

IS A RENEWAL OF HUMANISM POSSIBLE TODAY?

One often wonders whether a universal mind of the fourth century B.C., Plato, say, or Aristotle would be startled if confronted with our own civilization our technological achievements, our cultural preferences, in short our way of life.

The general aspect of our civilization, as it would appear to Plato or to Aristotle, is markedly homogeneous. For it clearly reflects a common tendency towards two main goals of mankind: easier and happier life for the individual, and greater organization and prosperity for society. Plato and Aristotle would also find that humanity has been in continuous evolution, something they had already noticed. They would however consider that, evolution being not necessarily identifiable with development or progress, our moral achievements do not seem to adequately match our technical achievements, as far as respect for human beings is concerned, and they would have made a striking note of the gap. They would have tried to point out the significance of this gap in retarding the harmonious growth of our societies, and would have concluded that the gap was the most prominent manifestation of a deep and lasting historical crisis.

History seems to be moving ever faster forwards today. To speak of the next phase of the world means that we see our contemporary world as a world of transition towards a future new world, likely constructed on an equally essential base of technological, cultural and moral accomplishment. In this sense, "world" should be taken to mean, firstly, our (natural, terrestrial, or extraterrestrial) environment, with all the changes entailed in making it profitable to human society, to meet human needs; and secondly, the complex of institutions through which such a process may be faced and realized for the happiness of humankind, within a certain system of freely and universally accepted principles and values.

We see, then, the need for a new world, which cannot be anything else but the outcome of the process of transforming our present world. Five propositions follow: (a) The new world will result from further evolution of the present world, which is itself the result of the evolution of a succession of past worlds, the successive phases of a unique world. (b) This evolution is somehow constant, in spite of history's ups and downs, accelerations and decelerations, and is itself the true historical essence of this world. (c) It remains possible, at any time, to decide on a new way of life, as part of a complete and permanent change that qualifies the world in its various aspects.

(d) To adapt this world to human society, renewal of the individual's attitude to the world and other human beings needs to be subject to an order of consensual principles and values, a point which must be emphasized. (e) All this being so, the new world entails the adaptation of the old world to its renewed image. The old principles and values should also be thought of as subject to their renewed conception – not so that they may be adapted to the new world, but so that they may become the models on which the latter will be fashioned. In other words, a new dimension of an old ethics based on eternal values is needed in other words, in order to make possible the conception of the model of at least one new dimension of the old world. The “new morality of the new world” obviously means, in this sense, the renewed humanistic morality of the world of tomorrow.

The future interplanetary societies will undoubtedly have some common features, and these can already be imagined and described with some accuracy, bearing in mind the prevailing trends of present societies.

The main features of future societies will very probable be: (a) Pragmatic universalism tending towards a real planetary and interplanetary unification when modeling scientific, technological, economic, cultural and institutional structures, notwithstanding eventual differential tendencies. (b) Intensified analysis of language and language comprehension as a function and means of communication, stemming from a need for a greater and better unified system of mutual human metalinguistic relations that can truly claim cosmic validity and based, e. g., on the thorough knowledge of Greek, which has proved to be, besides a diachronic vehicle of humanistic ideas, an excellent tool in informatics. (c) General acceptance of the need for even economic growth and cultural development of every society through planned programs and a heightened feeling of proper measure. (d) A burning conviction that total respect for human individuality and freedom is necessary within the bounds of the need to blend individual and group preferences, so as to ensure accurate general planetary policy. (e) A federalist, or better confederalist, conception of human and social relations, so as to avoid or offset any danger arising from preponderantly technocratic and bureaucratic organization of life; noting that, in any case, the organization of life will lay increased emphasis on leisure and on cultural and spiritual activities.

