

Introduction

In October 1998 the International Council for Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences followed the tradition of colloquia accompanying the biennial meetings of the statutory General Assembly of its Member Organizations. There was all the more reason for doing so that year, since the ICPHS was celebrating the fiftieth anniversary, give or take a few days, of the definitive drawing-up of the agenda and statutes of the ICPHS and, a few weeks early, the commemoration of their presentation to the first General Assembly at Brussels in January 1949. We have been able to do this in considerable style, thanks to the generous assistance of UNESCO, which we owe to the kind interest which the Director General, Federico Mayor, has demonstrated yet again for our ventures, as well as the lavish and well-organized hospitality secured for us by Avv. Gerardo Marotta at the Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici at the Palazzo Serra di Cassano at Naples. The ICPHS office ensured that the colloquium was an opportunity for the Member Organizations to make themselves heard and to listen to one another. The working group arrived at the theme of 'Philosophy and Humanistic Sciences on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century.' They commissioned me to submit a line of thought to speakers and listeners which they could readily draw on to assure the thematic unity of the colloquium. I expected that, by promoting the sense of a continuous and contradictory movement of scholarly thought in a difficult world, this text would free them from any millenarist perspective which the title of the colloquium might have suggested and which would have revealed more about a systematized apprehension than a significant historical synopsis. This was my text:

Since the Second World War, which was a shock with resonances which have not yet died away, the world has changed, for better or for worse, and particularly the world of learning, where the humanities have a role to play through research and teaching. Decolonization, the collapse of totalitarian ideologies and the emergence of new hegemonies, globalization, the expansion of human contacts by means of electronic networks, the value-conflicts produced by these upheavals with all that implies for humanity's progress or regression, the multiplication on a global scale of places of learning, the extreme specialisms and hypertechnicalities which sometimes constitute knowledge for its own sake, or the opposite, the risks of popularization, whether good or harmful, communicated by the media with uncontrollable repercussions – all these, with very many other changes, whether large or small, beneficial or detrimental, have marked science and scientists, their plans and their perspectives.

All the contributions will appear in the *Proceedings* of the colloquium. The periodical, *Diogenes*, wanted to be involved in the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary by offering the delegates and speakers of the General Assembly, as well as a wider public, an *Anthology* which brings together a score of the major contributions published since its inception. It also wished, with this issue, to participate in the period of fruitful encounter in the sessions at Naples, all the more because the development and execution of the programme had been substantially inspired by the *Diogenes* spirit of challenging established conformisms and fashions. Nine of the speakers at Naples accepted our invitation to

contribute to this issue. Some supplied an article relatively close to their paper, others developed an important aspect. The choice was linked to the diverse reactions of the speakers to the proposed theme and to the very different perspectives in which the topics had been treated both on the historical level and in terms of future approaches. A unanimity emerged: from the comfortable scheme of the genetic analysis of source or image perceived in the source by its observer, whose own logic inspires the illusion of objectivity, we pass to the fluid complexity of mutual relations between the object, packed with conscious and unconscious confluences which must be sought out, and its observer who himself becomes the object on which he is invited to make a relative judgement, with respect to those confluences of his own which distort his logic. Stage by stage (they are particularly perceptible in history and disciplines pertaining to literary expression), new methods of analysis, new fields of proposed study, new methodological achievements, and technical progress have modified the structures and objectives of research. Only soon to discover, in most cases, the limits of the revival – in the form, for instance, of a structuralism at times deconstructed. Often, just beneath the surface, there appears a third dimension of the dialogue between the object and its assessor, the perception by the latter of the future reception of this complex relation, a question which makes the globalization of culture a burning issue, with the implication of research for social problems, with all the risks of pedagogic or valorizing distortion of discourse. But this balance in instability which animates the humanistic sciences is best sought in the diversity of tone, depth, and perspective of these nine articles.

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