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# **Philosophy: Questions that Concern us All**

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THE MEANDERINGS OF INQUIRY

THE WEIGHT OF THE QUESTION RATHER THAN THAT OF THE ANSWER

As I stated earlier, one of the goals of this study is to establish, even if partially, a list of philosophical problems and also, as much as possible, to advance some of the required technical tools to tackle them. Philosophical problems are intrinsically linked to concepts. This is obvious since all problems linked to the human condition are linked to concepts. However, it is helpful to make it explicit given the

peculiarity of philosophical concepts, which have become almost paradigms in the history of thought, serving as ground not only for different problems but also for antithetical answers to the same problem.

In a way, from the pre-Socratics to contemporary thought, we keep talking about the same things. Or at least since Aristotle, given that even if philosophy is humanity's heritage, the Stagirite represents a unique moment when everything seems to be registered and accounted for. It is not by chance that Aristotle was called "the Philosopher" by the great figures of Scholastic philosophy since it can be said that the history of philosophy is a history of Aristotelian problems, none of which has yet found a definitive answer.

By saying this, I am obviously not ignoring that Darwin's conception of the species is antithetic to that of the Greek thinker. Neither am I ignoring that Aristotle's finite and spherical cosmos either is not so, or if it is, it in no way has the center Aristotle assigned to it and even its eventual spherical form does not coincide with the classic sphere. It is not a matter of claiming Aristotelian answers in general as real, even if they are extremely acute at times, as are some of his "topological" intuitions, which a great mathematician of our time considered to be fundamental. It is rather a matter of making real those Aristotelian problems linked to concepts, as I was saying earlier, even if they have to be dusted off in due course.

So which are then those Aristotelian problems? Just those that concern human beings exclusively for being such; those that do not depend on contingencies; those that Kant has in mind when, in his introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he claims that the metaphysical drive cannot be removed from the human condition. Philosophical problems are anthropological universals, that is, they pervade all languages and are objects of obsession in all societies.

## ALL LANGUAGE IS PHILOSOPHICAL

What I say above does not mean to ignore the fact that Greek language, and Greek culture in general, constitute a privileged moment of crystallization concerning philosophy. I mean to say that the universal character of philosophy is perfectly compatible with its problems being concretized in a historical moment and in a particular language. In addition, out of an ethical need, I should also add that the fact that there are privileged languages, either because they are vehicles of the most widespread information and even because some of the most general concerns of humanity happen to have been expressed in them, does not allow us to think that the remaining languages are not, *salva veritate*, interchangeable with the former ones. Plainly put: it is no news to anyone that almost all scientific exchanges and a great number of philosophical exchanges, take place in the English language. But it would be almost insulting to conclude that the English language has some kind of

intrinsic goodness that encourages the introduction of spiritual concerns in English (unfortunately many people are not far from holding such a view). And what I say about English could have been said about French, at the times when the German Leibniz felt obliged to turn to it, or about Latin, when the French Descartes or the Italian Galileo rebel against its rule, precisely in the name of the dignity of their own everyday languages. In short, it is established as a postulate that philosophy concerns everyone, and consequently it concerns all languages. Once this is established, we can fondly and appreciatively contemplate the Greek language in which this common preoccupation crystallizes.

Obviously this position needs justification. At this point, I can state that such justification is based on assuming *grosso modo* the general tenets of *Generative Grammar*, which add some kind of ethical legitimacy to its theoretical consistency. It is hard to see how the principled declarations regarding the equivalence of human beings (independently of their social status and level, let us say, of culture channeled by information) be anything other than mere Pharisaism, unless it is granted that, beyond the tremendous differences of social, cultural, and media power between English and Guarani, there is a deep register at which both languages are made equivalent.

Precisely because there is such a basic equality in the languages, equality can be projected without fraud on their speakers. The fact that devaluing Einstein (because he is Jewish, for example) is as ignoble as exploiting the hardship of a clandestine and illiterate immigrant, is because the obvious differences between them have no weight when one considers what makes them both human beings. Among those features, linguistic capacity plays an essential role, providing the potential to actualize structural elements of the common grammar in one of its variants, made up of each particular language.

