In Defense of Genuine Dialogue vs. the Spurious Monologism of the "International Society for Universal Dialogue"

Tatiana Danilchenko, Vasily Gritsenko

Abstract

The present essay reviews the ideas of dialogical philosophy as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and their implicit continuation in the discourse ethics of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. They formulated the normative principles of discourse ethics as opposed to "strategic actions" and violence. Dialogue facilitates mutual understanding, democratic relations, and "deliberative democracy", while monologism is associated with dogmatism and authoritarian power. This analysis is focused on the obstacles hindering intercultural dialogue, which not only come from nationalism and hegemonism but also from authoritarian monologism dressed up in pseudo-dialogical garb. This problem is explored by examining the degeneration of the so-called "International Society for Universal Dialogue" (ISUD), which has been hijacked by an authoritarian parochial group presenting themselves as self-styled leaders of "universal dialogue". Their demagoguery provokes mistrust and compromises the whole idea of dialogue. This essay shows that genuine dialogue must be defended and differentiated from fake imitations. Upholding intercultural dialogue is crucial for better mutual understanding, for the humanistic transformation of society, and for collaboration to mitigate social and global problems.

Keywords: dialogical philosophy, discourse ethics, monologism, ISUD

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The recent global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, paralyzed normal life in many countries, and triggered global economic crises, is a serious warning to humanity. This global pandemic, like any serious crisis, is a litmus test for each of us, for our social systems, and for humanity, revealing who we are as individuals, as societies, and as an international community.

This crisis exposed the systemic flaws of the existing international order. It was one more blow to the rosy picture of the triumphalist "end of history", to the prosperity secured by the technology-driven neoliberal free-market economy, to the universalized "model" of democracy, to homogenizing globalization and to the unipolar world order dominated by a "benevolent hegemon". This utopic myth has, in reality, turned out to be a dystopia of growing economic and political polarization, violence, imperial domination, and aggravating global problems. As many critics have shown, the continuation of this trend is heading to a catastrophe.

In contrast to the deterministic view of history, the humanistic philosophical tradition of Immanuel Kant, Karl Jaspers, Karl-Otto Apel, and Jürgen Habermas, among others, asserts a view of history that is open to and capable of being directed by morally responsible human actions. In the search for viable alternatives to the global crisis, it is helpful to learn from the humanistic tradition of thought and from the progressive social-cultural movements which, although marginalized in the past, still have the potential for a rebirth and increasing influence. The ideas of social equality, justice, the rule of law and collaboration remain valid and can be held as viable alternatives to the current disorder.

For example, in the realm of culture, the movements for the recognition of cultural diversity, the unique cultures of minorities and the cultures of developing nations were hijacked by the ideology of liberal multiculturalism, which recognized the "other" in words only while considering its own dominating culture as superior or absolute. This duplicity became evident when western political leaders turned their backs on multiculturalism and thus opened the door to right-wing extremism, nationalism, and hegemonic xenophobia. The failure of the liberal politics of multiculturalism stimulated efforts by many philosophers to rethink the matters of diversity and relationships among cultures; they accordingly developed alternatives, such as theories of transculture, intercultural philosophy, and intercultural and intercivilizational dialogues.

Today's polarized world faces possible scenarios ranging from the optimistic (such as the humanistic use of technology for the amelioration of people's lives) to the pessimistic (ecological, biological or nuclear catastrophe). Within the broad spectrum of political trends and ideologies, the main ideas gravitate roughly around two poles, which can be metaphorically categorized as "monological" and "dialogical". The former is associated with the neoconservative preservation of the status quo, ideological dogmatism, intolerance of the "other", and domination as authoritarian or pseudo-democratic domestic rule and the hegemonic policy of *divide et impera*. The latter advocates for plurality, the recognition of social-cultural diversity, democratic equality, openness to the "other", dialogical relationships among individuals and social groups, and peaceful international diplomacy and collaboration.

The upholding of the dialogical trend and the rebirth of humanistic culture requires a twofold task: to regain intercultural and dialogical traditions in theories and practices, and to overcome

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obstacles that hinder this process. This is a very broad theme, so we will limit our reflections to our personal perspective on and experiences in our field of interest, which is the area of intercultural philosophy. We also participate in a program on theory and history of culture and intercultural dialogue at the Krasnodar State Institute of Culture in Russia. In this regard, our Institute has collaboration with a number of universities abroad (in Armenia, Azerbaijan, China, Lithuania, Poland, and UK). We pay special attention to the dialogical philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin and its continuation by various humanistic philosophers, including in culturology, discourse ethics, and intercultural philosophy. Our country is multinational and multiethnic, and this diversity has always been a source of the richness of its culture, which is appreciated and valued. At the same time, diversity, in order to be harmonized, needs an intercultural education promoting dialogical relationships (Stepanyants 2020; Gritsenko, Danilchenko, Rimsky 2017).

We have also had a rather disappointing experience with the International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD), in which the adherents of dialogue were attacked by an authoritarian group that hijacked the organization through a coup. This problem and its detrimental consequences have been discussed in *Topologik* (Pizzi 2017; Black 2018), and we would like to add to this debate with the present essay.

This discussion will help us to better understand the underlying problems faced by intercultural dialogue and why its practical advancement leaves much to be desired. In order to promote intercultural dialogue, we need to remove the obstacles that are hindering it. It is no secret that the power of ideas is frequently abused by demagogues seeking political power. In a conflicted world, the noble efforts of the adherents of intercultural dialogue among equals are confronted by the authoritarian monologism of those who are only interested in power and money, and who mask their ulterior motives in the garb of pseudo-dialogical demagoguery. This abuse of noble ideals for ignoble purposes provokes mistrust and disgraces the whole idea of dialogue. Thus, we need to separate genuine dialogue from fake imitations.

