

Alfred Locker

An Obituary

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Univ. Prof. Dr. Dr. Alfred Locker, Emeritus,
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From his birth on 19 March 1922 to his death on 12 February 2005 Alfred Locker spent physically almost all his life in Vienna during the winters and at his hunting lodge in Schwarzaeu im Gebirg during the summers. Except for a research fellowship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill he only sporadically attended scientific events in Mexico, Canada, US, England and Germany. Yet his career ranged over many fields and in his mind he experienced the inside of a cell, the mentality of animals, major cultures of the world, its history and prehistory, the universe and beyond.

I have met him on the Isle of Wight in 1979 during the first conference on self-reference, and instantly we became friends. From then on we have met many times and discussed his manuscripts and ideas by mail or phone until shortly before his death. He was an intensely lively, complex, broadly learned, deeply intellectual, but primarily a lovable and stubborn man. With utter dedication, he tried to combine physicality and intellect, wide scholarship and varied worldly experience, a deep understanding of mathematics and science with a profoundly Austrian religiosity.

He had intended to become a physician. Yet his study of medicine was interrupted by WWII and he spent it as a medical orderly at a military hospital a couple of blocks from the house where previously Freud had his office. After the war he was first involved with the study of cells. From biomedicine his interests shifted later to biophysics, but already included an interest in *Naturphilosophie*, which at that time in Austria was intimately connected with biology.

His doctorate from the University of Vienna in 1949 was in biophysics with a dissertation in zoology. His research appointments include Research Laboratory of the First Medical Clinic and Antibiotics Research Unit at the University of Vienna (1949-60) and Unit of Physiology and Biophysics and Unit of Medical and Biological Radioprotectivity at the Institute of Biology, Austrian Reactor Center (1960-69). In 1965 he became associated with the Institute of Theoretical Physics at the Technical University of Vienna where until his retirement he was a Professor and Head of the Department of Theoretical Biophysics.

Already in the early sixties he had met Ludwig von Bertalanffy, one of the main proponents of the biological world view (later presented in the US as general systems theory) and eventually became his last student in Vi-

² Page numbers in: *Kybernetes*. Vol. 34, No. 9/10 (2005), pp. 1665-1666.

enna. But only after his Chapel Hill experience did he turn his full attention to the ontological, logical and mathematical foundations of complex goal directed systems. He introduces his view “On the Ontological Foundations of the Theory of Systems” in a 1973 Festschrift for von Bertalanffy. His first *Kybernetes* publication (with Coulter) on “Recent Progress towards a Theory of Teleogenic Systems” appears in 1976. It defines his pivotal interest for the remainder of his life. From then on, more than one hundred of his publications revolve around this issue.³

Although he appeared to shift his critical attention from general systems theory, cybernetics and autopoiesis through the theory of evolution to theological issues, his central concern did not waver. He wanted to reconcile, through the medium of systems  1666 theory, his acceptance of scientific biology and his unshakable belief in the immanent role of God in the universe. Into the last days of his life he attempted to integrate his view of nature and spirit, or ‘reality’ and ‘truth’, within a “Trans-Classical Systems Theory”.⁴

The last sentence in Professor Locker’s 1981 “Autopoiesis” article could serve as his epitaph:

“I conclude by expressing my conviction that unyieldingly withstanding naiveté and unmasking the preposterous ostentation of scientism will result in a breakthrough toward the surcease of prejudices and regaining the regrettably lost franchise in the land of ideas.”

³ Three representative statements of Alfred Locker’s positions are currently available on the Internet. “Meta-theoretical Presuppositions for Autopoiesis – Self-Reference and “Autopoiesis” is at <http://www.vordenker.de/locker/metatheor-presupp-autopoiesis.pdf> and “Evolution und 'Evolutions' Theorie in system und metatheoretischer Betrachtung“ at <http://www.vordenker.de/locker/evolution-theorie.pdf> . “The Present Status of General System Theory, 25 Years after Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s Decease: A Critical Overview” is at <http://www.systemsresearch.cz/bert2.pdf> , where a photograph of Alfred Locker and a partial bibliography of his texts from the systems theory period is also available.

⁴ While several more recent versions are yet to be published or are in manuscript, the most recent, perhaps the only, published version is: “Recent Approach to Transclassical Systems-Theory. The Paradoxical Unity of Science with Non- and Super-Science.” In: Lasker, G.E. (Ed.): *Advances in Systems Res. & Cybernetics Vol. III, (1999)* IAS: Windsor/Ontario, pp. 11-16.