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de impletione

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Preliminary Remarks

Every human being is alone on their journey between birth and death, on their space odyssey. Not even twin siblings or kindred spirits can change that. Only you inhabit your own skin, look through your own eyes, experience your own thoughts and feelings. No one else. Your existence is unique.

No matter how many books a person devours, their worldview will be just as unique. This is not least because language is utterly inadequate when it comes to representing inner experience and making it shareable. Firstly, language is linear, whereas thought can be multidimensional. Secondly, it is not always clear what a word actually means: even a closed network of concepts does not save us from the fall through infinity, for I am still able to question it again as a whole. And thirdly, no one can look into another person's mind. Especially when the object of contemplation lies entirely within, any exchange about it becomes an exceedingly nebulous matter. Everything that is spoken is harder to grasp, and every attempt to write down an idea harder to accomplish, than simply thinking it in the first place. The transmission of thought demands great effort on both sides, and success remains uncertain.

For this reason, I believe that the world, at least to begin with, is best unravelled through solitary reflection. In this way, philosophy is open to all people. They possess the necessary tools simply because they exist and have an inner experience. Reading is not useless, but it can wait. Whoever has passed by the milestones of philosophy on their own will after-

wards find much easier access to the thoughts of others.

Since my youth I have been searching for the truth almost compulsively. I did not want to win an argument, but to be correct. This aspiration led me to reflection, to the study of philosophy, to countless discussions, and to the consumption of one drug or another. What has emerged is this work. It is meant to summarise my worldview as concisely and coherently as possible – for myself and for anyone else who may be interested. It should be understood as a snapshot of an ongoing process of thought. For ten years now it has been growing, and this version, too, will probably not be the last.

The Fall Through Infinity

Philosophising is never born in darkness. I already find myself in the midst of the world. I see, hear, feel – I perceive something. And I have a certain understanding of it: this is a tree, and this is my body. I have memories and I speak a language. Philosophising is inevitably an attempt to decipher existence from within.

It is tempting to think back to an origin, to proceed step by step: let there be light, and then the world. But light has long since come to be. The very words meant to describe the beginning – where did they themselves begin? I must presuppose what I have not yet had the chance to explain.

In order to untangle the knot of existence, I therefore grasp at some part of the thread and try to feel my way towards its end. Yet it turns out that the thread has no end at all. Returning to the tree already

mentioned: a definition is possible, but it brings with it further concepts that must in turn be defined. Through the lens of physics, the tree consists of “particles”, that is, of matter and energy. But what is that supposed to mean? On the quantum level, where does the boundary lie between the tree and the rest of the world?

Every justification demands another justification, every cause another cause. And even if everything holds hands in an endless chain, or if one thing simply was the first, I can still ask: why?

On the swampy ground of explanations, no true knowledge can be built. There is no absolute certainty, no completely satisfying answer. Logic cannot explain existence in its entirety. Anyone who claims otherwise is deceiving themselves.

Hardly has thinking begun when we are confronted with an almost insurmountable obstacle. The world seems tangible – it is there, after all! And yet, upon closer inspection, it dissolves. It is enough to drive one mad. I am, and yet I cannot explain being.

The piercing questions never end, they grant no rest. What is the world made of in its smallest parts? What does it amount to in the greatest? How did it begin, how will it end, and above all: why? No answers – only ever new questions. *The Fall Through Infinity*.

Self-Evidence

Despair over the absurdity of existence is a typical stage of philosophising. The way out is a simple insight, which makes all others possible in the first

place: some things are simply *self-evident*. They must be – they cannot be further explained or proven.

I can meaningfully question the concept of a tree. I probably acquired it after encountering many trees, or representations of trees, and deriving the abstract idea of a tree from their common features. At the same time, other people tried to convey precisely this idea to me, together with the corresponding term. My present understanding of what a tree is developed gradually and depends on context. (This is why absolute definitions are so difficult.)

Such acts of categorisation require certain prerequisites, for instance the ability to make comparisons and abstractions. Likewise, I depend on immediate perceptions such as colours, sounds, and so on. Ultimately, I must be able to experience the tree in order to categorise it, and in order to understand what those around me are trying to tell me.

As a child, I was taught colours with the help of coloured pencils. “This is red,” people said, and I connected my visual impression of the pigment with that word. Physical explanations of how vision works and what light is tell us nothing about why it is precisely the sensation (the so-called *quale*) of red that occurs within me, rather than, say, blue. Moreover, such attempts at explanation already presuppose an understanding of an external world. The crucial point is this: I cannot meaningfully question the basic building blocks of my inner experience.

Instead, I must deconstruct what presents itself to me until I have found what can only be stated – about which nothing further can be said. Among these self-evident things are immediate sense perceptions and

fundamental logical principles. They determine my inner experience, my consciousness.

Inner experience is the magical stage of existence. Everything begins in the mind – even the appearance of a “material” world. Every explanation must begin or end respectively with what is self-evident. These are the first and ultimate grounds of philosophy. Thought rests upon them. To question them would be like sawing off the branch on which I sit. (And yet, again and again, it must be discussed whether the things we take to be self-evident truly are so, or whether they might themselves be composed of something deeper.)

Reality

With the help of what is self-evident, scientific methods can be developed that lead to new insights. Apparently, the universe follows the laws of nature, and human beings are, in their functioning, largely comparable; they behave as though they all possess an inner experience. My mind now appears as a product of the material world, even though this insight itself is a product of my mind.

Such a reality must be distinguished from imagination and illusion. Dreams may, for their duration, not differ from ordinary existence, and yet we are able, in retrospect, to classify them as illusory.

The inner experience of others eludes me, and vice versa; it is subjective. And yet human beings can learn, however laboriously, to reach an intersubjective understanding about their inner life and about reality. They can practise empirical science and, through new insights, bring about further experi-

ences in turn. In this way, theories and predictions are confirmed, our understanding of reality improves, and our power to shape the world grows.

I hesitate to use the term objectivity, for, as I have said, I arrive at all knowledge only within my own consciousness. An absolute truth greater than the worldview of an individual remains excluded. Instead, every insight is temporary and, at best, intersubjective.

If we direct the scientific gaze back towards its own origin – inner experience – we obtain a second perspective on the mind: an external view alongside an internal one, physical descriptions alongside qualia. Two different perspectives on the same thing.

Human beings have their limits. I was able to save myself from the fall through infinity by desperately clinging to what is self-evident, and yet some things remain transcendent. Life after death or the existence of God can be neither theoretically nor empirically proven, nor clearly distinguished from alternative claims. Strictly speaking, this does not mean that they are excluded – but it is of no use to integrate them into our understanding of reality. What does not follow from what is self-evident, for whose real existence there is no evidence (non-existence cannot be proven), is of no further significance.

No one can look behind the curtain, and it makes no difference what, if anything, lies beyond it. For us, there is nothing beyond.

At the edge of the transcendent, however, lie concepts with which we can work, but which we cannot fully grasp: for example, I cannot form a clear mental image of either absolute finitude or infinity.

The Meaning of Life

From the insights so far it follows that the meaning or purpose of our existence cannot be found outside ourselves. Rather, the question arises: what is the meaning of life for me, or for us as individuals? The answer is another self-evident thing: *impletion*. I derive this term from the Latin *impletio*, which means fulfilment.

Impletion is what feels good and worth striving for: a state without suffering, the beautiful mode of being – more than that, a penetrating appreciation of (absurd) existence, of its power, but also of its insurmountable mystery. Opposed to impletion, above all, is suffering.

Suffering has an obvious evolutionary end: the preservation of life. This is why hunger is normally unpleasant. Or boredom – it is meant to protect us by preventing harm to our brain that would arise from under-stimulation. In the same way, the pleasures of life are meant to move us to continue living and to reproduce.

For me it is self-evident that what is right is what serves my impletion most. Since impletion is the meaning of life, we ought to eliminate unpleasant sensations as far as possible and pursue the pleasant ones.

Impletion is the purpose of reason. Will and motivation arise only from the unavoidable drive to attain impletion; purposeless action does not exist. The human being, whether acting intuitively or following a conscious and rational decision-making process, always chooses the course of action that they associate

with the greatest prospect of impletion. We cannot do otherwise – this is simply how we function.

This does not mean that we always, whether thoughtfully or not, actually find the path of greatest impletion. It can never be said with absolute certainty whether the outcome of an action was the best possible. Mistakes happen. For our own sake, we should nonetheless try to avoid them. Conscious reflection and openness to insight recommend themselves as grateful means to a good life.