The first part of this essay will review the ideas of dialogical philosophy as developed by Mikhail Bakhtin and their implicit continuation in the "discourse ethics" of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas. All these philosophers highlight, among the conditions for dialogue, its moral underpinning and the necessity for its participants to be truthful, sincere, and respect each other as equals. The second part of this essay will focus on the obstacles that hinder dialogue, some of which come from the "monological" attitudes of those who act in violation of the ethical and democratic principles of dialogical relationships. These obstacles are analyzed by examining the degeneration of the ISUD. The essay concludes with some suggestions on how to prevent these problems. The dialogical relationships at the intersubjective, social, and intercultural levels are crucial for the humanistic transformation of society and the mitigation of current crises.

1. The change of the philosophical paradigm: from monologism to dialogical thinking

The crises of the twentieth century, from the First World War and the ensuing bloody social revolutions through the Second World War to the Cold War and many other wars, have spilled over

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into the twenty-first century because their symptoms were only sporadically and cosmetically mitigated, and their complex root causes were never resolved. Philosophy at that time was undergoing a radical transformation, a "paradigm shift" that manifested itself in the "turns" of philosophy – phenomenological, existential, ontological, linguistic, hermeneutic, dialogical, etc. In the twentieth century, the theme of intersubjectivity – the I-Other relationship – became predominant.

In studying that period, Michael Toynissen pointed out the "social ontology" (*Sozialontologie der Gegenwart*) sketched by various European philosophers who tried to bridge the gap between being and thinking and who emphasized the priority of concrete historical, "factual" thinking over the monological structure of modern scientific theory. The use of the category of the Other transformed Being from "essence" into an open intersubjective event of the I-Other relationship. Toynissen distinguishesd between transcendentalism and dialogism in the approaches to "otherness" taken by Edmund Husserl and Martin Buber, and identified two lines in the development of philosophy: transcendental and dialogical (Theunissen 1986).

Martin Buber, in his classic 1923 book *Ich und Du* (*I and Thou*), distinguishes between two word-pairs that designate two modes of existence: "I-Thou" (*Ich-Du*) and "I-It" (*Ich-Es*). He characterizes "I-Thou" relations as "dialogical" and "I-It" relations as "monological". He further clarifies the dialogical principle by distinguishing three kinds of communication in life. The first is "genuine dialogue – whether spoken or silent – when each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them" (Buber 1985, p. 22). The second is a technical dialogue. Finally, there is monologue disguised as dialogue. Buber draws a sharp contrast between dialogue and monologue: "Being, lived in dialogue, receives even in extreme dereliction a harsh and strengthening sense of reciprocity; being, lived in monologue, will not, even in the tenderest intimacy, grope out over the outlines of the self" (ibid., p. 24). At the spiritual level, he also describes a dialogue with the "eternal Thou", or God.

Mikhail Bakhtin's moral philosophy of dialogue

An original contribution to dialogical philosophy was made by Mikhail Bakhtin. In the early twentieth century, he pointed out the shift from the "monological" paradigm of classical idealism to "dialogical" principles of thinking. He criticized the monologic way of thinking and worldview: "In the monologic world, *tertium non datur*: a thought is either affirmed or repudiated; otherwise it simply ceases to be a fully valid thought" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 80). Monologism is deaf to the other's response and "pretends to be the *ultimate word*" (ibid., p. 293). Monologism finds support in some philosophical schools in metaphysical forms of "'consciousness in general' ("*Bewusstsein überhaupt*"), 'the absolute I', 'the absolute spirit', 'the normative consciousness', and so forth… In an environment of philosophical monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus genuine dialogue is impossible as well" (ibid., pp. 80-81).

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The ideas of dialogical philosophy, which are opposed to monologism, were further developed by Bakhtin in his early philosophical works such as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, which was written in around 1920 but published only in 1986, and in his monograph on Dostoevsky, which was finished in 1922 but first printed only in 1929 under the title *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*). Some researchers have noted conceptual similarities between Buber's I-Thou and Bakhtin's I-Other and even wonder about the possibility of Buber's influence on Bakhtin, but there is no convincing evidence for this (Friedman 2005). In any case, Bakhtin developed his own full-fledged and original dialogical philosophy, which had a huge impact on areas of ethics, aesthetics, linguistics, literary theory, and intercultural philosophy.

Bakhtin's "dialogism" is much broader than his use of the term "dialogue". He employed the programmatic dialogical principle from the very beginning, while he only started using the word "dialogue" later on and gave this concept a diverse and elaborate meaning. He stresses that dialogical relationships are the very foundation of all human activities, of language, consciousness, cognition, intersubjective relations, and culture: "Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life" (Bakhtin 1984, p. 293).

Dialogical relationships between I and the other, as well as between I and the Absolute Other, constitute "the once-occurrent Being-event of life" (Bakhtin 1993, pp. 12, 20). This ontology determines the forms of existence. An event of Being is fundamentally constituted through human activity, involving a morally responsible or answerably performed act in "a once-occurrent life-as-deed" (ibid., pp. 28, 53). Dialogue presupposes the diversity of perspectives of its participants: "I" and "the other" are both participating in the same event, each from his or her own position and retaining his or her uniqueness and equality of value, yet in dialogical co-existence within the unifying event of Being.

Bakhtin develops the conception of dialogue not only as merely the "conversation" for a search for consensus, but also, and more significantly, as a norm of intersubjective, social, and intercultural relationships in the broadest sense. In dialogue, "the communion of this *I* with *another* and with *others* takes place directly on the territory of ultimate questions" and in genuine community (1984, p. 280).

Bakhtin's conception of dialogue stresses its moral underpinning. In the philosophy of acts, the general basic moments of the mutual disposition are "I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other" (1993, p. 54). In my relation with the other, I assume the ought, while providing an "ethical-aesthetical kindness to the other" (1990, p. 56). The other is altruistically prioritized over the self.

