

WORKING PAPER

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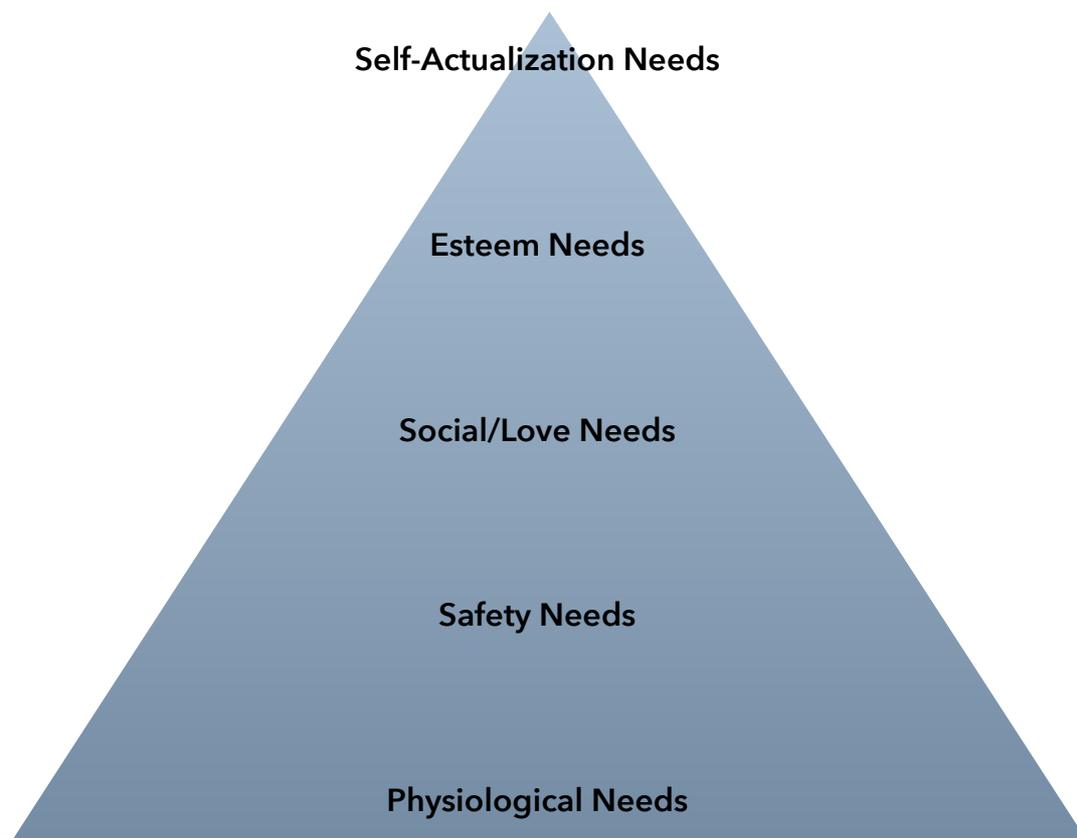
SELF-ACTUALIZATION IN THE COMMONS

[The following is a condensed version of a larger futures vision focused on how the concepts of “self-actualization” and “global commons” can contribute to the active construction of a Humanist Utopia on the pathway to Singularity.]

In order to explore the possible ground of a Humanist Utopia I would like to employ the Maslowian humanist psychology perspective, first developed by Abraham Maslow in *A theory of human motivation* (1943). The main lessons from Maslowian humanist psychology is that there exists within humanity a common drive for an unbounded process of self-actualization, but more crucially, there also exists necessary material and social preconditions which must be met as a baseline of existence if an individual is to maintain and stabilize a sociocreative state of self-actualization.

Thus, for Maslow, we can understand human development from the standpoint of multiple hierarchical (but interacting) “levels” of growth from lower (more basic, animalistic, physiological) needs, like food and water, to the higher (more complex, humanistic, or psychological) needs like the desire for self-actualization (i.e. to be completely immersed and at home in an unbounded sociocreative process). The (well-known) hierarchy can be roughly articulated as follows (1943):

FIGURE 1: MASLOW’S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



The crucial importance of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is in the realization that an individual human being is not and can not be fully satisfied in development

(i.e. subject at home with the object) unless that human being has the opportunity to actualize what s/he could potentially be(come); and thus it is in that *process of actualization* (i.e. in a dynamic ever-changing state of psychosocial growth towards higher inner unification) where satisfaction can be found.

