

# Pluralism, Economism and the Two Kinds of Wars

By Lu Feng

Human beings cherish both freedom of individuals and the order of society. Pursuing freedom, people approve pluralism of values and beliefs. When they feel the danger of fragmentation of society and realize the importance of social order, they will expect certain universal laws and moral codes. Modern people are swaying between pluralism and universalism. Cherishing freedom, they are afraid of over unification. But the unification of the market economy and science and technology globalizes human lives. Today, all people in the world are living in the village of the Earth. But it does not mean that people live together peacefully. Now the questions arise: how can we make a good balance between freedom and order? What is the root of contemporary wars? If pluralism at a certain level is irrevocable, which level is it? If we must have certain universal norms – what should they be? How can we minimize wars? These are the questions I will try to answer in this paper.

From the point of view of modernity, we can see that the unifying of comprehensive beliefs is a terrible thing. Since the Enlightenment, western people take liberty of thought as one of the basic human rights, and now liberty of thought has become a value accepted by all people in democratic societies. If a state enforces the unifying of belief for individuals, it inevitably violates individuals' liberty of thought. People can share a common language, and also common sense and some ideas, but they can never completely share the same system of thought. Different groups of people usually have different ideas about the world, society, values and selves. To use John Rawls' terminology, different groups of people usually have different "comprehensive doctrines". In this sense, the tragedy of western societies in the Middle Age was the unification of religion enforced by power. The terrible religious wars or other horrible things such as Bruno's death and the trial of Galileo stemmed from the intolerance of different thought. In the age of the Enlightenment, Kant thinks, what the Enlightenment requires most is the freedom of thought, "and indeed the most harmless of all that may be named liberty, to wit, that, to make a *public use* of one's reason in every point."<sup>1</sup> After the Enlightenment, the public culture of democracy grew up gradually in western societies. In Rawls' opinion, "the diversity of reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines found in modern democratic societies is not a mere historical condition that may soon pass away; it is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy."<sup>2</sup>

But this superficial diversity of "comprehensive doctrines" or "reasonable pluralism" has concealed an extremely important fact: in the modern public culture of democracy, there is a

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<sup>1</sup> Simon Eliot and Beverley Stern (ed.) *The Age of Enlightenment*, Vol. 2, (The Open University Press, 1979), 251.

<sup>2</sup> John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 36.

relatively unified comprehensive doctrine, i.e., economism. It isn't religious and transcendental, perhaps, but it is comprehensive. Economism, as the mainstream of western ideologies, even of many Asian countries' ideologies today, can be summarized as follows:

1. Basically all behavior is economic in nature.
2. Well-being depends absolutely on economic factors. Where productivity is high, and the economy is expanding, people will be well off. Where the economy is underdeveloped or stagnant, people will be badly off.
3. Because of this, an indefinitely expanding economy is desirable.
4. This expansion is to come from natural population growth, and more immediately from the development of new technologies. Hence the close connection that economism draws between knowledge and economic policy.<sup>3</sup>

Today, few people will justify that economic expansion is to come from natural population growth, but almost everyone believes that the progress of science and technology will support an indefinite expanding of economy.

Someone might deny that economism is a comprehensive doctrine in Rawls' sense. But it is. It contains the most popular views about values and meaning of human lives. Contrasting to the values of the Middle Ages in the west, it does not take economic activity as the only necessary activity for human lives, but as the ultimate value or meaning for human lives. It presupposes that the ultimate meaning or concern of human beings is to be rich in material wealth and to get the Greatest Happiness. To use John Stuart Mill's words, "...the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments".<sup>4</sup> What Mill expresses is the idea of hedonism, of course, but there is intimate connection between economism and hedonism (or classical utilitarianism which contains hedonism). People who believe in economism think that economical growth is the only resource of human happiness and enjoyments. Ian Davison regards economism as a new religion in modern times. He says, "The structure of economism closely parallels that of Protestant Christianity from which it developed. Hard work and individualism remain as primary virtues, but welfare replaces salvation as the final goal."<sup>5</sup> In contemporary times, economism has led to consumerism – and consumerism proclaims that the ultimate meaning of human beings is the enjoyment found in consumption. Furthermore, with the function of "the logic of capital", consumerism leads to contemporary consumer societies.

