Marx On Tribalism

TRANSCENDING TRIBALISM: MARX'S INSIGHT

(A Discussion of Universal Human Solidarity By Way Of "Species-Being")

THE BALKANIZATION OF MANKIND:

In Islam, a concept is posited known as "ummah"—meaning the global Muslim community (i.e. the in-group).Using such an idea entails that **the other** is viewed as somehow inferior–a foreigner disqualified from being in the hallowed fold.In other words, the out-group is seen ipso facto as less important than the anointed in-group.This modus operandi is the hallmark of tribalism in all its manifestations: Muslims have infidels (those unapproved by Allah), subscribers to fundamentalist Judaism have goyim (the people who haven't been "chosen"), political apparatchiks have subversives (those who aren't loyal to the established order), fundamentalist Christians have heretics (those who challenge church authority), and Aryan supremacists posit inferior races (those who weren't born as gentiles into the white race).In every case, **the other** is rendered a subaltern segment of mankind: expendable, unworthy, and thus prone to be systematically marginalized…or even persecuted.The Balkanization of the human race invariably ensues from such a mindset.

Fragmenting mankind into disparate factions (groups that are often automatically set up to be mutually antagonistic) is a defective point of departure if we aim to forge a global community—to foster a universal fellowship based not on tribal affiliation, but solely on our shared humanity.Such a brotherhood would be predicated on that to which we all—as humans—have access: things that are catergorically universal.

COSMOPOLITANISM:

To be categorically universal is to categorically transcend all social constructs (i.e. accidents of history).The first thinker to put forth this idea was Diogenes, who coined the term "cosmopolites": citizens not of nations, but of the world. Mevlana was a pioneer of cosmopolitanism in the ancient Muslim world. In the modern era, Thomas

Paine was the first to not only promote this concept, but to actually live it.Cosmopolitans from Spinoza and Kant to Amartya Sen and Kwame Anthony Appiah have promoted this approach in their writings.

The best articulation of this idea (and perhaps the first explicit articulation) is found in Karl Marx's seminal essay, **On The Jewish Question**. The essay is one of the most philosophically profound statements against anti-Semitism and for the separation of church and state. But even more profoundly, it is a clarion call for the human race to transcend any and all tribalism.Written during the autumn of 1843 when he was only 25, it is one of Marx's least-discussed works. The essay breaks new ground. Alas, its important message has been mostly forgotten in the modern era.

The essay outlines a new way of thinking about all humans–regardless of their tribal affiliation.It thereby offers a new way of addressing problems in the world—one grounded in a cosmopolitan worldview–and based on humanism. Marx posits what he calls "species being"—a concept that is so simple that it is rather astonishing that no other great thinker in human history (barring Diogenes, Mevlana, Spinoza, and Kant) had invoked it up to that point.The brotherhood of mankind, Marx pointed out, is THE ONLY legitimate tribe.It is the omni-tribe…and thus not really a tribe at all. Only by partaking in "species being" can we all—as fellow human beings—get past our tribal divisions.To do this, we must rid ourselves of divisive dogmatic systems (e.g. religions)—sanctified institutions that only serve to further entrench those divisions–and only serve to faction the human race.

It is important to note that the message is anti-religion; it is not "against" any particular race / ethnicity.In other words, while it is against Judaism, Christianity, and ALL religion, it is FOR ALL RACES.(Thus, the anti-Judaism must not be confused for anti-Semitism.Though Marx does indulge in stereotypes, his point is that Jews are fellow humans. Thus, any flaw a RELIGIOUS Jew may have is attributable solely to his religionism, not to his ethnicity…just as is the case with the Christian, or ANY religionist. The point is that each of us must "get past" the tribal affiliation by which we define ourselves; and start defining ourselves first and foremost as human beings. Why? Because we are all part of the same species; and that should be what ultimately matters.

"The equality of all citizens is restricted in actual life," Marx noted. Tragically, it is a life that "is still dominated and fragmented by religious privileges." Why is this a problem? He tells us: "[B]ecause the lack of liberty in actual life influences law in its

turn and obliges it to sanction the division of citizens, who are by nature free, into oppressors and oppressed.”Society is thereby divided into the privileged in-group and the subaltern.It is necessary, then, “to abolish all religious privilege, including the monopoly of a privileged church.If, thereafter, some or many or even the overwhelming majority feel obliged to fulfill their religious duties, such practices should be left to them as an absolutely private matter.”No better articulation of the separation of church and state has ever been stated.

In this scenario, Marx explains: “There is no longer any religion when there is no longer a privileged religion.Take away from religion its power to excommunicate and it will no longer exist.”When one religion-based group can no longer demean, marginalize, exploit, oppress, or persecute others, religion-defined identity will no longer serve to pit one group against another.

The solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is contained in this single insight.The ultimate goal here, Marx tells us, is “**universal human emancipation**.”It must be noted that Marx singles out no particular religion here—though the issue that prompted the essay concerns circumstances involving subscribers to Judaism vis a vis the surrounding gentile population. But this was only a case-in-point. The message pertained to religionism in general, as he was careful to point out: “Criticism here is criticism of theology; a double-edged criticism of Christian and of Jewish theology.”Put bluntly: “The existence of religion is the existence of a defect” in society—the source of many social problems.

