Chapter 9: Education in Times of Crisis – Learning from Young People on the Way to "Centres of Sustainability"

January – August 2022: How to change schools and universities – (eco)philosophy for a sustainable democracy

At the university – a story and a fundamental challenge

Sometimes it is time to look back and look forward. What could and should happen in all educational spaces?

This time I do not go alone to Stockholm University. I present my teaching rooms proudly to some of the activists who are about to start studying.

All this is familiar: getting out of the underground and walking into the wind which tries to blow us down the endlessly long escalators. And then passing all the institutes and departments.

In these conversations with the young activists – globally, too – a new idea gradually emerges. The university could react to the crisis to an entirely different extent. A huge "lever" of change becomes visible: as in Gender Studies, whose intersectionality courses must be attended by most students in all subjects in Sweden, there could be sustainability studies and a centre for sustainability at every educational institution, every school and university everywhere in the world. This could quickly change all subjects, teaching methods and research. We could make that happen, I suggest.

So, some of the managers of the Department of Child and Youth Studies commission me to write a paper. It is to outline how democracy, sustainability, care, and education are connected, and how these connections could shape teacher training. Soon I will be switching to the Marc Bloch Centre in Berlin as

a researcher linked to the Climate Change Centre, and I want to use the chance to put all these ideas together.

And so, at a meeting, I begin to tell the story of the last four years, the story of four or five young people who started to strike. How they built up the movement, together with their peers worldwide, who worry so much every day about the world and their future. How they became more and more familiar with these topics, from climate science to global theories of justice. How they themselves sought to work with hundreds of scientists and organised webinars – to save the forest, to influence agriculture, to reshape energy and education.

I continue the story, explaining how they introduce new young people to this knowledge; how they share their panic over the crises, as well as their grief. How they invite their friends to Stockholm, including Maria from Mexico, Eric from Kenya, and Yusuf from Balochistan, so that they can pass on insights into the crises from the perspective of those who are most affected. And how all of them work together with us researchers almost daily and strike every week.

In particular, I emphasise the fact that the original scene of the strike in Mynttorget, when the young people fought with their whole beings to stop things continuing as they were, gives rise to a task for all of us. Or, as the philosopher Levinas (1969) would probably say, a "demand" which comes from a human face: to care about giving them a future without this deep fear, to do everything for change, including as researchers – and that means reshaping the universities now.

It is wrong, I claim, just to continue as we have been, or only to study these young people from a sociological and empirical point of view. We must react to them and research together with them to find out how we can respond to the crises fairly. And from a global perspective on young people, this means that researchers in Child and Youth Studies and Democracy Studies ought to train their perceptions so that they see all people, including all children globally, as equal and free, with the same dignity. That isn't happening, even at our institutions, I think to myself. We are still clinging to a status quo which is already destroying the livelihoods and lives of hundreds of thousands through drought and floods.

And I draw attention to a scandal: all students at most universities can complete their education in all subjects (whether they study economics or law, and whether they want to be teachers or doctors) without receiving deeper knowledge about the crises and their causes, or learning the skills and values with which they could now immediately build a really sustainable society. In ten

years, emissions have to be reduced almost completely, in all areas, at least in the Global North.

How can those responsible allow something like this? Why do the directors of the Stockholm universities boast about their work at a joint sustainability conference ("Sustainable Planet, Sustainable Health", 1st of June 2022) when they should actually be apologising to these young people for the fact that in the last decades since the climate summit in Rio almost nothing has changed? And the whole scientific community ought to be apologising along with them for not taking the crises seriously for so long.

How can schools and universities instead take their task as democratic institutions seriously (on this, see Raffoul 2023; Barry/McGeown 2023; Barrineau et al. 2021)? How can all disciplines redefine their content, their teaching, their ethics, their research, and their institutional framework so that all students and teachers are involved in a project which leads the way out of the crises?

And how can we reach a new understanding of the project of modern science, which played its own role, together with industrialisation and the establishment of a capitalist market economy, in creating a reductionist, mechanistic worldview and thus driving the climate crisis?

The idea – sustainability centres as the core of education

It is still late winter and cold – the ground is frozen – when I walk with the young people across the campus. We almost slip on the icy ground and the wind briefly makes it seem as if we could fly away.

I think about what I myself can contribute through my research from the last few years. The idea is simple: what if we had a centre for sustainability here, a prototype? But not one which only brings together knowledge or produces specialist knowledge on topics such as education for sustainability, as is the case at so many universities, or which sets goals for fewer flights and for renovating buildings on campus. (Though that is also necessary – immediately, in fact.) This would instead be a centre to research and present the sustainable core of education, so that all institutions can make use of it, at every school and university. In developing it, we could work together with researchers across the world. They can bring in indigenous traditions of knowledge, decolonial arguments for reshaping universities (Patel 2015), intersectional theories of justice, and interdisciplinary knowledge about the climate crisis.

We could research a new relationship to the world, with creative and practical means of teaching it and making it accessible to all disciplines. How to interact sustainably, democratically and in a caring way. Then I wouldn't have to walk past institutions with the young people which seemingly have nothing to do with each other, even though all of them ought to be connected by the crises: political science, geography, teacher training, and so on.

The rebellion of the scientists

Globally, too, a lot is going on. More and more researchers across the world are becoming dissatisfied in their offices and joining Scientists For Future and Extinction Rebellion, forming Scientist Rebellion and no longer just writing articles but going into the streets in acts of civil disobedience: in Zurich, Copenhagen, Berlin, and many more in so many cities across the world (Kalmus 2022). At last, I think to myself. At last, something fundamental can happen. However: something is still wrong.

I certainly agree with the arguments of Scientist Rebellion: it is no longer enough just to write articles and books. The situation is getting worse daily, emissions are rising, and global injustice is increasing. The earth is burning. Scientific climate advisory boards and task forces are – in contrast with the situation during the corona crisis – not being listened to. It is appropriate, then, at least for those whose living situation allows it, to go out into the streets, take action, and participate in civil disobedience, particularly as university researchers. And I think back to the last four years in Mynttorget, to our cooperation with researchers such as Isabelle, who works in Youth Studies, and the strikes and street blockades.

But I still keep thinking that this is not enough. It misses what might be the central point, because it implies, at least in some cases, that we, the researchers, are the "good" people. What is missing is a sense of what is wrong within educational spaces, academia and at schools and universities themselves, the extent to which they, in their current "logic", are part of the non-sustainable society: from the curricula which ignore the crises, to the teaching methods, which reproduce the upper middle class and are focused on learning texts by heart.

We must instead look to an activism which addresses both society and politicians with civil disobedience, I say to my colleagues, but which also addresses internal structures and aims to change the universities themselves.

The Friday strikes, or non-cooperation on Fridays, combine both these two directions. They are directed both outwardly at the powerful, disturbing the status quo, and inwardly too; a refusal to let things continue as they are among students and teachers. If thousands took part in this refusal to cooperate, something fundamental would change.

But what should we be fighting for in these internal protests? How should the transformation of the institutes look; what kind of centres should be created? What could – for example – be demanded at every school and university in a joint citizens' assembly, a democratically organised gathering of teachers and students?

While I open the doors to the "stables", the theatre, music, and dance space of the university, all of this is going through my mind. What would be the core of a centre for sustainability and thus the core of transformative and regenerative education (Van den Berg 2021)?

The core of a centre for sustainability – "regenerative metabolism"

Isn't there something simple which could be the priority, even if it's not easy to realise: understanding how we can democratically create a secure, fair, and flourishing space for all humans and for nature, in which all of us can have a good, dignified life? That would mean (as the previous chapters have outlined): understanding the domination of nature and other people; seeing through these mechanisms, structures, and relationships; dismantling them and replacing them with knowledge about how democratic and regenerative spaces are created, as a joint project; through mutual help and by being in contact with each other and with nature in such a way that we strengthen one another. In that sense, we could and should incorporate intersectional justice and sustainability into our thinking from the very beginning when developing such a centre: it would be a centre for sustainable democracy.

From this, however, a new basic attitude to each other would emerge among people in educational spaces. We could see each other as vulnerable social beings, as creative beings who live, body and soul, in problematic power relations with each other and with nature. However, we can also enter into a regenerative exchange. That is where all education could start; as presented in the previous chapters. Gradually, I make contact with others who are working on similar ideas: with the CEMUS institute in Uppsala, with the Stockholm Resilience Centre; with the teaching department of the Doughnut Economics

Lab; with researchers in Wuppertal, Lüneburg, and Hamburg; with the Wyss Centre in Bern, with the new institute at Columbia University in New York, but also with smaller institutes across the world, and with the researchers connected with them – and of course with For Future groups such as the Fridays, the Scientists, and the Teachers For Future, who organise lecture series and annual education conferences at universities in the German-speaking region. But most of them are focused on researching socio-ecological systems. Barely any see themselves as centres which can influence every course of study and the whole of school education.

