

Human Self-determination as a Basis for Sustainable Living¹

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ABSTRACT

We have conquered the Earth, but now face the threat of global disaster. This seems to suggest that there is a fundamental contradiction between human freedom and environmental sustainability. This notion is mistaken, however, derived from an erroneous understanding of freedom or self-determination. Real freedom is not equal to arbitrary free will, but means the realization of maximum human potential within bounds. To avoid destruction of this planet and thus of ourselves, we have to observe the existence of necessities. We can do this by establishing a respectful living relationship to the natural environment, to other human beings, and to ourselves. The basic obstacle to overcome for a move in this direction is the largely anonymous economic system with its tremendous self-dynamics. This system forces us to live unecologically in the broadest sense of the term and, consequently, contrary to what the economists keep telling us, does not increase our personal freedom. We have to break up its force, but how? It is suggested that we need a strong basis of comprehensible and tangible structures within which necessities can be personally experienced. It is suggested that such structures, which relate to environmental, social and psychological aspects of self-determination, can be found in the currently discussed ideas about bioregionalism, libertarianism and self-realization.

Keywords: *Self-determination, sustainable living, societal systems, ecoregions, libertarian communities, self-realization*

INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS THE MEANING OF SELF-DETERMINATION?

Often it is suggested that there is a fundamental conflict between human self-determination or freedom and ecological sustainability and that, consequently, we must contain the former in order to attain the latter. In this present contribution I will argue that this kind of thinking is based on a false notion of freedom and that, if properly understood, human self-determination is in fact a prerequisite for any kind of sustainable living. Indeed, in philosophical discussion a distinction is being made between freedom in the broad and freedom in the narrow senses of the word. The former refers to human action in total absence of any kind of constraints whatsoever and,

therefore, should better be called arbitrariness. The latter means human action which is free of coercion by others but acknowledges at the same time the observance of necessities.

Necessities are given by the fact that human life can unfold in a fulfilling fashion only if it remains embedded in a network of relationships involving the community, the environment and the human self. "Life in a community is guided by rules. The necessity of rules does not have the character of coercion or even regimentation, but signifies an order and structuration of human practice for the sake of maximizing freedom for all," says Annemarie Pieper (1991, 14).² This becomes obvious to all of us as soon as we realize that we can conduct our everyday life only by following socially established rules all the time. On the other hand, as most of us are no longer engaged in regular interactions with natural components of the environment, it is less obvious that such rules should extend to the way we treat the environment as well. But, as Gerhard Huber (1984) points out, "facing the present ecological situation, ... a supplementary determination of our notion of freedom becomes necessary ...: it must include nature in principle. The free self-determination of humans can last only as long as it respects the continuation of nature, because nature constitutes the life support of humans, and without its continued existence human freedom cannot exist either."

The promotion of human freedom was the leading idea of Enlightenment. Indeed, it resulted in a liberation of humans from political dominion and theological dogmatism. It also made possible the beginning of societal rationalization as "processes of substituting random, planless, traditional and customary forms of action by reflected, means-ends-oriented, calculated and correspondingly organized, systematically planned forms." (Hartfiel 1976, 545). The outcome of this development was a society divided into institutionally specialized functional domains such as religion, politics, economy, law, science, etc. Niklas Luhmann (1984) describes these domains as systems, each operating according to a specific information code. As a consequence society gained in functional efficiency, but at the same time became highly ambiguous with respect to the project of human freedom. Günter Hartfiel (1976, 545) describes this situation as follows: "On the one hand, it is acknowledged that the domination of nature and of social conditions of existence, made possible through rationalization, is a precondition for human freedom. On the other hand, however, rationalization means radical systematization, the

construction of relatively stable ... connecting structures between elements of organizations (persons and things), ... binding rules and procedures, command and obedience, dependence, submission and control.”

Indeed, we live today in a society which provides us with more options for conducting our lives than ever before. At the same time, however, the other side of the coin makes itself felt with increasing poignancy. The functional systems, all following their own special logic, start to develop a life of their own: their rules are at the service of their own efficient functioning rather than of human communal and sustainable living. In fact, they may force humans to do things which run counter to the necessities mentioned previously.