Endless and above all anxious thinking – *overthinking* – can, by contrast, be detrimental to impletion, because it steals time from what is more desirable.

Our expectation of impletion is not unchangeable, but can be influenced through reflection. A thought in itself, however, is not always sufficient to experience more impletion. Otherwise even the cruellest torments could be dissolved simply through the insight that their absence would be preferable. Sometimes impletion is reached only indirectly, for instance by exerting influence on our circumstances.

The expectation of impletion can be self-reinforcing; it is accompanied either by anticipation or by apprehension. Impletion and suffering are not dichotomous states, but can occur in colourful mixture; they must be understood as poles of a spectrum. How much, or whether, someone experiences impletion is moreover entirely subjective and not intersubjectively comparable, because there is no shared object of perception to which one could point. (This is not fundamentally altered by the fact that we can, of course, try to exchange sincerely about our mutual

inner experience.) Only about one's own inner experience can comparatively clear statements be made.

The Will

No living being can act without the expectation that the decision it makes serves its impletion more than any other option. This expectation is the condition of action, even when it is not consciously perceived. Seen in this way, every decision-making process is an automatic procedure, regardless of whether it is accompanied by inner experience or not.

Almost everything has a cause and is itself merely an effect; this world is determined. Neither evolution nor its products are anything more than logical consequences of the universe. This fits with the fact that living beings fundamentally strive towards a state of impletion, which originally crystallised as the motor of survival, and that this state does not necessarily have to be attained, for it is not an intrinsic aim of the universe – although for us it is the meaning of life. What we experience as drive is nothing but a falling domino in a vast chain reaction.

The world is simply as it is. “Free will” does exist within our inner experience, but not beyond a causal principle that simply takes place, or beyond natural randomness on the quantum level. Both amount to a rejection of the magical situation in which, figuratively speaking, we stand before two doors and can decide entirely freely through which one we shall pass. A decision as such requires motives, and these motives are causes.

Yet this does not mean being controlled from without against our will. Our acts of will are precisely the

determination of the universe. Our inner experience, including our perception of time and the decisions we consciously make, are simultaneously part of the fixed universe. Conversely: the part of the fixed total universe that takes place in or through us is what we subjectively experience as free will.

From our point of view, we thus turn possibilities into determination. We should not drive ourselves mad with other points of view. It would make no sense not to think and speak about right and wrong action, for such deliberations are themselves part of our decision-making processes. Likewise, we must not cling to the half-baked fantasy of an absolute freedom of the will, or of an absolute responsibility, and hold grudges over mistakes that have already been recognised.

The Psyche
or
The Unconscious
or
The War Against Fear

Experience differs greatly from person to person; needs are different. The concrete sources of impletion certainly depend strongly on an individual's personal history. Yet there is one thing we must all keep in mind: not every unpleasant feeling we seek to avoid, not every supposed source we seek to satisfy, is truly set in stone. Such fundamentally surmountable blockages of greater impletion cannot simply be resolved through rational acts of will. Instead, a journey into the psyche is required.

The self consists of an unconscious and a conscious part. The conscious is what I mean by “inner experience”: sensory perceptions that can be traced back to external stimuli, thoughts, memories, and emotions. The blockages in question are unconscious influences – more precisely, fears that originally served to secure our survival, but no longer have any real object.

A child’s life depends on the care, and thus the affection, of its parents; for this affection the child would, for evolutionary reasons, do anything. If it has the experience that a certain behaviour might endanger the relationship with its parents, then from that point onward this behaviour becomes associated with literal fear of death. Instinctively, the child will try to find a way out: as a survival strategy, it adapts its behaviour accordingly – even though its life is not in danger at all.

This mechanism is not conscious to human beings. The fear linked to the old behaviour appears as a form of suffering to be avoided, as a false self-evidence, and the new behavioural pattern appears as personality.

I define solvable psychological problems – in everyday life I simply speak of “issues” – as surmountable blockages of greater impletion, whose overcoming is worth the impletion that lies behind them. The behavioural change described above falls under this category.

Such psychological problems can be overcome through confrontation with the underlying fears and their origin. One then realises: the fear was meant to protect me, but in truth it has needlessly placed me in chains.

Unfortunately, this confrontation is not pleasant – fear is repulsive, after all; that is its function. You must go where it hurts. The effort will be rewarded. It gets worse before it gets better. This insight is the first step towards being able to allow the confrontation. We recall: motivation arises from the expectation of greater impletion.

“Issues” appear in many forms, and the parents are not always responsible. Particularly widespread are forms of insecurity: the fear of not being good enough, of having to prove one’s worth, to achieve something, to be strong or beautiful. Typically, this leads to arrogance towards other people or living beings, in order to feel better and escape this fear. And no condemnation of others exists without a mirrored self-condemnation.

Equally widespread is the inability to allow one’s own emotions. In general, it is not healthy to suppress emotions, for they never truly disappear. They must come out; we must cry. Whoever can allow this will become aware of their “issues” more easily, and overcome them more easily. In this light, it is terribly tragic how insecurities and arrogance lead to the social stigmatisation of emotional openness.

I suspect that almost all people suffer from some kind of solvable psychological problem – and most do not even know it. In the worst case, their problems are so self-preserving that their revelation is feared as an admission of weakness, and is therefore not permitted at all. People harm one another and themselves. Their fear-driven thoughts tell them that they are “better” than others, or that they must not make mistakes, or that they alone are responsible for saving the world. As I said, “issues” are as countless as

grains of sand. But the world does not end if we cry in public, embarrass ourselves at karaoke, disappoint our parents, and so on. We are all only human.

Not too long ago, I had not the slightest understanding of the psyche. Above all, the psychedelic LSD revealed my “issues” to me. Psychedelics can unfold immense therapeutic benefit. They are unjustly stigmatised and criminalised. Nevertheless, it is always advisable to inform oneself thoroughly about these substances before consuming them, and to have already engaged with one’s own psyche. Whoever cannot relinquish control will, in the usual but then futile attempt to run away from what is feared, be mercilessly tormented. Psychonautics is a serious matter.

Because explaining is particularly difficult when it comes to the psyche (terms can, depending on context and understanding, mean precisely the opposite), I want to try once more in other words:

The cold logic of the universe has given us an inner experience that is meant to increase our chances of survival. What threatens our life feels bad. Against the feared threat we instinctively and unconsciously set something: we fight or try to appear more threatening (anger, arrogance); we flee, freeze, or submit. Under certain circumstances we rationalise and repress the perceived threat.

Yet some fears are merely learned; no threat exists that would require a life-saving reaction. Instead of fighting the terror as usual, or fleeing from it, and so on, we must consciously surrender to it. As great as the fear of this confrontation may be, it will be liberating. Death may remain eerie, but here it does not await us. It is not only about grasping the meaninglessness of a psychological problem rationally. The

fear must be experienced – and through this alone it will eventually vanish, whether it has meaning or not.

Whoever cannot stop fighting threats, even when and although it achieves nothing against them, will go through hell – fear becomes panic. In my understanding, this is exactly what happens in a so-called horror trip.

To express this in a metaphor that has proven very useful to me: we humans fear tigers in the bushes. This moves us to do something against the threat. Some of these tigers, however, are completely harmless; we have merely had misleading experiences. In such cases, fear-driven action is harmful. Instead, we should let ourselves be attacked by the false tigers, again and again, until they have lost their terror.

I can only scratch the surface here, and I do not wish to overstate my case. When it comes to the psyche, I learn something new every day. And mere words are particularly ill-suited to convey what is at stake in this topic. Ultimately, it is a deeply personal journey. What remains is that human beings can be plagued by unnecessary unconscious defence mechanisms, but that they are able to overcome them consciously in favour of impletion, by facing their fears rather than being driven by them.

The concept of blockages can sometimes also be applied to addiction and depression. Addiction can be the satisfaction of a pseudo-source of impletion, combined with the flight from fears that ought instead to be confronted. Depression, in turn, can arise from a variety of psychological problems which extinguish every expectation of impletion, and thus every motivation.

Despite all of this, there are psychological problems or forms of suffering that cannot be fully dissolved, and can therefore only be circumvented. It remains the task of reason to find the best possible path towards impletion.

The Moral Compass
or
Considerate Egoism

No human being can willingly decide against their expectation of impletion. Selflessness does not exist; every action follows egoistic motives.

