

## Triologue: Implicit and Explicit Views of Human Nature

Friederike Habermann, Stefan Meretz, and Christian Siefkes

### (1) Why One Should Make One's Own View of Human Nature Explicit—and Why It Preferably Should Not To Be Too Detailed

#### Christian Siefkes

Whoever talks or thinks about how society could or should be organized has necessarily to deal with the question of how human beings would presumably behave under different circumstances. To the extent that one does not want to be limited to the current condition of society or to earlier or elsewhere existing relations, empirical observation will not get one far. Instead, one needs a theoretical model of human behavior that makes it possible to predict behavior that can be expected under circumstances that are not observable today. Such a model of human behavior roughly corresponds to what is commonly known as a “view of human nature”; hence, I will make use of this somewhat more concise term.

In order to make statements about human behavior in a hypothetical scenario, one thus always needs a view of human nature, if one wants to say something more than “don't know.” Two things are important here:

1. One should make one's own view of human nature explicit, instead of simply allowing it to operate implicitly.
2. Ideally, the view of human nature on which one's argument is based should not involve too many presuppositions.

Point (1) is important, since otherwise one leaves one's public or interlocutor confused and frustrated. If one's view of human nature is merely implicit, one will often get reactions like “But people are not like that” or “To do this, you first need new people, whom you have to produce by way of forced re-education.” (This has already happened in the context of our

project.) Of course, even an explicit view of human nature can be rejected with a “People are not like that,” but at least it is, then, clear to all parties what exactly they are talking about. And when one’s own view of human nature is not formulated as a mere postulate, but is justified as empirically secured knowledge, then any objections that are to be taken seriously have also to be situated on this level of theoretical justification, instead of appearing simply as counter-postulates.

Point (2) is less important, since if one has well-founded knowledge, then it makes sense to use it too. The emphasis is placed here on “well-founded,” since if one builds one’s own theory on insecure foundations, one weakens it unnecessarily. But even if it is theoretically well-secured, in considering additional details of the view of human nature, one should ask oneself if they are needed at all or if one’s own argument can do without them. The latter option offers the advantage that others can follow and accept the argument more easily, without having to evaluate the additional elements involved in the underlying view of human nature.

A further advantage of doing without additional assumptions is that one’s argument is not damaged, in case one of these assumptions should turn out to be erroneous. There is rarely absolute certainty, after all.

The unrealistic conceptions of others—for instance, the typical economic textbooks—should be criticized. Nothing would be gained, however, by replacing reductive and misleading models like the *homo economicus* by other equally reductive models like, say, the *homo cooperativus* (Rogall 2002).

## (2) Why Views of Human Nature—and Humans Themselves—Can Never Be Independent of Their Society

### **Friederike Habermann**

Exactly: A view of human nature is not a matter of wishful thinking, but rather every bit as much a question of scientific knowledge as other considerations regarding transformation. I do not want only to call for this, but also to provide it.

From a feminist and anti-racist perspective, the fact that human beings are always part of their society is a platitude. For why was it so difficult in the nineteenth century to argue that women or black people are not less intelligent than white men? Because it was not only perceived but also made true that, as a rule, they did not correspond to the hegemonic understanding of a rational personality.

It was Judith Butler (1990) whose queer-feminist approach made it clear that, as against the accepted division between a given differing sex, on the one hand, and socially-constructed gender, on the other, the cultural influence is inseparable from our bodies. For example, women in the Stone Age were not the weaker sex of the nineteenth century, and today's toned beauties from the health club look different than the ideal of the Baroque period. How much estrogen we have in our bodies depends on how much pork we eat, and how much testosterone our bodies produce is, among other things, a result of whether we follow a traditionally female life path or a classical male career. But this is not only limited to aspects of gender: The age at which we die is essentially influenced by whether we are privately or publicly insured (in the case of forty-year-old women in Germany, the difference is seven years) and by what neighborhood we live in (in many western European cities, the difference is up to ten years; in Glasgow, for men, it is thirty years). But we cannot simply "strip off" beauty ideals, eating habits, career, health insurance, and neighborhood, in order to arrive at a "natural" life expectancy.

The merging of the biological and the social applies still more for our modes of behavior. The most recent findings of neurobiology show precisely this. Thus, genes are not only continually regulated by environmental influences; research in epigenetics demonstrates that environmental experiences are crucial to whether and, if so, how strongly a gene gets expressed (cf. Bauer 2006: 52f.).

Similar observations apply to the development of our brains. Thus, according to the Canadian doctor and author, Gabor Maté, everyone is inseparable from the environment in which he or she grows up. For precisely this reason, it is no surprise that the view of human beings as naturally individualistic and egoistic persistently finds confirmation in our competitively-oriented society.

Social relations prescribe a certain rationality by which individuals must abide, if they want to exist within these relations. If they act, then, in accordance with this rationality, the basic social relations are reproduced through their action. Since people do not see any alternative, they experience their behavior as "natural."