The extreme case of a system with a life of its own is the economic system. The fact that it is being supported by a mainstream economic theory which has the character of an ideology rather than of scientific wisdom makes it worse. I am referring to the kind of thinking which ascribes to the market a degree of harmony that results miraculously in a congruence of individual selfishness and societal welfare or which, stated paradoxically, suggests that if individuals act irresponsibly in social terms, i.e., egoistically, they in fact act responsibly, because the “invisible hand” invariably manages to convert the sum of many egoisms to a common good. It seems quite appropriate to label this kind of reasoning as economism and to see it as a real threat to the future of this planet. The political scientist John Dryzek (1987, ix) illustrates its dangers with a Titanic metaphor: “Many ecologists are aware of icebergs in the vicinity, and seek to convince us that the ship of state should chart a course to avoid them. Most economists would be more concerned with ensuring a utility-maximizing arrangement of deckchairs.” And the major concern of the well-known non-mainstream ecological economist Herman E. Daly (1993, 24) is “that our disciplinary preference for logically beautiful results over factually grounded policies has reached such fanatical proportions that we economists have become dangerous to the earth and its inhabitants.”

The economic perspective, then, suggests that the fundamental insight of liberal thought, namely that my freedom must be limited in order to avoid encroaching on the freedom of others, is considered automatically by the market mechanism. Under the same perspective it is easily feasible to cover environmental concerns as well: All that needs to be done is to reinterpret environmental problems as social problems with a monetary value attached to them and by so doing internalize them into the system. The problem of environmental devastation can be solved, it is claimed, not by changing the rules of the system, but by expanding the domain of their binding force. As a result, economic agents can comfortably stick to their customary behavior. As Lothar Mayer (1992, 44) puts it: “It is the discrete charm of market economy that it keeps all thought at a distance which might cloud our nice feeling that we are good and decent human beings.”

Can we think of dampening the workings of the systems, in particular the economic system, such that human self-determination unfolding within the bounds of necessities enables

us to assume an ecological lifestyle? I think we can, but only in terms of reducing to a significant degree the geographical span of the systems’ interconnectedness. In other words, I suggest that the present trend to total globalization, with its growing uncertainties (“manufactured unpredictability” according to Anthony Giddens³), should be replaced by a counter-development in the direction of decentralized structures with tangible and comprehensible life spaces, largely socially integrated⁴ communities and a considerable degree of local to regional subsistence and self-administration. Only then will humans be enabled to experience the necessities related to human-environment relations and to communal living directly and let this experience shape their frame of mind. The two domains are mutually dependent on each other, and they are also linked to a third source of necessities: the internal nature of human individuals which, if given sufficient room for development, can contribute to their state of consciousness in a positive way, which then, in turn, will interact accordingly with structures in the environmental and social domain. Using Félix Guattari’s (1989) term, we could say that it is the “three ecologies” which need to be restored.

If the coercion exercised on individuals by the systems keeps them from becoming self-determined and, hence, acting in an ecologically compatible way, it is not reasonable to expect that the workings of the systems at large will somehow bring everything to a good end (although this is exactly what neo-classical economists claim with respect to the market system). Still we can ask the question about whether the systems have not, at least, a potential to become geared to ecologically relevant goals. We will do this in the next section, “The Ecological Failure of the Systems;” as its title suggests, the answer is negative. The remainder of the paper will be taken up by a description of the structural reshaping in the domains of the “three ecologies” necessary for the promotion of human self-determination. The lifespaces aspects will be dealt with in the third, “Ecoregions as Lifespaces,” the community aspects in the fourth “Libertarian Communities,” and the individual nature aspects in the fifth section “Self-realization.”

THE ECOLOGICAL FAILURE OF THE SYSTEM

This section will consider the question concerning the possibility of reorienting the systems in such a way that their workings would become ecologically compatible. Niklas Luhmann (1986), in his system-theoretic investigation, reaches the conclusion that the specificity of the communication codes associated with the different systems makes it virtually impossible to face the ecological issues in a concerted manner within the society at large. True, one could argue that Luhmann develops his system theory at a fairly abstract level, but then the results of John Dryzek’s (1987) more down-to-earth analysis of the environmental problem-solving capabilities of systems, or “social choice mechanisms” as he calls them, justify a discussion about their failure in this respect. This applies to all systems considered by Dryzek: market, administration, law,

moral persuasion, polyarchy (a western style democratic political system), diplomacy and armed conflict.

