



# Weltethos for Business: Building Shared Ground for a Better World

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## Abstract

In order to provide context and ground for a future assessment of the manifold overlap and possible differences between the Humanistic Management Project and the Weltethos Project, this article offers a comprehensive assessment of the history, arguments, and relevance of the Weltethos Project as applied to economics and business. A literature review of foundational documents on “Weltethos” and “Weltethos for business” outlines essential elements and arguments from two main Weltethos Project pioneers. It first recounts how its founder, the theologian Hans Küng, has launched a fruitful academic and public discourse spanning almost three decades since 1990, including the presentation of the Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic by world leaders at a joint event with the UN Global Compact at the UN headquarters in New York in 2009, calling for business to serve human dignity. Then, the agenda of Claus Dierksmeier, Küng’s academic successor and a philosopher with foundational contributions to the Humanistic Management Project, is assessed both in regard to Weltethos motifs and Humanistic Management arguments, spanning from Dierksmeier’s conception of qualitative freedom as the foundation of unity in diversity to his effort to reframe economic theory and ethics, the inclusive and innovative practices of Humanistic Management, and to the capability approach. The article ends by highlighting how these two different approaches to Weltethos commitments converge in their care for human dignity, the idea of globally responsible freedom, and the capacity for dialogue as a learning process for creative change leadership.

**Keywords** Weltethos project · Global ethic · Hans Küng · Theology · Philosophy · Business ethics · Rethinking economics · Freedom · Responsibility · Diversity · Dignity · Global economic order · Social market economy · Humanistic management · Leadership · Innovation · Capability approach · Stakeholder dialogue

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## Introduction: Weltethos for Business and Humanistic Management

The Weltethos Project and the Humanistic Management Project share a number of common concerns, perspectives and programmatic interests. Though research often overlaps, and references from one project to the other are frequent, a comprehensive assessment of the consensus, differences, and the relationship of both projects to each other has not yet been undertaken. As a first step toward such an assessment, this article provides a comprehensive account of the foundational theoretical and practical discourse on “Weltethos for Business”. This assessment establishes the Weltethos Project as a global peace, dialogue and research program beyond economics; sketches the fields of the Weltethos economic agenda in theory, practice, and policy; and provides guideposts to continue the existing integration of the Weltethos Project and the Humanistic Management Project.

In order to provide context and ground for a future assessment and its relevance, the article will describe the history of practical cooperation between both projects first (I.). A literature review of foundational documents on “Weltethos” and “Weltethos for Business” will outline essential elements and arguments from two main Weltethos Project pioneers, first its founder, the theologian Hans Küng (II.), and then Claus Dierksmeier, a philosopher and the founding director of the Weltethos Institute 2012–2018 as well as a first generation member of the Humanistic Management Network (III.). While future research will have to analyze and appraise important contributions on Weltethos for Business by business ethicists Klaus Leisinger, Josef Wieland, and researchers at the Weltethos Institute, a conclusion marks the consensus of the different approaches of Küng and Dierksmeier: Weltethos as commitment to care for human dignity and a change agenda for leadership in business (IV).

## Humanistic Management and Weltethos: a Fruitful Relationship

For the purposes of this article, the Humanistic Management Project (HMP) is understood to comprise the efforts to advance a theoretical, practical, and political agenda of forms of management in business which are focused on protecting and promoting human dignity. Such an agenda, with an emerging focus on well-being, has been advanced by members of the Humanistic Management Network since 2008, and has found fora or assumed an organizational form in the Humanistic Management Caucus at the Academy of Management (since 2010), the early Humanistic Management Center in Geneva (in 2010), the powerful International Humanistic Management Association (in 2017) which is also a UN PRME Working Group on Humanistic Management, and the Humanistic Management Conferences in Tübingen and elsewhere (since 2013). The discourse of the HMP is documented both in the book series on “Humanism in Business” at Palgrave Macmillan, with 16 books to date since the first book was edited in 2011, and in the Humanistic Management Journal (launched in 2016).

The Weltethos Project (WEP) is a project initiated in 1990 by the Catholic theologian Hans Küng. A preeminent critical voice for reforms in Catholic theology, liturgy, and church organization since his principled contributions as a young member of the Second Vatican Council 1962–1965, the Tübingen-based Swiss theologian had expanded his focus of research on the foundation of a dialogue between the world religions throughout the 1980ies. Just when the Cold War gave way to hope for global peace and cooperation, he published a sum of his inter-religious and political insights in his book “Projekt Weltethos” (Küng 1990). In this thin but dense publication, he made the case for a global consensus on values, norms, ideals and

goals as a foundation for shared human survival in the twenty-first century. In 1993, he drafted the resolution “Towards a Global Ethic” for the Parliament of World Religions, outlining two principles and four values common to all religious traditions. In his draft of the “Declaration of Human Responsibilities” of 1997 for the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government, these six ideals were once again at the core of the agenda, this time affirmed from a secular perspective. In 2009, the same six ideals inspired the Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic, written by and advanced with leading economists and business ethicists Josef Wieland, Klaus Leisinger and Jeffrey Sachs and presented by prominent signatories at the UN Global Compact in New York. Since 1990, Hans Küng and other researchers have produced a substantial body of literature, often organized by the Weltethos Stiftung, a foundation established in 1995. Since 2012, research on Weltethos has also been led by the Weltethos Institute at the University of Tübingen.

It is through the work of the Weltethos Institute that the HMP and the WEP joined forces. Claus Dierksmeier, the founding director of the Weltethos Institute in 2012 and its leading thinker until a change of roles in the summer of 2018, was tasked with a twofold agenda: (a) establish a philosophical foundation for the WEP, and (b) apply Weltethos to business and economics. Dierksmeier happened to be a first generation member of the Humanistic Management Network as well as its formative philosophical mind. He offered his reconstruction of a qualitative freedom – understood as the plurality of self-determined and creative exercises of cosmopolitan responsibility – as a central argument both for the philosophical foundation of the WEP (Dierksmeier 2016a), and for “Reframing Economic Ethics. The Philosophical Foundations of Humanistic Management” (Dierksmeier 2016b).<sup>1</sup>

The argument of qualitative freedom unites the WEP and the HMP in their supposition that human beings ought (to be empowered by each other) to be free to shape their destiny with a disposition of responsibility towards each other and the world they share. Human conduct in the field of business is understood in both projects to be a highly transformational field of action worthy of attention for the sake of human and humane survival (Küng 1990), requiring the protection and promotion of human dignity (Dierksmeier 2016b) and of well-being (Pirson 2017). Both in the WEP and the HMP, these basic assumptions drive theoretical, practical, and political discourses on a variety of issues. Some such central concerns were addressed from 2013 to 2017 at the annual Humanistic Management Conferences hosted at, and largely financed by, the Weltethos Institute in Tübingen. They have also been, and continue to be, argued at conferences of the Academy of Management (AOM) as well as the annual gatherings at the Society of Business Ethics (SBE), where research within the WEP was always presented, and framed, as integral part of the HMP. In short, Dierksmeier cast the HMP as part of the WEP. And in as much as the first article in the first edition of the Humanistic Management Journal on the issue of “What is ‘Humanistic’ About Humanistic Management?”, written by Dierksmeier, may prove to be formative for the future, the HMP project has adopted WEP arguments as a foundation of its agenda (Dierksmeier 2016c). In that sense, both projects have not merely been mutually re-enforcing important concerns of the other but they have become parts of each other.

For all the familial commonalities, however, neither the WEP nor the HMP may be reduced into an exclusive partnership where Weltethos is the only foundation of Humanistic

<sup>1</sup> Hans Küng and Claus Dierksmeier have published in different languages. Wherever possible, I have used original texts in English. In other cases, I quote from German texts with my own translations.

Management, or Humanistic Management the only possible application of the WEP. From the point of view of the WEP, it is concerned not just with management but with economic practices worldwide; with interreligious and intercultural challenges; and with global trends and transformations beyond the business context. Secondly, arguments for decent business practices long precede, and complement, more specific or explicit contributions to the Humanistic Management discourse in the Dirksmeierian mold. Seen from the HMP, it may also establish firm foundations in the many other traditions of humanistic thinking; and in the tradition of secular humanism, not all adherents of the HMP may share the interest and benevolent commitment to religious traditions inherent in the WEP. In conclusion, both projects are animated by often similar, and sometimes the same, central motives and concerns. As similarities do not signify sameness, however, differences may give rise to different arguments, or strategic priorities.

