

Perspektivwechsel in Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft VI: Dimensionen der Nachhaltigkeit



<https://www.geo.de/wissen/weltall/horizons/19579-rtkl-horizons-mission-hier-blickt-alexander-gerst-besonders-gern-zur>

Lehrstuhl für Internationales Management und Soziales Unternehmertum
Öffentliche Ringvorlesung
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- Introduction to the Chair
- Asceticism and Climate Change: From Lady Poverty to Voluntary Simplicity
- Discussion and Questions



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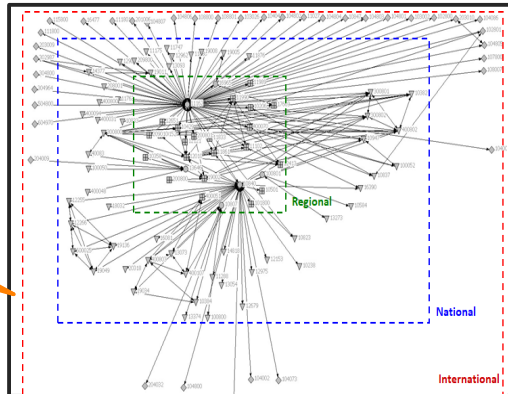
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Social
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- Introduction to the Chair
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Asceticism and Climate Change: From Lady Poverty to Voluntary Simplicity

Suleika Bort
(University of Passau)
&
Alfred Kieser
(Mannheim University)

Since the Greek antiquity, asceticism has proven an enormous potential to transform the life of individuals, groups and whole societies:

- Michaels (2004: 11) defines asceticism as “systemized control of body and soul”.
- This denotation reflects the original meaning of the ancient Greek word *askesis*: “exercise”, especially in the sense of “training of the body”.
- Ascetics are prepared to suffer deprivations for reaching a higher target.



Source https://de.toonpool.com/cartoons/Askese_291985

Asceticism and early Monasticism



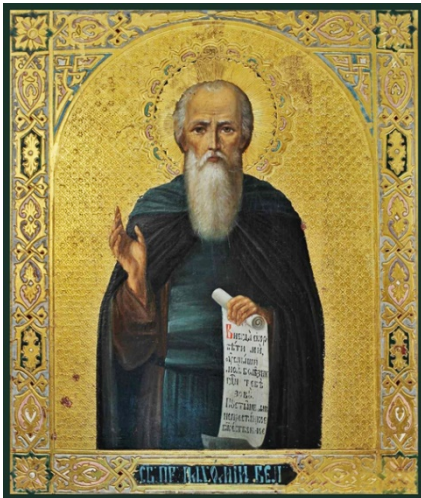
St. Antonius

“The untransformed body was best treated, for all practical purposes, as the enemy of the soul or, at best, as an untrustworthy and ever rebellious subordinate.” (Brown, 1998)



St. Simeon Stylites

Early Monasticism up to the Franciscans



Pachomius



Benedict of Nursia



Cistercians



Today's Franciscans

Asceticism lead to many technical and social innovations

- Asceticism is a key condition that was conducive to many technical and social innovations in medieval European monasteries which were pioneers in
 - water use
 - agricultural engineering
 - viniculture
 - glass manufacture
 - mining
 - architecture
- In addition, they conceived and tested new organizational forms, e.g. new forms of religious orders

St. Francis, the Franciscans and Lady Poverty



The Marriage of St. Francis and Lady Poverty (Fresco Giotto di Bondone)

St. Francis saves the falling church (Fresco by Giotto)



Pope
Innocent III

St. Francis preaches to the birds



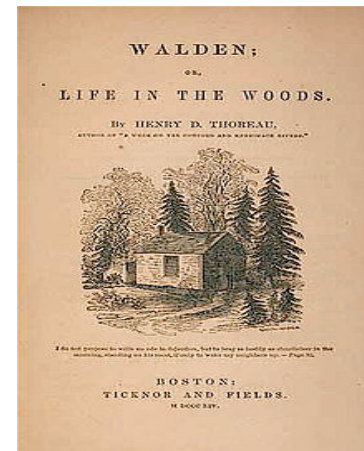
St. Francis preaches to the birds

The Simplification Movement as a Modern Form of Asceticism

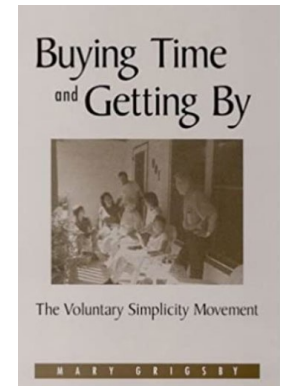
- In modern times, medieval ideas of frugality if not poverty were reemphasized, most prominently by Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) whose principle lead to the Simplification Movement.
- He was seen by some as a follower of St. Francis



Henry David Thoreau



The Simplification Movement as a Modern Form of Asceticism



Can the Simplification Movement contribute to solving the climate change problem?

“The Voluntary Simplicity Movement or something like it will almost certainly need to expand, organise, radicalise and politicise, if anything resembling a degrowth society is to emerge in law through democratic processes.” (Alexander, 2013)

The promise is that simple living would not only help to mitigate the problems of climate change, it would also increase our wellbeing and happiness.

Spirits (people who?) that have learned to control desires and thus to increase their independence from consumption desires fed by capitalism, allow one to work less and thus to enjoy more leisure which also contributes to happiness.

Simple living is also assumed to promote serenity through detachment.

Yet, how can we enjoy working less when, in most industrialized societies, the ability to work hard is praised as the key to success?

Imagines of a sufficiency economy

Clothing. The fashion industry would be considered a superfluous luxury and accordingly it would be **amongst the first industries to disappear**. We would salvage, swap, and reuse clothing diligently, as well as get very good at sewing and mending...