To conduct his analysis, Dryzek uses a concept of functional rationality: "To describe a human social structure as functionally rational means, first and foremost, that its organization is such as to consistently and effectively promote or produce some value" (Dryzek 1987, 25). Examples are: a rational firm produces profits; a rational economic system satisfies consumption needs; a rational system of law settles disputes; a rational collective security system maintains peace. Noteworthy is the fact that Dryzek ascribes a functional rationality to ecosystems as well: "Setting aside ... the question of human interest, an ecologically natural system is one whose low entropy is manifested in an ability to cope with stress and perturbations, so that such a structure can consistently and effectively provide itself with the good of life support" (Dryzek 1987, 35).

Now, Dryzek's question is to what extent system rationalities are capable of translating their goal orientation in such a way that a persistent working of ecological rationality in the environment remains guaranteed. To answer it he employs the following system theoretic criteria:

- * Negative feedback: The system is capable of initiating corrective action if it receives environmental signals which indicate undesirable changes;
- * Coordination: The system manages to adjust actions and their effects both on the individual and the collective level in the direction of the common goal;
- * Robustness: The system can perform well under a variety of conditions;
- * Flexibility: The system is capable of answering changes in environmental conditions with structural adaptations. Robustness and flexibility may replace each other because both are the expression of a power to deal with variability;
- * Resilience: The system manages to return into the domain of normal operations after a loss of equilibrium.

As an example, let us consider the results of Dryzek's investigation (supplemented by information from some other sources, notably Wackernagel and Rees 1995) for the economic system,⁵ which is of particular interest to us here. Indeed, it incorporates a negative feedback mechanism governed by price signals, which also can be extended to environmental goods as long as those goods can be internalized into the mechanism, i.e., given a price. However, there are several reasons why, under usual conditions, the effect of this feedback becomes substantially diminished:

- * It may be difficult or even impossible to internalize environmental goods;
- * Because of the discounting practice associated with positive interest, future goods are systematically undervalued;
- * Market prices inform about the relative scarcity of goods within the market system only and not about their absolute scarcity within the biosphere;
- * The claim that an international division of labor based on comparative advantages results in multilateral benefits and in an efficient use of resources can be maintained only as

long as the factors of production (in particular capital) are immobile. In reality, of course, the unlimited mobility of those factors is being fostered (Daly 1993, 25);⁶

- * Economic rationality, as it is geared exclusively to material profits, really implies a miserable kind of morality.

The most important fact, however, is that, even if we assume that negative feedback has some effect, very rapidly it will become overshadowed by the workings of a positive feedback mechanism: the internal logic of growth which is a threat not only to the environment but to the economic system itself.

The economic system also has some power of coordination in the form of the "invisible hand." Again, however, there are associated problems:

- * The coordination works for private goods only. With common and public goods there is the danger of the "tragedy of the commons," i.e., destruction of the resource by overuse, which takes place if all concerned individuals will try to maximize their own private benefit. Traditional communities, consisting of people acquainted with each other, are known for their capability to avoid the catastrophe by means of cooperative agreements. In turn, the anonymity of the modern market means, of course, that economic subjects will only rarely meet face-to-face and have the opportunity to develop a cooperative behavior;
- * If traditional systems based on cooperative communities still exist, they are always in danger of collapsing under the onslaught of external market forces;
- * The market system favors the division of labor to such a degree that special interests will dominate common interests.

What about the remainder of the criteria mentioned above? The economic system is robust because it can function under a considerable variety of circumstances. On the other hand, it is inflexible in that its structure (the rules governing its functioning) is very resistant to all sorts of changes, a fact which occasions the following sarcastic comment by Murray Bookchin (1988, 66): "One might more easily persuade a green plant to desist from photosynthesis than to ask the bourgeois economy to desist from capital accumulation." Finally, with respect to resilience, it is difficult to give any kind of reliable judgement.

Because of the present absolutely dominating position of the economic system in our society, it is particularly important to be able to recognize its ecological failure. Seen in an evolutionary perspective (see Steiner 1993 and 1995a),⁷ this system, as a latecomer, should play a subordinate role only. It is true that the new phenomena which emerge out of the differentiating process of (biological and cultural) evolution are precisely new phenomena because they provide new degrees of freedom and have causal powers to work back on the evolutionarily speaking older phenomena, i.e., on the very basis they differentiated out from. At the same time, for its continued existence, the new must to some extent remain embedded within the old. The meaning of this "evolutionary logic" for our present problem is that the economic system should function within certain bounds set by the (older) political system

only. The latter, in turn, should be anchored in the (still older) socio-cultural system, and this system, as the basis of any kind of human society, should, for its own support, avoid excessive tinkering with the ecological rationality of the all-embracing natural environment. To speak of political bounds for the economic system is to speak of more than just some legal framework (related, for example, to property rights) within which the free market can unfold unhampered otherwise; it is to ask the question whether the framework should not be such as to force the economic system to become structured differently. For example, Ulrich Thielemann (1994, 63) thinks that economic action should be (at least partially) relieved from competition coercion if we wish to entertain the vision of an economic system which, on the basis of moral responsibility, can become ecologically sustainable.

