Abstract:
Jean Gebser’s work is devoted to showing that the crisis of Western culture, manifest in the turmoil of the twentieth century, was part of a restructuration. This restructuration, manifest in diverse disciplines within the natural and human sciences and the humanities and in new art and literary forms, involves a mutation of consciousness leading us into the ‘aperspectival age’. Gebser represented this as one of a number of major mutations of consciousness that have taken place through the history of humanity, in the transformation from the archaic to the magical, from the magical to the mythical, from the mythical to the mental, and then from the unperspectival to the perspectival. The birth of the aperspectival consciousness, Gebser suggested, began with the irruption of time into our consciousness, not as an analytical system of measurable relationships, but recognized as a quality and an intensity. In accordance with this new appreciation of time, Gebser did not portray the coming mutation as inevitable. It is a challenge to achieve it. There is nothing automatic about such mutations. As he put it, ‘if we do not overcome the crisis it will overcome us’. This suggests a long struggle to effect this mutation, which in turn suggests that such mutations are associated with conflicts between structures of consciousness over extended durations. Here I will argue that the beginnings of the new consciousness celebrated and promoted by Gebser extends further into the past than Gebser realized, to the Renaissance. The first manifestations of this new consciousness were suppressed and almost aborted with the persecution of its greatest proponents (such as Giordano Bruno) and, in the seventeenth century, with the development of the mechanistic world-view and possessive individualism designed specifically to combat it. However, the abortion was not completely successful, and the new consciousness revived as what has now come to be known as the Radical Enlightenment, perhaps the ‘true’ enlightenment as opposed to the ‘fake’ enlightenment of proponents of the ideas of Newton and Locke. Gebser’s work and the developments in consciousness he identified can thus be appreciated as part of this Radical Enlightenment, and conceiving it in relation to this longer history, I will suggest, highlights the need for and could improve the chances of effecting the mutation of consciousness Gebser called for.

Introduction

The relationship between Jean Gebser and the Radical Enlightenment can be considered in two ways. Firstly, it can be illuminating to see Gebser as part of the tradition of the Radical Enlightenment, showing both how he has been influenced by it and how his work contrasts with other Radical Enlightenment thinkers. But another way of considering Gebser in relation to the Radical Enlightenment is to consider whether, and in what ways, his work could contribute to and advance this Enlightenment. In my view as a proponent of the Radical Enlightenment, the latter is more important. But this requires that we first situate Gebser’s work as a development of the Radical Enlightenment, and at a
conference on Gebser, it is these that are likely to be of more interest. Nevertheless, since it is the second set of questions that interests me most, I will address the first set of questions with this in mind, and then briefly go on to consider the second issue.

One way of considering Gebser’s work as a development of the Radical Enlightenment would be to look at his own evaluation of the thinkers of the past, showing thereby how he himself defined the difference between his own thinking and other members of the Radical Enlightenment. However, in this talk I will take a more radical position and suggest that Gebser’s characterization of the past needs to be modified. Essentially, I will argue that history is messier than Gebser portrayed it. It is not that I disagree with his characterization of the sequences of ages characterized by stages in the development of consciousness through history. Rather, I want to argue that the mutations to the new structures of consciousness Gebser has identified are a much more drawn out process than is suggested by his work. Gebser did acknowledge that there were anticipations or seedlings of later mutations that could not flourish until the conditions were appropriate; however this way of characterizing these anticipations does not do justice to the drive to develop these new structures, the opposition they have faced, and the role of this drive in bringing about major mutations. When seen as the beginnings rather than mere anticipations of mutations it can be seen that the first breakthroughs and the establishment of new structures which bring into question the old structures occur far earlier than Gebser acknowledged. The development of new structures takes place over an extended duration, to begin with, within a culture dominated by earlier structures of consciousness, and the crisis point where the new structure triumphs after a period of turmoil, is presaged by a protracted struggle, often with major reverses, preceding this crisis. In arguing this, I will suggest that what Gebser characterized as ‘Oceanic Thinking’ (Gebser, p.252ff.) and treated as closely related to mythical thinking, a kind of thinking that emerged in Ancient Greece and was revived in the Renaissance with the work of Giordano Bruno and in Germany in the work of Schelling, is in fact the original form and earlier development of the new structure of consciousness Gebser claims is now in the process of being born.