## MAN WONDERS ABOUT MAN

Philosophical problems. Problems that demand some distance from the immediate. Aristotle expresses it clearly: That which concerns subsistence and recreation in life has to be resolved. But it does not mean that philosophy emerges as leisure or luxury once this stage has been reached. Basic needs have to be solved in the sense that, as Aristotle remarks, those themes that are *in themselves* the deepest are the last ones to arise for us; whatever marks us and determines us is not immediately obvious.

The philosophical question is thus born out of some kind of anthropological optimism: man is the being who transcends his attachment to his own subsistence. But what does he subsist for? From his probable origins in Herto, Ethiopia, man can be regarded as a being that, by his own *nature*, questions and wonders; a being

who acknowledges himself as linguistic. That is to say, he loves the word for itself, he starts to use it for purposes that no need would justify; he subsists for something else, and this is where his dignity lies.

Man's first question is, obviously, about man himself. We are aware that we are separated from the natural environment by words, while at the same time those words offer it to us symbolized. We are aware that there is no world for us is that is not filtered by words, and we suspect that this word filter is the fundamental feature of our being, which basically expresses our singularity as a species and leads us to pose the problem of origin in terms as basic as these: Why the word? Why cannot *I* dissociate from it? In short, why man rather than nothing (to modify a memorable phrase regarding *being*)?

The anthropological question is the first question. Obviously it concerns philosophical anthropology as opposed to descriptive anthropology. Philosophical anthropology is not a science. In general, philosophy is not a science. In order to make a science out of philosophy we would have to make a revolution in the concept of science that would get us closer, perhaps, to the Greek concept of science, but that would not make sense today. So I repeat: philosophy is not a science. But even though it is not a science, without reducing itself to one, it is no doubt *meta-science* and, first of all, *metaphysics*, which is to say posterior to the reflection that describes the immediate form of *physis*, i.e., nature's immediate form.

But philosophy is also *meta-anthropology*. I am simply saying that philosophical anthropology cannot ignore mere anthropology. It cannot ignore the findings of ethnologists, the conjectures of paleontologists, or the almost mathematical precisions of geneticists. Philosophical anthropology goes beyond all that, but it makes use of it as an indispensable tool.

The knowledge regarding what happened in Herto more than 100.000 years ago, and the knowledge about the moment when certain mutations in a particular gene allowed for the conditions that permitted the possibility for the appearance of a primate with a capacity to articulate. The knowledge of the existence of parts of the genome which would explain that despite such a high degree of quantitative and qualitative match in that part of the genome in charge of codifying protein, man has little to do with mice, ..., all this knowledge is indispensable in order to formulate the first question: Why man?

## BEYOND PHYSICS

But man is a natural being and nature has many features, some of which overrule preceding ones. Man verifies his singularity at the heart of animalist nature, but he

also verifies the singularity of animals at the heart of life, and even the singularity of life at the heart of nature. Before being life, and *a fortiori* animal and human life, nature just *is*. So what then is nature?

The word *nature* is very ambiguous. Sometimes it is used as a synonym for *essence*, thus embracing anything that has a definition. In this sense, it would pertain to any set of features which distinguish one conceptual entity from another. Obviously when a physicist speaks of nature he does not do it in such a general sense. For example, when Erwin Schrödinger states that the singularity of Greek civilization lies in the fact that nature was considered to be intrinsically knowledgeable (a topic that I will deal with later), he is referring to a very precise kind of essence.

What then are the minimal conditions for the possibility of establishing that something rendered is a natural being? Images of angels, for instance, are presented to the spirit, and so are concepts such as God. Without going that far, we can think of images of surfaces, of lines, of dimensions in general, and of numbers. Are those things (gods, angels, surfaces, lines, dimensions, numbers...) *natural*? Nothing could be less certain: we can consider that there are angels with sexual and linguistic capacity, and this set of angels would be perfectly circumscribed by opposition to the angels without those features, i.e., angels not affected by sexual difference and/or that would have a merely intuitive perception (without language mediation). In any case there is no reference to nature when we speak of these entities.

