

## Welcome & Introduction by chairman Dr. Günter Bechly

Wednesday, May 29, 2019 7:30 – 9:30 PM

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to our opening meeting of the *Zentrum für BioKomplexität & NaturTeleologie* and to our symposium on teleology in nature. I hope you had a good trip and will enjoy your stay in beautiful Lower Austria.

So, why did Siegfried Scherer and I initiate this new association?

With the advent of the enlightenment and especially in the wake of Darwin's theory of evolution teleology has become ostracized from the natural sciences and not only became a forbidden word but a forbidden thought. However, especially in biology it has proven to be impossible to have any meaningful discourse without using teleological language, which is why the term teleonomy has been invented for "*apparent purposeful design*". However, it looks like mother nature was not satisfied with our decision and decided to teach us some lessons. Modern science, from quantum mechanics to cosmology and biology has provided an ever-increasing amount of conflicting evidence that suggests that materialism is wrong and that we should reconsider the notion of real teleology in nature. In physics there is the observer effect in quantum mechanics, the origin of all of space-time and matter-energy a finite time ago, the delicate finetuning of the physical laws and constants, and of course the philosophical question of the "*unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics*", "*the nature and origin of the laws of physics themselves*", and the question "*Why there is anything rather than nothing?*". The growing willingness to consider an infinite ensemble of undetectable parallel worlds only to avoid the teleological implications of modern physics shows in a way the desperation of the ruling naturalistic and materialistic paradigm. Even in biology this anthropic multiverse approach is now considered by some scientists to solve the intractable problem of the unlikely origin of life and the first replicator. Problems and explanatory deficits of the Neo-Darwinian mechanism are increasingly recognized by mainstream evolutionary biology, as evidenced by the call for an *extended* evolutionary synthesis, but arguments for purposeful design are mostly still dismissed as creationist nonsense even if they are purely based on scientific

evidence and reasoning as suggested by ID theory. Clearly a naturalistic bias is here at work and imposes a limit on the spectrum of alternative explanations that is even considered to be permissible. Our goal is a collaboration of interested scientists and philosophers from different disciplines to reintroduce the question about real teleology in nature back into academia but also into public discourse and promote an unbiased quest for the best explanation wherever the evidence may lead.

At a personal level, all of us at this meeting of course hold various theological or philosophical positions, and some of us are even well-known for their personal point of view. However, our work for the *Zentrum für BioKomplexität & NaturTeleologie* should be independent of such personal belief systems, in favour of an unbiased result-oriented and open-ended academic approach, which is exclusively based on empirical scientific evidence and rational philosophical arguments. This approach clearly distinguishes the *Zentrum für BioKomplexität & NaturTeleologie* from faith-based organizations, which necessarily work within the constraints of their theological framework.

Tomorrow afternoon we will have the constitutive general assembly electing our executive committee and scientific advisory council. At our closing discussion on Saturday morning we will introduce and discuss some of the activities and projects that we aim for in the next years.

We would like to thank *Discovery Institute* in Seattle for generously supporting our ambitious project and this event. We emphasize that, even though *Discovery Institute* will be our main donor, this new association is not a legal branch of *Discovery Institute*, and we are not restricted to intelligent design theory but open to all kinds of scientific and philosophical investigations about biocomplexity and teleology in nature. We sincerely believe that even dedicated naturalists must not fear or oppose such an endeavour, because science can only profit from critical questions and the exploration of unsolved problems that may reveal the limits of certain theories and paradigms. Nevertheless, our endeavour might also contribute to open a window for a novel scientific paradigm in academia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.