Back to Glasgow – the "Faculty For A Future"

During these conversations with the activists, a memory comes back to me. Fog blows through the narrow streets of Glasgow. Only a few weeks earlier, we marched through the city with tens of thousands of children and adults during the COP meeting. After the march, I went in search of a small café. Drizzle had set in and transformed the streets into a dark, uncanny film set. I was to meet a certain Jordan Raine. We had contacted each other when exchanging texts about reshaping the university landscape. He said something about a faculty – a "faculty for a future".

In the café, I am sinking into an oversized armchair when the door opens and Jordan appears, full of energy, and takes a seat. How are these people aiming to deal with the problem: that we lack the knowledge we would need to perceive the crises as socio-ecological systemic crises; and at the same time, we need to learn the skills to build a sustainable society in ten years, from agriculture and sociology to the economy?

After his doctorate in bioacoustics, I learn, Jordan worked in London as an editor at *The Conversation*, perhaps the most important online platform for academic communication. He was increasingly frustrated by the inaction of schools and universities worldwide regarding the climate crisis, and collected researchers around him who felt the same. Thus, a small crew came together to take on the project of a "faculty for a future": Clara, Josephine, James, Wolfgang, and many others. They have formed a platform online (www.facultyfor afuture.org) which everyone can take part in: a kind of grassroots movement for researchers and also students. The focus is on all the areas we keep coming back to: curricula, teaching methods to ensure that we are present with our hearts, minds, and hands; a new research ethics, and the institutional, theoret-

ical and social framework for an education which itself becomes regenerative and transformative, making prosperous lives possible.

But how do we set out the criteria, we ask ourselves in the café, which is full of damp Glaswegians who have taken refuge from the rain. How can someone decide what really contributes to sustainable education and is not just "green-wash" drivel? Or pure ideology rather than free science? The network of the "faculty" has established six principles, with the most far-reaching being the decision to talk of a sustainability crisis and not just a climate crisis.

The principles are: recognising that we are facing multiple systemic, urgent and interdependent crises (ecological, social, economic and so on); that these crises are caused by systems which dominate humans and nature and exploit them; that severe damage has already been done; that communities who have contributed the least are typically the first and the worst affected, especially in the Global South; that we are all worse off without urgent action, risking bigger catastrophes that overwhelm our capacity to adapt; and that if we take on our shared but differing responsibilities to act, as a joint global task, then rapid transformation is possible.

And soon the Faculty collects all the existing, relevant MOOCs (massive open online course): public lectures accessible to everyone, incorporating sustainability into all disciplines, including in pharmacology, sociology and architecture. The question comes up: what would need to be taught in a "super MOOC"? By popular demand from students, Barcelona is currently introducing a compulsory "Studium Generale" focusing on sustainability, which tries to answer this question (Burgen 2022; see also Thunberg 2022, an anthology in which one hundred scientists present their knowledge in two or three pages, with the aim of communicating this kind of fundamental information).

The members of the Faculty also work with specialists worldwide on a freely available collection of resources on sustainable teaching, which can be found on the website: how to teach so that students are involved, body and soul, with hearts, hands and minds, as the research on sustainable development says (ZDI 2022), acting as equal partners on their path of learning? And while we drink one cup of tea after another in the winter air of Glasgow, we begin to talk about more existential topics, about the way in which universities keep so many of us in uncertain situations through temporary contracts. That connects everything, we say: sustainable democratisation must also apply to the institutions themselves.

A tour through the rooms of the prototype centre

The memory fades, and I find myself once again with the activists in the theatre rooms of the teacher training institute. We open costume cupboards and rummage through the fabric supplies, take the musical instruments off the walls and move partitions around to create a stage set. I imagine a compère, a guide, who could lead people through the university campus, or rather not through the campus but through the fictional sustainability centre which I am sketching out – like a bizarre version of Steve Jobs and all the other tech bosses who proudly present their new products and features. But this is not about the technical details of something which is basically the same across all products, but about what makes us humans unique and democratic.

I continue to play with the thought. "Roll up, roll up," he could call. "Come closer! Look around you! The presentation is about to begin!" And in my imagination, he begins to lead us into one research room after another, from the smallest neuropsychological room to the biggest room of global cooperation: the diverse abundance of the core, the substance of democracy.

Room 1: A different understanding of animals

"Welcome to the first room!" calls the compère. "Welcome!" In the paper for the Department of Child and Youth Studies, I argue that democracy, sustainability, and care belong together, from kindergarten on. Because some researchers say that already as small children, we are democratic animals – or we can be

when social spaces allow it (Stern 1985). But first of all: what does it mean to be an animal? A pig. A moose. A rat. Something some people like some species of, while others are killed mechanically and bureaucratically by the million, and then eaten? What is our place within this horde, and therefore in nature itself?

We are all very similar, according to the researcher Jaak Panksepp (2004), the founder of "affective neuroscience". He says: there are a few basic aspects that characterise all mammals which are bigger than mice. In his research lab, he discovered something which he called the basic equipment of animal life: seven "affective systems of action". What we call "feelings" should, according to his idea, be seen as aspects of practical exchange with the environment, as relationship systems. They enable an exchange beyond the obvious "systems of needs" – for example, depending on the theory: the search for food, reproduction, or temperature regulation. There is the "seeking system", and the curious "discovery system", which is so obvious in dogs when they go around sniffing everything. Then the anger, desire, fear, and care systems. And finally, two which have for a long time not really entered the mainstream image of animals in the Global North: the play system and the bonding/grief system. Even rats play, says Panksepp. They giggle and bond with each other. They establish relationships and miss their parents when they are away, and complain when they feel lonely.

According to this theory, the question of whether animals have a consciousness is absurd. All these systems are nuances of a conscious process of relating to the world. When we rear animals and slaughter them or imprison them by the million, we are not only contributing to the climate crisis because of the methane which is released and the forests which are cut down (Foer 2019). We are treating living and feeling creatures, "earthlings", as the young people also call them, in a dominant way which causes terrible suffering. The various disciplines at universities, not only biology, physiology and neurology, ought to deal with this knowledge and prioritise its practical consequences for our relationship to nature, I propose.

On the contrary, many theories of consciousness miss the main point, according to this tradition, namely that consciousness is linked to us (and animals) as embodied beings in practical, existential exchange with the environment, as meaning-making and beings which connect with others. That is at least the theory of philosophers such as Hubert Dreyfus, Sean Kelly, and Evan Thompson (2010), who link their arguments to Merleau-Ponty's gestalt theory. From this perspective, it is absurd to think that non-biological entities such as

computers, robots, or any form of artificial intelligence could have conscious-
ness, or experience pain or happiness, compassion or attachment.

But everything goes wrong when we reduce people to this neurological, bi-
ological equipment. The next point is to ask what it is that defines us as poten-
tially democratic creatures.

Room 2: The animal which can lose contact –
the human spirit and imagination (the neuropsychological
foundation of "being connected/democratic exchange")

I look around in the theatre spaces. So often, the students here, who are
training to work in kindergartens or as teachers, have looked at different ways
in which we can communicate with small children so that they feel safe and
free – and are taken seriously as free and equal beings.

So that we can be seen as democratic animals in evolutionary history,
we need the Pankseppian "infrastructure". This is what allows us to lead a
life which is oriented towards relationships with the world. But that is not
enough. Relationships can also be undemocratic. Rather than being on an
equal footing, we can dominate others or be subjugated. What happens in
a democratic encounter, when we meet each other as equal and free people;
including in social movements or in educational spaces?

"Let us visit the world of David Bäckström in northern Sweden, and that
of the American researcher Mary Immordino-Yang, and of Daniel Stern, who
filmed the interactions of small children throughout his life," the compère
could now call out. Let us look at their theories about what happens in a
democratic encounter.

A small child drops a ball on the floor. That creates a particular rhythm.
"Boing, boing!" Pause. "Boing!" An adult can repeat this, bouncing the ball and
copying the rhythm. And the rhythm can be repeated again, but this time the
last bounce can be delayed. And in a funny way, this can create playful contact.
This often works even with children who are only a few months old and cannot
yet speak.

Stern (1985) discovered various "channels" of such non-linguistic commu-
nication: rhythm is one of them, but there are also patterns of intensity, and
shapes. We can throw the ball with the same force and intensity – or more
softly, or harder. This "language" is located at a "transmodal" level, transcend-
ing the individual senses such as hearing, sight, and touch, connecting them

together, according to Bäckström (2022), and making them translatable into each other. The result is a "gestalt": a meaningful "whole" which is more than the sum of its parts, manifesting itself in front of a background (Merleau-Ponty 1974). This is the fundamental way in which we perceive and experience as embodied beings, searching for and creating meaning in terms of meeting the world. If we hear that the sound of a train is getting quieter, we immediately connect this with a visible train which becomes smaller as it travels away from us. Patterns of intensity agree with each other – a "synaesthetic attunement" emerges. The getting smaller and the getting quieter match each other. And this, according to Bäckström, defines the core of the mysterious ability known as imagination. His research shows that most people, in common with other primates, have a well-developed infrastructure for this "synaesthesia". But in comparison with other primates, and also with dolphins, for example, it is often particularly pronounced in humans.

