

DIALECTIC INTERPRETED IN THE LOGIC OF COMMERCE: A PARADIGM FOR LIVING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

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Abstract

This article proposes a new way of thinking about engaging in commercial enterprises meant to safeguard Planet Earth.

Most often, the central term used to characterize capitalistic commerce is **profit**. However, this is naming an outcome, not a process, and thus misses the dynamics of engaging with commerce. This term also fails to define what is the destination of profit: is it for individuals, communities, nations, groups of nations, all of these?

I suggest that a better way of characterizing commerce is that it has its own (changing) logic, and that this logic is a dialectical one. By this I mean that the purpose of commerce is doing away with “absences” of any kind, that is, constraints on people’s well-being coupled with planetary well-being. Well-being is also an outcome, therefore we need to investigate the processes by which it is attained, what are the constraints of attaining it, and whether the machinery put in place to achieve well-being is actually working.

One way to understand how this machinery is working is to see it embedded in structures of natural necessity that are “intransitive” in the sense that they not under human control but show the impact of human control, as evident in global warming. In fact, one could say that it is global commerce that has moved mankind into a different era of its existence, often referred to as the Anthropocene.

The notion of “anthropocene” shows an emerging awareness that the logic of commerce might be clashing with the logic of nature in the sense of natural necessities that are being offended by unreasonable human action upon nature. This shows the core of the dynamic of commerce as the enterprise of “absenting absences” or constraints on human well being (Bhaskar, 1993).

When looking at the two logics – that of commerce and of nature – together it is evident that the former is constellated within the latter, and not the other way around. This is hinting at the fact that humans overdraw their natural credit when as partners in commerce they disregard the embedding they are acting within.

A good way to think of the larger surround of commerce is to understand it as forming a four-dimensional constellation comprising the following aspects (MELD, Bhaskar, 1993):

1. 1M: A stratified context in the form of layers of natural being that can be disregarded only at humanity’s great peril since it is governed by natural necessities.

2. 2E: An unstable and unceasingly changing dimension, both social and physical, that provides a dynamic, in commerce, of constant fluctuations of a global nature that impacts natural necessities.
3. 3L: A set of intrinsic relationships that imposes the law of totality on all parts of commerce, social and physical that, if disregarded, causes de-totalization both of human well-being and of nature, namely fissure, alienation, and isolation.
4. 4D: An agentic dimension in which competition between often contradictory commercial and social intentions and enterprises is focused on transforming human practice through which to create a balance of planetary costs and benefits, with human benefits as a side-effect.

I suggest that the dialectic of commerce is ongoing between these four dimensions which are aligned in the sequence of C<P<R<T. There is always a “context” in which commerce plays out, namely the natural surround, and this surround is undergoing unceasing change (P) as well as comprising a net of intense social and physical relationships (R) that, if disregarded, hinder de-totalization – essentially devastation – to be overcome.

Once we view the logic of commerce as subordinate to, and embedded in, the logic of nature, we are at least beginning to become aware of signs of dialectic between them that to handle requires the capability of a CEO and of a statesman simultaneously, thus a union of contradictory outlooks and intentions.

This seems to show that the crux of the clash between commercial and natural dialectics ultimately falls into the realm of personal maturity which, itself, is a life-long process of adult development.

Within this life-long process of maturing, which is part of the human condition, we are again focusing on “natural necessity”. It turns out that this necessity is not outside of us, but defines us internally. We are unlikely to be able to change this natural necessity of our own emotional and cognitive development. Rather, it is part of the logic of nature that we have to work with through the logic of commerce.

There is one frequently observed contemporary way of handling adult development: reducing the logic of individual development to the logic of commerce (i.e., training for getting a job instead of educating for getting a life). This reduction is not going to contribute to the harmonization of commerce and nature since it devastates human development. This reduction is not even profitable since its outcome consists of people with no ability of systemic and holistic thinking who are not only going to mess up their own lives but that of society as a whole.

