

HERALDING A NEW ENLIGHTENMENT

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Abstract: The present-day anatomy of disarray we have to cope with brings out the necessity of a fundamental change in our spiritual attitude and societal conduct, aiming to reassess the value of wisdom in connection with the scientific and technological progress; all, being grounded in the network of the manifestations of the *logos of life*. This approach highlights the articulations of our very own vision of heralding a New Enlightenment for humankind, throughout a new critique of reason, by framing a new philosophical insight able to lead us to a better understanding of the meaning of life.

Keywords: logos, New Enlightenment, reason, wisdom, meaning of life, communication.

As is frequently lamented, with today's explosive geometric growth in scientific knowledge and technology, a development underway now for centuries, we are facing a real upheaval in our view of the world and in our approach to life and its conditions. Unprecedented events like our probes sent to other planets, extraordinary inventions transforming human life in time and space like the aircraft shrinking the globe for us, instant telecommunication, and the many appliances easing and accelerating the pace of everyday life have not only transformed in numerous ways our existence but also have us on the alert for further wonders and shocks. All humanity simply expects and is in some dread of a never ending, advancing transformation of life.

Living in these extraordinary times, we are immersed in such a variety of new ideas, experiences, practices, intuitions. We need to devote time and effort to familiarize ourselves with them, understand them, and employ them in practice. It seems not only that we remain lost in the mass of the ever changing but also that we cannot come to terms with and embrace the ever fresh, even startling appearance of

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reality. Expanding knowledge of nature, the world, the cosmos, of human beings too, keeps humanity in perpetual incertitude. The perspectives that have long conditioned the aims of human endeavors, the coherence of the world has undergone a loosening, even ruptures. Criteria and rules of validity have become questionable or have been outright rejected.

The world-sprawling migration of peoples confronts us with people of different cultures. Since newcomers do not adapt at the most profound level to their chosen communities, they provoke an inner fermentation in the cultural habits of their new countries. Standing now within a maze of fragmentary worldviews, we find ourselves lacking points of orientation, which seems to make it impossible to assess the bounds or the expansion of the givenness with which living beings / the human being is dealing. From numerous intellectual perspectives and philosophies, social scientists and humanists alike lament the distortion and downfall of our culture, deploring what Michel Henry calls its abysmal fall into “barbary”.

Philosophical reflection as well has suffered diminution. Great philosophical endeavors that have aimed and grasping and understanding the significance of the numerous horizons encircling the human mind and our lived world, at differentiating the respective realms of human experience and seeking their coherence, have lost their meaningfulness.

How could we even dream now of embracing this ever escaping infinity open to our human gaze in a harmoniously coalescing vision? How could we seek its sense, its reason?

It seems as if humanity’s classic dream of a metaphysical vision has vanished from sight. Not so.

We may compare, in fact, the present-day situation of our seemingly deep down disorientation within the fluctuating and rapidly advancing waves agitating our civilization with ever new perspectives opening upon reality with the turmoil that agitated the early modern age in the Occident as the rigid worldview of the Aristotelian-scholastic framework of thought was shaken off. Then, as now, discontent with the received worldview and human being’s view of its place in the cosmos, matters that had been interrelated in an all-embracing system of thought that fell into discredit with surprising new scientific findings and philosophical scrutinies. Under new impulses, Aristotelian rationality ceded to the Newtonian. Still, in spite of all the assaults of Bacon, Hobbes, Locke, the world revealed an

order and coherence and the human mind could grasp it, reinterpreting its order within the perspectives of new approaches. What was in question, therefore, was the nature of rationality, when in a conceptual revolution, mathematical models captured empirical science.

Even so, today as previously obscure enigmas of reality and human cognition are illuminated, “first principles” have not dropped out of sight altogether.

The last century saw great contributions made to the purely unprejudiced progress of the human mind. The evolution of knowledge, of the human mind, has brought powerfully to the fore not only all the classically formulated questions – of the final reasons and principles of reality – but this very evolution has also brought to light striking gains: prospects for human advance in scrutinizing life, the world, man him/herself, and our capacities of availing ourselves of the forces of nature and expanding our mastery of them. There is to be considered not only our more fundamental understanding of our fabric, of the human mind in its evolutionary course, but also the contemporary clarification of the nature of language in framing reality’s interpretation. There are being elaborated stricter postulates of reasoning, criteria of certainty that call for a critical assessment of conceptions hitherto accepted in philosophical inquiry (e.g., subject and object, individual and community, essence and existence, substance and accident). Furthermore, there is to be appreciated the significant new insights we have into the associative links, communicative threads, etc. that lead to a more adequate picture of the real.