Money, Markets, and Exchange. Everyone should have enough, and this means taking responsibility for ensuring that **the basic needs of all are universally met**. This will require a significant degree of social control of the economy, as basic needs would not be adequately met if resource allocation were purely left to market forces. The most important issue would be that everyone had access to land and affordable housing, and communities might have to experiment with how best to ensure this occurred...

Technology. Microwaves, vacuum cleaners, electronic kitchen gadgets, mobile phones, etc., **may all become relics of history**. Vast quantities of industrially produced goods, tools, and materials will already be in existence, and for many decades, perhaps centuries, we would be living in what some have called the 'salvage economy'.

(Alexander 2019)

Is there hope?



Ian McEwan

“We are shaped by our history and biology to frame our plans within the short term”... “Now we are asked to address the wellbeing of unborn individuals we will never meet and who, contrary to the usual terms of human interaction, will not be returning the favour.” (McEwan 2005)



Ulrich Beck

“... the main source of climate pessimism lies in a generalized incapacity, and/or unwillingness, to rethink fundamental questions of social and political order in the age of global risks.” (Beck 2016)



Jonathan Franzen

“The goal has been clear for thirty years, and despite earnest efforts we’ve made essentially no progress toward reaching it..” (Franzen 2019)

Rejecting Franzen

„Shut up, Franzen!“

„Doom is a possibility ...

But I am a scientist, which means I believe in miracles. I live on one. We are improbable life on a perfect planet.”

(Kate Marvel (2019), Climatologist, Columbia University)

Asceticism has changed its meaning

Asceticism is always vulnerable to critique

“Broadly speaking, the ascetic ideal and its sublimely moral cult, this most ingenious, unscrupulous and dangerous systematization of all the methods of emotional excess under the protection of holy intentions, has inscribed itself, in a terrible and unforgettable way, into the whole history of man, and unfortunately not just into his history.” (Nietzsche 1994)

In modernity, permanently trying to improve one’s work competence and capacity has become many people’s idea of asceticism (Michaels, 2004)

Today, managers no longer vacation in the Caribbean but in a monastic cell while experiencing a fasting cure, or a meditation training. Thus, for many, asceticism degenerated to a fashion (Gronemeyer, 1998).

Webers Pessimistic Outlook

“No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: ‘Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.’” (Weber, 1930)

Asceticism can no longer serve to obtain a nearness to God in eternal life but only to state, in the end, to have lived „a fulfilled life“, i.e. a life that conveyed a unique identity.

Overall Conclusion

... probably we face the dilemma that

**„people are more afraid for their lives than for the survival of
mankind”**

Richard David Precht,
German Philosopher 2020

- Im Mittelalter wählten junge Menschen ein Leben in klösterlicher Armut, weil es Rettung vor ewiger Verdammnis oder Apokalypse versprach. Vielleicht sollten Diskussionen über den Klimawandel stärker in einem apokalyptischen Rahmen dargestellt werden, um die Menschen zu erschrecken und um ihre Bereitschaft zur Askese zu erhöhen. Zum Beispiel warnte Prinz Charles 2009 vor den Gefahren des Klimawandels:
 - “If we do nothing, the consequences for every person on this earth will be severe and unprecedented—with vast numbers of environmental refugees, social instability and decimated economies: far worse than anything which we are seeing today... We have 100 months left to act.” (Prince Charles, March 2009, quoted after Swyngedouw, 2013: 9)
- Westacott (2016: 225-26) untermauert seine Skepsis bezüglich der Wirksamkeit des VSM als Maßnahme zur Abmilderung der Folgen des Klimawandels mit den zu erwartenden Auswirkungen auf das Wirtschaftssystem:
 - “Whole spheres of the economy devoted to recreation and entertainment would virtually collapse as people cut back on expensive tickets for musical, theatrical, and sporting events. Colleges would see their enrollment plummet as young people decided to avoid taking out hefty student loans. It would probably be easier to say which businesses would survive than which would perish.” → Sollte das Wirtschaftssystem geändert werden? Wenn ja, wie?

- Trotz dieser Vorteile ist die Philosophie des einfachen Lebens und der Genügsamkeit schwer zu verkaufen. Wie können wir es genießen, weniger zu arbeiten, wenn in den meisten Industriegesellschaften die Fähigkeit, hart zu arbeiten, als Schlüssel zum Erfolg gepriesen wird?
- Und... ist die Diskussion um freiwillige Einfachheit eine „Luxusdiskussion“. Millionen von Menschen leiden unter Hunger und leben in Armut. Hier stellt sich die Frage nach freiwilliger Einfachheit und Verzicht nicht.
- Wie gut sind wir darin, die Realität zu konstruieren / umzudeuten? In einer detaillierten Studie in einer ländlichen norwegischen Gemeinde fand Norgaard (2011) heraus, dass beunruhigende Emotionen, die mit dem Nachdenken über den Klimawandel verbunden sind, wie die Angst oder der Verlust von Sicherheit, Hilflosigkeit, Schuldgefühle sowie die Bedrohung, als "schlechter Mensch" wahrgenommen zu werden, Menschen dazu veranlassen, beunruhigende Emotionen und die sie auslösenden Gedanken zu unterdrücken. Indem Menschen steuern, welche Informationen sie selektiv wahrnehmen, konstruieren sie aktiv ihre Umwelt. Sie denken nicht zu weit voraus und konzentrieren sich stattdessen auf das, was man tun kann, und sie schaffen perspektivische Selektivität wie "Amerika" ist ein Spannungspunkt und "Norwegen ist ein kleines Land".
- Sind die aktuellen (politischen) Machtstrukturen fähig, einen Wandel zu ermöglichen?

Thank you for your attention