According to Bakhtin, dialogical relations are "not a duet, but a trio", the third party being the particular image in which they model the belief they will be understood: "In various ages and with various understandings of the world, this superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth)" (1986, p. 126).

Bakhtin further developed the conception of dialogue in his philosophy of language. In contrast to formalism and structuralism, he focuses on the speech acts of individuals and their dialogical

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communication, which is studied by metalinguistics. He offered the theory of the double-voiced word, which explains the dialogic relationship between two "voices" within the same utterance, a double-voiced word that is concomitantly a single syntactic unit (Bakhtin 1984, p. 184).

Bakhtin also expanded the meaning of "dialogue" to intercultural relations, contributing to the theoretical grounding of the recognition of cultural diversity and dialogical relationships among cultures. He applied his category of "outsideness" (an ability to see any object from the outside) to the realm of culture and said that a dialogue of cultures helps one to better understand their meanings: "A meaning only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures" (1986, p. 7).

The publication of Bakhtin's work *Rabelais and His World* in 1965 was a major moment, as his concept of outsideness and his carnivalistic motifs provided a sensational new perspective on challenging the universalistic pretensions of existing political organizations (1968). His ideas of plurality and dialogical relationships resonated with several movements that protested against domination in its many forms and with those striving for freedom and social equality.

Bakhtin's dialogical philosophy provided a justification for the recognition of cultural diversity and contributed to intercultural philosophy. In Russia, it laid the ground for culturological research, which focuses attention on both the diversity and the unity of cultures, as articulated in the works of Bakhtin, Aleksei Losev, Sergei Averintsev, Yury Lotman, and Vladimir Bibler, among others. In the 1980s, culturology evolved into transcultural theory and practice (Epstein 1999, 24).

Discourse ethics of co-responsibility

The tradition of "dialogical philosophy", which emerged in the first half of the twentieth century, obtained new impetus in the last decades of that century and in the twenty-first century. In response to the challenges of our time – atomistic individualism, monological authoritarianism, hegemonic globalization, and economic-political polarization – it promotes a view of society based on dialogue in intersubjective, social, and intercultural relationships.

Dialogical philosophy obtained its renewed and distinctive further development in the theories of discourse ethics of Karl-Otto Apel and Jürgen Habermas that became influential in the philosophical and political realms. In tune with the linguistic turn in philosophy and embracing the principles of dialogue and the fundamental norms of morality, they created the discourse theory of ethics, or discourse ethics.

Apel's two-volume *Transformation der Philosophie* (1973-1976) contributed to a linguistic turn in philosophy and inaugurated both "transcendental semiotics" and "discourse ethics". He undertook a project of a semiotical-pragmatic-hermeneutical transformation of Kantian transcendental philosophy. This project involved a reformulation from the vantage point of transcendental pragmatics not only of the theory of rationality and the theory of truth, but also of the theory of ethics. In contrast to Descartes's "I think", the noncircumventable presupposition for a

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strictly philosophical reflection is "I argue". Apel developed a theory of ethics in terms of an ethics of the ideal communication community.

Apel indicates a set of necessary noncontingent presuppositions of argumentative discourse, all of which are implied in the fundamental claim that each argument should reach a consensus: 1) the claim to sharing an intersubjectively valid *meaning* with one's partners; 2) the claim to *truth*; 3) the claim to the *truthfulness* or *sincerity* of my speech acts as expressions of my intentions; and 4) the claim to the *morally relevant rightness* of my speech acts as communicative actions in the broadest sense (1993, p. 509). Apel stresses the crucial importance of a sound moral ground for discourse. For the participants of a discourse, these are the necessary rules to follow in order for it to be a genuine discourse leading to consensus and mutually acceptable solutions to the issues under discussion.

Both traditional dialogical philosophy and discourse ethics have their strong moral underpinnings in common. Apel acknowledges the phenomenological and existentialist types of ethics, such as those of Martin Buber, Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Levinas, in which "the evidential centre of moral obligation is constituted by the situation of the *I-thou-relationship*" (2001, p. 95). Apel, similarly to Levinas, views reason, from its basic structures to its highest levels, as closely interwoven with the ethical response to and responsibility for the Other, the dialogue partner through whom we discover our own "I" and society. However, there is a distinction between them. Although Apel does not deny that the encounter with another person "is a distinguished *origin* and even *yardstick* of moral obligations", he mentions that Levinas had "the problem of *justice* from his point of view of the *immediacy* of the evidence of the obligation". For Apel, in most cases, "the *encounter with the other* and its implicit moral obligation is indeed *mediated by rules*" (ibid., p. 96). The four above-mentioned presuppositions of argumentative discourse, without which no consensus is possible, can be considered among these rules. Apel further broadens the scope of these mediating rules of application of the norms of discourse ethics to the real-life world, including conventional rules of social institutions as well as post-conventional norms of justice and co-responsibility.

Another distinction of discourse ethics in comparison to traditional dialogical philosophy is its explicit transformative orientation. Apel supplements the foundational discourse (oriented toward the conditions of an ideal communication community) with the application of discourse ethics to the real human community. He stresses that our efforts should be motivated by the regulative principle of contributing to a change of social reality so as to approximate the ideal communication community within the real one. This implies that such a principle should also be a norm for learned organizations.

Discourse ethics implies responsibility. Apel formulates the interrelated normative principles of discourse ethics, stating that all possible discourse partners must acknowledge each other as having *equal rights* and *equal co-responsibility*, which presupposes "the primordial solidarity of the discourse community" in solving life-world problems through argumentation and seeking consensus, "without application of violence (i.e. open fighting or purely strategic negotiation)" (2001, p. 48). He stresses the importance of dialogues and conferences at all levels of national and international politics (ibid., 109). Apel calls for the "planetary ethics of co-responsibility" and joint

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efforts in finding solutions to the global problems of the Third World's underdevelopment, climate change, and nuclear proliferation.

