Silo Speaks

An Anthology of Opinions, Commentaries, and Speeches

1969–1995

Note to the Reader

This book is a compilation of the speeches and other public addresses given by Silo over the course of the better part of three decades. Also included are three explanatory notes. The first precedes Silo's public address of May 4, 1969. In that note, we attempt to give the reader some feeling for the circumstances surrounding that event, at which Silo for the first time publicly expressed the foundation of his thought. The second note precedes Silo's talk of September 27, 1981, in Madrid, Spain, and the third note is the introduction of Silo preceding his talk "Religiosity in the Contemporary World," which was given on June 6, 1986. The use of these prefatory notes in place of footnotes or endnotes comes from a desire to provide a context for Silo's words that the reader would otherwise lack, while avoiding interruptions in the flow of the discourse.

In this anthology we have not attempted to include the voluminous material comprising interviews of Silo by the news media, as that material requires a different treatment from the one employed in this volume.

The present texts are drawn from transcribed notes as well as audio and video recordings.

The Editors

I. Opinions, Commentaries, and Speeches

The Healing of Suffering

Punta de Vacas, Mendoza, Argentina, May 4, 1969

Notes:

1. At the time Silo gave this speech in 1969, the military dictatorship then in power in Argentina had banned all public gatherings in urban areas. Consequently, a bleak spot known as Punta de Vacas, high in the Andes on the border between Argentina and Chile, was chosen as the location for the speech. Early in the morning of May 4, the authorities placed roadblocks on all roads leading to the site. Machine-gun posts, military vehicles, and armed soldiers were stationed along the roads, and everyone was required to show identification papers to pass through the checkpoints, which led to disputes with some members of the international press. Against the magnificent backdrop of the snow-capped Andes, Silo began to speak to an audience of some two hundred people. The day was cold and bright, and by noon the event was over.

2. This is Silo's first public expression of his ideas. In poetic language, he explains that the most important knowledge for living ("true wisdom") is not the same as the knowledge found in books—knowledge of universal laws or things of that type—but is a question of inner experience. The most important knowledge for living is related to comprehending suffering and how to surpass it.

In this speech, Silo presents a very simple thesis, which is divided into several parts: (1) It begins by distinguishing between physical pain *and its derivations, on the one hand, maintaining that they can be made to recede through progress in science and justice, and* mental suffering, *on the other, which cannot be eliminated by such means. (2) Suffering comes through three pathways: the pathway of perception, the pathway of memory, and the pathway of imagination. (3) Suffering reveals a state of violence. (4) Violence is rooted in desire. (5) There are various degrees and forms of desire. By attending to these factors ("through inner meditation"), one may advance.*

Thus: (6) Desire gives rise to violence ("the more gross the desires"), which does not remain inside *people but spreads to others, contaminating the space of relationships. (7) Violence can be seen in various forms besides its primary form of physical violence. (8) We need simple forms of conduct by which to orient our lives ("keep simple commandments"): Learn to be a bearer of peace, joy, and, above all, hope.*

Conclusion: To conquer physical pain, science and justice are necessary; to conquer mental suffering, it is indispensable to surpass primitive desires.

If you have come to listen to a man who it is thought transmits wisdom, you have mistaken your way, for true wisdom is not communicated through books or speeches—true wisdom is found in the depths of your consciousness, just as true love is found in the depths of your heart. If you have come at the urging of slanderers and hypocrites to listen to this man so that what

you hear today may later be used against him, you have mistaken your way, because this man has not come here to ask anything of you or to use you, because he does not need you.

You are listening to a man who does not know the laws that rule the Universe, who is not privy to the laws of History, who is ignorant of the relationships that govern the peoples of the world. High in these mountains, far from the cities and their sick ambitions, this man addresses himself to your conscience. Over the cities, where each day is a struggle—a hope cut short by death—where love is followed by hate, where forgiveness is followed by revenge; over the cities of the people rich and poor; over the immense fields of humanity, a mantle of suffering and sorrow has fallen. You suffer when pain bites your body. You suffer when hunger seizes your body. But you suffer not only from your body's immediate pain and hunger, you also suffer from the consequences of the diseases that afflict it.

We must distinguish between two types of suffering. There is the suffering that occurs during illness, which recedes with the advance of science, just as hunger can recede if the empire of justice advances. There is also the suffering that does not depend on the sickness of your body but yet derives from that sickness: If you are disabled, if you cannot see, if you cannot hear, you suffer. But though such suffering derives from your body, or from the diseases of your body, that suffering is of your mind.

There is yet another kind of suffering that does not recede even with the advance of science or with the advance of justice. This type of suffering, which belongs strictly to your mind, retreats before faith, before joy in life, before love. You must understand that this suffering is always rooted in the violence that exists in your own consciousness. You suffer because you fear losing what you have, or because of what you have already lost, or because of what you desperately long to reach. You suffer because of what you lack, or because you fear in general.

These, then, are the great enemies of humanity: fear of sickness, fear of poverty, fear of death, fear of loneliness. All these forms of suffering pertain to your mind, and all of them reveal your inner violence, the violence that is in your mind. Notice how that violence always stems from *desire.* The more violent a person is, the more gross are that person's desires.

I would like to tell you a story that took place long ago.

There was once a traveler who had to undertake a long journey. He yoked his animal to a cart and began the journey to his faraway destination, a journey he had to complete within a certain length of time. He called the animal *Necessity* and the cart *Desire;* one wheel of the cart he called *Pleasure,* and the other he called *Pain*. Our traveler turned his cart sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left, yet he never ceased moving toward his destiny. The faster the cart traveled, the faster turned the wheels of Pleasure and Pain, carrying as they did the cart of Desire and connected as they were by the same axle.

But the journey was very long, and after a time our traveler grew bored. So he decided to decorate his cart, and he began to adorn it with all manner of beautiful things. But the more he embellished the cart of Desire with these ornaments, the heavier became the load for Necessity to pull. On the curves and steep hills of the road, the poor animal grew too exhausted to pull the cart of Desire. And where the road was soft, the wheels of Pleasure and Suffering became mired in the earth.

One day, because the road was long and he was still very far from his destination, our traveler grew desperate. That night he decided to meditate on the problem, and in the midst of his meditation he heard the neighing of his old friend, Necessity. Comprehending the message, he arose very early the next morning and began to lighten the cart of its burden, stripping it of all its fine adornments. Then he set off once more toward his destination, with the animal Necessity

pulling the cart at a brisk trot. Still, our traveler had already lost much time—time that was now irrecoverable. The next night he sat down again to meditate, and he realized, thanks to another message from his old friend, that now he had to undertake a task that was doubly difficult because it involved his letting go. At daybreak he sacrificed the cart of Desire. It is true that when he did so he lost the wheel of Pleasure, but then he also lost the wheel of Suffering. And so, abandoning the cart of Desire, he mounted the animal called Necessity and galloped on its back across the green fields until he reached his destiny.

See how desire can trap you. But notice that there are desires of different qualities. There are cruder desires, and there are more elevated desires. Elevate desire, purify desire, surpass desire! In doing so, surely you will have to sacrifice the wheel of Pleasure—but you will also become free of the wheel of Suffering.

Spurred by desire, the violence in a person does not simply remain like a sickness in the consciousness of that person—it acts in the world of other people and is exercised upon them. And do not think that when I talk of violence I am speaking only about the armed act of war, where some men destroy others. That is only one form of physical violence.

There is also economic violence. Economic violence is the violence through which you exploit other people; economic violence occurs when you steal from another, when you are no longer a brother or sister to others but a bird of prey feeding upon them.

There is also racial violence. Or do you think that you are not being violent when you persecute someone because that person is not of your own race? Do you think that you are not engaging in violence when you malign that person for being of a race different from your own?

And there is religious violence: Do you think that you are not engaging in violence when you refuse work to, close your doors to, or dismiss a person, because that person does not share your religious beliefs? Do you believe that it is not violence when you use words of hate to build walls around other people, excluding them from your society, because they do not share your religious beliefs—isolating them within their families, segregating them and their loved ones, because they do not share your religion?

There are other forms of violence that are imposed by the Philistine morality. You wish to impose your way of life upon another; you wish to impose your vocation upon another. But who has told you that you are an example that must be followed? Who has told you that you can impose a way of life because it pleases you? What makes your way of life a model, a pattern that you have the right to impose on others? This, then, is another form of violence.

Only inner faith and inner meditation can end the violence in you, in others, and in the world around you. All the other doors are false and do not lead away from this violence. This world is on the verge of exploding with no way to end the violence! Do not choose false doors. There are no politics that can solve this mad urge for violence. There is no political party or movement on the planet that can end the violence. Do not choose false doors that promise to lead away from the violence in the world… I have heard that all over the world young people are turning to false doors to try to escape the violence and inner suffering. They turn to drugs as a solution. Do not choose false doors to try to end the violence.

My brother, my sister, keep these simple commandments, as simple as these rocks, this snow, and this sun that bless us. Carry peace within you, and carry it to others. My brother, my sister—if you look back in history, you will see the human being bearing the face of suffering. Remember, even as you gaze at that suffering face, that it is necessary to move forward, and it is necessary to learn to laugh, and it is necessary to learn to love.

To you, my brother and sister, I cast this hope—this hope of joy, this hope of love—so that you elevate your heart and elevate your spirit, and so that you do not forget to elevate your body.

Valid Action

Las Palmas, Grand Canary Island, September 29, 1978

Talk in a Study Group

What actions are valid? This is a question that people have answered, or attempted to answer, in many different ways. They have tried, almost always on the basis of the goodness or the badness of an action, to discover what it is that makes an action valid. In other words, since antiquity people have attempted to answer what has been known as the question of ethics or morality. For many years we have been concerned with consulting others about what is moral and what it is immoral, what is good and what is bad. But fundamentally, our interest has been to discover what it is that makes an action *valid.*

People have given us a variety of answers. Some have given us religious answers, some have given legal answers, and others ideological answers. In all these answers, what we have been told is that there are certain ways in which people ought to do things, and other ways of doing things that they ought to avoid.

It has been very important for us to obtain a clear answer to this question, because a person's whole way of life follows from whether his or her actions go in one direction or another. All the varied elements that make up our lives find their place according to the direction that we take—my present situation corresponds to the direction that I take toward the future. So this question about which actions are valid and which are invalid, what is good and what is bad, affects not only the individual's future but his or her present as well. And it doesn't affect only the individual—it affects groups and even entire peoples.

The various religious positions have offered their solutions. So it is that if one is a believer in a certain religion, one must obey certain religious laws; one must follow certain precepts inspired by God. And that is valid for believers in that religion. But we find that different religions cite different precepts. Some religions say that one ought not to perform given actions so as to avoid a certain turn of events; others say it is to avoid a particular hell. Sometimes these religions, which in principle are universal, do not agree among themselves; they agree neither in their precepts nor in their commandments.

But what is most troubling in all of this is the situation of so many throughout the world who, though they may in good faith want to obey these precepts, these commandments, cannot do so because they do not *feel* them. And so for nonbelievers, who are unable to keep these commandments—and who, according to the religions, are also the children of God—it is as though they have been forsaken by God. It is not because a religion occupies the whole of the world geographically that it is a universal religion, however, but rather because it occupies the hearts of human beings, independent of the condition in which they live, independent of the latitude at which they live. And so religions present us with certain difficulties in regard to their answers about ethics.

This has led us to consult the judicial systems, inasmuch as they, too, are shapers of human conduct. These legal systems form our conduct and shape our behavior by laying down certain rules about what one ought to do or ought not to do in one's relationships, in one's social behavior. There are codes of many kinds to regulate relationships, extending even to penal codes that establish punishments for various crimes, for behavior considered unsocial, or asocial, or antisocial. Legal systems, too, have tried to give their answer to the question of

human conduct, in terms of what is good behavior and what is bad behavior. And like religions, they have given us their answer, and that is fine—fine for those who believe in a given legal system. Each legal system gives its own answer, and that is fine for that historical moment, fine for a given type of social organization—but none of this speaks to the individual who is having to follow one of these systems of conduct.

Although reasonable people will undoubtedly agree that it is interesting for social behavior to be regulated as a means of avoiding total chaos, such regulation is a technique of social organization, not a justification for any particular morality. And in fact, depending upon their development and depending upon the way they view their world, various human communities have regulated behavior legally or judicially in ways that are sometimes in striking contrast to one another. So it is clear that legal systems have no universal validity. They serve for a period of time, for a particular type of social structure, but they do not serve for all human beings or for all times and all places. And most important of all, they say nothing to the individual about what is good and what is bad.

We have also consulted various ideologies. These ideologies are more development-friendly, so to speak, providing explanations that are quite a bit more colorful than either the somewhat dry legal systems or those precepts and laws handed down from above. Some of these doctrines characterize the human being as a kind of rapacious animal, a being that develops at the expense of everything else, that will proceed without regard for anything else, even without regard for other human beings. A kind of *will to power,* then, underlies this morality. Having appeared romantic to some, this morality is in fact success-oriented, and it says nothing to the individual about how to handle those times when things go badly in this quest for power.

There is another kind of ideology which tells us that, since everything in nature is in evolution, and the human being itself is the product of that evolution, and since the human being is the reflection of the conditions that prevail during a given period, then human behavior will be a reflection of the type of society in which a person lives. Thus, one class will have a certain type of morality, while a different class will have another. According to this point of view, morality is determined by objective conditions, by social relations, and by the mode of production. Then there's no need to worry, because one does what one is mechanically driven to do, even though for public relations purposes people talk of the morality of one class or another. Being limited to this mechanical development, I act as I do because I'm driven by mechanical forces to do so. But where is good and where is the evil in all of this? There is only the mechanical clash of particles in motion.

Other rather singular ideologies tell us, for instance, that morality is a social pressure that like a kind of super-ego serves to contain the force of impulses. Then, the compression brought about in the cauldron of the consciousness is what allows those basic impulses to be sublimated and gradually channeled in other directions.

So our poor friend, seeing himself variously defined by these often conflicting ideologies, finally sits down by the side of the road and says, "What am I supposed to do, then? On one side I'm constrained by social pressures, and yet at the same time I have impulses that apparently can be sublimated—if I'm an artist. But if I'm not, it's either lie down on the psychoanalyst's couch, or wind up neurotic." So morality appears as a way of controlling those impulses, which sometimes, however, still boil over.

There are other ideologies, also of a psychological nature, that explain good and bad on the basis of adaptation. But a morality of adaptive behavior—behavior that enables one to fit into

one's society or, to the extent that one doesn't fit in, results in one's being segregated from it—entails problems of its own. That is, it says that the best thing you can do is just to walk the straight-and-narrow and try to "fit in." It tells us that what's good and what's bad is based on one's degree of adaptation, one's conformity to one's surroundings. And that's fine—it's another ideology.

In periods of great cultural exhaustion, as have occurred time and again in past civilizations, there tend to arise short-term, immediate answers to the question of what one should and should not do. I am referring to what could be called the "moral schools of decadence." As various cultures fell into decline, there arose moralists who tried to adapt their behavior as best they could in order to give some direction to their lives. Some said things like, "Life has no meaning, and since life has no meaning, anything goes—as long as I can get away with it." Others said, "Since life has little meaning (laughter), I should just do whatever I like, whatever feels good to me, regardless of how it affects anyone or anything else." And still others said, "Since I'm stuck in this bad situation, since life itself is nothing but suffering, I should just do what I have to do, do my duty and keep a stiff upper lip—I should be stoic." And that is the name of these schools of decadence, the Stoic schools.

Even though these schools represent what are in effect "emergency" answers to these questions of morality, behind them there is also ideology. The basic ideology appears to be that all meaning has been lost, and there is a corresponding urgent response to that loss of meaning. Today, for example, we find some who try to justify action with a theory of the absurd, into which the idea of "commitment" has been smuggled. But this is like the coercion imposed by the banks—that is, somehow I'm "committed" to something, and therefore I must fulfill my obligation. Yet it is difficult to understand how commitment can be established if the world I live in is absurd and ends in nothingness. Nor can this last position give the person who holds it much assurance.

The various religions, legal systems, ideological systems, and the moralities of decadence have all recognized the importance of the justification or lack of justification for human actions. So it is that they have all endeavored to give answers to this serious question of behavior in order to establish a morality, to define an ethics.

But what is the basis of truly *valid* action? The basis of valid action is not given by ideologies, or by religious mandates or beliefs, or by laws or social regulations. Even though all of these things have great importance, none of them provides a basis for valid action. Instead, the basis of valid action is given by the *inner register* that an individual has of that action. There is a fundamental difference between the valuation of an action when that valuation is seen to come from the outside, and when it is based on the internal register that human beings have of the actions they carry out.

And what is the *register* of an action that is valid? A valid action is experienced as giving one greater *unity.* At the same time, this action gives one a feeling of inner growth; it is something one desires to repeat because it has the flavor of *continuity in time.* Let's examine these aspects separately—the register of internal unity, on the one hand, and continuity in time on the other.

In the face of a difficult situation, I can choose among various ways of responding. If I'm harassed, for example, I can react violently to the irritation produced in me by that external stimulus, seeking in this way to relieve the tension provoked in me. If I react in this violent manner, I can experience relief as that tension is released. Thus, the first condition of valid action has apparently been met—faced with an irritating stimulus, I remove it, and in doing so I un-tense myself, and in relieving myself of tension I have a register of unity.

But an action cannot be said to be valid simply because of that momentary relief of tension if this feeling does not continue in time; indeed, without this continuity the situation that occurs is exactly the opposite—a feeling of contradiction is produced in me. Suppose, for example, that at moment A I produce a release tension by reacting violently as I have previously described, but at moment B I find that I am not at all in agreement with what I did only a short while before. That kind of release of tension is not unitive, inasmuch as the succeeding moment contradicts the preceding one. To be valid, an action must also meet the requirement of giving one unity through time, without gaps or subsequent contradictions. We can all find many examples in which what seems to be a valid action at one moment is not so in the next. In such cases a person cannot coherently seek to prolong that action and that attitude, because the register is not one of unity but rather one of contradiction.

And there is yet another point to consider: the register of a *sensation of inner growth.* There are many actions that we carry out in the course of our daily lives that relieve various tensions. These actions have nothing to do with morality; we carry them out, and we release tensions. This alleviation of tension produces in turn a certain pleasure within us, but it doesn't go further than that. And when that tension arises once more, again we discharge it, and in capacitor-like fashion the charge rebuilds, until at a certain point it discharges once again. Finally, with all that charging and discharging like a capacitor, we find ourselves with the sensation of being trapped on an eternal wheel of actions, endlessly repeating. Even though there is a sensation of pleasure at the moment the tensions are discharged, we're left with a strange taste when we realize that if life is simply this wheel of repetitions, of successive pleasures and pains, then it can never be anything other than absurd. So it is that today I feel tension and I discharge it, and tomorrow the same… and so, like night follows day, the wheel of actions turns endlessly, independent of all human intention, independent of all human choice.

There are, however, actions of a different type, actions that we may perhaps have carried out only a few times in our lives. These are actions that give us a sense of great *unity* at the moment we do them. In addition, they give us a register that, through having done them, *something has become better in us*. These actions offer us a future project, in the sense that we feel that if we could *repeat them in the future* something in us would continue to grow, would continue to improve. These actions give us unity; they give us a sensation of inner growth, as well as a sensation of continuity in time. These, then, are the registers of valid action.

I have never said that this type of action is better or worse; nor have I said, coercively, that this is something that one *must* do. Rather, I've outlined proposals related to valid action and the systems of registers that correspond to these proposals. I have spoken of the actions that create unity and those that create contradiction and, lastly, of how valid actions can be perfected through repetition. And to complete that system of registers of valid actions I have said: "If you repeat your acts of internal unity, nothing can detain you." This refers not only to the register of unity, the sensation of inner growth, and to continuity in time, but also to the possibility of *improving* valid action, since clearly not everything that we do turns out well on the first try. In fact, quite often when we attempt new and interesting things, they don't turn out very well at first, but we know that with practice things can be improved. So it is that valid actions can also be perfected. Repeating those acts that give one unity and inner growth and that have continuity in time is something possible, and it is what constitutes the improvement of valid action.

In very general principles we have indicated the registers of valid action, and highest among these principles is the one known as the "golden rule." This principle says, "When you treat

others as you want them to treat you, you liberate yourself." This is not a new principle—it is thousands of years old, and in many parts of the world, in many cultures, it has withstood the test of time. It is a universally accepted and valid principle that has been formulated in various ways—sometimes in the negative, as in "Do nothing to others that you do not want them to do to you." That is simply another approach to the same idea, as is the formulation, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Of course, it is not exactly the same as saying, "Treat others as you want them to treat you." But that's all right; however they may have phrased it, since ancient times people have invoked this, the highest of all moral principles, the highest of all principles of valid action.

But how do I want others to treat me? Even if we take it as given that it is good to treat others as I want them to treat me, exactly *how* is it that I want to be treated? I will have to answer this question by saying that if other people treat me in certain ways they are treating me badly, and if they treat me in other ways they are treating me well. I will have to answer this in terms of *good* and *bad.* Once again, I will have to return to the eternal wheel of defining valid action according to one theory or another or one religion or another. For me, a certain thing is good, but another person may see this differently. And there will never fail to be people who treat others very badly, while still claiming to be applying the same principle, because supposedly these people like to be treated badly.

This principle that speaks of treating others according to how I want them to treat me, according to what would be good for me, is all very well. But it would be even better if I knew what would be good for me. So that's how things stand, and we're interested in turning now to the basis of valid action, and the basis of valid action lies in the register that one obtains from this action.

If I say that I should treat others as I want them to treat me, immediately I may find myself asking, Why should I? But it's as if there is some internal process or some way in which the mind functions that creates problems inside me when I treat others badly. But what type of function could this be? If I see someone in a very bad state, if I see someone suddenly cut or injured in some way, something resonates inside of me. But how can something that is happening to another person echo *inside of me?* It seems almost magical! It happens that when someone is in an accident, somehow I experience, almost physically, the register of the accident in that other person.

As students of these phenomena, you know that to every perception there corresponds an image, and you understand that there are images that can cause certain points in one's body to tense up, just as other images can cause them to release tension. If every perception is linked to a representation, and that representation in turn has its register—that is, a new sensation—then it is not so hard to understand how when I perceive a phenomenon there is an internal image that corresponds to that phenomenon. And when that image is mobilized, certain parts of my body or intrabody can experience a corresponding sensation, since they have been modified by the action of that image. I feel "identified" when someone is injured, because the visual perception of that phenomenon is accompanied by the triggering of a visual image and, correlatively, an unleashing of coenesthetic and tactile images. In addition, these images carry with them a new sensation that ends up provoking in me a register of the other's injury. So it cannot be good for me to treat other people badly, because when I do I have a corresponding register in myself.

Let's look at this almost technically. In order to do that, we'll simulate the functioning of the mental circuits, step by step, even though we know that the structure of the consciousness

works as a whole. But for the sake of illustration, we can separate out a “first circuit” that is comprised of the initial perception and its representation, then a re-taking of the representation, and finally an internal sensation. And we can separate out a “second circuit” that has to do with action, whose results might be described as follows: For every action that I launch into the world, I also have an internal register. That feedback is what allows me, for example, to learn things through doing them. If there were no such feedback from the actions I take, I could never perfect them. I learn to type, for example, by repetition; that is to say, it is through trial and error that I record these actions. But I can record actions only through performing them. It is through the doing of actions that I have a register of them.

Here I would like to make a short digression. There is a serious prejudice that at times invades the field of education: the belief that one can learn by *thinking* about things rather than by *doing* them. Clearly, one learns because one has received data, but no datum is simply memorized. It always corresponds to an image, which in turn mobilizes one to new activity: checking, testing against experience, rejecting, and so forth, demonstrating the ceaseless activity of consciousness, not some supposed state of passivity within which the datum somehow resides. This feedback is what allows me to realize, for example, that “I typed the wrong key.” As I type, I register the sensation of correctness or the sensation of error. In this way, I gradually perfect the register of correctness, I become more fluent, and little by little the correct way of typing becomes automatic. All of this is related to the “second circuit.” The “first circuit” relates to the example of the pain in the other person that I register inside myself, while the “second circuit” relates to the register I have of actions that I perform.

All of you here know the difference between those actions that we call *cathartic* and those that we call *transferential.* Cathartic actions refer basically to the discharge of tensions and go no further than that. Transferential actions, in contrast, allow us to transfer internal charges, to integrate contents, and to facilitate healthy psychic functioning. We know that there will be difficulties for the consciousness when there are mental contents that, like islands, are isolated from one another. If we think in one direction, for example, but feel in another and, finally, act in yet a third, we can see that things won’t “fit together” and that the register we obtain will not be one of completeness. It seems that only when we build bridges between our inner contents does psychic functioning become integrated, allowing us to advance a few more steps. There are some very useful transferential techniques that can mobilize and transform problematic images. One example of such techniques is presented in literary form as *guided experiences,* some of which appear in the book *Guided Experiences.*

However, we know that, in addition to the work of images, the actions we carry out are also capable of setting transferential and self-transferential phenomena in motion. But there are actions of different types. Some actions allow us to integrate our internal contents, whereas other actions are terribly disintegrative. There are certain actions that a person never wants to repeat, because they produce such an overcharge of grief, such regret and inner division in the one who performed them. Unfortunately, however, such actions remain strongly linked to that person’s past. So, even if the person does not repeat such actions in the future, nonetheless those actions continue pressing from the past, with the consciousness unable to resolve them—unable to translate, transfer, and integrate its contents. As a consequence of all this, the person is prevented from having that sensation of inner growth that we spoke of earlier.

It is not, then, a matter of indifference which actions one carries out in the world. There are actions that give one a register of unity, and there are other actions that give one a register of contradiction and dis-integration. If we study this carefully, in light of what we know about

cathartic and transferential phenomena, the matter of one's actions in the world with respect to the effect of those actions on the integration and development of one's contents, will be much clearer. And, of course, all this simulation of circuits we have gone through in order to understand the meaning of *valid action* is part of this complicated subject.

Meanwhile, our friend keeps asking us, "What should I do?" Even if we have only a minimal knowledge of these things, we register it as unifying and worthwhile when, through simple words and deeds, we offer what we know to that disoriented person, who is without references in his or her life. Even if no one else offers help to this person, we make what we have available—as we offer so many other things that allow people to overcome pain and suffering. And in doing so, we will also be working for ourselves.

On the Riddle of Perception

Las Palmas, Grand Canary Island, October 1, 1978

Talk in a Study Group

Two thousand five hundred years ago, in a master class on descriptive psychology, the Buddha—employing a method of registers—addressed one of the most important problems related to perception and to the consciousness that observes perception.

This descriptive type of psychology is very different from the established, official psychology of the West, which works instead with *explanations about* phenomena. If you pick up a typical book on Western psychology, you'll see, I think, how in treating a particular phenomenon, it immediately offers a whole series of explanations about that phenomenon; but with respect to the phenomenon itself, the correct register is never given.

So the explanations of psychological phenomena given by the various psychological currents change, as over the course of time their ideas, hypotheses, and data change, as their knowledge grows or declines. Thus, if we examine a treatise on psychology written a hundred years ago, we will find a number of statements that seem naive and unacceptable by contemporary standards. This type of psychology, with no core or center of its own, depends in large part on the contributions of other sciences. A neurophysiological explanation of the phenomena of consciousness is interesting, and it is certainly an advance. Yet soon we will find ourselves with other, even more complex explanations.

At any rate, in terms of *explanation,* knowledge continues to advance; but in terms of *description* of the phenomena themselves, these explanations neither add nor detract. And yet an accurate description, although it was made twenty-five hundred years ago, allows us to participate in the observation of these mental phenomena in exactly the same way as if that description had been produced today. In the same way, an accurate description developed now is something that will surely serve for a long time to come.