Whoever helps another person across the street must necessarily assume that this act is, in some way, most conducive to their own impletion. Even the sacrifice of one's own life for another individual can occur only if it is accompanied by the expectation of the greatest possible impletion. Such expectations are not necessarily correct. For a life that is to be rich in impletion, they must be reconsidered with the help of reason. The question "What serves my impletion most?" is the only valid moral compass of *impletionism*.

At first glance, a ruthless, cut-throat egoism in the everyday sense may seem to promise the greatest impletion. On second glance, such *inconsiderate egoism* ought to give way to a *considerate egoism*.

For an individual who exploits their strengths without regard for other living beings creates a social norm according to which it is right, and perhaps even necessary, to trample over the weaker. And through such a condition, they themselves risk suffering harm as soon as they belong, in some respect, among the

weaker. An injured person tends to adapt their strategy for survival – if not rationally, then at least for psychological reasons. A society so corrupted ultimately becomes a danger to all.

Thus, it is far more promising if I take others into consideration and contribute to a society that likewise takes me into consideration. This principle of reciprocity goes beyond direct exchanges and includes abstractions: do not do to others what they do not wish to experience, because you do not wish others to do to you what you do not wish to experience.

Against this logic of consideration in favour of one's own impletion, a dear fellow student once formulated what I have since called the objection of the evil dictator: a very powerful person, he argued, has no reason to make their decisions dependent on others. Ruthless egoism would, in their case, be reasonable. I do not fundamentally disagree. The fewer consequences and repercussions a person has to fear, the more freely they can decide – even at the expense of others.

However, the echo of a poisoned society must not be underestimated. In the realm of such a dictator, all those who suffer under his ruthlessness, and for whom he is therefore evil, have an interest in his downfall. He ought to factor this risk into his decisions; afterwards, they would likely turn out far more considerate. I consider it probable that ruthless action does not pay off even for dictators.

For a considerate society, empathetic people are an advantage. They do not refrain from harming others merely because of indirect consequences, but because they themselves feel immediate suffering in doing so. Yet even those lacking empathy should be able

to grasp the disadvantages of ruthless egoism rationally.

In contrast to human society, a lack of consideration towards other species usually does not lead to any significant threat through their resulting behaviour. That is why humanity is cruel to animals. Yet the benefit that such ruthlessness brings does not outweigh its harm. Which ranges from ecological consequences to the brutalisation of society. If we do not value every life equally, we come one step closer to atrocities against human beings. Not for nothing does the devaluation of human life so often go hand in hand with comparisons to animals.

Nevertheless, consideration is never an end in itself; its meaningfulness has limits. At a certain point, the immediate suppression of one's own impletion no longer stands in a profitable relation to the echo effects. For instance, it may be justified to kill and eat a living being if one's own survival depends on it.

When two individuals enter into a conflict of interests, they should try, through extensive communication, gathering of information, and placing themselves in the other's position, to find a perfect compromise that guarantees both the same measure of impletion. The difficulty of such disputes lies above all in the impossibility of directly comparing inner experience. The two can only do their best. This will not always succeed.

In all of this, it is not productive to hold oneself back further than seems worthwhile according to one's own final judgement. The aim must always be to maximise one's own impletion. At the same time, any action against the consent of the other is highly dangerous because of its possible repercussions.

More complex conflicts involving a multitude of participants are far harder to resolve in such a way that all are satisfied with the outcome. Since imple- tion is not measurable and disputes cost valuable time and strength, a more efficient system of decision- making is required – one that in turn derives from the principle of reciprocity: a system of equal votes.

(Radical) Democracy

Social conflicts of interest should not be decided through the violent enforcement of one's own world- view, but through a voting procedure in which every- one possesses an equal vote in every question of de- cision.

I advocate this equality and defend this condition because I assume that this social system serves my imple- tion better than the ruthless imposition of my opinion.

Nevertheless, a situation may arise in which ruth- lessness is more worthwhile than the toleration of other views. This would be the case, for instance, if the social majority were firmly determined to support my murder. To depart from the democratic principle must, however, be the utmost extreme – for example as an act of self-defence in response to an open will to annihilate. At that point, a democracy is already severely damaged.

Because constitutional hurdles such as two-thirds majorities, veto rights, interventions by institutions such as constitutional courts, or the supposedly un- avoidable election of representatives would undermine the equality of votes, this democracy must necessarily be a direct majoritarian democracy. Anything else

would mean that the votes of the defeated majority are worth less than those of the prevailing minority. In contrast to the liberal representative system, the democracy of which I speak is better described as *radical democracy*.

Nonetheless, voluntary and broad compromises are desirable. For even within radical democracy, the principle of reciprocity applies, in order to prevent counterproductive repercussions. The pronounced ruthlessness of a majority can lead to a dissatisfied minority and provoke anti-democratic resistance that threatens the majority itself. On the other hand, democratic majority decisions should be accepted even when they appear wrong. A functioning democracy depends upon the appropriate political culture and the benevolent cooperation of all. This does not mean that discussions and disagreements do not belong to it. Yet social peace and the survival of democracy cannot simply be written down and enforced. What matters most is the prudent weighing, by all involved, of what serves their impletion best.

If a society is not yet grounded in radical-democratic decision-making, equality of votes should not be forced through the violent imposition of one's own worldview. How could such a process be crowned with success and contribute to the necessary social norms if it directly contradicts them? Instead, one must work towards it through peaceful persuasion – at least as long as it remains readily possible to criticise the status quo and to advocate openly for change.

My call for equality of votes, as expressed here, refers—let me emphasise—to questions of *societal* decision-making. Conflicts that concern only a manageable number of individuals and can be resolved directly

on an interpersonal level were already addressed in the preceding chapter.

However, the question of whether a matter concerns society is itself of a societal nature. It is therefore not required to involve everyone in everything at all times—but the possibility of a society-wide decision by equal vote must exist in principle. That is to say: the majority may choose to refrain from intervening in smaller decision-making spaces or private affairs, even though the proposed system would in principle allow them to do so.

From the logic of impletion as laid out above, it follows that no person should interfere in matters unless they are affected to at least an extent that renders such interference worthwhile—even in the context of abstract repercussions. Accordingly, I do not expect majority decisions to take the form of a totalitarian encroachment by the uninvolved. Why would the majority wish to control matters that do not concern them? At least, they will consider themselves affected.

As explained above, it is also not in the majority's interest to antagonise a minority against democracy. For any actual victim of encroaching majorities, democracy is, at a certain point, called into question (see above).

And once again, I must urge caution: radical democracy must never fade to the point that a ruling elite remains in practice, whose legitimacy rests solely on the formal possibility of being abolished by the majority. The greater the overall participation, the more deeply democracy is anchored.

Furthermore, radical democracy may encounter organisational limits of feasibility. In such cases, one must come as close as possible.

Equal Distribution
or
Freedom Through Equality

We have seen that an equality of impletion, for reasons of reciprocity, is the desirable outcome of distributive questions of every kind. Yet because impletion cannot be measured absolutely from the outside, it is sometimes impossible to determine which (perhaps unequal) distribution would in fact lead to such an outcome. The logic of reciprocity therefore provides, as a solution, not only a decision system of equal votes, but a general distributive principle of numerical equality.

If people – whether two individuals or a radical-democratic society – cannot find a compromise of unequal distribution that secures equality of impletion better than pure equal distribution, then equal distribution is to be preferred: in cases of doubt, each person should possess the same. For more or less arbitrary inequality always carries the risk of deviating even further from an equality of impletion. The doubt must therefore be given priority.

At this point I could also speak not of impletion, but of freedom. In general, freedom means having possibilities. Yet only when these possibilities contribute to the realisation of a fulfilled life do they unfold their significance. I therefore understand freedom above all as the enabling of impletion. Corre-

spondingly, a lack of freedom is to be understood as the restriction of impletion.

A person who does not act purely intuitively, but thoughtfully, and who need not take into account any restrictions imposed by the environment – such as the interests of others or the availability of resources – would be as free as one could possibly imagine (without entirely excluding the limitations of existence itself, for then we would be dealing with an eternal state of perfect impletion). In reality, however, we must, for our own sake, take the restrictions of the environment into account. Whoever wishes to experience the greatest possible freedom under these conditions must, for example, show consideration for other living beings – even though under other circumstances still more freedom might be conceivable.