Only in one single respect, per Maté again, should one speak of "human nature": "We have a human need for companionship and for close contact, to be loved, to be attached to, to be accepted, to be seen, to be received for who we are."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quote from the film *Zeitgeist: Moving Forward* (2011); Available online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Z9WVZddH9w> (accessed April 15, 2018).

In the same spirit, Joachim Bauer makes clear that—only seemingly paradoxically—it is precisely the quest for recognition that, in our society, brings people to strive for financial success and to behave competitively and egoistically to obtain it: “From the point of view of our brains, all the goals that we pursue in our normal everyday lives—whether as regards education or career, financial goals, purchases, etc.—have their deep, mostly unconscious ‘sense’ in the fact that we thereby are ultimately aiming at interpersonal relationships, i.e. we want to acquire or preserve them” (Bauer 2006: 39).

This does not mean that there would be no more egoism and competition in an ideally organized society. When it is a matter of breaking up the view of human nature as being driven by egoism, this does not imply that in a “good” society, people would exclusively honor altruism and total self-sacrifice. But it obviously makes a difference whether we live in a society in which the asocial qualities receive the greatest recognition (because they represent the absolute precondition for success) or we live in a society in which these conceptualizations would be recognized as false oppositions and overcome, because only very few activities are covered by them and (re)production is accordingly organized in such a way that they have hardly any significance in day-to-day life.

### (3) Why We Need a Concept of Human Being and of Society

#### **Stefan Meretz**

Happily, we do not contradict one another much. Nonetheless, I would place a couple of accents differently. In the first place, I do not like to use the expression “view of human nature,” since for me it is inextricably bound to wishful thinking. I have often had to hear how: “Your utopia only works if you start from a certain view of human nature.” Explicitly or implicitly, images of what we would like to be the case are—rightly—rejected, but, at the same time, the obtaining of a scientific concept is completely negated. The baby is thrown out with the bathwater.

I am trying to make clear that we need a scientific concept: i.e. one that is well-founded and hence also susceptible to criticism in scientific discussion. In fact, everyone who deals with theories of the individual or of society—whether directly or indirectly—must rely on such a concept. To dispute this merely means reproducing common everyday conceptions and redefining the behavior that we experience on a day-to-day basis as something natural—as you have explained, Friederike.

My “concept of human being” is an indissolubly double one: It is identically the concept of the social human being in human society. When I use the word “identical” here, I am doing so in the Hegelian sense of the identity of identity and difference: The human being and society are identical, but also different. It is difficult to think the simultaneity of identity and difference in the mainstream of an analytical formal-logical theory of knowledge. The latter has first to bring together disjoint particles, in order to produce an interrelationship, instead of starting from the assumption that, in the real world, these particles are already the interrelationship in which they can distinguish themselves as individual entities. Considered from this perspective, the idea that human beings come together to found a society is absurd. For example, as agreeable as the demand for “cooperation instead of competition” may be, it is misleading. Human-social existence *is* cooperation. Society *is* a cooperative set of interrelationships. Competition *is* a form of cooperation. Hence, the question is not whether we cooperate, but only how. And what historically specific psychological equipment we have to acquire, in order to take part in the dominant form of cooperation—hence, how we have to be able to think and feel, in order to want and be able to act—depends on this “how.”

A concept of human nature is one of potentiality. It grasps what people are able to be able to do. As in our experience, they can behave competitively in such a way that they do so at the expense of others. Is competition, therefore, part of their nature? No. But competition as historically specific form of cooperation belongs to the domain of human possibilities. It is possible to organize society according to a logic of exclusion: i.e. the development of one person takes place at the expense of another. From the point of view of a theory of the individual, however, it belongs just as much to the domain of human possibility to organize society according to a logic of inclusion. But this does not require us to start from the assumption that “inclusion” is true human nature. Thus, we recognize that in the question of what social relations are possible, the focus must be placed on the aspect of social structure, which predetermines the matrix for individual action—and not on assumptions about what human beings are like. We can reject ontological assumptions. But along with them, we have also to reject all those assumptions that try to stylize the massively observable behavior of real people under real conditions of competition and exclusion into how human beings are as such. Under conditions in which structurally one person always prevails at the expense of another, since this corresponds to the suggested action matrix, it is subjectively functional to do precisely that. There are good reasons to play along, since the game secures one’s own existence. But there are also good reasons not to play along with the game of exclusion and to conduct research into the possibility

of relations in which the development of one person is not a limitation to, but rather a precondition for the development of others.

This is the background to why I would not share Maté's suggestion on human nature that you cite, Friederike. The usual dichotomization appears in the postulated "need for companionship": I have a need for something that I am not. And if I add the alleged need for "close contact," matters become even more difficult: Why should it be so? Cannot people also exist (and be happy) without this? Analogously to cooperation, the same rule applies here: Close contact and companionship is one form of living out human sociality, but it is not *the natural* form. The quote from Maté gives me the impression of a (simple) inversion of the current relations: instead of isolation, distance, hatred, exclusion, discrimination, denigration, now contact, proximity, love, inclusion, acceptance, embrace. Just as the former does not represent "human nature," neither does the latter. But both are evidently possible. The question is under what conditions which mode of behavior can develop socially. It appears almost crazy, however, to have to argue that the second option also belongs to the domain of human possibility. It is Maté's merit to have highlighted this possibility; to pronounce its concrete realization as natural, however, is not helpful.

