues is that it is based on the Darwinian theory of evolution: he concludes to natural and ethical behaviour from common explanatory principles. However, it is precisely this that is their position's weak point as well. According to Fritzell's paradox,[40] if man is truly seen as part of nature, then there is nothing to stop him behaving according to the amoral laws of natural necessity, since there is and can be no compassion or selfless giving among the various species. If, however, one maintains that he is a moral being and that his acts are determined by ethical considerations and not the laws of evolution, then one accepts the decisive significance of the difference that separates the inhabitants of the ethical universe from other living beings and their communities. Following Margaret Midgley, Callicot responds to this counter-argument with the theory of pluralistic community holism: why can we not view as a community a grouping in which beings possessing

[37] Holmes Rolston III: *Challenges in Environmental Ethics.* In Herbert Borman, Stephen Kellert eds: *Ecology, Economics, Ethics: The Broken Circle.* Yale University Press, New Haven 1991.

[38] J. Baird Callicot: The Conceptual Foundations of Land Ethic. In: J. Baird Callicot: *In Defense of the Land Ethic.* State University of New York Press, 1989.

[39] Konrad Lorenz: *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins.* Harcourt, New York, 1974.

[40] Quoted by J. Baird Callicot *Ibid.*

ethical self-awareness and moral feelings live together with beings that listen to their natural instincts, in close mutual dependence?

However, it is likely that such coexistence cannot be called a community. Luke Roelofs rightly warns that to call biocoenosis a community, is nothing other than twisting words.[41] The distinguishing characteristic of an ethical community is intentionality, a mutual commitment based on a conscious decision. In this sense, the coexistence of living beings is not a community; it is what it is. This should not prevent us from maintaining that our behaviour towards our fellow living beings is subject to ethical considerations, but then this conviction has to be proven, which has yet to occur.

3. The ethical value of nature. Ethics and evolution

It seems that one cannot conclude to the ethical significance of nature from the man-centred theories of modern moral philosophy without contradictions. Can one argue instead for the intrinsic ethical value, i.e., "goodness" of nature itself? At first sight this does not seem so difficult. Who would deny that photosynthesis is a good thing? The laws of life can only be good laws or vice versa: what else can be good and beautiful, if not the order of life? From Akhnaton's Hymn to the Sun, through Spinoza's Ethics to Holmes Rolston's environmental philosophy, humanity has always been aware of this connection: "The way the world is informs the way it ought to be. We always shape our values in significant measure in accord with our notion of the kind of universe that we live in, and this process drives our sense of duty."[42] We cannot imagine anything better and the reason we cannot is that we ourselves are the work of nature too. This order, the order of coming to be and passing away, is that of eternal change. If we have managed to understand some of it, it initiates us into the meaning of our own sufferings and mortality: one's decision is good if one's goals are in harmony with the processes maintaining the integrity, wholeness and beauty of the natural systems. This is still Land Ethics, only no longer on a pragmatic, but instead on a teleological basis.

Holmes Rolston, one of the founders of environmental ethics, raises another important argument in favour of the ethical value inherent in

[41] Luke Roelofs: There is No Biotic Community. *Environmental Philosophy* 8.2., 2011.
[42] Holmes Rolston *Ibid.*, p.95.

nature. He claims that those who think that man is the only being for whom living means evaluating circumstances are mistaken. In his opinion, every living system is thereby an axiological system as well, since the most fundamental activity of life is evaluation: distinguishing between good and bad options from the perspective of the survival and reproduction of the given organism: "...the genetic set is a normative set; it distinguishes between what is and what ought to be. ... Every organism has a good of its kind; it defends its own kind as a good kind... A moral agent deciding his or her behaviour ought to take account of the consequences for other evaluative systems."[43] He then extends this obligation to the natural systems themselves, with the claim that the order of coexistence ensures the survival of the associated species; therefore, one ought also to attribute ethical importance to the system itself. Rolston does not distinguish between vital interests and ethical interests; it seems that for him, ethics is nothing else than the superior development of the selective behaviour determining the connection between a living organism and its environment. According to this, the foundations of ethics should be sought in biology, primarily in biocoenology, the study of the coexistence of species, or in ecology. In Rolston's view, the source of ethical value is quite simply "there" in nature, before and independently of all evaluative actions. At one point he uses the example of the lights in a fridge: it is true that the light goes on if the door is opened, but it only goes on, because the source of the light, the bulb, was already there in the fridge.

How do those reply who stand poised to jump with Ockham's razor, to separate the will of the Creator (the "let it be") from the sinful earthly world corrupted by Evil (what is)? The aim to naturalise ethics is henceforth subject to strenuous criticism, since the majority of ethicists since David Hume have accepted that there is no state of affairs which can be termed good in every case and without qualification. Therefore, we cannot conclude from the facts to values (from the state of the world to the will of God; from the order of nature to man's duty). Few would probably dispute anymore that biological value and the interest in the survival of the species or of the ecosystem contain perspectives unavoidable for ethical consideration. But biocentrist ethics has failed to prove to those who shrink from the axiomatic recognition of nature's ethical self-value (and think that ethics cannot neglect the difference in class between biological and ethical value) how much and on what basis

[43] Ibid. pp.80-81.

their consideration would have direct ethical consequences. Benjamin Hale, for instance, argues that the question itself is not posed correctly by those who seek the source of ethical value in nature, because we term acts good and evil, not what endures them.[44] Nothing has any inherent ethical status that could be judged and ranked, stresses Hale. For we judge not the things of the world, but the motives of the actor. Judging is not some kind of account of the qualities of things, but a practical act; it is the way in which we participate in the affairs of the world. It follows from the universal nature of rationality that such deliberative thought must take into account everything that it is at all capable of comprehending of the world. Everything matters, therefore: the burden of proof lies with whoever claims that someone or something need not be considered during the deliberation. "The burden is on us – human animals with voices and minds – to approximate the morally binding rules and principles that are already in play in human – nonhuman relations. … Entities in the world deserves at least honest and deliberate consideration … by virtue of what we are, not by virtue of what they are."[45] It is not impossible that in eco-ethics it is in fact Hale's antinaturalist, deontological approach that leads to the most radical conclusions.

This argumentation nevertheless fails to satisfy the naturalists who claim inherent ethical value for nature. For even if they recognise that Hale has posed the question of ethical evaluation more clearly than them, they could still make the point that the question of the source of ethical value also acquits them of the accusation of a naturalistic fallacy. Even Hale admits that the laws placing us under ethical obligation are already in some way "in play" in the relation of man and nature. To what can we refer when we find the motives of an act good or bad, if not to the previous knowledge of the difference between good and evil and whence comes this knowledge if not from experience? In this centuries-old debate between the adherents of end- and duty-based ethics, the defenders of the inherent ethical value of nature find themselves on the side of the Thomists and can refer to the teleological view of human nature as mediation between human duty and natural order. This applies to the neo-Thomist representatives of the school of ecotheology, such as John Finnis or Michael Northcott, who aim to vindicate the relevance of the classical theological view of man and nature, as mediated by Aquinas (and

[44] Benjamin Hale: Moral Considerability – Deontological, not Metaphysical. *Ethics & the Environment* 16.2. 2011.

[45] Ibid. pp.46, 54.

preferably bring it into line with the sensibilities of their utilitarian contemporaries). "For Aquinas, every creature necessarily seeks its own good. The good is that form of life that we are best fitted to live. The evidence shows that most people most of the time find more happiness in sociability, marriage and the nurture of children than they do in buying and possessing material objects, but our culture has a range of hidden and overt persuaders which try to convince us otherwise... We need to exercise our reason and intuition... in ordering our lives and our societies to the good for us. However if the good for us is to live in conformity with our nature, with the objective moral order of nature in us and in the non-human world, then the moral ends both of our individual actions and of human communities must include within them reference beyond human life to the whole of the natural order whence we not only derive normative values about human life and the good, but also those biophysical attributes of nourishment and aesthetic beauty which are... essential elements of the human good."[46] Can this argumentation be maintained in isolation from its original metaphysical foundation? Rolston would no doubt respond that from this perspective it matters not whether a creating deity or natural necessity gave evolution its direction, for in both cases we need to find the measure of human behaviour in our nature and in harmony with nature. If not, we come into contradiction with ourselves.

The question is not quite so simple for lay ethics (but possibly not for the Judeo-Christian tradition either, given its millennia of grappling with the questions of chosenness and sin). As regards our nature, one will discover purposefulness in its historical changes and a common law in the diversity of personalities only if one is already convinced of the purposefulness of evolution and the goal of man (his *telos*). The same applies to the harmony between the two – human nature and the order of the world; everyday experience reveals the relation of the two to be much more ambivalent. It seems that the suppositions and opinions relating to the order of the world do not provide a sufficiently sure foothold for our practical activity. Before this leads us to despair, let us remember that the name of this torturous or uplifting uncertainty is freedom. The ecological turn in ethics does not necessarily entail a change in the theoretical conditions – including the lack of certainty – of the ethical evaluation of our acts. The change may only affect the range of actions that come under ethical consideration. If nature is a

[46] Michael Northcott: *The Environment and Christian Ethics.* Cambridge University Press, 1996. pp.247–248.

novelty in eco-ethics not as the source of ethical law but only as the object of acts that fall under ethical consideration, then evolution is still unlikely to be of any assistance in how to deal with nature. We may recall that it is exactly the independence achieved in this area that is usually celebrated as man's special evolutionary achievement. Does it change anything if, through our freely willed acts – or at least acts which we have to view as if we had performed them out of free will – our independence henceforth extends to the ability to interfere with the course of evolution itself and if this interference proves fatal?

In general, it can be said that the hitherto-presented arguments of environmental ethics, either the extensionist (pathocentric and biosocial) or the biocentrist (bioegalitarian and ecocentrist) schools that other beings are the source of categorical ethical obligations for man, are not entirely convincing. On the one hand, they are contradictory (which should we consider among the interests of the individual and the ecosystem?). On the other, they bypass the boundary dividing biological association from ethical community and, generally, nature's state of subjection to necessity from freedom (which is not a state), without convincing of the justification of their proceedings those who think we are ethical beings precisely because our behaviour enjoys a relative independence from natural necessity.

Albert Schweizer, whom in my opinion the eco-ethicists cite much more rarely than they should, rightly emphasises that it is not nature that teaches us to respect life but the conscience. Schweizer speaks directly of life's "terrible play", which remains a painful mystery for man, and of the self-doubt in the will towards life. "I can do nothing but hold to the fact that the will-to-live in me manifests itself as a will-to-live which desires to become one with other will-to-live. That is for me the light that shines in the darkness. The ignorance in which the world is wrapped has no existence for me, I have been saved from the world. I am thrown, indeed, by the reverence for life into an unrest such as the world does not know, but I obtain from it a blessedness which the world cannot give. If in the tender-heartedness produced by being different from the world another person and I help each other in understanding and pardoning, when otherwise will would torment will, the division of the will-to-live is at an end. If I save an insect from a puddle life has devoted itself to life, and the division of life against life is ended."[47]

[47] Albert Schweitzer: *The Ethic of Reverence for Life.* In *Civilization and Ethics,* p.246. Adam &Charles Black, London, 1946.

"I am different from the world." With homo sapiens a strange being appeared on the stage of the *theatrum mundi*, one who makes himself increasingly independent from natural necessities. If this capacity, commonly known as freedom, does not have its own measure (the laws of ethics) or if man does not accept this measure as binding on himself, then his seeming evolutionary success can turn into self-destruction. Since the mechanisms ensuring the self-regulation of life on Earth cannot sufficiently limit his expansion, man, if he behaves not as an ethical, but as a natural being, exactly thereby upsets the dynamic balance of the coexistence of living beings. This can lead to the collapse of the system. *Ethics, in this sense, is part of the self-regulation of the living world and the role of ecophilosophy is not to find the role of nature in the world of ethics, but rather the contrary: to clarify the role of ethics in the history of evolution.*[48]

Aldo Leopold attempted exactly this in his Land Ethics. His suggestion for the extension of the moral community, however – "...to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land"[49] – fails to account for the special existential situation of our species and attempts to make up for the insufficiency of ethical argumentation with ecological reasonings. While the behaviour of the other beings fits perfectly with the conditions of their existence and the laws of evolution ensure that it happen thus, man does not "know" how to act. He can experiment with various possibilities of living within the much broader framework of necessity, without the certainty of direct positive or negative feedback. We live in a terrible uncertainty: we alone have the possibility of erring, i.e., deliberating between good and evil.

The laws on the basis of which a being blessed with the special ability of freedom chooses between good and evil – the laws of ethics – play the same regulatory role in the life of society as the laws of nature play in evolutionary processes. The difference is that the moral law does not make its impact as a combination of constraints. The thinking subject *understands* its judgment, recognises its validity, admits its necessity and *aims* to live a life worthy of man, i.e., to determine the goal of his acts as the knower of good and evil, to use the words of the Book of Genesis. This too, however, is a law which destroys those who sin against it (not the individual, but the community), for we are free only in choosing our

[48] I argue for this in my book Oidipusz avagy a Természetes Ember (*Oedipus or Natural Man)*: Liget Műhely, 2015.

[49] Aldo Leopold: *Land Ethics.* In Leopold: *A Sand County Almanac,* p.239. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1949.

goals, not in whether we accept the jurisdiction of the moral law over our acts. Man is a moral being, since for him moral truth is a question of being and non-being. If he misses it, he perishes, just like the deer which fails to measure the width of the chasm before its legs correctly and falls into its depth.

There is therefore no question of the appearance of self-awareness creating a gap in the course of evolution and of man's freedom being a kind of anomaly in the life of nature, which makes the expansion of our species similar to that of a cancerous tumour, as claim the desperate nature-lovers. The fatal effect of technological civilisation on its environment represents merely the failure of a single spectacularly unsuccessful adaptive strategy. The human population, far exceeding the Earth's carrying capacity, with its resource-wasting way of life and brutal technological power, has, in the absence of ethical barriers, destroyed in a few generations the incredible wealth of Earth's lifeforms. (Our outlook is worsened by the fact that this strategy eliminated cultural diversity first, which was hitherto the chief source of the flexible adaptability that characterises the species. An unprecedented homogenisation took place; currently almost the entire human race is following the same unsustainable pattern.) The consequence, from the perspective of life on Earth, of man being "let loose", is merely one of the anomalies which appear in nature from time to time and have cataclysmic consequences: mass extinction of species, the transformation of the climate, etc. In the cases where the anomaly is caused by the way of life of a species, the resultant catastrophe which destroys the species and restores balance is itself the negative feedback. If homo sapiens is but one of the living species, then this must happen here too: the consequence of excessive human intervention is the quick extinction of the species. This possibility exists; its occurrence is increasingly likely, but by no means a necessity.

The question is not whether it matters to nature what we do with it. In nature the laws of generation and destruction are applied with majestic indifference; only man can call anything good, bad or neutral, because only man *names* those that exist: only he has a world – the world of language, i.e., of meaning.

To judge well, man has to have some measure of the good: he requires ethics. But he cannot hope for more from it than general principles whose contradictory nature is revealed in every taut situation. The "uncertainty" of his situation and the way in which someone responds to this situation distinguishes him not only from the other beings, but

from the answer of all other humans as well: this shows us the irrepeatable, irreplaceable and incomparable uniqueness of our personality. But conscience itself merely confronts us with the "terrifying limitlessness" (Schweitzer) of our responsibility and does not necessarily provide any direction regarding what we must do. To do well, i.e., to decide well, man must above all else acquire accurate self-knowledge and, for this, special abilities: virtues.

What do virtues have to do with nature? Potentially quite a lot, actually. When the forerunner and role model of all greens, Henry David Thoreau, moved to the shore of Walden Pond to spend his time alone far from civilisation in a hut built by himself, wandering, reflecting and observing nature and meanwhile live from what the earth was capable of providing without coercion or unnecessary effort, the protection of nature did not even occur to him – or that it should even need protection. The inhabitants of the nineteenth-century American small town surrounded by the wild indeed had no cause for such thoughts. "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived"[50], he writes. His main work, *Walden*, is about the search for the good life and draws Aristotelian conclusions: he convinces his reader that only they can find the meaning of life who has acquired the virtues needed for the search of the good. The adherents of environmental virtue-ethics rightly see in him their predecessor.

