

Philosophical Implications of Environmental Management

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The following paper is supposed to sketch the outlines of a research project that has been inspired by different lines of thought. The driving force was the feeling that the disparity between the different social sciences is inadequate relative to the problems which are supposed to be tackled by contemporary management. The field of environmental management serves as a prime example since the consideration of subjects not adequately treated by economic thought alone are quite obvious in this field.

Business and the Rest

It is common in business studies to view the firm as a system which therefore by definition has an environment. The environment includes everything which is not included in the system itself. The system is constructed starting with criteria of division. These criteria may be functional, procedural, spatial, et cetera. In order to be able to determine whether a particular firm is working well criteria of evaluation are necessary and have to be made explicit. These may be efficiency, number of employees, health of employees, number of fish in the near river, return on investment, profit, turnover, et cetera.¹

To talk about a firm as a system therefore means to have made one step of abstraction. This abstraction determines the relevant features of the bunch of people out there doing their thing. Semantically the problem arises that for the predicator as well as for the abstractor the same word is used. To say the firm *is* a system though doesn't make any sense in the semantical framework used here. To change the semantics accordingly would mean to ontologize the systemic view which leads to problems which will be exemplified later on.

Additionally the concretum firm is not easy to get a hold of. This might be one reason why the step to the systemic view is easily taken. It makes things clear. But by focusing on the chosen, i.e. relevant, properties others 'disappear', i.e. are irrelevant.

The firm as a concretum is a social thing, a bunch of people doing their common thing (not to say structure, system, group or the like). And in order to evaluate the quality of the above abstraction for different ends a view of the firm has to be developed which is more complete in the sense of incorporating more views than the above. The

¹Certain criteria may be considered as part of the definition, i.e. they have to be fulfilled in order to call a system a firm. They constitute the frame of identity of a firm. To say these are inadequate means to change the semantics of firm which thereby changes the subject of corresponding research.

relevance of the 'irrelevant' has to be scrutinized.

One obstacle to this task is the sedimentation of social science language in everyday language. Apparently systems, social structures, et cetera are simply there like a table. The abstraction is omitted or forgotten.² This is the reason why relative to the approach followed here there are no words for the concreta. It would be overbearing in this short paper to offer a terminology. To say social thing though will because of its awkwardness always remind us of this deficit.

The problem of determining what we are talking about leads thus to general problems of all social sciences as which in a far more general sense business studies and economics have to be understood.³

Sociology

In this section three apparent social dichotomies will be examined in order to solve the 'embedding-problem' just defined. Embedding-problem is put in inverted comas in order to point to the fact that to talk about embedding already takes the abstract view for granted.

Lifeworld and System

The word lifeworld has a long philosophical and sociological history which cannot be referred to in any detail in this paper. Here the lifeworld is the missing substantial starting point which is necessary for a systemic view to makes sense. It is the ensemble of social things, i.e. of the missing concreta. Thus the lifeworld is not to be identified with any conception of community nor with day-to-day life. Lifeworld is the pre-scientific, the substantial starting point in terms of being a presupposition that has to be shared in order to follow the arguments it is founding. The lifeworld is *as a starting point* a fiction but nevertheless an unproblematic part of everyday life.

To start in the lifeworld means to tell a story - Lyotard would call it a myth. This story is supposed to lead out of an apparently natural state which is not discriminating. The story is *ex post* although it is supposed to function as a foundation. The story includes the way we want to live and thereby ways how we want to determine how we want to live. Foundation in the lifeworld is critical work in the Kantian sense without the big story of reason behind it.

But even without getting further into the 'metaphysics' of the lifeworld the message should be clear: The substantial foundation upon which a systemic view is built and which serves as a base of evaluation and critique is neither self-evident nor natural nor situated in any kind of community. The very idea of lifeworld does not necessarily need to be positively introduced. It is the seed of critique and thus defended against any kind of usurpation. Lifeworld is the unavailable.⁴

The fact that we act not alone, that we live not alone, that we act and live together

²This problem can be exemplified by the concept of family which appears to be easily introduced.

Everybody knows what a family is! But then: Is the concept of biological reproduction relevant? Or do we mean a 'social' concept which involves responsibilities, personal history or the like?

³This means that instead of (hegemonically) exporting the instruments e.g. of economy into other social sciences we will try to import perspectives.