Seeing the mutation of consciousness at present struggling to emerge as a development of this earlier thinking also enables us to see more aspects of this new structure of consciousness and what it will mean if it does successfully inaugurate a new age. What I want to show is that this is associated with the quest for freedom or liberty, not as it has come to be understood in recent centuries as freedom from any constraint, but rather freedom as self-determination of individuals as members of communities, and of communities of communities, including the ecological communities extending to the global eco-system, or what James Lovelock calls ‘Gaia’. Understood this way, the suggestion of Gebser that ‘if we do not overcome the crisis it will overcome us’ (Gebser, xxvii) gains added poignancy; if we do not bring about this restoration of the age on the basis of this new structure of consciousness we will severely damage the global ecosystem, and possibly, destroy humanity.

The Origins of the Radical Enlightenment

However, before we can go any further in this line of thinking we first need to consider What is the Radical Enlightenment? The Enlightenment is usually taken to have
begun as a French movement of thought of the Eighteenth Century. From there the Enlightenment was taken up in Scotland and Germany and spread to the rest of Europe. Newton and Locke are seen to have inspired the French Enlightenment, and Voltaire, who promoted Newton and Locke within France, is usually taken to be the pre-eminent and prototypical figure of the early Enlightenment. This assumption of basic unity was challenged when Margaret Jacob, building on work in the history of the origins of modern science, first published The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans in 1981. (Jacob 1981/2003) Jacob argued that there was an original, more radical Enlightenment that emerged from the English Revolution and the Dutch Republic, with deeper roots in the Civic Humanism of Northern Italy and Nature Enthusiasm, particularly of Giordano Bruno. It was a movement that divinized the world and promoted democratic republicanism. Jacob’s work spawned new research, and recently the thesis that there were two Enlightenments has been defended strongly by Jonathon Israel (Israel 2002; Israel 2006). The main achievement of Israel was not to have justified his central claim that Spinoza was the source of the Radical Enlightenment, but to have shown in detail how the ‘moderate’ Enlightenment developed as a reaction to this Radical Enlightenment, with one of its main goals being to neutralize the influence of its radical cultural, social and political agenda. Developed by Cartesians, Newtonians and Leibnizians, the Moderate Enlightenment was, as Israel noted, supported “by numerous governments and influential factions in the main Churches”. (Israel 2002, 11) And it was the ideas of Locke and Newton “which seemed uniquely suited to the Moderate Enlightenment purpose” (Israel 2002, 11) and which had the greatest influence. The ‘Moderate Enlightenment’ could more appropriately be characterized as the ‘Fake Enlightenment’.

So What was Civic Humanism? What was Nature Enthusiasm? How were these ideas related? And what was involved in the fusion of these ideas into the Radical Enlightenment?

Very briefly, Civic Humanism originated in the self-governing cities of Northern Italy. While this movement of thought was at its most creative in the Fifteenth Century, it was a development of the culture of the Northern Italian city states which had begun to set up democratic republics in the Eleventh Century. Their culture developed in their efforts to defend their republics first from the German emperor and then later from Rome, and finally from the tendency for despots to seize power (Skinner 1978; Skinner 1998). It was in the struggle to sustain their liberty that these Italians revived ideas from the Roman Republic and to a lesser extent, Ancient Greece, and developed these in new directions. The Renaissance then was not merely a flourishing of culture and a rediscovery and revival of ideas of the Ancient World; it was a revival of the struggle for liberty of the Ancient World, lost when the Greek city states were subjugated by Macedonia and again when Julius Caesar overthrew the Roman Republic. But it was not only a revival; it was a new stage in this struggle enriched by the creative response to the new circumstances that the Northern Italians had had to confront. The centre of this movement of thought was Florence, one of the last cities to preserve its democratic form of republicanism from both conquest and despotism (Baron 1966). Here, liberty was characterized as being a member of and an active participant in a free self-governing community, in opposition to slavery - the condition of being subject to arbitrary will of
another. A community organized to be self-governing was characterized as a *stati liberi*, or free states. The power of the state was equated with the power of the people.