Bäckström (2022) attributes our ability to be conscious of ourselves, to be very aware of our contact with ourselves and with others, to this same structure. It is as if we can "meet" ourselves so well because our individual senses can meet each other well. And – I would say, going beyond Bäckström's analysis – our senses can also "disintegrate", becoming disconnected from each other. An example for this disintegration is the split between the visual form of letters, for example an "A", and its auditive qualities. Probably no one would say that the form is in "synesthetic attunement" with the sound.

What matters most here is not our ability to perceive patterns of rhythm, for example, but to integrate the experience of different modalities (seeing, listening etc.). In some sense, the perception of an integrated gestalt is much more than just noticing a pattern: it is "meeting" (as we meet someone when we explicitly say that we affirm the other as a whole person, beyond all good or bad actions).

In this perspective, losing contact or creating it with ourselves and others can be described in terms of becoming present as a whole person by integrating the modalities, the different parts of the brain, and the different embodied parts of the lived body (in detail: Fopp 2016). Someone says something which scares us (or we encounter violence), and we begin to look away, without quite realising it; our ears become closed. We become tense, diffuse – and lose contact, perhaps as a defence mechanism (Broberg et al. 2006). With the tradition which explores the emergence of "authoritarian characters" (Winnicott, Adorno) this ability to be integrated or not could be seen as relevant for the possibility of creating democratic encounters, or encounters shaped by dom-

ination. The main point here is not so much one of – individually different – infrastructure, but instead relates to the question of how we might create social spaces in which no one is forced to lose contact. In this sense, here we could already jump forward to room 8 and look at the societal transformations needed for everyone to live a life in dignity.

Room 3: The democratic animal – forming bonds (the socio-psychological foundation of "being connected")

At our institute, we also use the books of Dion Sommer (2012), who describes something similar. He says: all of this can happen through a "look" of recognition between parents and child, or between kindergarten teachers and children (Stern 1985). A "look" of affirmation (as a metaphor for an attitude and a way of behaving) opens a space in which people can feel free and secure. It can also consist in the sound of a voice. The point is not which senses it depends on, and in fact no one can be forced into eye contact. Such a "look" has the same structure as the affective, synaesthetic "attunement" which takes place when the ball is bounced or a spoon is hit, and it is basically democratic, one could say. It establishes a relationship on an equal footing, beyond domination. It expresses, as many philosophers since Hegel have said, freedom and love simultaneously: it sets free, but in a caring way. With my gaze, which aims to dismantle domination and accept the other, I see that you see me with the same gaze, and that we see each other like this; which is not only, to use the philosophical terminology (Schmid 2013; O'Madagain/Thomasello 2021), a shared but a reflexive intentionality, or what Kierkegaard and Hegel call "spirit" (Hegel 1986); it is therefore not only consciousness. Every theory of consciousness could start from this phenomenon of "full contact" or "spirit", to avoid the debate about its location "in" the mind or "outside" of it (Noe 2010, Chalmers 2010). For an idea, thought, or emotion to become conscious can in this approach be seen as a function of interfering with or repairing the social fabric of integrity (Fopp 2016; Thompson (2010) makes a similar argument).

The opposite would be an attitude towards the other which demands submission. Domination is often literally connected with making others small, pushing them off balance, and so on; or ignoring and neglecting them (this is why Marx uses "indifference" as the main concept in his analysis of the alienated capitalist society; see Lohmann 1991). This makes them withdraw. Sometimes, withdrawing and breaking off contact also has to do with one of the

seven "systems" mentioned above, which according to Panksepp are found in all mammals bigger than mice.

One of those is bonding behaviour: children, for instance, do many things to ensure that their primary carers protect them and remain close to them (Bowlby 2010). And if these older humans turn away when intense feelings and needs are expressed, children will stop expressing them, stop showing them, perhaps consciously at first, but then increasingly unconsciously: their faces might show contentment (or fear) which is not really felt. They no longer cry when their parents go away. And with time, such "masks" solidify as patterns of muscle tension and habits which we no longer notice – and which mean that we are no longer completely aware of our own impulses, ideas, or feelings. In the long term, this can result in serious illnesses.

Subconsciously, we "prioritise" closeness and protection rather than real contact, because we have to withdraw, out of fear and distress. That is why I keep emphasising that adults in social movements should be aware of their position of power in relation to young people and should use it in such a way that the young people dare to say and express what is important to them. Education could be focused on this dimension of democratic care, I think to myself in the theatre rooms. This is also – I suspect – the basis for a sustainable approach to the world.

Room 4: Nonviolent communication

"You are now entering an intermediate space," the compère calls. When we look at ourselves as animals with our affective behavioural systems: fear, anger, desire, bonding, playing, and so on, what can we conclude from this? Now we can look at the ways in which we can behave democratically or not, including in chats or generally in educational spaces and social movements.

We can focus on what happens when we don't just follow our impulses to act, but act in such a way that we make contact – or not. We can be afraid, angry, and so on, and still flee, freeze, or make others flee, but instead seek contact even in these situations – if it is appropriate and possible. Sometimes it might be better to run away or to tense up (see Fopp 2016). If we are at a strike in the square in front of parliament or blocking a road, and we feel exposed knowing that passers-by are looking at us and might be doing so with hate, threatening us, then it may be that we freeze and that we actually want to flee. For a long time, hours or days after the protest action, we might remain in this state. But

we do it because we believe that through the protest, in the long term, a more democratic society can emerge.

But let us look at the means with which – if circumstances allow – we can actively make contact. It is not something (like "resonance" in Rosa 2019) that simply kicks in based on the mechanisms of mirror neurons when we walk into the right surroundings. Naturally, it can also happen spontaneously, but whether we are in contact or not is also up to us and in the hands of others. Rather than taking revenge or answering domination with domination, it is possible to seek contact; this is what the theory of "nonviolent communication" proposes (Rosenberg 2015). In a conflict, it is then our task to steer the focus to concrete ways of behaving which create discomfort; to the emotions which this provokes from our own perspective; to our own fundamental needs which are not being met; and to concrete suggestions for changing behaviour. This can mean that people are affirmed even when their behaviour is being stopped and changed. This, too, seems to be central within intergenerational movements: affirming other activists as people, even when their behaviour is problematic.

Room 5: Alexander Technique and improvisation (the physiological foundation of "being connected")

"On we go!" calls the compère. "Now it's about putting all of this into practice creatively!" Frederick Matthias Alexander studied the process of making contact among children and developed his Alexander Technique (Alexander 2001). It has become part of the English health system, for example (NHS 2021). It can help to explain how patterns of muscle tension arise through physical or psychological pressure, and how subtly these can shape our perceptions. Alexander's remedy is connected with the imagination: by imagining the space around the neck, and then all the joints, and by remembering the orientation of the body (that the head points upwards; that the shoulders point outwards, and so on). For this, it is crucial to pause, to stop everyday habits and spend a short time finding a new direction with less tension.

Many people, through a life of psychological pressure or physical strain, have developed a false picture of the way their joints sit, especially the joint of the neck between the ears, and this means that they "use" their bodies "against" the body's own structure, so to speak.

We are often "anaesthetised" and don't even feel how tense we are, and this makes us suffer, especially in an education system or a job market which does

not leave us any time to do so. At the university, I have so many misgivings about the courses I teach, which confront the students with more and more material and the pressure to get the right grades.

If we practise pausing and turning in a new direction, we become increasingly aware of the patterns and can let go of them. It is then no longer about doing something, such as establishing new patterns, but about letting go of something; finding our way into a given energy. An energy can develop in such a way that we don't have to "create" it, but rather "accept it": by accepting, for example, that the ground is supporting us. And when we have spaces in which we can allow this – depending on the social conditions – we can simultaneously listen to external stimuli and to impulses from within, without one of these having to dominate the other. Precisely this is what happens in theatre improvisation under good direction: for instance, with the help of ideas from Meisner (1987) or Johnstone (1987). Meisner creates his exercises from the point of view that good improvisation "begins from the other." Johnstone focuses on the way people "block" and "help" each other. In the theatre spaces, we explore a whole range of artworks, films (by Daldry, Scorsese, Anderson, Aschan, Bergman and so on which are about (not) meeting on "eye level" and equal footing; see Fopp 2021), music, and images, and see how they combine the visible aspects of the fabric of integrity (materiality, viscosity, texture, colours and shapes) with the invisible – but still very palpable – elements of the dominating social forces and worldviews.