⁴Frankenberg, Rödel, and Dubiel have tried to grasp something similar to the concept developed here in their 1989 work on the theory of democracy. They call it the 'symbolic dispositive of democracy'. (Ulrich Rödel, Günter Frankenberg, Helmut Dubiel: Die demokratische Frage. Frankfurt a.M. 1989)

with others is an ultimate certainty. Not certain in a scientific sense, not true since the corresponding criteria are not available methodically. To doubt that we live and act together with others thus means not to share the starting point offered here. That's all! Once this start is agreed upon the quest is not to overload it with any further presuppositions, e.g. a concept of structure, system, or the like.

We live together and do things in a customary way without thinking about it.⁵ This non-reflexive state can be reconstructed by being governed by implicit rules and norms. These, reconstructively made explicit, are not part of the lifeworld but of the science occupied with the social. In sociology explicit rules and norms have to be considered additionally. The lifeworld thus must not be confused with some natural state of so called primitive societies which are supposed to rely only on implicit rules and norms. That is why the parallel with myths convincingly demonstrated by Lyotard is only one part of the story.

What is called socialization, learning about and experiencing the social is part of sociological reconstructions. To learn about the availability of rules and norms, about defensive strategies and mechanisms relative to change, or about the space and time spread of restrictions is sociology and needs additional presuppositional background. This in turn must also be acquired by recourse to the lifeworld, i.e. the corresponding story.

Lifeworld thus is not only the starting point of the social as the object of social sciences but the methodical base of the sciences and their validity claims. We are now in the midst of the most delicate problems of the foundation of social sciences in terms of a philosophy of science which is not social science itself but sees itself in the tradition of a theory of knowledge.

The so far indicated concepts of system and lifeworld do not allow an opposition or comparison of the two. To see the lifeworld as being endangered by systems implied a twofold hypostasis which leads to a strangely polarized ontology of the social. In our picture the lifeworld is nothing that can be endangered and systems cannot endanger anything.

But how can the corresponding endangerment be reconstructed? Which concepts are involved? The above social relations taken as the lifeworld. The legal, i.e. explicit relations, taken as the system can be helpful. To restrict the implicitly regulated by explicit regulations which lack the potential dynamic of the first would make the endangerment metaphor sensible. We won't extend the reconstruction here but point to the fact that this analysis is prone to a kind of social romanticism which is unlikely to be intended.

Furthermore it is said that a certain system is created or implemented. This type of speech can be reconstructed using the above definition: The concept of system is used as a theoretical concept which serves as a heuristic device to design regulations.

System thus can be used as an abstractor in the sense of the last section as well as a theoretical construct as shown in the last paragraph. The abstract talk is based upon the relevant aspects. To talk about the political system of a country abstracts from everything but the explicitly defined aspects which serve as equivalence-criteria. If the relevant aspects are materially prescribed and then used for the arrangement of

⁵ We don't self-monitor ourselves all the time; a cybernetic metaphor which is importing too much theoretical ballast at this point.

regulations a theoretical construct is used. To use a chemical example: To talk about a substance means to talk about a thing invariantly relative to certain substantial parameters. To design a substance with specific values of these parameters by e.g. molecular modeling is first of all a theoretical concept which then is tried to be realized. It must be noted that this analogy is purely semantic and must not be extended to any other field of interest.

A firm thus is an ensemble of social and legal relations which can be described as a financial, productive, political etc. system or as an element of a corresponding system.

Action and Structure

The basic concepts of a theory of action are action, behavior, and 'happening-to'. A behavior just happens to somebody. To trip e.g. or to cough or to sneeze. To sneeze on purpose is an action though: to act as if sneezing. By actions ends are supposed to be reached. Apart from behavior there are other events that are happening-tos like a soccer ball hitting us passing by a soccer field.

We notice that acts are done to reach an end because we try again if we fail to reach it. A metaphysics of action, ends, intention, or free will doesn't make sense at this point. It is methodically inadequate to post a determinism since only ends provide criteria to judge validity claims in the first place, i.e. to discriminate between successful and unsuccessful in day-to-day life, between true and false in scientific discourse. This is a methodical starting point from which structure equivalencies can be examined.

The questions: How do acts happen? Do we act in order to reach ends or do we simply 'know' how to act in a customary way, i.e. just act without thinking? make sense only on the basis of a reconstruction like the above. Methodically the structures influencing actions are accessible only by actions themselves. Structures happen to us in the course of action. Actions are the access to structures and change them.

Giddens calls this the duality of structure.⁶ I prefer to call it the duality of action in order to focus on the methodical starting point, i.e. action. Actions therefore exhibit structures and change them. Structure is an abstractor on the basis of actions.

