

**SELECTED PAPERS FROM  
THE XXIII WORLD CONGRESS OF PHILOSOPHY**

FOREWORD TO *SELECTED PAPERS FROM  
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THE present volume includes papers presented at the Plenary Sessions, Symposia, and Endowed Lecture sessions of the Twenty-Third World Congress of Philosophy. World Congresses have been held since the inauguration of this institution in Paris in 1900. In a sense, the lapse of time between that first occurrence and the World Congress that this volume is designed to help commemorate and preserve is relatively short—short relative to the duration of human history; short relative to the origins of Western philosophy that were so vividly recalled by virtue of the fact that participants were gathered in its birthplace, Hellas; and short relative even to the lifetimes of individual philosophers who participated, some of whose parents, teachers, and erstwhile colleagues had been born before the beginning of the Twentieth Century. And yet—what vast changes occurred during that 113-year period!

Two world wars (which also caused disruptions in the scheduling of the World Congresses) devastated the planet. Empires and ideologies rose and fell. Transportation possibilities and communication facilities accelerated enormously, in the case of communications almost exponentially. More recently, the quite significant expressions “new world order” and “globalization” were invoked repeatedly, although often with diverse and even opposing connotations. And the very size of the human race, despite all the premature losses of lives brought about by wars and natural catastrophes, more than quadrupled.

In the planning for the now-quinquennial World Congresses, which have taken place under the sponsorship of FISP, the *Fédération Internationale de Sociétés de Philosophie*, since its creation at the Amsterdam World Congress in 1948, it has become customary for the FISP Steering Committee to begin by soliciting possible themes from members and to reach a consensus about this. Past themes have been interesting and varied, but few if any have been as expressive as was the 2013 theme of what I think of as philosophy’s twin functions (in Aristotle’s sense of ἀρεταί, excellences): “Philosophy as Inquiry and Way of Life.” This theme seems in a sense to represent philosophy as a counterbalance to the flux and near-chaos of ongoing world history to which I have just alluded. Indeed, as I

said in my brief remarks at the Opening Ceremony of the 2013 World Congress in the Odeum of Herodotus Atticus: “The aspiration to connect with eternity, whatever forms this aspiration may sometimes take, is in fact a crucial part of the charm of philosophy—of virtually all philosophy, East and West, North and South.”

But fulfilling that aspiration, as I believe all of the papers contained in this volume do to at least some degree, is by no means at cross purposes with the wish and need to maintain contemporaneity. The nature of philosophy as incarnated in the World Congresses, if not also of philosophy as such, has itself changed enormously over the last eleven and a half decades. I think that all of us planners were committed to ensuring that this fact would be reflected in that part of the program for which we had principal responsibility, the part that readers will discover in this text. So, for example, one will find here reflections on contemporary science, art, and religion, as well as on philosophy as practical wisdom, coping with today’s world as with past worlds. And these reflections come not only from the “North” and “West,” as was overwhelmingly the case in World Congresses of the early years, but also from the East and the South; and not only from persons of one gender and of one skin color and of only a few privileged nationalities, as was also the tendency “back then,” but from a true diversity of voices.

At the same time, there were special privileges that we participants enjoyed to which attendees at no previous World Congress had had access—privileges that derived from the fact that we—meaning we assembled representatives of the world philosophy community, not we as individuals—were meeting together in Athens for the first time. Our Greek hosts, whose own recent and ongoing collective difficulties were well known to all, offered their hospitality and invited us to see the hallowed sites of which they are so justly proud. In fact, several of the sessions at which the present papers were given took place in those very sites: that of Plato’s Academy, that of the Pnyx, that of the imagined dialogue of Plato’s *Phaedrus*, at which descendants (as we may suppose!) of the crickets to which he refers there sang their old, familiar song . . .

In short, these papers were presented in the cradle of Western philosophy, and to recall that this was their original venue may, for those with strong powers of imagination, add a certain special aura to the reading of them. But they should also cause us to remember that Western philosophy has significant siblings, and that it and the latter are now vibrant, healthy adults.

The same—“vibrant, healthy adults”—cannot be said, it is to be feared, of some of the current inhabitants of our planet. We are plagued by illnesses—extreme aggressivity, massive avarice, arrogant intolerance—that are not due to any virus, but rather to something deep in the human psyche, as well-known diagnoses by the ancient Greek philosophers already made clear. One of philosophy’s principal tasks has always been, by *inquiring* into the origins and nature of this “something” and by offering alternative *ways of life*, to attempt to offer inoculation against it. Aristotle was surely right, I believe, when he remarked that man in the generic sense of the word, ὁ ἀνθρώπος, is not the best thing in the universe. And yet the practice of philosophy, to the vigor of which the present volume and the World Congress as a whole bear witness, opens up to all of us perspectives infinitely beyond the often discouraging limitations of everyday human life: perspectives εἰς ἄει.