If all human beings are equally free, then no one is free at the expense of another person's freedom. No one practises a ruthless egoism that proves to be a boomerang, and no one suffers from it. A society of equally free individuals is more conducive to the impletion of each person than a society of unequally free individuals, in which all must fear for their impletion. The striving for ideal freedom through ruthless egoism does not, as a rule, realise the meaning of life.

And if the optimal unequal distribution that would lead to an equality of freedom cannot be found, then equal distribution becomes the most reasonable option. Through restrictions, it may thus follow that the greatest possible freedom is achieved through numerical equality – in contrast to the liberal doctrine, which portrays freedom and equal distribution as contradictions.

With regard to the distribution of resources, I fundamentally advocate equal distribution, because no better distribution can be sufficiently justified. Any individual can irrefutably claim that they require more resources for the same impletion that others experience through fewer resources, since impletion is neither measurable nor comparable between individuals. Such claims therefore do not serve, at least on the societal level, as a standard of distribution by which an equality of impletion could be achieved.

Something similar applies to the liberal concept of merit. Consider a thought experiment: let us imagine that a few individuals – say three – compete in a sprint. For the purpose of the experiment, the precise number of runners is irrelevant.

Proponents of merit-based distribution would argue that the order in which the runners reach the finish line should serve as the basis of distribution, as long as the runners began under equal conditions. The fastest should receive the largest share, the second-fastest somewhat less, and the last the least. Merit should be rewarded, or effort compensated, because that would be just, or because society as a whole would benefit.

Let us examine more closely what is meant by “equal conditions”. If the runners had truly started under completely equal conditions, none of them could have reached the finish line faster than the others. In that case, they would necessarily cross the line simultaneously, from which equal distribution would follow. If, instead, we obtain an inequality of outcome, this is because at least one runner has benefited from hidden advantages.

The usual objection is that many of these advantages are negligible, because they are the result of personal effort and merit. Perhaps one runner trained harder than the others. Yet no runner is responsible for the circumstances of their existence, their physical abilities, or their access to training opportunities. Even discipline and willpower are ultimately products of circumstances over which they had no control. Individual merit cannot be viewed in isolation.

Nor can one reliably infer from a sporting result what efforts preceded it. Under certain circumstances, the runner who came last may have suffered or “achieved” far more than the one who came first. Impletion is simply not measurable.

In my understanding, liberalism is not at all concerned with an equality of impletion (or freedom) that arises directly through the mode of distribution. Rather, it expects that unequal distribution on the basis of differing merit, as a contribution to society, benefits everyone most – even if in the end they experience differing amounts of impletion.

This argument, in turn, presupposes the sufficient measurability of contributions to a world of just inequality, in which any given individual is better off than they would be through equal distribution. The attainment of differing incomes on the free market does not fulfil this condition, as I shall explain in more detail in a later chapter.

Furthermore, liberals usually do not speak of “equal starting conditions”, but of “equality of opportunity”. As long as we know nothing more about the individual prerequisites of the runners, we can indeed promise each of them an “equal chance” of winning the race. Yet this terminology obscures the fact

that equal chances by no means guarantee success. It is manipulative and perfidious, because it gives the inevitable losers hope of victory, and in this way increases consent to unequal distribution – the reinforcement of a logic of ruthless egoism.

Apparent differences in merit are therefore not in the slightest suitable to justify an unequal distribution of resources. That is why, alongside radical democracy, I advocate an economic equal distribution. (According to the logic of reciprocity, equality of votes is a higher good than my more specific opinion.) On the basis of such equal distribution, inequality may indeed arise through voluntary renunciation and the redistribution that follows, approximating an equality of impletion. The starting point must nevertheless remain equal distribution.

The meaning of this equality reaches its limit where it no longer concerns only the distribution of resources, but comes into conflict with bodily self-determination. For instance, it is far from my intention to demand the redistribution of organs, should some be able to spare them (quite apart from the risks of such operations) while others require them in order to survive. It would be too dangerous to call bodily self-determination into question. As with the principle of reciprocity, democracy, or equality, great caution is required when deviating from the principle of bodily self-determination. These principles should always be means towards one's own impletion, never obstacles.

The significance of consideration and equality in my worldview, as the result of applying my moral compass, makes me a libertarian socialist.

The Ideal Social System
or
My Vision of a Libertarian Socialism

The results so far lead me to a proposal for how human beings ought ideally to organise their life together. Which social system serves my impletion (or, as we have seen, the impletion of each individual) most?

In this chapter I am not concerned with what currently exists – *tabula rasa*. We shall begin by considering only how things ought to be.

Decision-Making

In my vision, people vote directly and democratically on all questions of decision. This takes place digitally, in order to meet the classic challenges of direct democracy (such as large populations, vast territories, or a multitude of decisions). Those entitled to vote are those who have declared their own maturity – more on this later.

The digital voting system also allows the flexible delegation of one's vote. It can be transferred for certain questions of decision or for a fixed period of time. It remains possible at any moment to reclaim one's vote. Above all, however, there is no obligation to delegate (as there is in indirect electoral democracy). This form of democracy is also known as *liquid democracy*.

Anyone who assumes the vote of one or more delegators can, in addition to their own secret vote, cast a second vote that is public to those delegating. This does not contradict the democratic principle of equal-

ity, since all people retain full control over their vote. Such control includes the possibility of voluntary delegation.

Votes that are not cast are automatically counted as no-votes, or as votes for the status quo. A proposal must therefore achieve a “real” majority. This arrangement enables everyone to introduce proposals without having to overcome arbitrarily fixed hurdles. The more yes-votes a proposal receives, the more visible it becomes on the agenda. The remaining procedural details of a proposal are determined by the proposal itself – for instance, whether it is open to a vote only for a limited period.

No further stipulations are required. It goes without saying that newer decisions replace older ones in the case of substantive conflict. Likewise, it is to be expected that political associations and bundles of proposals will emerge in order to achieve the necessary majorities. Unpopular proposals can be rejected and replaced. In the spirit of radical democracy, there are moreover no constitutional restrictions; the majority alone counts.

If, for whatever reason, the digital implementation of democracy should not be possible, a sortition-based democracy with direct-democratic elements presents itself as an alternative. At the shortest possible intervals, volunteers are selected by lot from the population in order to form a governing assembly. While this does not entail equality of votes, it does entail a strict equality before the lottery: all have a guaranteed equal chance of becoming a member of the selected assembly and voting directly on questions of decision. In the case of narrow majorities, the population as a whole can be involved. The formation

of rigid power structures remains excluded. This is a decisive advantage over council- or electoral democracy.

People remain free to introduce territorial subdivisions with defined areas, budgets, and responsibilities, which are organised in the radical-democratic manner described. I consider this approximation to a federalism “from above downwards” decidedly more advantageous than the reverse approach – a decentralisation from the outset – which seems to me far more cumbersome and also more dangerous, since it provides greater space for the strengthening of local identities and stereotypical images of enemies.

True equality of votes furthermore requires an equality that goes beyond the voting system itself. No one must be able to gain greater political influence through wealth. For this reason as well, equal distribution of available resources is to be preferred.

Economy

Let us begin, in thought, with the totality of digital points or tokens – the term “money” is no longer appropriate. These tokens represent the maximum consumption of resources, within a given period of time, as determined by the requirements of sustainability.

The population decides democratically which resources ought to be subject to limitation, how large the maximum quantities must be in the name of sustainability, and which period of assessment is to apply (for instance, a quarter of a year).

On this basis, each limited resource is valued in tokens according to the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{token value of an amount "x" of a resource} = \frac{\text{total number of tokens}}{\text{number of resource types}} \cdot \frac{x}{\text{total amount of the resource}}}{}$$

Each token thus represents an abstract share of the total consumption that has been defined as sustainable. Conversely, any quantity of a concrete resource can be expressed in tokens.

Suppose that 500 limited resources have been decided upon, a maximum quantity of crude oil of one billion tonnes per quarter, and a total token supply of one trillion. Then the token value of one tonne of crude oil is:

$$\frac{1 \text{ trillion tokens}}{500} \cdot \frac{1 \text{ tonne}}{1 \text{ billion tonnes}} = 2,000 \text{ tokens}$$

A portion of the tokens available in the period of assessment (that is, of the available resources) is invested in infrastructure: housing, medical care, public transport, education, and cultural provision. Access to this infrastructure is freely available to all without further conditions – it is free of charge.