Someone might deny that economism is a doctrine with universal influence. But it is. Before the end of the cold war, perhaps it was only generally believed in by people in capitalist countries. After the cold war, almost all people in the world have come to believe in it. There are many religious people, of course, but they are also influenced heavily by economism. If they are not, they won't take money as the most important thing for their lives. So today's religions are the ones within the framework of economism, and many religious people don't take their faith as the ultimate concern, but as the instrument with which to enjoy secular happiness. For example, many people who seem to believe in Buddhism just hope that Buddha will give them health and bless them so that they make good money. Liberals might think that laws and institutions in modern

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<sup>3</sup> Ian Davison, *Values, Ends and Society*, (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1977), 174.

<sup>4</sup> From James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, (McGraw-Hill, 1993), 91-92.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Davison, *Values, Ends, and Society*, (Brisbane, University of Queensland Press), 170.

societies are neutral to different religions or “comprehensive doctrines”, but actually they are ideology-loaded. Modern institutions encourage all efforts to make money, without violating the laws, of course, but they never encourage Henry David Thoreau’s living-way in Walden.

Nowadays many thinkers and scholars are worrying about the increasing fragmentation of society, the disintegration of community, estrangement of the individual and the lack of consensus on a common moral authority. There are factual reasons for their worry. But they neglect the danger from this pursuing of consensus.

It is a horrible thing in those countries in which the state enforces the unification of conviction, because individuals lose their freedom of thought and speech in such a political condition. Confronting today’s situation of human beings, we should realize that **consensus on economism all over the earth is much more horrible**. The distress brought about by dictatorship of thought can only be the loss of people’s freedom of thought. But the consensus belief in economism and global economic activities is leading humankind “peacefully” to catastrophe. As Henry David Thoreau said, just as men waged war against each other, they waged it on the natural world.<sup>6</sup> With the encouragement of modernity, especially that of economism, people have squeezed the Earth for centuries. That’s the war humankind wages on Nature. This war brings human beings into a serious ecological crisis. If we cannot get out of the crisis, we might destroy everything. Unfortunately, many people don’t realize the great danger of the war that people are waging on Nature, though they may oppose any unjust wars among people. Actually, modern war can destroy humankind because of the use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, and the **modern war that people wage on Nature can also destroy humankind because of the polluting technology and the damage to the Earth’s biosphere**. Human kind is confronting the threat of two kinds of wars: wars among states, and wars between human beings and Nature. The root of the two kinds of wars is belief in economism.

It is easy to understand why the root of the war between human beings and Nature is economism. With the institutions of modern societies and the modal of economy, damage to the biosphere is the precondition of the growth of economy.

It might be doubted that economism is also the root of the wars among states. But it is true. James L. Doti, an American economist, proclaims clearly that capitalism is founded on people’s greed, and takes richness and power as its ultimate goals. And he says, to lead a life based on greed does conflict with Christian ideas, but is suitable for the fulfillment of our goals – to make a rich and powerful society, and to benefit all people who live with us.<sup>7</sup> Capitalism is one form of economism. In human history, capitalist culture is the sole culture which encourages everyone to release his/her greed rationally. In all pre-modern societies, the rulers were usually greedy in their personal lives, but they used religions or ideologies to persuade all others to work hard and to be abstinent. Only capitalism encourages everyone to do their best to maximize their self-interests. In such a culture, the virtue of temperance becomes out-of-date, and people’s desires are always expanding. Those who earned one hundred thousand dollars want to earn one million, those who earned one million want to earn ten million, and so on. Being greedy, the subjectivity or activity of human beings is shown as all sorts of expansion and individuals’ expansion is combined socially.

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<sup>6</sup> Kim Heacox, *Visions of a Wild America*, (Washington, D.C: National Geographic Society, 1996), 25.

<sup>7</sup> James L. Doti and Dwight R. Lee (ed.), *The Market Economy: A Reader*, translated by Lin Jihong, (Nanjing, Jiangsu People’s Press, 2002), 12.

That is manifested necessarily as the expansion of states.

Some economists try to argue that the expansion of capitalism can be kept peaceful because capitalism has weakened religious and ideological fanaticism greatly. Within the framework of capitalism people know an absolute truth from economics, i.e., others' happiness will become yours at last, and the scientific foundation of the truth is that trades are always reciprocal, the growth of economy always brings about more opportunities for people to get jobs, and wars have never brought about any good.<sup>8</sup>

But why do wars happen in the world today? This is because there is another truth; during the period of preparation for a war, military expenditure increases rapidly and military purchasing grows greatly, and that can drive the general needs of a state and stimulate the growth of its economy. John Maynard Keynes was an economist who caused a revolution in the history of western economics. He brilliantly illuminated the relationship between economical growth and war. He says, if the officials from the ministry of finance put a huge sum of money into a box, and bury the box in a useless mine with a lot of rubbish from cities, and then let all the business companies try to find it and get it according to the principle of the free market, then the problem of unemployment will disappear, and the actual income and wealth of society will become much more than before. Therefore the function of digging in the useless mine is the same as that of mining gold in the real world. When the depth of a gold mine is within the extent of human mining, the wealth of the world will increase rapidly. So gold mines are very important for human civilization. Just as politicians take war as the sole business which is worth borrowing huge sums of money to do, so bankers take gold mining as the sole reasonable activity to dig in the earth. Both wars and gold mining are proved to contribute to human progress. In Keynes opinion, to bury a lot of money and then let people try to dig the earth to find the money can also make contribution to human progress, just as wars and gold mining can.<sup>9</sup>

Since wars can stimulate the growth of the economy and economic growth is taken as the ultimate aim of capitalist society, it is easy to understand why there are so many politicians, entrepreneurs and financiers being enthusiastic about wars. The logic of capitalism (or economism) is just as such: to pursue economical growth permanently; when conflicts occur in international trade, firstly will be political strategy; and then when political efforts fail, war will follow. People say that war is the continuing of politics, but it is also the continuing of economy. When the second Persian Gulf War started in 2003, some mass media claimed that the war was making the American and the world's economy worse off. But different states had different ways of economical reckoning and within a state, different classes or groups had different reckoning. The makers of munitions definitely made great money; and American politicians could show that the war would safeguard economical prosperity for America, even for the world.

Therefore economism is also the root of wars among states. Some think that human beings are rational enough to fight wars in a controlled way; i.e., rational enough not to use nuclear and biological weapons. But I am not sure. The potential catastrophe of nuclear wars exists in the world because economism is the mainstream of ideology.

The domination of Christianity or any other religions is not desirable, nor is that of

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<sup>8</sup> George Gilder, *Wealth And Poverty*, translated by Chu Yukun, (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1985), 11.

<sup>9</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, translated by Gao Hongye, (Beijing, The Commercial Press, 1999), 134.

economism. Human kind needs real “reasonable pluralism”.

Reasonable pluralism might be justified from a point of view of epistemology and logic. We can take dogmatic universalism (a special form of universalism) as the antagonism of “reasonable pluralism”. Dogmatic universalism in metaphysics usually presupposes the metaphysical realism that is the main target of Hilary Putnam’s criticism in his *Reason, Truth and History*. Putnam describes metaphysical realism as having the view that “...the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’. Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things.”<sup>10</sup> Putnam holds that the favorite point of view for metaphysical realism is “a God’s eye point of view”.<sup>11</sup> The view that there is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’ is extremely important for dogmatic universalism. The point is that there is exactly one system of truth that is the complete description of the real world. We can use the capital “Truth” to denote this system of truth. Any other discourses or system of thoughts that are different from the Truth are false. Therefore all people who are in a normal mind should believe in the Truth, but only very few prophets can discover the Truth or the Way to find the Truth first. We can call this theme monism of truth. I myself am a realist in some sense, and I don’t think that all themes contained in the metaphysical realism defined by Putnam are false. But I refuse monism of truth without compromise. The mainstream of analytical philosophy also refuses it. Agreeing with John R. Searle, I regard the view as sound that there exists a world independent of human minds.<sup>12</sup> But I don’t think that any scientist, or group of scientists, or school of sciences, or philosopher, or group of philosophers, or school of philosophy, or religious thinkers, or religions, or politicians, can discover the whole of the truth about the world, and give the “exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’”. Human beings are finite, though they aspire to be infinite, and they should be conscious of themselves as finite<sup>13</sup>. Because human beings aspire to be infinite, they dream to establish one system of truth including all the secrets in the universe; the dream which John Watkins calls the Bacon-Descartes’ Ideal.<sup>14</sup> But this dream or ideal is a crazy one. God does not want to let human beings build a Tower of Babel. To use the language of naturalism, Nature does not want human beings to know all her secrets. After the Enlightenment, science is the most influential course of intellectual exploring. But the philosophy of natural sciences from W.V. Quine to Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend proves clearly that there is no absolutely objective criterion for scientists to choose an absolutely true theory among rival theories.<sup>15</sup> Therefore even scientists have no way to construct a unified scientific theory which includes all branches of science and excludes all false

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<sup>10</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Cf. John R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*, Chinese translation by Li Bulou, (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 2001), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. A. W. Moore, *Points of View*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 253-254.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. John Watkins, *Science and Scepticism*, Chinese translation by Qiu Renzong and Fan Ruiping, (Shanghai: Shanghai Translation Publishing House, 1991), 23.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. W.V. Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, in Paul Benacerraf and Hilary Putnam (ed.) *Philosophy of Mathematics*, (Prentice-Hall, 1964), 346-365; T.S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); and Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method*, (London: New Left Books, 1977).

theories. The movement of unifying science launched by logical positivists has failed definitely. In the history of science, there were illusions sometimes that science would end with a complete system of truth.<sup>16</sup> But these illusions never come to reality.