To summarize: We need a concept of the *social nature* of human beings. Such a concept of potentiality allows us to conceive social relations "after money." That this is challenging is obvious. The "monetary society" that we have now creates a structural action matrix in which competitive behavior is rewarded, because it works and secures one's existence. A "post-monetary society" that is worth striving for needs to confront a dual task: In the process of constructing a new action matrix, in which inclusive behavior is rewarded, because it works and secures one's existence, we must change ourselves in such a way that we leave behind inherited modes of behavior and appropriate ourselves anew. This is a major undertaking. But people are able to be able to do it.

#### (4) Concept of Human Being and Social Organization

##### **Christian Siefkes**

Both of you say that assumptions about human beings are of limited relevance, because people, such as we are able to observe them, are always shaped by social structures and typically behave in the way that is expedient within the framework of these structures. Hence, what is needed are other, better structures, in which it makes more sense to work with others instead of

against them—“in which inclusive behavior is rewarded, because it works and secures one’s existence” (Stefan) and in which not “the asocial,” but rather the more social “qualities receive the greatest recognition” (Friederike). I totally agree with this, but what follows from it is the crucial question: What could such structures look like and how could they function?

If it is the structures that are at issue, then it is not enough to limit oneself essentially to the negation of existing structures and their functional principles. Instead, what is needed is clearly to describe the alternative structures “in which inclusive behavior is rewarded”—one cannot merely postulate this rewarding or recognition of the desired behavior, but rather one has to show how it comes about. And here I find it problematic when Stefan (in his contribution to this volume) instead formulates principles that seem precisely to exclude this: for instance, that “utilizations and contributions . . . are [equally] socially recognized.”

If utilizations and contributions are equally recognized, then this suggests that no matter whether I make the bed for others or lie down in a bed that was made by others, I have in both cases rendered service to others and to society. No distinction should be made anymore between doing something for others and having others provide for you: none, in any case, that could reward the former and sanction or attach costs to the latter (not even when it occurs to such an extent that not enough is left over for others).

So, if it is not social structures that could steer behavior in the socially desirable direction, what is it then? One possible, partial answer is the reference to the variety of human interests and desires to act, which in Stefan’s contribution is called the *Stigmergic Law*: “Given enough people and commons, a person or commons will be found for every task that has to be done.”

But this *Stigmergic Law* is in no way a law (of nature) that has been proven. It is a mere postulate. It would be more justified to formulate it as a hope: If there are numerous different tasks and numerous different people, for every task hopefully enough people can be found that have enough interest in this task to take care of it to the extent required. Or maybe, instead of “that have enough interest in,” we should say rather: “that may have no interest in the task, but take it on anyway, due to their insight into what is socially necessary”?

It is not clear from the original *Stigmergic Law* which formulation is intended, but this makes a huge difference with regard to the underlying concept of human being. If it is a matter of interest in doing something, then what underlies this is the conception of a humanity that disposes, as a whole, over a gigantic potential for different interests and desires to act: more than enough so that for all tasks—even for those that from an individual perspective seem most boring or thankless—a sufficient number of people

are available that find them highly interesting and motivating. This is a beautiful vision, which is surely not entirely implausible, since the multiplicity of human interests is in fact immense. But, nonetheless, how can it be established that this multiplicity is enough not just for many, but in fact for *all* necessary tasks?

If, on the other hand, it is a matter of insight into what is necessary, then this raises further questions in turn. Whence do all these people come that are so responsible that they make the affairs of the whole society their own and devote themselves to the necessary, but from their perspective not especially rewarding, activities that would otherwise remain undone? In order to “produce” a sufficiently large number of such responsible people, would not social indoctrination or, in other words, a program of re-education be required? Emancipatory projects, for good reason, recoil from such an idea. And would it not be rather unfair for some to toil away, in order to take care of what is socially necessary, while others only do what they want to do?

## (5) Beyond Exchange, Extortion, and Sanctions

### **Stefan Meretz**

When we reflect on qualitatively different forms of socialization, we have to free ourselves from the deeply ingrained imperatives of commodity society. These include exchange, extortion and the application of sanctions. In the case of exchange as a form of reciprocal extortion—you only get if you give—we are in agreement that it cannot provide the foundation for human interrelationships. But now, Christian, I understand you to be saying that, nonetheless—even though it appears to follow—you would not fundamentally leave behind extortion and sanctions, even if you have a nicer name for it.