There is the risk of deep and prolonged crisis, if, within such a universal humankind, organization is not carefully adjusted to the features of each and every specific society. It is helpful to analyze the two chief ideologies of yesterday's industrial world: Marxism and Christianity. As an ideology, Marxism undoubtedly had elements of humanism. But it entirely subordinated them to one central and all-important concept, that of the class struggle. It thus reduced the notions of individuality and hence of freedom literally submitted them to the notion of collectivity. Under these conditions, humanism was no longer of any value to Marxism. The latter eventually proved to be its own negation. The other ideology, Christianity, is some-

thing more than an ideology; it is a religion, and must be treated as such, even when it is the religion of about a quarter of the world's total population. We should never forget, however, its origins. As a revealed faith, Christianity is the extension, not the polar opposite, of Judaism, itself a religion of a nationalistic and prophetic kind. There are significant ideological differences between Judaism and Christianity, as we all know. One of these is in ecumenicality. Furthermore, Christianity, unlike Judaism preaches loving forgiveness, not revenge. But if Christianity is to be consistent, it can hardly (nor should it) surrender its religious character, with all the prestige of twenty centuries of church worship, to become a mere ideology. Whatever ideological values there are in Christianity should be fastened on and prized, without giving them a Christian label; but they cannot in themselves form a coherent ideological basis for further enlargement and for global universalization. The moral is clear. Christianity, a major and prominent religion (and all other religions, even Islam, a religion whose "success" clearly results from its practical assets) is unable to provide a proper basis for working out a universally acceptable ideology, one able to philosophically underpin the global ethics needed for the world of tomorrow.

To look now at philosophical ethics, these may be sorted into one of three categories, according to their criteria of moral action: sensualistic, sentimentalistic and rationalistic. Sensualistic theories may be divided into three categories, hedonistic, eudaemonistic and utilitarianistic. Hedonism may lead to continuous search for pleasure, and hence to saturation and disgust. Eudaemonistic theory sees in pleasure the absence of pain. The disadvantage of such a conception is that what is sought is only in the interest of the individual. Utilitarian concepts transfer sensualistic ethics to a higher level. For Jeremy Bentham, what counts is the intensity – the quantitative importance – of pleasure, since individual and general interest are not to be distinguished. Such an ethical theory does not rise above the level of subjective evaluation of interest. Sentimentalistic conception of ethics presuppose a kind of sympathy for the object of moral behavior. However, in order to be ethically valuable, sympathy must be allied to reason. Rationalistic conceptions of ethics presuppose the objective existence of good, whether immanent or transcendent. For Plato, good is the reality towards which every consciousness tends. The form of good can be conceived, with an effort, at its root. For Aristotle, on the other hand, good is conceived through measure. Both these theories treat good as a potential that can be realized by action. Kantian ethics is based on the notion of good will. For Kant, a moral act is not valuable because of its aim or because of an inclination of whatever kind. It is not easy, however, to accept Kant's assertion that everything except the intention is insignificant. Of the principles proposed by classical ethical theories, none is sufficient of itself to be the guide to moral life. But while philosophical ethics is the best foundation of morality, there is evidently no philosophical ethics that can of itself be the substrate of universally accepted

morals, and can be wholly and totally adaptable and acceptable by the world of tomorrow such as it has been described. There are two further possibilities. The first is to take the eclectic view. The problem is then how to conceive this eclecticism. The second possibility is to avoid eclecticism, and look for a conception of life that is neither specifically philosophical nor generally ideological, but both practical and theoretical a conception of life that has proved universally efficient in the past and can be eked out by absorbing elements from the standard moral practice of our own day.

If we opt for this second route, the most exact moral conception would seem to be the classical Greek humanism. Not only is it profoundly universal, so that it has proved adaptable to both past and present civilizations; it is adaptable also to the world of tomorrow, already depicted in outline. Greek humanism is free of any kind of national or nationalistic ties. At the same time it is broad enough to absorb elements from any other culture in the world. Such a conception of life seems to be the one that should be preferred. There are three reasons for this. *First*, the strength of Greek humanism, historically speaking, is its theoretical flexibility, and hence the ease with which it adapts to various contexts. Greek humanism, in combination with Christianity, with other religions and ideologies, or with philosophical theories, has provided the underpinning for a platform of thought. It seems well able to continue doing so in the future. *Second*, Greek humanism has an intellectual weight that rests on its claims about scientific activity. It proposes that scientific activity must not be subordinated to the aims of the moment, but, must remain open to any kind of desire for knowledge. Since truth is not an interpretation of need, but – in the Aristotelian sense – an adequacy of mind and reality, Greek humanism is understandably resistant to schemes about the future. Greek humanism is neither a philosophy nor a religion. Strictly speaking, it is something less than a philosophy, and something more than an ideology. This is why it is able, in its eventual enlarged and renewed form, to meet the actual intellectual and spiritual needs of a renewed universal society. *Third*, Greek humanism is the combination and the outcome of certain tendencies that were valid for the Greek world, and continue to be so. It is founded mainly, if not exclusively, on a sense of measure and the freedom of the individual, or rather the concept of the free person freely integrated into a free society of free citizens. There are no limits to the freedom of the Greek human being, other than those suggested by respect for the freedom of everyone else, individually and collectively.

