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A NONARY OF PRIORITIES



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“PHILOSOPHY AND THE HUMAN FUTURE” WAS THE TITLE OF AN INTERESTING CONFERENCE HELD AT CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND, FROM 6TH TO 11TH AUGUST 1989, CONVENED BY THE ESALEN INSTITUTE REVISIONING PHILOSOPHY PROGRAM, WHICH GATHERED SOME HUNDRED PARTICIPANTS, MAINLY PHILOSOPHERS FROM THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. THIS ARTICLE IS BASED ON THE AUTHOR’S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM, PUBLISHED IN “REVISIONING PHILOSOPHY”, ED. JAMES OGILVY, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK PRESS, ALBANY, 1992, PP.235-246.

WHAT FOLLOWS IS NOT A SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE, BUT JUST A REFLECTION ON THE PROBLEMATIC.

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Official Philosophy, like “official churches” and “official nation-states”, is in crisis today. The anti-academic attitude of reducing the notion of Philosophy to what goes under the name of “official academia” has led many philosophers to look for a wider and deeper philosophical activity outside “Academia”. This is why this Conference was prompted by the desire to offer an opportunity for a meeting of “academic” and “specialized” philosophers with thinkers in other professions. The “trouble” is not with Philosophy, but with officialdom.

The collaboration between philosophers and people with more practical concerns brought acutely to the fore three problems which I would like to mention.

I. The Need for a Universe of Shared Discourse

Because “official” Philosophy has become a specialization, it has, like Modern Science, a specialized language which is different from that of the artist, the businessman, the worker, etc. One of the urgent tasks of Philosophy, it became ob-

vious, is not the analysis of “ordinary language”, but to assist at the birth of a common language for the use of those people who coincide in the search for a fully human way of life. Philosophy is not “another” discipline, but the critical link between the several human disciplines. Philosophy is *essentially* interdisciplinary. Philosophy cannot have a specialized language like the Modern Sciences. It has to create a truly human language for each concrete situation. In fact, the technical terms in philosophy were mostly taken from ordinary speech; people said, for example, this soup has *substantia*, this flower gives off *essentia*, a tiger has *natura*, Man is a *persona*. Philosophy offers the matrix from which specialized disciplines may emerge. The old womb may be barren, but the human spirit, nevertheless, is not dead.

II. The Crosscultural Imperative

Now, in our times, the rejuvenation of Philosophy cannot come from one single culture, and certainly not exclusively from the modern technoscientific world. *Today it is urgent that all cultures collab-*

orate with one another, which is not to say transculturally or superculturally, because each Philosophy is rooted in its own culture, which is, in fact, its expression. As I have repeated time and again, crosscultural studies does not mean studying other cultures, but letting other cultures join in the study in hand, which by this very fact will emerge transformed. In this sense, a crosscultural Philosophy does not study other philosophies but changes the true perception of what “Philosophy” means. Paraphrasing Marx, I would say that it is not just a question of changing the world and how to do so, but also of loving it and how to love it without ceasing to struggle to understand it. It is a question of recovering the integral meaning of philosophy. Philosophy, I submit, has a triple dimension. The triad is trinitarian, that is *intrinsically* threefold, so that no dimension can exist without the others. It is a triad in which knowledge is not possible without love and action. And if the abstraction succeeds in “isolating” knowledge like a chemical element, what emerges is perhaps an exact proof, but not true knowl-



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edge. Similarly, action without love and without knowledge is beating about the bush. In the same way that love, without knowledge and action, is sentimentalism and barren narcissism.

In short, the task of philosophy is to know, to love and to heal, all in one. It knows in as much as it heals. It heals if it loves and knows. But the relationship is not automatic: you might say it is a kind of free wheeling. *Rota in rotae*, said the Medieval Christians quoting from the Bible. It is the function of Philosophy to understand, to act and to contribute to man's salvation. It is not foreign to the nature of Philosophy to act with wisdom, to love with discernment and to perceive with detachment. It is not a question of blind action, selfish affection or biased vision. All is one; and so, each dimension corrects the others, in such a way that none in fact exists without the others.