By the same stroke, old sclerosed conceptual chains, theories, preconceptions about human nature, the world, nature, moral standards, ethical laws and principles have loosened up, weakened in their validity; and the strength of conviction they carry with themselves has yielded to new perspectives opened by scientific progress.

But from this seemingly disjointed situation there seems to be emerging the promise of a dynamic skeleton for future fusions of *sense*. In its expanding advance toward the unknown, scientific inquiry further and further differentiates itself and prompts us to pursue more and more inquisitive paths as there freshly emerge new suggestions of shaping and generative links.

Consequently, we cannot in our presentation of our new vision follow the discursive patterns of traditional conceptual frameworks.

We have, to the contrary, to follow our spontaneous intuitions as they appear to our mind/sight in a “zig-zag” fashion, simply in order to, as the French say, “Reculer pour mieux sauter”.

A transformative progress is occurring not only in scientific inquiry but also and even more in the development of the human mind conducting that inquiry.

Let us recall the vision of future things set forth by Turgot and the Marquis de Condorcet, who at the end of the enthusiastic (but actually failed) wave of optimism of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that is called the Enlightenment viewed human history as a record of the race’s advance toward perfection, an advance that proceeded despite cataclysms, plagues, and phases of barbarism. In his *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain*, Condorcet maintained that we had reached an epoch in which this perfection could no longer be stopped and will come to pass. Compare that with the situation and spirit of our times, in which humanity, after further chaos as disorientation about everything and the “deconstruction” of all footholds in life proceeds. We cannot but be struck by the seeming failure of hope, but equally by the profound misunderstanding therein of the present situation of humankind.

I am claiming that, in fact, beneath the present-day mood of disarray and our feeling that we lack a compass, there is a deeply brewing flux of renewal, growth, and the perfecting of humanity. As Voltaire, the herald of the Enlightenment, voiced it, the progress of humanity depends upon the renewal of reason. It is, indeed, from a rebirth of reason proper that we are heading toward a New Enlightenment, which I herald.

In a situation comparable to that of the Eighteenth Century, we are, indeed, ready to launch A NEW ENLIGHTENMENT FOR HUMANKIND.

In order to assess the transformations that the present-day scientific, technological, social, and civilizational upheavals are creating, *a new critique of reason* is indispensable. A vision of reason that breaks out from the narrow traditional framework and opens up creatively toward appreciation of the host of new rationalities now expounded is needed in order to deal with the changeable currents of existence, to generate criteria of validity, predictability, prospects, measure.

With this urgent call for the new critique of reason, we are back to philosophy. However, philosophy with its full range of queries,

reaching to the abysses of physics and reaching beyond physical horizons to the innermost existential promptings elevating mind/spirit, all as an extension of questions traditionally considered as “metaphysical”, has been abandoned. With today’s exuberant multiplicity of empirical-experiential inquiries into reality, the great principles formerly framed by speculative imagination to deal with philosophy’s queries as well as to pursue the innermost personal quest for wisdom have lost their application. In our postmodern period they are simply outlived.

These great principles are in the first instance denigrated because of their inadequacy given how their universal/abstract conceptualizing dominates the questions they were meant to answer. But in the last analysis, are they abandoned? Do they appear pointless? That is not the case. In the fundamental overthrow of their rationalized framing and conceptual formulation, these questions are revealed to have not been simply imagined futile placebos for existential queries and yearnings, for the thirst for the meaning of life and human destiny. To the contrary, although our view of reality and human involvement in it has so diametrically shifted, swinging away from the heights of speculative reason toward ordinary concreteness and its sources, the roads leading away from these sources take our querying in the direction of the ultimate questions that were ostensibly abandoned. Even a perusal of the historical unfolding of philosophical reflection prompts us to reflect on the “eternal return” of *human concerns*, of the insights, ideas to which our mind responds. They are being constantly transformed in their formulation, molded in sense and modes, or even altogether denigrated as to the validity of their correspondence to the “real” in their intended apprehensions and so are replaced by other insights, ideas. The inquiries perdure, however transformed. Expression after expression, these concerns return.