Let us move on to less transcendent entities. We could ask: Are numbers natural entities (that is to say, physical)? This question is linked to an archaic philosophical problem, namely the origin of mathematical entities. It still seems reasonable to claim that the whole numbers called natural numbers come from physical realities, because there is *one* desk in front of me; there are *two* books on the desk, etc. But the problem turns more complicated when we speak of  $1/2$  or when we speak of  $1/3$ , and turns into a real nightmare if we talk about the *square root* of a desk.

In any case, in order to tackle the question of whether what we refer to is *natural* or not we need to have a proper concept of what *nature* means in its most immediate form. And here, once again, philosophy is literally metaphysics because there is no way of talking about nature without referring to the great concepts of mechanics and dynamics of classical physics. A philosopher has to keep such concepts in mind, as Aristotle shows well, in his own way, (even if it seems anachronistic) by turning something very similar to that which physics designates as “amount of motion”, into a feature of nature. I will now anticipate here something that I will deal with in detail in a subsequent chapter.

Let us consider an arbitrary object: a pen, for example. There is no doubt that it is a physical entity. But what is it that allows us say this? In classical physics, the answer would be that:

- 1) It has a location, even though this is not too clear until we know the exact meaning of *location*.
- 2) It has what is called the *amount of motion*, that is, it has a *mass* (measured in kilograms), *velocity*, and the product of both.

It should be noted that velocity could eventually be null, which means that such a state is a particular case, the limit case, of motion. This pen is a physical entity, given that it is a substance, which means that it can find itself in motion or equally at rest. Eventually I can throw it at someone. This is not a trivial function of physical entities, since it is impossible to do the same with the surface of the pen. The surface travels with the pen or it remains with it if no one touches the pen, but surfaces do not travel or remain where they are by themselves.

Aristotle himself attributes a second feature to nature similar to what is called *location* in physics, although this is much more complex because Aristotle's *topos* has nothing to do with location in a Galilean-Newtonian space, in the sense of the location that physics textbooks talk about in their pre-relativity chapters.

All this played a tremendously important role in the history of thought when, in the last century, physicists were able to demonstrate that the amount of motion and the location are two determinations that cannot be given *at the same time* in a physical particle; either we determine mass and velocity (eventually null) or we determine location, but never both. There we have one of the most fascinating debates in the history of thought; something to which I will dedicate considerable time during this study.

In any case, the famous question: "what is *Physis* and how is it determined?" cannot be tackled with intellectual legitimacy without the mediation, not of the fundamental texts in classical mechanics, but of the subversive power in this type of mechanics that the Theory of Relativity and, much more radically, quantum mechanics have.

I am not saying that you have to be a physicist to deal with the metaphysical problem of what nature is and how you determine it. What I am saying is that it is necessary to keep up with the terms in which contemporary physics, in dialectic with its own history, sets out the problem. I can add that to keep up with these terms is relatively very easy.

## AFTER MATHEMATICS

So as to deal with *physis*, some elemental mathematical knowledge will put us in a position to discuss the laws of Newton, the physical concept of the *amount of motion*, the physical concepts of mass and density... I have already alluded to the

fact that being equipped with these concepts will help us see how easily understood the Aristotelian concept of *substance* (source of so many sometimes indigestible dissertations) is, as opposed to appearances, attributes, surfaces, images and all those things that lack subsistence.

In addition, the mathematical knowledge required for a basic yet deep understanding of what Special Relativity means should be at everyone's reach and if it is not so, it is simply because of the social problem of education. It is problem with enormous implications, since it is not by chance that contrary to the Platonic demand that mathematics be like oxygen for the spirit, mathematics has instead become more like a weapon of social selection and therefore one of mutilation of the non-selected.

One step further and we will also be ready to discuss mathematical concepts such as dimension, co-dimension, and curvature, which will permit us to get us close to the Theory of General Relativity. We would still lack the concept of metric, which points to something that is intrinsically constituent of human beings. On this subject, I can advance as a conjecture that the emergence of *I* correlates to the location of the linguistic subject as the nucleus, or the point of intersection in a Cartesian coordinate system. What surrounds this point becomes world because each thing is first located in relation to it, and secondly it keeps a distance in relation to each and every other thing.