Or the same idea expressed in terms of pain and suffering: so many people have no idea that the muscles in their face and neck (and whole body, because they are part of a "whole") are tense, often in a very subtle way and permanently, in characteristic patterns that have become habits over the course of their lives. This phenomenon challenges our traditional modern concepts of freedom, "well-being" and so on (see Pettit 2015), because one could argue that it is – at least in some circumstances – in itself a reaction to suffering; or a state of suffering itself, making contact to oneself and others diffuse. And creating this contact is in this view more a task of letting go of the tension, if that is possible; not learning new patterns or habits, as so many popular books recommend. Thus, being humane, connectedness, the space of integrity and the fabric or material of integrity are connected: in humane social spaces, people don't have to cut themselves off from the dimension of the person with its inviolable dignity, because they can look at and undo domination; they can fill, unharmed, their space of integrity. (The concept of „being connected" tries in this sense to avoid the dilemmas of the concept of authenticity which Charles

Taylor (2018) describes as a foundational idea of modernity from Rousseau and Heidegger to analytical moral philosophy.)

Room 6: Creating social spaces democratically (the social foundation of "being connected" and meeting on equal footing)

I think back to the previous years, and especially to how different approaches in the grassroots movements or among individual NGO workers have given the young people space to develop – or not.

"Welcome!" Once again, the compère leads us into a new room: this is where social spaces are organised and created, including at school, in the health system, and at work. How can we create spaces so that the democratic exchange and contact described here are actually possible?

"There are a few rules here. Listen up!" "Firstly: all ideas are allowed inside our heads; no censorship. It is not about obeying other people's expectations. Even ideas that seem completely unoriginal or politically incorrect are valuable. No question is too weird. Mistakes are allowed."

"Two: but not everything can be put into action. Respect other people's integrity. Be careful with each other, really listen; try to understand needs and articulate them."

"And three: everyone should ensure that everyone is okay. It is not enough to say that everyone is allowed to take part. That is true, a liberal inclusivity, but it's too little, because it does not affect the dominant power structures." Because this has been shown in many teaching sessions at Stockholm University: if we all look after everyone's wellbeing, the atmosphere in the room often changes instantly. It is no longer about being better, cleverer, more original; and precisely through this, something valuable is created.

Many researchers agree (Samuelsson 2017): it is important to establish such rules explicitly for a space – and of course to react if they are broken, so that everyone can rely on them.

But rules are not enough. It is also about the attitudes of those who have leadership roles (which in democratic spaces might be all of us) and who establish these rules. One: "Try to see everyone; and as equals, with no one being preferred. Give everyone the necessary space and time to express themselves in a fair way, appropriately to their needs." Two: "Rotate cooperation in smaller groups so that no informal centres of power are formed." Three: "Establish the difference between people and actions. Criticise and praise actions,

not people; make sure people are affirmed, even when their behaviour needs to be stopped."

Here, too, improvisations can help, including status exercises (Johnstone 1987). Through such improvisations, we can test these principles playfully. Someone takes on the role of a teacher and talks to a headteacher, with both of them taking on the same status initially – and then the teacher rises up and treats the headteacher condescendingly; until the two of them switch round and the headteacher's status increases. This can take place in a friendly way, so that the person with the higher status tries to lift the other to the same level, or in an unfriendly way, through domination, by keeping the other person down (Johnstone 1987; see also the descriptions in the first chapters of this book). It is always astonishing to see the energy released by this. The aim is to see through domination – and to learn to establish relationships which are at least on an equal footing, or are even beyond the struggle for status; this makes them humane (see Nussbaum 1992) and allows people to fully connect to each other.

What can happen in improvisations, in these playful encounters, if we succeed in listening to impulses from others as well as our own ideas, is the integration of these interdependent systems: the subconscious self and the conscious; the deeper, older parts of the brain (which Panksepp describes) and the cortex; and within the cortex the areas linked to different senses; and between the attuned senses and higher level reasoning (Fopp 2016). This is matched by the integration and cooperation of body parts, expressing the transmodal integration of the "connecting" self, one could say; a self which is to be treated as being there even if all of these integrating processes cannot occur. This is one meaning of treating someone with dignity (Bieri 2016).

Precisely this attitude and these rules are the basis for the "democratic leadership" of groups, which relies on training in collective decision making. It would be so important to try out all the democratic processes from early on which the activists have encountered over the last four years, all the collective decision processes. Because the consensus-orientated decision-making which the young activists have practised so often at meetings of Extinction Rebellion and Fridays For Future requires everyone to be cooperating affirmatively. Collective autonomy and self-limitation (Heidenreich 2023) becomes possible without this having to be experienced as a loss of freedom, quite the opposite. All of us can participate, bringing in our experiences and needs, and trust that we will be taken seriously.

Room 7: Sustainable exchange in all sectors and areas of work (the interactive foundation of "being connected")

"On we go!" calls the compère. "Let's get to work!" Now, with this compass (of being in full contact), we can explore all the work that is necessary to build a sustainable society. Because what is missing is the understanding that we, as democratic animals, are embedded in the nature and culture which surrounds us: the rivers, the forests and the cycles of growth and decay, of planting and harvesting, the building of houses and cities, repair and care. "In short," says the compère, "welcome to the space which is here to explore democratic-regenerative exchange with nature and the culture arising from that!"

I think back to all the struggles which the young people have become involved in over the last years: the fight for sustainable forestry and agriculture based on conservation; and the fight for a sustainable energy system and a sustainable finance sector. So we have to go out into the world, into the space where we now have to explore what is needed so that we can extend and preserve the democratic energy which comes from making contact with each other. This can also happen with the help of experts, not only from the Global North, but also indigenous experts who work daily on creating a regenerative relationship to the world.

That means building furniture, apartments, houses, and cities with materials, ideas and concepts that correspond to this democratic energy: from the way in which workplaces are organised, to the idea of really sustainable, sufficient and efficient cities and houses. When we are in contact, everything can be measured by a new standard. And the same goes for the broad areas of planting, caring for nature, fields, and forests, but also for producing food, cooking it, and producing clothes (see Pelluchon 2019 for a detailed theory of such a practice in relation to agriculture, cooking and eating, and treating animals). The third realm is that of caring for animals and humans and looking after their health. The fourth is that of child-rearing and childcare, looking after children and older people. The fifth is our treatment of economic means. The sixth is that of developing technology and engineering, through which our relationship to nature and to other humans can be explored and developed (Vetter 2023), including research into solar, wind and water power, rather than nature being treated as a burnable material. Then there is the realm of political participation and leading political processes, and the realm of philosophy, which develops new concepts of what all this means for our understanding of nature as (non-)property (von Redecker 2021). And so on.

When these realms are shaped in a way that is guided by democratic contact and exchange, and when the latter is also at the centre of education, then not only do we combine theory and practice – minds, hearts and hands (ZDI 2022), but we really learn to deal with life in concrete ways and build our lives individually and together. With our students, we also incorporate the development of mathematical and linguistic skills into their fundamentally productive exchange with the world; into cooking and playing, making clothes, and looking after children.

If we know how to do this, we can relate it to what is now happening and what has happened historically: how political processes currently don't happen in this way; how we are not brought up on these principles, how the production of food currently looks, and so on. But learning all this – that is, the current, often non-sustainable content of our education – only makes sense if we know and learn how sustainability works. Otherwise, we can neither make sense of any of this, nor criticise it.

What could also be redefined in this way is the relationship between education and work. Work is now not entirely separate from the realms of living together, education, playing, regeneration, creativity, and self-expression. It is part of a movement for democratisation: "creating the resources together" which all of us need (see von Redecker 2021 for similar arguments). It is then no longer about submitting to non-democratic command structures in workplaces, nor about dominating nature through processes of exploitation, nor about polluting or burning, but about building up regenerative energy; it is not about appropriating or taking control of nature, and also not about self-actualisation or expressing ourselves through products, but about weaving and repairing the shared fabric of integrity.

Back at the Glasgow café – the problem with "education for sustainable development"

Back to Glasgow. The evening in the café grows ever longer. The big educational concepts of the last twenty years begin to swirl around the two floors of the café.

What was it that ended up being so strange about one of the biggest educational projects, we ask ourselves. It is called "education for sustainable development," and it is still one of the projects showcased by the UN, as well as by many countries and their education systems. Somehow this project has failed, we think to ourselves. And still we have great sympathy for those who are working

on it, with whom we ourselves are in contact (Sterling/Huckle 1996), as well as with the cooperation of all universities worldwide and with UNESCO as the organ which coordinates this global initiative for sustainability education. Many of them would like to work together on a "Faculty For A Future." Because they themselves draw sobering conclusions at the UN global conference of the universities in May (UNESCO 2022): the climate crisis is continuing unabated. Educational institutions are changing too slowly.

Is this failure (if one wants to use this description) due to the fact that the project seems to have fallen apart into two sections, even though the interesting part is actually the connection between the two, on which our lives depend? The two extremes are: the practical heart-hand-mind understanding of ecosystems, meaning the understanding of how we can act sustainably in our everyday lives, which is important knowledge but only plays a role as a niche area that exists alongside all the other disciplines, such as history, philosophy, economics, and so on. And then the project also has an abstract section: understanding global sustainability goals such as the SDG goals and the UN Agenda 2030. This is also important, but as well as being generally abstract it is a bleak kind of knowledge which we can barely absorb. Poverty and hunger still shape the lives of large parts of the world population; about a third of people have no secure access to clean water (WHO 2019). Many girls and women still have no access to education. Understanding all of that, we say to each other in Glasgow, ought to be accompanied in quite concrete terms with an understanding of our own place and our own role in world history – in such a way that we can really change things. (One solution to bridge this gap is the model by De Haan (2010) to develop twelve basic sustainability competences.)