## **Weltethos for Business: from Hans Küng to Claus Dierksmeier**

### **Hans Küng: finding Common Ground for Planetary Responsibility**

At the dawn of a globalizing post-Cold War era, after a decade of personal dedication to inter-religious research and dialogue, Hans Küng published a short treatise in 1990 on the need for a global consensus on values, norms, and dispositions. He succinctly called it “Projekt Weltethos” (Küng 1990), with a more descriptive title in English, “Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic” (Küng 1991; for his own view on “the long road to the Global Ethic” see Küng 1999). With it, Küng launched an academic and public discourse for the coming decades – including the Weltethos program for business, which Küng would spell out in more detail (and under the header of a “Global Ethic”) in later works (for an overview of the WEP Küng 2012). In many respects, Küng had delivered, *avant la lettre*, the counter-argument to the rise of angst captured in the “Clash of Civilizations” by Samuel Huntington (1996) – a program for a consensus among civilizations.

### **In Search of a Humanizing New World Ethic**

In his 1990 publication, Küng made his case in a classical *mélange* of systematic argument and prophetic urgency. He proceeded in three steps: Analysis, review of possible answers, and a proposal of an answer as invitation to a dialogue.

### **A World in Need of Moral Orientation**

First, Küng diagnosed the advent of a comprehensive paradigm shift in moral orientation at the end of the twentieth century. Both socialism and neo-capitalism were dead, Küng said. So were modern and western promises of progress which had only materialized, he argued, at the cost of social and ecological self-destruction. Progress was thus viewed with increasing self-doubt in the West, and with suspicion in the Non-Western world. Out of the shambles of twentieth century modernity, Küng saw the emergence of a new era marked by the poly-centrism of world regions, post-colonialism, post-imperialism, post-industrialism, post-patriarchy, and post-ideology. And in the manifold departure from old mistakes, Küng marked out the potential of humanization. Yet, we could learn about and realize the promise of a truly humane

world society only, Küng cautioned, if, and only if, the transformational forces of technological breakthroughs, political changes, and of a change - not a demise! - in values could be forged into a new global synthesis of an “elementary ethical consensus of integrating human convictions”, which he first called a world ethic (Küng 1990: 44; 1991: 34), and later a global ethic (Küng 1998).

### The Common Ecumenical Ground of a Humanum

After this analysis, Küng rehearsed possible elements of an answer to what such a “global ethic” should entail. Informed by practical challenges, he searched for the golden mean as a driver of melioration, and though he explicitly rejected Hegel’s philosophy of history (Küng 1991: 112–114), Küng’s mode of argument often imitates the dialectic method of Hegel, an earlier world-philosopher from Küng’s hometown Tübingen. Recounting polar opposites both of which he rejected, Küng sought to define a better synthesis: Not counter-modernity, nor ultra-modernity, but “Aufhebung” of critique and affirmation in a humane vision; not with a utilitarian ethic of success, nor with one of ultimate ends, but with an ethic of responsibility; not through just secular philosophy and reason, nor through religious thought and belief alone, but through a coalition of believers and non-believers; not fanatic, nor relativistic about the truth, but open to self-critique, revision and correction. Here and in other books, this is how Küng builds shared ground: Consulting the history of ideas for a polarity of paradigmatic arguments, out of which he creatively crafts, in the light of contemporary analysis, a third perspective forward.

Küng’s first proposal of an answer, finally, centered on curating the “Humanum” as a basic (ecumenical) criterion implicit in both religions and secular philosophies, by which he means a respectful understanding of a shared humanity, epitomized by human dignity as the basis, and exemplified in elementary universal values (Küng 1990: 115, 118–122; 1991: 87, 89–93). In his 1991 book, Küng also tried his hand at a first list of elementary values which might exemplify the “Humanum”: “Not just freedom, but also justice”; “not just equality, but also plurality”; “not just brotherhood, but also sisterhood”; “not just coexistence, but peace”, “not just productivity, but solidarity with the environment”; “not just toleration, but ecumenism” (Küng 1990: 93–96; 1991: 67–69). It was a first list, indicative of Küng’s ongoing search and sensibilities.

### Declarations of Two Principles and Four Values

It took his work as author of the 1993 “Declaration Towards a Global Ethic” of the World Parliament of Religions to settle unto a more concrete proposal of two principles and four values (Küng 1993) – a selection carefully guided by strategic criteria Küng explains in greater detail in a chapter of “A Global Ethic as a Foundation of a Global Society” (Küng 1998: 91–113).

Though Küng never meant to propose a final list, these two principles and four values of the 1993 Declaration have since defined the message of the WEP – not the least because after the affirmation of this list by the World Parliament of Religions, the 1997 “Declaration of Human Responsibilities” of the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government pledged its commitment to the same six ideals from a secular perspective (with an explicit nod to 1993), and the “Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic” applied them to economic matters in 2009 (see below). In 1999, the Parliament of World Religions issued “A Call to Our Guiding Institutions” that invited institutions to a process of “creative engagement” with the

directions of the 1993 declaration. On its current website, the Parliament credits its 1993 declaration with even more inspiration: “Themes advanced in the Global Ethic have inspired documents such as the Earth Charter, the Charter of Compassion, a Charter of Forgiveness, A Common Word Between Us and You, and campaigns have also been launched to promote the Golden Rule” (Parliament of World Religions 2018).

The two basic principles are (1) the Principle of Humanity: “Every human being must be treated humanely and not inhumanely”; and (2) the Golden Rule of Reciprocity: “What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others.” The four values were called “irrevocable directives” (or “Imperatives of Humanity”): (3) Commitment to a culture of non-violence and of respect for all life: “You shall not kill – but you shall also not torture, torment, or hurt” – or to put it positively: “Have respect for life!”; (4) Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order: “You shall not steal – but you shall also not exploit, bribe, corrupt” – or to put it positively: “Act honestly and fairly!” (5) Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness: “You shall not lie – but you shall also not deceive, falsify, manipulate” – or to put it positively: “Speak and act truthfully!”; and (6) Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women: “You shall not abuse sexuality – but you shall also not abuse, humiliate or degrade your partner” – or to put it positively: “Respect and love one another!” (Küng 1998).

### The Capacity for Dialogue as a Capacity for Peace

The process of defining, protecting, and pursuing the specific implications of these commitments and the *Humanum* they promote requires (interreligious, and everyday public) dialogue. For Küng, such dialogue promises progress towards a humane humanity, and is a program for peace: “Capacity for Dialogue is Capacity for Peace” (Küng 1990: 134, 1991: 103).

Küng configured the capacity for dialogue as a capability of actors achieved in the combination of steadfastness in one’s own position with an open search for “truth in freedom” (Küng 1991: 94–105). To him, “capacity for dialogue and steadfastness are not opposites”, but complementarily form “basic attitude of true ecumenicity”, which is “readiness of dialogue in steadfastness”, and “neither dogmatic combativeness nor the neutralization of all standpoints” (Küng 1991: 94–105). “Those who stand in their own tradition, but at the same time are self-critically open to other traditions begin with what is given and leave completely to the process of conversation and understanding what will finally emerge as a result.” Dialogue means steadfastness with a curiosity to listen and learn: They “a priori accept the standpoint in faith of their conversation partners and primarily expect of them unconditional readiness to listen and learn, and unlimited openness which includes a transformation of the two conversation partners in the course of a process of arriving at an understanding. This is a patiently realistic way” (ibid.: 102–103).

Küng understood that his requirement of an open search for truth was also a fundamental challenge to the idea of religious truths and the steadfastness required of believers. As an achievement, he believed the capacity for dialogue to be a driver for peace and nothing less than “an epoch-making undertaking” (Küng 1991: 104). It is at this point in his argument that Küng first mints his insights into what would become the elevator pitch version of the WEP program: “There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There can be no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. There can be no dialogue between the religions without research into theological foundations” (Küng 1991: 105).

## The Responsible Conduct of Business in a Global Economy

The implications for business had always been on Küng's mind. Klaus Schwab, the founder and president of the World Economic Forum, had invited Küng to address the plenary session in Davos with a keynote speech on "Why we need global ethical standards?" in January 1990. Küng credits this speech as one of three occasions that prepared him to write, and publish his "Projekt Weltethos" later the same year. His dialogue with business leaders and economists, time and again in Davos and elsewhere, led him to publish his study "A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics" in 1997, providing issues for discussions, among others, on "Ethical Standards for International Financial Transactions" at the 1998 International Confederation of Stock Exchanges' meeting in Kuala Lumpur, and a high-level Symposium of the Weltethos Foundation in 2001 in Baden-Baden on the need of global standards and frameworks for a global market (Küng 2010). Complementary to the Global Ethic Manifesto of 2009, Küng published a volume on the "Decent Conduct of Business. Why the Economy needs Morality" (in German and Italian) in 2010, which was both an update and a consolidation of his 1997 argument.