In pre-modern times, extortion and applying sanction were in the hands of powerful rulers, whereas in capitalism they are based more on the omnipresent compulsion to valorize, although they can also appear in personal form. Due to the entirely understandable concern that, in the end, all necessary tasks would not be voluntarily performed after all, you would like to retain a structural, depersonalized form of domination of this sort (in however soft a form). Thus, you would like to “sanction or attach costs” to excessively “having others provide for you” (to a degree that is harmful to others). This is an argument that, for good reason, is well known to us from contemporary neo-liberal discourse: Extorting good behavior and sanctioning are elementary components of commodity production—as is, for instance, explained to us on a daily basis in the context of the German

“Hartz 4” welfare benefit regime. Thus, it is no accident that you take my postulated supersession of the separation between contributions and utilizations as the starting point for the debate. It is certainly the case that one can distinguish between contributions and utilizations (although a blurring of the boundaries already occurs under our current conditions, as the phenomenon of “prosumption” shows). But it is only commodity production that first made this into a separation and opposition whose poles obey different action rationalities, which from now on always appear as linked: Without a contribution, no use; without money, no commodity for satisfying a need. But this means that, vice-versa, a supersession of linked negative reciprocity (which is the social form of exchange) necessarily involves no longer distinguishing between contributions which count as such and “merely” useful contributions. Also because it is, from my perspective, unjustifiable (even just partially) to exclude those people who *are able* to contribute little or nothing from the *full* use of total social wealth. But who could reliably distinguish between not being able and not wanting to do so? My conclusion is that we must fully take leave of sanctions and extortion.

To this end, is it necessary to make assumptions about human nature? No. You only have to leave behind ingrained assumptions about human nature and to start from the possibility, in principle, for people to adopt a different form of social organization. From my point of view, the paradigm shift that has to be accomplished can be described as follows: The question is not how do I get people to do this or that—I call this a “really-existing socialist” style of thinking, which has not freed itself from the extortionist logic of the commodity form—but rather under what conditions do people, for good reasons, act and organize themselves in such a way that no one loses out. Just as under the old regime, it is subjectively functional (i.e. “is rewarded”) to exchange, extort and punish, under the new regime—this is something that is being called for—it is functional to act inclusively. I provide an experimental description of how this can occur on the categorial level in my contribution to this book. Stigmergy plays a key role in the mediation here. But *mediation* implies that there can be no steering of the process in accordance with external standards (like in the case of the commodity, whereby the ability to valorize serves as external standard), but rather stigmergy is a means for self-organization and self-planning. To demand of me that I justify how self-organization can ultimately accomplish “*all* necessary tasks” is internally contradictory. At best, I can provide support for the plausible assumption that people who obey their own needs in a structure of an inclusionary-logical sort will do this—precisely because they experience the need to do so. (See my chapter.)

From my point of view, it is theoretically unjustifiable to want a post-monetary society, which can only be a free society, and simultaneously to

retain a little bit of structural extortion and sanctions. How people act, then, on the interpersonal level—whether they do, after all, try to employ sanctions, etc.—is irrelevant for the social relations of mediation, so long as such individual behavior does not become socially functional. Where there is basic structural freedom from domination *and* an unconditionally secured existence, it is always individually possible to avoid traditional “measures.” In his theory of free cooperation, Christoph Spehr (2003) has developed the essential possibility of being able to leave a cooperation. This does not resolve all problems, nor does it do away with all conflicts (for instance, an unequal perception of fairness), but it provides, finally, a foundation for dealing with problems and conflicts without extortion and sanctions. And I am sure that under such domination-free conditions, creative energy will indeed flow into doing just this.

## (6) Beyond Our Worldviews

### **Friederike Habermann**

Is not our discussion characterized by the construction of oppositions? This only goes to show how much we ourselves are part of this society, but within it, in turn, also of our own respective contexts. One of us writes something and then the other responds: “If you do not want this, then you must want the opposite—and that is wrong!” This seems to me to be an expression of the fact that we move in relatively similar, but often still different discussion circles, which accounts for different views, but also brings with it differing associations with different concepts and thus gives rise to unnecessary oppositions. This does not foster communication.

Stefan, concerning Gabor Maté’s statement (“We have a human need for companionship and for close contact, to be loved, to be attached to, to be accepted, to be seen, to be received for who we are”), you write: “The usual dichotomization appears in the postulated ‘need for companionship’: I have a need for something that I am not. And if I add the alleged need for ‘close contact,’ matters become even more difficult: Why should it be so?” In keeping with this, you accuse Maté or, respectively, me of making a simple reversal: “The quote from Maté gives me the impression of a (simple) inversion of the current relations: instead of isolation, distance, hatred, exclusion, discrimination, denigration, now contact, proximity, love, inclusion, acceptance, embrace.”

In contrast, what I read in the quote is that we humans are not alone. We are always dependent on one another—this is a key moment in the feminist

discussion (cf. Knecht et al. 2012). The basis of queer feminist theories is, in any case, always to see individuals as part of society. But this aspect was also frequently thematized in the eco-feminist debates of the 1980s and in the care discussion of recent years. We are not autonomous individuals, but rather we need one another: as babies, as children, in our erotic needs, in our demand for love, in old age, in sickness, to learn to speak and to think judiciously, to develop in connection with one another, but also in order to be materially well provided for. Some of this even requires close contact. But the fact that in the process of all these dependencies, which, at the same time, represent socialization mechanisms, individuals also emerge who would rather spend the day alone is another matter—for these people too need all of that. To say nothing of the fact that I am convinced that sociophobes do not think any less about people and their reactions. Doing so might not trigger positive feelings for them. But that is beside the point.