As we all know, the real situation looks different; in fact, it is almost the reverse. The economic system dominates the political system almost at will (and this domination extends to the socio-cultural and the ecological system; for how long?). At best, the two are allied with each other, which means that we should not expect to find any improvement if we apply Dryzek's criteria to the joint functioning of the two systems. On the contrary, we will find that there is not only a failure of the market, but a failure of the state as well (see, for example, Jänicke 1986).⁸ The economic system creates problems whose solutions are left to the state. The state thus becomes overloaded, but it also has a co-responsibility for the problems, because it desists from preventive intervention. The more the state spends money on problems produced by our capitalist society, the more it institutionalizes a loss of interest in preventive action. And the more the state restricts itself to repair behavior after the fact only, the more it becomes dependent on a tax income provided by a growing economy.

ECOREGIONS AS LIFESPACES

From a purely economic viewpoint it may be logical to conclude that environmental problems can be solved best by an economic system which is as deregulated and as globalized as possible. Unfortunately, however, factual experience seems to tell a different story: The increasing internationalization of the free market economy appears to be a source of massive environmental destruction. A growing globalization means an increasing degree of anonymity associated with the systemic integration⁹ of economic actions and, hence, an increasing degree of "organized irresponsibility" (the subtitle of a book by Ulrich Beck 1988). "Organized" means that irresponsibility, once we have this kind of system, is built into it, in other words unavoidable. It does not mean that participating individuals have the intention to act irresponsibly.

On the basis of this fact, I entertain the concluding notion that we should find our way back to largely decentralized structures which afford human beings the possibility to acquire a sense of familiarity with a tangible lifespace. In geographical terms it means regionalization instead of globalization. This requires a restructuring of society such that it becomes territo-

rially instead of functionally differentiated. Support for such an idea comes from a multitude of sources, for example from E.F. Schumacher (1985) ("Small is Beautiful"), John Dryzek (1987) ("radical decentralization")¹⁰, Gerhard Bahrenberg and Marek Dutkowski (1993) ("ecoregional strategy"), Murray Bookchin (1988) ("ecocommunities") and Van Andrus et al. (1990), Kirkpatrick Sale (1991) and Michael V. McGinnis (1995) ("bioregionalism"). A territorial organization should be capable of providing a framework for the first two necessities mentioned above, the social and the environmental, adding comprehensible communities to comprehensible lifespaces. Such a structure can serve the goal of liberation from system coercion in favor of genuine self-determination. Arne Naess (1993, 142) puts it thus: "... in as many as possible of the essential aspects of life, one should be able to resist coercion. These freedoms are diminished every time there is a centralisation of a decision in the sense that some actor at a distant centre contributes to the decision in a way that must be felt to come from the outside, unduly narrowing one's own freedom of choice. Therefore ecological policies will be on the side of decentralisation."

An ecoregion can be thought to be a geographical region which has been delimited on the basis of some natural conditions and exhibits a marked degree of political autonomy and economic autarky. Political autonomy empowers the human population of this region in terms of exclusive control and jurisdiction over the ecosystems with their productive, protective and waste-assimilating functions within the boundaries of the region. A large percentage of the land is preferably common property rather than privately owned. Economic autarky implies self-sufficiency, which requires a direct and creative type of interaction between people and the regionally available natural resources. As a consequence, there is no further expansion but a reduction of the extent of international division of labor. Any remaining interregional exchange of resources should serve the principle of self-determination: "What is suggested through self-reliance is not that all kinds of such communication should cease, but that they should be carried out only if favourable for Self-realisation¹¹, and not done as a necessity for satisfying needs that could be satisfied locally just as well" (Naess 1993, 143).

In addition, the division of labor also becomes less important at the level of individuals: By means of job rotation or diversification, intellectual and physical labor as well as industry and agriculture draw nearer to each other (see Bookchin 1988, 69). For the extraction and the use of resources ecologically compatible technologies (for example, energy supplies based on solar and wind power) are being used. And the principle of a high degree of decentralization and self-sufficiency also applies to the individual household, which then becomes "disindustrialized," i.e., loses its status as "a transit station where consumer goods flow in and rubbish and garbage flow out" (Häussermann 1987)¹², and changes to a place with a strong do-it-yourself kind of orientation.