Nature Enthusiasm developed later, after the defeat of democratic republicanism in its last stronghold, Florence, and is best understood in part as a response to this failure, and as a consequence, as a clarification, radicalization and strengthening of the struggle for democratic republicanism and liberty by reformulating its defence on the foundation of a new cosmology (Jacob 1981/2003, 31f.). In general, the Nature Enthusiasts were hostile to hierarchical structures of power and promoted egalitarianism. Bruno, the most original thinker among the Nature Enthusiasts, came from the South of Italy which was ruled by the Spanish Hapsburgs, and his execution in 1600 was partly associated with the efforts by the Spanish to crush an insurrection in this region by people influenced by such ideas (Gosselin and Lerner 1995, 22). His political work involved serving Henri III of France in his effort to woo England into a union in opposition to Spain on the basis of new, more tolerant panentheistic Catholicism which would overcome the opposition between Protestantism and Catholicism, the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation (Gosselin and Lerner 1995, 24ff.), and provide support for autonomous republics. As Ramon Mendoza characterized his aims:

Bruno … wanted …. an entirely new order for the world, a transvaluation of values similar to the one Nietzsche would propose three centuries later. As theoretical foundation and justification for that total revolution, Bruno had proposed a new philosophy based on a totally new vision of the world and the universe, a philosophy which could, in turn, serve as a basis for an utterly new undogmatic religion acceptable to all rational men… (Mendoza 1995, 61)

This was based on a philosophy which synthesized ideas from the radical Neo-Platonism of Nicholas of Cusa (who himself had been concerned to reconcile Eastern and Western Christianity), Stoicism and ideas from Anaximander, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras and Lucretius. In developing his new conception of the world Bruno collapsed the Neo-Platonic hierarchy which extended from the One down through the forms and the world soul through the created world to matter. In *Cause, Principle and Unity* Bruno identified the omni-temporal One of Plato and Plotinus with matter, and then saw matter not as merely the potential to take on forms, but as active and creative, as the womb which is pregnant with forms. The forms are provided by the world soul, the unity which permeates all matter (Bruno 1584/1998, 61; Gatti, 1999). Matter unfolds (*esplica*) what is enfolded (*implicato*) within it, coinciding with nature as principle of generation. This clearly corresponds to Geber’s ‘ever present origin’. Bruno also defended atomism, but took atoms, or “*monads*”, as the minimum spiritual units, like everything else, permeated by soul. Through the agency of spiritual atoms, God becomes the source of all change and all existence in the universe. However, Bruno was not a determinist, arguing that new forms, structures and systems are continuously emerging from matter as it incessantly explores and tests these, bringing the viable ones to fruition. All bodies were seen to be alive, to have their own internal source of motion and capacity to steer themselves. On this basis Bruno offered support for and a radical reinterpretation of Copernicus’ astronomy, going beyond the Copernican solar-centric conception of the universe to argue that each star is a sun with its planets, populated by other people. Developing the ideas of Nicholas of Cusa he argued that the universe is infinite; it is a sphere whose circumference is no-where and whose centre is everywhere (Bruno...
As a corollary to this, Bruno took each individual to be a centre of the universe, having its own significance. As Bruno argued, “Whatever thing we take in the universe, it has in itself that which is entire everywhere, and hence comprehends, in its own way, the entire everywhere, and hence comprehends, in its own way, the entire world soul … and the world soul is entire in every part of the universe.” (Bruno 1584/1998, 91)

The Radical Enlightenment as the Synthesis of Civic Humanism and Nature Enthusiasm

As the ideas of the Civic Humanists and Nature Enthusiasts became more influential they provoked more efforts to defend the old order and the old ideas. But at the same time they provoked something new; a reaction against the democratic tendencies of this movement of thought by philosophers who were nevertheless inspired by it to develop a new conception of the world and defend their political and ethical beliefs on this basis. The first major figures in this intellectual movement were Gassendi, Mersenne, Descartes and Hobbes, and their work was continued by Robert Boyle, Newton and Locke. While influenced by Renaissance thought, these thinkers took up such thought one-sidedly to obliterate consciousness of what the Renaissance, particularly the Florentine Renaissance and the work of Bruno, stood for. What emerged from this was the mechanistic world-view promoting what C.B. MacPherson characterized as ‘possessive individualism’ in opposition to democratic republicanism (McPherson, 1962), extolling knowledge as a way to control nature and people, and promoting free markets as the principle for organizing society. The state was reconceived to be a set of coercive institutions designed to protect property, control the people in a territory and to extend this territory. This was the triumph of what Gebser characterized as the rational-technical structure of consciousness.