However, this humanist tendency or desire for an unbounded sociocreative actualization requires a stable hierarchal developmental platform, namely: a social platform (strong positive social relations, love, kinship, community), which requires a security platform (shelter, peace, cooperation), which requires a material platform (food, water, etc.), and so forth. Thus, the problems with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is not necessarily in its fundamental structural gesture (which can be considered somewhat obvious or intuitive as a general psychosocial developmental pole of human becoming), but rather in its individualist conception and implementation, i.e. in its failure to properly identify the practical geopolitical and socioeconomic implications for the structure of society and civilization itself.

From the Maslowian perspective, if a Humanist Utopia is to be achieved, the ground of civilization must somehow sustainably enable an unbounded psychosocial growth that minimizes conflict or friction in the spontaneous tendency of the human mind to strive towards its own actualization (of what it could potentially be(come) in-and-for-itself). But when the individualist structure of Maslow's hierarchy is applied to society as a whole, i.e. "Human Societal Level Hierarchy of Needs", we run into a developmental paradox between what is "individual" and what is "common", what is "diversity" and what is "universal", or what is the "part" and what is the "whole". Specifically, in order for civilization to function (as a "common-universal-whole"), there are specific practical tasks/work that must be fulfilled that do not provide the human mind (civilization's "individual-diverse-parts") with an authentic and free outlet for actualization (thus the historical need for centralized external coercion).

Here the way out of this paradox of civilization development, and potentially a direction towards Humanist Utopia, may be the development of revised humanist political vision (i.e. universal vision of emancipation) characterized by an ***eschatological socialism***, i.e. utilizing the State to establish a Global Commons guided by libertarian and anarchist principles (i.e. principles of respect for individual freedom and rejection of unjust authority). Here the "Global Commons" concept requires the articulation and elaboration of the following three concepts: ***automated commons***, ***collaborative commons***, and ***nested commons*** (TABLE 1):

TABLE 1: POTENTIAL DEVELOPMENT OF GLOBAL COMMONS

CONCEPT	DEFINITION
ESCHATOLOGICAL SOCIALISM	State function designed to disintegrate upon completion of automated/collaborative "Global Commons" projects with distributed international mechanisms for guided self-organization (as opposed to maintaining bureaucracies and military projects).
AUTOMATED/COLLABORATIVE COMMONS	Networked spaces (i.e. interconnected distributed commons) designed around principles of universal access and the general phasing out of labour (where contextually desirable) due to the implementation of general purpose robotics, artificial intelligence, etc.
NESTED COMMONS	Networked spaces at multiple interacting levels of organization from the local-to-global enabling international access and sharing of resources and knowledge.

This form of eschatological socialism (or in the positive sense: the active construction of a Global Commons) is made possible by the new technological possibility space, i.e. general purpose robotics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, etc. and their developing interconnection with the Internet of Things, i.e. our emerging planetary nervous system, or Global Brain (see: Rifkin 2014, Heylighen 2015). From utilizing the potential of this automated technology, and its distributed global interconnection within the infrastructure of the Internet, the State could actively prepare the ground for a self-sustaining universal abundance, peace, and well-being, i.e. the State could attempt development projects which literally and permanently eliminate the base of Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" on a societal scale. This is the core principle of the form of eschatological socialism I am suggesting, where the State can be conceptualized as a mechanism for guided self-organization of an actual Global Brain.

Or, said from a Maslowian perspective, to conceptualize the State as an entity for guided self-organization whose end purpose is to create a planetary "environment for self-actualization".

This end function can be logically justified on humanist grounds utilising Maslow's "Hierarchy of Needs" if we conceptualize the "Physiological" and "Safety" needs of humanity as universal, i.e. food, water, shelter, energy, health care, transportation, education, and we also conceptualize the State's ultimate historical function (end function) to produce a universal ground of abundance, peace, and well-being. From this reasoning practically applied in reality we could imagine the development of State projects to ensure that all aspects of these aforementioned

services were readily available and abundant, with minimal labour (or perhaps conceptualized as a gradual “phasing out” of undesirable labour) and no control of property (i.e. “commonly” owned spaces maintained on the principle of universal access).¹

Or, said again, the State could be utilized as a mechanism for the construction of an **automated commons** (TABLE 1) at the base of the societal Hierarchy of Needs. However, the establishment of such a base, would necessarily lead to humanity becoming *increasingly important for*, and *increasingly preoccupied with* the higher levels of the societal Hierarchy of Needs, namely things to do with social love, esteem, and self-actualization. This simply means that humanity would become more pre-occupied with qualitatively new dimensions of social life and creative desire. For this end, the State could aid in the construction of the **collaborative commons** at the higher levels of the societal Hierarchy of Needs.