The most solid argument in favor of regionally organized economies comes from reflections about global carrying ca-

capacity. In the words of William E. Rees and Mathis Wackernagel (1992, 10):

If all human populations were able to live within their own regional carrying capacities (i.e., on the continuous flows generated by natural capital within their home regions), the net effect would be global sustainability. However, no region exists as an independent unit—the reality is that the populations of all urban regions and many whole nations already exceed their territorial carrying capacities and depend on trade and natural capital depletion for survival. Such regions are running an unaccounted ecological deficit—their populations are appropriating carrying capacity from elsewhere or from future generations.

As a consequence, the two authors have developed an instrument called “ecological footprint” (see Wackernagel and Rees 1995). It determines the size of the land area needed for resource extraction and waste assimilation under current conditions by a regionally defined human population. In other words, it is a measure of carrying capacity appropriated by that population. The application of this instrument to countries of the western world demonstrates to what extent their populations live in too grand a style or, conversely, to what extent they would have to simplify their lifestyles, if all humans on this planet should get a fair share of the total available planetary carrying capacity.

The following is a list of expected benefits arising from ecoregional structures (partly according to Bahrenberg and Dutkowsky (1993):

- * Environmental signals have shorter ways to travel and thus a much higher chance of being noticed;
- * Supply routes are short and, consequently, the transportation volume is small;
- * Common property resources guarantee a collectively regulated access to them (prerequisite: contractual agreements between members of the community) and avoid their depletion by outside interests;
- * Large scale technologies, with their associated risks, tend to vanish because they cannot find the large spaces they need for their deployment anymore;
- * The innovative potential of many small regional units is probably larger than that of a globally homogenized society;
- * Responsibility can no longer be delegated to central, supra-regional and supranational institutions; it has to be taken directly at the regional level;
- * The increased directness of human-environment interactions fosters a sense of responsibility;
- * Do-it-yourself type of work creates action competencies and thus helps to become independent from system coercions;
- * Scientific expert knowledge with its generalizing tendencies can become embedded within regionally valid stocks of endogenous knowledge.

In conclusion: Ecoregional structures have the capacity to create conditions which will facilitate self-determined action

of individuals as well as communities, i.e., action free of coercion, but carried out in recognition of the ecologically necessary. In the words of Murray Bookchin (1988, 110): “It is within such a decentralized community, sensitively tailored to its natural ecosystem, that we could hope to develop a new sensitivity toward the world of life and new level of self-consciousness, rational action and foresight.”

LIBERTARIAN COMMUNITIES

The functional differentiation of society into a number of systems has resulted in a growing volume of intrasocietal connections, into which more and more individuals have become tied. This means that an increasing size of societal units goes in parallel with a growth of system coercion, because only a high degree of systemness can keep these units from falling apart. Consequently, to free ourselves from the claws of the systems, smallness is also required with respect to the size of societal networks of relations, because “... the greater the size of the units as a whole, the less possibilities exist for individual creativity. There is less possibility for each member of the unit to have a comprehension of what is going on” (Naess 1993, 143).

Large societies are also inefficient because they suffer from overproportional social costs and resource consumption. Leopold Kohr has addressed this problem by looking at nation states of different sizes¹³ and concluding that the problem starts when a certain critical size is exceeded: “Once the development has gone beyond this point, the further growth of society does no longer contribute to promoting a good life among its individual members, but will be simply needed to keep itself afloat” (Kohr 1986, 59). Thereby it seems that the expenditures necessary to keep the political and economic mechanisms running will, in comparison to societal size, mount in geometrical progression. As an example, Kohr mentions national defense expenditures whose importance relative to the total gross national product tends to increase with growing size of the country (see Kohr 1986, 66).