And you, Christian, seemingly citing verbatim, have me saying that “the more social ‘qualities [should] receive the greatest recognition’” in a different society. In fact, I wrote, “it obviously makes a difference whether we live in a society in which the asocial qualities receive the greatest recognition (because they represent the absolute precondition for success) or we live in a society in which these conceptualizations would be recognized as false oppositions and overcome.” Here again: If the asocial qualities do not receive the greatest recognition, then this must mean that the social ones receive it—and in which case, you continue, the alternative structures have also to be clearly described. Which, then, is the focus of your further discussion.

Not only are we, as people, part of our society, but so too are our categories of thought. This too is a commonplace in feminist writings. But it also is, for example, in the writing of the post-colonial theorist Edward Said (1995) on “orientalism”: the division into pairs of opposites in (Western/patriarchal) thinking—of which one is always, then, somehow better. In reality, however, the one is only ever existent, because the other is constructed. With our present everyday understanding, we simply cannot say whether all activities would be voluntarily performed in a moneyless society in which the logic of exchange does not apply: because the opposite of voluntary is compulsion and this opposition could be dissolved. That it is a matter of the “rediscovery of the self-evident” (Praetorius, 2015), of the fact that people take action, because something has to be done, is what feminists in recent years have called for. Feeding a baby served as the archetype in the discussion and was invoked by, among others, Geneviève Vaughan: “The mother does not feed her child in order to be fed by her, or in order to make the child put her finger in the mother’s mouth” (Vaughan 2000). This is to say, she does it not

according to a logic of exchange or for fun, and, as a rule, also not as a work burden, but rather, above all, as something that is self-evident—which does not exclude its being fun or burdensome.

There certainly could be many possible future societies in which people are not willing to undertake activities in such a way that everything is covered afterwards (whereby the possibilities of technization, of reorganization, so that the activity is fun, of job rotation, etc. have often been discussed, including by you, Christian; cf. Siefkes 2008). There is not just *one* future society, nor even just one future society without money, and this is not a question of technology or of the chosen form of mediation, but depends rather on how people will develop within the society. And, happily, we do not have to argue about it from the point of view of our everyday understanding or of our respective worldviews, since we cannot foresee this.

Instead, we have to make a start. Then we will see.

## (7) Do Not Demonize Exchange

### Christian Siefkes

Stefan, you are emotionalizing our debate by using ethically highly charged concepts like “extortion.” Everyone knows that extortion is reprehensible. When one speaks, as you do, of “extortion and sanctions” always as a pair, this suggests that applying sanction is just as reprehensible—even that sanctions are hardly to be distinguished from extortion. And in the case of exchange, you say explicitly that you regard it as a “form of reciprocal extortion” and hence cannot accept it as “foundation for human interrelationships.”

But at least as regards exchange, the picture is skewed, since extortion requires an active role: I threaten someone else with negative consequences, in case he or she fails to meet my demands. But I have to produce these negative consequences: by, say, divulging a secret or shooting a relative or a friend of the victim of the extortion. By contrast, in the case of an exchange that does not take place, both sides remain passive.

It seems to me that an ethically emotionalized fallacy is involved here: Since A (extortion) is evil, both B (sanctions) and C (exchange) are also evil, and hence a better society must forgo all three and be organized “beyond exchange, extortion and sanctions.” Instead of this emotionalized argumentation, a pragmatic one seems to me more appropriate: Exchange is not bad per se and hence to be rejected, but rather forms of social organization beyond exchange are to be promoted when (and only when) they lead to better results for the people involved. This means that, vice-versa, where

exchange transactions work well for the participants, there is nothing to be said against them.

This is why for me the question concerning “How will it work then?” is so important, whereas both of you tend to dismiss it with a “we will find out.” For me, it is by no means sure whether a society in which neither people nor nature lose out must or even could entirely do without exchange. This has rather to be made plausible, and the problem is not resolved simply by saying “creative energy will, then, flow into doing so” (Stefan) or “then we will see” (Friederike).

And I become even more skeptical when you, Stefan, demand that “we must fully take leave of sanctions.” If this only refers to applying sanction when someone does not contribute, then we can presumably still come to agreement. But your claim sounds more general: Every sort of sanction is to be rejected. You thus distance yourself from the findings of commons research, in which “graduated sanctions” figure as one of the essential conditions for successful commons: “Sanctions for rule violations start very low but become stronger if a user repeatedly violates a rule” (Ostrom 2009). Unnecessarily harsh sanctions are counter-productive—but it is not possible either to do entirely without.

The findings of commons theory also include the fact that commons always need rules: “No commons can function without rules that have been agreed upon” (Commons-Institut 2017). But rules without sanctions make no sense. The sanctions can, of course, be relatively harmless: say, a public admonition or disapproving looks. But a rule whose violation entails *no consequences whatsoever* can just as well be done without.