Much of this has to do with consistency of standards. The lesson applies to EVERYONE, as it pertains to the treatment of all mankind as one group.The tribalist, Marx points out, considers it a right to separate his own group from the rest of humanity.As a matter of principle he is not concerned with taking part in HUMAN movements.Rather, he looks to a uniquely-privileged future, a “special” future exclusively for the designated clan–as if it were divinely ordained. It is a future that has nothing in common with the future of mankind-as-a-whole.Consequently, the tribalist regards himself, above all else, as a member of his anointed group…and sees all things through this prism.

“How is a religious opposition resolved?” Marx asks.“By making it impossible.And how is religious opposition made impossible?By abolishing religion.As soon as Jew and Christian come to see in their respective religions nothing more than stages in the development of the human mind—snake skins which have been cast off by history and man as the snake who clothed himself in them—they will no longer find

themselves in religious opposition, but in a purely critical, scientific and human relationship.Science will then constitute their unity.But scientific oppositions are resolved by science itself.” Tribal divisions may only be transcended once we see all relations between humans as HUMAN relations–ALL of us, fellow travelers, in this together.

We can see why it may be appropriate to deem this the most important essay in human history. Its message contains the ultimate solution to some of the most pressing matters of our day.

Israel-Palestine is a feud OVER LAND, but is between tribes that are DEFINED BY religion. The conflict concerns an issue that is ultimately BASED ON religion, as the participants predicate their identity NOT on their shared humanity, but on the social constructs they have sanctified.The solution, then: take the religion out of the equation…thus rendering the matter solely about humans living with fellow humans.

Whether Jew or Palestinian, Marx would have all people–involved in any conceivable matter–think of themselves first and foremost as “citizens of the world”—to “live in a universal human condition” with one another.Many of our most serious problems arise, Marx observed, when one’s restricted tribal nature triumphs over one’s obligations to one’s fellow humans **as a human**.In the event that one doesn’t emancipate himself from his tribal identity (which he adopts AT THE EXPENSE OF species-being), the superficial becomes the essential…and therefore triumphs. Species-being is the way we can preclude this dysfunctional condition.

The conclusion is straight-forward: We must approach problems in a meta-religious (i.e. secular) way if we are ever going to resolve our disputes.Here, people “will transcend their religious narrowness once they have overcome their secular limitations.We do not turn secular questions into theological questions; we turn theological questions into secular ones.History has for long enough been resolved into superstition; but we now resolve superstition into history.The question of the relation between political emancipation and religion becomes for us a question of the relation between political emancipation and HUMAN emancipation.We criticize the religious failing of the political state by criticizing the political state in its secular form, disregarding its religious failings.We express **in human terms** the contradiction between the state and a **particular religion**, for example, Judaism, by showing the contradiction between the state and particular secular elements, between the state and **religion in general**, and between the state and its general presuppositions.” (Emphasis added.)

The absolute religious neutrality of the State is, therefore, key: “The political emancipation of…the religious man in general is the emancipation of the state from…religion in general.”In becoming secular (unconcerned with favoring this or that group of people, unconcerned with promoting this or that religious agenda), “the state emancipates itself from religion”…and thus from tribalism.

In the essay, Marx also called for the abolition of “the property qualification for electors and representatives, as has been done in many of the North American States.”Marx observed: “Hamilton interprets this phenomenon quite correctly from the political standpoint: The masses have gained a victory over property owners and financial wealth.”We know we have true democracy, Marx correctly noted, when the poor man can legislate for the rich man.The key here is that political influence is not tied to socio-economic status. Why? Because all humans matter equally–regardless of material wealth. The goal, Marx writes, is the condition wherein “every member of society is an equal partner in popular sovereignty, and treats all the elements which compose the real life of the nation from the standpoint of the state”…as opposed to from the standpoint of his own personal agenda / interests.(This could be considered a precursor to Rawls’ Original Position.)

Marx’s bone to pick is with materialism, and any culture or institution (any sanctified dogmatic system or sacred doctrine) that fosters it.His gripe is with narcissism and avarice: ANY man who betrays the principles of humanism; anyone who breaches what Kant called the Categorical Imperative. Of the materialist, Marx says: “Mammon is his idol which he adores not only with his lips but with the whole force of his body and mind.In his view, the world is no more than a Stock Exchange, and he is convinced that he has no other destiny here below than to become richer than his neighbor.Trade has seized upon all his thoughts, and he has no other recreation than to exchange objects.When he travels he carries…his goods and his bean-counter on his back and talks only of interest and profit.”For Marx, such an modus operandi is the antithesis of civic-mindedness.

The “god of self-interest” he tells us, “is money”.To Marx, “money…has deprived the whole world, both the human world and nature, of their own proper value.Money is the alienated essence of man’s work and existence. This essence dominates him and he worships it.”This, again, is the observation of a 25-year old in 1843.

Acting in self-interest, without regard for social responsibility, shorn of civic-mindedness, is therefore a matter of operating on that which separates man from man: socio-economic status and the self-absorbed pursuit thereof. Marx thus indicts

“the circumscribed individual, withdrawn into himself.”Conducting oneself in such a way “leads every man to see in other men, not the RELAIZATION, but rather the LIMITATION, of his own liberty.”In this myopic sense of “liberty”, one merely asks, “What’s in it for me?” It is defined exclusively by the ability to pursue one’s own interests. In this view, Marx notes, “every man is equally regarded as a self-sufficient monad.” In this way, we are all disconnected from one-another: atomized utility-maximizers vying for domination over one another. Marx thus puts this obtuse conception of “liberty” in sharp contradistinction to a conception of liberty that is consumate with humanism.In this way, he says, “public affairs [become] the general affairs of each [and every] individual.”

Marx also echoes Kant when he expresses concern for the narcissist who acts ONLY as “a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a mere means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers.” This is a reiteration of Kant’s Categorical Imperative, indicting the Kingdom of Means, while prescribing a Kingdom of Ends. Each human is entitled to be treated as an end in themselves, and never as merely a means to one’s personal ends.

Marx noticed that individual autonomy and civic-mindedness are not antithetical to one-another.Insofar as one defines oneself as the affiliate of a group (with its own agenda), one is not a citizen of the world.For Marx, the genuine “citizen” was he who thought of himself as the member of the wider community. Species-being is, after all, a frame of mind, not an ideology. It involves seeing ALL people as fellow citizens (fellow members of the omni-community that is mankind).

Imagine applying the following Marxian insight to the Israel-Palestinian conflict:

“Man emancipates himself politically from religion by expelling it from the sphere of public law [read: international relations].Religion is no longer the spirit of the state.”We thus find ourselves in a situation “in which man behaves, albeit in a specific and limited way and in a particular sphere, **as a species-being**: in a community with other [humans qua humans].”Insofar as a person defines himself by (and bases his thinking / actions on) affiliation with an anointed tribe, he “is separated from the [wider] community, from himself and from other men.”Religion is the expression of that separation from the larger community-of-mankind.In other words, religion is not “the essence of community, but the essence of differentiation…only the abstract avowal of the individual folly, a private whim or caprice.”

The key, then, is to end states that define themselves by a religion-oriented agenda.“The state which is still theological, which still professes officially the Christian creed…has not yet succeeded in expressing in a human and secular form, in its political reality, the HUMAN basis…” (Emphasis mine.) The basis of the democratic state, Marx makes clear, is a **human basis**, not a religious one.Meanwhile, religious freedom is paramount.“The privilege of faith is a **universal right of man**.”

Meanwhile, as long as a man remains Jewish (or Christian or Muslim), “the limited nature which makes him a Jew [or a Christian or a Muslim] must prevail over the human nature which should associate him, as a man, with [all] other men; and it will isolate him from everyone who is not a Jew [Christian / Muslim].”It is through tribalism thatwe see “society separate itself completely from the life of the state, sever all the HUMAN bonds of man, establish egoism and selfish need in their place, and dissolve the human world into a world of atomized, self-absorbed individuals–each fixated on the anointed social contruct.

Marx leaves us with the following:

“Objectification [of other men] is the practice of alienation.Just as man, so long as he is engrossed in religion, can only objectify his essence by an alien and fantastic being; so under the sway of egoistic need, he can only affirm himself and produce objects in practice by subordinating his products and his own activity to the domination of an alien entity [the other], and by attributing to [the other] the significance of an alien entity, namely money.”

In a world where self-interest rules (were civic-mindedness breaks down), Kant’s Categorical Imperative goes out the window.Tribalism (especially in the form of religionism) is the primary culprit in this scenario.Part of the solution, then, is gentiles without Christianity, Arabs without Islam, and Jews with out Judaism–thereby making all of them members of the same family: the human family.Only then, Marx postulated, can people of all ethnicities live as brothers. Only then will people see each other (and treat each other) first and foremost as fellow humans. Only via “species-being” will the interests of the community-of-mankind be the primary concern, trumping all other concerns.

We do not do good because we are following instructions provided in an instruction manual (or being loyal to some delimited tribe).We do good because we’re human beings capable of being fully human.We do not do the right thing because we are

obeying orders, complying with commands, or conforming to norms.We do the right thing because we deal with other humans as fellow humans.Our bonds aren’t tribal (limited to our fellow tribe members); they are human bonds (with other members of mankind).When we are citizens of the world, our human-ness isn’t prescribed to us; it is our own to realize (or to neglect).Our shared humanity must be the summum bonum of all human relations.

Marx reminds us that in order to correct tribalism in others, we first must correct it first in ourselves.“We have to emancipate ourselves before we can emancipate others.” After all, in the end, the worst thing is hypocrisy—exploiting others for our own aggrandizement.Presumably, then, I can’t criticize another person for his tribalism until I’ve taken care to liberate myself from my own tribalism.Imagine the possibilities if everyone were to do this.