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ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS = CRISIS IN SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR?: PROSOCIALITY, COOPERATION, COMPETITION, OR...*

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There is no doubt that the present global environmental crisis is caused by humankind and thus presents a kind of threatening of man by man. It can be a matter of discussion whether the social dimension is a primary cause of this crisis or whether it is only a mediated consequence. Nevertheless, it is dominant, if not crucial, that we consider the possibilities for the resolution of the crisis.

At first glance, prosociality (altruism) is the best and most suitable form of social behaviour to help overcome the global crisis. Writers frequently stress its importance in environmental education (i.e. Erdmann, Kastenholz, 1990, LaRoche et al., 1991). Based on an analysis of communication dynamism, the authors of this paper try to seek the positive aspects of various forms of social behaviour, namely those being considered as non-adaptive (i.e. competition). In the changing conditions from totalitarianism to democracy, this comparison becomes of special importance, as for the preceding 40 years competition and similar behaviours were declared to be undesirable and dangerous for the sake of society. This society, however, has to simultaneously solve the basic social background of a burgeoning democracy with its market economy, and at the same time the environmental crisis, which can result in serious problems, as these two processes have often contradictory goals.

The earth has entered in a period of hydrological, climatological, and biological change that differs from previous episodes of global change in the extent to which it is human in origin. To explain, predict, and if possible influence the course of the present global environmental change, one must therefore understand the human sources, consequences, and responses, some of which can alter the course of global change (Stern et al., 1992). On a behavioural level of analysis, a first distinction should be made between individual and social behaviour. Individual behaviour can have direct impact on various environmental objects – both living and material. Social behaviour, on the other hand, has no direct impact on

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the material environment. It can, nevertheless, have an even more significant impact on a subject's individual environmental behaviour, as the mediation of social relations into individual behaviour may produce activities, which are assumed to vary from the highly protective to the highly destructive.

On the other hand, individual environmental behaviour often has strong consequences for people living in a subject's more or less distant surroundings. One wrong decision in a nuclear energy plant may influence the lives of millions of people for thousands of years. Environmentally unconscientious behaviour could in this sense be categorized as a kind of "environmental psychopathy", psychopathy being defined as a group of disturbances, whereby the subject harms his social environment more than himself. A variation of this shift of environmental consequences to something or someone other than the subject can also be seen in the postponement of solutions of environmental problems to future generations.

An attempt to categorize various forms of social exchange behaviour from the point of view of benefits and losses for others results in a three level hierarchy: altruistic, cooperative and competitive behaviour.

These basic forms of social behaviour have an evolutionary substance. They play the main role in the evolution of species and in the regulation of natural selection – also called "differential survival" by J.P. Scott et al. (1989).

Contemporary environmental analysts have started to emphasize the meaning of altruistic, prosocial behaviour, which should serve as a social-rescue project for the global environmental crisis (Erdmann, Kastenholz, 1990). According to this paradigm, prosociality, which is completely expressed in early mother-child behaviour, remains in ones behavioural repertory to that extent to which it succeeds in competition with other more assertive forms of behaviour needed for standing in social comparisons and in the fulfilment of life-tasks. Cooperation and competition thus enter the game and the subject has to find a balance between these three forms.

From the viewpoint of an environmentalist's interests, any reduction of altruism in the behavioural repertory should mean the reduction of the probabilities for humankind to survive. But is it really true, that cooperative, and mainly competitive behaviours, which are typical and basic for democratic society with its market economy design, are opposed to the good of the environment?

From an evolutionary point of view, the relations between competition and other forms of social behaviour are not so dramatic. In anatomical structural organization, competition is strictly limited because of the independence of entities in the system. There is no way that entities can compete on this level without mutual harm. The emergence of (social) behaviour makes it possible to evolve social organizations whose entities (individuals) must cooperate, otherwise there would be no social organization. But their behavioural interaction also makes it possible to compete. And, as species have evolved more elaborate forms of social organization, they have also evolved systems with the specialized function of regulating

competition (Scott, 1989). According to J.P. Scott (idem, p. 174) altruism, cooperation, and competition are: "First not bipolar opposites with fixed boundaries between them. They may overlap and even serve a combined function. Second, there is no need to assume that one is derived from the other, though in some case it can be so."

From a temporal point of view, there arises the question of whether there is a significant difference between altruism, cooperation and competition when we consider how they contribute to the fulfilment of individual goals: altruism serving the fulfilment of distant goals, cooperation being aimed at mid-distance goals, and competition, aimed at reaching immediate goals.

In this context it should be mentioned, that considering various single non-competitive behaviours, many of them are competitive indirectly, or can become competitive under special conditions (because of: limited space, limited food supply, seeking a sexual partner, etc.). Even epimeletic behaviour (caring for – mainly – offspring) may produce competitive behaviour under certain conditions (Scott, 1989).

Following this theoretical consideration we would like to present some implications concerning the relations of the three forms of social behaviour – altruism, cooperation, and competition – to actual problems of socio-political change being undergone in Central-Eastern Europe.