Structuration and Postmodernity

By choosing a more or less vague concept of lifeworld as starting point a theoretical concept is supposed to be avoided. Every specification which follows *introduces* a picture of the social which has to be treated as such. Even to talk about a basic duality of structure, about the underlying fact that we are constantly self-monitoring ourselves, or the degree of systemness of a social thing is importing abstractions or as-if-talk, i.e. theoretical constructs. These concepts smuggle in an ontology which is potentially misleading since it presents as a fact what is invested.

But instead of refraining from using theoretical constructs or hiding these in apparently obvious ontologies they should be creatively employed and marked as such.

Instead of drawing the picture holistically and thereby deconstructing the individual's influence we establish a methodical order which avoids the dualism Giddens wants to surmount but does not have to rely on the duality he puts forward. The picture of the structure that is reproduced by and leads action at the same time is methodically

⁶Anthony Giddens: *The constitution of society*. Berkeley. 1984.

reorganized in favor of action as the basic concept. This, of course, does not mean in any way that the methodical organization defines the empirical outcome.

Central for the argument brought forward in this paper is the fact that so called structural or system imperatives lack justification. They presuppose a foundation they don't have. Ethical reflection is necessary.

To act purposefully in a social context means to act on the base of a certain picture of this context. The fact that this is a major difference to technical contexts where scientific laws hold doesn't mean that it is in vain to try to change things in a certain direction. A picture of the whole which counteracts these efforts may well be suspected to be ideological.

Ethics

Morals will here be considered as the usual, the customary, ethics as the reflection of morals. We act in a customary way and oftentimes think about it and sometimes change the ways we act. The ensemble of customs and change is part of the condition humaine. The fact that we may act according to the usual or divergently implies the obligation to decide, to answer the corresponding Kantian question: What are we supposed to do?

It has been a quest of philosophers of all times to free (!) man from this obligation, to answer the Kantian question from the perspective of a universal certainty, to simply deduce what is just and right from there. This quest though is in vain!

There are nevertheless helpful differentiations and principles provided by ethics as a philosophical discipline. These applied to decision making are the core offer of a decision theory oriented ethics e.g. for political consulting. It mainly constitutes methods of checking consistency and comparison of morals.

There however are two other functions a discipline ethics may fulfill. Ethics as the foundational discipline of practical philosophy provides propositions for an answer of another Kantian question: What is man? Finally ethics is the discipline which in a Lyotardian sense has to unmask the 'trash' philosophy left behind in the course of its history.

Ethics may thus provide mere technical propositions or reflectionary help to clarify the condition humaine.

Individuals and Communities

Ethical reasoning can be seen as starting either with individuals or with communities and a long-lasting philosophical discussion has been going on whether the one is more adequate than the other.

There are two lines of thought considering this dualism not to be confused. The ontological one: Where is reason revealed? And the epistemic one: Where can we establish a starting point?⁷ Just as in the first section the ontological perspective is turned down in favor of the epistemic.

To establish the starting point in individuals or communities, of course, doesn't mean that on the other hand communities or individuals respectively are of no relevance.

⁷An interesting question here is the one of the constitution of the self. Does it have to be seen ontologically or epistemically. How is an evolutionary point of view situated in this dichotomy.

The claim on the one hand that criticism itself has its foundation in communities can be understood descriptively (it has always been there; evolutionary; avant-garde). We could thus try to understand the mechanisms of change but don't have a seed for critical science unless we turn the outcome of such research normatively. The question now is how can this turn be justified and does the factuality have justificatory power. If not, the resources of criticism don't have to be the community, better: the outcome of analysis of the respective community. The foundation of criticism may then be traced in the individual.

The Good Life and Acceptable Rules

We now come back to the story of the lifeworld which was deemed methodically prior to other concepts of social sciences. This story not only necessarily is the beginning of social research but also the base of ethical argumentation. We have to clarify how we want to live in order to be able to decide what to do. An argument of systemic necessities here has the bitter taste of paternalism. This of course does not mean that the difference of acceptance and acceptability is not maintained.

The concept of lifeworld has in sociology a heuristic function. In ethics though it has a normatively foundational one. This means if a sociologist thematizes the Good Society the ethical function is applied and therefore an ethical discourse is taken up.

The movement of critique and deliberate identification or change hence has to be distinguished from the difference of acceptance and acceptability. Then the problem of facticity and validity loses its threat.

Utility and Morality

Utilitarianism tries to avoid the foundation problem of moral philosophy by starting by expressed needs instead of acceptable ones. Utilitarianism apparently takes people seriously. This obviously can only be the one side of the coin because the outcome of this procedure may as well be what people don't want although their priorities have been invested. The difference between utility and morality consequently has to be maintained.