Habermas's discourse theory of deliberative democracy

Apel's main arguments of discourse ethics were critically complemented and reformulated by Habermas's own version of discourse ethics. Habermas developed the theory of discourse ethics in his *Theory of Communicative Action* as an attempt to rethink and defend a post-metaphysical, formal, cognitivist, and deontological ethical theory, elaborating on its legal and political implications.

Habermas drew a contrast between the monological and dialogical approaches to the foundation of universally valid moral norms. He criticized John Rawls's theory of justice and his method of the original position as "monological", a mental experiment of separated individuals behind "the veil of ignorance". To this, Habermas opposes his "dialogical" theory, which is embedded in the principles of discourse ethics and in an intersubjective practice of argumentation. This discourse is dialogical since it requires the joint participation of a plurality of agents. Discourse ethics points to the linguistic-communicative constitution of intersubjectivity and to real practical discourses within the public space of social communication.

Similarly to Apel, Habermas highlights the following validity claims: truth, rightness, and truthfulness (sincerity). Habermas indicates a set of rules of argumentative discourse, according to which every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in a discourse, to introduce any assertion into the discourse, to question any assertion, and to express his (or her) needs, and no participant may be prevented from exercising his (or her) rights to do that. Participants must treat one another as equals and reciprocally grant one another equal status in deliberation, without any direct or implied force. They are also required to have a mutual perspective-taking and to have a sense of solidarity. These are the conditions for practical discourse, out of which valid norms may emerge (Habermas 1990, p. 89).

Habermas distinguishes between dialogical and strategic modes of interaction. Communicative action is designed to promote common understanding and cooperation. To this he opposes secretively strategic actions, which are deceptive and parasitic on communicative action. He stresses that "the use of language with an orientation to reaching understanding is the original mode of language use … and the instrumental use of language in general are parasitic" (1984, p. 288).

The core of Habermas's discourse theory of democracy is formulated in the Discursive Principle (D): "Just those action norms are valid to which all possibly affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourses" (1996, p. 107). This principle states the intersubjective conditions of rationally acceptable norms. It is essential to the elaboration of a moral theory grounded in discourse ethics, a theory of law, legitimacy, and deliberative democracy. Deliberative democracy presupposes the citizens' participation in discursive processes of opinion- and will-

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formation that can be institutionalized through a system of rights that secures equal participation in the political process for each person (ibid., pp. 278–279).

A discourse theoretical understanding of politics also highlights the importance of dialogue in international relations and promotes the horizontal networking of national public spheres toward transnational deliberative democratic legitimation. According to Habermas, "[t]he contemporary world situation can be understood in the best-case scenario as a period of transition from international to cosmopolitan law, but many other indications seem to support a regression to nationalism" (1997, p. 130). These two opposing and competing trends and possible perspectives of development – the cosmopolitan versus the nationalistic and hegemon-centric – can be metaphorically characterized in terms of the opposition between the dialogical and monological models. The dialogue in international relations is carried out through a variety of platforms, including the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, and the "thousand conferences" (Apel 2001, p. 109). In a culturally diverse world, dialogue must be based on "relations of mutual recognition, mutual role-taking, a shared willingness to consider one's own tradition with the eyes of the stranger and to learn from one another" (Habermas 2001, p. 129). Such dialogues could contribute to arousing the consciousness of a cosmopolitan solidarity.

2. Intercultural Dialogue versus the Spurious Monologism of the "International Society for Universal Dialogue"

The ideas of dialogue became broadly spread in society, and its democratic and ethical principles, set forth by Bakhtin, Apel, Habermas, and other thinkers, became unwritten norms, comparable to customary laws. As a rule, these principles are acknowledged as norms to be implemented in practice, including in scholarly "communicative communities" and learned associations.

We must also consider the fact that learned organizations in philosophy and the humanities function in a world of conflicting political interests and ideologies, and that the power of ideas is frequently abused by demagogues pursuing their own agendas. With the neoconservative and hegemonic turn in world politics, organizations promoting ideas of intercultural dialogue are coming under increasing pressure. Such an atmosphere may encourage opportunistic demagogues to attempt to use an organization as a means for their own self-serving interests. An example of this is the hijacking of the ISUD.

We both became an ISUD member in 2007, participated in its IX Congress in 2012 in Olympia, and witnessed the coup. In our view, Jovino Pizzi's essay correctly describes the hijacking of the organization and its consequences (Pizzi 2017). We would like to build on his work, in addition to offering our own opinion about this kind of "universal dialogue", particularly with regard to the recent publication of Emilia Taysina (Kazan State University of Power Engineering, Kazan, Russia) about the ISUD, which continues to glorify this notorious organization, misleading the public with propaganda and distorting the whole idea of dialogue (Tajsin/Taysina 2019).

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We joined the ISUD, taking its attractive name at face value and naturally expecting that it explored the theoretical aspects of dialogue in a scholarly manner and that it practiced the principles of dialogue. But we found out that it was international and dialogical in name only. In reality, it was controlled by a closed group of self-serving individuals and had four presidents from the US, using its members from other countries mainly for show. It was a trap. When these members wanted to be treated as equals in its decision-making processes, they were targeted, seen as disposable, and discarded.

During the opening of the IX Congress on June 22, 2012 in Olympia, the ISUD president Leonidas Bargeliotes (Greece) told participants about the obstacles that he and the Board had encountered since being elected at the previous congress. During that election, Charles S. Brown (US) was an alternative candidate and lost; he subsequently organized the "destructive opposition" and attacked the newly-elected president, ultimately aiming to take over and control the organization. We and other participants at the congress were shocked when we learned about this. Keynoter George Anagnostopoulos said that it was terrible that L. Bargeliotes was the target of such intrigues. L. Bargeliotes replied, in a conciliatory tone, that he hoped that there would be opportunities to discuss, clarify and settle all the disputed issues at the current congress. But this "olive branch" was rejected by C. Brown and his militant oppositionists, who came to the congress with the purpose of overthrowing a sitting president and taking control of the organization.