This type of descriptive psychology, dispensing with explanations except when unavoidable, is based on *registers,* which are similar in all people who follow the description. It is as though these descriptions make all human beings, however widely separated in time and space, into contemporaries and compatriots. This type of psychology represents, moreover, a gesture toward uniting all cultures, however different they may be, because it neither lays undue stress on their differences nor tries to impose one culture's particular schema on all other cultures. This type of psychology unites human beings, it doesn't divide them, and is thus a valuable contribution to increasing understanding between peoples.

But let us get down to our subject. It seems that the Buddha was meeting with a group of specialists, and in dialogue form he developed what later came to be known as "The Riddle of Perception."

Suddenly, the Buddha raised his hand and asked one of his principal disciples, "What do you see, Ananda?"

In his customary precise and sober style, the Buddha posed and answered questions. Ananda, in his more exuberant way, replied, "O Noble Lord! I see the hand of the Enlightened One before me as it closes."

"Very good, Ananda. Where do you see the hand, and from where?"

“Oh Master, I see the hand of my noble Lord closing and forming a fist. I see it, of course, outside myself and from myself.”

“Very good, Ananda. With what do you see the hand?”

“Of course, Master, I see the hand specifically with my eyes.”

“Tell me, Ananda, is the perception in your eyes?”

“Of course it is, Venerable Master.”

“And tell me, Ananda, what happens when you close your eyes?”

“Noble Master, when I close my eyes, the perception disappears.”

“That, Ananda, is impossible. Are you saying, Ananda, that when this room grows dark, and you gradually see less and less, that your perception is gradually disappearing?”

“Indeed, Master.”

“And are you saying, Ananda, that when this room has become totally dark, and yet your eyes are open and you see nothing, that your perception has then disappeared?”

“Oh Noble Master, I am your cousin! Remember that we were educated together and that you loved me greatly when we were young, and so refrain from confusing me!”

“Ananda—if the room grows dark, I do not see the objects in it, but my eyes continue to function. Thus, if my eyes are closed, yet there is light, I see that light pass before me, and if there is total darkness I perceive darkness. Therefore, perception does not disappear because one closes one’s eyes. Now tell me, Ananda, if perception is in the eye and you *imagine* that you see my hand, where do you see it?”

“It must be, Lord, that I see your hand by imagining it also from my eye.”

“What do you mean, Ananda? That imagination is in the eye? That is not possible. If imagination was in the eye, and you imagined my hand inside your head, you would have to turn your eye back into your head to see the hand that is inside your head. Such a thing is not possible. So you will have to acknowledge that imagination is not in the eye. Where is it, then?”

“It must be,” Ananda said, “that neither vision nor imagination is *in* the eye but rather *behind* the eye. And in being behind the eye, when I imagine, then I can see toward the rear, and when I see, when I perceive, then I can see what is before my eye.”

“In the second case, Ananda, you would not see objects, but rather see your eye itself…”

And the dialogue continued in this way. But in “The Riddle of Perception,” the registers continue to grow more and more complicated, apparent solutions are presented, but stronger and stronger objections are also made. Finally, Ananda, quite unsettled, pleads with the Buddha for a satisfactory explanation of how this whole matter of vision, the imagination, and the consciousness in general works. And though the Buddha is very rigorous in his descriptions, in his explanations he begins to become increasingly roundabout, and that is the way this chapter of the *Surangama Sutra,* one of the most interesting studies in this field, finally closes.

When we hold up our hand, we see our hand outside ourselves, but from inside us. That is, the object appears to us in a different place from the point of observation. If my point of observation were outside, I could have no notion of what I see. Therefore, the point of observation must be inside, not outside, and the object must be outside, not inside. But if I now *imagine* my hand inside my head, both the image and the point of observation are inside. In the first case—the hand I see outside of me from inside of me—it would appear that the point of observation coincides approximately with the eye. In the second case—when the hand is imagined, represented as inside of me—the point of observation clearly does not coincide with my eye, since if I represent the hand inside my head, I can see it looking from my eye inward, or from the back of my head inward. Obviously, I can also see my hand from above, from below,

and from many other points of view. That is, when what is involved is a *representation* and not a *perception,* the point of observation can vary. Therefore, with respect to representation, the point of observation is not fixed in the eye.

If I now imagine my hand, which is in the center of my head, coming out the back of my head, I am still imagining my hand from inside my head, even though I am representing my hand outside of it. One might think that the point of observation at some moment moves outside my head, but, of course, such a thing is not possible. If I imagine myself, for example, looking at myself from a point in front of me, I can represent myself to that-which-looks-at-me from here, from where I am. I can also come to imagine my image as though it were seen from out there, from the point of view of the person who is looking at me. However, even when I place myself, locate myself, in the image of the person who is standing before me, I have the register from me, from where I am. In the same way, I cannot say that when I look at myself in the mirror, I see myself inside the mirror, or I feel myself to be inside the mirror. I am *here* looking at myself *there*, not *there* looking at myself *here*. One can become confused and believe that, because one is standing before the representation of oneself, that *that* is the point of observation, out there—but not even in that case is such a thing possible.

There are experimental situations (a sensory-deprivation tank, for example) where certain perceptual registers are lowered and one loses one's sense of self. And when one loses the sense of self, when one has no reference as to one's tactile boundaries, one may have the impression that one is outside of one's body, and even that one is seeing oneself from the outside. But if you attend to the register carefully, you will observe that it is not that some coenesthetic, tactile projection places the register outside of you, but rather that you have no exact notion of the location of the register because its boundaries have been lost.

Thus, I see my hand outside myself and from myself, or else I see my hand inside myself and also *from* inside myself in the case where I imagine it. While all these examples might appear to involve the same space, there is in fact one space in which the objects that I *perceive* are located and that we could call the *space of perception*. There is another space in which the objects of *representation* are located, which we could call the *space of representation,* and this space is not the same as the space of perception. The objects that are located or positioned in these two different spaces have different characteristics. If I look at my hand, I see that it is at a certain distance from my eye. I see that it is closer to me than some objects and farther away, perhaps, than others. I see that there is a color associated with my hand, with the shape of it. And if I imagine other things around my hand, the perception of my hand will still prevail. Now let me *imagine* my hand. The image of my hand may be in front of an object or behind it. I can change its location in an instant. I can imagine my hand becoming very, very small or make it fill virtually the entire field of my representation. I can change the shape of my hand and its color as well. Thus, the location of a mental object in the space of representation changes in accordance with and depending upon my mental operations, whereas the location of objects in external space, the space of perception, also changes, but independently of my mental operations. For example, if I try to move that stone column over there with my mind, by thinking about it I can do it with respect to representation; but perceptually, no matter how hard I try, the column remains fixed and unchanged. There are, then, great differences between the *represented* object and the *perceived* object. And there are correspondingly great differences between the *space of perception* and the *space of representation.*

Now, however, let's take the case in which I close my eyes and represent my hand. Everything is fine if I represent my hand inside my head. But when I close my eyes and *recall*

my hand, which was outside my head, where do I represent my hand now that I am remembering it? Am I representing it as inside my head? No, I represent it as *outside* of my head. And how, when remembering objects I have seen, can I now remember them out there where they were—that is, located in an external space? It is acceptable to say that I locate inside my head the external object that I remember. But what kind of space am I seeing when I remember an object that is not inside my head but rather outside of it (my eyes being closed and therefore not seeing it)? Either the objects that I remember are inside my head and I only think I see them outside it, or when I close my eyes and remember the objects my mind goes outside my internal space and enters that external space. But such a thing is not possible. I can distinguish perfectly well between internal and external objects. I can distinguish perfectly well between the space of perception and the space of representation. But I become more confused about the register when I *represent* the objects in the place where they are and I have *perceived* them—that is, outside of my internal representation.

How do I distinguish between an object that is represented inside my head and an object that is remembered or represented as being outside of my head? I make the distinction because I have a sensation of the boundaries of my head. And what is it that marks these limits? The limits are marked by the tactile sensation, and it is the tactile sensation of my eyes (whether closed or open) that allows me to distinguish whether an object is represented as *inside* or *outside* of me. In this case, the object represented as outside is not necessarily outside, but rather located in the most superficial part of my space of representation, which gives me the register, translated into a visual image, that it is outside. But the difference in the boundaries is tactile, not visual.

So powerful is representation that it can even modify perception. If you look at that curtain there in the back of the room, and you close your eyes and imagine it as being very close to your eyes, you will see that when you open your eyes and look at the real curtain you need some time to adjust your vision, to refocus your eyes. That is, when you imagine that the curtain is very near your eyes, your eyes adjust their focus to the closer, imagined curtain, not to the real one. And conversely, if you close your eyes and imagine that you see a building back there behind the curtain, farther away, and then you open your eyes and look at the curtain again, once again your eyes must adjust their focus. They have to do so because they were incorrectly adjusted, and they became out of focus in this way because your eyes focused in accordance with the image rather than the perception. Then the image—the representation—can modify perception. In this case, the data of perception can be modified considerably depending upon the representation that is present and at work. It may be that our system of representation adjusts to the world in general in a way that is not as precise as we normally believe it to be, especially considering the fact that phenomena situated in the space of representation do not coincide with the phenomena in the space of perception. And knowing that phenomena of representation modify perception, we recognize that under the influence of the system of representation, perception may be altered (in using the word “altered,” I am not referring to particular cases of alteration but to perception in general). This has enormous consequences, because if my representation corresponds to a particular system of beliefs, then surely that system of beliefs will modify my vision and my perspective on the external world of perception.

Normally I orient my body in relation to objects through *perception.* But I can also orient my body in relation to objects through *representation.* However, if instead of being represented as outside of me, an object was represented as inside my head, I would be unable to orient my *actions* toward the object. When I am awake, in vigil, and my eyes are open, my point of

observation coincides with my eyes, and not just with my eyes but with my other external senses. But when my level of consciousness falls, my point of observation moves inward. This occurs because, as the level of consciousness falls, the range of perception of the external senses diminishes and the register of the internal senses increases. Therefore, the point from which one observes (which is simply the structure of memory-data and perception-data when external perception-data decrease and internal perception-data increase) now moves inward. As the level of consciousness falls, this point of observation moves inward, thus ensuring that dream images do not unleash their charge and move the body toward the external world. Sleep would do little good in helping the body to rest, to recompose itself, if all the images that arose in my dreams were to trigger activity toward the world. If they did, I would wind up in a state of somnambulism, or in some sort of altered sleep in which I might talk, move, become agitated, or even get up and start to walk around. Indeed, such phenomena do take place if the point from which one views, instead of moving deeper internally, continues following the representations from a more superficial position.

If, while I sleep, the point from which I view things is, because of problems with my internal contents, forced outward toward the periphery, or if because of external stimuli my point of observation is drawn toward the periphery, my images will tend to be located in the most external region of the space of representation. Consequently, they will tend to discharge their signals toward the external world. When one enters deep sleep, one's point of observation falls deeper inside, the images move deeper within one, and the general structure of the space of representation is modified. In other words, when I am awake I look outward from myself but I do not see myself, yet during sleep I often see myself included among the other images.

On occasion, while people are asleep they do not see themselves, but rather see in a way that is similar to the way in which they perceive the world in daily life. This is so because their point of observation is displaced toward the boundaries of the space of representation, in which case their sleep is not quiet or peaceful. But if my point of observation falls inward, then when representing myself in dreams I see myself as though from the outside. And it is not that my images are outside my head, it is that my point of observation has slipped inside, and I observe the "movie" of representation in which I appear as though it were on a screen. I'm not observing the world from myself as when I'm awake; instead, I see myself there, carrying out my activities among the other images. The same thing happens with my oldest memories, of things long past. If you remember yourself at two or three or four years of age, you will not recall yourself as though seeing things *from* yourself, but rather you will see an image of yourself doing things, or among things. With respect to images, the point of observation moves deeper within when remembering events long past, much the same as happens with the representations that occur in deep sleep. This point of observation is none other than my "self." This ego moves, and it situates itself at a greater or lesser depth within the space of representation; it is from the ego, the "I," that the world is observed, that the representations themselves are observed. The ego is variable, and as we have seen in this example it modifies representations and it modifies perceptions.

If I observe my eyes when I represent images that are situated at varying depths, for example when I imagine that I am descending a set of steps into the depths or that I'm ascending a flight of stairs, I will see in the first case that my eyes look down and in the second case that they look up. That is, although they are not looking at any external object and there is no *need* for their activity, nevertheless my eyes will follow the representations as if they perceived them. If I imagine my house as being in a certain direction, for example, my eyes tend

to look in that same direction. And even when they don't, my representation still corresponds to that location in the space of representation. Similarly, if I imagine my house somewhere else, my eyes will look in that direction. The eyes look up and down, left and right, following images or falling upon various objects, and this happens because the systems of impulses from throughout the body feed into that screen of representation observed by the ego. So in a given region of the space of representation there are impulses from a corresponding part of the body, in another region of the space of representation appear impulses from other areas, and so on. And as you may remember, these impulses are continually being translated, distorted, and transformed.

Let's look at an example. In his imagination, our subject begins to descend. He goes down through a sort of tube, and during his descent he suddenly encounters a strong resistance. The resistance turns out to be the head of a large cat, and it prevents him from continuing his descent down the tube. In order to overcome the resistance, in his imagination he strokes his cat's neck, and then suddenly the cat becomes very small. At the same time, our subject registers the release of a tension in his own neck, and now notices that he is able to continue his descent down the tube. That is, in this case the cat is nothing more than the allegorization of the tension in the subject's neck. When a release of tension occurs, that image's system of signals, allegorized as a cat, is modified (i.e., the cat becomes smaller), the resistance decreases, and our friend can continue his descent.

In another case, a subject also begins to descend in his space of representation. Down in the depths, he suddenly encounters a man who gives him a small, black stone. Our friend begins to move upward, coming to what we might call the middle plane—the plane of everyday images of things that are more or less habitual. Here, another man comes along and gives our subject a different object, although it is similar in shape to the object he was given on the lower plane. Our subject continues to ascend to higher levels. He rises above mountains, becoming lost in the clouds, and there he encounters a kind of angel or being of that type who gives him a more radiant, brighter object, though still with characteristics similar to the others he has received. In all three cases, our friend observes the objects in the same relative part of the space of representation. The objects do not appear at one location in the depths, at another location in the middle plane, and at still another location in the heights. Rather, on each of the three planes or levels in which they are present, the objects always appear to our friend in front of him, near the middle of the plane, and a little to the left. And as our friend later understands, this turns out to be related to the fact that he has an artificial vertebra in his back. This vertebra was sending a signal to his internal senses, and that signal was translated consistently as a visual image, although perceived with different attributes depending on the level in the space of representation at which it was found.

Thus, the systems of allegorization transform signals from the intrabody, translating them into images at various locations in the space of representation. It is not that when the eye looks up or down following the images that it does so in order to observe what happens in the intrabody. The eye did not travel down into the esophagus, but rather the signal of the tension came onto the "screen" of representation (in that case, as a cat), without the eye having had to travel to that point. Thus, if I descend in the space of representation, I make contact with translations of signals that come from various levels of the intrabody. Of course, this does not mean that my eye has gradually descended into my intestines and translated what I see there.

As you may remember, as one descends in the space of representation this space grows darker, and as one ascends in the space of representation it grows brighter. This darkness

below and brightness above have to do with two phenomena: the increasing or decreasing distance from the visual centers, and the habitual systems of ideation and perception in which we associate such things as the light of the sun with the sky above and the absence of light with lower regions such as caves, watery depths, and things of that kind. This will undoubtedly vary in places where there is typically snow on the ground with a dark sky above, as it is for the inhabitants of cloudy or dark, wintry regions of the world. Of course, there are objects up high that are dark, even when the space of representation is generally more illuminated above, and some bright objects can be found in the depths of the space of representation. And finally, there are limits to both ascending and descending in the space of representation. But that is a topic that would require further descriptions.

We have looked at fourteen cases: The first case dealt with the location of the point of observation with respect to an object outside ourselves; the second, with the point of observation when the object is represented as inside; the third, with the point of observation when it is set behind or elsewhere outside us; the fourth case concerned the false point of observation that appears to be exteriorized when representing oneself from a point of observation in front of oneself; the fifth showed what happened with objects located in the most external part of the space of representation; the sixth dealt with differences in the space of representation when representing things outside and things inside of oneself, these differences being marked by the tactile boundary set by one's eyes; the seventh point dealt with the modification of perception by representation; in the eighth point, we saw what happens when an object is positioned in one's internal space and one tries to operate with the body; in the ninth point, we saw the modification of the space of representation when one acts in vigil; the tenth point dealt with the modification of the space of representation when one is in the level of sleep; in point number eleven, we examined what happens with objects that correspond to the internal space; in point number twelve, we spoke about the space of representation and saw that this space arises as a sort of screen and is related to the various areas of the intrabody; in point number thirteen, we saw that as one ascends with one's images in the space of representation, the space tends to become brighter; finally, in point number fourteen we saw that as one descends with one's images in the space of representation, this space tends to grow darker, although there are exceptions to both of these cases.

From here, it is possible to draw any number of other consequences.

Meaning of Life

Mexico City, October 10, 1980

Interchange with a Study Group

I appreciate the opportunity you have given me to come here today to discuss with you points of view regarding some aspects of our conception of human life. I say *discuss* because this will not be a speech but rather an opportunity to exchange ideas.

Perhaps the first point to discuss is what it is that all our work points to, and specifically the question of whether or not our object of study is the same as that of the sciences.

If our object of study is the same, then science will have the last word. But while our interest focuses on human existence, it is not on human existence as a biological or social fact (there are already sciences dedicated to these questions), but rather human existence as daily register, as one's personal register of everyday life. When people do research into the social and historical phenomenon that are constitutive of the human being, the questions they ask in such studies are inevitably formulated based on their own daily lives, on their situations, moved by their desires, their anguish, their needs, and shaped by their loves and hates, their frustrations and successes. In short, their questions originate from something prior to statistics and theorizing—they originate from life itself.

What is it that is common to all humankind and at the same time particular to each human existence? The search for happiness and the desire to overcome pain and suffering are common to all human beings and yet particular to each individual human existence. This is a truth that can be registered by each and every human being.

Well then, what is this happiness to which the human being aspires? This happiness is whatever the human being *believes* it to be. This statement, while perhaps surprising, is based on the fact that people orient themselves toward different ideas or images of happiness. In fact, the ideal of happiness changes with people's historical, social, and personal situations. From this we can conclude that human beings seek what they believe will make them happy and, correspondingly, what they believe will keep suffering and pain at bay.

With the aspiration to happiness, the resistances of pain and suffering arise. How can these resistances be overcome? First, we need to ask ourselves about the nature of these phenomena.

In our view of things, *pain* is a physical fact. All of us have, or have had, experiences of pain. It is a sensory, corporal fact. Hunger, natural hardships, sickness, old age—all produce pain. We make a clear distinction between this type of pain and other phenomena that have nothing to do with the sensory. Only the advance of society and science can make pain recede. And the eradication of pain is precisely where scientists and social reformers—and above all peoples themselves, who generate the progress that sustains these scientists and social reformers—can most productively expend their efforts.

Suffering, on the other hand, is mental. It is not a sensory fact in the same way that pain is. Frustration and resentment are also states that we have all experienced, yet they cannot be localized in any specific organ or combination of organs. Is it possible that even though they are of different natures, pain and suffering somehow interact? Certainly, pain also gives rise to suffering. In that sense, social progress and the advance of science can make this one aspect of suffering recede. But where, specifically, will we find the solution to how to make suffering

itself recede? We will find it through *meaning in life.* There is no reform, no scientific advance, that can cause the suffering produced by frustration, resentment, fear of death, or fear in general to recede.

Meaning in life is a direction toward the future that gives coherence to life, that provides a framework for all of one's activities, that justifies one's life fully. In the light of meaning, suffering in general and even pain in its mental component retreat and grow smaller as one comes to understand them as experiences that can be surpassed.

What, then, are the sources of human suffering? They are the factors that produce *contradiction*. One suffers when one lives in a contradictory situation, but one also suffers when one remembers past contradictory situations or imagines such situations in the future.

These sources of suffering have been called the *three pathways of suffering,* and they can be modified in accordance with the individual's state with respect to meaning in life. But before speaking about meaning in life and its significance in our lives, we need to briefly examine these three pathways.

(Inaudible question on recording.)

It is clear, for example, that just as there are sciences that study stars or microorganisms, there is the science of sociology that studies human groups. And from their various perspectives, biology, anatomy, and physiology study the human body, just as psychology studies the behavior of the psyche. But those who engage in such studies, the scholars and scientists in these fields, do not study their own immediate existences. There is no science through which one studies one's own existence. Science says nothing about the situation, for example, in which a woman finds herself when, upon arriving home, she has a door slammed in her face and is treated badly, or instead, perhaps, receives a caress.

And this is precisely where our interest lies, in the situation of *human existence,* and thus the discussions proper to the sciences lie outside our area of competence. At the same time, we note that science has serious drawbacks, serious difficulties, when it comes to defining what happens in human existence. What is the nature of human life with respect to meaning, the nature of suffering and pain, the nature of happiness, the nature of the search for happiness? These are the objects of our study, of our interest. From this point of view, it might be said that we have a *position* vis-à-vis existence, a position with respect to life, rather than that we are a science that deals with these things.

(Inaudible question on recording.)

We have focused on what people search for, what people believe happiness to be. But the point is that today one may believe happiness is one thing, while tomorrow one may believe it is something else. If we examine our own experience—what we thought happiness was when we were twelve, for example, and what we think it is today—we will notice the change in our perspective. Similarly, if we consult ten people, we will see a wide diversity of points of view about what people believe will make them happy. In the Middle Ages, people had a general idea of happiness that was very different from the ideas held during the Industrial Revolution. And in general, the idea of happiness varies for different peoples, cultures, and individuals. Indeed, nothing is at all clear when it comes to the object of happiness. Apparently, such an object does not exist—it is more like a mood that is being sought than some tangible object.

At times this is confused in certain advertising that presents a bar of soap, for instance, as happiness itself. Naturally, we all understand that in fact this is an attempt to describe a state, the state of happiness, and not an object, because as we know such an *object* does not exist. Not that it is at all clear what the *state* of happiness is either. It's something that has never been

satisfactorily defined; it's as if there has been some sort of swindle that's left people with nothing clear about all this. Well, then, unless there's another question, let's go on.

(Inaudible question on recording.)

The question that's just been asked has to do with the progress made in overcoming pain and overcoming suffering. How is it that while the advance of science and society lead to overcoming pain, there seems to be no parallel way in which suffering is overcome?

There are those who hold that the human being has not advanced at all. However, it is obvious that in terms of scientific conquest, in terms of mastery of nature, and in terms of material development, the human being has indeed progressed. Of course, different civilizations have not developed to equal levels; but despite the fact that problems of all kinds remain, human beings and human civilization have certainly advanced—that is obvious. Consider how in the past, a certain bacteria would wipe out entire populations, while today the prompt administration of medical care can solve the problem. At one point, half of Europe succumbed to a plague. Today, we have moved beyond that, and while humanity continues to fight both old and new diseases, it is certain that with the passage of time more and more diseases will be overcome.

Things have changed, and changed a great deal. It is clear, however, that with respect to the *mental suffering* we have been discussing, someone five thousand years ago and someone today register and suffer disappointments inside themselves in the same way, register and suffer fears, register and suffer resentments in the same way. They register and suffer these things as though for them history did not exist, as though in this regard every human being was the same as the first human being. While *pain* continues to be pushed back by the progress of civilization, *suffering* in the human being has not changed—there have been no satisfactory responses with respect to suffering. And in this sense, there is something unequal in the conquest of pain, on the one hand, and suffering on the other. Yet how can we say that the human being has not progressed? Perhaps humanity has advanced sufficiently that today we are asking and attempting to answer this kind of question—a question that in earlier times would probably not have been necessary to ask.

Let us now return to the subject of the three pathways of suffering, which are pathways that are necessary for human existence, but whose normal functioning has become distorted. Let me try to explain.

The sensation of what I am now living and perceiving, the memory of what I have lived, and the imagining of what I might someday live—these three pathways are necessary to human existence. Cut off one or more of these functions, and existence becomes disarticulated. Do away with our memories, and we lose the ability even to manage our own bodies. Eliminate sensation, and we lose all self-regulation. Take away our imagination, and we will not be able to orient ourselves in any direction at all. Yet these three pathways, so necessary for life, can become distorted in their functioning, can then become enemies of life, carriers of suffering. Indeed, we suffer every day because of things that we perceive, things that we remember, and things that we imagine.

On other occasions, I have said that we suffer when we live in contradictory situations, such as when we want to do two things that are mutually opposed. We also suffer because we fear that in the future we will not obtain what we desire or that we will lose what we have. And certainly we suffer because of what we have lost or what we have not been able to achieve. We suffer now over what we once experienced: that punishment, that betrayal, that injustice, that humiliation, that shame, that physical pain that itself is past. And we live with the ghosts of the

past as though they were events still happening today. These things, which are the sources of our anger, resentment, and frustration, condition and close off our future and cause us to lose faith in ourselves.

Let's discuss the problem of the *three pathways of suffering.*

If these three pathways—perception, memory, and imagination—make life itself possible, how is it, then, that they become distorted? If we assume that people seek happiness, it would seem reasonable to expect that they would learn to manage these three pathways in their favor. So how is it that these three pathways can suddenly become precisely their own worst enemies?

Apparently, when the consciousness of the human being first began to expand, at a time when the human being was not yet a very well defined being at all—apparently at that moment, as the imagination expanded, as memory and the recollection of history opened up into a wider horizon, as perception of the world in which human beings lived was amplifying, at the same time that these functions were expanding, corresponding resistances arose. That is how things work with internal functions. Much as we encounter resistance whenever we try any new physical movement, any new activity, for the first time, we see that resistance is also found in nature itself. From the moment that it rains, and the rain falls to the earth, and the water flows into the river, the water encounters resistances in its path—though in surmounting those resistances, those obstacles, the water finally reaches the sea.

As human beings grow and develop, they continually encounter resistances in much the same way. And in encountering and overcoming these resistances they become stronger; and as they become stronger they integrate difficulties; and as they integrate these difficulties, they surpass them. Thus, all the suffering that has arisen in the course of human development has also helped the human being to become stronger than that suffering. So it is that past suffering has contributed to human development, in the sense that it has helped to create precisely the conditions to surpass that suffering.

We do not aspire to suffering. Moreover, we wish to reconcile with our species, which has endured so much suffering, thanks to which humankind has been able to achieve new advances. The suffering of primitive humankind has not been in vain; the suffering of generation upon generation—limited by the conditions of their times—has not been in vain. Our gratitude goes out to those who have preceded us, because despite their suffering it is thanks to them that we can now attempt new liberations.

The point is that suffering did not appear all at once, but rather with the development and expansion of humankind. And clearly, as human beings we do not wish to continue suffering but rather to move on, to break through these resistances, to integrate them, and to forge a new path in the continuing process of our human development.

We have said that it is through *meaning in life* that we will discover the solution to the problem of suffering, and we have defined this meaning as one's direction toward the future, a direction that gives coherence, that provides a framework for one's activities and fully justifies existence. This direction toward the future is of the greatest importance, because if, as we have noted, the path of imagination, of project, of future, is cut off, then human existence loses direction, and this becomes an inexhaustible source of suffering.

It is clear that for everyone death looms as the greatest future suffering. From this perspective, people can see that life has the character of something provisional, and therefore in this context that all human construction is useless, leading only to nothingness. This is why, perhaps, that turning their gaze away from the fact of death has made it possible to "change" life

and to make it as if death did not exist… Those who believe that everything will end with death can make themselves feel better by thinking that they will be remembered for their splendid good works, or that their loved ones, or even future generations, will never forget them. But even should that be true, we all march finally toward an absurd nothingness that will interrupt all memory.

There are also those who think that all one does in life is to respond to needs as best one can. Well, soon enough those needs will end in death, and the struggle to escape the rule of necessity will have lost all meaning. Some might say that an individual's personal life lacks importance in the life of all humankind, and that therefore an individual death has no significance. If that were the case, then neither one's life nor one's individual actions would have any significance, any meaning. There would be no justification for any law or any commitment, and there would be, in essence, no great difference between good actions and bad ones.

Nothing has any meaning if everything ends with death. And if everything ends with death, the only recourse for making it through life is to seek solace in provisional meanings, provisional directions to which we can apply our energy and our action. That is in fact what generally occurs; but in order for that to happen, one must constantly negate the fact of death—one must act as if death did not exist.

If you ask people what meaning life has for them, they will probably tell you that meaning in life is related to their families, or other people, or humanity, or some cause that, according to them, justifies their existence. And those provisional meanings will give them a direction and enable them to face life. But when problems arise with their loved ones, when they become disillusioned with that cause they embraced, when something changes with respect to that meaning they have chosen, then absurdity and disorientation will return to claim their prey.

Lastly, the problem with those provisional meanings in life, those provisional directions, is that if they are achieved they are lost as references, they lose their value for the future. And if they are not achieved, in that case, too, they lose their value as references. Of course, after the failure of one provisional meaning, there always remains the alternative of adopting a new provisional meaning, perhaps one opposite to the one that failed. As the years go by, then, people go from meaning to meaning, all traces of coherence obliterated, and in doing so they increase their contradictions and thus their suffering.

Life has no meaning if everything ends with death. But is it true that everything ends with death? Is it true that one cannot achieve a definitive direction in one's life, a direction that will not be turned aside by the accidents of life? How can human beings position themselves to face the problem of everything ending with death? Let's examine this question, but first let's discuss what we have seen so far.

(Break and discussion.)

Just as we noted that there are three pathways of suffering, we also observe five states associated with the problem of death and transcendence. Every person can be found in one of these five states.

There is a state in which a person has indisputable evidence of transcendence, arrived at not through education or surroundings, but through the person's own experience. For such people, it is completely clear that life is only a transition and death the merest accident.

Others believe that the human being will go on to a state of transcendence of some kind, and this belief comes from their education and their surroundings, and not from something that they *feel* or have experienced. This is not something evident to them, but rather they believe it because it is what they have been taught and have accepted without any experiential basis.

There is a third way of locating oneself with respect to meaning in life, and it is present in those people who *want* to have an experience of faith or certainty of meaning. You must have encountered those who say, “If only I could believe in something, have that certainty, it would change my life.” We can find many examples of this—of people who have suffered misfortunes and have overcome them, either because they have faith or because they have a register that these difficulties, because they are transitory or provisional, are not all there is to life but instead are simply a test, a resistance or obstacle, that in some way makes them grow in knowledge. You can even find people who accept suffering as a tool for learning. It is not that they seek out suffering—unlike those who seem to have a special taste for suffering. We are talking about people who, simply, when something bad happens, take the best from it, not people who go around looking for ways to suffer, but rather those who, finding themselves in a situation of suffering, assimilate it, integrate it, and surpass it.

Very well, so there are people who locate themselves in this state: They have no faith, they have no belief, but they have a *desire* to believe—they *wish* they had something to encourage them and give direction to their lives. Yes, these people exist.

There are still others who suspect, intellectually, that there may, perhaps, be a future beyond death, that some sort of transcendence could exist. They believe that this is possible, although they have had no experience of transcendence nor do they have any sort of faith, nor do they aspire to have that experience or that faith. You will also encounter people in this state.

There is, finally, a fifth state, which corresponds to those who deny any possibility of transcendence. You will also find people in this state, and even among you it is possible that many think in this way.

So we see that, with variations, each person can locate him or herself among those who have evidence of transcendence and for whom it is indisputable; or among those who have faith because they were taught to have faith when they were young; among those who *wish* they had that experience or that faith; or among still others who consider it to be an intellectual possibility but don’t give it much further thought; or finally among those who deny any possibility whatever of transcendence.

But we have not yet come to the end of this point regarding how one locates oneself with respect to the problem of transcendence. Clearly, there are also different *depths* in this matter of locating oneself regarding continuity or transcendence. There are those who say that they have faith, who affirm this, but what they say does not really correspond with what they experience. We are not saying that these people are lying; we simply mean that they say this superficially. Today they say that they have faith, but tomorrow they may no longer have it. And so we observe different degrees of profundity in these five positions, and thus in the shakiness or firmness of people’s convictions with respect to what they affirm. We have known people who were devout, who were believers in a faith, but then, when a family member died, when a loved one died, all the faith that they said they had disappeared, and they fell into the most profound state of non-meaning. That faith was a superficial faith, a peripheral faith, the vestiges of faith. On the other hand, quite the opposite occurs for those who suffer terrible catastrophes, and yet continue to affirm and even strengthen their faith.

And then we have known other people who were absolutely convinced that transcendence did not exist. You die and you disappear and that’s it. In a manner of speaking, these people had faith that everything ends with death. Of course, once in a while, walking past a cemetery on a dark night, some may have walked a little faster and felt a little uneasy… and how is this

compatible with their absolute conviction that everything ends with death? So there are people who, even in their negation of transcendence, are superficial, are not firmly in this state.

One can find oneself in any of these states, and also at various depths within a state. At certain times in our lives, we may have believed one thing about transcendence, and at another time something else. Our belief may have changed not only at various times in our lives but also in response to different situations—it is something mobile, not something static. Our belief with respect to the problem of transcendence can change; it can even change from one day to the next. Sometimes in the morning I believe one thing, but by the afternoon I believe something else. And this is clearly of the greatest importance, because it means that the orientation of human life is excessively variable. And in the end, it brings confusion and disharmony to our daily lives.

Thus, the human being can be located in one or another degree of one of these five states. But what is the *correct* location? Does one exist, or are we simply describing problems without giving a solution? Are we able to suggest what is the best position from which to face this problem?

Some people say that we either have faith or we don't; that faith either arises in us or it doesn't. But let's look more closely at that state of consciousness. Someone can have absolutely no faith at all, yet at the same time can *want* to attain it. This person can even understand, intellectually, that such a thing would be interesting, that it might be worthwhile to orient him or herself in the direction of having faith. Well, then, when that begins to happen, it is because something within the person is already moving, already expressing itself in that new direction.

Those who achieve that faith or that transcendent experience—even if they cannot define it in precise terms, as one cannot precisely define love—will recognize the need to orient others toward meaning in life, though never do they try to impose their own landscape on those who do not recognize it.

And so, coherently with everything that has been said, I declare before all of you my faith and my certainty of experience that death does not stop the future, that death on the contrary modifies the provisional state of our existence to launch it toward immortal transcendence. And I do not impose my certainty or my faith upon anyone, and I live in harmony with those who find themselves in different states with respect to meaning in life. But I am obliged in solidarity to offer this message—a message that I recognize makes the human being happy and free. For no reason will I evade my responsibility to express my truths, though they may seem doubtful to those who experience the provisional nature of life and the absurdity of death.

Furthermore, though I clearly define my own position with respect to this point, I never ask others about their personal beliefs. And I proclaim the freedom of all human beings to believe or not to believe in God and the freedom to believe or not to believe in immortality.

And so, among the thousands upon thousands of men and women who, shoulder to shoulder, work with us in solidarity, there are atheists and believers, people with doubts and people with certainties, and none of them are asked about their faith. Instead, everything is given as an orientation that may help each of them decide for themselves the path that best makes clear the meaning of their lives.

It is less than courageous to refrain from proclaiming one's truths, but it is unworthy of true solidarity to try to impose them upon others.

The Volunteer

Mexico City, October 11, 1980

Comments During a Break in a Study Group

It appears that many of the people who are active in our Movement share a certain history—they have a background as volunteers, although this is not the same as believing in volunteerism. It seems that many are social workers, nurses, and teachers. That is, they are people about whom one can say that while they do their jobs and are paid for them, their wages are in no way their complete compensation. Of course, if they are seriously underpaid, they are going to protest just like anyone else, but the basic orientation of their activities does not end in themselves, but instead is turned outward toward others. After that comes the need to be paid and take care of daily necessities, which is only natural, of course—they can't live on air!

What can we learn from these people who, though typically underpaid, have that strong urge to teach others? And what of these others, social workers and the rest, who carry out activities where the rewards are not obvious? It seems that there are a lot of people in our Movement who have had experiences of this sort—people who set up groups in their neighborhoods, or who when they were young organized sports teams of one kind or another, the kind of people who get things moving. While many who come to our Movement are like this, others are not—they come in other ways, for other reasons, and only a little later do they come to understand the significance of these works, and then they, too, in their way begin to participate.

So it is that many people become active when our work gives them a meaning, gives them an inner justification. They start by following the tendency they already had, drawing in part on the experience of things they have done previously. One can easily observe this sort of participation; there are many examples. I don't know how things are here in Mexico, but I have seen these characteristics in many of our friends in the Movement all over the world. They tend to be, in general, the kind of people who get things moving. Generally their biographies demonstrate those kinds of experiences.

But why do some people do things without looking for any immediate return from their disinterested action? How can that be? What is it that they do in their heads that allows them to act in such a strange way? From the point of view of today's consumer societies, it is a very atypical way of going about things. All who are born, raised, and educated today have been affected by the impact of propaganda of a consumer structure, and thus they tend to see the world in terms of feeding themselves.

Let me try to explain what I mean. I am a consumer; therefore, I have to consume—to swallow—more and more things. I am a kind of enormous belly that must be filled up. Not for a moment do I entertain the idea or the register that something should come *from* me. Quite the contrary, I find it all too easy to say, "Enough comes from me already, so I have every right to these consumer goods. Don't I put in long hours at the office, don't I give up my time—which I'd prefer to dedicate entirely to consuming—don't I pay with all that time when I'm working for the system and not consuming?" Indeed, it's a good argument. In various ways people exchange hours of work for remuneration. Isn't that so? But where is the emphasis placed? People do not focus on the activity that they carry out in the world. They consider that activity a necessary evil that is unavoidable in order for the circuit to come back around full circle to themselves again.

That is the way today's systems, under one banner or another, are set up. It always comes down to the same thing: being a consumer.

The entire populace is becoming neurotic, which is only logical considering that in reality, just as there is one circuit in a person for things to enter, there is another for things to go out. And if we close off the exit circuit, the circuit that goes out, the person is going to have problems. But the fact is that most people are locked into this pattern of exclusively receiving. And as this ideology of receiving spreads, people are less and less able to understand, even to consider, how there are some people who do things for which they receive little or nothing in return. From the point of view of the consumer ideology, such behavior is extremely suspicious. What would lead a person to do things without receiving any corresponding compensation? What motive could this person possibly have? What this suspicion really betrays, however, is an abysmal lack of understanding of the human being. Today, people tend to understand utility only in terms of money, while knowing nothing of the existence of life-utility, of psychological utility. There will always be someone who is "living well," without any job problems, without any health problems or problems of aging or retirement, with all these things completely resolved. Nevertheless, inexplicably, this person jumps out a window, or becomes an alcoholic and spends all day in a drunken haze, or takes drugs, or one day ends up killing a neighbor.

In contrast, our Movement publicly defends this behavior of disinterested giving, of giving without self-interest, which others disdain. We defend the man who springs out of bed because the house next door is on fire. He throws on his clothes, puts on a helmet, runs over, and puts out the fire. And when he returns home (at six o'clock in the morning, singed, smelling of smoke, bruised), the wife he dearly loves starts throwing china and saying, "How much do they pay you for that? You're going to be late to work and get us in trouble and have big problems at home, too, because of these crazy ideas of yours!" And when he walks down the street, people point at him and say, "There's that volunteer fireman." He's a kind of village idiot to those who feel so good about themselves that they jump out of windows. Normally, volunteer firemen don't jump out of windows.

That is, in their own way, empirically, such people have found a way to apply their energies in the world. These volunteers are able to do something more than launch themselves, cathartically, into certain activities (the way other people throw themselves into sports, into games, into so many other activities). They do something much more important than what most people do: *They express an inner meaning out into the world.* And when they do this, they carry out an *empirically transferential function.* They are not responding to conventional stimuli, they are *composing* meanings that go out from themselves toward the world. Those people who start with their inner world and express it in the external world are very different from people who are obliged to do certain things, and after doing them are remunerated. In the first case, such people voluntarily shape the contents within themselves in ways that may not be altogether clear, even for them, although they may try to express them with words like "solidarity," perhaps even without understanding the deeper meaning of that word. Our poor volunteer fireman may, each time he returns home to rebukes and flying china, even wind up thinking that he really is some sort of fool, and conclude that "something must be wrong with me because this kind of thing always keeps happening to me." And if the volunteer is a woman, it's even worse—in this society, much worse.

So in the end, these volunteers wind up humiliated, feeling bad about themselves, and eventually giving in, assimilating into the system, because no one has ever explained to them how all of this works. They know they're different from other people, but they can't quite

understand why that is. And if we go to them and say, “Come on, then, explain what you get out of all this,” they stammer and shrug their shoulders as though they had been asked to explain something almost shameful. No one has ever made it clear to them, no one has ever given them the tools to understand why they turn that enormous potential they have within themselves out into the world, without expectation of personal gain. And after all, it *is* quite extraordinary.

Public Talk in Madrid

Sports Pavilion, Madrid, September 27, 1981

Note: At the invitation of the Community for Human Development in various countries, Silo took part in a tour during which he spoke at a number of public events. His speeches were accompanied by those of his friends Bittiandra Aiyyappa, Saki Binudin, Petur Gudjonsson, Nicole Myers, Salvatore Puledda, and Daniel Zuckerbrot. Since the core of the ideas presented by Silo in this talk in Madrid was repeated at similar events in Barcelona, Reykjavik, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Milan, Colombo, Paris, and Mexico City, in this anthology we have included only those speeches given in Madrid and Bombay

Some time ago I was asked, “Why don’t you explain your thinking?” And so I explained. Later, others said, “You don’t have the right to explain your thinking.” So I kept silent. Twelve years passed, and once again I was asked, “Why don’t you explain your thinking?” So once more I will speak, knowing beforehand that again I will be told: “You do not have the right to explain your thinking.”

I said nothing new on that first occasion; I’ll say nothing new today.

But what was said then? I said: Without inner faith, there is fear; fear produces suffering; suffering produces violence; violence produces destruction. Therefore, inner faith prevents destruction.

Today our friends have spoken about fear, suffering, violence, and nihilism as the principal examples of this destruction. They have also spoken about faith in oneself, in others, and in the future. They have said that we must modify the destructive course that events are taking by changing the *direction* of human actions. In addition, and most fundamentally, they have told us how to do all this—so I will be adding nothing new today.

I simply want to make three observations: the first with respect to the right that we have to explain our point of view; the second regarding how our world has reached this situation of total crisis; and, lastly, what it is that will allow us to make an immediate resolution and change the direction of our lives. This resolution should conclude with a commitment by every person who agrees with what is said here today.

All right, then, what right do we have to explain our point of view and to act accordingly? In the first place, we have the right to diagnose the current ills according to our understanding, even though our judgment may not agree with the established view of things. In that sense, we say that no one has the right to silence new interpretations by claiming to possess the absolute truth. As for our activities, why should some find them offensive, when we do not interfere with their activities? And if in any place in the world what we say or do is silenced or distorted, we can say that there we find bad faith, absolutism, and lies. Why not let the truth run free and allow freely informed people to choose what is reasonable for their own lives?

Well then, why do we do what we do? I will answer very briefly: We do it as a supreme moral act, and our morality is based on this principle: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” If, as individuals, we want the best for ourselves, we are required by that moral imperative to give our best to others as well. And who are these “others”? Others are those closest to me, and it is there with them that my real possibilities of giving and changing things lie. And if my possibilities of giving and changing things should span the world, then the whole world will be “those closest to me.” But it would be absurd for me to busy myself proclaiming my concern for the whole

world if my real possibility for changing things reached only as far as my next-door neighbor. That is why there is a minimum requirement in our moral action, and that is for each person to act and to explain things in his or her immediate surroundings. And it is contrary to our morality *not* to act in the world but instead to remain suffocated in a dead-end individualism. This moral imperative gives precise direction to our actions and also clearly indicates toward whom those actions are directed.

When we speak of morality, we refer to a free act, to the possibility of freely acting or not acting, and we say that this act is beyond all necessity and beyond all mechanicity. This is our free act, our moral act: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” No theory, no justification, is above this free and moral act. It is not *our* morality that is in crisis. It is other moralities that are in crisis, not ours. Our morality is not in reference to things or objects or systems—our morality refers to the *direction* of human actions. All the criticism we offer, all the communication we provide or attempt to transmit, is oriented to the *direction of human actions.*

There is another point that I should touch on, and it refers to the state of crisis that we find around us. How did all this come about, and who is to blame for it? I will not make a conventional analysis of this. There will be no science, no statistics. Instead, I will offer my answer in images that can reach the heart of every individual.

After an immense period of time had passed, human life began to flower on this planet. But with the passage of millennia, the peoples and the nations began to grow separate and distinct. There was a time to be born, a time to laugh, a time to suffer, and a time to die. Individuals, peoples, and nations, building and growing, succeeding one another until at last they inherited the Earth. They ruled the waters of the oceans and flew faster than the wind, and they crossed the mountains. And in voices of the storm and with light brighter than the sun, they demonstrated their power. Then they looked back and saw in the distance their blue planet, their gentle protector, veiled by clouds.

What energy has moved all this activity, what motor has propelled the human being through history, if not rebellion against death? From earliest times, death has dogged humankind’s footsteps like a shadow. And since ancient times, death has found its way into the human heart and tried to conquer it. What was at first an unrelenting struggle driven by the necessities of life became a struggle driven by fear and desire. And two roads opened: the road of Yes and the road of No. At that point, all thought, all emotion, and all action became torn by doubt over whether to choose the Yes or the No. “Yes” created everything that allowed humankind to surpass suffering. “No” added suffering to pain. There was no person, no relationship, no organization free of its internal Yes and its internal No. Then the separate peoples and nations began to connect one to another, until at last the civilizations came together, and the Yes and the No of every language was heard simultaneously in the farthest corners of the Earth.

How will human beings ever triumph over their shadow? By fleeing it? By confronting it in incoherent struggle? If the motor of history is rebellion against death, I say to you now: Rebel against frustration and revenge! For the first time in history, let us stop looking for people to blame. Everyone is *responsible* for what they have done, but no one is to *blame* for what has happened. If only with this universal judgment we could declare: “No one is to blame,” and with this establish a moral obligation that every human being reconcile with his or her own past. This will begin here today in you, and you will be responsible to see that it continues, reaching those around you until it has spread to the last corner of the Earth.

If the direction of your life has not changed, you need to change it. And if it has already changed, then you need to strengthen this new direction. So that all this may be possible,

accompany me in a free, courageous, and profound act that is also a commitment to reconciliation. Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation. Let me repeat this: Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation.

For everyone, Peace, Force, and Joy!

Talk at an Agricultural Collective

Colombo, Sri Lanka, October 20, 1981

An Interchange with the Buddhist Sangha in Sarvodaya

Greetings to the Sangha, to the brothers, sisters, and elders, and to all of you here today. Doctor Ariyaratne has been too kind and has spoken of us in terms that are too lofty.

Truly, since coming to this center, we have been impressed by the sobriety and the value of the work being carried out here. We have often spoken of *humanizing the Earth,* but this is something that must be carried out in practice. Humanizing the Earth can too often remain nothing more than an idea, but here we have seen that humanizing the Earth is put into practice. We have seen, above all else, a moral force in action. This contrasts with what we see today in all latitudes, where the Earth is being dehumanized and the world is becoming dehumanized.

I come from an agricultural region, and in recent years I have witnessed how the countryside has become depopulated as its people have concentrated in the cities. I have witnessed how the family that once existed has been gradually destroyed and the elder generation cast aside. The countryside has been abandoned, and the cities have swelled, gathering around them zones of people trapped in poverty. If the numbers given to us by the United Nations are correct, in 1950 half the world's population lived in rural areas and the other half in cities, towns, or villages. If present statistical trends continue, it appears that by the year 2000 more than 90 percent of all the working men and women on the Earth will live in cities. This will have consequences that will be, from every point of view, explosive.

The work that we have seen in Sarvodaya and its social organizations, the decentralization that has been accomplished, the creation of compact agricultural centers in the countryside, is an idea that holds out a new possibility for the world. Of course, the question remains whether the new generations will be able to make their lives in centers like those proposed here, in which health care, education, and the possibility of work for all are right at hand, where even cultural and university centers can be established in rural areas.

The worldwide process we are witnessing today is one of continuing concentration in cities. Everywhere we see urban concentration, the concentration of capital in the hands of a few, concentration in every sense of the word. Apparent decentralizations are in fact simply breaks with the old order and lead only to concentrations at another level. Nation states disintegrate only to re-concentrate into larger parastates; as centralized businesses disintegrate, multinational corporations and financial capital only become stronger. It seems that nothing is centrifugal, but everything is centripetal. Everything concentrates, and the apparent de-concentrations are simply steps in the breakup of the old frameworks, which then become incorporated into even greater concentrations.

More and more the human being is being transformed into a consumer. Today, people think that everything begins and ends in them, that everything pertains to them alone. Here in Sarvodaya, new ideas and new behavior are being proposed, and a new direction is being demonstrated that is opposite to the prevailing, selfish direction. Here in Sarvodaya there is no question of viewing the human being as a consumer; here you are trying to meet the basic needs of life. Here you are trying to distribute and decentralize, and to bring culture into the countryside. Here it is clear that you are trying to reverse this compulsive process of

concentration that has swallowed up today's world. It is of the utmost importance to understand this experience which, independent of any success it may have in the future, is a valid action in and of itself. Furthermore, I believe I have understood the vision of the human being and of society that is taking visible shape here in Sarvodaya. Here it seems that a person is not considered an isolated being but is viewed instead within the sphere of social relations. Underlying all this is the idea of compassion, the idea of action that does not end in oneself but rather extends to the other person. I believe I have seen that the concern here is less with the suffering one might be going through *oneself* than with the suffering of the *other.*

This is precisely the point of view that we in our Movement have long maintained. We say that problems are not resolved within the consciousness of a single person; we say that one must leap over one's own problems and go to the pain of the other person. That is the moral act *par excellence:* "Treat others as you want them to treat you."

There are those who think that they have a great many personal problems, and that because they have so many problems, they can do nothing for others. This is quite extraordinary, but in the West one sees people with a very high standard of living who nevertheless find it impossible to help others, because they believe that they themselves have too many problems. And yet we have seen how the poorest part of the population—those who suffer real hardships and face enormous problems—are still able to direct themselves toward others, are able to share their food, are able to leap over their own suffering in repeated acts of solidarity.

Here we have seen that same moral force, but organized and expanding—this force that goes toward others and makes us better in the measure that we help others overcome their suffering. We have been here only a short while, and yet we have looked deep into the eyes of the children who have found refuge from the street. We have seen the smiles and the conduct of those who work here, and we have realized that behind all this, once again, is that moral force in motion.

This is a great social movement, or rather spiritual movement, but I would define it as a great *moral force* in motion. This is the impression I would communicate from what I have seen so far in Sarvodaya, but I would also say that I would need more time in order to learn from all that is being done here.

Thank you for your kind attention.

"We would like to hear your message. In Theravada Buddhism, sila *is the moral rule that leads to right action. Please explain, please make your moral rule explicit."*

Reverend, my message is simple and applicable in everyday life. It is a message directed toward the individual and his or her immediate surroundings. It is not a message directed toward the world in general. It is directed toward people who love, live, and suffer in the company of their husbands or wives, their companions in life, their families, friends, and coworkers—in the company of those right around them.

The world faces many critical problems, but it is exaggerated of me to focus on changing the whole world if it is not within my real possibilities to do so. The only thing I can change is my immediate surroundings, and in some way change myself. And if my possibilities for action and transformation should reach further than that, in that case my neighbors will include more people, more than my loved ones, my friends, and those I work with.

We say that one must have an awareness of one's own limitations in order to carry out an action that is both wise and effective. Therefore, everywhere we go we propose that people

form small groups, each consisting of the individual and his or her immediate human surroundings. These groups, whether urban or rural, gather together all those volunteers who want to leap over their own problems in order to direct themselves to others. As these small groups grow, they connect among one another, and their possibilities for transformation also grow.

What is the basis for the growth of these groups? What is it that unifies them? They are based on the idea that *it is better to give than to receive*—on the idea that every act that ends in oneself generates contradiction and suffering, and on the idea that actions that end in others are the only acts that make it possible to surpass one's own suffering.

It is not wisdom alone that allows a person to overcome his or her own suffering. There can be right thought and right intention, but right action can be missing. And there is no right action that is not inspired by compassion. This basic human attitude of compassion, this notion that human action should go toward others, is the basis of all individual and social growth.

As you know, these things have been said for many, many years, and so I am saying nothing new here. I am only trying to make people aware that this self-enclosure, this individualism, this turning of action back in upon oneself, is producing a total disintegration in the men and women of today. Nevertheless, it seems that in many places even such simple ideas are not easily understood. And lastly, there are many people who think that closing themselves up in their own problems at least avoids new difficulties. Of course, this is not true. In fact, what generally occurs is the contrary—personal contradiction spreads, contaminating one's immediate surroundings.

When I speak of *contradiction,* I am speaking of acts that are harmful to oneself. I betray myself when I *do* things opposed to what I *feel.* That creates permanent suffering in me, and that suffering does not remain in me alone—it contaminates all those around me. This apparently individual suffering that arises out of personal contradiction winds up becoming social suffering.

There is only one act that allows the human being to break with his or her contradiction and permanent suffering. This is the moral act in which human beings direct themselves toward others in order to help those people overcome their suffering. When I help another person surpass his or her suffering, I later remember my own kindness. On the other hand, after a contradictory act I recall that moment as one where my life went wrong. Thus, acts of contradiction invert the wheel of life, whereas acts that end in other people—helping them surpass their suffering—turn the wheel of life.

All acts that end in oneself inevitably lead toward contradiction, toward contamination of one's immediate surroundings. Even pure wisdom, intellectual wisdom that resides only within oneself, can lead to contradiction. It is a time for action, and the action that is called for consists of beginning to help others overcome their suffering. That is right action, compassion, the moral act *par excellence.*

"In that action of people helping other people, does there not exist the danger of 'the blind leading the blind'?"

Reverend, it is possible for a blind person to use other senses. It is possible that, walking through the night, a blind person might hear the distant sound of a waterfall, or the slithering of a serpent drawing near. Therefore, it is possible for a blind person, relying on other senses, to warn those whose hearing is not so acute that there is danger nearby. And I would go further to

say that this blind person is not only useful for others who are blind but also for those who have eyes but in the night are unable to see.

"In order that harmony be generated within us, it is necessary for us to do something within ourselves. Children grow up naturally, without thinking about it, but their conduct has no direction until they learn something about themselves. The forces of nature also act without direction, without consciousness of what they do."

Reverend, human beings also learn by doing—in the measure that they do things, they learn. People learn to type, for example, by putting their hands to work, and then through trial and error they gradually improve their movements. We say that one *learns by doing.* The very act of thinking is a primary act of the consciousness. Of course, letting your mind wander is not the same thing as thinking with direction. The act of thinking with direction implies a prior act of consciousness. And if I propose to stop thinking, producing a mental void, then I'm acting in that direction.

"We ask: Is action prior to thought, or is thought prior to action?"

Reverend, from our point of view, there are no linear causes and effects. There is a circuit of feedback in which one thing feeds back upon another, and this produces growth. Put in visual images, if we view it from above, the process is circular—it looks like a wheel; if we view it from the side, we realize it is a spiral in motion that grows at every turn. Thus, it is possible not to know how to do something, but by working on that task one's experience is enriched, and from this enrichment there arise ideas, and these new ideas are reapplied to the task. In that sense, the human being has grown differently from other living beings. Human beings have grown through having grappled with the pain of their own bodies as they tried to obtain warmth, shelter, and food, and endeavored to foresee the future physical injuries with which nature challenges them. Thus, through trial and error, the human being has transformed nature. Now, the human being—always active, learning, and growing—must restore balance to the current imbalances. This is the idea with which I would answer your question about thought and action.

"Unfortunately, the human being has difficulties in attempting to deal with nature, and this brings suffering."

Reverend, unfortunately you are right. The human being has long experienced suffering, and still today continues to suffer in that encounter with nature; but we should also recall that through this suffering the human being has learned. Progress, in reality, has been a rebellion against suffering, against death—the motor of human history has been the human being's rebellion against death. Of course, humankind has suffered enormously in this process.

But we know that there is a great difference between *pain* and *suffering.* Pain is physical, and this pain will be overcome when science and the organization of society have developed sufficiently. Truly, physical pain can be overcome. Medical advances show this to be the case; social progress demonstrates this as well. But *mental suffering* is a very different thing. There is no science or organization of society that can overcome mental suffering. Human beings have grown as they have managed to overcome a great deal of their physical pain, but they have yet to surpass their mental suffering. And the notable and significant function that the great messages and great teachings have served has been to make us understand that we need very precise conditions in order to surpass suffering. About this point we can say little more at this time. There are the teachings, and we respect them as they are.

But in this world of perceptions, in this world of the immediate, in this world of aggregates for consciousness, in which illusory perception and illusory memory produce in me an illusory consciousness and a consciousness of an illusory self; in this world in which I am provisionally submerged, I do things in order that pain may be overcome, and I try to help science and the organization of society move in a direction that improves human life. I also understand that when human beings truly need to surpass mental suffering, they will have to appeal to understandings that rend the veil of maya, that penetrate illusion. But the straight path is one that begins immediately before us—it is the one we walk in compassion, in helping others to overcome pain.

Public Talk in Bombay

Chowpatty Beach, Bombay, India, November 1, 1981

In a small rural village at the foot of the highest mountains of the West, in faraway South America, we gave our first message. What did we say on that occasion? We said: Without inner faith, without faith in oneself, there is fear; fear produces suffering; suffering produces violence; violence produces destruction. Therefore, faith in oneself overcomes destruction.

We also said: There are many forms of violence and destruction. There is physical violence, and there is economic violence, racial violence, religious violence, psychological violence, and moral violence. We denounced all forms of violence, and in response we were told that we must keep silent. And so we kept silent, but first we explained: "If what we have said is false, it will soon disappear. If it is true, there is no power on Earth that will be able to stop it."

Twelve years of silence have passed, and now we are speaking once again, and thousands upon thousands of people on the different continents of the Earth are listening to what we say. And in the cynical West some people ask: "How can it be that people listen to you, since you do not promise anyone wealth or happiness, you perform no miracles, and you cure no one? You are not a teacher or a great master, but simply a man like other men."

"There is nothing extraordinary about you," they say. "You aren't an example to be followed, you aren't a wise man or someone who's discovered a new truth… And you don't even speak in our language. How is it possible that anyone would want to listen to you?"

Oh, brothers and sisters of Asia, they do not understand the voice that speaks from heart to heart!

In the West, they have achieved a certain level of material development. They have achieved a material level that we also need. But we want development and progress without their suicide, without their alcoholism, without their drug addiction, without their madness, without their violence, their sickness, and their death.

We are common people, we are not cynics, and when we speak from heart to heart, good men and women in all latitudes understand us and love us.

And what do we say today from India, the throbbing heart of the world, from India whose spiritual reserves have been a teaching and an answer for a world whose mind is sick? We say: "Treat others as you want them to treat you." There is no human act superior to this; there is no moral law higher than this. When human beings understand this and carry it out in practice every day, and in every hour of every day, they progress and help others to progress with them.

The Earth is being dehumanized, and life is being dehumanized, and people are losing faith in themselves and in life. Therefore, to Humanize the Earth is to humanize the values of life. What is more important than overcoming the pain and suffering in others and in oneself? To make science and knowledge progress is of value if it goes in the direction of life. The fair and just production and distribution of the means of subsistence, health care, education, the formation of intellectuals with a sensitivity to social issues—these are tasks to be undertaken with the enthusiasm and faith merited by every action that struggles to overcome pain in others.

Everything that improves life is good; everything that opposes life is bad. That which unites people is good; that which divides them is bad. That which affirms "there is still future" is good; to say there is no future or meaning in life is bad. To give the peoples of the Earth faith in themselves is good; the fanaticism that opposes life is bad.

To Humanize the Earth is also to humanize those who have influence and power over others, so that they in turn will listen to the voices of those who need to overcome poverty and disease. Our Community is inspired by the great teachings that preach tolerance among all people. And that tolerance goes even further, because it sets as the highest value of every human act this principle: “Treat others as you want them to treat you.” Only if people put this principle into practice—this principle that is opposed to insensitivity, to selfishness and cynicism—will they be able to begin to Humanize the Earth. Our Community is a tolerant and nonviolent moral force that teaches that the highest value is to “treat others as you want them to treat you.” This is the moral impulse that must give direction to the new generations and be put into practice by everyone who truly wants to begin to Humanize our Earth.

Many people want to become better human beings, many want to overcome their inner confusion and spiritual sickness, and they believe that they can do so by closing their eyes to the world in which they live. I say that they will grow in spirit only if they begin to help others to surpass their pain and suffering. That is why we propose that people act in the world and not abandon the parties or organizations to which they belong. On the contrary, if one believes that one’s organization can contribute to overcoming pain and suffering, one should participate there with enthusiasm. And if these organizations have shortcomings, then one should push to correct them and to turn these organizations and these efforts into instruments in the service of humanization. Because, if faith in oneself is not renewed, in the sense that one is able to contribute to progress, and if faith in the possibility of change in others is not renewed (even when those others are not without their shortcomings), then we shall stand paralyzed before the future—and the dehumanization of the Earth will surely triumph.

To form communities with the members of one’s family, with coworkers, friends, and neighbors; to form them in the cities and in the countryside; to form these communities as a moral force that gives us faith in ourselves, in others, and in human communities—all this is to grow in spirit as you look upon the face of your brother and sister, so that they too may grow. And if you believe in God, consider His infinite goodness and His plan that the human being will one day stand up and honor the Earth by humanizing it.

You must begin a new life, and you must have faith in what you can do. In order for this to be possible, accompany me in a free, courageous, and profound act that is also a commitment to reconciliation. Go to your parents, your loved ones, your companions; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation. Let me repeat this: Go to your parents, your loved ones, those close to you; go to your friends and your enemies alike, and tell them with an open heart, “Something great and new has happened in me today,” and explain to them this message of reconciliation.

To all of you, Peace, Force, and Joy!

Regarding What Is Human

Tortuguitas, Buenos Aires, Argentina, May 1, 1983

Talk in a Study Group

To have an understanding of the human phenomenon in general is one thing, while one's own register of the humanity of the other is something quite different.

Let's consider the first question—that is, an understanding of the human phenomenon in general.

If one says that what is most characteristic of the human being is sociability, or language, or the transmission of experience, one still has not fully defined the human being, because we find all of these expressed in the animal world as well, if only in some elementary state of development. We can observe chemical recognition, and consequent attractions or rejections, in organisms of the hive, the school, or the pack. There are host, parasitic, and symbiotic forms of organization in which we can recognize elementary patterns of what we later see in more elaborate form in human groups. We also find a kind of animal "morality," with social punishment for transgressors, even when those behaviors, viewed from the outside, might be interpreted on the basis of the instinct of preservation of the species or as a complex of conditioned and unconditioned reflexes. Rudimentary technology is also not unknown in the animal world, nor are the emotions of affection, hostility, grief, and solidarity, whether among members of a group, or between groups, or between species.

Well then, what is it that defines *what is human* as such, if not the reflection of the socio-historical as personal memory? Every animal is always the first animal, while every human being is his or her historical and social environment, along with a reflection of, and a contribution to, the transformation or inertia of that environment. For an animal, the environment is the *natural* environment. For the human being, the environment is the *historical and social* environment, the transformation of that environment, and certainly the adaptation of nature to both immediate and longer-term needs. When compared to the systems of ideation, behavior, and life of the animal world, the human being's deferred response to immediate stimuli—the meaning and direction of human labor with respect to a future that is planned (or imagined)—presents us with a new characteristic. The broadening of the temporal horizon of human consciousness allows it to delay responses to stimuli, locating such phenomena in a complex mental space configured for the placement of deliberations, comparisons, and conclusions that lie outside the field of immediate perception.

In other words, in the human being there is no human "nature" unless this "nature" is considered a capacity, distinct from that of other animals, to move through various times that are outside the horizon of perception. Putting this in yet another way, if there is something "natural" in the human being, it is not in the mineral, vegetable, or animal sense, but rather in the sense that what is natural in the human being is change, history, transformation.

It is difficult to adequately reconcile the idea of *change* with the idea of *nature,* and therefore we prefer not to use the word nature as it has been used in the past—this term that has been so often used to justify all sorts of treachery toward the human being. For example, simply because the original inhabitants of a particular place appeared different from their foreign conquerors, these inhabitants were called aboriginals or "natives." Because other races presented different morphologies or coloration, they were ascribed different "natures" within the human species,

and so on. Thus, there was a “natural” order, and changing that order was a sin against all that was eternally established. Different races, different sexes, different social positions—all were fixed within a supposedly natural order that was to be conserved for all time.

The idea of “human nature” that had served an order of natural production broke down in the period of industrial transformation. Yet even today we still see vestiges of the zoological ideology of human nature—in the field of psychology, for example, in which people still talk about certain natural faculties such as the “will” and similar things. Natural law, the State as part of a projected human nature, and other such notions have not contributed to progress, but only to historical inertia and the negation of transformation.

If copresence in human consciousness functions because of its enormous temporal broadening, and if the intentionality of human consciousness allows it to project a meaning, then what is most characteristic of the human being is *being* and *making the meaning of the world.* As this is said in *Humanize the Earth:*

> Namer of a thousand names, maker of meanings, transformer of the world, your parents and the parents of your parents continue in you. You are not a fallen star but a brilliant arrow flying toward the heavens. You are the meaning of the world, and when you clarify your meaning you illuminate the earth. When you lose your meaning, the earth becomes darkened and the abyss opens.
>
> I will tell you the meaning of your life here: It is to humanize the earth. And what does it mean to humanize the earth? It is to surpass pain and suffering; it is to learn without limits; it is to love the reality you build.

We stand, then, at a great distance from the idea of human nature—in fact, at its polar opposite. What I mean is that if an imposed, supposedly permanent order, a “nature,” has ended up suffocating that which is human, now we are saying the contrary: What is natural must be humanized, and this humanization of the world makes humankind a creator of meaning, direction, and transformation. And if that meaning liberates us from the supposedly “natural” conditions of pain and suffering, then what is truly human is what goes beyond the natural—it is your project, your future; it is your child; it is your dawn; it is your breeze and your storm; it is your anger and your caress; it is your fear and trembling for a future, for a new human being free from pain and suffering.

Let’s now consider the second question: one’s own register of the humanity of others.

Insofar as one registers the presence of the other as “natural,” then the other will be no more than an object-like, or perhaps animal presence. Insofar as one is anesthetized against perceiving the temporal horizon of the other, the other will have no meaning beyond a for-me. *The nature of the other person will be a for-me.* But when I constitute the other person as a *for-me,* I constitute and alienate myself in my own *for-myself.* I say, “I am for-me,” and in saying that I close my horizon of transformation. People who make others into “things” make themselves into things, too, thereby closing off their own horizons.

Insofar as I do not experience the other except as a for-me, my vital activity will not humanize the world. The other must be an inner register for me, a warm sensation of an open future that does not end in the objectifying non-meaning of death.

To feel that which is human in the other is to feel the life of the other in a beautiful, multicolored rainbow that moves farther and farther away the more I try to stop, to seize, to capture its expression. You grow farther away, and I take comfort if I have helped you to break your chains, to overcome your pain and suffering. And if you accompany me, it is because in a

free act you constitute yourself as a human being, and not simply because you were born “human.” I sense in you the liberty and the possibility of your constituting yourself as a human being, and in you my acts find the liberty at which they aim. And so, not even your death can halt the actions you set in motion, because you are in essence time and liberty. What I love in the human being, then, is its growing humanization. And in these times of crisis, reification, and dehumanization, I love the possibility of the human being’s future vindication.

Religiosity in the Contemporary World

Casa Suiza, Buenos Aires, Argentina, June 6, 1986

Before speaking, Silo was introduced with the following remarks by a founding member of the Community for Human Development:

When one introduces a speaker, it is not uncommon to touch on the speaker's prior talks and the surrounding circumstances, and so today I will do exactly that.

In the state of siege imposed by Argentina's military government during the latter part of the 1960s, Silo's first attempt to speak publicly was forbidden. When the authorities were consulted about whether Silo could give the speech at a location far removed from any urban center, they granted permission with the sarcastic remark that there was no ban on "speaking to the stones." And so on May 4, 1969, high in the Andes at a place known as Punta de Vacas, Silo spoke before a small group that had had to endure interrogation and harassment by armed security forces. Despite these difficulties, CBS broadcast the message beyond the stones, reaching 250 television channels around the world.

On July 20 of that same year in Yala, a town in Argentina in the province of Jujuy, police dispersed those who had gathered in a field to hear Silo speak; there was no speech that day. On September 26 in Barrio Yapeyú in the province of Cordoba, tear gas was used and sixty arrests were made; again no speech was allowed. On October 21 at a press conference in Buenos Aires, despite harassment by the authorities, it was announced that Silo would attempt once more to speak publicly. On October 31 in Plaza Once in Buenos Aires, this attempt, like the previous ones, was met with tear gas, there were thirty arrests, and again no speech was permitted.

When a new military regime came to power, officials gave authorization for Silo to give a short course privately on specific subjects. This course was to take place August 16–19, 1972, and in the interim a supposedly democratic civilian government was elected by the people. On August 15, Silo gave a private talk in Cordoba, and the authorities arrested eighty people. On August 17 in Mar del Plata, the police blocked yet another attempt to speak. The result: 150 arrests. And the final attempt, in that same auditorium on September 13, 1974, resulted in 500 arrests, with Silo jailed in Villa Devoto. All of this took place during a time of "democratic government."

On October 15, 1974, in Mendoza, the house of a member of the Movement was bombed. On July 24, 1975, in La Plata, eleven participants in the Movement were arrested and imprisoned for six months, and two others were assassinated. In the ensuing persecution, hundreds of Movement activists were fired from their jobs and many were exiled, with the result that they were dispersed to numerous other countries, taking their message with them.

Following a new military coup, there could be no thought of giving speeches, but word was circulating that Silo had been invited to give a series of talks in Europe and Asia since it was not possible to do so in his own country. Then on August 12, 1981, just a week before he was to leave, shots were fired at Silo in an attempt on his life.

Upon his return from abroad, Editorial Bruguera was just publishing one of Silo's books, and he was invited to speak on the book's publication at the Eighth International Book Fair in Buenos Aires on April 10, 1982. But the authorities allowed only twenty people into the room to hear Silo speak, because, they explained, "it appeared that the floor was not in good condition."

Add to all this the sustained, malicious distortions in the reporting of these events by the press under every one of these regimes, and it is clear with what coin the advocacy of a methodology of nonviolence and pacifism has been repaid.

Now that we have returned once again to a democratic government here in Argentina, on this occasion Silo will offer his thoughts on religiosity in today's world, on another occasion he will speak on politics, and in the future he will speak on still other subjects. We trust that we will not encounter any further difficulties in this regard.

What possible use can there be in a discussion of religiosity in today's world? That depends. For those concerned with the development of social phenomena, any change in beliefs and religiosity may be of interest. For the politician, the subject holds no interest whatsoever, as long as religiosity is in decline; but if religiosity is on the rise then it will certainly merit attention. For us common, ordinary people, a discussion of this subject may draw our interest if it can be seen to be linked to the search or aspiration for something beyond the everyday. I don't think that in my remarks today I will be able to fully address such diverse interests. And so I will not pretend to give a scientific exposition following the model of a sociologist—I will simply try to illustrate my point of view on this question.

I will not attempt to define either *religiosity* or *religion;* instead, I will leave those two terms floating in the air, with meanings as might be intuitively understood by today's average citizen. Of course, I will not confuse a religion—its church, rituals, forms of worship, or theology—with *religiosity* or religious sentiment, which is quite frequently found outside of any church, ritual, form of worship, or theology. In any case, this state of consciousness, this religious sentiment, is surely referred to some object, since in every state of consciousness and therefore in every sentiment there is a structure in which *acts of consciousness* are in relation to their corresponding *objects.*

From this point on, I hope that those of you who are experts in these subjects will greet our somewhat naive thoughts with a tolerant smile rather than a gesture of disdain. So let's open our bag of opinions and see if anything in it is of use.

In my opinion:

First, a new type of religiosity has begun to develop in recent decades. Second, underlying this religiosity is a diffuse background of rebellion. Third, as a consequence of the impact of this new religiosity and, of course, as a consequence of the dizzying changes taking place in all societies, it is possible that at their core the traditional religions may undergo reaccommodations and adaptations of substantial importance. Fourth, it is highly likely that people all over the planet will experience further psychosocial shocks in the coming years and that this new type of religiosity I have been referring to will figure as an important factor in this phenomenon.

Furthermore, and even though it may seem contrary to the opinion of most social observers, I do not believe that religions have lost their impetus. I do not believe that they are increasingly cut off from power in political, economic, and social decision-making, nor do I believe that religiosity has ceased to stir the consciousness of the peoples of the Earth.

Let me try to support these opinions with some background:

The textbooks tell us that if we mark off a rectangle lying between 20 and 40 degrees north latitude and 30 and 90 degrees east longitude, we will find ourselves in a region of the globe in which great religions have arisen that have gone on to cover the Earth. More precisely, we are told that the three points known today as Israel, Iran, and India have acted for thousands of

years as “centers of barometric pressure of the human spirit.” These centers have generated what might be called ”spiritual cyclones,” which in turn have demolished entire political systems, forms of social organization, and customs that preceded them, and in their beginnings have sent forth a faith and hope for all those who felt failure in the face of established power and the anguish of the world.

Judaism produced both the religion of its own people, its national religion, and a universal missionary religion: Christianity. The genius of the Arab people in turn wove together out of the diversity of its tribal beliefs a religion that was also missionary and universal in character—Islam, sometimes also called Mohammedanism—which was in its origins indebted to Judaism and Christianity as important sources. Today, Judaism as a religion of the Jewish people and Christianity and Islam as universal religions are still living and continue to evolve.

To the east in what is now Iran, the ancient national religion gave way to other missionary and universal religions. Of the mother religion, there remain today only about one hundred thousand believers, and these mostly in India, particularly Bombay. In their country of origin, these believers no longer have any real relevance, since Iran has long been in the hands of Islam. But down through the years and as late as the fourth century of this era, the missionary religions of Iran advanced eastward and westward to such distances and with such strength that it appeared they would prevail in their competition with Christianity. In the end, however, Christianity triumphed, and these other missionary religions were abolished along with the paganism of the ancient world. Thus, the religions that had been generated in Iran apparently died out forever. And yet, many of their concepts and beliefs continued to have strong influence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, producing heresies within the orthodoxy of these religions. For example, the Shiite sect of Islam, which stands as the official religion in today’s Iran, was strongly affected by these forces. Then, in the nineteenth century, a new religious force emerged in Iran; at first called Babism, it later came to be known as the Baha’i faith.

In India, the national religion of Hinduism produced several other religions, among which Buddhism, with its missionary and universal character, is perhaps best known. Both the mother religion and others from earlier times are still vigorous today. And in this century, Hinduism—for so long only a national religion—began for the first time to expand beyond India, sending missions to the West, among which we recognize the Hare Krishna faith. This is perhaps one of several responses to the arrival in India of Christianity as the religion of English colonialism.

Nor do we wish to overlook such important religions as those of China, Japan, and black Africa or those that flourished in the Americas. None of these other religions, however, has managed to forge great supranational currents in the way that Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism have. So it was that, following the expulsion of the Muslims from Europe, Christianity reached the Americas, was imposed on these continents, and spread across them. And Islam spread beyond the borders of the Arab world, expanding throughout Africa and east into Turkey, Russia, India, China, Indochina, and beyond. Buddhism made its way into Tibet, China, Mongolia, Russia, Japan, and all of Southeast Asia.

Almost from the beginnings of these great world religions, schisms arose. That is, these religions began to divide into sects: Islam into Sunnis and Shiites; Christianity into Nestorians, Monophysites, and others—and since the Calvinist, Lutheran, Zwinglian, and Anglican reformations, it can be seen as split into two large sects, generically called Catholic and Protestant, to which, of course, must be added the Orthodox Churches. With the fragmentation of the great religions, we see the emergence of the great sects. And if the struggle for temporal power among the different religions was long and fierce (as in the Crusades, for example), the

wars between the great sects within each religion sometimes reached unimaginable extremes of ferocity. Time and again, reformations and counter-reformations of every kind have been visited upon the world. And so it went, until the time of the revolutions that mark what in scholarly circles is generically called the “Modern Age.”

In the West, the French, English, and American Revolutions moderated the previous excesses of these sectarian struggles, and the new ideas of liberty, equality, and fraternity permeated the social sphere. This was the age of the bourgeois revolutions. New cults emerged such as that of the Goddess Reason, a form of rationalist religiosity. Other more or less scientific currents displayed an almost social evangelism, as they proclaimed the egalitarian ideals from which they derived their plans for a new society. As industrialism took shape, the sciences began to organize themselves along new lines, and during this period the official religions lost much ground.

In the *Communist Manifesto,* Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels magnificently describe the situation of those inventors of social gospels. As they wrote in the third section of Chapter III: “The socialist and communist systems properly so called, those of Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen and others, spring into existence in the early period…of the struggle between the proletariat and bourgeoisie. Since the development of class antagonism keeps even pace with the development of industry, the economic situation, as such socialists find it, does not as yet offer to them the material conditions for the emancipation of the proletariat. They therefore search after a new social science, after new social laws that are to create these conditions. Historical action is to yield to their personal inventive action, historically created conditions of emancipation to fantastic ones, and the gradual, spontaneous class organization of the proletariat to an organization of society specially contrived by these inventors.”

Within these currents of social evangelism, the writer Auguste Comte appeared. Comte worked on Saint-Simon’s newspaper and also collaborated with him on “The Industrialists’ Catechism.” Comte is known for having begun the school of philosophy known as positivism and also for having formulated the concept and invented the name of the social sciences, which he called “sociology.” He was the author of *The Catechism of Positive Religion* and founded the Religion of Humanity. In England some traces of this religion still remain, but in France, its country of origin, it no longer exists. Still, it did manage to transplant itself to the Americas, reaching Brazil, where it put down roots and continued to influence the education of several generations of positivists, though less from a religious than from a philosophical point of view.

These new currents were soon joined by a stream of militant atheism, as in the case of Bakunin and the anarchists, archenemies of both God and the State. In these instances what one finds is not simply irreligiosity, but rabid attacks on anything that remotely smacks of religion, and particularly of Christianity. And then, of course, there is Nietzsche’s famous statement, “God is dead,” which has had such ramifications in this century.

Other mutations were taking place as well. Leon Rivail, in Switzerland, was the organizer of the ideas of Pestalozzi, one of the creators of modern pedagogy. Rivail took the name Allan Kardec and became the founder of Spiritism, one of the most important religious movements of recent years. Kardec’s *Spiritualist Philosophy: The Spirits’ Book* was published in 1857, and the movement to which it gave rise expanded throughout Europe, the Americas, and even parts of Asia.

Then came Theosophy, Anthroposophy, and other expressions, all of which might be grouped together under the rubric of “occultist currents” rather than religion, strictly speaking. Neither Spiritism nor these occultist groups have the features of sects within a religion but rather

another character altogether, though in any case they certainly involve religiosity. These associations, among which we also include Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, achieved their greatest gains in the nineteenth century, with the exception of Spiritism, which continues growing vigorously to this day.

With the enormous proliferation of sects within sects that occurs as we approach the twentieth century, things become little less than chaotic. Christian sects such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, along with countless others, appeared. Much the same occurred in Asia, where social gospels also inclined toward the mystical. For example, in China in the 1850s, the Tai-Ping gained such strength across large parts of the country that all that was missing for it to be able to declare itself a socialist republic, collectivize the means of production, and bring equality to the living conditions of the people, was the taking of Beijing. The political ideas proclaimed by that movement's leader, the "King of Heaven," were imbued with elements of Taoism and Christianity. The ensuing struggle against the Empire claimed millions of lives.

In 1910, Tolstoy died in Russia. By the latter part of his life, he had so distanced himself from the Orthodox Church that the Holy Synod had decided to excommunicate him. Tolstoy was a fervent Christian, but after his own fashion. He proclaimed the Gospel that he recognized: *Take no part in war; swear no oaths; judge no one; resist not evil with force.* Then he abandoned everything—books, home, family. No longer was he the brilliant, world-renowned writer, the author of *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace;* he had become a Christian-anarcho-pacifist mystic, the source and inspiration for a new teaching and a new methodology of struggle: nonviolence.

Tolstoy's anarcho-pacifism, combined with the ideas of Ruskin and the social gospel of Fourier mentioned by Marx in his *Manifesto,* came together in a young Indian attorney, Mohandas Gandhi, who was active in the struggle against discrimination in South Africa. Following the model of Fourier, Gandhi founded a communal phalanstery, but above all he experimented with a new form of political struggle. He returned to India, and in the following years the movement for Indian independence began to coalesce around him. It was with Gandhi that peaceful marches, sit-down strikes, the blocking of streets and railways with bodies lying limp, hunger strikes, and peaceful sit-ins began—what was called "civil disobedience."

This was no longer the strategy of taking over critical nerve centers as in the revolutionary tactics of Trotsky—this was quite the reverse: to create a void. And so there occurred a most extraordinary confrontation: a struggle in which a *moral force* was pitted against all the forces of economic, political, and military might. Of course, with Gandhi we are not talking about some soft, sentimental pacifism, but rather an active resistance, probably the most courageous form of struggle there is, in which one's defenseless body is totally exposed, as with empty hands Gandhi and his followers faced the bullets of the Western invaders and colonizers. This "naked fakir," as the English Prime Minister called him, ultimately won the struggle, but was later assassinated.

In the meantime, the world continued to suffer one tremendous shock after another. World War I broke out, and the socialist revolution triumphed in Russia. This last occurrence demonstrated in practice that those ideas considered utopian by right-thinking people of the time could not only be applied in practice but could also modify social reality. The new structuring and planning for the future in Russia changed the political map of Europe. The philosophy that organized the ideas of the Revolution began to spread vigorously throughout the world, as Marxism leapt quickly not just from country to country but from continent to continent.

It is good to recall some of the events that took place during that period of war, from 1914 to 1918. Any list of events would include more or less the following: Richardson described his electron theory of matter; Einstein introduced his theory of general relativity; Windhaus carried out research in biochemistry; Morgan performed his experiments on the mechanism of Mendelian inheritance; Mayerhof studied the physiology of muscles; Juan Gris revolutionized painting; Bartok composed his Hungarian dances; Sibelius his Symphony No. 5; Siegbahn studied the X-ray spectrum; Pareto wrote his *Sociology;* Kafka, *Metamorphosis;* Spengler, *The Decline of the West;* Mayakovsky his *Mystery-Bouffe* (Comic Mystery); Freud, *Totem and Taboo;* and Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology.*

In addition, aerial and submarine warfare were introduced, and poison gas and tear gas were used for the first time. The Spartacus League emerged in Germany; Turkish power was broken in Palestine; Wilson announced his Fourteen Points; the Japanese entered Siberia; there were revolutions in Austria and Germany; republics were declared in Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia; the Yugoslav state was born; Poland gained its independence; women gained the vote in England; the Panama Canal was opened; the Empire was re-established in China; Puerto Ricans became U.S. citizens; and the Mexican Constitution was approved.

We were at the dawn of the technological revolution, the collapse of colonialism, and the beginning of imperialism on a worldwide scale. The catalogue of watershed events would grow even longer in the following years, and even to list them all would be impossible; but for purposes of our theme, we will mention a few key events.

In science, Einstein made truth flexible: No longer were there absolute truths, but only truths relative to a given system. Freud claimed that reason itself is moved by dark forces that, in their struggle with the superstructures of morality and customs, determine human life. Bohr's model of the atom had shown matter to be largely emptiness, vacuum—and the rest electrical charge of infinitesimal mass. The universe, according to astrophysicists, began in an initial explosion that expanded outward, forming galaxies, clusters of galaxies, and island universes, all moving toward increasing entropy that will finally end in catastrophe… In that universe, we find a spiral galaxy of perhaps 100 billion stars, and out on the edge of that galaxy a small yellow star about 30,000 light-years from the center of the system. A mere eight light-minutes from that star revolves an absurd particle some 12,000 kilometers in diameter. And on that particle another war has broken out, embroiling even the most remote parts of the planet.

The various forms of fascism advanced. One of their representatives proclaimed: "Long live Death!" But this new war was not a religious conflict; it was a struggle between businessmen and mad ideologies. There were genocide and holocausts, hunger, sickness, and destruction on a scale never before witnessed on the face of the Earth. Human life was reduced to absurdity.

Some were led to ponder, "Why exist? What *is* existence?" The world had exploded. One's senses deceived one; reality was not what one saw with one's own eyes. Then a young physicist, Robert Oppenheimer, while studying Sanskrit so that he might understand the Vedas of Hinduism, became director of the Manhattan Project. In the early morning hours of July 16, 1945, he made history—a light brighter than the sun was detonated on the Earth. The nuclear age had begun, and World War II was brought to an end as other men brought destruction to Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

From then on, there was no longer any civilization or point on the globe that was not in contact with all the others—a communications network covered the Earth. And this involved more than just the objects of production transported by air, sea, or land; it also involved language signs, the human voice, and information that instantaneously reached all points on the

globe. While the Earth healed its wounds, Pakistan and India became independent and the war in Indochina began. Israel was declared a state, as was the People's Republic of China with Mao at its helm.

In 1951, the European socialist bloc created COMECON, while Western Europe created the Coal and Iron Community. There was war in Korea and that other conflict, the so-called Cold War between capitalism and socialism. In the United States, Senator McCarthy began his witch-hunt. There were arrests, firings, blacklisting, and even deaths among those like the Rosenbergs who were minor spies, or only suspected of espionage. Stalinism, for its part, carried out every possible kind of atrocity and repression. With Stalin's death, Khrushchev rose to power, and the world's eyes were opened to reality. Intellectuals of good will who had considered all the stories simply attempts by Western propaganda to discredit the U.S.S.R. were stunned. Then came the disorders in Poland and the return of Gomulka to power. In 1956, the Hungarian uprising took place, and the leadership of the U.S.S.R. had to choose between Russian national security on the one hand, and the International and their image on the other. The leaders chose security, and Soviet tanks rolled into Hungary, producing a shock to the Party worldwide.

Fresh winds began to blow. The new faith was in crisis. In Africa, liberation movements followed one after another. National borders shifted. The Arab world was convulsed, while in Latin America the injustices that had propped up tyrannical regimes worsened under the delayed influence of European fascism. Coups, countercoups, and the fall of dictators continued. The United States, now established as an empire, maintained a rear guard in Latin America. The enormous wealth of Brazil remained in the hands of a few, while the country grew and inequality became an increasingly pronounced social irritant. Brazil was a sleeping giant, but it was awakening. Its borders touched on almost every country of South America. Its religions, such as Umbanda and Candomble—born in Angola and other parts of Africa—spread to Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay.

The "Switzerland of the Americas," as Uruguay was once known, went bankrupt. Agrarian, cattle-raising Argentina became another country altogether, unleashing the most formidable mass movements ever seen in the Americas. A populist president and his charismatic wife proclaimed their doctrine with its "social mysticism." An earlier president, almost opposite in his positions, though equally populist, had been a Krausist and a believer in Spiritism. The year 1955 saw several Catholic churches burned in Argentina. How could this be happening here? This peaceful country, no longer the "breadbasket of the world," was struggling to throw off the remnants of British economic colonialism.

It is in the context of these conflicts that Ernesto "Che" Guevara emerged. Guevara was an important figure in the Cuban government following the successful 1959 Cuban Revolution that overthrew Batista, and he went on to fight for revolutions in other countries and on other continents. A Guevarist uprising failed in Sri Lanka, but his influence ignited youthful guerrilla movements in far-flung places of the world. He was both theorist and man of action. Using the ancient words of Saint Paul, he attempted to call forth the "new man" and almost poetically proclaimed: "From today onward, History will be forced to take into account the poor of the Americas." Little by little he moved away from his original ideas; today his image is frozen forever in the photograph printed around the world. He is dead, but someplace in Bolivia he remains the Christ of Las Higueras.

During this period the Catholic Church issued a number of pronouncements on social issues, and it organized the Christian-Social International, under different names depending on

the country. In Europe, the Christian Democrats come to power in several countries, and from that time on power was traded back and forth among the Social Democrats, the Christian Socialists, and the Liberal-Conservatives. Christian Socialism spread to Latin America. In Japan, the imperial religion of Shintoism received a critical blow, and through the small Soka-gakkai sect Buddhism moved in, mushrooming to six million believers within six years. From that base, the Komeito was launched, and it soon became the third-largest political party in Japan.

In 1957, the U.S.S.R. launched the first artificial satellite into orbit around the Earth. With this event, at least two things became clear to the general public: first, that interplanetary travel was possible; and second, with satellites as antennae and relays, the entire world could now be connected via television. From that time on, images were beamed to every point where a television receiver could be found. The electronic revolution erased all national borders. And that led to another problem: the manipulation of information and the use of ever more sophisticated propaganda. Now the System was able to enter any household—but information could enter as well.

With the nuclear tests on Bikini atoll, the world was introduced to the bathing suit that still bears that name. The Mao jacket was adopted as casual dress. The voluptuousness of Marilyn Monroe, Anita Ekberg, and Gina Lollobrigida gave way to a unisex look that tended to blur the differences between the sexes. The Beatles appeared as a new role model for youth. Young people everywhere began to cherish their blue jeans. Europe had suffered a substantial decrease in the percentage of men in its demographic pyramid, and following the war women became a more significant part of both labor and management. But this also happened in the U.S. and other places where not nearly so much blood had been shed. The influx of women into the labor force was a worldwide process, despite the stubborn resistance of those who discriminated against them. But this process was not always as rapid as in other fields, and once again the right to vote for women was defeated in Switzerland. In spite of everything, however, women now attended schools and universities that had once been closed to them, and they participated politically and protested against the Establishment.

Toward the end of the sixties, a youth revolution arose around the world—first students in Cairo, then in Nanterre and at the Sorbonne. The wave reached Rome and spread across all of Europe. In Mexico, security forces shot three hundred students, and the Paris student uprising of May 1968 stunned every political party. No one knew what was happening, not even the protagonists of the struggle—it was a psychosocial torrent. Young people cried, “We don’t know what we want, but we know what we don’t want!” What do we need? “Power to the Imagination!” Demonstrations by students and young workers erupted in country after country. Though protests at Berkeley focused on the war in Vietnam and those in Europe and Latin America on other causes, what was striking was the simultaneity of the phenomena. A new generation spoke, showing that the planet had indeed become unified.

On May 20, a strike in France spread to six million workers; the government organized counter-demonstrations, and De Gaulle’s administration tottered. In the United States, civil-rights leader and minister Martin Luther King was assassinated. The world of the young was filled with hippies, yippies, counterculture fashion, and music—lots of music.

Three paths—guerrilla action, drugs, and mysticism—were explored by different parts of this generation. Each of these paths is distinct from and normally at odds with the others, yet during this time it seemed they all had in common a mark of rebellion against the Establishment. The guerrillas formed groups like the Bader-Meinhoff gang, the Red Brigades, the Tupamaros, the

Montoneros, the Mir, and so on. Many followed the model of Che Guevara, killing others and causing their own deaths. Others took as their model the teachings of Aldous Huxley and the great psychedelics like Baudelaire. More than a few of these young people, too, ended up in suicide. Finally, the third group explored every possibility of inner change. Their models were figures such as Alan Watts, Saint Francis of Assisi, and Orientalism in general. Quite a number of these young people destroyed themselves as well. Of course, these factions were minuscule in comparison to the entire generation, but these things were symptomatic of the new times. The System reacted quickly: “All young people are suspect.” Everywhere the hunt was on, though with a methodology that was brutal or sophisticated depending on the means available in each place.

Cases such as those of the IRA, the Basque ETA, the Corsican movement, and the PLO do not precisely fit the generational pattern we have been describing. These represent a different phenomenon, even when at times they overlap with what we are describing.

In 1969, the United States put the first man on the moon. From the time that panic had been spread across the United States by the radio broadcast of Orson Welles’ *The War of the Worlds,* science fiction had grown increasingly popular—and not just Martians fighting Earthlings. In stories, films, and TV series, the protagonists became robots, computers, mutants, androids, and demigods. Let’s recall those times. You may remember that since 1945 there had been a growing number of reports from widely separated locations of strange objects in the skies. Sometimes these lights were very hard to explain. They began to be called “flying saucers” or generically UFOs—unidentified flying objects. Sightings would occur intermittently. Psychologists such as Jung became interested in this question. Physicists and astronomers gave skeptical explanations. Writers such as Cocteau went so far as to say that these were “beings from the future revisiting their past.” Centers were created in which observers, often coordinating with one another, watched the skies and tried to make contact with these purported beings from other worlds. Today these beliefs have gained considerable ground. Sightings have been reported with particular frequency in the Canary Islands, the south of France, the southern part of the U.S.S.R., the western United States, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. In 1986, the government of Brazil officially announced visual and radar contact with a UFO. For the first time, a government had confirmed a contact. It also noted that the Brazilian Air Force had pursued the phenomenon.

While, as we have noted, the Catholic Church had begun to recover ground through confessional political parties, Islam was not far behind. Monarchies and unstable regimes were toppled, and Islamic republics began to multiply. Thus, by the 1970s, the great religions had recovered considerable ground on the political and economic fronts. Yet there was great concern about faith. Everyone realized that it was not enough for the traditional religions simply to regain the ground that the forces of politics had occupied for a time, to become simply an intermediary between the individual and the State, between needs and their solutions. Astute Muslim observers realized that many things had now changed. The old tribal organization had weakened. In many Arab countries oil wealth had been poured into new industrial development, and large urban centers had begun to spring up. The family had grown smaller and no longer lived as the old extended family had lived. The landscape of the young was changing—an exodus toward Europe had begun as workers from the poorest countries left their homelands seeking new sources of employment. Muslim countries that had begun to enjoy the prosperity that oil made possible were also now experiencing the influence of Westernizing institutions, behavior, and fashions, particularly within the dominant strata of those societies. In this climate

of change, the Shah of Iran imposed Westernization. He did so despotically, backed by the best-equipped army in the Middle East. Unskilled agricultural labor was absorbed by the oil-producing centers. With the exodus from the countryside, the cities mushroomed. But in Iran everything was under control; there was only one other leader, and he was not really a politician. He remained in exile in France, while the various political parties, under the watchful eye of the Savak and manipulated by their foreign masters, jockeyed for position. Surely no one need worry about an old theologian from the University of Quom. Nothing to take seriously, assured Western and Soviet analysts.

Suddenly, the cyclone of ancient Iran—that creator of universal spiritual movements, that hotbed of heresies and religious ferment—began to blow once more. For a week the whole world watched in stunned amazement as a psychosocial chain reaction was unleashed—it was like a dream. Governments in Iran rapidly succeeded one another; there was a vacuum at the center of public administration. The army remained paralyzed and was thus defeated. It was only in the religious sphere that things functioned. In the mosques, the mullahs and ayatollahs followed the orders that came down from the mythical Imam. And what then ensued constitutes a sad and bloody chapter in history.

Khomeini declared: “Islamic government is a government by divine right, and its laws cannot be changed, modified, or debated. In this lies the radical difference between an Islamic government and monarchical or republican governments, in which representatives of the State, or those elected by the people, propose and vote on laws, whereas in Islam the only authority is the Almighty and His divine will.” Muammar al-Khaddafi said in October 1972 in Tripoli: “Islam is an immutable truth; it gives man a sense of security because it comes from God. Theories invented by men may be the result of madness, like the theory proclaimed by Malthus. Even the pragmatism dictated by men is not free of falling into falseness and error. Thus, it is completely wrong to govern human society in the name of temporal or constitutional laws.”

Of course, I have quoted these statements out of context. But what I have tried to do is to transmit an understanding of the Islamic religious phenomenon as one that subordinates all activity to itself—including, of course, politics. And this particular tendency, once apparently in retreat, now appears to be gaining strength. We know that Islam is growing in the United States, while today in France there are 200,000 converts, and this does not include those of Arab extraction. Naturally, I give these two cases only as examples, since Islam has also had to change considerably as it has moved toward the West. The dervish and Sufi forms are particular cases of this tendency.

In Christianity today we can observe a certain mobility between the large sects. Thus, in countries where Protestantism is in some sense the “official religion,” the Protestant sects tend to be concentrated near the centers of power while Catholicism gains ground on the periphery. And conversely, in so-called “Catholic countries,” as Catholicism abandons the periphery, Protestant denominations move in to occupy those areas. This rapid and perceptible change inspires not a little alarm in both sects, though naturally with a different interpretation depending on which sect is dominant. In this struggle, groups of both persuasions sometimes resort to questionable tactics. But one can hardly blame Protestantism in general if a madman named Manson walks around with a cross and a Bible killing people, or if Protestants from the People’s Temple, in a parody of Masada, end up in a massive act of collective murder-suicide in Guyana. Those are phenomena, in my view, that correspond to the present state of psychosocial dislocation, and are important inasmuch as they are symptomatic of a society on the verge of even more serious phenomena.

In my view, there is a possibility that Catholicism can regain a part of its lost influence in Latin America and, as a rebound, in Africa as well. That possibility may play out in the destiny of the so-called “Liberation Theology.” At present, Nicaragua stands as the best example of this compatibility between Christianity and social gospels.

The first interview ever to take place between Fidel Castro and a Catholic priest, Frei Betto, occurred in Havana on May 23, 1985. At 9:00 p.m. the priest made the following statement:

> Comandante, I am sure this is the first time that a head of state of a socialist country has given an exclusive interview on the subject of religion. The only precedent in this regard is the document that was issued by the National Headquarters of the Sandinista Liberation Front in 1980 on religion. That was the first time that a revolutionary party in power had issued a statement on that subject. Since then, there has not been a more informed, more probing word, even from the historical viewpoint, on the subject. And considering the current moment, when the problem of religion plays a fundamental ideological role in Latin America; considering the existence of numerous grassroots ecclesiastical communities (indigenous communities in Guatemala, campesinos in Nicaragua, workers in Brazil and many other countries); considering, too, the imperialist offensive that since the Declaration of Santa Fe has attempted to combat directly this more theoretical expression of the Church committed to the poor and known as Liberation Theology, I think that this interview and its contribution to this subject are very important.…

In turn, Armando Hart, the Cuban Minister of Culture, in his note to the book *Fidel and Religion,* says of the Christian-Marxist dialogue:

> And this is, in and of itself, a supremely important event in the history of human thought. The ethical and moral note appears in these lines charged with every human meaning that binds together those engaged in the struggle for freedom and in defense of the humble and the exploited. How can this miracle be happening? Social theorists, philosophers, theologians, and an enormous intellectual class in various countries will have to ask themselves this question.

For our part, we do not ask ourselves this question. It seems very clear to us that religiosity is advancing—here in Latin America, in the United States, in Japan, in the Arab world, and in the socialist camp: Cuba, Afghanistan, Poland, the U.S.S.R. Our question regarding this matter lies, rather, in the issue of whether the official, established religions will be able to adapt this psychosocial phenomenon to the new urban landscape, or whether they will be overwhelmed by it. It may happen that a diffuse religiosity will continue to grow in small, chaotic groups, without constituting a formal church, and if this is the case it will not be easy to grasp the real magnitude of this phenomenon.

Although the comparison is not entirely legitimate, a distant antecedent comes to mind: As Imperial Rome began to lose faith in her official religion, all manner of cults and superstitions began to arrive from every corner of the empire. And one of those insignificant groups eventually became a universal church.

Today it is clear that if it is to advance, this diffuse religiosity must somehow combine the landscape and the language of our times—a language of computer programming, technology, and space travel—with a new social Gospel.

Thank you very much.

II. Book Presentations

Guided Experiences

(*Experiencias Guiadas*)

El Ateneo, Madrid, Spain, November 3, 1989

On May 2, 1916, here in Madrid in El Ateneo (the Atheneum), Ortega introduced Bergson. On that occasion, Ortega explained that this society, El Ateneo, was an institution dedicated to the cultivation of and reverence for ideas. With that mission in mind, I would like to speak here tonight in this same hall, not about literature, as one would think is called for by the nature of the book we are presenting, not about the tales or stories of which this volume is composed, but rather about the ideas out of which these stories have arisen.

Of course, I'm not saying that when one speaks about a literary subject ideas are absent, but simply that typically the focus is on the aesthetic aspects of the work, though sometimes one will examine the content of the work while looking at its formal aspects. Often, the author may relate his or her life experiences, allowing us access to his or her biography, sensibilities, and perception of the world. What reason is there, then, for my speaking tonight about ideas? Simply because this book is the practical application of a theory of consciousness in which the *image,* as phenomenon of representation, has special importance. It is true that I will have to say a number of things first, especially for those of you who have not held in your hands the book that we will discuss tonight. In any case, these preliminaries need not impede the communicating of that structure of ideas, that theory which I mentioned.

Let's look first at the history of this work. Originally written in 1980, this book was revised in 1988, and just a few days ago it was published and made available for your consideration. At this point, I would like to read the introductory note by J. Valinsky, which says the following:

> The work consists of two parts. The first, "Tales," is a collection of thirteen stories that comprise the more dense and complex part of the work. The second part, "Playing with Images," includes nine descriptions that are simpler than those of the first part.
>
> This material may be viewed in various ways. From a superficial point of view, it may be seen as a series of short stories with happy endings, simple literary divertimenti. Another focus, however, reveals this work as a series of psychological practices based on literary forms. While all the stories are written in the first person, it should be noted that this "first person" is not the one habitually found in other writings. Rather than that of the author, the first person in this work is that of the reader—each story provides a different setting that serves as a frame for the reader to fill with his or her own life and concerns.
>
> As an aid, asterisks (*) appear at intervals throughout the text to mark pauses at key points that can help the reader—or listener—introduce, mentally, the images that transform a passive reader into an actor in and coauthor of each description. This original form also allows one person to read aloud (observing the aforementioned pauses), while each listener imagines his or her own literary "knot." This approach—the hallmark of these writings—would in more conventional stories destroy all plot sequence.

It should be noted that in every literary piece, the reader—or spectator in the case of plays, films, or television programs—can identify more or less fully with the characters, while recognizing, either at the time or later on, differences between the actor playing the role in the piece and the observer, who is "outside" the production and is none other than the spectator him or herself. However, in these writings quite the opposite occurs: The main character is at once the observer, agent, and recipient of the actions and emotions.

In any case, whether or not we find these "guided experiences" to our liking, we will at least recognize that we are in the presence of a new and innovative literary initiative, which is not something that happens every day.

That is the end of the note.

As we have seen, then, the book is composed of brief stories in which asterisks appear at critical points, indicating a pause in reading—or listening—and allowing one to insert at those points whatever images one deems most appropriate. In this way, the development of the story continues but is rendered more dynamic by the reader's introduction of these new elements. Let's look at the specific case of the first of these tales, titled "The Child":

It is night, and I find myself in an amusement park. Everywhere I see mechanical rides, filled with light and movement, but I do not see any people.

Then I discover a child about ten years old, who is facing away from me. As I move closer, the youngster turns to look at me, and I realize it is myself when I was that age. (*)

Asterisk! That is to say, here we find an interruption, where, following the suggestions in the text, I am to insert myself, as an image, into the story. The story continues this way:

"What are you doing here?" I ask. The child tells me something about an injustice that has happened, and then begins to cry. To console the child, I promise that we'll go on some rides, but the youngster insists on talking about the injustice. In order to understand the child better, I try to recall what happened to me at that age that was so unfair. (*)

Asterisk! From what I've said so far, I'm sure you can understand the mechanics of reading the guided experiences that make up the stories in this book. In addition, you will see that there is a common pattern in how all the guided experiences are constructed. First, there is an *entrance* to the theme and general setting of the scene; second, there is, in a manner of speaking, an *increase in "dramatic tension;"* third, we find the *representation of a life problem;* fourth, there is the denouement, an untying of the central knot or *resolution* of the problem; fifth, there is a *reduction in overall tension;* and sixth, there is a not-too-abrupt *exit* from the experience, generally retracing the previous steps of the story.

Let me say a little more about the way the situation presented in each story is framed, that is, the context in which each experience occurs. In order to place readers in a situation in which they can more easily make contact with themselves, it is necessary to distort the structure of time and space in the story, and this is done following the lessons we learn from our own dreams. We need to help the reader free the dynamics of his or her images, avoiding the rationalizations that can prevent the story from flowing easily. If, at the same time, there is a destabilizing of the reader's corporal register, the sense of position of the reader's body in

space, this will help the reader question anew these moments in his or her life, including future moments in the sense of actions that might yet be carried out. Let's look, then, at an example that illustrates this distortion and destabilization from the experience titled "The Rescue":

> I am in a car that is speeding down a large highway. In the strange half-light I'm unsure whether it is dawn or dusk. The driver beside me is someone I've never seen before. In the back seat are two women and a man, who are also strangers to me. The car races onward, surrounded by other cars that are driving recklessly, as if their drivers are drunk or crazy.
>
> I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, *"Rex voluntas!"*
>
> Turning on the radio, which blares noisy static, I can faintly hear a weak metallic voice monotonously repeating, *"Rex voluntas, rex voluntas, rex voluntas."*
>
> The traffic slows, and by the roadside I see wrecked and overturned cars with fire spreading among them. We stop, and abandoning the car, join a sea of terrified people rushing toward the fields.
>
> Looking back through the smoke and flames, I see many hapless souls who are trapped and doomed, but I'm forced to keep running by the human stampede that pushes me along. Some of the people stumble to the ground, and amid this delirium I struggle in vain to reach a woman trying to shield her child as the mob tramples over them.
>
> The chaos and violence are spreading everywhere, so I make up my mind to move in a slightly diagonal direction that will let me escape the crowd; I aim toward some higher ground that diverts this mindless stampede. Many of the fallen clutch at my clothes, tearing them to shreds, but I notice that the crush of people around me is growing less.
>
> One man does break free of the mob and comes running toward me. His clothes are in tatters and his body is covered with wounds, yet I feel a great joy that he's been saved. On reaching me he clutches my arm, and yelling like a madman points frantically down the hill. He's speaking a language I do not understand, but I think he wants me to help rescue someone. I tell him to wait for a while—that right now it's impossible. I know he cannot understand me, and his desperation is tearing me apart. Then he tries to go back down, but just as he's leaving I trip him and he falls headlong. He lies sprawled on the ground, sobbing bitterly. For my part I realize that I've saved both his life and his conscience—his conscience because he did try to rescue someone, and his life by preventing his doomed attempt.
>
> Climbing higher, I reach a freshly plowed field. The earth is loose and furrowed. In the distance I hear gunfire, and think I know what is happening—hurriedly I leave. After a while, everything is silent and I stop once more. Looking back toward the city, I see a sinister glow.
>
> I feel the ground begin to shake beneath my feet, and a rumbling from the depths warns me of an imminent earthquake. Within moments I've lost my balance and find myself lying on the ground. Curled on my side and gazing up at the sky, I'm overcome by waves of dizziness.
>
> The earthquake passes, and I look up to see an enormous, blood-red moon.

The heat is unbearable and the air is filled with an acrid odor. Meanwhile, I'm still uncertain whether the day is just beginning or night is falling.

Sitting down, I hear a growing roar. Soon hundreds of aircraft fill the sky, passing overhead like deadly insects and disappearing toward some unknown destiny.

Nearby I come upon a large dog that is staring up at the moon. It begins to howl, almost like a wolf. I call out to it, and the animal approaches me timidly. When it reaches my side, I gently pet its bristling fur and see shivers running down its body.

The dog pulls away from me and begins to leave. I get to my feet and follow it, and we cross a rocky area until we reach a small stream. The thirsty animal rushes forward and eagerly begins to drink, but all at once draws back and falls over. Approaching the dog I touch it, and realize that it's dead.

I feel a new earthquake, which threatens to knock me over, but it subsides.

Turning around, I behold far off in the sky four enormous clouds advancing toward me with the muffled rumbling of thunder. The first cloud is white, the second is red, the third is black, and the fourth is yellow. And these clouds are like four armed horsemen riding on the storm, traveling across the heavens and laying waste to all life upon the earth.

I begin running to escape the approaching clouds, for I realize that if their rain touches me I'll be contaminated. As I run toward the highway, suddenly my path is blocked by a gigantic figure—towering over me I see a huge robot swinging a sword of fire in a menacing arc. I shout that I must keep going because the radioactive clouds are approaching, but the robot replies that it has been stationed here to prevent destructive people from entering; adding that it's armed with lasers, it warns me not to come any closer. I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I'm coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life.

So I shout to the robot, "You must let me pass because I've done a good deed!"

"What is a good deed?" the robot asks.

"A constructive action, something that builds and contributes to life," I answer.

"Then tell me what you've done that's so good," the robot demands.

"I've saved a human being from certain death, and what's more, I've saved his conscience as well."

At once the giant robot stands aside, and I leap into the protected area just as the first drops of poisoned rain begin to fall.

Here I'll stop reading from this story, but there is also an endnote about this story that contains the following comments:

> The eeriness of the plot is achieved through the ambiguity of time ("In the strange half-light I'm unsure whether it is dawn or dusk"); the contrast of place ("I see that the robot stands on the dividing line between two distinct areas—the one I'm coming from, barren and dying, and the one ahead, filled with vegetation and life"); the inability to communicate with other people and the Babel-like confusion of tongues ("I ask my companion what is happening. Looking at me furtively, he answers in a strange language, *'Rex voluntas!'"*); and finally by leaving the protagonist at the mercy of uncontrollable forces—heat, earthquakes, strange astronomical phenomena, polluted water, a climate of war, an armed giant robot, and so on.

Time and again the protagonist's body is destabilized—it is pushed and shoved, it must walk across the soft, uneven ground of the freshly plowed field, it is knocked to the ground by an earthquake.

The aforementioned pattern in the framing of the situation is repeated in a number of guided experiences, each time with different images and each time stressing the particular problem or "knot" that is the focus of that story. For example, in the experience titled "My Greatest Mistake," everything revolves around a kind of misunderstanding, which is treated by presenting a confusion of perspectives. In turn, since this story involves an event in our past that we wish could be changed, that we wish had happened in a different way, temporal and spatial modifications are introduced to modify our perception of the phenomena, and these changes eventually transform the point of view from which we see our past. Thus, while it is not possible to modify the actions that occurred, it *is* possible to change the point of view from which we see them, and this allows the way that we structure or integrate those contents, those memories, to change for the better in significant ways. Let's look at part of that story:

> I am standing before some sort of court. Every seat in the silent courtroom is filled, and I'm surrounded by a sea of stern faces. The court clerk adjusts his glasses and picks up a long document. Breaking the tremendous tension that fills the room, he solemnly pronounces, "It is the sentence of this court that the accused shall be put to death."
>
> Immediately there is an uproar—some people applaud while others boo, and I see a woman faint. Finally an official manages to restore order in the courtroom.
>
> Staring at me darkly, the clerk demands, "Does the accused have anything to say?" When I say that I do, everyone sits down. I ask for a glass of water, and after a brief commotion they bring me one. Raising the glass, I take a sip, and finishing with a loud and prolonged gargle, I exclaim, "That's it!"
>
> Someone from the jury harshly demands, "What do you mean, 'That's it'?"
>
> "That's it," I repeat. But to satisfy the juror, I say that the water here does taste excellent, much better than I expected, and continue with two or three other pleasantries of this sort.
>
> The court clerk finishes reading the document with these words: "Accordingly, the sentence shall be carried out today: You will be abandoned in the desert without food or water—above all, without water. I have spoken!"
>
> "What do you mean you have spoken?" I demand. Arching his eyebrows, the clerk only reaffirms, "What I have spoken, I have spoken!"
>
> Soon I find myself riding in a fire truck through the middle of the desert, escorted by two firemen. We stop, and one of them says, "Get out!" As soon as I step down from the truck, the vehicle turns around and heads back the way it came. I watch it grow smaller and smaller as it moves off across the dunes.

Other events transpire in the story and finally the following occurs:

> Now the storm has passed and the sun has set. In the twilight I see before me a whitish dome several stories high. Although I think it must be a mirage, I get to my feet and make my way toward it. As I draw closer, I see that the structure is made of a smooth material, a shiny plastic perhaps inflated with air.
>
> A man dressed in Bedouin garb greets me, and we enter the dome through a carpeted passageway. A door slides open, and I feel a refreshing rush of cool air. Once

inside, I notice that everything is upside down—the ceiling is like a smooth floor from which things are suspended. I see round tables above us with their legs pointing up toward the ceiling. I see water falling downward in streams that curve and return upward and high overhead there are human forms seated upside down.

Noticing my astonishment, the Bedouin hands me a pair of glasses saying, “Try these on!” When I put on the glasses, everything is restored to its normal appearance—in front of me I see a large fountain shooting streams of water high into the air. The tables and all the other things are right side up, and everything is exquisitely coordinated in color and form.

I see the court clerk coming toward me, crawling on all fours. He says he feels terribly dizzy, so I explain to him that he’s seeing reality upside down and needs to remove his glasses. Taking them off, he stands up and says with a sigh, “Indeed, now everything is fine—except that I’m so nearsighted.” He goes on to say he has been searching for me in order to explain that there has been a most deplorable mistake, and I’m not the person who should have been put on trial at all. Immediately he leaves through a side door.

Walking a few steps, I find myself with a group of people seated in a circle on cushions. They are elders of both sexes, with varied racial features and attire. All of them have beautiful faces. Each time one of them begins to speak, I hear the sound of faraway gears, of gigantic machinery, of immense clocks. I hear intermittent thunder, the cracking of rocks, icebergs splitting off, the rhythmic roaring of volcanoes, the light impact of a gentle rain, the muffled beating of hearts—motor, muscle, life—and everything in perfect harmony, a majestic symphony of sounds.

The Bedouin hands me a pair of headphones, saying, “Try these on, they translate.” Putting them on, I clearly hear a human voice. I realize it is the same symphony of one of the elders, now translated for my clumsy ear. This time as he opens his mouth I hear, “We are the hours, we are the minutes, we are the seconds. We are the various forms of time. Because a mistake was made with you, we will give you the opportunity to begin your life anew. But from what point do you wish to start again? Perhaps from your birth, or perhaps from just before your first failure. Reflect on this.” (*)

Asterisk! And so on.

Here I should add some further comments with respect to the type of images that are used, because while one may have the impression that all the descriptions involve a strong visual component, it happens that many people tend to favor a form of representation that instead is basically auditory, or kinesthetic, or coenesthetic, or perhaps a mixture. In this regard I would like to read a few paragraphs from a more recent work, an essay titled “Psychology of the Image” from the book *Contributions to Thought*. It reads as follows:

Psychologists through the ages have made extensive lists dealing with perceptions and sensations, and today, with the discovery of new neuroreceptors, they have begun to talk about thermoceptors and baroceptors, as well as internal detectors of acidity, alkalinity, and so forth.

To the sensations corresponding to the external senses we will add those that correspond to diffuse senses such as the kinesthetic (movement and corporal posture) and coenesthetic (register of temperature, pain, and so on—that is, the register of the

> intrabody in general) which, even when explained in terms of an internal tactile sense, cannot be reduced to that.

For our purposes today this quotation is sufficient, even though we do not pretend with it to exhaust all possible registers that correspond to the internal senses and the multiple combinations of perception between and among them. What we need to do now is to establish parallels between the representations and perceptions that are generically classified as "internal" and those termed "external." It is unfortunate that discussions of *representation* have so often been limited to visual images and that spatiality is almost always taken to refer to the visual, when in fact auditory perceptions and representations also denote sources of stimuli that may be localized in some "place." The same thing also happens with regard to perceptions and representations of touch, smell, and taste, as well as those related to the position of the body (kinesthesia) and the phenomena of the intrabody (coenesthesia). Since 1943, laboratory observations have shown that some individuals have a propensity for non-visual images. This led W. Grey Walter in 1967 to develop his classification of distinct types of imaginative contents. Irrespective of the accuracy of that formulation, the idea began to be taken seriously among psychologists that the recognition of one's body in space or the memory of an object could often be based on something besides visual images. Indeed, psychologists began to take seriously the case of perfectly normal subjects who described a sort of "blindness" with respect to visual representation. No longer was it possible after these studies to consider visual images as the nucleus of the system of representation, casting other forms of imaging into the dustbin of "eidetic disintegration," or indeed into the field of literature, where it is only idiots and the mentally retarded who say things like this character in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury:*

> I squatted there, holding the slipper. I couldn't see it, but my hands saw it, and I could hear it getting night, and my hands saw the slipper but I couldn't see myself, but my hands could see the slipper, and I squatted there, hearing it getting dark.

To return, then, to our comments on *Guided Experiences,* I think we can agree that even when the guided experiences in this book are presented in a way that is predominantly visual, anyone can adapt them to his or her own system of representation. Furthermore, some of the guided experiences are clearly based on other types of images. This is the case, for example, in "The Creature," as you can see from this brief passage:

> It is night, and I find myself in total darkness. Somewhere nearby is the edge of a cliff. Groping ahead with my foot, I can feel uneven ground that is covered with vegetation and rocks. I also sense the presence of the creature that has always provoked in me a special feeling of terror and disgust. There may be one of them, or there may be many—but I'm certain that something is relentlessly drawing near.
>
> A ringing in my ears, at times mingling with a faraway wind, contrasts with the utter silence. My wide-open eyes cannot see a thing. My heart is pounding, my breathing is shallow, and my dry mouth has a bitter taste.
>
> Something is approaching—what is creeping up behind me, making my scalp bristle and sending cold chills up my spine?
>
> My knees feel weak, and if something grabs me or jumps on me from behind I'll be completely defenseless. I'm paralyzed—all I can do is wait.

Let's also look at another case, one that involves not only different types of images but also the translation of one system of representation into another. This is part of the guided experience called "The Festival":

> Lying in a bed, I gradually become aware that I'm in a hospital room. Faintly I hear the dripping of a faucet. I try to move my arms and legs and then my head, but they don't respond. It's an effort just to keep my eyes open.
>
> The ceiling is smooth and white. As each drop of water drips from the faucet, a ray of light flashes across the ceiling. One drop, one ray. Then another. Then many rays, and after this I see waves of light. The ceiling keeps on changing with the rhythm of my heart, perhaps an effect of the arteries in my head as blood pulses through them.
>
> Now the rhythm outlines the face of a young person.

Later on in this same experience we move beyond visual perception, which becomes included in a more complex system of representation and is translated into other perceptions and therefore other representations:

> I fix my attention on a flower, connected to its stem by a slender stalk that, within transparent skin, gleams a deep green. I reach out my hand, lightly running my finger along the polished fresh stem, barely disturbed by tiny knobs. Moving up through emerald leaves, I come to the petals, which open in a multicolored explosion. Petals like stained glass in a solemn cathedral, petals like rubies, petals like embers awakening into flame—and in this dance of hues, I feel the flower lives as if a part of me. (*)
>
> The flower, disturbed by my touch, releases a sleepy drop of dew, barely clinging to the tip of a leaf. As it falls the drop vibrates, forming an oval as it lengthens. And now in the emptiness it flattens out, only to become round again, falling in endless time—falling, falling, through endless space. Finally landing on a mushroom's cap, the drop rolls like heavy mercury, sliding to the edge. There, in a spasm of freedom, it hurls itself into a tiny pool, raising a tempest of waves that bathe an island of marble. (*)
>
> Ahead the festival continues, and I know that this music connects me with that young woman gazing at her clothes, and that young man leaning against a tree and petting a blue cat.
>
> I know that I have lived all this before, and I have known the tree's jagged outline, and the sharply defined volume of each thing.
>
> In the velvet butterflies that flutter around me, I recognize the warmth of lips and the fragility of sweet dreams.

And so on.

In these experiences, images are not only located in front of the protagonist or in the surroundings, but may also be inside the subject. We should note here that there are dreams in which the dreamer sees him or herself in the scene among other objects—that is, with a look that is "external." But it also happens that the dreamer will sometimes see the scene from his or her own point of view, almost the way it would be seen when awake, in vigil. In these cases, the dreamer's look has moved inside, is more internalized. In our representations right now—in everyday representation—we see things that are located outside us precisely as *external* to us; that is, we look out from "behind" a tactile, coenesthetic boundary given by the register of our eyes and face and head. Thus, when I close my eyes and represent what I have previously

seen, I experience these things as “outside,” even though I am looking at them *not* outside, in perception, but rather *inside* myself, within my space of representation. In any case, my *look* is separate from the object, and I see the object as though it were outside myself, even though I am in fact representing it “inside my head,” so to speak.

In the example from “The Child” that we considered earlier, I see myself when I was little. In reality, I see the child from the register—the internal sensation—that I have of myself today, in which I recognize myself. That is, I see the child as outside myself, but from my present *inner look*. The child (which is me many years ago) speaks to me now of an injustice that took place long ago. In order to know what the child is talking about, I make an effort to remember (the I of today tries, not the child) what happened to me when I was that child (that which-I-once-was). As I do so, my *look* moves deeper “inside” me to my own recollections, and the child I see is outside the direction of my recollection. So when I encounter myself in a scene from my childhood, how do I recognize myself as truly myself? It must surely be through a *look* that is external to me, but internal with reference to what is external, in this case the child in the amusement park.

This raises a number of interesting questions, but we can simplify the subject if we remember that we differentiate “outside” and “inside” simply by virtue of the difference given by the tactile-coenesthetic boundary of eyes, face, and head, and this is what makes it possible to speak of some representations as “outside” and others as “inside.” Now that this is clear, let’s consider some examples of differences in the location of *looks* and *scenes.* In the experience titled “The Chimney Sweep” we find the following:

> After a while the Chimney Sweep rises and picks up a very long, slightly curved pair of forceps. Standing in front of me he says, “Open your mouth!” When I do, I feel him insert the long instrument into my mouth, and it seems to reach all the way down into my stomach. To my surprise, however, I find that it’s not too uncomfortable.
>
> Suddenly he shouts, “I’ve caught it!” and little by little he begins pulling out the forceps. At first it feels like something is tearing apart inside of me. But then I feel a pleasant tingling sensation, as if something malignant is being pulled loose from my lungs and internal organs, something that has been stuck there for a long, long time. (*)

Here it is clear that we are working with coenesthetic registers, images from the intrabody. But when these are imagined as “outside” (as with what is perceived as “outside” in daily life), they produce effects in the intrabody. The modification of the scene and one’s *look* follow the mechanics that we observed in the story of the child, except that in this case what we imagine as “outside” is not like the “child” that we considered visually. Rather, it’s a sort of coenesthetic register that’s placed “outside,” not in the sense that I feel something in my interior and now that feeling is outside my body, but rather that now what I feel in my intrabody is external to my *look* (i.e., outside of a new coenesthetic register that is even deeper, even more internal). Without this mechanism for introducing change in the position and point of view of both one’s *look* and the scene being viewed, many phenomena of daily life would not be possible. How could an external object produce repugnance in me simply through my looking at it? How could I “feel” horror when another person is cut? How could I feel solidarity with another’s pain, or with his or her suffering or pleasure?

Let’s examine a few paragraphs from the experience titled “My Ideal”:

I am walking through a fairground filled with exhibition halls and displays, and I see many children playing on high-tech mechanical rides.

I come upon a giant figure made of some solid material. It stands upright, and its large head is painted in bright colors. There is a ladder extending up to its mouth, which the little ones climb to reach the enormous opening. Whenever one enters, the mouth gently closes, and soon the child pops out the back of the giant, coming down a slide and landing in the sand below. One by one the children go in and come out, as a song flows from the giant:

See Gargantua gobble up the children,
With great care, not harming a hair,
Tra la la, tra la la,
With great care, not harming a hair!

I decide to climb up the short ladder. As I enter the huge mouth, I meet an attendant who tells me, “Children go down the slide, but grownups use the elevator.”

The attendant continues the explanation as our elevator descends through a transparent tube. Soon I say that I think we’re probably at ground level by now.

“That’s right,” replies the attendant, “although we’re still only passing through the esophagus. The rest of the giant’s body is below ground, unlike the children’s giant, which is completely on the surface. You see,” my guide informs me, “there are actually two Gargantuas in one—one for children, and another one for grownups. We’ve already passed the diaphragm, and soon we’ll stop at a very pleasant place—look, the elevator door is opening and I can show you the stomach. Would you like to get out here? As you can see, this modern restaurant serves delicious food from all over the world.”

The proposal of “external” images acting upon internal representations is clearly visible in the experience titled “The Miner.” Here is how this story goes:

Suddenly I yell at the top of my lungs as the floor gives way beneath me, dragging me down in its collapse.

I plunge downward until a sharp jerk on the rope at my waist abruptly breaks my fall; I’m left dangling absurdly at the end of the rope like some muddy pendulum.

My fall has been stopped just above a carpeted floor, and I see before me an elegant room flooded with light. I glimpse some sort of laboratory filled with enormous bookshelves, but my predicament is so pressing that I’m completely absorbed in trying to free myself.

With my left hand I grasp the taut rope above; with my right hand I release the buckle fastening the rope around my waist, and tumble softly onto the carpet.

“What manners, my friend, what manners!” says a high-pitched voice behind me. I spin around and stop short.

Standing before me is a little man, scarcely taller than my knee. Except for his slightly pointed ears, he could be described as very well-proportioned. He is dressed in bright colors, yet in the unmistakable style of a miner.

I feel at once ridiculous and dismayed when he offers me a glass of punch. It’s quite refreshing, however, so I drink it straight down.

Now the little man cups his hands before his mouth and makes the plaintive cry I recognize so well. On hearing it I’m outraged, and demand to know just what he means

by tricking me this way. To my bewilderment, he replies that thanks to this experience, in the future my digestion will be much improved.

This extraordinary little character goes on to explain to me how the rope squeezing my waist and stomach during my fall has done me a world of good, as did the journey I made through the tunnel crawling on my elbows. He concludes his strange remarks by asking me whether the expression “You are in the bowels of the earth” means anything to me.

I answer that this is just a figure of speech, but the little man assures me that in this case it holds a great truth. Then he adds, “You are in your own bowels. When something goes wrong in their viscera, people can think all kinds of crazy thoughts. In turn, these negative thoughts can harm their internal organs. So from now on you must take good care of yourself in this regard. If you don’t, I’ll begin walking around, and you’ll feel sharp pains and all kinds of internal discomfort. And I have colleagues who are in charge of other parts of your body like your lungs, your heart, and so on.”

Having said this, the little man begins walking around on the walls and ceiling. As he does so, I feel twinges of discomfort near my stomach, liver, and kidneys. (*)

Afterwards the little man sprays me from head to toe with a stream of water from a golden hose, thoroughly cleansing me of all the mud, and in an instant I’m dry. I stretch out on a spacious sofa and begin to relax. Rhythmically the little man passes a soft brush over my waist and abdomen, producing a remarkable sensation of relaxation in these areas. I realize that when discomfort is relieved in my stomach, liver, and kidneys, my ideas and feelings change for the better. (*)

I feel a strong vibration and find myself back in the elevator, rising toward the surface of the earth.

In this guided experience, the little man proves to be a true expert in the theory of the coenesthetic image, though naturally he doesn’t tell us how it’s possible for an image to be connected with the intrabody and to act upon it.

Earlier we saw, with some difficulty, that the perception of external objects serves as a basis for the elaboration of images, and that this allows us to re-present what has earlier been presented to the senses. We saw that in this re-presentation, there occur modifications, changes in the location and point of view of the observer’s *look* with regard to a given scene, and we asked ourselves about the connection between the *perception* of an object or scene that we find disgusting or repulsive and our *internal reactions* to this perception. That is, we are talking about sensations in the intrabody, which then serve as the basis for new representations that are also “internal.”

So here we are, filled with questions that have not been fully answered, and I fear that with so little time remaining it is here that we will have to end this talk. But first I would like to add one or two thoughts.

Insofar as we continue to consider the mental image to be only a simple copy of perception; insofar as we continue to believe that consciousness in general maintains a passive attitude before the world (acting only as some sort of reflection of it), we will neither be able to answer the foregoing questions nor others that are truly fundamental.

For us, the *image* is an active form, placing the consciousness (as structure) in-the-world. The image can act on the body and the body-in-the-world because of *intentionality,* which is directed outside itself and does not simply correspond to a *for-itself* or some “natural,” reflected,

and mechanical *in-itself.* The image acts within a temporo-spatial structure and within an internal “spatiality” that has thus been termed the “space of representation.” The various and complex functions that the image carries out depend in general on the position it occupies within that spatiality. A fuller justification of what I am explaining here would, of course, require an understanding of the associated theory of consciousness, and for that I refer you to the essay “Psychology of the Image” in the book *Contributions to Thought*.

If, however, through these “literary divertimenti” as they have been called in the introductory note, I have been able to help you see the application in practice of a broad conception, then I have not failed to do what I promised at the outset of my presentation when I said that I was going to talk about these *Guided Experiences,* not from a literary point of view but from the standpoint of the ideas that have given rise to this literary expression.

Thank you very much.

Humanize the Earth

(*Humanizar la Tierra*)

Scandinavia Center, Reykjavik, Iceland, November 13, 1989

Humanize the Earth is in fact a collection of three works. The first of these, *The Inner Look,* was completed in 1972 and revised in 1988. The second, *The Internal Landscape,* was completed in 1981 and revised in 1988. And the last, *The Human Landscape,* was written in 1988. These are, then, three productions from different periods that are related to one another in a number of ways, as we will soon see. But they are also conceived sequentially—they build upon one another. For the moment, I ask you to accompany me in considering the formal aspects of the book.

These three works are written in poetic prose, and divided into chapters, which in turn are made up of paragraphs, often numbered. This division into paragraphs, combined with the direct address so often apparent in them, along with some of the subject matter they deal with, has led some critics to situate this work within the genre of mystical literature. While this classification does not offend me in any way, I do not think that the elements that have been cited are sufficient to justify it.

The first criterion used by these critics—segmentation into numbered paragraphs—is indeed common to many works of mystical literature. We see this in the numbered verses of the Bible, in the suras of the Qur'an, in the Yasnas and Fargards of the Avesta, as well as the divisions of the Upanishads. But we should also note that there are many other works of mystical literature that do *not* conform to this type of textual organization, while there are texts from many other fields—those of a legal nature, for example—that do. Indeed, civil and penal codes, along with procedures and regulations of many kinds, not to mention other documents of that general nature, are typically organized in numbered sections, subsections, articles, paragraphs, clauses, and so forth. Much the same thing is seen today in works in the fields of logic and mathematics. If one examines Russell's *Principia* or Wittgenstein's *Tractatus,* for example, one will surely agree that they are not exactly *mystical* works.

Let's take the second criterion, then: direct address, that is, discourse formalized into imperative statements (as opposed to declarative ones) that cannot be subjected to the test of truth. While this form often occurs in works of religious literature, it is also found in works that are not religious in nature. Moreover, in the work at hand, the sentences or phrases are not simply imperative but are also often discursive, giving readers an opportunity to examine their own experience and thus test the validity of what is being said. What I mean to say is that if this work is being classified, elliptically, as "mystical," when in fact what is meant is that it is "dogmatic," then the criteria given for classifying it in this way do not seem to be sufficient.

The third criterion, the subjects addressed in the book, would seem to establish connections with religion. And, in fact, such subjects as faith, meditation, meaning in life, and so on, have often been addressed by religions, but of course also by thinkers and poets concerned with the fundamental questions of human beings as they find themselves facing problems in everyday existence.

It has also been said that this work is "philosophical" in character, but anyone who takes a moment to leaf through its pages will see that it bears no resemblance to a text of that kind, much less to a treatise organized with systematic rigor. ("The Human Landscape," the third work of this collection, is the one that might most strongly incline some to that error of classification.)

Others have seen the book as a sociological or psychological text. But in reality, all of that has been very far from my intention in writing these works. What is certainly true is that throughout the collection there are indeed statements, opinions, and expressions that fall within the scope of all those disciplines. And how could it be otherwise, when one is attempting to address the broad range of situations within which human life unfolds? So then, to say that some subjects are treated from a psychological, sociological, philosophical, or mystical perspective would be entirely appropriate, and I would certainly accept that statement. But to classify the work as belonging exclusively to any one of those forms seems to me incorrect.

The truth is, I would be pleased if people would simply say that this is a work written without concern for narrow categories and that it deals with the broadest and most general themes that people encounter throughout the course of their lives. And if someone were to insist that I further categorize or define it, I would simply say it is a meditation on human life written in poetic prose.

Having come to the end of this brief discussion of formal issues, let's proceed to the heart of the matter.

The first work, titled "The Inner Look," deals with *meaning in life.* The principal theme addressed is the state of *contradiction*, and the work shows clearly that the register one has of contradiction in life is *suffering,* and that overcoming mental suffering is possible in the measure that one orients one's life toward non-contradictory actions. Non-contradictory actions are those that go beyond the personal and are constructively directed toward other people. In summary: *The Inner Look* speaks of overcoming mental suffering by launching oneself into the social world, the world of other people, so long as that action is registered as non-contradictory. The text is rendered a bit obscure by the numerous allegories and symbols that appear—the paths, dwellings, and strange landscapes through which people pass according to the vital situation in which they find themselves.

One of the most important of these allegories is that of the tree, that ancient *Tree of Life* that appears in the Kabbalah and in the creation myths of the Makiritare, the indigenous Amazonian people who follow the Yekuaná cult. This is the *Tree of the World* that connects the sky with the earth and that your own Icelandic *Vlüspá* calls *Yggdrasill.* Thus, in "The Inner Look," there is a kind of map of the inner states in which a person may find him or herself throughout the various moments of life. The states of confusion, desire for revenge, and despair, for example, are allegorized in the locations of the paths and dwellings through which one journeys in the "Yggdrasill" of *The Inner Look;* but one also encounters the way out of those contradictory situations: hope, the future, joy—in sum, the state of unity or non-contradiction.

In this work we also find a chapter dedicated to the "Principles of Valid Action." These are a set of recommendations, sayings that enable one to remember certain laws of behavior that contribute to a life of unity and meaning. Not escaping the allegorical style of the entire work, these Principles have a metaphorical character. Here we may cite a few examples: "If day and night, summer and winter, are well with you, you have surpassed the contradictions"; "Do not oppose a great force. Retreat until it weakens, then advance with resolution." We find recommendations of this kind in the *Hávamál,* too, for example, in Verse 64:

> A wise man will not overweening be,
> And stake too much on his strength;
> When the mighty are met to match their strength,
> 'Twill be found that first is no one.

The Principles in *The Inner Look* are, in reality, laws of behavior of a sort, although they are conceived not as moral or legal prescriptions but rather as constants, descriptions of how forces will function in action or reaction depending on the placement, the location, of the person who acts.

The second work, “The Internal Landscape,” continues in the style of the first, but with less emphasis on allegories and symbols. The description turns outward, toward the world of cultural values, and contains increasingly specific references to the social sphere. In the early sections of this second work, we read: “Leap over your suffering, and it will not be the abyss but life that grows within you. There is no passion, idea, or human deed that is not linked to the abyss. Therefore, let us turn to the only thing that deserves our attention: the abyss and that which overcomes it.”

This apparently dualistic statement makes clear certain fundamental concerns with the *growth of life* and the *annihilation of life.* Annihilation appears to take on a certain substantiality when it is termed the “abyss,” but this is merely poetic license, for to speak of the nihilization of being, or the “crossing out” of being as Heidegger does, would cause an irreparable break in style. We are not speaking of the abyss in terms of substance, then, but rather in terms of an annihilation or darkening of meaning in human life. It is clear that the first dualistic effect disappears when we understand the concept of abyss as non-being, as non-life, rather than as an entity in itself. The concept of *abyss* was chosen for its psychological implications, since it evokes internal registers of the kind of vertigo associated with the contradictory sensation of repulsion and attraction. This attraction toward nothingness leads to suicide or mindless destructive fury, and it can mobilize the nihilism of an individual, a group, or an entire civilization. This is not *anxiety* as in Kierkegaard or *nausea* as in Sartre, in the sense of a choice at a crossroads or a passive disintegration of meaning. Rather, it is vertigo and *attraction toward* the nothing as an *activity-toward-destruction,* a kind of motor of personal and social events that wrestles with life for preeminence and power. Thus, if the human being has the freedom to choose, then it is possible for people to modify those conditions that would portend catastrophe if left to follow their mechanical development. If, on the other hand, human freedom is only a pious myth, then it does not matter what individuals or nations decide, since events are already foreordained to develop mechanically either in the direction of the growth of life, or instead toward catastrophe, nothingness, non-meaning.

This work affirms the *freedom* of human life, freedom within certain conditions, but ultimately freedom. Moreover, it says that the meaning of life is in essence liberty, and that this liberty rejects the “absurd,” rejects the “given,” even when the given is Nature itself. It is this struggle against the given, against pain and suffering, against the adversities that Nature has imposed on the human being, that has allowed the development of society and civilization. Human life has not grown due to pain and suffering, but on the contrary has equipped itself precisely to *defeat* them. The decision to expand human liberty reaches beyond the individual, and since this being has no fixed nature but rather follows a historical and social dynamic, it is the individual who must take responsibility and act for society and all human beings. Following this, Chapter VII of *The Internal Landscape* says: “Namer of a thousand names, maker of meanings, transformer of the world, your parents and the parents of your parents continue in you. You are not a fallen star but a brilliant arrow flying toward the heavens. You are the meaning of the world, and when you clarify your meaning you illuminate the earth. When you lose your meaning, the earth becomes darkened and the abyss opens.” It goes on to say: “I will tell you the meaning of your life here: It is to humanize the earth. And what does it mean to humanize

the earth? It is to surpass pain and suffering; it is to learn without limits; it is to love the reality you build…. You will not fulfill your mission if you do not apply your energies to vanquishing pain and suffering in those around you. And if through your action they in turn take up the task of humanizing the world, you will have opened their destiny toward a new life."

In the final analysis, *The Internal Landscape* deals with meaning in life as a struggle against nihilism inside of each human being and in the life of society; furthermore, it exhorts people to convert this life into activity and militancy in the service of the humanization of the world. As you can understand, this work does not speak of solutions that are merely individual and personal, since there is no such thing as a purely *personal* solution in a world that is *social* and *historical.* Those who believe that their individual, personal problems can be solved through some sort of introspection or psychological technique make a crucial error, for we are only able to move toward solutions thanks to action directed toward the world, that is, through meaningful action directed toward other people. And if someone should insist that a certain psychological technique has its usefulness, this work would seem to reply that its worth can be measured only from the perspective of action directed toward the world, that is, from the perspective of whether or not that technique is something that *supports coherent action.*

Finally, this text deals with the problem of *time,* and it does so allegorically. This is time that appears in its true temporality—that is, where past, present, and future act simultaneously—and not as in naive perception or those numerous philosophical theories where time has no structure but instead is viewed as a succession of instants flowing infinitely toward a "past" and a "future" without touching one another. The work presents *lived* time as a structure in which everything that has happened in my life acts simultaneously along with all that is taking place with me at the present moment and all that I imagine may happen to me as possibility, as "project," in the more or less foreseeable future. Although that future presents itself to me as a "not yet," it determines my present through the project that I launch toward it from my now, from my "at this moment." The idea of time as *structure* and not as a simple succession of independent instants is an intuition that human beings have had since antiquity, though it has most often been expressed in the form of myths and legends. Thus, we read in your own Icelandic *Poetic Edda* in "The Seeress's Prophecy":

> I know that an ash-tree stands called Yggdrasill,
> a high tree, soaked with shining loam;
> from there come the dews which fall in the valley,
> ever green, it stands over the well of fate.
>
> From there come three girls, knowing a great deal,
> from the lake which stands under the tree;
> *Fated* one is called, *Becoming* another—
> they carved on wooden slips—*Must-be* the third;
> they set down laws, they chose lives,
> for the sons of men the fates of men.

Thus, past, present, and future are not successions of instants, but structural determinants of situation. And so in *The Internal Landscape* we read the following, in which the rider speaks:

> "Strange encounters these, where the old man suffers for his short future, seeking refuge in his long past; the middle-aged man suffers for his present situation, seeking

refuge in what has happened or what will happen, depending on whether he grasps before or behind him; and the youth suffers because his short past nips at his heels, spurring on his flight toward a long future.

"And yet I recognize my own face in the faces of all three, and it seems to me that all human beings, whatever their age, can move through these times and see in them phantoms that do not exist. Or does that offense of my youth still exist today? Does my coming old age exist today? Does my death already dwell here today in this darkness?

"All suffering steals in through memory, imagination, or perception. But it is thanks to these same three pathways that thoughts, affections, and human deeds exist. So it is that even while these pathways are necessary for life, if suffering contaminates them they also become channels of destruction."

The third work, "The Human Landscape," dedicates its opening chapters to a clarification of the meaning of the ideas of *landscape* and the *looks* with which one gazes upon that landscape. It questions the way in which we look at the world and understand its established values. This work also examines the significance of one's own body and the bodies of others, and it examines *subjectivity* and the curious phenomenon of the appropriation of the subjectivity of others. It is, further, a study (divided into chapters) of *intention:* intention in education, intention in the story that is told of History, intention in ideologies, intention in violence, in Law, in the State, and in Religion. It is not a work, as I have said, that is simply polemical; rather, it proposes new models in each area that it criticizes. *The Human Landscape* attempts to ground action in the world, reorienting meanings and interpretations regarding values and institutions that might seem to be "givens."

With respect to the concept of *landscape,* let me say that it is the cornerstone of our system of thought, as can be seen in other, more recent works such as "Psychology of the Image" and "Historiological Discussions" in *Contributions to Thought*. In the book we are concerned with today, the idea of *landscape* is more modestly explained, and within the context of a work with no pretensions to rigorous thought. So it is that the work *The Human Landscape* begins with the following: "External landscape is what we perceive of things, while internal landscape is what we sift from them through the sieve of our internal world. These landscapes are one and constitute our indissoluble vision of reality."

And who better to understand these ideas than you Icelanders? Although human beings are always to be found in a landscape, that does not mean that they are always *aware* of this. But the landscape becomes a living datum for people when the world in which they live presents itself in full contrast as a contradiction impossible to bear, as unstable equilibrium *par excellence*. The inhabitants of vast deserts or infinite plains have in common the experience that there, in the distance on the horizon, the earth merges with the skies so gradually, so subtly, that finally one cannot tell what is earth and what is sky… only empty continuity appears before the eyes. And there are other places where utmost ice clashes with utmost fire, glacier with volcano, island with sea that surrounds it; where water erupts furiously from the earth in geysers hurling skyward; where all is contrast, all is finitude, and the eye turns upward to the immobile stars, seeking repose. But then the very skies begin to move, the gods dance and change shape and color in gigantic aurora borealis. And the finite eye then turns back upon itself, generating dreams of harmonious worlds, eternal dreams—dreams that sing histories of worlds lost in hope of the world to come.

And so I believe those places are landscapes where every inhabitant is a poet who may not recognize him or herself as such, every inhabitant a traveler who carries his or her vision to other places. That being the case, then in some measure and in some form all human beings have something of the Icelander about them, because their original landscape always imposes itself on their perceptual vision, because all of us see not only what is there before us, but our comparisons and even the discovery of the new are based on what we have already known. Thus, we are dreaming even as we gaze at things, and then later we take them as though they were reality itself.

But the concept is even broader, since *landscape* is not only that which is natural, that which appears before our eyes; it is also that which is *human,* that which is *social.* Every person interprets other people from within his or her own biography, investing the other with more than what is perceived. That being the case, we never see in the reality of the other, what the other *is* in him or herself; rather, we have of the other a schema, an idea, an interpretation, that arises out of our own internal landscape. One's internal landscape is superimposed on the external landscape, which is not only natural but also social and human. Clearly, over time that society continues to change, and the generations succeed one another, and when a generation's time comes to act it does so trying to impose values and interpretations that have been formed in an earlier moment. This can go relatively well in periods of historical stability, but in times like the present, of tremendous dynamism and change, the gap between the generations widens alarmingly as the world changes before our very eyes.

Toward what is our look to be directed? What must we learn to see? It is not surprising that in these times the idea of "turning to a new way of thinking" is becoming more popular. Today, one must think fast because things are moving faster all the time, and what we took as late as yesterday to be immutable reality we find is no longer so today. And so, friends, in today's world we can no longer think from our landscape if this landscape does not become dynamic and universal, if it does not become valid for all human beings. We need to understand that the concepts of *landscape* and *look* can serve to help us advance toward that much-heralded "new way of thinking" demanded by this ever-accelerating process of planetarization, of converging diversity moving toward a *universal human nation.*

To return to the third work, "The Human Landscape," let me say that just as the themes of institutions, law, and the state are relevant in the formation of the human landscape, so are the reigning ideologies, the education that people receive, as well as their conception of the historical moment in which they live. This third work speaks of all those things, not simply in order to criticize their harmful aspects, but above all in order to propose a particular way of observing them, in order to help the *look* seek other objects, in order to *learn to see* in a new way.

To conclude these comments, let me add that the three works that make up the body of *Humanize the Earth* are three moments arrayed in a sequence extending from the most profound interiority, the world of dreams and symbols, outward to the external and human landscapes. They are a journey, a shifting of the point of view, beginning from the most intimate and personal and concluding with an opening to the interpersonal, social, and historical world.

Thank you very much.

Contributions to Thought

(*Contribuciones al Pensamiento*)

San Martín Cultural Center, Buenos Aires, October 4, 1990

Commenting on my recently published book, *Contributions to Thought,* would seem to be a rather technical undertaking. And while that is certainly the type of approach this material calls for, I feel I should make it clear that I will try in today's brief presentation to limit my comments to highlighting the principal problems and questions treated in the text, without excessive rigor.

As you may know, this work consists of two essays: "Psychology of the Image" and "Historiological Discussions." As these titles indicate, these essays are reflections on topics that would seem to fall within the fields of psychology and historiography, respectively. And as we will see, these two essays are connected by their shared objective of laying the groundwork for the construction of a general theory of human action, a theory that at the present time lacks sufficient foundation. When I speak of a *theory of action,* I am not speaking simply of an understanding of human labor, as in the praxiology of Kotarbinski, Skolimowski, or the Polish school in general, though they have the merit of having dealt extensively with the subject. Rather, these essays are an attempt to understand the phenomenon of the *origin* of human action, its significance and meaning. Of course, some may object that human action requires no theoretical justification; that action is, in fact, the antipode of theory; that the urgencies of the moment are primarily practical ones; and that the results of action are measured in terms of concrete achievements. Finally, they may maintain that this is the time for neither theories nor ideologies, since both have already demonstrated their failure and definitive collapse, clearing the way at last for concrete reality itself—a way that should lead straight to the simple choice of how to achieve the most effective action.

This patchwork of objections belies an underlying pragmatism which, as we know, is a way of thinking employed every day by that anti-ideological stance which would submit the value of any proof to "reality" itself. But the defenders of this attitude tell us nothing about this so-called "reality" that they are invoking, or the parameters that they are using to measure the "effectiveness" of a given action. Because, if the concept of "reality" is reduced to nothing more than crude perceptual verification, then we remain under the influence of a superstition that science, at every step of its progress, has shown to be false.

It seems reasonable to ask as a minimum that those who invoke the criteria of the "effectiveness of an action," explain their criteria. Is the supposed success of that action to be measured in terms of immediate results on the basis of only the action itself, or is it to be measured with an eye to the consequences of that action, that is, on those effects that continue even after the action itself is completed? If it is only the first of these criteria that these pragmatists affirm, then there is no way to see how one action is connected to another. This then leaves the way open for incoherence, or to contradiction between our action at moment *B* and our previous action at moment *A*. If, on the other hand, there are continuing consequences to action, then it is clear that at a given moment *A* an action can be successful whereas at moment *B* it is no longer so.

At the risk of digressing and even of lowering the level of this presentation, I feel that I must respond, if only briefly, to this ideology that pretends not to be one, this view of things that, however flawed its argument, has gained a certain hold over public belief, and can thus lead to an unthinking prejudice against ideas such as those we'll be talking about today.

We appreciate the value of theoretical formulations relating to the problem of human action, and indeed frame our ideas within the array of existing ideological positions—taking “ideology” to mean any complex of thought, scientific or not, that is articulated into a system of interpretation of a given reality. Yet from another perspective, I would claim a complete independence from those theories that, born in the nineteenth century, have demonstrated their failure not only in a practical sense but also, and above all, as theory. Thus, the collapse of those nineteenth-century ideologies in no way diminishes, but quite the contrary makes all the more important the new conceptions taking shape today.

In addition, I would say that both “the end of ideologies” heralded by Daniel Bell in the sixties and “the end of history” more recently announced by Fukuyama correspond to outmoded perceptions, remaining closed in a debate that in ideological terms had already been exhausted in the fifties—that is, long before recent spectacular political events so shocked those who, hypnotized as they were by their assumptions of practical success, took only belated notice of the march of history. That is why this worn-out pragmatism—whose roots we find in the Metaphysical Club of Boston around 1870, and which William James and Charles Peirce set forth with their characteristic intellectual modesty—has also long since failed in ideological terms. All that’s left now is to watch the amazing events that will soon bring to an end those assumptions about the “end of history” and the “end of ideologies.”

Now that the objective of this book is clear—that is, to lay the foundation for the construction of a general theory of human action—let us go on to the most important points of the first essay, “Psychology of the Image.” This essay attempts to establish the basis for a hypothesis that posits consciousness as not simply the product or reflection of the action of one’s surroundings. Rather, it holds consciousness as something that, taking the conditions imposed by the surroundings, constructs an image or complex of images that are capable of mobilizing human action toward the world and, through this action, modifying the world. The one who produces the action is in turn modified by that action, and in that constant feedback there emerges the structure subject-world, and not two separate terms that only occasionally interact. Therefore, when we speak here of “consciousness,” we are doing so simply in accordance with the psychological focus imposed by the theme of the image, even though we understand consciousness to be the moment of interiority in the opening of human life in-the-world. It follows, then, that the term “consciousness” should be understood in the context of concrete existence, and not separate from it as is often the case in certain schools of psychology.

An important aspect of the work we are commenting upon today is its treatment of the phenomena of *representation* in their relationship with *spatiality,* precisely because it is thanks to representation that the human body can move and therefore act in the world in its characteristic manner. If we found reflection-based explanations convincing, we would have at least partially solved the problem, but there would remain the problem of the deferred response to stimuli—that is, the response that is postponed—and this demands a broader explanation. Furthermore, if we accept a variation in which the subject makes a decision to act in one direction and not another, then the concept of reflection becomes so diluted that in the end it explains nothing.

If we were to seek antecedents for the study of consciousness-become-behavior we would find them in the works of several scholars and thinkers, among whom Descartes stands out. In a remarkable letter to Christina of Sweden, Descartes speaks of the point of union between thought and bodily mobility. Almost three hundred years later, Brentano introduced into psychology the concept of *intentionality,* which he in turn drew from Scholasticism’s

commentaries on Aristotle. But it is with Husserl that the study of intentionality is developed more thoroughly, particularly in his “Ideas Relating to a Pure Phenomenology and a Phenomenological Philosophy.” In the best tradition of strict reflection, Husserl calls into question not only the data of the external world but also those of the inner world, opening the way for the independence of *thought* vis-à-vis the materiality of phenomena. Up until that time, thought had been squeezed in a vise—on one side, the absolute idealism of Hegel and, on the other, the natural physical sciences, which were just then undergoing such rapid development. Husserl did not remain long in the study of the hyletic, material data, but produced an eidetic reduction, and from that moment on it was simply impossible to turn back.

With respect to the spatiality of representation in general, it must then be considered a *form* from which the contents cannot be independent. Varying the size of the image, Husserl verified that in any visual image, color cannot be independent of extension. This point is of fundamental importance, because it establishes the form of extension as a condition of all representation. It is from there that we take up this assertion as the theoretical basis for the formulation of the hypothesis of the *space of representation.*

No doubt all of this requires some supporting explanations that at the moment we can deal with only in passing. In the first place, we need to understand *sensation* as the register of the variation in the tone of a sensory organ impacted by a stimulus from our external or internal environment. Moreover, we view *perception* as a *structuring* of sensations carried out by consciousness in relation to one sense or a complex of senses. We all know perfectly well that even in the most elemental sensation a structuring occurs, and recognizing that classical psychology contains at least an approximation of this aspect of our subject we will not need to go too far into the definitions of all these terms. Lastly, I would note that the *image*—which is a structured and formalized re-presentation of sensations or perceptions that are coming or have come from the external or internal environments—precisely because of the immediate structuring effected, cannot be considered a mere passive “copy” of the sensation, as naive psychology would claim.

In contrast, then, to atomistic psychology, we reach the conclusion that sensations, perceptions, and images are all forms of consciousness, and that it would be more correct to speak of a “consciousness of sensation,” a “consciousness of perception,” and a “consciousness of the image,” without necessarily thereby locating ourselves within an apperceptive stance. What I mean by this is that consciousness *modifies* its mode of being, that consciousness is *none other* than a mode of “being”—for example, “expectant,” or “moved,” and so on. In accordance with the idea of intentionality, it is clear that there is no consciousness without *consciousness of something,* and that this “something” cannot escape the spatiality of representation. And since all representations, considered as acts of consciousness, refer to objects that are represented, and since these two terms form a structure in which the two parts cannot be separated from each other, then representing any object involves the corresponding act of consciousness in the spatiality of representation. Spatialization always occurs in all experience with external representations, whether these have as a base either the five classical senses or the internal senses (originating in coenesthesia or kinesthesia). Moreover, just as the spatiality of sensation and perception are inextricably linked to “places” on or within the body where the sensory detectors are located, the corresponding re-presentations follow the same path. To represent, for example, a toothache we no longer feel today is to try to “re-create” it at a precise point in one’s mouth, and not, for example, in one’s leg. This is clear and holds true for all representations.

But it is here that one of the most interesting problems arises. The image can become modified to such an extent that it bears little resemblance to the original object, and naive psychology has always treated such “distortion” as a fundamental defect of the image. For that approach, the idea was clear: If an image was a simple copy of a sensation that allows the memory to recall that sensation—that is, if it was only an instrument of what has been called the “faculty of memory”—then any distortion in the image was almost a sin against “nature,” which psychiatrists of the time felt they had to rush in and treat aggressively when some poor unfortunate would go too far in his or her alteration of reality. But joking aside, it is clear that naturalism, and it could not have been any other way, had invaded psychology, just as it had invaded art, politics, and economics. However, it is this very “defect” in the image that allows an image to be distorted, transformed, and finally, as in dreams, translated from one sensory source to be localized in another—and this demonstrates not only the plasticity of this phenomenon but also its extraordinary activity. You can see that to develop these statements more fully would require far more time than we have available today, so let’s continue with our initial idea of outlining the central themes of this investigation. There is, for example, the problem of how the image acts in distinct levels of consciousness, and how it produces various motor abreactions, depending upon how far internally or externally the image is located in the space of representation.

To confirm this, consider an image that, when one is in vigil, makes it possible to extend one’s hand. During sleep, this same image is internalized and no longer moves the hand—except in rare cases of altered sleep or somnambulism in which what occurs is precisely that the image becomes externalized in the space of representation. Even when one is awake, in vigil, a strong emotional shock can displace the images corresponding to fight or flight to a more internal level, sometimes to such a degree that the body is left paralyzed. Conversely, we see how in altered states of consciousness projected images—that is, hallucinations—can mobilize bodily activity, even though they are based on sensory sources that are displaced, translating re-elaborations of the internal world. Thus, depending on the depth and position of the image within the space of representation, various types of bodily activity may be triggered. But we should remember that we are talking about images that are based on different groups of senses—some external, some internal. Coenesthetic images, operating at the appropriate depth and location in the space of representation, provoke abreactions or somatizations in the intrabody, while images that correspond to kinesthesia are what ultimately act on the body from “inside,” setting the body in motion externally.

But in what direction will the body move, given that kinesthesia is a manifestation of internal phenomena? It will move in the direction that has been “traced” by other representations that have the external senses as their sensory basis. If I imagine my arm extended in front of me, I can easily confirm that it does not move simply on account of the visual image, and yet (as has been amply demonstrated in experiments on variations in muscular tonicity) the image does cause my arm to “trace” the direction, although my arm will actually move only when the visual image has been translated into a kinesthetic one.

Let us proceed to those issues related to the nature of the space of representation and to the concepts of *copresence*, *horizon*, and *landscape,* and their role in the system of representation. We have nothing new to add to what has been said in paragraphs three and four of Chapter 3 of “Psychology of the Image,” except what bears upon the final conclusion of this work:

We have not been speaking of a space of representation *per se* or of a quasi-mental space. Rather, we have said that representation as such cannot be independent of spatiality, though we are not thereby maintaining that representation *occupies* space. It is the form of spatial representation that concerns us here. So it is that when we speak of a “space of representation” rather than simply of representation itself, it is because we are considering the ensemble of perceptions and (non-visual) images that provide the registers (the corporal tone, as well as that of the consciousness) on the basis of which I recognize myself as “me.” That is, I recognize myself as a continuum despite the flow and changes that I experience. So the space of representation is not such because it is an empty container to be filled with phenomena of consciousness, but rather because its nature is representation, and when particular images occur, the consciousness cannot present them other than under the form of extension. Thus, we might also have emphasized the *material* aspect of what is being represented without thereby speaking of its substantiality in the same sense as would physics or chemistry; rather, we would be referring to the *hyletic* data, that is, to the material data and not to materiality itself.

We are left, however, with a difficulty. Of course, no one would think that the consciousness has color or that it is a colored container simply because visual representations are presented as colored. So when we say that the space of representation possesses different levels and depths, is it because we are speaking of a three-dimensional space with volume? Or is it that the perceptual-representational structure of my coenesthesia is presented as having volume? Undoubtedly the latter is the case, and it is thanks to this that my representations may appear above or below, to the left or the right, toward the front or back, and that my “look” may also have a particular perspective toward the image.

For each structure of representation there exist countless alternatives that are not ”unfolded” completely, but rather act *copresently,* accompanying the images that appear “center stage.” Clearly, here we are not referring to “manifest” and “latent” contents, or to the associative paths that can carry the image in one direction or another. Let’s consider an example: When I imagine a certain object proper to my bedroom, even though other objects from that same environment are not present “center-stage,” they accompany that represented object *copresently,* they are part of the same environment as that object. And thanks to that region, in which non-present objects are included, I can, at will, call up before me some or all of those other objects from within the boundaries that demarcate what I call “my bedroom.” In this way, regions are structured among themselves, linked together not simply as groups or ensembles of images but also as expressions, meanings, relationships. I am able to differentiate each region or set of regions from others thanks to “horizons,” what might be called “boundaries” that give me mental orientation and also allow me to move through various mental times and spaces.

When I perceive the external world, when I move in it and my daily life unfolds in it, I am constituting it not only by means of the representations that allow me to recognize and to act in it but also by *copresent systems of representation.* This structuring of the world that I effect I call ”landscape,” and I know that my perception of the world is always the recognition and the interpretation of a reality that corresponds to my landscape. That world that I take as reality itself is in fact my own biography in action, and that action of transformation that I effect in and upon

the world is my own transformation. And when I speak of my inner world, I am also speaking of the interpretation that I make of it and of the transformation I effect on it.

The distinctions we have made so far between “internal” and “external” space are based on the registers of the boundaries set by coenesthetic-tactile perceptions. But they cannot be sustained when we speak of the global nature of consciousness-in-the-world, for which the world is its “landscape” and the self is its “look.” This mode of being in the world on the part of consciousness is basically a mode of action in perspective, whose immediate spatial reference is one’s own body and no longer only the intrabody. But the body, in being an object in the world, is also an object in the landscape and an object of transformation. The body, then, becomes the prosthesis of human intentionality.

If images allow us to recognize and to act, then according to how that landscape is structured in individuals and peoples, according to the needs of those individuals and peoples (or what they consider to be their needs), that is how they will tend to transform the world.

To conclude these comments on “Psychology of the Image,” I will add only that in the configuration of every landscape there are at work, copresently, thetic contents—beliefs or relationships among beliefs—that cannot be rationally maintained and that, accompanying every formulation and every action, constitute the foundation for human life in its continued unfolding.

Therefore, any future theory of action will need to include an understanding of how it is possible that, from its most elementary expression, human activity is not a simple reflection of conditions, and how it is that this activity, in transforming the world, transforms the producer of the action as well. From the point of view of a future ethic as well as the perspective of the possibilities for human progress, the conclusions reached will have import, as will the direction chosen on the basis of these conclusions. Let us now move on to comment briefly on the second essay.

The second essay, “Historiological Discussions,” is an attempt to study the prerequisites needed for a proper foundation of what we call “historiology.” The discussion begins by questioning whether or not the terms “historiography” and “philosophy of history” can continue to be useful for much longer, considering that they have been used in such diverse ways that it is now difficult even to determine just what they refer to. The term ”historiology” was coined by José Ortega y Gasset in about 1928 in an essay titled “Hegel’s Philosophy of History and Historiology.” In a note to my essay, I quote Ortega, who says the following:

> Against this state of affairs in the realm of History, there raises up historiology. It is moved by the conviction that History, like empirical science, above all has to be construction and not a ‘gluey mass’—to use the words that Hegel hurls again and again at the historians of his time. The case that the historians could have against Hegel, by opposing [the idea] that the body of history should be constructed directly by philosophy, does not justify the tendency, even more marked in that century, of being content with a sticking together of data. With a hundredth part of what for some time has already been gathered and polished, it was enough to work out some kind of scientific conduct much more authentic and substantial than so much, in effect, that History books offer us.

In the present essay, then, continuing that debate begun so long ago, I speak of *historiology* in the sense of the interpretation and construction of a coherent theory in which historical data *per se* cannot simply be juxtaposed or treated as a simple chronology of events, except at the risk of emptying the historical event of all meaning. The pretension of a History (with a capital H)

free of all interpretation is nonsense, and has invalidated many historiographical efforts in the past.

The second essay of *Contributions to Thought* studies the vision of historical fact that has been employed from Herodotus on, a vision that begins with the historian's landscape being introduced into the description of historical "fact." In this way, at least four distortions become apparent in the usual historical optic. In the first place, there can be the intentional introduction of the time in which the historian is living, in order to emphasize or minimize facts in accordance with this perspective. This defect can be observed in the presentation of the historical account, and it affects the transmission of the facts as much as the myth, legend, religion, or literature that has served as its source. The second error involves the manipulation of sources, and such imposture merits no further comment. The third error is the simplification and stereotyping that allows facts to be elevated or discredited, in order to make them conform to some more or less generally accepted model. The economy of effort for both the producers and readers of works of this nature is such that they often draw a large readership, though their scientific validity is questionable at best. In these works, stories, rumors, or secondhand information are often substituted for verifiable information. The fourth form of distortion is the "censorship" that at times lies not only in the pen of the historian but in the mind of the reader. Such censorship prevents new points of view from being accurately disseminated, because the historical moment itself, with its whole repertoire of beliefs, forms such a powerful barrier. The free circulation of new views and perspectives thus arises only with the passing of time, or perhaps the eruption of dramatic events that discredit widely held beliefs, clearing the way for a candid reassessment.

This discussion thus examines the general difficulties that exist for the evaluation of events in the "mediate past." But our disquiet grows as we see that even in the telling of the most immediate history—a subject's own autobiography—the person will tell third parties and even him or herself of events that never took place or are clearly distorted—and all this, in turn, within an inescapable system of interpretation. If that is the case, what will not happen with events that have not been lived by the historian and form part of what we call "mediate history"? At any rate, we note that none of this necessarily leads us to a skepticism with regard to History itself, thanks to our recognition of the need for Historiology to be constructive and, of course, to meet certain other conditions if it is to be considered an exact science.

"Historiological Discussions" continues, but now with what we call "conceptions of history without temporal foundation." This is from the first paragraph of Chapter 2: "In the numerous systems in which some rudiments of historiology appear, all the effort seems to be focused on justifying the dateability, the accepted calendar time, of facts, analyzing how they occurred, why they occurred, or how things must have occurred—without considering what this 'occurring' is, how it is possible in general that something occurs." All those who have undertaken to construct true cathedrals of the Philosophy of History, insofar as they have not answered the fundamental question on the nature of *occurrence*, have presented us with a history of the accepted dateability of things, but without the dimension of temporality that is necessary in order for that to be apprehended. In general terms, we observe that the concept of time that has prevailed is one that corresponds to naive perception, in which facts or events "unfold" without structurality, in simple succession from one, earlier phenomenon to the next, in a linear sequence of occurrences following "one after another," without our understanding how it is that one moment turns into, becomes another—without our grasping, that is, the inner transformation of events. Because to say that an event occurs from moment A to moment B and so on to moment *n;* from a past, moving through a present and projecting into a future, speaks to us only of the location

of the observer in a time of conventional dateability, emphasizing the historian's perception of time—and, as the perception that it is, spatializes it toward a "back then" and an "up ahead" in just the way that the hands of a clock spatialize time to show its passing.

Understanding this concept presents no great difficulties, once we recognize that all perceptions and representations occur in the form of "space" (see "Psychology of the Image"). Now, why must time flow from a back-there toward an up-ahead, and not, for example, the other way around, or in unpredictable jumps and leaps? And one can't answer with a simple "because that's the way things are!" If each "now" is "at each end" an indeterminate succession of instants, then one comes to the conclusion that time is infinite. When we accept that purported "reality," we remove our *look* from the finitude of the person who is looking, and we pass through life with the sense that "doing" among things is infinite, although copresently we know that life has an end. Thus, the "things we have to do" escape death at every moment; that is why one "has" more or less time for certain things, because "have" refers to "things," and then as we pass through life, the flow of life itself becomes a thing, is naturalized.

The naturalistic conception of time to which Historiography and the Philosophy of History have been subject until today lies in the belief in the *passivity* of the human being in the construction of historical time, and with that we have come to consider human history as a "reflection," an epiphenomenon, or a simple mechanism for the transmission of natural events. And when, in an apparent leap from the natural to the social, people have spoken of humanity as the producer of historical fact, they have continued to rely on that naturalism within which society has been "spatialized" in a naive vision of time.

A strict reflective thought leads us to understand that, in every human activity, moments in time do not follow one after another "naturally," but that past, present, and future instants act constructively, "that which occurred" as (past) memory or knowledge is as determining as the (future) "projects" one attempts to achieve through (present) action. The fact that the human being does not possess a "nature" in the way that an object does, the fact that intention tends to overcome any natural determinants, demonstrates the human being's radical historicity. The human being constitutes itself and constructs itself in its action-in-the-world, and in that way gives meaning to its journey through life and to the absurdity of non-intentional nature. Finitude, in terms of time and space, is present as the first absurd, meaningless condition that, with clear registers of pain and suffering, nature imposes on human life. The struggle against that absurdity, the overcoming of that pain and suffering, is what gives meaning to the long process of history.