### Dignity through Business between Leadership and Global Order

Always arguing in the context of historical and contemporary developments the interpretation of which Küng makes explicit, and into which he aims to intervene with his positions, Küng again seeks to build shared ground by evaluating polar opposites to build a new synthesis (Küng 1998, 2010): The welfare state is in crisis, but neo-capitalism can't be the solution, either. A pure market economy, and its a priori assumptions seem folly – but a social market economy, such as the German model, also needs ecological, ethical, and global reformation. This requires not the idealism of an ethic of conviction, nor a realist ethic of the economy devoid of conviction, but "responsible economics"; sustainable development, not just economic growth; not just for shareholders, but for all involved; and requiring "strong leadership with a basic ethical and religious attitude" (Küng 1998, 274). Central "aim and criterion", Küng argues, are "human beings in an environment worth living in". Again, the "Humanum", the insistence on human dignity and related values of a humane humanity, becomes both the purpose and principle of (economic or business) conduct (Küng 1998).

Küng's perspective on economics and business spans from a "macrolevel of an ethic for the economy" to the "mesolevel of business ethic and the microlevel of an individual ethic" (Küng 1998: 215). It includes business leadership, management, the world financial system, and the framework of a political economy in a globalized world. The Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic of 2009 states intentions that Küng shares throughout his books and speeches: (1) to address "(e)ach one of us – in our diverse roles as entrepreneurs, investors, creditors, workers, consumers, and members of different interest groups in all countries (...) in (our) day-to-day economic decisions, actions, and general behavior"; and (2) beyond the behavior, ensuring that the framework of behavior, "the rules of the market and of competition", are "put (...) on a solid ethical basis for the welfare of all." (Küng et al. 2010: 153–154). Though Küng's treatment of economic practice overrides systematic distinctions, it may be argued that Küng's early work on Weltethos for business is more concerned with the rules and global framework than with the conduct in everyday business, which only becomes the clear focus in Articles 5–13 of the Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic in 2009.

## Rules for the Economy: the Basic Model of Germany's Social Market Economy

True to his conviction that the capacity for dialogue requires both steadfastness in one's own position and an open search for "truth in freedom" (Küng 1991: 94–105), Küng offers positions on a globalizing economy that are moored in his own particular perspective and understanding as a Christian living in Germany. One central example are his overall affirmative references to the German discourse on a "social market economy", a model of the political economy that originated in the work of economists and legal scholars in the German town of Freiburg (Küng 1998: 196–207). The historical genesis and the political aims of the social market economy (Küng 2010: 65–86) are instructive in understanding Küng's basic conception of the macro-level of political economies, and his expectations in regard to an adaptation of the economic order to global circumstances. It may be notable that a certain understanding, and a basic positive affirmation, of Germany's social market economy model also circumscribes the circle of partners for Küng's application of a global ethic to business. His co-authors for the Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic in 2009 are German business ethicists Klaus M. Leisinger and Josef Wieland, themselves deeply steeped in the German economic model. Claus Dierksmeier, the founding director of the Weltethos Institute, is a member of the board of an important think tank dedicated to the renewal of the social market economy.

Labeling their own approach as "ordo-liberalism", the Freiburg scholars had offered a theoretical response to failures and dangers of *laissez-faire* liberalism in the 1930ies, amongst them the power of monopolies and threats of the re-feudalization of society. Ordo-liberalism went on to become the guiding political idea of the German "third way" between socialism and the free market model after the Second World War (Erhard 1961). While the "social market economy" denotes both a specific form of liberal thinking and a particular economic practice in Germany (and is infused to some degree by Catholic Social Thought), it also shares a history of ideas with other neo-liberal schools of thought that have dominated the western economies, and arguably the globe, in the second half of the 20th century.

## Rules for the Economy: Towards a Liberal Order for the Global Social Market Economy

While historically, neo-liberalism denoted an effort to update the liberalism of the 19th to the twentieth century, the stigmatizing contemporary use of "neo-liberalism" today would be wholly misapplied to the ideas of ordo-liberalism, which, as a historically neo-liberal argument for the primacy of legal frameworks and governmental oversight over the market, has always been critical of that other version of neo-liberalism that promotes deregulation above anything else, and that is embodied by the Chicago School (Milton Friedman, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich August von Hayek) and the Washington consensus. So while Küng's argument is often informed by the rather specific experience of a "social market economy" in Germany, he can claim global relevance of the German experience as one type of liberal order that has (arguably) succeeded in encouraging a responsible conduct of business and wide-spread welfare (Küng 2010: 86).

As adherents of the social market economy are, Küng is, on the one hand, fundamentally a critic of government *intervention* into market processes, going so far as to criticize "Brussels Eurocrats" for it (Küng 1998: 215). On the other hand, he is also a champion of government regulations of the market process wherever these regulations are a *framework* that ensures the primacy of political goals over market dynamics. While he appreciates, with caveats, the



historic success of such regulations in the German policy arena, he clearly sees that scaling such regulations from a specific national arena to the global arena requires a lot more dedication – especially a global ethic as the foundation of a universal morality upon which the legal framework of a just world order could be built.

Consequently, Küng urgently calls on “theoreticians and practitioners of the social market economy” to further develop and enhance their model in light of the new global dimension of the market economy and its ecological and ethical challenges (Küng 1998: 205–208; for a later admonition Küng 2010: 86). The primacy of politics over the economy ought to be complemented, Küng argues, by the primacy of ethics over both the economy and politics (Küng 1998: 214, 2010: 156–160). He joins Swiss business ethicist Peter Ulrich in the latter’s call for “a global, competitive, social, and environmental order which ensures that the global markets, too, are incorporated into an ethical and political framework of a global ‘vital policy’” (Ulrich 1995: 75–27, cited by Küng 1998: 215.) Küng finds his vision also well expressed by German economist Ingomar Hauchler’s call for “a global market economy which is politically obligated to humane and social goals, which does justice to future needs and risks, and reckons with the natural foundations of life” (Hauchler 1995: 16, cited by Küng 1998: 215).

### World Governance as Task of Leaders in Politics, Business Practice, and Science

For all his affirmation of a global order for global markets, especially financial markets, Küng himself remains vague on his own vision of global – in the sense of supranational – institutions. Küng rejects the idea of global government, placing his bet on “new governance arrangements” in the international community – that is, from national leaders who find ways to cooperate with one another, whether in Europe or in the United Nations (Küng 1998: 224). International commissions, World Commissions, International Councils, United Nations organizations - in Küng’s world, these are the drivers of an “ethically motivated policy for world order” (Küng 1998: 220–234; 2010: 263–276). Küng’s concern is not with order and law, it is with values and norms: “But laws are not enough. (...) Laws without morality cannot endure, and no legal provision can be implemented without moral consciousness based on some elementary ethical standards” (Küng et al. 2010: 167). In that view a *policy for world order*, however that world order ought to look like, ought to be driven by a global ethic. World community, to Küng, is not so much an arena mounted on the pillars of institutions, and upheld by the rule of law. First and foremost, world community is a practice of moral agents; and fundamentally of individual agents who cultivate a certain morality in their respective political and economic associations; and who would benefit by cultivating a humane, universal morality, such as the elementary values and principles of a universal global ethic – of *Weltethos*, which denotes, beyond a mere moral appeal and call, actual moral action and consequences.

Consequently, Küng’s main expectations lie with responsible leaders who either negotiate international agreements in politics (declarations, proclamations, manifestos, treaties, and the like), or cultivate globally responsible business conduct in their businesses (Küng 1998: 250–276, 2010: 187–238). As evidenced implicitly by Küng’s regular method of introducing ideas with thinkers, they also lie with the great minds of philosophers, religious thinkers, politicians and economists. They are the target audience of Global Ethic declarations, such as the Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic of 2009.

## Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic: business in Service of Dignity

### Josef Wieland: Cooperating for Mutual Benefit

The “Manifesto for a Global Economic Ethic” of 2009 (Küng et al. 2010; Küng 2010: 153–166), an initiative by the World Ethos Foundation and presented at a joint event with the UN Global Compact at the UN headquarters in New York, was intended to “spark further debate” on the transcultural development and establishment “of shared ethical values and virtues of for the business world”, as its main author, the ethicist Josef Wieland explains (Wieland 2010: 143). So far, globalization was characterized, Wieland said, “by an enormous institutional and organizational deficit”, which had “resulted in a new and ever greater significance of individual virtues”. If “the aim of political and economic activities and decision-making in the upcoming decades will be to structure economic globalization so that it leads to long-term prosperity for everyone”, Wieland argued, then actors needed “to cooperate transnationally for the sake of mutual benefit”. In turn, such “(p)roductive cooperation requires in a very fundamental way a minimum level of joint, globally accepted, legal and ethical rules for economic activity as well as effective institutions and organizations to establish and enforce them.” Hence, “the development of transcultural ideals as a common bond in economic activities and decision-making is of crucial significance for this objective” (Wieland 2010: 143).

