

*Mr Representative of His Royal Highness Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, Mr Representative of His Excellency the Minister of Education, Excellency the Dean of the Corps Diplomatique, Mr Governor of the Province Noord-Holland, Messieurs les Délégués de l'Unesco, Mr Burgomaster of Amsterdam, Mr Alderman of Public Education, Mr Rector of the University of Amsterdam, Mr Rector of the Free Calvinist University,*

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I bid you welcome to this congress, that is the first to be held since the second world-war interrupted the tradition of international philosophical congresses that had been started in Paris in 1900. Many of you will remember, as I do, the last session of the preceding congress, the Congrès Descartes, in the evening of Friday, August 6th, 1937, when the invitation of the Netherlands Government to hold the next congress in this country was conveyed to the assembly by the Netherlands official delegate, Professor Sassen and underlined with warm eloquence by Professor Leo Polak, who was to have presided that congress in Groningen in 1941. Although the execution of human plans is never certain and particularly in that year those whose eyes were open to reality saw threatening clouds of aggression and barbarism gather, we did, as the organizing committee, the only thing it was reasonable to do: we started to prepare the Congress and thus had some meetings under Polak's presidency. When war broke out, we postponed the Congress. We did not yet know, that this would be for seven years, neither that we should lose our president. As I now occupy the place that he would have taken if things had been right, I beg you to let me say some words to commemorate him. Leonard Polak was born in 1880. From early youth his many-sided mind showed an intense interest and uncommon intelligence. He studied law and philosophy and became a private lecturer for epistemology in the University of Amsterdam. In those days the Amsterdam Philosophical Association flourished under his chairmanship, lectures being delivered there by outstanding philosophers of many countries, of whom Bertrand Russell, Léon Brunschvig, Ernst Cassirer, Edmund Husserl, Adhemar Gelb, Simon Frank may be mentioned. When Heymans died Polak was called to his chair and worked at

Groningen from '29 till '40. Soon after the occupation of this country he fell a victim to a law that excluded Jewish Netherlanders from university teaching. The frankness with which he spoke about this injustice in a letter that was sent to the occupant authorities determined his fate. He was arrested, imprisoned and sent to the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen, where he died on December 9th, 1941.

His fate was an exceedingly tragic one. He would not have been arrested so early, if he had not been betrayed and he would probably have lost his life some years later if he had not succumbed to the consequences of hard work and of an operation in the camp. He was aware of the dangers that threatened him as a progressively thinking Netherlander and particularly as a Jew. He knew, through his friends and many others about the effects of that criminal folly called antisemitism that was one of the cornerstones of the ideology that rose to power in 1933. He sent his valuable library to England and remained at home himself exposing his much more precious life and that of his family. Like a true philosopher he was quiet and brave and thus remained loyal to his country. Being optimistic and confident in his opinions about human beings he had no idea of the meanness and moral perversion in others. If Nietzsche says that among men from the bottom upwards misunderstanding is unavoidable the inverse seems equally true and such was the case with Leo Polak.

He was a rationalist and a humanist. The strongest philosophical inspiration he had received from Kant and Spinoza, just as Heymans did. As a rationalist he showed to a generation that has a variety of faiths, what it means to have a reasonable faith. He could have said with the Indian mystic Vivekananda: Is there a greater blasphemy possible than to believe against reason? He argued his philosophical faith with passion and he lived up to it. Before oppression came we chiefly knew his intellectual clearness and sagacity. When he was caught in the net of the abject men-hunters he displayed his faith in reason in a way that deserves the highest admiration. The approach of death did not in any way modify his views about the fate of the individual mind when it dies. Being together in prison with people of various creeds he tried to convince them by reasonable arguments that there can be no consciousness beyond this life. These people were devoted to the cause of justice like himself. But they had learned from their early youth that there is another life after this earthly life. And now, in the face of death, this belief was the hope they clung to. They had the kind of courage one gets based by picturing to oneself a future of eternal bliss after the troubles of this actual existence. Leo Polak was not thus. They had the courage of belief and he had what may be called the courage of unbelief, which does not transcend empirical reality and which is based on a good conscience and nothing else.