However, the ideas of the Civic Humanists and Nature Enthusiasts were not entirely buried. They were preserved in disguised form in the philosophy of Spinoza, and in the early Eighteenth Century they were revived and promoted by proponents of democratic republicanism (Israel 2001; Israel, 2006). These republicans began to synthesize Civic Humanism and Nature Enthusiasm, developing a more radical and more inclusive notion of liberty and democracy than that of the Civic Humanists. They were concerned to alleviate the causes of poverty within countries and support liberty for all countries. According to Jacob, the major figure in effecting the synthesis of Civic Humanism with Nature Enthusiasm was John Toland. Toland coined the term “pantheism” to characterize the identification of God and matter and he and his followers disseminated democratic republican ideas clandestinely through the Masonic Lodges. This is what Jacob called the Radical Enlightenment.

Different aspects of the Radical Enlightenment were developed by different thinkers independently of each other. And yet when seen as the development of a fusion of ideas from Civic Humanism and Nature Enthusiasm, it is possible to see a developing tradition of thought. Opposition to the old order or to despotism came to be understood by those aligned with the Radical Enlightenment not as freedom to satisfy one’s appetites, but as self-determination within an autonomous political community. This was the case in France, and then in Germany. It was in Germany that the Radical Enlightenment was developed most fully and philosophers grappled most profoundly
with the nature of freedom, but to a considerable extent, the radicalism of the ideas of the Germans were disguised and developed by people who backed away from acknowledging the full political implications of their ideas. The exception to this was Herder.

Herder embraced and developed the tradition of Civic Humanism while developing a general attack on the mechanistic view of nature, atomic individualism and the utilitarianism of the Moderate Enlightenment. (Herder 1774/2004; Herder 1787/1940/2003; Barnard 1965; Barnard 1988; Beiser 1992; Beiser 1996; Beiser 2003; Zammito 2002) Having encountered Toland’s writings in the 1770s, and through them, the work of Bruno, (Nisbet 1970, 13) Herder was the legitimate heir and the most important proponent of the Radical Enlightenment in the late Eighteenth Century. In Germany, as elsewhere, those aligned with the Radical Enlightenment were branded as Spinozists. But while Spinoza had exposed the incoherencies in Descartes’ philosophy and identified God and the world, he still supported a mechanistic view of nature and an egoistic view of human motivation. Herder, in *God, Some Conversations*, defended Spinoza, but used Leibniz to criticize the mechanistic aspects of his thought. In doing so, he recovered and further developed Bruno’s cosmology, with a stronger emphasis on nature’s creativity (Herder 1787/1940/2003). Nature was seen to consist of organically functioning forces, continually active, progressing and perfecting themselves according to inner eternal laws (Herder 1787/1940/2003, 190). He argued that humans are essentially social beings participating in this creativity, and promulgated an ethics of self-expression or self-realization, calling on nations and individuals to express the potentialities unique to them. The concept of “culture” was central to his thinking, and Herder was the first philosopher to refer to “cultures” in the plural. Herder argued for respect for the diversity of cultures, but at the same time he argued that there was a general evolution of cultures through history associated with the development of humanity. He saw this being associated with the advance towards a political order of mutually supporting democratic republics. Herder and the framework of ideas he developed to counter the Moderate Enlightenment had an enormous influence on the subsequent history of Europe - and the world, although this was usually mediated by the people he influenced: Goethe and Schiller, Fichte, the early Romantics, Schleiermacher, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Hegel and Schelling.

Schelling was particularly important in this regard, having advanced and promoted a dynamic, evolutionary conception of nature as an alternative to the mechanistic world-view and for characterizing the evolution of humanity through various stages. In his early years he, along with the early Romantics, embraced and developed Herder’s radical political philosophy and proposed something like the United Nations to protect the independence of nations from each other. Grappling with the opposition between Idealism and Realism, Spiritualism and Materialism, Schelling struggled to develop a system of thought that could transcend these oppositions, arguing for a dynamic, evolutionary conception of nature of dynamic processes more primordial than the division between subjects and objects, and a history of the development of human spirit from mythopoetic though to modern philosophy (Schelling, 1994, 120). He argued for the possibility of an ‘intellectual intuition’ through which the Absolute, the unconditioned source of existence (equivalent again to Geber’s ‘ever present origin), could be grasped. Art was seen by Schelling as particularly important in this regard,
being superior to science because the artist is productive activity giving unity or form to appearances that appears to be outside it. It therefore provides the easy path to grasping the Absolute, whereas only a few philosophers with exceptional imaginations could grasp the Absolute through philosophical intuition. Science’s mode of asking questions objectifies the world and so can only deal with products, not productivity or the subjective side of Being. Schelling rejected the idea that the Absolute could be identified with thought, arguing (in opposition to Hegel) that there is an unprethinkable Being that precedes all thought. It was in developing these ideas that Schelling came to appreciate the crucial significance of time. As Edward Beach commented on the form of reasoning developed by Schelling: “This approach reflects [Schelling’s] underlying conviction that temporality is both epistemologically and ontologically prior to essence, prior to eternity, and even prior to dialectical logic itself” (Beach, p.41). It is difficult not to see in Schelling the germs of not only the post-mechanistic view of nature which came to triumph first in physics and then in the other sciences through the Twentieth Century, not only ideas about art which again came to fulfillment in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Centuries, but the mutation characterized by the irruption of time into consciousness celebrated by Gebser.