For that, the concept of "development" is not helpful within the project of "education for sustainable development": the whole thing is conceptualised as a program of hundreds of small steps which citizens can learn and put into practice in the existing late capitalist market context – while, as the terms imply, everything basically remains the same. But that is an illusion, and the clever people and texts within "education for sustainable development" are aware of that. It is not about "development", small steps of improvement, as if we just needed to recycle a bit more rubbish, or plant a few more trees, or build a few more wells and solar panels. That is not a scientifically sound description of the problem. The problem is systemic, as UN organs such as the UNFCCC, the WHO and so on have said when analysing the climate crisis and the biodiversity crisis. And it is not a "development" which would be sustainable, but a systemically different way of living together. That is why this is about transforma-

tive and regenerative education, not about education for sustainable development.

Room 8: Democratic system change (the political-economic foundation of "being connected") – the Diabolo model

This raises the question for the next and final room: which underlying political and economic conditions, as well as cultural conditions, would need to prevail so that this kind of democratic exchange and humane contact would even be possible in the other rooms?

"Welcome!" calls the compère one final time and leads us to the "laboratories" of political science, economy, sociology, philosophy, and the humanities (as described in previous chapters). There, theories come up which aim to think about society in a new way, so that it is oriented towards the needs of all people within planetary limits, not only towards economic growth as traditionally understood (see e.g. Raworth 2018; Göpel 2016; Hickel 2021). But an important role is also played by the research which approaches this transformation on the basis of intersectional justice (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.), which aims to replace structures of domination; as well as theories of global democracy and ethics.

All these approaches fundamentally aim to create a framework which could become a new system, compatible with what has been described in the other rooms: non-dominant exchange and cooperation to provide most important resources to everyone in a way that is sustainable.

At the same time, we now have a compass for these new ideas and for the systemic transformation that would be required: they have to correspond to the enabling of democratic meeting, contact and being connected in a humane way to oneself, each other and nature. That is the "dough" of the "doughnut" (Raworth 2018), meaning the core of a secure social space. The definition of education in economy, law, or sociology can be newly investigated from that point. "The point is to keep walking between the rooms and find out how they rely on each other and require each other!" The compère hurries from one room to the next: "All of them build on each other. Together, they form the structure of what defines substantial democracy!"

The image of a diabolo presents itself – the toy which looks like two bowls joined together which can be catapulted into the air on a string and caught again. On one side, there are the conditions which are necessary for a globally,

nationally, and locally sustainable life in the crisis: the diagram of the dough-
nut, the idea of a CO2 budget; the democratising systemic transformation of
the economy; the political action plans in relation to regenerative exchange in
all sectors. This means combining research in climate and biodiversity studies
with studies of socio-economic system change and global justice.

The other bowl is formed by knowledge about caring encounters on
an equal footing, humane energy and being in contact (what I have called
spaces of integrity and the fabric of integrity in previous chapters), from
neuropsychology and drama education to the educational organisation of
social, intersectional democratic spaces. In the centre of substantial democ-
racy, they are connected: through the bodily and practical understanding of
relationships of domination and the structures they create; and through the
understanding of how we replace them through democratic relationships and
through inclusive, democratic decision processes.

Connecting all the rooms through education –
the science of democracy

Such an approach to education at school and at university would bring together
the research of climate scientists with that of social psychology; it would allow
the free exploration of the link between disciplines. It would not only be trans-
disciplinary but would aim for something like a shared core of everything at
a "subdisciplinary" level: a sustainable "being towards the world" (to use Mer-
leau-Ponty's concept inspired by gestalt theory).

As I walk across the campus with the activists, the lack of such a centre
is so obvious. The institutions each stand by themselves, without seeming to
be related to each other at all, or to the democratic task in the sustainability
crisis. Being in the world in a regenerative way, and the theoretical and practi-
cal-creative knowledge discussed here, often have no role to play. They literally
have almost no space at schools or universities. They still – in contrast with the
approaches of drama education – reproduce Descartes and Kant's separation
of body and mind and the Aristotelian distinction between practical/techni-
cal, theoretical and ethical knowledge (Gustavsson 2017). But the aesthetic, the
theoretical and the ethical cannot be separated, nor can the content of what we
learn from the teaching methods.

That is why we do not just need institutes for social and ecological system
theories, which is what many geography faculties are gradually becoming, but

also a new "science of democracy" which would hold the university together (see the similar approach by McGeown/Barry 2023; Raffoul 2023).

Theories of sustainable democracy

Developing theories for a centre of sustainability could also go in the same direction. The three perhaps most important theories which have set out to understand sustainability and democracy during these years and which dominate the humanities and social studies – system theory, actor-network theory, and posthumanism – do not seem to do justice to the core of democratic spaces which has just been discussed. Many of the most important books on the climate crisis operate with system theory (including the research of Göpel, Raworth, Rockström, Hickel, and Monbiot). In them, among all the parameters and variables, the experiences and structures of domination or of meeting on an equal footing hardly play a role. In the case of posthumanist or network approaches (Braidotti 2017; Latour 2017), in which the boundaries between humans and nature are rightly questioned, the perspective on experiences of our own shared humanity is problematically neglected – "being humane" defined as a characteristic of spaces and practices as well as approaches and structures which make it possible to dismantle domination and participate in affirmative contact; transforming and sublating the three concepts of "being human": the ethical of being compassionate; the anthropological of being different from other animals; and the moral of being full of weakness and failure (Fopp 2016).

Finally, theories of democracy, which can be seen clearly in Heidenreich's 2023 book on democracy and sustainability following Habermas and Rawls, often focus one-sidedly on formal aspects of human rights and collective decision processes without paying attention to the substance of democratic encounters – and with that the key question of how the substance and form of democracy can be newly connected, nationally and globally (for a similar critique, see Young 2000). Postdemocratic theories, meanwhile (on this, see Marchart 2018) emphasise often their disagreement with established formal democracy, without explicitly discussing its substance. The theoretical task would instead have the goal (as described in earlier chapters) of pursuing these substantially democratic spaces, open to new theories and methods (see the research in previous chapters on eco-feminist and eco-socialist as well as degrowth approaches), so that it becomes clear what the consequences would be for a deepening of democracy.

Extra room – the foundation of it all: from moral and political theory to (eco)philosophy

If we follow this approach, we need philosophy to act as a foundation for moral and political thinking and acting, as well as a foundation for all sciences, but we also need it to be inspired by the sciences.

But what is philosophy? Evidently, it involves working with concepts and reasons, arguments; exploring what "justice", "suffering" and "happiness" are, and what a "prosperous society" is or could be. But with the approach sketched here we can get a new view of what philosophy is, can and should be.

One main task is indeed to work with concepts which match reality better, helping us to understand ourselves and our world, especially by making dimensions visible which are otherwise overlooked; for example, making everyone's dignity visible, and what I called the common fabric of integrity, this strange material which links us to nature, but also transcends us as unique souls, as persons beyond actions which may be good or bad.

In this view, this enterprise is already something different from the simplifying definition of analytical philosophy as "analysing meanings", namely: working with concepts, their premises and implications (see Dummett 1996, Glock 2008 and Brandom 2022 for the difference between working on concepts and analysing meanings).

But what I would like to stress and what seems often to be overlooked in universities: philosophy is (as all sciences could and should be) creative work with exploring new concepts, not only dealing with traditional ones and existing theories. In this sense, it is about letting oneself be inspired by reality, so that we are compelled to describe it in a new way: defining "being humane" for example, in relation to three concepts of "being human", transforming and integrating them: not only human in an ethical sense of being compassionate and trying to care for the ones who suffer; not only human as "a-moral" in the sense of the spontaneous following of all impulses; not only human as an anthropological feature of humanity as a species which can reason; but humane in the sense of integrating all these three but transcending them: understanding impulses and structures of domination, not denying them, but going beyond them into creating loving relations to persons beyond good and bad deeds; making visible the space and fabric of integrity, and so on. This conceptual work does not take place in a vacuum, but reacts partly to existing, important theories, for example in moral and political philosophy: thinking about

how to frame our compass for actions and political structures; and about why we should act ethically in the first place.

But by focussing on creating contact with the other and the idea of being humane, this approach to philosophy encompasses our practices as social, embodied, creative human beings, and is therefore not only concerned with theory and concepts. But before exploring this thread, a short exploration of how this approach reacts to existing theories and tries to "solve" their challenges.