He was a humanist too. All his writings are concerned with human problems. His dissertation as a doctor of law was about the sense of retaliation. In this study, whose second part is available now as volume II

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of his collected works, he rejected the interpretation of penalty as a preventive measure only and considered it as the redress of the wrong that has been done. In his epistemological work he stressed the priority of the mental in connection with the material side of reality. In a book about sexual ethics he indicated modern ways for this important domain of life. His main interest was connected with morality as being pure only when it is independent from any religious creed whatsoever. He fought for independent morals in a country where spiritual group-traditions are very strong. In Leo Polak contemporary philosophy lost a man of brilliant intelligence, the Netherlands a noble son and humanity a mind that had devoted itself to its highest aims. I express a wish that this congress may honour him in pursuing its activities as if he were still there and that his widow and children and his ninety years old mother may find some relief in my assurance that we all mourn with them for the loss of a man whose mind and personality leave the traces of a thinker of exceptional acuity and admirable frankness and courage.

I invite you when in a moment the music will play to direct your thoughts and feelings to the memory of Leo Polak and to realize the intellectual splendor and moral beauty we have found in this thinker, of whom the Netherlands will be proud for centuries. I pray you to add to this commemoration the remembrance of all those philosophers whom we have lost since the last congress, be it by natural death or by barbarian violence. The list of their names is too long to enumerate even the more important ones so that some greater names than Polak's was and numerous others may be all symbolized by the name of the president of the Xth international congress.

Let us now turn to the problems of today. There is a large gap between this congress and the preceding congress of Paris. This is not only a gap in respect of time. The events that shocked humanity and Europe in particular have deeply influenced spiritual life and philosophy. I consider it as one of the main aims of this meeting to ascertain how circumstances influenced philosophy and in what direction. If I venture to anticipate the diagnosis that can only be made up by the cooperation of us all, I would say that the following tendencies that were already arising before the second war are now prevailing. The attitude of philosophers towards human life in general has been changed in this sense that thought has approached life itself much more than before. There is an old speculative conception we inherited from a certain current of Greek thought whose leader was Aristotle and whose device was that contemplation is the sweetest and noblest occupation. This is the attitude that created metaphysics and ontology and that flourished till the Renaissance, in the times when, as Aristotle holds too, rest was deemed to be nobler than motion and the sense of the eternal prevailed over the temporal and secular aspect of things.

So metaphysics has in succession been first a theory about the cosmos, then a theory about the human mind and its cognitive powers. This was the

case with Kant's idealism, which criticized the preceding phase. Now after Kant and particularly in our times we see metaphysics change again and claim access to the absolute through personal experience and through the emotional side of human consciousness. If we look back at the different stages metaphysics went through, we see such essential changes in its aim and method that we may wonder if there is any continuity at all. Nevertheless we may state the reason why metaphysics changed its orientation. It was because it got scientific thought as a rival which putting its aim lower, proceeded in a way surer and more efficient than that of speculation. Hence the characteristics of scientific thought are different from those of metaphysical thought. Science collects facts and then tries to construct a pattern they may fit in. If they prove to do so, the pattern is right, and if they do not, it has to be adjusted. The pattern is called a theory. Theories are due to mental activity, undoubtedly. So far as we know, only human beings are able to build up theories. Theories are no arbitrary inventions. They give coherence to isolated facts. On the other hand they are under the control of facts. Reason does not dictate to things how they have to be, it is at the same time creative and receptive, as it submits facts to patterns and patterns to the response of facts. This method proved to be more reliable in the long run than the other, intuitive and speculative one. We see the fascinating struggle between the tendency towards a subjective picture of the world and the increasing consciousness of rational objectivity. We see it in Plato's cosmology where the speculative principle of beauty of form prevails over the patient observation of the actual movements of the stars. We see it in Aristotle who with all his love of this actual world as the object most worthy of knowledge nevertheless holds that earth is the centre of the universe and that all things have been made in order to serve man. This view of things has blocked for almost two thousand years a more objective view of the cosmos and man's relation to it. The continued efforts of such giants as Galilei, Francis Bacon, Descartes and Kant were needed to free the mind from the static attitude of speculation. Actually philosophers dislike the self-satisfaction that accompanies a speculation that withdraws itself from being-in-time towards timeless being and doing so thinks itself to be "au dessus de la mêlée". It is this attitude of inactivity placing itself above action that is no longer adequate to the spiritual requirements of our day.