It is, of course, both conceivable and desirable that a future society could largely get by without sanctions, because all of its members find the rules so self-evident and clear that, in any case, no one violates them. But this can only be shown in practice, it cannot be theoretically postulated in advance.

Friederike, you refer to the feminist finding “that people take action, because something has to be done,” using the example of the mother who feeds her child, precisely because the child needs to be fed. As true as this is, I do not find it very convincing when it comes to the organization of society as a whole. Society cannot be grasped on the model of a nuclear family. And even the example of the mother is not self-evident and hence universally human: In earlier times, rather than the mother, often a (paid) wet nurse was responsible for feeding children in well-to-do families. And why should specifically a woman have to do this task? Why should it be self-evident that the father or other men, who could just as well perform bottle-feeding, should be released from this responsibility? These sorts of one-sided role assignments are also criticized by feminists, and rightfully so.

This little example already makes clear that the seemingly self-evident is anything but self-evident. In this example, moreover, it is at least easily determinable what has to be done: The baby needs food (maybe it signals this stigmergically by crying) and then it is fed. The child does not have much say in the matter: It gets what other people think it needs.

Transferred to society as a whole, I see here a threatening parallel. Without money as general means of mediation, I am dependent on the decisions of others concerning what is needed: I do not decide as potential beneficiary, but rather the respective producers decide. Alternatively, I can try to make everything that I find necessary or desirable myself. But do-it-yourself is only possible within a very limited scope and sometimes not at all. With money (but without other means of domination), it is likewise not possible for me to force others to do what I would like to have done. But I can entice them: I can pay them, as long as I have enough money. Since I am sooner or later likely to run out, I have to decide what is most important to me—but this decision is mine.

Without money, on the other hand, there is little that I can do to influence potential producers. I can formulate wishes and leave signs, but I cannot exert any further influence on whether others take up these signs and wishes. (I can, of course, take action myself. But here we again run into the problem of do-it-yourself: It is only possible in a few cases and within a limited scope.) One of the key questions that I posed in my book *From Exchange to Contributions* was “How to coordinate the producer side ... with the consumer side?” (Siefkes 2008: 17).

It is possible that findings deriving from the view of human nature, or concept of human being, could allay the fear that in a production-driven society (in which potential producers decide how and where to get involved as they see fit), the consumer perspective would be neglected (because consumers cannot do anything more than to provide indications of their needs and wishes and then to hope for the best). But my impression from the trialogue thus far is that you are just as lacking in findings of this sort as I am.

In the absence of such knowledge, my answer was to assume “weighted labor” as general currency, which one can earn and spend as one sees fit. This would be a sort of money, but one which cannot be accumulated by exploiting others and in the case of which, prices are established in the form of transparent social agreements, instead of “behind the backs of participants” in the general competitive struggle.

It seems to me now again that something would be lost if today’s money would be completely thrown overboard instead of being replaced by some such “almost money”: the possibility for people to organize their lives according to their own notions—not only as producers, but also as

consumers—would suffer. Nobody would like to stay a child for their whole lives, since today being a child also means that others decide what is good for you. The first allowance that children can spend as they see fit, instead of having to rely on adults as the “great fulfillers of wishes,” is often already experienced as a sort of liberation—and rightly so. A future society should not fall back behind this condition.

## (8) Comprehending Structurally, Instead of Merely Interpreting Interpersonally

### Stefan Meretz

Christian, your clear reaction to my clear challenge is understandable. It makes hitherto hidden controversies visible. Let us take them one by one. I write of exchange, extortion and sanctions in *commodity society*. For me, these are *structural relations* and not ethical concepts, and I claim that we must free ourselves from them, both in thought and in practice. In exchange in commodity society, giving and taking are linked to each other and the relation is subject to the compulsion of equivalence. I perhaps need to mention that I am always considering the average situation and not the individual case that deviates from it. Contrary to what you claim, the consequences of an exchange failing to take place are not only negative, but, in generalized form, even pose an existential threat: for sellers, on the level of valorization and for buyers, on the level of sensory-vital satisfaction of need. Someone who does not sell anymore, goes broke; someone who cannot buy anything, starves—in the extreme case, which globally is not so infrequent. Pope Francis recognizes that the structural relations are the cause, when he notes that “capitalism kills.”

When you say that “where exchange transactions work well for the participants, there is nothing to be said against them,” you lose sight of structural compulsion, along with the reciprocal situation of extortion in which exchangers stand to one another. Exchange transactions very often work well for the participants, and I am glad too when, in making a purchase, I receive the commodity at the value that I have put on the counter as monetary equivalent. But such a purely interpersonal view obscures the structural conditions that first create the superficial appearance of good functioning: The producer has succeeded in producing the commodity at the market value and the buyer has succeeded in obtaining money, in order to be able to buy the commodity—and in both cases, structurally at the expense of, for the most part, invisible others (say, the Indian farmers who kill themselves

or the indigent who have to hold out their hands to get a meal). Although it appears interpersonal, the situation of extortion is thus, in fact, a structural situation of compulsion, which first makes the extortionist action functional and also necessary. The sellers cannot give away the commodity and the buyers cannot simply take the commodity either, even if it is available in abundance, since both sorts of behavior are structurally sanctioned (as bankruptcy or legal penalty). I do not find this structural view in your reflections. In your case, everything take place only at the level of persons.