Another portion of the tokens is initially conserved and held back. The remaining portion is paid out as a uniform income to everyone. This means that each individual disposes of the same personal share of the available resources (equal distribution). Apart from this, an individual's digital token account allows only expenditures. Wages no longer exist. People no longer have to work in order to survive. If they work, they do so voluntarily, not under indirect coercion.

I assume that the necessary human labour will, in this way, be carried out without compulsion. Human beings have interests and passions; they wish to be

active. Such activities are often of social benefit. And there are the possibilities of automation.

If, nevertheless, people find that too little work is being done, or that the wrong work is being done, they should in any case not resort to a system of coercion. First, they must ask themselves whether they can do without. Or perhaps enough volunteers will be found who, in view of such an emergency, are willing to take on the unpleasant but necessary tasks. Only if no solution can be found other than once again uniting work and income, and deviating from voluntariness, is it worth considering increasing the incentive for the missing work through bonus tokens. Whoever then takes it upon themselves to do what the majority wishes to see done, but what no one else wishes to do, should receive more resources.

However, this measure carries with it the danger of anti-system alliances, which deliberately refuse all work in order to extract more resources and thus return to wages and a meritocracy. In a similar way, the token system could be undermined through a parallel barter economy and a new means of payment. A democracy functions only among democrats – and a socialism only among socialists. This merely as a marginal note.

Enterprises that introduce a resource into the economic cycle for the first time – for instance, a logging operation – must symbolically repay to the communal account of the population as many tokens as correspond to the extracted resources, such as the harvested wood. The token costs that arise for these enterprises – from now on I shall speak more aptly of *work associations*, more on this shortly – are costs

that must be settled through the passing on of resources.

Work associations, unlike individuals, possess their own token accounts, which allow both income and deductions.

This means that the resource-extracting associations pass on resources to other associations at exactly the token costs of their extraction, where they are ultimately processed further. This processing brings additional resources, and thus additional costs, into play, until the price of the final product is formed – a price paid by individual consumers out of their income.

In this way, the tokens issued as a uniform income flow back through the work associations into the public treasury, in order to be redistributed once again in the next period of assessment. The established resource maxima determine the token prices of all products and services. A good whose production required no limited resources is accordingly free of charge.

Tokens represent available resources in general and do not distinguish between them. For example, the issued tokens could all be spent on plastic rather than wooden products, thereby greatly exceeding the oil maximum, while the wood maximum remained underused.

Such shifts are prevented, on the one hand, by the tokens retained in the public treasury (see above). On the other hand, it is possible to adjust the maxima in the next period of assessment: if there is an excess of oil consumption in the first quarter, its maximum in the next quarter is simply reduced by the amount of the excess – the token costs of the resource rise, and

demand falls. This ensures, at least in the medium term, compliance with the originally established limits.

Such fluctuations can be anticipated to a greater or lesser extent through predictive models, of the kind already employed today by capitalist corporations.

People are not compelled to spend their tokens within the period of assessment in which they receive them. They may also save them. In order to prevent such saving behaviour from eventually making it impossible to pay out the uniform incomes in the accustomed amount – because too few tokens have flowed back – some must have been retained in the public treasury. Alternatively, a wealth tax on saved tokens could be introduced, or the total quantity of tokens could simply be increased, which would lead to a devaluation of saved tokens.

Back to the work associations. In my vision, they too are organised in a radical-democratic manner. Liquid democracy, through its delegation function, enables a division of labour in operational decision-making: employees need not necessarily concern themselves with every question. Should a managerial position emerge in this way, it remains always democratically legitimised. Work associations recognise neither rigid hierarchies nor private ownership of the means of production. All employees retain full control over their vote at all times.

While the population as a whole can in principle make decisions that are more binding for the work associations than their own majority decisions, each association should nevertheless be able, to a large ex-

tent, to decide unhindered whom it hires or dismisses.

Anyone who wishes to pursue a form of work that must be carried out within an association, but who finds no place anywhere, can found one of their own. Should even this not succeed or not be feasible, that person's existence is at least not at stake, since they receive their income regardless. In return, associations are guaranteed control over their working environment.

The founding of a work association takes place through the establishment of a token account, which may not be used for private purposes, but is intended solely to finance production expenditures. Each association begins with an initial amount in this account, provided either by individuals or by society as a whole (from the public treasury). These tokens are used for the purchase of means of production until, through sales, as many tokens have flowed back in as were spent on purchases.

Work associations may not generate profit (for otherwise token prices would no longer express the generality of available resources). If production is to be expanded or improved, tokens must once again be supplied to the association's account by individuals or by the community. Tokens for such expenditures are likewise retained in the public treasury.

In principle, competition between associations is conceivable, and a certain freedom of consumption prevails. However, the entire economy operates within the democratically determined limits of sustainability, and only within them can it grow. The more sustainable the production, the greater the prosperity, the more people can afford.

My vision knows no profit, no class struggle, and no compulsion to work. People act voluntarily; they decide together, consciously.

Environmental protection, of course, is not yet sufficiently achieved through the token system alone. Limiting the extraction of wood, for example, would have to be complemented by a sophisticated forestry policy, so that stocks can recover adequately. Either the responsible association would take care of this, or the population as a whole would make the corresponding decisions.

Infrastructure

In my vision, many things are provided free of charge. This is simply less cumbersome and disruptive than instead paying out a higher income, requiring more payment procedures, and moreover making avoidable work necessary (such as ticket inspections on the railway). Besides: why should those who do not depend on the use of public transport or medical care receive a resource bonus?

In rare cases, however, it may still be worth considering some form of limitation of use. Free tap water, for instance, might lead to careless waste. In such cases, it is sensible to impose token costs beyond a certain amount per person. Such policies can, for the time being, safely be left aside; it suffices if they are introduced reactively. Simplicity and the absence of bureaucracy (less work for everyone involved) clearly outweigh the pedantic avoidance of theoretical injustices. We need not assume that people will tend towards problematic levels of water waste merely because they do not have to spend tokens for it.

In this spirit: whoever asks for a wheelchair, a dental implant, or medication receives it – without bills, without detours. And whoever would like a home is likewise assigned one.

But how is something as varied as housing to be distributed justly? In general, a lottery procedure is suited to the distribution of limited goods that cannot be equally divided. In my vision, housing is allocated with regard to preferences and previous living situations – and only in cases of doubt does the lottery come into play. In this way, all who desire it receive the same chance of the house by the lake, the three-room apartment with a balcony, or the accessible ground-floor loft.

Distributing housing in this way is more sensible than requiring it to be paid for in tokens, because individuals in the token economy pay for things only once. Whoever wishes to get rid of a purchased piece of furniture after some time can only give it away, and cannot exchange it again for tokens (since no new resources have been expended). While the settling of costs among work associations is intended to shape token prices, it is not provided for beyond that, and for good reason.

The best way to shape public space is through progressive, green cities. Traditional rural life (a few detached houses lying many kilometres apart) is terribly inefficient. People should return a large portion of the land they occupy to wild nature.

In my vision, there are no automobiles any longer – with the possible exception of emergency or delivery vehicles. Rail transport is, especially if green cities and settlement along their long-distance connections are prioritised, the best form of mobility, com-

plemented by cycling and, of course, walking. Instead of broad asphalt roads, green cities are dominated by parks. This improves the quality of life, benefits the environment, and saves vast amounts of resources.

Public infrastructure – whether hospitals, housing, or railways – depends upon administrations. These administrations differ from other work associations only in that their costs are covered directly from the public treasury. For this reason, it is sensible for them to remain without competition, and, in their special role, to possess no autonomy with regard to the selection of their employees (though they may of course advertise positions). If too many people apply, an entrance test devised by the employees themselves, or once again the lottery, must decide.

Attention-seeking advertising in people's everyday lives has, moreover, disappeared. Instead, there remain ways of informing oneself consciously about what is available – for example through a digital search engine. No one, however, is prevented from recommending products and services freely and without compensation.

Education

The education system, naturally part of the infrastructure, deserves special attention. For the ability of human beings to arrive at insights and to form their own judgement constitutes the backbone of a democratic society. Whoever knows little and has scarcely practised thinking will never be able to stand up for themselves to the same extent as a person with a higher level of education.

In my vision, education is free. By this I mean the absence of grades, certificates, curricula, and subjects. All forms of compulsion are abolished. A public, university-like institution offers everyone – regardless of age or background – constant access to teaching and learning materials, as well as to rooms and facilities.