Thus, if we conceptualize the **automated commons** as the construction of distributed self-organizing commonly-owned technological networks composed of general purpose robotics and AI designed to eliminate the need for labour and property at the base level of civilization; then we can conceptualize the **collaborative commons** as the active construction of distributed self-organizing commonly-owned human networks designed to facilitate the formation of novel social and creative interconnection.

- **Automated Commons:** eliminates lower (physiological-animalistic) levels of societal Hierarchy of Needs (Fig. 1)
- **Collaborative Commons:** facilitates the development of the higher (humanistic socio-creative) levels of societal Hierarchy of Needs (Fig. 1)

The logic of the distinction between actively “automating” the lower and “humanising” the higher levels in regards to the construction of the Global Commons is as follows:

- 1) the most undesirable and difficult labour tends to include jobs related to the rudimentary functioning of civilization,

¹ Here I want to strongly emphasize that I am not advocating for a total elimination of labour from sectors like health and education, for example. There are many jobs in many sectors related to basic human needs where human work is not only necessary, but also desirable. The point of the automated commons concept is strictly to emphasize that, where labour is both unnecessary and undesirable, we should (as a moral imperative) automate it out of existence. The point of the collaborative commons concept is to end the type of work that humans experience in their daily existence to be a form of slavery.

2) general purpose robotics and AI tend to be capable of performing routine repetitive tasks/work well (tasks/work that enable the baseline of civilization functioning), and

3) auto-technology is not capable of handling fundamental sociocreative tasks/work, tasks/work that are the essence of what it means to be a human Subject (i.e. reflective, loving, imaginative, creative, emotional, etc.).²

Thus, in the construction of an automated baseline for civilization, we approach a myriad of complex problems related to the economic, social, biological, and technological commons, with very simple universal solutions that promote the formation of new local sociotechnological interactions (i.e. a “simplex” approach to developing a self-organizing Global Commons). These new local sociotechnological interactions would be built around emancipation (from both basic scarcity and authoritarian relationships), with an attempt to build a planetary “environment for actualization” (i.e. by reducing the material-societal friction in the desire for psychosocial becoming). In other words, the purpose of the automated commons would be to emancipate humanity towards a qualitatively new level of civilization built on the depth of loving social relationships; the exploration of science, art, philosophy, technology; the mystery of cognitive and sensory experience; and everything else the human mind (and future mind more generally) finds fulfilling.

Here, although I have mentioned this, I would like to re-emphasize the following: in terms of a humanist approach to globalization, the automated commons rests on three crucial distinctions from contemporary geopolitical and socioeconomic organization, distinctions related to labour, property, and State:

- Labour: automated commons spaces would be designed to eliminate and/or phase out human labour (where labour is unneeded/undesirable)
- Property: automated commons spaces are not owned or operated by any entity, in other words, they are commonly owned and can be represented as the common inheritance of humankind
- State: consequently, automated commons spaces, although potentially established in collaboration with the State, are not the property of any State, but instead become networked into a Global Commons

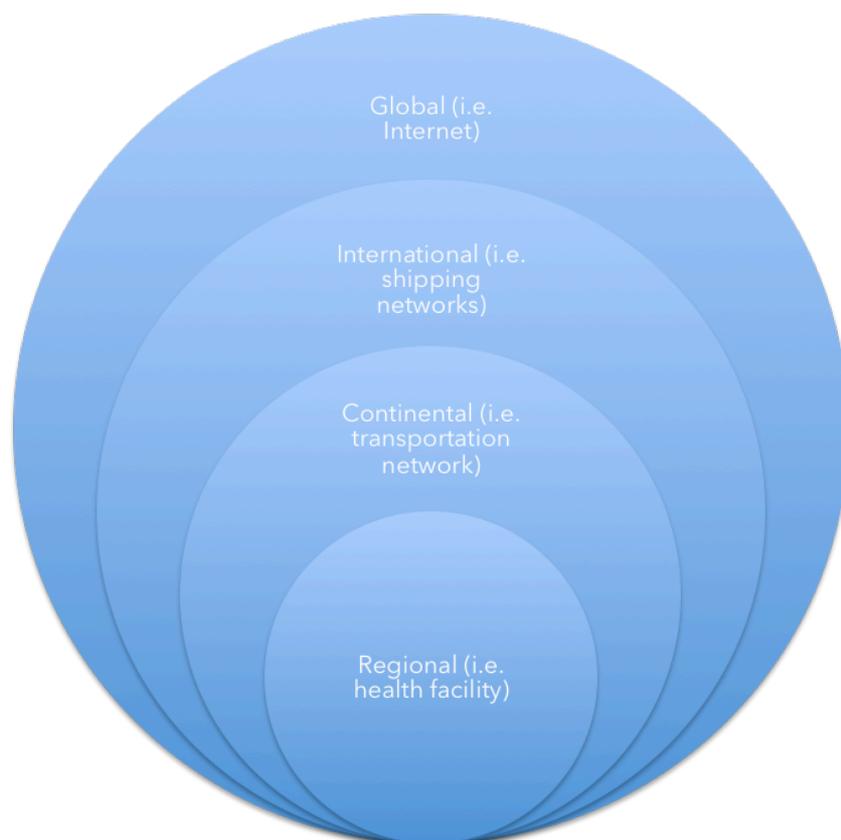
However, it is crucial to also realize that this project would also become “multi-level” in a systemic sense and “international” in the sense that all “common”