It is with the perspective that, in response to the present-day sense of life, I will not suppress the perennial metaphysical concerns of the mind, and so I will introduce my own metaphysical panorama.

The most concretely felt concern emergent at the present, and this is universally so, is with “communication”. This stems directly from the above-mentioned spirit of our times but penetrates into the very foundation of life: its roots, the world, nature, the geo-cosmic *positioning* of the human condition within the unity-of-everything-there-is-alive, reaching to reflective human selfhood, which with its creative societal network, as well as with its personal life, ties the

threads of the logos, which extend throughout life and reach to the divine. The state of our culture prompts us to search after reason. This very state of affairs requires a remedy that proceeds from reason itself; it calls for philosophy to free us from our impasse and to lead on.

Humanity is indeed struggling to master concrete issues concerning its survival and to deal with the overwhelming differentiation of rationalities bursting forth from scientific discoveries, which with their inventive insights draw our search ever onward. These discoveries deal directly with nature, with human health, with immediate practical matters – with transactional environmental as well as societal dealings, with national and global affairs. The progress of the human mind with its sentient and emotional dimensions as well as with spiritual, intimately personal longings to see one's very own meaning of life and self-fulfillment elucidates our ties with the Divine – calls for a meaningful, cogent coordination of our sensibilities, valuations, convictions, and our faith, all of which are indispensable to our maneuvering upon the chaotic flux of life. To begin with, it is enough to point out the need for establishing a cooperative network between the different planes of reality that multiply with our interdisciplinary work in all fields of inquiry and practice. To discover links, ties, modes of coalescence, and generative as well as evolutive fusions in biological inquiries involves an entire network of vital forces, processes, which differentiate into the biological, chemical, physical scientific realms, and the calls for interdisciplinary work. It is already at the generative level that networks of "communication" have to be projected by the vital forces of generation of life, evolving, dissolving, which calls for the scientist to reach and search ever deeper. Furthermore, human societal dealings – in communal as well as personal life – among groups and nations springing forth from ties from time immemorial are constantly in question.

The human quest for wisdom, for making sense of the things we believe on faith, is being pulled apart by the intellectual program of "deconstruction", on the one hand, and by a revival religious distrust of reason, on the other. This situation calls for a deep-down revision of the foundations that faith and reason generate in our reality. As traditional standards for morals, habits, principles of conduct, aims, and prospects have been dissolved by the spirit of progress, the standing of expectations vanishes from sight. Without even a provisional framework of reference, the instantaneous measures taken

for handling immediate necessities do not seem to lead, direct, or even promise to conduct us to a foreseeable point. New modalities of ties, contracts, laws, and moral sensibilities as well as procedures for generating “information” are constantly being revised in the search for new accommodations in emerging situations. Only a novel elucidation of all underlying principles of reason adequate for meeting the needs of present-day formulations of concerns may satisfy these imperatives.

Communication, it is understood universally, is key to our new assessment of reason. Yet can we amid the dazzling differentiation of rationalities by which we view reality adequately approach its constructive coalescence, the coordination of the fleeting stream of events, transformations, insights by which we propel ourselves? Can we envisage any rationale – scientific, artistic, spiritual – as being decisive for the rest of them? The stream of reality flows forward, and we, the operative and reflective agents who maintain ourselves within it, float along. We turn to the wisdom of philosophy, but no common denominator is available by which to delve into its ever further escaping levels. Neither any permanent structure of being such as that assumed by the Ancients, nor any ordering laws of the human mind such as those that for Moderns account for our knowledge may do justice to the abundance and variety that our present state of human experience reveals, to say nothing of the expanding perspectives on our horizons. Only a new framework acknowledging the common modality of all differentiation, only an authentic *mathesis universalis* has the alphabet by which to convey comprehensively the full sense of creation: constructivism, energy, metamorphic versatility, the force prompting growth as well as dissolution in the regenerative fonts of the Unconditioned.

To account for the pendulum’s swing from the pit of dissolution to regeneration in a novel mode, we have to reach the *sense of sense*, the ancient logos, that is. We have to rediscover it within the maze of novel data revealing reality and to assess it with the givens newly emerging and hence freshly available to our mind. Logos, the sense of sense, penetrates All; it encompasses human reality, the entirety of its fulgurating waves, our new cultural enlightenment, as well as what is to come. IN LOGOS OMNIA!