Hence, it is logical that you expect the recipe for a free society on this interpersonal level. But I respond structurally and say that it is not possible to say in advance how people will concretely behave. You are looking for the answer where it is not to be found. But then, nonetheless, you come to the conclusion—by way of a kind of fallacy of immediacy—that from your perspective it is inexplicable why people should behave differently than they do today, for which reason one has ultimately to compel them to do so. My argument, on the other hand, is essentially that what matters is creating relations in which there are *good reasons* for people to behave differently: no longer at the expense of others, etc. From this average structural point of view, I cannot, in fact, guarantee that socially destructive behavior will not also occur. I merely try to show that under the conditions of an inclusionary logic, this behavior is dysfunctional and can then—indeed interpersonally—be managed as conflict, because everyone else has no reason to reward the dysfunctional behavior of individuals. I cannot say whether, under such conditions, interpersonal acts in which giving and taking are linked will still take place. This is also inconsequential, since such “post-exchange” acts, as I would like to call them, have *no structural functionality* any more. There is not anything that depends on them: neither for the individual nor for society.

The structure-neutral, interpersonal view is repeated in the discussion of the results of commons research. The necessity of sanctions that Ostrom generally noted for existing commons refers to relations in which it is altogether functional to exploit individual commons: for instance, to take material resources or products from them, contrary to the rules, in order to pocket an extra profit by selling them externally. This *must* be punished, in order to preserve the commons. But this is the case, because the social environment obeys a different logic, in which exploitation at the expense of others is rewarded (a.k.a. “logic of exclusion”). If there is no such “external” countervailing destructive logic, then the essential grounds for action threatening the commons are removed. And even if, under general social conditions of an inclusionary logical sort, a commons should fail, this does not threaten individual existence—in contrast to today. But, of course, not all reasons for destructive behavior will have been eliminated. No guarantee for

their elimination can be given, even if all structural conditions are maximally favorable. There will certainly be conflicts, for the simple reason that we are such different individuals and have different needs.

Even in the absence of structural sanctions, will there still, nonetheless, be sanctions on an interpersonal level? Must there be for a free society to function? Similarly as in the case of post-exchange, I would answer the question of *post-sanctions* as follows: Such sanctions may exist, but they no longer have any socially constitutive function. Unlike you, Christian, I do not think that rules have necessarily to be linked to sanctions, in order to be effective. I mean here generally applicable, hence abstract, sanctions that have—in a dual sense—an “indifferent” character. In stigmergic terms, rules are signals for desirable behavior—without its having to be said what generally occurs in the case of undesirable behavior. Of course, the people affected will deal with undesirable behavior. But this is part of the conflict resolution that, from my point of view, will acquire considerably greater significance as compared to today. Nowadays, many conflicts are simply “decided” by power in its various forms; they are precisely not worked out by way of the mediation of the different underlying needs. These are structural sanctions that you miss. From my point of view, concrete conflict resolution takes the place of abstract sanctions. Hence, I suggest that we conceptually distinguish between structurally anchored sanctions, which always have an abstract character, and concrete interpersonal conflict resolution.

Exchange, extortion and sanctions are to be abolished as structural relations and to be brought back as conflict resolution in the interpersonal domain. For every conflict is specific, and conflicts can only be resolved in their specificity when individuality is no longer subject to abstract sanctions regimes: so that there is the prospect of all being able to satisfy their needs.

## (9) We Have to Make a Start—Then We Will See

### **Friederike Habermann**

Thank you, Stefan, for your remarks on the difference between personal exchange and social exchange logic. To make this distinction clear, contemporary projects speak of being “exchange-logic-free.” Another possibility consists of taking one’s distance from “equivalent exchange,” since what corresponds to the equivalence can only be socially determined and hence leads to the structural logics of exclusion to which you have alluded.

This brings us to the fundamental subject of this book. For what is at issue here are possible post-monetary societies: and hence too a society without a

logic of exchange, since every exchange relation based on equivalent value is money.

Christian, it is true that exploitation would no longer be possible in your system of weighted labor as money. That is why I have argued in my paper “Solidarität wär’ eine prima Alternative” (“Solidarity Would Be a Great Alternative”; Habermann 2011) that it represents a kind of socialism before communism. But, ultimately, I fear that it preserves too much the logics of capitalism: the striving to have to do as little as possible to obtain resources—rather than conceiving sensibly taking action as an elementary human need. Of course, it will never be the case that all activities are popular. But once I bring also my favorite activities onto the market—and possibly have to learn that they are “of no value” in the competition with other activities—can I really, then, still take pleasure in contributing them? Or if, on the contrary, I see that my activities are treated as valuable, perhaps because others cannot replace them, will I not, then, start to hold back on them, instead of taking pleasure in my contributions?

