

# DIALOGUE AND UNIVERSALISM

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## UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE

Edited by Charles S. Brown and Małgorzata Czarnocka

### ONTIC ROOTS OF DIALOGUE

*John Rensenbrink* — Dialogue and Being—an Ontological Investigation

*Marian Hillar* — What Does Modern Science Say about the Origin of Cooperation? Science Confirms Philosophy

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*Kevin M. Brien* — A Meditation on Universal Dialogue

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**AND**  
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**3/2013**

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## UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE

Edited by Charles S. Brown and Małgorzata Czarnocka

<i>Editorial</i> — Universal Dialogue .....	5
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### ONTIC ROOTS OF DIALOGUE

<i>John Rensenbrink</i> — Dialogue and Being—an Ontological Investigation .....	7
<i>Marian Hillar</i> — What Does Modern Science Say about the Origin of Cooperation? Science Confirms Philosophy .....	23

### DIALOGUE AND UNIVERSALITY

<i>Kevin M. Brien</i> — A Meditation on Universal Dialogue .....	35
--	----

### DIALOGUE AND THE PROBLEM OF MAN

<i>Janusz Kuczyński</i> — Dialogue and the Human Being as <i>Homo Creator</i> .....	63
<i>Charles S. Brown</i> — Identity and Difference: Overcoming the Master Self through the Cultivation of a Dialogical Self-Identity .....	83
<i>Regina Fazleeva</i> — Dialogue as Asymmetrical Intersubjectivity .....	95

### DIALOGUE AND THE SOCIOCULTURAL WORLD

<i>Andrew Fiala</i> — The Fragility of Civility: Virtue, Civil Society, and Tragic Breakdowns of Civility .....	109
<i>Martha C. Beck</i> — Systems Thinking and Universal Dialogue: The Creation of a Noosphere in Today's Era of Globalization .....	123
<i>Emiliya A. Taysina</i> — Semiotics of Globalization as a Subject of Philosophical Reflection .....	137
<i>Marta Sghirinzetti</i> — Does Intercultural Dialogue Need Relativism? Moral Rationality and Cultural Difference .....	153



## **Editorial**

### **UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE**

The papers gathered in this D&U issue connect the on-going philosophical attempts to make sense of our lives, our selves, our world, and the spirit of our age with the matter of dialogue. The field of dialogue is viewed here as inevitably transcending the barriers of philosophical schools and specific cultural traditions.

These papers demonstrate the complexity, the multi-dimensionality, and the open-endedness of the process of dialogue while teaching us that efforts to better understand the nature of dialogue as well as to cultivate dialogue require a deeper understanding of human nature, rationality, values, and even being itself.

The investigations on dialogue and the resulting new visions of it included in this D&U issue do not result in capturing one unambiguous essence of dialogue, nor, much less, give a unique solution to the question of what dialogue is and how it does or should function in the human world. These papers point to the unfinishedness, the on-going flow of diverse ideas and traditions that constitute the core of philosophy. The papers presented in this D&U issue offer a multiplicity of valuable insights. They elucidate much. They deepen our understanding of dialogue by extending previous perspectives and by forging new ones. They associate dialogue with new subject fields, not clearly detected till now, i.e. with the domains of being, spirituality, cooperation on the biological level, noosphere, civility, etc.

From the diversity of approaches and views presented in this D&U issue a shared belief emerges—on the basic importance and necessity of dialogue in the present and future human world. Thus the presented works strongly affirm the vitality and importance of the ideas which motivated many years ago the establishing of the International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD).

These ideas include the belief that genuine dialogue, understood as an open and transdisciplinary exchange of perspectives, also among diverse cultures and disciplines on a wide variety of issues with global implications, is necessary for



a truly democratic way of thinking and acting. With this in mind, the editors at *Dialogue and Universalism* seek to disseminate the sorts of scholarship needed to co-create a more positive future for humanity and all living beings. We believe that such idealism is not simply a luxury for academics but a necessity for all at this moment in history.

Rooted in the aspiration to actualize the highest and richest human values in art, science, politics, education, and social life and to work toward the emergence of a decent world order we hope these papers will advance dialogue as a community-building discourse and to further nurture a global ethos of dialogue.

These papers also demonstrate the belief that the enduring and historical quest of philosophy, i.e., to make sense of our world, and ourselves is bound up with the destiny of humankind. In spite of the great diversity of these papers, they share a common vision that the promise of philosophy in today's world is bound up with the importance and necessity of recognizing the plurality of points of view. In today's world consensus can only be meaningfully achieved by beginning with the recognition and respect for difference.

Consensus must emerge from the dialogical respect for plurality rather than from the forced imposition of any one particular view. Only through this respect for plurality and dialogue philosophy can offer ideas and comprehensive visions for humankind's progress. A dialogical approach to understanding our world and ourselves does not only contemplate the world, but also changes it by influencing the consciousness of individual human beings, and, next, it should be hoped, of societies.

D&U promotes investigations on dialogue with special force. The D&U Editors hope that the here-presented discussion on dialogue will be continued. Their incessant intention is to publish papers on dialogue, as soon as they will be submitted, in a separate fixed section, in each issue. Unfortunately, a few papers, being the aftermath of the call for papers directed to the ISUD members, cannot be included in this D&U issue through its limited scope. They will be published in the near issues.

*Charles S. Brown, Małgorzata Czarnocka*

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<sup>1</sup> Marx's XI thesis on Feuerbach, paraphrased here, is modified by a concretization, mainly by adding the word "consciousness."

*John Rensenbrink*

## **DIALOGUE AND BEING—AN ONTOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION**

### ***ABSTRACT***

This essay affirms the proposition that dialogue emerges from being itself. There are five parts: being and nature; how it follows that dialogue emerges from being itself; full dialogue; why it is that dialogue has faltered; and ground for optimism, given the noticeable turn in recent decades to an ontology of relationship. We, the human species, are part of nature. We are part of an evolutionary development. The full comprehension of this reality leads to critique of the separation between nature and supra-nature in the ontology of ancient Greek philosophers and of Christian, Judaic, and Muslim religions—a separation that posits the hierarchic superiority and dominance of the Idea as in Plato and of God in the religions, replacing the unity of spirit and nature in the earlier animistic religions. Nor has the ascendance of mechanistic modernity in the work of Bacon, Descartes, Newton and their heirs to this day changed the separation. The Cartesian formulation of “I think therefore I am” backed up by the notion of a deistic first mover, scraped nature clean of spiritual and moral qualities and made it open to industrial exploitation, resource extraction, and degradation. Einstein and the quantum theorists who developed his breakthroughs led science to a new view of nature as a world of internal relations. This provides scope and substance for re-thinking nature as revealing multiple sets of interactive relationships. Interactive relationships are the ground for the gradual development of dialogue. The older ontologies of separation had little scope or support for dialogue since the dominating style and substance of relationship was consumed in patterns and styles of command and obedience. The new ontology of relationship reveals and fosters the reality of interactive communication and dialogue. Full dialogue is a mutual awareness and authentication of each other’s lived being leading to deeper and deeper levels of successful understanding and action together. Yet dialogue has had to take a back seat for much of human history since the emergence of stratified and hierarchical agrarian societies capped in recent centuries by industrial command structures and technologically advanced warfare. But the new understanding of nature and of its multiple interactive relationships is making significant headway and there is ground for optimism that dialogue will at some point come fully into its own.

**Keywords:** being; dialogue; nature as self-organizing; evolution; animistic religion; the Idea (Plato); Christian theology; deism; internal relations; interactive communication; science and religion; dynamic energy; repulsion/attraction; full dialogue.

The question presented for discussion is: “What are the fundamental roots of universal dialogue?” Possible answers have been posed. They include: “Does universal dialogue emerge from the attributes of human nature? Or does it emerge from culture (a particular one, or is it inherent in all cultures)? Or from *a priori* theses of systems of knowledge? Or from ethical systems? Or from more general axiological systems? Or does dialogue emerge from being itself?”

I make the argument that “dialogue emerges from being itself.”

The essay is in five parts: being and nature; how it follows that dialogue emerges from being itself; full dialogue; why it is that dialogue has faltered; but there is ground for optimism.

### BEING AND NATURE

At first one feels drawn to the notion that the fundamental roots of universal dialogue emerge from the attributes of human nature. But on further reflection, I realize that human nature is not the whole of being. It is a part of being—a manifestation of being. One must look beyond our human nature in order to locate the being in and through which, and by which, the human is constituted.

Several decades have passed since I first (and suddenly as it seemed) encountered the proposition that we, the human species, are part of nature. This meant to me that we are not “above” nature; nor are we “below” nature. As this came through to me as a fact, and as concomitant therewith, I absorbed the further fact and implications of evolution, I came to realize more and more fully that to hold that we human beings are partly in nature and partly not in nature, and that the part that is in nature is secondary, if not inferior, to what is outside nature, is a major ontological error. We are embraced by nature. Nature offers and provides the source and ground of our being. Intellectual shocks and adventures followed for me from what I now would describe as an overwhelming realization.

In order to locate the being in and through which the human being is constituted, I draw on the thought of thinkers like Edmund Husserl, Max Scheler, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and David Abrams; on philosophers pursuing a post-Newtonian understanding of the world such as Ilya Prigogine; on feminist and ecofeminist thinkers such as Sandra Harding; and on the great outpouring of ecological studies and analyses in the last thirty years. [COMMENTARY 1]<sup>1</sup> The conclusions about the nature of our world and the nature of nature stemming from these investigations prepare the ground for my argument that dia-

<sup>1</sup> All the commentaries are at the end of the paper.

logue is rooted inherently in the way of all things—rooted in the structure of being, as set forth in the second part.

What Plato sought, I have come to realize, was an appeal from nature to something outside of nature. What Augustine and the Christian tradition sought was outside of nature. God, in their view, was a lofty being, the source and ratification of all being. The ancient Greek and medieval Christian concept was to assume an Archimedean point, a God or Idea outside of nature, in terms of which nature is judged and dealt with. The natural world is considered contingent-being, dependent for its true being on God or the Idea. Access to true being (of God, of the Idea) is through contemplation and, for the Christians, coupled with obedient worship. For Aristotle, participation in the affairs of the world can be a stepping stone (though also a barrier) to encounter with the divine and thus to contemplation as the highest form of life's activities. Plato has much of that in his writing as well. [COMMENTARY 2]

One might initially think that Bacon, Descartes, and Newton and their worldly followers like Hobbes, Locke, Adam Smith, and Rousseau—corrected for, and rejected, the bias that heavily favored what is beyond the natural world and “this life.” But not so. Expressed most clearly by Descartes, radical doubt establishes a new Archimedean point separate from “mere” nature. The mind finds certainty in the proposition “*cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am”). This Archimedean point, a point radically separate from nature, is ultimately guaranteed its reality by reference to a first mover, a deity, outside the universe, who presides as watchmaker over a machine-like universe, a universe composed of hard and irreducible and separate atoms. Nature is scrubbed clean (note, for example, Locke's attack on Plato's notion of innate ideas). Nature is henceforth treated as an instrument of mind, a mind that is radically separate from body. Nature is made available for control and for resources to be exploited in accordance with the rules and contrivances of right reason, a reason rooted in “I think therefore I am.” [COMMENTARY 3]

In all of these pictures of being, the universe is composed of things separate from one another. External relations characterize all things (this/not this, either/or). Separateness is central, not relationship.

Albert Einstein up-ended the Cartesian and Newtonian atomistic view of physical reality. [COMMENTARY 4] His thought experiments led to splitting the atom and to developing the principle of relativity. These showed a way to think about physical reality that focuses on internal relations and inclusiveness rather than external relations. Even so, Einstein still harbored hopes of finding the one concept or unified theory that would “explain” all things; in this he revealed a continued hankering for a wholly unified and fixed force, an Archimedean point that would not “play dice with the world.” Implicit in this hankering for something fixed is the re-instatement of external relations.

He apparently did not follow the direction of his own thinking but hearkened back to the fear that if nothing is fixed then there is no ground to stand on, no

God to establish a point of departure and return, no Archimedean point from which to reason. But as later thought shows, the fact that nothing is fixed does not mean that nothing is ordered, that it's all chaos. Things are located and locate themselves through relationship.

The notion of internal relations grew from the work of quantum theorists in the decades following Einstein. [COMMENTARY 5] They followed the direction of his work, building on his great breakthroughs. Quantum theory provides a revolutionary perspective and direction for thought and understanding. The universe as a whole is seen as a set of internal relations; within the universe sets of internal relations dynamically operate and inter-relate. Each set is composed internally of relations. Each set inter-relates with other sets within the whole.

But the whole is not fixed. Nor are the sets of internal relations (whether physical bodies or groups of bodies) fixed as if they are self-contained with walls around them. There are no walls, but there are boundaries.

The notion of internal relations does not therefore mean that there are no borders. The whole, because of received language about "the whole", may conjure up the image of a closed universe. Not so. The borders, correctly understood as having boundaries (not walls), reveal the question of what lies beyond the borders of a given body or group of bodies, including that group of bodies composing the universe as we have thus far been able to perceive it.

It is critical to realize that the existence of the question (the question of what lies beyond the borders of a given whole) applies to the universe as a whole and to all wholes within the universal whole. Nothing is permanently fixed, not even the North Star. The solar system is not fixed. Planet Earth is not fixed. The ecosystems of the earth are not fixed. Geo-political boundaries are not fixed. The stone walls separating farmers' fields are not fixed.

The universe is composed of bodies each with internal relations among their parts and between themselves and other bodies; and the bodies, having borders, are in actual or potential interaction with other bodies. What is "within" and what is not now within but may yet be "within" and what in any case is not within but acts upon what is within—all this means that, though embodied, the bodies are open. And are open to the question mark that comes right along with the given body's existence.

Being as being belongs as the central and focal attribute of nature. Nature produces life and life manifests the being that nature has produced. It is incorrect thinking that imagines or invents or infers a force separate from nature acting upon nature as from without, dominating it, fashioning it, controlling it. The force that is imagined, if and when and where it is real, is within nature. Better said, it is woven into the texture, the warp and woof of nature. Even better said, it is nature. It is important to add a caveat. It is nature unfixed, dynamic, and changing. Nature opens to that which it is not. Nature is open to that which is not within and may be discovered to be without, which, once discovered is drawn within. That "drawing within" still leaves the whole open to that which

continues to be “without.” The question mark remains in place. Mystery continues to be in place, arousing curiosity, arousing fear, but also enabling the experience of grace.

Does this deny God? No. Three replies. It relocates God—from an entity outside of the natural whole to a force within the whole. It revolutionizes God’s attributes so that we assign non-dominating qualities to God (he or she is a friend not a potentate). And there is a relation between the force within the universal whole that we associate with God with the question mark at the boundaries of the whole. The question mark is supremely interesting. Science and religion tend to deal with the question mark in different ways.

The critical thing to my way of thinking is to note that the relationship of what is within (the relatively known) to what is or may be or is inferred to be or assumed to be without (the relatively unknown)—the critical thing is that the relationship is an interactive one. It approaches the possibility of dialogue. The way science conducts the dialogue and the way religion conducts the dialogue differ, but both in their own way conduct dialogue. Neither has ground to stand on to assert dogma, neither scientifically claimed dogma nor the more familiar religious dogma.

Fixed certainty for either is neither scientific nor religious. Yet fixed certainty seems to be the temptation into which each falls repeatedly. The fall is because they do not see the boundary between the whole and the other as a boundary but as a wall. And both are always yearning for ultimate certainty, refusing to acknowledge that dialogue does not require such certainty—in fact it precludes and trumps certainty. Understanding dialogue is a solvent of the fear that leads to the demand for certainty. Understanding dialogue is also a goad to creative research for the scientist and to creative faith for the religious person. Both reach into the mystery, but in different ways. We must turn to the second part of this ontological investigation for an examination of dialogue and its antecedents.

#### **HOW IT FOLLOWS THAT DIALOGUE EMERGES FROM BEING ITSELF**

Dialogue is inherent in all life in some form—however primitive and simple the dialogue may be or however advanced and complex. It is through dialogue that relationships among and between the distinct and diverse embodiments of nature are mediated, realized, and enhanced. Dialogue is not just another word for communication, but is a profound process. Without it, we become separate from one another and divorced from being. The life work of Henryk Skolimowski is a living testament to the proposition that dialogue is immanent in life itself. [COMMENTARY 6]

The fulfillment of being within us requires dialogue. Dialogue frees us and bonds us at the same time. If it were not for dialogue in some form, we could and would spin away from one another; or we could and would do the opposite

by moving, or bumping sharply, into one another, collapsing into one another, erasing each other's identity as that embodiment of being.

"In some form." I am thinking here of the most primitive form of dialogue. Or we might instead simply look at it from the point of view of the elements out of which dialogue potentially can come.

Implicit in matter is the spark of life. This is an ordinary way of saying it and would seem to be adequate for usual purposes. But that still is not quite saying it. What we are trying to discern is the reality of that which is there, not just to find the words that say it. But, at the same time, we need words to convey what's there. Words can reveal it, or conceal it. Words can open our minds and consciousness to what it is; or they can lead us hopelessly astray. But we must try.

The spark referred to should give us a start. What can cause a spark? The encounter of two or more elements can produce it. But, let's get closer if we can: the encounter itself is the spark. That from which the two or more elements come is the burst of pure energy. Inherent in pure energy is both the thing and its opposite and the two together in their encounter with each other is the spark. The encounter is a relationship. Not a static relationship but a dynamic one. Not two or more elements separate from one another, but two or more elements in dynamic movement with one another. Nor is it a matter of equilibrium. If and when what seems like equilibrium occurs, the equilibrium is shattered by change—fueled by the inner impulses of the energy in all the components involved.

This could then be another way of saying that one is two, inherently so, so that two in relationship are both one and two—both united and distinct. We must hold in mind that the encounter of the elements is and continues to be an interactive one, each acting upon and being acted upon. Though this suggests repulsion, it also with equal strength and validity suggests attraction. It's not as if the elements in contact with one another are just objects that appear together or are thrust together by some form of gravity. The communication is interactive. What then proceeds is the necessity of dialogue. What also proceeds is a dynamic opportunity for ever better dialogue.

What pure energy evolves into is interactive communication (dialogue). The relationship is a unity, however stretched the unity may be, or however close the unity may be. And the relationship, simultaneously, is the distinct identity of each element.

I have used the word "element." I could also have used the word "body." The proposition advanced here is that interactive relationship inheres in all things in nature, from the simplest elements to more and more complex organisms; i.e. bodies and groups of bodies.

But, surely, one may say, dialogue can only be ascribed to conscious bodies. Dialogue does not take place among bacteria, for example. I can agree with that, but that is not the decisive question in this investigation. What I am concerned

to bring fully into view is that there is a structure of being that characterizes all things, from simplest and smallest to very complex and large. That structure is an interactive relationship throughout. It is this structure that forms and informs the basis for dialogue wherever it occurs and whenever and at what point evolutionarily it occurs, including of course dialogue among conscious bodies.

There is a natural tendency to engage in interactive communication throughout the various relationships of nature. One may say that this natural tendency comes to fulfillment as dialogue in the relationships of conscious bodies. One could also say, however, that intimations of dialogue characterize the relationships of creatures other than the human species as well. [COMMENTARY 7] We are so used to thinking of all things as separate one from another, living as we do (especially in the west) in a culture heavily conditioned by mechanistic ideas. The separation-ism of the mechanistic world view makes it seem unlikely that seemingly non-conscious bodies communicate, much less communicate in an interactive manner.

But as the mechanistic world view fades, there more and more comes into view the realization that relationship is real throughout the universe and in all its parts; that this relationship of one with another, and of each one with nature [COMMENTARY 8], pulsates with the energy of each element or body (each entity) in the relationship; and that this distribution of energy to all entities fosters and fuels a disposition favoring interactive communication.

Interactive communication can reach the level of full dialogue at a certain evolutionary point. But that point would and could not be reached if it were not for the relational, self-organizing, and interactive structure of being that is the evolutionary antecedent on which full dialogue is built.

### **FULL DIALOGUE**

Dialogue is just that: dialogue. Yet there are degrees of its development and fullness. I think of it not only as an interactive exchange (which it can start out from) but as a mutual engagement with one another's being. This means that my awareness of you is that you are a being in your own right and that you are a self-starting being and that as such you are aware of me as a similar kind of being. This depth of mutuality enlivens both of us and can make each of us and together greater than we would be alone and separate. It frees us to be ourselves, surely, and it bonds us to be in each other's common light. This brings satisfaction and, not infrequently, exhilaration. The satisfaction and the exhilaration do not so much come from the dialogue being a smooth and balanced interaction. Engagement with another self-starting being is seldom smooth; and though balance occurs it come as a result of an interaction that has in it a lot of creative tension. The relationship is dynamic and moving; balance is won through the process of interaction, not as if once balance is found it remains rigidly in place. Thus the word "full" is misleading if it means that a balance has been reached



and is set in stone. In an important sense, dialogue is never full, for the more it develops the more it expands in depth and meaning.

As I write this, I do not want to seem as if I think of dialogue as having fully arrived in our species evolution or that it happens automatically. As I have endeavored to show, there are many antecedent moments or stages in the gradual development of dialogic communication.

But having arrived, why then has it not become the characteristic and common feature of human communication and action? It must be admitted as a matter of disappointing fact that dialogue has faltered time and again. Sometimes it has failed entirely. It may be seen but barely used, even barely tolerated in public and private affairs. And yet, dialogue has roots deep in the structure of being itself. Why, when its full potential seems within our species grasp, does it seem that its power has sadly waned?

### **REASONS WHY DIALOGUE HAS FALTERED**

There are many reasons. I will cite several.

In evolutionary time, our species has not had very much time to practice dialogue. With more time and more experience, dialogue and a dialogic consciousness can take full root. This would seem to be a reasonable observation, not an excuse but a wise realization. Dialogue takes time to develop and mature.

Unfortunately, our species does not have very much time. Species ruination has become a possibility. If we are to save ourselves, it's time we turned to dialogue in a serious way.

I will briefly touch on some of the leading difficulties hampering the development of dialogue in our species.

The growth of consciousness in the human species produced what was a step forward surely. In epochal terms it must have been a very heady and galvanizing time for the developing human beings. They could do things they never could have imagined were possible. As their powers of thought and skill grew, and as their technology improved and expanded into more and more areas of life, so grew their expectations. But it turned out that the planned or expected results often did not come about. Unexpected consequences increased in number and severity of repercussions. The gap between expectation and fulfillment brought regret, anger, impatience, and the search for explanations, and for scapegoats. The explanations took on lurid forms often and led to human sacrifice. The scapegoats were people outside the group or people within the group who were different.

Yet, side by side with these negative consequences of growing consciousness, there also grew countervailing sources also stemming from consciousness—greater understanding, science, the wisdom of the elders, feedback systems, the resort to law, ethical norms, and also conversation and dialogue. So that, though the negative consequences were and are potent for despair and dis-

aster, the positive consequences are also very strong and in potential, more potent.

Along with the growth of consciousness, the self-declared high religions of the world have made an enormous impact on human development. Yet for all their vaunted clarification, and (in their view) purification of our human access to God, they combined their strong spiritual insight with a haughty and destructive attitude and practice toward the animistic religions of indigenous peoples, which they sought to replace. To apply a homely but apt cliché, they threw out the baby with the bath water—the baby of the unity of the human and the natural with the bathwater of superstition. The unity of the species with nature was broken, the voice of nature was largely lost; the high religions became intensely idealistic, un-worldly, very uneasy about sex and the body in general, and were given to exclusionary practices and dogma. They often pitted their theologies—and even armed weapons—against one another. Their idea of a supreme and remote deity presiding with inscrutable authority over all things increased tendencies to hierarchy, control, and rule through fear. This not only provided no nurturing context or framework for dialogue, but stymied its growth. The emergence of Christianity saw an effort to restore a direct connection between the people and the divine. Jesus as the incarnation of the divine even while also and simultaneously a human being was that effort. But after a brief sojourn ending in his crucifixion and resurrection Jesus returned to the heaven from which he had come. He promised he would come back and would send a holy spirit to those who believed in him. A highly organized priesthood and church hierarchy grew up to superintend the connection of God with the people through this now remote but much celebrated Jesus.

Parallel with the high religions, societies left behind the economies and common social life of early peoples. Society became highly stratified. There grew the notion that it was normal for the few to rule the many and even for one to rule over all, mirroring the similar practice and beliefs of the high religions. Much energy, cleverness and force was needed to keep the lower orders subservient. [COMMENTARY 9] In such a context there was, and is, little if any room for dialogue. Aspirations for power and money and the conflicts arising from those aspirations superseded all else. Any gestures towards the use and usefulness of dialogue are only that, just gestures not seriously meant. This continues to be the case.

It is also tragically the case that as we as a species evolved and grew in economy, religion, political organization, technology, in our numbers, and in our conscious powers, we found ourselves caught in the vortex of endless warfare. In a book entitled *The Parable of the Tribes: the Problem of Power in Social Evolution*, published in 1984, Andrew Schmookler points out that we may lament the weary repetition in society after society of oppression and inequality, yet once a tribe or city-state or nation invented an organized military and used it to threaten, subdue and enslave their neighbors, then others had to follow suit or

perish. There followed inexorably, he argues, the proliferation of military establishments on fighting alert in each country and a tax system and legal order that must squeeze and dominate the people. There is much cogency in his argument. Given this chronic situation, the outlook for a turn to dialogue seems dubious if not impossible. The impulse to dialogue, present in us from the beginning of our emergence as a species, is blunted.

### BUT THERE IS GROUND FOR OPTIMISM

And yet, there is ground for optimism. As human beings, sated with commercial pursuits, weary of constant oppression of the many by the few, and overwhelmed by constant warfare or threat thereof, begin to turn to nature for healing and knowledge, as is happening, the prospects for a turn to dialogue brighten. This essay shows that dialogue is part of the long evolutionary human heritage, from dialogue's embryonic beginnings to the present day. Dialogue is a crucial ingredient in efforts to change the world. If it is brought into the center of efforts to change the world, there is ground for optimism both about the future of dialogue and the future of humanity on planet earth.

### COMMENTARIES

#### 1.

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938) was among those in the forefront of those making an attempt at a thorough scientific revision of our view of nature, body and the sensuous life. Not that a rebellion against the drab and drear image of nature and of the body as part of that image of nature stemming from the early moderns had not already been made by poets and essayists and philosophers in the 18th and 19th centuries. But the bifurcation of the human and the natural had not been refuted or in any way abandoned. Science, with mainstream philosophy in its train, still meant the mechanistic world of the early moderns. Emotions, feelings, sensuous awareness, values, qualities of life were treated, at best, as something ideally good to have, but not really part of the underlying things of nature—not part of the nature of things in general, not part of the real facts of life. Husserl *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, 12th impression<sup>2</sup> was a pioneering force opening—though only slightly as yet—a pathway to a new scientifically based philosophy in our understanding of the natural world. Max Scheler (1874–1928), was a towering intellectual figure in Germany in the years immediately following the First

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<sup>2</sup> Husserl, E. 1999. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*. Dordrecht–Boston: Kluwer Academic, 12th impression.

World War. He built on Husserl with his favorite concept, “the lived body”<sup>3</sup>; as did Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) who courageously advanced the proposition that the body is the primary site of knowing the world<sup>4</sup> (especially his *Phenomenology of Perception*); and as did David Abrams (1957–) in *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World*<sup>5</sup>, building on Merleau-Ponty. In between those latter two philosophers, the women’s movement produced powerful critiques of the mechanistic world view and showed how deeply it was rooted in patriarchal understandings of the body, of nature, and of women. Sandra Harding, Julia Kristeva, and Riane Eisler are just a few of the cogent thinkers who have taken up the challenge. During the same time, 1970 forward, eco-philosophy came to the fore and has become a catalyst and beacon for a new understanding of nature and of the human project within nature. One may cite a host of fine writers, among them Rachel Carson, John Muir, Arne Naess, Henryk Skolimowski, Vandana Shiva, Joanna Macy, Ellen La Conte, and Charlene Spretnak. But the mechanistic legacy does not fade easily and seems to inhabit and shape the mind-set of the world’s ruling elites. From there, as an ideology, it conditions and intellectually distorts, if not corrupts, policy and the education of the young.

## 2.

Plato and Aristotle both argued the superiority of mind over body. Plato assumed it as a given in all his works. He gave it special consideration in the *Phaedo* and further reinforced his argument in that work with his argument for the immortality of the soul in Book Ten of the *Republic*. Reading it, one gets a strong impression that for him the division of body and mind (or soul) is a dichotomous one. Mind, or soul, is the directive force for the body to such a degree that the body is relegated to a decidedly inferior status. The body is like a theater in which the mind or soul or spirit expresses its quest for ideal truth and justice. Aristotle forthrightly likens the rule of the mind over the body to the relation of master and slave. He discusses this in some detail in the first book of the *Politics*.

Augustine enters into a passionate description of his struggles with what he describes as “the flesh” in his *Confessions* which he wrote at the age of 40, looking back on his youth—his sinful youth as he would say of it. Sensual appetite, or what he called concupiscence, gripped him. He regarded his early life as immersed in lust and felt it as sin but could not rid himself of his desire. He eventually reached a point where he wrenched free as part of his conversion at the age of 33 to Christianity. He abandoned his mistress and henceforth embraced absolute chastity. He came to consider a man’s erection to be sinful if it did not take place under his conscious control. He regarded women as beings who can cause this sinful response in a man.

<sup>3</sup> Scheler, M. 1981. *Man’s Place in Nature*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 11th printing.

<sup>4</sup> See especially his *Phenomenology of Perception*, written with Donald A. Landes. 2012. London: Routledge.

<sup>5</sup> Abrams, D. 1997. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human-World*. New York: Vintage Books (1st Vintage Books edition).

They must therefore be closely controlled. He turned his back, as it were, on the body and saw it as a threat. His writings and his life as he described it have been enormously influential in the over-long ambivalent and harmful attitude of humans toward sexuality, women, nature and the body. Upon his conversion, Augustine gave his worldly goods to the poor. He became Bishop of Hippo (in present day Algeria) and held that post with courage for over 30 years until his death in 430 AD. He wrote voluminously, including his long and famous book, *The City of God*.

In 1967, a historian of the Western medieval period, focusing on its technology, Lynn Townsend White, Jr., wrote an essay that appeared in *Science* magazine under the title “The Historic Roots of our Ecologic Crisis”.<sup>6</sup> It was very widely read and has become a classic. White poses the argument that Judeo-Christian theology was fundamentally exploitative of the natural world. He points out that the human relation with the natural environment was always a dynamic and interactive one, but that the Judeo-Christian approach to nature paved the way for the modern industrial treatment of nature as an object for control and resource extraction. This essay marked for me the beginning of my realization that we human beings are not “above” nature, but are interactively part of nature.

### 3.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626); Rene Descartes (1596–1650); and Isaac Newton (1642–1727) together span 150 years in which a great turning took place in what leading thinkers were thinking about nature, God, and the human world. They helped usher in a new paradigm that in some form is still very much with us, though it is gradually being replaced. Their view of nature as a machine; of God as remote and as external-to-the-world watchmaker; of “right reason” (Bacon’s formulation) and Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum” (I think therefore I am); of irreducible atoms; of nature stripped of secondary qualities; and of body as nature to be tricked and molded by the mind for purposes of endless progress introduced the new bourgeois middle classes of rising capitalists to a world seemingly made to order for exponential productive and commercial expansion. See Bacon’s *Valerius Terminus* (1603) and *Novum Organum* (1620); Descartes’ *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) and *Discourse on Method* (1637); and Newton’s *Principia* (1687).

### 4.

For me and for millions of people, Lincoln Barnett’s *The Universe and Dr. Einstein*, first published in 1957, was a memorable and liberating event. It not only gave us access to the way Einstein was configuring the universe but that what Einstein showed us was a truly exciting picture of a universe in which each of us participates in timespace. As I pondered this, and read other accounts and was introduced to quantum theory and its successors all the way to string theory, I felt a kind of mental seismic shift. We live in a rich, varied, diverse universe, open to change and experimental thought and action, and rife with diversity (even parallel universes

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<sup>6</sup> White, L. T. Jr. 1967. “The Historic Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” *Science*, Vol. 155, Number 3767, March 10, 1203–1207.

perhaps!). A much later work, Walter Isaacson's *Einstein, his Life and Universe* (2006) showed Einstein pressing ever onward for more accurate and satisfying (to him first of all) accounts of a dynamic universe. In the meantime I read with astonishment Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time* (1988) and *A Briefer History of Time* (2005); and Carl Sagan's *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage* (1980); and then with growing wonder and awe Brian Greene's *Making Sense of String Theory*. I should mention that just a few years ago (2011), TIME, Inc. published a very readable, popular, and also substantive biography of *Albert Einstein: The Enduring Legacy of a Modern Genius*. Done by Richard Lacayo, Arthur Hochstein, and Dot McMahon, and others, it is worth reading—and more than once.

## 5.

Many thinkers have helped me understand and formulate the idea, contra the Newtonian world view, that we live in a relational and self-organizing universe and that we humans, in belonging to this universe, are characterized in our being by inherent relationship and self-organizing power. Even so, many post-Newtonians have assumed that the world, scientifically understood, is pretty much the way Newton and his heirs thought about it, but that they could offer a picture of life and the world from a human (and thus presumably a non-scientific) point of view. I see most Existentialism in that light as well as a great outpouring of humanist writings. The misleading and futile bifurcation of “hard science” and humanism is maintained in those works. How exciting and forward looking is the scientific and philosophic work of Ilya Prigogine, a Nobel Prize winner in chemistry in 1977. Encountering the world view of Newton directly, he dispels the myth of the separation between a scientifically understood nature and a non-scientific and “higher” human nature. For example, in the book *Order out of Chaos*, written with Isabelle Stengers, they wrote of life in general, that it

“is the outermost consequence of the occurrence of self-organizing processes, instead of being something outside nature's order . . . Earlier science [stemming from Newton] about a passive world belongs to the past . . . superseded by the internal development of science itself.”<sup>7</sup>

Humanism's demand for choice and freedom is answered in this “internal development of science itself.”

Inspired by Prigogine, Erich Jantz wrote *The Self-organizing Universe*<sup>8</sup> in 1980. Fritjof Capra poses a similar approach, notably in *The Web of Life, a New Understanding of Living Systems* (1996).<sup>9</sup> In the 1990's I delved into books by Danah Zohar, *The Quantum Self*, *The Quantum Society*, and *Rewiring the Corporate Brain*.

<sup>7</sup> Prigogine, I., I. Stengers. 1984. *Order out of Chaos. Man's New Dialogue with Nature*. New York: Bantam Books, 172.

<sup>8</sup> Jantz, E. 1980. *The Self-organizing Universe*. New York: Pergamon Press.

<sup>9</sup> Capra, F. 1996. *The Web of Life, a New Understanding of Living Systems*. New York: Anchor Books.

Charlene Spretnak's books develop a similarly new and engaging world view, most recently in *Relational Reality* (2011). Ellen LaConte's recent book, *Life Rules: Nature's Blueprint for Surviving Economic and Environmental Collapse* (2012) aptly explores the seamless relationship that exists within nature between human and non-human systems. Thomas Berry, philosopher and widely revered Catholic priest (1914–2009), wrote an arresting book, *Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe and the Role of Humanity in the Universe Process*. The first principle is consonant with what the forgoing authors advance. He writes, "The universe, the solar system, and planet Earth in themselves and in their evolutionary emergence constitute for the human community the primary mystery whence all things emerge into being." I've touched here on only some of the literature and philosophy in recent decades pointing to and developing a post-Newtonian understanding of nature, of the human in nature, and the human as active agent in our own evolution.

## 6.

Henryk Skolimowski is a pioneer of eco-philosophy. He has written a great number of provocative and insightful books. The one that inspires me most is his recent *The Lotus and the Mud: Autobiography of a Philosopher* (2011. Creative Fire Press). In this as in his other works he shows how deep in the evolutionary trajectory of the human species is the practice and the growing awareness of dialogue.

## 7.

There are now many books and research projects that explore and examine the interactive relationships and dialogic intimations that occur in non-human nature. Consider, for example, the pioneering on-the-ground research and writing of Jane Goodall. Two of her books were especially enlightening for me: *Reason for Hope, a Spiritual Journey*, with Phillip Berman (1999) and *Through a Window: 30 Years Observing the Gombe Chimpanzees* (1990).<sup>10</sup>

Building on Jane Goodall's theme of animal interactive communication and dialogic intimations, we have been treated with many books, articles, and research projects.

I rejoice to include: Andrew R. Halloran, *The Song of the Ape—Understanding the language of Chimpanzees*; Tim Flannery, *Here on Earth—A Natural History of the Plane*; John D. Barrow, *The Artful Universe Expanded*; and Neil Shubin, *The Universe Within—Discovering the Common History of Rocks, Planets, and People*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Goodall, J., Ph. Berman. 1999. *Reason for Hope, a Spiritual Journey*. New York: Warner Books; Goodall, J. 1990. *Through a Window: 30 Years Observing the Gombe Chimpanzees*. London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, and Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

<sup>11</sup> Halloran, A. R. 2012. *The Song of the Ape—Understanding the Language of Chimpanzees*. New York: Martin's Press; Flannery, T. 2010. *Here on Earth—A Natural History of the Plane*. New York: Grove Press; Barrow, J. D. 2005. *The Artful Universe Expanded*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Shubin, N. 2013. *The Universe within—Discovering the Common History of Rocks, Planets, and People*. New York: Pantheon Books.

## 8.

Conversations of a human being, or groups of human beings, with other-than-human-beings and with nature as a whole (or “the all” to choose different language) has encountered skepticism, dismissal, if not disdain from the creators and devoted followers of a mechanistic understanding of the world. But in the new science stemming from Einstein, quantum theorists, anthropologists, paleontologists, eco-philosophers, and feminist thinkers, there is growing scientific support for listening to, and acknowledging, the experiential claims of voices—ancient, modern, and contemporary—affirming a conversational initiative-and-response relationship with other-than-human-beings and with the universe as a whole. St. Francis’s claims to such conversations are being taken seriously, for example, an especially relevant and affecting one. There are a host of other examples. Poets like Emily Dickinson and Mary Oliver are just a few of the artistic voices expressing a conversational relation with nature. Jane Goodall, whose work has been noted earlier in this essay, was once asked whether she believed in God. Her response, quoted in the Wikipedia biography of her, was, “I don’t have any idea of who or what God is. But I do believe in some great spiritual power. I feel it particularly when I’m out in nature. It’s just something that’s bigger and stronger than what I am or what anybody is. I feel it. And it’s enough for me.”

## 9.

In *Maps of Time, an Introduction to Big History*, David Christian<sup>12</sup> details the long, boisterous, and also tortuous record of agrarian civilizations worldwide, capped by the emergence in the past several centuries of an equally if not even more problematic industrial civilization now spreading to the entire world. It is a record of sharp bifurcation of the few and the many, of top heavy elite structures, and of a steady and increasingly self-destructive assault on nature. Andrew Smookler addresses an additionally crucial factor reinforcing top heavy structures. He notes that one of the most potent forces pressing on rulers to over-tax and oppress the people of a tribe, or city-state, or nation is the constant threat—real or manufactured—of hostile forces and danger from without.<sup>13</sup> I make the point that in this context, dialogue, though repeatedly attempted from time to time, is a frail force destined to be marginalized.

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<sup>12</sup> Christian, D. 2004. *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History*. University of California Press (first paperback printing: 2005).

<sup>13</sup> Smookler, A. B. 1984. *The Parable of the Tribes: the Problem of Power in Social Evolution*, University of California Press.



book about the Solidarity movement published in 1988, *Poland Challenges a Divided World*. His writings about Green politics includes *Against all Odds, the Green Transformation of American Politics* published in 1999. He founded and is editor of *Green Horizon Magazine*, an international journal. He has also co-founded a leading ecological education project in this home area of midcoast Maine, the Cathance River Education Alliance.

*Marian Hillar*

## WHAT DOES MODERN SCIENCE SAY ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF COOPERATION? SCIENCE CONFIRMS PHILOSOPHY

### *ABSTRACT*

During the last decades evolutionary science has made significance progress in the elucidation of the process of human evolution and especially of human behavioral characteristics. These themes were traditionally subjects of inquiry in philosophy and theology. Already Darwin suggested an evolutionary and biological basis for moral sense or conscience, and answered Kant's question about the origin of the moral rules postulated by philosophers. This article reviews the current status of such investigations by natural scientists, biologists and psychologists, and compares their models for explanation of human moral behavior with those postulated by philosophers. Today natural scientists postulate cooperation as the third element of evolutionary process after mutations and natural selection. They seem to fully confirm the intuition of philosophers. The thesis on the fundamental status of cooperation in the entire animal world leads to a belief concerning dialogue: dialogue, rooted in a sense in cooperation, is a primary men's capability, being emerged from the biological essence of humans. Thus the examination of cooperation reveals *inter alia* biological foundations of dialogue.

**Keywords:** cooperation; moral philosophy; behavior; moral principle; moral sense; conscience; kin selection; reciprocal altruism; group selection.