If this picture of the present situation of philosophy is correct, if active reason is a higher value than speculative dreaming, philosophy is no longer a pass-time for minds-at-leisure, nor a luxury, but rather a spiritual factor in the process of reality and its problems are the problems of life itself. By saying this we do not mean at all any vitalism, on the contrary we mean the life of reason and reason as a life. Reason originally was the means by which man succeeded in protecting and maintaining himself against hostile surroundings. It became successively the principle of invention, of scientific knowledge and of many other mental achievements. It is the basis of

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harmony and order in personal and social life. It is no more connected with intelligence than with feeling and will, although the contrary is often maintained. Reason is to be considered as the common root of intelligence, feeling and will, as the medium too through which we must communicate in this congress, as the great counterweight to the manifold particular divergences, by which every member of this congress is determined in a specific direction as a member of a nation, as a person belonging to a certain class of society or spiritual group and as a personality.

Reason as the uniting principle, to which everybody freely submits himself should be the only tribunal whose sentences are recognised as valid. Now, with reason the case is a very curious one. Considered in its threefold structure it is the principle of all human life, of knowing, willing and feeling. All suffering, all injustice and unhappiness are caused by the fact that there is something either in the body or in the mind or in both that is against reason and therefore not in harmony with reality. Any lack of freedom is connected with some incapability to apply reason and to let it work. And although at bottom scientific reason and practical and artistic reason are one, their manifestation in concrete human beings is often very different and even contradictory. We often may find a man in whose mind scientific reason works powerfully, but whose emotional tendencies are childish and uncontrolled. In such a man reason only works in a limited domain and his personality is weakened by a dualism that, as it limits reason, is against reason. Or we may find a man who is harmonious since reason as sense of proportion reigns in his emotional life and acts, but this man naively thinks that the sensitive reason he is gifted with makes the scientific reason that others have superfluous and that social problems may be solved if personal harmony becomes general. Such a man is induced to underrate the proper sense of the two other manifestations of reason that are correlative to intelligence and will. In both cases reason is accompanied and dimmed by unreason. There is nothing so difficult as to be just towards those manifestations of reason that happen not to be one's own. And yet: there ought to be no limitation in the power of reason. Actually we often see philosophers applying reason in a one-sided way. While devoting themselves to scientific analysis, they shrink from conclusions of rational analysis with regard to practical life, either personal or social. A philosopher may be very progressive in scientific ideas, and at the same time a conservative in practical matters. He does not feel that he is at the same time in one respect advocating Einstein and in an other respect condemning Galilei. Or a man may think that all is done if personal harmony is attained and that there is nothing more to be done in the field of knowledge or of social life. Even in that case reason remains incomplete in man.

The programme of this Congress has been inspired by our conviction as to the task contemporary philosophy has to accomplish towards human life. We have made the ideas of *Man*, *Mankind* and *Humanity* as a center around which all special problems of philosophy may be ranged as much as

possible. In doing so we did not intend in any way to limit the independence of philosophical research in all its variety. We only thought, that *man* and *mankind* are so to say the actual basis on which all problems of knowledge, of practical work and artistic creation rest. We are particularly grateful that several subjects will be treated in cooperation with the section of Humanities of the Unesco, which has taken the sponsorship over the group of problems connected with the high values of freedom and of peace. I am very glad to announce to you that the Director of Unesco, Dr Julian Huxley, intends to come to Amsterdam on Friday next in the evening. Mr Huxley will address the congress at the beginning of the performance in the East Indian Institute at half past eight.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this Congress has two official languages. You will allow me now to use the other as I have to say something to the French-speaking members in a language that is more familiar to me.