### Serving the Development of Individual Resources and Capabilities

With a reference to the 1993 declaration, the Manifesto again affirms, as a fundamental first principle, “humanity: Being human must be the ethical yardstick for all economic action.” That meant, Article 1 says, “the creation of a fundamental framework for sustainably fulfilling human beings’ basic needs so that they can live in dignity.” All economic decisions had to “always serve the formation and development of all individual resources and capabilities (...) for a truly human development of the individual and for living together happily” (Küng 2010: 155). It should be noted that this article restates Küng’s earlier and more pessimistic premise – that human survival was at stake – by giving a positive purpose to business, namely to create value for a life of everyone in dignity. “Humanity flourishes only in a culture of respect for the individual” (Article 2). Avoiding evil was not enough, Article 3 reminds readers: One also had “(t)o promote good”. The key principle of reciprocity, as captured in the Golden Rule, “promotes mutual responsibility, solidarity, fairness, tolerance, and respect for all persons involved” – “attitudes or virtues” which were “the basic pillars of a global economic ethos” (Article 4). As in the Declaration of the Interaction Council 1997, the second principle (reciprocity) of the two principles of the 1993 Declaration was again framed as the concretion of the first principle (humanity) (Küng 2010: 293).

Articles 5–13 lay out the implications of the four basic Weltethos values for the conduct not only of business but for the whole of economic dynamics: Non-violence and respect for life (5–6); justice and solidarity (7–9); honesty and tolerance (10–11); and mutual esteem and partnership (12–13). All articles are moored in repeated references to “the ethical frame of reference: To be an authentic human being means - in the spirit of the great religions and ethical traditions - (...)”. Altogether, the Manifesto admonishes that “(e)ach one of us - in our diverse roles as entrepreneurs, investors, creditors, workers, consumers, and members of different interest groups in all countries - bears a common and essential responsibility (...) to recognize and apply this kind of global economic ethic.” (Küng et al. 2010: 253).

## Hans Küng, Jeffrey Sachs and Klaus on Weltethos for Business

The publication of the Manifesto featured a foreword by Josef Wieland and Jeffrey Sachs, and four instructive commentaries by Hans Küng, Klaus Leisinger, and Josef Wieland (with two commentaries) (Küng et al. 2010). The two forewords and four commentaries offer a fascinating, if highly condensed view of the four main minds who advanced the argument of the Manifesto. While Sachs is a world-renowned economist, both Leisinger and Wieland are leading business ethicists. Klaus Leisinger has been a pioneer of the international CSR and sustainability discourse, with extensive experience especially in issues of human rights, health, and the intercultural challenges of business. He has served for many years as a special advisor to various UN initiatives, the World Bank, the World Economic Forum, and the Vatican, and has been an indispensable advisor for Hans Küng and a mentor of the Weltethos Institute since its inception in 2012. Josef Wieland, a former president of the European Business Ethics Network and long-time head of the German section of Business ethicists, has pioneered governance ethics, values management, and intercultural leadership. Their contributions to Weltethos in Business merit a separate future analysis and appraisal, the scope of which goes beyond the article at hand (Leisinger 1997, 2006; for a first-hand account of Leisinger's take, see his article in this edition).

## Claus Dierksmeier: globally Responsible Freedom of Everyone as Driver of a Better World for All

In April of 2012, German philosopher Claus Dierksmeier became the founding director of the Weltethos Institute in Tübingen. Hans Küng asked him for two contributions: to lay a secular foundation for the Weltethos idea, and to continue and sharpen the argument of Weltethos for business. The opening of the Institute was marked by the passing of the baton from Küng to Dierksmeier on the occasion of the traditional “Weltethos Speech” at the University of Tübingen. Joining a line of previous speakers including Kofi Annan and Desmond Tutu, Dierksmeier laid out his Weltethos agenda. Like Küng, he proceeded in three steps: an analysis of the contemporary state of the world and its challenges marked by “globality”, a review of possible elements of answers, and the proposal of one answer in the field of business ethics, understood to be an invitation to further dialogue (Dierksmeier 2012). While Dierksmeier had already written on globality (Dierksmeier 2009; Dierksmeier et al. 2011), he later expanded the second and third part of his 2012 argument into two books, “Qualitative Freedom. Self-determination in cosmopolitan responsibility” on a secular foundation of Weltethos (Dierksmeier 2016a), and “Reframing Economic Ethics. The Philosophical Foundations of Humanistic Management” (Dierksmeier 2016b). Both books are invitations to participate in a reflection on the history of ideas, more specifically the (classical) idea of freedom and its meaning for theory, practice, and policies in the field of global business and politics.

## Challenges of Globality and Diversity

People all over the world now live in a state of globality, Dierksmeier contends in his analysis (Dierksmeier 2011, 2012, 2014, 2016a): “We live in a world not only of globalization, but increasingly also of *globality*, i.e. within a world that is already cosmopolitan. Whether we like it or not, our individual and institutional interests are intertwined with those of other persons and states. We increasingly devise local activities, regional business dealings and national

politics with reference to their global reception” (Dierksmeier 2014: 2; also Dierksmeier 2012: 2–5). Global interdependencies are real; their dynamic effects are increasingly felt, challenging the statics and stability of the world order; and global responsibility becomes the new norm, not only in regard to the global commons such as the climate or oceans, but in everyday life and in the conduct of business everywhere. Echoing an observation of German sociologist Ulrich Beck (Beck 2006), Dierksmeier argues that the insight into the global (and intergenerational) consequences of our actions drives global cooperation and institution building, both requiring a unifying universal consensus on the underlying norms. Thus, Dierksmeier takes a cosmopolitan approach to business ethics (Rendtorff 2015).

However, Dierksmeier cautions, a universal monoculture with uniformal procedures would conflict with the existing diversity of culture and context (Dierksmeier 2012: 4; Dierksmeier 2016a: 14). Rather, Dierksmeier advises, we should build a political world order institutionalized by law on the global level that makes space for, connects to, builds on, and draws inspiration from the diversity of national political orders on the macro-level; the diversity of morality, religious and cultural conventions on the meso-level; and the diversity of individual conscience and virtuous conduct on the micro-level (Dierksmeier 2016a: 14–15). In this view, unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive and opposing, but ought to be mutually enhancing, dialectical concepts (Dierksmeier 2014: 5). Such mutual support of unity and diversity, though, is not a harmony naturally given to us. Instead, it requires the hard work of qualifying and regulating each specific aspiration – towards unity here and diversity there – in light of the other. So in terms of an ethics, Dierksmeier argues for an ethics that “neither capitulates before, nor simply levels” the factual divergence of norms around the globe, but pursues inclusive unity (Dierksmeier 2012: 5).

## The Idea of Qualitative Freedom

### Freedom as a Unique Foundational Value

It is here in the second part of his argument that Dierksmeier invites us to focus our reflection on the value of freedom in its different conceptions. In the bouquet of all values, Dierksmeier argues, freedom has a special role to play – that of a foundational value (Dierksmeier 2012: 5–6; 2016: 16). He admits that “there are cultures that do not rely on the idea of freedom for their explicit self-understanding”. But he cautions that “wherever people call for self-determination, they implicitly claim freedom; even and especially when they reject liberality in their own way of life. (...) Even those who completely commit themselves to illiberal life models want to do so autonomously” (Dierksmeier 2012: 5). In that view, the freedom to commit oneself to one’s purposes in life is the prerequisite for any dedication to specific values (and thus, the pursuit of a moral life). So anyone who so ever makes a claim for the (superior) validity of one value over another always already exercises (and experiences) her moral autonomy, that basic freedom to commit to values at all.

If any particular value commitment is a realization of the universal freedom to commit, then this value commitment is itself bound by the provision to afford such freedom to others: If such “freedom, however, can not be denied for oneself, it must consistently be conceded to others and coherently made possible for all” (Dierksmeier 2010: 13). “(W)e begin to realize the liberty of others not (only) as a *limit* of our own freedom, but (also) as its *aim*. Freedom, so to speak, is not given to us as an asset but rather as a task.” Where “the *demand* for individual freedom and the *promotion* of its general presuppositions must go hand in hand” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 122), a program of individual emancipation, communal empowerment and systematic capability building results: “Freedom commits. Responsibility liberates” (Dierksmeier 2016c: 38). It is “(b)y

understanding that liberty encompasses the duty and obligation – the responsibility – to empower everyone to live an autonomous life in dignity” that this understanding of “freedom links personal liberty to universal freedom” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 96).