Their point of view could be held selfish by "true" environmental ethicists, since they do not intend to use their virtues for the protection of nature. Quite the reverse: they live in an intimate relation with nature so that they might acquire the virtues indispensable for happiness. What good does this do nature? Nothing less, one might reply, than if one were to attribute some kind of inherent ethical value to nature itself. When a vile act triggers our moral outrage, we do not necessarily take the time to consider whether it truly harms biodiversity or the right to life of the unnecessarily felled tree or the animal species brought to the edge of extinction. We simply feel disgust at the perpetrator and think "what kind of human being behaves like this?" The authors who revive the position of classical virtue-ethics, such as Thomas Hill Jr., measure goodness not through the effect on others of individual acts. Rather, they see it as an ability that either characterises one's personality as a

[50] Henry David Thoreau: *Walden or Life in the Woods*, p.68 Library of America.

whole or does not. "Learning humility requires learning to feel that something matters besides what will affect oneself and one's circle of associates. What leads a child to care about what happens to a lost hamster or a stray dog they will not see again is likely also to generate concern for a lost toy or a favourite tree where they used to live. Learning to value things for their own sake and to count what effects them important aside from their utility, is not the same as judging them to have some intuited objective property, but it is necessary to the development of humility and it seems likely to take place in experiences with nonsentient nature as well as with people and animals."[51]

According to this, the measure of correct behaviour is not to be acquired from nature, in contrast to the views of the early ecophilosophers, since the problem is caused exactly by our essential difference from other beings and not that in which we resemble them. As a consequence of this realisation, considerations arising from man's particular state of being are gaining an ever-larger role in the ethical reflections on the ecological crisis. There are strong reasons to believe that this is not a mere return to the speciesism previously condemned by eco-ethicists. One might even claim that the Western thought criticised for its human-centrism always had something other than man at its centre: the logical subject for the rationalists, the biological organism with its own abilities and needs for the empiricists and the concept of humanity in its own abstract universality for classical German philosophy. The possibility of a truly anthropocentric ethics arises perhaps only with the twentieth century thinkers – not without antecedents, of course – who finally did not seek man in the mirror, but recognised that he is standing next to them: he is the Other, who addressed us and is now waiting for our response.[52] Then, finally, the I is replaced at the centre by the *You*, to whose call – according to the ethics of personalism or responsive phenomenology – we try with our whole lives to answer.

[51] Thomas Hill Jr.: Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments. In: Philip Cafaro – Ronald Sandler eds.: *Environmental Virtue Ethics.* Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham (MD) 2005. p.54.

[52] This is the subject of my paper Is anthropocentric ethics anthropocentric? in the Oedipus-book.

4. Deep ecology and ecophenomenology

The founder and name-giver of the Deep Ecology movement, the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, aimed, in contrast to the majority of his peers, not to cast doubt over but to rethink man's privileged position: "...a life form has developed on Earth which is capable of understanding and appreciating its relations with all other life-forms and the Earth as a whole,"[53] he claims in his work explaining Ecosophy T, his own philosophical system. He holds that the capacity of understanding does not entitle us to dominion over other beings, but rather obliges to care about them. Man's constitutional particularity is that he is able to consciously take in the attempts of other living beings for self-realisation. He must therefore take some kind of responsibility for his behaviour towards them. "Human beings who wish to attain a maximum perspective in the comprehension of their cosmic condition can scarcely refrain from a proud feeling of genuine participation in something immensely greater than their individual and social career."[54]

Naess' most original recognitions relate to his critique on the static conception of the Self. Appealing to the lessons of the revolution in the theory of living systems (e.g., Bertalanffy, G. H. Mead, Maturana, Capra), he claims that the I is not something that exists in itself, independently of its peers, society or nature. It can only be realised in its relationships: a knot in the web of interactions. "Speaking of interaction between organisms and the milieu gives rise to the wrong associations, as an organism is interaction. Organisms and milieux are not two things..."[55] (The savannah belongs to the elephant as much as its trunk, claims Holmes Rolston as well.) The conscious self is realised in such interactions; its way of self-realisation is to identify with others. We underestimate ourselves, Naess warns his reader, when we seek to master and rule the world. We would incorporate it into ourselves if we could, instead of identifying ourselves with everything that awakens desire, respect and wonder in us. In this latter case we could discover the limitless broadness of our Self and the spiritual unity of the world, to which we ourselves also belong.[56] If we call the elimination of the Self-boundaries *advaita* (not-doubling) and the cosmic Self Atman, we

[53] Arne Naess: Ecosophy T: unity and diversity of life. In: Arne Naess: *Ecology, Community and Lifestyles.* Cambridge University Press, 1989. p.166.

[54] Ibid. p.165.

[55] Arne Naess: *From Ecology to Ecosophy.* Ibid.p.56.

[56] Arne Naess: *Self-realization,* ibid.

can recognise the Vedic sources of Naess' philosophy. And if we read it as an account of the human state, in the centre of which stands the openness of the Self to the world and self-understanding, then the influence of Martin Heidegger's approach to human existence becomes evident as well. As for the idea of the compassion and responsibility arising from the suffering and will to live of other beings, that is familiar directly from the writings of Albert Schweitzer. Naess opposes the legacy of the Early-Modern theory of knowledge that dulls and objectifies nature with the arguments of Gestalt philosophy: European science doubles the world. It places experience and the sensual qualities in the subjective sphere and recognises as real only the objects of cognition constructed according to the strict methodological precepts of mathematical logic and experimental physics. (He could of course here also refer to Edmund Husserl.)

Naess' transpersonal ecology drew enthusiastic followers, but also much criticism from his colleagues. They held him to account mostly for the return of anthropocentrism under the guise of the concept of identification. "Given this emphasis on the gestalt-experience of the human subject, it is difficult to see how the relational holistic ontology of deep ecology can avoid an anthropocentric bias. Human beings cannot escape the anthropocentric character of their relational experiences."[57] Others pointed out that if one makes nature the extension of the Self, then in the rush of identification one can easily forget its fundamental and insoluble otherness. A limitless Self can have no environment, since the world is not centred around it, but rather belongs, so to speak, to its being. And yet "...the deepest intuitions of deep ecologists are formed as much if not more from the direct experience of the mysterious and radical otherness of nature than from a transpersonal identification with it.",[58] as Leslie Paul Thiele reminds us.

How can man approach nature so that what is revealed in this relationship – the truth – is not the result of the appropriation and objectification of nature, but rather the result of preservative care, which is capable of maintaining in its own infinite otherness what it understands? But what else could be termed understanding if not our exceptional capacity to see beyond our own interests and biases and become the conscious and joyful admirers of the fantastic wealth of a more-than-human world? Naess' true intentions are no doubt directed

[57] Eric Katz: Against the Inevitability of Anthropocentrism. In: E. Katz – A. Light – D. Rothenberg eds.: *Beneath the Surface*, p.36. MIT Press, 2000.

[58] Leslie Paul Thiele: *Nature and Freedom. Environmental Ethics 17.2.* 1995. p.188.

towards the latter. Thiele, however, rightly points out that identification and self-realisation are perhaps not the most apt concepts for the expression of his aspirations. In any case, it is the Norwegian philosopher's indisputable achievement to have recognised that for ecophilosophy the relation between man and nature is fundamentally an ontological issue, not an ethical one: we need to rethink who or what man is and how he relates to nature.

Some adherents of ecology find an original answer to these questions in the writings of Martin Heidegger, despite – i.e., exactly because of – the fact that in his view man is not one intelligent animal among others and thinking is not coming to know, i.e., it is not a process executed by the intellect. Rather, it is man's mode of being. Anthropocentrism thus gains a new meaning: thinking is the "stage" (Heidegger is speaking of the clearing in the midst of being) where things open to the Dasein – to use the expression of his letter on humanism, they „acquire a voice".[59] Heidegger's efforts are directed against the subjectivisation of thought: language is not the property of man; it is the event of being. Man's destiny is to help the meaning of being to speak. The world uncovers itself by language, while the other existing things, being worldless or poor in world, merely live in it in the physical environment which form their existence's conditions of necessity.[60]

The characteristic of this strange mode of being, is that, continuously surpassing itself, it achieves realisation precisely in this self-transcendence: it „is" not; it „happens". „Does not every essential determination of man overreach him?", he asks in his study on Schelling. "Does man not exist in such a way that the more primordially he is himself, he is precisely not only and not primarily himself? ...man is experienced in what drives him beyond himself..."[61]

Insofar as, following Heidegger, one views being's acquisition of speech as man's ontological mission, the contradiction between human freedom and the natural limitations highlighted by the eco-ethicists disappears. "Freedom reveals itself as the "letting-be" of what is", Thiele

[59] Martin Heidegger: Letter on humanism. In: Martin Heidegger: *„...Poetically, Man Dwells...".* T-Twins–Pompeji, Budapest–Szeged, 1994. p.117.

[60] On whether or not and even how their "worldlessness" should be understood according to Heidegger, see Vajda Mihály: Heidegger és az állat kísértete (Heidegger and the Shadow of the Animal). In: Vajda Mihály: *Nem az örökkévalóságnak (No to Eternity).* Osiris–Gond, Budapest, 1996.

[61] Martin Heidegger: *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom.* p.163-164. The Ohio University Press, 1985.

quotes Heidegger from the *Essence of Truth*, which he explains thus: "... To be free in Heidegger's sense of the term means to free that which is other, to disclose the world in a way that preserves and safeguards its difference. (...) Use and predation in themselves are neither unwarranted nor illegitimate as long as we understand the origin of human freedom and dignity to lie not in the mastery and possession of beings, but in the witnessing of their Being."[62] Not for nothing did the moral obligation inherent in man's essential determination to be "the shepherd of being" attract those aiming to establish eco-ethics. Yet most of them still shrank from assuming intellectual kinship with the German philosopher tainted by Nazism, who, moreover, stood as far as possible from the views of the bioegalitarians who treat man as a natural being.[63] (Deep Ecology has already been descried by its opponents as anti-human and anti-progress and Murray Bookchin, the father of social ecology, condemns Naess himself for what he sees as views tending towards confused nature-mysticism.)

Heidegger was not the only classic of phenomenology, however, who had a serious impact on ecophilosophy. The authors in conflict with the dominant scientific worldview were inspired primarily by Husserl's program: the "return to things" (which, of course, they gladly interpreted as "return to nature"). The examination of direct experience free from metaphysical prejudices promised for them the demolition of the iron curtain between the two worlds of real but value-free facts and respectworthy but only subjectively valid values – and this without having to fall into the naturalistic fallacy often described by Anglo-Saxon philosophers. This phenomenological examination does not aim to conclude to value-preferences from experience. Rather, it sees the latter as one of the necessary preconditions of the former. Its starting point is that to even perceive objects, we necessarily have to perceive them *as some kind* of things. They become things in the context of a world already full of meaning and laden with values. No object exists without thought directed towards it, identifying the object and making distinctions, just as there is no thought not directed towards *something*. It is our direct and real experience that the two belong together. It is this that is hidden by the naïve objectivism of the scientific worldview: "Rather than risk contaminating the vaunted objectivity of its judgements with the alleged objectivity of value, Western thought

[62] Leslie Paul Thiele *Ibid.* pp.133-34. Thiele op.ibid. pp.182, 184.

[63] On this see e.g., Zimmermann: *Rethinking the Heidegger – Deep Ecology Relationship.* Environmental Ethics 15.2. 1983.

accepted a reality reduced to the quantifiable while consigning judgements of value and meaning to the outer darkness of the irrational, which respectable scholars could dismiss as unscientific, leaving questions of good and evil to prophets, poets and postmodernists," writes the Czech ecophilosopher Erazim Kohak.[64] Who took the fruit from the tree of knowledge became, according to Scripture, the knower of good and evil; this is the basis of all further knowledge. In one of the footnotes of his work An Understanding Heart, Kohak draws attention to the fact that it was not without reason that Goethe interpreted the words of John the Evangelist – In the beginning was the Word – thus: "In the beginning was the Deed." To say something is to act. The Word is a word that implies action and the final conclusion of constructive phenomenology is indeed that thought does not mirror reality but instead creates it: it creates the formations of knowledge in which we are capable of relating our experiences to a common world that can be shared with others. In this way, not only do thought and its object belong together, but in fact, reality is a direct province of thought. If this is so, then man is responsible for the world of knowledge as for his property. This responsibility would be contemporary man's authentic experience of nature, claims Kohak. His hope is that this will replace defeated nature, the experience of nature as pure raw material, which, however, was and has remained the sole reality for the technological civilisation moving towards its tragic fate.[65]

Man gathers experience: he is the author of what he experiences. This authorship, however, does not mean the empirical person for Husserl, either. The theoretical conditions (essential structure) of possible experiences at any time are determined by the network of intersubjective connections that form the living world. "Subjectivity means a network of subject relations",[66] Erazim Kohak explains, according to whom "Husserl's basic recognition is that subject experience is rendered intelligible by such a transcendental structure. It is experience constituted as an intelligible whole by purposive activity and, already as such, it has a structure independent of and prior to the preferences of a particular agent."[67] From the perspective of phenomenology, the

[64] Kohak: *An Understanding Heart.* In C. Brown, T.Toadvine eds: *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself.* p.22. SUNY Press, New York, 2003.

[65] Erazim Kohák: *Varieties of Ecological Experience.* Environmental Ethics 19.2. 1997.

[66] Erazim Kohák: *An Understanding Heart.* In C.Brown, T.Toadvine, eds: *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself,* p.26. SUNY Press, New York, 2003.

[67] *Ibid.* p.27.

old debate between the philosophers fighting for the inherent value of nature and those who insist on the subjectivity of value judgments is losing its meaning. Value is neither objective, nor subjective, since direct experience shows that the object to which a particular value is attributed forms a unity with the act of evaluation itself.

But on what basis do we evaluate? In his study *The Real and the Good*, Charles Brown claims to have discovered the possibility within Husserlian phenomenology of providing a rational foundation for a nature-based value theory. The difference between good and bad is just as real from a phenomenological perspective as any other quality that we experience. In contrast, the concepts of the valueless object and of value in itself are revealed to be pure abstractions. As for the intentions behind our values, they are proved not to be subjective and by no means incidental either, but rather intersubjectively grounded, since their motivation comes from the living world, which, according to Brown, means that their biological expedience vouches for their validity: "... good and evil does have an ontological justification: some things sustain life, others destroy it (...) ...life is a value for itself... (...) and death, too, is a part of the order of good life," as he quotes Kohak.[68] Brown sees the role of ecophenomenology as discovering how nature determines the structure of phenomenological experience. It would be hard to deny that this approach confuses the Husserlian conception of lifeworld with a suspiciously biological understanding of the living world and that it therefore, via a complicated phenomenological detour, arrives exactly at the starting point of deep ecology: that the order of the good life mirrors the order of nature.

5. Corporal contact. The Voice of the Earth.

However, "Today we no longer believe nature to be a continuous system of this kind; a fortiori we are far removed from thinking that the islets of "psychism" that here and there float over it are secretly connected to one another through the continuous ground of nature. We have then imposed upon us the task of understanding whether, and in what sense, what is not nature forms a "world," and first what a "world" is, and finally, if world there is, what can be the relations between the visible

[68] Charles Brown: The Real and the Good: Phenomenology and the Possibility of an Axiological Ratonality. In: Charles Brown – Ted Toadvine eds.: *Eco-Phenomenology.* SUNY Press, New York, 2003. p.13.

world and the invisible world. (...) ...it is necessary to re-examine the definition of the body as a pure object in order to understand how it can be our living bond with nature," opines Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[69] The struggle on two fronts by the great figure of French phenomenalism against naturalism and transcendentalism promised to be a particularly apt starting point for ecophenomenology. According to Ted Toadvine, "the difference between Merleau-Ponty's thought and classical phenomenology then lies in the fact that he situates the meaning-bestowing subject within the meaningful world itself (...) rather than succumbing to the anthropocentric temptation which situates the transcendental subject outside of the mundane world," but for him the material of the world is not the 'matter' of the physicist, nor the 'soul' of the psychologist, but instead the *life* of the body, at once perceiving and perceptible.[70] "The perceived world (like a painting) is the ensemble of my body's routes and not a multitude of spatio-temporal individuals" – in one of his notes on the unfinished main work, Merleau-Ponty expresses with emblematic conciseness the essence of this reality – which he calls the corporeality of the world – that is bodily, yet not physical and coming to be rather than established.[71]

Perhaps it was David Abram who first recognised the importance of the turn carried out by Merleau-Ponty from the perspective of ecophilosophy. "If this body is my very presence in the world, if it is the body alone that enables me to enter into relations with other presences, if without these eyes, this voice or these hands I would be unable to see, to taste and to touch things, or to be touched by them – if without this body, in other words, there would be no possibility of experience – then the body itself is the true subject of experience."[72] This body can however by no means be regarded as one object among others: my body is the place I occupy in the dialogue of living beings, i.e., beings reflecting on each other and the mode in which I perceive them and, in the encounter with them: myself. "To acknowledge that „I am this body" is not to reduce the mystery of my yearnings and fluid thoughts to a set of mechanisms, or my „self" to a determinate robot. Rather it is to affirm the uncanniness of this physical form. It is not to lock up awareness

[69] Maurice Merleau-Ponty: *The Visible and the Invisible,* p.27. Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1968.

[70] Ted Toadvine: Naturalizing Phenomenology. *Philosophy Today* 43. 1999. p.126.

[71] Maurice Merleau-Ponty *op.ibid.* p.247.