It is this type of holistic philosophy which makes us very sensitive to the world today and constantly brings our philosophical discussion to the vital problems of our contemporary human predicament.

III. A List of Priorities

If something links "Philosophy" with the "Human Future", Philosophy has to take a stance and offer avenues of action for a more just and brighter "Human Future". Here is the project of thought, action and

compassion I propose. I formulate it in the form of proposals which I comment on briefly, without attempting to spell out the consequences of each *sûtra*. To put it simply, I am proposing this important and urgent nonary of points for an enlightened, loving and therefore healing involvement.

I am aware of the utopian character of this manifesto and I do not elaborate now the intermediary steps or the required strategies for going about it. What is in play is nothing more than a communitarian task. Blueprints are out of place. I hasten to underline that the seriousness of the moment demands the radicality of the points. Many of them overlap each other; some of them are more concrete than others. Some are hierarchically related and all are mutually linked so that a change in one of them leads to a change in the others. Aristotle spoke of "political prudence" and I appeal to it for the implantation of the points. This is only a sort of memorandum.

1. Demonetizing Culture

Money plays an important role in human relations, but it has become a *totalitarian tyrant* in modern Westernized culture. It

has penetrated all spheres of human action: food, health, education, well-being, art, marriage,... all seem to depend on money. As geometry abstracts forms from physical perceptions, elaborates on the forms and eventually applies those abstracted forms again to physical realities, money abstracts from human activities their quantifiable aspect—that is to say it homogenizes them—and eventually makes those very activities dependent on money. The real world is not made of monetizable commodities, like physical entities are not made of geometrical figures, fractals notwithstanding. And this is not only the case for spiritual values, but also for material realities. To have to pay for water, food—and soon even air—is a sign of a sick culture. The monetization of all cultural values is the natural outcome of the quantification of the human outlook. Money allows us to stick a quantitative tag on any human activity and makes it possible to measure that activity by its monetary coefficient. Even Modern Science begins today to surmise that physical entities may not be measurable, not only because of a factual Heisenbergian impossibility, but because of the theoretical incommensurability of any *real* thing. Reality is incommensurable to any intellect. This is why Reality is real and not only ideal. Once again Platonism is lurking from behind the Western soul.



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2. *Dismantling the Tower of Babel*

One of the most significant symptoms of our times is the unbridled power of the world-market in a world economy where all goods are monetizable commodities on an abstract world scale. This global homogenization centralizes all goods in fewer and fewer agencies. In short, the centripetal tendency of our time is fruit of a mechanistic and quantitative concept of cultural values. Technocratic civilization kindles again the temptation of a World Empire. Technocentrism is the insidious temptation.

There is a paradox here. Planet Earth is not the center of the universe, just as the astronomic sun is not the center of the Milky Way. Ethnocentrism may be absolute and anthropocentrism a weak substitute for a lost theocentrism which contradicts itself the moment it is interpreted by Men. Technocentrism claims to be unbiased (it privileges no one race or even culture) and objective (neither Man nor God). This is not true, as I have argued elsewhere. But its power lies in the fact that man needs a center, a point of reference, a place of convergence.

The difficulty lies with the geometrical interpretation of the metaphor projected into a mechanistic worldview. None of the things mentioned nor any of us is the center of the universe. And yet, in a more holistic vision, the center of the uni-

verse lies in each and every one of these things which constitute the *uni-versum*. Each Man and also each culture (natural body of the individual) is a center of the entire Reality. Unless we have this vision of the center of Reality passing through our Self, we are condemned, more irresistibly than water precipitates down the torrents of the mountains, to fall into the precipices of phantasy, power, profit and, ultimately, of desperation. We are then atoms striving for survival at the cost of others. If life has a meaning only for the victors, only for those who "make it", we create an artificial hell for all the others, and no amount of Redemption or Reincarnation can rescue them from it. The meaning of life for the individual Irene cannot lie in her becoming the head of the Corporation where she works, having beaten the other 3,000 employees. The people of Madagascar will not maintain their identity panting after the "model" of a rich and powerful USA. Cultural pluralism means, amongst other things, that each culture has its own center, however illusive, mobile and contingent it may –and should– be. Without that self-confidence that in every one of us befalls the center of Reality, *Homo sapiens* is reduced to an *animal imitans* –an aping animal (with all the connotations of the word).