People may use this provision autonomously for their own learning or for teaching others. Whoever prefers classical schooling will find teachers and classmates; whoever would rather listen to lectures will find lecturers; whoever seeks an audience will find students; and whoever prefers to work as equals in groups will find partners. Autodidacts, too, are fully accommodated.

Democratically agreed guiding curricula are conceivable, but non-binding. In principle, it is up to individuals to shape their own educational path, or at least to seek out a mentor. No one guarantees the “quality” of teachers – these institutions will certainly be places of disagreement. For a democratic and epistemically open society, this is only beneficial. It is to be expected that guardians accompany their protégés, or support them in choosing their first supervisors.

In this education system, what matters is not performance or employability, but openness to insight and learning as such. Certificates will not be missed. Work associations themselves assess whether applicants for their advertised positions are suitable or not. People may prepare themselves for these requirements.

Upbringing

Children owe nothing to their parents. For it is the parents who have brought their child into existence. No one can do justice to the magnitude of this. For this reason, I am fundamentally opposed to deliberate procreation. The creation of a new individual inevitably involves the risk – I cannot put it into adequate words – of bringing forth an existence of suffering. At the very least, every human being is burdened with their assured mortality and all the other horrors of existence.

This is a sober text which, as so often, fails to do justice to its subject. In any case, I hold that the decision to procreate is wrong, because the consequences of this decision far exceed any human being. To refrain from procreation, by contrast, harms no one. At most, it would harm the last human generation, if all were to decide in this way. Yet I assume that such a generation would find a way to make its final years, and the end of humanity, bearable. There would be nothing to lament. The continuation of our species may be of no concern to us.

But people do reproduce, sometimes inadvertently, and this raises the question of how society ought best to deal with this. First of all: pregnant people must have access to abortion, for otherwise their life and bodily integrity would be valued less than that of an embryo or foetus which is not viable outside the uterus.

Beyond the termination of pregnancy, there remains the possibility of placing the child into the care of other people.

In my vision, a single legally mature person suffices for the care and upbringing of a child. Such guardians thereby assume legal and moral parental responsibility, even if they themselves were not the cause of the child's existence. Ideally, guardians have an understanding of the psyche and are as free as possible of psychological problems, so that they can accompany the growing child appropriately.

They strive for an upbringing that is neither neglectful nor oppressive, but takes place on equal footing, encourages the child to make their own decisions, and provides them with the necessary tools to do so. If the guardian must at times make decisions over the child's head, they explain the reasons for their decision, create space for arising emotions, and show understanding.

Guardians may separate themselves from their duties only by finding new guardians for their child. This transfer of responsibility must be possible, because anything else would entail dangers for the child. Nevertheless, guardians should endeavour to spare their children such experiences of uprooting.

Above all, it is the children themselves who decide upon their dependency. At the beginning of life, a human being depends upon a helping and guiding hand – not upon captivity.

Whoever releases their guardians from responsibility for their own wellbeing receives full access to their own account, voting rights, and so forth. The step towards maturity is, in my vision, an act of self-determination. Until then, children are moreover free to change their guardians. Teachers, medical staff, and other adults should inform them of these possibilities.

Children should always be made to understand that their guardians are not the keepers of absolute truth, and that they must never oppress them.

Jurisprudence

Decisions of the population as a whole determine what is to be done and what is to be refrained from. In cases of violations or ambiguities, courts are necessary in order to find socially acceptable solutions to these problems. This is what jurisprudence means in my vision: problem-solving, not punishment – for punishment serves no meaningful purpose.

For each trial, three judges are selected by lot, and they must reach a verdict by at least majority agreement. If plaintiffs or defendants are dissatisfied with the verdict, they may appeal. Once again, three judges are drawn. Should they not confirm the first verdict, three further judges decide the outcome of the proceedings definitively.

The number three guarantees the smallest possible plurality in which a tie is impossible. Judges and lawyers need not undergo any special qualification procedure; they merely have to declare themselves willing to take on this dispute-settling task.

As already explained in earlier chapters, human beings act for reasons – sometimes out of bad experiences and fear, but always in the expectation of the greatest possible impletion. They cannot do otherwise.

My system relies on insight. Even a murderer faces no consequences so long as they show credible remorse. Only where there is serious potential danger – whether through a lack of insight or foreseeable loss

of control – is deprivation of liberty conceivable. This serves not as punishment, but as the protection of others.

The libertarian socialism will, one hopes, foster peace and solidarity – yet violations of democratic decisions and violent crimes can never be ruled out entirely. If such breaches of law are not recognised as mistakes by those convicted, and if they do not pledge improvement, then as a rule a reprimand by the court suffices, the ordering of psychotherapy, or the obligation to make amends for the damage caused (where possible).

The restriction of freedom of movement is the utmost measure, reserved for persons who are reliably highly dangerous.

Classical prisons no longer exist in my vision. Instead, potentially dangerous individuals are accommodated in secured residential facilities and receive psychological care. The aim always remains to maintain the balance between individual freedom and social safety.

The detainee should not suffer unnecessarily. In many cases, even an electronic ankle bracelet might suffice to ensure the necessary protective measures.

Security

While the guaranteed token income, free healthcare, and free education provide social security, one question remains: who, in the final instance, apprehends a violent criminal?

Without a work association equipped for this purpose – a “police force” – it is not possible. Yet armed individuals with a special licence to use force repre-

sent a great danger to a social order that strives to be as free from domination and violence as possible.

For this reason, my vision includes a second, mirrored work association, which has the same means at its disposal, but whose sole task is to monitor the police force and, if necessary, bring charges against it.

Secondly, both associations possess only defensive weapons (shields, protective gear), net weapons, or at most irritant weapons (pepper spray, tear gas).

Thirdly, their personnel must wear identification and body cameras.

Capitalism

In order to fight for a future worth living, we must first understand the existing system. I therefore wish briefly to explain my view of capitalism and its inherent compulsions, before turning in the final chapter to political struggle.

Let us begin with a reconstruction of exchange from an impletionist perspective. Human beings always act in the expectation of the greatest possible impletion, and depending on this expectation they assign each good a subjective value. Expected impletion thus defines the value of a good. An objectively measurable value cannot be grasped.

An individual can express this subjective value to a limited extent by stating the perceived value relation between two goods, for example: “At this moment, I expect just as much impletion from this bread roll as from this bottle of water.”

Value can be attributed both to imagined things (such as an unbaked bread roll or a fictional happiness machine) and to real, already existing goods. An

individual is therefore able to compare the values of all goods they already possess with the values of all goods they do not possess (and which may not even have materialised yet). This is why people desire the property of others.

Those who possess goods will relinquish them if they in turn expect a gain in value from doing so – that is, more impletion. As a rule, this occurs through a bilateral act of exchange: each party achieves greater impletion, on the basis of differing needs, by giving up a good that appears less valuable to them than what they receive in return.

Money, or a currency, arises as soon as very many people express their subjective value attributions in relation to one and the same thing – thereby making them directly comparable (apart from the intrinsic value of this thing itself, for instance as jewellery in the case of gold, as an intoxicant in the case of cigarettes, or as a note in the case of banknotes). As a result, each individual indirectly attributes to a certain amount of money the value of the goods that could be acquired with it, which it now represents in abstract form.

Other things can receive similar indirect value attributions. Whoever trades in goods, that is, is not interested in keeping them, does so for the sake of greater impletion, which will only be triggered by the good ultimately acquired. And whoever considers something valuable even though it serves impletion only at a later point in time (for example, a bread roll in the absence of present hunger or appetite) follows the same logic of mediation.

In any case, the value of a good is subjective for each individual and always rests upon their expecta-

tion of future impletion, however tangled or reflective that expectation may be.

Both parties to an exchange, let us say the seller and buyer of a chair, have attributed to this chair a value expressible in monetary terms. The seller will never sell the chair below the sum of money corresponding to their valuation – after all, they wish to achieve a gain in value. Recall: they act without exception in the expectation of greater impletion. The buyer, conversely, will never purchase the chair above the value they attribute to it. (Under certain circumstances, they may not even be able to buy it at a lower price if they do not possess the means they would theoretically be willing to exchange.)

If these valuations do not overlap – if the seller demands twelve monetary units for the chair, but the buyer is willing or able to pay at most eight – then no exchange takes place. If the valuations do overlap, however, for instance if the seller demands at least eight units and the buyer is willing to pay up to twelve, negotiation occurs.

Since both individuals seek the greatest possible gain, they will not readily reveal their true subjective valuations. If both negotiate equally well and no additional external influences intervene, they would have to agree upon an exchange of the chair for ten monetary units. Through this process, final sale prices are formed from subjective value attributions.

