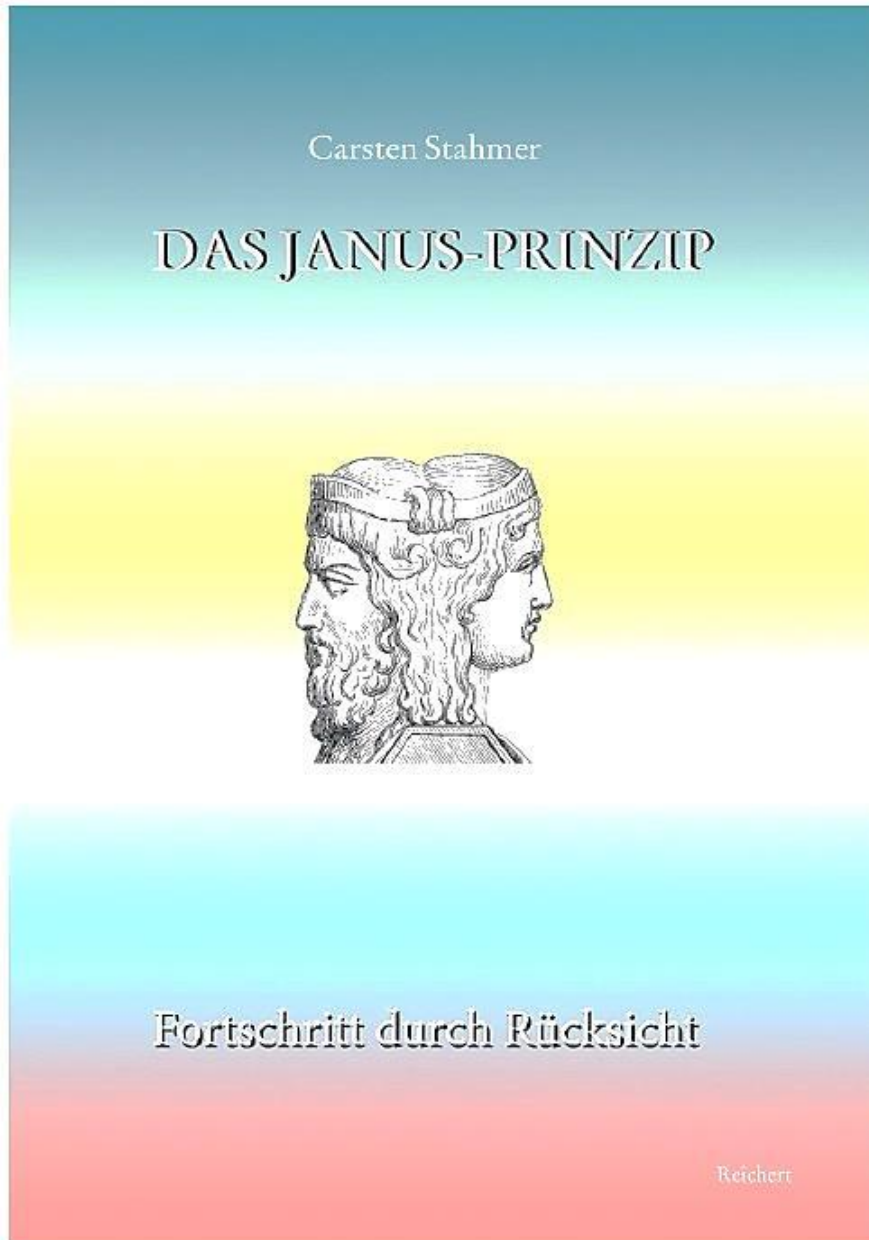


JANUS PRINCIPLE PROGRESS BY RETROSPECTION

Carsten Stahmer



2023. 8°. Hardback, 376 Pages, 20 black and white and 22 color illustrations

Print: 29.- EUR (978-3-7520-0721-3)

eBook: 29.- EUR (978-3-7520-0260-7)

Reichert Verlag Homepage www.reichert-verlag.de

Mail info@reichert-verlag.de

Foreword

This book now has a story itself. Originally I just wanted to present and evaluate the development of the Federal Republic from 1960 to 1990. The question arose as to whether the years from the economic miracle to reunification could be described as progress overall if we included not only economic growth but also its social and ecological consequences in the assessment. I therefore chose “30 Years of Progress?” as the first working title for the book.

As the empirical work progressed, my doubts increased as to whether it would make sense to limit myself to purely historical considerations. The discussion about a future-proof sustainable Germany had been going on very intensively for several years. However, historical aspects remained largely ignored. Many suggestions appear utopian because they cannot be made plausible as at least a conceivable continuation of our current development. The further question of whether we should not also learn from our history, or whether we could even use elements of our past as a model, is not asked. A return to the “good old days” still seems taboo since the horrific events of the Nazi era and the devastation of war. At best, the past serves as a refuge for nostalgic feelings.

The joint consideration of past and future developments led me to the “Janus principle”. As the Roman god of entrances, Janus gave his name to the first month of the year. In this respect, he primarily embodies the look forward, into the future. However, with his double face he also looks back into the past. The recommendation that God Janus can give us, according to my interpretation, is therefore: look forward, but do not forget to occasionally look back; design a future worth living, but also preserve what is worth preserving from your origins.