We are the center of the universe, because as a microcosm we reflect the

whole, but we are not the circumference of Reality. We can only be a center when we have no dimension of our own and are open to an ever greater circumference. The center is stifled the moment it draws a circumference upon itself. This is the reason of the paradox that in order to decentralize culture we need more and more centred individuals and self-confident human societies. A self-reliant economy, for instance, means not self-sufficiency, but an equitable interdependent net of markets. Interdependence is not unilateral or unbalanced dependence. Bio-regions, as relatively complete ecosystems, offer here an appropriate paradigm.

3. *Overcoming the Nation-States Ideology*

The alternative is not to fall back into absolute feudalisms or "primitive" tribalisms. The alternative has to be elaborated by fostering in an organic way the healthy tendency, noticeable everywhere, of increasing *ontonomies*, and working a network of multilateral –but not necessarily universal– relationships which allow for a fruitful coexistence. I am proposing neither a single gigantic Nation-State nor a proliferation of monadic and lilliputian nation-states.

It is not a question of shifting the notion of sovereignty from nation-states to peoples or even cultures. Overcoming



state-nationalisms does not mean transposing the same ideology of self-sovereignty and absolute freedom to smaller or more voluminous units or even to the entire human race. There are no sovereign values on Earth. The ancients had the belief in the cosmic order, *ordo, rta, tao, dharma, kosmos*, or an upholder of it, God. Without a homeomorphic equivalent to those symbols, the delicate balance between freedom and cohesion (let alone spontaneity and coercion) is not possible. The problem is not merely political. It is theological. Two given societies can be *ontonomically* related only if there is a third element co-ordinating them, only if they form part of a Whole which is more than its “parts” but which requires the well-being of the “parts” in order to be a harmonious Whole.

The Empire was a myth with a unifying force. Its demembration produced nation-states. The Empire could be sovereign because it was founded on a divine principle superior to it. Not so nation-states, but they retained the title (even against etymology –there cannot be many “supremes”). The ideology of Empire has collapsed, and along with it the absolute sovereignty of partial units. A new myth is required.

4. Reducing Modern Science to its Proper Limits

The undeniable grandeur of Modern Science has produced its unbounded success well beyond its proper boundaries. It has modified modern Man’s way of thinking in areas far distant from the domain of the scientific disciplines. It has influenced ways of living in almost all aspects of human civilization.

This reduction of science to its proper limits cannot be imposed from without. Modern scientific ideology is so widespread as to make any kind of heteronomous morality ineffective. We cannot bridle the intrinsic expansionist force of genetic engineering by legislation and artificial boundaries, for instance. It has to be by a discovery of the very *ontonomic* order of Reality. This discovery has to be fruit of an insight into the meaning of human life and the nature of Reality.

The limits of Modern Science are both epistemological and ontological, besides being objective and subjective. In spite of the sacred name of *scientia*, Modern Science is not identifiable with it. It is not *gnôsis, jñâna, nor hochma, chi, sapientia*. It has no intrinsic saving power. Not all epistemology is “scientific”; not all cognition is measurable; not all knowledge is covered by “Science”. Modern Science cannot be said to know the world or to have penetrated the nature of Reality. Not all ontology is “scientific”; neither is all being necessarily reducible to the *logos*. Not all is object of Science and certainly the scientist as subject cannot be included in it.