[72] David Abram: *The Spell of the Sensuous – Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World.* Vintage Books, New York, 1997. p.45.

within the density of a closed and bounded object, for as we shall see, the boundaries of the living body are open and indeterminate; more like membranes than barriers, they define a surface of metamorphosis and exchange."[73] The meaning of life is this mutual and universal sensitivity, resonance and desire-driven intertwining, which for Merleau-Ponty form "the flesh of the world". Abram explains this thus: "To touch the coarse skin of a tree is thus, at the same time, to experience one's own tactility, to feel oneself touched by the tree. (...) We can experience things – can touch, hear and taste things – only because, as bodies, we are ourselves included in the sensible field, and have our own textures, sounds and tastes. (...) We might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and that the world is perceiving itself through us."[74]

In language the sounds, music and thundering of an audible world reverberate. Man is not merely speaking of the world: the world speaks in his speech and the context of what it says is formed by the universal dialogue of the living. This is the main thought of Abram's book *The Spell of the Sensuous*. Through a multitude of tribal examples, he demonstrates the organic connection – deemed to be inseparable and perhaps truly so – between spoken word and deed, speech and landscape, upon which all magical practices are formed. He tracks how language gradually moves away from nature through the cultural history of literacy. In parallel, he introduces the process of separation of a spiritual universe maintained for concepts, numbers and immaterial divine beings. It is to this process that he traces the fatal alienation towards nature that characterises the human being of Western civilisation and which ecophilosophy is dedicated to reversing. "As long as humankind continues to use language strictly for our own ends, as if it belongs to our species alone, we will continue to find ourselves estranged from our actions (...) then surely our very words will continue to tie ourselves, our families and our nations into knots until we free our voice to return to the real world that supports it – until we allow it to respond the voice of the threatened rainforests, the whales, the rivers, the birds and indeed to speak for the living, untamed Earth which is its home."[75]

[73] *Ibid.* p.46.
[74] *Ibid.* p.68.
[75] David Abram: *Merlau-Ponty and the Voice of the Earth.* Environmental Ethics 10.2. 1988.

However, another important ecophenomenologist, Ted Toadvine, criticises Abram too for naturalising phenomenology and not without reason. Toadvine sees in Merleau-Ponty's views not the possibility of a new philosophy of nature, but the impossibility of any philosophy of nature. He finds the dominant aim of eco-ethics problematic to start with: the justification of the moral value of nature through kinship or continuity (i.e., on the basis that the ethical person is at once a natural being as well) and the viewing of morality as an evolutionary development, something which developed as the extension of a basic biological function – the evaluation of nature. Whether we objectify nature or personify it so as to attribute preferences to it, according to him we have already betrayed direct experience, which in its own uniqueness confronts us with something which we cannot without further ado replace with our general concepts, which contradicts our expectations and which is inexpressible by its essence.[76]

But can anything be said of what precedes this expression? According to the work quoted from Toadvine, experience is preceded by the lack of experience, a lack, moreover, that is painful and therefore has a coercive force: desire (which cannot be confused with biological necessity, for that always refers to a certain state of one's own body; desire, however, is fundamentally directed towards something else, precisely towards that which is unpredictable in advance). According to Toadvine, this desire is independent of all previous expectations. It cannot be motivated by the dialectic of either similarity or opposites; neither goal nor meaning can be assigned to it. He claims that this is why Merleau-Ponty uses the expressions of intertwining and interconnection instead of "dialogue" for the description of the connection between the sensing body and "the flesh of the world". Perhaps one should not even be speaking of bodily desire, but instead of the opposite: the embodiment of desire, since it is not the living

[76] László Tengelyi also draws attention to the fact that this falling short between the always perceived individual impression and the institutionalised meaning that serves its expression triggers, for Merleau-Ponty, the spontaneous or "wild" creation of meaning. "The connection between impression and expression is created by a meaning that arises and develops by itself. Experience of reality is therefore carried not so much by the first impression as by the meaning which is uncertainly delineated at first and which carries multiple possibilities in itself throughout. Hereafter it goes through repeated changes of form … We can confidently claim that the experience of reality always questions the ossified concepts in the name of a meaning newly emerged and developing by its own accord." László Tengelyi *Élettörténet és sorsesemény* (The Wild Region of Life-History) p.164, 166.

organism that desires but desire that "organises" the manifestations of life. Desire arises in us at the call of something that motivates the experience from the outside. The name of this something is for Merleau-Ponty – and Emmanuel Lévinas – the *il y a*, something which is without even being something. I would therefore translate it as *Being there* (referring to the apparent creation by the French philosophers of the counter-concept of the Heideggerian *Dasein*, being that is presence. The *il y a* refers to the impenetrable and undiscoverable depths of the forest surrounding the clearing in the midst of being.). Following Merleau-Ponty, Toadvine talks of the blind spot of experience, a border-experience, which refers to what is not revealed in experience, cannot be sensed and cannot be thought, but is no "absolute other" either, merely the other side of the sensible and thinkable. "But if we are seeking the fundamental basis of an ethical response, that basis cannot be worldly; it cannot be within the dialectic of culture and nature, or at the level of perception and thought. The basis for responsiveness is in the call of a more radical Outside. Nature in this radical sense is, if anything, the refusal of the hegemony of perception, language and thought…"(…) He therefore claims that "the attempt to ground such an ethics on a metaphysically homogeneous substratum be displaced by a phenomenology of the impossible – that is, by an attentiveness to the resistance of what cannot be thought or perceived, to the opacity of a wild being that circumscribes our concepts and precepts."[77]

How does this benefit eco-ethics, one could ask. Toadvine could respond that nature, once we recognise that it always and of necessity surpasses what we are capable of perceiving of it, can only be the object of our respectful wonder. Its incomprehensibility cautions us to a careful, sparing approach. We should also admit that the recognising subject cannot remain on the outside, that to understand is to participate – "as though we were the parts of a single body", as Merleau-Ponty writes in his work-notes – and the knowledge of original togetherness is a good basis for solidarity. Finally, if we take literally what Abram quotes from these work-notes, "…that the things have us, and that it is not we who have the things (…) That it is being that speaks within us and not we who speak of being,"[78] then man's moral mission as the voice of the Earth and the spokesperson of the living world seems quite obvious. What is certain is that "the phenomenology of the impossible" is an

[77] Ted Toadvine: The Primacy of Desire and Its Ecological Consequences. In: C. Brown – T. Toadvine eds.: *Ibid.* pp.149-50.

[78] David Abram *Ibid.* p.343.

effective counter-measure to any attempt to anthropomorphise nature, including those which claim to perceive the measure of good in nature (in the immeasurable).[79]

Merleau-Ponty himself was prevented by death from accounting for the ethical consequences of the ontological turn he had carried out. However, Emmanuel Lévinas, his contemporary, bases his own radical ethics of responsibility on many similar presuppositions. Here too, the starting point is the body, with the difference that for Lévinas, the basic bodily connection with the world is not sensing but feeding. Above all else, man lives from the world, makes it his own and identifies with it. He is only forced to differentiate between himself and others, when he is called by the Other. A new meaning is revealed in the speech of the Other. It resists all attempts to trace it back to the familiar. This is what Lévinas means by the statement that only another human being can be an absolute stranger. "The presence of the Other is equivalent to this calling into question of my joyous possession of the world. (...) To speak is to make the world common...", he writes in *Totality and Infinity*.[80] The Other is infinite, i.e., transcendent, because its identity cannot be the object of the dialogue which aims to grasp meaning (force things within limits), since its starting point is exactly the encounter of the two of us. I am speaking not of him but to him; I am seeking to understand not something but someone. "...the comprehension of being in general cannot dominate the relationship with the Other. The latter relationship

[79] The meaning of the quoted metaphor (being speaks through us) is, however, opaque. During his further inquiries, Toadvine develops the question: if the meaning that gains expression through language is not given to the world by the subject, but is rather achieved by life with the mediation of the sensing body and squeezed out of the pre-existing things, as claim the ecophilosophers who appeal to Merleau-Ponty, what then is the ontological status of the expression? What can be the motive of the process during which meaning is placed from one medium (nature) to the other (expression)? He concludes that this supposed dialogue between the living being and some kind of external world simply does not exist. The act of sensing cannot be deduced. "Sense is ontologically more primordial than either a sense-bestowing subject, or a sense-carrying substance, more basic than the poles of life and world themselves. It is the pure event from which the two orders of subject and object, or the two series of causality and intentionality split off. (...) ...sense is rather a happening, an event of radical creation, a vortex of self-reflective movement whose ongoing rupture throws off questioner and questioned, subject and object, body and thing, as so many by-products of its fission." (Ted Toadvine: *Singing the World in a New Key. Janus Head* 7.2. 2004, pp. 279-80.) Toadvine's final conclusion is that it is not only philosophy that begins with questioning and the wonder that leads to it, but nature as well.

[80] Emmanuel Lévinas: *Totality and Infinity,* pp.75-76. Martins Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague, 1979.

commands the first. (...) This „saying to the Other" – this relationship with the Other as interlocutor, this relation with an existent – precedes all ontology; it is the ultimate relation in Being."[81] Language, therefore, precedes awareness; the companion of necessity precedes the object. Lévinas explains the priority of speech over language thus in the section of his work titled "Language and Objectivity": "The word that designates things attest their apportionment between me and the others. (...) To thematize is to offer the world to the Other in speech. (...) This objectivity is correlative not of some trait in an isolated subject but of his relation with the Other."[82] The Other, however, does not merely speak to me, but addresses me: they has something to say, to which they expects a response, i.e., they wants something from me. Recognising the right to expect a response, i.e., accepting responsibility for the Other, is for Lévinas not the consequence of understanding but its precondition. He thus reaches the conclusion that our basic experience of reality has an ethical nature. In this encounter, man awakens to himself as the subject of responsibility towards the Other. The basic relation is not acquaintance but commitment. "To recognize the Other is to recognize a hunger. To recognize the Other is to give," claims Lévinas.[83] To understand someone is to understand the very much concrete things one has to do regarding him/her: "...my position as I consists in being able to respond to this essential destitution of the Other, finding resources for myself. The Other, who dominates me in his transcendence is thus the stranger, the widow and the orphan, to whom I am obligated."[84]

Eco-ethics has hardly started to explore the possibilities of Lévinas' theory of the absolute responsibility that grounds man's existence in this world. The reason for this is clear. The source of the claim for a response is, for Lévinas, personal connection, the asking, urgent Face of the Other turned towards us. Can we attribute a similar summoning power to the whole or particular parts of our experience of reality, to the joy/suffering of a living being or to the beauty or desolation of a landscape? Does the look of our fellow-beings contain inexhaustible meaning for us? In brief: does nature have a Face? The question is posed by Lévinas himself in an early writing. He leaves it unanswered, but hints that

[81] *Ibid.* pp.47-48.
[82] *Ibid.* p.209.
[83] *Ibid.* p.75.
[84] *Ibid.* p.215.

perhaps art does just this: it gives things a face.[85] László Tengelyi believed Lévinas' attempt to absolutise the responsibility principle to be premature, because „it can hardly be taken as self-evident that the silent challenge which every experience of reality poses us could in every case be interpreted as a claim for a response, which gives us something to answer".[86] In his opinion, in the majority of cases, we would seek in vain for the manifestation to us of an alien meaning that awaits a response behind the raw facts of experience.

Lévinas appeals to Martin Buber. "Although Buber accords a privileged status to the purely intersubjective aspects of the I – Thou relation the reciprocity of which may be expressed in language, the meaning is also construed as a relation with God as well as with things. For we can behave towards God, too, as if we were called, and the tree, too, instead of being of use to me or dissolving into a series of phenomenal appearances, can confront me in person, speak to me and elicit an answer."[87] As an example for such a personal answer, he again gives the work of art, which is brought to life by the non-ethical commitment to the object. "Man's response is a formative vision," he writes and calls it, with Buber's words, „a formative fidelity dedicated to what is unknown and which collaborates with the latter; fidelity is not devoted to the phenomenon but to the inaccessible being with whom we are in communication." (...) According to Buber, this communication is perception itself, which is more real than the perceiving subject or the perceived object themselves. "My perceptions are *acts in the natural order*".[88]

In this work, Lévinas develops the foundation of his own ethical worldview point by point with reference to the thoughts of Buber. He finds acceptable the explanation that the "Thou-radiation" is imposed on the personal relations between man and the non-human as well, i.e., "...the relation between humans – as soon as the Thou has a human face – has a privileged status and even *conditions* all other relations..."[89] Is not the result of all this that for a being who is the creation of a

[85] „Can things take on a face? Is not art and activity that lends face to things? Does not the facade of a house regard us? The analysis thus far does not suffice for an answer." Emmanuel Lévinas: *Is Ontology Fundamental?* In Adrian T. Peperzak et al eds: Emmanuel Lévinas: *Basic Philosophical Writings,* p. 10. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996.

[86] László Tengelyi *Ibid.* p. 168.

[87] Emmanuel Lévinas: *Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge.* The Levinas Reader, p.170. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1989.

[88] *Ibid.* p.70-71.

[89] *Ibid.* p.71.

fundamentally ethical relation connected to the Other and whose sensibility belongs at the same time to the order of nature (in Lévinas' words: *an event of being*), the silent call of nature can also contain a claim to a response which gives him/her something to answer? Simply put, can it be a source of obligations?[90]

However, though the urge to respond, recognised in the look of the Other and entrapping us, can be a motive from outside the ethics that grounds moral acts, our answer can nevertheless only be justified by its correspondence to a law and by the existence of such a law, according to which the various answer-options can be measured. My answer requires justification, because it does not belong to the two of us only: there are always Others affected who are present in the situation. Their claim for a response relativises the absolute justification of the Other's claim: "do not kill!" Or even: "give!" (Should I not kill you even if I can save Him/Her/Them by doing so? Should I give it to you – i.e., deny it to others?) But can one compare alien claims that are incomparable by their essence? Is it not rather the case that, as claimed by Bernard Waldenfels, the pioneer of responsive ethics, "when we subject the alien claim to a general law and thereby make equal that which is not, justice will always contain an aspect of injustice"?[91]

Eco-ethics has radically expanded the circle of Others who appear with a claim to a response and demand just treatment, thus increasing to breaking point the tension between law and the necessity to answer, between measurable and immeasurable. Following Lévinas, it is hard to exclude our non-human fellow beings from the group of those who

[90] Christian Diehm, among others, draws similar conclusions in his study *Natural Disasters*, though through different reasoning. What he appeals to is that though Lévinas links the ethical connection to Speaking, what addresses one in it is the Other's vulnerability. In so far as the basic principle of ethics is, for Lévinas, caring for others' suffering, then in a vulnerable world full of suffering beings we cannot, in the spirit of Lévinas, exclude non-human beings from the circle of those whose suffering is a source of an unconditional ethical obligation. Nonetheless, Diehm's reasoning is, in my opinion, resonant rather of Jeremy Bentham: "The question is not: can they reason? Nor: can they talk? But: can they suffer?" If it were this easy, we could have settled for the utilitarian reasoning and all the further efforts made for the foundations of eco-ethics would have been superfluous.

[91] Bernard Waldenfels: *Responsive Phenomenology of the Alien*. Gond 20. 16.o. 1996. In the same place László Tengelyi justly points out that "Levinas is right; the alien claim for a response imposes a responsibility on us even if its justification remains questionable. For this, however, we must add, along with Waldenfels, that the responsibility to nature justly poses a challenge to the law of order, but this challenge is by no means indispensable for the responding actor". (László Tengelyi: *Törvény és feleletkényszer (Law and the Compulsion to Answer.* Ibid. p.38.)

justly claim a response from us. For the starting point of this radical ethics of responsibility is the event of being addressed, which precedes all objectification. We cannot therefore previously pose the usual question as to who they are – or more precisely, what: things or persons –, we cannot thematise their ethical status or tie it to biological criteria ("let them be bipeds without fur"), for instance. But then how can we know whether who or what begs for our mercy is appealing to our duty rightfully or wrongly?

Joe Larios, the author of a recently appeared study, offers a way out in sophisticated fashion for man fleeing from his responsibility, only to immediately close it off. He reminds us that, according to Lévinas, I can tell from the Face of the Other not only their mortality and vulnerability, but also his/her right to hold me accountable. If they can judge me, they must possess judgement themselves. This is usually taken to mean that in the moral sense the Other can only be another human being, i.e., that an eco-ethics is impossible. Larios, however, argues that other higher vertebrate animals besides us also have this capacity. He points to instances where their behaviour indicates individual decisions, i.e., intentionality, and, moreover, intentionality based on the recognition of the interests of Others. Would they therefore be capable of what Waldenfels, in his above-quoted lecture, called the criterion of a moral act: "are they capable of not starting with themselves"? Many take this to be self-evident in the case of a beloved or long-known animal – between a dog and his master, say. How is this possible and why do we not perceive this personalness in the case of other living beings? Larios answers that we attune ourselves over time to our pet and that this makes it possible to notice their Face turned towards us, in spite of the biological distance: the intentionality in their behaviour, the reciprocity in our relationship. Not incidentally, we can create eye-contact with them. (And we could with our livestock doomed to a life of suffering, as well. Why would we avoid the gaze of a cow or pig being dragged to the slaughterhouse if they have no Face? If their gaze contained only instinctive protest and not the forbidding command that addresses us?) But what if it is only the same distance that prevents us from recognising the Face of a stag beetle or an oak forest? Is it possible that the ability required for the creation of a personal, i.e., ethical, relationship is missing not from them but *from us*?[92]

[92] Joe Larios: *Levinas and the Primacy of the Human.* Ethics & The Environment 24.2. 2019.

Behold, the main results of the experiment of personalist eco-ethics: justified uncertainty regarding the boundaries of the ethical universe on the one hand and the recognition of the unavoidable injustice within the nature of justice on the other. Is this a poor result at the end of an arduous journey? Whoever expects certainty and a clear direction from ethics, is trying to shrug off the burden of personal responsibility. Our responsibility-centred authors hardly offer any justification for this.