If once equipped with these elementary notions of mathematics and physics, we want to explore more radically the concept of *space* or *place* (two absolutely different translations of *topos*), we will take one more step. We will introduce ourselves into the mathematical concepts of limit and its correlative concept, that of continuity. We may lightly touch on the concept of contiguity as well as the reasons why, from Aristotle to Einstein, many thinkers have rehabilitated a *principle of contiguity* (which excludes, among other things, the idea of action at a distance) as a fundamental postulate of thought when developing a physical theory. In addition we will extract from any book of elementary physics, a small summary of the notion of *field* and the different types it encompasses.

By understanding in an elementary manner what *space*, *field*, and *matter* mean in contemporary physics we see, in all transparency, the reason for some of Aristotle's texts in which he stresses the importance of differentiating between the concepts of *consecutiveness*, *contiguity* and *continuity*, all linked to the eternal problem of discerning whether or not a vacuum could exist. This problem was as obsessive for Aristotle as it goes on being in our day, even if Borges exclaimed almost ironically "and they reached deeper and deeper levels of vacuum to the astonishment of the Aristotelians."

Even if that literally empty distance, one correctly governed by Euclidian geometry, seemed to be dismantled by the Theory of Relativity, it was brought back by some phenomena that question the principle of contiguity.<sup>1</sup> If aether (useless in physics

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<sup>1</sup> Such as the ones shown by Aspect's experiment read in the light of Bell's inequalities

once one accepts with Newton that light is corpuscular and travels in a vacuum in a straight line) dies, it comes back to life with Maxwell's electromagnetic theory<sup>2</sup> and it dies again with Special Relativity (until further notice?)... Maybe something analogous can be said about the vacuum, action at a distance, and in general any phenomena that seem to cast doubt on the principle of contiguity.

And since I evoked aether, it would be good to refer to it more fully. For Faraday aether was the elastic support of the "lines of force," along which a magnetic field unfolds with uniform power. The aether hypothesis would thus get us around the problematic concept of *action at a distance* which, even as a resource for Newton,, continued to be a source of headaches.

In order to be the medium of transmission of light and magnetic waves, aether had to be a solid medium (since transversal waves can only be propagated through a solid medium, waves in water being an exception) and it would also have to be extraordinarily rigid (otherwise it would be impossible for the wave to reach light speed).

Nevertheless, aether should not interfere with the motion of any particle, as a result of which that solid and extra-rigid medium had to be, at the same time, absolutely malleable. In sum, the characteristics attributed to aether seemed to make it something close to a kind of vacuum.

## COSMOS, INFINITE, TIME

In any case, meditation on vacuum, linked to meditation on the physical objectivity of Euclidean space, is absolutely indispensable if we want to deal with the philosophical question concerning the cosmos. A question that we can relate to Greek thought, but that is obviously absolutely universal, since there is no society in which men do not look at the limits of their surroundings and question about what is beyond; there is no society in which men do not wonder if the apparent finite nature can be transcended; there is no society in which the problem of limit and infinite is not posed.

The problem of the infinite was regarded by the Greeks both in a cosmological and a mathematical dimension. Today it is impossible to tackle it in cosmological terms without the mediation of the strictly technical issue of the density limit, which would allow us to tell if the universe is expanding, stabilizing or collapsing. But this question mathematically cannot be posed either, without the mediation of the twentieth century subversive arrival: transfinite numbers and infinitesimal

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<sup>2</sup> A wave needs a medium to propagate but light showed wave-like characteristics since its speed didn't seem to be affected by the speed of its source.

numbers, both of which having been excluded not only by Aristotle, but also by Leibniz (despite being co-inventor of the so called *infinitesimal* calculus).

Nowadays it is simply not honest to deal with the problem of the infinite without such mediation. I want to make it clear that the question that concerns us here is the *metaphysical* problem of the infinite and not just the problem of the *Calculus*. In fact, one of the great mathematicians of the infinite sets an example by titling one of his works *The Metaphysics of Calculus*, thus corroborating Hilbert's words that the infinite "does not only concern the interests of a specialized discipline but touches on the dignity of the human spirit itself."

Linked to the problem of the infinite is the problem of time, a term for which Aristotle had two words: *kronos* and *aion*. In fact only the first one means something about time in the sense that we, products of our epoch, can understand it: irreversible time. In order to grasp it, it is absolutely indispensable to glance again at an elementary book of physics for the *second law of thermodynamics*. This simple observation will help Aristotle's reader understand perfectly why the Stagirite defines time not as a measure of change but as a measure of destructive change. Earlier I mentioned Aristotle's topological intuitions, but we can now also point out his chronological ones.