This “indirectly self-establishing structure” of the idea of freedom, Dierksmeier points out, is unique among values, and establishes freedom as an underlying, unifying value. He recommends it for working out the cross-cultural questions of values that arise when we judge concrete aspirations towards unity (now understood as a unifying commitment to an inclusive idea of freedom) and diversity (now understood to consist of particular autonomous commitments to different values on the basis of moral autonomy) (Dierksmeier 2012: 5; 2016a: 17).

## A Critique of Dominant Theories of Quantitative Freedom

Dierksmeier pits his understanding of freedom against the (philosophically, politically, and economically) dominant ideas what freedom ought to be and mean – different from *negative freedom* as an absence of outward coercion, and the “neo-liberal” program of deregulation of the “Washington consensus” built on it; and different from *positive freedom* as a predefined subject matter of internal and external enabling conditions, a favorite motif of paternalistic, dictatorial, or collectivist governments (Dierksmeier 2016a: 31–49). To replace these two prominent (and other) merely *attributive* conceptions of freedom, Dierksmeier proposes a *categorical* distinction between a (comprehensive) qualitative and a (merely) quantitative understanding of freedom. In shorthand, “the more freedom, the better!” connotes the quantitative understanding of freedom. He sees the focus on quantity (of a space of independence, or of the number of options) embodied in theories of symmetrical partnership where free equals bargain over, and exchange, their entitlements to freedoms to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. Cutting back on individual freedoms here and there, the basic argument goes, increases the possible sum-total of composite liberties, and so enlarges the quantity of freedom for everyone – a proposition that unites public choice theories, game theories, or social contract doctrines, the widely prevalent strands of liberty/choice-based political thinking in the second half of the twentieth century. At first sight, these theories appear to be good recipes for a neutral world order: Steering clear of contentious debates about the “good life” in religious, philosophical, or cultural traditions, they make the case for a liberal constitutional state as a fair coordination structure of individual liberties. If everyone adheres to the liberal order because she is better off, peace ensues. “No genuinely moral reasoning is needed. Sheer calculations along the lines of enlightened self-interest, that is computing merely the amounts of freedoms that are being traded off and gained, would suffice to establish these rules” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 79; 2008).

In effect though, Dierksmeier cautions that this program of quantitative freedom is a recipe for the conservation of vested (already posited and positive) freedoms against any claims to counterfactual freedom rights (f.ex. to education, or other forms of empowerment questioning the status quo). Often, it degenerates into a uniform program for deregulation per se (“less government = more freedom”), unleashing the dynamic of market forces unto local cultural practices. This libertarian conservatism of the “neo-liberal” kind has systematic reasons: Rights are granted conditionally, not unconditionally. Where no symmetrical exchange of utility is possible, a mind interested in advantages lacks a cogent reason to opt for self-restraint or solidarity (Dierksmeier 2008). There is no place for unconditional respect, nor responsibility, for the socially, economically or medically disadvantaged or weak, for the underprivileged or discriminated against members of society – and hence: no systematic reasons for policies of

empowerment. Theories with a quantitative understanding of freedom simply outsource such concerns for the conditions and qualities of a good life in certain contexts to particular moral or religious traditions under the liberal order: The concern for indigenous people on an island around the globe which is threatened by climate change; for future generations; or for anybody else not in a position to really benefit us. In consequence, with a quantitative understanding of freedom, the use of reason in the ethical consideration of specific conditions is replaced by the calculation of quantitative net-results, with a blind eye to the destructive dynamics unleashed by the erroneous equation “less responsibility = more freedom” (Dierksmeier 2010).

### Qualitative Freedom as the Inclusive Idea of Diverse Conceptions of the Good

In stark contrast, a qualitative understanding of freedom sees responsibility as the realization of freedom, not as a restraint on freedom. It insists on the ethical consideration of the substance (properties, attributes) and context of freedoms (in their plural forms) as conceived of by different people: What is the goodness of a freedom in question? Whose freedom is it, what is the context, and what are the effects of the exercise of this freedom? With such an evaluation, the idea of qualitative freedom promises to establish a more solid and inclusive foundation of a cooperative world order. In order to facilitate such a proper evaluation with (a) elements to be evaluated, (b) standards to be evaluated against, and (c) a method to do so, Dierksmeier builds on the tradition of Kant (Dierksmeier 2016a: 63–96) and his disciple, the cosmopolitan philosopher Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (Dierksmeier 2016a: 133–195).

Kant had made the twin distinction between “Idee und Begriff”, between the structural unity of an “idea” and the differences of concrete “conceptions” that have evolved in its realization (Dierksmeier 2016a: 78; 91–92; 350). The (a) elements to be evaluated are the diverse, and often conflicting, *conceptions* of freedom which are prevalent in a world marked by pluralism. They are always inherently informed by context, shaped and shaded by related understandings of other values, and in this sense, cultivated and “thick” conceptions. And just as the quantity of a substance is a decisive characteristic for its quality as medicine or poison, so the quantity of freedom is reviewed as part of the focus on quality – the quantitative aspect of a given freedom thus treated as an important part of its qualitative shape. The (b) formal standard against which any such particular conceptions of freedom (or of other values, for that matter) ought to be evaluated against is the regulating *idea* of freedom as a universal right for every person in the world: Everyone ought to be able to live her own life in self-determined responsibility. Qualitative freedom, in that sense, recognizes the conceptual diversity of particular freedoms while insisting that their goodness be judged against the universal regulative idea of responsible freedom for every human being as a person (Dierksmeier 2016a: 360).

The method of arriving at such judgment (c) had first been expounded by Krause, who insisted that the determination of concrete conceptions of the idea of freedom ought to be governed by “*freedom as a method*” (Dierksmeier 2016a: 63–64). “(T)he procedural and material aspects of freedom and autonomy rights come together in a postulate for participatory liberty, which demands that whoever comes under the influence of sanctioned rules have a say in their making” (Dierksmeier and Pirson 2010: 13). So the actual realization of the general idea of freedom for everyone requires forms of (equally) free participation in such a determination of concrete concepts of freedom by all those concerned (Dierksmeier 2010: 12–13). In a Krausean process of *construction* feeding both off *deduction* and *induction*, people determine what they conceive of as valuable conceptions of freedom realized, and how much of a given freedom they want to

configure with other conceptions of freedom (“The better the freedom, the more”). Freedom becomes its own project – the intrinsic intention shaping its own instruments, both the purpose, and the principle in its service, and both the universal ground and the concrete bound of all evaluative inquiry at the basis of ethically responsible conduct in society, business, and politics.

### **Weltethos: qualitative Freedom as the Foundation of Unity in Diversity**

This argument is simply the forward projection of Dierksmeier’s insight into the “indirectly self-establishing structure” of the idea of freedom: If any particular value commitment is a realization of the universal freedom to commit, then this value commitment is itself bound by the provision to afford such freedom to others. This is Dierksmeier’s contribution to the WEP: Understanding the reciprocal and dialogical structure of responsible freedom is, in the last analysis, a cosmopolitan understanding of freedom as “planetary responsibility”, a “responsibility for our neighbors, the environment, and the world afterwards” (Küng 1991: 30; Dierksmeier 2012: 10). As an inclusive, relational, dialogical, self-regulating idea, qualitative freedom is the comprehensive regulative idea Dierksmeier offers to align aspirations for global unity with aspirations for human diversity, conceiving of one aspiration as the shaping factor for the other. It is Dierksmeier’s imperative that we unite in our efforts to afford to each other what we expect from each other: the opportunity to live our own lives responsibly. That is, by exercising our freedom in responsibility for the same opportunity for others, or, as the capability approach would have it: that everyone has opportunities to “lead a life that human beings have reason to value” (Sen 1999; see below III.6).

### **Weltethos as the Responsible Exercise of Freedom in Economic Theory, Business Practice and Policy**

In the third part of his argument, Dierksmeier applies his understanding of Weltethos – qualitative freedom as cosmopolitan responsibility in the dialogic mode of Weltethos ideals – to the field of economics. He does so in line with the dialogic, Krausean method of offering opportunities of participative reflection. In this guise, business theorists offer to practitioners a discussion about mental models that guide economic action – dominant as well as alternative mental models, their origin in the history of ideas, and the effects of their exercise. Dierksmeier’s aim of “an outstretched hand” of partnership in reflection was exemplified by the annual Humanistic Management conferences between 2013 and 2017 in Tübingen which were always structured to think through certain central mental models – the ideas of integrity (Dierksmeier 2013b), dignity (Dierksmeier 2014), prudence and practical wisdom (Dierksmeier 2015), well-being (Dierksmeier 2016b, c), and Weltethos (in 2017) – in the fields of (1) Theory, (2) Business Practice, and (3) Policy, and with representatives from each field.

Overall, Dierksmeier adds affirmative, and at times constitutive, arguments to three agendas of research and argument: (1) the agenda of *Rethinking Economics* in the realm of theory; (2) the discourse of *Humanistic Management* which Dierksmeier frames as an approach to business ethics that is concerned, amongst other issues, with management theory, CSR, the innovation of Social Entrepreneurs, and stakeholder dialogue in the realm of practice; and (3) the discourse of the *Capability Approach*, which is concerned with creating political and economic conditions conducive to the substantive freedoms of human beings in the realm of policy. In all three of these approaches, Dierksmeier relies on his common core argument that the “neglect of the idea of freedom in economics in

recent decades has led to an inadequate conceptualization of the ethical responsibilities” of economic actors (Dierksmeier 2016b: 6). His ambition is nothing “short of a thoroughgoing epistemic and methodological reform of economics in light of the idea of freedom (Dierksmeier and Pirson 2009)” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 7).

### Theory: rethinking Economics: Epistemic Arguments for a New Pluralism

Dierksmeier’s ambition to transform economic thinking is grounded in his understanding that “(a) richer, more contextualized depiction of economic agency is necessary because only realism brings relevance and enables responsibility” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 5). While the fictitious *homo oeconomicus* paves the way for theoretical rigor, theory would prove its relevance only when it would recognize that ethical ideals and moral commitments were a part of the *conditio humana* of the *Homo sapiens*. Consequently, “(i)n real-life settings, understanding ethical *prescriptions* is inevitable for the correct *description* of economic agency. As the possibility of humanistic management results from the human reality of business, by becoming more humane, economics stands to become more realistic too.” Economists who “acknowledge the societal function of their instruction (...) can take on the social responsibility of their academic function” by developing “ethical literacy again. Economic ethics must hence be reframed from a marginal constraint to an integral and strategic dimension of economic theory simply because, bereft of ethics, economics is incomplete as well as incorrect.” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 117).

### A Procedural Teleology

Dierksmeier’s proposal on how achieve ethical literacy again takes its cues from a project in philosophy to bridge the divide between the (ancient, Aristotelian) teleology of the ethics of goods, and the (modern, Kantian) procedural deontology of the ethics of duty. In his “Reframing”, Dierksmeier demonstrates how this could be achieved by way of what we may call with Axel Honneth a “procedural teleology” (Honneth 1999). First, he pits three paradigmatic approaches against one another: (a) the modern “mechanistic paradigm” where economics aims to imitate the natural sciences, and is characterized by the calculations of “quantitative freedom”; (b) the “teleological paradigm”, where up until the late nineteenth century, all economic action was aimed towards qualitative ends, such as a certain understandings of subjective well-being or objective welfare; and (c) the “liberal paradigm” in the tradition of Immanuel Kant, the enlightened understanding of ethics in the tradition of Kant that we now live in a world marked by the plurality of convictions, and “no longer is there but one conception of ‘the good’ for each and everyone” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 67). He then proposes a fourth paradigm, (d) the “humanistic paradigm”, which unifies (b) and (c) in a procedural teleology that allows for the integration of diverse moral traditions with universal responsibilities by way of the inclusive good of (qualitative) freedom.

Dierksmeier recognizes that at the outset of the mechanistic paradigm, economists drawing on utilitarian philosophers were understandably dissatisfied with the century-old, often class-oriented quarrels of Aristotelian and Scholastic thought over axiomatic conceptions of the common good. They saw emancipative and egalitarian value in according each human being and her individual utility a central status in theorizing. However, Dierksmeier cautions, the introduction of both the methodological apparatus of physics and mathematics, and an understanding of economic structures according to



quasi-mechanical laws that could, by and large, be translated into mathematic equations also came at the cost of transforming qualitative values into quantitative worth (Dierksmeier 2016b: 13–18). With this empirical turn, economics measured what people actually appreciated, and ceased to rank what they should or ought to value (Dierksmeier 2016b: 13–14). Consequently, imaginative ethical considerations morphed into empirical economic calculations, and the understanding of freedom – a central idea of modern economics to this day – shrank from an inclusive qualitative mode into an exclusively quantitative mode. Ethics was, and remains, exiled from the sphere of predominant neoclassical economics.

### The Freedom-Responsibility Nexus: reintroducing Ethics into Economics

Dierksmeier’s proposal to ground economics in ethical considerations once again combines the teleological (Aristotelian) with the liberal (Kantian) paradigm. Wherever thinkers of the liberal paradigm have caved in to either pave the way of a morally hollow, quantitative understanding of freedom (as exemplified by the *homo oeconomicus* model or the *principal/agent* theory), or have gone overboard so as to vehemently determine and defend certain conceptions of (existing, positive, and often exclusive) freedoms against other conceptions of freedoms, Dierksmeier defends the comprehensive project of inclusive qualitative freedom as the true promise of the liberal paradigm (Dierksmeier 2016b: 94–96). This idea of qualitative freedom then allows Dierksmeier to insist on the (ancient and traditional) aim towards a common good, to recognize the diversity of conceptions of the good at the same time, and to invite all concerned into an open process of responsibly defining the concrete conceptions required to realize qualitative freedom as a right of every person. This combination becomes the foundation of an economic ethic suitable to the twenty-first century: “A global economic ethic, I shall argue, has to rest on the dual premise of the autonomy of each and the cosmopolitan responsibility of all” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 7).

As a central nexus of economic thinking, this re-conception of “freedom-responsibility nexus” is a pivotal move to rethink economics (Dierksmeier 2011), to re-connect modern thinking to traditions such as theories of virtue and its interest in practical wisdom (Dierksmeier and Pirson 2009; Dierksmeier and Celano 2012; Dierksmeier 2013b; Hühn and Dierksmeier 2014); to re-conceive and replace central mental models (Dierksmeier, Hoegl & Wihlenda 2016), such as the idea of freedom, and the anthropology of economic actors (Dierksmeier, Hemel & Manemann 2015); and to advance examples, case studies, and aspirations with the ultimate aim to open the door to a pluralism of more realistic (and thus: relevant) theories in economics, with important consequences for business education again (Dierksmeier 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016b; von Kimakowitz 2010; Amann et al. 2011; Dierksmeier et al. 2016; Moosmayer et al. 2018).

### Practice: Humanistic Management

As an author or editor of seven of the 16 books in the “Humanism in Business Series” at Palgrave Macmillan since 2011; in his inaugural article for the Humanistic Management Journal on “What is ‘Humanistic’ About Humanistic Management?” (Dierksmeier 2016c), and especially in his “Reframing Economic Ethics. The Philosophical Foundations of Humanistic Management” (Dierksmeier 2016b), Dierksmeier has made

substantial contributions to the discourse on Humanistic Management. In line with his ambition that “we ought not to strive for piecemeal corrections but for a thoroughgoing paradigm change of the predominant economic theories and practices in favor of a genuinely ‘humanistic management.’” (Dierksmeier 2016c: 9), he projects his program of business ethics as a critical and constructive theoretical intervention into the current, mostly problematic practice of business. Business theorists begin to realize, Dierksmeier argues, that the financial crisis and other unsustainable effects of irresponsible profit-maximization were driven by aberrant neoclassical theories of economic action, driven as they are by the harmful conceptions of merely quantitative freedom.

### Freedom and Responsibility, Dignity and Reason as Shared Intercultural Grounds

In his approach to reframing economic ethics for Humanistic Management (Dierksmeier 2016b), Dierksmeier also takes the argument of his monograph on qualitative freedom (Dierksmeier 2016a) one step further. He introduces “the supreme moral value of all: human dignity”, the “bedrock for an intercultural dialogue on a cosmopolitan ethics in the age of globality” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 7, 2014). But rather than upending his previous arguments through the new introduction of such a central, supremely important idea, Dierksmeier merely aims to restate and affirm his previous argument. With Kant, Dierksmeier understands dignity to be “premised on moral autonomy” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 68), resulting in an “indissoluble (...) unity of liberty and dignity, with freedom being the origin of dignity and dignity serving as the end of liberty” (Dierksmeier 2014: 6). So “our capacity for moral freedom must be seen as the true source of the unique status of the human being and its specific dignity” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 71), with the universal implications Immanuel Kant spells out in his formulation of the moral law: “‘So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only’ (AA IV: 429)” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 70; 2014).

With this new accentuation of a thread of discourse on dignity in the larger history of liberal humanistic ideas including Renaissance thinker Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, Dierksmeier not only connects universal liberal ideas to Hans Küng’s principled insistence on the central principle of humanity and the *Humanum’s* core of human dignity. He also aims to open a shared space for intercultural dialogue on the grounds of a “humanistic consensus” which he recognizes both in the substance of international declarations and covenants, and in the foundational research on a global ethic (Dierksmeier 2016b: 110–111). The World Ethos project “is not aiming at an artificially abstract ethical super-structure breeding uniformity and conformity, thwarting the richness, variety, and intricacy of the world’s many traditions.” Rather, “(b)ecause of this dual nature—respect for difference on one hand, coupled with an emphasis on the boundaries of divergence in light of shared principles and values on the other—the ‘Global Ethic Project’ is a paragon for what the humanist paradigm is all about: respecting human dignity by a procedural rather than substantial translation of ethics into practice” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 112).

While Dierksmeier does caution that the “answers of Western philosophers to questions about the nature and meaning of human freedom, responsibility, and dignity need, of course, not uncritically be worshiped as capstones of human wisdom”, he also sees “no way to resolve the debate on the cultural relativity of rational standards other than through the employment of the very capacities of critical human reasoning, whose universal character relativists so

staunchly deny.” So he claims to go beyond western traditions when he includes “*reasoning* as the means of making moral claims”, and “*reason* the ultimate arbiter” in moral arguments in intercultural settings. Consequently, “(e)stablishing the humanist paradigm on a conception of qualitative freedom means to welcome that different people in dissimilar contexts will find distinctive ways of how to give expression to the idea of human dignity”, again begging “a *proceduralist* imperative for participative decision-making as both a *normative* touchstone and a *pragmatic* yardstick for ethical decision-making on values in business and society” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 109–110).

### Applications to Humanistic Management: principles for Practice

In consequence, “(a) humanistic economic ethics would thus prioritize procedural forms over substantive norms and advocate participatory rather than excessively paternalistic ethical models” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 113). Though “handing out a set of ready-to-use management tools with the promise that with these in hand the humanistic paradigm of economic ethics can unfaillingly be converted from theory to practice” would “contradict the liberal and procedural essence of the modern notion of human dignity”, Dierksmeier has taken pains to guide thinking in regard to organizational theory, strategy, a stakeholder-model of governance, leadership and its virtues, culture, and banking (Dierksmeier and Pirson 2010; Dierksmeier 2011 on Kant; Pirson et al. 2014; Dierksmeier 2016b; Spitzack, Pirson & Dierksmeier 2012).

His basic argument promotes “ethically motivated innovation” far beyond the minimal stipulations of “do no harm” or “compliance with the law”. The global protection, pursuit and promotion of human dignity as qualitative freedom is driven by dialogue on all levels. Thinking helps, Dierksmeier argues, and mental models matter: proven ideas can drive innovation, and the reality of successful business models beyond profit maximization proves its principal possibility for others who convert their thinking from quantitative to qualitative freedom, from a transactional logic to a transformational logic, from wealth to well-being, and from knowledge to wisdom. Businesses can be drivers for a better life wherever they aim to create value with stakeholders instead of maximizing profit for shareholders; where ethics drives efficiency and excellence, where prudence connects profits to purpose, and the focus shifts from the bottom line to the top line.

### Between CSR and Social Entrepreneurship: creative Innovation

Though it is never his principal systematic argument, Dierksmeier does not shy away from arguing with case studies and research that ethical conduct in business pays off in profits in the long run. He thus appreciates forms of CSR concerned not only with environmental and regulatory requirements, avoiding costs of litigation, and brand or image enhancement, but with “sustainability as an integral part of value creation” (BCG 2009) in terms of efficient production, new distinctive products, learning from stakeholders and benefitting from their good will, and developing innovative strategies and business models.

The agenda of innovation motivated by global responsibility has become especially important to Dierksmeier and the Weltethos Institute. Time and again, Dierksmeier had highlighted the example of social entrepreneurs – of “firms experimenting with new business models in the pursuit of moral objectives” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 114; Elkington and Hartigan 2013). The insight that “Social Entrepreneurs thus prove day-by-day that one can, indeed, do

well by doing good” (Dierksmeier 2016b: 115) became one of the founding ideas of the Weltethos Institute’s own World Citizen School. In line with his aim to “make ‘the good’ central again in business education”, the World Citizen School is a social and educational innovation that empowers students to build a better tomorrow by building capabilities as Social Innovators, Social Entrepreneurs, and Social Intrapreneurs (Dierksmeier 2016b: 116; Wihlenda 2018). Here, qualitative freedom is the freedom to critically reflect the status quo, experiment, and innovate in the spirit of global responsibility.

### **Business as a Stakeholder: the Importance of Stakeholder Dialogue**

In a world of globality, Dierksmeier argues with Robbins (Dierksmeier 2008), business is first and foremost a stakeholder of society “on whose sound functioning it depends”, not vice versa. “This shift in perspective impacts our entire conception of business ethics: as either marginal or central to corporate strategy” (Dierksmeier 2014: 7). It is also the foundation of Dierksmeier’s argument for the centrality of the capability approach: Where businesses realize independence from society is unobtainable in light of the inescapable interdependence with its surroundings, they wisely engage in commitments to the capability enhancement of its stakeholders (Dierksmeier 2014: 9). Affirming the importance of stakeholder theory in the tradition of Freeman (Freeman et al. 2010), Dierksmeier generally conceives of open stakeholder dialogues as opportunities to learn, explore and articulate (possible) consequences of business conduct in the context of interdependencies, and as as public exercise of critical reasoning.

### **Policy: Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach**

Amartya Sen’s capability approach embodies a well-established, globally and intercultur-ally relevant example of a liberal procedural teleology (Sen 1999). As the theoretical foundation for United Nations poverty reporting standards and human development policies as well as a discourse combining Martha Nussbaum’s concern with Aristotelian traditions with Sen’s liberal interests, the conception and consequences of the capability approach are at the center of Dierksmeier’s agenda for theory, business practice, and especially economic and social policy. Like perhaps no other living economist, the Nobel Prize Winner’s argument for a freedom that provides humans wherever they live with the means and opportunities to “live a life that they have reason to value”, as defined by themselves in participatory and open procedures, matches the concern of the WEP from Küng to Dierksmeier with the planetary responsibility of cultivating conditions for a life in dignified autonomy for everyone.

Consequently, Dierksmeier has tightly integrated the capability approach into the WEP. In his 2013 inaugural lecture as a professor in Tübingen, Dierksmeier mounts a firm defense of Sen’s insistence on “substantive freedoms” against Nussbaum’s drive toward “substantial freedoms” while gently clarifying and correcting Sen’s own formulation of this freedom in terms of a qualitative freedom (Dierksmeier 2013a, 2016b: 84–85). In his 2016 book on Qualitative Freedom, Sen in turn serves as one of two modern examples of qualitative freedom as “fair freedom” (John Kenneth Galbraith) and “responsible freedom” (Amartya Sen) (Dierksmeier 2016a). Dierksmeier has also teamed up with economist Jürgen Volkert, one of Germany’s foremost experts on the capability approach, to advance case studies and examples of corporations and political actors committed to building capabilities (Volkert

et al. 2013; Strotmann and Volkert 2013; Dierksmeier 2014) – in this, again, a faithful heir to the Global Ethic Manifesto (see II.1.3).

## **Weltethos for Business: the Complementary Convergence of Küng and Dierksmeier**

With the founder of the Weltethos Project, Hans Küng, and his academic successor of choice, Claus Dierksmeier, this article has analyzed two major voices for Weltethos and their foray into Weltethos for business. The tradition of the research and discourse on Weltethos for business remains incomplete without a closer analysis and appraisal of the contributions by business ethicists Klaus Leisinger and Josef Wieland, especially on the occasion of the Manifesto of 2009, and of the body of research at the Weltethos Institute since 2012, especially by philosopher Friedrich Glauner and financial ethics expert Bernd Villhauer. They shall become the subject of future study.

### **Two Different Approaches to Weltethos Commitments**

With Hans Küng and Claus Dierksmeier, the WEP merges the power of two different strands of argument – one characterized by a (conservative, empirical) appreciation of a convergence of theological traditions in an elementary consensus that makes cooperation possible in the world as it is; and the other characterized by a (progressive, idealist) impetus to update philosophical ideas for a world that emerges beyond divergence to unite in the name of diversity. Both unite in their understanding of Weltethos as a dialogical script for dignity through globally responsible freedom, and in the implications for business in a globalized world.

