

**International  
Ontology Congress**

Prim 14, 6º C. SAN SEBASTIAN  
Enric Granados, 15-17, BARCELONA

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**I CIRCULAR**

**IX INTERNATIONAL ONTOLOGY CONGRESS**

**Universidad del País Vasco (UPV/EHU) Departamento de Filosofía,  
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB), Departament de Filosofia,  
Museo Chillida Leku,  
Fundación Paideia**

Colaboration Institutions:

**Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti,  
Centre Leon Robin (Sorbonne),  
CCCB-Institut d'Humanitats**

**San Sebastián (September 27-October 1) / Barcelona, (October 4-5) 2010**

**PHILOSOPHY AS AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL  
UNIVERSAL**

**Recent editions of the International Ontology Congress**

Since its first edition in 1993 the objective of the International Ontology Congress (IOC) has been to assess the situation of the key questions of fundamental philosophy contemplated in the light of contemporary reflection. It follows from this that its Permanent International Scientific Committee includes distinguished figures of contemporary science and art alongside philosophers. The editions of the Congress have been held with the sponsorship of the UNESCO.

The III and IV editions of the IOC concentrated on the concept of Physis. From the emergence of the concept in presocratic texts to the subversion that Quantum Mechanics (and specifically theorising such as Bell's Theorem) has meant for our representations of Physis, without forgetting the treatment of the concept in the physics of Aristotle, all angles were considered.

The V edition (held in October 2002) examined the concept of the living, which without ever abandoning the historical perspective was once again considered from the perspective of fascinating contemporary debates. Biology played the part of an architectural discipline, but was also enriched with approaches from linguistics, semiotics, psychology, chemistry, physics itself, and naturally ethics and aesthetics, understood beneath the prism of a radical questioning of Kantian order (is there or is there not a horizon of ends which, within the living, singles out "transcendentally" what is human?)

In the VI edition of the IOC the organisers proposed to extend the reflection initiated in the previous one and also to make the leap to the consideration of the problems with the intersection of biology and linguistics; hence the title *From the Gene to Language: the state of the matter*. The president of honour of the congress was Hilary Putnam.

The title of the VII edition was *From the Platonic Cave to Internet: what is Real and what is Virtual*. It was sponsored by the UNESCO and the president of honour was John Searle. Our perceptions, aesthetic or ethical judgements, and our cognitive efforts have never been so influenced by information (conveyed by digits) with two-dimensional plasmation as in our time. Digital modelling has permitted extraordinary advances, for example, in the field of medicine. It has been said that even purely theoretical reflection (whether scientific or philosophical) would today be impossible *de facto* without digital paraphernalia. Others object to this and maintain that Einstein, Niels Böhr, and even John Bell are the cause rather than the result of technological sophistication, and that science worthy of the name continues to respond to eternal objectives of intelligibility, for which technology must continue to be merely an instrument. The subject of what is real and what is virtual has various sides that involve from mathematical simulation to cybernetics, molecular biology, and neurobiology, without forgetting cognitive psychology, etc. Another prominent aspect is that of contemporary physics, in which the term "virtual" is applied to phenomena that violate the traditional laws of conservation when this violation is undetectable in a direct manner. The concept of what is "virtual" in art, and particularly in music, was not neglected either. The question of its universality is an obsession in many disciplines. Musicologists do not lose heart when it comes to affirm the anthropological importance of music because some people are not receptive to musical manifestations to which exclusivity has been abusively attributed.

The President of Honour of the VIII Congress, which once again was sponsored by the UNESCO, was the distinguished philosopher and physicist A. Grünbaum. Its subject was "Apeiron: the problem of infinity from Greek thought to contemporary science". Personalities from the world of mathematics, cosmology, and other disciplines attended from many different countries to assess the situation in sessions held in San Sebastián and Barcelona. At the Casa Asia in Barcelona and under the auspices of this institution, which is dependent on the Spanish Foreign Office, a special seminar entitled "Mathematical infinity in a Chinese context" was held with mathematicians and philosophers with connections with the Peking Science Academy under the direction of Professor J. Dauben of the City University of New York (CUNY) and the Peking Science Academy itself. The success of the participation of the public in this seminar has encouraged the organisers in their decision (which was not made recently) to strengthen links with Asian philosophical and scientific institutions.

## **About the IX edition of the International Ontology Congress**

The IX International Ontology Congress, which continues to be faithful to its theme of returning to the major problems of Greek philosophy in the light of the reflection of contemporary science, will however incorporate a minor shift. The subject chosen will not be a specific philosophical problem but rather the problem that philosophy itself represents.