The sharp contrast between adherents of dialogue and those who lust for power was clearly shown during the congress. Whereas L. Bargeliotes and the hosts of the congress were focused on organizational matters and showing hospitality to the guests, C. Brown and the oppositionists were busy undertaking a smear campaign against L. Bargeliotes and others, spreading totally false and defamatory rumors, and persuading the members to vote against L. Bargeliotes at the forthcoming election.

At the beginning of the General Assembly on June 26, 2012, L. Bargeliotes reported that, despite the many obstacles, the board had successfully achieved its goals in organizing the congress, publishing three volumes of papers, and remaining in good fiscal shape. This opened an opportunity for the further growth of the ISUD. But surprisingly, Charles Brown, Kevin M. Brien (US), Christopher Vasillopoulos (US), Jane Campbell (US), Martha Beck (US), Mark Lucht (US) and other oppositionists launched into a coordinated barrage of provocative questions and false allegations against the leadership, insinuating pseudo-problems and confusing participants during the election.

This well-organized group from the US occupied all seats with microphones at the conference table ahead of time, and thus the participants from other countries were sat behind, marginalized and deprived of an equal opportunity for participation in the meeting. This group blatantly disregarded the president's authority as the Chair and de facto usurped the administration of the meeting. There were many irregularities in the election that were caused by the oppositionists, including their illegitimate nomination of "alternative" and ineligible candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency; a gross violation of parliamentary procedures; their manipulation of the different sets of ballots; intentionally creating a chaotic and hostile atmosphere; and the imposition of their agenda upon the bullied and dominated participants. These violations were grounds for

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declaring the election unfair and their results illegitimate and invalid. It was shocking for many participants, causing many of them to leave the meeting in protest.

There was circumstantial evidence of the conspiracy of Charles Brown's group in several incidents, such as the illegitimate nomination of C. Vasillopoulos, who was an invited guest speaker who then turned against his host, as an alternative candidate for the presidency, or the fact that Keping Wang (WANG, Keping – China), who was the vice president, surprisingly shied away from his expected nomination for the presidency, thus opening the door to the opposition. Most likely, they had made their own deals with the opposition. Shortly after the coup, K. Brien revealed the scope of the plot when, in his open e-mail dated July 6, 2012, he reported it as a military victory: "In this connection I am happy to be able to say that three former presidents… have already told me in writing that they would attend the next ISUD Congress (John Rensenbrink, Steve Hicks, and Al Anderson)" (Pizzi 2017, p. 49). Indeed, John Rensenbrink and Steve Hicks openly endorsed the perpetrators of the coup and then were the keynoters at the illegitimate XI Congress.

Many members characterized this as "a staged coup" and called the conspirators a "junta" and "usurpers". It was certainly staged. However, Christopher Black put it more precisely as "a fascist putsch" (2018, p. 17). This definition was confirmed in the coup's aftermath as the group acted like a military junta of a "banana republic", trampling on the democratic principles of the organization and imposing their own will on the membership. These masterminds of the putsch are now pretending to be leaders in "universal dialogue".

"ISUD is hijacked and must be dissolved"

The events after the coup are additional evidence of the fundamental division within the organization between the adherents of dialogue versus the authoritarian monologism of a group interested mainly in money and their own cultural and political supremacy. Several members, trying to find an amicable solution to the crisis, proposed the establishment of an independent committee to investigate any irregularities that occurred during the election and to hold a new and fair election, but the junta rejected the proposal. Charles Brown and Kevin Brien unleashed libelous attacks on those who disagreed with the usurpation of power. The members were outraged, calling it a "colonial attitude".

The last straw was the junta's dirty political trick: despite the protests of the membership, the junta used the ISUD's name and money to stage an illegitimate "congress" outside of the membership and re-elected themselves in a manipulated pseudo-election. By doing so, the junta definitively separated themselves from the membership, who protested and broke their ties with the hijacked organization.

On behalf of the protesting members, L. Bargeliotes sent on December 19, 2014 an open letter to them all with the subject "ISUD is hijacked and must be dissolved". It provided a detailed analysis of the degeneration of the ISUD, starting with a synopsis of the crisis after the coup:

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For more than two years ISUD remains in a deepening crisis, which led to its lethal end. It was provoked by the group of self-interested individuals, who at the IX ISUD conference in Olympia, during the General Assembly and election on 26 of June, 2012 perpetrated a plot, which many participants called a "scandal" and a "staged coup". There were violations of the parliamentary procedures and many other irregularities of the electoral process, thus making its results invalid and claims of this group to power illegitimate. Many members expressed their outrage and protested. Several members from different countries proposed to establish an Independent Committee to investigate the disputed issues… But this group rejected this proposal. They were afraid that an independent investigation will reveal the truth about their plot and stolen elections… Acting as an authoritarian junta, this group hijacked the organization and imposed its own agenda upon the membership, tantamount to usurpation of power.[1]

The letter pointed out the junta's demagoguery: "[It is] abusing the noble notions and disgracing them, masking their own self-serving interests and lust of power by a fake talk and hypocritical demagogy about 'universal dialogue'. It is diametrically opposite to the principles of scholarly association and the declared purpose in ISUD", and stated that it should rather be known as "Intrigues, Slander, Usurpation, and Deception".