For Hans Küng, Weltethos is the disposition to act on certain elementary human values already present in our (religious and secular) traditions, a possible catalogue of which has gained empirical legitimacy through its various declarations. For Claus Dierksmeier, Weltethos is the disposition to exercise your own freedom as the cosmopolitan responsibility to care for the dignity of others by way of dialogue. More systematically said, it is a disposition to build a world regulated by the idea “qualitative freedom”, which is the comprehensive, inclusive (inherently relational and dialogical) regulative idea to align necessary (ethical) aspirations for global unity with the necessarily various moral aspirations inherent in the diversity of the human family. Such an alignment is a dialectical process of creative normative reflection where one aspiration is bent to serve the other, resulting in an ethically responsible conduct of world citizens motivated by particular moral traditions. The appreciation of moral traditions by Küng and the ethical regulatory idea proposed by Dierksmeier are themselves complementary aspirations, with one argument advancing the other. Where Küng highlights the consensus of converging ideals as foundation of peaceful and cooperative interaction with one another, Dierksmeier can build on that consensus and realize the potential of making differences fruitful in a dialogue that drives change and innovation for a better world. Taken together, ten Weltethos commitments emerge between them: Küng’s explicit list of two principles and four values, and Dierksmeier’s implicit list of freedom qualitatively understood, dignity, responsibility, and reason – all of them highly resonant with Küng’s own argument.

## Weltethos as Commitment to Care for Human Dignity

While their approaches, priorities, and highlighted commitments differ, both Küng and Dierksmeier can be observed (or may reasonably be expected) to agree on certain substantial definitions of Weltethos as an ideal, a norm, a list of values, a certain ethic, or a practice – depending on the context where “Weltethos” is invoked. As an *ideal* in the sense of a pure intention to be realized, Weltethos denotes the unifying aspiration of the diverse human family to cooperatively exercise and cultivate voluntary responsibility aimed at the dignity of all fellow human beings. This (planetary, cosmopolitan, global) responsibility is comprehensive in its principal extension to conditions and capabilities conducive to a dignified life of every human being. It thus concerns our neighbors as well as distant human beings, the environmental, social, cultural, legal and political conditions, and the world of tomorrow. The primary form to determine the requirements of responsible cooperative conduct is dialogue. – As a *norm* (or a collection of norms), Weltethos denotes a basic global consensus on a list of elementary commitments with a claim to validity as either (a) an empirical ecumenical consensus, in the sense of a consensus rooted in, and affirmed by religious traditions as well as by humanist approaches (such as Küng’s list), and / or (b) as a universal consensus in the sense that these values may philosophically be proven to be valid for all human beings (such as Dierksmeier’s understanding of qualitative freedom as foundation for the intention, principles and values of Küng’s list).

As a list of *values*, the ten Weltethos commitments are a list of desirable orientations that is attractive to anyone identifying as a human being among other fellow human beings and (a) looking for proven ways to get along well with them, especially in diverse or intercultural settings, and / or (b) looking for cosmopolitan purpose and guidance in building a better world with others. – As an *ethic* in the traditional sense of *ethos* – an *attitude* of character, an embodied *disposition* to act a certain way – Weltethos commitments take the form of cosmopolitan *virtues* that shape and shade all habitualized and creative action. – Finally, as a *practice*, Weltethos is the capacity for dialogue, built in the confluence of practicing all ten commitments together. The capacity for dialogue is central for Küng because it combines the steadfastness of religious truths with a readiness to learn and transform towards peace. And it is central for Dierksmeier as the practice of responsible freedom as a method, as the exercise of procedural and participatory liberty.

The list of ten commitments between Küng and Dierksmeier fully converges. To both Hans Küng, the cosmopolitan son of liberty-loving Switzerland whose autobiographies’ first part is titled “My struggle for freedom” (Küng 2004), and Claus Dierksmeier, the Kantian idealist who grew up in a Catholic home amongst Küng’s books, freedom is the fundamental value – that is, freedom as the foundation of its realization as human dignity; and thus freedom as the exercise of global responsibility for conditions of lives in dignity. Küng comments: “Whosoever interprets the idea of freedom in a consistent theoretical manner must define it practically in forms of cosmopolitan responsibility: Freedom and Weltethos – these are really just two sides of the same thing. Without regard to Weltethos, freedom can not be thought coherently, and without freedom, Weltethos can not be lived consistently” (Küng in his preface to Dierksmeier 2016a: 9).

For both Küng and Dierksmeier, Küng’s list of two principles and four values is a list of proven conceptions of qualitative freedoms – of tried, tested, and widely accepted value commitments that uphold, protect and promote the dignified and reasonable autonomy of others to differ in their exercise of moral judgment. For Dierksmeier, “the ideals of Weltethos appear to spell out qualitative freedom in the sense of taking

responsibility aimed at the dignified autonomy of all fellow human beings” (Dierksmeier 2016a: 401). For Küng, commenting on Dierksmeier, qualitative freedom raises the “prospect of humankind (...) unified as a community of fate striving for reasonable autonomy” (Küng in Dierksmeier 2016a: 9).

Like Küng, Dierksmeier casts a globally responsible freedom structured by the *Weltethos* values as the foundation and script of dialogue, “instructing people of all origins on what they agree upon in theory, and how they can cooperate in practice. In such a convergence of elementary values, (...) people of different origins may develop shared conceptions in dialogue, and cooperate purposefully on that basis” (Dierksmeier 2016a: 399–400). Both understand dialogue as an open participatory process and program of learning.

### **Weltethos for Business: an Agenda for Change Leadership**

As thinkers, both Küng and Dierksmeier stage interventions into economic practices they deem irresponsible and unsustainable. Their *Weltethos* arguments for business never differ in principle, merely in specification and priority, with Dierksmeier, called by Küng into the WEP as a philosopher experienced in global economic questions, drawing on his expertise in the history of economic ideas as well as ethics; making use of his awareness of contemporary potentials of CSR, Social Entrepreneurship, and stakeholder theory; and capitalizing on the fruitful partnership with other Humanistic Management scholars.

In terms of practice, both Küng and Dierksmeier conceive of the economy not as a separate sphere free of morality and ethics. Rather, both understand economic activity as a societal practice which, by virtue of its transformational power to destroy and create, absolutely ought to be channeled as a force for good. Both urge that businesses replace a primary focus on profit for the purpose of protecting, promoting, and pursuing human dignity, though neither of them is naïve in regard to the role of profit as a means to sustain the creation of value through business. Both see the dialogue among stakeholders of business as a driver for the achievement of conditions and capabilities conducive to humanity as a community unified in dignified autonomy, and in seeking dialogue with practitioners, both Küng and Dierksmeier conduct themselves as partners and stakeholders of economic practice.

In terms of theory, both contribute ideas and insights to a comprehensive agenda of change in the fields of theory, business practice, and policy in regard to (i) our behavior on the micro-level of conscientious conduct; (ii) our moral practices on the meso-level of cultural conventions; and (iii) our policies, laws and institutions on the macro-level of constitutionalized citizenship. Both turn to the history of ideas in philosophy as well as religion to draw inspiration for ideas, initiatives and innovations. Methodologically, both place their premium bets on the responsibility of individuals to exemplify responsible, creative and transformational leadership, though their enlightened individualism is likely better understood as a form of relationalism.

Finally, in regard to economic policy, both Küng and Dierksmeier are committed to a transformational update of a certain model of responsible capitalism – one modeled in description and prescription as a “social market economy” in Germany, and in need both of a transnational, global framework of order, and a transcultural foundation in values. Here, Dierksmeier contributes specifics of the Capability Approach that align with Küng’s intentions. In its concern for cultivating cooperative responsibility to empower each other with substantive freedoms via procedures of dialogue, the WEP flows right into the capability approach in the tradition of Amartya Sen (Dierksmeier 2013a). Dierksmeier also re-introduced the related ideas of

the German–British sociologist and liberal politician Ralf Dahrendorf on “life-chances” into the German political discourse (Dierksmeier 2016d). Concerned as Küng and Dierksmeier are with the interplay of the micro- and the meso-level of an individual with the communal ethic, with prudent and virtuous conduct in the light of diverse moral traditions, it remains the macro-level of an institutional order in Germany, Europe, and the world, and the policy advice that their reforms requires, where the agenda for *Weltethos* for business arguably merits more attention.

**Note of Interest** As an employee of the *Weltethos* Institute, I am part of the *Weltethos* Project which is the subject of my article. I am friends with my former colleague Claus Dierksmeier, and I am on friendly terms with Hans Küng and Klaus Leisinger. None of them have financial influence on me.

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