

**International Earth Trusteeship Forum  
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Welcoming Remarks by Dr. Georg Winter,  
HOUSE OF THE FUTURE, Hamburg**

Through the exploitation of natural resources and the strain put on the environment by pollutants, our technological civilization is becoming disconnected from our ecosystem on such a high level that, in the long run, the self-destruction of humanity seems not only possible, but exceedingly likely. Hence our most important future objective is the reunification of our technological civilization with our natural environment.

*«The wall between nature and our technological civilization must fall! »*

Almost tragically, numerous truly environmentally conscious entrepreneurs struggling for the ecological optimum are aware that their enterprise is – directly or indirectly, more or less – participating in the depletion of earth’s finite resources and by polluting the atmosphere, even within legal boundaries, contributing to the continuing destruction of the environment.

Thousands of entrepreneurs are under way to loosen this entanglement in the global work of destruction. Many introduce a management system that gives direction to all areas of the enterprise, from employee training to logistics, from product development and production down to the architecture of the production facilities, providing orientation not only toward economic success but also toward environmental protection (“environmentally conscious business management”).

However, far-sighted entrepreneurs are aware that by such methods they can reduce, but not entirely eliminate their enterprise’s contribution to the global work of destruction. The current general economic framework makes it impossible for entrepreneurs to truly act sustainably. Courageous entrepreneurs face this dilemma by going beyond entrepreneurial optimization and also becoming active on a macroeconomic level, i.e. in areas such as civil voting, associations and economic politics.

*«The core point here is the recognition of “rights of nature”»*

There is a necessity to work for the creation of sustainability-oriented frameworks of economic activity. What we need is a pertinent *ecological framework arrangement*. The core point here is – as mentioned repeatedly – the recognition of “rights of nature”.

Generally, nature is not dependent on humans granting it rights. In fact, humans are dependent on nature offering conditions for life that make their survival possible. Nature doesn’t care if climatic changes, volcanic eruptions or diseases encroach upon the constitutional right of humans to physical well-being. Nature is above every species it has produced, including the human species and its legal system.

*« By granting nature its own rights and thus placing it on the same level as humans within our legal system, humanity is also serving itself.»*

The best way for humans to protect themselves is by protecting nature from themselves. If humans recognize and enforce a basic right of all living beings to exist, this represents a survival strategy for humans as well. In the long run, it will not be possible to enforce human rights without recognizing the rights of nature.

“Human rights” require “rights of nature”. Many of the rights granted to humans in the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” lose their meaning in the case of continued destruction of the environment. Someone who has no access to drinkable water due to environmental destruction will have little use for the human right to freedom of speech. The human right to property becomes a farce when a tsunami caused by climate change rolls over the towns of an island.

*«Human rights require “rights of nature”  
to gain a watertight justification»*

But human rights need rights of nature not only in order to assert themselves and retain real meaning, but also to gain a watertight justification. Human rights were conceived mainly as liberties. But liberty does not mean being allowed to do anything one wants. Liberty is not capricious freedom; it is the freedom to do what does not harm others. In this way, **liberty is defined by the limits and rights of others**, thus being defined and limited. By addressing **nature as a carrier of its own rights and thus as a legal subject** (instead of simply a legal object) one does no more and no less than placing it on one level with the “others”.

In that case, rights of nature occupy the same rank as human rights, and that is the key facet of their recognition that makes them enforceable. The legal systems of many states already demand that the concerns of nature be taken into account in some well-defined way.

*«Recognizing nature’s own rights,  
clearly goes a step further!»*

“Rights of nature” are not to be confused with the natural rights of humans in the sense of natural law. According to the teachings of natural law, humans gain certain basic rights not because these rights are given to them by the state, but simply through being a human and thus a natural, rational being. The “rights of nature” on the other hand describe rights given to other living things by state jurisdiction.

*«There is a big difference between charging humans with certain duties toward nature – and giving nature its own basic rights.»*

**There is a big difference between charging humans with certain duties toward nature** – as in current jurisprudence – **and giving nature its own basic rights**. This difference will manifest itself in public consciousness, future judicial developments, and political agendas. Even in times of slavery and serfdom, there were more or less binding codes of conduct for the treatment of slaves and serfs. But the abolition of slavery and serfdom did not come until the people were given their own rights by the legal systems – regardless of their social standing.