Si la Section des Humanités de l'Unesco a droit à notre profonde gratitude pour avoir bien voulu offrir au congrès sa collaboration et son soutien, il en est de même pour l'Institut international de philosophie qui depuis le congrès Descartes a déployé une activité précieuse au service de la continuité des grands congrès internationaux de philosophie et de l'information philosophique en général. Cet Institut a organisé trois entretiens philosophiques, à Pontigny en '37, à Amersfoort en '38 et à Lund en '47. Les discussions de cette dernière réunion, la première après la guerre, qui fut accueillie par son vice-président le Prof. Petzäll ont contribué essentiellement à la préparation de ce congrès. Qu'il me soit permis de rendre hommage ici à l'infatigable activité et au tact exquis de celui qui en est l'âme, du professeur Raymond Bayer. Notre Institut a subi une grave perte par le décès de son président Léon Robin, grand maître et connaisseur de la philosophie antique et honnête homme dans le sens le plus absolu et le plus riche de ce mot.

La présence de philosophes représentants plus de trente nations est pour le comité organisateur une joie toute particulière. Tout en le chargeant de multiples devoirs cette affluence signifie pour lui une profonde satisfaction et la meilleure récompense de ses efforts. Avec plus de cent représentants la philosophie française est à la tête des nations étrangères participant à ce congrès. Nous pouvons en attendre une importante contribution à nos travaux. Comme le remarquait de Waelhens dans un remarquable article paru dans le Alg. Ned. T. de tous les pays belligérants de ce continent c'est la France qui a le mieux continué les travaux philosophiques dans les noires années de l'occupation. D'ailleurs la France a connu un rayonnement extraordinaire par Henri Bergson et Léon Brunschvicg, disparus tous deux pendant la guerre l'un déshonoré, l'autre persécuté, mais vivants pour toujours dans le souvenir reconnaissant de ceux qui ont vu à l'œuvre ce grand intuitif et ce magnifique rationaliste.

Nous sommes heureux de voir ici tant de nationalités représentées, mais

nous regrettons beaucoup que nos confrères polonais n'aient pas pu obtenir les papiers nécessaires pour se rendre à Amsterdam. Nous aurions aimé beaucoup saluer ici les profonds penseurs et les magnifiques logiciens de ce pays qui de tous a le plus souffert puisqu'il a été littéralement écrasé sous la botte de l'agresseur. Je salue de loin ces penseurs polonais qui auraient tant aimé être avec nous et que nous aurions accueillis avec joie et admiration. Nous avons d'autres regrets encore. Convaincus que nous sommes qu'un congrès international de philosophie ne saurait, s'il se respecte soi-même, respecter les séparations que la politique du jour impose à l'humanité désireuse de vivre en paix, nous nous sommes efforcés d'obtenir des penseurs représentants la seconde puissance du monde, l'U.R.S.S. Nous avons souligné auprès de l'Ambassade de l'Union Soviétique l'énorme importance que devait avoir dans la situation actuelle de l'humanité la rencontre de penseurs représentant les deux civilisations actuellement les plus vivantes, celles de l'occident et celle de l'U.R.S.S. Nous avons convaincu ces représentants de l'Union Soviétique de l'importance d'une telle rencontre, qui pourrait peut-être mener à purifier une atmosphère, infectée par le malentendu, la peur et la calomnie. Nous croyions servir la paix en ce faisant. Si nos efforts n'ont pas abouti pour ce congrès, j'exprime le vœux que quand sera le onzième congrès dans quatre ans et probablement dans une autre ville de l'Europe, nous pourrions féliciter le bureau de ce congrès pour avoir réussi à accomplir ce en quoi le nôtre est resté en défaut.

