

**THE DEMISE OF LIFE IS PROGRAMMED**

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*In the course of his sharply comparative analysis of the spiritual-cultural developments of Europe and Asia, the author relentlessly comes to the conclusion: The demise of life on this planet is programmed! The natural transmission of the mysterious principle of life was able to survive on this earth for around 600 million years. Recent developments of "progress" (see also the editorial in this issue) - seen here in a deeper spiritual-anthropological context as the "splitting" of the natural given - have become so threatening that the end - if it continues like this - cannot be stopped. Even if 'raum&zeit' does not share this hopeless diagnosis, we were so fascinated by the author's thought processes that we do not want to withhold his contribution from our readers.*

**The demise of life is programmed**

The demise of life is almost certainly programmed. Whether it will take another 5, 10, 20, 50 or 100 years remains to be seen. What counts is the high degree of certainty of the prognosis. Surprisingly, we do not arrive at this conclusion through elaborate "high-tech" calculations, but rather through some easily understandable philosophical considerations, or more precisely, by comparing our way of thinking with the ways of knowing of other cultures. Let us start from some basic concepts of our familiar everyday life. Judgement, classification, analysis, who would not be familiar with them. You don't need to be a scientist. Every day, every hour, sometimes every minute or even every second, we are asked to make judgements. We orient ourselves through judgements. We form our judgements via the media about what is not in front of our eyes. We are presented with analyses of all kinds of things, of this or that from technology and science, of the state of the economy, of our rights in certain situations, of music, literature and the fine arts. This pleases us, appeals to us, that does not. This is praiseworthy to us, that is reprehensible: we judge the world. We divide it.

**To split or to divide**

For most people, this judging and dividing seems natural. We are used to breaking things down into their constituent parts. But these terms are not only basic concepts of our subjective and collective environmental relations, they are also the most general foundations of our European science. That means they have a system.

With this approach, one soon notices, when using scientific dictionaries, how many words of western scientific origin directly or indirectly mean splitting or sharing. This applies not only to the basic terms of scientific thought mentioned, such as judgement, analysis, classification, etc., but above all to subject-specific terms such as element and analysis in chemistry, anatomy in medicine, atom and nuclear fission in physics, individual in the social sciences, and so on. All these words mean a dividing, cutting, dissolving or a particularisation of it. The recent "genetic manipulation" will also be understood in this sense, since in genetic engineering individual links of a vital whole are removed, replaced or exchanged.

These are only a few examples, the tip of a huge iceberg. Science and technology are dividing the world we live in. The divide, cut and dissolve words are programme for this.

**Holistic thinking of the Chinese**

In order to see this more clearly, a comparative look at Asian cognition may be useful. Herman Köster, one of the best experts on Chinese thought, says in his book "Symbolism of the Chinese Universe": (1) "In addition to observing the orderedness of reality, ... the ancient Chinese thinkers made another, - they discovered polarity. For them, the "ten thousand things" were not unrelated, isolated individual things; rather, they believed that the primordial germ of all becoming unfolded in two opposing and yet mutually striving series of effects that were mutually dependent, alternating and complementary." Köster's extensive material from Chinese intellectual history bears impressive witness to this "doctrine of uniqueness", which expresses itself in polar pairs of concepts. Polar, that is, thinking with black and white, light and dark, above and below, one and many, male and female, and so on.

With regard to our Western thinking in terms of cleavage, Chinese concepts of cognition have thus conventionally always been relative or synthetic. They were concerned with the relationship and joining of opposites, not their isolation. Consequently, there is a fundamental difference between Western and Eastern cognition, but one that can be presented scientifically. This is not at all mysticism, as is often believed, but quite plausible, quite real. One only has to recognise the fundamentally different motive that separates the two views of the world. Western thinking wants to establish a precise fact in its judgement. It is in order to postulate an arbitrary truth that results from a decision between opposites. Western thinking, seen in this way, has a panic fear of contradiction, which it excludes from every rational thought.

## Harmonious unity

This is completely alien to Asian thinking. The Eastern understanding of the world knows the inevitability of polarity, understands it from an "original tension", understands it as something that has grown. It sees things and circumstances in mutually dependent and complementary relationships, a kind of "relativity theory" of reality.

The basic motif? Asian thinking strives to create harmonious unities of opposites. Body and mind, light and dark, one and many, male and female, the Asian worldview is formative, shaping, not dividing. That is the big difference!