A return to the human scale of smaller communities may bring about a liberation from the dominion of systems, but then those communities will have to face the necessity of self-administration. Inasmuch as this self-administration is supposed to be free of domination, some kind of anarchistic concepts come into play. Rolf Cantzen (1984) has gone to the trouble of surveying such approaches and of evaluating them with respect to their possible relevance for a libertarian-ecological concept of society.¹⁴ Essentially there are two traditions, one stressing the principle of individuality, the other opting for the principle of solidarity. According to the former, the development towards a desirable societal order is hampered by the institutions of the state which constrain human freedom. It is true that getting rid of the institutions would automatically mean a liberation from the systems. However, this concept interprets freedom as “egoistic competition of all against all in the economic as well as in the social domain” (Cantzen 1984, 28). Clearly this would amount to a move out

of the frying pan into the fire; the systemic aspects of economic actions would not disappear but continue their existence in exaggerated form. "Individual anarchism interpreted in this way can be summarized with the formula: economic liberalism extended to all spheres of life, minus state (Cantzen 1984, 29-30). In contrast, with the second tradition "the sociality of humans, their togetherness, solidarity and mutuality are all ... constitutive for individuality and freedom" (Cantzen 1984, 33). Here the state is guilty of obstructing the possibility of the development of "organically grown" relations among humans, which might make such a kind of freedom possible.

Cantzen's solution to the problem is a "constructive anarchism," which will overcome the oneness of both approaches by combining their positive aspects and eliminating their negative ones. He pleads for cooperation, not competition, between individuals, but in a form which excludes the possibility of tendencies that are harmful to the principle of individuality. This is a danger Cantzen associates with the representatives of the solidarity principle because they see in a community a societal unit governed by a high degree of social control. Stated more precisely, Cantzen (1984, 49) proposes the principle of federalism as a political alternative to etatism¹⁵ and the principle of cooperatives as an economic alternative to capitalism.

Social rules regulating the living together of its members are at the basis of the self-administration of a community, rules which either have been negotiated explicitly or have evolved implicitly out of repeated experiences (whereby, however, such rules should not result in new forms of coercion). At a time of continuous changes and growing insecurities, probably the first type of rules is more important. This is congruent with the second conclusion Dryzek (1987) derives from the fact of system failure: The request for the realization of a principle of "practical reason," with which he addresses the theory of communicative action by Jürgen Habermas (1988, 1991) and the ensuing concept of communicative or discursive ethics.¹⁶

This concept proposes an unrestricted discourse supposed to guarantee that the democratic principle of participation of all concerned can take effect. The goal of the discourse is to reach at the end of an exchange of testable arguments a consensus on the basis of the best argument. Obviously, if such a procedure is followed, only generalizable interests will have a chance of becoming agreed upon. Seen this way, the conservation of the integrity of natural systems should, even with or exactly because of an anthropocentric perspective, clearly be a generalizable interest. After all they constitute the life support basis for all of us. Of course, a prerequisite is that the threat of looming disaster is generally recognized. Only then sustainability as the highest value can become the foundation of the best argument. The question as to what extent we can expect to reach agreements about environmentally compatible modes of action through procedures of discursive ethics is a current topic of discussion (for example, see Zierhofer 1993).

At any rate, a communicatively rational discourse does not necessarily end with an ecologically rational result. Eventu-

ally this has to do with the fact that the discourse concept addresses procedural aspects only and does not build on any preconditions related to content, such as preconceived values. This, of course, is paradigmatic for the modern position, represented by Habermas, according to which there are no sources of orientation outside the realm of human affairs, which means that, time and again, we must conduct a joint search for way signs. Of course, the participants in a discourse are free to express and defend their own personal value judgements, and the chances that such judgements are ecologically compatible are likely to rise if the discourse in question takes place within an ecoregional and communal milieu. The participants are then, as pointed out earlier, confronted with the issue of ecological responsibility in a fairly direct way, and they are now also tied into a familiar social environment, which should make a readiness for cooperation more probable. Indeed, the Habermasian notion of communicative rationality has its root in the will to understanding which we must muster continuously for the successful conduct of everyday life. This will is the opposite to the blind coercion exercised by system rules and resulting in an instrumental and strategic kind of rationality. Also, it can help to overcome the fragmentation caused by the functional differentiation of society.

We can recognize ancient Greek thought to be at the root of the tradition which demands the constitution of communities of human proportions: the concept of the polis as an ethical community on the basis of justice, citizen participation and mutual care (compare with Bookchin 1988, 101 ff.). Aristotle was among the first to claim that a community's size should be such as to allow general personal acquaintance, as administrative and legal affairs would become grounded otherwise. In this context, Bookchin points to the fact that the term "autonomy" was actually used by the ancient Greek in the sense of "self-administration," whereas for us it has taken on the meaning of mere independence. For them autonomy was related to the possibility of directly becoming involved in the community's self-administration and of realizing one's self-determination within a network of social relations. I have no doubt that this possibility—which in contrast to the ancient Greek situation should be open to women as well, of course—is exactly what we urgently need again today because, as Naess (1993, 142) puts it, "being together with others is essential to the realisation of the Self."