To conclude. If what we are looking for is a new morality for the world of tomorrow, we should above all search for it within Greek humanism. One will find there the patterns needed for humanity to face the world in a contemporary way, as it endeavors to secure the continuity of established human values in a human society in constant change, but needing to be safeguarded from further unconsidered evolution, if there is still to be a constant relationship between society, with its universal vocation, the human environ-

ment and humankind itself. In this regard, what is essential is a wholehearted looking back to Greek humanistic ideals, since we prepare today for a future world that will harmoniously meet our material and spiritual needs, and will be just as harmonious an expression of the historical and actual presence of human beings in the universe. This explicit requirement is, I think, fully and implicitly present in the prevailing international mood, as exemplified in the founding charter and philosophy of our latter-day Amphictyonic Council, the United Nations. But there is (it seems to me) still much to do before the United Nations is strong enough to be able to apply its theoretical ideals in practice, before it can achieve its aim of imposing moral law universally in the face of all inhuman tendencies to break this law. Greek humanism has proved compatible with universal values. They obviously derive from its universal and ambitions. Besides, since ancient times, Greek humanism has strongly influenced non Hellenic thought. These various categories of systems have the power to join – through a dialogue between cultures – in confronting the problems of humankind in the world we are seeking to create.

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**EINAI ΔΥΝΑΤΗ ΜΙΑ ΑΝΑΒΙΩΣΙΣ ΤΟΥ ΟΥΜΑΝΙΣΜΟΥ
ΕΠΙ ΤΩΝ ΗΜΕΡΩΝ ΜΑΣ;**

Π ε ρ ί λ η ψ η

Ἡ θεμελιώδης προϋπόθεση προκειμένου νὰ ἀναβιώσει ὁ Οὐμανισμὸς ἐμπεριέχεται πλήρως, ἂν καὶ ἔμμεσα, στὴν κρατοῦσα διάθεση τῆς παγκόσμιας κοινότητος, ὅπως αὐτὴ παραδειγματικὰ καταγράφηκε στὴν ιδρυτικὴ διακήρυξη τῆς σύγχρονης Ἀμφικτιονίας, τοῦτέστιν τῶν Ἑνωμένων Ἐθνῶν. Ὑπάρχει ἐντούτοις, ἔχω τὴν ἀποψη, πολὺς δρόμος ἀκόμα, μέχρις ὅτου νὰ μποροῦν τὰ Ἑνωμένα Ἐθνη, ὄντας πλέον ἐπαρκῶς κραταιά, νὰ ἐφαρμόζουν τὰ θεωρητικὰ ἰδανικά τους στὴν πράξη, τοῦτ' ἔστιν προτοῦ νὰ εἶναι σὲ θέση νὰ ἐπιτυγχάνουν τὸν στόχο τῆς ἐπιβολῆς τοῦ ἠθικοῦ δέοντος παγκοσμίως. Ὁ Ἑλληνικὸς Οὐμανισμὸς ἔχει ἀποδειχτεῖ συμβατὸς μὲ τὶς παγκόσμιες ἀξίες. Οἱ τελευταῖες προέρχονται καταφανῶς ἀπὸ τὶς ιδέες καὶ τὶς στοχεύσεις του. Πέραν τούτου, ἀπὸ τὴν ἀρχαιότητα ἤδη, ἡ Ἑλληνικὴ Παιδεία ἔχει ἐπηρεάσει βαθύτατα ἀκόμα καὶ τὴν μὴ Ἑλληνικὴ διανόηση. Ἔχει λοιπὸν ἀποδεδειγμένα τὴν ἰκανότητα, διαμέσου τοῦ διαπολιτισμικοῦ διαλόγου, νὰ συνενώνει τοὺς πολιτισμούς. Ὡς ἐκ τούτου, θὰ μπορεῖ νὰ τοὺς συνενώνει καὶ ἐνώπιον τῶν ὅποιων μελλοντικῶν προβλημάτων καὶ ἀπειλῶν.

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