5. Displacing Technocracy by Art

The direct result of modern techno-science is the technocratic complex of modern society. The old theocracies, monarchies, oligarchies, aristocracies and even anarchies have given way today to modern technocracy. The *kratos*, the power, is not invested in God, in a special group of people, but in modern technology. Modern technology, like Modern Science, has borrowed a traditional word and invested it with a new meaning. “Science” is not *scientia*, nor is modern technology synonymous with traditional techniques, *techné*, namely arts, crafts, machines of first degree, arrangements of material artifacts without artificially induced accelerations. Behind each *techné* is the spirit that inspires it. The craftsman has to be inspired. Modern technology has substituted the *Pneuma* by the *logos* in the sense of the *ratio*. The “scientist” needs information. This has given birth to technocracy.

Today, the *kratos*, power, does not lie with the politicians, obliged as they are to submit to the megamachine of the technocratic System. It does not even lie with the experts, who need capital and approval from the politicians and can only work in one direction: increase of power, acceleration, miniaturization, efficiency, etc.

Unless we play demagogically with words, the *demos*, the people, can have *kratos*, power, not when it is told to vote, but when it has the capacity to exert it and, furthermore, is able to exert it. Technocracy makes it impossible for the

people to steer its own destiny. The megamachine commands, and its experts of long and highly specialized years of training can do no more than manipulate it, impotent as they are to direct it in other ways and to other uses than those allowed by the inner mechanisms of the technocratic system. Weapons, inflation, growth of megalopolies, agriculture converted into agribusiness, etc. are just some of the results of the fatal laws of the System.

The people can only recover its power if it has dominion over its own destiny. Technocracy makes that impossible. It would require a highly specialized know-how which is impossible for the people to master. Technocracy makes children out of adults. The people cannot even know –and thus decide– what is good for them. The Computer surely knows! The people? It must obey. Some suspect that capitalism is incompatible with democracy. Technocracy is certainly contradictory to democracy. Protagoras had already seen that. While for all the other arts and crafts we can rely on qualified experts, the art of politics, the *politikē technē*, cannot be delegated to other competent experts (Plato, *Protagoras*, 222 b sq.). A new anthropology is required here.

The word art needs an explanation, so much are we accustomed to taking this word for entertainment, folklore and a purely marginal activity. Art is that which art-iculates life and brings it all together by the “artistic” creation of the person. The meaning of life is to make a work of

art of each of us. For this artistic creation we need the collaboration of the entire universe, from the Divine to Matter and to our fellow-men. Each one of us must be able to express himself and create himself in symbiosis with the rest of Reality. Beauty and Love are paramount in most human traditions: the first attribute of God, the first of the Gods, as so many traditions affirm.

6. *Overcoming Democracy by the Experience of a New Cosmvision*

The *demos* can have *kratos*, power, only if the people is more than the sum-total of more or less isolated individuals. Man is a person, a knot in a net of relationships, and not an autonomous individual. Man is an *ontonomous* being. We need a new anthropology. But a new anthropology requires a new notion of the cosmos different from scientific cosmology. The very word has connotations of world, order and ornament. Cosmology, then, connotes not a new, probably “scientific” concept of the universe, but the experience of how the cosmos manifests, reveals itself to us: our sense of the cosmos, our perception of Reality, our real world. Today’s cosmology is just one particular cosmvision that puts almost all the emphasis on a quantifiable vision within a primordially mechanical concept of the universe.

The cosmos we live in is not necessarily the astronomic or the geologic, or even the geographic or historiographic universe. Each culture has its own sense of the cosmos. The main cause of our pres-



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ent-day crisis can be found in the conflict of cosmologies latent in and around us. *In* us because our contemporary experience of Reality is ill at ease in the cosmos of a scientific vision of the world (I am not a grain of sand lost in the temporal and spatial infinity of an astronomic world). *Around* us because the mixing of people of different worldviews cannot be peacefully handled if we compare only different texts and ignore the underlying contexts.

There are new voices today singing new tunes and mixing with the old, but we do not yet have an adequate cosmvision of our experience of Reality. We bother about miracles, feelings and extrasensory perceptions, to cite some examples, because they are foreign and uncomfortable bodies in the overall prevalent “scientific” cosmology.