² Or as economist John Maynard Keynes – the theorist who first introduced the term “technological unemployment – suggested in his classic text “On the Economic Possibilities of our Grandchildren”: “mankind is solving its economic problem [... and] a point may soon be reached, much sooner perhaps than we are all of us aware of, when these [economic] needs are satisfied in the sense that we prefer to devote our further energies to non-economic purposes.” (1930, p. xxx).

spaces would (ideally) become interconnected/networked into the global whole (i.e. not owned and operated by any regional entity). Thus, a necessary conceptual addition to the concept of automated commons would be **nested commons**, i.e. networked automated common spaces at multiple levels of organization from the local (e.g. community center, grocery store, urban transportation grid, etc.) to the global (i.e. the Internet as a universal common medium of sociotechnological interconnection).

The development of an automated commons within a nested commons infrastructure would be a project where functional State activities become internationally outsourced to general purpose automated technology networks with the Internet – and eventual mature Global Brain (i.e. planetary hyper-intelligent environment) – creating a universally accessible “Absolute-level” or “Master Commons” which holds within its totality a multilevel interacting **nested commons** (FIGURE 2).

FIGURE 2: NESTED COMMONS³



³ The nested commons (above) attempts to represent the multi-level hierarchy of interaction involved in establishing networks of automated commons from the local to the global. There are simply some automated commons networks that will be more regional/local, like health facilities, school systems, or grocery stores; whereas other automated commons networks will be continental or international, like for example transportation grids, food and resource distribution networks, etc., whereas the total or all-encompassing “Absolute Level” or “Master Commons” would be the Internet itself, which would provide universal free access as a basic human right, and link all automated commons within its architecture.

From the multi-local development of automated commons projects, and their gradual networked interaction within a nested commons, the goal would be to facilitate the emergence of a global whole with diverse properties that manifest solely as a consequence of their cumulative local interactions (based only around common/universal principles of interaction as detailed regarding labour, property, and State).

Alternative/Additional developmental possibilities: If such a Global Commons project were to be attempted (adhering to principles of eschatological socialism), then perhaps the infrastructure of the United Nations could be repurposed as a structure designed to facilitate a new form of State-international cooperation. Of course, this would be a United Nations with higher responsibility, i.e. of facilitating the emergence of a common humanist value system centred around human well-being and civilization-earth symbiosis. This would necessarily require that these “ultimate” values (as guiding principles) take formal precedence over both the myriad activities of State interests and the activities of global Capital (i.e. State interests and the activities of global Capital must conform to international constitutional standards for operation).

In order for this conception to practically function, there would have to be a fundamental transition from national citizenship and national currencies – the political-economic foundation for the modern State-Capital nexus (of that nexus’s capability to sublimate human action into either State or Capital ends) – towards universal citizenship (a long-time Idealist conception of cosmopolitanism) and universal currency (the necessary Materialist solidification of that Ideal). However, this new universal citizen-currency nexus would have to be implemented not just on the principles of individual freedom, but also as a foundational baseline for something like a Universal Basic Income (UBI) (Van Parijs 2004), i.e. individual freedom cannot be disconnected from economic freedom. Consequently, any universal currency would function to ensure some minimal level of existence (totally disconnected from labour activity, as such), while enabling access to common spaces, but also and always, a way to encourage/motivate (not force) pro-social, pro-creative contributions aligned towards global values of humanist well-being and civilization-earth symbiosis (economy/ecology symbiosis).⁴

Of course, in the formation of an emergent value system with “well-being” and “civilization-earth symbiosis” as its guiding principles, there will be an unavoidable (and not necessarily undesirable or problematic) element of