Philosophy has an emblem in the opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in which he affirms that "*all men by nature desire to know*". Whether Aristotle was right or not and whether it is appropriate or not to attribute to human nature as such a predisposition to lucidity, this becomes then a key question that concerns, among other disciplines, education. In 2000 the cyclic World Philosophy Congress was held in Boston, precisely with the generic title of "*Philosophy educator of Humanity*". And this would be, indeed, a fundamental aspect of what we intend here, a kind of inseparably ethical and educational corollary of this purpose. Affirming or denying the universality of philosophy is almost a case of anthropological optimism or pessimism, of confidence in a common disposition of reasoning beings, disposition that would be a consequence of the essential richness of language beyond the contingent differences that separate peoples, cultures, and civilisations, and even beyond the difference between adults and children. There is no doubt that this requires us to understand philosophical disposition to be an elemental attitude of the spirit that also manifests itself in the demand for scientific intelligibility. Certainly we cannot obviate the outright rejection that the thesis could face (see the presentation of section 2).

Without underestimating the importance of these objections, divergence seems to be hampered by a misunderstanding regarding what should be understood by the term *philosophy* itself. It is hard to imagine a place where man does not wonder about man and, therefore, a place without some form of philosophical anthropology. And this is perhaps valid for each and every one of the questions that have fed the history of philosophy. The point is not to affirm that certain modes of spirituality with weaker or stronger links to religious attitudes characteristic of a given civilisation are definitely a part of philosophy, but rather perhaps to indicate that, after the multiplicity of its objectives, the aforementioned arrangement indicated by Aristotle persists as an invariable factor. This is reflected specifically by the fact that a person unfamiliar at first with Greek-Western culture would have no difficulty (obviously with the necessary educational mediation) in acquiring the theories associated with such a culture.

Without a doubt other objections arise here; it is unquestionable that some of the universal questions posed by philosophy are also addressed by other symbolic forms such as art and religion, and naturally by science. The universality of the questions is not in itself sufficient argument in favour of the universality of philosophy. The problem of isolating the epistemological specificity of philosophy, at least confronted to religion and art, will therefore be one of the keys of our congress.

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But if philosophy has aspirations to universality, if the aim is "philosophy as an educator of humanity", it is essential to wonder why so little importance is attached to philosophy in the basic training of citizens, starting with that of the so-called developed countries. Aristotle affirmed that a philosophical attitude was the prerogative of free men. But in this case the neutralisation of such a disposition in the immense majority of people constitutes an indication of the absence of effective freedom. The real reason for the lack of the universality of philosophy must be of a social nature: for the immense majority of human beings, the struggle to survive continues to take up the entirety of their existence. Under such conditions there is no chance of a general education according to philosophical requirements.

The foregoing implies that philosophy is intrinsically committed, it calls for a criticism of any illegitimate social order as a mere corollary of the vindication of itself. In the last World Philosophy Congress held in Seoul, the President stressed the importance of the event in the conviction that "the technological, military, and economic powers do not have a monopoly of world power". In his view philosophy, given its ability to "expose falsehoods and illusions" generated by these forces and to propose "a better world for humanity to live in", could establish itself as a "counter-power", the whole mission would be "fighting to create a world citizenship". The question is to

determine whether there is any possibility of this really happening, i.e. if philosophy can overcome the burden that the configuration of world powers represents for education in general. In any case, the vindication of philosophy would continue to be valid even if the globalisation of the free market became compatible with the reduction of the huge economic differences between countries and between citizens within each country. As Professor Ioanna Kuçuradi declared in the aforementioned Seoul congress, this greater equity would only mean the effective generalisation of human rights if it were accompanied by a general education intended to develop in each individual the faculties characterising them as a human being. This is where philosophy comes into play: educating humanity through philosophy would be tantamount to making possible for each one of us to update the entire potential that characterises us as beings of reason. It simply would be equivalent to helping us to fulfil our humanity (education must fertilise an organ, but cannot be its substitute, as Plato had already pointed out).

## SECTIONS OF THE CONGRESS

### **1. - The philosophical exigency considered from palaeontology and anthropology**

*Under the Honorary Presidency of Eudald Carbonell (Co-Director of ATAPUERCA Project)*

Aristotle: Πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φύσει

Philosophy has an emblem in the opening sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, in which he affirms that "*all men by nature desire to know*". Whether Aristotle was right or not and whether it is appropriate or not to attribute to human nature as such a predisposition to lucidity, this becomes then a key question that concerns, among other disciplines, anthropology and palaeontology.