To anticipate an obvious objection: individuals who do communicate their honest sense of value to their trading partners do so, of course, only because they also expect greater impletion from doing so – an expectation which they do not count into the directly communicated value. In the end, human beings can-

not help but act in the expectation of the greatest possible impletion, regardless of what their concrete exchanges may look like.

The process of price formation described above is a greatly simplified depiction of reality. It becomes far more complex as soon as multiple actors willing to exchange come together and compete with one another: this is the market economy.

With strong competition among buyers, they are forced to accept rising prices so long as these do not exceed their maximum limit, because none of them wishes to go away empty-handed (and forgo greater impletion). With strong competition among sellers, they are in turn forced to lower prices, for they wish to avoid all potential buyers turning away from them and going to the competition.

Likewise, sellers may undertake a (supposed) increase in quality, a hidden reduction in quality, or an increase in productivity. I will return to this shortly.

This play of supply and demand determines market prices, and these in turn feed back into the value attributions of individuals.

The existing economic system did not arise before our eyes step by step; rather, we were born into a world of established market prices. It would be illusory to believe that a single individual valuation could influence supermarket prices. Nevertheless, there is no objective value of things that could be measured independently of prices.

In the market economy, private enterprises operate according to a simple principle: if more money is generated in the end than was invested (we will return to the role of labour shortly), this is considered a success. For this not only means higher incomes for

owners and managers, but above all enables investment in the enterprise itself – for instance, in more efficient and cheaper production.

Such investments are necessary in order to gain an advantage over competitors, who pursue the same goal.

Thus, on the side of supply, the market economy produces a competition-driven compulsion towards growth through profit. This compulsion promotes technological innovation and modernisation on the one hand, yet on the other it becomes disastrous for the environment and leads, as we shall see, to the wearing down of the working population.

Enterprises that voluntarily take care to respect human beings and the environment generally lose the competitive struggle against those that turn their ruthlessness into an advantage. No one can simply withdraw from the forces of this competition.

For the manager of a large enterprise – the capitalist – acts of exchange are a means to the end of their personal expectation of impletion. In order to preserve the enterprise and their income, they submit to the compulsions of the market system. If they did not, others would likely take their place.

It is obvious that such a system automatically – without any malevolent puppet-masters in the background – favours an ideology that babbles about “merit”, educates people into ruthless egoists, and sets them against one another.

A free market does not lead to a just distribution of socially necessary labour and resources. Instead, it makes the fulfilment of the individual dependent in many ways upon market conditions and personal strengths.

If I possess nothing that I could exchange, and cannot directly provide for myself through the products of my own labour, I will die – or at least experience little impletion – unless another person happens to decide to help me, or unless I am able to sell my labour power.

The subjective value of my labour power depends on how much impletion its exercise provides me. If working feels like the opposite of impletion, then not exchanging my labour power is to be understood as the absence of the suffering associated with that exchange. The minimum price at which I am willing to exchange my labour power falls the more impletion the work itself provides me.

If the alternative to work is death – loss and the end of all impletion – then I must be willing to sell it at any price, so long as it allows me to survive. If, by contrast, I can sell my labour power at a very high price, then I have simply been lucky in a merciless world.

Enterprises depend on labour, for without labour no goods exist. A worker sells their labour power, as outlined above, in order to be able, through wages, to afford what they need and desire. Like all sellers, they have a minimum limit and strive for the highest possible gain.

The capitalist, as the purchasing party of labour power, meanwhile wishes to pay as little as possible and has an upper wage limit. For the lower wages are, the greater the share of the sale price that remains available for the capitalist's income and, above all, for the growth of the enterprise.

Against this background, it is advisable for workers to unite in order to influence the formation of

their wages collectively. This class struggle is directed against the interest of capitalists – an interest that does not rest solely on greed or malice, but follows from the systemic logic of capitalism itself.

Human beings harm themselves because the conditions of their existence, appearing as insurmountable natural laws, leave them no other choice (and this goes hand in hand with liberal merit ideology). They live under immense pressure not to lose the eternal competition, and they develop exhausting fears while destroying their own habitat.

Capitalism prevents the impletion of humanity. It denies access to oneself, the acquisition of insight into existence, and thus, above all, the possibility of overcoming this system in a common act of liberation for all, and continuing differently in self-determination. It forces humanity into a hamster wheel of self-destruction.

The Road to Freedom

We have seen how capitalism and merit ideology weigh on people. Their effects and interconnections are far too extensive to be explained fully in this work. At bottom, one point must be retained: human beings do not organise their coexistence in a way that serves the impletion of each individual most. Instead, they are born into a senseless and unplanned world of mutual devouring competition.

All attempts to implement socialist alternatives at the expense of democracy were doomed to fail at the very goal of liberation. More than that: without freedom of speech, the path to utopia becomes impossible

altogether. So how can we overcome the present conditions and arrive at the system I have proposed?

A revolution without delay would require the will of a large majority, and the absence of violent resistance. That is to say: the population would have to share my vision. It could then begin the transformation immediately. Unfortunately, such a radical rupture is very unlikely. People have too many psychological problems, and too little time or education to engage with philosophy and politics. The circumstances prevent their own overcoming. If even the preconditions of a revolution require a revolution, then any change appears impossible.

A “minority revolution”, by contrast, is nothing but a coup: the ruthless enforcement of one’s own ideas against those who think differently. In earlier chapters I have already set out why this approach is usually wrong (under conditions of freedom of speech). Above all, the suppression of people certainly lays no stable foundation for the political culture my vision ultimately requires.

This leaves only one path: the gradual persuasion of people. So long as freedom of speech exists, the best course is to use it to advocate my vision – even if the status quo can still claim neither an ideal democracy nor a socialist economy. (If freedom of speech does not exist at all, a coup attempt might become thinkable – though then it carries other personal risks.) The more people are persuaded, and the faster they are persuaded, the more thoroughly and the sooner my concrete vision can be implemented. Whether humanity ever reaches it is not in my hands. Saving the world is a collective undertaking.

Workers can fight for higher wages, better working conditions, and so on against the interests of capitalists; majorities within liberal democracy can, despite capitalism, soften its problems. The stronger the electoral results of “left-green” parties and politicians, the more successfully they can press for the implementation of their promises. If they nevertheless refuse, despite existing possibilities, disappointed voters with a libertarian socialist orientation will bring forth and elect other forces. And if, at some point, there is a clear majority behind the complete abolition of capitalism and a corresponding parliamentary majority and government has been elected, but the system change “from within” still does not take place, then the population can resist and take the transformation into its own hands: revolution.

Until then, every small approximation to my vision is progress: more redistribution, strengthening the social state, laws for climate protection, environmental protection, and animal protection. Class struggle and social liberalism (or “social democracy”) can bring about many relative improvements without leaving the terrain of capitalist liberal democracy.

Even so, imagination must not end here. Competition and the compulsion to grow, together with their ugly offspring, merit ideology, will always push back against these achievements and attempt to undo them. A more social capitalism is better, but certainly not the ideal system.

The same is true of consumer critique. Individuals can, through their consumption decisions, exert only limited influence on the damage caused by the capitalist system, let alone drive its abolition. Nevertheless, measured against its effects, there is better and

worse consumption. Yet the “best” consumption is bound up with harsh restrictions — often simply because of existing circumstances. For that reason, in case of doubt it suffices to restrict oneself only as far as would be required under the desired system. (This holds only if the desired system would already be feasible today under the assumption that everyone else supported it as well. Recall: saving the world is a collective undertaking.)

The energy spent on self-flagellation in order to limit harm within capitalism is far better invested in political activism for a change of system. Whoever, independently of that, enjoys living a life critical of consumption should of course do so — it benefits everyone. The less damage has been done (and some of it is unfortunately irreversible), the less will have to be repaired under socialism.

Back to persuasion. Freedom of speech is the precondition for all efforts to win a better world by peaceful means. Whoever must reckon with being punished for their utterances cannot, in practice, work for the further development of society. Meta-freedom of speech — the unrestricted possibility of publicly criticising what is not permitted to be said — is therefore my defining feature of all democracies in the broadest sense.

My concept of democracy is thus ambivalent. On the one hand, I mean my ideal of radical democracy by it; on the other, I also mean existing liberal democracies, which do not meet the criterion of equality of votes, but at least provide points of leverage for working towards improvements without violence and without fear of state repression — even if it is only

the very first step, demanding more freedom of speech.