The comparison of the different ways of knowing is based on fundamental building blocks of human world relations, the so-called categories. Aristotle worked these out in his "Theory of Categories" as fundamental elements of consciousness. To put it simply: in spatial, temporal qualitative and quantitative relation, these basic elements always express direct experiences: below/above, near/distant, once/now, light/dark, limited/unlimited, one/many, etc.. Both cultures - East and West - have in common that these most general terms of world-relationship occur coupled in pairs. In both cultures, it is fundamentally impossible to think below without above, light without dark, etc. Even for the most abstract instrument of the natural sciences, this is still true today. The xy-axis cross that everyone knows - from fever curves, for example - is conceived in the zero point with an infinitely small threshold, the point of transition between positive and negative values in both directions.

## One is equal to two

The crucial thing is that the West and the East depict this relationship between opposing pairs of categories quite differently. The only reason why this difference has not been understood until today is that the two systems are fundamentally incompatible. They are mutually exclusive. They are absolutely incompatible. One is an analytical system, the other a harmonic system. If you stand in one, you cannot comprehend the other. This applies to the most diverse disciplines, such as theology, art studies or even ethnology (cf. on this P. Duerr: "When the ethnologists come, the spirits leave the island.").

As I said, in the analytical system it is a matter of deciding between the opposites - in the sense of the logical law of non-contradiction - for one or the other partner of the pair of opposites. Analytical thinking needs the judgement to be certain that something is one way and not another. In this thinking, something cannot possibly be A and B at the same time, for example one and many, mathematically formulated:  $1=2$ . Mathematics would then very quickly come to an end. And yet this formula is precisely the basic axiom of Asia. Something, a single thing, only exists insofar as it simultaneously participates in something different. One is conditioned by the much, much is not possible without one. Black is least white and vice versa. An Asian philosopher - analogous to Plato, for example - would never have come to make the pure idea, abstract mathematics, the intellectual framework of the world.

Harmonic thinking has never been concerned with what a high or a low tone is in itself. He was concerned with the melody. In Asia, people never cut open plants or even the human body in order to reach organs and cells. Asian thinking tried to bring the human being into balance from the outside, through aesthetics, through social aspects, through rituals. In Asia, human beings would never have been defined in such a nonsensical way: as indivisible. Consistently reduced to this concept, he could neither exist - think of the mother relationship - nor could he reproduce. He would have neither language nor culture: he would be a "wolf child". Even today, the Japanese language, for example, has trouble with the Western concept of man. The conventional terms are always coupled, meaning people who stand in certain relationships to each other, such as husband and wife, parents and children, brother and sister, older and younger brother, etc..

It should be emphasised: there is nothing mystical about the difference between East and West; they are differently developed relationships to the world. In order to give simple images: the analytical attitude is more like the trader who examines his goods carefully, assesses them, weighs them, measures them, compares them with the corresponding object of exchange. The harmonising attitude, on the other hand, is more like the artist who creates melodies with high and low tones, with straight and crooked lines, with light and dark colours, who banishes his world in colours and forms, who seeks to unite opposites of spirit and physicality in the confrontation with material and form.

## Centrifugal mind

Looking at the living human being, a very essential aspect emerges: harmonious thinking is centripetal, the analytical centrifugal. When you cut up the things of the world, more and more things emerge over time. More and more accumulates: We are eventually inundated - as we are today - by a flood of self-manufactured facts. Joining, on the other hand, is limited.

A Chinese farmer's central concern is the - limited - harmonious relations of his village. He has not the slightest desire to be shot to the moon! His interest is in a humanly complete social organism, the village. In modern terms, his view is more or less that of a culturally conscious ecologist who, however, does not require writing or textbooks (2). And: the big wide world is completely far away from him. This is understandable, because in a harmonious system cultural differences are not essential: everything is unified in its basic structure.

The farmer from the Chinese village does not need tourism. Sharing, on the other hand, creates differences. From this point of view, look at the history of European discovery and colonisation. There is no better archive for the centrifugal spirit of European civilisation.

In our context, however, it is essential how one relates the different world views of East and West from their pasts. They can be compared historically, in terms of natural philosophy or in terms of cultural anthropology. The historical view makes it cheap. European logic is derived from Aristotle and presented as his invention. Aristotle, the genius, the father of science, etc. But in this way but indirectly only legitimises the logical foundations of science.

### **Eurocentric arrogance**

This short-sightedness often gives rise to European arrogance, as Bruno Snell (3), for example, prefaces his work "The Discovery of the Mind": "Our European thinking starts with the Greeks, and since then it has been regarded as the only form of thinking at all."