What can I hope for *(from politics)*?

1. What do the Greens want?

They are seeking forms of social coexistence suitable for the patient remedying of the terrible consequences of the Pyrrhic victory over nature and to reconcile with each other the people ready to jump at each other's throats for the means of survival.

This section will not treat of politics. I previously sought to provide an account of the crisis of industrial society from the perspective of a critique based on ecological insights. I presented the worldview of ecology from the reverse, as I think is right. For social movements tend to develop in opposition to something; not for abstract goals, but in the defence of very much concrete interests. They do not demand something previously non-existent, but rather act in the conviction that they are merely trying to restore the normal order of things. Therefore, if we wish to understand their motives, we most first of all see what they are defending and against what.

Well, their decisive argument is the scent of freshly cut hay and of linden trees. Birdsong. It cannot come to pass that we should have to live without these. It must not happen. However, we are at the point that many no longer understand it and even more misunderstand it. Yet I am speaking not of the defence of nature, but of something, the lack of which would destroy my own life. The Greens started to organise themselves when their conception of the good human life came under serious threat. One simply could not occupy oneself with anything else. The galvanising force of the sense of threat and of spontaneous dissatisfaction were, however, insufficient in themselves. Sooner or later, they also had to point out the way of warding off the danger they sensed in the world.

The more comprehensive the critique, the sooner this need arises. This is a dangerous moment in movements' lives. The temptation is great to limit their program to the aversion of the bad and to identifying the means necessary for this. István Bibó, in his study *The Meaning of European Social Development*, rightly attributed the failure of the socialist experiments to a lack of realistic notions about the desirable state of society. Instead, they placed the emphasis on the "revolutionary" means of seizing power. The improperly thought-through utopias about the abolition of private property and full equality led, together with the cult of revolutionary violence, to twisted, bloody dictatorships worldwide. The social reformers, on the other hand, had to content themselves with achievements that served to bolster capitalism instead of overthrowing it. Let us draw from this the conclusion that there has to be something between a systematic critique of society and a strategy aimed at seizing power, on which depends the relevance of a given political worldview: what kind of world would they actually like to live in? Let us call this the goal of the given movement and not confuse it for a moment with the political means used to achieve it. It is my conviction, however, that determining these goals is not primarily a theoretical question to be answered in the depths of a library. The goodness of the chosen procedures and goals are justified primarily by having been tried and tested and proven themselves.

Perhaps we can state as a central thesis that the adherents of an ecological (vulgarly: green) worldview want to maintain the rich diversity and variability– ability to change – of lifeforms in every case and, where necessary, to restore it, in society as well as in nature. It follows from the principle of diversity that they can want many different things under differing historical circumstances. It is not necessary for them to think the same about the good life and even less to demand such concepts, apart from a few basic principles, from others. The consequence of the defence of diversity is nevertheless not the contingency of possible good goals. For the rich diversity of lifeforms is not due in either society or nature to the independence of optional variants, but precisely to the ordered nature of their coexistence. The knowledge of the relations sets limits to this relativism. The ecological movements deny the right to existence of practices that destroy diversity and they protest against violent interventions against the spontaneous order of coexistence. The recognition that these can be eliminated only through systemic change gives their conviction a decidedly political character.

What, therefore, do the Greens want?

1. (the restoration of the relationship of man and nature!) The greens are occasionally asked what they prioritise: the interests of nature or man. The answer is awaited with suspicion. If they side with nature, they hate man and are traitors against humanism. If they recognise the priority of human interests, then they have said nothing new. In reality the question itself is meaningless. Even at the level of everyday conversation, ecology means the search for harmony between the two inseparable interests – or, one could say, man's two kinds of interests. The nature-centred approach of ecological politics originates from the recognition that in our age the survival of every good thing has come under threat from our ever more determined and inventive destruction of the natural requirements of an existence worthy of man. The unavoidable starting point and distinctive characteristic of the ecological movements is the defence of the unity, integrity and beauty of living systems, as Aldo Leopold put it, because their destruction is today the greatest threat humanity faces. Everything else is connected to this in one way or another: our increasing vulnerability to technological systems, the spread of violence, the unrestrained poverty on the one side and the unprecedented concentration of wealth and power on the other.

The coexistence of civilisation and nature, like every coexistence, is an endless succession of conflicts, in which any solution can only be temporary and a good solution can only be based on the mutual consideration of interests and sharing. Such compromises are contained by

– various formulas of sustainability to ensure the gentle use of natural resources and sinks in knowledge of their finiteness and to prohibit their use beyond the limit of their capacity to renew;

– the measures, quotas, international treaties (regarding e.g., greenhouse gases, plastics and so-called plant protection products), handling specifications (e.g., for radioactive waste, sewage, etc.) and recycling procedures limiting or prohibiting emissions that harm the environment;

– (overdue) measures to protect living beings from disturbance, which give a chance of survival to the remnant of life on Earth, which has suffered irreparable damage regarding the number and genetic diversity of species and individuals;

– the application of the precautionary principle to the intervention into natural systems as a general rule, in the knowledge that the complexity of these systems prevents us from knowing all the consequences of our actions, thus requiring us to proceed with the greatest caution.

If, in regard to man and nature, the Greens only demanded the minimum of what humanity must definitely and urgently do to prevent a civilisational catastrophe, according to the majority they are already demanding too much. They must therefore accept that they have but two choices: radicalism and insignificance.

2. *(not more, but better – an economical economy!)* When we wish to translate the goals regarding the protection of nature to the language of human acts and agendas, according to the current dominant way of thinking, we find ourselves in the field of economy, in the broad sense of the word. However, economic considerations demand exactly that the relationship between man and nature not be seen as a purely economic issue, because at its core it never was and never can be one. Our much-mentioned separation from nature effectively means that we no longer notice the irreparable loss we have caused ourselves in the most basic dimension of our being. According to Ernst F. Schumacher, we are practicing a false double standard of accounting; we record as gains the income derived from consuming our natural capital.[93]

The main factors of the separation or alienation are, according to Thomas Princen: automatic work, marketified conditions, mass distance transportation (which makes man rootless), overdriven urbanisation, electronic communication (the loss of physical connection with everything natural), formal education and finally – the existence of zoos. He claims that these are all consequences of a "mining economy"; the competition is for the exhaustion of resources instead of their increase. The problem with this is that the purpose of husbandry has been reversed: consumption is viewed as production, namely as what we remove and use up of nature and not what we add to it. For mining (removing) economy views labour as a technical necessity to be progressively phased out, as an unfortunate deviation from the ideal state, in which the ripe fruit falls into our mouth of its own accord. According to Princen, the first condition of the realisation of an economical economy in the original sense of the word – i.e., an economy that saves on resources – would be to place the emphasis from the end product of labour to the process of its production, from the breadwinning "occupation" to the creative activity. The main goal would no longer be the satisfaction (and generation) of so-called material needs, but rather the realisation of a truly human striving towards a meaningful

[93] Ernst F. Schumacher: *Small is Beautiful: a Study of Economics as if People Mattered.* Blond & Briggs, London, 1973.

life, which would make the need to act, create and care for others irremovable from us.[94]

The development of civilisations, aside from brief transitional periods (by which I am referring primarily to the periods of restoration following wars), does not involve the significant increase of the mass of goods per capita. Even so, population growth and the exhaustion of natural resources has still led more than once to collapse, desperate wars for dwindling resources or mass emigration.[95] A global civilisation and the inhabitants of an overpopulated planet must today also face the uncomfortable fact that they have nowhere to run from the consequences of the destruction they have wrought.

There are quite simply no rational arguments for maintaining the pursuit of growth. Man is not satisfied by the increase in size or quantity of the things he likes; rather, it arouses confusion or disgust. Nor is he made happy by acquiring them too easily. What he holds good is if the measure of the given thing fits its nature, be it the sweetness of a cake, the size of a city or the number of people in a group. If there is such a measure, then the good steward or the clever businessman has to know not how to increase what they have but how much and how big is just enough. This is how it was while economic performance was measured by material indicators. The pursuit of growth began when the value of economic performance began to be measured and compared with formal, abstract and unified index numbers.

Economic globalisation has brought with it a fatal turn of events in this process: the initiative slipped from the hands of the participants of the real economy into the hands of the creditors and financial investors. Their decisions and theirs alone are driven by a single motive: whether their investments will yield a return, without regard to anything else. There is no room here for personal considerations anyway, since the banks and portfolio investors are managing the money of people who perceive nothing out of the whole process apart from the rate of their shares. The decisions of the management therefore have to be made primarily with them in mind. And it is in fact difficult to increase the profit realised in the process of reproduction without an increase in the volume of production.

[94] Thomas Princen: *Treading Softly: Paths to an Ecological Order.* The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2010.

[95] Carl N. McDaniel – John Gowdy: *Paradise for Sale. A Parable of Nature.* The University of California Press, 2000.

Incidentally, the actors of the real economy have many interests which in certain cases run counter to those of the "hot money" that enforces revenue growth at any cost. Thus, as workers, their interest is primarily in job security and good work conditions and, as consumers, in the durability and good quality of the product. As for the traditional businessperson using his/her own capital and abilities for his/her enterprise, they is very much aware that there is an optimal business size and volume of production that it is inadvisable to overstep. The explanation for the pursuit of growth cannot lie, therefore, in some kind of economic rationality, but in an anomaly, namely that the creditor – who stands outside the process of reproduction, strictly speaking – forces his/her interests on the others. This is now much more of an obstacle than an aid for the prevailing of rational developmental goals and interests from the perspective of the system as a whole. It has been possible since the local authorities lost control over their markets and started competing with each other for the good graces of the investors and creditors. The growth indicators used are in essence the indicators of the operation of a closed, selfish system. They do not show the real benefit or harm of the economy, the effect on society and the natural environment.

3. *(free choice of technology!)* The restoration of the integrity of nature and our desire to live a meaningful life point, it seems, in the same direction: they demand the re-examination of the motives of husbandry. The classical principle of "man is the measure of all things" is irreconcilable with the principle of "profit is the measure of all things". Wastefulness of resources does not lead to the improvement of the quality of human life, because the good life is not one filled with the mass production and consumption of goods, but with something else that differs for each person. But we can only make a free decision about what would serve our happiness if we are not hindered in doing so by social constraints which we cannot avoid, independently of whether the power constraining us lies in an economic, legal or religious institution. (We can speak of freedom only in the case of human social contact. As natural beings we are not free, i.e., we can gain independence from natural necessity only in such measure as is made possible by our social-cultural conditions.)

For this process to occur, we need above all to reclaim the freedom of choosing technology, as Ivan Illich, Hans Jonas and others warned their contemporaries in the middle of the last century. The compulsion to choose the most effective technology has prevented the participants

in the capitalist economic competition ever since from favouring a better solution from a creative, healthy, environmentally friendly, safe or any other perspective. It shepherds them towards the use of technologies that replace man rather than lighten his work, with no regard to social consequences, moral considerations or anything else. According to Ernst Schumacher, this will remain thus as long as the logic of the economic system compels the participants to increase production. He recommends the opposite, the decrease of production, in the interest of work done with greater care and an increase in quality and jobs. "As Gandhi said, the poor of the world cannot be helped by mass production, only by production by the masses. The system of mass production, based on sophisticated, highly capital-intensive, high energy input dependent, and human labour-saving technology, presupposes that you are already rich, for a great deal of capital investment is needed to establish one single workplace. The system of production by the masses mobilises the priceless resources which are possessed by all human beings, their clever brains and skilful hands, and supports them with first-class tools. The technology of mass production is inherently violent, ecologically damaging, self-defeating in terms of non-renewable resources, and stultifying for the human person. The technology of production by the masses, making use of the best of modern knowledge and experience, is conducive to decentralisation, compatible with the laws of ecology, gentle in its use of scarce resources, and designed to serve the human person instead of making him the servant of machines."[96]

4. *(free the power of imagination!)* People can find many worthy reasons for protecting their natural and built environment and demanding fair treatment for their fellow beings or a healthier way of life for themselves. The distinguishing feature of the ecological worldview is that its adherents do all this out of a comprehensive conviction they have formed of the good life. They recognise the connection between the self-contained operation of the technological-economic system broken loose from any social interests or control and the destruction of the fundamental resources needed for life, between joyless waste and the destitution of millions, between the collapse of local cultures and the population explosion, between security of life and the spread of violence and between joyless work and the amassing of material goods. Honestly, these connections are quite obvious. The chief

[96] Ernst F. Schumacher: *Small is Beautiful: a Study of Economics as if People Mattered*, p.106. Harper&Row, New York, 1975.

obstacle to their recognition is not ignorance, but a lack of power of imagination and self-confidence. The majority of people are incapable of imagining any other sort of life. They experience their vulnerability in all areas of life, so they think that their lives would collapse and their living and security would be endangered if they tried to follow any path other than the one assigned them by the ruling institutions. They attempt it only if they have an idea of the life they would like to live and hope that it can be realised.

Therefore, the most important ecological goal – which includes all the others – is the creation of a more joyful, more fulfilling way of life. It is only with reference to this that we can claim that we are striving not against something, but towards the achievement of something positive.

5. *(freedom from plenty!)* Everyone, if they thinks not of humanity, but only themselves, knows on what their happiness depends.

– It primarily depends on others, on things which we cannot acquire from them with our power or wealth, things which they can only gift us with freely. Above all, therefore, we desire the love, appreciation, respect and care of our fellows and need substantial, strengthening relationships. Let us call this a need for a community.

– But we cannot be happy without good work. Our self-identity and self-esteem are inseparably connected with seeing the value of our work, with using and developing our abilities through it and with creating something appreciated by others as well.

– We need the knowledge requisite for communicating with each other and holding our own in our various social roles. We need education so we can value and enjoy what is beautiful and for differentiating between good and evil and important and unimportant; for arguing for our truth. (We would need a great deal of knowledge, yet our heads are filled with a great amount of worthless information from early childhood.)

– For social institutions that ensure that we do not have to fear, not even from strangers or our enemies. Living in security and receiving proper treatment and assistance from our fellow-humans, acquaintances and strangers alike, is a basic need. Let us call it the need for social security.

– The maintenance and restoration of our health is closely linked to the above, but primarily to treating ourselves well. Most of our issues arising from treating ourselves badly. Needless to say, all kinds of social necessities, fear and lack of love play a role here as well.

- Last but not least, we cannot live a good life in an ugly, unhealthy environment. Even those unaware of this suffer from the lack of an environment befitting their nature and from noise, light and air pollution: their senses are being dulled, their capacities are declining and their sense of wellbeing is decreasing.

I am scarcely wrong in supposing that for most people these constitute the indispensable conditions of life. None of them are necessarily connected with the multiplication of material goods and services or their circulation on the market. We experience the opposite: when we choose from the price catalogue of consumerist "wellbeing" (each according to the measure of his/her solvency of demand), we sacrifice the opportunity to choose something outside of what the system based on prodigality and its perpetual increase has to offer: meaningful work, good company, health and a safe social or whole and diverse natural environment. This is unfortunately not helped by sorting our ever-multiplying waste, buying products with an environmentally friendly sticker or taking part in a self-awareness training in the meantime. To be happy, we would first need to free ourselves from the illusion of plenty, which actually makes our lives increasingly impoverished, and from the compulsion to grow, which only increases our vulnerability.

(Voluntary self-restraint??) I can imagine few things more suitable for discrediting Green goals and the ecological movement than the principle of self-restraint. The ecological movement follows goals that it holds to be good precisely because they make life better and more beautiful, i.e., they fulfil it instead of restraining it. They would like to limit the destruction of the resources needed for life and their dependence from technological-economic necessities. It is more than misleading to label the fight against the application and endurance of coercion as self-restraint, for at most we can talk of the restriction of the restriction of freedom. Refraining from meaningless waste is not renunciation and on no account loss. True, the Greens are full of ideas for how to ensure the material conditions of our existence with significantly more simple means (regarding nutrition, heating, housing, hygiene, transport, etc.), but simplicity is not for them a goal in itself. They believe that this would allow people to devote much more time and energy to solving the more complicated, interesting and, let's face it, important problems of life. The avoidance of unnecessary complications, known as voluntary simplicity, is therefore not renunciation, just as sensible thrift is not either. Self-restraint would be the renunciation of something good.

Whoever mentions ecological self-restraint merely reveals thereby that at the bottom of his/her heart, they holds good to be bad and that they would prefer what they must sadly now call bad. In contrast, the basis of the ecological worldview is the conviction that good is truly good and bad is really bad. The struggle against what is bad requires no self-restraint from us. Quite the contrary: it liberates. Whoever does not feel this should not worry about it and, above all, should not attempt to convince others of it.

2. … and how can they achieve it?

Let us have no illusions: the glaciers are melting, the drinking water is being polluted, debt is mounting, jobs are decreasing and the number of hungry, uneducated, ill, hurt and therefore desperate people is increasing worldwide – and it is all for nothing, for the overwhelming majority maintains its steadfast belief in the validity of the common explanatory theories, i.e., in the necessity of the existing social order. They view the increasingly alarming disorder around them as a mere technical mishap; inconvenient obstacles on the difficult road towards the established good goals. The plentiful choice of means is guaranteed by the increasingly dazzling development of science and technology and for their fair distribution no better solution is known than a combination of some sort of free competition and the welfare state.