The subtitle “Progress through retrospection” is intended to provide an initial indication of the specific content of this principle. Progress in our society can no longer be achieved through further expansion of our economic activities, through purely quantitative economic growth. The social and ecological follow-up costs appear to be too high for such a policy. Progress in a positive sense is only possible if we develop activities that also contain a backward look. The word "retrospection" has a double meaning in this context: It describes looking back into the past as well as looking after our fellow human beings for strengthening social cohesion. Furthermore, we have to take care of our weak partners in the world, the developing countries and our natural environment.

Of course, a comprehensive treatment of this topic would have exceeded the intended scope of this book. A single author would be overwhelmed by this question; only a team of experts could provide satisfactory answers. The solution I chose was to forego completeness and conclusive statements but to present the reader with the opinions of individual authors who I have gotten to know over the last few decades and who have “grown close to my heart”. This selection is of course completely subjective. But when I took a look at my library and its inventory of favorite authors, I realized that, looking back, their composition was less a function of chance and my whims than I initially assumed. It also largely reflects contemporary trends from the 1960s to the present. Just as geological layers take us back to past geological eras, the books that I have read have taken me back to the sequence of my reading discoveries over the last decades.

Until now, I had viewed my literary, philosophical, psychological and historical excursions as a hobby that had no connection to my professional work. But in preparation for my book, I suddenly had the opportunity to break down the previous separation of work and hobby, of specialist work and personal

interests. Of course, I remained an interested layperson in most subject areas. At least I was lucky enough to ask friends who are experts in their respective fields. Nevertheless, the explanations in this book are largely limited to suggestions for the reader to further engage with certain authors and do not provide any conclusive assessments.

This text has been created since the mid-1990s. In the last years of my professional activities, my research focus on developing concrete social models for the future that could meet the requirements of ecological, economic and ecological sustainability. A particular focus was on social models that could ensure greater social cohesion, in which the focus is not on the selfish competitive economy, but on a society which combine principles of subsidiarity and solidarity. These considerations are summarized in the last chapter 21 “Guides”.

During my thoughtful, often somewhat nostalgic journey into the past, the beginning of *Wolfgang Hildesheimer's* (1916 - 1991) *Futile Notes* kept coming to my mind: “Everything has already been written. And if it hasn't been written yet, it's probably being written right now, by someone who either started five or ten minutes earlier, or by someone who writes faster than me, in which case he might even start later... “

Then *Hildesheimer* continues: “One should leave no stone unturned. (At least that's what they say. I personally believe that those who leave everything unturned are happier, but it's too late for that now, you have to start earlier in life.) Today I owe myself one last walk before I will finally lay down my pen and turn my attention to other things.”

However, he only made these lines of 1962 come true in the early 1980s, when he found protesting against wars, inhumanity and environmental destruction to be too powerless and hopeless.

Although *Hildesheimer's* melancholic attitude may be tempting, I think that we must face our responsibility for the future. I owe this attitude primarily to the constant support and encouragement from my family and friends. They encouraged me to follow the opinion of *Rainer Maria Rilke* (1875 - 1927), which he expressed in 1924 in the following poem *Für Fräulein Marga Wertheimer*, despite all the valid reasons for a resigned attitude.

*“What our spirit gains from confusion,
Will benefit living things in the future;
Even if sometimes they are thoughts only,
They dissolve in that great blood,
That keeps running.*

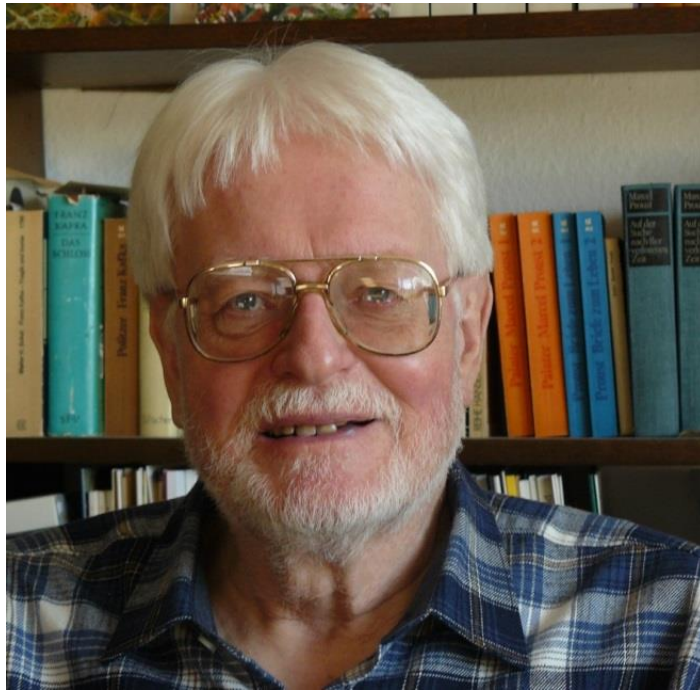
*And if it is feeling: who knows how far it reach,
And what it causes in pure space,
In which a little more of heavy and light,
Moves worlds and shifts a star.”*

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About the Author



Professor Doctor Carsten Stahmer, born 1942, worked at the Federal Statistical Office in Wiesbaden and as an international expert, in China and Russia, for the United Nations and the Club of Rome; Lessons at Heidelberg University in economic and social statistics. Fields of work: Economic, environmental and socio-economic accounts, sustainability indicators, future models of a sustainable society. In 2019, Carsten Stahmer published the three-volume work on "Goethe in Wiesbaden 1814 and 1815" at Reichert Verlag. Further information on Stahmer's website: www.carsten-stahmer.de.