To sum up, the monism of truth is untenable. There exist reality, orders or laws independent of the human mind. Every inquirer might discover some partial truth, but none can discover the whole of truth. So we should always be tolerant to different ideas, beliefs and ideologies. And we should always be conscious that we might be wrong and others might be right.

In pre-democratic times, many powerful rulers tried their best to unify the beliefs of their subjects, but they were never successful, i.e., they were never able to get rid of all heresies by force (political power). In pre-democratic societies, the orthodox religion or ideology oppresses all other comprehensive doctrines, and the rulers oppress all those who don't believe in the orthodox religion or ideology. The rulers could get benefits from the unification of beliefs by force, for they could keep political order stable by this way and unification of beliefs helps to form the powerful mainstream of ideology, religious or not religious.

Every era has its mainstream of ideology, and it may be religious, but may be also secular. In a pre-democratic society, the mainstream of ideology is supported **directly** by the political power or state force. So minorities in society who don't believe in the orthodox religion or ideology have to keep silence. If they are not careful enough they may be punished by the political power. In modern democratic society, it seems that the mainstream of ideology is not clearly defined and is **not** supported **directly** by the political power or state force. As Liberal thinkers claim, the state is neutral to all "comprehensive doctrines". But actually the mainstream of modern ideology, i.e., economism, is well supported by the political and economic institutions, and the institutions are supported by the political power and state force. Therefore **modern mainstream ideology is indirectly supported by political power and state force**. But anyway it is a great political progress from pre-democratic society to democratic society. It is good that everyone's basic human rights can be guaranteed and the minority who don't believe in or who oppose the mainstream ideology can break the silence to express their different ideas.

To diagnose the symptom of modernity, we can find that the illness of modern civilization is twofold: one is the incommensurable differences and quarrels in moral discourses, as A. MacIntyre points out,<sup>17</sup> another is the misleading of "modern religion" – economism. The incommensurable differences and quarrels have close relevance to the diversity of "comprehensive doctrines". Since "reasonable pluralism" is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy, we can't remove all moral differences and quarrels and expect to get consensus on every moral issue. Maybe we can get certain minimal consensus. But the most important thing is how to change the direction of development led by economism. Only when we change the orientation of economism, can we get out of the terrible crises we are facing. The effort of getting minimal consensus on moral issues should be consistent with the effort of the change.

We are in the time of globalization. We need a global ethic or universal ethic to regulate people's action and to live peacefully on the earth (or to do our best to minimize wars). As Hans Kung said in the 1990's, "Today, no one can still have serious doubts that a period of the world

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Sir William Cecil Dampier, *A History of Science and its Relations with Philosophy and Religion*, Chinese translation by Li Hang, Vol.2, (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1995), 285.

<sup>17</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 6.

which has been shaped more than any before it by world politics, world technology, the world economy and world civilization, needs a world ethic. That means a fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes. Without a basic consensus over ethics any society is threatened sooner or later by chaos or a dictatorship. There can be no better global order without a global ethic.”<sup>18</sup> Karl-Otto Apel gives a good argument for the necessity of universal ethics from another perspective. He says, “The main fact of our situation today is that our activities now are not the same as they were a thousand years ago. Today’s effects are always planetary effects for which we have to take responsibility. That can only take place by means of co-responsibility for these different traditions and forms of life.”<sup>19</sup> So, we have “the urgent need for a macroethics which in Apel’s opinion “is the prominent new task of philosophical ethics in our times,”<sup>20</sup> and macroethics in Apel’s sense is just the universal ethics or global ethics.

In Kant’s opinion, the moral imperative is the certain universal. So ethic in a real sense is always universal. The central term in Kant’s ethics may be “Categorical Imperative.” He thinks that categorical “oughts” are possible because we have reason. Categorical “oughts” are binding on rational agents simply because they are rational. How can this be so? Kant says, because categorical oughts are derived from a principle that every rational person must accept. This principle is his famous Categorical Imperative. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, he expresses the Categorical Imperative like this:

Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.<sup>21</sup>

So, it is not a problem for Kant to set up universal ethic. But in the cultural field<sup>22</sup> of modernity, doing so is quite dubious, because relativism about values and ethics is quite influential for a long time, and in the framework of modernity, relativism and pluralism are twins. But I think pluralism is different from relativism. The real obstacle of universal ethics is not pluralism, but relativism. I think we can refute relativism with good arguments, but that isn’t the task of this paper. We can make more and more people accept that we need universal ethics. And this can be the good foundation for us to establish it.

To establish a universal ethic, we have to answer two questions:

1. What approach should we take?
2. What should be the basic content of it?

Let’s answer these questions in order.

It is obvious that the job cannot be done only by individual thinkers like Kant. We cannot just think and write in our studies and construct a system of a moral code and then declare it to all people in the world and ask them to obey it autonomously. We need profound and comprehensive philosophical thinking, but it must have practical validity. How to make a universal ethic have practical validity? The only way is to make most people in the world reach a consensus approval

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<sup>18</sup> Hans Kung and Helmut Schmidt (ed.) *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities*, (London: SCM Press, 1998), 41.

<sup>19</sup> Sander Griffioen, *What Right does Ethics Have? Public Philosophy in a Pluralistic Culture*, (VU University Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, 23.

<sup>21</sup> From James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, (McGraw-Hill, 1993), 119.

<sup>22</sup> “The cultural field” means the social atmosphere fostered by a certain culture. In such atmosphere, people’s actions or choice of actions are deeply influenced by the whole of the culture.

of it. How can we do this? **Through dialogue among all nations in the world!** Though the framework of modern civilization stems mainly from the west, the future of humanity can't be led continuously by western modernity. Today, eastern nations are coming to a revival. They should and can make contributions to human civilization in the future. There are rich resources of thinking in eastern cultures. We can find valuable elements from them to construct a universal ethic for the human future. When we highlight the importance of eastern thinking and culture, we don't mean that the whole of western culture should be abandoned. We only mean that the universal ethic must be based on dialogue among all the nations, and that dialogue between west and east has a special significance.

Among the eastern cultural traditions, the Chinese tradition is a special one and is able to make a special contribution to a universal ethic. Since the 17th century, China has got behind in science and technology, and within the framework of modernity China can hardly make any original contributions to world civilization. But traditional Chinese thoughts are rich resources for postmodern thinking.<sup>23</sup> Liang Shuming, a famous modern Chinese philosopher, says, Chinese philosophy is the premature thought for human civilization which appeared in the ancient orient. It is not suitable for industrial civilization, but suitable for post-industrial civilization.<sup>24</sup> We are at the turning point of the history of mankind. Many ideas expressed by ancient Chinese thinkers are suggestive for us to reflect on the moral dilemma we are confronting. In talking about a universal ethic or global ethic, many authors emphasize that we should take global responsibilities "*for the effects of our collective activities*, especially in view of the ecological crisis", as Apel points out.<sup>25</sup> But many people understand "global responsibility" in terms of anthropocentrism, presupposing that we should be concerned only with the interests and well-being of people in the world and that we should exclude all non-human beings from the moral considering. But in order to get out of the ecological crisis, we must transcend the framework of anthropocentrism. In this respect, traditional Chinese thoughts can be an important resource for us to use. The idea of the "unity of Nature and humans", for instance, is very heuristic for us to construct a non-anthropocentric global ethic. Mencius thinks that a person should try to be a *tien min*; and indeed not only a citizen of society, but also a citizen of the universe. Such a one not only performs his/her duty as a citizen of society, but also performs this duty as a citizen of the universe.<sup>26</sup> According to Confucianism, Tien (Nature) has this good and interests, therefore a *tien min* should not only care for human welfare, but also for Tien's good and interests. A *tien min* has not only responsibilities for humankind, but also for Tien.

We cannot take ancient thoughts as the final truth, of course. Suggested by the idea of "unity of Nature and humanity", we can transform naturalism into transcendental naturalism. And from the point of view of transcendental naturalism, people have no competence to perform responsibilities for Tien (Nature), but do have competence to perform responsibilities for the ecosystem in the earth. To understand the relationship between humankind and Nature with

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<sup>23</sup> When I talk about postmodernity, my approach is quite different from that of Rorty, Derrida and Lyotard. I claim that within the cultural field of modernity, humankind cannot get out the crises they are facing today, but I don't think that we should appeal to relativism.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Liang Shuming, *A Summary of Orient Academic Thoughts*, (Sichuan Classics Press, 1986), 14.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Sander Griffioen, *What Right does Ethics Have? Public Philosophy in a Pluralistic Culture*, (VU University Press, 1990), 39.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Selected Philosophical Writings of Fung Yu-lan*, (Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1991), 202.



transcendental naturalism, we can understand the co-responsibilities of humankind correctly.

There should be certain principles for the dialogue to establish a global ethic. To consider this problem, it's well worth noticing the discourse ethics developed by Apel and Habermas. Habermas says, "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."<sup>27</sup> Apel claims that there are "necessary presuppositions which we must have acknowledged as people who, as members of a communication community, have entered the enterprise of argumentation." He says, "Here we must proceed very cautiously. I must strictly stick to what I can find as presuppositions which cannot themselves be called into question without performing a performative self-contradiction." This is his meta-criterion, and can be denoted as the criterion of performative self-contradiction. He says that he tries to test all those thoughts that come to him about what he always must have acknowledged. Then he suggests the following principles that we must acknowledge and which nobody could call into question without committing a performative self-contradiction when we enter a discourse of argumentation or join a communication community:

1. All members of this community have equal rights. And it is in principle an indefinite community. You cannot exclude someone but have to give reasons for it. And there must be advocates of the rights of others who are absent from the discourse. For example, the members of the next generation cannot come to the discourse to defend their own rights but they must be taken into account. This principle can be summarized as: we all have equal rights as members of an indefinite community of argumentation.
2. We all have equal duties, in one word, co-responsibilities, *Mitverantwortung*. In Apel's opinion, a single person today cannot be made responsible for the effects of industrial activities. We are all equally responsible with respect to the problem of pollution, for instance.<sup>28</sup>

Apel emphasizes that these would be the procedural principles for practical discourses, but not the substantial principles.<sup>29</sup>

It's important for us to consider the rights and interests of those who cannot enter the dialogue or discourse. But we should not only care about "the members of the next generation", but also nonhuman beings such as animals and plants, if we want to get out of the global ecological crisis.

When Apel proclaims that we all have equal duties, he is right in some sense. It is generally true that no single person can be made responsible for the effects of industrial activities. But in specific levels, we cannot admit that every individual has the same responsibility for the effects of industrial activities such as ecological crises. A person like Henry David Thoreau shouldn't be made responsible for them. Thoreau refused to join the mainstream of industrial and commercial society through all his life and always lived consciously on the margin of society. It is the leaders of industrial society, such as entrepreneurs, bankers, politicians and so on, who should have more care for the consequences of industrial activities. Similarly, we can not say that everyone has the same responsibility for the consequences of the second Persian Gulf War. But anyway, everyone has an equal duty to change their living habits fostered by consumer society.

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<sup>27</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, translated by Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 93.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Sander Griffioen, *What Right does Ethics Have? Public Philosophy in a Pluralistic Culture*, (VU University Press, 1990), 16-17.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, 18.

Now let's consider the contents of the universal ethic. Because my concern is mainly philosophical, I cannot deal with the concrete articles of any proposals. I would like to argue for a well-known principle about the content of universal ethic. It might be denoted as the principle of the minimum. We are in fact living in a world with a diversity of cultures. People in different cultures pursue different values and have different ideas about morality. People can never have consensus agreements on every issue about values and morality. But people are people, and they have something in common. And **there is an overlap of values and moral norms of all cultures**. The Golden Rule, for instance, is contained in all cultures, though it has different expressions in different moral traditions.<sup>30</sup> This proves that the overlap of values and moral norms of all cultures is at least not empty. If we can identify the overlap as largely and exactly as possible, it can be the basic content of a universal ethic. We can only identify the overlap by dialogue among all cultural traditions, of course. The overlap is not a fixed object. Every cultural tradition is changing, so the overlap is also changing. We cannot expect to establish a universal ethic once for all. If we can have a good beginning, we have to go on to revise it by perpetual dialogue. And through perpetual dialogue we can make the universal ethic more and more mature.

The principle of the minimum is obviously derived from a democratic principle. We have the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To establish a universal ethic doesn't mean to reject the Declaration of Human rights. "However, a declaration on a global ethic should provide ethical support for the UN Declaration of Human Rights, which is so often ignored, violated and evaded", as Hans Kung points out.<sup>31</sup> Just because we should respect everyone's human rights, we should also respect different ideas when we try to reach consensus. We should make all people realize that everyone is really confronting common problems and crises. Only when our actions involve the common interests of all people and security of the planet, should we take our duties or co-responsibilities, by obeying a universal ethic. As Apel explicates, "what we need today is indeed a universally valid ethics for the whole of mankind; but this does not mean that we need an ethics that would prescribe a uniform style of the *good life* to all individuals or to all the different socio-cultural forms of life. On the contrary, we can accept and even oblige ourselves to protect the *pluralism* of individual forms of life so long as it is guaranteed that a universally valid ethics of equal rights and of equal co-responsibility for the solution of the common problems of mankind is respected in each single form of life."<sup>32</sup> Here we can find that universal ethic and "reasonable pluralism" can coexist in human civilization. And we can live in the balance or necessary tension between the freedom of individuals and the universal orders.

