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## A Humanistic Look at the Dialectical Approach

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## A HUMANISTIC LOOK AT THE DIALECTICAL APPROACH

### INTRODUCTION

A theoretical model is more than a tool to understand reality; it is also a way of relating to reality. This is especially true of master models such as the evolutionary, cyclical, equilibrium and dialectical models. The theoretical, master models affect our ways of relating to individuals and society.<sup>1</sup> However, all models are incomplete by nature; by definition they are abstractions and as such they leave things out as Edward Hall notes.<sup>2</sup> What a model leaves out is not any less important in relating to or understanding reality. In fact, what a model leaves out is a creative opening for other models to emerge. One does not have to accept or reject a model in its totality; one can choose insightful elements from various models for his thinking, and action. Moreover, a model is not a static phenomenon; it has its history which involves growth, modification, decline and even death.

The words such as dialogue, dialectics, etc., come from the same root. Dialogue is one of the oldest forms of interaction. Socrates used a dialectical approach in his teaching. The Western political-judicial system is based on a dialectical view of life. For example, political parties, like the lawyers representing opposing parties, are expected to present the opposing views to the people so that a more accurate picture may emerge. Though dialectical approach had been part of the Western thinking for some time, it was the German philosopher Georg Hegel who developed the dialectical approach to the status of a grand theory. In the West, with the evolution of modern science, a mathematically rooted mechanistic, rationalistic thinking emerged. The whole universe was thought of as a smoothly running machine

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<sup>1</sup> P. M. George, "Some Master Models Within the Historical Perspectives". *Organon*, Vol. 5, 1968, pp. 73-83.

<sup>2</sup> E. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubledon Anchor, 1976, p. 11.

with its eternal structure and nature. It was this static view of reality which the dialectical model broke. Reality, according to the dialectical model, is in dynamic flux.

In social science, Marx, Simmel, and Scheler, to mention a few, used the dialectical approach to understand society. In psychology, it was Freud who, more than anyone else, broke the rationalistic, mechanistic mentality by portraying an individual's life as dynamic, ambivalent, and conflict-ridden; yet longing for harmony. Our relationship with the significant others such as parents is a mixture of love and hate, according to Freud; love and hate are not mutually exclusive in the sense that the more you love, there is less hatred; but more love can cause more fear, anxiety and hatred.

A dialogue means at least two parties are interacting to each other. When two individuals or cultures meet, the interaction can be classified into three basic types. They are "avoidance," "confrontation," and "dialogue." It is not an accident that these days dialogue has become a very popular idea. In this day and age of nuclear confrontation we have no choice but to develop a dialogue with the "opponents" if we are to survive. This is why dialogue is taking place between the parties who had previously considered themselves as arch enemies.<sup>3</sup> As a sociologist the author intends to point out in this article how a modified dialectical approach can be a useful tool in relating to and in understanding social reality without taking the traditional, classical dialectical approach in its totality. As a humanist, the author is interested to point out that it is our concern and respect for our fellow human beings, more than anything else, which call for a dialogue with others; moreover, according to a humanistic view, one needs to have an ongoing dialogue with others if he/she is to find fulfillment in life. For the details of the author's humanistic understanding of man and society, see the recent article.<sup>4</sup>

The classical dialectical models developed by Marx and Hegel basically involve the following positions:

1. Reality is not static, but in dynamic flux.
2. Every socio-cultural phenomenon has a dual nature in the sense that it contains both the seeds of destruction and of transformation; a thing (a nation, for e.g.) is partly what it aspires to be and partly what it is in actuality. (Hegel emphasized the former and Marx the latter characteristics.)
3. A phenomenon (thesis) is in a conflict-oriented dialogue with its "opponent" (anti-thesis).
4. Dialogue eventually leads to a synthesis of both the thesis and the anti-thesis, a synthesis which, in turn, becomes a new thesis facing its own anti-thesis in time.

<sup>3</sup> The Christian-Marxist Dialogue, P. Oestreicher (ed.), N.Y.: Macmillan 1969; *A Catholic-Humanistic Dialogues*, P. Kurtz, A. Dondeyne (eds.), London: Pemberton Books 1972.

<sup>4</sup> P. M. George, "Community: A Humanistic Vision of Social Life." *Organon*.

5. History is moving towards a predetermined goal of greater synthesis.
6. Dialogue continues until the tension is completely eliminated (Marx) or for ever as part of the nature of reality (Hegel).