This belief is based on three preconceptions: that material plenty can be increased ad infinitum, that the democratic state and the operation of the market economy correspond to their original purpose and finally – and above all – that plentiful choice and the democratic institutions make it possible for everyone to decide what goals to follow; reaching them depends primarily on the individual. As regards the illusion of infinite growth, its refutation is today quite widely known. We have encountered it within this book; the perspectives of the ecological critique of the market economy were also examined. Now we take a closer look at the basic principle of free society, the autonomy of the individual – or what is meant by it; that is, independent choice. The conclusions will be of use in clarifying the relation of the Greens to democracy. We seek the political conditions, the fulfilment of which will enable the realisation of the green goals outlined in the previous chapter.

We must return to the point that living beings are able to give a sovereign answer to the challenge of nature from a system-based

approach, because they are capable of changing their inner state in response to the external challenges they face. In the case of beings capable of symbolic communication, these internal changes take place primarily in response to contact with their peers, "... through the formation of interdependencies among the members of the population", claims Amos Hawley, who formulated the human ecological paradigm in the mid-twentieth century.[97] Their autonomy is therefore no independence from others, but rather a mode of mutual dependence, the only mode worthy of man. It is a state in which we do not live separately from others with the freedom of personal choice. Instead, we consider the effects of our decisions on others, from whom we hope for recognition and support.

From an ecological perspective, confusing freedom with the independence of individual decisions is already absurd with regard to the possible objects of the decision. Goods accessible in limited quantities, especially natural resources, are available to us or not depending on others' behaviour. For instance, the possibilities of future generations are drastically impacted by the behaviour of those alive today. The situation is similar for those interested in modes of profit-seeking utilisation, when they realise that they can acquire the material conditions of their choices only at each other's expense. Those who wish to build a line of hotels and a yacht harbour on the lakeshore and those who wish to preserve the reed marshes and their species cannot freely pursue their goals independently of each other. I decide in vain to live a healthy life worthy of a human being in my town of birth if I cannot convince the majority of my fellow citizens of its advantages. However, the example of dwindling natural resources warns us not only that there exist indivisible goods that can only be enjoyed together. For the pressure of public opinion also has a far-reaching impact on my decisions regarding the goods which, in theory, I should be able to enjoy without the cooperation of others. But let one try to buy only healthy, traceably sourced, local food where the majority are not interested in this and therefore it is not produced. Or to oppose the religious, sexual, etc. prejudices of the majority in an intolerant social environment. One will immediately discover that the dominant view of the good life is itself a common good. It is even possible that our chief good is itself the Good – the social consensus regarding forms of

[97] Amos Hawley: *Human Ecology – a theoretical essay*, p.7. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986.

behaviour to emulate and condemn. This influences not only our choices, but also our desires and the limits of the knowledge we can acquire as well. Consider how many and what kinds of people (alive and dead) one must meet in order to be able to form an opinion on the goodness or baseness of a possible way of life. Even more obvious is the connection amongst individual choices in the case of decisions with the greatest consequences for our lives: when we choose a partner or companions. How could we choose each other independently of each other? Can a person even make a choice if they is not chosen by the others, i.e., accepted as one of themselves?

If we have recognised that aiming towards autonomy connects us to our peers instead of separating us, we ought also to accept that individuals, always needing each other's help, have only two states to choose from: they can compel their peers' recognition or they can voluntarily support each other in the attainment of their goals. These, however, are of many kinds and their simultaneous achievement is practically impossible. How can one reconcile mutually exclusive ways of life and contradictory goals, if their representatives have to share the same set of resources? Can a mutual agreement be avoided in such cases? But is not the freedom of the decision of conscience endangered by the power which in such cases must be granted to the institutions and bodies that watch over the common good?

The atrocities in centuries past of governments appealing to the common good and acting in the service of common goals have repeatedly convinced the supporters of freedom that in politics nothing is more important than the protection of the individual from those who rule over him/her. Society is free insofar as it is able to impose strict limits on those who exercise public power, control them and, if necessary, expel them. Since the Age of Enlightenment, the view that the institutions performing public tasks have no right to choose goals instead of individuals or to give preference to some ways of life over others has gradually become dominant in the Western world. The state, therefore, has to remain neutral in the debates on the nature of good and evil. The role of civil servants and authorities is limited to judging the justness of citizens' behaviour. The judgement of their goodness is none of their concern.

For a long period, the main aim of liberal democracy was for the citizens of the state not to have to come to an agreement on the goals of the good life. It is, of course, also possible that relative social peace was ensured precisely by an unspoken agreement on basic social goals.

This was ended once and for all by the recognition of the scarcity of natural resources, a decline in the quality of life and worry about the prospects of the future. Can the fiction of neutrality of the state be maintained under such circumstances?

The question is what we are to understand by neutrality. In the eyes of the founding fathers, it seems, neutrality did not mean a lack of values. Most of them were pragmatic politicians who knew all too well that a governmental decision is always based on preferences of value and that this cannot be otherwise, since it has to support good solutions and obstruct bad ones. They thereby necessarily interfere in citizens' lives; this is precisely what they gained a mandate for. If they fail to do this, i.e., distinguish between individuals' performance and instead use taxpayers' money to finance good and bad, forms of behaviour that strengthen and undermine society alike, then they are wasting the resources at their disposal to an unjustifiable degree. Thus, the neutrality of the state originally meant solely the neutrality of the *state* or, in other words, the impartial rule of law – which is included in the principle of equality before the law – and a prohibition on anyone deciding the debate on values with power.

Nothing is further from the classic of utilitarian liberalism, John Stuart Mill, than the relativism of values that characterises libertarians. In his work on utility, he draws a sharp contrast between higher and base pleasures, the pursuit of others' happiness and the chase of individual happiness. He leaves no doubt that the bodies exercising public power must reward good and persecute evil. The only thing they can no longer do is decide themselves what good and evil are, be it a curriculum, urban development or scientific research. Their mandate is for ensuring fair conditions for the public debate on the nature of good and evil, learn from its results and make decisions of power accordingly, while maintaining the possibility of refutation, error and the correction of error.[98]

Mill's current followers claim that liberalism does not contradict the goals of ecological politics. They hold that it is the right of the neutral state – duty, even – to take preventative measures against those who harm the environment, saying that "...the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others."[99] The debate centres on

[98] John Stuart Mill: *On Liberty.* Batoche Books, Kitchener, Ontario.
[99] *Ibid.* p.13.

whether Mill's criterion can be applied to activities held to be basically useful that transform nature and, primarily, whether the formula justifies the principle of ecological precaution. Mill did not specify who the others are whom we must not obstruct "in pursuing their own good in their own way"[100]. We can therefore remedy this gap with the previously quoted statement of another famous utilitarian, Jeremy Bentham, that the question is not whether those in question are capable of thought and speech but whether they are capable of suffering. And here we have already the justification of a radically animal and environmentally friendly politics, on a strictly liberal basis.

In one of his studies, Marius de Geus takes the striking differences between the two liberal traditions traceable to Locke and Mill. These make it possible to understand the mixed reception of ecological aims on the part of the liberals: for one, the happiness principle means selfish individualism; for the other, the service of others' happiness. One proclaims power over nature; the other has compassion over the non-human beings forced out of their habitat, killed or tortured by man. For one, wellbeing means above all the enjoyment and possession of material goods; for the other, intellectual goods and the distinction between higher and lower pleasures. Accordingly, one is in favour of unlimited growth and the other seeks the right measure and believes in a durable economy. One rejects any limits on individual freedom; the other supplements this with the mutual ban on doing harm.[101]

Contemporary mainstream liberalism is closer to the views of Locke and holds that legal protection is due at most to the individual's right to a healthy environment – derived from basic human rights, on the pattern of social rights. Those who think in this way prefer to appeal to procedural law, the strength of the liberal state, in cases where environmental interests clash with other interests. It is true that liberalism appears more suited to the public representation of ecological values and interests than any other theory of government. It is, however, unsuited for actually enforcing what it represents. The neutral state would no longer be what it is, were it to recognise that these values and interests can outweigh others. The true political-economic relations of power in practice exclude the possibility of this conviction attaining predominance. The mysterious glass ceiling is thus formed, which, in a seemingly ununderstandable way, imposes severe limits on the behaviour

[100] *Ibid.* p.16.

[101] Marius de Geus: Sustainability, Liberalism, Liberal Democracy. In John Barry, Marcel Wissenburg eds: *Sustaining Liberal Democracy.* Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2001.

of the European democracies verbally so committed to the protection of the environment.[102]

The unsustainability of the rigid interpretation of neutrality probably escaped notice for so long, because in the so-called welfare states the basic questions faced by politics were characterised by a wide-ranging agreement. The neutral state was by no means neutral. Its decisions obviously served the established value system: technical-scientific progress, economic growth, businesspeople's profit and welfare as identified with the growth of individual consumption. However, the age of peaceful cooperation ended for ever around the turn of the second millennium. Doubts arose regarding basic values and polar opposite views clashed again, about how to judge the interconnected environmental, economic, security, demographic and other crises and especially regarding the course of action to be taken. In this tense situation, when we have to pay attention to the serious threats to our life opportunities and the far-reaching consequences and changed time horizon of our decisions simultaneously, the restoration of the meaning of politics appears unavoidable. Politics has to become an open contest again, where the goodness of the goals are debated and not how to divide the means, in the knowledge that the consequences of the decision will impact the future of the affected communities for a much longer period than hitherto. This undeniably limits the options of good ways of life available to the individual, or at least limits them in a different way to how it has hitherto been the case in industrial societies, where free choice of one's way of life was identified with the decisions of the consumer and made available according to the measure of demand. The difference is merely that henceforth the choices of the individual require not financial coverage, but good argumentation and moral justification.

I am well aware that this is the most delicate statement of the philosophy of ecopolitics. Its followers must honestly admit that they do not think it good for all desires to be fulfilled, that not every way of life is worthy of respect and that we cannot do anything we are capable of and deem advantageous for ourselves. *We can no longer wish things to be good for everyone*, because we can already see that the consequences would be bad for everyone. To avoid or at least mitigate these negative

[102] Daniel Hausknost: The environmental state and the glass ceiling of transformation. *Environmental Politics* 29.1. 2020.

consequences, it is essential to choose our goals well and to be able to communicate with each other in the interest of realising them.

But how are we to choose good goals and cooperate if everyone wants something different? If the entitlement of individual claims is no longer self-evident, but instead requires justification, then someone has to evaluate, and if needs be rank, the arising claims in the name of the community, considering the finiteness of resources. It is self-evident that in this case we will be much more sensitive to the method of decision-making and the legitimacy of political bodies. In *The Green State*,[103] Robyn Eckersley endorses the view that the overbureaucratised liberal state is no longer suited to the new situation and increased responsibility. The governmental decisions appealing to neutral (and effectively uncontrollable) expertise in reality lean very much towards the perspective of technocrat reasoning, consumerist mentality and an egoist-individual conception of basic rights. According to Eckersley, true pluralism presupposes a mechanism of decision-making in which all perspectives get an equal say and the affected can participate directly in setting common goals. "Voters in liberal democracies are in some sense free to vote for whom and what they choose, but their votes will not be effective unless they are cast for one of those alternatives defined for them by the political elites", warned Alasdair MacIntyre earlier as well.[104] When our children and grandchildren will ask us where we were when our future was sold, we cannot shift the responsibility to either the government or to all-powerful economic necessity. First person politics requires that decisions be made in public debate, following the careful considerations of the opportunities and consequences. Andrew Dobson expresses the conviction of the overwhelming majority of the Greens when he claims that, from the perspective of realising ecological interests, participatory democracy is the most suitable decision-making system. It ensures that those representing competing convictions will engage in open debate, in which truth still has a greater chance of prevailing than in the decisions of the specialised apparatus lacking all oversight or in the market automatisms of supply and demand.[105]

[103] Robyn Eckersley: *The Green State.* MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 2004.

[104] Alasdair MacIntyre: Politics, Philosophy and the Common Good. In Kelvin Knight ed: *The MacIntyre Reader* p.236. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1998.

[105] Andrew Dobson: Ecologism and Other Ideologies. In Dobson: *Green Political Thought.* Routledge, London, 2007.

Yet in the language of political theory, this all means that the Greens would favour "the freedom of the ancients", i.e., the sharing of public power, over the modern safeguards of the undisturbedness of individual decisions. The danger arising from this is long-known and obvious: the abuse of power by a democratically elected leader. József Eötvös' prophetic words are timelier today than when he composed them: "... If freedom consists of the limitlessness of power, which creates laws in the name of the people and rules directly through their majority... if, therefore, those who acquire the majority for a time through whatever means, even terrorism, have control over the full force of the state: in this case, such a powerful reason stands in favour of performing this experiment that surely it will not fail to happen."[106] Eötvös would today most likely say that it is not fascist, communist, paternalist or populist ideologies that are responsible for the development of autocratic systems, but rather the principle of popular sovereignty itself. From this it follows directly that the leader of the people, appealing to the will of the majority, can abuse his power at the head of "a state organised for absolutism" more than any previous ruler. The greatest danger to democracy today is still democracy, just as in Plato's time. Therefore, the representatives of ecological politics must emphasise that when they talk of representative democracy, they do not have in mind the usual reign of terror exercised in the name of the public will, a kind of green dictatorship – which is what their opponents accuse them of from time to time. Quite the contrary. Beyond the level of a wish, how can this be possible? The classical liberal answer, "the essence of freedom according to English concepts", which Eötvös analyses in his above-mentioned work, is nuanced and complex. It contains much more than merely the political guarantees of individual freedom stated as a fundamental principle.

- It shows that decentralisation and the limitation of the sphere of public authority do not weaken the state but are rather what guarantee of its stability and operability.

- He supports the power of local councils in all issues that do not affect everyone.

- He sees the freedom of individuals to form communities as the antidote to the dangerous selfishness of the local councils. The sense of

[106] József Eötvös: *Influence of the Ruling Ideas of the 19th century on the State.* Magyar Helikon, 1981, 1. köt. p.139.

togetherness in the citizens is strengthened by various associations, beyond narrow local interests.

- He sees the free – today we would say horizontal – communication of the differing and independent parts with each other as the basis of development.[107]

It is therefore clear that individual freedom is not threatened by the purposeful operation of public power and not by the demand for democratic participation in it, but by the centralisation of power, the decline of associations and the limitation of open dialogue between differing interests and convictions. Bottom-up deliberative democracy would be just as effective a countermeasure for a green or any tyranny in the name of the common good as it would be for the excessive power of technocracy.

According to Eckersley, the result of the deliberative procedure is "the economy of moral disagreement", because the interest of the participants is in supporting their own views with arguments acceptable to others and in learning to consider each other's interests. This improves the chances of a mutual understanding and, with luck, agreement, but it makes the participants more patient towards the decisions made even if consensus fails. The irreplaceable advantages of deliberation are seen primarily in its being the most suitable for increasing the spirit of tolerance and mutually taking responsibility in a pluralist society, where a people who are heterogeneous in every way has to bear the consequences of the resultant decisions together.[108] The participants of the dialogue tolerate not only the presence of ways of life that differ from their own, but on occasion are also willing to learn from one another.

In the deliberative process, Eckersley emphasises, there is room not only for rational arguments, but for various ways of self-expression for convincing others or arousing their sympathy. For the Habermasian ideal speech situation is not sufficient for giving the requisite weight to the perspective of groups incapable of rational argumentation, informing themselves or even participation, but nevertheless very much affected

[107] I am appealing to the classic of Hungarian liberalism instead of to his sources, Constant, Montesquieu, Burke, Tocqueville and Mill, because his work, as tends to happen, receives disproportionately little attention in Hungary as well, despite being on the level of his Western peers and thinkers with similar views.

[108] For the assessment of the advantages, see Nicole Curato – John S. Dryzek et al.: 12 Key Findings in Deliberative Democracy. *Daedalus* 146.3. 2017. Ian Saphiro's article in the same issue points out the drawbacks of deliberation.

by the decision. (Let us think here of future generations, distant people affected by our decisions, other beings, etc.) More is required for their proper representation and for empathy towards their – e.g., aesthetic, religious, etc. – manifestations which differ from the rules of rational discourse. These additional things must be given increased importance in ecological politics, through solidarity and mutual respect and goodwill. Eckersley emphasises that this can only occur in real communities, where the term community means, as already seen, agreement on the meaning of our shared things (e.g., words). This agreement is based not on a rational foundation, but is rather the fruit of sustained coexistence: that of shared historical experience – to be precise: that of the shared experience of successful cooperation. (That of shared failure starts, after a while, to inevitably undermine the mutual trust in the meaning of coexistence and cooperation. The history of Hungary in the past hundred years seems to illustrate this.)

Eckersley therefore goes on to question the position of the cosmopolitan Greens. He holds that only existing communities are capable of political self-determination and deliberation. Neither the universality of human rights, nor global risks form a political community of the people of the world. Nor can they legitimate the rule of a "justly" governing global regime. Eckersley confronts the utopia of global democracy with the transnational state, whose politics is directed not only by the selfish interests of the decision makers, but also by a global sense of responsibility that transcends this. The expression "ecological citizenship", popular in green political theory, means something similar, namely the extension of the welfare discourse familiar to liberal democracies to the universal principles related to environmental interests. Thus, green democracy makes moral demands of the self-conscious ecological citizen and wishes the political community to become definitively an ethical community. Some hold this to be an idealistic notion; others – from the liberal side – to be extremely worrying, the antechamber of a repression that appeals to moral principles.