## LIFE AND ITS DIVERSIFICATION

Man lives in an environment with other living beings. In some of them, man finds some kind of reflection of himself. Children instinctively distinguish between their kind, animals, and the rest of their environment. It is not certain, and even is highly unlikely, that before he speaks, a child has links with *specifically* determined living beings. Realistically, an infant relates to a particular cat or a particular dog rather than with the representative of the cat species or the dog species.

The fact that Chipi (a dog) and Mus (a cat) are both alive is much more important for a child that is still an *infant* than the fact that one is a dog and the other a cat. But this indifference towards the *specific* determination does not last. If there were living beings, Chipi and Mus, but they were not differentiated as *dog* and *cat*, we would not know how to distinguish things; in the specific words of a six year old: "people would be very slow."

Animals show an orderly diversification of that which is vital: there are not as many cases of life as individuals, but they are grouped by common features that make them representative of a species.

A priori this does not seem necessary: there could be, in fact, as many sorts of life as individuals. But in that eventuality, persistence of life i.e., reproduction, would

lack regularity. Obviously it could not be said “the set of individuals that constitute Group A reflects the fact that viable progeny emerges from their interbreeding” since saying this would be tantamount to indirectly raising the concept of species.

If we moved without transition from the genus *life* to living individuals we would not have the necessary mediation for classification. The Aristotelian concept of specific difference makes the link between the concept of *life* and the concept of *regularized life in its diversification*. Certainly, by telling us that the expression of this regularity, species, is immovable, Aristotle is making a huge step, opening the timeless debate that will find dialectic polarity in Darwin.

The infants’ indifference towards specific determination follows necessarily once it is accepted that man is a rational animal, that reason is a condition for the possibility of species identification, and that the child who *does not speak yet* is potential reason but not active reason. Nevertheless, a strictly human life has no meaning without the ties to other species that are beneficial or damaging to us, that we care about or that we destroy, that we consume, etc... Obviously there is no human society that has not classified its surroundings into genus’ and species, living entities and non-living entities, entities with animal life and entities with vegetal life. Just as it is possible to play music without theorizing about music, it is possible to live immersed in a *universe*, that is, to live in an organized plurality of genus’ and species, without any explicit reflection on that environment. Hence the singularity of the Aristotelian enterprise of classification, of making explicit the implicit, i.e., of bringing that which is underlying, to light.

## ARISTOTLE’S REASONS

It has occasionally been said that Aristotle was so fond of classifying that he classified types of classification (the so-called categories). Aristotle, who reflected so much about entities or substances, ponders specifically on living entities, which he tries systematically to classify with very scarce means. Aristotle is the first animalist in history and without his classification efforts, we probably would have never had thinkers such as Linnaeus or Darwin, and even, I dare say, we would have never reached the prodigious taxonomy of Carl Woese.

Aristotle, the animalist, does not classify innocently; of course he has his reasons, his postulates, or, if you prefer, his prejudices, helping him decide what to do. One of his fundamental postulates is that the cosmos is not subject to time. Only individuals populating the cosmos are subject to it. But the cosmos is made of a finite plurality of entities, and a fortiori, a finite plurality of living species. Then the postulate that the cosmos is not subject to time turns into the postulate that species are not subject to time. If species died, the cosmos could only be eternal if we

postulated the existence of an infinite number of species. Thus we have this type of paradox: individuals die and species prevail.

The reasons of Aristotle, the animalist, and in general of Aristotle, the classifier of living species, prevailed for centuries. In fact the view does not radically change even with Linnaeus. It is true that unlike Aristotle, Linnaeus is a creationist. However Linnaeus' God did not want an infinite number of species. Rather his God wanted the same number for all time.