Anyway, a universal ethic can be consistent with the principle of democracy. The advanced countries have fostered the spirit of democracy within their states, but the principle of democracy has not been carried out in their international relationships and affairs. Within the countries such as the U.S. and U.K., the democratic institution is quite mature and human rights are protected by the institution. But in international affairs, they don't obey the principle of democracy, but the principle of nationalism. The Bush administration regards every country which doesn't obey the U.S. as a "rascal country" or as being on the "axis of evil", and lets the U.S. function as the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Hans Kung and Helmut Schmidt (ed.) *A Global Ethic And Global Responsibilities*, (London: SCM Press, 1998), P.68.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

<sup>32</sup> Sander Griffioen, *What Right does Ethics Have? Public Philosophy in a Pluralistic Culture*, (VU University Press, 1990), 33.

international gendarme. It thinks that the world order can be maintained only by the action of the American army of justice. No country which doesn't take liberalism as ideology can make a nuclear weapon. But a country which has a terrible record during the Second World War has been overlooked and even supported by the U.S. just because this country always obeys the will of the U.S.

Within a state only the real criminals can be tamed by force. But the use of force must be strictly in the light of the procedure of democracy and laws. That is the pre-condition of democracy. There is not an international agency of justice, but there is the UN at least. If most nations in the world regard a certain country as a rascal country and judge that it will be very dangerous to the world, they should crack down on or attack it according to international laws and the decision must be made in the democratic procedure of the UN. In 2003, the U.S., U.K. and several other countries attacked Iraq, regardless of the opposition of many countries and without the permission of the UN. Does it accord with the principle of democracy? Within a democratic society, it is obvious that only the law-ruled use of force is reasonable. It is the same with international societies.

Today, all people are living in the earth-village. If the democratic principle and the rule of law is offended in international society, people's faith in democracy will waver. Whether western countries can be beyond the interests of states and observe the democratic principle in international affairs is the key to the fate of democracy in the future. But within the framework of modernity, it is impossible for western countries to observe strictly the democratic principle in international affairs because the basic competition within modernity is that of economy; every country tries its best to be rich and powerful. Therefore every country takes the interests of the state as the most important thing in international affairs. In order to have a democratic international society and the rule of law in the world, we have to transcend modernity. People must cultivate more their argumentative reason and become more reasonable animals. They not only should use argumentative reason to calm down the conflicts within a state, but also should use it to calm down the conflicts in the world. The use of force should be governed by law both within a state and in the world and international laws have to be supported by a universal ethic.

Though a universal ethic is minimal, it can and should be transcendental. When Apel emphasizes that *we always have to proceed in such a way that we do not forget those who are not present*, he has transcended the horizon of economism. Under the guidance of economism, we will do everything according to the laws of the market economy. And the basic presupposition of liberal economics is that people always maximize their self-interests. With such persons in the communication community, those who are not present can never be accounted. Only when people are mature enough to transcend the laws of the market economy, can they care about those who are not present. It might be easier for people to care about their future generations than to care about nonhuman beings. But in fact humankind as a species has to coexist with the whole ecosphere. If we really care about our future generations, we should care about the balance of the ecosystem in the earth. To do that we need to transcend anthropocentrism.

Now I will come to the last point of the paper. The validity of any moral norms is dependent on people's beliefs, religious or philosophical. Only when people have pious beliefs and the moral norms are well supported by people's beliefs, are moral norms valid in practice. In modern society, morality is impotent to regulate people's behavior, just because many people have no religious or

philosophical beliefs. To be exact, they have no ultimate concern, and no consciousness about Ultimate Reality. Ultimate Reality here means infinite being which is the absolute Subject and on which human beings are absolutely dependent. In Christianity, the Ultimate Reality is God. But in the framework of my transcendental naturalism, it is Nature.<sup>33</sup> Since the Enlightenment, westerners have changed their ultimate concern, and have no communication with any Ultimate Reality or don't listen to an Ultimate Reality anymore. They think humankind themselves can be the master of themselves. And they think that humankind can conquer Nature with the weapons provided by science and technology, therefore they can become the master of Nature. And they think humankind can get closer and closer to God's omniscience and omnipotence with the infinite progress of science and technology. But they don't admire God's divinity and perfection any more. So, the ultimate meaning of human life is not salvation but the welfare of economy. Then economism comes into the mainstream of modern society. With the encouragement of economism, many people spend most of their time and energy to find material resources from the earth, manufacture commodities to satisfy all sorts of the people's desires, do research on science and technology which serve the commercial business and military affairs, and so on. The rational institutions of economy and politics assemble the energy of thousands of individuals and make it a terribly powerful unitary force. By the use of this unitary force humankind has created a splendid material civilization which meanwhile leads humankind to double crises: spiritual crisis and ecological crisis.<sup>34</sup>

When humankind change their ultimate concern and cease to listen to Ultimate Reality, they think that moral norms are only the contracts among people and they have nothing to do with nonhuman beings. According to Kant, morality comes from human reason, and humankind themselves make moral laws for the human community. But actually, moral norms must have their ontological base. The approval of people's consensus is the necessary condition for moral norms to have a universal validity of binding, but this approval is not the sufficient condition. It's not that there is no moral code with universal approval in the human community in modern times. At least the moral norms derived from utilitarianism and anthropocentrism are acknowledged by most people in the modern societies. Nevertheless we can never forget that agreement by majority is not the guarantee of truth. Only when people cure their anthropocentric arrogance and begin to listen to Ultimate Reality again, can they make right moral laws. When we are beyond the horizon of anthropocentrism, we can establish the ontological basis for our moral thinking and code. In my framework of transcendental naturalism, listening to Nature is extremely important. And listening to Nature means to obey the natural laws discovered by natural sciences (especially ecology). And moral norms can be supported by natural laws. Moral norms prescribed by ecological ethics, for instance, can be supported by ecological science and environmental science. Thus there is no sharp distinction between fact and value (or "to be" and "ought to be") as Moore and logical positivists

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<sup>33</sup> In my opinion, Nature is an infinite being that can speak in its own language which is not a human language, and human beings are absolutely dependent on Nature. But only when people are modest and humble enough to listen to Nature piously can they understand Nature's speech partially. Because Nature is infinite and she has limitless secrets, human beings can never expect to know her secrets completely. Human beings should always respect Nature, because she is their Mother and she fosters them. Human beings should always revere Nature, because she has supreme power to punish them when they make terrible mistakes and commit terrible evil.

<sup>34</sup> The argument in detail on the point can be seen in Lu Feng, *Human Beings' Home, A Philosophical Reflection on the Contradictions of Modern Culture*, (Hunan University Press, 1996).

proclaim. But natural science is only the emissary between Nature and human being. It might be wrong now and then. It cannot be taken as absolute truth. A scientist who listens to Nature with humility will never declare that natural science is the absolute truth. Such a scientist will always take scientific enterprise as the way to listen to the speech of Nature. By listening to Nature humbly, we can make the relatively correct choice between right and wrong.

Thus it can be seen that it is only the first step to discover the overlap of values and moral norms from all cultures and to make an outline of a universal ethic. To make the universal ethic have practical validity, we have to promote the deep transformation of modern culture. We should appeal to a deep conviction to support a universal ethic. And the deep conviction here means the belief in the existence of an Ultimate Reality. When people have such convictions they will have their transcendental ultimate concerns again. And when people have transcendental ultimate concerns, they won't regard making money and consumption as ultimate meaning for their lives and will know that the validity of the universal ethic not only comes from the consensus agreement of people but also from the Order of Ultimate Reality.

But we don't want to return to the Middle Ages. We don't want a united religion. And "reasonable pluralism" should be encouraged. Different cultures and groups can have different deep convictions, and people can have different understandings about Ultimate Reality. People with different beliefs should be tolerant of each other. And they should ceaselessly communicate with each other to reach the blend of their horizons. Of course we cannot expect such a world in which nobody is a steadfast believer in economism and consumerism. But the truth I have to emphasize here is: only when such people become a minority in the human community and economism and consumerism drops out from the mainstream of human lives in the future, can the universal ethic have practical validity and our future generations live safely on the earth.

I hope that my treatise has proved the conclusion: **there are already unitary dimensions in world civilization, that is in the activities of economy, science and technology; we can never be unified in the level of deep faith, but we can be in the level of an ethic with minimal contents.** Beyond modernity and with a democratic principle supported by a universal ethic, we will have fewer wars, both wars within the human community and those against Nature.

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