#### HOW THE AUTHOR'S APPROACH IS DIFFERENT FROM THE CLASSICAL DIALECTICAL MODELS

Unlike the Hegelian and Marxian dialectical models, the author does not postulate a pre-determined path for history. History is moving neither towards a classless society as Marx predicted nor towards a higher expression of rationality as Hegel did. That does not mean that we cannot or should not create an egalitarian society as Marx suggested or work towards a greater expression of reason as Hegel thought. History is moving neither in a cyclical nor in an evolutionary manner; but could move in either direction; it moves forward or backward depending partly upon what we do in history. When history is limited to a preordained pattern, such a limitation makes human freedom and responsibility irrelevant for the most part. Therefore, history is considered, from a humanistic perspective, as wide open. Future holds the new and the unexpected as Peter Berger notes.<sup>5</sup> However, to consider history as open, is not the same as viewing it as something which we can manipulate according to our own wishes. We need to recognize the forces of history in every age. Moreover, the openness of history does not mean that history operates in a vacuum without any law of its own. What is denied here is only the predetermined path to history, unrelated to what we do in history and the total openness of history. Between the spirit manipulation and the spirit of fatalism lies the spirit of dialectics.

The dialectical model developed by the author does not subscribe *a priori* the causal priority to economic (realism) or to "spiritual" (idealism) factors. The principle of mutual causation is recognized as central to the approach. The relationship between individual and society, economic and noneconomic factors, and between nations or culture is considered mutually influencing. However, this approach does not deny the overwhelming influence one factor may have over others, at a particular time in history in a particular situation. What is denied here is the causal priority designated *a priori* to any one variable or phenomenon. The concept of mutual causation also means that both parties in the dialogue can be both cause and effect at the same time, though in varying degrees. Moreover, the author does not imply that the evolution of a synthesis necessarily negates the thesis and the anti-thesis, though such a possibility is open. Generally, transformation takes place in both the "thesis" and in the "anti-thesis", not between them. In fact, the author does not designate one part as the thesis and the other as the

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<sup>5</sup> P. L. Berger, *Facing up to Modernity: Exercises in Society, Politics and Religion*, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1977, p. 189.

anti-thesis; both parties in a dialogue are thesis and anti-thesis at the same time. It is also possible that one party may undergo creative transformation while the other remains basically the same. For example, it is possible for one nation to become more and more flexible and while the other remaining basically inflexible after a continued dialogue; but such an outcome is a rare occurrence.

#### DIALECTICAL UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN SELF

Traditionally, a human being is conceptualized in monolithic and static terms. The ancient Greek philosophers, for example, thought of a human being as a rational animal, a view which influenced the Western world a great deal. The one-sided rationalistic understanding of human life has had negative consequences in the sense that other human dimensions (i.e. non-rational dimensions) were ignored. A similar tragedy occurred in the case of the Social Darwinists of the 19th century who viewed human beings as competitive, aggressive animals struggling for survival. According to the dialectical view, a human being is a complex, dynamic animal in creative tension. For example, people not only struggle for survival where survival is an issue; but they also struggle to dominate others or to help others in the latter's struggle for survival where the mere survival is an issue. In other words, human struggle is a complex, dynamic phenomenon.

To view human beings as complex means that we can no longer understand human life in any simple, one-dimensional terms. However, the complexity of human life has a dialectical dimension to it. For example, one has not only emotional needs but also intellectual needs; one wants to be independent, but at the same time to be part of a community too. Moreover, there is an inner dialogue between the various components of a self, with an emphasis on harmony (synthesis) between the various dimensions within a self. The dialogue between the various parts of a self is tension-producing, since an individual is often pulled in different directions. Various components of the self want not only to be independent and strong, but also to establish a stable and living unity among themselves. In fact as the various components of the self become well developed, the corresponding need for a synthesis is also greater. It is easy to establish unity where the various components of a self are underdeveloped. Perhaps this was why Rousseau was able to talk about a "noble savage" regarding the pre-historic life of humans.

