

PREFACE

In 1986 the Swiss Association of Geographers decided to establish a working group to be concerned with 'Theory and Integrative Approaches'. The idea had emerged from the feeling that the existence of an ecological crisis was sufficient reason to re-examine possibilities of creating a bridge between natural science-oriented physical geography and social science-oriented human geography. That this should be necessary is rather ironical, as geography originally set out from the background of a philosophy which stressed the importance of a holistic view of regions and landscapes. Yet the modernization of the discipline has led, in parallel to the general development of science, to an increasing internal segmentation and divergence. At the same time, however, this has also meant the establishment of external links to neighbouring disciplines. Such links have a fairly extensive history in physical geography (for example, contacts between geomorphology and geology, hydrogeography and hydrology) but are less common in human geography. Only more recently have we witnessed the interest of certain branches of human geography in their outwardly corresponding sciences, for example, of economic geography in economics and of social geography in sociology. Even so, the outward connections remain rather one-sided; geography tends to import theories and methods from the neighbouring disciplines, whereas the latter are largely unconcerned with developments in geography.

In this situation it soon became apparent to the Working Group that the problem is not confined to the discipline of geography, but is of a more general nature. In fact, it can be restated in terms of a human ecology that attempts to look at human lifespaces and at the interplay occurring in those spaces between human beings and the biophysical environment. This has a bearing on many different disciplines. As it happened, a Human Ecology Group had been set up in 1985 within the Department of Geography at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH) in Zürich under the direction of Dieter Steiner, co-editor of this volume. As he also held the chair of the Working Group on Theory and Integrative Approaches it was natural that the work of this group developed into a kind of human ecology project. This undertaking had an interdisciplinary flavour that reached beyond the

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traditional confines of geography, while at the same time recalling some basic tenets of the old integrative notions of that discipline. Precisely because of the latter concern it also became apparent that integration cannot be brought about by science alone; any attempt to treat the human–environment theme in a holistic way invariably becomes entangled in questions of a philosophical nature and issues directly related to life–world realities; hence our interest in the possible change of dominant worldview or cosmology.

To stimulate a discussion within wider circles, the Working Group organized a workshop in December 1987. Statements presented to the workshop were subsequently published under the title *Jenseits der mechanistischen Kosmologie – Neue Horizonte für die Geographie?* ('Beyond the Mechanistic Cosmology – New Horizons for Geography?', edited by D. Steiner, C. Jaeger and P. Walther, Zürich: Department of Geography, ETH). From here we proceeded to the preparation of an international conference that we called 'Person – Society – Environment'. It was held on 24–26 May 1989, at Appenberg, Canton of Bern, Switzerland. Invited speeches were given by five people from five different disciplines: Stephen Boyden (biology), Claudia Carello (psychology), Ingela Josefson (linguistics), Gonzague Pillet (economics), and Peter Gould (geography), all of which are reproduced in this volume. The remainder of the contributions contained in this book are based on papers that were presented in abridged form at the conference and reworked later. Among the authors of this latter collection are a philosopher and theologian (Markus Huppenbauer), a psychologist and system theorist (Hans-Joachim Mosler), an architect and social scientist (Roderick Lawrence), and a psychologist (Alfred Lang). The others (Peter Weichhart, Dagmar Reichert, Gerhard Bahrenberg, Marek Dutkowski, Benno Werlen, Gregor Dürrenberger, Huib Ernste, Ola Söderström, Markus Nauser, and Dieter Steiner) are all geographers. The discipline of sociology was represented, if not in person then in spirit, by the theory of structuration of Anthony Giddens which, for reasons discussed in several papers of this volume, became a central focus of attention from which an attempt was made to start our networking enterprise. Several of the authors made an effort to read some of the collected papers, and gave cross-references to or made critical statements about them in their own contribution, thus adding to our general aim of tying loose ends together.

Although this volume, as evidenced by the list just given, leans heavily in the direction of geography, it is not intended to be a treatise of this discipline. Rather it is, as suggested by the title, meant to be a book about human ecology. It is an attempt at stimulating the development of a human ecology in the form of 'anti-fragmentary views of the world'. Such views are urgently needed if we ever hope to overcome the ecological crisis while preserving humankind and Planet Earth somewhat intact. Yet it is not likely that any kind of 'grand theory' can be developed. Instead the task amounts to trying to establish a network between existing disciplinary theories and methods, a

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procedure that might be called 'constructive eclecticism'. It goes without saying that this has its dangers. Indeed, the project seems to develop into a tightrope walk at times. Nevertheless, it is one that should be undertaken. And the danger may be lessened by the fact, as also suggested by the book's title, that there cannot be one single view. The bits and pieces presumably can be fitted to each other in several ways. The goal of a general human ecology, then, is not to find *the* one right answer to our problems, but to set a stage on which some kind of creative interdisciplinary and trans-scientific communication can unfold, whereby the stage itself can be questioned and reworked again.

The editors are grateful to the members of the Working Group on Theory and Integrative Approaches of the Swiss Association of Geographers as well as to the members of the Human Ecology Group at the Department of Geography of the ETH in Zürich for their support in organizing the Appenberg conference and providing materials and ideas on which we could draw, in alphabetical order: Lisbeth Bieri, Gregor Dürrenberger, Huib Ernste, Franco Furger, Carlo Jaeger, Markus Huppenbauer, Hans Kastenholz, Rito Kindschi, Verena Meier, Ruedi Nägeli-Oertle, Dagmar Reichert, Armin Reller, Erna Rüedi, Alec Schaerer, Ola Söderström, Pierre Walther, Jakob Weiss, Benno Werlen, Wolfgang Zierhofer. Some of them, of course, appear as authors in this volume. Among the people listed, however, Carlo Jaeger deserves special mention for providing his knowledge and drive which substantially furthered the development of the human ecology idea in general and the conception of the present volume in particular.

Thanks are also due to Susan Braun for reformulating clumsy or faulty passages in the papers written by authors whose mother tongue was not English, and to Brigitte Göldi for her assistance in the text formatting process. Finally, we should like to express our gratitude to Tristan Palmer who, as our Routledge contact, patiently bore with us in the tedious process of putting this volume into shape.

Dieter Steiner and Markus Nauser
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