The differing views on the neutrality of the state resurface often in the debate of globalist and localist Greens. In this debate, Eckersley argues for the localist-bioregionalist position. His important recognition is that taking global responsibility and being open to other cultures and interests is not only not an obstacle to the attachment of the members of a political community to their own particularities and territory, but is in fact the unavoidable condition of the development of any behaviour

of solidarity. "Without knowledge of and attachment to particular persons and particular places and species, it is hard to understand how one might be moved to defend the interests of persons, places and species in general. Local social and ecological attachments are the basis for sympathetic solidarity with others; they are ontologically prior to any ethical or political struggle for universal environmental justice."[109]

3. In the footsteps of community-centred thinkers

Man is the being most dependent on companions; few dispute this. Our special ability, self-consciousness, is the creation of connection through language. I have to see myself with others' eyes in order to consider the effect of my acts on them when performing my acts. For this, I must understand them. I think, therefore *we are*: thought is the creation of dialogue. The existence of a thinking being can be none other than coexistence with others. To be able to understand each other, however, we had to have already agreed with each other; at least on the correct use of words if on nothing else, Wittgenstein points out in his philosophical examinations.[110] This understanding has a precondition too: an advance of trust. Above all, we had to believe others so we could learn from them. In his work on tacit knowledge, Mihály Polányi calls this trustful participation in others' mental processes conviviality.[111] Its original Greek meaning referred to a group of participants of one of the banquets so important in ancient communities. To my knowledge, Polányi is the first to use it to characterise man's being. Man's being is being together. His chief goal is to participate in others' lives, because without the understanding and help of companions he would not even have been able to become who he is, let alone survive. I learn who I am from the Other, who is of existential importance for me.

Conviviality appeared in the lexicon of the burgeoning green or ecological discourse through the work of Ivan Illich (another emigrant from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy), a decade and a half after Polányi. The author of *Tools for Conviviality* considers it important to explain that the fact of interdependence does not impose a limit on human freedom, but rather gives it meaning. "I consider conviviality to be the individual freedom realized in personal interdependence and, as

[109] Robyn Eckersley *Ibid.* p.190.
[110] Ludwig Wittgenstein: Philosophical Investigations. First published in 1953.
[111] Mihály Polányi: *Personal Knowledge,* Part 2, chapter 7. First published in 1958.

such, an intrinsic ethical value… I choose the term conviviality to designate the opposite of industrial productivity. I intend it to mean autonomous and creative intercourse among persons and the intercourse of persons with their environment."[112] The Convivialist Manifesto, the statement of *dependence* published by notable French intellectuals in 2013, effectively echoes these thoughts, without, however, giving precision to the content of the new community-based political philosophy.

The Greens' political program was first connected with the principle of spontaneous self-organisation and unruled community by Murray Bookchin, the father of social ecology. Besides the classics of anarchism, Bookchin appeals to Aristotle and advises the socialist left to finally replace the economy-centred Marxist ideology with Aristotle's community-centred views. Other thinkers were inspired by communitarian authors such as Charles Taylor or Alasdair MacIntyre, who distanced themselves from the left – as the passionate adherents of which they started their careers – through the simultaneously anti-individualist and anti-collectivist approach to the relation of individual and community.

But whether they proclaim themselves anarchist or conservative, the communitarian Greens share the conviction that with our liberty we can live only as members of communities which exercise free decision over their own fate. On the one hand, they think that the individual cannot be free independently of his/her companions, in the political sense of the word, but rather only *in* his/her relations with his/her companions, as part of a community where the members mutually recognise and assist one another's liberty. On the other hand, they assume that such communities are capable of reaching an agreement on their common goals and that better decisions will arise from the unforced dialogue of the many convictions than if distant authorities or the considerations of market profitability were to decide.

However, the communitarians have to contend with notable objections. Firstly, it is common knowledge that there is no agreement among people. Secondly, let there not be, for if there is, it is due to the groups who possess the privilege of knowledge and the means of influencing opinion forcing their preferences on others. Thirdly, public agreement has fundamentally nothing to do with truth. (However, I would point out that philosophers from Plato until today mostly *agree*

[112] Ivan Illich: *Tools for Conviviality,* p.24. Harper & Row, New York, 1973.

on the *truth* of the three statements …) All three objections are valid; by the way, they are linked. It is true that nowadays one has a chance to attain a democratic mandate, i.e., the trust of the majority of voters, only if one acquires control over the means of mass communication. His/her truth will become the opinion of the majority; they can even determine the topics on which the majority should have opinions in the first place. It is a cliché, but could nevertheless be true that in media-saturated mass societies the citizens have no firm political preferences. In contrast to previous periods, today people have to take a position on such complex issues requiring specialised knowledge that they have no time, knowledge or ambition to navigate them. They settle for making their own one of the competing parties' opinions without being able to check their accuracy. Perhaps this is exactly the reason why party preferences are surprisingly stable, while voters, according to the opinion polls, do not trust the parties to which they might happen to be clinging obstinately. Decisions are not even made in Parliament anymore, but are rather based on the work of specialised apparatuses, behind closed doors, via the deals of influential businesspeople and party leaders.

The problem is not new. The classic Greek thinkers viewed the limits of democracy similarly. Aristotle, who faced the failure of ancient democracy in the court of a (possibly) enlightened autocrat – and who possessed the most practical common sense among his colleagues anyway – considers the participation of citizens in the rule of the city state indispensable. He does, however, tie it to three conditions. First, there cannot be too many of them. Meaningful dialogue, and perhaps agreement, is possible only where the everyday experience of coexistence and interdependence creates a strong bond, Secondly, they should be neither too poor, nor too rich. The overly rich can deceive or bribe the overly poor at any time. Democracy was invented for the middle classes, for people who possess some measure of intellectual and material independence. Thirdly, they should know whomever they elect to any post. The observations of the Greek sage are made extremely timely exactly by their seeming untimeliness. What can we do with them, one can ask, in a mass society where tens and hundreds of millions have to be governed? Where the middle classes have been destroyed by economic globalism and deprived of their influence by political centralisation? Where they vote for candidates whose fictitious personality the media builds up, then destroys with the aid of character assassination, fake news and falsified or stolen data?

We have to choose; that is for certain. Economic globalism and political centralisation are the realities of our age, but so too is the fact that in Western civilisation freedom is considered the fundamental value in politics and, in fact, there still remains in people a vague desire for self-determination and control over the means of power. These two realities are irreconcilable. We choose the latter without hesitation, because there is no case in world history where the concentration of power did not lead to unchecked violence and the adherents of violent rule did not, sooner or later, sacrifice their principles in the interest of keeping power, exactly as described by Plato in the eighth book of the *Republic*. It has also repeatedly been proven true that the other extreme, the unchecked competition of the equally free, itself leads to the tyranny of the stronger competitors, which the weak and vulnerable not only endure but even eventually demand – here, too, Plato was right.

Therefore, ecological politics can be realised only if it can free itself from the unprecedented concentration of material and intellectual power that characterises our age and if its decisions are made with the competent participation of those concerned, at a transparent, accessible local level, in communities whose members do not have to fear becoming victims to violence.

Participation, self-determination and decentralisation – behold, the fundamental principles of green democracy. Its adherents hold that the culture of solidarity and reasonable disagreement can develop anywhere where interdependence makes those concerned interested in dialogue. The sceptics hold the reverse: until there is no dialogue between them, they are not open to trusting and the lack of trust renders dialogue impossible. Formal logic supports them: Achilles cannot reach the tortoise. Yet formal logic does not reckon with the constant interaction of changes occurring in parallel, which decidedly improve the chances of Achilles and reasonable dialogue. Communities' self-determination can be achieved, an institutional system of participative decision-making can be established and the experience of successful cooperation can create communities of solidarity.

4. The question of global justice

"Justice" has replaced the successfully privatised "common good" at the centre of modern political thought. For a long time, the citizens of liberal democracies did not debate their goals but rather who was owed

what. Therefore, the authors of green political programs often see it as their duty to declare their allegiance to ecological and social justice. The "and" immediately reveals that they are not aware of the essence of political ecology: by ecology, they usually mean protection of nature and by social justice, the proper sharing of goods amongst the competing individual and group interests. Justice is everyone getting what they are due by law. Who is due what can be decided based on universally reasonable principles. All the more reason for the state to preserve its neutrality in this debate. We will now argue against this opinion.

Let us bypass all the twists and turns of the debate[113] on the question of justice that began in the house of Polemarchus circa two and a half thousand years ago and take as our starting point how the match currently stands. It seems that the majority of those debating the issue accept as the basis of discussion the formula of equality of freedoms. The debate revolves around whether the freedom of individuals should be limited in the interest of some kind of material equality or whether the freedom of competition for material and intellectual goods should be tolerated or even encouraged, thus accepting its natural consequences: social differences.[114] John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness offers a bridge. Its starting point is that what is just is what the majority sees as such – or would see, if they were not influenced by their individual interests. If "the veil of ignorance" were to hide from them their identity and fate, i.e., they would have to decide without knowing whether they will be men or women, sick or healthy, learned or ignorant, etc., they would have to agree from purely rational considerations on a few formal basic principles, the acceptance of which lies in all of their interests. The most counter-arguments, however, were made precisely regarding Rawls' starting point. His critics objected that if he abstracts from every individual characteristic, why make an exception of logical thought and

[113] The location of Plato's dialogue *The Republic.*

[114] Murray Bookchin, in *Ecology of Freedom*, represents a notable position. He believes that fundamentally, people like to differ from one another and only demand equality if their free interaction is limited by some kind of public restrictive institution. From this one could even conclude to some kind of law of reciprocity of equality: the less freedom one has, the more equality one will demand. Therefore, Bookchin breaks with the egalitarian dogmas of the socialist left, especially with Marxism's economy-centred perspective. He places the rule of abstract relations and bureaucratic structures damaging the cohesion of community at the centre of his social critique. The justice-performing socialist state, he emphasises, is just as sensitive towards ecological problems as capitalism's competitive market economy. The harmonious coexistence of man and nature can be realised only in the hierarchical society of self-regulating communities on a human scale. Bookchin: *Beyond Neo-marxism.* Telos 36, 1978.

the ability to correctly identify interests. To this Rawls answers,[115] in effect, that for the creation of a logical formula he required not human beings but logical subjects. Yet it is hard to make good decisions precisely because one has to do justice between the claims of flesh and blood human beings, whose claims are irreconcilable and whose interests are debatable and contradictory, which is exactly why one cannot claim that what they hold just actually is just. Real human beings in concrete situations do not even necessarily agree on what counts as an advantage or disadvantage at all. Thus, the determination of advantages and disadvantages, without which one cannot speak of justice, already presupposes a tacit choice of values which rules out the neutrality of applying the formula recommended by Rawls – in effect the Pareto principle. There is no fairness independent of our convictions on good and evil.

But fairness demands even more than this. No principle of equality would be sufficiently fair towards those who, for one reason or another, experience a situation of lasting suffering. According to the common understanding current today, they need more than should be theirs by right; positive discrimination should be exercised towards them. To this I would add only that everyone experiences lasting detrimental situations for a shorter or longer period at some point in their life: they become sick or poor, old, a child, disabled, a student, uneducated, in further education, a wayfarer, with many children or none, part of a religious, ethnic or linguistic minority, etc. In such moments preferential treatment is essential for them. No formula of just distribution can account for this realisation, however: to live a human life, *everyone* needs more than they are due. They need preferential, devoted help from others. Only mutual willingness to sacrifice is just.

According to this, only the third basic principle, fraternity, can reconcile the dilemma of freedom and equality; anything else is but vain effort. A just distribution of our due is important, but it is not the most important thing and the fair principles of distribution do not form a closed system that can be formalised. Justice only works among those already held together by something even greater: mutual loyalty. However, this realisation does not ease our task of applying the principle of justice to the new dimensions most important from the perspective

[115] John Rawls: Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical. In *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 14.2, 1985.

of the ecological worldview: the connections between peoples, generations and species.

Neither the terrible crimes committed against alien civilisations and the inhabitants of distant lands, nor extreme inequality among nations is a new phenomenon. The novelty in the Age of the Enlightenment was that the need for justice was even raised in regard to these relations. Today we must face the fact that there are neither alien civilisations, nor distant lands. This is what we call global interdependence or simply globalisation. But closer and more intensive contact between the continents has not dispelled the differences, but rather deepened them and raised them to a conscious level. It is hard to imagine handling the global ecological crisis without the collaboration of the nations and for this an agreement on the principles of fair cooperation is indispensable. At first sight, it seems that the universal recognition of human rights provides a sufficient basis for this, since by now it has become a legitimate point of reference in the area of international relations, even if they are ignored in open conflicts. Since these principles have been declared, the white man has exterminated whole races of native peoples who stood in the way of his expansion. But even here the principle of equality makes its benign effects felt: cutting edge technology is available worldwide. With it, the dictators and warlords of the "developing" countries can murder each other's subjects or even their own peoples en masse.

The question of global justice usually arises, however, in relation to the "peaceful" relations that connect rich and poor countries, whether it is in regards to the advantages and disadvantages of the free trade system, the distribution of the burdens of environmental pollution or global migration. The latter, the new migration, is without a doubt one of the gravest political and ethical problems of our age. It is indisputably connected with the symptoms of the crisis of the current world order. It poses the basic questions of global justice in an acute form. Firstly, as to whether the demands of justice can be interpreted on a global scale. If yes, in what must we share with the needy of the world? Do we bear responsibility for the good or ill fortune of distant peoples? Can the abstract principle of a brotherhood extending to the whole of humanity be reconciled with the just defence of the interests of one's own community?

The causes of mass migration:

– the misery of the losers of the postcolonial system known as free trade;

– the population explosion which took place in the impoverished countries following the collapse of the traditional order of social reproduction;

– the degradation of the natural resources that ensured a living: the lack of precipitation and desertification caused by climate change, soil erosion, deforestation and decreasing biodiversity, among other things;

– finally, the spread of violence, terrorism and wars in the poverty-stricken areas.

Every single one of these is connected to the consequences of the industrial revolution, the aggressive expansion of Western civilisation and the current world order, of which we are the participants and beneficiaries. That this concerns us is therefore indisputable.

The consequences are nevertheless not self-evident. The egalitarian position, formulated perhaps for the first time by Australian philosopher Peter Singer, recognises only individuals and demands the removal of the pre-existing, unjustifiable differences among them: the fair distribution of goods and burdens, without regard to anything else.[116] However, not only is this practically unrealisable; it is also worrying at the theoretical level. There is not always an injustice behind the inequalities developed throughout history. Moreover, the history of humanity is, whether one likes it or not, one of wars of conquest. Their consequences cannot be undone and cannot be laid at the door of the generation alive today. Inequalities also arise from some cultures using their resources more wisely and resourcefully than others. The most important resource is naturally human knowledge itself. Since the beginning of civilisation (and even before), conquerors have used the advantages arising from their knowledge to the detriment of the vanquished, which was hardly a "just" way of proceeding on their part. But what could the "original state" be, compared to which the measure of just compensation could be established today? Finally, even if we were to accept the principle of a global sharing of burdens, how should we distribute the burdens among the more prosperous nations, who took part and take part in colonisation, the burdening of the environment and the destruction of nature to significantly varying degrees? And why nations, since our original assumption was that we do not differentiate between individuals according to their national affiliation?[117]

[116] Peter Singer: Famine, Affluence and Morality. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1.3. 1972.

[117] I borrowed most of my argumentation from the article of Margaret Moore, though she takes a much more nuanced approach to the question. Margaret Moore: Natural Resources,

These objections lose none of their validity if one aims to support the authority of the just redistribution with arguments of solidarity. As is known, the economists and moralists who coined the expression "Spaceship Earth" appeal to the principle that all humanity and even all the inhabitants of our planet belong to a single community. We are all passengers of a planet soaring through space; we all share the same fate.[118] The spaceship-simile is not really apt, however: the planet has no helmsman; its passengers cannot influence its course; its inhabitants have never belonged to a single community – they are rather one other's good or bad neighbours, whose interests and fate differ at least as much as they can be said to be similar.

American biologist and systems researcher Garrett Hardin, father of lifeboat ethics, took a radically different starting point. He preferred to compare the situation of humanity facing a global ecological crisis to that of the shipwrecked. Each nation flees the catastrophe on its own lifeboat; each is responsible only for the fortunes of his/her own community (boat) and does not risk it for the sake of saving other groups in need. According to Hardin, if we save the passengers of the overladen, sinking boats, i.e., if we welcome the inhabitants of poverty-stricken areas or lend assistance with aid in the form of food, this just reinforces them in the incorrect practices which led to their impoverishment and overpopulation. Hardin warns against the expanded reproduction of destitution and emphasises that immigration cannot be a solution, because the population density of the target countries is well over the ecologically sustainable limit. Mass immigration would shake the foundations not only of their wellbeing, but of their whole culture; finally, our lifeboat would also sink under the increased burden, he claims.[119]

Two serious objections can be made to Hardin's arguments, however. The cosmopolitan liberals question our right to, for whatever reason, deny human beings similar to us the right, equal to ours, to choose their dwelling-place as they see fit. We have already encountered the communitarian refutation of this argument: if we recognise the right of a political community to self-determination,

Territorial Right and Global Distributive Justice. Political Theory 40.1 2014.

[118] The metaphor was coined by American diplomat Adlai Stevenson. It spread in the specialised and popular literature following an article by the economist Kenneth Boulding. (Kenneth Boulding: The Economics of the Coming Spaceship Earth. In: H. Jarrett ed.: *Environmental Quality in a Growing Economy.* John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1966.)

[119] Garrett Hardin: Lifeboat Ethics. In: *Living on a Lifeboat.* Bioscience 24, 1974.

this has to include the defence of their cultural and territorial integrity as well. Cultural integrity cannot be maintained if the political community has no right to decide whom it accepts into its ranks and with what conditions. And self-determination presupposes control over a piece of land and the resources it contains. Responsible husbandry cannot be imagined otherwise. There are good reasons for holding that the peaceful integration of a million-strong wave of people into European societies annually is impossible, because the culture and way of life of the people here differ from theirs in many respects. The hard-won basic values of our civilisation, such as religious tolerance, personal autonomy, the equal rights of women and the respect of human dignity are alien to the majority of the arrivals; at times they are unacceptable or perhaps clash with the commands of their religion. It can often be noticed that the second generation of immigrant families from other continents respond to their difficulties and failures in integrating by rejecting the need to adapt to and cooperate with the majority society much more than their parents did. And the greater the cultural distance, the faster the immigrants arrive and the greater their numbers, the smaller is the probability of successful integration. The peaceful existence of cultural islands side by side is hard to imagine in strongly integrated modern societies.

All this does not affect the second objection. To some extent, we are undoubtably responsible for the development of the circumstances which now force the millions affected by the natural and social consequences of globalisation to leave their homeland. Besides, mercy towards the people fleeing war, persecution or destitution demands that we take them in and help them even if we had no part in their misfortune.

How can we meet two contradictory demands if both arise from the deepest of ethical convictions? The new migration confronts us with a dilemma which puts our wisdom to the test. If we wish to determine the suitability of our political institutions for the handling of the serious upheavals that no doubt await us, the result will be crushing. Instead of weighing the real contradictions, European public opinion and its political opinion leaders have committed themselves almost without exception to one of two untenable positions. Sweeping aside the just objections, they have fought passionately for acceptance or rejection. Thus, the possibility that the duty to help and the right to self-defence might be reconcilable has barely been mentioned. What prevents us from accepting the validity of the command of humanity and at the same time also that we can only live a life worthy of human beings in

a cultural community where the members can engage in meaningful dialogue about their goals? (The latter does not require shared values, but rather merely a common frame of reference, within which they can share their experiences as experiences of a shared reality. For those incapable of this, coexistence involves continuous frustration and mutual offence, so that sooner or later they will be at one another's throats.) The two demands can be met simultaneously if we put all our strength to ensuring that the victims of migration can live a good life in their homeland instead. It is undeniable that for the overwhelming majority, this solution would be much more preferable to migration full of risks and vicissitudes.

For this, however, tolerable living conditions would have to be created in the Middle East and Africa and, among the achievements of our civilisation, conscious family planning and the human dignity of women should be popularised on other continents instead of our technological novelties and consumerist ideal of life. Above all, the final and chief reason of migration needs to be addressed, namely the ecological catastrophe, the victims of which are currently flooding Europe. Until we commit ourselves to this, the flood of humanity will remain unstoppable. No material sacrifice can be too much in service of this goal, once we have recognised our shared interest: that in the long term "we" can survive only if "they" can live in their country of origin. The curbing of decay and the spread of life strategies and technologies that adapt to the changed natural conditions naturally requires widespread cooperation. By comparison, the efforts of the international community have so far proved pitifully inadequate. Before us stands the greatest mutual enterprise in the history of humanity – or the collapse of our civilisation.

5. Why am I not an "anticapitalist"? Is there a Third Way?

I am not an anticapitalist, because for that or even its opposite, say, an enthusiastic proponent of capitalism, I would first have to accept the assumption of historical materialism, according to which existence determines consciousness; moreover, that this existence is identical with economic activity, i.e., the production and distribution of goods. Only in this case could I believe that the soul of social systems is the "mode of production", in this case, reproduction of capital.

It is true that the self-regulation of the market is one of the fundamental principles of a free society, but we know that this principle has never become exclusive. On the contrary, in parallel with the dominance of market-type relations, the state extends its own control over ever more areas of society to counter-balance the unbearable consequences of profit-seeking competition and to maintain the ordered cooperation and security of the participants. The prevailing of a third principle is likewise a logical consequence of the system of freedom. It is the independence of local, workplace, professional, religious, cultural, etc. communities based on free association among citizens, legally protected from the state and market. The joint prevalence and incessant struggle of these three – bureaucratic administration, the autonomy of communities and market relations (which is simultaneously competition and cooperation) – ensure the functioning of modern society. "Capitalism", i.e., the profit-seeking, accumulative and therefore growth-oriented version of market economy is only one of these principles.

To simplify the situation: while the state controls the operation of the market (or does not), the market ensures (or does not) that the citizens possess a living independent of the state. For their part, the citizens exercise control (or do not) over those who govern the state. Whenever an attempt is made to eliminate any part of this system, the result is always the total vulnerability of the individual and the immoderate waste of resources. It appears that legal security, private property, democracy and the market are inseparable from each other. Not for nothing does an attempt to separate them produce a crisis. The relation between the constitutional state, capital and civil society does not usually tend to be balanced, however. It is by no means peaceful; it is rather a ceaseless war between opposing interests. The aim of the market participants is to free themselves of the control of local society (citizens + public institutions). But when they succeed – first in the era of laissez-faire capitalism in the 19th century, more recently within the framework of economic globalism – they thereby unleash an avalanche of social and natural catastrophes upon the world, which, one way or another, must be followed by the correction (or collapse) of the system.

For the interests of the owners of capital is to realise their profits as investments on the one hand and to decrease their costs on the other. The former drives them to constantly increase the volume of reproduction and the latter to pass on the natural, social and cultural costs of growth to others, if possible. The usual conclusion from this is that capitalism is incompatible with ecological sustainability. Based on

the above, however, one could also hold the view that selfish growth that destroys its natural and social environment is but one of the possible alternatives. It does not arise from the essence of market economy, but is rather due to a newer development: the concentration of capital that puts civil society and democracy under strain; the impenetrable and uncontrollable system of global corporate empires and financial networks. Globalisation means that the negative feedback limiting the business interests related to unconditional growth has effectively vanished from the system. Hitherto the state represented natural, social and cultural interests ("cost factors"), on the basis of a mandate from its citizens. Now the roles have changed. The disintegration of communities and the increased control exercised by the mass media over publicity leads to the citizens' inability to influence or control the actions of the state. The political enterprises (the so-called parties) that specialised in the appropriation and mining of the instruments of public power fall under the control of the multinational corporate interests that finance them or they themselves build up their own economic empire. But the success or failure of the latter, the anticapitalist regimes that took control in the post-communist countries, also depends, like any other enterprise, on the results of the competition (economic in name, but concerning power in reality) in the global sphere. Thus, the roles are reversed: the corporate world dictates to the states and the states ensure that the majority of their subjects cooperate and even approve of the social, cultural, environmental and security policy measures in line with "economic" interests.

However, as previously indicated, these developments liquidate the market economy itself, in the strict sense of the word – if the market is taken to mean the spontaneous competition and negotiations of independent participants with an equal chance in theory, acting according to rules transparent for all of them. The corporate empires masquerading as companies behave much more like political organisations and wield political power. They do not levy tax, but instead rake in the spoils in the form of profit. In the majority of cases, they do not take care of the destruction of their opponents themselves, but instead use the assistance of the state to do so.

Unfortunately, the political left and right have both failed to provide a faithful description of the changes that have occurred in late modern industrial society. The left was perhaps hindered in doing so by its irresistible attraction towards simple answers and the right by its

eagerness to justify the system. Their original opposition, whether they explain it with the opposition of oppressors and oppressed or with the antagonism between freedom and equality, is by no means the consequence of differing answers given to the challenge of the twenty-first century. It is therefore hardly surprising that they have nothing relevant to say. Ecological politics begins at the very point where the traditional concepts of left and right lose their meaning.

The left originally took action against social injustice. Primarily on the influence of Marx, it saw its roots in the organisation of production (exploitation) and its remedy in class struggle. Its goal was a new system of the redistribution of goods, the fairness of which is ensured by the workers' state. However, as soon as it set to work to realise its program, it always became clear that the Bolshevik dictatorship exercising power over the proletariat in their name was incapable of being anything other than a kind of state-organised capitalism: the system of inhuman exploitation and total defencelessness. It also became clear that exploitation is not an economic, but a political category. It does not take place in factories where the evil capitalist appropriates the mysterious something known as surplus value. It is rather a matter of power: it depends on who exercises control over the institutionalised means of compelling, controlling and deceiving others and how. In full awareness of this, the radicalism of the new left started proclaiming already a good half a century ago that capitalism and communism are merely two versions of the oppressive system of the modern industrial state. Ecological politics was originally developed in this new left-wing milieu. Taking these realisations further, it gained its particular character and distanced itself from the traditional left.

In the West, the welfare state integrated these left-wing demands for social justice and equality of opportunity, thus ending class struggle there. By the time it could have started anew, there were no more classes, only consumers. Employers and employees threw themselves on the resources of nature with joint force and stripped them to the bone in a couple decades. In the meantime, the unjustifiable inequalities merely grew worse: they were exacerbated by the extreme difference between the situations of the victims and beneficiaries of the environmental catastrophe. However, progress confused with growth no longer had the remedy, nor did the recipe of consumerism confused with wellbeing; on the contrary, these appeared to have caused the problem in the first place. What, then, is to be done? While

the radical left searches for the revolutionary class it could lead but makes do with repressed minorities, the dissatisfied masses join right-wing populist movements or take out their frustration in manufactured identity-political hysteria. No positive program or social basis can be tied to being left-wing anymore. It survives as an intellectual martial art in the universities of the Western world, as long as it can find a suitable right-wing to distance itself from.

Ecological considerations draw the Greens towards a program more radical than that of the left: the just distribution of goods and rights no longer suffices. They also know that the appropriation of the appropriators, as foretold by Marx, would not solve anything. They must reject the whole system of industrial mass societies built upon the increase of production and the "scientific" organisation of society. Above all, they must reject the inhumanity that has long lain hidden within even the most reasonable forms of political centralisation – which, let us admit, the socialist and communist left had no intention of doing. Ecological politics sees the solution in localisation, the rethinking of the goals of the good life, the revolution of eco-friendly technologies and the re-examination of modernity's view of man and nature – by no means from anti-modern motives. They wish to create the conditions for all this by restoring the human scale of things. This cannot happen without ensuring the self-regulation of communities, i.e., the development of grassroots power structures, because this alone makes possible the responsible participation of those concerned in decision-making. This, if I am not mistaken, is neither a specifically left-wing nor a right-wing program. Conservatives and freethinkers alike can boldly call it their own; this is made more difficult by the left-wing label attached to it.

It cannot be repeated often enough that ecopolitics does not revolve around "environmental" issues. Rather, it seeks a way out of a civilisational crisis. It moves beyond the age of politicising that pits against each other the "liberal" perspective of freedom, the "socialist" perspective of equality/justice and the "conservative" perspective of fraternity/community. It focuses on the connection between the three fundamental Enlightenment-era principles in the conviction that they refer to three complementary sub-systems of social homeostasis, which can only ensure the comparatively balanced – sustainable – functioning of the system together. If any of the three, be it the market-individualist, the bureaucratic-centralist or the consensual-solidarist, attain predominance, the result is an oppressive force on the individual. Sooner or later, it will damage the fabric of society irreparably.

Thus, the rejection of global capitalism is not synonymous with that of the market economy. I hold the distinction important, because I see globalism and its catastrophic consequences as the organic consequence of modern industrial society. To those who seek a way out, what they wish to be free of is not irrelevant. They settle for the elimination of capitalism, seen as the greatest evil (let us not explain now how they imagine this) or recognise that globalism is the fulfilment of the internal contradictions that are tearing the order of modern industrial societies apart. This affects the system as a whole, so it cannot be treated by eliminating one of its parts. The renewal of Western civilisation – after it has destroyed all other civilisations – cannot occur without the complete rethinking of its fundamental moral principles, political institutions and technical apparatus. This recognition prevents us from misunderstanding the demand of revision and interpreting it as rejection. We simply do not have the foundations needed for a total negation; apart from anything else, because categorical rejection as a possible answer is itself a symptom of the one-dimensional thinking which prevents Western man from confronting the true nature of things.

It is hard to avoid here the connection between the above and the third way concepts that appeared in the first half of the previous century. Both are characterised by a belief in progress and the condemnation of consumerism, the protection of traditional ways of life from massification and a repugnance of laissez-faire capitalism, but of the socialist-collectivist versions of industrial society even more. According to Wilhelm Röpke, the author of *The Third Way*, the latter are characterised by "a veritable orgy of technology and organisation", the militarisation of work, the massification of society and the moving away of its way of life from nature.[120] "We had to recognise," he writes, „that nothing other than a tendency to tyranny can be expected from either the state, which has always had a natural tendency towards it, or from the masses as such. It is therefore clear that one must seek for support for freedom elsewhere, for anti-collective counterweights that can be found in neither the state, nor the masses. Only the lovers of freedom can be its guardians: the elite of society who commands its respect and the true community that stands above, below or around the state. Montesquieu called these true communities corps inter-

[120] Wilhelm Röpke: *Third Way: The Social Crisis of Our Time.* Chicago University Press, 1950.

medaires, intermediary bodies."[121] On them is built the strategy of *The Third Way*, which requires decentralisation, the ending of monopolies, the limitation of state intervention and the control of the markets by local communities. He also recommends the widespread sharing of property, the „...development of new, non-proletarian forms of industry, reduction of all dimensions and conditions to the human mean; elimination of over-complicated methods of organization, specialization and division of labour."[122]

I believe that the writings of Röpke (and Hungarian authors like László Németh or István Bibó sharing similar views) can still prove instructive for ecological politics as it seeks its own way – even if, unsurprisingly, they too proved more inventive in criticising the pre-existing than in creating a positive program. They recognised the importance of a third factor, the self-regulation of communities, besides state force and market mechanisms. Yet eventually they still arrived either at a more democratic socialism reconciled with the principle of private property or in the footsteps of Röpke's conservative liberalism, at the capitalism of industrious small business entrepreneurs, "...in a society in which the greatest possible number of people leads a life based on private property and a self-chosen occupation, a life that gives them inward and as much as possible, outward independence, which enables them to be really free."[123]

In effect, they were struggling with the same dilemma which the Greens were unable to avoid either. Left-wingers still condemn free market capitalism and take the freedom of the individual under their wing in the same breath. Meanwhile, conservatives dream of a capitalism flourishing within the framework of an organic community. They do not like to acknowledge that it was the "organic" logic of capitalism that destroyed these communities and which led to the concentration of profit, state power and information.

These are tricky questions not only for the third way, but for current ecological politics as well. How can one justify a politics which lends support to private enterprise and the local market but rejects their spontaneous development, corporate giants and the world market? First of all, it is worth clarifying that the difference between private property and corporate empire is one of quality, not quantity. The moral

[121] Röpke, *Ibid. p.85*. Corps intermedaires: Robert Nisbet also appeals to the concept derived from Montesquieu in his book *Conservativism: Dream and Reality*.
[122] *Ibid.* p.179.
[123] *Ibid.* p.178.

arguments behind private property defend the freedom of self-determination and the concomitant responsibility. There is no need to go into the details of the operation of large corporations, public companies or international business networks, in order for us to see that in them the freedom of individual choice is severely limited even for top management and the decisions of the rest do not really have an impact. The logic prevailing with inexorable necessity in the operation of the system absolves (or robs, as one pleases) the participants of personal responsibility for their actions. Thus, in these cases, property is no longer a means of self-determination but instead solely a means for the determination of others. This decisive difference was pointed out by István Bibó, who wrote about the meaning of European social development.[124] He held that ignoring this simple connection is what leads the liberalism of our day into self-contradiction. He returned to this thought in his last work, dictated into a recorder on his deathbed in 1979: "The fetishism of property and the practice of linking it with liberal democracy exists to this day … Liberal democracy generally sees it as its duty to put a stop to any attempts to interfere with the sanctity of property. This means that the forms of property precluded by their size from being property, simply become the means of power and come under the protection of liberal democracy."[125]

This recognition is of key importance for the proponents of ecopolitics. For if they do not wish to live in authoritarian communes isolated from one another and do not imagine the future of humanity in primitive tribal communities, then sustainable society cannot do without private property and profit-based exchange, which incentivises the owner – whether an individual or a grouping of individuals – to use his/her goods in a sparing, humane, long-term way – at least under normal circumstances, namely if they are not unbearably poor or exposed to external necessity. (The latter two are usually connected.) Previously, in the section Ecology and economy, I sought to clarify that I must not attribute this benevolent effect to the "free" market, but rather to the market regulated by the political community, since uncontrolled competition incentivises the participants precisely in removing

[124] István Bibó: Az európai társadalomfejlődés értelme. (The Meaning of European Social Development) István Bibó: *Válogatott tanulmányok.* (Selected Papers) vol.3. pp.110–111. Magvető, Budapest, 1986.