The letter characterized some of the junta's members and their backgrounds, such as that of C. Brown. who become treasurer and then president: "Charles Brown's main 'contribution' to ISUD was his role of the mastermind of the coup… His revenge was achieved at the cost of disgracing himself by dishonest intrigues and the coup, and thus ruining the ISUD". Regarding the new "secretary general" the letter stated: "Emilya Taisina was a new member, since 2012…Her surprising emergence as 'secretary general… the way to power through opportunistic servility to junta as an instrument of their *politikē* of intrigues. It is not a very honourable role to be usurpers' Trojan horse of pseudo-ISUD. Sharing their self-serving interests also means sharing blame for damage to the organization and to the ideas of dialogue caused by their cynical abuse and profanation by those who hijacked and destroyed ISUD".

The letter also explained the illegitimacy of the junta's congress: "In any normal organization, such attitude would be condemned and these individuals would be expelled… Let me make it absolutely clear: the original illegitimacy of the organizers of this political farce of their manipulated election, bypassing the vast majority of the membership, makes their outcome illegitimate". On behalf of the members, L. Bargeliotes demanded the formal dissolution of the ISUD: "The pseudo-ISUD should not obfuscate the idea of dialogue and substitute it by spurious demagogy, misleading and disappointing those who are genuinely interested in scholarly dialogue… This organization actually ceased to be ISUD anymore, it is unable to carry out its purposes and therefore must be formally *dissolved*".

Starting with the "fascist putsch", the junta continued operating outside of discursive, moral, and even legal spaces. Instead of complying with the membership's will and demand for its dissolution, the junta used the ISUD as a platform for a new round of personal attacks and character

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[1] Here and in the rest of this text, we are quoting excerpts from or referring to the open email letters of the ISUD members posted during the almost four-year long public debate about the crisis of the organization.

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assassinations of those who disagreed with them. Charles Brown and his proxy Kevin Brien spread defamatory letters, repeating fabricated allegations that they had used during the putsch and which had already been refuted. K. Brien deceptively used his college's letterheaded paper for his defamatory letter, trying to add extra weight to his lie. The former president brought the calumniator to justice through the State of Maryland judicial system. K. Brien had no leg to stand on, and after a year-long process, facing a lawsuit for defamation, he was forced to publicly apologize to his college for his illegitimate use of their letterhead and to officially retract his false statements, as well as on February 6, 2016 to notify all ISUD members about this. The defamatory lie the putschists had used during and after the coup had been unmasked and legally refuted, reconfirming their illegitimacy. That was the legal and moral victory of the former president as well as of all ISUD members who had struggled for truth, justice, and genuine dialogue.

Parochial "universal dialogue" based on money and self-glorifying propaganda

The existence of the pseudo-ISUD is artificially maintained, similarly to a life support machine, by sponsors' money and self-glorifying propaganda. Money is key to understanding the hijacking of the ISUD. It receives money from the so-called "Jens Jacobsen Trust". Seizing the ISUD was an illegal way for the junta to milk the Jacobsen Trust on behalf of the organization. With this money, Charles Brown as "president", Kevin Brien as "treasurer" and the junta ignore the members of the organization and stage their illegitimate congresses and re-elect themselves, and use it as corruptive leverage for their manipulative influence. C. Black writes about this complicity between the Jacobsen Trust and the junta as follows: "As my open letter to the managers of the Jacobsen Trust, I would like to ask them to publicly explain its policy and criteria for sponsorship and why it is sponsoring such a notorious organization" (2018, p. 21).

As for their self-glorifying propaganda, the junta portrays a rosy image of the ISUD in publications and tries to attract new members by promising them financial support for their participation at its congresses. E. Taysina is extremely active in this respect and, in her publications and e-mails, she spreads saccharine myths about the pseudo-ISUD and lobbies people to join it.

J. Pizzi's essay rightly conveys the indignation of many like-minded members by criticizing E. Taysina's complicity with the junta and her deceptive publications: "Emiliya Taysina published an article about the 'X[th] Congress', ecstatically glorifying the current ISUD and its leadership while concealing the real crisis of the organization, and this half-truth was a deception" (Pizzi 2017, p. 54; Taysina 2014).

In a recent essay, titled "Notes on the International Society for Universal Dialogue", E. Taysina presented her version of the (mainly post-putsch) history of the organization (Tajsin/Taysina 2019). It is distorted at both extremes by glorifying the junta's rule while deliberately covering up the crisis of the hijacked organization. On the one hand, she makes a hypothetical statement invoking the ISUD's constitution about a future ideal that "the main goal of the Society is to promote in theory and in practice the ideals of universality as the most effective means of gradually realizing a decent, peaceful and fair world order" (ibid., p. 246), and then, with a straight face, insinuates that the

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current organization is carrying out its declared purpose. On the other hand, she remains silent on the real facts of the hijacking of the organization, which are crucial for understanding its degeneration since the putsch. This double distortion of the history of the ISUD is just a continuation of putschists' propaganda, glorifying their hijacking of the organization and defaming the honest adherents of dialogue.

E. Taysina writes about her participation in the IXth ISUD Congress in 2012 "held in the sacred place for any philosopher—ancient Olympia" (ibid., p. 244), but says nothing about Charles Brown's putsch at that same congress, which desecrated that place and destroyed the organization.

The informative content of her essay is limited to a list of themes of (illegitimate) ISUD congresses, which in itself does not say much. As for any ideas, they are exhausted by the abundant quotations of C. Brown, whose trivial sophisms are presented by E. Taysina with reverence and adulation as she exalts the idle talk of a parochial demagog. He poses as a supporter of "democratic culture", of "authentic public moral discourse", of "collectively imagin[ing] a better future", and even flirts with leftist parlance, but this is all expressed in Orwellian double-speak and de facto sides with hegemonic supremacism as a kind of "new normal".