According to the dialectical view, conflict and tension are part of life, so is harmony. And there is no easy, mechanistic way of getting rid of the tension and conflict in life. A perfectly harmonious life is a myth. Though tension by definition is crying for its own elimination, we cannot eliminate tension or conflict completely without destroying life itself. Nor can we glorify them (because we have a strong need for harmony). Conflict is as

much part of life as harmony is. There is no creativity without tension and no meaning to life (peace of life) without harmony. There is always tension between one's ideals and real life; and it is this tension which pushes one for an even greater realization of his/her ideals in real life. A person without a struggle for something better has already lost the will to live; but unless a person is basically content with what he/she is, that person cannot be content in life. A person is partly what he/she aspires to be and partly what has been already actualized. So neither idealism nor realism has the whole answer. We cannot glorify harmony as the functionalists did or conflict as the Social Darwinists did. In fact the picture of a human being is far more complicated than that. As one tries to close the gap between his/her ideals and reality, not only the ideals and reality change, but the self too undergoes transformation. In other words, a human being is in dynamic creative flux.

It is extremely important to recognize the dialectical nature of self. Unless we recognize the tension between our ideals and real life, we cannot appreciate the tension others are experiencing in their life. The acceptance of our inner tension is the basis of accepting them with all their tensions. If we think of ourselves only in terms of our ideals, we are likely to be arrogant and self-righteous; but if we think of ourselves only in terms of the reality of life, we are likely to be pessimistic and depressed. To give another example, if we think of ourselves only as good, then we are likely to be utopian idealists; on the other hand, if we think of ourselves only as evil, we are likely to be Machiavellian manipulators or cynics. Unless we accept the basic goodness of human beings, we cannot appeal to their basic sense of goodness, justice, rationality, etc.; on the other hand, unless we accept the gap between our ideals and reality, we cannot work for a new social order of justice. Though we are capable of reaching the height of ideals in thought and action, we can also reach the bottom and be wrapped up in hatred, resentment, indifference, etc. In dialectical relationship with others, we accept and appreciate what is good in them, while rejecting what is evil in them. A humanistic understanding of life is our guide in deciding what is good and what is evil. But we cannot do that before we are able to do the same with ourselves. Moreover, a humanistic understanding of life helps us to put the emphasis on accepting others as people while rejecting certain aspects of their life, since humanism is based on a fundamental respect for human beings regardless of the gap between their ideals and reality.

The dialectical nature of the "opposing" dimensions of a self is such that as we emphasize one dimension, it tends to end up as an over-emphasis. The traditional emphasis on reason (intellect) in the Western world was good and healthy. It was this emphasis on reason which destroyed a good deal of superstitions and magic in the West and opened the way for modern science. Unfortunately, the emphasis on human intellect became a glorification of reason and a denial of other human dimensions (needs). In the West the rationalistic emphasis created what Max Weber called a disenchantment of

the world;<sup>6</sup> and the individualistic emphasis caused the destruction of community as Toennies made it clear with his concept of *gesellschaft*.<sup>7</sup> This is not to imply that the dialectical nature of life is applicable only to the Western world. In the non-Western societies where collectivity is emphasized, the individuality of the individuals is ignored. In the Western world where individualism is glorified, people are longing for a community whereas in the non-Western world where collectivism is emphasized, people are longing for individuality due to the dialectical nature of life.

The dialectical understanding of the self means that one is not totally free from his/her environment or totally influenced by it. Alcoholism or violence, for example, involves personal responsibility on the part of the individuals, but it is also a case of being influenced by the environment since these responses tend to thrive in certain environments. To take another example, in the case of prostitution who is exploiting whom? Are the money-hungry women exploiting the sex-hungry men or vice versa? We need to have a unified perspective in which both approaches of individual responsibility and of social influence are kept alive, if we are to develop a comprehensive understanding of life. A human being is both a victim and a responsible creature at the same time. However, this does not mean that the roles of personal responsibility and of the environment have equal weights in the lives of people at all times. The influence of the self or of the environment varies from individual to individual and within the individual from situation to situation. To think of one-self exclusively as a product (victim) of the environment is to develop self-pity and as a producer of the environment is to develop a sense of arrogance and illusion, both of which are self-destructive in nature. In fact self-destruction is the ultimate warning against the one-sidedness of an approach in life. We have no choice but to be influenced by others since we are social animals; but we cannot be totally shaped by others without losing self-respect. We need social structures and norms as members of a society; but if they destroy our spontaneity they destroy us. We need not only freedom but also structures which limit our freedom due to our dialectical nature. The dialectical model brings to our attention the fact that every dimension contains the opposite. For example, our knowledge is not complete (pure). It contains its opposite, doubt. As we sharpen our knowledge, our ability to doubt also increases. Our doubts cannot be eliminated or denied, but must be synthesized with our knowledge as Frye explains.<sup>8</sup> In fact, it is the ever-present component of doubt in our knowledge which keeps us ever open to new knowledge or to the modifications of

<sup>6</sup> M. Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations*, (translated by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons), N.Y.: Free Press, 1947.

<sup>7</sup> F. Toennies, *Community and Society: Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, (translated by Charles P. Loomis), N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1957.

<sup>8</sup> N. Frye, *The Great Code*, Toronto: Academic Press, 1982.

the old. We have to assume that we know in order to live, yet we experience doubts in the midst of our assumptions and axioms calling for a modification of our knowledge. Without doubts we are likely to be victims of absolutism. Our sense of pride (self-respect) contains its opposite, humility. Without humility, self-respect (individual or collective) becomes arrogance, and without self-respect humility becomes lack of initiative. Our sense of freedom can easily degenerate itself into liberation from responsibility and commitment. We are always caught up in the dialectics of the opposites calling for a synthesis in life. The opposing components are not enemies, but dialectical partners in a creative synthesis. It is true that our sense of freedom must be encouraged if it is to survive; but it is equally true that our sense of freedom cannot survive very long without efforts on our part to promote our sense of discipline. The solution for our freedom partly comes from its opposite, discipline, for example. Same thing is true of self-respect, humility, etc.

The critical question for the dialectical approach is how to accomplish an organic, living unity between the seemingly conflicting components. There is no mechanical answer or mathematical formula to it. However, a dialectical approach can be very helpful. It is by developing a dialogue between the various dimensions of the self that one accomplishes a higher synthesis in life. Instead of allowing one dimension to dominate the other, the self opens the way for a dialogue between them. A person is more than a single dimension. Unless we have a genuine respect for the various dimensions of life, there is no inner dialogue. Moreover self is not thought of as a finished product, but as a process in creative thrust. But as individuals, one can cut the inner dialogue off or open ourselves for it. A creative synthesis is expected because we are more than conflicting components. We have a unified self which is in creative tension struggling for greater unity especially during the time of great dynamism.

There is dialogue not only within the self but also between the self and the environment. So the traditional subject-object dichotomy is absent in a dialectical model. For example, as one reads a book, he/she is in a dialogue with the author of the book. Reading a book is more than collecting information or theories; it is a dynamic process of entering into a dialogue with the author of the book. We find ourselves challenging certain parts while accepting some other parts in reading a book, a process which transforms us. What one gets out of a book depends partly upon the book, no doubt; but partly upon the ability of the reader to develop an inner dialogue with the author of the book. Our ability for creative transformation is directly related to the degree we promote our dialogical nature. Martin Buber's whole philosophy was based on a dialogical nature of man as Herberg explains.<sup>9</sup> The insight of a dialectical approach lies not only in developing a dialogue but also in deciding which aspects of reality is more

<sup>9</sup> W. Herberg, *The Writings of Martin Buber*, N.Y.: New American Library, 1956.



fruitful in developing a dialogue with, since some books or people are more challenging than others, for example. The dialectics of life is such that as we become more challenging, our environment too becomes more challenging to us and vice versa.

#### DIALECTICS OF SOCIO-CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL PHENOMENA

The dialectics of socio-cultural life is related to the dialectics at the individual level. An individual as a member of a culture identifies with his/her culture to a great extent. Yet the individual transcends his/her culture at the same time. The fact that an individual transcends the culture is the basis for the transformation of any culture. For example, an individual is more than an American or Canadian. A human being belongs to the whole humanity as the humanists claim and as such he/she longs for a dialogue with other cultures and nations. The dialectical model recognizes this deep-seated hunger of human beings to develop a dialogue beyond one's own culture. The individuals with their ability to reflect and criticize, refuse to accept their cultural definitions as the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