SELF-REALIZATION

It is to be expected that the frame of mind of a self-determined human being will reflect an orientation motivated by the insight in environmental and social necessities. However, for each individual there is still a third independent source of self-determination, namely subjective necessities related to one's own nature. This does not mean that here we have to do with orientations that are all individually different and arbitrary. On the contrary, I expect to come across elements with some degree of objectivity. After all, a human nature is common to all human beings; think, for example, of the concept

of the “collective unconscious” developed by Carl Gustav Jung.¹⁷ Following a concept of humanistic psychology and also the eco-philosophical thinking of Arne Naess (1993), I call the process of being able to develop according to one’s own nature “Self-realization”. Note that Naess (1993, 85) distinguishes “Self-realization” (with a capital S) as a process of human maturation to an expanded Self from “self-realization” (with a lower-case s) as a merely egocentric development.

Rather than being an egocentric process, self-realization relates to the development of an internal potential which, according to Abraham Maslow (1962, 3), can be given a positive interpretation:

We have, each of us, an essential biologically based inner nature, which is to some degree ‘natural,’ ‘intrinsic,’ given, and, in a certain limited sense, unchangeable, or, at least, unchanging. ... Each person’s inner nature is in part unique to himself [or herself] and in part species-wide. ... This inner nature ... seems not to be intrinsically evil, but rather either neutral or positively ‘good.’ What we call evil behavior appears most often to be a secondary reaction to frustration of this intrinsic nature. ... Since this inner nature is good or neutral rather than bad, it is best to bring it out and to encourage it rather than to suppress it.

Seen this way, “discontents” should not arise in our civilization because it just barely manages to keep the lid on our natural destructive instincts, as Sigmund Freud (1985) had it, but rather because it has taken on a form which makes it difficult for its members to develop the positively valued characteristics of their nature. “To oversimplify the matter somewhat,” says Maslow (1962, 5), “it is as if Freud supplied to us the sick half of psychology and we must now fill it out with the healthy half.” By the same token we should, I think, dispense with the latest “wisdom” emerging from a teaming up of sociobiology and economics, namely that a “human propensity for thinking mainly of short-term self-interest” is the one and only anthropological constant on which all our considerations for problem-solving should be based (Ridley and Low 1994, 1). How about giving credit instead to the Aristotelian assumption that humans have, by nature and if embedded within social relationships, the capacity for a virtuous and fulfilling life? (Hans-Friedrich Bartig 1978). We may not want to go as far as Maslow, who emphasizes the point that humanistic psychology’s notion of self-realization is in fact merely a preparatory stage for a still higher level of psychology, one “which is transpersonal and transhuman, which has its center in the universe, not in human needs and interests, and which transcends humaneness, identity, self-realisation and the like.” (Maslow 1985, 12). That we should move away from aggressiveness and selfishness, real or imagined, however, is obvious.

In the narrow sense of the word, our own nature is our body. In a sense we must rediscover it because our heavily rationalized civilization has led not only to a splitting off of our higher levels of consciousness from our lower levels, but from our bodily foundation as well. Following Gernot Böhme (1992),

who has been developing thoughts about a philosophy of the body, this splitting off is a consequence of the sharp separation of subject and object and of a devaluation of phantasy and sensuality as powers of cognition. Our body has become degraded to an object which we treat instrumentally in the same way as we treat outer nature. As it turns out, it is accessible via feeling self-experience only, and if we wish to find our way back to our body we must learn to feel again. Critics may classify such notions depreciatingly as a reactionary trend to neo-romanticism. In fact, as Cornelia Klinger (1992) explains, the issue is not one of falling back behind Enlightenment, but one of transcending it such that human beings in their subjectivity can gain autonomy from rationalistic coercions and develop the expressive components of their personalities. “Requesting autonomy for whole human beings necessarily changes the relationship to nature, not only to inner (human) nature, but also to outer nature surrounding those beings” (Klinger 1992, 33).