You already called attention to one aspect, Stefan, but it is so important to me that I would like briefly to repeat it: Currently, thousands upon thousands are starving around the world, precisely because they have nothing to exchange. They can leave behind as many signs and wishes as they like, and they can continue hoping until the end. This goes under the “collateral damage of the system.”

How would this be dealt with in your system, Christian? Everyone who can work does not have to starve and the social safety net takes care of the others? All of that preserves the logic of performance.

This brings us to the domain of care: hence of the “feeding, providing, caring, disposing, procuring, and attending” activities (Maler 2010).<sup>2</sup> Which of these are included at all in your answer (“to assume ‘weighted labor’ as general currency, which one can earn and spend as one sees fit”)? Only those that I would gladly outsource, because I do not want to do them myself? But this leads to the care activities that I gladly do—because they are fun or because it is my own family members who need care—not paying. I still have to “look for work.” And if I include them, how do I differentiate them from private life? They will inevitably be subject to a logic of competition. If it is the number of people washed that counts, then those caregivers will have the advantage who wash people effectively and rapidly. Thus, we would have the current situation, wherein there is no time available for needs that go beyond what would also be necessary when washing cars. And if it is only the number

<sup>2</sup> All of the terms in the original German quote from Maler—*Versorge, Vorsorge, Fürsorge*, etc.—contain the root *Sorge*: care.

of hours worked that counts, then whoever dawdles the most has the advantage.

And, indeed, here you are absolutely right: It does not have always to be the mother who takes care of the baby. Many of the considerations of feminist economics come from a time that was marked by difference-based feminism (see my contribution to this book). But do I have to reflect this fact in every quote? This is not the point of the passage. Even if I would argue that the crying of the baby is more than a stigmergic signal, the example could also have gone as follows: “When an oven signals that the rolls in the oven are ready, we would also turn it off when we are not paid for doing so and even when it is not at all clear that the rolls are for us.” Apart from the family, which in capitalism is kept private as opposite pole, it is in fact difficult, however, to find examples that do not sound absurd. For, right away, someone would ask: Where is the, presumably paid, person who turned the oven on? Whose property are the rolls? Etc.

What, above all, comes into play, however, is that we have learned to be guided exclusively by money and self-interest outside the family—and hence the so-called gummy bear effect: namely, all those experiments that show that people cease to act helpfully or responsibly when money—or, in the case of children, gummy bears, for instance—comes into play. It is also for this reason that Ina Praetorius (2015) speaks of the “rediscovery of the self-evident.”

People do not always think so much in terms of their self-interest. But when they do not, they are thinking *in opposition* to the social logic. And this is damned difficult, since we are always part of the social context. But it does happen. For example, there are fewer and fewer market-related economic reasons to cultivate organic foods. I use this example, because I wonder if you see capitalism—which in some parts of the USA, which are known as “food deserts,” does not provide any more fresh food—as the outcome of free consumer choices? Now, you will respond: I am speaking of a system without a profit logic. But a profit logic will always develop out of a monetary system with an individual logic of maximization. And you will always be dependent on decisions. Even in an exchange-logic-free society, the latter will not always be to your liking, but they are still not determined by a logic of competition.

Everything that we are, we owe to other people. As the neurobiologist Gerald Hüther (2015: 145) has put it: “Nobody can develop his or her potential alone. Every human being needs the relation to others to do so.” In contemporary society, however, everyone has learned to treat one another as objects, because what actually needs to take place between these people can no longer do so: namely, co-creation and co-evolution.

The *ABC des guten Lebens* (“ABC of Living Well”) is a dictionary of terms for being able to comprehend the new that was brought out by nine feminists

in 2012. The authors undertake throughout to expose the dependency/freedom binary as a false opposition. Both only exist in relation to the other. Recognizing the fundamental dependence of all upon all, freedom means being able, accordingly, to bring one's own wish into the course of the world: "Freedom consists of making one's own uniqueness visible in the world in the first person" (Knecht et al. 2012: 59). This would be one possible form of self-evidence in a society without money.

Yes, Christian and also Stefan, empirically existing commons are often connected to sanctions. But Elinor Ostrom found that these seldom amount to more than a fraction of the monetary value that a violation of the rules would yield (cf. Ostrom 1990: 59). In other words, following the rules was economically irrational despite the sanctions. Nonetheless, they were hardly violated. So, what is the use of the sanctions? Just as Stefan argues for rules in general, they provide signals for desirable behavior. Or as I put it, they serve to demarcate a domain of self-evidence. Or in your words, Christian: "It is, of course, both conceivable and desirable that a future society could largely get by without sanctions, because all of its members find the rules so self-evident and clear that, in any case, no one violates them. But this can only be shown in practice, it cannot be theoretically postulated in advance."

This is precisely what I wrote: We have to make a start. Then we will see. Or borrowing from Eduardo Galeano's notion that utopia is always on the horizon: It is only once we have gone further that we can see further.

Because humans—and views of human nature—can never be independent of their society.

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