

Dr. Vera Szöllösi-Brenig
Welcome Address
Conference „Governing the Anthropocene: Cybersystemic Possibilities?“
29.-31.9.2015, Schloss Herrenhausen

Dear Professor Izon,

dear Professor Hagedorn,

ladies and Gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to the conference “Governing the Anthropocene: Cybersystemic Possibilities?”. I am delighted to see so many guests from different countries here at Herrenhausen Palace. I am especially honored to welcome our very distinguished speakers. And, of course, the early career researchers invited to take part.

Since this audience is international and may not be entirely familiar with the German foundation VolkswagenStiftung, please allow me first to introduce the Foundation and its profile. The Foundation is not directly affiliated with the car company V-W. It owes its existence as well as its name to a contractual agreement between the Federal Government and the State of Lower Saxony which put an end to the controversy concerning the ownership of the Volkswagen Company after the Second World War.

Following lengthy discussions, in 1961 it was decided to convert the car company into private ownership by issuing so-called “Peoples shares”. And the proceeds resulting from the sales of these shares have been the basis of the capital of the Foundation. Our purpose – as stipulated in our statutes - is to support the humanities and social sciences as well as science and technology in higher education and research.

Now this Conference is taking place in Herrenhausen Palace, a conference center which was inaugurated in January 2013. The Palace was rebuilt in its former neo-

classical shell originally built by Georg Ludwig Friedrich Laves, an architect who shaped the architecture of the city of Hanover at the beginning of the 19th century. The Palace was destroyed in October 1943 and: The VolkswagenStiftung initiated and financed its rebuilding.

It has been a dual investment for the foundation: On the one hand, it is considered a sustainable financial investment which provides additional funds for research. On the other hand, it is an investment in scholarly exchange and intellectual debate.

Perhaps there could be no better patron for this conference center as well as for this conference other than Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the great philosopher of the early enlightenment who lived and worked here in Herrenhausen.

Leibniz strongly believed in God's rational creation of the world: "*Cum Deus calculat, fit mundus*" – "By way of God's calculations the world is created". And he also believed in his famous conclusion: we "live in the best of all possible worlds", "in der besten aller möglichen Welten". This statement is often not been taken very seriously because of Voltaire and his book "Candide", a satire on Leibniz' conclusion. But in fact, this conclusion implies that we have to behave as responsible human beings in this world and realize its innate potential for further development. In Leibniz' concept, there is a dynamic component.

This brings me to the conference "Governing the Anthropocene".

If the Holocene has actually come to an end and if yes, when the Anthropocene started, is being determined by an international working group. The objective of *this* conference is to identify if there are any possibilities to govern this new era, an era, characterized by the negative and disastrous consequences of men's impact on planet Earth.

More specifically: What contributions would a more coherent field of cybernetics and systems scholarship make to governing the Anthropocene --- having in mind that the Anthropocene is “die beste aller möglichen Welten”?

Hoch much could be governed and what will remain forever outside of Man’s efforts to govern?

Or isn’t it hubris – to quote critical voices like the German philosopher Jürgen Manemann -::: isn’t it hubris to define the Anthropocene as an era – doesn’t it mean that humans are like God?

Or is this effort to govern the Anthropocene by nature invalid as the French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour explained in his lecture “Facing Gaia”: Bruno Latour, in combining the thesis of Paul Crutzen of the Anthropocene with his own actor-network-theory, sees the dawn of politics coming, a new dawn of potentially bellicose geopolitics.

Therefore we may ask: are there really possibilities to govern the Anthropocene?

In this respect: I wish you a fruitful and very interesting conference! Thank you very much for your attention.