The dialectics of social life is such that on the one hand, the individual is part of a culture; yet he/she is not totally happy with a limited cultural identification, since he/she is more than an American or Russian, for example; and the tension cannot be easily eliminated. One's own basic sense of community or justice is human not cultural. Though a particular definition of what justice means at a particular time in history is cultural, the very sense of justice which gave birth to the particular definition is not cultural, but human. In our dialogue the basic appeal is to what is fair, just, true and rational, for example, not to a cultural definition of truth or justice; yet we know the rational or the just only from our cultural expressions of rationality and justice. We do not grasp the rational as it objectively is, for example. That is why we have to be humble and open-minded about our cultural definitions of rationality or justice. We know that our cultural definitions of rationality or justice change from time to time. Since we know that our sense of rationality transcends our cultural definitions of rationality, we are not only uneasy about them, but also dare to hope for a new and better definitions of rationality in the future. No culture can fully satisfy our deep hunger for justice since all cultural definitions of justice are limited and time-bound; yet we have to live by the definition of justice we have at present; thus a dialectical tension is the result. However, as human beings who can reflect on the culture we are free to choose the best definition of justice available to us. To accept the best definition of justice a culture gives (and deny the worst ones), is to open oneself for creative transformation. We know the limited nature of our cultural definitions partly due to our exposure to other cultures (partly due to our ability to reflect). To be totally content with one's own cultural definition is to destroy the internal dynamism of the self. The self must have dialectical relationship with its culture if

both are to be transformed. A culture must be challenging to its members and vice versa.

A culture or society is not a unified social system in perfect harmony; it has its internal tensions (conflict). This is not to deny the basic, underlying unity of a culture or society. In reality, a culture is a mixture of conflicts and unity, but always in dynamic flux. When we look at a culture as a unified monolithic phenomenon, or as nothing but a conflict, we are furthest away from the truth. Even when the consensus or conflicts are not manifest, they are present in latent forms. Often a nation or even blocks of nations are called "capitalistic" or "socialistic" without recognizing the conflict between the nations or cultures involved. A culture is in dynamic flux as Sorokin noted.<sup>10</sup> Today's capitalism or socialism is not the same as they used to be years ago. Yet we have to classify reality, and give labels if we are to make sense out of it. Our labels (concepts) are relatively fixed while reality is in flux. As reality changes we need to change our labels (concepts) if they are to be meaningful; but it is equally true that our labels and concepts must have considerable degree of stability if they are to be useful for us. However, when these labels become so fixed that they cannot be changed easily, they become a hindrance not only in understanding others but also in relating to them. Moreover we have labels which promote or destroy dialogue. Withing a humanistic philosophy we can easily find labels which would promote dialogue. When we do not want to change our labels about others, we refuse to enter into a dialogue with them; and when we do not want to enter into a dialogue with others we tend to give inflexible, negative labels to them. Even our labels become part of a creative dynamics or destroy it, depending upon the kind of labels we use for people. According to the humanistic approach, what is crucial is not the quantity of conflict or consensus but their quality. Unless we are united as a culture by the best in our culture, our very unity is destructive. Similarly, unless we oppose the worst in our culture, our very lack of opposition could destroy us. When the best in our culture unites us and when we learn to oppose the worst in us, we are open to transformation.

Every culture or social system is based on a partial truth as Sorokin noted.<sup>11</sup> But it is not easy for most people to see that their culture does not have the whole truth and nothing but the truth. To view one's own culture as complete, gives one a sense of satisfaction though a false one whereas to view it as incomplete is to experience a certain level of tension. But to see one's own culture as incomplete is necessary to develop a dialogue with other culture(s). A culture is not only incomplete, but also dynamic (changing). Considering a culture as dynamic is more than a matter of describing it; it is also a way of relating to it with a positive attitude; it means that the other culture is open to creative transformations. We cannot have a positive

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<sup>10</sup> P. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Mobility*, N.Y.: Free Press, 1959.

<sup>11</sup> P. Sorokin, *The Crisis of Our Age*, N.Y.: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1957.

attitude towards an individual or culture without believing in their possibilities for creative transformation. The assumption that an individual or culture is dynamic in itself would not create a positive attitude towards them. We need to have respect and concern for others to relate to them with a positive attitude. Here too it is the humanistic interest in human dignity which forms the basis of our respect and concern for others. Moreover, for the author, there is no future point in time when a culture will be complete nor any definite pattern to the process of synthesis. According to the author, what is crucial and challenging in the dialectical approach, is the assumption that every point in time is pregnant with opportunities for dialogue and transformations.