The methodical decision for a utilitarian approach - which only makes contemporary economics possible - prevents economics from solving the problems it has most urgently to solve in our days. These are simply not accessible by its methods. To take into consideration the claims of the different stakeholders commonly accepted in alternative approaches to business is simply out of reach. The scope of research can be widened but as long as the methodical foundation which constitutes the instruments is not expanded the focus will be too narrow.

Nature and the Environment

In the following sections different attitudes toward the environment, i.e. concepts of environment and nature will be introduced which make a difference for the assessment and evaluation of environmental management.

Holism

The holistic concept of nature can be traced all the way back to ancient Greek philosophy. Plato e.g. wanted to describe nature as a whole, as comprehensive in order to use it as a reference point of naturalness. Methodically the problem arises that

this concept either has no differential power or it transports hidden presuppositions that have to be thoroughly examined. If nature is comprehensive then everything is natural analytically because then there is nothing outside of nature. But if this 'whole' of nature is used as an ideal and thus gains normative power the ideal has to be justified unless we accept a platonic ontology of ideals.

Aspectualism

The aspectual view of nature is an Aristotelian invention. Corresponding to his *Physics* he starts with the particular things and formulates criteria of naturalness. He differentiates nature (*physis*) and the artificial (*techne*), i.e. natural things and artefacts. Natural things have the principle of motion in themselves, artefacts are in their motion determined by man. Normative power can be gained by a teleology which assigns every thing its proper natural end. This teleology does not have to be dealt with here because the concept of nature itself is invariant concerning different normative orientations. Important is that the difference between the artificial and the natural is made based on human action. Furthermore does the introduction of the concept of nature itself not imply a normative orientation which human action has to be in accordance with a certain predetermined order of nature.

The Parts and the Whole

Ecological and economic aspects thus can be viewed as contrary or the economic one as embedded in the ecological one. Neither view in its exclusivity is helpful as a starting point for environmental management and the corresponding research. We have to decide how we want to live and then how we want to manage to do so. This is not hybris but a necessity. This view is necessary if the paternalism of an apparent self-evidence and the naivity or escapism of an apparent natural order is to be avoided. The decision which aspects are deemed relevant is inevitable in order to start this type of reflection.

Environmental Management: Business as usual?

The above implies that the usual discussion of an economization of ecology or ecologization of economy taking one aspects as and end and the other as a restriction is too exclusive. Not only from a philosophical point of view these approaches are equivalent and likewise unsatisfactory. It almost sounds cynical to claim economic imperatives were *only* restrictions: You can do whatever you want as long as you obey the economic restrictions! This means nevertheless that the economic criteria are substantial. Thereby the autopoietic character of economy becomes self-fulfilling. The 'critical' reconstruction becomes the source of conservation.⁸

The starting point for EM efforts generally are apparently obvious environmental problems caused by business activities, e.g. waste production and energy inefficiency. Many papers of last years Greening of Industry Network conference in Santa Barbara took this intuitive approach to operationalize the concept of sustainability. The step from general definitions to real world problems is of course necessary not to lag behind the 'economic realities' but *additionally* work on systematic concepts that build a methodically sound and democratically acceptable bridge from general concepts to applicable rules has to be done.

⁸The same is valid for economic and moral aspects.

This work has to be interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary at the same time and that is why it is so hard to do in the prevalent disciplinary contexts. A simple juxtaposition of disciplinary points of view - a multidisciplinary - is not enough. It likewise is misleading to start talking to each other from this multidisciplinary bases in order to construct a interdisciplinarity. Interdisciplinarity rather should be guided from a transdisciplinary point of view, i.e. a view that starts from a non-disciplinary bases in order to focus on real world problems and questions.

The problem of EM consequently is its aporetic structure. On the one hand it tries to be faithful to its economic and therefore liberitarian foundations - of course the management knowledge readily available is supposed to be applied. On the other hand it tries to implement its findings that business is a part of a whole of nature and that structures are determining the scope of one's actions, i.e. that these structures are not limited to preserve the personal freedom of action.

Philosophy plays the somewhat annoying role of explicating implications and implicit presuppositions in order to make people aware of what they 'buy' together with a certain approach. Philosophy can try something like a life-cycle analysis of management concepts and thereby extend the concept of environmental care and sustainable development to the social and the political.

The quest of the research project alluded to here will be to shift from the apparent supremacy of a system, structure, individual, utility approach to a broader view likewise incorporating and taking seriously action, lifeworld, community, morality aspects. Lifeworld and action will function as the methodical beginning.