⁴ Historically, the use of money has served three principle functions: as a medium of exchange, a unit of account, and as a store of value. The challenge of preparing a new socioeconomic ground is in redefining these aspects of money, as the “medium of exchange” would ideally be social sharing (or “offers”), the “unit of account” would be social “trust” or “reputation”, and the “store of value” would be human “well-being”. However, social sharing, trust/reputation, and well-being are deeply subjective phenomena, and thus, not easily quantifiable in the way that money can be.

contextual trial-and-error experimental process from the local to the global level of interaction (i.e. what social offers do we consider as enhancing human well-being? And what activities will ensure longterm resource sustainability? etc.). Thus, there would be a naturally occurring process of a type of Darwinian-Platonic selection (i.e. a selection of social forms/Ideas) that, although guided along by the Ideal of creating a sustainable planetary “environment for actualization” (i.e. to maximise human well-being and civilization-earth symbiosis), will nonetheless involve unavoidable elements of sociocreative contingency (i.e. we will ultimately have to choose in our contingent and distributed actions, what it means to create and live in a sustainable planetary “environment for actualization”).

Let me be as clear as I can here by juxtaposing this global developmental proposition next to the contemporary reality of the State-Capital nexus. The crucial concepts forwarded will be the philosophical concepts of “necessity” and “contingency”. In our current global organization, the State-Capital nexus, the necessity (what are the necessary structural conditions of global order) can clearly be found in the circulation of global Capital and service to State authority. In other words, most human work, regardless of location or function, are in service to maximise profit and to maintain State structures. These are the necessary conditions of our existence today. Our contingency comes in how we choose to engage with such a structural nexus to survive and actualize. In this contingency there is always an undetermined and unpredictable selection process, where people compete and cooperate in various forms of labour activity. Thus, even though the basic structural contours are a pre-determined necessity, i.e. the reproduction of Capital, and the reproduction of State structure; there is nonetheless an undetermined contingency of selection within this universal arrangement.

In contrast, in the the nexus proposed above, of a nexus designed around the construction of a Global Commons (automated/collaborative commons linked to a societal scale “Hierarchy of Needs”), and with a universal citizenry/currency at its Ideal-Material foundation, the dynamic between “necessity” and “contingency” are fundamentally adjusted. The “new necessity” would switch from the circulation of global Capital and service to State authority, and instead be transformed into the maximisation of humanist well-being, and civilization-earth symbiosis. However, we do not lose our contingency, our contingency still comes from how we freely choose to engage with this structural nexus to survive and actualize. And it is in this very radical and local contingency, where “emergence” of a “true humanist” global value system can occur, i.e. what does it mean to live in a society attempting to maximum humanist well-being and civilization-earth symbiosis, as opposed to living in a society attempting to maximum corporate profit and State stability?

Consequently, main difference is that this new nexus is not constructed around exploitation, exclusion, and division; instead it is constructed around dignity, inclusion/access, and holism. There would, of course, be struggle in this new nexus, the struggle for the establishment of a totally new order, but also unforeseen challenges and obstacles. However, there is also the opportunity to transcend our current situation, and confront new challenges, challenges of a qualitatively higher order.⁵

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⁵ In a recent presentation at the Brookings Institute, the chief of staff of the United Nations, Susana Malcorra (2015), gave a speech on the need to adapt the United Nations at its structural foundations in a new way to the challenges presented in the 21st century. In this adaptation she noted that the main obstacles for the United Nations include a fundamentally new way to deal with income/wealth inequality, as well as human rights abuses, as many problems, especially in the developing world, are increasingly becoming problematic in so many complex and multi-dimensional aspects, that it becomes impossible to understand how to approach and implement a coherent solution. She also noted that the United Nations has no effective way to deal with the activities of multinational corporations, and the conflicting interests they represent in relation to the lived experience of most humans around the world, as well as a lack of "appetite" from member States to cooperate and more fully dedicate time towards facilitating equal economic development, social justice, and sustainable ecology. In short, Malcorra is identifying that, as the world becomes more complex, and as the State-Capital nexus prevents coherent and reasonable global action, any chance of international cooperation is disintegrating, and only a new approach can help to escape it. Here, could not the United Nations be seen as a potential structure to form a distributed international ground with the ability to facilitate the development of a Global Commons? The primary challenge would be on ensuring that this new structure, to guide a process of self-organization towards a global whole, remained without a center, i.e. remained dynamic and distributed in its foundational organizational principles. Of course, there would be no center, because if we were to ever achieve a planetary "environment for actualization", everyone would be the center, everyone would become a Philosopher King/Queen.