### PHILOSOPHICAL INTUITION

Investigation of the phenomenon of cooperation has a long history. Perhaps the most eloquent expression of this phenomenon was given by the Stoic, Marcus Aurelius (121–180 C.E.), Roman Emperor during the years 161–180 C.E. Aurelius followed the principles of the Stoic moral philosophy, which emphasized the well-being of the community and the naturalistic basis of human behavior:

“Men exist for the sake of one another.  
We ought to do good to others as simply as a horse runs,  
or a bee makes honey, or a vine bears grapes season after  
season without thinking of the grapes it has borne.”<sup>1</sup>

Aurelius wrote his *Meditations* during his campaign between 170–180 for his own guidance for he was a priest at the temple in Rome. His book was first published in print in 1558 in Zurich from a manuscript that is lost today. However, there exists another manuscript that survived to our times now located in the Vatican library. His book was read throughout the centuries for moral and spiritual edification by rulers, politicians, philosophers and writers.

Another Stoic philosopher, Cicero (106–43 B.C.E.), claimed that the pattern of human behavior changes from purely animal-like and instinctive to fully rational and involves five stages. They represent the development of human nature, but only a few people will reach the highest stages, because the process is not independent of man’s own effort. The “function” or goal of man in this process is attainment of the perfection of his nature. The term used by Cicero is *officium* (corresponding to the English office, duty or task, as the office of an official charged with certain duties) and the Greek term is *kathekon*. One could not talk about the “duty” of an animal or of an infant, but rather of their natural function. The term duty becomes appropriate in stages three-through-five in human development as the changes in behavior become the functions of a rational being.<sup>2</sup> Thus the Stoics recognized a natural biological basis for human behavior from which reason draws conclusions, develops rules and constructs a moral philosophy.<sup>3</sup> Even Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) wondered about the origin of the moral principle that humans displayed and which he called “good-will”:

“Duty! Thou sublime and mighty name that dost embrace nothing charming or insinuating but require submission and yet seekest not to move the will by threatening aught that would arouse natural aversion or terror, but only holdest forth a law which of itself finds entrance into the mind and yet gains reluctant reverence (though not always obedience)—a law before which all inclinations are mute even though secretly work against it: what origin is worthy of thee, and where is the root of thy noble descent which proudly rejects all kinship with the inclinations and from which to be descended is the indis-

<sup>1</sup> Aurelius, M. 1964. *Meditations*. Transl., with an introduction: Staniforth, M. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.

<sup>2</sup> Cicero. 1986. *On the Good Life*. Transl., with an introduction: Grant, M. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books; Hillar, M. 1998. “Natural Development, Rationality, and Responsibility in Stoic Ethics.” *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*. Ed. Finch, R. D., M. Hillar, F. Prah. American Humanist Association, Houston, vol. 6, 44–78.

<sup>3</sup> Hillar, M. 1998. “Natural Development, Rationality, and Responsibility in Stoic Ethics.” *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, op. cit., 44–78.

pensable condition of the only worth which men alone can give themselves?”<sup>4</sup>

This classification of the behavioral levels derives from the Stoic intuitive philosophical doctrine<sup>5</sup> and corresponds to the stages of moral development of man through which community life and virtue are recognized as pre-eminently “things belonging to man” in their terminology and are related to the autonomous behavioral level (categorical imperative of Kant). In modern times such a Stoic view of the moral development of man in the Kantian modification was wholly confirmed by modern psychology and philosophy. Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) suggested six stages of the moral development of children through three levels—the pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional, each subdivided into two stages. The first two levels correspond to the heteronomous behavioral level of Kant.<sup>6</sup>

### EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY AND COOPERATION

Looking at the principles of evolutionary theory it seems at first that the existence of cooperation should be contradictory to the evolutionary process. This difficulty was noticed already by Darwin when he discussed the origin of social moral faculties in “the primeval man.” Darwin admitted that such traits as courage and fidelity could increase in competition between tribes: “A tribe rich in the above qualities would spread and be victorious over other tribes.”<sup>7</sup> But asking how within the same tribe could a large number of members become endowed with these social and moral qualities, Darwin answered:

“He who was ready to sacrifice his life, as many a savage has been, rather than betray his comrades, would often leave no offspring to inherit his noble nature. ... Therefore it hardly seem probable, that the number of men gifted with such virtues, or that the standard of their excellence could be increased through natural selection, that is by the survival of the fittest; for we are not speaking here of one tribe being victorious over another.”<sup>8</sup>

Then Darwin postulated that though the high standard of morality may give a slight advantage to each individual in a tribe, yet an increase in the number of

<sup>4</sup> Kant, I. 1993. *Critique of Practical Reason*. Ed., transl. with notes and introduction: Beck, L.W. Third edition. New York: Macmillan, 90.

<sup>5</sup> *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* Collegit Ioannes Ab Arnim (Stutgardiae: In: Aedibus B.G. Teubneri MCMLXIV), vols. 1–4. (abbreviated as SVF). SVF 1.197.

<sup>6</sup> Kohlberg, L. 1981, 1984. *Essays on Moral Development*, vols. 1, 2. San Francisco: Harper & Row; Hillar, M. 2009. “Foundation of Kant’s Moral Philosophy and its Reinterpretation. A Quintessential Humanistic Doctrine.” *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, vol. 17 (1), 71–90.

<sup>7</sup> Darwin, Ch. 1860. (reprint of the second edition of 1860, no date). *The Origin of Species and the Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*. Toronto: Modern Library, 498.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

well-endowed men and an advancement in the standard of morality will certainly give an immense advantage to one tribe over another. A tribe including many members who, from possessing in a high degree the spirit of patriotism, fidelity obedience, courage, and sympathy, were always ready to aid one another, and to sacrifice themselves for the common good, would be victorious over most tribes, and this would be natural selection.<sup>9</sup> Evolutionary scientists classify such a selection as a “between-group selection.” Moreover, cooperative and altruistic behavior, understood not in the everyday sense of conscious act, but as a behavior, which benefits other organism at a cost to the donor, is widely common throughout the animal kingdom. It seems from the studies of many biologists that entire organisms like multicellular organisms with specialized cells could also be considered as organisms made of cooperating cells and entire colonies of social organisms depend on cooperation and often altruistic sacrifice of some individuals for the sake of the group.<sup>10</sup> Thus Martin A. Nowak building mathematical models for evolution considers cooperation the third fundamental process for evolution after mutations and natural selection.<sup>11</sup> The problem puzzled many biologists, economists and mathematicians. Darwin suggested that natural selection favored families whose members were cooperative and answered Kant’s question about the origin of moral rule:

“The following proposition seems to me in a high degree probable—namely, that any animal whatever endowed with well-marked social instincts, the parental and filial affection being here included, would inevitably acquire a moral sense or conscience as soon as its intellectual powers have become as weak, or nearly as well developed in man.”<sup>12</sup>

Such a prediction by Darwin is confirmed today by scientific investigations postulating the existence of the “moral faculty.”<sup>13</sup> This concept of the moral faculty goes back to antiquity when the ancients had a premonition of innate moral principles (moral sentiment, sense of justice, common moral thought) which were working subconsciously. It is the basis for the moral rules which like rules of logic or of natural sciences are objective truths, outcomes of rational choice. These rules were developed and formulated in various cultures with varying degree of success and today they are at the foundation of humanistic ethics. John Rawls (1921–2002) in his well known treatise *A Theory of Justice* (1971) suggested that these innate moral principles can be analogized to the

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 500.

<sup>10</sup> Hunt, J. H. 2007. *The Evolution of Social Wasps*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Hölldobler, B., E.O. Wilson. 2008. *The Superorganism: The Beauty, Elegance, and Strangeness of Insect Societies*. New York: W. W. Norton.

<sup>11</sup> Nowak, M. A. 2006. *Evolutionary Dynamics: Exploring the Equations of Life*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

<sup>12</sup> Darwin, Ch. 2006. *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, op. cit., 471–472.

<sup>13</sup> Hauser, M. D. 2006. *Moral Minds. How Nature Designed Our Universal Sense of Right and Wrong*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

“sense of grammaticality” (a “faculty of grammar”) described by Noam Chomsky.<sup>14</sup>

### HAMILTON MODEL OF INCLUSIVE FITNESS: “KIN SELECTION”

The process of group selection postulated by Darwin was first in early days of neo-Darwinism discredited as a weak evolutionary force.<sup>15</sup> Still the phenomenon of natural cooperative, altruistic behavior needed an explanation.

The advent of modern genetic science could attempt to explain and expand the intuitive speculations of philosophers and explain the observations of Darwin by providing insight into how biological mechanisms operate. Thus our focus is now on the genetic conditioning for cooperation. William Hamilton developed a model based on genetic studies of social insects. It is based on the observation that the offspring of relatives count toward one’s individual fitness by helping to spread shared genes. Such a situation exists in colonies of social insects composed of related individuals. The closer the degree of relatedness, the stronger the cooperation one may expect among individuals. This theory seems to be an explanation of Darwin’s dilemma and was already vaguely suggested by John Burdon Haldane (1892–1964) in the 1930s.<sup>16</sup> The Hamilton model can be illustrated by behavior as when a parent or a close relative jumps into the water to save one’s own or closely related child. Such behavior contributes to the survival of one’s own genes. The degree of relationship is an important parameter in predicting how selection will operate and the behavior, which appears to be altruistic, may, knowing the genetic relatedness of the organisms involved, be explained in terms of natural selection. The genes that are selected for this behavior contribute to their own perpetuation regardless of the individual in which the genes appear.<sup>17</sup>

### TRIVERS MODEL OF “RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM”

The model of kinship cooperation, i.e., the kin selection model of Hamilton, however, cannot explain all cooperation. Humans, for example, belong to a species that developed a high degree of cooperation among genetically unre-

<sup>14</sup> Chomsky, N. 1965. *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 3–9.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, G. C. 1966. *Adaptation and Natural Selection*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Smith, M. J. 1976. “Group Selection and Kin Selection.” *Nature*, 201, 1145–1147; Dawkins, R. 1976. *The Selfish Gene*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> Trivers, R. L., Hope H. 2002. “Haplodiploidy and the Evolution of the Social Insects.” In Trivers, R. *Natural Selection and Social Theory. Selected papers of Robert Trivers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 164–206; Haldane, J. B. 1990 (1932—first edition). *The Causes of Evolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Haldane, J. B. 2009. *What I Require from Life: Writings on Science and Life from J. B. S. Haldane*. Ed. Dronamvain, K. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>17</sup> Hamilton, W. 1964. “The Genetical Evolution of Social Behavior.” *J. Theor. Biol.*, 7, 1–52.

lated individuals. Such cooperation between genetically unrelated individuals is defined as altruistic behavior or as reciprocally altruistic. It can be selected even when the recipient is so distantly related to the organism performing the altruistic act that kin selection can be ruled out. Such cooperation will represent behavior between members of different species. It is a behavior that benefits another organism not closely related while being apparently detrimental to the organism performing the behavior. Here benefit and detriment are defined in terms of contribution to inclusive fitness. Natural selection favors these altruistic behaviors because, in the long run, they benefit the organism performing them.

Robert Trivers in the 1970s developed this idea of “reciprocal altruism” as a model for explaining cooperation between genetically unrelated strangers based on naturalistic observations.<sup>18</sup> One of them involves symbiosis. There are innumerable examples of fish of one species hosting of another to the host. It seems that this symbiosis evolved many times being favored by natural selection. In this symbiosis the hosts of the cleaning organisms, in turn perform several kinds of altruistic behavior such as not eating their cleaners and warning them about approaching predators. The host benefits from quickly and repeatedly returning to the same cleaner. Another example of this behavior is that of some birds which emit special calls warning other birds when spotting an approaching predator.

Human reciprocal altruism takes place in a number of situations and in all known cultures and is represented by such kinds of behavior as: helping in time of danger; sharing food; helping the sick, the wounded, or the very young and old; sharing tools and knowledge. This altruistic behavior meets the criterion of small cost to the giver and great benefit to the receiver. It seems that human altruistic behavior comes directly from reciprocity and not indirectly through nonaltruistic group benefits. Some social scientists and philosophers tended to explain human altruistic behavior in terms of benefits of living in a group without differentiating between nonaltruistic benefits and reciprocal benefits.<sup>19</sup>

Trivers’ model explains the psychological mechanisms of emotions such as friendship, dislike, moralistic oppression, gratitude, sympathy, trust, suspicion, trustworthiness, aspects of guilt, forms of dishonesty, hypocrisy and moralistic aggression as adaptations to regulate the altruistic reactions. Anthropologists analyzed these human behaviors in terms of group survival, but Trivers model is more basic. Nietzsche is an example of a philosopher who, from an early age,

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<sup>18</sup> Trivers, R. L. 2002. “The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism.” In Trivers, R. *Natural Selection and Social Theory. Selected papers of Robert Trivers*, op. cit., 18–51.

<sup>19</sup> Baier, K. 1958. *The Moral Point of View*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press; Rousseau, J. J. 1954. Transl. Kendall, W. *The Social Contract*. Chicago: Henry Regnery.

was interested in the provenance of morals and ethics.<sup>20</sup> The question of evil in the world to him was of primary importance and Nietzsche resolved it by separating it from theological inquiry with the question, “Under what conditions did man construct value judgments *good* and *evil*”? Nietzsche proposed that “All sciences are now under an obligation to prepare the ground for the future task of the philosopher, which is to solve the problem of value, to determine the true hierarchy of values.”

In Trivers model each individual human is seen as possessing altruistic and cheating tendencies, the expression of which is sensitive to developmental variables that were selected to set the tendencies at a balance appropriate to the local social and ecological environments. Trivers postulated that emotions of friendship and intelligence are prerequisites for the appearance of altruism that transcends the limit of family relationships. The underlying emotional dispositions affecting altruistic behavior have a genetic thus instinctive and unconscious component, and display a certain set of universal characteristics:

1. dispositions are sensitive to nuances in behavior; often in such behavior it will pay to cheat and detection of subtle cheating may be difficult;

2. friendship and emotions of liking and disliking will be selected towards those who themselves are altruistic. Moreover, friendship and intelligence are prerequisites for the appearance of such altruism that transcends the limits of family relationship;

3. once emotional dispositions for altruistic behavior have developed the altruist is in a vulnerable position because cheaters will be selected to take advantage of the altruist’s emotions. Such a situation produces a selection pressure for the development of a protective mechanism in the form of “indignation” and “moralistic aggression.” These dispositions were selected in order to

a. counteract the altruistic tendencies in the absence of reciprocity to continuing the altruistic acts;

b. educate the unreciprocating individual by frightening him with immediate or future harm of not receiving moral aid;

c. and, in extreme cases perhaps, select against the unreciprocating individual by injuring, killing or exiling him.

Thus much of human aggression has moral overtones motivated by injustice, unfairness and lack of reciprocity.

4. dispositional emotions of gratitude, sympathy, and cost/benefit evaluations:

Emotion of gratitude has been selected to regulate human response to altruistic acts and is sensitive to the cost/benefit evaluation of such acts.

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<sup>20</sup> Hillar, M. 2008. “Friedrich Nietzsche: Social Origin of Morals, Christian Ethics, and Implications for Atheism in His ‘The Genealogy of Morals’.” *Essays in the Philosophy of Humanism*, vol. 16 (1) Spring-Summer. American Humanist Association, 59–84.



Emotion of sympathy has been selected to motivate altruistic behavior as a function of the plight of the recipient of such behavior and increases with the increase of the potential of the benefit even to strangers or disliked individuals.

5. guilt and reparative altruism: Catching a cheater and making him pay dearly will produce a selection for a reparative gesture. This creates an emotion of guilt which is selected to motivate the cheater to compensate for his misdeed and to behave reciprocally in the future and in this way to prevent the rupture of the reciprocal relationship.

6. mimicking the behavior: Once the emotions favoring altruistic or cooperative behavior develop, they select behavior for mimicking these traits in order to influence the behavior of others to one's own advantage.

7. detection of subtle cheaters: trustworthiness, trust, and suspicion. These dispositions are selected for in order to detect and discriminate against subtle cheaters. In classical philosophical and sociological considerations this issue was presented in terms of a problem how to define altruism, whether in terms of motives—a "real altruism" or "calculated altruism" or in terms of behavior, regardless of the motivation.

8. setting up altruistic relationships: natural selection will favor for establishing reciprocal relationships.

9. multiparty interactions: selection will favor more complex interactions than two-party interactions. This involves:

- a. learning from others indirectly by observation and language;
- b. helping to deal with cheaters;
- c. generalizing altruism;
- d. developing rules of exchange—language facilities formulating and codifying multiparty interactions. Anthropology and cultural history provide abundant evidence for these interactions.

10. developmental plasticity: Human evolution set up a selection pressure for psychological and cognitive powers which contributed to an increase in human brain size during the Pleistocene period (from 2.5 million to 12,000 years ago).

Trivers' model of reciprocal altruism constitutes a biological foundation for the naturalistic social theory. Already Nietzsche had an inkling into it when he attempted to describe the origin of "guilt" or "bad conscience" in the human psyche of emotions and the evolution of punishment and its purpose as an expression of moral rule. Nietzsche explains that the feeling of guilt is a product of the oldest relationship between humans, that of "buyer and seller, creditor and debtor." With this origin is linked the concept of punishment as compensation for the contractual relation between debtor and creditor. Damage produced by not keeping a contract results in rage and for every damage some equivalent for compensation may be found, even in inflicting pain. In older civilizations drastic pledges were made by the debtor in order to guarantee fulfillment of the promise. These compensations were in the form of inflicting

bodily harm through which the creditor, in place of material compensation such as land or money, was receiving pleasure. Later this punitive authority was passed on to the legal authority and the creditor then enjoyed seeing the debtor despised and mistreated. Thus through such a process of contracts and legal obligations these moral concepts were developed: guilt, conscience, duty.<sup>21</sup>

Axelrod and Hamilton<sup>22</sup> inspired by the Trivers studies developed computer simulations of his model and created game programs such as Prisoner's Dilemma in which two players have the option to cooperate. It was found that such computer game models evolve and can be maintained between two people if they follow the rule of reciprocity and learning in subsequent encounters. Prisoner's Dilemma games increased in complexity in further studies by allowing a gradation of responses mimicking more closely the complexity that evolved in the behavior of species like ourselves and our close relatives.<sup>23</sup> Also, the studies of reciprocal altruism were extended to many animal species.<sup>24</sup>

### REPUTATION AND RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM MODEL

But these new models could not explain how large cooperative groups could evolve. In such groups the possibility of reencountering a person who is helping or who has been helped is quite small. Also one has to consider the situation when some people are cheating and become freeloaders, others may follow the cheaters and the stability of the group could be jeopardized.

To overcome these problems Martin Nowak and Karl Sigmund<sup>25</sup> developed a mathematical model in which people decide what to do based not only on whether others have helped them but also whether others have helped others. Thus a person with a reputation of a helper can get help even from someone who has not benefited directly from such a person in the past. Such a model was confirmed in 2004 by Robert Boyd and Peter J. Richerson who showed that those who did not help nor had a reputation of being freeloaders were shunned.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, F. 1956. *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*. Trans. Golfing, F. New York: Anchor Books.

<sup>22</sup> Axelrod, R., W. Hamilton. 1981. "The Evolution of Cooperation." *Science*, vol. 211, 1390–1396.

<sup>23</sup> Nowak M., Sigmund K. 1998. "The Dynamics of Indirect Reciprocity by Image Scoring." *Nature*, vol. 393, 573–577; Nowak M., K., Sigmund. 1998. "The Dynamics of Indirect Reciprocity." *J. Theor. Biol.*, vol. 194, 561–574.

<sup>24</sup> Connor, R., M. Heithaus, L. Barre. 1999. "Superalliance of Bottlenose Dolphins." *Nature*, 397, 571–572; Godin J., S. Davis. 1995. "Who Dares, Benefits: Predator Approach Behavior in Guppy (*Poecilia reticulata*) Deters Predator Pursuit." *Proc. Roy. Soc. London. B.* 209, 193–200.

<sup>25</sup> *Selecta Mathematica*. 2002, 2003. (German and English Editions), vols. 1, 2. Ed. Menger, K., B. Schweizer, A. Sklar, K. Sigmund. Berlin: Springer.

<sup>26</sup> Boyd, R., P. J. Richerson. 2005. *The Origin and Evolution of Cultures*. New York: Oxford University Press; Richerson, P. J., R. Boyd. 2006. *Not by Genes Alone: How Culture Transformed Human Evolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Boyd, R. 2009. *How Humans Evolved*. New York: W.W. Norton.

### PUNISHMENT AND RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM MODEL

The reputation model for reciprocal altruism still could not explain fully the cooperative nature of human interactions. Ernst Fehr and others observed in their labor market studies that people tend to be more cooperative than the economic theory would predict. Fairly paid employees worked harder than predicted solely from their self-interest. To explain such behavior he suggested, by using game-playing experiments, that punishment was a factor in cooperative behavior. In a game model, participants could decide whether to keep money they were given or to contribute some or all of it to a group project and, at the same time they had the option to punish non-contributing participants. In this game participants were chose to punish the non-contributors and the majority of those who punished were those whose contributions were above-average. In a situation when punishment was not an option, average contributions dropped. Also, it was demonstrated that a mere threat of punishment was enough to prevent cheating.<sup>27</sup>

It is thought that altruistic learning may be instinctive because, in small groups of evolving humans, reputation always counted. Moreover, punishment had less importance since in human encounters rewards work better than punishment.<sup>28</sup>

### GROUP SELECTION MODEL

The other model was developed on the premise that competition among groups can foster cooperation within them. Natural forces may work in different directions, e.g., natural selection may make individuals less cooperative, but competition between groups may push them to cooperate within the group enhancing thus the survivability of the group. This was observed by Darwin and is still observed for modern warring groups and from military history. Archaeological studies, on evidence about 50,000 years ago, and historical reports demonstrated that death from warfare averaged about 14%, significantly higher than in the 20th-century Europe with two world wars.<sup>29</sup> This result was confirmed by using game theory simulation. Thus it seems that cooperation between groups increased significantly with time in human evolution.

<sup>27</sup> 2006. *Economic Life. Economic Learning and Social Evolution*. Ed. Gintis, H., S. Bowles, R. T. Boyd, E. Fehr. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; 2004. *Foundations of Human Sociality: Economic Experiments and Ethnographic Evidence from Fifteen Small-Scale Societies*. Ed. Henrich, J., R. Boyd, S. Bowles, C. Camerer. New York: Oxford University Press; Glimcher, W., C. Camerer, R. A. Poldrack, E. Fehr. 2008. *Neuroeconomics: Decision Making and the Brain*. New York: Academic Press.

<sup>28</sup> Ohtsuki, H., Y. Iwasa, M. Nowak. 2009. "Indirect Reciprocity Provides only a Narrow Margin of Efficiency for Costly Punishment." *Nature*, vol. 457, No. 7225, 79–82.

<sup>29</sup> Bowles, S. 2009. "Did Warfare Among Ancestral Hunter-Gatherers Affect the Evolution of Human Social Behaviors?" *Science*, 5 June, vol. 324, no. 5932, 1293–1298.

## COOPERATION AMONG VIRUSES AND MICROBES

It is interesting that cooperation was also observed among such low level organisms as bacteriophages, viruses that live in bacterial cells. Two researchers Joel Sachs and James Bull<sup>30</sup> injected into a bacterial strain two different types of viruses at the same time. After many generations, the two viruses packaged their genomes within a single coating protein thus ensuring the transmission of both of their genomes to the next bacterial host. Other researchers expanded such studies on cooperation between bacterial strains showing that, when they sense the accumulation of other bacteria nearby, so-called quorum sensing, they increase secretion of certain biochemicals which are of benefit to all bacteria present.<sup>31</sup> The best known among social microbes is the slime mold *Dictyostelium*. It was shown that these single-cell amoeba organisms often merge to form stalks with fruiting bodies on top, thus allowing some cells to produce spores which may disperse to more food-rich places. But among these amoeba cells are also cheaters, cells that mutated, and which infiltrate the fruiting body, thus avoiding becoming the nonreproductive stalk. A large number of genes were discovered that confer the ability to cheat. At the same time studies showed that amoebas can keep cheating in check because mutations that make cheating possible prevent cheaters from getting into the aggregation at all. One of the genes, called the green-beard gene, enables an amoeba to recognize others with the same gene and help perpetuate copies of the gene in others regardless of relatedness.<sup>32</sup>

The existence of such type of genes for cooperation was postulated a long time ago by Hamilton. Many other organisms from termites to meerkats provide examples of cooperation. “The origin of sociality is unlikely to be encompassed by a single explanation. Sociality like multicellularity, has happened numerous times, in diverse taxa, and reached many different levels of integration.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Sachs, J., J. Bull. 2005. *Proc. Nat. Acad. Sci.*, 102, 390.

<sup>31</sup> Stuart A., W. A. Gardner. 2010. “Altruism, Spite and Greenbeards.” *Science*, 12 March, vol. 327, no. 5971, 1341–1344.

<sup>32</sup> Khare, A., L. A. Santorelli, J. E. Strassmann, D. C. Queller, A. Kuspa, G. Shaulsky. 2009. “Cheater-Resistance is not Futile.” *Nature* 461, 980–982 (30 September); Mullard, A. 2009. “Cheating Bacteria Could Treat Infections.” *Nature News* (21 January); Queller, D.C. 2008. “Behavioral Ecology: The Social Side of Wild Yeast.” *Nature* 456, 589–590 (3 December); Santorelli, L.A., Ch. R.L. Thompson, E. Villegas, *et al.* 2008. “Facultative Cheater Mutants Reveal the Genetic Complexity of Cooperation in Social Amoebae.” *Nature*, 451, 1107–1110 (13 February).

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in: Pennisi, E. 2009. “On the Origin of Cooperation.” *Science*, 4 September, vol. 325, 1196–1199.

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*Kevin M. Brien*

## **A MEDITATION ON UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE**

*Dedicated to Robert S. Cohen*

### **ABSTRACT**

This meditation is a series of reflections about some milestones along my philosophical journey that concern universals, universal definitions, claims to universal moral principles, and universal dialogue. It begins with a focus on the Socratic search for universal definitions of general terms; and it continues with a look at the way my discovery of non-Euclidean geometries began to challenge my attitude toward the possibility of universal definitions of all general terms. Along the way I bring out how Wittgenstein's notion of "family resemblances" added to this challenge. The meditation continues with reflections on Kant's attempts to make a case for a universal and unconditional moral imperative. Following this I sketch a counter-case that the concrete human being gets lost in a haze of Kantian abstraction. These reflections bring out the clear conceptual linkage between the "abstract universal" and the "external relation" as canons of interpretation.

The meditation then makes a shift to some later milestones on my journey, beginning with reflection on the "concrete universal" and the "internal relation" as alternative canons of interpretation. I try to illustrate how Marx critically appropriated Hegel's view of these canons via discussion of Marx's notion of "praxis;" and then go on to adopt these canons of interpretation throughout the rest of the meditation. Employing these canons of interpretation, and with Aristotle's very broad understanding of the term "politics" in mind, I construe universal dialogue to be a mode of discourse oriented toward the development of a new "politics of the global village" that could cultivate the practice of concretely relating to the other person as a person. Inasmuch as Aristotle construed "politics" as involving a developed ethics as well as a "science of society" (in addition to what westerners currently mean by the term), the meditation proceeds with a preliminary sketch of these two dimensions of a new "politics of the global village."

My meditation goes on to suggest a fundamental ethical principle (contrasting it with Kant's moral imperative) that could be concretely and universally adopted by all

people, and that could guide universal dialogue. The meditation continues with a sketch of a philosophical reconstruction of a humanistic Marxist “science of society,” and integrates the fundamental ethical principle with it. This sketch is basically a philosophical clarification of Marx’s theory of cultural evolution that brings into play the key role of the concrete universal and the internal relation as fundamental canons of interpretation. The meditation concludes with an argument that universal dialogue on the part of a very wide spectrum of ordinary people, as well as specialists, is the *sine qua non* for any hope of transforming the secular basis of human societies in the direction of social justice, as all of humanity faces the daunting crises that loom throughout planet Earth.

**Keywords:** abstract universal; alienation; Aristotle; capitalism; categorical imperative; concrete universal; cultural evolution; external relation; forces of production; Hegel; internal relation; Kant; Marx; politics of the global village; praxis; social relations of production; social superstructure; Socrates; triangles; universal definitions; universal dialogue; Wittgenstein.

The phrase universal dialogue has had many different connotations for me over the years; and I am sure it has had different connotations for very many others. So with a view to becoming clear in my own mind just what connotations the phrase has for me at this juncture in my life, I believe it will be helpful to look back over the years so as to review some of the earlier connotations the phrase has had for me. In this way I will hopefully also be able to clearly convey to an interested reader what I now take universal dialogue to mean, and in this way bring out why I find the practice of universal dialogue to be so important for on-going human cultural evolution.

Early in my philosophical journey I thought of universal dialogue in relation to the search on the part of Socrates for universal definitions illustrated, for example, in the search by the character Socrates for a universal definition of “piety” (ὁσιότης) in Plato’s *Euthyphro*. In this dialogue Socrates and Euthyphro cross paths with one another near the law court; and Socrates soon discovers that Euthyphro has come to the court to prosecute his own father for the death of a laborer who is himself a known murderer. Socrates is surprised to hear of this once Euthyphro explains the circumstances of the laborer’s death, and he is puzzled that Euthyphro seems so very sure that what he is doing is a pious act, especially when his relatives and others view the act of prosecuting his father as impious and are angry with him for doing so.<sup>1</sup>

So Socrates challenges Euthyphro to explain to him just what he construes the term “piety” to mean. But Socrates makes clear he is asking him to explain

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<sup>1</sup> Plato. 1985. “Euthyphro.” In: *Plato: Five Dialogues*. Trans. Grube, G. M. A. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 3e-5d.

the one “form that makes all pious actions pious,”<sup>2</sup> and he tries to guide Euthyphro via a process of on-going dialogue in which he asks questions to draw him out, and then critically comments on his various responses. All through this process Euthyphro fumbles at every turn, and every response about the nature of piety that he proposes succumbs to Socrates’ critical scrutiny; and while many tentative definitions of piety are given by Euthyphro, the dialogue never comes to an acceptable definition of piety. However, it became clear to me that the sort of response that could pass muster with incisive critical scrutiny by Socrates, or by any one else, would have to be a universal definition. Thus I saw that a universal definition of piety (or of anything else) would be a definition that articulated in clear language the complete set of attributes that taken together constituted the essence of piety (or whatever else) and that distinguished piety unambiguously from everything else.

At that time I also interpreted philosophical dialogue to mean dialogue involving Socratic method as the instrument of analysis and critical assessment of tentative hypotheses. I clearly understood that the method begins with the emergence of some philosophical problem of interest; and proceeds to formulate a tentative hypothesis about that problem. It goes on to clarify key terms that appear in the hypothesis, and to draw out the implications of the clarified hypothesis. A cross-examination ensues to determine whether there is any internal conflict within the hypothesis itself, or between the clarified hypothesis and its network of implications. The method proceeds to make explicit the interconnections that the tentative hypothesis and its implications might have with various background beliefs, presuppositions, criteria of analysis (e.g., universal definitions), and rules of inference, that have been implicitly or explicitly adopted. The cross-examination goes on to explore whether or not any conflict arises in such an investigation. If any conflict emerges the original tentative hypothesis is modified or rejected entirely; and a new tentative hypothesis is advanced. The new tentative hypothesis is then subjected to the same critical cross-examination.

As an extension of Socratic method as it plays out in the *Euthyphro*, I also understood that if very many tentative hypotheses are rejected, a shift in tactics can be undertaken in which the various presuppositions and background beliefs that were hitherto accepted are themselves systematically brought into question, subjected to critical cross-examination, and sometimes replaced by new presuppositions and beliefs, etc. In principle the cross-examination can continue until a tentative resolution is arrived at which is secure enough to survive intense critical scrutiny for the time being—and which involves an acceptable array of presuppositions, background beliefs, criteria of analysis, and rules of inference.

That the *Euthyphro* did not offer a convincing universal definition of piety did not, at this early stage in my journey, necessarily mean that a universal defi-

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 6d.



inition of piety was a will-o-the-wisp. Moreover, it was not initially clear to me if the character Socrates in the *Euthyphro*, or more importantly the historical Socrates, construed the one form of piety to be something that was inherent in the particulars, or whether it had some real existence apart from them—as it presumably did for Plato. So I continued to muse about the possibility of Socratic-like universal definitions, and gradually turned my attention to mathematical forms, and what seemed to me the clearer possibility of giving universal definitions of them. I was especially struck by a section of Plato's *Meno* where the character Socrates is trying to demonstrate Plato's "doctrine of recollection" of universal forms. In this connection Socrates has an interchange with a young attendant of his interlocutor, Meno. Socrates sets a geometrical problem for the boy by asking what the length of the side of a square would be, if the square were *twice* the area of a given square the length of whose sides were known.<sup>3</sup>

The boy is initially confident he knows the correct answer, and blurts out that the length in question would be twice the length of the side of the square of known area. But Socrates points out that if the known square has sides of two measures each, it would have an area of four square measures. So a square that was double in area would have an area of eight square measures. Thus, the boy comes to see that his initial response to the geometrical problem is incorrect, since the area of a square whose sides were twice the length of a square whose sides were two measures in length would be an area of sixteen square measures—that is, four times the area of the given square, and not two times that area.

Socrates patiently continues to engage the boy in dialogue and elicits from the boy still another tentative response to the problem at hand, which also turns out to be incorrect. Then at a pivotal point in the dialogue with the boy, Socrates draws a square in the ground and subsequently bisects the square with a diagonal that goes from one corner to the opposite corner, dividing the square into two triangles of equal area. This clue serves as a catalyst whereby the boy presumably recollects the appropriate eternal mathematical forms, allowing him to give the correct answer to the geometrical problem, namely that the length of the sides of a square twice the area of a given square will be equal to the length of the diagonal of the given square.

And now let me come to the point of all this. When I first encountered the *Meno*, Socrates' dialogue with the boy also served as a catalyst that brought back into my mind many of my high-school encounters with geometry, and particularly my understanding of triangles in Euclidean geometry. Now I clearly had in mind a candidate for a successful universal definition that would help me to become clearer about Plato's thought; for I could give a universal definition of the term "triangle" that seemed quite unambiguous at the time. I clearly understood that a triangle was a plane, three-sided figure, enclosed by three

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<sup>3</sup> Plato. 1985. *Meno*. In *Plato: Five Dialogues*, op. cit., 82b–85c.

straight lines, which met forming three angles, the sum of whose angles is 180 angular degrees. Here now was a definition of a triangle in strict accordance with Socrates' conception of a universal definition; a definition which articulated in language all the attributes which, taken together, constitute the essence of a triangle. I then thought I was coming to a much clearer understanding of Plato's thought than I had hitherto.

Not that this meant for me at the time that there was an eternal form of a triangle, and of a multiplicity of other mathematical forms subsisting in some other-worldly Platonic realm. But even if I did not yet have a clear universal definition of piety, I did indeed have a clear universal definition of a triangle, and I still admitted to myself the logical possibility of eventually discovering such a definition of piety, and also of many other non-mathematical concepts such as justice, beauty, etc.

However, my thinking along these lines eventually underwent a significant shift, when I later began to probe non-Euclidean geometries. Prior to this probing, I had believed that it was absolutely clear that all triangles had 180 angular degrees. But when I probed the non-Euclidian geometries developed in the nineteenth century by Riemann and Lobachevsky, I came to understand that triangles in these geometries did not have 180 angular degrees. For I learned that all triangles in Riemannian geometry had more than 180 angular degrees; and that all triangles in the geometry developed by Lobachevsky had less than 180 angular degrees.<sup>4</sup>

This was a startling discovery for me! It was all the more startling to me when I subsequently learned that Riemannian geometry was absolutely essential to Einstein in working out his general laws of relativity. Without getting into the intricacies of such non-Euclidean geometries, let me just recount that my awareness of them began to unravel some of my earlier thinking about universal concepts. I now clearly saw that there were three different self-consistent geometries, each having plausible postulates (including alternative postulates about parallel lines), and that these geometries conflicted with one another concerning how many angular degrees triangles have as well as.

Given this situation, how would it make sense to speak of one universal definition of triangle? For now it seemed that there were three forms of triangle: a Euclidean triangle where triangles all had 180°; a Riemannian triangle where triangles all had more than 180°; and a Lobachevskian triangle where triangles all had less than 180°. Not just one geometry, but three self-consistent geometries each based on plausible postulates. Not just one form, but three forms of triangle! To be sure one could still give three different universal definitions of the term "triangle"—the Euclidean definition applying to all Euclidean trian-

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<sup>4</sup> Sommerville, D. M. Y. 1958. *The Elements of Non-Euclidean Geometry*. New York: Dover Publications Inc.

gles, the Riemannian definition applying universally to all Riemannian triangles, etc.

But could there be one unambiguous definition of the term “triangle” that could be captured in a unique universal definition? Since the notion of a Euclidean triangle ranges over isosceles, scalene, and right triangles, etc., perhaps one might define “triangle” very generally as “an enclosed figure with three lines and three angles” (assuming the lines could be straight or curved). Such a projected definition would presumably range over triangles in all three geometries. But is it really a unique universal definition? (What about an enclosed figure in the form of a circle [one curved line], with one radial line from the center to any point on the circumference, plus another straight line, half the length of the radius, and extending from the center at right angles to the radial line?)

Also, if three geometries at present, why not other possible geometries in the future? For example, a dialectical geometry, say, which might articulate specific conditions in which triangles might have  $180^\circ$ , other conditions in which they might have less than  $180^\circ$ , and still other specific conditions in which they might have more than  $180^\circ$ ? To save the notion of a universal definition one might argue that it might still be logically possible to devise a universal definition of triangle for such a geometry in the form of exclusive disjunctions correlating to the alternative parallel postulates of the three geometries. Logically possible presumably, but this move reminds me of the ancient story of a man who tried to fish in a tree and, not finding fish in the lower branches, he climbed to higher and higher branches in search of fish.

Considerations such as these eventually led to a shift in my thinking about general concepts where I began to interpret all alleged universal definitions not as holding for all possible domains of human thought or practice, but rather as abstract universals which were viable for specific circumstances that were either explicitly articulated or implicitly understood. For example, I interpreted the Euclidian notion of a triangle as an abstract universal that was associated with the study of a space that was flat, and that was viable only in such a circumstance; I interpreted the Riemannian notion of a triangle as an abstract universal that was associated with the study of a space that was curved, and only viable in that context; and I interpreted the Lobachevskian notion of a triangle as an abstract universal that was associated with the study of a space that had constant negative curvature, and that was only viable in that context.

Moreover, and importantly as far as my own development was concerned, I interpreted the definitions of the three forms of triangle just mentioned not as universal definitions in any absolute sense, but at best as relative universal definitions if I can speak paradoxically—that is, as definitions relative to a specific universe of discourse, whether it be the universe of discourse of flat space, or of curved space, or of space with constant curvature. To speak less paradoxically, I came to interpret them as abstract universals that were perma-

ment possibilities of human conception within some specific domain of discourse (whether explicitly stated or implicitly understood) rather than as entities that subsisted in their own right, or that were universal in any absolute sense.

Furthermore, I adopted this outlook as an instrument for assessing all purported claims about absolutely universal definitions of all general concepts—whether they be concepts concerning the nature of justice, beauty, moral evil, moral worth, or even of universal dialogue, etc. I learned to become cautious about all universal definitions that did not give some clear indication of the universe of discourse within which they were functioning. Eventually I abandoned the view that unique universal definitions of all general concepts was a philosophically viable position. In my ongoing philosophical journey it has seemed, more often than not lamentably, that purported claims about absolutely universal definitions reflect an underlying dogmatism, that is either not aware of the presuppositions at play in its own universe of discourse, or that is aware of them and would intentionally impose them on others.

Before leaving the present context of this meditation, I would like to jump ahead briefly to a later phase of my journey when I first encountered the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein. (Following this brief interlude, I will return to some considerations of the way in which my explorations of Kant's thought have shaped my thinking about abstract universals and universal claims.) Concerning Wittgenstein, I have in mind some passages of his *Philosophical Investigations* that had significant relevance for my reflections about general concepts and purported universal definitions. In one of these passages he brings to the fore an imaginary interlocutor who wants to be told what the essence of language is—that is, what is common to all that we call language. Wittgenstein responds:

“I am saying that these phenomena [that we call language] have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all—but that they are *related* to one another in many ways.”<sup>5</sup>

“Consider [...] the proceedings we call ‘games.’ [...] Don't say: ‘There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all.—For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!”<sup>6</sup>

Wittgenstein asks us to consider all sorts of games: board-games, card-games, ball-games, etc. He asks us to consider the various similarities and differences within and between different types of game, and the way features over-

<sup>5</sup> Wittgenstein, L. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. Anscombe, G. E. M. New York: The Macmillan, no. 65.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 66.

lap and crisscross, some features dropping out, new features coming in, etc. Then he concludes:

“[T]he result of this examination is we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. [...] I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, color of eyes, gait, temperament, etc. etc. overlap and crisscross in the same way. — And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.”<sup>7</sup>

Among other things, Wittgenstein is suggesting that the meaning which the general term “game” has for a particular person, or a particular culture, is related to the range of specific games with which a person or culture is already familiar; and further that the term “game” will become richer and richer in meaning as new games come into awareness; and that, while the extension of the term “game” can be arbitrarily circumscribed by a fixed boundary, this is not the way the term normally functions, for this term “is not closed by a frontier.”<sup>8</sup> In most circumstances, Wittgenstein argues: “We do not know the boundaries [of a general term] because none have been drawn. To repeat, we can draw a boundary for a special purpose. Does it take that to make the concept usable? Not at all! Except for that special purpose.”<sup>9</sup>

My reflections on Wittgenstein helped me to see that one’s developing understanding of the term “game” is intimately related to the expanding extension which the term has as one becomes aware of different specific types of games that bear family resemblances to one another—but without there being an articulable essence as Plato would have it. Moreover, just as games form a family, Wittgenstein definitely holds that languages form a family without there being an articulable essence. Importantly, would he not say that the possible modes of universal dialogue also form a family, and without there being an articulable essence, etc.?

Returning from this interlude I now turn to a review of some reflections concerning Kant’s “categorical imperative” that further shaped my thinking about universal dialogue.

In perhaps its most well known formulation Kant’s imperative reads: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.”<sup>10</sup> Kant helped me to understand just what this means by pointing out that there are three interrelated formulations of

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., nos. 66–67.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., no. 68.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., no. 69.

<sup>10</sup> Kant, I. 1959. *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Trans. Beck, L. W. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 47.

his categorical imperative, and that they are “fundamentally only so many formulations of the very same law, and each of them unites the others in itself.”<sup>11</sup>

This means that one can take recourse to the other formulations of the categorical imperative in order to clarify what Kant means in the formulation already given by “persons,” and by treating a person “always as an end and never as a means only.” Thus a second formulation reads: “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”<sup>12</sup> Another formulation reads: “[Act in accordance with] the idea of the will of every rational being as making universal law.”<sup>13</sup>

The net effect is that, relating to a person as an end, is assimilated to relating to that person in a way that can consistently be projected as a universal law—by one’s self, that person, and all others. The projection of universal law, which stands at the center of Kant’s categorical imperative, is modeled on the projection of the *a priori* structuring principles of “theoretical reason” which enter into the constitution of the universal laws of nature as explored in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Running parallel to the position of this work—that there is a common realm of nature by virtue of objective *a priori* structuring principles which are common for all people—Kant assumes that there is an *a priori* “objective principle of the will.” On this basis he projects a common “realm of ends” in which there is a “systematic union of different rational beings through common laws.”<sup>14</sup>

In my explorations of Kant’s position I was deeply struck by the fact that he abstracted from all empirical considerations in the derivation of the categorical imperative, holding it to be “derived from the universal concept of a rational being generally.”<sup>15</sup> He abstracts from all those historically conditioned factors that enter into the shaping of individuals as individuals of one sort rather than another, including those conditions that shape the modes of consciousness of individuals. In doing so he consequently abstracts from those conditions that may have culturally shaped the notion of reason in relation to which he attempts an *a priori* derivation of the categorical imperative.

What we seem to be left with is a very abstract notion of the human person that assimilates the “person” to an abstract rational agent projecting an objective *a priori* universal moral law, namely the categorical imperative. The corollary of this is that the “realm of ends” Kant projects is an abstract union of abstracted rational agents. Thus, human persons are not seen as being essentially situated in a world, in a social and cultural environment, and in a body. Moreover, Kant seems to hold that the assessment of what is morally worthy need not take into account any of the conditions which might obtain in any real-life situa-

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 28.

tion, but that one can simply take recourse to the categorical imperative as a sort of unambiguous moral algorithm—the supposedly objective arbiter of what is morally worthy or unworthy.

To bring this out more clearly let me focus on one of the examples Kant gives to demonstrate what he means by his categorical imperative. The example I have in mind concerns the issue of a lying promise. When one feels an urgent need to borrow money, is it morally permissible to borrow money by making a lying promise to repay it without any intention of doing so? Kant argues that it would not be morally permissible to do so, since a maxim to the effect that one in need “could promise what he pleased with the intention of not fulfilling it” could not be universalized, because “it would make the promise itself and the end to be accomplished by it impossible.”<sup>16</sup> For the attempt to universalize such a maxim would involve a conceptual contradiction, and the very meaning of what we ordinarily call a promise would go out the window.

At first glance Kant’s position might seem plausible. But it is one thing to say that making a lying promise in every possible situation is not morally permissible; and it is quite another thing to hold that a lying promise in various carefully specified circumstances is morally permissible. Consider, for example, a case of a person who is faced with the circumstance of a bipolar relative who is off his medications, and who has somehow come into possession of a dangerous weapon. In such a situation would it be morally permissible to persuade the bipolar relative to hand over the weapon for safe-keeping, if one could do so only by making a lying promise to return the weapon at another time? Since the person in such a set of circumstances could readily formulate the maxim describing her/his action so as to take account of the specific contingencies of the situation, the person could readily and consistently will that such a maxim should become a universal law that everyone could adopt in those specific circumstances. Thus it could pass muster with Kant’s categorical imperative. However, if the maxim is formulated in a way that strips away the specific contingencies of the situation, as it does in Kant’s example of the lying promise, then the maxim can not be universalized without contradiction. I stress, though, that it only does so because of the illusions of abstraction.

So just how one formulates the maxim of one’s action in given circumstances seemed to be crucially significant in assessing whether a given action conflicts with the categorical imperative or is in harmony with it. Looking back on my explorations of Kant’s ethical perspective, I remember envisioning many other scenarios of contemplated actions that could not be universalized when the maxim describing the action stripped away relevant contingencies, but that *could* be universalized provided the maxim describing them was formulated so as to take account of specific circumstances. Also some of the scenarios I envi-

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

sioned were very different than the non-problematic example mentioned above about the lying promise to return a dangerous weapon to a sick person.

For I also envisioned many other scenarios in which people in power could potentially take recourse to Kant's categorical imperative to justify what many of us would regard as egregiously exploitative treatment of workers, women, slaves, etc. Thus it became clear to me that historically conditioned modes of consciousness would condition the formulation of the particular maxims that might be advanced on particular occasions to describe particular acts whose justification in terms of the categorical imperative might be sought. And it would also condition the general social acceptance in particular contexts of such maxims as universal laws. Furthermore, in addition to cases of exploitative people in power, it would seem logically possible that any moral degenerate could load on enough contingencies to be able to formulate maxims that could be universalized, so as to presumably justify just about any action at all.

Reflections, like the foregoing, concerning some of the earlier phases of my philosophical journey cumulatively led me to be more and more cautious about the central role of abstract universals in much of western thought. I still recognized that the abstract universal was a viable canon of interpretation in many contexts; but I gradually came to believe that it was no longer an adequate canon of interpretation for understanding many of the domains I became most interested in understanding—especially the concrete realities constitutive of social and natural environments, where those realities are constituted to be the realities they are by virtue of complex shifting arrays of dynamic interacting factors. I began to see that if one tries to understand such realities in terms of abstract universals, one carves them out of the context of the dynamic interacting factors which make them what they are, and one then sees the abstracted realities as externally related to one another, rather than as internally related. I began to see the close conceptual association of the abstract universal and the external relation; and I began to clearly understand how these associated canons of interpretation can lead to skewed understandings of the concrete realities constitutive of social and natural environments.<sup>17</sup>

It was against the background of such reflections that I first began to study the thought of Hegel and Marx. While this is not the place to get into the intricacies of either of these philosophers, let me just indicate that in Hegel's thought I found much interesting discussion about concrete universals and internal relations. I felt myself immersed in ideas that I believed were extremely important, even though I admitted to myself that I did not fully understand

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<sup>17</sup> For one of the clearest analyses of the deep conceptual connection between the external relation and the abstract universal, see Blanshard, B. 1939. *The Nature of Thought*. London: George Allen & Unwin, vol. 2, 428–520. Blanshard explains that there is “the most intimate connection between the doctrine of abstract universals and the doctrine that things may be related externally [...] And it is evident that just as the abstract universal and external relations are natural allies, so are the concrete universal and internal relations.” *Ibid.*, 459–60.



them. However, I felt I did understand the close conceptual interconnection between the notion of the concrete universal and the notion of the internal relations that Hegel was projecting; and I saw that both of them were ontological notions, as well as epistemological notions. On the other hand, I found aspects of his conception of the concrete universal to be quite bizarre, especially his projection to the effect that the universal concretely actualizes itself.<sup>18</sup>

My subsequent explorations of Marx's thought introduced me to a significantly different understanding of the concrete universal. I recognized that Marx's thought was deeply influenced by Hegel's conception of the concrete universal, and the internal relation as its conceptual associate. Importantly, though, it gradually became very clear to me that Marx rejected Hegel's view that the universal concretely actualized itself—and that he did not simply adopt Hegel's position, but modified and adapted it for his own purposes. I note that Marx famously said in his "Preface" to the second edition of the *Capital* that "with him [Hegel] it [dialectical thinking] is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell."<sup>19</sup> However, by this metaphor I came to understand that Marx did not imply that in standing Hegel's dialectical thinking on its head he was thereby eviscerating the play of the concrete universal and the internal relation from the dialectical thinking that he had "uprighted."

For Marx the concrete universal is no longer the kind of ontological notion as it was for Hegel; it is primarily an epistemological notion. In Marx's thought the concrete universal is a conceptual instrument that he employs in his dialectical explanation of the internally related interacting factors which he sees to be constitutive of the domains of the concrete real which he explores.<sup>20</sup> But for Marx the concrete universal does not generate the concrete real. Moreover, Marx does not talk about the concrete universal as such; rather the instrument of the concrete universal is at play in the way he functions with general terms in various contexts.

The meaning of a general term, such as "praxis" for example, cannot be codified in some neat suitcase definition, as the traditional notion of the abstract universal would have us understand things. Rather the general term "praxis" functions as a sort of conceptual lens or signpost, a sort of undeveloped schema, that is implicitly oriented toward a very complex array of internally factors constitutive of the developing concrete real of human social and cultural life. (I note that in Marx's thought the internal relation is both an ontological notion and an

<sup>18</sup> Hegel, G.W.F. 1969. *Science of Logic*. Trans. Miller, A. V., with Foreword by J. N. Findlay. London: George Allen & Unwin.

<sup>19</sup> Marx, K. 1906. "Preface" to Second Edition of *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. Moore, Samuel and Edward Aveling. Ed. Engels, F. New York: The Modern Library, 1906, 25.

<sup>20</sup> For an elaborate analysis of Marx's dialectical-empirical method of explanation, see Brien, K.M. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, chapter 2.

epistemological notion.) Thus, to understand the general term “praxis” one must develop an awareness and understanding of the network of internally related factors implicitly referred to by the general term. But the general term does not spin the theoretical web of internally related factors out of itself. Rather these factors have been identified on the basis of prior research, and the web becomes more fully elaborated as these factors are introduced into the explanatory web in the appropriate way. Thus, if one mistakenly identifies the meaning of the general term with the “conceptual lens” itself, it can not be understood as Marx intends its meaning.

After these brief reflections about some earlier phases of my philosophical journey, this meditation now jumps ahead to the current phase of my journey and to reflections on what I construe the phrase “universal dialogue” to mean. Presumably some people would project a traditional universal definition of this phrase. However, when the issues of human living and human well-being are concerned, I hold that any such projection would involve some philosophical system, lurking somewhere in the shadows, that would truncate living, breathing, suffering human beings into wisps of abstraction. So any attentive reader of this meditation would readily understand that I would not attempt to interpret this phrase in terms of the traditional abstract universal that could be codified in a universal definition.

To begin to bring out the meaning that the phrase “universal dialogue” has for me, I employ, instead, the concrete universal as a fundamental canon of interpretation, and offer the following tentative conceptual schema as a signpost implicitly pointing to an array of internally related factors that taken together will elaborate the meaning of the undeveloped schema. Thus, I construe universal dialogue to be a mode of discourse between human beings, or within the mind of a given human, that is oriented toward the development of a new contemporary “politics” of the global village—one which would cultivate the practice of concretely relating to the other person as a person, and never simply as a means. So far just a signpost!

Probably many readers of this meditation will recognize that this formulation has at least faint echoes of Aristotle (as well as more obvious echoes of Kant, that will soon be addressed). Our contemporary Western use of the term “politics” is quite narrow when compared to Aristotle’s very broad use of the term. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* he writes that “knowledge of the [highest] good [...] belongs to the most sovereign and most comprehensive master science, and politics [*politikē*] clearly fits this description. [...] Thus it follows that the end of politics is the good for man.”<sup>21</sup> So Aristotle’s “master science of politics” embraces a fully developed ethics, and it also embraces a science of society and the state.

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<sup>21</sup> Aristotle. 1999. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Ostwald, M. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1094a, 23–1094b, 7.

Significantly, though, the state that Aristotle referred to was the relatively small self-sufficient city-state of ancient Greece, the *polis*. While Aristotle referred to the *polis* as the focus of concern for his “master science,” I mean to refer to the whole human family as the focus of my concern in this meditation. We human beings all belong to one biological species; we are all literally members of one human family. A dysfunctional family in very many ways, to be sure! But a family nonetheless! Lamentably, however, for many hundreds of years the existential significance of our being members of one human family has (among other causes) been smothered by the ongoing idolatry of the nation state—the “golden calf” that has ensnared with its seductive glitter so very many peoples, so very many countries, for so very, very long.

It is against this backdrop that I advocate in this meditation for a “politics” of the global village. The phrase “global village” is a metaphor of course. But is it not an apt metaphor in view of the indisputable fact that in our era the human family is interconnected in a vast skein of tangled weavings—analogueous to the ways a village of old would be? Think of the rapidity of communication in a village of old; then think of the vastly greater rapidity of communication made possible by modern technology, as well as the stunning difference in the orders of magnitude of human beings that one can communicate with simultaneously. Think of trade routes that connected nearby villages of old; then think of the literally unimaginable network of trade routes that directly or indirectly currently interconnect every part of planet Earth. Think of the impact of a serious man-made disaster in a village of old, like depleting the soil of its capacity to sustain life by unwise overuse; then think of the world-wide environmental degradation that is already due to so many man-made causes, and think also of the frightening man-made global disasters yet to come, if the behemoth of unhinged capitalism continues to stalk a ravaged planet Earth.

Now to the echoes of Kant mentioned above when I said that the “politics” of the global village for which I advocate is one that “would cultivate the practice of concretely relating to the other person as a person.” The qualifier concretely is crucial here! In remarks made earlier in this meditation, I tried to briefly explain my understanding of Kant’s “categorical imperative.” So many years ago now, I undertook close study of the three different formulations of Kant’s imperative, as carefully interpreted within the wider conceptual context from which Kant projects them. It was clear to me then, and even clearer to me now, that what most people would construe a human person to be seems to disappear in a Kantian cloud of abstraction. Kant mystifies the human person into an abstract rational agent projecting a supposedly objective *a priori* universal moral law; and he mystifies the human community into an abstract union of abstracted rational agents who give objective universal laws to themselves and to each other. This, however, is most definitely not what I mean by a “person” or a practice of “concretely relating to the other person as a person.”

For me a human person is a concretely existing situated being; a living, breathing being who is situated in and interconnected with a body that will eventually die; a being that is also interconnected with a social and cultural environment—with a world of some sort—a world that both shapes the human being, and that to some extent at least can be shaped by the human being. A being with biological needs of various sorts; and also with many other kinds of needs, including various “existential” needs.<sup>22</sup> A being who can feel, imagine, sense, think; a being who can experience joy or suffering; a sense of meaning, or a sense of depression and despair; a sense of loneliness, or a sense of genuine community with other beings, with nature, and with whatever the wider reality might be. A being who can be oppressed by others, and who can also oppress others. A being who is capable of both blood-curdling cruelty, but also extraordinary compassion.

All this, and more too, is what I mean by the human person. Furthermore, I submit that, given the daunting global crises that confront human beings in our era, Kant’s “categorical imperative” is a rather thin reed with which to attempt to navigate the troubled waters we find swirling around ourselves. Perhaps some of us would be able to draw enough air through that thin reed to survive in a relatively humane way. But would most of us now alive be able to draw enough air through that reed in current conditions? I do not believe so; but perhaps a fully developed “politics” of the global village might be the raft, made up of very many thin reeds, that could help see us through to a more humane stage of cultural evolution.

Let me stress immediately, though, that I make no pretense about being able to provide such a full development in this mediation, or even beyond it. Nonetheless, I can envision a few steps in that direction; and as the first of these steps, let me suggest the following tentative formulation of a fundamental ethical principle.

Act so that the tendency of your action is to cultivate an environmentally sustainable,  
non-violent, non-exploitative, non-oppressive, non-sexist, non-racist,  
mode of being-in-the-world that could be concretely  
and universally adopted by all peoples.

This principle makes explicit reference to the principle of universality that has become one of the cornerstones of Western culture. But the principle of universality is interpreted here in terms of the concrete universal, rather than the abstract universal as in the case of Kant. Instead of focusing moral attention on isolated maxims of action, as Kant does, this ethical principle focuses moral

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<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of existential needs in relation to Marx, see Brien, K. M. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, 233–36; and a more elaborate discussion in Brien, K. M. 1996. “Marx and the Spiritual Dimension.” *Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy* 15, no. 2, 211–223.

attention on a whole complex of interrelated maxims which are implicit in the notion of the universalization of a mode-of-being-in-the-world. This principle directs moral attention away from Kant's abstract "realm of ends" toward concrete practice in the world; it projects a practice in which persons would concretely relate to other persons as ends in themselves.

It is quite important to note here, too, that this ethical principle, when interpreted in terms of the concrete universal, would allow for an array of possible modes of being in the world that might be ethically acceptable—even if not ideal. In speaking earlier in this meditation about Wittgenstein's reflections concerning the general term "game," I tried to briefly explain his position that the numerous games of many different types form a family involving a "network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail"; and this without there being an articulable essence of the term "game". For Wittgenstein the similarities of various games of different types bear "family resemblances" to one another—games form a family. Likewise in the present case. One could imagine a family of ethically "sound" modes of being in the world that bear family resemblances to one another; and importantly, one could also envision the members of such a family asymptotically approaching a worthy ethical ideal that could probably not be completely realized in practice.

These brief remarks having been made about the fundamental ethical principle articulated above, it is important to situate this ethical principle in the wider perspective of a contemporary "politics of the global village". So this meditation now turns to some reflections on a major dimension of such a "politics" (following Aristotle) that could do this—and more. Namely a contemporary "science of society" that could provide a viable theoretical framework for understanding the past stages of human cultural evolution, and the possibilities of future stages of such evolution on both smaller and larger scales. Among other things such a science would have to be able to offer empirically well-grounded explanatory accounts of how given social formations come into being, how they change and develop, how they impact in varying ways on the lives of the human beings whose interactions constitute those social formations, how they are replaced by other social formations, etc.

Many, perhaps most might ask: Is there such a science of society? Can there be such a science? If I had been asked these questions when I was still taking graduate courses many years ago, I would have responded: "I don't think so." But ask me now, and I say: "Yes, I have good grounds for thinking so." Let me sketch some milestones on the journey that took me from there to here. In the last semester of my third year of graduate course work in philosophy, I took a course on Philosophy of Marxism in which I encountered the early writings of Karl Marx for the first time. They awakened me in many ways, and I began to envision different horizons and to imagine a path out of personal alienation. After completing all my graduate course work, I decided to change the topic of

my dissertation. I had been intending a project in the philosophy of science having to do with different modes of explanation in the various sciences, especially physics and evolutionary biology. But I shifted to an exploration of Marx's thought; and read widely and voraciously in the writings of Marx and in the writings of a wide array of his critics and commentators, etc. After two years I had a relatively decent two-hundred page dissertation draft which I mailed to my mentor. However, before hearing back from my mentor, I had another awakening.

In the process of preparing my dissertation draft, I studied the patterns of explanation in the three volumes of Marx's *Capital*.<sup>23</sup> This study was all the richer on account of much previous graduate work on explanation in the sciences that had made me attentive to such issues. My awakening was a breakthrough realization concerning Marx's mature method of explanation in *Capital*—including his dialectical empirical method of explanation that systematically moves from more abstract levels to more concretely elaborated levels, and his use of the internal relation and the concrete universal as fundamental canons of interpretation throughout the explanatory process. This breakthrough realization led to a fateful decision for me. I decided to scrap all but the first chapter of my earlier dissertation draft; and to completely restructure my dissertation using Marx's method explanation as the explanatory model for it. It took me another six years to complete. The outcome amounts to a philosophical reconstruction of the full range of Marx's thought, from early to late Marx, organized around three categories of freedom at play in his thought: freedom as transcendence, freedom as spontaneity, and freedom as a mode of being.<sup>24</sup>

In the more than thirty-five years since the completion of my dissertation, I have continued to develop this reconstruction. Let me note that it dramatically conflicts with the broad spectrum of varieties of orthodox Marxism that can be discerned. These varieties of orthodox Marxism (often classified collectively as the "scientific Marx") have in common the fact that they all neglect, suppress, reject, or otherwise fail to take account of the rich humanism of the early Marx, and its many echoes in the later Marx. Moreover, there are varieties of humanistic Marxism that focus on the so-called "critical Marx," but without giving adequate attention to the scientific side of his thought. In contrast to such varieties of orthodox and critical Marxism, the philosophical reconstruction of Marx's thought I have underway argues for the essential philosophical continuity of the early and late Marx, as well as the philosophical harmony of the critical and scientific dimensions of his thought. I view Marx's thought, when viewed as a whole, as a critical science; and I have come to view Marx as the Newton of social science.

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<sup>23</sup> Marx, Karl. 1967. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. 3 vols. Ed. Engels, F. New York: International Publishers.

<sup>24</sup> Brien, K. M. 1978. *Human Freedom in Marx*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.

In the course of this meditation, though, it is obviously not possible to give more than a brief big-picture sketch of Marx's theoretical understanding of human cultural evolution. Hopefully this might be enough for an open minded reader to get a preliminary sense of how a clear understanding of his thought could be pivotal for the development of a "politics of the global village." Let me do so by citing, and then commenting on, the following famous passage—which I believe to be one of the most misunderstood passages in Marx's thought.

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness."<sup>25</sup>

Those who interpret this passage through the lens of the abstract universal would naturally interpret this formulation as involving a sharp distinction between "social being" and any kind of consciousness whatsoever. But this is not what Marx intends. Marx is here dissociating himself from Hegel, who holds that an allegedly independent consciousness of the "World Spirit" somehow suffuses the consciousness of people, which in turn determines their being. What then does "social being" mean for Marx? "Social being" connotes conscious social being for Marx. It connotes *praxis*, the practical activity of conscious human beings who are consciously interacting with one another, and who are consciously and intentionally acting upon the natural world and various forms of matter, and in so doing shaping themselves and their environment. Moreover, it is the conscious social being of humans in a given phase of their development that, in turn, shapes their consciousness in all other respects in that phase, including the ideas that are dominant in that phase.

Of course this bare bones formulation of the notion of praxis is quite an abstract notion, inasmuch as it does not *explicitly* indicate any specific modes of praxis. Importantly, however, in Marx's thinking this abstract notion of praxis must be understood as being *implicitly* oriented toward a wide range of specific modes of human practice. For Marx the very nature, the very being of specific human beings is constituted by some specific array of dynamic interactions obtaining among those human beings, and between them and their social and natural environments. So one must recognize that the notion of praxis projects deep internal relations between human beings and their social and natural environments. Also, one must understand the notion of praxis as a concrete universal, that is, as a sort of structured matrix of internally related factors that is intentionally oriented toward a wide spectrum of more concrete elaborations. Getting a handle on the more concrete elaborations which successively introduce more and more explanatory factors on successive levels of analysis is absolutely necessary if one is to understand the abstract notion. It can not be understood in its abstraction. Let me emphasize immediately that the

<sup>25</sup> Marx, K. 1977. "Preface" to a *Critique of Political Economy*." In: *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*. Ed. McLellan, D. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 389.

explanatory factors that are introduced are not spun out of thin air, but have already been identified on the basis of prior empirical research.

If the human being is a being of praxis as Marx holds, and if praxis is an ongoing internally related activity through which human beings shape their very being as they shape their environment, then human reality must be understood as a process. To comprehend human reality one must comprehend this process, and the way in which human beings constitute themselves to be the specific human beings they are by virtue of their specific praxis. Furthermore, one must comprehend how transitions from one phase to another in such a process come about. For the potentialities of human beings are not exhausted by the particular form and by the particular mode of interrelations that characterize them at a particular time. Human reality is what it has been in the past, and what it is in the present, but also more than all this. Thus, one may not legitimately identify human nature as such with the particular form which it would have at some particular stage.

So how understand this process, then? Well, as many readers might already realize, Marx understands this process in terms of the interplay between what he refers to as the forces of production and the social relations of production and reproduction—for the time being, I leave aside the social superstructure). These notions also have to be understood in terms of the concrete universal. For Marx, the ‘forces of production’ of European feudalism, for example, would include the vast network of the conscious activities of human beings involved in the production of goods and services throughout the feudal system—activities involving specific skills, techniques, and knowledge; employing specific tools and instruments of production; and working up matter for the satisfaction of human needs. The “social relations of production,” in turn, must be dynamically adapted to the forces of production, and they would include the complex network of social feudal relations, within the framework of which the forces of production are set in motion, that is the feudal division of labor, the feudal class structure, the patterns of distribution of wealth, resources, property, etc.<sup>26</sup>

The “forces of production” and the “social relations of production and reproduction,” collectively referred to as the “economic base,” cannot be understood apart from conscious activity in the world—that is, apart from praxis. They are two dynamically interacting currents within the stream of praxis. Furthermore, these two interacting currents mutually shape, and are shaped by, still another complex of currents of praxis—currents which are frequently referred to as the social superstructure: that is, the predominant ideas, the modes of consciousness, the political and legal institutions, the forms of the family (etc.) that come into being. In a relatively stable social formation the

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<sup>26</sup> For a full analysis see Brien, K. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*. 2d ed. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 45–126.



“social superstructure” will be dynamically adapted to the “economic base.” When a given social formation is relatively stable, the other two currents of praxis, namely the “forces of production” and the “social relations of production,” will have a relative dominance over the “social superstructure,” so that its various elements will serve to stabilize and regenerate the existing “economic base.” However, the “social superstructure” in all its dimensions is never an epiphenomenon of the “economic base.”<sup>27</sup>

In any social formation the “forces of production” will develop over time, as new needs come into play, as new knowledge and technical skills are acquired, as new tools and instruments are created. As the “forces of production” develop a steadily increasing conflict can build up between the developing stage of the “forces of production” and the network of “social relations” that have been in place, so that they become less well adapted to the developing stage of the “forces of production.” Furthermore, and this is crucially important, if a situation develops such that there is an increasing instability in a social formation due to the developing “forces of production” being increasingly impeded by the existing “social relations of production,” a major rupture in a social formation can be generated. Whenever this happens there will be shifts in the relative dominance of the “economic base” *vis à vis* the “social superstructure,” so that elements of the social superstructure can have a relative dominance in shaping a new configuration of “social relations of production” in a period of transition.<sup>28</sup>

Think, for example, of the increasing instability in the “economic base” of the European feudal social formation, and the social rupture that eventually occurred leading to the emergence of the early capitalist social formation. As the feudal system was gradually coming apart, there was a proliferation of new ideas in the changing social superstructure. Chief among them were new ideas reflecting a spirit of individualism, new religious ideas promulgated by Luther and Calvin, including the associated ideas of the Protestant work ethic, new ideas disputing the doctrine of “natural places” (both in the universe at large, and in the social world), etc. I note here that Max Weber famously argued that the Protestant ethic was causally central in shaping the development of early capitalism and the transformed social formation that ensued.<sup>29</sup> However, Weber dissociated his own analysis from what he took to be “the doctrine of the more naive historical materialism ... [according to which] ... ideas originate as a reflection or superstructure of economic situations.”<sup>30</sup> It is clear, though, that Weber accepted the caricature of Marx’s historical materialism

<sup>27</sup> See Brien, K. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, op. ct., 227–238.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 63–66, 86–88.

<sup>29</sup> Weber, M. 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Trans. Parsons, T. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

known as “economic determinism”—an interpretation that Marx himself rejected.<sup>31</sup>

Shifting focus now to the capitalist social formation, let me round out this sketch of some of the key elements of Marx’s theoretical understanding of cultural evolution. Marx clearly recognized the growing internal structural conflict between the developing capitalist “forces of production” and the capitalist “social relations of production” in his own lifetime. On the one hand he was fully aware of the strong tendency within capitalism toward the forces of production, but he also was fully aware of the various ways in which this tendency was systematically thwarted by the social relations of capitalism. He understood that the vast numbers of working people were the primary “force of production,” but also that they were caught in a system which systematically negated them in a host of ways.

While they were legally free to sell their labor power for whatever wages were offered by capitalist agents, working people were not free in an existential sense, since more often than not it was absolutely necessary for them to accept gross exploitation if they wanted to survive. For the dead-eyed weight of pauper hood was in open view all around. March in step with the juggernaut of capitalism and accept those consequences; or do not march in step and suffer even worse consequences. The capitalist system generated a panoply of goods and services; but it also systematically generated increasing alienation in all its different modes: alienation from one’s own activity, alienation from the products of one’s activity, alienation from other people, alienation from nature, and alienation from “free conscious activity”.<sup>32</sup> These are just some of the many ways, identified by Marx, in which the capitalist “social relations of production” have structurally impeded the tendency toward universal development of the capitalist “forces of production.”

Marx held this structural conflict to be one of the defining features of the capitalist system; and he believed that this intensifying conflict would eventually lead to a breakdown of the capitalist system in the long run. Furthermore, he believed there was a real possibility for a transition to a more humane social formation to be brought about in what he saw as the relatively near future. But, significantly, such an outcome was never literally inevitable in his view! It was always contingent on the possible development of a widespread understanding of the dynamics of cultural evolution and of the real possibilities of a more humane society, as well as a widespread and sustained effort to bring it about. It was always contingent on such a transformation of consciousness!

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<sup>31</sup> For a critique of Weber’s interpretation of Marx see Brien, K. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, op. cit., 67 ff.

<sup>32</sup> See Karl Marx’s striking discussion about different interrelated aspects of alienation in his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 1964. Ed. with an Introduction: Struik, D.J. Trans. Mulligan, M. New York: International Publishers, 106–119.

My own journey through Marx's thought led me to clearly see that no particular post-capitalist outcome was theoretically or methodologically guaranteed by Marx's scientific/philosophical paradigm!<sup>33</sup> It is important to note here that this view is quite at odds with the "economic determinist" interpretation of Marx's thought, which Marx himself rejected, famously saying: "All I know is that I am not a Marxist."<sup>34</sup> In fact, a range of possible outcomes of the intensifying structural conflicts of the capitalist system was (and still is) theoretically possible as viewed from Marx's scientific/philosophical perspective—including some undesirable outcomes such as state-capitalism, which Marx himself decried.

So Marx did not hold that some particular post-capitalist outcome of the intensifying structural conflicts of capitalism was guaranteed. Nonetheless, Marx did envision the general contours of an outcome which, given his understanding of the dynamics of human cultural evolution, he construed to not only be desirable but also to be a real possibility (whether near his own life time, or much later). An immediate caveat is warranted here, though. I do not use the phrase "real possibility" to suggest a possibility that is the most likely in given circumstances, or even one that is plausible; I use it to suggest something that is in principle theoretically possible as viewed from a given perspective. In this case a perspective that recognizes the philosophical harmony of the critical and scientific dimensions of Marx's thought, and also the essential philosophical continuity of the early and late Marx.

Perhaps I can most readily bring out the general contours of the post-capitalist outcome that Marx himself advocated by bringing into focus a mode of praxis which would be free in Marx's sense, that is a mode of 'free conscious activity'.<sup>35</sup> It would be a mode of conscious activity which recognizes that the growing dominion of things over human life is grounded in an oppressive and dehumanizing social practice; it would be conscious activity which is no longer a one-sided development of the individual; it would be conscious activity which affirms the need for a manifold of human expressions of life, and which involves the many-sided development of the individual's potentials. Such conscious activity would be spontaneous and creative; it would be experienced as an end in itself, and would involve joy and pleasure in the very process of the activity, and not just as an aftermath—if that. Thus it would be conscious activity which no longer serves merely as a means to ends which are external to it.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> For a full discussion of these methodological issues, see the chapter on "The Dialectical Movement from the Abstract to the Concrete" in Brien, K. M. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, op. cit., 17–44.

<sup>34</sup> See Karl M. and F. Engels. 1942. *Selected Correspondence*, Trans. Torr, D. New York: International Publishers, 472.

<sup>35</sup> See Marx, K. 1964. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 113 where Marx famously maintains that "free conscious activity is man's species character".

<sup>36</sup> For a full elaboration of these themes, see Marx, K. 1964. *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 120–164.

It would be the sort of activity that does not involve or imply the denial or repression of the other as it affirms itself. Thus it would be conscious activity in the world which has undergone a transformation toward a new common sense: a common sense which is sensitive to the dynamic interplay of the social factors which constitute and reconstitute the form of social reality; a common sense which gives full positive recognition to the social nature of human being; a common sense which comprehends that community with other people need not operate as a limitation of individual fulfillment, but rather as a pathway toward individual fulfillment; a common sense which affirms the need for a manifold of human expressions of life, and which affirms as well the need to be related to the other person as a person. It would be activity in the world which would adopt for itself a mode of being in the world which can also be universally adopted.<sup>37</sup>

Upon reviewing this sketch of a “science of society,” that I consider a major dimension of a contemporary politics of the global village, many people might raise objections like these. Has not Marx been refuted by history? Is not the capitalist system even stronger now than it had been in Marx’s time? A few very brief responses to such surmises. Presumably those who maintain Marx has been refuted by history have in mind the “communist” revolutions that took place in Russia and China in the twentieth century. However, neither of these revolutions was the sort of “humanist-socialist” revolution that Marx envisioned. Importantly, the necessary conditions for the sort of revolution Marx envisioned were simply not in place in these countries—especially the necessary conditions of advanced technological developments of the “forces of production.” In fact Marx himself explicitly indicated that, close to his time, the most likely country for a successful humanist-socialist revolution was the United States. The revolutions in Russia and China were actually a betrayal of Marx; and they were carried out under the banner of a radically distorted interpretation of Marx’s thought—an interpretation from which all the humanist dimensions of his thought had been eliminated. I would agree, though, that the breakdown of the former Soviet Union is a sort of historical refutation of the egregiously distorted version of Marx’s thought that was dominant there.

Let me turn now to the issue of the continuing survival of the capitalist system. That the internal structural conflicts of the capitalist system have not yet led to the kind of structural upheaval Marx envisioned does not mean that those conflicts have disappeared. For that matter I would argue they have become stronger. But so far, at least, modifications of the system since Marx’s lifetime have been able to manage the more threatening aspects of the structural conflicts. For example, the shortening of the working day for many in the developed countries, government intervention in various crises, the provision of safe-

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<sup>37</sup> For an elaboration of these themes see Brien, K. M. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, op. cit., 127–180.

ty nets like social security, the increase in the standard of living, the cooptation of large proportions of the populations in capitalist countries by making accessible a bewildering array of goods and services, and with it the rise of the materialist ethos—these and a host of other significant factors have made it possible for the system to maintain itself despite its structural conflicts.

What about our own times? Will capitalism continue to survive? Does it deserve to survive? And will it do so without degenerating into international fascism? I have no grounds to make viable claims about future events. But I believe I do have solid grounds for claiming that all of us throughout the world live in times that are fraught with peril of one sort or another. The threats to freedom in some of its various meanings, and often in all of them, loom over all of us in one way or another—no matter where we might live; for our global economic and social village becomes increasingly mired in deepening trouble.

Think of the array of Gordian knots in which the capitalist system has entangled all of us. Think of the ascendancy of international corporations throughout planet Earth, and the not so hidden power they have in impacting the lives of people living within the major capitalist countries, as well as people throughout the world. Think of the powerful international banking systems, often riddled with corruption. Think of the international corporations in collusion with the international banking systems generating still greater and greater wealth, power, and control for those already wealthy; and this on the backs of working people, including children, throughout the world. Think of the obscenely widening gap between the richer and poorer segments of the populations in so many nations. Think of the tax loopholes through which many corporations and many overly rich people crawl.

Think of the various wars, including many dirty wars, that governments of the major capitalist nations have undertaken throughout the world in the last hundred years in support of capitalist interests. Think of the way governments of capitalist countries have served as minions of the capitalist system by helping to overthrow democratically elected leaders of other nations.<sup>38</sup> Think of the way major capitalist countries, in order to secure oil for their economic engines, have propped up oppressive governments in the Middle East and elsewhere over the decades. Think of the frightening backlash this has generated among many groups of oppressed people in the Middle East and elsewhere. Think of the recourse to terrorism by militant fundamentalist groups in a panoply of incidents throughout the world, and the development of world-wide terrorist networks. Think of the arms trade, together with the development of ever more sophisticated weaponry, and the on-going development of militarism around the world. Think of the possibility of another nuclear weapons race!

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<sup>38</sup> For example, the U.S. Government's role in overthrowing the governments of Mohammad Mosaddegh in Iran in 1953, and Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973.

Think, too, of the sad and lamentable environmental impact that the capitalist system has had throughout the world. Think of the obsessive scavenging for fossil fuel by every means possible: sinking evermore oil wells into the land and the sea bed, colossal strip mining projects and other projects to obtain mountains of coal, “fracking” to obtain oil and gas by literally splitting open Mother Nature’s entrails to obtain them. Think of the unimaginable pollution that the burning of these fossil fuels generates in our air, our water, our land, and the resulting rapid change in global climate and its repercussions. Think of the millions of acres of old forests—our very lifelines—that have been destroyed to provide new grazing land for cattle or various types of monoculture. Think of the pesticides and other chemicals that have been indiscriminately poured into that lap of Mother Nature. Think of the toxic runoff of industrial waste polluting our rivers, lakes, and water tables.

Think of the inequities in the pay for women *vis à vis* men for the very same work in the U.S. and elsewhere. Think of the way capitalist corporations outsource so much work to be done by men, women, and even children in developing countries, where they are able to take egregiously unfair advantage of such workers. Think of the way capitalist companies remain viable at home by virtue of gross exploitation of workers in developing countries. Think of the way international corporations have been able to extract the natural resources of developing countries in ways that actually serve to perpetuate poverty and gross exploitation in those countries, even if they make a few people in those countries very rich—a few unconscionable individuals who don’t mind robbing their own kinsmen. Think of the impact all this has on women and children in those developing countries.

Think also of the existential crisis of the human person generated by these capitalist systems. Think of the pervasive alienation and existential meaninglessness whose symptoms are everywhere, although the full awareness of them is blunted by a materialist ethos that feeds on an unending cornucopia of consumer goods, mindless entertainment, drugs, and alcohol. Think of the epidemics of domestic violence against women and children, as well as the violence outside the home, and even in our grammar schools.

Is there any realistic course of remedial action that could be effective in humanely coping with such problems as those listed above? Is there any worthy cultural horizon toward which to orient such action? For my part, I do not believe there is any panacea that would enable humankind to adequately cope with all the serious threats that face us at this juncture in history. Nonetheless, while recognizing the immense practical difficulties involved, I am personally convinced that it is theoretically possible for a gradual shift toward a more advanced stage of cultural evolution to become established—a stage which could be humanely effective in addressing such a daunting array of cultural problems as those just indicated above.

Furthermore, I believe that for such a shift to come about a widespread transformation of consciousness amounting to what I consider a sort of spiritual revolution would be required. I believe, in turn, that a process of universal dialogue on the part of a very wide spectrum of ordinary people, as well as specialists in the various disciplines is the prerequisite—the *sine qua non!* That is, universal dialogue between human beings and within the minds of given individuals, that is oriented toward the development of a new contemporary “politics” of the global village that could serve to cultivate the practice of concretely relating to the other person as a person, and to institute a full participatory democracy at every social level. Once again I state a fundamental principle that could guide such universal dialogue.

Act so that the tendency of your action is to cultivate an environmentally sustainable,  
non-violent, non-exploitative, non-oppressive, non-sexist, non-racist,  
mode of being-in-the-world that could be concretely  
and universally adopted by all peoples.

I suggest that the root of the spiritual is not to be found in some otherworldly reality. Rather, it is to be found in this world.<sup>39</sup> To emerge from our contemporary historical juncture without degenerating into something like international fascism, I believe it is practically imperative for the peoples of our era to reclaim the spiritual dimension from the debris of a thoroughly alienated secularism, and also to reclaim the spiritual from the clutches of authoritarian, dogmatic, and fanatic fundamentalist theists, and most especially from extremist and violent religious fundamentalists whether Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Jewish, or whatever. Our era is the time to radically transform the secular basis of human life. Perhaps, as some people believe, there is life after death. But at least there should be life before death—vibrant, creative, healthy, life-affirming life—which affirms the full life of other people, just as it affirms one’s own life.

Moreover, I believe such universal dialogue could be deeply inspired by a growing understanding of how various great world traditions have been able to discern the spiritual dimension right within the earthly dimension and the secular dimension. I am thinking here of traditions such as Taoist, Confucian, Buddhist, and Native American traditions—and many more. Our era is the time to suffuse a revolutionary praxis with a this-worldly mode of the spiritual that has some real hope of transforming the secular basis in the direction of social justice as all of humanity faces the daunting crises that loom throughout planet Earth. Our era is the time to humanize the spiritual, and to spiritualize the secular!

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<sup>39</sup> On the theme of a this-worldly spirituality, see papers by Kevin M. Brien listed in the bibliography.

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## **DIALOGUE AND THE HUMAN BEING AS *HOMO CREATOR***

*For Leo Emmanuel*

### **ABSTRACT**

This essay outlines my view on the anthropic conditions of authentic dialogue. In my opinion dialogue as such can be pursued only by people endowed with specific qualities and enjoying maximal fulfilment as human beings: people who are creative, who have an active attitude towards themselves and the world, who do not feel estranged from it but are united with it, and for whom the world is neither alien nor hostile, people who are free and responsible. These anthropic conditions of dialogue are connected with the herein-postulated image of human nature, whereby human nature is not only bound to the world by social relations but is co-created by the world, simultaneously retaining its subjective, individual dimension. In this context I will outline my concept of *homo creator* as a vision of modern humanism. In my belief this anthropological concept is one of the fundamentals of philosophy of dialogue.

**Keywords:** dialogue; *homo creator*; human nature; freedom; responsibility; alienation; estrangement.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In opposition to the *homo contemplator* concept and the idea of the human being's antagonistic juxtaposition to the world, I will present a hypothesis involving the human as creator, and thereby attempt to resolve certain anthropological problems posed chiefly by phenomenology and existentialism. In my intention the *homo creator* concept is a concept of modern humanism, a recipe for the future formation of the human being. Normative in character, it is in part a project of the human being and human transformation. However, it is also a

realistic project as it is completely founded upon a descriptive diagnosis of human nature. It is a vision of a fully accomplished human being. Unalienated from the world, free and responsible, *homo creator* may well come into being in social conditions freed from alienating pressure. I regard this concept among others as an anthropological platform for dialogue, because—to come down to a lower level of reflection—*homo creator* is nothing but a human being involved in authentic dialogue, a human being who is self-active and active towards the world and not merely a contemplator and receiver, a free human being in the sense explained below, responsible, a co-creator of reality, and, at the same time, immersed in and a part of this reality instead of being alienated from it. Such human beings are essentially subject of dialogue as their nature is founded upon the relational—also with regard to their relations with other humans, which not only enrich but co-create them. A necessary condition of authentic dialogue is the acceptance of a system of humanistic values, including truth (attained by cognition), and freedom. I believe these values to be essential for authentic dialogue and pay special attention to them. Humans who are alienated and who perceive the world as alien and hostile have no ability to undertake authentic dialogue.

## 2. THE HUMAN STRUGGLE AGAINST AND UNITY WITH THE WORLD

### 2.1. The alienation of humans and the world

I will only devote a few very brief comments to the antagonistic juxtaposition of humans and the world and human alienation from the world. One of the first, still mythological accounts of this problem can be found in *Genesis*: The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise symbolises nothing else but humanity's severance from and resulting resistance against the primal whole. Over the ages, the mounting alienation of humans and God (initially their relation was almost family-like, gods were sometimes even a part of the household, and at all times faithful companions of humans) merely reflected the increasing alienation of the world. Generated by authentic social alienation, this motif can be found in various forms in almost all European philosophy.

The most common remedy or, more precisely, opiate involved fleeing to God through salvation or mystical communion. Other such opiates were doctrines which professed a return to humanity's primordial unity with nature and the community. Such doctrines have always returned stubbornly, from Golden Age legends to today's ideas.

The alienation process was additionally enhanced by the fact that the ontic status of the human being was indeed different from that of objects and the world. This distinctness is not only a fact; it is also evidence of our humanity and the condition of our freedom. For this reason the conclusion that the most debatable and criticised motif in Sartre's philosophy is "the ontological dualism

of two spheres of phenomena, i.e. awareness and existence, can arouse serious doubts when uttered in isolation. Only dialectics offers a true solution here. The error in existentialism's ideological tendency is not that it manifests the distinctness of humans and things but in that it fails to see the possibility of eliminating alienation in any form of social organisation. Thus, distinctness transforms into hostility towards the human, transformed into a thing by the mechanisms of rule and enslavement or by his own doing.

These well-known traits are present in a multitude of varieties in civilisation concepts, literature, as well as theories claiming that contemporary mankind is in an essentially dangerous condition.

## 2.2. Human relations with the world and their substantial-subjective fundamentals

For me the most important of our diverse relations with the world are those in which humans do not put themselves against the reality around them as separate, and much less hostile, existences but find to themselves precisely in relations with reality. When Antonio Gramsci wrote that man is the process of his actions<sup>1</sup> he expressed a very similar experience. Friedrich Nietzsche would have said outright that we are not an existence but a becoming.<sup>2</sup> Over the past decades European thought has produced many similar concepts of severance with the substantialistic approach to the human being.

One could say that a human being is a substance also when examined through the prism of its achievements and history. However, such substance can also be defined by its current social position and the mentioned system of relations.

Precisely for this reason the individual as a substance stands opposed to the world in its past attainments, as in the past the individual functions not only as a subject but also as a social position and a legacy. Objectivity embraces only the here-and-now, in the past and future I am an object of remembrance/plans and projects for myself. Our relation with the world is simultaneously an object-subject relation and it is only death which, by destroying the subject, makes us merely an object for others. Nonetheless, community offers protection from annihilation or at least hope for such protection. Community is a collective subject because in it even the deceased are not mere object. Although indirectly, ties and relations continue with those who remain preserving the importance of those who have departed. Thus, only subject-world relations give humans a

<sup>1</sup> Gramsci, A. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 351. I quote here Gramsci's view in his original formulation: "We can see that in putting the question 'what is man?' what we mean is: what can man become? That is, can man dominate his own destiny, can he 'make himself,' can he create his own life? We maintain therefore that man is a process and, more exactly, the process of his actions."

<sup>2</sup> This has been best approached by Eugen Fink in his: 1960. *Nietzsches Philosophie*. Stuttgart.

chance for real and not illusory self-formation. In such relations human individuals become through the accumulation of successive biographic “layers” or their “substance”. Individuals exist in relations and are themselves relations in a narrow beam of light—the here-and-now. Subjectivity, which escapes the narrow limits of the traditionally-perceived “I”, confronts individuals with various situations and meanings relating to things and other people as subjectivisation possibilities. This is why such relations are the most essential meeting point for ourselves as objects and subjects and other objects and subjects. In a sense such relations determine where we come into contact with the world or, more precisely, they are, in the subjective and essence-generating sense, a unique extension of our personalities. In fact, personality as such is a relational structure, an extension of the subject and its “I”, hence it is “filled” with the world. But the world is not empty, nor inhuman: it contains human things and the meanings given them by other subjects. Therefore we cannot claim to give things meaning each time we encounter them. This can happen only in special cases and within relatively narrow limits as usually the things we encounter exist with meanings given them earlier by their manufacturers, interpreters, etc.

Therefore, the human world is not constituted by humans as individual subjects but humans who are simultaneously collective subjects or even a species, as most of the meanings allotted to humanised things by earlier generations have survived to this day. Indeed, this is what enables cultural continuity and communication, and lays the ground for dialogue as a primal human attribute.

For also this reason it is not only the subject that humanises the world, but also the human world humanises the subject—the humanisation process is mutual in many areas. Externalisation is usually preceded by internalisation and subsequently both reinforce each other, the process always leading to dual (external and internal) objectification.

However, from the point of view of human theory there exists another method of objectification—as we may describe the partial substantialisation of the subject. The subject objectifies itself not only in products and objectifications but also on a certain level of internalisation on which it forms its own “substance,” history, body and countenance. This, however, is objectification primarily by memory—we build pictures of our past, of things and events which influenced us and which we participated in, in our thoughts and memories.

This opens the path to a further analysis of the subject, to a deeper look into the “ego.” In the subjective sphere we must first distinguish the substantial and relational elements which remain in a close and dynamic relation. The substantial element, in turn, contains at least two ontically differing layers: corporal and mnemonic. The next distinction: the genetically corporal layer consists of that which is given by the genotype and phenotype and that which has been formed by the subject itself in the course of its individual biography.

In a modification of the so-called pre-reflexive *cogito* theory Maurice Merleau-Ponty claims that primary communication with the world takes place through the body which is the imprisoned natural spirit.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we can even go so far as to say that also in this sense the body is the fundament of awareness as the subject indeed consists of body, mind and relationality. Here I accentuate the substantial element of the subject—despite my basic rejection of the substantialistic concept of the human being as a whole—in order to reveal the material-mnemonic fundament of human endurance and identity, which is a unique fulcrum for humans in their entire relations with the world.

This is so because such relations are rooted and stored in the subject's deepest material-mnemonic layers, which is well expressed by the *superego* metaphor.<sup>4</sup> In this sense internalised relations become objectified, become objects within the bounds of our psychological structure. Besides being rooted, these relations are also subjectivity's extension to the world and define and co-determine human openness. Preserved through internalisation, they are a psychological and cultural material whose successive layers cover the deepest "I", enriching it with objectification.

The above distinctions provide a better insight into the destructive influence of alienation on the human personality. Alienation not only leads to the external world's domination over its creator but disintegrates the personality because it internalises alienness, arranging it in us in the mentioned layers. This inevitably leads to internal dissolution. In this way evil layers and arranges itself in the social world.

### 2.3. Types of relations with the world and the specific role of creativity

Especially significant in the present analysis are three types of relations: cognitive, practical and emotional. This is, however, a rather abstract distinction as in reality most relations with the world contain all three, albeit in varying degree. I will introduce a fourth type, i.e. creative relations. The term, however, will apply not only to art or research, but also that practical and theoretical human activity which is also emotional, because creativity is a unique combination of cognition, praxis and emotion. In fact, creativity may be described as uniting theory (cognition) with praxis in a specific emotional climate. It is evident that humans fulfil themselves best in creative activity where they form not only objects, institutions or events, but also themselves in the most complete and deepest sense.

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<sup>3</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. 1945. *Phenomenologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard, 350. English edition: 1965. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Trans: Colin Smith, C. London: Routledge.

<sup>4</sup> Freudianism—especially in its concept of the *id* as a reservoir and internalisation of the *superego*—is still a substantialistic doctrine, but the idea of the *ego* as mediator as well as the dynamic relations with the world, defensive mechanism and similar concepts herald a move towards relationism.

The pure cognition process is somewhat one-sided: the cognising subject only internalises the world, adopting a receptive, and at times even defensive, position. The so frequently voiced and refuted critique of the copy theory can, I think, concern only such a purely cognitive approach to the world, without heed of the processual character of cognition which must consist of various, and at times only technically separated, phases. The designate of such purely passive cognition can only be contemplation as a cultural phenomenon.

Paradoxically, a similarly purely practical relation appears only in its “dirtiest” form—when it is utterly deprived of the thought element. There are, however, many kinds of practical activity and in principle praxis is primarily a form of objectification, a movement away from the subject towards the world. The externalisation of cultural and material praxis in everyday human life is counterbalanced by the internalisation of the world in the process of cognition, education and upbringing. Both these relation orientations are united in the creative process. Creationism strives to comprehend and explain precisely this fact by tying it to the complete human being concept. *Homo creator* is the contemporary phase on the path to the creation of *homo universalis*. Creativity is the path to human completeness—not only because it best combines externalisation with internalisation but also because it ensures the most adequate and most complete union with the world.

People usually defend themselves against the world or attack it. However, probably the biggest and practically unceasing human dream is reconciliation with the world, the establishment of a union with it which would allow humans to preserve their separateness and individuality and at the same time eliminate the feeling that the world is a hostile and alien place.

This was heretofore possible only with the help of illusion and this is why humans have been and remain so strongly influenced by religion—although often at the price of real activity, and even individuality (here especially in the so-called mystical union with God). At the same time, however, religion helped societies endure the immensely difficult conditions most of them lived in; on the historical plane however, religion, alongside its conservative function so aptly underscored by classical Marxism, must also be seen as a factor which has indeed given societies some equilibrium, and at times also a stable existence. Even if the hope it provided was illusory, religion did ensure the psychologically important premise of endurance. This is especially evident with regard to the here-discussed model as religion was also a solution for the problems arising from humanity’s relation with the world, a solution which offered a certain basic order. Rebellion and revolution are unable to arise from total chaos and must also have something stable to negate.

That which primarily gives us a sense of unity and separateness (of the positively individualistic kind) is love. True, in its object and scope love is focused on the individual, but we know well that real love is often able to change our view of the world. As Erich Fromm maintains, when this happens the problem

of human existence becomes resolvable—within a certain time limit, to a certain degree and under certain conditions. Nonetheless in the social scale love is at all times a purely personal and individual journey which may at most supplement solutions rooted in ideology and culture.

In the social scale solutions may be provided only by creativity understood as a universal form of communion with a totally dealientated world, a world open to humans, equipped with essence endowed by others, who are friendly and open to us as we are to be open to this world. It is then that we will potentially find ourselves in a good-hearted, understanding and authentic dialogue with the world. Creativity means establishing a possibly strongest bond with the world as it is what co-creates our world, a world which is capable of being in the highest degree humanised. In the course of the creative process we conquer thy world without destroying it—more still, we enrich it in a way that differs essentially from regular practical and productive activity.

Creativity is an authentic social resolution to the problem of human existence as it is precisely the above-described communion with the world which allows the individual for its separateness and helps to develop individuality. This was understood by Georg Hegel who bound individuality to action and put it in opposition to the general and things. However, the power of the individual opposed the might of the above-individual, in other words, the subjective spirit stood in opposition to the objective spirit in the all-embracing unity of the whole.<sup>5</sup> And this is precisely why “nothing but truth constitutes the whole.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the metaphysical and absolute juxtaposition of the subject and object is replaced by a dialectical juxtaposition of mutually enriching poles. There is no chasm between the object and the subject if both are situated in a history-created, universal oneness.

#### 2.4. The dialectical premises of activity

The dialectical character of human relations with the world is expressed in simultaneous battle and unity, which are permanent determinants of the human fate. Mutually contradicting strivings are an immensely powerful, perhaps fundamental, source of human activity. Universally present, they may indeed appear in all forms of activity and thought. Frequently they differ in what the accentuate, and sometimes one of the conflicting elements appears temporarily absent, nonetheless it is hard to imagine human life without such contradictions.

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<sup>5</sup> Wein, H. 1964. *Realdialektik. Von hegelscher Dialektik zu dialektischer Anthropologie* [Real Dialectics. From Hegelian Dialectics to Dialectical Anthropology]. Den Haag, 178.

<sup>6</sup> The famous statement in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* acquires a special significance here and in the anthropological plan will, of course, lead towards community. Hence also the essence of life is contained in the individual's finding its place in the whole, its fragmentary truth in reference to a religious, historical or social absolute.



Unperceived, pathologically intensified and degenerated by alienation or restrained by passiveness, these essentially dialectical forces have been exploited only in a slight degree and most often for adverse, socially uncreative purposes. They determined the antinomies between the individual and society, the underlying fundament of all ideology which can be seen among others in extreme individualism and totalitarian ideas.

Resolving this problem in class societies proved a stumbling-block even for these societies' major ideologues, including Hegel as the dialectics of rule and enslavement stands in the way of union with the world and already in our encounters with the world's most important representative, i.e. another human being, we are confronted with a deadly hostility. Hegel finally solved the matter—as did Johann Wolfgang von Goethe on the artistic plane—at the tragic price of the individual's happiness.

Consent to the world, to others and to one's place in the world is not always tantamount with conformism or surrender. It can also be a source of psychological equilibrium and in this sense it is always to some degree necessary. It can be an introduction, or stage along the path to, unity. Thus, human dialectics enables the ordering of theoretically important phenomena, their inclusion in a broader philosophical construct and, ultimately, comprehension of the human being.

## **2.5. Self-identification and transpersonalisation**

The human being's inner unity and inner struggle is perhaps the most difficult issue for scholars and also important for the individual's life-plan. I understand this primarily as a constant and simultaneous striving for self-identification and transcendence: we wish to preserve our identity, at the same time we permanently seek to transgress our position and expand our individuality.

Self-knowledge reveals this constant split which Jean-Paul Sartre analysed so thoroughly. Sartre, however, bases his reflections on false premises because his dialectics hangs in a void, is merely a dialectics of awareness, and is moreover juxtaposed to non-dialectical nature. It is a negative dialectics which uses the subtle language of philosophy to express humanity's deep hostility towards a world of reification, and in consequence towards itself.

However, authentic love enabled connections in time and the simultaneous combination of movement towards identification and transcendence. Thus, love is not only a philosophical issue but also one of the important models for the kind of relations which should be predominant.

The dialectics of the human being is the most general description of human essence. Nonetheless, it was more often destructive than creative, its tension, identifications etc. resembling a huge and untempered river of energy. Therefore, it frequently carried with it an unhappy awareness, pain, and even the self-destruction of humans. It was an unexploited and squandered dialectics.

It is also an incomplete dialectics, in other words, in times of reification and alienation humans are incapable of being fully dialectical beings in the social sense. Exceptions to this rule—like Faust—are exactly that: exceptions, and inevitably tragic ones.

### **3. HOMO CREATOR**

Who will the human of the future be? Contrary to how it may sound, this question concerns not only the future, but also—and perhaps most of all—the human here-and-now and human essence in their deepest sense. Because the answer to this question must, if only silently, assume a specified concept of human nature and comprehension of humanity's present situation.

The essence of the human being consists of a unique bond between biological and psychological structure and the human attitude towards the world, viewed through the entirety of human social relations. Practically constant biologically but evidently subject to increasingly rapid social change, humans are primarily social beings. We must, therefore, conclude that the people of the future will be like the civilisation and culture of the future. The future, however, is not automatically granted under perennial laws, nor is it solely a product of human will. It is the effect of objective development trends and organised human awareness.

In relation to the here-discussed problem we can assume that this resembles a self-fulfilling prophecy: in our conditions humans have subjective premises to become what they wish to become and to what they wisely programme themselves. In other words, humanity's future reality depends to a very considerable degree on the human model developed today by philosophers, sociologists, psychologists, educators, biologists, anthropologists, etc.

This reality, however, depends primarily on our praxis. Also the undertaken measures will have to be of a specific kind. They will first of all have to involve investment in the human being, i.e. the fundamental modernisation of the institutionalised public education system, the practical transformation of human upbringing and self-upbringing through the enhancement of knowledge, sensitivity, intellectual and operative efficiency, and the improvement of human relations. If the entire palette of social relations constitutes the essence of man and, hence, the truth about humans, then humans also reflect and co-create the communities in which they participate. We are mutually responsible for ourselves because we mutually form ourselves.

#### **3.1. The human sciences and philosophical anthropology**

One of the most promising phenomena in contemporary intellectual culture is the emergence of a new vision of humanity which opens prospects for the practical transformation of the human being. Once humans are changed, they will also have a different perception of the world, a different everyday life, and

history will take a different course. Let us, however, devote some reflection on what this justifiably hoped-for transformation can mean for us today.

Philosophical anthropology must be connected with the human sciences as, for multiple methodological, social and axiological reasons, these sciences are in need of an open and at once dynamic philosophy. Success in the resolution of the increasingly complex human situation is only possible through a liaison of philosophy with science and its methodology.

### 3.2. The demise of idealistic and materialistic substantialism

The evolution of the human sciences allows us to say today that the onetime claims about the constancy of human nature are ultimately false. This natural evolution, however, gave rise to a number of moral and philosophical/axiological problems: a specific naturalistic essentialism which used the concept of human nature was not only connected with the best traditions of European humanism, but also opened the door to non-nihilistic historicism. On the humanistic plane it enabled the construction of values pursued by the human community as a species. The difficult and complex task, increasingly also for philosophers, will also have to involve the preservation of human bonds with tradition by those who will probably increasingly prevail over their predecessors in their ability to act, understand and feel.

Here, however, our interests concern not the moral, but the ontological issue. The old idealistic concepts of the human being, especially those propounded by religion, which defines the essence of humanity through the immortality of the human soul, are becoming increasingly anachronistic in light of the evolution of biology, physiology, genetics and other sciences which are today laying the ground for what in the future will perhaps be known as “soul” or awareness engineering. At this point the problem signalled above presents itself again: the incredible rise on technological possibilities leads to deep moral problems which we will not be able to deal with by optimistic sophistry.

The above also applies to the classical Thomistic formulation of the thesis about the human being as *compositum humanum*. Complex Thomistic constructs are all the less capable of standing up to contemporary science’s analysis of the real, dynamic and changeable psychophysical and social complexity of the human being.

A similar fate awaits the traditional materialistic/substantialistic vision of the human as merely a biophysical and essentially genetically and environmentally motivated being burdened by its bodily constitution. This traditionalistic materialism embraces not just the materialism of the Enlightenment or the vulgar materialism of the 19th century, but also appears to apply to some influential 20th century thought trends, like certain simplified interpretations of Freudianism (perhaps most to the writings of Melanie Klein and Wilhelm Reich) and some interpretations of behaviourism. This substantialism can also be ques-

tioned from another angle: that of the rising role of awareness and the contestation of the thesis about the absolutely determining role of the environment. Generally speaking, all substantialism must be discarded from the vantage point of the activist concept of the human being.

### **3.3. Relationism. The ego-world relation**

The biggest blow to both kinds of substantialism, i.e. idealistic and materialistic, has been dealt by the new concept of the human being: relationism. Here, the human essence is no longer defined by the soul nor any psychophysical or biophysical complexity but only through the relation between the subject and the world. Thus, relationism breaks away from idealistic and materialistic substantialism's autarchy over the human being.

In relationism relations with the world not only shape but also define the human being, and decide about the human being's essence. Crushed is the substantialistic wall separating the subject from the world's objective sphere, and the human sphere broadens immeasurably. The human essence is no abstract existing within an individual. It is the entirety of social relations. In this perspective the human being in a sense absorbs the world it co-creates and the world becomes a part of the human being seen as a historical, and even cultural-classic species. In the context of human history the concept of humans as a natural species becomes the most universal and above-historical fundament, on which the human being can be comprehended only with the help of historical clarification.

This is important as a point of departure towards defining the relationism I propound here as a materialistic/dialectic and naturalistic/historicistic standpoint. Relationism abolishes naturalism only in its historically limited forms. It is preserved as a genetic departure point and the constant presence of nature both in the human body and the world surrounding humans. However, in relationistic naturalism nature is present not as fate, an absolute determinant, but a flexible possibility from which the human being is created by history. More precisely, the human being creates itself from nature through history, as the here-described relationism is simultaneously activism.

Nature and history (or society) are the two pillars of materialistic relationism. Their interaction creates an extremely expansive network of relations, whose co-creation and clarification constitutes the material from which the essence of the human being is built. The dialectical character of this approach is expressed here by relationality, which breaks through the metaphysical seclusion and stasis of substantialism. This kind of relationism replaces the illusory pathos of idealistic substantialism and its immortal soul as the mainstay of human dignity and eternity, and ahistorical naturalism with its passivistic belief in the eternal constancy of human nature, by an optimism which obliges to practical action and the highest moral responsibility and bases upon the possibility of

changing human nature, transforming it by the above-mentioned genetic engineering and first and foremost by political and economic change in social relations.

Dynamic and developed by humans themselves, human nature thus becomes one of the fundamentals of increasingly expanding relations with the rest of nature and society at large. Here development will consist not only in, as heretofore, the rising number and complexity of humanity's bonds with the world, but also on the changeability of human nature, one of the three pillars constituting the human being. The awareness of animals and children does not emanate from the surrounding world. Children simply see no boundary between themselves and the world. Until now historical evolution from animal and child primarily consisted in the acquisition of a certain distance towards the world, the distancing of the subject from the object. This dynamism can now be multiplied and also very importantly guided thanks to the recognition of the flexible character of the once constant-deemed departure point, i.e. corporeal human nature. And thanks to the recognition that human essence is formed not within human nature but in the relation of the whole subject, i.e. body, mind, and society with the surrounding and co-created world.

Authentic Freudianism, i.e. the theory expounded by Freud himself, can also be understood as not a substantialistic but a relationistic concept of the human being: the superego is the interiorisation of relations between the ego and society, the human character is formed though the resolution of the basic relation between the human being and its parents manifested in an Oedipus or Electra complex. Here, human essence will not be found solely—nor even primarily—in biological determinants despite their major role in Freud's theory, but in relations between the subjective reservoir of psychological and physical energy with the family environment and culture. In this respect social psychology and its latest findings in personality theory have contributed even clearer and better-provable material. Numerous known social anthropology studies which need no mention here are good examples of the universal character of the relational trends present in contemporary research.

### **3.4. Creating diversified unity with the world**

What is the nature of social relations? This historical variable is of primary theoretical and practical importance here. Humans were happy in the utopias of the "Golden Age" and primeval communities because they were reconciled with the world, at one with their communities and with nature, which had not yet alienated itself from them nor within them. However, history of culture is also the history of the human being's mounting alienation from nature, other people, and in effect its own self. Leonardo da Vinci's famous, "If you are alone you belong entirely to yourself" is a beautiful and moving confession, but also evidence of human isolation and mounting hostility towards and alienation from

others even in an era which strove to put the human being in the focus of its attention. It was finally Sartre who rolled out the heaviest accusation against his contemporaries with the conclusion that “hell is other people,” and in subtle analyses of his own writings drew horrifying pictures of a chasm, or at least fundamental hostility, between humans and the world.

Our challenge to that world and those ideas goes beyond lifestyles, political solutions and ideology and aims at the creation of a new kind of relation between humans and the world. This will be made possible by a new society based on authentic community.

The dreams contained in utopias expressed the human striving for unity with the world. They could, however, be realised only in an illusory sense, namely, in utopias, in religion, especially in mysticism where postulated or even experienced communion with God was the highest form of fulfilment. God was everything, so, although in an illusory way, individuals were thus able to find their place in the whole and sense in their lives. Because sense is order and a place within the whole. And happiness frequently involves the acceptance of one’s place in the whole, and therefore also reconciliation with oneself.

However, such acceptance of oneself and the world was rooted in resignation. Humans succumbed to a world symbolised by God, and in some extreme variations of mysticism even annihilated themselves, finding contentment in total depersonalisation, in the surrender of their bodily and spiritual separateness.

In the reverse model of human-world relations (which also has various historical and philosophical variants), individuals in the Western world find their dignity in radical separation from and contestation of the entire environment and wage war on the world, which they usually see as hostile. Some doctrines even claim that the individual is the only reality, or at least the only true value. In this case overcoming the dialectical tension between both poles, i.e., humans and the world, takes place through the negation of the world.

The philosophical novelty of today’s historical and political situation consists in the retainment and simultaneous control over the dialectical tension between humans and the world. The energy generated by this tension, visible both in differentiation (personal separateness, the self-preservation instinct, individualising social trends) and merger (assimilation, many educational processes, community goals, projection and cultural identification mechanisms etc.) is usually exploited one-sidedly and incompletely, which enhances the “fragmentation” of the human being.

Therefore, the full employment of the two-way energy produced by this tension (in philosophical terms this may be called a dialectics which interiorises the world in awareness and objectifies thought in products) will not only help increase the power of societies and individuals but also, in the way described above, lead to the emergence of a new relation between people and the world. This in turn will bring on an era not only of qualitatively new human beings (“complete” human beings, also with regard to the humanisation of the social

environment and increasingly larger areas of the natural environment), but of new interpersonal relations based on mutual enrichment in a unique liaison of energy and values.

Only then will we be able to speak about a true and enriching unity between humans and the world. An essential element of this project is the thesis that this differentiated unity will not be achieved at once through one idea or dream. It will be built gradually, bit by bit, in a progressing expansion of the environment we consider our own in the axiological sense, i.e. which we approve of and value. Hence, creativity appears also here as the most mature and humane bond between humans and the world.

Humans who will create themselves with the mighty help of united other people will also have to find, or rather create a primal, authentic and natural bond with the world. In this bond they will not only be able to retain their autonomy but also develop their individuality. The spiritual wealth of individuals is strictly tied to the cultural wealth of communities. This concerns not just the general and somewhat abstract concept of society as a whole, but also, and primarily, concrete communities: organisational, productive, cultural, etc. Putting it simply, humans are and will be like the workplaces, social organisations, artistic groups or neighbourhood communities they co-create. The wisdom of life lies in the ability to find big issues in everyday life, to raise daily praxis to a work of the heart and mind. An automated life dominated by habit and devoid of reflection and sensitivity is tantamount to gradual self-annihilation.

Thus, human wisdom also means living deeply, sensibly and happily and seeking one's humanity in one's own existence and thereby in community co-created with others. The path to individualised spiritual union with the world can only lead through concrete communities and a new society.

### **3.5. Humans of the future: experts, philosophers, creators**

Contemporary humans are increasingly evolving to experts in ever-narrower theoretical or practical fields. Consequently, it would be advisable for them to take steps to balance this limitation by creating possibly broad cultural and perceptive horizons for themselves. For this reason, individuals, who supplement their communities with their unique personal activity and existence, should strive to be people of profound sensitivity and humanistic coexistence skills, individuals guided by true human wisdom, in other words, philosophy. The term, attributed to Pythagoras, who did not dare call himself a sage but merely one who had a love of wisdom, is today closest to describing the intellectual expectations and ideologically predominant praxis of the contemporary world. Indeed, only philosophy is able to intellectually merge the dispersed and disintegrated sciences and praxis with theory, i.e. elevate praxis to the level of rationality and make theoretical dreams come true. Thus, philosophy also carries hope for individuals as it is able to imbue sense and order into life, define its

natural dimensions and show how one can co-create one's own, everyday existence in accord with the beauty of art and the truth of science. This is why art should become a crucial element of the new human being's broadened perceptive horizons, while humanistic sensitivity and activity should evolve to an all-penetrating factor of practical life.

This, in the briefest terms, substantiates the title of the present reflections: *homo creator*—a creator of himself and co-creator of his environment and world. The toil of a worker masterful with his tools, the visions of an architect or constructor developing ever-better buildings and machines, the reflections of a scientist and the passion of an artist—they all can be manifestations of creativity. Creativity is not only the completion of an original work, it can also involve a reproduction or even ordinary production provided the effort behind it is fuelled by love and free, and reflects the human struggle with finiteness, transience and separation. If it is effort by which the individual strives for self-expression not necessarily through the product's originality but its quality, quantity or perfect workmanship.

First and foremost, however, through their creativity community-reconciled individuals can establish true alliances and true understanding with the world, penetrate it not just by thought but also emotion (as such individuals are not alienated), and activity (in the creative process).

#### **4. FREEDOM AND THE ONTOLOGICAL STATUS OF THE HUMAN BEING, MORAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE COGNITIVE SPHERE**

Freedom in all its meanings is a human issue and not, as Plato believed, a divine privilege. Equally alien and morally repulsive is Aristotle's condonement of slavery, e.g. in the famous statement in *Nicomachean Ethics* that "a slave is an animate tool and a tool is an inanimate slave".

Nonetheless, that era's negation of a slavery-based world, resistance (chiefly moral) against social evil and strivings to reconcile the individual with nature also produced the magnificent ethic and ontology of the Stoics—most notably their concept of freedom as an inalienable human right, and simultaneously freedom perceived as awareness of the necessities and laws that determine human existence. This idea is close to my viewpoint, its ethical pathos is also close to mine because it clearly points to the moral responsibility of humans for all their deeds. Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, and Epicurus before them were certain that humans carried an almost absolute responsibility for their conduct and choices. However, what for them glorified humanity later evolved (especially in Christianity's radically neophytic, apologetic and institutionalised variant) into the individual's dependence on God as a fundamentally sinful and imperfect being. This development-hindering symbolic of the *Genesis* has been fully exploited by the Church. However, Christianity also inherited, and to a greater degree developed (especially in its inspiration of various doctrines), several



interpretations of freedom (we need only mention Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky or Nietzsche).

Human freedom stems not only from the human being's natural separateness and uniqueness, but primarily from the fact that the human being is a part of the world and is subject to its laws. Thanks to the objective dialectics of causality, necessity, the cumulation of influence, relative isolation and the pan-union of systems, freedom appears to be rooted in the very order of existence. In a sufficiently precise definition of freedom animals are also free in that they can choose their flight route or attack mode. The fundamental qualitative difference, however, is that the extent of this freedom is extremely narrow. This is probably so because the degree of a complex system's (the animal's) isolation from its surroundings is very low in the stimulus-motive-response relation, i.e. almost any stimulus within the animal's perception field causes an immediate response. Training teaches animals to guide their responses and select stimuli, in other words to develop some distance to stimuli. E.g. a well-trained dog listens only to its master's voice, eats only upon his consent, etc.

The ontic fundamentals of freedom in the full sense of the term are found only in the distinguished existence that is the human being.

Human ontology is able to offer a more complete and adequate answer to the question about the fundamentals of freedom. The human being is characterised not only by an immeasurably higher complexity than other organisms, but also by a greater isolation from its surroundings. An isolation is constructed consciously over centuries of civilisation and culture. The human being's distance from attacks on its stimulus-motive-reaction system is also incomparably greater, thus enabling immense flexibility of behaviour and allowing the human to co-create situations.

The basic ontic discriminant here is thought. Thought can be described as a relatively autonomous sequence of causes which proceeds over long periods of time in complete independence from the surrounding world. Indeterminism absolutises this fact or, more precisely, fails to comprehend it as the thought's temporary lack of external determinants does not mean that it is totally unconditioned. Analyses of thought processes, even so-called free association sequences, convincingly reveal that they are in every point preceded by a cause or sequence of causes which are primarily mental in character, but also emotional stimuli, processed external stimuli, etc.

We can therefore say that external physical, chemical and biological factors interpenetrate and occasionally clash with the causal sequence of another mental order/system. This mental system's relative and temporary autonomy is the direct ontic fundament of truly human freedom, freedom in the proper sense of the word.

It must be said, however, that the ambiguity of the term "freedom" has led to many misunderstandings. As rational beings we are free in the above meaning, to the highest degree autonomous (though relatively autonomous) with regard to

the surrounding world. This is our ontic, existential freedom. But we are also free in what we may call a moral sense: like all living beings we are subject to the implicit laws of biology and have to die. However, only we humans are able to refer to death consciously. From the physical/ontic point of view we are, like animals (to put it drastically), imprisoned in the grasp of blind necessity and absolute laws. However, we, humans, are able to imagine this predicament. Thus, our entire dignity lies in thought.

Pascal's words, however, are only partly true as, in keeping with the principles of humanistic Prometheanism, we can add to them that our whole dignity lies in thought which produces action. And for us this has not only axiological but also ontic importance, an importance which makes the difference between passive and active, co-creative attitudes. Because in my opinion humans not only describe the world ontologically but also co-determine it ontically.

Human responsibility also hangs together with the human ontic situation, from which it stems, but which it also bears influence on. If our fate lies in our hands, then so does in part our existential (ontic) status. Indeed, the degree to which we make use of our thoughts and skills distances us from the animal world, and even inanimate matter. The dialectics of this relation is that this distancing is the more real, the greater the degree in which we are able to perceive and make use of the laws of nature and the extent to which we actually make use of them.

Let the following conclusion close our ontological reflection: freedom, hence also our responsibility, is not only ontically possible but this freedom also burdens us with responsibility for the evolution of our ontic situation. Neither our place in nature nor our ontic construction are granted for ever; we ourselves have the possibility and the duty to co-create it. Thus, the words said at the outset—we ourselves co-create our freedom—have for us not only an ideological/axiological but also an ontic, existential meaning.

Freedom also means our rule over ourselves and nature. This authority results from cognition, therefore it extends beyond the European tradition which almost identified freedom with cognition. Even St. John says, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." In activism freedom can not be reduced to cognition and awareness, it is closely tied to action and control over oneself and the outside world. First and foremost, however, it is situated in the human existential structure.

Cognition is doubtless a very important part of acquiring and realising freedom. Let me put it in the following simple words: existence enables the possibility of freedom, or, more precisely, contains this possibility, which is enabled by cognition. In a sense, cognition makes freedom aware. Thanks to cognition we know who we are and what our possibilities are. The next step is action, transforming possibility into reality, and this is how freedom is realised. In keeping with the above thesis, however, this is not the end of freedom's path; freedom is co-created in creative human activity.

The more freedom the more responsibility. This common maxim finds full confirmation in the cognitive sphere, which is well-evidenced throughout the history of civilisation and visible with increasing force today. Let us consider how much bigger that the freedom of Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, was the freedom of Einstein, the co-inventor of the atom bomb, and, in effect, how much greater was his responsibility. Today scientists, the depositaries and creators of cognition, carry responsibility for literally the entire world. And they are not freed of this responsibility by the fact that they carry it collectively and share it with politicians.

Thus it appears that increased freedom in combination with increased power (not only political) ought to lead to increased responsibility. How ironically, though deeply, Fyodor Dostoyevsky expressed this in *The Grand Inquisitor!*

This finds confirmation in every walk of social life, of course, with essential modifications imposed by politics. Generally, though, observation of contemporary society allows the conclusion that every human is responsible for the scope of his rule.

In the context of the here-discussed issue cognition is of interest to us because it reveals the immense diversity of the world, and also because it shows how differently freedom, necessity and responsibility manifest themselves in various spheres of life. Cognition also enables us to distance ourselves from (unfulfilled) demands to close the freedom issue in a single formula, which are being forwarded by some philosophical schools. Cognition, which in philosophical generalisation reaches into the disciplinary sciences, offers an overview of the broad and very complex dialectics of freedom and responsibility, their historical and social vicissitude and difficult, dramatic evolution.

## 5. ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND AXIOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Alongside its investigations of the ontic and cognitive spheres, philosophical anthropology also broadens the study of freedoms. Here we arrive at the highest level of freedom, i.e. the subjective freedom of the human being, the subject, but first and foremost the freedom of *homo creator*.

Thus:

1. Freedom may be considered a characteristic feature of the human species. A truly human being capable of developing its humanity is primarily a being that is free.

2. Political freedom is a philosophical term which calls for fulfilment of the human being's ontic status.

3. Individuals and societies are not given a "readymade" world—they co-create and supplement it. Thus, they lay the ground for and co-create freedom. Therefore, in the broad context of historiosophy (philosophy of history) and the anthropological plan we can again speak about a permanent and systematic increase of freedom, or at least about the possibility of such an increase, be-

cause, as history teaches us, the paths of freedom are never simple and all too often marked by bloodshed and tragedy.

4. My understanding of freedom partly follows Hegelian inspirations and distinguishes between “freedom from” and “freedom to.” Juxtaposing the two is pointless as in human evolution it is incomparably more important for humans to know what they are free to do than what they are freeing themselves from.

## 6. FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

The above explains the issue of human responsibility. Generally, the scope of human responsibility is identical with the scope of human freedom, and to a degree and in a certain sense with the scope of human rule. In an overwhelming majority of cases real freedom was and is the effect of practical activity, which constitutes a material force. In the realities of contemporary society the scope of freedom is still decided in battle.

Transition from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom broadens the responsibility of every human being. Humans define the aims of their activity subjectively and internally. For instance a teacher who pursues a certain curriculum accepts a certain framework and certain obligations (necessities), whose execution, however, largely depends on him. He is free not only in how he transmits knowledge to his students but most of all in the degree of his involvement in transmitting it.

In a general and fundamental sense moral responsibility—responsibility for oneself, one’s fate and the shape of one’s life—is an even bigger responsibility. Here those philosophies are right which burden each individual with responsibility for the fate of entire humanity, because all we do to some extent confirms or degrades the humanity within us. In this respect the Kantian categorical imperative and the theses forwarded by the existentialists offer noteworthy and truly morally beautiful proposals.

Thus, moral responsibility varies not just in scope but also in degree. Practically all humans determine the hierarchy of their values on the axiological plane. The choice and hierarchy of values and goals influences our lives to a considerable degree. Therefore, our subjective initial choices, which depend almost solely on ourselves, are the choices that determine our fate. Hence, we have the right to say that we ourselves choose our fate.

The individual carries responsibility for its fate because in oppression-free social relations this fate largely depends on its own activity. We are responsible for our actions because they are the effect of our undertakings, our character, our willpower, etc. They externalise and objectify our inner, subjective world, hence are primarily the products of our freedom.

One of the main motifs in the present reflections is the structural growth of freedom. The more complex the system’s structure is, the broader the freedom. Although presented in a rather abstract form, Hegel’s intuition was indeed in-

genious: history is the path to freedom, more precisely, a dialectical path full of inner conflict which through permanent “reduction” leads to ever-broader liberty.

Freedom is always something concrete. It is, first of all, relative, historically attributed to a social class, group or even a single ruler, as was the case in the eastern empires. This was strongly underscored by Hegel. However, freedom is also (although in unequal measure due to class divisions) the freedom of entire humanity, of cultures and eras, freedom from nature and also freedom from itself. The idea of collective responsibility in its contemporary meaning has a humanistic sense, because it expresses our moral community with others. However, collective responsibility is a concept to be used with caution and only in specific instances. The existentialists’ attempts to lay responsibility both on the henchmen and their victims appear, to say the least, ambiguous. Thus, I once again protest against total responsibility as this puts the criminal on one level with his victim. Only in this awareness can there be sense and true force in the famous words about the engagement of entire humanity by every individual act.

## **7. CONCLUSION—DIALOGUE AND HUMANISM**

Modern-day humanism, a humanism that offers fundamentals for authentic dialogue, should today proclaim not only the freedom, equality and brotherhood heralded by the French Revolution, but also the immense importance of cognition because cognition is a fundamental value. It must also proclaim versatility, which is a sign of humanism and a necessity of our day, and—as I have tried to show here—human responsibility in its varying scope and intensity, because the fate of our environment, and even entire humanity, rests upon the shoulders of us all and, even if in a minute degree, on the shoulders of every individual human being.

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*Charles S. Brown*

**IDENTITY AND DIFFERENCE:  
OVERCOMING THE MASTER SELF THROUGH  
THE CULTIVATION OF A DIALOGICAL SELF-IDENTITY**

***ABSTRACT***

This paper argues that the pluralist ethos of today's world requires dialogue, i.e., the construction of shared meaning through a plurality of perspectives. This, in turn, requires that partners in dialogue overcome the perspective of the "master self" who claims universal legislative authority in its quest for epistemic closure. Dialogue requires the cultivation and development of a dialogical self-identity that reflects the ability to co-construct shared meaning without the erasure or suppression of differences.

**Keywords:** dialogue; dialectics of identity and difference; master self; dialogical self; pluralism; monological rationality.

**PROLEGOMENA TO DIALOGUE**

The human condition is one of living in a shared and meaningful world. What we know or believe as real and true comes from both an element of personal experience and a shared way of interpreting or making sense of this experience. Making sense of the world is both a personal and a shared phenomenon that requires the construction of stable meanings and identities from a manifold of differences.<sup>1</sup> In the Greek tradition philosophy began with the construction of logos. For over two thousand years Western philosophy has mostly assumed a monistic interpretation of logos, i.e., a monological understanding of rationality. The result was that the enduring questions concerning truth, reality,

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, Ch. S. Forthcoming. "Intentionality, Life-World, and Language: Towards a Theory of Inter-Cultural Understanding and Dialogue." In: *Language and Communication*. Ed. K. Das. New Delhi: Northern Book Publishers.

and goodness were taken to be reducible to one correct view of the world, a final vocabulary describing a metaphysical absolute. While pluralism was always an alternative to this way of thinking, monism (metaphysical and ethical) has traditionally been considered to be either the point of departure or the end goal of serious thinking.

The great systems of Western thinking, viz., Thomism in the religious tradition, Newtonian mechanics, and the moral theories of the Enlightenment each seek a final explanation of things in one basic entity, law, or principle. Each of these monological systems claim a monopoly of truth, i.e., a single grand narrative centered on a metaphysical absolute whether that be God, man, or nature. Monistic systems seek epistemic closure in which all contingencies and uncertainties are finally settled.

In today's world the assumption of a monological rationality and with it a timeless guiding truth for all people has withered. Philosophy today is largely a post-foundational enterprise that rejects any and all systems of thought centered on a single and correct point of view. The point of departure for serious thinking today requires the recognition of diverse points of view. Post-foundational thinkers today need not reject the quest for unity or identity but must recognize that each unity and identity is constructed on a manifold of diversity, often through the suppression or elimination of diversity.

Serious thinking today about the enduring questions of truth, reality, and justice can only begin with a methodology that recognizes the on-going dialectic of identity and difference. This means that for questions of social justice as well as questions about the material constitution of the world top-down absolutes (abstractions masquerading as metaphysical discoveries) expressible in universal principles are no longer viable. Pluralism has emerged as the ethos of our times.<sup>2</sup> The recognition and respect for plurality means that monological interpretations of rationality along with monological systems of thought are now faded and worn out. Such a new ethos, today more than ever, requires dialogue and a commitment to dialogical forms of rationality.

Dialogue begins with the recognition and respect for multiple points of view and the desire to integrate rather than suppress difference, into stable, if not permanent, *gestalts* of shared meaning, i.e., meaning that has been co-constituted by partners in dialogue. Dialogue arises from the shared exercise of *logos* among a plurality of points of view. For much of human history (at least in the Western tradition) the promise of dialogue has been held captive to a monological rationality that seeks to construct meaning on a framework on monism.

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<sup>2</sup> Mohanty, J. N. 2000. *The Self and Its Other: Philosophical Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 19.

Our various understandings of what is real, true, or good have never been the result of a single or pure form of thinking. Understandings of the real, the true, or the good have always been co-constituted by an endless variety of points of view. Sometimes these various points of view occur within a single person, sometimes within a single culture, sometimes within a single species. Often these diverse perspectives occur within a plurality of persons, cultures, and even species. Rachel Carson's simple but monumental book, *Silent Spring*, points to the possibility of a degraded future in which birds have ceased to share their joyous expression of life. In such a world the silence of the birds would alert us to a new and profoundly sad reality. Dialogue, rooted in the recognition of the dialectics of identity and difference, would continue to seek ever better formulations and understandings of goodness, justice, and truth. These formulations would not be considered as discoveries of atemporal certainties or incorruptible principles but as temporal approximations in an on-going quest for truth and understanding.

#### FOUR PRINCIPLES OF DIALOGUE

The ethos of pluralism dominating contemporary thought emerges from both the material and cultural state of an increasingly interconnected world in which previously silenced or marginalized voices demand to be heard and from the two hundred year history of critical philosophy within Western culture. The first principle of dialogue arises from this history of critical philosophy. Kant taught us to see that the world described by Newtonian physics is bound or structured by assumptions that lie outside that system. Hegel taught us that any and all systems of thought are bound or structured by historically developing principles that lie of outside those systems. Nietzsche similarly taught us that moral systems of thought express an underlying way of looking at the world rooted in the will to power. Feminist philosophers have taught us that calculative monological rationality silently presupposes a masculine bias. In each case these critiques of knowledge reveal that too much of our thinking is silently controlled by background assumptions that are taken for granted and mostly unquestioned. In different ways these philosophers teach us not to confuse our conceptual systems (maps) for the things themselves (territory). The recognition that our maps are not the territory, or that our conceptual systems are never mirrors of reality need not prevent us from recognizing that some maps are better and some are worse. Nor should it prevent us from recognizing that differing conceptual systems may each reveal and illuminate different but distinctive features of the world in important and insightful ways.

This first principle of dialogue, viz., not to confuse our theoretical systems for the things themselves, is closely related to the second principle of dialogue. This is the idea, independently formulated in many contexts that for each thing revealed something is also concealed. When I present the back of my hand to



you I conceal the front. Newtonian physics reveals the role of gravity in explaining and predicting motion while concealing other possible forces. The atomic theory of matter reveals the separate and discrete nature of material things while hiding their interconnectedness. Liberal theories of politics and economic reveal the individuality of persons while concealing their inherent and essential social nature. Likewise, socialist theories of politics and economics reveal the social nature of persons while concealing their inherent and essential individuality. The first two principles of dialogue are descriptive while the third and fourth principles are prescriptive.

The third principle of dialogue is the active application of the norm of ahimsa to dialogue. This means that when interpreting the standpoint of the other, one must do no harm, that is, one must not mischaracterize the perspective of the other.<sup>3</sup> Included here in the notion of ahimsa is the positive admonition to interpret the other as generously as one's sense of reason allows. Partners in dialogue must search for common ground and shared commitments and for any kernel of truth in the position of the other. Partners in dialogue must be open to the possibility that any point of view may be partly true, partly false, and partly indecidable.<sup>4</sup> Points of view that initially seem mutually exclusive and contradictory may later reveal themselves to be complementary while sharing overlapping content.

The fourth principle states that dialogue must be essentially revisionist discourse. This simply means that partners in dialogue must be open to revising their own beliefs and background assumptions. Partners in dialogue must adopt an attitude of openness to entertain, as much as possible, the perspective of the other. The willingness to entertain and possibly adopt some or all of the other's perspective is more than a merely academic exercise. The willingness to change or modify one's belief system is the willingness to change one's personal identity. This entails that such a willingness to entertain the perspective of the other involves the willingness to critically reflect on one's own core assumptions about self and world. Such willingness comes with a risk, the risk of losing one's self-identity, as personal identity is partially constituted from an internalization of and identification with culturally constructed points of view and sets of beliefs. Openness to dialogue opens this layer of self to revision and change.

These four principles of dialogue require a method that seeks consensus from multiple points of view. The goal is not to discover a final vocabulary but rather to maintain an on-going conversation tempered with the recognition that each insight may present something of importance while concealing other features. Recognition that the construction of shared meaning is ongoing and never final teaches us that our self-identities and worldviews are never complete. Just

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

as Socrates argued that the recognition of our ignorance motivates us to search for truth, the recognition that our knowledge and wisdom is never complete, i.e., a central lesson of critical philosophy, teaches us to be open to revisionist discourse.

Dialogue rooted in these four principles moves away from the focus on metaphysical, atemporal, or final concepts anchoring our worldviews and the resulting conceptions of self and world. This conception of dialogue rethinks the nature and structure of rationality from a monist to a pluralist framework.

### **BARRIERS TO DIALOGUE—THE MASTER SELF**

The dialogue needed in today's world requires that the mutual exchange of ideas and perspectives must be unimpeded by power relations. It is further necessary that partners in dialogue accept the notion of truth as consensus with the caveat that no census is ever final and that any existing consensus must be challenged by ongoing reflection and openness toward the recognition of alternative points of view. Consensus is neither a license for the suppression of difference nor the imposition of epistemic closure.

The foundational monism of Western culture, and with it, its idealized final concepts, what Derrida has called "transcendental signifiers,"<sup>5</sup> such as "God," "man," and "nature," has impeded dialogue by its relentless suppression of differences. Within such a monistic framework differences can only be recognized as the absence of the essential. Discourse within a monistic framework thus must mark differences by their lack or their opposition of the essential. Discourse within monistic frameworks thus requires a dualistic conceptual system that continues to privilege metaphysical absolutes while marginalizing all differences. Theocentrism requires a God/world dichotomy, anthropocentrism requires a man/nature dichotomy, and naturalism requires a subject/object dichotomy. In each case the world is conceptualized by dividing differences into mutually exclusive dichotomies: what is God and what is not God, man and not-man, nature and not-nature, and then privileging one side of the dichotomy as essential while relegating the other side to the inessential.

Western thinking and Western concepts of rationality have been silently structured by a value-hierarchical and dualistic mode of thinking that makes sense of the world by interpreting important differences as mutually exclusive and opposing dichotomies in which one member of the pair possesses greater value than the other.<sup>6</sup> Some of the more philosophically, morally, and politically

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<sup>5</sup> Derrida, J. 1974. *Of Grammatology*. Transl. Spivak, G. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Warren, K. 1990. "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism." *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Summer), 125–46.

important pairs of these oppositional hierarchies include the reason/emotion, the mind/body, the human/animal, culture/nature, the masculine/feminine, and the self/other dichotomies. In each case a pair of concepts is defined in strict opposition to each other with one member of the pair being privileged over the other; reason is valued over emotion, humans are valued over animals, culture is valued over nature, the masculine is valued over the feminine, and self is valued over the other. These pairs of mutually reinforcing value hierarchies have served to justify not only dominant forms of oppression but the forceful imposition of a monistic and totalizing conceptual system and thereby the elimination of dialogue. Human domination and control of nature has been “justified,” or made to seem natural, on the grounds that only humans are rational and thereby only humans possess intrinsic value. Male domination of women has been “justified” on the grounds that men are more rational than women and thus more fully human than women. Racist domination of whole cultures and people has been “justified” on the grounds that one group of people are more rational than the other.

Racism, sexism, and colonialism each appeal to this value-hierarchical dualistic conceptual system as racist, sexist, and colonial elites argue that their perspective and ways of life more fully embody the unique essence of humanity than the other. This value-hierarchical dualist conceptual system and the logic of domination it creates embodies a set of assumptions that make sexism, racism, class superiority, and the domination of nature seem natural and justified. If we are to end any of these forms of domination we must remove the final ground of justification and learn to re-conceptualize these differences, now marked as value-hierarchical dichotomies, in new ways.<sup>7</sup>

The dominant narratives within the Western tradition have been silently structured by this value-hierarchical and dualistic mode of thinking that encourages the tendency to interpret the human self as an atomistic and rational ego separate from emotion, body, nature, and animality. The complete internalization of this conceptual framework results in a detached, impartial, and impersonal perspective that dismisses all other points of view as irrational. When this privileged perspective is claimed for one’s self the result is the formation of what eco-feminist philosopher Val Plumwood<sup>8</sup> calls a “master self,” a self that claims the capacity to make unbiased judgments rooted in what it judges to be the highest standards of rationality. Rationality is here correlated with the monological perspective of objectivity, universality, and emotional detachment. The subjectivity that internalizes this perspective has no need for dialogue, as it be-

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<sup>7</sup> Plumwood, V. 1991. “Nature, Self, and Gender, Feminism, Environmental Philosophy, and the Critique of Rationalism.” *Hypathia*, vol. 6, no. 1 (Spring), 3–27.

<sup>8</sup> Plumwood, V. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. London–New York: Routledge. See, especially, Chapter Six “Ethics and the Instrumentalising Self,” 141–164.

comes the master self, the self that sees the world as conforming to its categories of thought.<sup>9</sup> This is the self who speaks with the voice of universal legislative authority, the self who claims, for itself, the authority to suppress or dismiss alternative points of view.

The master self constructs its identity as separate to and opposed to the other, finding its essential identity in a detached and impartial point of view, which it interprets as rational while the other is dismissed as irrational and inessential to its identity. There are many historical forms and variations of this master/narrative self, the Eurocentric self, the racist self, the patriarchal self, and more abstract forms of selfhood including the impartial ego of scientific inquiry and moral theory who constructs its self-identity by dismissing and disrespecting emotional and bodily ways of knowing as well as the atomistic self of liberal economic and political theory who dismisses and disrespects its relations with others. The master self, claiming the power of universal legislative authority, can only view dialogue, i.e., shared logos with the other, as a contradiction.

The master self claims universal legislative authority by interpreting its point of view as the “view from nowhere”, i.e., an impartial, objective, and universal perspective. This point of view is, in fact, the particular point of view of the most powerful actors in human history. It is the point of view of elite men who typically make decisions in industry and government. The master self, in its arrogance, assumes its point of view is the only legitimate one. Among the many flaws of the value-hierarchical and dualistic perspective of the master self is its inability to recognize any worth in other points of view. Dialogue with the other, under these assumptions, becomes irrational. The master self masquerades as the point of view of a purely rational, universal, and impartial ego, but in actuality, it reflects a particular point of view best characterized as the point of view of elitist power.

This point allows us to see the deepest problems of the commitment to a monological understanding of rationality, i.e. its tendency to privilege the so-called purity of universal and abstract principle over the contingency and particularity of concrete life and to dismiss any dissenting perspective as irrational. The point of view of the master self can only regard plurality and difference as something to be reduced to its privileged point of view or eliminated altogether. The point of view of the master self justifies its own attempts to halt dialogue by the exercise of power. The master self that claims the power of universal legislative authority in its own quest for epistemic closure stands behind all attempts to arbitrarily bring dialogue to a halt.

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, Ch. S. 2000. “Defending the Indefensible: A Dialogical and Feminist Critique of Just War Theory.” *Skepsis* XXI/i—2010, 92.

## ORIGINS OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue is the historical telos of logos. It is the natural progression of the process of constructing a rational and intelligible world. To fulfill this historical possibility dialogue must overcome the monological rationality of the master self.

The origins of dialogue lie in the structure of intelligibility and sense making, i.e., in the form and structure of rationality. This is first experienced within the life of a solitary person. We make sense of the world by constructing identity and meaning from a manifold of differences. Different perspectives and profiles coalesce into particular things with stable identities. At one level of sense making, the construction of stable meanings occurs within a single person. An odd figure of shape and color in my visual horizon is relatively under-determined. Further observations, second looks, multiple perspectives typically coalesce into some stable gestalt of meaning that presents some "thing" as a meaningful identity.<sup>10</sup> While identity construction typically attempts to extrapolate some unchanging core of sameness it is, nevertheless, an on-going conceptual process. As new perspectives emerge some are consistent with prior perspectives and are expected while some are inconsistent with prior perspectives and are unexpected. On occasion, new and radically inconsistent perspectives destroy a previously stable gestalt of meaning.<sup>11</sup>

Each meaningful perception refers beyond itself by anticipating new attributes that are either confirmed or disconfirmed in subsequent experience. When anticipated aspects of a thing do not reveal themselves or when unanticipated attributes show themselves the identities of things continue to evolve. Through the dialectics of empty and filled intentions, through the coherent progression of fulfilled anticipations and its constant correction a stable and coherent surrounding world emerges. As there is no guarantee that our anticipations will be satisfied, as new perspectives may reveal unexpected and puzzling attributes the final meanings of things are always postponed.<sup>12</sup>

The meaning inherent in our perceptual experiences requires continual reassessment in light of subsequent experience. To experience a thing as useful, as dangerous, or as good is not simply to impose the sense of utility, danger, or goodness upon it but also to expect to continually find those qualities in that object and to have such expectations fulfilled. The spectre of incompatible and inconsistent attributes of a thing revealed in future experience haunts the stabil-

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, Ch. S. Forthcoming. "Intentionality, Life-World, and Language: Towards a Theory of Inter-Cultural Understanding and Dialogue." In: *Language and Communication*. Ed. Kantital, D. New Delhi: Northern Book Publishers.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

ity of even seemingly stable objects and meanings. The meanings inherent in perceptual experiences are provisional and revisable in light of future experience. This self-correcting inner logic within ordinary experience rooted in the dialectics of empty and filled intentions,<sup>13</sup> is essential to the constitution of any sustainable and coherent surrounding world. The roots of dialogue lie in the rational and teleological structure (the logos) of meaningful experience.

Identity construction thus involves the negotiation of differences and differing perspectives. Such negotiation may be done internally, that is within the conscious life of a single individual, or it may be done among a multitude of subjects. In any case, the construction of the identity of things simultaneously involves the construction of a conceptual framework, a meaningful horizon, or surrounding world. This fundamental way of knowing the world is, from the beginning, inter-subjective. The things we see and touch, fear and hunger for, are there for everyone. What we take to be the real world is a shared world as the objectivity of a thing is its public character. Not only do my ongoing perceptual experiences tend to correct earlier mistakes I may have made in interpreting the world but also the perceptual experiences of those around me tend to confirm or disconfirm my perceptual interpretations of the world.

Even when the identity of a thing is fairly stable this unity of meaning calls for further understanding. How is this thing related to the rest of the world? How does this thing fit coherently into the surrounding world? To make sense of one perspective we need another and to make sense of an object or thing we need to place it in a still broader context. In this way constructing the identity of a thing is at the same time constructing a meaningful surrounding world, i.e., constructing a context of interlocking beliefs that give coherence and meaning to experience, i.e., taken for granted background frames of reference and interpretation.

These broader background frames of reference are networks of meaning co-constituted by a community. As these background frames of reference take hold within a particular historical community specific cultures emerge, each by constructing networks of concepts and categories progressively making sense of the world, i.e., by constructing new layers of identity from a previously given manifold of differences. Today, the controlling identities structuring the thought and reflection within cultures, viz., God, Allah, Tao, and Brahman bump up against each other as do Confucian and liberal ideals of the good life.<sup>14</sup> Today, the variety and plurality of cultures shows itself with greater intensity. No longer is it

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<sup>13</sup> Brown, Ch. S. 2004. "The Real and the Good: Phenomenology and the Possibility of an Axiological Rationality." In: *Eco-Phenomenology: Back to the Earth Itself*. Albany: SUNY Press, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Brown, Ch. S. 2012. "Democracy in Dialogue: Chinese and Indonesian Responses to Western Ideologies of Democracy." *Skepsis* XXII/iii—2012, 24–37.

responsible to think about the world solely within the framework of a single tradition.

The diversity of cultures that reveals itself today calls for the construction of a shared inter-cultural identity. Just as the traditions of differences within each culture have been unified into a larger historical community and culture, the various cultures in today's world are busy constructing shared inter-cultural identities today. This process calls for a form of dialogue that constructs identity from differences without the elimination or suppression of those differences. This requires liberation from the master self model of personal identity and the cultivation of a dialogical self-identity. This possibility is rooted and prefigured in the rational and teleological structure of intentionality.

### **OPENING TO DIALOGUE—THE DIALOGICAL SELF**

An era of pluralism requires the abandonment of the perspective of the master self and the cultivation of the dialogical self. The perspective of the dialogical self, a form of personal identity, develops from the internalization of a framework of seeing the world as a network of differences in which the identities of things are constructed through their interrelationships with other things. Such a perspective recognizes: 1) that the identities of things are never stand-alone essences, 2) that differences within the world need not be ordered as mutually exclusive oppositions arranged in value hierarchies, and 3) that the differences between varying perspectives, whether internal to oneself or found among other persons, cultures, or species, need not be silenced or suppressed. Cultivation of a dialogical self need not stop with the integration of various perspectives and points of view into its everyday subjectivity but must understand the dominant perspective of one's own self, not as a monolithic personal or cultural identity, but as a network of cultural differences, an intertwining of many stories, a sedimentation of differences. The resulting self-identity realizes that its personal story is intertwined with its cultural stories and that its cultural stories are intertwined with the stories of other cultures, which are, in turn, intertwined with and founded on a shared pre-linguistic life world.

The core identity of a dialogical self is not anchored by some single atemporal essence but arises from an ongoing flux that unites a prior manifold of differences including the varying and sometimes incompatible perspectives internal to a single subjectivity. As a result, the dialogical self is able to understand rational thought as a dialogue open to a variety of perspectives and differences rather than as a monologue that suppresses difference. The promise of dialogue will only be realized when we learn to adopt a perspective that is able to consistently rethink and re-contextualize the differences that we now mark as reason and emotion, mind and body, self and other, human and non-human, in ways that do not support logics of domination.

The promise of dialogue will never be realized until a monological and instrumental conception of rationality is overthrown in favor of a dialogical conception of contextualized rationality. As long as the current value-hierarchical dualist conceptual system is dominant, attempts at dialogue simply become a way of legitimating “our” perspective while de-legitimizing the perspective of the “other.” Escaping the boundaries and limitations of the master self requires constantly re-contextualizing the value-hierarchical categories of Western metaphysical dualism and its shadow, monism. This requires the conceptual space of a form of subjectivity, i.e., a self-identity defined in terms of the other, through its concrete relationships with others rather than in opposition to others.

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*Regina Fazleeva*

## DIALOGUE AS ASYMMETRICAL INTERSUBJECTIVITY

### *ABSTRACT*

Basing on ideas proposed by Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jürgen Habermas, this paper suggests combining the concept of horizontal (intersubjective) relationships between people with the idea of the vertical dialogue with the transcendental, the spirit. The logic of ultimate mutuality brings us closer to the idea of dialogue with the transcendental; the Other as the spirit appears as a third party in the intersubjective space of dialogue. Thus intersubjectivity may become a condition of implementing human spirituality.

**Keywords:** symbolic exchange; asymmetrical relationships; existential dialogue; discourse ethics; intersubjectivity.

### INTRODUCTION

Some ideas stemming from various philosophical traditions, among others proposed by Jean Baudrillard, Slavoj Žižek, Emmanuel Levinas, and Jürgen Habermas presented below suggest combining the concept of horizontal (intersubjective) relationship between people with the idea of the vertical dialogue with the transcendental, the spirit. Such an approach allows for acquiring the authentic self in communicating with other people as well and in the dialogue with the Other (the notion of Other is taken over by Žižek from Jacques Lacan's theory), which becomes a condition of implementing human spirituality.

### SYMBOLIC EXCHANGE AND THE LOGIC OF MUTUALITY

Jean Baudrillard argues that the main law of modern consumer society, characteristic of the postindustrial era, is the law of value, according to which all affections, symbolic and objective relations undergo the procedure of abstracting, revealing their common equivalent in utility and in the system of demands.

Things are able to be consumed only as signs. The transformation of the object into the sign leads to a change in human relationships which become no more felt but abstracted and cancelled, being consumed in the sign-thing. Baudrillard writes:

“Which is not to say that objects are mechanically substituted for an absent relation, to fill a void, no: they describe the void, the locus of the relation, in a development which actually is a way of not experiencing (*vivre*) it, while always referring to the possibility of an experience. [...] The relation is not absorbed in the absolute positivity of objects, it is articulated on objects, as if through so many material points of contact on a chain of signification. In most cases however, this signifying configuration of objects is impoverished, schematic, and bound, where the idea of a relation, unavailable to experience, merely repeats itself over and over again.” (Baudrillard, 1988, 27–28)

Thus all the ambivalence of social relationships is removed by their equivalence. On the contrary, symbolically, the principle of interactivity is not the symmetry of equivalent exchange but the asymmetry of a gift, giving, sacrifice—that is the principle of inequality or ambivalence. The symbolic exchange arises and evolves beyond the law of value because at bottom it has waste, value annihilation, instead of accumulation, and its final purpose is relationship reversibility. It is the waste produced by the symbolic exchange that enables one to leave the boundaries of extended reproduction of exchange and customer value by destroying their abstract expedience. The activity of both elements is embedded in the reversibility of the symbolic exchange which implies mutuality and duality of relationships. According to Baudrillard, the subject can be alienated only when he or she carries a certain abstract substance, unilaterally subordinating everything else. It is indispensable that the subject's domination over the object is eliminated. The duality of a symbolic act lies in the equality both of the object to the subject and of the subject to the object. In the case of a different, “positive” attitude towards each other (in Baudrillard's terms, “under the sign of value and equivalence”), the subject and the object are doomed to constantly endeavor to dominate each other. In the symbolic exchange there arises a new strategy of the subject who henceforth does not long to capture the object, but undergoes a counter-motion on its part, and in this process their positions irreversibly disintegrate. For the symbolic is losing, devaluating and destroying the sign positivity. Baudrillard brings this logic of mutuality to a limit.

This elimination of the sign, value annihilation may become a basis for the intensity of symbolic relationships and, as a consequence, a possibility of direct (not mediated by signs) living through one's unity of one's self and existence.

However, according to Baudrillard, all the establishments of modern society, all its social, economic, political, psychological mediators do not give anyone a

chance for a symbolic, lethal challenge, for such an irreversible gift. It is connected with the transition of “producer-capitalist” society to “cybernetic neo-capitalism” which is aimed at total control—the transition that is now taking place.

“Far from ‘indeterminate,’ this mutation is the outcome of an entire history where God, Man, Progress and even History have successively passed away to the advantage of the code, where the death of transcendence benefits immanence, which corresponds to a far more advanced phase of the vertiginous manipulation of social relations.” (Baudrillard, 2006, 60)

The censorship of the sign casts away and displaces death, insanity, childhood, sex, perversion, ignorance. This is the “monopoly of the code” which ideology strives to get hold of.

### THE IDEA OF THE OTHER AND ITS CONDITIONINGS

In his studies of ideology (according to him, ideology penetrates all spheres of social life) Slavoj Žižek stands by and develops Jacques Lacan’s views on reality and its subjects as if they were split up and “traumatic” in their essence. Following Lacan, Žižek holds that the direct reality of human life is characterized by a certain crack, fracture, “non-recognition.” The fact is that there is a significant distance between the real and its symbolization: the real is excessive in relation to any symbolization; it is a traumatic event, the “hard core” that resists symbolization, that is not subject to dialectics, and that always persistently turns where it belongs. The main peculiarity of a “traumatic” event is that it is followed by a series of structural effects that distort the reality. The real appears to be a certain substance which must be constructed “behindhand,” so that the deformation of the symbolic structure could be explained. Drawing upon this, Žižek describes the real as an antagonism, i.e. as the cause which does not exist by itself, but is manifested in a set of consequences in a symbolic order. He calls this antagonism an “impossible” core, i.e. a limit that is nothing on its own, a core that is constructed retroactively, from the traumatic point as its reason.

In Žižek’s view, we all reside in conditions of the society of a scrupulously concealed trauma. In the Freud-Lacan tradition, followed by Žižek, not only reality, but the subject is prescribed by the trauma. The trauma appears at the core of subjectivization. The subject becomes possible only in the light of his or her non-integrity, inadequacy, disintegration. It is possible only when a certain material remains that resists subjectivization and when there is a persistently self-asserting surplus in which the subject cannot recognize himself or herself. The subject’s paradox (as well the antagonism of the real) lies in the fact that it exists only due to its own radical impossibility: only due to the Other.

Žižek takes over the notion of the Other from Lacan's theory. Lacan differentiates between the notions of the other and of the Other. The other (beginning with the small letter) is merely the other person in whom our image is reflected: the other as my image projected outside. When it comes to the Other, what is implied is a radical otherness that outmatches a certain imaginable other; something that cannot be fully appropriated by the ego; something with which the ego cannot perfectly identify itself. According to Lacan, the subject not only speaks in the Other but desires only proceeding from the Other: "... man's desire finds its meaning in the other's desire ..." (Lacan, 1996, 222). The first object of his or her will consists in being recognized by the Other. In Lacan's theory, the Other belongs to the law of symbolic order; it is the place where the symbolic space of the speech is constructed. The Other is not only connected with the speech, but is its source. The speech emanates not from the ego, but from the Other, one evidence of which is that human conscience does not control it. That is why Lacan argues that "the subject's unconscious is the other's discourse" (Lacan, 1996, 265). Thus the unconscious is not a container for instincts, but a privileged place for the word. The unconscious "makes slips of the tongue." Moreover, in Lacan's words it is "structured as the language": it manifests itself in such figures of speech as displacement and condensation. Thus psychoanalysis does not aim to restore the subject's connection with the reality, but it aims to teach the subject the understanding of the truth of the unconscious. It speaks, but its discourse, in Lacan's view, cannot be deciphered, for it is "the discourse of the Other." It is not the very subject talking, but his or her unconsciousness. In the beginning was the Word, not Action. The law of the person is that of the language as of the denoting to which he or she constantly resorts. The denoting weaves a net around a person since his or her birth. A neurotic symptom is thought of by Lacan as a result of the situation when the denoting is pushing the denoted out of the subject's conscience.

In Žižek's view, the fact that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other leads in modern society to shifting responsibilities for one's utterances on the ground that the Other talks in one, and one is but an instrument of ideology. Paradoxically, the liberal consumer society converges here with the totalitarian regime where the subject adopts the position of the object, that of an instrument of pleasure of the Other (Žižek, 1995).

According to Žižek, the subject is an answer of the real (the object, the traumatic core) to the question of the Other. The subject is constituted by its own disintegration in relation to the object, to the thing that tempts the human. In Žižek's view, by its voluminous, spellbinding presence the thing (object) disguises not some other positiveness, but its own place, void, lack in the Other. In other words, the subject must realize that an object-oriented desire not so much looks forward to compensating for a certain lack, but rather is an embodiment of this lack. To expose the illusion of ideological discourse is not simply to claim that there is nothing behind it. The subject of ideology, as Žižek believes, must

be capable of seeing precisely that there is nothing behind the illusion: “nothing” that is the subject itself.

In the space of ideological discourse the subject appears to be alienated into the denoting. The real in him is excluded into the symbolical, paradoxically leaving the void as a positive condition of its existence. The person is locked within the boundaries of a vicious circle formed by the will and the law, the will that appears due to law force. The reason is that the law is a form of indirect influence of ideology. As a consequence of this, the law is somewhat absurd: we must obey it not because it is useful and fair, but simply because it is the law. Žižek assumes that this tautology expresses the vicious circle of law force, when the only reason for its power is the act of its enunciation. In modern society the law of infinite production of desire and pleasure becomes predominating.

One condition of leaving the vicious circle of desire-law, according to Žižek, is love. In the state of love the person can overcome his or her disintegration and dividedness because love can fill the void and make him or her integral. Love is not so much aroused by idealizing the other, but rather its activity lies in penetrating the imperfect Other separated from us. The matter is that the content of the Christian love resides in the affection for human imperfection. This fact is, in Žižek’s view, more valuable today than whenever. Such sacrificial love is love-mercy, *agape*, which Žižek relates to Saint Paul. In his doctrine, the Christian position in its most radical shape implies just a pause in moving around this vicious circle of law and desire. This pause resides in *agape* of a deed committed unexpectedly to oneself. For the law this deed will mean death, i.e. a symbolic death that will enable to start everything anew.

There is one more idea that is fundamental for the subject in experiencing love—that of *agape*. If the traditional (pagan) model glorifies the deed which at its core has self-sacrifice for the sake of the most important, a certain Thing, then Saint Paul speaks about the radical gesture that constitutes the person as he or she is—about murdering the dearest in oneself. This gesture is “a self-destructive act [that] could clear the terrain for a new beginning” (Žižek, 2000, 151). Thus the only means to unlock the vicious circle of sin and punishment is readiness for self-elimination.

Thus Žižek turns to the notion of *agape*, sacrificial love, to show a possibility for the subject to leave the borders of his or her desire and, ultimately, to overcome one’s own traumatic disruptiveness in a lethal temptation by the Thing. It is possible, as love, according to Žižek, commits a double action when the subject overcomes his or her lack by offering himself or herself to the Other as an object which, in its turn, will replenish a lack in the Other.

As Emmanuel Levinas believes, the source of the ethical is established in the existential necessity of the Other for the Ego: through dialogue with the other the person takes the road to himself or herself. The fact is that, strictly speaking, the existence of the person begins with taking responsibility for the Other.

Levinas creates his own concept of responsibility by transforming the relationships between the internal (person's "self") and the external (Other) order into the asymmetry of intersubjective relations. It becomes a basic feature of the person to be capable of giving priority to the higher principle, the ideal of sacredness, due to which the person does not lose, but finds himself or herself. His logic of responsibility contains *inter alia* a thesis that one's true transcending activity demands to see one's epiphany in addressing a fellow creature.

"In welcoming the Other I welcome the On High to which my freedom is subordinated. But this subordination is not an absence: it is brought about in all the personal work of my moral initiative. [...] in the attention to the Other as unicity and face ..." (Levinas, 1979, 300)

"It is only in approaching the Other that I attend to myself [...] The face I welcome makes me pass from phenomenon to being in another sense: in discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response—acuteness of the present—engenders me for responsibility; as responsible I am brought to my final reality." (Levinas, 1979, 178)

For Levinas, the Other is another person; the idea of Infinity, God, Good shines through him or her. Thus in the dialogical intersubjective space a third party appears that provides a relationship asymmetry. This asymmetry is understood as one's fundamental capability of moral responsibility and as acquiring a specific quality, i.e. fertility. Fertility frees the person from his or her own factuality and, leading him or her beyond the boundaries of possible, enables the person to become different. The case is that, according to Levinas, despite the fact that the Other is a fellow creature, the intimacy itself does not reside in the person's degradation to his or her merge with another person. Levinas believes that with the mutuality that is characteristic of civilized relationships, the asymmetry of intersubjective connection gets forgotten. That is why this civilized mutuality is a space where every person perceives the other as an end, and never as a means to an end. Asymmetrical intersubjectivity becomes a place of transcendence where the subject while maintaining its subject's structure, receives an opportunity to avoid the fatal retrieval to him or herself and to become different through responsibility for the other. The process of personal transcendence to the Other is itself described by Levinas as kindness that germinates as pluralism. Pluralism is implemented in kindness by passing from one man to another, where the latter may appear only in proximity of a direct contact, or "face to face" communication. "Society must be a fraternal community to be commensurate with the straightforwardness, the primary proximity, in which the face presents itself to my welcome." (Levinas, 2000, 216)

Levinas contrasts the new notion of human spirit, whose essence manifests itself in the dialogue with the Other, with the classical tradition of integrity and self-sufficiency of the Ego. Meeting the other, according to Levinas, is a fun-

damental element of the spirit. The Other is established as a necessary condition of self-consciousness: the spirit is born on the border between consciousnesses, in dialogue. In the existential necessity of the Other for the Ego Levinas establishes a source of the ethical: through the dialogue with the other a person takes the road to himself or herself.

In this respect the traditional opposition of the subject and the object in the process of cognition becomes limited. The “subject-object” paradigm stays indifferent to the unique experience of internal personal suffering. In dialogical intersubjectivity (as well as in the “asymmetrical intersubjectivity” of spiritual communication) is realized the existential concept of consciousness that goes beyond the frame of subject-object paradigm. Due to this consciousness, a holistic comprehension of the other in his or her unique and original way of existence becomes possible. The consciousness is thought of as something inseparable from the reality of life.

### IDENTITY AND PERSONALITY

Together with the change of ideas concerning personality, the meaningful content of identity also changes. In classical philosophy identity is the sameness of a personality to itself as to something whole. In the postmodern discourse a “split” individual may acquire an identity only by identifying himself or herself with someone or something single, deriving from discerning in oneself a multiplicity of variants of one’s own social and existential self-expression. Identity (Latin *identificare*—to identify, Late Latin *identifico*—I identify) is an interrelationship between the person and himself or herself in the coherency and continuity of his or her own volatility. The notion of identity can also be presented as difference in one’s singularity, individuality, and personhood. Personality implies identity as a way of including others (horizontally) and the Other (vertically) in oneself. It seems to me that it is the process of self-identifying that gives the person an opportunity of self-projection, self-integration, and reflection in the framework of communication. Communication includes experiencing, understanding and transcending, namely, the correlation of the person with absolute values. But in the situation of modernity identity constantly evades from being grasped, and does not want to be “discovered,” “un clothed,” “unveiled.” It is not “hidden” but it “hides” from itself and from others. It turns out that the notion of personality gets back to its original etymology, to the Latin *persona*, mask, role, “disguise.” It is conditioned by all the previous history of becoming a person: a self-developing creative personality, who comprehends his or her selfness through believing in God (the medieval person), gives way to the autonomous (self-ruling) subject of modern philosophy. In the 20th century a separate subject gives way to “a man of masses”—a polar opposition of the “personality.” Then an acute problem arises: the man is left without any personality at all. What can be done? Different philosophers



propose various ways to solve it. For instance, Romano Guardini argues that in mass consumer society one must retain one's person. The notion of person points at "singularity and uniqueness that derive not from particular predisposition or favorable circumstances, but from the fact that this person is called by God." If a person is called by God then it means that he or she is irreplaceable in his or her responsibility in front of Him. This is the essence of singularity and uniqueness of the person. What matters is that each human has an opportunity to be a person. However, the self-actualization of a spiritual person does not take place only in the shape of individualism. In other words, one confirms one's individuality not when one sets a goal to develop one's abilities (it is not an end in itself), but when one makes efforts for the good of society, in order to realize the sense of life. Besides, according to Guardini, establishing the singularity of human personality allows for true friendship that maintains values of good and just in modern times. Guardini's "person" is not "disguise;" it includes three significant features: opposing God, inherent dignity and indispensability in one's responsibility. In such a situation, according to Guardini, a personality must cultivate a grave desire of truth, courage that is "opposed to the looming chaos" and asceticism (Guardini, 1998, 93). Suchlike virtues start the mechanism of moral conscience which appears precisely due to certain self-understanding of personalities. The fact is that by retaining the "person" one realizes one's appurtenance to the moral community, and morality becomes a condition of realizing the universal dialogical space.

### AN INTERSUBJECTIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION

Any true dialogue implies free, self-dependent participants who are capable of bearing responsibility for decision making. In this respect one should pay special attention to the discourse ethics formulated by Jürgen Habermas.

Habermas' theory of communicative action and that of discourse ethics are based upon an intersubjective approach. The aim of the theory of communicative action is to clarify the premises of rationality in the process of achieving understanding. In this respect Habermas adds to the intersubjective approach the notion of communicative rationality which

"... recalls older ideas of logos, inasmuch as it brings along with it the connotations of a noncoercively unifying, consensus-building force of a discourse in which the participants overcome their at first subjectively biased views in favor of a rationally motivated agreement." (Habermas, 1998, 315)

Communicative action is based on such symbolic acts with help of which the subject can understand and control other people's actions. On the one hand, communicative action is aimed at informing, on the other—at negotiating: a verbal message reaches its goal if it is accepted by other members of a linguistic

community. In communicative action it is not content, but rather form that matters—form, due to which the agreement is being reached.

Habermas writes: “I call interactions communicative when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims.” (Habermas, 1992, 58). Herewith the participants of communication start claiming on verity, correctness or truthfulness when they refer to the *status quo* in the objective world, to the social norm, or to their own sense of justice, respectively. Communicative justice is provided where the following conditions of the discourse process are satisfied: 1) none of those who desires to contribute to the discussion can be excluded from the number of its participants; 2) everybody is granted equal opportunities to contribute his or her thoughts; 3) the participants’ thoughts should not diverge from their words; 4) communication must be free from external or internal coercion that positions of acceptance or denial with regard to criticized significance claims were motivated solely by the power of persuasion of better reasons. Herewith it is stressed that true (rational) consensus is achieved through discourse—dialogue as an equal argumentative procedure. Thus formed discourse ethics is universal, i.e., it comprehends every sensible communicative subject. However, as Habermas puts it, the principle of universalization is not sufficient for moral norms to be shaped as absolutely compulsory offers. Universal norms may become global rules for action if they receive recognition on the part of all persons affected by them. The experience of communication norms recognition is related to the fact that the universal approval is achieved if these norms cognitively embody the interest that is common for every involved person. According to discourse ethics, “only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse” (Habermas, 1992, 66). Thus moral issues cannot be tackled monologically but require collective efforts. According to Habermas, universalism requires a cooperative effort.