Je dois ajouter que les tentatives du bureau de ce congrès pour rendre vraiment internationale cette première grande rencontre philosophique d'après-guerre ont suscité un malentendu qui est chuchoté par certains congressistes et qui dit que ce congrès a des tendances politiques et plus particulièrement d'extrême gauche. A cela je répondrai que cela est très exactement contraire à la vérité et aux véritables intentions des organisateurs de ce congrès. Si nous avons voulu avoir des représentants d'un grand pays qui pour l'opinion vulgaire représente ce que j'aimerais appeler le revenant de l'humanité, c'est justement puisque nous croyons qu'il est indigne d'un philosophe, cela veut dire d'un esprit-libre, de se plier aux suggestions journalières au lieu de juger par la raison. Si les organisateurs de ce congrès ne poursuivent aucune tendance politique mais s'ils essaient de servir la vérité par l'exercice de la raison et de contribuer ainsi à dissiper les ténèbres de la méfiance, de l'égoïsme et de la calomnie, j'ose croire que l'atmosphère de ce congrès ne sera plus troublé par ce malentendu et j'ajoute que le congrès qui n'a aucune tendance politique par lui-même, risque d'obscurcir la recherche de la vérité, si les passions qui se manifestent discrètement dans ces chuchotements, ne cessent pas d'exister.

Maintenant que j'ai dissipé, je l'espère, le seul nuage qui offusque l'atmosphère d'un congrès qui, à part cela, s'annonce bien, je vous invite à commencer les travaux en vrais philosophes et de vous en réjouir. En effet, il y a une joie cachée dans le labeur de la pensée dont ne se doutent pas ceux qui végètent sans arriver à exercer la fonction éminemment humaine de

penser. Si Hegel nous dit que notre sort est de ne pas pouvoir ne pas penser et si Pascal nous assure que toute la dignité de l'homme est là-dedans, quel privilège surprenant avons nous, Mesdames et Messieurs, d'être ici dans le but exprès de penser. Et pour finir, si je vous souhaite de jouir de ces jours de pensée, j'espère que cela ne vous détournera pas entièrement de jouir aussi la ville d'Amsterdam, qui, étant la capitale, représente en un sens le cœur battant et le cerveau engagé de ce pays. Je sais bien que tout le monde aime sa ville natale et peut-être parfois c'est un préjugé. Personnellement, je suis assez mal placé pour être objectif, puisque je suis né ici et je vous confesse que mon rationalisme objectif n'est pas capable d'étouffer et même pas de modérer mon grand amour pour Amsterdam. Aimant beaucoup voir des pays et des villes étrangères, je me surprend souvent, au voyage de retour de chançonner tout doucement et sans que personne l'entende une chanson populaire parmi les soldats de ce pays et qui commence en traduction en prose: Ramène-moi à Amsterdam. Évidemment, ceci est exagéré et tout à fait indigne d'un philosophe. Mais ce qui me soutient dans cet amour un peu excessif, c'est le témoignage de nombreux amis étrangers que j'ai promenés à travers les rues et les canaux et chez qui j'ai capté dans le regard cet éclat que donne la jouissance de la beauté.

Eh bien, Mesdames et Messieurs, j'espère que vous serez comme eux, que vous jouirez Amsterdam, que vos yeux seront ouverts à la beauté vieille, reposée et spirituelle de sa vieille cité, que vous aimerez à apprécier son air, ses nuances, sa saveur et surtout son peuple actif, réaliste et plein d'humour. J'espère que vous verrez Amsterdam par toute votre intelligence et toute votre sensibilité et que vous ne manquerez pas d'y distinguer la perspective du passé où reposent les ombres de tant de grands esprits et parmi eux, solitaire et bienheureux, les dépassant tous, la silhouette de Baruch de Spinoza, le philosophe dont nous sommes fiers, puisqu'il est parmi les très grands, puisqu'il est unique comme libérateur de la pensée et comme éducateur à cet amour de Dieu qui est pur puisqu'il est conforme à la raison.

Pendant la séance d'ouverture, l'orchestre à cordes de l'Orchestre Philharmonique d'Amsterdam (chef d'orchestre: M. Karel Mengelberg), avec le concours de MM. Louis Zimmermann et Jan Bresser, exécuta le Concerto en ré mineur pour Deux Violons et Orchestre de J.-S. Bach.