We know, further, enough sociology, psychology and political science to ignore the fact that democracy is an indispensable technique, but a very weak theory. We know not only that people are manipulable. We know also that the *demos* as the highest instance only works within a given and accepted *mythos* which gives a certain consensus to a particular people. The true *demos*, like the ancient *polis*, needs its temples, its Gods, its open-



ing to a super-democratic power. We can only avoid tyranny if a new cosmovision appears. I have spoken elsewhere of the *cosmotheandric insight*.

7. *Recovering Animism*

Without quarrelling about words, I understand by animism the experience of life as coextensive with nature. Every natural being is a living cell forming part of a whole and mirroring the whole at the same time. Not only animals and plants are alive, so are mountains and rocks, matter as well as spirit. "Who will deny that the elements earth and water are alive, since they give life to the creatures born from them?", says Marsilio Ficino in 1476, echoing an almost universal tradition (*De amore*, VI, 3).

Philosophy has to do not only with the human future, but also with the future of the cosmos and with the destiny of the entire universe. We are not only actors and spectators of the *Divina Commedia*. We are also authors of it –co-authors, to be sure.

Life is the time of being, said the ancients (*zoê chronos to einaí*). Anything temporal is alive by the very fact of being temporal. Time is not only, and not even mainly, a quantitative or "scientific" parameter; it is the very life of the universe. Individual existence is the symbiosis of each entity with the Tree of Life, with the Being of Beings.

The meaning of human life, therefore, is to share as fully as possible in the Life of the Universe. Christ came, says John the Evangelist, so that we may have Life and Life abundantly. Not all life is the same, to be sure. And the modern Gaia hypothesis is not the *anima mundi* of the neoplatonics, the *javâtman* jaina, Tylor's African animism, or Mach's philosophical vitalism.

Two features should be mentioned here, one negative and the other positive. Animism here stands for an overcoming of all mechanistic and rationalistic world-views. There is a principle of freedom, of life, in everything –as contemporary scientists seem to surmise also. Animism stands, further, for the relatedness of all reality according to one principle which is itself all relatedness and not univocal. To say that all is alive is not to affirm that all is of one stuff or all is alike. It affirms the moving, free, precisely living relationship of every bit of Reality. It connotes, further, that death is a real possibility.

8. *Peace with the Earth*

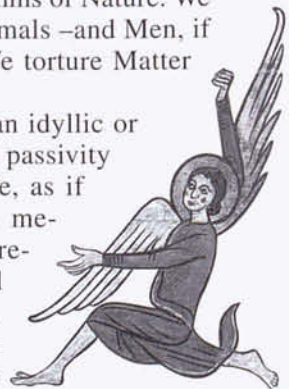
No ecological recovery of the world will ever succeed until and unless we consider the Earth as our own Body and the body as our own Self. This would be an aberration if the "own" were to be understood as private and individual property. Neither the Earth, nor the Body nor the Self is my psychological ego. We are sharers in the Word, as the Vedas say and the Gospel echoes –equating the Word with Divine Life, identifying Life with Light, and Light with God. The ecological prob-

lem is strictly theologic –and vice versa!

The Jewish tradition reports about the Covenant of Noah. A Covenant with the earth is one of our most urgent and important tasks. The true ecological movement is not a new technological way of exploiting the earth more rationally and more lastingly. If there has to be an eco-philosophy worthy of the name, it entails a different relationship with the Earth altogether. The Earth is neither an object of knowledge nor of desire. The Earth is part of ourselves –of our own Self. That is why I have taken the liberty of speaking (and writing) of *ecosophy*.

The time is coming to swear a human Covenant with the Earth. It is a covenant of fidelity towards ourselves and a question of sensitivity. It is this which has led me to describe the splitting of the atom –for whatever good intentions– as a cosmic abortion. We kill matter and extract from its very womb the extra energy units which our greed needs because we have disrupted the rhythms of Nature. We do not only torture animals –and Men, if we include politics. We torture Matter as well.