The same applies and will apply to the “rights of nature”! Putting them on an equal footing is the lever for actual implementation and enforcement.

Evolution granted humans rationality and thus a quantum leap in terms of power. Nature will drive humans to extinction unless they balance this quantum leap in power with a quantum leap in ethical consciousness. Such ethics demand that we preserve life, foster life, and allow life to flourish.

*«Such ethics demand that we preserve life, foster life, and allow life to flourish.»*

## Rights of Nature

- an initiative of House of the FUTURE, Hamburg, Germany

2008 Dr. Georg Winter started the Rights of Nature (Biocracy) Initiative. Between 2008 and 2018 this idea was promoted by the House of Future with Conferences and a book series published by the HAUS DER ZUKUNFT in Hamburg and released at the Metropolis-Verlag.

### Rights of Nature: The Idea

Legislation, administration and jurisprudence should be organized in such a way that the existential interests and rights not only of humans, but of all living beings - including future generations - are taken into account and balanced accordingly.

A democracy respecting the Rights of Nature means: respect human dignity, honour all life in its diversity, preserve and promote life, mediate value conflicts conscientiously and defend endangered life decisively.

Such a "Biocracy" (= Gr. bios, life + kratein, govern, rule) is more than the implementation of an ethical model in which humanity takes nature as a partner seriously. It is also part of a survival strategy for humans, who are in the process of threatening their own existence through overexploitation of the biosphere and its biodiversity.

Describing our planet in constitutional terms, the territory is the biosphere - in the water, on land and in the air. The nation is the totality of all living beings. The state power is the evolution of all life.

Evolution is legislative, judicial and executive power by providing all living species with the minimum requirements for survival, recording deficits and violations, and enforcing the extinction of species, even humanity itself.

In this sense, such an extension of democracy is not some gracious gift from humanity to evolution, but rather humanity's attempt to save itself by fulfilling the minimum requirements of evolution for its survival, adapting its form of government and its whole legal order sufficiently and in just enough time to avert being extinguished by evolution.

At the international level, the United Nations is called upon to supplement the Declaration of Human Rights with a Declaration of the Rights of Nature. The United Nations must take responsibility not only for all people in all countries, but for all living beings as well.

As a world-wide visible signal, the United Nations should raise, next to the Flag of United Nations, a Flag of United Nature showing humans as one species among many living species with which they must live in harmony.

Dr. Georg Winter, HAUS DER ZUKUNFT Hamburg

### Book Series

The business book series RIGHTS OF NATURE / BIOCRACY is published by the HAUS DER ZUKUNFT in Hamburg and has been released at the Metropolis-Verlag.

### Further Information / Contact

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## Rights of Nature - Chronology

The goal of increased responsibility for the natural basis of life brings with it the demand for a strengthening of nature's position in the legal system. In 2008, the "Rights of Nature" initiative is started by Dr. Georg Winter, HAUS DER ZUKUNFT, Center of excellence for business and the environment in Hamburg.

Who will pass judgment in favor of the polar bears on their melting icebergs? When will environmental sinners from business and society be held accountable for damages caused? How can justice be served in the name of nature, creatures, and future generations?

### From democracy to biocracy

In 1993, Dr. Georg Winter coined the term Biocracy at the International Conference for Eco-Management in Tokyo.

*"Biocracy as a form of government means: respect human dignity, honor all life in all its diversity, preserve and promote life, mediate value conflicts conscientiously and defend endangered life decisively."*

Dr. Georg Winter, HAUS DER ZUKUNFT, Center of Excellence for Business and the Environment

### 2008

#### Rights of Nature – Human Rights Aren't Enough

60 years after the Declaration of Human Rights - a Declaration of the Rights of Nature is long overdue.

In 2008, Dr. Georg Winter organized a symposium at the HAUS DER ZUKUNFT, Hamburg. Winter proposed that not only conservation organizations but in future also animal welfare organizations should be able to pursue their demands with so-called collective court action.



#### HAUS DER ZUKUNFT

##### The Flag of United Nature - the Face of United Nature

Humanity is one of many stars of the flora and fauna. The blue circle symbolizes the globe, the white background stands for peace.

Dr. Georg Winter created the symbol of the equality of all living species including humans.