The dialectical tension created by being open to an opposing culture is even greater; but such tension is the basis of transformation of both cultures. However, both parties could avoid each other or continue the confrontation rather than developing a dialogue. One way of avoiding dialogue with another culture is to glorify one's own culture. The time when we are most likely to glorify our culture is the time when we are in war with other culture(s). Even here our ability to transcend our culture is somewhat evident. As human beings we are still capable of mourning for the loss of lives our enemies suffer. It is this uneasiness (tension) we suffer from the loss of lives regardless of the political ideology of the people involved which keeps our moral creativity alive; it is a reflection of our love and respect for life. In an interaction between two cultures, the temptation of the stronger one is to dominate the weaker one and of the weaker one to avoid the stronger one. What dialogue points out is the creative possibilities before us; yet it is not easy to cope with the dilemma of dialectics. How can a society develop pride in itself and at the same time be critical of itself? How do we appreciate and criticize other cultures at the same time? How can we create structures of justice in society which are open to change? These are some of the challenges of any society at any time, according to the dialectical approach.

A dialogue is often thought of as an intellectual, cerebral interaction between people. The author is using the term dialogue with a wider meaning. We need to recognize and accept the fears, tensions, hurts, hopes, anger, etc. of a people before we are able to enter into a dialogue with them. But we cannot enter into a dialogue with others until we recognize and accept similar emotions in us. It takes maturity to respect the others and courage to allow them to criticize us. Those who have not learned to criticize themselves cannot face the criticism from others. It takes courage and faith to criticize oneself. As Niebuhr pointed out self-criticism is a kind of inner disunity which a feeble-minded nation would find it difficult to cope with.<sup>12</sup> Those who do

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<sup>12</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics: His Political Philosophy and Its Application to our Age as Expressed in His Writings, H. R. Davis and C. R. Good (eds.), N.Y.: Charles Scriber and Sons, 1960.

not have a fairly stable foundation, cannot develop a critical attitude towards themselves or others, yet the very critical attitude opens the way for a change in the "stable" foundation. The dialectical nature of life is such that the more we open up to others, the more stability we need for our foundations and the more stable we make our foundations, the more openness we need; the more we emphasize the individual freedom, the greater is the need felt for commitment and stability and vice versa. This is why in the West where individual freedom reigned supreme, the hunger for more enduring, committed relationship is also the greatest, and in the non-Western cultures where community reigned supreme, the hunger for individual freedom is also the greatest, for example.

The dialectics of inter-cultural interaction contains the possibility for upward and downward spirals. For example, the more one culture tries to manipulate another culture, the more freedom the former loses by being preoccupied by the ideology of manipulation; on the other hand, the more one culture respects another culture, the more it gains a sense of freedom. We are not free because we have a cultural ideology of freedom and we are not just because we talk about social justice in glowing terms. We must have social structures which promote freedom and justice, yet open to change. But even here the dialectical nature of social life is clear. We have to be tolerant of others in order to promote freedom; but even tolerance has its limits. How can we tolerate intolerance or racism, for example? Our social tolerance can not survive without its dialectical opponents, limiting structures.

Dialectical model looks at a cultural phenomenon historically. Freedom for example is not treated in the abstract, but in relation to the historical forces of oppression in history. The forces of liberation are always in antithetical relation to the forces of oppression. Looking at history exclusively in terms of the forces of liberation is as misleading as looking at it exclusively in terms of the forces of oppression. History is always a dynamic interplay of antithetical forces. Which force will win in the long run and for how long, depends upon what we do in relation to these forces. These social realities contain the seeds of destruction as well as the seeds of transformation. For example, competition was a great socio-historical force of transformation in the Western world. The free market forces destroyed the citadels of feudal elitism and it still contains the seeds of transformation. For example, if a company cannot compete in the open market on the basis of the quality of its product, what moral right does that company have to survive, for example? So competition has a healthy, creative element in it. But, it also contains the seeds of its own destruction since competition eventually leads to monopoly, a process which digs its own grave. The more we promote free market, the more structures (regulations) we need to protect us from monopoly and the more we encourage regulations, the more freedom from regulations too we need if social life is to be a dynamic, creative and transforming.

The dynamic nature of social reality is more than a description of reality; it provides us with a healthy orientation in social life. For example our "sacred" institutions which once worked may no longer be adequate for the new environment; however they contain insights still useful for us. Thus a dialectical approach calls us from an open-minded orientation towards cultures. Individuals and societies must change in order to survive; however, they must also preserve what is just, great, true and good in them if they are to survive the changing dynamic flux of life. For example, in the rural agrarian societies people celebrated the festivals of harvests, shared their crop, etc.; in an urbanized society there is no place for a festival of harvest or sharing of crop; however, the spirit of festival and sharing must find new expressions in the urbanized, industrialized society too if we are to remain human. The dialectical insight lies in finding out what aspect of our institutions need modification and what aspects need preservations to what extent. We can not look at institutions from an eternal, non-historical perspective.