Yes, have the Chinese not produced any valuable thinking in over 4000 years? This is an exorbitant, Eurocentric overestimation of one's own worth, which is nourished by a short-sighted historicism, for Aristotle is only superficially a beginning. He stands in the middle of a much older process. This demonstration of continuity in the development of European thought is of decisive importance, because it is able to fundamentally put it into perspective.

We must - especially today - finally have the courage to show what questionable foundations European science is standing on: Historicisms from A to Z! This applies not only to philosophy, but also to religious studies, art studies, the social sciences, etc.. The retarded ties of the human sciences to history have literally catastrophic consequences: the natural sciences can develop unrestrainedly because they are not confronted with an anthropologically-systematically founded theory of the human - across the historical cultural spaces - from the human sciences.

A brief excursion. It is probably no coincidence that in Europe, especially in the most advanced areas of natural science, namely where one looks into the no-man's land of matter at the edge of the familiar, the usefulness of European logic has been questioned for a good 50 years. We are talking about Bohr, Oppenheimer, Heisenberg, etc., the well-known names in atomic physics. Physicists have an advantage over philosophers in that they represent the history of European thought. They are committed to natural philosophy. The historian of philosophy usually begins with Attic philosophy in order to establish Western thought. What comes before that is myth, pre-logical thinking. Natural philosophy, on the other hand, also includes the early pre-Socratics and is able to see continuity, at least as far as one speculates about nature.

Natural philosophy thus reaches unbrokenly deeper in time, down to Heraclitus. There, strangely enough, one encounters exactly the way of thinking that we described above as harmonic. But modern atomic physicists ask no further questions. In their search for new forms of thinking, this finding is enough for them. They take the facts as an analogy to the East and attribute the peculiar coincidence to the coincidence of history. After all, isn't it strange that the supermen of our progressive world, the nuclear physicists, rummage in the dusty box of ancient Chinese thought in order to find practicable forms of thought for their boundary conditions of a progressive reality?

### **Heraclitus: The Last Harmonist**

What we have discussed so far is in the air. Fritjof Capra has popularised it with success. But he too remains attached to the historical analogy. And now we come to the decisive point, the demand: one must look at the development of cognition in cultural-anthropological terms. Heraclitus was not dark, as people like to say. He was not a mystic. Nor was there any question of the "everything flows" that has been attributed to him. He was - in the European line - the last representative of a pre-oriental-Egyptian substratum. With his "high and low tones", from which the melody comes about, he was the last one who still represented harmonic thinking.

Let us imagine that we could reconstruct - e.g. in cultural history (4) in an interdisciplinary association - how man - originally similar to an artist - would have learned to recognise and shape the world in ever more differentiated categories and ever more differentiated relationships to the environment in a harmonising way everywhere via an aesthetically shaped morality in the course of long phases of development. It would have visibly expanded its system of harmonious metaphors. Let us assume that we could show - e.g. by arranging the sources of man's material culture in a completely different way, namely not historically but systematically - exactly how this system would have grown on man, how he used it, and how his consciousness thereby gained more and more world. This would then mean that the analytical way of thinking would not have been something fundamentally new, it would merely have been a development that displaced an earlier layer. And it did so in such a way that it tore the high and low notes out of the melody and examined each separately, determined its vibrations and so on.

We can certainly follow this process with today's sources, for example in ancient Egypt, where life is divided into a transient this world and an eternal hereafter, where the universe is composed of "what is and what is not". Ancient Egyptian religion was still aesthetic, not absolutely spiritual. It was based on syntheses of physical and spiritual, of limited and unlimited categories. Politically, too, Egypt consisted of both "countries". Upper and Lower Egypt formed a unity. These are only a few examples (5).

On this substratum, Heraclitus must be seen as the ultimate harmoniser. Parmenides then vehemently opposed him. His ontology became the fateful hour of European rationalism. With a linguistic trick, the famous tautology "being can impossibly not be", he launched an assertion of world renown. To this day, humanities scholars in particular feed off the naïve belief in the "identity of the order of thought and being" (6) that underlies Parmenides' ontology. The atomists, on the other hand, set in motion the indivisible, the splitting of which we are afraid of today. Incidentally, the field of the so-called pre-Socratics - as if they had been waiting for Socrates! - was determined by precisely those questions that were still bound to pairs of categories, which we presupposed above. With the difference that categories are increasingly needed analytically: "Is the world limited or unlimited?", "Is it unity or diversity?" etc.. With Heraclitus, of course, this would still have meant: the world is limited and unlimited, unity and multiplicity. Pre-Socratic questions of this kind - they originated in the Ionian coastal cities of Asia Minor - obviously drew their inspiration from Near Eastern-Egyptian ritual traditions. In them, the world was still ordered in polar-categorical harmonious relationships.