Gebser’s Contribution to the Radical Enlightenment

If what Gebser is identifying as a mutation of consciousness into an integral structure is the triumph of the Radical Enlightenment, what light does this throw on Gebser’s own work? And what then does Gebser contribute to the Radical Enlightenment? Clearly Gebser has made major advances in identifying the structures of consciousness, the mutations that have taken place, and the defining features of these structures, particularly the integral structure that he is heralding. By tracing this new structure through such a diversity of developments in art, science, law, sociology etc. and showing the underlying unity to these diverse developments, Gebser has greatly clarified what is happening. He has also clarified the nature of decay of the rational-technical ‘mental’ structure of consciousness and its social effects. It is in relation to Gebser’s comments on this social malaise showing why it can only be resolved by a mutation of consciousness to an integral structure that the relationship between Gebser and the Radical Enlightenment is most clearly manifest, as is the significance of each to the other.

Gebser wrote in a number of places how the modern world is caught in a destructive and impoverished opposition between a defective form of individualism and a defective form of collectivism in which each can only perceive their own sector (p.23). He characterized the situation as: ‘on the one hand an egocentric individualism exaggerated to extremes and desirous of possessing everything, whole on the other it manifests and equally extreme collectivism that promises the total fulfillment of man’s being.’ And he noted that ‘In the latter instance we find the utter abnegation of the individual valued merely as an object in the human aggregate; in the former a hyper-valuation of the individual who, despite his limitations, is permitted everything. … [It] is increasingly evident that the individual is being driven into isolation while the collective degenerates into mere aggregation.’ (p.3). Later, he quotes Romano Guardini’s analysis of this situation:
The feeling for the intrinsic being and proper sphere of man, the previous basis for all social conduct, is rapidly disappearing. With increasing frequency, humans are treated like objects as a matter of course – from the innumerable modes of statistical ‘inventory’ by the authorities, to the inconceivable violations of the individual, the group, and indeed of entire peoples. … Either the individual is absorbed into the whole [the collective], becoming a mere vehicle of functions – a terrible peril threatening in all events – or man merges into the vast framework of life and work and relinquishes the no longer possible freedom of individual movement and formation: he withdraws into his core to save his being. (Gebser, 431).

This situation, Gebser argues, ‘can be resolved only by the supersession of both: by the achievement of an apersonal, supra-individual and supra-collective “Itself” constituting the “core” as well as the “essential” in man.’ (Gebser, 432). This is the achievement of an aperspectival world characteristic of the integral structure.

Seen in relation to the Radical Enlightenment, Gebser is diagnosing the consequence of the triumph of the possessive individualism and final exhaustion of the ‘moderate’ or ‘fake’ Enlightenment along with the collectivist negation of this. What is illuminated by Gebser is that a characteristic of both possessive individualism and collectivism is perspective associated with consciousness of three dimensional space. It is this that always leads both individualism and collectivism to negate themselves as each inevitably leads to the triumph of an instrumental reason. So what does the Radical Enlightenment and Gebser have in common? Both moved beyond the assumption of one unifying perspective on the world. Bruno construed the world as a sphere whose circumference is nowhere and whose centre is everywhere – in other words, as a world consisting of infinite centres, each of which is a perspective and each of which is equally significant. Essentially, this anticipates Einsteinian relativity theory which Gebser took as a manifestation of integral consciousness.

The significance of this becomes clearer in relation to the social and political order promoted by the Radical Enlightenment. Once this is understood, it becomes possible to deal with different possible interpretations of relativity theory and so show which interpretation should be accepted to achieve integral consciousness. And it is then possible to show the importance of integral consciousness not only to the democratic republicanism of the Radical Enlightenment, but also to understanding and dealing with the global ecological crisis.