C. Brown's talk about "universal dialogue" always raises the question of what kind of "universalism" he means. E. Taysina quotes C. Brown's statement as follows: "The notion of 'universalism' seemed contrary to the prevailing ethos of pluralism within contemporary philosophy", that universalism was criticized "for a single worldview for all that always ended in dogmatic views of truth, freedom, and justice", for threatening "to swallow up all cultural differences", and that "the result of such a monologue expressed itself as colonialism, Euro-centrism, and other justifications of elitist power" (Cf. Tajsin/Taysina 2019, p. 247). Exactly so. In this case, C. Brown is describing dogmatic and monological universalism, which he, together with his junta, has been obsessively propagating as a pedestal for their grandeur.

The hijacking of the ISUD turned the junta's heads, and they pretend to be self-styled pundits of "universal dialogue" and to have an epistemological privilege of knowing what "universalism" and "universal discourse" are. But their parochial monologism protrudes like the ass's ears of Midas.

At a time when progressive philosophers were striving for the recognition of cultural diversity and liberation, C. Brown and the junta were using the ISUD as a megaphone to trumpet their dogmatic "universalist" slogans in tune with the neoconservative ideology of hegemonic globalism. This kind of metaphysical and West-centric "universalism" was critically exposed for its groundless claims to a universalist truth, for its imposition of universalist claims about the very nature of humanity and the universal laws guiding human behavior and history, and for its complicity with totalitarian ideologies and imperialist domination. These claims were debunked from various perspectives by critical theory, post-metaphysical thinking, postmodern deconstructions, and liberational, postcolonial, feminist, and intercultural theories.

Does this mean that C. Brown's description of dogmatic and monological "universalism" is an admission of his and his junta's ideological error and abandonment of this dogma? Does it suggest his indirect and belated *mea culpa* for the damage caused by being complicit in reactionary ideology, which is obstructing transformative movements for freedom, equality, and cultural diversity? Not at all. In the same breath, he continues playing the same broken record of this kind of

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"universalism" while, in an empty gesture, he adds the words "new" and "dialogue". In an offhand manner, he mentioned the desiderata of "a *new form* of universalism—one that began and ended in dialogue" (Cf. Tajsin/Taysina 2019, p. 247). But he failed to provide any explanation of what he means by this.

This is evidently just a continuation of the juggling of "universal dialogue" through a reshuffling of the terms "universalism" and "dialogue" without providing any explanation as to the sense in which they are used, insinuating only an empty signifier that is void of meaning. The initial name of this organization was the International Society for Universalism (ISU), but it was problematic, and in 2001 it was modified by converting the noun "universalism" to the adjective "universal" and adding "dialogue", thus becoming the International Society for Universal Dialogue (ISUD). But the meaning of the combination of the words "universal dialogue" was also unclear. The junta's "universalistic" pretensions are in sharp contrast with the parochial character of this group and the pitiable pseudo-ISUD, which has no research program and is small and nomadic, mainly populated by occasional members who enroll during each conference and then do not renew their membership.

This double-speak is quite typical of the junta's failed attempts to present themselves as self-styled leaders of "universal dialogue". Shortly after the coup in 2012, when its members protested against the usurpation of power, Charles Brown managed to publish in the journal *Dialogue and Universalism* (2013, n. 3) under the headline "Universal Dialogue" the papers of his supporters: Kevin Brien, John Rensenbrink, Emilia Taysina, Jean Campbell, and Martha Beck. The papers are mostly off-topic and fail to explain what they mean by "universal dialogue". They mainly glorify the organization under the junta's rule and its allegedly messianic role as a locus of "universal dialogue". They employ a circular argument: in their attempt to justify the notion of "universal dialogue", they cite the ISUD as allegedly representing this idea, and when it comes to justifying the existence of the organization, they cite the idea of "universal dialogue". But this is a fig leaf, covering the naked non-truth of mystification. As J. Pizzi put it, "The abysmal gap between the pretensions of 'universal dialogue' and the paltry self-serving attitude of this parochial group is glaring, like a clown car in a circus" (2017, p. 53).

Failing to justify their claim to "universal dialogue", the junta is now claiming its presence in a new territory, namely "intercultural philosophy". E. Taysina in her essay, claims that "The ISUD Congresses speak of the great contribution of members of society to the development of intercultural philosophy. However, this information could simply be gleaned from the program materials" (Tajsin/Taysina 2019, p. 50). Apparently, she does not have a clue about what intercultural philosophy is, given that, in order to corroborate her claim, she only refers to the titles of the post-putsch congresses, listing a mixed bag of topics, from the digital revolution to globalization, that are irrelevant to intercultural philosophy. The only output of the pseudo-ISUD is the publication of some of the papers delivered at congresses in the journal *Dialogue and Universalism* under C. Brown's control. The futility of the organization is evident in the fact that after the putsch, despite the money received by the junta from the Jacobsen Trust, it did not produce a single book.

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This claim to represent intercultural philosophy is unsubstantiated, and it is particularly problematic for the junta and their pseudo-ISUD, who are entrenched in their own dogma of monological "universalism": it is hard to imagine how they can square two such different things as pluralistic or polyphonic interculturality and monological "universalism". The authoritarian monologism of the junta is as anti-intercultural as it is anti-dialogical. The claim that this organization has anything to do with intercultural philosophy is misleading and solely propagandistic.

The truth of the matter is that intercultural philosophy was developed as an alternative to the metaphysically "universalistic" view of philosophy, which was Eurocentric or West-centric. Jürgen Habermas wrote that "This pseudo-universalism is a kind of universalized ethnocentrism" (Habermas 2006, p. 103). To this, he opposes "the universal validity claim" and basic political values such as "the vocabulary of human rights", which recognize the right to ethnical and cultural self-identity, and argues for an "egalitarian universalism" (ibid., p. 35). The postmetaphysical thinking asserts the idea that the world can be conceived through the intersubjective, communicative relations. As an alternative to the imperial and war-driven "universality", Walter Mignolo argues for "pluriversality" and "multiverses", which are convivial and dialogical (Mignolo 2011, pp. 70-71).