In terms of moral and political philosophy and their relation to each other (in this section I am referring rather to the analytical tradition, while the whole book is inspired by the continental approach and tries to see bridges between the two): many classic problems can be reframed or even solved by the introduction of concepts like the idea of "being humane" as seeing through domination and creating social spaces in which no one has to disconnect and everyone can fill the space of integrity, repairing and "weaving" a common fabric of integrity.

With such an approach, the idea (which is only sketched here) is to avoid the opposition of utilitarianism (minimising suffering and maximising happiness for everyone) and Kant's deontology or other approaches focusing on inner motivations and human rights (as guaranteeing integrity and dignity) – which all remain in the frame of what I called "formal" democracy.

A similar analysis can be applied to classic texts about justice (Rawls, Nagel, Sandel, Nussbaum, Sen etc.), either in terms of distribution of resources, in terms of vices and virtues, or in terms of guaranteeing freedom: we can see how the intersubjective and structural work on repairing the space and fabric of integrity and dismantling domination in some cases "unites" these approaches but also goes beyond them in terms of substantial democracy, focusing on the quality of relations and the routes of the ethical dilemmas and political challenges (and not only on the distribution of resources, the application of rights, the procedures of decision making etc.) – similar to the approaches of ecofeminism/postgrowth-socialism/postcolonialism etc. (discussed throughout the previous chapters: from the ideas of Angela Davis, Iris Young, Judith Butler and Nancy Fraser to Eva von Redecker etc.).

For example, we can now focus not only on suffering and happiness but on (de-)connectendess and domination (which seems to be morally and politically problematic even if no one suffers; see Pettit 2015). We can work on repairing the fabric of integrity which opens up space for a new (non-libertarian or liberal) definition of freedom. Using this terminology, intergenerational justice

for example is not primarily about „future people" (Parfit 1986), but about our common fabric of integrity which links all dimensions of time and space.

Or we can develop a better compass of "doing well" which is a intersubjective and social category – instead of "happiness" or "well-being" (see the chapter on economics, and Fopp 2015). In this way, one can establish an objective foundation of moral and political reasoning action without neglecting the dimension of subjective experience. And finally: the idea of justice, even in the sense of non- domination, cannot be seen as the only fundamental compass – it has to be complemented by the idea of being humane (or "love" as Martha Nussbaum 1992 defines it), which could mean: going beyond relations and structures of domination, affirming everyone as a person beyond their actions, and making a life in dignity possible, including providing resources, for all.

This critical "expansion" of the philosophical work (that it is not only about making concepts explicit but inventing new ones which correspond better to our lives and the challenges we face), can – as mentioned above – be complemented by a second one. From this perspective, philosophy is not only conceptual work. To be able to work with concepts, to present arguments, justifications and giving reasons, we must be connected with others, ourselves and the realm of ideas, with the fabric of integrity: and this is a social, embodied, creative practice which takes place in social spaces affected by problematic power relations. This work of connecting ourselves to ourselves and the environment is not an arbitrary step, but a part of the fundamental work of making visible how the world can be and "is" when we are not forced to disconnect. Pelluchon (2020) uses Lévinas to make the argument that the foundation of ethics are not rules or ideologies, but the perception of the other as other, as "Antlitz" which demands of us to care. In this sense, philosophy becomes a practice of making a phenomenon visible, as Simon Critchley argues in his book about the relation between analytical and continental philosophy (2001), reframing Merleau-Ponty´s phenomenological "gestalt theory" approach and demanding the integration of "wisdom" and "knowledge".

Or in terms of Hegel (1986): we try to get into and operate in the realm of "Vernunft", in which we are linked to a common spirit, not only in that of the argumentative "Verstand", presenting reasons and arguments. Philosophy can itself be or become a substantial democratic activity, rather than only analysing what democracy could be. (This is reflected in the idea of "being humane": describing social spaces and relations as well as attitudes and structures; see Fopp 2016.)

This view has a double political consequence: philosophy (and its institutions at universities and schools) needs to be a very specific activity which is carried out with a practical knowledge (or ethic-aesthetical wisdom) of how to create the (social) circumstances which allow connectedness to the realm of ideas, the others and nature. This should be a premise, a prerequisite and an ingredient of philosophy and all science. And, second, this implies that philosophical and academic institutions – if they want to live up to the scientific methods and have a reliable compass – need to become outward-facing: working on transforming society (and educational institutions) so that these spaces and activities become possible in society; in which we can connect to each other and to the realm of ideas.

In this sense, we can say with Feuerbach (and Marx) that philosophy (and academia) shouldn't only give an interpretation of the world but change it. But there is a second step: highlighting that this transformation is also done by creating concepts and practices which help us to make everyone's dignity (or the "demand by the face") visible; to open us up to the shared fabric of integrity; and to lead to a change in how we see each other, nature, and the rules which should govern our shared lives on this living planet.

Back to the question of what philosophy and academia is. In this sense, philosophy is needed as a foundation for all sciences; including neurophysiology, literature, history, education, economics etc. Hegel (1986) called it the work of the "absolute spirit", which consist of art, religion and – philosophy. We can describe his main idea by going back to our rooms 1 to 8, or the life of the "subjective" and "objective" spirit, as Hegel calls them (see Taylor 2015 and Theunissen 1980 and 1984 for a similar analysis of Hegel's basic idea): our relation to the environment which enables us to go beyond domination ("Herrschaft") and establish a relation of freedom and care (subjective spirit); and the ethical and political relations and structures which are informed by this movement and make it possible (objective).

I want to translate this idea into the insight that ethics, moral and political theory – with their idea of the good and justice – are not enough: in order to create even a basic foundation for ethical and political theory and action, we need the idea of love and the fabric of integrity which art, religion and philosophy could develop (and should be measured against; for this aspect of religion, see e.g. the work of Martin Buber, and that of Dorothee Sölle and Catherine Keller).

Notions of what is good, of what is morally right, and of justice can produce results which lead to the opposite: the "tyranny of the good", as Corine

Pelluchon calls it, totalitarianism, violence and so on, if pursued only for themselves. Nussbaum (1992) shows in her analysis of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* how ethics can become deadly. Some notions of ethics are inconsistent, Hegel might say, and lead to and require a foundation: the humane spirit, which means freedom, mercy and love, acknowledging impulses of domination, playing with them and going beyond them; allowing us to create affirmative connections with others and with ourselves, as persons with inviolable dignity beyond the realm of actions.

However, against the tradition of idealism, all this work is not carried out by an anonymous reason or spirit itself, but is a task for all of us: it is not something which makes its own way through history, leading by itself to a better world, but is dependent on us human beings (in a similar way, Menke 2023 reinterprets the concept of spirit and the task of the humanities).

In this sense, philosophy (or for Hegel: "the absolute spirit") is not just about looking back at all that happens in rooms 1 to 8, from the subjective to the intersubjective, social and political; it is not only a reflection on all the other topics, but a work in itself: making – by developing adequate concepts – the fabric of integrity visible and experienceable for every one of us, exploring ways to describe what is already there, and how we can repair and renew it; as persons with equal dignity (which is more than relating to psychological states of "intuitions" and "moral sentiments"). Recognition in social relations and the material provision of resources are interdependent, to solve an opposition between two strands of Critical Theory (see Honneth and Fraser 2004), if our approach is rooted in a phenomenology of being humane.

And accordingly, "doing" ethics, politics, or moral and political philosophy is ultimately not something elitist; it is not just something for upper middle-class seminars with their analytical terminology; it is not only what you hear in (often privately owned) prestigious halls of philosophy etc. It is about connecting to and articulating the idea of being humane, which is already there, a humane energy for which we must rather remove the aspects of domination which stand between us and it (and thereby let it be a guiding "value" which produces duties and obligations). In this sense, this approach is a non-relativist and objective one in its approach to moral and political values and principles. We don't have to choose a morality, ethics, or political philosophy; and we don't have to find reasons to engage in this project in the first place, because not engaging in it, not making the fabric of integrity visible is often itself already an effect of deconnectedness (to react to a discussion about the objectiv-

ity of norms and values; and the question of why we should create and listen to ethics in the first place).

Moving through the drama rooms at Stockholm University, we try to connect to these dimensions. Art and aesthetics become important even in university spaces (as part of "Hegel's "absolute spirit") if this is true: that all sciences and all education, not only social sciences and the humanities but even law, theology, psychology, literature, economics, etc must be rooted in this embodied social practice of creating humane spaces in which democratic meeting becomes possible. Otherwise there is no normative foundation for the scientific enterprise.