Democracy, economic growth, and market economy are the most discussed "conditio sine qua non" in the countries undergoing change in this region. But the introduction of a market economy also reveals questions about the environmental consequences of these changes.

Economic growth necessarily influences the environment, but the amount of stress from a given amount of economic growth depends, among other things, on forms of national political organization and the development of policies. At the same time, technologies may either increase or decrease the impact of human activity on the environment, depending on the other *driving forces*, which determine the technologies developed and used. From the point of view of political-economic institutions there are a rich variety of possible influences. Markets, governments, and international political economy are involved here. As markets are never perfect, environmental impact depends on which imperfect market method is being used. Attitudes and beliefs of individual people within their individual lifetimes can also have a significant influence on resource-using behaviour, even when socio-structural and economic variables are held constant.

Uncoordinated human responses are greatly affected by markets. Environmental changes are likely to affect the prices of important commodities. However, existing markets do not provide the right *price signals* for managing global crisis, and moreover the participants in markets do not always follow the strict rules of economic rationality. Environmental externalities of economic activity including nature as a whole, and effects experienced by those not directly involved

in economic transactions, are not priced in markets today – effects that have no price may be treated as if they have no value. On the other hand, economic theory suggests prescriptions for government action when market signals do not correspond to social values. The goal usually considered most important is getting the environmental impacts reliably translated into the price and income signals that will induce private adaptation. But it is difficult to arrive at "correct" prices because so many of the impacts of global change are unknown or uncertain and because the appropriate values of future events are unlikely to be the same from all generational vantage points and resource endowments.

P.C. Stern et al. (1992) summarize approaches to the problem of developing well-functioning markets, suggested by economists:

- quasi-market mechanisms (auctioning pollution rights)
- controlling research and development with the aim of slowing or adapting to global change
- international markets, which allow for the migration of labour and capital over a greater geographical range
- promoting knowledge and collecting and distributing data to enable rational response.

Some theorists even discuss the possibility that democratization may also slow appropriate responses, compared with what might be achieved in an authoritarian regime by simple decision of the leadership (Kaplan, 1989, Muller, 1988, Roberts, 1990, Stephens, 1989).

Attitudes and beliefs are, according to P.C. Stern (1992) the most suitable units for analysing individual human contribution to the environmental crisis. Market behaviour is an expression of preferences, which are ultimately attitudes, so the treatment of environment is an indirect result of attitudes, even in economic analysis. Sociocultural systems, including families, clans, tribes, and communities copy these changes introduced by the market and develop behavioural strategies, which are, according to the appropriateness of the market method, more or less adaptable. An early argument in this vein attributes the modern environmental crisis to the separation of spirit and nature in the Judeo-Christian tradition (White, 1967). Another traces the rise of capitalism with its materialist values and social and economic structures back to Protestant theology (Münz, 1992). The Frankfurt school of critical theory accorded a similar role to the spread of purely instrumental rationality (Offe, 1985). The list of theoretical explanations could be continued, but one consequence can be arrived at immediately: across advanced industrial societies a value transition from materialistic to postmaterialistic values is occurring that has significant implications for the ability of societies to respond to global change with mitigation strategies that involve changes in life-style (Rohrschneider, 1990). Short-sighted and self-interested ways of thinking and acting, which act as underlying causes of environmental degradation, Hardin (1968) calls "the tragedy of the commons".

P.C. Stern et al. (1992) bring an example which illustrates the necessity of matching human values and attitudes on all levels, from low – hedonistic and conforming, through medium level – ipsocentric, to high level – altruistic and task oriented when environmental efforts should succeed, as given in the case of the international agreement restricting CFCs. Analysts have identified four important factors:

– an evolving scientific consensus

– a high degree of public anxiety in developed countries about the risks associated with the continued use of CFCs (skin cancer)

– the exercise of political muscle by the United States

– the availability of commercial substitutes for CFCs, which finally served the critical role of diminishing the opposition of the chemical industry, or in other words, which "arranged the success" on the market level.

In the light of evolutionary data on the character of competition mentioned above, and according to the socio-economic analysis presented here, an evaluation of competitive behaviour should be reconsidered. It is difficult to keep its "dramatic" counterposition to altruistic and cooperative behaviour. Emphasizing competition as itself, as well as its counterposition is an artefact based on a strong Anglo-American cultural tradition. In the contemporary global environmental crisis the value of competitive (market) behaviour is clearly positive, and "deficits" of the capacity of the market mechanism in solving the environmental crisis have to be solved by sensitive corrective approaches. The idea of such correcting approaches is in concert with the whole concept of democratic socio-political organization: democracy is in fact a kind of empty agreement of people, which has to be filled with rules (laws, moral) serving as guidelines and corrections of interindividual exchanges in the "game" which all of them have decided to play. Thus the hypothesis raised in the opening question about whether the roots of the present environmental crisis are in disbalance with social behaviour of current western civilized society has been proven to be incorrect. Instead, the rules which are in the background of democratic society should be reconsidered in order to arrive at a framework, which will guarantee sufficient protection for the environment and at the same time guarantee full possibilities for the development of a complete repertory of human social behaviour.

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