Intercultural philosophy provides a heuristically productive approach to the study of the problem of universality and historical-cultural uniqueness of philosophical knowledge. In intercultural philosophy the universal significance of philosophical ideas has received a new justification, taking into account the diversity and specific realities of unique cultural worlds (Mall 2000; Wimmer 2004; Fornet-Betancourt 2015; Stepaniants 2020). In contrast to both an "abstract universality" and relativism, the theorists of interculturality assert inclusive plurality, the cultural embeddedness of philosophical thought, cultural diversity, and dialogical relationships among cultures. As an alternative to both hegemonic "universalism" and nationalistic fragmentation, intercultural philosophy promotes ideas of a multipolar world, sovereign equality and collaboration among the nations.

The junta's ambitious claim to represent "universal dialogue" or "intercultural dialogue" backfired on them. The junta were never able to explain what they meant by "universal dialogue", but their actions speak for themselves, and they are incommensurable with the norms of dialogue. The theorists of dialogical philosophy highlighted moral principles as an indispensable precondition for dialogue. Apel and Habermas formulated normative principles of discourse, such as validity claims of truth, rightness, truthfulness (sincerity), inclusiveness, and uncoercedness. In comparison to these norms, the actions of the junta are quite the opposite: they unleashed a power struggle, blatantly lied to the membership, conspired against the legitimately elected president, staged a putsch, trampled on democratic and ethical principles, ignored the will of the membership, used the verbal violence and libeled honest members, and hijacked the organization. This is the junta's "dialogue" in practice. Conversely, their actions fall under the definition of what Apel and Habermas characterized as being opposite to argumentative discourse, namely "purely strategic negotiation" and violence, modes of interaction "which are deceptive and parasitic on communicative action" and practiced by those who serve their own interests with the use of

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violence or purely strategic negotiations in order to "*instrumentalize* the discourse in the service of their pre-fixed interests" (Habermas 1984, p. 288). The junta's strategic mode of interaction is not only contrary to the principles of dialogue, but its bullying supremacism goes far beyond any academic criteria, trampling over morality and law. This is the complete opposite of dialogue: it is anti-dialogue.

E. Taysina's essay finally attempts to put a good face on the hijacked organization by boasting about its membership in FISP, but this also backfires. This is an example of their "parasiting" on the past efforts of progressive members, who strove to transform it into a scholarly dialogical association and promoted membership to the in FISP in 2004. But after being hijacked in 2012 by the junta, the organization ceased to be the ISUD and ought to have been dissolved. The current pseudo-ISUD is illegitimate and anti-dialogical, and it is incompatible with the principles of the FISP and is compromising its reputation (Pizzi 2017, p. 57; Black 2018, p, 22) . The FISP has provisions for the exclusion of members, and the removal of this notorious simulacrum is well overdue.

The importance of genuine intercultural dialogue

Evidently, the pseudo-ISUD is not an independent organization but a hostage of and a megaphone for the hegemonically-minded authoritarian group, sponsored by corporate money, similarly to neoconservative ideological think-tanks. C. Black explains these "strategic actions" within the general policy of hegemonism:

> It struck me that the individuals who took over the learned society were from the United States and acted in the bullying manner… The consequence of their assault on the Society and its purpose indicates that the reason behind it was to sabotage any attempts to engage in true international dialogue as equals. Behind the "benevolent" mask, the hegemonic attitude is reflected in different levels of relationships, from the manner of treating the fellow-members of an organization to dominance over other nations. (2018, p. 23)

The existence of the pseudo-ISUD has detrimental consequences, including the spread of its metastases to other learned associations. The junta advertises a falsely glorifying image of the organization and their illegitimate congresses, misleading participants and using their money, their votes in farcical elections to perpetuate their usurped power, and their names as alleged supporters in the reports eulogizing the organization under the junta's leadership. But the reality, of which we have first-hand knowledge, is disappointing. The pseudo-ISUD discourages many, undermines trust in learned organizations, and compromises the whole idea of intercultural philosophical dialogue.

An analysis of the "anatomy" of the degeneration of the hijacked ISUD allows the scholarly community to learn lessons that may help them to take protective measures and avoid similar crises from befalling other organizations. It shows the need to uphold the democratic principles of organizations and ethical standards, as well as critically separate genuine dialogue from pseudo-dialogical imitations. It also shows that in a conflicted world, learned organizations in philosophy

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and humanities that promote ideas of intercultural discourse are coming under increasing pressure from "monological" authoritarian and hegemonic forces. The degeneration of the ISUD is an example of the struggle between dialogical and monological tendencies in practice. This struggle was a litmus test and revealed a sharp contrast: on the one hand, the pseudo-dialogical demagoguery of those with authoritarian-monological attitudes who seek power and money; on the other hand, the honest scholars devoted to dialogue who courageously counter pseudo-dialogical sophistry and defend truth and genuine dialogue. With such colleagues, tested by fire, intercultural philosophical dialogue will continue and it will find its free and creative modes.

The current crisis has shown that the struggle between monological and dialogical tendencies, first detected in philosophy a century ago, is now manifested in politics at various levels. The monological tendency, associated with authoritarian and hegemonic policies, is unable to solve glaring social and global problems and only escalates them. This makes the search for positive alternatives an urgent task. The promising insights in the search for humanistic alternatives can be found within a dialogical trend of philosophical and political thought, as represented by dialogical philosophy, discourse ethics, and intercultural philosophy, as well as within the positive experiences of social movements for cultural diversity, social justice, and peace. In countering the political polarization of today's world, the urgent need for better communication, understanding, and collaboration between people for the sake of mitigating critical social and global problems makes genuine intercultural dialogue more important than ever.

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