From this point of view, the further development of European thought was given a tremendous consequence. Aristotle's analytics first had an effect on theology by helping scholasticism to construct an absolute spirit. With the Enlightenment, this construction visibly loses its support. The pendulum of analytics swung towards absolute matter and pure empiricism. The now "desacralised" matter can be manipulated at will, which brings us to the modern phenomena of industry and technology.

### **Whole armies of divisive inventors**

The much sought-after objectivity of natural science is not an epistemological but a spiritual-historical, or rather a spiritual-anthropological problem. The modern catastrophe now lies in the fact that the outlined splitting process of analytical thinking throws itself globally onto the natural matter. Theological imperialism - the realm of an absolutely postulated God - has been followed by scientific-technical-economic imperialism. Today we are dividing the world on a gigantic scale by using whole armies of divisive inventors. Their profane "creations" are brought into the world with machines and artificial energies on an unprecedented scale. Rationalisation in this sense means nothing other than ever more perfect splitting! The tragedy of the matter lies in the fact that science seeks objective truth in the front, where it lies in the back. In short, the divisive cognition of science has become detached from a harmonising substrate. The process becomes quite clear when one places the theory of categories before logic in Aristotle. A continuum emerges from Heraclitus to Aristotelian analytics, where the world then begins to break in two.

The anthropological formulation of this substrate also implies the sobering but at the same time decisive insight that there is no escape from this evolved structure of coupled pairs of categories. Whether we arrange them analytically or harmonically, we are trapped in this "conditio humana", in this intelligent system that we have developed as human beings. Every attempt at cognition always remains a projection of this human order onto a nature that is unknown in itself. In world space, as in microphysics, we search dual for bodies in the infinite void, particles in free space. What we think we recognise are ultimately only coincidental coincidences between the unknown structure of nature and our evolved human system of order.

### **The scary "progress"**

The uncanny "progress"

Finally, the lesson: European logic, science is not the measure of all things. This was a life-threatening illusion, perhaps even a fatal error in thinking that could send us back to the pro-zoic, to an age of the earth without life. Who claims here that things must always go forward? We may be on the verge of the greatest regression of all time! The dinosaurs also went backwards. But the regression was not great then. Just a small oscillation compared to what awaits us: suddenly it is all about life itself! An incredible "progress" in about 40 years. Back then, people were still afraid of the "annihilation" of nations and their rather short-legged history, but today we are approaching the annihilation of a much more formidable "history" with globally drilled orders and organisations!

Life, a process some 600 million years old that has also produced us humans, is on the brink. The devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the potential of nuclear deterrence erected by a handful of falcons, the reactor catastrophe of Tchernobyl, the deformed children of Minamata and the helpless thalidomide births, the chemical catastrophes of Bophal and Basel, the dying of the forests, the contamination of the waters and the sea, the depletion of the ozone layer in the stratosphere, the invasion of drugs into our so regulated everyday life, finally even the genetic manipulation of life itself, all these are not isolated events.

They are not merely localised disturbances of the ecological balance! Rather, they are glowing fire signs of a coherent catastrophe that is relentlessly rolling towards us. They are portents like those that once signalled the end of the proud king of the Chaldeans and his empire. As there, it is probably too late. The downfall is unstoppable. Each one of us is blithely pursuing it. There is no turning back. The demise of life is programmed. Our deluded minds have burnt out our natural fuses. We are racing unstoppably down to our doom on a gigantic time bomb.

Global context: we are dividing the world! The programme according to which everything runs: European historicisms, so-called science. One thing in this scenario is incontrovertible. Whether 5, 10, 20, 50 or 100 years: it cannot go on like this with absolute certainty.

Notes:

(1) Stuttgart 1958

(2) He takes his "teaching from the cultic, artistic and social, local tradition. It is important to know here that Christianisation emptied the European villages spiritually and artistically by abolishing the so-called "primitive" cults. Asian agricultural villages are often still self-contained, fully-fledged "cultures".

(3) Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen (Studies on the Emergence of European Thought among the Greeks), 1948.

(4) S. Wernhard, in J. Stagl: Basic Questions of Ethnology, 1981

(5) cf. Hermann Kees: der Götterglaube im alten Ägypten, 1980. A similar situation can be seen in the Near East with the earliest Sumerian sources.

(6) W. Röd: Die Philosophie der Antike 1; Von Thales bis Demokrit, Munich 1976, (:116)