Peace does not mean an idyllic or idealistic view of total passivity or a static idea of Life, as if positive and negative metabolisms were not required. The animal does not "kill", it eats. Man does not exploit when following Natu-



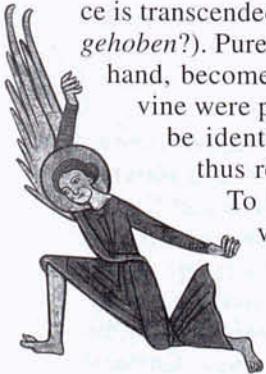


re; it grows and evolves. The chain of being or the wheel of existence is a living thing. Where there is exchange, there is death. But there is also resurrection.

Peace with the Earth excludes victory over the Earth, submission or exploitation of the Earth to *our* exclusive needs. It requires collaboration, synergy, a new awareness.

9. *Uncovering the Divine Dimension*

Atheism, I submit, is another form of theism, although a negative one. Polytheisms, as well as monotheisms and deisms, belong to an already decaying cosmology. The old controversies about reason and faith, believers and unbelievers, are rapidly becoming obsolete. The divine Mystery is not pigeonholed in neat philosophical categories. Pure transcendence is a contradiction in terms. It destroys itself the moment it is not only formulated but simply thought. Thought becomes then the bridge to transcendence and by this very fact transcendence is transcended (should I have said *aufgehoben*?). Pure immanence, on the other hand, becomes unnecessary. If the divine were purely immanent it would be identical with ourselves, and thus redundant.



To try and talk of the Divine implies accepting a "something" irreducible and yet related to ourselves; a "something" "above" all our faculties

(of loving, willing, knowing...), and at the same time "in" all of them. All too often "God" has been envisaged as an *x* situated beyond the actual grasp of our faculties. This *x* recedes in the same measure that our knowledge advances, or our feelings deepen, or our will increases. This God "strategically" recedes each time "Science" advances. No wonder that most perceptive thinkers see this battle lost in advance. To cover our ignorance we do not need the Divine any longer. Pure potentiality will do.

The divine dimension is more than a plus in the aesthetical or intelligible *status quo*. It is "more" than transcendence or immanence. The way to experience the divine can be a path of the *plus* or of the *minus*, fullness or emptiness, but in both cases the way is not the goal and yet the goal is nowhere behind or beyond the way. The divine dimension is a third dimension irreducible to but not independent from the other two, and thus not an "object" of the senses or the intellect, i.e. matter and consciousness. And yet the divine is utterly meaningless without them. There is a dimension of freedom and infinitude which impregnates both matter and spirit, the senses and the intellect, the *aisthesis* and the *noesis*. The Greek tradition called it *ta mystika*, the space in which we move and sense and think, in which we live and are. When speaking about the Divine, anthropomorphism is inadequate and so is cosmomorphism. And yet it is that *plus* and/or *minus* concerning both the experience of Man and Cosmos that opens up the very experience not of "something Else" but of the other "third" dimension

of the trinitarian Whole. Reality is of a cosmotheandric nature. The relation between the three dimensions is non-dualistic, trinitarian.

It is here, at this level, where we should situate the most upsetting and terrifying problem which no charter should eschew—the problem of evil. There is disorder, suffering, hatred on all levels. It is no good closing our eyes to it or shrugging our shoulders. Fighting it on the same level or with the same weapons would only double the evil. Evil is—by definition—inexplicable. If we could explain it we would explain it away. It is certainly a "privation", but also a privation of intelligibility. Evil forces us to experience our contingency, our incapacity of having a neat and coherent picture of Reality. It opens us to the abyss of the Divine from the other side, as it were, and it cures us of any superficiality and sense of self-sufficiency. At the same time, it spurs us on to our personal jump into life and does not cover the risk. Evil forms part of the Mystery.

"Philosophy and the Human Future" is more than the survival of the human species. To begin with, because Man is not a species. In the "human" future the being of Being is at stake. And this is the burden of Philosophy—lest we make of Wisdom a farce, of Love a mockery and of Man a robot.



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