[125] István Bibó: A kapitalista liberalizmus és a szocializmus – kommunizmus állítólagos kiegyenlíthetetlen ellentéte. (The Supposed Irreconcilable Opposition Between Capitalist Liberalism and Socialism-Communism) István Bibó *Ibid.* vol. 4. pp. 780–781.

themselves from the remit of market conditions. At the same time, private ownership of the means of husbandry seems inseparable from the principle of personal responsibility and autonomy. And since the individuals, enterprises or cooperatives engaging in business have to communicate with each other somehow, it is better for them to be able to do it freely, so long as they keep the rules that bind everyone, than to do so on command, according to a unified plan. Therefore, market exchange cannot be rejected, unless we have a custom or sacred tradition that every participant follows out of inner conviction (without regulations). The democratic deliberation that occurs with the participation of those involved (employees, consumers, locals) supplements – or if needs be, overrides, but never rules out – the perspectives of market interests and bureaucratic expertise. Its task is rather to counterbalance the excessive power of the impersonal mechanisms of compulsion (state, market, information systems).

Ecological politics should therefore take a stand beside free private enterprise, voluntary association and market exchange regulated by the affected communities. It can appeal to these, i.e., the defence of local markets – in defence of local entrepreneurs and employees as much as of natural resources, in firmly rejecting all the artifices of corporate empires, financial networks and supra-national bureaucracies to limit or evade the sovereignty of (necessarily local) political communities. Strengthening local autonomies does not mean questioning the right to exist of the national and supranational political level: in the age of global interdependence, the reliable, coordinated operation of the larger units is essential.

In my opinion, the debate of globalists and localists is based on two misunderstandings. On the one hand, local autonomies not only do not weaken the state's ability to act; they in fact strengthen it. On the other, the worldwide cooperation needed for addressing global problems, if it is even possible, will be realised through the cooperation of states, not above their heads. *Ecopolitics does not want to dismantle the institutions that hold society together, but to build them, i.e., place them on a firmer foundation. The solid foundation is this: individual responsibility, mutual solidarity and the self-regulation of communities.* The state is either built bottom-up, as the community of communities or it becomes a tyrannical power that supresses its subjects. It is clear that the same applies to international and supranational organisations as well, if they attain political power, with the difference that exercising social control over them is practically impossible.

The decentralisation of hierarchically built systems that far surpass the human scale is an existential question for ecological politics. Global interdependence and communication networks accessible from anywhere by no means contradict the aim of localisation; quite the contrary. The rapid development of telecommunications technologies at once makes possible and superfluous the centralisation of power; in reality it decidedly favours connections based on purely horizontal contact between local communities. It has been proven countless times that those immediately affected by the issues of their village/town, vocation or workplace are more capable of evaluating and solving these than the bureaucracy operating above their heads. Experts' competence and problem-solving capacity usually decreases in direct proportion with distance in the social sphere. (Except, of course, the solution of problems created by the technocratic mentality itself to justify the need for centralisation and experts.)

The importance of local autonomies and personal responsibility is emphasised just as strongly by the Anglo-Saxon conservative tradition from Edmund Burke to Alasdair MacIntyre as by members of the radical new left such as Cornelius Castoriadis or Murray Bookchin. The attraction to human-scale communities was a common characteristic of the extremely varied counter-culture that developed in the sixties and seventies, which formed the source of ecological thought. As is usually the case, some mentioned the kinship to anarchism, others to conservatism. Some claimed outright that ecological politics begin where left and right cannot offer authentic alternatives for the situation and therefore political philosophy should instead be differentiated according to the position taken on the issue of centralisation and decentralisation on the one hand (on a scale of "state strength") and the relation of individual and community on the other.[126] The Greens, being mostly in favour of decentralisation, would naturally be drawn to the views of the anarchist left and distance themselves from the (state)socialist left. Their take a similar approach to the conservatives: they oppose the authoritarian conservatives, especially if the order these support is the current order of industrial mass society. At the same time, their views closely resemble those of the communitarian conservatives, who protect the traditional diversity of ways of life and the principle of organic

[126] András Lányi: *Az ökológia mint politikai filozófia.* (Ecology as Political Philosophy) In András Lányi: *Elképzelt közösségeim* (My Imagined Communities), Scolar, Budapest, 2016.

development in opposition to the all-unifying and -subverting progressives.

I will go so far as to say that the difference between the two – conservative and anarchist – views of community boils down to two questions. The first is lack of compulsion. The anarchists think in terms of voluntary forms of association. The conservatives remind us that the ultimate form of coming together is people's interdependence, i.e., the need for cooperation; in circumstances not of their own choosing, moreover, such as family, country of origin, mother tongue, etc. The citizens of a free society do not wish to escape interdependence – which would be impossible – but to find its tolerable form appropriate to human dignity – together. (For they depend on each other even in the search.) The other is the perception of the role of tradition. If the community is organised on a purely voluntary basis, such as a grassroots movement, a drama group or a city fire brigade, then the measure of agreement indispensable for cooperation is already given. However, where the composition of the group and the framework of the community are a given, there agreement is a rarity, at least in the case of a modern pluralist society. Hence why what we previously called the culture of reasonable disagreement becomes an existential question. According to the conservatives, this has a chance only if the participants possess common cultural foundations: for instance, ideas about the acceptable ways of handling problems, the purpose of institutions and the status of the participants which others can rely on and respect. For conservative thinkers, this approach often goes together with overvaluing tradition or affording it unquestioning respect. This is however by no means necessary. The modern conservative approach prefers to emphasise dialogue within the framework of tradition on the meaning of tradition.[127] A tradition is living, they claim, while it changes. It must change, for its true meaning lies not in the preservation of the memory of the past, but in passing down and renewing the knowledge a community needs for recognising the potential of the future. In the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, "...an adequate sense of tradition manifests itself in a grasp of those future possibilities which the past has made available to the present. Living traditions, just because they continue a not-yet-completed narrative, confront a future whose

[127] Alasdair MacIntyre, ibid.

determinate and determinated character, so far as it possesses any, derives from the past."[128]

This, however, is no longer an explicitly conservative thought. MacIntyre's formula was born of the hermeneutic rethinking of the approach to tradition. It could serve as the common denominator for communitarian endeavours, among which, it seems, we must seek the place of the philosophy of ecological politics. For its mission is similar to that of those who, in the final days of Antiquity, "set themselves to achieve … - often not recognizing fully what they were doing – was the construction of new forms of community within which thee moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness." According to MacIntyre, "what matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time."[129]

6. Fleeing the camp of conquerors

If, finally, I were asked as to what original new concept this work can contribute towards the founding of the philosophy of ecological politics, I would briefly reply as follows.

We have recognised that interpersonal relationships are ruled by either compulsion or mutual understanding and goodwill which urge us to accept the truth of others. The hope that we can escape from the rule of compulsion while increasing the use of violence against nature has ended in utter failure. The power which humanity has won over the forces of nature has increased the individual's vulnerability to social conditions to the extreme. Understanding cannot defeat compulsion. If we nevertheless wish it to become prevalent in human relations, then compulsion must not be eliminated – which is sadly impossible, as it is inherent to institutionalisation –, but rather balanced and neutralised. Recognising this is unavoidable for those

[128] Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue* p.223. Notre Dame University Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 1981, 2007.
[129] *Ibid.* p.263.

seeking political means for saving the physical and mental conditions for an existence worthy of man.

The ecological aspect of the matter would be strengthened if I were to support my claim with argumentation taken from the theory of living systems. I could, but I must confess that it does not originate there. I took it from the notes left behind by Simone Weil. Thus, as a postscript, I shall attempt to reconstruct the train of thought that led her here.

Her starting point was the same question that occupied Horkheimer and Adorno in their work on the nature of rational rule: how did man become the slave of his own work? What trap have we fallen into? *"Capitalism"*, Weil writes, *"has brought about the emancipation of collective humanity with respect to nature. But this collective humanity has itself taken on with respect to the individual the oppressive function formerly exercised by nature."*[130] From this, she draws a simpler (one might say naïve) and definitely more radical conclusion than the philosophers of alienation of the Frankfurt school. *"By the nature of things, the person is subdued to collectivity and rights are dependent upon force. The lies and misconceptions which obscure this truth are extremely dangerous because they prevent us from appealing to the only thing which is immune to force and can preserve us from it: namely, that other force which is the radiance of the spirit."*[131] Well, these lies and misconceptions, to which Weil refers, are the presuppositions of modern political philosophy.

For the concept of the "dot-like" individual detached from his social relations fails to take into account the fact of our original interdependence: that freedom does not divide us, but rather unites us with our companions. If we remove this bond from consideration, we cannot arrive at any other conclusion than the ever-newer utopias connected to compelling the rights of the repressed individual. The attempt at realising them merely intensifies man's isolation and increases his vulnerability to the impersonal power of the ever-newer institutions promising "the order of freedom" or "social justice".

According to Weil, the anarchist philosopher – Christian mystic, persecuted Jew, French resistance fighter – all attempts to eradicate oppression and violence from human social relations through the introduction of new, more just rules, are in vain. The attempt of enlightened modernity to humanise the forces that direct history has proved self-deceptive. *"Utilitarianism was the fruit of one of these attempts.*

[130] Simone Weil: *Gravity and Grace* p.154. Routledge, London, 2002.
[131] *Sian Miles ed: Simone Weil – an Anthology.* Virago Press, London, 1986, p.61.

It rests upon the supposed existence of a wonderful little piece of mechanism thanks to which force, on entering into the sphere of human relations, becomes an automatic producer of justice. The economic liberalism of the nineteenth century middle classes rests entirely upon the belief in such a mechanism; the only proviso being that in order to possess this property of being an automatic producer of justice, force must take the form of money to the exclusion of all use either of arms or of political power."[132] However, the apparent neutrality of currency, which makes everything comparable with everything else and which realises the enforced relations of superiority and inferiority in the form of "objective" quantitative connections, is an enormous lie. Reconciling this lie with the freedom of the individual or with the principle of social justice is impossible. This is the reason for the huge success of Nazi demagoguery. Hitler, she writes, represents the victory of a coherent lie over an incoherent one.

"There is only one possible choice to be made," she wrote in her final work. *"Either we must perceive at work in the universe, alongside force, a principle of a different kind, or else we must recognize force as being the unique and sovereign ruler over human relations also."*[133] The question is not whether we prefer the power game to be regulated by scientific planning, the will of the majority or the individual's thirst for profit, but whether we accept the rule of force in social relations. Yet we must accept it if we have no other principle that we can oppose to the blind necessity of power relations ("real" relations! what a soothing expression).

However, this different principle exists! It exists and few would deny its fundamental importance in human contact. What protects from force and what Weil calls the radiance of the spirit is reason itself. Not the reason that guards the order of industrial society in the form of rational calculations, but the capacity to *understand* others, which creates a whole new kind of connection among people. Participating in others' lives with understanding is exactly the opposite of knowing how to deal with them, of *the power of knowledge.* Not only does it fail to help one do away with them, harm them or rule over them, but it makes one incapable of doing so (as Emmanuel Lévinas explains).

Following Simone Weil – and others, such as Alasdair MacIntyre – we can boldly state that the incoherent lie forming the foundation of modern Western civilisation is none other than the removal of goodwill and mutual assistance (which has continued to be valued in private

[132] Simone Weil: *The Need for Roots – Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind.* Routledge, London, 2002, p.236.
[133] *Ibid.* pp.235-36.

contact) from the list of fundamental principles upholding the political community. It experimented with technologies of organising society, which promised to provide the optimal distribution and maximally efficient application of the means of power, in the hope that these would be capable of maintaining successful cooperation, independently of the good or bad behaviour of individuals. The introduction of these technologies, like all technological systems, requires the total conformity of the participants and demands the application of various forms of compulsion – whether brutal or refined, direct or indirect – against those who refuse. This could only lead to the legalisation of the superiority of force that had been converted into power in one way or another, despite the seeming impartiality of the rules of the game. The greater this power is, the more unshakable it makes the rule of those who wield it and the more hopeless the situation of those who attempt to oppose them. Currently, this applies just as much to the power of the Islamic fundamentalists or the Chinese or Russian tyrants as to that of the multinational business networks. It may already be too late for humanity to change this situation, which has placed its fate in the hands of a few thousand vastly rich people and their experts, computer scientists and mercenaries armed to the teeth. The coherent lie, Weil would say, has triumphed over the incoherent one.

But she herself did not give in to despair. *"Where force is absolutely sovereign, justice is absolutely unreal. Yet justice cannot be that. We know it experimentally. It is real enough in the hearts of men. The structure of a human heart is just as much of a reality as any other in this universe..."*, she writes in 1943, with the certainty of saints and madmen.[134] It is not as though she were deluding herself – at least not regarding the benevolence of the human heart. (She speaks of the structure of the heart and not the heart, because she was convinced that it is not the personal in us that is worthy of respect, but the possibility we all have of rising up to that which is above it.) She knows that the suffering endured and the fear of what is to come has left little goodwill in people and even less willingness to make sacrifices for each other. They do not want justice, but rather the power to be unjust. Thus, freedom in itself, i.e., the association of autonomous individuals without rule or hierarchy is unlikely to create a good or even tolerable society, admits the former anarchist fighter. *"As it cannot be expected that a man without grace should be just, there must be a society organized in such a way that injustices punish*

[134] *Ibid.* p.237.

each other through a perpetual oscillation. Equilibrity alone reduces force to be nothing. If we know in what way society is unbalanced, we must do what we can to add weight to the lighter scale… (…) But we must have formed a conception of equilibrium and be ever ready to change sides like justice, 'that fugitive from the camp of conquerors'. (The meaning of the famous passage in the Georgias about geometry.) No unlimited development is possible in the nature of things; the world is entirely based on measure and equilibrium, and it is the same with the city."[135]

Finally, there is solid ground under our feet: back to Plato; back to Aristotle. What is there to see here, however? The proponents of freedom have been arguing for at least a hundred years over who can find more "repressive structures" in human relations: in the division of labour, culture, religion, regarding public power, between sexes and races and so on. They tirelessly urge us to put an end to the violence, exclusion and expropriation that lie at the bottom of pre-existing conditions. They reproach us if we fail to do so and irritably deflect responsibility if their followers' eagerness results in ever newer and more cruel repressive systems. Few among them have reached the point of recognising the necessity of the asymmetry of social conditions and the unavoidability of the compulsion present in institutions. Or, if they do, few forgo using this compulsion in service of the noble goal, the hammering of the asymmetries into symmetry; let it cost what it will. Weil reminds us that never in the course of human history has anyone managed to eliminate the institutions of compulsion standing in the way of an order based on mutual understanding and acceptance; at most, one can play them off against one another. The closest we can get to the desirable state of a lack of compulsion is if these forces balance and cancel each other out and thus hinder the members of the political community from seeking the truth as little as possible – simply put, from communicating with each other and holding a fair, continuously renewing dialogue over their common goals – since this is the original raison d'etre of politics and the only thing which makes their coexistence bearable.

It is now perhaps clear that this conviction demands significantly more from its proponents than the division of power or the limitation of the market. It requires the restoration of a third regulatory principle besides bureaucratic rationality and market competition (even in opposition to these two, if needs be), as the final source of legitimacy:

[135] Simone Weil: *Gravity and Grace.* Routledge, London, 2002, p.171.

voluntary agreement (and reasonable non-agreement). This program, which our authors previously characterised with the expressions self-organisation, self-regulation, conviviality and deliberation, is not at all new. It is well-known from the lives of the new types of communities which formed at least as indispensable a role around the development of modern civic society as the state and the market. It is also true, however, that dependence on our communities and its concomitant, the demand of agreement, can be just as cruel a tyrant towards the individual, if not more so, than the order of the state or the compulsion of economic efficiency. It is clear that only the balance of these three forces has any promise of tolerable conditions for man, insofar as they relativise and neutralise each other. Though one cannot be too careful with drawing biological parallels when examining social phenomena, it can be observed that the balance of processes in living systems is never maintained by a single regulatory system. The more complicated a system is and the more achievements it is capable of, the more complex its regulation and the more complicated the relation of the regulatory subsystems to one another.

What can be said for sure is that this ceaselessly collapsing dynamic balance – the essence of self-organisation – can only be restored as long as the size of the organisation fits the nature of the association. This is why we emphasised that the ecological turn in politics means, above all, the restoration of the human scale of things, i.e., decentralisation in all areas of life. It encourages us to follow patterns formed in the local communities fighting for their self-determination. To quote from Simone Weil's notebook once more: *"After the collapse of our civilization there must be one of two things: either the whole of it will perish like the ancient civilizations, or it will adopt itself to a decentralized world. It rests with us, not to break up the centralization (for it automatically goes on increasing like a snowball until the catastrophe comes), but to prepare to the future."*[136]

[136] *Ibid.* p.177.

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