Call for papers

The General and the Particular in the Contemporary World: Philosophical, Anthropological, Theological, Aesthetic and Political-Economic Implications

An international conference, The General and the Particular in the Contemporary World: Philosophical, Anthropological, Theological, Aesthetic and Political-Economic Implications will be held at Queen’s University, Kingston, Ontario on May 8th and 9th, 2020.

This is the second conference dealing with topics taken up by the late Professor Lawrence Krader (1920-1998), philosopher and anthropologist, and former Director of the Institut für Ethnologie at the Freie Universität Berlin. The first conference was held at McMaster University
and the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre in Hamilton, Ontario on May 5th and 6th, 2016. That conference focused largely on the implications of Krader’s magnum opus: Noetics: The Science of Thinking and Knowing although it included appreciations of his work on myth in his earlier anthropological writings as well. The second conference has a more direct focus on a topic which has become of central interest in terms of national and global trends as the structures put in place as a direct result of events following the conclusion of the Second World War and the ensuing Cold War are being called into serious question. At the heart of these changes are matters of universalism and particularism, globalism and nationalism, free trade and protectionism, international alliances and nationalist aspirations, multiculturalism and ethnic and racial particularism, diplomacy and belligerency, issues of gender binary coherence and gender fluidity, cultural/ethnic/racial/gender appropriation, civil liberties and political correctness etc.

Krader has taken up the universal (he preferred the word “general”) and the particular, in relation to the question of human history and human development as contained in the following citation from Noetics:

The difficulty in conceiving of salutation in theory arises both in taking up inter-relations of order and randomness in the theory of nature and in uncritically and speculatively considering unity and the One in human history. The party of humanity, the church universal, and the world revolutions are expressions of such speculative unity; one of the products of this speculative expression is the idea of a world history from the standpoint of a world citizen. We can conceive of a world standpoint, party, church, revolution, and citizenship in the imagination, in speculation and in abstracto, but concrete issues arise out of particular experiences, problems, and solutions, leading in these and in other directions. To be sure, history bears not only on the concrete particular; general problems of the human kind are also concrete, and by considering them critically we go beyond our individual and particular formations. But the general is concrete only in the particular and not concrete in the general, either in human history or in natural history. The human particular is sifted through the worldwide or the local perspectives, and this particular is critically treated. (Krader 2010, 105–106)

And in a much earlier study of primitive myth Krader (1966, 51-52) not only took up the question of humankind in general in relation to particular cultures, but he went further by suggesting that treating abstractions of humanity as though they were concrete realities actually impedes the further development of the humankind in the direction of what philosophers have sometimes called the concrete universal:

The expression of the nature and identity of mankind in the abstract, however clear it may be as a concept, is neither well thought out nor fully explored; hence it is at once the triumph and defeat of speculative and empirical anthropology. To be human is to participate in mankind in general, and to participate in a particular culture; it is the latter which is known best. Objectively, the individual achieves his or her human nature only through the channel of the particular culture, not through that of mankind in
general; in this sense we speak of particular human nature. The unity and uniqueness of mankind as the culture bearer, while having gained formal expression, has been given little substantial content. Moreover, the concept of the abstract concept, the totality as unity, has few consequences in relations between peoples and between social classes. The individual identity of man is engendered by the expression of his being of his own kind as opposed to the being of those other nations and classes, and as opposed eventually to the being of the other; this mode of achieving identity is counter-posed to the concept of the unity of man, and the unity of the separate human group with mankind as a whole [...] The conditions which have made possible the concept of mankind as an abstract unitary, objective totality, impede the realization of the concept.

In the second conference concerning the works of Lawrence Krader, we take up the challenge posed by him regarding the general and the particular in the development of the humankind. We invite scholars in all fields whose work addresses this important theme to respond to this call for papers. We will invite 16 successful applicants to participate in the conference, based upon their abstracts (200-300 words in length), submitted before the end of the 2019 calendar year to one of the following members of the Krader Project:

- Prof. Rob Beamish  rob.beamish@queensu.ca
- Dr. Sabine Sander  sandes1@mcmaster.ca
- Prof. Cyril Levitt  levittc@mcmaster.ca

We will inform successful applicants of our decision by January 31, 2020, and will have their travel costs, room and board covered by the Lawrence Krader Research Project.