We move through the drama rooms, watch films, improvise and explore ways of meeting and doing art. It is possible to transform the analysis of the works and the history of art, from Bergman, Daldry and Aschan to Paul Thomas Anderson's films: it is possible to make the fabric of integrity visible, everyone's dignity beyond the realm of actions: to show how the main characters in the movies are driven and disconnected from themselves by "forces" (of the diagonal versus the vertical; the roundish versus the edgy; and so on) which can be analysed in terms of politics (patriarchal or late capitalist structures etc.), ethics (being selfish etc), psychology ("the "doubtful" versus "the determined"), gestalt theory (these "forces" being deviations from the gestalt structure), and so on; and by doing so, making visible what it means to meet in a non-dominant way, literally "at eye level", which is humane, affirming, unconditional and universal. In a paradoxical shift (of "mercy", one could say), the person and soul becomes visible, to which we can connect even if it is struggling with life and not connected to itself – because nature, the environment, the fabric of the world in its transmodal texture (beyond colours, forms, and so on), takes upon itself the "forces" of disconnection (see Fopp 2019; also for the argument that we cannot describe this process in terms of metaphors, forms, signs or structures as aesthetics often does). But art, as Hegel would also say, in this classical "Western" form of commodified works of art, can also be criticised (and is criticised by contemporary art itself) if it leaves the political and economic spaces untouched which need to be changed and transformed so that we human beings can live our lives without being structurally excluded from humane relations in the first place.

Five perspectives on ecophilosophical thinking

We could – in a very simplifying and incomplete way – identify four perspectives (or even „epochs" and paradigms) of ecophilosophical thinking; at least in the academic world of the Global North. They partially overlap and sometimes compete with each other. I tried to sketch above a fifth alternative, using traditions which have been overlooked by these approaches. All of them react critically to the "mainstream" tradition of sustainability research which is linked to ideas such as neoclassical market economics of monetary values of ecosystems, nature as capital, green growth, the reduction of humans beings to consumers, and so on (see Neumayer 2010; Grunwald/Kopfmüller 2022).

For the first one, influenced by the „deep ecology" movement, represented by Arne Naess (see for texts: Birnbacher 1997), the idea is to explore a new way of understanding our place in nature. This is done in something which Birnbacher (1997) describes as a mixture of ethics and ontological-metaphysical enterprise, often referring to philosophical approaches by Spinoza and Whitehead as well as poetical works by Thoreau and the Romantics. Some of the discussed problems are: is there an intrinsic value of nature and species; and how can we develop a lifestyle which acknowledges this presence of an own value (and sometimes: of panpsychism) of nature (see Birnbacher 1997 and 2022 regarding the philosophical incoherencies and problems of this tradition).

During the second era, the methodical and thematic interest shifts to ethics, more precise to applied ethics (first to environmental ethics and sustainable thinking, very much inspired by Rachel Carsons „Silent Spring"; and even more specific to climate ethics, see for example Moellendorf 2014), as well as to metaethics and questions of the justification of our norms and values.

This „subjective" shift („how should we act in an ethical appropriate and reasonable way" confronted with the destruction of nature) is then in a third epoch expanded and criticised by the posthumanist tradition (Braidotti 2017), going back to more metaphysical-ontological questions about the problems of separating humans from the rest of nature. A fourth tradition, inspired by ecofeminist/socialist (D'eaubonne 2022; Shiva 2020), postgrowth and decolonial ideas, focuses on the intersectional destructive effect of the economic and ideological system as a whole; and emphasises – sometimes against the posthumanist "association" of humans and non-humans – the specific human responsibility for changing these norms and structures (see for this argument: Hornborg 2017, Malm 2017).

Finally, the approach presented here as an ecophilosophy of democracy starts with (post-)phenomenological theories by Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Pelluchon (2019), the indigenous thinking by Kimmerer (2015), and the traditions introduced above: especially the experience of another individual as ethical imperative; but expands it with the help of empirical sciences (psychology, neurophysiology, sociology, education, politics and economics etc.) to an understanding of the creation of non-dominant relationships and structures of „being connected". In that sense, the ethics of „being humane" can be linked to an ontology of our sustainable „being towards the world" as embodied, vulnerable beings which can lose or create affirmative meetings and connectedness, to others and the realm of ideas. Maybe we can talk about a fifth epoch which focuses on these questions of global democratic convivialism and develops arguments about justification of (ethical and political) norms from the philosophical interpretation of experiences as well as the scientific explorations, including the tradition of indigenous knowledge. This tradition questions even the difference between theory and practice by pointing to the challenge of making the dignity of everyone visible and to change our perception as one of the philosophical tasks.

Ecophilosophical debates and an adapted theory of science

In Mynttorget, debates often arise on the following question: what is our place in nature? The question is taken up by many in their talks on the climate crisis. It also shapes discussions in connection with the struggle for ecocide legislation, which would expand the offence of crimes against humanity to environmental crimes against whole ecosystems. In that context, some argue for a form of anti-speciesist thinking (for a discussion of this, see Gunnarsson/ Pedersen 2016), claiming that humans should not be in the centre of our worldview. They argue that we ought to be seen as one of the animals which form a complex whole together with all the others, and not as the exceptional animal which can place itself above all the rest.

But although such arguments seem very plausible, they can also be problematic, depending on the way the theory is developed. The approach described above – building democratic spaces – is in this sense also meant as a proposal for this field of eco-philosophy. It tries to retain the intuitive impulse to locate ourselves in nature, but avoid a reifying view. Because that is what seems to af-

flict many of these approaches. They rightly locate us humans in socio-ecological systems, but take on a problematically objectifying approach towards us, as well as to all other animals and nature; they look at the whole system from the outside. It seems more appropriate to me to start with our democratic or dominating relationship with our environment. From this we can derive a yardstick of values that goes beyond an abstract adding up of suffering. And from this perspective philosophy and science would not be an objectifying project, but would be connected with insight and interest, as Habermas has argued in the context of Critical Theory (Habermas 1987); but not only in the sense of emancipation, of shaking off dominating structures, but also in the complementary sense of building what we need for everyone to live a dignified life.

This does not mean that the standard of objectivity or truth must be given up. Quite the opposite: it moves to the centre when it is sensibly defined as approaching reality with integrity, self critically and with transparent methods, in an open, fair exchange with fields of research, without favouring certain positions one-sidedly. But it will no longer be acceptable to ignore the key research suggesting what it would mean to live a dignified life as free and equal people within planetary limits.

The path to this flourishing life is then not just part of theory but can only be understood in practice. Many researchers point this out, including in art-based research (Leavy 2009), which critically extends the concept of Critical Theory: away from the interest behind theory (emancipation) and towards education as a democratising, global creative practice of transformation and regeneration (Raffoul 2023).

From a decolonial and indigenous perspective (Patel 2015; Kimmerer in Thunberg 2022), researchers also alert us to the fact that the fundamental framework of science must be redefined. The existing distinctions made by the theory of science, which are drummed into first-year students across the world, including here on the campus of Stockholm University, thus turn out to be problematic. Epistemology (how does individual knowledge come about), value theory (which norms are we working with) and ontology (what are the characteristics of the world) can no longer be abstractly separated from each other. How we see and perceive the world; what causes suffering or enables contact; and how the environment and our own bodies are composed: all of this belongs together in a permanent exchange which can cause suffering or repair the shared fabric of integrity (see Merleau-Ponty 1974). The point of departure is that we are already deeply entangled in dominant relationships – as has long been emphasised by education theorists from Paolo Freire, Ellen Key,

and Augusto Boal to Gert Biesta, as well as a large part of the feminist theory of science and "critical university studies".

Transformative and regenerative education

But such democratising education can and does provoke resistance (see Van den Berg 2021) – at the level of teachers and students, and from institutions. That seems to be an important element of education, and this would apply to a sustainability centre too: dealing with this resistance, leading transformative processes and thus building democracy.

Here it is important to learn from those who have long been leading and reflecting such transformative processes, for instance in relation to racism (e.g. Ogette 2018). If, for example, a person realises that they are taking on a higher status than others and subtly keeping others down, this realisation is often a shock. We have to learn to deal with this, and have the courage to look at all of this together and dismantle it, and to try out the opposite: daring to interact in caring ways, to improvise together, and to help each other with resources in difficult situations.

If we succeed in building this project – not moralistically, by simply condemning domination and demanding empathy, but in such a way that we set off on a path together on which everyone makes mistakes and is allowed to do so, this can become transformative, changing the whole person as well as the group which is learning.

And so, transformative education can become regenerative. The transformation applies emotionally and cognitively to our values, our worldview, and to a change in attitude to learners and teachers. The whole of the educational process and the institutions can become regenerative. In this approach, the aim of education can be defined as building up democracy and regeneration, and thus as weaving the shared fabric of integrity. Science then has the function – among other functions, at least – of pursuing this regenerative coexistence in democracy, researching it, and enabling it in concrete terms. The ethics behind the whole project, which all researchers should already subscribe to now, could thus be defined as follows (Raffoul et al. 2021): It is not just about not causing harm, but also about repairing the harm that has been done, and making a dignified life possible for everyone.

Science and activism

While I present these thoughts about reshaping teacher training and creating a new pedagogy of sustainability to the management team, the young activists are preparing for the next global strike, and scientists across the world are beginning to take to the streets and to get involved in civil disobedience. The question is: how can we make all these ideas a reality?