As we said, it is hard to imagine that in any place man stop wondering about man, that is, that there is not any kind of philosophical anthropology. And this is perhaps valid for each and every one of the questions that have fed the history of philosophy. It is difficult to contemplate a human community without a background of these elementary questions (from which arises, among other aspects, the need to analyse phenomena, to describe them and to order them as a whole, all of which we may refer to as *science*), as this would almost be tantamount to imagining it without culture, without knowledge, and even without technology.

### **2. - The debate about universality of philosophy in the philosophical tradition of occident.**

*Under the Honorary Presidency of Pierre Aubenque*

It is a fact that philosophy, whatever its features may be, is a human production of a relatively recent history, especially in the occidental version. Can a cultural universal appear so late? Can it arise only within one geo-cultural context or just within some of them? It is legitimate to keep the term "philosophy" for what in the West has been practised since the Greeks under this name, excluding by this way spiritual productions that intercultural philosophy calls philosophic as well?

### **3. - Invariant features of philosophy and non-occidental traditional cultures**

*Under the Honorary Presidency of Darius Shayegan*

It is known that some people supported that philosophy would be the exclusive fruit of the Greek culture, in such a way that the analogue forms linked to other civilizations would be modalities of spirituality that correspond to an exigency of spirit different from the philosophical one. Nevertheless, the so called intercultural philosophy admits that in the Maya, Vedic or ancestral Africans cultures, among others, there are modalities of philosophy as well. Which are the intersection points, if there are any? If that is the case, the following question arises: is it not abusive to characterize as "philosophy" almost exclusively what in occident is called under this name?

### **4. - Philosophy and the origin of science**

*Under the Honorary Presidency of Andrés Moya (Head of the Instituto Cavanilles of Biodiversity and Evolutionary Biology)*

In this section we will wonder about those philosophical invariances present in the scientific activity (very probably in all civilizations and in all times). This section, in a certain way, tries to

remember that science, originally, may be primarily an exigency of intelligibility, whatever its ulterior applications may be. Remembering this origin, philosophy interrogates science in a world that we know it is mainly the fruit of science itself and of the ways of technology that are shoots of science.

## **5. - PARMENIDES.**

### **Common root of philosophical thought and poetic thought.**

*Under the Honorary Presidency of Jose Saramago (NOBEL Award)*

The significant *Parmenides* finds himself inextricably connected to the history of philosophy and literature. Many times it is forgotten (simply because of the difficulties of translation) that this jewel of the logical thought is, primarily and first of all, a **poem**. Remembering this inextricable knot of both dimensions of spirit (poetry and philosophy) is the aim of this section.

## **6. - PAIDEIA**

### **“Philosophy educating humanity”**

*Under the Honorary Presidency of Ioanna Kuçuradi (Director of the Centre for Research and Application of the Philosophy of Human Rights, Hacettepe University)*

Affirming or denying the universality of philosophy is almost a case of anthropological optimism or pessimism, of confidence in a common disposition of reasoning beings, disposition that would be a consequence of the essential richness of language beyond the contingent differences that separate peoples, cultures, and civilizations.

As we said before, in 1998 the World Philosophy Congress was held in Boston with the generic title of “*Philosophy educating Humanity*”. This title was mentioned in the last edition of the Congress (Seoul 2008) by the professor Ioanna Kuçuradi. The professor emphasized the fact that the biggest equity that would mean the reduction of the abyssal economical differences between countries and persons would only suppose an effective generalization of the human rights if it were accompanied of a general education intended to develop in every individual the faculties that entitled them as a human being. And in this project perhaps philosophy would have a fundamental role.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS:**

Papers must be sent to the Secretary of the Congress, who will pass them to the Advisory Council of the International Scientific Committee. A one-page abstract should be sent before **30th June 2010**. A selection of papers will be included in the Proceedings.

**REGISTRATION:**

UPV\* and UAB\*\* students: ..... Free  
Students: ..... 35 euros  
General public before 30th June 2008:..... 70 euros  
General public after 30th June 2008: ..... 100 euros

Please transfer the corresponding amount to the following bank account:

2101 0001 10 0010789824: Kutxa, Calle Garibay, San Sebastián, Spain.

IBAN code..... ES98 2101 0001 10 0010789824  
BIC (SWIFT) code..... CGGKES22  
Account holder..... International Ontology Congress  
Reference ..... IOC

**REGISTRATION FORM:**

This form should be completed and sent to the Secretary of the International Ontology Congress:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

TELEPHONE NUMBER:

FAX:

E-MAIL:

INSTITUTION:

PRESENTING A PAPER:                      YES                                      NO

SECTION IN WHICH YOU WISH THE PAPER TO BE INCLUDED:

TITLE OF THE PAPER:

\*UPV = Universidad del País Vasco  
\*\*UAB = Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona