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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*" (*ὸσιότης*) 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.[1]

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

[1] 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,"[2] 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-

[2] Ibid., 6d.

nition 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.[3]

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

[3] 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.[4]

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-

[4] 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°, other conditions in which they might have less than 180°, and still other specific conditions in which they might have more than 180°? 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-

nent 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."[5]

> "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!"[6]

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-

[5] Wittgenstein, L. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations.* Trans. Anscombe, G. E. M. New York: The Macmillan, no. 65.
[6] 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."[7]

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."[8] 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." [9]

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."[10] Kant helped me to understand just what this means by pointing out that there are three interrelated formulations of

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[7] Ibid., nos. 66–67.
[8] Ibid., no. 68.
[9] Ibid., no. 69.
[10] 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."[11]

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 send formulation reads: "Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[12] Another formulation reads: "[Act in accordance with] the idea of the will of every rational being as making universal law."[13]

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."[14]

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."[15] 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-

[11] Ibid., 54.
[12] Ibid., 39.
[13] Ibid., 49.
[14] Ibid., 51.
[15] 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."[16] 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 contingences 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-

[16] 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 realties 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.[17]

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

[17] 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.[18]

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."[19] 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.[20] 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

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

[19] 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.

[20] 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."[21] 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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[21] 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—analogous 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.[22] 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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[22] 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*.[23] 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.[24]

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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[23] Marx, Karl. 1967. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. 3 vols. Ed. Engels, F. New York: International Publishers.

[24] 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."[25]

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

[25] 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.[26]

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

[26] 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."[27]

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.[28]

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.[29] 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."[30] It is clear, though, that Weber accepted the caricature of Marx's historical materialism

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[27] See Brien, K. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, op. ct., 227–238.

[28] Ibid., 63–66, 86–88.

[29] Weber, M. 1958. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* Trans. Parsons, T. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

[30] Ibid., 55.

known as "economic determinism"—an interpretation that Marx himself rejected. [31]

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".[32] 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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[31] For a critique of Weber's interpretation of Marx see Brien, K. 2006. *Marx, Reason, and the Art of Freedom*, op. cit., 67 ff.

[32] 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![33] 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."[34] 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'.[35] 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. [36]

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[33] 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.

[34] See Karl M. and F. Engels. 1942. *Selected Correspondence,* Trans. Torr, D. New York: International Publishers, 472.

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

[36] 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.[37]

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-

[37] 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 ascendency 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.[38] 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!

[38] 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.[39] 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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[39] On the theme of a this-worldly spirituality, see papers by Kevin M. Brien listed in the bibliography.

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