This use of the term may at first seem diluting: why should I call “democratic” what falls far short of my ideal? First, liberalism has long since successfully hijacked the concept of democracy; second, there is something far worse than liberal democracy, namely the complete absence of meta-freedom of speech. I can only campaign for a more progressive understanding of democracy if the seizure of power by anti-democrats is prevented. And in this struggle it is useful to form a united front behind the positively connoted term “democracy”.

Nearly all anti-democratic forces spread a tribal “us versus them” narrative in order to justify suppressing freedom of speech: a forcibly homogeneous collective is set against enemy images that are to be fought with violence — sometimes even annihilated. In the simplest case, the opposition is merely: those who think alike versus those who think differently. Consistently, the collective is then said to possess a single common political will which can be embodied by an autocratic leadership.

The psychological dynamic of such exclusive collectivism is highly worth examining. Before I go into it in more detail, I want to address the terms populism and fascism. Both, in their established usage, are excellently suited to name this crucial point. I want to make my own terminology transparent, justify it analytically, and thereby develop useful terms of struggle that can serve in political confrontation and are suited to denouncing seemingly novel threats. I attempt to take historical and political-scientific backgrounds into account. I do not, by any means, wish to

lump together what plainly must still be distinguished.

If one takes what has been described above as a minimal definition of fascism (compulsion towards purity and unity; violence against those excluded), then the concept focuses chiefly on the striking structural commonality of anti-democratic ideologies, and less on their differing intellectual histories or effects. This also means that it includes anti-democratic socialisms (which is, for good reasons, contested). It then makes a great difference whether, and in what mixture, a concrete fascism is ethnonational, racist, antisemitic, nationalist, religious, or socialist in its shape.

Socialism, at least as a distant final aim, always contains the equal worth of all human beings; accordingly, for anti-democratic socialists violence is more a means to an end, whereas for anti-socialist fascists – fascists in the narrower sense – it is an end in itself. Most devastating remains ethnonational-racist fascism, which deems human beings unworthy of life by birth. Never forget: in the name of “National Socialism”, such thinking led to the Holocaust, the industrial mass extermination of human lives.

By populism, by contrast, I mean the use of the us-versus-them narrative as a method within liberal-democratic competition, without the unambiguous aim of actually abolishing democracy and employing violence. Through lies about political opponents and the branding of dissent as oppression – even though dissent is precisely what constitutes freedom of speech – deviating opinions are delegitimised even under populism. Such inversions, in which freedom of opinion is suddenly supposed to denote an attack on

freedom of speech, and democrats are insulted as un-democratic, are a typical game of anti-democrats. Populism is nothing but fascism in its infancy.

Now to the relationship between psyche, capitalism, liberalism, and fascism. The existing system favours fascism in many ways. Merit ideology leads to the belief that a person must first prove their worth. In some minds this is followed by the question: what should happen to those who, by implication, have proved that they are worth nothing? Might it not even be the case that some people are, by nature, worth nothing?

Us-versus-them narratives are especially appealing to those who, precisely because of capitalism's competitive character, fear being inferior to others, failing, and dying. By devaluing others – shifting into a fight response, so to speak seizing their chance – they run away from this fear. People suffer and seek exits; gratefully they take the opportunity to feel strong for once: because they believe they can finally defend themselves, or because they enjoy trampling on others, or because belonging to the collective gives them a sense of external meaning in life.

And once a critical mass has fallen prey to fascist forces, group pressure takes effect. All people long for connection; they will follow their surroundings rather than contradict them. None of this needs to be fully conscious.

Unfortunately, fascist developments are encouraged, welcomed, or at least ignored by many capitalists so long as they distract people from class struggle. This is the link that allows fascism to be understood as the self-preserving defensive reaction of the

capitalist system against socio-ecological progress. One more reason to abolish capitalism.

Anti-democratic socialism does not fit the picture quite as neatly as fascism in the narrower sense, for socialism tends rather to provoke fascist backlash from capitalism than to be that backlash itself; and, as said, every socialism follows the final aim of equal worth. Still, the conscious justification of violence makes no difference to the individual victim, and the unconscious motives of such behaviour are often unlikely to differ. Freedom of speech, and with it the chance of reaching my vision, is surrounded on all sides. For that reason I consider the use of an expanded concept of fascism in political confrontation to be acceptable.

A popular motif of all anti-democratic worldviews is, moreover, the role of victimhood. To understand oneself as a victim of injustice is not, in itself, problematic. Discriminated groups must, in order to point to their situation and fight for emancipation, usually adopt an identity oriented around their discrimination. People discriminated against as women defend themselves as women; people shoved into a racial category and discriminated against for it — although there are no human races — may defend themselves, for example, as Black. This is right and important.

But such identities can also become dangerous; self-defence can overshoot. This happens immediately if the defence was unjustified from the start (as with the defence of patriarchy or “white” hegemony). Yet every logic of a just struggle against evil contains its own potential for horror. Democracy is not an end in itself. The question of when self-defence is permitted and what form it should take has ignited many

atrocities that should never have occurred. That is precisely why the victim role is so popular among fascists: as an instrument of anti-democratic radicalisation.

In summary, the political reality appears to me as follows. Liberal capitalist ideology does not serve people; worse still, it drives them into the arms of anti-democracy, where freedom of speech no longer exists, lies rule the world, and social progress is far harder to achieve. By contrast, my worldview fundamentally recognises disagreement and relies on self-determination – born from a logic of considerate egoism, ultimately for the sake of my impletion.

Thus I have no choice but to fight fascism side by side with all other defenders of freedom of speech and openness to insight – the democrats in the broadest sense – while at the same time trying to spread my vision. The two go hand in hand. And piece by piece, I hope, the world will improve. The anti-democratic centrifugal forces of the existing system work tirelessly against it.

In closing, I want to sketch a few proposals for how we can face this challenge.

First: as difficult as it may be, we should meet people with love, understanding, and forbearance. Anger and arrogance are poor advisers. We are all only human. No one is infallible. The likelihood is high that many of those we face are under the spell of their psychological problems. (This does not mean that all people can be convinced. Some are better left alone, while with others sharpness works best.) And we ourselves are not necessarily free of “issues”. What appears as compassion may be a form of arrogance.

Such things must be avoided; openness to insight is called for.

We need an awareness of the psychological. Only a society that has, in this sense, come to itself will be capable of applying more openness to insight. An important point here is trust through honesty: we should be sincere. No one needs to be ashamed of anything — that is “issues”. People must lose their fear of one another. At the same time, it must be conveyed that the existing system does not allow real togetherness. It lies in our hands to replace it.

Second: as an alternative to anger, we must communicate hope. People thirst for concrete proposals of how the world could be shaped differently, so that they can judge whether they consider it possible. If we say that things cannot go on like this, we must also offer a concrete alternative. Otherwise the status quo appears as bad, yet still the best possible status — or, worse, hatred and destruction as the only way out. Even if our visions differ, we have at least initiated a valuable debate about the future. Political struggle is a struggle over the topics that are discussed. Ideally, we achieve such a far-reaching shift in discourse that libertarian socialist convictions reach a critical mass.

Third: it is advisable not to use a political party as the source and guardian of the vision, since it is subject to the compulsions of party competition. Parties are nothing more than tools: at some point they wear out and must be repaired or replaced. Our movement, which seeks to influence the rest of society and the party landscape, can criticise capitalism without inhibition, speak of absolute goals and of the details of its visions. It must never succumb to a supposed realism according to which society is not yet ready for

this or that demand. It does not need to be – for it is not a party. Everything we say will contribute to shifting discourse. To what extent remains to be seen. The main thing is that we do not hold ourselves back.

Parties, by contrast, must weigh very carefully what they demand and do. For a start, two programme points occur to me that could serve as beacons of hope: an unconditional basic income and the democratisation of economy and politics. An unconditional basic income, redistributed from top to bottom and functioning like a minimum security without stigma or bureaucratic burden for its recipients, is an excellent springboard for my further vision. It opens discourses that concern compulsory work, merit ideology, and income inequality. Meanwhile, more direct democracy and the expropriation of enterprises likewise prepare the libertarian socialism. I would expect both demands not to encounter too great resistance among the population. That is only as an aside.

We are at the very beginning. But I dare to claim that there are paths to achieve the implementation of my vision, a libertarian socialism, and an impletionist world.