“By entering into a process of moral argumentation, the participants continue their communicative action in a reflexive attitude with the aim of restoring a consensus that has been disrupted. Moral argumentation thus serves to settle conflicts of action by consensual means. [...] the revision of the values used to interpret needs and wants cannot be a matter for individuals to handle monologically.” (Habermas, 1992, 67–68)

Thus involving the other means here that community boundaries open up for every person. Finally, in every community the moral community is embedded as its better Ego. Everyone who has been socialized in a communicative form of life belongs to this community. According to Habermas, persons are socialized only on the track of socialization, so morally both a single person, irreplaceable by another, and a member of community are taken into account, and by virtue of

this justice gets related to solidarity. Equality in relations is practiced among the unequal who, nevertheless, realize their solidarity. Discourse ethics justifies the content of morality of treating everyone equally and of solidary responsibility for everyone.

The notion of lifeworld is of constitutive significance for the processes of mutual understanding. In Habermas' theory, lifeworld functions as forming the context and as being the resource of communicative action. Due to lifeworld as a communication background, its participants

“no longer appear as originators who master situations with the help of accountable actions, but as the products of the traditions in which they stand, of the solidary groups to which they belong, and of the socialization processes within which they grow up.” (Habermas, 1998, 299)

Ultimately, as Habermas claims, in the process of communication lifeworld reproduces itself, namely continues cultural traditions, unites social groups by working out norms of social behavior, and includes representatives of the younger generation into social relations. Thus communicative action serves both to consolidating traditions and to renovating cultural potential, as well as to social interaction and forming solidarity. In the aspect of socialization it contributes to personality formation and identity acquisition.

However, according to Habermas, the tendency of modern social development constitutes a fundamental problem. The fact is that at the bottom of social modernization lifeworld rationalization lies. Progressively rationalized lifeworld is simultaneously separated and subordinated to such formally organized spheres of action as economy and state governing. The formally organized spheres of action are no longer integrated with the help of the mechanism of mutual understanding, but are separated from lifeworld contexts and become a sphere that is free from sociality norms. The isolated systemic social integration lies in coordinating actions through “muted” communication media—money and power. As a result—Habermas argues—the expanding of the mechanisms of systemic integration leads to “colonizing” lifeworld: by penetrating it, on the track of its monetization and bureaucratization, the mechanisms coerce communicative action to fit in formally organized action systems that are regulated through economic exchange and power (Habermas, 1995). However, such social self-regulation means as money and power do not work in spheres of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialization; they cannot replace the process of mutual understanding between people.

Habermas assumes that the primary source of suchlike contradictions of social modernization is a fundamental peculiarity of rationality of the Enlightenment project which undergoes severe criticism on his part and becomes a starting point of his own original version of “modern project.” The fact is that the autonomous subject of the Enlightenment in his or her cognition and action splits the world into the subject and the object; this disjunction becomes the

foundation of the European mentality. Habermas' communicative action theory and discourse ethics oppose the subject-centered reason of the Enlightenment:

“Subject-centered reason finds its criteria in standards of truth and success that govern the relationships of knowing and purposively acting subjects to the world of possible objects or states of affairs.” (Habermas, 1998, 314)

Habermas confronts the institutional and cultural coercion that distorts communication and imposes false agreement:

“Subject-centered reason is the product of division and usurpation, indeed of a social process in the course of which a subordinated moment assumes the place of the whole, without having the power to assimilate the structure of the whole.” (Habermas, 1998, 315)

In this respect the thinker considers it indispensable to re-orient social development towards the fundamentally subject-subjective structure, the interaction that is constituted in interpersonal communication. Instrumental rationality is oriented towards achieving goals, which inevitably implies the pragmatic use of the other as the object (means), whereas communicative rationality implies accepting the other as a means to an end, and excludes every goal except the act of self-realization itself. In this respect the emancipation interest of a person who is longing to liberation from any violence may be realized only through the establishing of true “interaction.” Communicative reason expresses the intersubjectivity of relations that are aimed at mutual understanding, and relations based on mutual recognition. The structure of intersubjective relations allows the subject to reject the objectivized position and to work out an absolutely different attitude to him or herself. Drawing on this, Habermas argues that the paradigm of object cognition and operation must give a way to the paradigm of mutual understanding between the subjects who are capable of reason and action. Thus, there is a truly humanistic potential of modern project embedded in creating communicative reason and in the theory of communicative action. Habermas believes that the instrumental reason, separated from moral values, indeed no longer continues to serve the person and even opposes him or her, as moral conscience can be formed only in contiguity with the absolutes of human existence, where knowledge and telic rational practices are helpless. This critique of instrumental reason leads Habermas to an updated version of “modern project.” Eager to tie together reason, morality and democracy, he seeks a place for them to meet and finds it in communicative actions meant for achieving agreement, mutual understanding and recognition during negotiations, for exchange of opinions and their grounding. Besides, communicative action serves to consolidating traditions and renovating cultural potential as well as to forming solidarity. Herewith, the “incomplete modern project” is a possibility to create a society that is not hedged off from its own creative abilities that be-

long to the past, but, in contrast, such a society that is in a mobile unity with the past.

The idea of connection between the present and the past in the modern project turns into conscious and obligatory settings with regard to the past and the tradition. According to Habermas, traditions are not something naturally grown up; they wait for being checked, joined and selectively continued. In the society lead by communicative reason, the sense of moral and political autonomy is growing, when people themselves must make decisions regarding the norms of their collective life in the light of arbitrary principles. Under the pressure of mobile (due to communicative actions) traditions and independently elaborated norms, there is formed the principle-regulated moral conscience which changes the socialization pattern.

In *The Inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory* (2002) Habermas argues that the true (rational) consensus is achieved by means of discourse or dialogue. As it was mentioned above, discourse ethics is universal. However, according to Habermas, the principle of universalism is not sufficient for moral norms to be shaped as absolutely compulsory propositions. The universal norms may become global rules of action if they receive recognition on the part of all people to which they relate. The experience of recognizing communicative norms is related to the fact that universal approval is achieved in case these norms cognitively embody the interest that is common for every affected person. Thus moral issues cannot be tackled monologically, but demand collective efforts. It is significant that in terms of Habermas' universalism is "highly sensitive to differences." He assumes that equal respect for everyone expands not only on someone like yourself, but on the other in his or her otherness. Thus such a community will be constituted on the basis of the idea of avoiding discrimination and suffering. The involvement of other means here that the community boundaries are open for every person. At last, the moral community is founded in every specific community as its better Ego. Everyone who has been socialized in any communicative form of life belongs to this community. As Habermas puts it, persons are socialized only on the track of socialization, so morally a single person, who is irreplaceable by another, and a common member of community are both to be taken into consideration, and due to this, justice links to solidarity. Equality in deals is practiced among the unequal who, nevertheless, realize their solidarity. Discourse ethics justifies the content of morality that resides in treating everyone equally and in solidary responsibility for everyone.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the above-presented ideas concerning—less or more directly—dialogue the following conclusions can be drawn. All the examined ideas voices in various philosophical conditionings the thesis that the existence of the person

is constituted by the other, i.e. another for me becomes in a sense a warrant of my Ego.

On the one hand, the norms of discourse ethics enable the dialogue in the sphere of proper interpersonal relations; Habermas' project of including the other is based on the art of compromise and on the politics of negotiations. On the other hand, the logic of ultimate mutuality and asymmetry of gift in Baudrillard's symbolic exchange leads us to the idea of dialogue with the transcendental: the third party appears in the space of intersubjective dialogue (the Other as a spirit) which provides a relationship asymmetry. This is proved by the mechanism of love as dedication and self-sacrifice for the sake of the other (sacrificial love-agape by Žižek), as well as by Guardini's singularity of person as the integrity of dignity and personal indispensability in responsibility in the face of God, and, undoubtedly, by Levinas' ideal of the sacred due to which the person does not lose, but finds himself or herself. Thus, intersubjectivity (both as a link "human-human" and as the asymmetry of relations Ego-Spirit") may become a condition of actualizing human spirituality. In its turn, dialogue appears as a possible form of the transcendental in the person and for the person. The personal environment must become a world which emanates from the person toward another person, where personality manifests itself being not closed in its isolated, purely individual Ego. Besides, it is probable that the notion of intersubjectivity put forward in the research presented in this paper can become one of the possible ways of overcoming the cultural dehumanization and may be *a sui generis* indicator of the transition of the modern society from the postmodern (with its critique of the subject) to the after-postmodern, where the demand for human individuality arises again.

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## **THE FRAGILITY OF CIVILITY: VIRTUE, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND TRAGIC BREAKDOWNS OF CIVILITY**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores civility as a virtue for individuals within the sphere of civil society. Civil society is conceived as consisting of voluntary associations regulated by persuasion, praise, and shame. The virtue of civility is a key value for members of the associations of civil society. The paper considers circumstances in which institutions of civil society breakdown and in which unscrupulous and un-civil operators take advantage of more civil members. While admitting that civility is a fragile virtue, the paper concludes that best solution to threats to civility is to avoid cynicism and to cultivate common-sense moral behavior that models civility.

**Keywords:** civility, civil Society, virtue ethics, liberal political theory.

Civility is an important virtue in liberal, democratic polities. It is also an important virtue for scientific and academic communities. Indeed, civility is essential for free and open conversations among neighbors and friends. Civility is a prerequisite of genuine dialogue. The difficulty of civility is that it requires institutional stability, advanced cognitive skills, as well as psychological and spiritual sophistication. Furthermore, civility can be taken advantage of. This makes civility a kind of tragic virtue. Tragic virtues are character traits that normally promote a good life, but which in some unfortunate circumstances can produce bad outcomes. While the idea of virtue is usually connected with an account of the good life and the sort of flourishing described by the term *eudaimonia*, there is no guarantee that virtuous people will always succeed. Indeed, many of the classical Greek sources for thinking about both virtue and tragedy show us circumstances in which virtuous individuals end up with bad outcomes: Antigone is killed, as is Socrates. Nonetheless, the moral of such



stories—at least on Plato’s telling of Socrates’ execution—is that virtue is its own reward.

One might hope that in the long run, civility, wisdom, and justice will triumph. But there is no guarantee that this will happen. Stable relationships, productive academic departments, good institutions, genial societies, and even civilized nations can easily be undermined by uncouth, un-civil, bad apples who exploit the structures of civility out of self-interest, pathology, or cluelessness. We should strive to shore up civility, to build humane institutions, and to develop caring relationships against the onslaughts of the uncivil. But we should also acknowledge with a bit of Stoic indifference that nothing good lasts forever. This insight could lead to cynicism, which holds that the institutions of civil society are easily manipulated by self-interested agents. The difficult task is to be honest about the fragility of civil society, while avoiding the cynical conclusion. Indeed, the risk of incivility is that it tends to breed cynicism: when we see others exploiting institutions it is easy to give up on civility with the attitude of “if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” To avoid that cynical conclusion, we need to remember that civil institutions often do function well and that the virtue of civility is connected with other virtues of living well, such as honesty, empathy, loyalty, and courage. Civility and the structures of civil society are fragile products, which can easily be undone. But it is worth the effort to try to preserve the virtue of civility against the threat posed by those who lack it.

### CIVILITY, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND FREEDOM

Civility is a key value for pluralistic societies.<sup>1</sup> Ronald Arnett explains, “civility offers minimal common ground that permits diverse groups who share the goal of continuing the public conversation and maintaining civil society to engage life together.”<sup>2</sup> The hope of civility is that there is a minimal and mutual common ground for public reasoning and deliberation across our differences. Rawls explains:

“the idea of citizenship imposes a moral, not a legal, duty—the duty of civility—to be able to explain to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason. This duty also involves a willingness to listen to others and a fair-mindedness in deciding when accommodations to their views should reasonably be made.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I discuss civility in further detail in my: 2013 (forthcoming). “Religious Liberty and the Virtue of Civility in Democratic and Religiously Diverse Communities.” In: *Civility and Education in a World of Religious Pluralism*. Ed. Fiala, A., V. Biondo. London: Routledge; and in Fiala, A. 2013. “Tolerance, Civility, and Cognitive Development.” In: *Religion in Schools: Negotiating the New Commons*. Ed. Waggoner, M. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

<sup>2</sup> Arnett, R. 2008. *Communication Ethics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 92.

<sup>3</sup> Rawls, J. 2005. *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 217.

Rawls reminds us that civility and fair-mindedness are moral values and not legal duties. This points in the direction of an analysis of civility that is best understood by way of virtue ethics. Civility is a virtue for individuals. It is different from other virtues of citizenship such as loyalty and obedience in that it is freely chosen self-restraint that is not legislated by coercive threat. Obedience to law is required and enforced by a coercive threat. But civil behavior within the legal system is freely chosen self-restraint in a context in which it is possible to behave in uncivil ways.

Civility is a virtue for persons engaged in common activities in the sphere of what is often called “civil society.” In terms of the primary virtues of the Greek virtue tradition, civility is related especially to *sophrosyne*, which can be translated as moderation, self-control, and discretion. Harold Barrett explains:

“Civility is a social virtue and an old idea. *Sophrosyne*, a name for self-control and moderation valued by the ancient Greeks, may be close in meaning. Opposed was hubris: excessive pride, insolence, and arrogance.”<sup>4</sup>

While the virtue of civility is a virtue of individuals—and not of nations or communities, it is important to note that civility is best suited for social interactions within what we might call “civil society.” The term “civil society” has a variety of connotations. The concept has roots in Hegelian political philosophy. One important component of the Hegelian idea of civil society—as explained in his *Philosophy of Right*—is that civil society falls short of a fully political or state level of organization and authority. Hegel’s account is of limited value in the contemporary world, since Hegel’s account of civil society reifies a variety of values associated with gender, property holding, etc., which we should reject. However, what is important is the way that Hegel locates civil society between morality and the law in his system. Hegel’s notion of civil society involves something more than abstract morality—something more than basic moral rules of a Kantian sort. But civil society is not quite political, since the norms of civil society lack the power and majesty of legal rules.<sup>5</sup> There are important benefits of an extensive sphere of civil society—as the institutions of this sphere allow for creative social activity that falls outside of the regulation of the state. Business, scientific, literary, religious, artistic, and recreational organizations are located in “civil society.” While some legal regulation of these organizations is necessary, we presume in liberal-democratic political theory that it is better when these organizations are left alone to satisfy the specific purposes of their members. One of the threats to civility is the incursion of the legal system into the organizations of civil society. It is difficult to develop civility as a virtue

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<sup>4</sup> Barrett, H. 1991. *Rhetoric and civility: human development, narcissism, and the good audience*. Albany: SUNY Press, 146.

<sup>5</sup> For a more critical reading of Hegel’s notion of civil society, which connects with a Marxist interpretation of bourgeois civil society as grounded in the legal system, see Balibar, É. 2002. *Politics and the Other Scene*. London: Verso, 2002, chapter 1.

when social life is legislated to such a degree that the free choices of individuals are no longer involved. One of the important features of civil society is that it is a sphere of self-regulated behavior that is not simply a matter of obedience to law. One of the important features of civility is that it is freely chosen moderation and self-control that occurs in a social context in which aggressive and confrontational behavior are possible and legally permitted.

A problem arises, however, when the institutions of civil society are either themselves discriminatory and uncivil or when uncivil members try to exploit these institutions. In such cases, the legal system may be asked to intrude upon these institutions, thus reducing the freedom of the institution and impinging on the autonomy of the members. Liberal-democratic societies involve a complex interplay of legal regulation, institutional freedom, and individual autonomy. When unscrupulous agents disrupt the institutions of civil society, there is a tendency toward more state regulation of the free associations of individuals. This happens, for example, when lawsuit enjoined against institutions of civil society: the Boy Scouts, Universities, Churches, Sports Clubs, Scientific and Literary Societies, etc. When an unscrupulous agent does something wrong under the auspices of such an institution and the state intervenes, the institution loses some of its autonomy, and members feel restrained by the system of regulations such that apparently “civil” behavior is no longer governed by the freely chosen virtue of civility.

There is no denying that the political realm is superior to the institutions of civil society—and that the political and legal structure should be focused on ensuring equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination. In the political realm, there are structures of authority and enforcement, which can be employed to deter and prevent unscrupulous agents from taking unfair advantage. The state has a monopoly on the use of force in a geographic region. The state is authorized and empowered to utilize force to deal with criminals and wrongdoers, whether they act as individuals or whether they are participating as functionaries of some institution.

But within civil society—considered in isolation from the state—things are different. The enforcement mechanisms of civil society are either weaker or they depend upon the state. When an organization of civil society is fragmented by an internal conflict, the cops can be called or lawsuits can be enjoined. But the organizations of civil society do not have their own police force or prison systems. Indeed, they are viewed as free associations, which almost by definition do not rely upon coercive measures to establish harmonious interaction. There are other forms of enforcement in civil society but these lack the authorization to use lethal force or to deprive someone of liberty, which is typical of police and political power.

In terms of enforcement, the institutions of civil society primarily make use of persuasion and shame. These institutions also reserve the capacity to determine membership—including excluding disruptive members. These institutions can employ positive reinforcement in terms of accentuating paradigm virtues

celebrated by members—for example, through awards or encomia for paradigm members. A local athletic league or a national scientific society can encourage certain virtues among members by various positive and negative reinforcement mechanisms. But these leagues and societies ultimately rely upon the freely chosen good behavior of individuals in response to the subtle social pressure of members who want to keep the spirit of the organization alive. The institutions of civil society lack more overt and powerful means that can be used to coerce and force members into obedience. This is why the associations of civil society are inspiring for those who value liberal-democracy: they remind us that free individuals can be trusted to organize themselves, without the intrusion of the state.

We might say that within civil society what is required is conformity and not obedience. Obedience is more properly associated with the political realm and the threat of coercion, while conformity is something that occurs in institutions of civil society as the freely chosen behavior of autonomous individuals. We should note that the idea of conformity has multiple connotations. Sometimes it means compliance in a legal sense: an action is in conformity with law when it complies with the legal regime. But the idea of conformity in civil society is not primarily guided by fear of coercive measures. Instead, conformity in civil society is better understood as comporting oneself in accord with a model or paradigm of virtue—perhaps out of fear of social stigma and shame or out of hope for recognition by the members. This idea could be fleshed out in more detail by considering, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre’s explanation in *After Virtue* of “practices,” which are defined in terms of “internal goods.”<sup>6</sup> Those who follow the rules of the chess club and become champion chess players obtain the good of being a virtuous chess player. It is possible to cheat and manipulate the rules in order to become a champion. But we would not then say that the cheater was really a virtuous chess player. (Nor would we, by the way, call the cops when the cheater was discovered as a cheat, unless violence or theft were involved.)

One recent interpretation of civility emphasizes that in civil society the two primary “enforcement” mechanisms (in scare-quotes because less coercive than legal enforcement) are the urge to conform and the possibility of exclusion, with the associated notions of social stigma attached: those who are excluded from civil institutions are shamed.<sup>7</sup> This process of shaming and stigmatization has significant force, since members of civil institutions presumably join these organizations in order to obtain recognition as members, i.e., in order to be valued as a member of the organization who is owed the respect accorded by the members to other members in virtue of the goods internal to the practice of the organization. For example, doctors who join medical associations do so in order

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<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, A. 1981. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Orbach, B. 2012. “On Hubris, Civility, and Incivility.” *Arizona Law Review*, vol. 54, 443–456.

to be esteemed by their peers, where such esteem is based upon their success at the practice of medicine.

The importance of esteem, stigma, and shame in social organizations is not unproblematic, since conformity to the norms of civil society can be used to reinforce prejudices, bigotry, and unjustified exclusions. In college fraternities, for example, it can create peer pressure, including harmful hazing rituals and immoral behavior and attitudes. Sometimes civility can be used to censor unpopular—but true and morally appropriate—ideas, along lines outlined by Herbert Marcuse in his important criticism of liberal toleration.<sup>8</sup> Thus, for example, in the name of civility members of a religious organization may refrain from criticizing inappropriate behavior by church leaders. According to David Estlund's interpretation of Marcuse, civility only works when there is a shared commitment to the disclosure of truth.<sup>9</sup> I would add that civility only works when there is a shared understanding of the paradigm virtues of the group—and indeed, when these are connected to virtues that are basic for human beings. The institutions of civil society ought to be oriented around key values such as justice, honesty, and open inquiry. While secretive, dishonest, racist organizations do exist, they fail to live up to the standards of virtue. One would hope that virtuous members would eventually criticize and leave such institutions. However, the power of civil organizations is such that peer pressure and the tendency to conform can leave vicious organizations intact. Depending upon the degree of vice involved, the state may again have to intrude, as it does in criminal organizations and gangs.

Building upon Estlund's and Marcuse's insights we should also acknowledge that the institutions of civil society can be deformed by the various ways that power is deployed within an institution: either within the dominant power structure of the institution or by unscrupulous agents who manipulate that structure. Power shows up, for example, when civil institutions are set up in ways that privilege some at the expense of others: say when membership dues are set so high as to exclude those with low incomes, when homosexuals or minorities are excluded, and so on. It also occurs when unscrupulous members manipulate institutional rules and procedures in ways that corrupt the institution. In ideal social circumstances and idealized institutions of civil society, deliberation would proceed through open inquiry that allows each interlocutor and member to contribute in equitable and agreed upon ways. As Estlund explains, in these ideal situations there would be something like a condition of "power's noninterference with reason."<sup>10</sup> Estlund points out that this is a normative ideal, which most likely does not obtain within any real institution. However, he notes that the normative force of this ideal helps us critique dysfunctional institutions.

<sup>8</sup> Marcuse, H. 1969. "Repressive Tolerance." In: Wolff, M., H. Marcuse. *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*. Boston: Beacon Press.

<sup>9</sup> Estlund, D. 2009. *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chapter 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

The mechanisms of persuasion, shame, conformity, and stigmatization point toward an analysis of civility and civil society that is connected with virtue ethics and the culture of shame that is associated with ancient virtue traditions—especially those in which legal proceedings overlapped with moral and religious judgments.<sup>11</sup> Virtues are learned and practiced through a process that involves modeling one’s behavior after paradigm examples, philosophical and moral inquiry, and social pressure including both shame and praise. But in modern liberal-democratic societies, virtues are not subject to the enforcement of law. For example, while murder is wrong—and punishable by the criminal law—virtues such as honesty, loyalty, and courage are not enforced and punished in this way, unless they lead to acts of transgression. The virtue of civility—or the vice of incivility—is not usually viewed as something that is subject to legal enforcement and punishment. We do not call the police to remove uncivil members from a group (unless they transgress other legal norms against violence or trespassing). Indeed, we often rely on moral persuasion and modeling in order to inculcate the virtue of civility. When a new colleague shows up to a faculty meeting, for example, she is not given an explicit set of rules for meetings. Instead, we expect her to observe the proceedings and model her behavior on the behavior of the current members. Of course, one might argue that things would work better if the rules were more explicit. Often the norms of civility and of civil society remain mysterious—especially to newcomers. This is because such institutions tend to rely upon an informal mentoring approach, which encourages conformity to social norms based upon modeling, gentle persuasion, and a common sense awareness of moral norms and rules of decorum. Again, problems occur when individuals are exposed to unscrupulous models, when they are resistant to moral suasion, or when they lack common-sense morality or a sense of decorum.

One of the problems for civility is how to ensure and establish the base of common-sense morality and decorum that is prerequisite for productive membership. The institutions of civil society have to rely upon a prior process of socialization and education that is beyond the control of the organization. In other words, members show up as adults with habits, dispositions, and virtues that have been developed throughout life. These institutions rely upon one another to filter out immoral dispositions and character traits. For example, the professional medical association assumes that the medical schools and universities have screened out those who cheat. Problems occur, however, in civil organizations when members lack social skills and moral habits that are essential for becoming good members, and who have somehow passed through the standard credentialing process. While it would be convenient to screen out would-be members by making social skills and moral habits a prerequisite for membership, it is not clear that this would be either legally feasible or non-

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<sup>11</sup> See: Williams, B. 1993. *Shame and Necessity*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

discriminatory. Could an association of medical professionals really exclude a doctor who had been reputed to have cheated in medical school? What level of proof would be required here? And how do we ensure that such screening procedures would avoid re-instantiating old racial, gender, or ethnic stereotypes? Indeed, there is significant question here about which norms and habits would count as the virtues of good members. Would we want to include punctuality, or generosity, or athletic prowess? Some of these virtues may be specific to the function and purpose of the organization: an athletic league presumes some skill at sports and membership in an academic organization presumes some capacity for intellectual endeavor. As a baseline, however, we might want to include the virtue of civility: members of the organizations of civil society ought to have some sense of the importance of civility. It remains an open question as to how we might establish that a potential member of a civil organization actually possesses the virtue of civility.

### CIVILITY, CIVILIZATION, AND RESPECT FOR LIBERTY

One traditional interpretation of civility connects it with a certain level of “civilization.” The term “civility” points toward a level of civilized development, implicitly contrasting civil persons with uncouth barbarians. Such a definition of civility is culturally loaded, implying that the uncivilized are somehow inferior—and it should be rejected. The “civilized”—those who belong to “advanced” civilizations—are not necessarily more humane, tolerant, kind, or generous. Indeed, the sins of civilization are many: civilized men have behaved in ways that are un-civil, especially toward native peoples, the working classes, women, and so on. We must be careful in discussing the virtue of civility, that we don’t simply identify civility with the manners of the ruling class. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that civility is made possible by stable institutional structures and the cognitive, psychological, and spiritual resources of maturity. We might, then, conceive civility as a social virtue of mature human beings who live within stable social circumstances and who are able to cooperate with others within that social context. Civility develops as we learn to understand social conventions. But it is more than mere conventional knowledge. Civility develops as we learn to adopt the perspective of the other, that is, as we learn to take the other into account in conversations and in behavior.

Unfortunately, this points toward the problem of cultural variability, since there can be variation of what is social acceptable. Consider for example, the civility code described by George Washington in a set of rules he copied at age 16 as part of a writing exercise.<sup>12</sup> The 110 rules on Washington’s list were de-

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<sup>12</sup> “George Washington’s Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation.” *Foundations Magazine*, <http://www.foundationsmag.com/civility.html> (accessed March 30, 2013).

rived from principles of civility established by the Jesuits in the 17th Century. Among the rules on Washington's list are a variety of principles governing a system of deference defined by social status—rules for standing up, bowing, doffing a hat, etc. There are also rules for dining—using a knife at table, slurping beverages. And rules governing laughter—when to laugh and not laugh depending upon context and social circumstance. Such rules are a central feature of civility in hierarchical societies.

These kinds of rules for “civilized” behavior have been viewed as a central feature in the evolution of more peaceful social institutions. This idea is most closely associated with the work of Norbert Elias, whose book, *The Civilizing Process*, explains how violence and power are transformed into civilized behavior through the growth of courtesy, manners, and civility. This idea has been reiterated recently by Steven Pinker, whose book, *The Better Angels of our Nature*, spends quite a few pages recounting Elias' thesis about the civilizing process. Elias' central idea was that civility codes of this sort show us how external constraints against violent and brutish behavior have been replaced by internal monitoring, which has helped us learn to be polite and well-mannered. Pinker explains this as the transformation in culture by which warriors were turned into courtiers.<sup>13</sup>

What is significant, however, is that the sorts of rules emphasized by Washington remind us that civility has a socially relative component. In Washington's day, in the hierarchical society in which he lived, civility included knowing when to bow and when to take off one's hat. We would not include such behaviors in our account of civility today. In our egalitarian society, we no longer bow or doff our hats as a sign of respect for our social betters.

Or consider the case of recent “civility laws” in China that have been established in an effort to prevent people from smoking, spitting, and urinating in public, and to encourage people to clean up after their pets.<sup>14</sup> As noted above, there is something odd about trying to legislate civility in this way, since we tend to think that the state should not be involved in the enforcement of manners. Indeed, one might argue that one of the marks of a free society—as opposed to an authoritarian society—is the degree to which the political system avoids “legislating morality.” In liberal societies, there is greater leeway for the institutions of civil society to take care of themselves. This is not unproblematic, however, as the institutions of civil society can be discriminatory. At any rate, although we might agree that laws against smoking or spitting are useful, it is important note that these values are somewhat conventional: norms about smoking and spitting and doffing hats are culturally and historically variable.

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<sup>13</sup> Pinker, S. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*. Viking, 75.

<sup>14</sup> “Civility Law to Take Effect March 1” *Shenzhen Daily*, [http://www.szdaily.com/content/2013-01/24/content\\_7640843.htm](http://www.szdaily.com/content/2013-01/24/content_7640843.htm) (accessed March 30, 2013).



A deeper consideration of civility, that looks beyond the culturally variable content of such civility codes, might direct us toward a kind of Kantian respect for the dignity and autonomy of the other; as well as a focus on respect for the norms of social organizations. This level of civility requires substantial intellectual and moral development.

One useful recent description of civility by Clifford Gentry Lee explains it as follows:

“The quality of civility is a state of character, a component of an individual’s style of carrying him or herself in the world through action and presentation to others in speech. As such, civility requires emotional regulation to prevent our emotions from leading us to act impulsively. Civility also requires the capacity for the suspension of self-interest, such that a shared ideal of the common good, the noble or beautiful, determines the way by which we manage disagreement, conflict, and decisions of public policy.”

Lee’s account is interesting insofar as he emphasizes emotional regulation, overcoming (or suspending) self-interest, and recognition of some shared ideal of the common good. Lee also maintains that civility develops both from empathy and from a kind of Socratic humility that acknowledges ignorance and multiplicity of perspectives. Lee explains:

“Civility requires imaginative empathy and the capacity to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty. One of the structural foundations of this virtue is the ability to stand within the space of Socratic wisdom, to become comfortable knowing that we do not, and will not, have absolute certainty, that our individual perspectives are not definitive of absolute truth.”<sup>15</sup>

This points toward a significant challenge for the concept of civility, as a middle path negotiating between absolutism and relativism. The difficulty of civility is that those who are civil ought to remain open to others in a way that can appear to encourage relativism—but if we believe that civility is a virtue that everyone ought to develop, then we are not exactly espousing relativism. The solution to this apparent conundrum is to emphasize that civility is in fact grounded on some sort of absolute claim about the importance of respect for persons and their liberty.

This idea can be found in Washington’s list of civil behaviors. Among the most important and basic rules, from this perspective, are rules for good conversation. One should be highlighted (#86):

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<sup>15</sup> Lee, C. G. 2011. “The Courage of Civility: Taming Public Discourse and Ourselves in the 21st Century.” *Alabama Humanities Review*, March 31.

<http://alahumanitiesreview.wordpress.com/2011/03/31/the-courage-of-civility-taming-public-discourse-and-ourselves-in-the-21st-century/> (accessed March 28, 2013).

“In Disputes, be not So Desirous to Overcome as not to give Liberty to each one to deliver his Opinion and Submit to the Judgment of the Major Part especially if they are Judges of the Dispute.”<sup>16</sup>

A further principle of good conversation admonishes (#88):

“Be not tedious in Discourse, make not many Digressions, nor repeat often the Same manner of Discourse.”

The first rule quoted here (#86) indicates the importance of liberty and of conforming to the will of the majority. That is a central principle of liberal democratic governance: that each should be free to express his or her opinion but also that each should be willing to go along with (to “submit to,” as Washington puts it) the judgment of the majority. The second rule appears to present an argument against the filibuster, which is a significant problem for civil discourse. Sometimes in civil conversations, the discussion can be dominated by those who refuse to yield the floor to others. Washington condemns that sort of domineering loquacity by saying basically that once you have made your point, you should yield the floor to others—out of respect for the liberty of others, who are also entitled to express their opinion.

The problem with this account of civility is that while members of liberal-democratic polities will agree that respect for liberty is a fundamental value, others may not agree. Non-democratic peoples may emphasize a more deferential account of civility. In a hierarchical society, civility may be more properly understood as deference to authority. And in terms of the filibuster, it might be that in hierarchical societies, where the voice of the leader is viewed as being more important, it is appropriate for the leader to keep talking (just as it is important for the masses to keep listening ...). While we would reject such a notion in liberal-democratic societies, the possibility of such a cross-cultural clash of ideas about civility points toward a significant problem for inter-cultural dialogue, international organization, and global institutions. Because members come from different cultural backgrounds, they bring social and moral values with them as they enter into the cross-cultural social situation. Thus it is possible that in the very name of “civility” there will be misunderstanding and miscommunication. While this is especially a risk for cross-cultural and international organizations, it is still a problem within the institutions of liberal-democratic civil society. Faculty meetings and local social clubs can be disrupted when different members arrive with different expectations about the norms of civility that are supposed to be governing the proceedings.

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<sup>16</sup> “George Washington’s Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation,” *op. cit.*

### THE PARADOX OF CIVILITY

Civility is a difficult virtue because it appears to be required most when there is a breakdown of civil discourse, when there is lack of consensus, disagreement, and when social fragmentation and diversity inhibit understanding. David Estlund indicates that our duties and virtues may change when such breakdowns occur. It might be that when there is a major breakdown in an organization there is a new duty that is substituted for ordinary civility. It might be that we are entitled to retreat to a purely political power struggle in the face of such a breakdown of civility: “no holds barred, we may now do as we please.”<sup>17</sup> I view this as a retreat to cynicism. And I think that it should be avoided if at all possible. When we give up on civility we are in a position of revolutionary action—we are thrown back into a Hobbesian state of nature, as it were, with regard to this particular civil institution. This may seem a bit extreme, since I am presuming only a break down within a civic institution and that the institutions of the state remain in place. Nonetheless, there is something like a state of nature when an organization breaks down, as the assets of the organization and allegiances of the members are up for grabs. Estlund suggests—and I agree—that such circumstances are rare. Instead, what often happens is that the ordinary norms of civility are replaced by a transitional set of norms. Instead of operating as normal, in institutions going through a breakdown, there is more distrust and less cooperation—in other words, less civility. This happens in marriages, in friendships, in transitions within academic organizations, and civic groups, and so on. The goal, however, of such a transition is to achieve a return to normalcy, that is a return to the state of normal civility through which members of the organization would be able to cooperate without suspicion and distrust. Often a reconstituted institution will have to find a way to exclude some of the members who were causing the distrust to begin with. Or if unable to exclude these members, some of the members may break away and form a new organization. Thus academic units are reorganized, excluding some departments; or marriages and families are dissolved with some members isolated from others; or civil associations, leagues, and so on involve occasional purges of membership and the formation of new organizations.

The chief problem for civil institutions comes from members who do not conform to the norms of civility expected within the institution. It is easy for the uncivil to take advantage, at least in the short run, of those who are motivated by norms of civility—as loud, domineering, and obnoxious speakers hold the floor, while those exercising civility politely wait their turn. It is easy for unscrupulous agents to manipulate free and open institutions from behind the scenes, making alliances, spreading rumors, and sowing distrust among the members. All of this happens fairly easily, at first, because the members pre-

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<sup>17</sup> Estlund, D. 2009. *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework*, op. cit., 191.

sume that civility is widespread and that each member is operating above board with good intentions. But selfish and manipulative agents can easily use the trust of the rest of the membership to their own advantage.

This points toward one danger of civility, which is that those who are civil can be manipulated by the uncivil. This points toward an apparent paradox. The paradox of civility occurs when dealing with those who are uncivil: should we permit incivility in the name of civility? This paradoxical feature is similar to what some call the “paradox of toleration”: the problem of whether we ought to tolerate the intolerant.<sup>18</sup> The danger of civility—as with other human virtues such as hospitality and toleration and even liberal democracy itself—is that it can be exploited by the unscrupulous, the callous, and the clueless. The further problem is that civility, toleration, and other liberal virtues appear to be required for exactly the sorts of situations in which they are abused by the unscrupulous or the clueless.

## CONCLUSION

It is easy enough to remain civil in circumstances of mutual civility. If you allow me to speak, then I allow you to speak; and *vice versa*. Also implied in mutual civility is the idea that each of us will listen to the other. We may ultimately disagree. But we each agree, in the spirit of civility, to try to understand the point of view of the other. We allow one another the space and time to reflect upon and express our opinions. In such circumstances, disagreements may occur; but they will be accepted by each of us as a normal and inevitable result of the diversity of human experience. We do not expect to agree about everything. But we do expect agreement about the basic norms of civility. Mutual civility occurs in contexts where there is a certain overlap and sharing of basic values—especially at the procedural level—as Rawls suggests in the passage quoted at the outset. In terms of process, civility develops when there is a frame or format for each to express his or her opinion. One reason to “agree to disagree” about particular policy issues and decisions is that we share a deeper agreement about fundamental structural or procedural values. In liberal and democratic societies, the basic agreement extends in the direction of agreement about ideas such as human rights, equality, and the importance of representational institutions, which give voice to the interests of relevant constituents. Disagreements will occur; and sometimes my opinion and ideas fail to carry the day. But if I am to remain civil, I will acquiesce to the decision of the group.

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<sup>18</sup> I have discussed this in my: 2007. *Tolerance and the Ethical Life*. London: Continuum. Relevant sources include: Heyd, D. 1996. *Toleration: An Elusive Virtue*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Churchill, P. R. 2007. “Moral Toleration and Deep Reconciliation.” *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*, 14:1 (Spring), 100–113; Nys, T., B. Engeln. 2008. “Tolerance: A Virtue? Towards a Broad and Descriptive Definition of Tolerance.” *Philosophy in the Contemporary World* 15:1 (Spring), 44–53.

One reason for civil acquiescence is that I trust the procedures which have been employed in the decision process: I trust that the rules are fair, that the votes have been properly counted, that each voice has been given equal consideration by each constituent. Another reason I might acquiesce when things do not go my way is that I trust that my fellow constituents are virtuous—that they respect my rights, my opinions, and the procedures we have agreed upon. Civil interlocutors trust that each has been heard, that the interests and rights of all have been accounted for, and that if the decision had turned out differently those who were on the losing end, the winners and losers would both submit to the decision that was arrived at by civil means.

Unfortunately, a condition of mutual civility is easily fractured by unscrupulous players, by callous boors, and by the selfish ruses of the un-civil. In such a breakdown of civility it might be tempting to retreat to a cynical state of nature—and start playing the game of political manipulation. However, such a retreat to cynicism marks the end of civil society. Not only does a retreat from civility encourage more cynical manipulation on the part of the other but it also invites intervention by political authorities, which will disrupt the spirit of the organization. At some point the police may have to be called—when legal transgressions occur. But it would be best to model civility in the hope of appealing to the sense of shame and decorum of the members (including the un-civil members who provoked the ruckus). There is no easy solution here. All social organizations—from families to states—are fragile human creations. They occasionally fall apart. When social institutions fall apart, it is better to be on the side of the civil members than to be numbered among the cynics, since the cynics will be excluded from whatever future organizations may arise by those who remain committed to civility.

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*Martha C. Beck*

## **SYSTEMS THINKING AND UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE: THE CREATION OF A NOOSPHERE IN TODAY'S ERA OF GLOBALIZATION**

### ***ABSTRACT***

This paper summarizes Ervin Laszlo's worldview in *The Systems View of the World: A Holistic Vision for Our Time*.<sup>1</sup> Laszlo claims that current discoveries in the sciences have led to a different model of the physical world, human nature, and human culture. Instead of the models formulated during the Enlightenment, according Systems thinkers "systems interact with systems and collaboratively form suprasystems" (Laszlo E. 1996, 60). This view has led to a reexamination of: 1) each academic discipline; 2) the relationship between disciplines; 3) the nature of theory and its relation to practice; 4) the relationship between religion and the sciences; 5) of the nature of the social sciences and our ability to develop a universal, normative ethic; 6) the relation between reasoning, emotion and imagination. The evolution of the reflective self-consciousness unique to *homo sapiens* has led to the formation of cultures. Cultures must be understood as suprasystems that emerged from natural systems and are dependent upon them. Given this universal natural foundation, systems thinkers are recognizing the common patterns between nature and culture and between different cultures. The examination of systems has also shown us that the suprasystems of culture create a level of complexity and reality over and above the natural world and can even destroy themselves and their own natural foundation

From the perspective of the ISUD, this view means it is possible, natural, and necessary for academics to engage in meaningful dialogue with each other, showing how the ways they have been trained to examine "reality," or "truth," can be integrated. Further, professional academics should be able to talk to non-academics, to people in leadership roles, and to all human actors. Since it is a fact that individuals are parts of many larger wholes, the ISUD can nurture the process of the development of reflective self-consciousness in the formation of an international culture, an emerging suprasystem.

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<sup>1</sup> Laszlo, E. 1996. *The Systems View of the World: A Holistic Vision for Our Time*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Laszlo calls this sphere of spiritual interaction, with its physical foundation, a noosphere, his word for a “meeting of the minds.” Given our collective destruction of natural systems, it is imperative that human beings develop some version of a Systems view of reality. ISUD should work to foster this development, even though the professional training of individuals will call the process by other names, based on the labels of the past.

**Keywords:** Systems thinking; noosphere; holistic; reflective self-consciousness; subjectivity; normative values; evolution; humanism; macrodetermination; religion; spiritual.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper begins with a model of reality called “Systems Thinking” as described by Ervin Laszlo in his book, *The Systems View of the World*.<sup>2</sup> Laszlo claims that recent developments in many of the sciences and social sciences have led to the development of a new paradigm for our understanding of nature, human nature, and human culture. Laszlo presents a vision of the kind of meeting of the minds, or creation of a “noosphere” that follows from this new view. Systems thinking opens new avenues for dialogue between ways of thinking that have been cut off from each other for centuries, particularly the split between religious dialogue, philosophy, the sciences and the social sciences. Laszlo claims that these disciplines are simply parts of a whole, the system of human culture, which is itself a system within the broader system of the natural world and the universe from which our earth, with its various living and non-living systems, formed. Our culture has developed in a way that expects academics to focus on small aspects of reality and to use our brains in specific and limited ways to gain “knowledge” a small part within the whole. But the nature of these entities is fundamentally related to the connections between them. Studying them separately gives us a distorted view of reality. Using the different intellectual powers in our brains in this way—training some capacities to a high level while ignoring the other ways our brains take in and learn about reality—is not natural; it distorts the goal we all seek: truth.

The emerging model of reality coming out of many of the sciences requires intellectuals to reexamine their views of human nature and human culture. Further, the new model leads inevitably to a model for ethics, the well-lived life. Laszlo’s view is a good starting point for opening up intellectual dialogue between professional philosophers and academics from many different disciplines as well as with non-academics who focus their intellectual powers on practical and particular choices rather than theoretical models. In the context of the International Society for Universal Dialogue, the Systems view provides an argu-

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

ment for encouraging the organization to invite papers from people of all academic disciplines and all walks of life. Interdisciplinary dialogue is not only possible; it will lead to greater insight, a better grasp of the truth, than the models Western culture has been based on since the Scientific Revolution and the Western Enlightenment.

### **LASZLO'S DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE OF REALITY AND THE KIND OF THINKING NECESSARY TO GRASP IT**

Laszlo begins with a definition of worldview: "Worldviews are constellations of concepts, perceptions, values, and practices that are shared by a community and direct the activities of its members." (Laszlo, 1996, 13) Further, he claims,

"the avant-garde branches of the contemporary sciences are veritable fountainheads for the creation of a non-atomistic and non-mechanistic vision that can fill the need for practical guidance in our time. The new systems view can provide the clues, the metaphors, the orientations, and even the detailed models for solving critical problems on this precious but increasingly crowded and exploited planet." (Laszlo, 1996, 13)

A complete worldview goes beyond the sciences to provide a model for the good life,

"If a worldview is coherent and embracing, it can also provide a pathway for carrying people through the succeeding epochs of their lives, from childhood through adolescence to adulthood and into old age . . . We cannot expect to satisfy all the requirements attaching to a worldview in reference to science alone, without also drawing on the insights of religion and the values of humanism." (Laszlo, 1996, 13)

Laszlo argues that the model of reality coming from the Systems sciences is leading to a reexamination and reaffirmation of religious and humanistic traditions.

Laszlo is very critical of the Enlightenment worldview, its view of nature, its method for how to gain knowledge of nature, and the way that method was applied to the study of human nature.

"Following the rise of modern science, investigators tended to dissect general questions concerning human nature into specific problems to be handled by specialized research. The classical scientific method led to a vast number of highly accomplished theories concerning man's behavior, dispositions, and even his subconscious. But it also led to the fragmentation of our understanding of human beings. In the midst of all the complex special theories, we have gained little real insight into human nature itself." (Laszlo, 1996, 60)



Systems thinking rejects specialization and focuses on studying the relationships between all aspects of reality. "Opposed to atomism and behaviorism, the systems view links the human being again with the world (s)he lives in, for he or she is seen as emerging in that world and reflecting its general characteristics." (Laszlo, 1996, 60) This wholistic approach leads back to a reexamination of the worldview of ancient scientists, "The philosopher-scientists of antiquity viewed the human phenomenon within a cosmic context and held that to understand humans one must understand their world." (Laszlo, 1996, 60) Systems thinking also leads back to a reexamination of ancient mythological traditions, "In early cultures rational, emotive, imaginative, and mystical elements were interwoven in syncretic unity. Myth is part science, part art, part religion." (Laszlo, 1996, 76) Laszlo describes the split between the power of reasoning in the sciences and the powers of imagination and emotion in mythology and religion,

"The great split that led to the medieval distinction between moral and natural sciences, and later to the malaise of the 'two cultures,' was foreshadowed in the rivalry of Greek philosophers and dramatists. The global unity of previous cultures was gone, and never entirely recovered." (Laszlo, 1996, 76)

Laszlo claims that Systems thinking requires a reexamination of all the ways of thinking about the world and using the powers of the human brain that have been handed down to us from ancient times, taking the cultural legacy we have been given and adapting it to form a culture that corresponds to human nature as it should be understood on the Systems view of reality.

### **HUMAN NATURE: FROM BIOLOGICAL NATURE TO CONSCIOUSNESS**

Laszlo uses the language of systems thinking to describe human nature. First, he rejects the paradigm of the past, "the human being is not a *sui generis* phenomenon that can be studied without regard to other things" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Laszlo begins with the basics: a human being is, "a natural entity, and an inhabitant of several interrelated worlds. By origin (s)he is a biological organism. By work and play (s)he is a social role carrier. And by conscious personality (s)he is a Janus-faced link integrating and coordinating the biological and the social worlds" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Certainly Enlightenment thinkers would agree that human beings are both natural and cultural creatures, but the Systems view presents a new model for, and way of describing, what it means to be both. First, human beings are very complex systems, along with everything else, "The human individual is a part of a majestic cathedral of great complexity of detail, yet of sweeping simplicity and order in overall design" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Second, Systems thinking has a very different model for how nature and culture fit together, "All parts express the character of the whole, yet all parts are not the same. This is the systems concept of nature, and it is a precondition of coming to know ourselves" (Laszlo, 1996, 60). Third, the development of the world as

we know it on earth is the result of a long evolutionary process that follows certain patterns. Nature is self-constructive: developing from less complex wholes to more complex wholes, from subsystems to natural wholes, to suprasystems, such as human culture. On this view,

“The human being is one module in the multilevel structure that arose on earth as a result of nature’s penchant for building up in one place what it takes down in others. On multiple levels, each with its own variant of the general systems-characteristics which reflect the nature of the self-constructive segment of the world, systems interact with systems and collaboratively form suprasystems.” (Laszlo, 1996, 60)

Laszlo calls this interaction between systems a “holarchy” and the relation of each individual part of the whole its “interface” with the system. Human beings, then, are “in the final analysis, a coordinating interface system in the multilevel holarchy of nature.” (Laszlo, 1996, 60)

On the Systems view, consciousness has emerged because nature operates by continually moving and changing toward higher and higher levels of complexity. This process led from non-living to living beings and from living species with fewer capacities to the emergence of consciousness, then to higher and higher levels of consciousness. As the systems become more complex, the behavior of the system as a whole becomes very different from the behavior of each part or smaller parts. Animals differ in their levels of complexity and consciousness, “The difference between a swarm of bees and a dog is one of degree, not of kind. The dog is a more integrated system than a swarm of bees, therefore it is more convenient in more respects to speak of the dog acting than his body cells doing so.” (Laszlo, 1996, 68)

Human consciousness is even more complex and creates a system even more removed from the sum of its parts: “Think how awkward it would be to describe a concert goer’s reaction to Beethoven as the reaction of the cells in his nervous system, not to mention of the subcellular tissues and bodies constituting his nerve cells.” (Laszlo, 1996, 68)

Further, human beings interact in groups and establish institutions, which also become wholes, “it is more convenient to speak of a student body being riotous or bright or lazy than each individual student and of a nation being upset rather than each of its citizens.” (Laszlo, 1996, 68) A study body can be “bright,” for example, without every individual being bright.

#### **HUMAN NATURE: FROM CONSCIOUSNESS TO REFLECTIVE SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE**

All natural wholes possess what Laszlo calls “subjectivity [...] the ability of a system to register internal and external forces affecting its existence in the form of sensations, however primitive they may be [...] subjectivity is universal in

nature's realms of organized complexity". (Laszlo, 1996, 69) However, human beings are the creatures that possess "reflective consciousness, the ability of a system to be *aware* of its subjectivity". (Laszlo, 1996, 69) This level of awareness requires a complex nervous system, "There are good reasons to correlate self-awareness with certain varieties of highly integrated nervous functions, performed only by the most evolved nervous systems." (Laszlo, 1996, 69) Given the existence of a complex nervous system, the physical foundation for reflective consciousness, there are two ways to determine if this capacity is being used: (whether an organism) "has developed a language and other symbolic modes of expression and communication, and whether it can transcend the limits of the here-and-now by making plans not directly triggered by actual stimuli." (Laszlo, 1996, 70) For Laszlo, evidence shows that, "Man alone passes this test." (Laszlo, 1996, 70) Science has determined that "In human beings, the cerebral cortex is the part of the brain that engages in the activity of monitoring the performance of other systems and setting it right when needed". (Laszlo, 1996, 71)

Because of the evolution of the cerebral cortex, our ancestors, "exploded the limits of genetically programmed behavior" because "They learned to learn from experience. By reflecting on the events of a hunt, for example, they could abstract its relevant elements and compare them with other occasions. They could select the most successful pattern of behavior and adopt it." (Laszlo, 1996, 72) As societies became more and more complex, "the brunt of the responsibility for survival rested on abstract mental processes, that is, on intelligence." (Laszlo, 1996, 72)

One major factor in the growth of complexity among human beings has been the development of language,

"Human language, in using denotative symbols rather than expressive signs, became an effective instrument for communicating meaning. It enabled our ancestors not only to survive, but to dominate their world. Existence became social existence, within the context of a common set of meanings, communicated by means of a common language. Culture was born, and elaborate forms of social organization created. We became a sociocultural animal." (Laszlo, 1996, 73)

Human reflective self-consciousness emerged from nature, but is also unique. It functions as a system in an entirely different way than less complex natural systems. Further, human culture evolved from the original uniting of small groups of human beings in order to survive, but has developed into an entirely different kind of holistic system,

"Culture is more than a tool of human survival—it is a qualitatively higher phenomenon. Thinking rationally and feeling with clarity and intensity, coupled perhaps with faith and a conscious morality, is qualitatively different

from behaviors to assure one's survival and the continuity of the species. Culture and survival functions must not be confused." (Laszlo, 1996, 73)

### **HUMAN NATURE: FROM CULTURE TO REFLECTION ON THE CULTURES WE HAVE CREATED**

Because culture is a unique whole, disconnected from the need to survive, the cultures human beings have created include an element of choice and can be changed to follow the ideas generated from the cerebral cortex. We can look at patterns from the past, anticipate the future, and plan ahead. We now act in a way that promotes what we think of as the best possible future for future generations,

"Our evolutionary history determined that we become a cultural creature, but did not determine what *kind* of culture we would have. Hence our problem today is not whether to have a culture; it is what kind of a culture to have. And this requires some serious thought." (Laszlo, 1996, 75)

Unlike anytime in the past, as far as we know, "The kind of culture we inherited from our fathers and grandfathers is beginning to challenge our ability to survive on this planet. If we do nothing more than blindly accept it [...] we may not have the grandchildren to hand it down to." (Laszlo, 1996, 75)

Given the situation we are in, we choose to change our behavior by creating a system of values, one aspect of a culture. The Systems view provides us with a way of understanding the connection between science and values,

"Objective value norms can be deduced directly from the contemporary systemic world picture [...] Values are goals which behavior strives to realize. Any activity which is oriented toward the accomplishment of some end is value-oriented activity [...] Nothing that pursues an end is value free." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

Both non-human creatures as well as human beings pursue ends and hence have values.

The Enlightenment view claimed that the material world has no inherent value. On the Systems view, "there is nothing in all the realms of natural systems which would be value-free when looked at from the vantage point of the systems themselves." (Laszlo, 1996, 80) The view of nature during the Enlightenment claimed that values are created by human beings. They are based on the particular material conditions and historical circumstances of a group of people, so they are completely different. Laszlo says: "There is nothing in the sphere of culture which would exempt us from the realm of values—no facts floating around, ready to be grasped without valuations and expectations." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

Everything that evolves, including cultures, do so within the context of a system. Cultures depend on natural systems. Enlightenment thinkers encouraged the exploitation of natural resources for human well-being and the development of more and more complex cultural systems. However, the suprasystems of human culture were always ultimately dependent upon the natural systems from which they emerged.

The study of culture in the social sciences during the Enlightenment period sought to be "value-neutral." Academic disciplines studied a culture apart from its natural foundations. Today, social scientists who have adopted the Systems view are reexamining this approach. In their studies of the suprasystems of culture, they include the interface of a given cultural system with its natural foundations, even as human beings create a culture that is an independent suprasystem,

"Contemporary cultural anthropologists are specifying a number of fundamental universal values shared by people everywhere. The same basic values of survival, mutual collaboration, the raising of children, the worship of transcendent entities, and avoidance of suffering, injustice, and pain, are manifested by all cultures, albeit often in radically different ways. The surface forms differ, but the depth structures are analogous." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

The formation of cultures has led to many, many variations, because "there is no imperative attached to the cultural specification of [our] values. These we can choose according to our insights." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

However, there is a natural foundation that does not change, "[we] remain within the limits of general natural-systems values. Finding and respecting these limits is precisely the problem facing us today." (Laszlo, 1996, 80)

Laszlo distinguishes between descriptive values, those behaviors we recognize by observing how people live and asking them why, and normative values, those values that we can figure out as best, through studying the nature of reality and its interlocking systems,

"Normative values (or value norms) are things we discover by examining human characteristics and pointing to those values which could lead people to fulfillment. Hence normative values are not described but *postulated*; they are creations of the inquiring intellect (but not arbitrary)." (Laszlo, 1996, 81)

To understand values and ultimately to determine any normative values, systems theorists first have to look at the roles individuals play within a culture. They recognize and describe individuals as parts of much greater wholes,

"Roles are not made for given individuals, but for kinds of individuals classed according to qualification. When the roles are filled, the particular personality of each new tenant is reflected in his interrelations with others, and it produces corresponding shifts within the organizational structure.

There is flexibility within the system, as part adjusts to part.” (Laszlo, 1996, 85)

Each system, of any kind, includes aspects that change and aspects that do not change,

“There is a high degree of internal plasticity within any natural system. The system as a whole is determinate, but the relationship of the parts is not. This is not the mechanistic casual determinism of classical scientists, but the flexible, dynamic ‘macrodetermination’ of contemporary systems biologists, psychologist, and social scientists.” (Laszlo, 1996, 85)

On the Systems view, the ultimate value is simply the cultivation of all of the powers of the human soul in as many people as possible. The best societies are complex systems that function well, meaning with relatively little internal conflict, with a high level of coordination between societies and with a cooperative relationship with all the other natural and microsystems,

“Our humanistic goal is to enhance individual fulfillment in an increasingly deterministic multilevel society composed of greatly differentiated individuals [...] Like all complex natural systems, human institutions and societies function best when they are spontaneous expressions of the freely chosen activities of their interrelated members. Such a society is the norm against which we must measure existing forms of social structure.” (Laszlo, 1996, 87)

Again, Laszlo is critical of the Enlightenment worldview because it was focused on nature and human nature from a physical point of view. This was false. In spite of the efforts of many leaders and intellectuals, a materialistic way of understanding nature eventually led to the excess value of physical well-being over the cultivation of all the human capabilities: “The Western world offers the values of affluence as the panacea for all social ills. As norms, these values are now superannuated. In their place we must propose positive, humanistic value norms” (Laszlo, 1996, 88).

Laszlo’s model for humanism is universal, even though the underlying universal foundations have been ignored and denied, “Humanistic norms are not arbitrary: they are encoded in every natural system. But they can be overlaid by diverse cultural value objectives and hence, in times of urgency, they need to be consciously rediscovered.” (Laszlo, 1996, 88)

If we recover these universal, natural values,

“If they are found and adopted, we will again exercise our powers of adaptive innovation in maintaining ourselves and our culture within the thresholds of compatibility with the dynamic and balanced multilevel holarchy that is the biosphere-cum-humanity: the Gaia system of planet Earth.” (Laszlo, 1996, 88)

### CREATING A NEW MODEL OF HUMANISM: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NOOSPHERE

Given Laszlo's view of reality, the best way of describing the ultimate normative value for human culture is

“the actualization of potentials inherent in all of us [...] Self-fulfillment, as contemporary humanistic thinkers and psychologists acknowledge, is the end of human purposeful behavior [...] It is the pattern of what *can* be, traced in actuality. Individual fulfillment can be a human value. And it can be specified and analyzed in the systems perspective.” (Laszlo, 1996, 82)

Laszlo points out that the Greeks had the same overall view, “What are intrinsic human norms? The Greeks had an answer: they said that the end of the good life is happiness. Happiness, Aristotle specified, is the fulfillment of that which is specifically human in us.” (Laszlo, 1996, 82)<sup>3</sup> Besides the Greeks, Laszlo calls for the reintegration of all the world's religions into a set of normative values on the Systems model of reality and he explains why,

“Science addresses reason and intellect. Humanity, however, is both a rational and spiritual species; the human being has an intellective as well as an affective faculty. Consequently if the norms of contemporary humanism are not only to be discovered but also effectively brought to bear on the thinking and behavior of contemporary people, the rational discoveries of science need to be complemented by affective, time-honored tasks of religion, as ‘religio’—the binding and integrating of people within meaningful communities—takes on a fresh aspect.” (Laszlo, 1996, 88)

Integrating science with religion requires that the world's religions find their common foundation. Laszlo briefly suggests how it could be done,

“Religions would not need to sacrifice, or even compromise, their cherished tenets to make a unique contribution to this shift. They would only need to draw on their own humanism and ecumenism to encourage creative thinking in regard to the elaboration and extension of their traditional insights. There is, obviously, a significant humanistic and ecumenical component in every great religion. Judaism sees humans as God's partners in the ongoing work of creation and calls on the people of Israel to be ‘a light to the nations.’ At the heart of the Christian teaching is love for a universal God reflected in love for one's fellows and service to one's neighbor. Islam, too, has a universal and ecumenical aspect: Tawhid, the religious witness ‘there is no god but Allah,’ is an affirmation of unity as Allah means divine presence and revelation for all people. Hinduism perceives the essential oneness of man-

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<sup>3</sup> I have written extensively about Ancient Greek culture as a whole and its relevance in relation to systems thinking today. But that is not the point of this paper.

kind within the oneness of the universe, and Buddhism has as its central tenet the interrelatedness of all things in 'dependent co-origination.' In the Chinese spiritual traditions harmony is a supreme principle of nature and society; in Confucianism harmony applies to human relationships in ethical terms, while in Taoism it is an almost esthetic concept defining the relationship between man and nature. And the Baha'I faith, the newest of the world religions, sees the whole of mankind as an organic unit in process of evolution toward peace and unity—a condition that it proclaims both desirable and inevitable. The great religions could draw on such ecumenical and humanistic elements to nurture a creative elaboration of their fundamental doctrines, supporting and promoting the shift to the new holistic consciousness." (Laszlo, 1996, 89)

Laszlo explains how the nature of physical reality and its evolution fits with the evolution of human nature and human culture. Physical evolution has a spiritual component and the realm of the spiritual has a physical aspect because human beings are biological as well as spiritual beings. Laszlo suggests that we should begin with what we now know about the physical universe and its history as a natural foundation for the common theme of unity, oneness and cooperation in the world's religious traditions. The physical world can be understood spiritually,

The key unifying concept could be the spiritual assessment of the universe's progressive self-creation. The vast sweep of system-building processes from Big Bang to the emergence of life, mind, and consciousness could be recognized, and indeed celebrated by the religions. The recognition of the evolutionary self-creation of humanity, and of the larger reality of the cosmos, need not be confined to the empirical sciences. The process is all-embracing, and has a spiritual in addition to a physical dimension. We bear, after all, within our own body the impress of every transformation through which the universe has ever passed (Laszlo, 1996, 89).

In the process of learning about the nature of reality, one holistic system emerging out of another, we also literally physically develop and stimulate our brains in a way that leads to higher and higher levels of reflective self-consciousness. We use language to develop communication networks based on both the spoken and written word, leading to a more complete and complex body of recorded knowledge that is passed down to the next generation. This cultural legacy provides the occasion to develop an even more complex and accurate model of reality and a more complete and universal grasp of underlying normative values. The intellectual search for truth has a physical component in the brain and a non-physical, spiritual component. The emerging systems are made up of connections in the world, in our brains, in our words and in our minds, as we reflect upon how the systems relate to each other and to ourselves as learners. Systems theory recognizes all these connections,



“Not only our bodies, also our minds are immanent to this process. The forces that brought forth the quarks and the photons in the early moment of the radiance-filled cosmos, that condensed galaxies and stars in expanding space-time, and that created the complex molecules and systems on a life-bearing planet—these forces inform our brain and thus infuse our mind. They could come to self-recognition in each thinking and feeling human being.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90)

Human beings have always sought knowledge and many other ways to develop their potential. These purposes have always created values, “Values define cultural man’s need for rationality, meaningfulness in emotional experience, richness of imagination, and depth of faith.” (Laszlo, 1996, 76) In the past, these values have been considered unique to each individual, or to each integrated culture. Today, using Systems theory, our understanding of all aspects of reality and all inherent human capacities should lead from mere descriptions of different values to a comprehensive worldview that integrates human rationality, emotions, imagination, and faith. This integration leads to the formative of a system of normative values. This system would describe how all the evolved systems work together best.

Religions today should embrace the self-conscious awareness of this view as normative, not just descriptive, “By recognizing and celebrating the world’s evolutionary self-creation, religions could promote this process of recognition in each individual.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90) The particular intellectual capacity for recognizing this whole Laszlo calls “noos,” following the Greek view. The formation of a sphere of human culture where we recognize the integration of all aspects of reality is what Laszlo calls a “noosphere” of human interaction. On Laszlo’s view, the world’s religions could and should, “celebrate the evolution of the noosphere on Earth as the next, and especially significant, phase in the world’s evolutionary self-creation [...] the self-creating universe is our larger self—our primary sacred community.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90) The spiritual is not separated from the physical. The sacred is not separated from the profane. What is known through reason is not separated from what is known from the inspiration to seek a higher level of complexity beyond what one observes.

### **CONCLUSION: THE CREATION OF A NOOSPHERE IS NOT RELATIVE BUT NORMATIVE**

Given the fact that the Enlightenment worldview has now led humanity to the brink of self-destruction, it is imperative that human beings develop a noosphere as Laszlo understands it. The purposes related to recognizing the fact that all of reality is a series of interconnected systems and the necessary consequences of this for the kind of culture we must develop in order to avoid self-destruction is a normative way of constructing values, not merely descriptive. It

should be a guide for how we ought to behave, not a description of one way of actualizing our potentials that is no better or worse than many others.

Laszlo points out that in the past the world's great religions also emerged as a way of addressing a crisis in the cultures from which they emerged,

“Religious renewal always came in the wake of civilizational crises. It was in the disastrous moments of the history of Israel that the prophets of Judea made their appearance; Christianity established itself in the chaos left by the moral weakening of the citizens of a declining Roman Empire; the Buddha appeared in a period of spiritual and social confusion in India; Mohammed proclaimed his mission in an epoch of disorder in Arabia; and Baha'ullah wrote in confinement imposed by a moribund Ottoman Empire.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90)

The ecological crisis we face today is perhaps the most serious humanity has faced, which is why the resources of the world's religions need to be harnessed to address this crisis,

“Today, at a time when humankind is in the throes of the greatest and deepest transformation it has ever known, there is an epochal need for a creative extension of the traditional fundamentals of the great religions, to complete and complement the rational worldview that is already emerging within the new sciences. With an alliance between science and religion, the shift to a systemic and holistic worldview would be reinforced. Both through reason and through feeling, contemporary people could be brought into closer harmony with each other, and with their environment.” (Laszlo, 1996, 90–91)

## SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE ISUD

This paper was submitted as part of series of essays on *Universal Dialogue* because the Systems view shows the possibility and the great need for universal dialogue in the Era of Globalization taking place today. The Enlightenment era has led to our ability to exploit nature for human well-being so that we have created a global cultural system that is more complex than it ever has been. It is growing at a rapid rate. Unfortunately, it is still dedicated to connecting people with each other and with nature in a way that values the exploitation of nature and the material prosperity of individuals who focus on their own desires with the expectation that everyone else will benefit from the rational calculation of one's own well-being. This model has been exposed as a false view of nature, of human nature, and of a flourishing culture. The complex systems are breaking down and will eventually self-destruct.

In the development of a Systems-based, normative model of culture, the world needs dialogue between academics who have specialized in all the traditional, Enlightenment-model, disciplines. Academics need to talk to each other

and find the ways to bring together what they were educated to assume was separated. They need to rethink their academic training in order to understand reality and the place of their disciplines within the reality of interconnected wholes. Academics need to encourage non-academics, people focused on practical affairs, to become engaged in the dialogue. Artists, public intellectuals, leaders in all sectors of society, and people without academic training or political power, should all learn how to communicate with each other in the formation of a self-conscious level of cultural interaction that follows the Systems model. People need to behave, individually and at all levels of interpersonal interaction, in ways that preserve the natural environment, thereby self-consciously creating a culture that is integrated with nature, leading to well-functioning whole. The ISUD's name, "International Society for Universal Dialogue," gives it a public "image" of an organization that will, indeed, promote the normative values of the Systems view, apart from what particular philosophical, theological, artistic, or leadership training labels that those in the society give to themselves based on their own training and experience. The Systems view shows why such universal dialogue is possible, based on the nature of reality, why it is crucial today, and why people often disagree on the labels given to the actual activity of developing a noosphere.

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## SEMIOTICS OF GLOBALIZATION AS A SUBJECT OF PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

### *ABSTRACT*

Examining dialogue, one may underline its being amicable or not, intellectual (Socratic) or not, useful or useless, plainly transferring message or hinting metamessage, serving social or private goals etc. However, speaking about dialogue in general we speak in terms of semiotics.

Considering globalization in general one should adopt the semiotic framework within which globalization is not just a collection of cases, and globalistics (a field of academic research) is not only a catalogue registering it. It will turn globalization into the subject of philosophical interest. The paper presents a specific basis for semiotic investigations. This basis postulates *inter alia* the fourth part (besides the three standard ones, i.e. syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics), not widely known, called sigmatics, dealing with the construction of adequate ontologies. It can help to explain in a complete way what we observe in the present and to foresee the prospects of the future, including the integrated problems of dialogue, globalization and tolerance which are the main concern of the presented considerations. Some special characteristics of the semiotic research and of globalistics in Russia are displayed in two Appendixes.

**Keywords:** dialogue; semiotics; globalization; globalism; communication; universalism.

### ON GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBALISTICS

Globalization seems and often proves to be the world-wide process of modernization, communication, civilization, urbanization, democratization, universalization and the like, promoting economic progress, political consensus, jurisdiction, unanimity, scientific flux, religious intercourse and cross-cultural dialogue. In short, it is a trend very positive for humankind. Globalization has been for more than a dozen years the subject of academic investigations. Globalistics

may be regarded as a sort of systemic and a more or less integrated core within global studies.

### THREE CONTROVERSIES OF GLOBALIZATION

Is there a better means to promote universal dialogue than globalization? This question seems purely rhetorical. “No, there is not” seems to be the answer, but it seems firm and unproblematic only in commonsense, loaded by the ideology of the ruling forces. Whence, then, do the philosophical and social problems come, if at all? Why do societies not initiate such a dialogue today and complete it within a short time, thereby creating a truly universal humanity? Many contemporary philosophers strive to fulfill this task, believing that philosophy is the only key to it.<sup>1</sup> Hundreds of people do believe in universal dialogue and declare that the global village needs it indispensably. That the global village IS there, with the Internet, Olympic Games, World Championships and World Congresses, economic and financial globalization etc. does not need be argued for.

However, some realistic voices point out that globalization is twofold. Jang-Moo Lee claims:

“We must not forget that the encounter of different cultures is a *mixed blessing*. It can *enrich human spirit* by producing new forms of life, ideas, arts, literature, and science. At the same time, however, it can produce various forms of violence, which we are in fact witnessing along the borders of disparate cultures [...]”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Layla Abd al Gawed stressed that globalization was a progress for science and technology, but it was dangerous for cultures and traditions.<sup>3</sup>

Here I have to draw some divisions, taking the risk of being accused of falling into the trap of outdated “pre-postmodernist” bi-lateralization. Among others, I point out three controversies. First, there exists a curious difference between messages and “metamessages” in communication. Second, there exists a deep East-West contradiction between broadly understood cultures. Third, there exists a dramatic precipice between globalization and globalism. Processes integrating people can be of objective value, and these are globalization and univer-

<sup>1</sup> Among them Fidel Gutierrez, Lima, Peru, “World Wide Project of Integration of Philosophy and Science for Humanity Conservation.” See: [www.evafil.com](http://www.evafil.com), Escuela Virtual de Asesoría Filosófica; Abraham Joseph, New Delhi, India, “Conscience of the society”: [conscience@conscienceofthesociety.com](mailto:conscience@conscienceofthesociety.com)><http://wpf.unesco-tlee.org>

<sup>2</sup> Lee, Jang-Moo. 2008. “Congratulatory Address III.” Speech presented at the Opening Ceremony of the XXII World Congress of Philosophy, Seoul, South Korea, July 30.

<sup>3</sup> Abd al Gawed, Layla. 2009. Speech presented at the Plenary Session of the Conference “Globalization in Modern World in Context of Historical Experience of East and West Peoples’ Identity Preservation,” Cairo–Hurgada, Egypt, January 31.

sal dialogue of the corporative style of discussion, as well as of deliberate subjective will of great powers to impose, which is globalism.

### HYPOTHESIS

These three controversies of globalization can be examined in semiotic researches. As was stated above, speaking about dialogue in general we speak in terms of semiotics, i.e. sets and systems of signs, sense and meaning, representation and the like. Considering globalization in general, tending to view it as a system, and globalistics not only as the catalogue, but as an academic study we may use the “prism” of semiology.<sup>4</sup> This prism has a tetrahedral shape: four “facets” that guide a researcher into different semiotic topics: the logic of taxis, i.e. syntactics, concerns with sign-selections, taxonomic styles and strategies of rule constructions, semantics studies cognitive problems of various meanings of signs, and pragmatics explores relationships between signs and users of language, among others it investigates symbols and metaphors in different cultures. To put it differently, the task of syntactics is sign-to-sign relating and analyzing, whereas the task of semantics consists in investigating the sign-meaning problem, and the task of pragmatics consists in studying relationships between signs and the human world. The investigation of rules of selecting and combining signs into a code, or a system (organizational principles) is the main objective of technical semiotics, and thus of syntactics. Semantics, in general, concerns the whole field of sense and meaning and of their vehicles, i.e. the signs. There is one more field (subdiscipline) of semiotics, namely, sigmatics which concerns the true sign-object relationship. Are all the problems of semiotics, especially of pragmatics equally important? I argue that the most important of them and the most intriguing is communication.

### METHOD

Besides the obligatory rules of logic and dialectics I use the main principles of semiotics and communication theory. Like logic for Boetius or dialectics for Hegel, semiotics is twofold: it is a method as well as an academic discipline. Language, a central semiotic system, is a universal social means of any activity and a matrix for any other system of signs. It conveys conceptual information and emotions, tacit hints and open commands, focus knowledge and backcloth knowledge, etc., through its locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, as John L. Austin showed already in 1955 in his *Oxford Lectures*. Many disciplines study speech acts, *inter alia* the philosophy of language, linguosemiotics, sociolinguistics, etc., all using their own methods. However, semiotics is the mightiest of them. Any order and period, be it natural or social, is prone to be

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<sup>4</sup> Semiology is another word for semiotics.

understood as meaning something. We are inclined to understand any fragment of reality as a sign, even symbol, if we impose some sense to it. Due to it, semiotics can serve a universal method, and, being such, it has a tendency to specific kind of “arrogant imperialism,” as Umberto Eco once put it. Such a hypostasis is redundant, but, nevertheless, semiotics has great, though not omnipotent, explanatory power.

Semiotics is a vast and necessary research field since no man, society, or culture can exist without systems of signs and symbols. It is not useless to view it as metalogic, or philosophy of logic. A.J. Nesterov acknowledges that semiotics “contributed to formulate and investigate some general philosophical problems, such as semantics, logical forms, and invention (or novelty itself).”<sup>5</sup> So we make use of semiotics and its aspects (vision facets), or subdisciplines distinguished by Ferdinand de Saussure: syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics. To improve the explanatory force of semiotics, one more its dimension should be established, i.e., sigmatics (the name itself was put forward by a German philosopher, Georg Klaus). In addition to semantics which studies the relationship between the sign vehicle and the mental representation, Klaus introduced sigmatics “studying the relation between the sign vehicle [...] and the material object [...].”<sup>6</sup> The Russian investigations in this field are of considerable importance (see Appendix 1).

I apply a new simple and effective division of all most relevant human relationships into two main bunches only, thus explaining what we intend and what we mean. These bunches are independence, i.e. a strive to be free and left alone in privacy, and involvement, i.e. a need of the person to communicate with his/her own group of people. Everyone is stuck to this “double bind.” The division can serve as a basis of a new method, first proposed here, for semiotics and social philosophy. It is taken from the communication theory by Deborah Tannen, the author of the concepts of “independence and involvement double bind” and “metamessage.” In her book “That is not what I meant! *How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships*”<sup>7</sup> Tannen studies from the psychological perspective the laws of human communication through signs and symbols of language and other sets of signs: gestures, intonation, pitch, etc. “What is communicated about relationships—attitudes toward each other, the occasion, and what we are saying—is the metamessage. And it is metamessages that we react to most strongly,” Tannen argues.<sup>8</sup> I assert it is right and true.

<sup>5</sup> Nesterov, A.J. 2012. “Семиотика в контексте аналитической философии” [Semiotics in Analytical Philosophy Context]. In: *Analytical Philosophy: Problems and Perspectives in Russia*. Spb. Univ., 173.

<sup>6</sup> Posner, R., K. Robering, T.A. Sebeok, 1996. *Semiotik/Semiotics*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, p. 267.

<sup>7</sup> Tannen, Deborah. 1987. *That's not what I meant! How Conversational Style Makes or Breaks Relationships*. New York: Ballantine books edition.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

On the personal level the “double bind” of independence and involvement as the core controversy in our social relationships can cause problems and troubles and make conversation imperfect, or ruin it at all. Tannen’s book is full of convincing examples. Showing involvement or not imposing, in different cases, for people of different traditions, may serve well and may do harm—she says. A question can be a request for information or covering for criticizing and giving orders. Expressing too much emotion is an evidence of hostility or hysteria. You can discourage trying to give support and you can put off disguising interest. You can be generous by pronouncing the right formulae or by keeping silence. You can be rude by paying attention or by not paying it. In general, we can say that the Golden Rule (stated by Confucius, present in almost every ethical tradition) “One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself” is not absolute. “Maxwell wants to be left alone, and Samantha wants attention. So she gives him attention, and he leaves her alone.”<sup>9</sup> Conflict is actually irrevocable. Any conversational device can serve to convey the metamessage of independence or involvement—Tannen underlines—and it can also violate either.<sup>10</sup>

I may add that things worsen when not persons but cultures and countries are considered. On this most relevant social level the controversy under study often transforms into grave conflicts. We do not talk about economical colonization, political urging or financial pressure but about semiotic systems functioning in society.

### **INVESTIGATION. ON UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN CULTURES**

Peter Kemp pointed out the problems of intercultural co-existence, and of financial globalization as main problems facing philosophy today. He emphasized:

“No peaceful solutions to global problems can be carried out if we do not learn [...] to use language as a peace instrument and not as weapon. We live with the problems in a technological conjuncture, but we cannot master this conjuncture if we cannot master our language.”<sup>11</sup>

The 20th century, as almost all earlier history, opened and closed under the drums of battles. Economic, political and cultural problems force us to claim that the total and permanent crisis takes place. The Kingdom of Goodness turned into a mystic mirage and flew away behind the horizon. Political and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 16–43.

<sup>11</sup> Kemp, P. 2008. “Rethinking Philosophy as Power of the Word.” Opening Speech presented at the Opening Ceremony of the XXII World Congress of Philosophy, Seoul, South Korea, July 30.



ethical ideals broke down, different slogans arise and pass away, and generations were brought up having no patriotic, and no humanistic ideas able to consolidate particular nations or much less all the world. Can anti-terrorism serve as a consolidating global idea, as it is sometimes maintained?

Nature-human and human-human dialogue, tolerance, peace, understanding and respect, harmony, globalization, communication, cross-cultural relationships had been the main topics of discussion on the XXII World Congress. Myung-Hyun Lee was speaking about the great challenge of our mutual surviving on the planet Earth:

“We are failing to have a wholesome communication not only with Nature, but also with other humans due to the high barrier of cultural differences. As a result, we are facing the crisis that threatens the sustenance of civilization on the global level [...] We should grope for the new grammar of integrated thinking and open mind that will lead us into harmony with Nature and other humans enclosed by cultural barriers.”<sup>12</sup>

So communication is our aim.

Years have passed since. Does the mergence of cultures and civilizations (which is actually taking place) lead us to globalization or to globalism? Does the West strive to understand the East? Does the East enjoy Western views? Both the anti-Eastern and anti-Western sentiments are still strong. Peter Kemp said:

“As members of this humanity, as citizens of the world, we must recognize that humiliation of others might be the most brutal violence we can practice without directly killing. Economic exploitation [...] is a big problem, *but not the greatest problem* [...] that consists in the lack of *mutual recognition* between peoples from different cultures, different languages, different histories, different races, different religions. It would cost us Europeans and Americans nothing in money or capital to give this recognition. Nevertheless it seems to be much more difficult for us to practice than any renounce of material goods. It demands a humility we do not possess.”<sup>13</sup>

The West feels rather skeptical about it. The East feels West is rather skeptical about it. The best of the West strive to gain a consensus, and universal dialogue is still a great problem.

Tannen claims, expressing the opinion widespread among intellectuals, that “the fate of the Earth depends on cross-cultural communication.”<sup>14</sup> At least the fate of the universal dialogue depends on it. But again, there is dialectics of

<sup>12</sup> Lee, Myung-Hyun. 2008. Opening Message presented at the Opening Ceremony of the XXII World Congress of Philosophy, Seoul, South Korea, July 30.

<sup>13</sup> Kemp, P. 2008. “Rethinking Philosophy as Power of the Word,” op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> Tannen, D. 1987. *That's not what I meant ...*, op. cit., 30.

universal and unique, and, using the same signs to transfer relevant information, messages are enveloped in different meta-messages. We have to bear vulgar straightforwardness while our communicator is striving to be short, clear, open, and friendly. We have to impatiently wait for necessary information while our interlocutor is showing politeness first inquiring about our health, then our parents' health, and so forth, to sound courteous and amiable, not bluntly rude. What seems courtesy to one side seems exaggeration to the other. What seems to be openness turns impertinence.

“Cultural differences in habitual use of intonation and other means of expressiveness [...] account in part for cross-cultural stereotyping. [...] Laughter is the customary and expected Japanese way of masking emotions. [...] an American Indian is rigid and silent.”<sup>15</sup>

Cross-cultural recognition, in my view, depends deeply on the communicative challenge. These questions are of high relevance for us, both semantically and practically. Tolerance somehow turned to be a synonym of quiet epical goodwill or stoical “low-tempered” and indifferent attitude towards “the Other.” Practically, however, it is something else: one has to endure lifelong infinite closeness of “the Stranger”. There are different types of tolerance: the indulgence of a senior to a child or the condescension of a teacher towards a pupil, the indifference of despair, the diplomatic pace, the patience of an artist waiting for the right light-angle or self-control of a military officer at war, the persistence of a scholar repeating an experiment, the conscious enduring of “the Different” or cherishing hidden insult, heroic “non-resistance to evil by evil”, or the endless tolerance of essentially different persons, groups or nations united by common fate, place, time, action, mission of goodwill and prudence. It is not only a question of knowledge and intellect of scholars since one can know truth and still ignore it, as Socrates already argued.