Christianity, for example which originated as a movement by the oppressed became an establishment of oppression by the Middle Ages if not before that time. Same thing is true of most radical revolutions in history including the most recent ones. The dialectical model alerts us not only to the dynamic changing nature of socio-historical reality, but also to the synthesis which has occurred in history. For example, Christianity is now partly for the establishment and partly for change, partly for oppression and partly for liberation. Instead of treating Christianity exclusively as a pious moment for liberation (salvation) or as a demonic conspiracy for oppression, dialectical models direct us to the conflicting aspects of Christianity. The insight lies in discovering what aspect is for liberation from oppression and how liberation can be promoted while preserving what is truly human. It is the role of the humanistic model to point out what is truly great, good, true, and beautiful in life which transcends the cultural and the historical. An institution or a culture cannot be reduced to its historical environment. As expressions of the human spirit, they contain the seeds of transformation. A particular expression of the human spirit (spirit of celebration or sharing, for e.g.) may die in time, but the hunger for celebration and sharing is ever part of being human and ever struggling for actualization.

#### HOW DOES SYNTHESIS TAKE PLACE IN A DIALOGUE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP?

With the emphasis on the dynamics and conflict involved in any situation, the dialectical model is against all one-sided approaches to life. We do not cure the one-sidedness of a historical evil by one-sidedly emphasizing its opposite. For example, we can not overcome male chauvanism by emphasizing the

domination of society by the females. A dogmatic ideology normally promotes its opposite ideology but still ideology, often more dogmatic than the first one. For example, right wing dictators promote left wing dictators and vice versa. Militarism by one side tends to create militarism by the other. This is why a healthy, dialogue rather than a militant confrontation becomes crucial in solving most of our social problems. But we can not create a healthy dialogue without a humanistic approach to life. Without a genuine concern and respect for human beings regardless of their ideology, sex, religion, colour or wealth, our attempts to develop a dialogue with others is likely to end up in failure. However, that does not mean that we have to have a fullgrown understanding of life to begin dialogue; but our understanding of life must be open to change.

The dialectical model makes us aware not only of the aspirations of a culture but also its realities (shortcomings). If a culture is judged exclusively in terms of its ideals (aspirations) or of its realities, we can not develop a healthy dialogue. We need to be aware of the conflicting sides of a culture. Even when we can not admire a culture in terms of its achievements we can still admire it in terms of its struggle. We can have a relationship of acceptance and challenge (conflict). According to the dialectical model not only conflict and tension are part of life, but there is no creativity (synthesis) apart from conflict and tension. There are no winners and losers in a dialogue, only winners. What the dialectical model suggests is that creative ways of doing things are open to us if we are willing to learn from others. Sociologically speaking, after doing something in a certain way for generations in isolation from others, we tend to think that our ways of doing things are the natural ways of doing things.

For example, in the capitalistic societies some people think that competition is natural and co-operation is unnatural (evil) just as in some other societies some think that it is natural for the state to run the economics for the people. In fact most people think of capitalism and socialism as natural, irreconcilable opposites; thus fail to recognize the creative synthesis possible between them. Until recently, it has been hard for good many people in the USA to think of a worker-owned company running at profit on the basis of competition; however recent economic crisis in the West has created a few companies on the above-noted basis. Japan has already shown that the modern and the traditional can be reconciled in the running of industries. In the West, socialism is considered collectivistic and the revolutions as violence-dominated. Mahatma Gandhi and others have shown that revolutions can be peaceful. After fighting for some time against a people, we tend to think of them as our natural enemies. What the dialectical model suggests is that the opponents can reconcile, if they are willing to enter into a dialogue; the opponents can become dialectical partners in a creative synthesis which still respects the uniqueness of both parties. But we can not enter into a dialogue with our "opponents" unless we have a vision of life which transcends

socio-cultural conflict; a vision by definition captures our imagination by inspiring us. It is the role of a humanistic approach to provide new visions for the time. How revolutionary would it be if we believe that we owe a better future for our children or that the Arabs and Jews or Hindus and Muslims can live together in peace? History gains its creative momentum not because of a mystical force in it but because some dare to go beyond their culture to a humanizing vision of life.

The dialectical model can be a help to liberate us from the ideological and dogmatic ways of thinking, opening our eyes to the creative possibilities historically present to us. But we need to develop a dialogue with our opponents. In fact the dialectical approach goes one step further and claims that it is through a dialogue a system saves itself from deterioration. For example, it is through a dialogue with the non-capitalistic nations that capitalistic nations save themselves from being ideologies. Same thing is true about non-capitalistic systems too. In other words, part of the life-giving blood for any social system comes from its antithesis (enemies). The question is not how to defeat the "enemy" but how to turn him into a dialectical partner.

In a dialectical relationship, both parties are free to challenge the other, and the best dialectical challenge we can give to the other is to call the other to live up to its own ideals. For example, capitalists can be challenged to keep the true spirit of competition alive in this day and age of multinational corporations and the socialists to their true spirit of social justice in this day and age of statism. So the dialogue in a dialectical relationship appeals to the best in others while being aware of the worst in them; but the worst in them is not an obstacle to a dialogue with them because we are aware of the worst in us. What the dialectical model claims is that no culture can be open to the greatness of others or united by its greatness without being transformed by such activities. That is what dialogue is all about. What the humanistic model suggests is that a dialogue is most likely to occur in an atmosphere of mutual trust, respect, openness and challenge. Here too the dialectical nature of life must be understood. Trust or respect can not grow in a vacuum. Every initial trust is a call for trustworthiness from the other, and every trust-worthy action calls for further trust. We can not break the vicious circle of mistrust and fears in the world without one side taking a bold step of trust and trust-worthiness. One party must show solid signs of leadership if we are to escape the vicious circle of life. In this day and age when we have arms to destroy the world several times over, one would think it is easy to see the suicidal nature of arms race and to enter into a dialogue. Unfortunately confrontational approaches are so much part of us that we do not realize that they have brought us to the brink of disaster. One small, but daring step back by one party can open up a new era of dialogue.

The role of the dialectical model is not limited to socio-political matters.

For example, traditionally ethics and science have been considered as separate fields which have very little to do with each other. Dialectical model can not deny that they are separate fields. But what the dialectical model brings to our attention is the fact that these two fields like two cultures can enter into a mutually beneficial interaction (dialogue). Let us consider the ethical principle of moral integrity for example. Without a dialogue with the modern science we do not realize the innumerable ways we can be dishonest and misleading. However, without high moral ideals on our part, our science is likely to become a tool in the hands of the powerful. No doubt, we are influenced by our environment: but the assumption becomes a tool to manipulate others unless we are rooted in some high moral ideals. It is the role of the humanistic model to provide high moral ideals so that our seemingly value-free assumptions do not become tools of oppression. In fact, when we are committed to human dignity, the assumption that one is influenced by his/her environment becomes part of a radical, revolutionary tool to remove the oppressive and dehumanizing conditions from his/her environment. Without genuine, high ideals, we can not expect to be transformed.

Even the assumption that one is influenced by his social environment has to be modified in a dialectical approach. To assume that we can change a person or culture has authoritarian implications, We can not change others; we simply provide an environment for it. They still have to be open to change. In other words, they have to enter into a dialogue with us. Creative transformations of people and cultures occur because human beings every where motivated by high ideals dare to challenge their own cultures and to enter into a dialogue with others who have different belief systems.

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Life is in creative dynamic flux. Socio-cultural life is no exception. Ability of the individuals to reflect on their culture is the basis of creative change. In this day and age of increasing inter-cultural contacts, more and more people are questioning their ways of thinking and acting: yet it is not a smooth one-sided phenomenon. As we question the old ways of thinking, the more we long for the security the old ways provided us. As we become preoccupied with our culture, we tend to look at others as "enemies." In fact, our ideological approaches have brought us to the brink of nuclear holocaust. At this time in history, we have no choice but to enter into a dialogue with our "opponents" if humanity is to survive. "Dialectical humanism" is suggested as a conceptual tool for understanding the modern socio-historical tragedy and for developing a dialogue with others. The dialectics of life is such that the life-giving blood for our own creative transformation comes partly from our dialogue which turns the "opponents" into dialectical partners. Whatever



destroys the humanity of our "opponents" destroys ours too. What we need is a humanistic vision which will unite and inspire us by what is best in our culture and still will keep us humbly open to what is great in other cultures. To be open to the greatness of others or inspired by the greatness in our culture is to be open to the creative transformation of life because life is dynamic and creative by nature; but we can close the door against dialogue and destroy all of us in the process.