The democratic republicanism of the Radical Enlightenment has been opposed to both possessive individualism and collectivism, promoting liberty as an achievement of communities as the condition for individual freedom, with such communities supporting each other’s quest for and maintenance of liberty. Such communities are based on mutual appreciation of the perspectives of each individual and of each community. That is, the perspectivism that was taken up and developed by the ‘Fake Enlightenment’ had already been transcended by Bruno and those he inspired. As the Radical Enlightenment evolved through the work of Herder, Schelling and others, acknowledging diverse perspectives came to be recognized as more and more important, coming to be seen as the condition for the development of genuine individuality. In the early Twentieth Century it was George Herbert Mead who developed this insight furthest, and worked out its
implications not only for ethics and politics, but also for cosmology. He saw the
development of individuals being associated with their transcending their particular
perspectives on the world, evolving to the perspective of the ‘generalized other’. He
embraced the development of relativity theory as this had been interpreted by Alfred
North Whitehead as having demonstrated the objectivity reality of perspectives. As he
put it, ‘In Professor Whitehead’s philosophy of nature is this conception of nature as an
organization of perspectives, which are there in nature. The conception of the
perspectives there in nature is in a sense an unexpected donation by the most abstruse
physical science to philosophy.’ (Mead, 1959, p.163).

This way of understanding relativity theory accords with Gebser’s analysis of
Picasso’s paintings which, Gebser pointed out, provide a view of the body from all
perspectives while at the same time achieving transparency. What I am suggesting is that
this interpretation can clarify in what way relativity theory can support an integral
consciousness, at the same time clarifying what is an integral consciousness. Gebser
noted that relativity theory and the notion of the space-time continuum can be interpreted
in different ways, not all of which are associated with achieving integral consciousness,
which he then equated with ‘the “four-dimensional” transparent “sphere” in motion’
(Gebser, 352). While Gebser characterized this integral consciousness as aperspectival,
interpreting relativity theory through Mead and Whitehead emphasizes that such an
aperspectival consciousness does not obliterate perspectival thinking, as the rational-
technical mental structure tended to obliterate preceding structures of consciousness, but
rather, achieves integral consciousness by making perspectives transparent to each other.

It should now be evident why the development of integral consciousness is of
such importance to the political project of the Radical Enlightenment. It is this structure
of consciousness that provides people with a ‘feel for the whole’ which is required to
organize a community democratically, with its members freed from both the drive to
subordinate others to their own projects or to succumb to the efforts by others to control
them, appreciating the different and diverse perspectives of all its members of their
communities and of other communities; but also having the tranquility to live without the
drive to dominate and without fear of freedom. It is the structure of consciousness
required to enable people to envisage and commit themselves to the common good of
communities, from the local to the global level.

Furthermore, it should be evident why the development of this integral
consciousness is so important to overcoming the global ecological crisis. This crisis is
above all the legacy of the rational-technical mentality with its drive to control, and
inability to appreciate the destructive effects of this drive. It is associated with the
globalization of the free market, the fragmentation and atomization of communities, and
the enslavement of the whole of humanity to the destructive logic of the market. This is
associated by an inability of those imposing markets on people to appreciate diverse
perspectives and their significance. Along with recognizing the objectivity of
perspectives in the cosmos and appreciating the perspectives of other people, this integral
consciousness should be seen as making transparent the perspectives of not only diverse
people and diverse communities, but other forms of life constituting the global eco-
system, and of the global eco-system as a whole, that is, of ‘Gaia’ as James Lovelock
characterized it. It should facilitate the organization of the world into nested communities
augmenting each other’s liberty to develop their unique potentials to augment life. Gebser
examined developments in biology leaving behind mechanistic thinking, including the
work of Jacob von Uexkull. He was critical of the vitalism of such thinkers. In recent
years post-mechanistic biology has advanced greatly through the development of
biosemiotics, leading to the development of the concept of the ‘semiosphere’, which
enables us to appreciate non-human perspectives and their importance for ecosystems,
and thereby appreciate what is for the common good of Gaia (Hoffmeyer, 1996; Barbieri,
2007; Gare, 2007) and to live accordingly. This should be understood as a development
of an aperspectival integral consciousness, which should provide the orientation and
inspiration to live such a life.

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