At this time, a debate is developing on social media and in politics over the extent to which scientists can be committed activists. Because everywhere in the world, more and more teachers are saying that they can no longer just watch while forests burn, emissions continue to rise, and science is not taken seriously by those in power. We join these actions in Stockholm, and in April we block the centre of the city with several hundred people (Platten 2022); many more teachers should be involved, we think to ourselves. Doing nothing is activism for the status quo.

And still, there is a lack of change at the universities themselves. The image which emerges is one of middle-class professors blocking the way of workers. And it is professors and the upper middle class who produce the most emissions. Among all the possible forms, we in Mynttorget still see the "strikes" as the most appropriate one, at least the non-cooperation strikes on Fridays, as a demand to end "business as usual" – making a statement to the institutions that we can no longer teach or learn in the same way. At some point, whole universities or schools would have to strike, to insist that this cannot go on. Even after four years of school strikes, still almost nothing is happening, even at the universities with the most progressive sustainability departments (see HU 2023). Neither the curricula are changing, nor the things which could be changed so easily, such as the enormous number of academic flights.

But the dichotomy of the existing discussion also ignores a fundamental dimension. There is not just research and teaching on the one hand, and street activism on the other. This notion of inside and outside the universities is abstract and wrong: if we look at education itself, at teaching and research, and if we change the "social logic" of the spaces of education, we are already working on societal transformation. And by the same token, this transformative education is only possible if universities are changed, in terms of their structure, their management and the societal and political conditions underpinning them.

I come back to where I started: "We all ensure that everyone is okay and develop an inclusive attitude. All ideas are allowed, no censorship, but not all ac-

tions. Have the courage to try something new. Help each other." Something in the room changes, something that does not happen when they see each other as lone fighters, these students, who are afraid of not understanding something and of getting bad grades. That is what they are made into. So this kind of teaching is resistance against the logic of educational spaces, but also already a change, a transformation of society.

The dual way into the future

In my conversations with the institution's management, I keep returning to the "original scene": the time in 2018 when the five young people sat on the ground on Fridays. How this action gives us a task. How this task consists of working together with them to guarantee a secure future for everyone worldwide. And how this requires changes to schools and universities.

And so a double perspective opens. On the one hand, all of us can continue to build sustainability centres in every school and university (and a prototype for these), as well as virtual variants such as the Faculty For A Future: platforms which place the focus on the crises, their urgency and interdependence as social and environmental crises, by changing what is learned, how it is taught, and the institutions where this takes place.

On the other hand, it is about expanding activism. Otherwise, neither universities nor society will change. All those who have the resources can take part in the movements of pupils, students, and teachers, who strike and rebel through civil disobedience; ideally as entire institutions. Two dimensions can be combined: one which is shaped by communication (Scientists For Future) and blockades (Scientist Rebellion), which address society; but also a new, key dimension which incorporates and addresses educational institutions through non-cooperation such as the Friday strikes. These two strands can be connected through citizens' assemblies to reshape institutions: combining the Faculty For A Future with Scientists For Future and Scientist Rebellion.

If only all the tens of thousands of scientists would begin to go out on Fridays and stand in front of their institutes, I think to myself, and join together to form assemblies with the students who want to take their education into their own hands and implement sustainability. Then the educational institutions could make it clear to politicians that life at school and university will not continue in the same way and that they must respond to research; to "listen to

the science". That is what all states, we all have promised to do by accepting the Paris Agreement with its focus on stopping the emissions in a fair way.

And so we meet: some of us from Scientists For Future and Scientists Rebellion, some Faculty people and even delegates from the youth movement. "We have to make clear that the universities are ours," a professor says. "We should say: 'We take them over. We are the universities. And we won't allow them to be places where the fossil society reproduces itself,'" says the youth delegate. We need disruptive direct action, combined with assemblies; we all agree. We start to create a basic document, basically a flyer, for all schools and universities, saying: as an emergency reaction to the interdependent sustainability crises, we are taking over; we, the students and teachers, the workers at educational institutions. This is about democratisation: away from the tendency to commodify everything. Universities should be public places serving the local and global community. This is what sustainability is about. And we start to create a "toolkit" on how everyone can lead democratic assemblies; how to react to resistance; and how to go deeper than talking about UN goals for 2030. Teachers and students at every school and every university could stand up like this and fight until the institutions are changed; until there are centres for sustainability and the idea of sustainability and democratisation is in the core of curricula, teaching methods and research.

Occupying schools and universities – what are the demands?

While we scientists take to the streets in this spring of 2022, pupils across Europe begin a wave of occupations at many schools and universities (SZ 2022). They go into the biggest auditoriums or sit in front of the doors of the headteachers and rectors and refuse to continue cooperating. The "wave", as they call themselves, begins in Portugal and the United Kingdom; then Austria follows, as do Switzerland and Germany. A few groups gather under the label "End Fossil", while others operate more independently, although they are connected through the chats which soon include more than a thousand participants; many from Fridays For Future are involved.

Every group comes up with its own demands, partly in cooperation with scientists. Some are concerned with the content of teaching: the crises should be part of the introductory courses, and the perspective should be decolonised. Others care more about practical questions: no flights, vegan food. A third group is concerned with criticising the fossil industry and its connections with

institutions and their funding; a fourth is focused on educational justice and the inclusion of the whole population.

Young activists address academia, tutors, and teachers directly

Winter is over. The puddles have thawed. It has become warmer, and we are once again walking through the campus to the theatre rooms of my institute. With some of the activists, I am making a film for an interdisciplinary conference in the Aula Magna (on the topic of "Young People, Power, Societal Change", Fopp 2022/3). They are now addressing the university directly, and the whole research community, and calling on them to strike. They say that we are in such an existential crisis that we all have to work together. And we are the ones who are so privileged that we can choose whether we get involved or not. And they point out that for many millions of people, the crisis is already an unavoidable part of their everyday lives. For them, too, we have to stand up.

We begin to speak about the first days, four years ago, when they suddenly left their schools and sat in the squares in front of the parliaments and town halls. They say that when children are sitting on the ground and fighting for their lives, that obviously has a strong effect. Just sitting there, silently, is a strong act in itself: doing nothing. Not cooperating, not acting like we could buy our way our way out of the crises. Stopping, pausing, opening up for new directions.

Schools and universities – strike, occupation, transformation: Five possible demands and perspectives for assemblies

1. Introduce an obligatory "studium generale" for all, focusing on the sustainability crises
A. Discuss the origins and interdependences of the crises (climate, biodiversity, social justice, …);
B. Teach the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes needed to create a sustainable society within very few years (and about the urgency: tipping points, CO2 budget, etc.);

C. Focus on climate justice and the knowledge in social sciences about the intersectional analysis of injustice and democracy beyond structures of domination (class, gender, ethnicity etc.: anti-racist, anti-colonial etc.).

2. Transform all curricula in all disciplines
When implementing A, B, C (perspective 1), adjust it to every discipline (economics, history, education, geography etc.). Linking content to UN Agenda 2030 goals is not enough.

3. Focus on and teach transformative, healthy, and regenerative teaching methods and didactics
A. We are embodied, social, imaginative, creative, vulnerable creatures living in problematic power relations to each other and nature, even within educational spaces – this should be the starting point for didactics and teaching methods;

B. Incorporate knowledge about (mental) health into curricula and teaching methods and focus on a "sustainable relation to each other and nature" as the core of education: care, sustainability and democracy are linked;

C. Focus on the practical, hand-heart-head sustainable "metabolism" with nature: teaching in real life contexts (in the areas of building; agriculture/forestry; arts; care) the basics about creating, repairing and sustaining social, ecological and economic sustainable work;

D. Focus on democratic leadership within school/university classes and spaces, creating democratic relations beyond domination and being able to handle existential and emotional transformative processes related to the crises in a regenerative way.

4. Specify Research Ethics – with sustainability criteria
A. Specify the three obligatory ethical principles which are guiding all research today, so that the educational sector contributes to a sustainable democratic world. "Not doing harm" or "not harming integrity and well-being" is not enough;

B. Create clear funding flows into sustainable transformative research and stop all research funding by fossil society (fossil industry, banks etc.).

5. Create Institutional Change – towards sustainability

5.1 Within schools/universities:

A. Install a creative transdisciplinary sustainability centre which can help with all these aspects (curricula, teaching, institutional change, research) in every university/school;

B. Give students influence and co-leadership over their sustainability education;

C. Stop emissions caused by universities/schools (transport/flying, buildings, food etc);

D. Stop all institutional funding by fossil society (fossil industry, banks, etc);

E. Democratise the workplace: 1. Move away from the (new public management) logic behind the organisation towards democratic decision-making by all involved; 2. Open up educational institutions with an intersectional approach (to BIPOC, working class people etc.);

5.2 This implies but also presupposes a political and economic system change within society – for (educational) democracy:

A. Away from a political and economic framework of competitive, exponential growth towards a post-growth, regenerative, cooperative, sustainable one;

B. Focusing on educational justice (class, ethnicity, gender etc.) which is linked to the democratisation of the society in general.