Aristotle in his *Ethics* stressed out that human happiness is the activity of soul in order to realize and reify our virtues. He divided all virtues into two groups: ethical virtues and “dia-noethical” (intellectual) virtues which represent regular and lawful activity of mind in contemplation (theoretical mind), whereas the aim of this latter activity is likewise double-folded: 1) observing truth; 2) establishing norms of behavior. So, *dianoia* (understood also as the dialogue with oneself) which happens to be the theoretical branch of virtue—together with manifested ethics, or etiquette (Aristotle marked it with the symbol of “golden middle”)—branches itself, divides itself into theory and practice; the former includes the virtue of ethics, and the latter is exclusively ethical (normative, proper) behavior which we can attest as moral. The inner feeling of balance, *metriopatia*, is supplied by a conscientious belief, or, the more so, a self-conviction on the necessity of moral regulative code, controlling people's social

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 40.

behavior. Pure instrumental reason isolated from moral values does not help human beings, drops its service and turns against them. No one will ever call, even on the intuitive level, a low-moral society reasonable and civilized. The intellectual power of it, in a wider sense, is characterized not as much by the quantity of Nobel prize winners, scholars, high school professors, circulation of scientific press, number of theatres, libraries and museums, concert halls, though it is very important, but mostly by the level and state of moral—of persons, groups, whole social systems. So, one system of similar moral values—one humanity, many parts of the world—many nations. The similarity is based on most valid consensus in the estimation of meaning and the purpose of human activities, mainly, preserving life by common labor. Every universal idea consolidating nations is very important, being a real power. It does not mean that we have to annihilate every variety, level all unique cultures and traditions rejecting the richness of multiplicity, exterminate “vernacular” languages for the sake of “vehicular” for best control or out of primeval fear towards the Other. One idea—one nation, many peoples—many cultures and traditions form together a unity. Paraphrasing the wise Chinese proverb: let hundred flowers blossom, we can say: let hundred (philosophical) schools flourish [...]

The beginning of universal dialogue has to deal with such a semiotic aspect of it as syntactics, or the right combination and succession of rightly chosen functional styles, or sequence. What language units to choose and how to combine them are the questions of syntactics whose rules form logic of consecutive and turn-taking discourse. But what to choose and how to combine righteously not to violate or impose but to display good will and tolerance is the problem of other semiotic means. The search of information and questions of cognition are in the hands of semantics. That the discourse is prerogative of pragmatics is known from Saussure’s time. Beside logic, there is rhetoric, and what logic ignores, or cannot grasp at all, rhetoric makes use of: c.f. the prosecution of *argumentum ad hominem* or *argumentum ad publicum* by the former and welcoming the very means by the latter. How do we turn from cognition to communication, from semantics to pragmatics, from theory of knowledge to social philosophy?

The problem of sense and meaning belongs traditionally to semantics. Semantic analysis is considered to be the most theoretical and abstract one. It may be feasible and useful to consider the idea of conceiving semantics as a kind of epistemology. This could contribute to define and grasp semantics as a very complicated and comprehensive discipline of the highest and sometimes an artificially high theoretical level. Analytical philosophy helped to formulate semantics as an investigation field seeking for propositional functions of different grades. However, the problem of the comprehension of semantics cannot be formally solved in general. Let me only notice that even the works of logical positivism show that syntax necessarily is in a “double bind” with semantics.

Contrary to this, pragmatics is interested in the vast substantial content of human relationships signified by semiotic means. Losing the theoretical highly abstract accuracy characteristic of semantics, pragmatics wins in richness; pragmatics analysis is simply vivid, plainly interesting and realistic because it treats the daily occurrences.

So, semantics is clearly logical, of a high level of abstraction and of theoretical value. Its forming and limiting category is essence. Its quest is cognition. Pragmatics is vivid and “palpable,” rich and interesting, though not so highly abstract; its leading category is content and its quest is communication. Hereby I am going to deal with both of them.

Parts of semiotics group their facts and statements under different umbrellas: the category of form for syntactics, the category of essence for semantics, and the category of content for pragmatics. (For the aims of analysis we always choose one category as the attractor for knowledge, and this makes a discipline).

The numerous theories of meaning can be divided on different grounds, but they mainly differ in viewing meaning as some-thing, or as an evaporating nothing but a relation (which is binding at least two some-things). In my theory of semiotics, meaning is regarded to be an abstraction, a certain qualification of ideal, i.e. non-material. Meaning is not given in sensations. The latter only tell us about the perceptible signifier, or sign vehicle, transporting and manifesting meaning. More often than not the signifier is a thing or phenomena of objective material world, but for the cases of memory, when we reproduce it in our notions or conceptions. The signified thing (referent<sup>16</sup>, denotat<sup>17</sup>, significat, nominant, presentant, interprenant, etc.) can be of any origin irrespective of objective reality. De Saussure stated that the linguistic sign binds the sound (or its memory) and the concept, not the thing and its name. Hence the obvious neglecting of the objective referent comes, and covered or even unconscious drawing it back in; Saussure implies it as the thing according to which the sign is arbitrary, or non-motivated.

In the Western tradition semantic research does not consider the word—object relationship. By the object I mean here a real object, a palpable object, and not any construct of consciousness. Western semantics concerns always relations between words and ideas, or between signs and meanings.

Dealing with the problem of meaning, specialists in semantics often fall into two parts: materialists and idealists, functionalists and substantialists, relativ-

<sup>16</sup> Fr. *Ferein* (Gr.-Lat). **Refer**: to reproduce, represent; to assign; to impute; to attribute; to bring into relation. **Reference**—a submitting for information or decision. See: 1965. *Chamber's 20th Century Dictionary*. Glasgow-Edinburgh, 926.

<sup>17</sup> Fr. *notitia* (Lat.); the notion in English is akin to German *Vorstellung* (presentation), but is irrevocably semiotic.

ists and metaphysicians. The theories of meaning are also divided into two groups: *de jure* and *de facti*. This way seems easy to follow. But there is no place for consensus in dialogue between these trends. The manner and the aim of dialogue can be triple: dispute, when you produce your statements and argumentation trying to be fully understood with no hope to convince; discussion, when you know you will have to sacrifice something for consensus, but a consensus is your aim; and polemics, when you are ready to give your life to win, and your foe-opponent to die. But there are other ways, as we shall try to show, and there are other means to achieve a compromise, without perishing. For that task traditional logic is of great help. To see how it works I offer some definitions of the fundamental semantic categories, i.e., sign (symbol as its variant), and meaning, according to Boetius' classic pattern based on Aristotle's logic.

### Sign

**Genus:** presentant (thing presenting something else than it is, i.e. mental image)

**Species:** re-presentant (=sign)

**Propria:** material fixer exteriorizing (ideal) meaning

**Definitia:** sign represents only through the help of mental image, always bearing sense

**Accidencia:** sign is 1) a terminator (scissors away all qualities but essence); 2) generalizer (transfers no qualities but universal); 3) simplifier (cuts away some qualities leaving alone some others).

### Symbol

**Genus:** re-presentant

Species: symbol

**Propria:** conventional, artificial, picturesque thing bearing (any kind of) resemblance to its referent

**Definitia:** syncretism, utmost totality of content

**Accidencia:** symbol 1) manifests idea or event; 2) condenses knowledge; 3) in abstract semiotics (i.e., algebra) loses material "body" (thus we speak of "symbolic" mental forms).

### Meaning

**Genus:** mental image<sup>18</sup>

**Species:** presentant

**Propria:** ideal by nature; sign-embodied; sense-bearing; triple in structure (a system of cognitive, modal, and crypto- components)

**Definitia:** zig-zag intention, as if of "AC-direction of fit;" this direction changes depending on the social role of human agent in semiotic situation

<sup>18</sup> There are mental images not yet (or not already) serving as meanings of signs; theirs is "DC-direction of fit", or intention directed straight to the object of reflection.

(time-taking communicant, generator, translator, recipient, etc.). Meaning presents its object of reflection only through its sign.

**Accidencia:** ensemble of “fifth” adjusted like in I.S. Bach’s “Quint circle.”

To make it clear: instead of ordinary dichotomies, we can construct a more emblematic and rigid composition of the main theories of meaning analogous to a “well-tempered Clavier.” For that we have to adjust them following a certain order, which, being completed, makes a circle of 12 “tones,” or periods, allowing to play in 24 keys of piano key-board. The logic of adjustment is based on passing from the substantial to non-substantial theories of meaning, and back again, in a Mobius band manner. This modulation brings about the following “abstraction of approximation.”

1) Meaning as object.<sup>19</sup> 2) Meaning as mental image, mostly notion or concept. 3) Meaning as quality of the object. 4) Meaning as attribute of sign (mostly by linguists). 5) Meaning as an instrument of singling out the referent. 6) Meaning as referents’ function. 7) Meaning as usage. 8) Meaning as game. 9) Meaning as operation. 10) Meaning as information. 11) Meaning as relation. 12) Meaning as intention.

Then it comes again to the beginning point of the circuit. The coincidence of process and result in cognition plays an agglutinating role in drawing this circle. As we can judge, this way brought us from semantics to pragmatics, and back again.

To practically shift from one to another, we may use some other ways; c.f. certain conversational devices (expressing reaction, asking questions, complaining, and apologizing).<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the question of meaning remains open within pure semantics, because, as Nesterov stresses it, “indices, icons, and symbols demand principally different pragmatic skills.”<sup>21</sup> It is not syntactics or semantics that matters for the said “double bind” of communication. It is pragmatics.

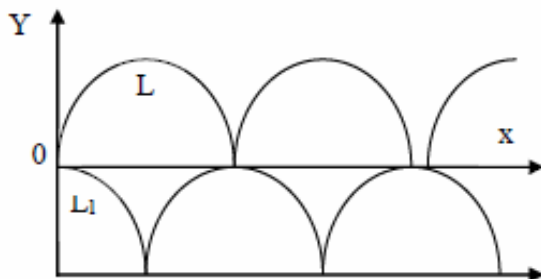
After defining the fundamental semantical categories I return to in my opinion the most challenged question of semiotics: How do we turn from cognition to communication, from semantics to pragmatics? I propose here the following answer. There is a necessary and sufficient switch-code turning from pure cognition to communication. Pure cognition and communication can go apart, and they can coincide as well. In mathematical terms, we can view the cognitive situation as a cycloid, and a communicative situation as its evolute. The evolute  $[L_1]$  of the cycloid  $[L]$  is a cycloid, congruent with the original one but shifted for the half length of the base and dropped under it at a distance equal to the height.

<sup>19</sup> Most of logicians and analytical philosophers hold this.

<sup>20</sup> Tannen, D. 1987. *That’s not what I meant*, op. cit., 43.

<sup>21</sup> Nesterov, A.J. 2012. “Семиотика в контексте аналитической философии” [Semiotics in the Context of Analytical Philosophy], op. cit., 173.

Here I make use of the graphics presented first in Russian in 1993 (*Philosophical Questions of Semiotics*) and in English in 2013, during the LUMEN International Scientific Conference in Iasi, Romania “Current Paradigms in Social Sciences”.



Conversation begins as a regular “small talk”. Communicational maximum is the beginning of cognition, whereas cognitive maximum, i.e. a discovery, is silent. After the phase of discovering we can return to dialogue.

The combination of four main conversational devices (expressing reaction, asking questions, complaining, and apologizing) provides for the needed mechanism of turning from sign-to-sign relations (syntactics) and/or sign-to-meaning relations (semantics) to the truly social world of pragmatics, where globalization and multiculturalism belong.

#### APPENDIX 1. ON SEMIOTICS IN RUSSIA

In Russia semiotics did not start in the 19th century, as in Europe did, with Saussure and Peirce. Russian scholars begun semiotic research in the middle of the 20th century, and formed at least 5 schools: the Moscow School (in close connection to logic and linguistics), the Leningrad School (dealing mainly with semiotics of art and literature), the Tartu School (it was most multilateral, mainly linguistic-cultural), the Sverdlovsk School (treating on epistemology and science language), and the Kazan School (within the framework of theory of knowledge and philosophy of language). Semiotic studies were also popular in Yerevan (Armenia).

The first books on semiotics were written by philosophers (L.O. Reznikov, Leningrad, 1964; L.V. Abramyan, Yerevan, 1965), and next by linguists (A.G. Volkov, Moscow, 1966) L.V. Uvarov (Minsk, 1967) and I.S. Narsky (Moscow, 1968). The most prominent authority in Russian semiotics was Y.S. Stepanov, a Moscow academician. His first book on semiotics was published Moscow, 1971. An *Anthology on Semiotics* was edited in 1983 (2nd ed. in 2001). The Tartu School also proved to be very original and prolific, at least beginning from 1964, when its famous journal *Sign Systems Opera* was established, up to

the end of the 20th century when J.M. Lotman, a founder of the Tartu School and a merited specialist in the classical Russian literature, deceased.

The first Russian textbooks of semiotics were written by N.I. Mechlovskaya (her first works were in sociolinguistics), S.T. Mahlina (semiotics of the daily occurrence), A.B. Solomonik, Belorussia (semiotics as the ABC of communication).

Becoming a philosophical academic discipline semiotics in Russia went its own way because Russian scholars being all Marxists for more than a century were bound with a promise to never incline to idealism and besides to never support the known Theory of Symbols (by the way, Helmholtz, the author of this theory, used the term *Zeichen*, i.e., “sign,” not “symbol”). The story runs as follows.

In his *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, chapter IV, § 6, Lenin pointed out the specific kind of idealism (he did not call it “semiotic,” but this was it): Helmholtz’s theory of symbols based on the Theory of Specific Energies of Feelings by I. Müller. It was argued that if human sensations did not really reflect the things of the outer world<sup>22</sup> then our sensations could not be images. What are they? The answer was: they are symbols. It is very well known that the Marxist-Leninist epistemology was grounded in the theory of reflection (equivalently, mirroring, copying): we can investigate and know the object because our sensations, first and basic instruments of any knowledge, do really reflect (mirror) the things of the outer world thus being images.

So all Soviet scholars were aimed at criticizing Helmholtz’ theory since Lenin had underlined that though you could not really have anything against (abstract) symbols in general, nevertheless it can be said about any concrete sets of symbols that they serve as a path to agnosticism and idealism. It is meant that signs and symbols can be tokens and marks of something real, and they can well be tokens and marks of nothing real, thus mystifying knowledge and leading to agnosticism, idealism and religion which are plants of the same root. Art and religion use and invent symbols, but not science or materialistic philosophy. (Being religious was not considered a sin. But being a religious philosopher meant being idealist thus never capable to follow the right way to communism). With this heritage Russian philosophers and linguists came to study and develop semiotics only roughly 50 years ago.

We could not follow either Saussure or Peirce, fathers of semiotics. We were well acquainted with Charles Morris works, but we would never take up behaviorism. So the starting model of semiotics in Russia consisted of the following theses:

1. Cognition is reflection.
2. Signification is not. Signs manifest thoughts which reflect things.

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<sup>22</sup> They do not, since the ear, for example, can only hear: it hears sound irrespective of the stimuli quality, whether it be a mechanical, chemical or electric wave stimulus.



3. Cognition begins from sensations which are basic images. Cognition is true in general. The truth-maker is the outer world. The truth-bearer is the image—sensual or abstract.

4. Signification is not estimated from the point of truth or falsehood. It is neither.

5. So, signs signify (or signify, or designate, or denote, etc.) what the images reflect; they manifest feelings and ideas which otherwise would have stayed unknown, even to the owner of these feelings and ideas.

“Frege’s triangle” was interpreted by the first Russian semioticians in the following way: it is a unity of sign-vehicle (or “name”) at the top—object in the left bottom-corner, and meaning in the right. This is a symbol of material and ideal worlds meeting in the linguistic sign. The objective and subjective, the sensitive and logical, the unique and universal unite in sign.

I can add that there is a great tradition behind us dealing with the same triangle which is the core model of semiotics since 3000 years. I mean the *Memphis Philosophical Treatise*, an ancient Egyptian text concerning the heroic deed of Ptah, the God of Memphis. The *Treatise* says that the Thought was born in the heart of Ptah which then turned into the creative Word in his mouth which sacred Word in turn incarnated into the World. So the main semiotic idea was born thousands of years before semiology of de Saussure, Frege, Peirce, or even of Aristotle. This triad is the embodiment of an outlook which we hitherto remain heirs.

It is possible to underline the profit of studying semiotics in Russia. Its rigid materialism making us always stick to the statement that signs do not reflect, but through mental images that do; signs are nominating not meanings, but objects themselves. This can be seen as a necessary ontology for semiotics, binding all other parts of it into a crystal unity of a methodological prism.

Concluding I would like to say that methodology in general is analysis, not synthesis, so it does not extend our knowledge; rather it disciplines and trains intellect and imposes an order on empirical facts and theoretical statements. To accumulate knowledge, semiotics has to borrow from all existing sciences. Only all four aspects of semiotics taken together can serve its methodological task. Semiotics is an unaccomplished project.

## APPENDIX 2. GLOBALISTICS IN RUSSIAN RESEARCH

Russian scholars joined the contemporary trend in philosophy by publishing many books on globalistics. Among them the anthology *Globalists and Globalization Studies* edited by L.E. Grinin, I.V. Ilyin, A.V. Korotayev<sup>23</sup> is worth men-

<sup>23</sup> 2012. *Глобалистика и глобализационные исследования* [Globalistics and Globalization Studies]. Ed. Grinin, Leonid, Ilya Ilyin, Andrey Korotayev. Moscow–Volgograd: Moscow University Press “Uchitel,” 400 pages.

tioning. Today globalization can be treated as one of the most important planetary processes inflicting and often decisively forming economics and finance, science and technologies, morals and aesthetic priorities, politics and ideologies, art and literature and even philosophy itself. It is a multi-faceted phenomenon, and in every country it has its own image. One can get a truly objective picture of the rapidly changing and integrating world only through the synthesis of all those particular visions. The abovementioned anthology presents different images of globalization formulated by scholars from different countries (Ervin Laszlo, Roland Robertson, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Randall Collins, Christopher Chase-Dunn, William Thompson, and others). One can also get acquainted with certain rather peculiar visions of globalization given by Russian scholars. The anthology presents the wide range of diagnoses of contemporary changes in the world as well as views on the past and the future of some important global processes.<sup>24</sup>

One more book published lately in Russia is worth mentioning: *Globalistics. Personalia, Organizations* edited by I.V. Ilyin, I.I. Mazur, A.N. Chumakov.<sup>25</sup> It claims to play the role of a “Russian variant of unique vade-mecum, or guide, including information about most prominent scholars, well-known politicians and public figures, who importantly contributed to the development of globalistics or participated in form the global world.”

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<sup>24</sup> It consists of the following four parts: 1. *Historical Dimension*; 2. *Globalistics, Global Studies and Models*; 3. *Trends, Risks, and Problems*; 4. *Perspectives and the New World Order*.

<sup>25</sup> 2002. *Глобалистика. Персоналии, организации, труды* [Globalistics. Personalia, Organizations]. Ed. Ilyin I.V., I.I. Mazur I.I., A.N. Chumakov. Moscow: Alpha-M, 430 pages.



*Marta Sghirinzetti*

## **DOES INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE NEED RELATIVISM? MORAL RATIONALITY AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCE**

### ***ABSTRACT***

Is a rational approach always able to resolve intercultural conflicts about values and morals? The leading questions of this paper deal with the relationship between cultural difference and moral reasoning, the possibility to argue about cultural differences and the possibility of rational grounds for intercultural dialogue. The underlying idea is that a true intercultural attitude needs a serious theoretical and methodological reflection in order to be aware of the limits of understanding and the pitfalls of universalism. In the first part of the paper I will give a general account of cultural difference and why does it matter from a moral point of view. In the second part I will deal with the issue of rationality, arguing for a pluralistic account of reason. Then I will focus on its relation with cultural differences, outlining some features of moral reasoning as intercultural dialogue.

**Keywords:** identity; culture; relativism; rationality; intercultural dialogue.

*(...) we shouldn't give up on reason too early. We don't need to be so intimidated by distance and incomprehensibility that we take them as sufficient grounds to adopt relativism. There are resources in argument. These have to be tried in each case, because nothing assures us either that relativism is false. We have to try and see.<sup>1</sup>*

What role can reason play when sharp and morally relevant cultural differences are at stake? The answer provided by Charles Taylor in the concluding remarks of his article *Explanation and Practical Reason*, after having consid-

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, C. 1995. "Explanation and Practical Reason." In: *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 55.

ered the cluster of theoretical issues coming from the attempt to use practical reasoning in cases where deep differences between culturally grounded moral perspectives seem to lead to incommensurability, is reported in the quotation above. In Taylor's view, even in presence of the greatest differences we are not allowed to "give up on reason too early," we are at least morally compelled to try and see, to listen and argue and look for shared assumptions until we get a (provisional and tentative) common perspective on the issue. Sticking to his interpretation of moral reasoning, we should always be able to rearticulate our values in a way that make them understandable even to those who do not share them; this will allow a rational argument and, in case of incompatible views, to set the more rational one.<sup>2</sup>

Is it true? Can we conclude that a rational approach is always able to resolve intercultural conflicts about values and morals? The leading question of this paper deals with the relationship between cultural difference and moral reasoning, the possibility to argue about cultural differences and the possibility of rational grounds for intercultural dialogue. The underlying idea is that a true intercultural attitude needs a serious theoretical and methodological reflection in order to be aware of the limits of understanding and the pitfalls of universalism.

Cultural difference does not necessarily mean "conflict," even if sometimes it does; so-called cultural conflicts are too often related to economical and political power, and it would be very difficult to detach the truly cultural level and treat it separately. I attempt here to consider cultural difference and intercultural relations in a very broad and general sense, in order to draw some remarks about the way in which we can deal with them and avoid—or handle more properly—conflicts on the practical, everyday level. My background assumption is that such differences lead to conflict especially if we take for granted some premises about culture and rationality that I will put into question. In the first part of the paper I will give a general account of cultural difference and why does it matter from a moral point of view; in the second part I will deal with the issue of rationality, arguing for a pluralistic account of reason. Then I will focus on its relation with cultural differences, sketching out a possible model for moral reasoning as intercultural dialogue.

## I

Herodotus' remarks about the funeral customs he met in Central Asia are perhaps the first—likely one of the best known—instances of taking into account the problem of culturally based moral differences, at least in the Western tradition. He was impressed by the fact that, whereas Greeks considered burning the best way of honor their dead relatives, people in Central Asia preferred eating them. He realized that there were no reason to consider wrong, irrational or

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<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, 41 ff.

impious each other: they simply acted differently on the basis of different cultural and religious assumptions. A sound different attitude was shown by Cortés when he saw the way Aztecs worshiped their gods: he simply concluded that they did not believe in God but in Satan, and that was, among others, a good reason to exterminate them. The account of Azande's witchcraft and magic provided by Edward Evans-Pritchard shows us a very different way to conceive the whole reality and to understand cause-and-effect relationships: trying to describe and to make sense of those people's practices he first interprets them as incompatible, incommensurable to our scientific view of the world, but ends up considering them irrational or unreasonable as they do not fit a clear and modern view of things. In a similar way, Western secularized people often think of religious conducts as non fully rational behavior; scientific arguments, and very often political ones as well, just consider pointless debating with enchanted people (but also *vice versa*). I am not trying to defend religious or secularist, magic or nonscientific thinking, but I am claiming that whenever we label something or someone as irrational or superstitious we should wonder by what (higher? Objective?) criteria we judge.<sup>3</sup>

What those examples are meant to show is that radical difference exists (not only in ethnography) and it is not always far away from our reality. Further instances of this kind of encounters-clashes of cultures could be found both in literature and in everyday life. It is a quite common experience to consider absurd or irrational a certain cultural habit and then (sometimes), after directly knowing people that use it, come to change our mind and consider it just another way to behave, a way that we may still consider nonviable, but no longer inconceivable. And it remains valid what Peter Winch said about the Azande society (criticizing Evans-Pritchard): "while there may well be room for the use of such critical expressions as 'superstition' or 'irrationality,' the kind of rationality with which such terms might be used to point a contrast remains to be elucidated."<sup>4</sup>

When we are faced with radical difference, concerning justice, dignity, piety, righteousness—one could more generally say humanity—we experience at least *prima facie* a sort of incompatibility. Incompatibility is a stronger category than mere difference. I chose to use this term because the basic question I want to address concerns the possibility of moral reasoning in the absence of a shared ground in terms of value perspectives. How is moral reasoning and arguing possible between incompatible moral perspectives?

Obviously, not every value incompatibility has cultural origins and not every cultural difference turns out to be value incompatibility. Cultural differences are

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<sup>3</sup> As I am suggesting, strong incompatibility is not to be found only in geographical or ethnic distance, but also in different cultures (such as the religious and the secularist one) within the same broader culture.

<sup>4</sup> Winch, P. 1864. "Understanding a Primitive Society." *American Philosophical Quarterly*. Vol. 1, no. 4 (October), 307–324.

just a case among others in which incompatibility can emerge. Culture is an important dimension of our identity: our language, the meanings and conceptual tools that we use to make sense of reality, have a deep cultural origin. The successive identities that we assume in the course of our existence are also partially made of, or conditioned by, the culture we belong to. Moreover, every cultural perspective is a point of view on reality: all our ideas about the meaning of freedom, dignity, justice, about what is rational and what is not, have a deep cultural origin. Even if, we can enrich and modify those ideas during our lifetime, we can hardly do totally away with this kind of cultural influence. This plainly does not mean that cultural identity is the only relevant feature of human identity: gender, class, professional category, religion, etc. are equally relevant kinds of belonging—whose number is virtually infinite and that can be more or less (or not at all) related to the place of birth. But what is worth noting is that belonging to a tradition, however it is conceived, plays a basic role with regard to the outlook we assume about reality. It can be claimed that the values we espouse and the moral categories that we use cannot be fully understood without taking into account the broader context of meaning that we can generally call “cultural.” Our actions and behaviors, as well as our accounts and evaluation of them, are related to this cultural background that remains mostly unreflected; the encounter with cultural differences offers a chance to call it into question or at least to become aware of it.

Besides those purely theoretical considerations, multicultural contexts are the best starting point to address questions related to cultural differences:<sup>5</sup> the presence of cultural minorities often raises dilemmas (again, not necessarily conflicts) concerning the ways and means in which cultural practices, customs, etc., are to be reproduced within the “guest” majority culture. Such dilemmas can remain limited to the cultural level or touch the political and legal dimension (as debates about the veil, the right to places of cult, etc. in Europe show). In any case, multicultural contexts create contact and interaction among different habits, customs and outlooks—and this usually turns out to be an opportunity and a difficulty at the same time.

Another domain in which intercultural issues typically arise is the more theoretical one of the debate about justice, democracy and human rights. Here we find ideas and categories that, although often considered universal (or universalizable) concepts, have been called into question in the light of their exclusively Western origin or their being not quite fitted in some traditional cultures.<sup>6</sup> But

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<sup>5</sup> I am thinking especially of cultural minorities in a larger community, such as multiethnic neighborhood in an otherwise (or previously) homogeneous urban context (so poliethnic rather than multinational in terms of the distinction introduced by Will Kymlicka in: 1996. *Multicultural Citizenship*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>6</sup> I have dealt with this issue and the related debate in: Sghirinzetti, M. 2012. “Democracy and Intercultural Dialogue.” *Skepsis. A Journal for Philosophy and Interdisciplinary Research*, no. XXII/iii, 301–314.

aside from rhetorical claims around the exportability of political theories and practices, it is worth noting that this debate compels us to cast doubts on our most common moral and political insights, detach them from the plain and taken-for-granted dimension in which we usually leave them, wonder about their alleged universality and their cultural origins.

Whether we are personally involved or just engaging a philosophical reflection (and the two experience are not rarely coincident), it happens that we come up against conceptions sharply different from ours, and are led to acknowledge that our usual attitudes and assumptions are unfit—or not fit enough—to face those kind of issues. The attaining awareness of the deep limits of our rational comprehension represents a necessary step towards avoiding the risk of “trans-cultural misunderstanding” and, by this way, towards an attempt to deepen and sharpen our strategies of understanding, to reflect and cast doubts on our interpretive tools.

In the absence of such a critical assessment, we could only have intercultural dialogue without reasoning, or reasoning in the absence of intercultural attitude: that means to run the risk, on the one hand, of unconditioned openness that can lend itself to helpless relativism, and on the other hand of a kind of universalism unable to mind and engage cultural differences. Good intentions are not a good enough defense against that twofold risk. Methodological carefulness is at least a possible way out the alternative. Such an attitude, that we could call “epistemic modesty,” requires a willingness to comprehension in a broader sense than our usual idea of rational understanding. Clifford Geertz summarized it as follows:

“Comprehending that which is, in some manner of form, alien to us and likely to remain so, without either smoothing it over with vacant murmurs of common humanity, disarming it with to-each-his-own indifferentism, or dismissing it as charming, lovely even, but inconsequent, is a skill we have arduously to learn, and having learnt it, always very imperfectly, to work continuously to keep alive.”<sup>7</sup>

Instances of such methodological carefulness can be found in anthropology as well as in psychology: whereas anthropological reflection has been engaged with cultural differences since its very beginning, psychology had to overcome a certain basic universalism of its grounding ideals in order to “open the door” to culture as one of the fundamental features of human behavior. Starting from the assumption that culture influences the subjects of research as much as the objects, it has been necessary to take into account the scientific approach itself: being aware of the cultural conditioning does not lead to an attempt to neutralize or to get rid of it, but to stress its theoretical significance. An authentic cul-

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<sup>7</sup> Geertz, C. 2000. *Available Light. Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 87.



tural revolution in psychology has been coming along since the 80's when Jerome Bruner, among others, showed the importance of the cultural construction of meaning since the first stages of children cognitive development. This focus on culture makes way for the rise of cultural psychology, a discipline that conceives human psyche as deeply influenced and framed by cultural factors.<sup>8</sup> Given the impossibility of studying “culturally naked human beings,” psychology turns out to be necessarily cultural, and has to take into account the cultural dimension of individual actions and behaviors.<sup>9</sup> Hence the importance of interaction and mutual improvement between psychology and anthropology, in the joint effort to understand minds without detaching them from the individual's concrete common existences, arises.

On this basis, more recently, Françoise Sironi called “theoretical mistreatment” (*maltraitance théorique*) the way in which most clinical psychology deals with pathologies and more generally behaviors related to cultural belonging, and stresses the importance of taking into account the influence of culture on the therapist's approach as well as on people under treatment. Her critical work is especially directed towards the pretended neutrality and objectivity of scientific language and interpretive practices. The denial of the cultural dimension (*deculturation*) has a specific impact on psychological research that runs the risk—both theoretically and practically—of misunderstanding its object. As a therapist working in context of collective violence and abuses, Sironi showed the perils coming from the absence of adequate comprehension of the cultural context by the therapists who risk to produce a particular kind of additional trauma in already traumatized people.<sup>10</sup> Hence the deeply political implications of psychological theory and practices: the way in which cultural difference is conceived (or not conceived; or misconceived) turns out to be a political attitude, strictly related to the particular kind of power that the researcher wields upon his subjects of research (or patients).

Concern about theoretical tools and awareness of their cultural origin are very helpful in philosophical reflection as well. Articulating the strain towards universality balancing with the attention to locality and particularity is perhaps the only way by which the word “universal” does not run the risk to have just an ethnocentric meaning. In the remainder of the paper I aim to attempt to pursue the same kind of ideals in the reflection about cultural difference and moral reasoning. More generally, I think that intercultural attitude in philosophy could

<sup>8</sup> See Bruner, J. 1990. *Acts of Meaning*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. See also: Shweder, R. 1991. *Thinking through Cultures Expeditions in Cultural Psychology*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, especially 73–110.

<sup>9</sup> Bruner, J. 2008. “Culture and Mind: Their Fruitful Incommensurability.” *ETHOS*, vol. 36, Issue 1, 29–45. See also Shweder, R. 1991. *Thinking through Cultures ...*, op. cit., especially 73–110.

<sup>10</sup> Sironi, F. 2007. *Psychopathologie des violences collectives. Essai de Psychologie Géopolitique Clinique*. Paris: Odile Jacob, especially Chapter VII “Pour en finir avec la maltraitance théorique.”

do the same good job that the cultural revolution have been doing in psychology.

## II

Reflecting about the importance of cultural impact on moral reasoning necessarily means also to reflect on the issue of universality-plurality of human reason, and wonder about the limits of a conception of reason which has been worked out within a specific cultural tradition. My argument is not meant to criticize reason as such, or to discredit its effectiveness, but to point out some limits, particularly related to its use in intercultural contexts. A similar claim is stated by Isaiah Berlin in *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, where he provides an inspiring account of how he ended up abandoning a certain idea of reason: he realized that the common idea of (philosophical) reason was deeply related to the ambition of reaching the *Truth*, in an unequivocal, unambiguous, unquestionable way.

“All genuine questions must have one true answer and one only, all the rest being necessarily errors; [...] there must be a dependable path towards the discovery of these truths; [...] the true answers, when found, must necessarily be compatible with one another and form a single whole, for one truth cannot be incompatible with another.”<sup>11</sup>

The basic idea is that, through (a proper use of) reason, we would be able to work out every kind of contradiction, in the natural sciences as much as in the human domain—at least in principle; this is, in Berlin’s words, the solution of the “cosmic jigsaw puzzle.” This conception leads to the conviction that there is only one way to truth, and although it can be hard to reach it (one can miss the correct direction, get lost or be late ...), nevertheless there is just one right direction to follow. It is clear that in such a conception there is no place for cultural difference, i.e. for different conceptions about the right and the good, conflicting visions of freedom, happiness, etc. Berlin describes as a real intellectual shock the discovery that “not all the supreme values pursued by mankind now and in the past were necessarily compatible with one another. It undermined my early assumption [...] that there could be no conflict between true ends, true answers to the central problems of life.”<sup>12</sup> Disillusion about this kind of rationalism does not necessarily bring to relativism, but compels us to find subtler and more complex way to deal with the issue, if we do not want to dismiss the whole question as pointless or superfluous. Moreover, each form of life has different internal values that need to be understood in their own terms—and

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<sup>11</sup> Berlin, I., 1998. “The Pursuit of the Ideal.” In: *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*. Ed. Hardy and Hausheer. London: Pimlico, 1–16, 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

understanding does not amount to evaluating. Thus, it is necessary to find a more proper rational approach to moral difference that does not take for granted the resolvability of every cultural disagreement but does not give up the ideal of mutual comprehension and respect.

“... our values are ours, and theirs are theirs. We are free to criticise the values of other cultures to condemn them, but we cannot pretend not to understand them at all, or to regard them simply as subjective, the products of creatures in different circumstances with different tastes from our own, which do not speak to us at all.”<sup>13</sup>

Until we stay within the human horizon, we have to strive to understand also what we cannot morally accept, what appears to be miles away from our moral conceptions. In terms of rational understanding, this means that we have to broaden our idea of reason and make it more hospitable towards cultural difference: it is not necessary that all the good and true things turn out to be reconcilable. Again, the struggle against universalism does not amount to give up every critical and rational attitude: this would mean a sort of nihilism. But we have to be extremely careful in using our moral categories to judge and label other culture's practices. For this purpose, we need a powerful enough model of moral reasoning which would allow us to “grasp what we cannot embrace”, in Geertz's words. A corollary of this attitude is to consider cultural differences not mere epiphenomena, but factors that we have to take into account in the rational reflection, without reducing them to a private or idiosyncratic dimension. All this suggests that our idea of rationality can mean something different than the domain of unquestionable and mutually exclusive truths; I am trying to defend a pluralistic ideal of reason, capable to include an attempt of reasoning among differences in a non-reductionist way.

A first step in this direction amounts to detach the ideal of rationality from the one of impartiality: the idea of rationality is in fact commonly identified with a normative stance of neutrality, both cognitively (independence from the observer) and morally (independence from the agent's perspective). This ideal of objectivity has its roots in the natural sciences approach, whose idea of effectiveness amounts to dismiss the first-person outlook;<sup>14</sup> it is just a short step to the ideal of unambiguity mentioned above. Taking into account the first-person perspective does not mean to weaken the ideal of rationality, but just to broaden it; I think we should fear objectivist biases as much as relativism, being aware that only the tension between them can bring us to a properly rational approach.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>14</sup> See, among others, “Introduction.” In: Taylor, C. 1985. *Human Agency and Language. Philosophical Papers I*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

The same kind of tension has been pointed out by Habermas through his discussion of contextualism and the unity of reason, that is, the faith in a disembodied and context-independent reason versus the disillusionment towards the possibility of overcoming perspectivism. Habermas' approach allows to move from a purely theoretical dimension to a relational, communicative one: we need a "weak but not defeatistic concept of linguistically embodied reason"<sup>15</sup> whose claims of validity have to be context-dependent but at the same time transcend it. Unity and diversity find a possibility of mediation in the intersubjective and linguistic dimension of the human beings; only the concrete and circumstance-related dialogical situation can make room for a shared strain to universality able to overcome the contradiction between "the logical grammar of a single language that describes the world" and a culturally situated reason that "disintegrate kaleidoscopically into a multiplicity of incommensurable embodiments."<sup>16</sup> Far from being a solution, this kind of constitutive tension is what substantiates every communicative situation as a tentative construction of shared reality.

### III

Stressing the concrete and everyday character of the communicative situation is a suitable starting point to outline the intercultural option as a kind of dialogue that do not renounce to critical assessment and judgment, but try to approach the differences through an attitude of interpretative carefulness—or modesty, as I called it earlier—trying to avoid the pitfalls of universalism. By intercultural dialogue I mean in a very broad sense what happens when people from different cultures meet; there can be a real communicative exchange or just attempts to make sense of one another. The prefix "inter-" defines the relational and mobile character of dialogue; it never occurs in an empty or neutral space, but its space arises through the relation among two or more interlocutors. It is a shared and public space, not always equally hospitable and comfortable to all; always in progress and never fully definite.

The implications of this stance are both cognitively and emotionally relevant: it requires the others to allow for speaking without imposing our frameworks of understanding and putting in place the greatest caution in order not to superimpose them on our idea of what should they say. It follows that the requirement of rationality cannot mean using our argumentative model as a critical proof towards the other's perspective; but, on the contrary, that we need a more inclusive argumentative model to set afresh the limits of what we mark as "rational." What we need is a capacity to openness that allows us to rely also on

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<sup>15</sup> Habermas, J. 1992. "The Unity of Reason in the Diversity of Its Voices." In *Postmetaphysical Thinking. Selected Essays*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 115–148, 142.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 134–5.

what we cannot fully grasp, we need a critical approach and openness to work side by side. This is to say that rationality should become relational, that is, grounded on the experience of the dialogical relation. All this implies that we formulate a revised notion of universalism that is an attempt to attain more and more shared formulations through a process of joint moral reasoning.

The basic difference compared to the previously mentioned kind of universalism is its bottom-up, not top-down inspiration: it does not consist in generalizing asserts from above or exporting values beyond their context of formation, but in exchanging and discussing ideas and perspectives until a partial and provisional agreement is reached. Probably this approach will never lead to a world ethics—which would be just the product of a world culture; its aim is, instead, to construct processes of mutual cooperation and solidarity among the different cultures of humanity. This project would also oppose the integration and assimilation of the minority cultures in an allegedly better and fairer order, in favor of a pluralistic and context-based process.<sup>17</sup>

In the light of these reflections we can retrieve the discussion about relativism: if considered just as a critical attitude, as interpretive carefulness and methodological modesty, it does not lead to nihilism or solipsism but on the contrary to a committed critical stance towards cultures and ethics. Such a stance does not involve further normative assertion except to refrain from improper universalizations based on the generalization of contextually valid values and beliefs. It amounts to a form of awareness of the ethnocentric limits of our style of reasoning; while we cannot attain a general and universal point of view, what we can do is being aware of our interpretive biases, the “basic features of our understanding of human life, those that seem so obvious and fundamental as not to need formulation,” those we cannot help relying on; trying to articulate “the whole context of understanding that we unwittingly carry over unchallenged.”<sup>18</sup> Once we start putting into question this kind of uncontested framework, we do not have to give it up—it would be, if possible, a true form of relativism. We may just become more sensitive to the fact that our criteria are not absolute but as contextual as the other’s. Rather than “relativism” we should therefore call it relativity, that is the awareness of the partiality of every perspective and the impossibility to get a general and “from nowhere” view. Every view can, instead, be broadened and pluralized only through the relation and interaction with other equally partial and contextual perspectives.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This ideal of universalism as solidarity is proposed by R. Fernet-Betancourt, in his 2001. *Transformación Intercultural de la Filosofía*, Bilbao.

<sup>18</sup> Taylor, C. 2011. “Understanding the Other. A Gadamerian View on Conceptual Schemes.” *Dilemmas and Connections*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 24–38, 28.

<sup>19</sup> The distinction between relativism and relativity has been suggested by Raimon Panikkar within his broader account of pluralism and interculturality. See for instance Panikkar, R., “Religion, Philosophy and Culture.” In: *Polylog* (website <http://them.polylog.org/1/fpr-en.htm>).

The kind of approach I have been supporting is, in my view, among the requirements of an authentic and effective intercultural dialogue: the possibility of a communicative relation that, instead of defending and protecting each other's positions, engage a shared practice with the mutual disposition to listen and learn, and the common aim of mutual understanding. The intercultural stance does not amount to an optimistic or irenic view of reality, nor does it deny that, in some circumstances, there is no room for dialogue. It affirms, however, that pursuing this way and cultivating this kind of awareness we can at least prevent, and sporadically also avoid, dangerous cross-cultural misunderstandings.

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