The denial of our body, which after all is also the carrier of our sense organs, demonstrates that there is a link between the loss of access to our inner and the loss of access to the outer nature. To recover the broken links, both sides are important. Exactly this is a central topic in the concept of “Self-realization” by Naess (1993). A spontaneous experience of the exterior world can be had by a human being if he or she manages to see him- or herself as being situated in a multilateral relational field. If this person further manages to internalize external relations, i.e., to make them a part of his or her own identity, then a process of Self-realization can get underway. A Self-realized human will be able to perceive contexts in a holistic way such that not only facts but also values become visible. He or she can get on the track of things, so to speak.

Referring to Kant, Naess (1993, 86) speaks of beautiful action as an expression of a state of Self-realization:

... the norm ‘Self-realisation!’ is a condensed expression of the unity of certain social, psychological, and ontological hypotheses: the most comprehensive and deep maturity of the human personality guarantees beautiful action. This is based on traits of human nature. We need not repress ourselves; we need to develop our Self. The beautiful acts are natural and by definition not squeezed forth through respect for a moral law foreign to mature human development. Increasing maturity activates more of the personality in relation to more of the milieu. It results in acting more consistently from oneself as a whole. This is experienced as most meaningful and desirable, even if sometimes rather painful.

We may expect that the Self-realization of human individuals is facilitated within an ecoregional-communal context as discussed previously. After all, in such an environment the first two necessities can be felt more easily and this can help to motivate the individuals to engage in a more heavily relational lifestyle. Conversely, we may assume that the state of consciousness of a Self-realized individual is such as to suggest to him or her action in support of an ecoregional-communal environment. Biophysical and social structures on the one hand

and state of consciousness on the other hand are not independent of each other.

CONCLUSION

You think this is all utopian? Yes, I agree, but I also think that we depend on utopias as way signs. Humberto Maturana's stance is informative here. He maintains that utopias with a positive character are indicative of a search for something lost.¹⁸ However, to say that we use an utopia for purposes of orientation does not amount to some kind of atavism. A literal return to possible situations in the past is not feasible anyway, but a reattachment to the positive aspects of such situations in the sense of integrating old and new is at least possible. Without such an anchoring we may get completely lost on our way ahead. Jim Dodge (1990, 10) emphasizes that the guiding star of human existence should be life, and neither economic profit nor political power, and that the three elements capable of providing a life orientation are "a decentralized, self-determined mode of social organization; a culture predicated upon biological integrities and acting in respectful accord; and a society which honors and abets the spiritual development of its members."

ENDNOTES

1. Slightly condensed and modified English version of a paper previously published in German (Steiner 1995b).
2. This and all following quotes taken from publications in German have been translated into English by the author.
3. Giddens in a lecture on "Globalization and Modernity" at the Department of Geography, University of Zurich, June 11, 1993.
4. The term "socially integrated" refers to Giddens' (1984, 28) distinction of "social integration" and "system integration:" "Social integration ... means systemness on the level of face-to-face interaction. System integration refers to connections with those who are physically absent in time or space."
5. Compare with Dryzek 1987, ch. 7: "Markets," 67-87, and Wackernagel and Rees 1995, "Measuring progress toward sustainability: the dos and don'ts," 40-47.
6. Daly describes this paradox as follows: "... free traders are using an argument that hinges on the impermeability of national boundaries to capital to support a policy aimed at making those same boundaries increasingly permeable to both capital and goods!" (Daly 1993, 25).
7. For a discussion of the evolutionary perspective in these two papers see 61-65 and 40-43, resp.

8. In particular see ch. III, Zur Theorie des Staatsversagens, 52-62.
9. For the meaning of the term "systemic integration" see note 4.
10. In particular see ch. 16, Radical Decentralization, 216-229.
11. For an explanation of this term, see the corresponding section.
12. 16, quoted from Bahrenberg and Dutkowski 1993, 291.
13. For Kohr, "size" does not simply mean the number of people, but depends in addition on their density and mobility as well as on the degree to which they are administratively integrated (see Kohr 1986, 27).
14. The subtitle of Cantzen's book.
15. Term used with reference to the French étatism, meaning "the direct intervention by the state in the economic life of a capitalist society ... In a wider sense it signifies the vesting of power in the state, as a necessary condition of political transformations" (Scruton 1983, 156).
16. For details see ch. 15, "Practical Reason," 200-215.
17. For a brief account see, for example, Hall and Lindzey 1957, ch. III, Jung's Analytic Theory, 76-113.
18. Maturana in a lecture entitled "The integrated scientist and the courage of utopia," given on September 2, 1989, during the 4th "Cortona Week" organized by Pier Luigi Luisi from the Institute of Technology of Zurich.

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