The flag of United Nature is hoisted by four environmental centers at the same time, at **Five minutes to twelve**. 2008 in front of the Haus der Zukunft, the flag is raised by a group of children. Winter had organized the first flying of the flag back in 2006 at the World Life Culture Forum in Kyeonggi, South Korea. In 2014 on the occasion of the "Week of the Sun", Prof. Volker Stahlmann raised the flag of United Nature in front of the Kulturbahnhof Ottensoos.

**2010**

**Biocracy Award for dissertations in the field of law on the participation rights of nature, founded by Dr. Georg Winter, HAUS DER ZUKUNFT**

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Research Center for Environmental Law at the University of Hamburg in 2008, Dr. Georg Winter, founder of the HAUS DER ZUKUNFT in Hamburg and member of the board of the Association for the Promotion of Environmental Research, created the “Biocracy Award”. The highly endowed award is given for outstanding academic work in the field of nature and posterity conservation. The Biocracy Award honors achievements that contribute in a particularly effective way to an improved alignment of the legal system with the responsibility towards all lives. In addition to jurisprudence, achievements in science, environmental education and politics are also eligible for consideration.

**2012**

**Presentation of the first Biocracy Award and “Rights of Nature” conference at the University of Hamburg**



Winners of the first Biocracy Award: Dr. Angela Schwerdtfeger (left) and Dr. Jan-Hendrik Dietrich (right) with the founder Dr. Georg Winter, HAUS DER ZUKUNFT Hamburg (middle).

Dr. Angela Schwerdtfeger (left) investigates in her dissertation the influence of the provisions of international law laid down by the Aarhus Convention on the German legal protection system and the rights of environmental organizations and individuals to file court action. In his dissertation, Dr. Jan Hendrik Dietrich (right) analyzes the conflict of objectives between environmental protection and the interests of national defense in the case of military-related environmental damage.

**2013**

**Presentation of the second Biocracy Award and conference at the University of Hamburg**



The Biocracy Award 2013 was presented to Dr. Cathrin Zengerling (left) from Hamburg for her dissertation on “Greening International Jurisprudence - Environmental NGOs before International Courts, Tribunals, and Compliance Committees” and to Prof. Berndt Heydemann (right) for his lifetime achievements.

**2014 The Rights of Nature / Biocracy portal [www.rechte-der-natur.de](http://www.rechte-der-natur.de) goes online (German, part in English)**

## **2015 Academic conference Rights of Nature – in the Dimension of Economics at the University of Hamburg**

Enforcing the “rights of nature” helps to achieve climate goals and safeguard human rights. With this conference on the “rights of nature in the dimension of economics” the HAUS DER ZUKUNFT mobilized the “rights of nature” concept for economics.

In his keynote lecture, Prof. Klaus Töpfer, former German Federal Minister for the Environment, later Director of the United Nations Environment Program and then Chairman of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, assessed the global climate situation and the chances of the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, due to begin three days later.

15 experts point out – and demonstrate by example – which business methods can be used to prevent the destruction of natural resources. Sustainability-oriented ethics in society, economy and business prove to be indispensable.

Dr. Georg Winter, HAUS DER ZUKUNFT, calls for nature to be provided with its own constitutional rights. The rights of nature network in Germany expanded the legal issue to include the economic dimension.

## **2016 Conference on Rights of Nature/Biocracy in Economics and Organization**

A growing number of sustainability-oriented entrepreneurs, economists and scholars discuss a reorientation of business management theory. They add to the fundamental criticism vis-a-vis neo-liberal economic theory the specific, concrete demand to anchor the intrinsic rights of nature in the constitution. The symposium was held in Siegen in honor of Prof. Eberhard Seidel’s 80th birthday.

## **2017 Conference on the Rights of Nature/Biocracy and Human Rights in Ottensoos/Nuremberg**

### **2017/2019 Book Series “Rights of Nature / Biocracy” (in German)**



The book series “Rights of Nature / Biocracy” was conceived by Prof. Eberhard Seidel. More than 35 authors have contributed to the series comprising 20 volumes, published by the HAUS DER ZUKUNFT and the Metropolis Verlag. The basic texts by Georg Winter and Eberhard Seidel can be downloaded free of charge [www.rechte-der-natur.de](http://www.rechte-der-natur.de).

### **2019 published english abstracts of series**