## DARWIN'S REASONS... AND THOSE OF HIS HERMENEUTISTS

The idea that species mutate, the idea that species eventually die, like individuals mutate and die, was overwhelming even in Darwin's time. The question is not whether to be Darwinian or Aristotelian: unless moved by mere prejudice, who would not regard themselves as Darwinian today? The interesting point is the leap itself from Aristotle to Darwin. Darwin, also a classifier, finds reason to conjecture that species have no privilege; that they are also subject to the same change, either generative or destructive, that affects individuals. Understanding Darwin's reasons is crucial in order to deal with the metaphysical leap that takes place when even the will to remain loyal to creationism cannot cope with the demands of the spirit.

It makes no sense to talk about Darwin as a kind of counterpoint to Aristotle. Darwin rigorously makes Aristotle's problem his own and his response to it is contrary to that of the Stagirite. Once again, the essence is the problem not the response, a response that, by the way, can be qualified today. There is a whole hermeneutics of the Darwinian Theory that, without questioning the fundamental postulate, can lead to very diverse conclusions, even to conjecture that the evolution of the species is a fact, but not a necessity, contained in the concept of "species" itself. To understand Darwin's reasonings will lead us to try to understand J. Gould's reasonings, and some other reasonings that feed a magnificent contemporary debate; a debate, once again, literally *metaphysical*, a reflection beyond the description of entities but complex physical entities, physical entities endowed with life.

**physical entities. Only this time, the debate does not concern immediate physical e**

## AFTER GENETICS AND LINGUISTICS

If contemporary metaphysicians cannot but follow the iterations of Darwin's reasonings, they cannot get around Mendel's reasonings either since, as it is

known, the great revolution which started with Darwin only finds its real scientific crystallization in the rise of genetics.

Genetics represents the moment when for the first time in history, biology becomes a science in the radical sense of the word. Because in the code of genetics we find the explanation for the phenomena of life, just like in the code of particles there is found the explanation of physical phenomena in their entirety. Exaggerating a little it could be said that genetics is to biology what mathematics is to physics, and it is understood that today there is no statement in Physics that is not capable of being expressed in *mathéma* form. In any case, due to its purely formal architecture, genetics shows most decisively that our modality of animal being is most singular. Genetics translates into symbols that justify, or explain, the life from which reason itself emerges. Thus it can be said that in genetics life finds its own reflective mirror.

Genetics' weight is that much greater now as it attempts to make its way into none other than linguistic problems. A giant step was taken when an attempt was made to find the key to the capacity for language articulation, as was done in the famous case of the mutation in the FOXP2 gene (something we will deal with in detail later). By this means we are laying the scientific foundation for the divide between what is a possible matrix of a code of signs and a matrix of something as radical as human language. There is no doubt that without the mediation of genetics, we cannot nowadays tackle the problem of the conditions that make the emergence of language possible; that language which indeed seems to *transcendentally* mark human beings.

My point is simply that an elementary textbook in genetics is an indispensable tool to confront philosophical questions. It starts explaining Mendel's motives and ends up reflecting on the model called *lac operon*, which thirty years ago prompted a fascinating controversy in philosophical, as well as scientific and even theological circles. There is no doubt that for the philosopher to explore genetics requires patience, as does anything that needs to be tackled technically.

Obviously dealing with philosophical questions requires the mediation of central linguistic issues, some of which have already been mentioned: the polarity of *language-code of signs*; what is in general a system of communication?; the conditions of possibility and necessity of language diversification in a variety of languages; the grammar-grammars polarity (that is, the polarity between structures that are the outcome of an eventually contingent development and lasting structures that determine the possibilities of such development)...

In connection to this last point there are cases in which language is arranged in conformity with a common structure, for example, to Japanese or Basque; or to a structure that is common to Catalan and English with the exclusion of any third possibility due to the simple fact that *deep grammar* only allows for two possibilities. Even if only to qualify or to ultimately oppose them, the philosophical reflection of our time cannot do without the central theses of *Generative*

*Grammar*, in the same way as to deal with space it cannot do without non-Euclidean geometries or without the Theory of Relativity.

## CULTURE, *ETHOS*, AND ETHICS

It is common nowadays to offer such a general definition of *culture* that the fact that a bird learns to “sing” by the mediation of the song of the other birds would almost make such animal a *cultivated* being. Culture is, then, from this point of view, everything we are genetically capable of, but that we cannot achieve without the mediation of others. An example of culture (and from the perspective of some contemporary ethologists, this is just one example without any hierarchical relevance) would be a child learning their mother tongue. Genetically he or she is capable of implementing one language but without the mediation of mother, father, educators, and society in general, this implementation would not take place. In short, there is no such thing as a savage human being. This issue is linked to the problem of extending key concepts to different species besides the human one.

Animal ethology is nowadays a very developed discipline to which we owe magnificent descriptions about how animals interact within their species, with individuals of other species, and with their environment. In this field, like many others concerning science, it is nevertheless a good idea to distinguish clearly between the facts described (generally indisputable), and their interpretations by philosophers, or even by scientists who become *hermeneutists* of their own observations.

Thus, for example, the verification that relations among the members of an animal species are not fortuitous, but are subject to a kind of regulation (more or less reducible to the internalization of relations of power), has allowed an extension to the animal *ethos* of the very complex disposition of the spirit that we name *ethical* behavior. Until now we reserved ethical behavior exclusively to humans since we did not think of it as dissociable from reason and language. (An extension such as this one is at the antipodes of Kant’s erection of the *categorical imperative* in being something like an analogue for man’s *practical* reason what the principle of non-contradiction is to *cognitive* reason). This tendency to dilute the borders of what was thought to separate animal condition from human condition has two aspects:

From the first aspect, the animal is “humanized” by enriching the set of faculties that Aristotle already acknowledged in them (sensation, memory, imagination... all of which would suffice for animals to have *experience* and be *prudent*) with potentialities as complex as representation of objectives or intentionality, will, abstract thought and, in extreme cases, even language.

The second aspect consists of diminishing the weight of human faculties and there is a tendency to make language a code of signs (complex no doubt); to make conceptual activity a mere expression of such code, and to make the representation of goals that determine disinterested behavior some kind of simulacrum that masks mere adaptation. All this will be discussed in due course. For now I will just draw one consequence of this approach: Aristotle defined man as a rational being, but also as a *political* animal. It is worthwhile to stress that the later is also a specifically human trait. If there are other political animals, it ceases to be a distinctive characteristic. This matter is relevant at a time when it is common to hear talk about other animal societies as having characteristics analogous to ours; societies in which hierarchies and value systems exist, such as that of the wolf, which represents an emblematic example.

This extension to animal societies, of traits, which up to now were considered exclusive to human societies obviously has enormous implications. Specifically, politics would cease to be something we need to partake in so as to realize our condition. Since if politics is something that concerns multiple species, then it is not in the political terrain where what is specifically human is resolved.

So the abusive generalization of concepts such as *culture* and *politics* and its extension to multiple animal species, is perhaps related to the fact that the social conditions for the possibility of a politics process worthy of the term do not exist and consequently, the feeling of the intrinsic link between politics and the individual's realization has been lost.

## “SAVING THE CITY”

Frequently when referring to the goals behind Plato's and Aristotle's philosophies we hear the phrase “saving the phenomena,” that is to say, giving support to what is shown; offering an explanatory foundation that harmonizes it into a whole along with the other manifestations. However, it is necessary to stress the fact that this project cannot be separated from what constitutes its very condition of possibility, i.e., to build a social context in which philosophy can meet the condition of being the “science of free men.” And this context can be nothing less than a city free from corruption, and in general, from the perturbations due to the subordination of the city's interest to that of its individuals. In short: “saving the city” (*sozein ten polin*) is not only a complementary project, but may be even one that is prior to that of “saving the phenomena.”

It is well known that Greek society was a hierarchical and exclusivist society (it regarded non-Greeks as “barbarians”, practically sub-human, and it considered languages other than Greek a *laia*, a type of simulacrum of language). Nevertheless, within the depths of the society itself, that is to say, that of non-slave Greeks, the

identification of individual and social dignity was of the utmost importance. If it is generally correct that *one man alone is not a man*, in the Greek world, that conviction was absolutely crystallized: someone not recognized as a peer by the free citizens would lose in some sense his *andreia*, to be translated as *manhood*, but designating the response with fortitude to the hard demands of being fully human. Thus it is attributable to men as well as to women.

Obviously all this was abstract in Greece since the project of a politically realized humanity was contradicted by the social conditions in which such project was to be realized. And yet it is a brilliant idea. It can be said that such an idea has accompanied all attempts to emancipate the human condition in the history of what we call the Western World. Without it, we would not have the "Enlightenment," nor the French Revolution. Equally, without it, something as full of promise as the October Revolution was in its day, would not have emerged.

The October Revolution certainly failed; its goal was truncated and today it is practically a thing of the past. Even its critics feel sorry for it and it is not even true that they sincerely condemn Stalinism: it is mere rhetoric because the reigning social order *a d'autres chats 'a fouetter*, has other pressing issues to take care of. Nevertheless stirring up behind the project was something that already gave life (less concrete in regard to what would its conditions of possibility be) to the French Revolution, which is nothing but the idea of reconciling humanity with itself.

## ATHENS WITHOUT SLAVES

Humanity's reconciliation with itself does not mean that individuals of the human species reach some kind of limbo. It means that humans see themselves as united and as peers at that inescapable time, when each individual has to confront the problems that are *inherent to his humanity*; problems that make harmonization impossible in a merely natural order.

Even at moments of radical nihilism, the embers of the project of universalization of the *pólis* remain. A Greek polis without slaves or barbarians; a place where the destiny of each and every human being would be to contemplate oneself in the mirror of their most singular animal nature, and feel that the totality of their perceptions is mediated by the word. Even if the word uproots us from nature, it provides nevertheless some kind of refuge when it *is* simply *shared*.

But the Greek *pólis* is also emblematically the place for tragedy... and tragedy is only easily bearable in *representation*, that is in absence. Therefore, in order to escape tragedy the *pólis* is relinquished. Such renunciation has as corollary the multiplication of false disputes, meaningless problems and fabricated hatreds which serve fundamentally to distract us from what is essential. Every

emancipatory project, every project of realization of the *pólis*, does away with the situation in which stultifying labor, and the leisure that is complementary to that stultification, prevent the citizens from having a single instance of *veracity*; that is to say, of lucid exploration of their condition as indissolubly exultant and tragic. The same veracity of life, to which artists and poets, as well as simply all really sensible people, have appealed to throughout history.

Contemporary society plots wars in which sometimes patriotism is false, but hatred is indispensable because without that hatred a slight crack would open and the light of a collective project could get in. From Baghdad to Haiti, the earth is full of conflicts without a foreseeable solution given the current state of affairs. However it could be said that in the origin of those conflicts is not the struggle of human beings to reach essential goals to the realization of their nature, but the nihilistic effort to prevent human beings from clearly establishing them. Today the slogan: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need" sounds sarcastic or at least ironic. Yet, only when we grasp the meaning of this phrase can we understand that art concerns everyone; that science is not just for elites; that poets, painters or musicians, who were in the vanguard of so many emancipatory projects, were not really motivated by a mere narcissistic interest.

In the parody of common destiny for humanity brought about by the so called "global society," the struggle for mere subsistence continues as an ingredient (once again we have the image of Africa, subject of prey not only of its natural resources, but of its culture, its ways of life, and even the languages of whole populations). But Aristotle already indicated that the things that affect human beings most gravely, appear not only when that which concerns subsistence is resolved, but also when that which concerns leisure is realized. Aristotle already indicated that if mathematics was able to take off in Egypt, it was due to the presence of a group of privileged beings, by all appearances free: the priests. I emphasize by all appearances because freedom is either global or it is a contradiction in itself.

The absence of effective freedom is more than a setback for the project that we are discussing. It is impossible for philosophy to appear as something that is essentially of concern to the citizens, if their everyday existence is marked by the seal of that intrinsic poverty that is brought about by the lack of freedom.

But it is also true that philosophy has always been forged in a situation of penury. The fact that the project is linked to a project of global emancipation does not preclude it being conceived under all circumstances. Socrates continues to be a paradigm in this regard: repudiated by the city (and by a restored democratic regime); rightly accused of perverting the youth, by making them lose due respect for the values supporting that particular civilian order... Socrates showed at a high price that philosophy is a praxis, similar to some kind of permanent creation. We can also think of Descartes, victim of all types of inquisitors and defenders of more or less masked orthodoxies, who did not abandon his philosophical disposition until his death in his Nordic exile, a death that he embraced with the fortitude reflected by the sobriety of his last words: "*il faut partir.*"