We will not continue here with the interesting questions of the extended and difficult debate on the problem of temporality, the issue of the human body and its transformation, and the natural world as the growing prosthesis of society, because I would like to stop here to list the principal problems and questions that are maintained as hypotheses in this essay.

In the first place, this essay examines the social and historical constitution of human life, seeking the inner temporality of its transformation, something far removed from a succession of linear, "one after the other" events. It then goes on to observe the coexistence on a single, historical stage of generations that have been born at different times and whose landscapes of formation, whose education, and whose projects are not homogeneous. The generational dialectic—that is, the struggle for control of the central social space—is seen to take place between temporal accumulations in which either the past, present, or future are primary, and in which those accumulations are represented by generations of different ages. The landscapes of each generation, in turn, along with the different substrata of beliefs that each of them holds,

dynamize their action toward the world. But just because the birth and death of generations is a biological fact, that does not allow us to biologize their dialectic. Thus, the naive conception of "generations"—according to which "the young are revolutionaries, the middle-aged are conservatives, and the old are reactionaries"—finds strong refutation in numerous historical analyses, which if not taken into account will only lead us to a new, naturalistic myth whose correlate is a glorification of youth. What defines the sign of the generational dialectic at every historical moment is the project for transformation or conservation that each generation launches toward the future. Of course, there are more than three generations that coexist on the same stage of history at any given moment, but the leading roles are played by those we have mentioned, that is, those contiguous to the center, not those that are "copresent"—children and old people. But since the entire structure at any given moment of history is in transformation, its sign is constantly changing, as children enter youth and those in middle age move into old age. This historical continuum shows us temporality in action, and makes us understand human beings as protagonists in their own history.

And so, with greater understanding of the functioning of temporality, we find in these "Historiological Discussions" elements that, along with those concerning the space of representation in "Psychology of the Image," will perhaps allow us to form the foundation of a complete theory of human action.

Thank you.

Universal Root Myths

(*Mitos Raíces Universales*)

San Martín Cultural Center, Buenos Aires, April 18, 1991

Before beginning my comments on *Universal Root Myths,* I would like to explain what led me to write this book and how it is related to my previous works. First, the reasons for writing it:

With an intention more like that of the student of social psychology than the student of comparative religion, ethnology, or anthropology, I have delved into to the myths of many cultures. I have asked myself, Why not review the most ancient systems of ideation so that, since we are not directly immersed in them, we might as a result of that fresh perspective learn something new about ourselves? Why not penetrate into a world of beliefs that, while it is foreign to us, surely accompanied others' attitudes toward life? Why not stretch ourselves in this way so that we might understand, thanks to these reference points, why it is that our fundamental beliefs are tottering today? These are the concerns that have motivated my survey of the mythic productions of these cultures. It is true that I might have followed the thread presented by the history of institutions, or ideas, or art, in order to try to arrive at the base of beliefs that have operated in these different times and places, but I would almost certainly not have obtained phenomena as pure and direct as those presented by mythology.

My initial plan for the book was to set down the myths of various peoples of the world, accompanying them with brief comments or notes in such a way that this would form neither an interference nor an interpretation. As I began, however, I encountered a number of difficulties. In the first place, I would have to limit the scope of this survey, since I proposed to use texts accepted as historically accurate, discarding those that were compilations of more ancient material or were commentaries on the material itself, and would thus present a number of drawbacks. I found that I could not overcome this problem, even by limiting myself to using the source texts on the basis of which the information of the past has come down to us. Nor could I go to the oral tradition that contemporary researchers have rescued from isolated collectivities.

It was the recognition of certain methodological complications that decided me in this. Let me give an example of these by citing Mircea Eliade from his work *Aspects du mythe:*

> In comparison with the myths that narrate the end of the world *in the past,* myths that refer to a *future* end are paradoxically few among primitive peoples. As Lehmann points out, this rarity is due perhaps to the fact that ethnologists have not asked these questions in their surveys. It is sometimes difficult to tell whether the myth concerns a catastrophe in the past or future. According to the testimony of E. H. Man, the Andamans believe that after the end of the world a new humanity will make its appearance, and will live in a paradisal state; there will be neither illness nor old age nor death. The dead will be born again after the catastrophe. But according to R. Brown, Man probably combined several versions, gathered from different informants. In fact, says Brown, this is a myth that tells of the end and re-creation of the world; but the myth refers to the past, not the future. Since, according to Lehmann's own observations, the Andaman language has no future tense, it is hard to decide whether this is a past or future event.

In Eliade's observations there appear at least three points of disagreement among researchers in regard to a given myth, which are that: (1) there is a possibility that surveys of

these groups of subjects have been poorly formulated or phrased; (2) the sources of information are not homogeneous; and (3) the language in which the information was originally conveyed does not have the tense necessary for us to understand it, especially when what is in question is a temporal myth.

Stumbling blocks of this sort, to which many others might be added, have prevented me from taking advantage of much of the enormous wealth of information provided by researchers in the field. Thus, I have been unable to include the myths of black Africa, Oceania, Polynesia, or even South America in this study.

When I examined the most ancient texts, I found great disparities in the range of documents. For example, the Sumero-Acadian culture left one great poem, *Gilgamesh,* almost complete, with the remaining fragments in no way reaching the same level. On the other hand, the culture of India almost overwhelms us with its vast body of works. To achieve at least a minimum of balance I decided to take from Indian literature a number of brief samples that would be representative of the whole. Thus, taking the Sumero-Acadian and Assyrio-Babylonian cultures as examples, I reduced the overabundance provided by the other cultures, finally setting before the reader's eyes the myths—in my judgment the most significant myths—of ten different cultures.

Having said all this, and while I must acknowledge that this procedure has resulted in a work that is rather incomplete, it is nevertheless a work that in its essentials manages to underscore a key point in the system of historical beliefs. I am referring to what I call the "root myth," which I understand as the *nucleus of mythic ideation,* which—despite any deformation and transformation of the stage upon which its action unfolds, despite variations in the names of the characters and in their secondary attributes—may pass from nation to nation with its central argument preserved more or less intact, thus becoming universal. Moreover, the double character of certain myths, in which they are both "root" and "universal," has allowed me to focus my subject by selecting myths that fulfill both of these conditions. This does not, of course, mean that I do not recognize the existence of other mythic nuclei that are not presented in this summary anthology.

With this, I believe I have answered the question regarding the reasons that led me to write this book, and I've also tried to give some idea of the difficulties I encountered as I attempted to achieve the objectives I originally set for myself.

But there are still a few points to make clear. I refer to the second question that I put forth at the beginning regarding the relationship between this work and my previous works.

No doubt many of you have read *The Inner Look* and possibly *The Internal Landscape* and *The Human Landscape.* You may remember that those three little books, written at different times, were gathered together under the title *Humanize the Earth.* Through the poetic prose of those works, I was able to shift the point of view from one that is oneiric and personal, charged with symbols and allegories, to one that opens outward to the interpersonal, to the social and historical. The conception underlying that work has been further developed in other works that have followed it, though with varying treatments and styles. For instance, in *Guided Experiences,* a series of short tales, I framed or "staged" a variety of scenes that enable the reader to imagine a range of problems from daily life. From the beginning of each story in an "entrance," which is sometimes more realistic and sometimes more unreal, readers are able to move through scenes in which they can, allegorically, come face to face with problems and issues from their own lives. These are presented as literary "knots" or conflicts, which raise the

general tension of the scene, followed by a dénouement, and finally an "exit" from the story in a "happy ending."

The central ideas on which these guided experiences are based are these:

1. Just as in dreams there appear images that are the allegorized expression of deep tensions, in daily life there occur similar phenomena, though we do not pay them much attention—these are the daydreams and mental meanderings that, converted into images, carry psychic charges that perform very important functions in our lives.
2. Images are what allow one to move one's body in one direction or another. But images are not only visual—there are images that correspond to each external sense, and they are what allow the consciousness to open outward into the world, mobilizing the body. Of course, since we also have *internal* senses, there are, correspondingly, images whose energy discharges toward the interior, and that in so doing decrease or increase tensions in the intrabody.
3. One's entire biography—that is, one's memory—also acts through images that are associated with the various tensions and affective climates with which they were "recorded."
4. That biography is constantly acting in every one of us, and therefore we do not *passively* capture the world that is presented to us in each new perception, but rather our biographical images act as a previously constituted "landscape" for that perception. So it is that every day we carry out various activities during which we "cover" the world with our daydreams, compulsions, and deepest aspirations.
5. One's action or inhibition vis-à-vis the world is closely tied to the theme of the image, so that transformations of the image are also important keys to behavioral variation; since it is clearly possible to transform images and transfer their charges, one must therefore infer that changes in behavior do occur in these cases.
6. In dreams and daydreams, in artistic production, and in myths, images appear that correspond to vital tensions and to those "biographies," whether of the individual or of whole peoples; such images orient behavior (likewise individual or collective, as the case may be).

These six ideas form the foundation of the stories in *Guided Experiences.* In the notes that accompany the text readers will also find material from ancient legends, stories, and myths, although in that work they are applied to the individual reader or those who may read these writings aloud in small groups.

Turning now to my most recent work, *Contributions to Thought,* no one can fail to notice that the style of this book is that of the philosophical essay. The two sections of the book examine, first, "Psychology of the Image" in a quasi-theory of consciousness and, second, the subject of History. While the objects of investigation in these two cases are, it is true, quite different, the themes of "landscape" and the "prepredicates" of an era—that is, its underlying beliefs—are common points in both sections.

As can be seen, *Universal Root Myths* bears a close relationship to these previous works, although it focuses on *collective* rather than individual or personal images, and takes a new turn in its mode of expression. On this latter point, I would add that I do not believe that systematic production with uniformity in style is what is called for in the times we live in. On the contrary, our age demands diversity in order for new ideas to fulfill their destiny.

Universal Root Myths is based on the same ideas as my other works, and I believe that any new book of mine will maintain that ideological continuity, even though it may deal with different subject matter and may vary in its style and genre. Having explained, at least synthetically, my

reasons for writing this book, and the relationship it bears to my previous works, let's move on to the root myths themselves.

The word "myth" has been used over time in many different ways. Two and a half millennia ago, Xenophanes began to use the word to reject those statements by Homer and Hesiod that did not refer to proven or acceptable truths. Later, *mythos* gradually came to be contrasted with *logos* and *historia,* both of which indicated that the events they told of or the stories they narrated had actually taken place. Little by little myth became desacralized, and the word began to mean more or less the same as *fable* or *fiction,* even when the stories being told dealt with gods that people still believed in. The Greeks were also the first to try to understand myths in a systematic way. Some used a sort of allegorical interpretive method and sought the truths that underlay the mythic surface. Thus, they came to view these fantastic productions as rudimentary explanations of physical laws or natural phenomena. But by the time of Alexandrian Gnosticism and during the period of patristic Christianity there was also an attempt to understand myths as yet another type of allegorization—explanations not so much of natural phenomena as of phenomena of the soul, or what today would be called the psyche. A second interpretive method tried to find in myths the history that preceded the dawn of civilization. Thus, the gods were but vague memories of ancient heroes, elevated from their mortal state. In the same way, this method viewed mythic events as having originated in much more modest historical events, which were later raised to a heroic level.

These two interpretive paths that were used to try to explain and understand myth (and there were, of course, other methods as well) have continued down to our own day. In both cases, there is an underlying idea of the "distortion" of events and of the delight or enchantment that such distortion produces in the naive mind. It is true that myths were used by the great Greek tragedians and that to some extent the theater derived its productions from mythic events, but in this case the spectator's enchantment was aesthetic—the spectator was moved by artistic grace, not because he or she believed in those representations. It was in Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and the Neo-Platonic schools that myth took on a new meaning, in which it was attributed the power to transform the spirit of the person who came in contact with it. Thus, in performing mythic scenes, the Orphics sought to achieve a "catharsis," an inner cleansing that would later allow them to ascend to a greater understanding in the order of emotions and ideas. As can be seen, all of these interpretations have come down to us today and form part of the unexamined ideas espoused by both the public in general and specialists in the field. We should note, however, that for a long period in the West, Greek myth lay hidden, and indeed did not begin to reemerge until the time of the Humanists in the Renaissance and subsequently in the age of the European revolutions. An admiration for the classics made scholars turn once more to the Hellenic sources. The arts, too, were touched by this influence, and in this way Greek mythology has continued to act.

Transforming itself once again, mythology has become fused into the very foundations of the new disciplines that study human behavior. Though subject to the attraction of Romantic irrationalism, Depth Psychology, born in Austria during the decline of Neoclassicism, stands as a particular offshoot of those ancient currents of thought. It is not surprising, then, that the motifs of Oedipus, Elektra, and so on, have been taken from the Greek tragedians and used in explanations of the functioning of the mind, or that cathartic techniques of dramatic re-creation along the lines of Orphic ideas and practices have been applied in various therapies.

I should note that traditionally, myth has been differentiated from legend, saga, story, and fable. In *legend,* history is deformed by tradition; epic literature is rich in examples of this type.

With respect to *story,* authors such as de Vries consider that story is distinct from legend, which incorporates folkloric elements with which it colors or modifies the tale. *Saga,* in turn, is similar to story but almost always ends tragically, whereas a story often has a happy ending. At any rate, desacralized mythic elements are often introduced into both the pessimistic saga and the optimistic story. A very different genre is the *fable,* which hides a moral lesson beneath the mask of fiction.

These elementary distinctions serve our purposes in that they mark the differences between these latter genres and myth as we have been defining it—that is, characterized by the presence of the gods and the actions of the gods, though their actions may be carried out by men, heroes, or demigods. Thus, when we speak of myths we are also referring to an ambit touched by a divine presence that is believed in and that pervades all its constituent elements. It is a very different thing to refer to those same gods but in a desacralized ambit, in which belief has, for example, become converted into a kind of aesthetic enjoyment. This marks a great difference between the presentation of the mythologies currently in vogue (which describe ancient beliefs in an externalized and formal way), and a mythic expression that is treated as sacred from "within" the atmosphere in which the myth was created.

Continuing with the question of what differentiates the present approach, I should explain that I have not attempted to address the living religions that surely accompanied the myth, nor have I dealt with the ritualistic or ceremonial aspects. I have also not included any treatment of Christianity, Islam, or Buddhism, but have limited myself to presenting some profound myths of Judaism, Hinduism, and Zoroastrianism in order to gain an understanding of the powerful influence their images have had on those first three. In this way, the idea of the root, universal myth shared by all peoples of the world has, I believe, been done full justice.

In contemporary times and in common language, however, the word "myth" denotes two quite distinct things. On the one hand, it refers to fantastic tales of the deities of various cultures; on the other, it refers to things in which people believe very strongly but that are in fact false. Clearly, these two meanings have in common the idea that certain beliefs have a strong hold over people and that any rational argument against them finds hard going. Thus, we find it surprising that clear-headed philosophers and thinkers of antiquity could believe in things that today our children listen to as simple bedtime stories. Encountering beliefs in a flat earth or geocentrism brings a tolerant smile to our lips, for we realize that such theories were nothing but explanatory myths for a reality about which scientific thought had yet to formulate definitive answers. And so, when we look today at some of the things that we believed in just a few years ago, we can only blush at our own naiveté—while in the meantime we continue to be drawn in by new myths, without realizing that the same phenomenon is happening to us all over again.

In these times of vertiginous transformations of the world, we have witnessed beliefs that are held as unquestionable truths about the individual and society emerge and disappear over the course of just a few short years. I say "beliefs" instead of "theories" or "doctrines" because I want to underscore the nucleus of prepredicates, those perhaps unseen prejudices that operate prior to the formulation of more or less scientific schemata. Just as technological innovations are greeted with exclamations like "Fabulous!" or "Incredible!"—the equivalent of oral applause—we often hear the same "Incredible" also applied to today's political changes, the sudden collapse of entire ideologies, the conduct of leaders and opinion-makers, the behavior of societies. But this second "Incredible" is not exactly the same as the emotional state that is manifested in the face of technological wonders; rather, it reflects surprise and disquiet at phenomena that were

not believed possible. Simply put, many of our contemporaries believed that things were different and that the future was leading in another direction.

We should, therefore, recognize that there has been a great exposure to myths, and that this has had consequences in our attitudes toward life, in the way that we face existence. I should note that I do not take myths to be absolute falsehoods but, on the contrary, as psychological truths that may or may not coincide with the perception of this world that we find ourselves in. And there is something else: Those beliefs are not just passive schemata or ideas, but correspond to tensions and emotional climates that, taking shape in images, become forces that orient and direct action, both individual and collective. Independent of the ethical or exemplary character they sometimes have, certain beliefs by their very nature possess great referential force. We are aware that beliefs regarding the gods are quite different from strong beliefs of a secular nature; however, even taking those differences into account, we note structures that are common to both.

The weak beliefs with which we move through daily life easily change as soon as we notice that our perception of things was mistaken. On the other hand, when we speak of strongly held beliefs—those beliefs upon which we mount our overall, global interpretation of the world, our most general likes and dislikes, our irrational scale of values—then we are touching the structure of myths that we are not even willing to question deeply because we are so totally committed to it. Moreover, when one of these myths collapses, we are plunged into a profound crisis in which we feel like leaves tossed about by the wind. These myths, private or collective, orient our behavior, though we are generally aware of their profound action only through certain images that guide us in a particular direction.

Every period in history has its own powerful underlying beliefs, its own collective mythic structure, whether sacralized or not. These beliefs facilitate the cohesion of human groups, giving them identity and allowing their participation in a common ambit. Questioning the basic myths of an age opens one up to an irrational reaction whose intensity will vary depending on the force of the critique and how deeply rooted are the beliefs in question. But, of course, one generation follows upon another and the historical moment changes; thus, a belief that was repellent in an earlier time begins to be accepted with a naturalness that makes it seem the most obvious truth.

Today, for instance, if we begin to question the central myth of money, we will most probably elicit a reaction unfavorable to any sort of dialogue. Our interlocutor will rush to the defense, exclaiming, for example, “What do you mean, money is a myth? You have to have money to live!” Or perhaps, “A myth is something that’s false, something you can’t see or touch. But money is a tangible reality—money makes the world go round.” And so on. There is no use in our pointing out the difference between the tangible nature of money and the intangible things that we believe having money can bring us. There is no use our noting the great difference between money as a sign representing the value attributed to things, and the psychological charge that that sign possesses. We will already have become suspect. Immediately our interlocutor will begin to look us coldly up and down, exorcising the heresy as he calculates the price of our clothes—which have, indisputably, cost money. He will reflect on our weight and our daily caloric intake, consider the neighborhood we live in, and so on.

At that moment we might soften our position by saying something like, “But, of course, we have to distinguish between the money that one needs to live and *unnecessary* money…” But that concession comes too late. After all, there are so many banks, credit institutions, money in such a range of different forms—that is, so many “realities” all attesting to an efficacy that we

appear to deny. Yet in this picturesque fiction we have not denied the instrumental efficacy of money—in fact, we have endowed it with a tremendous psychological power, for we have seen that the object “money” is attributed greater magic than it actually has: This tangible thing will bring us intangible happiness and in some way immortality, for it can distract us from our concern with the problem of death.

This secular myth is often found operating not too far from the gods. We all know, for instance, that the word “money” derives from Juno Moneta—Juno “who gives warning,” at whose temple the Romans minted the coins of their realm. People prayed to Juno Moneta for abundance, for wealth—but for those who believed in her, Juno herself was more important than the money that came from her benevolence. True believers today pray to their gods for different things, among which is money; but if they truly believe in their deity, the deity itself remains at the apex of their scale of values.

Money, as a fetish, has undergone great transformations. At least in the West, for a long time money was backed by gold, that mysterious, rare metal whose special qualities have made it so attractive. Medieval alchemists set out to produce it artificially. To gold, still sacred, was attributed the power to multiply itself without limits, to serve as a universal elixir, and to confer long life as well as wealth. Gold thus inspired zealous quests throughout the Americas. But I am referring not only to the so-called “gold fever” that drove adventurers and colonists in the United States, I am also speaking of that El Dorado sought by the conquistadors and associated with minor myths such as the Fountain of Youth.

A deeply rooted myth will pull a whole constellation of minor myths into orbit around it, like a sun. Thus, in our example of money, there are numerous objects that become charged with an aura transferred from the central nucleus. The automobile, which is so useful to us, is also a symbol of money, and may symbolize a status that opens the door to still more money. On this point, Andrew Greeley has the following to say:

> All it takes is a visit to the annual car show to recognize a profoundly ritualized religious manifestation. The colors, the lights, the music, the reverence of the worshippers, the presence of the priestesses of the temple (the models), the pomp and luxury, the prodigality of money, the compact mass (in another civilization all this would constitute an authentically liturgical rite). The cult of the sacred automobile has its faithful and its initiates. The Gnostic did not await with any more impatience the revelation of the oracle than the car-worshiper awaits the first rumors of the new models. It is in that moment of the annual periodic cycle that the priests of the cult (the car salesmen) take on new importance, at the same time as an anxious multitude impatiently awaits the advent of a new form of salvation.

While I may not fully agree with the dimensions that this author ascribes to the worship of the fetish automobile, what is interesting is that he has allowed us to see the mythic aspect of a contemporary object. This is, of course, a secular myth, but perhaps we can see in it a structure similar to that of sacred myth, though without its fundamental characteristic of autonomous, conscious, independent force. If the author were to consider rites of annual periodicity, for example, the same description he has given could also be applied to birthday and New Year’s celebrations, the Oscar ceremonies, and other such secular rites, though clearly these rituals tend not to take place in the religious atmosphere proper to sacred myths. It would also be interesting to examine the differences between “myth” and “ceremony,” though that is beyond the scope of the present study. And it would be interesting to examine the differences between

the universes of mythic beings entreated by prayers and those of magical forces manipulated by rites of enchantment, but that is also beyond the scope of the present study.

When we examined money as one of the central secular myths of our time, we described it as the nucleus or gravitational center of a whole system of ideation. I suppose that my listeners will probably not have imagined in this context a figure such as the atomic model of Niels Bohr, in which the nucleus is the central mass around which the electrons revolve. But in fact the nucleus of a system of ideation colors with its own particular characteristics a great part of people's lives—their behavior, their ambitions and desires, their fears, are all related to this theme. And there is even more to this: An entire interpretation of the world and the events of that world is connected to this nucleus. In our example, the history of humanity would then take on an *economic* character, and this history will culminate in paradise when conflicts that question the supremacy of money finally cease.

We have taken as our reference one of the central secular myths of our time, in order to illustrate the possible functioning in their own times of the sacred myths presented in this book. There is, however, an enormous distance between these mythic systems, because the numinous, the divine, is completely absent in one of them, and that produces differences that are difficult to ignore. In any case, in today's world things are changing at a tremendous rate, and I believe we can see that one historical moment has closed and another one is opening. We are at a moment in which a new scale of values and a new sensibility seem to be emerging. Nevertheless, I cannot assure you that the gods are once again approaching humankind. Much as Buber experienced it, contemporary theologians feel anguish over the absence of God, an anguish that Nietzsche was unable to overcome following the death of God. It could be that in the ancient myths there was too much of a personal anthropomorphism, and perhaps that which we call "God" expresses itself voicelessly through the Destiny of humanity.

If I should be asked whether I expect the emergence of new myths, I would say that that is precisely what is taking place today. I only hope that those tremendous forces unleashed by History might come to generate a planetary and truly human civilization in which inequality and intolerance are forever abolished. Then, as an old book says, "swords shall be beaten into plowshares."

Thank you.

Philosophy and Literary Works

Grand Palace, Santiago, Chile, May 23, 1991

I wish to thank Planeta Publishers and the many friends who have invited me to speak today about some of my recently published writings. And, of course, I want to thank all of you who are present today.

In lectures given in a number of countries I have spoken separately about each of these books as they have been published. Today, on the other hand, I will try to give an overview of the ideas that form the basis of all of these works. However, since the four volumes of which we are speaking are not uniform in style or subject matter, it will be necessary to mention some of their specific characteristics. As we will see, the interests that gave rise to these works are diverse and the forms of expression vary—from the poetic prose of *Humanize the Earth,* to the short stories of *Guided Experiences,* to the exegesis of *Universal Root Myths,* and to the essays of *Contributions to Thought.*

Touching briefly on each of these works, let me note that the first, *Humanize the Earth,* is a triptych comprised of three works that were written in 1972, 1981, and 1988. These works circulated separately under the titles *The Inner Look, The Internal Landscape,* and *The Human Landscape. Humanize the Earth* is, then, comprised of these three works, and each work is in turn divided into chapters and the chapters into numbered paragraphs. In general, the discourse is meant to serve as an appeal, hence the imperative sentences that give the text a certain hardness. To discharge the resulting tension, however, there are frequent declarative sentences, which allow readers to compare what is being said against their own experience.

This slightly polemical work can present the reader with some difficulties owing to the deliberately forced quality of the Spanish in which it was written. This quality produces an atmosphere that, while it is in keeping with the emotions I have wanted to communicate, can result in problems in grasping the meaning, and therefore a full understanding, as became apparent when this work began to be translated into other languages. *Humanize the Earth,* then, is a work that presents in poetic prose ideas dealing with human life in its most general aspects. It makes use of a dynamic point of view, which begins in the interior of the person and opens toward the social and interpersonal; it makes an appeal to readers, urging them to overcome the non-meaning of life, proposing activity and militancy supporting the humanization of the world.

The second book, titled *Guided Experiences,* was originally written in 1980. As observed in the prefatory note, this is a collection of short stories written in the first person; however, it should be clarified that that “first person” is not the author, as is so often the case, but in fact the reader. This effect is achieved by making the setting of each story a frame for readers to fill with themselves and their own contents. To assist the text, asterisks are placed at certain points; these asterisks indicate pauses that assist the reader in mentally introducing images from his or her own life, in this way turning the passive reader-observer into an actor in and co-author of each description. In literary works, plays, films, and television programs, the reader or spectator can identify more or less completely with the characters, but always recognizes, either at the time or later, the differences between the actor who appears “in” the scene and the observer who is located “outside” it, and who is none other than the reader or spectator him or herself.

In these guided experiences, quite the opposite occurs: The main character is the reader-observer, who is at once both agent and recipient of the actions and emotions in the

story. In addition, the notes to the book provide elements sufficient to enable any person with a minimum of literary ability to construct new tales that can form the basis of aesthetic pleasure or, alternatively, parameters for reflection on situations in the reader's life that demand some change in behavior or an immediate response that the reader may need to clarify. In contrast to *Humanize the Earth,* which dealt in poetic prose with the *general* situations of one's life, encouraging and exhorting people in similarly general ways, the *Guided Experiences* employ the technique of the short story to help the reader give order to and orient the actions he or she may decide to take in *particular* situations of daily life.

The third volume, *Universal Root Myths,* was written in 1990. Unlike *Guided Experiences,* which focuses on images that correspond to individual life, this work compares and comments upon those ancient *collective images* that cultures have fashioned into myths. It is a work of exegesis, of interpretation of texts from other times and places. *Universal Root Myths* attempts to focus on, or isolate, those myths whose central plots have shown a certain permanence in time, even though the names and secondary attributes of the protagonists have changed. These myths, which I call "root myths," also have a "universal" character, not simply because of their geographical range but also because of how they have been adopted by other peoples. Considering the double function that we attribute to the *image* in New Humanism—as a translation of vital tensions and also as giving impulse to behavior tending to discharge those tensions—the collective image fashioned into myth allows us to approach an understanding of the psychosocial basis of that image-myth. In this way, *Universal Root Myths* leads us toward an understanding of the factors that bring about cohesion in and give orientation to human groups, whether the myths in question embody religious truths or powerful social beliefs of a secular nature.

Two essays, "Psychology of the Image" (1988) and "Historiological Discussions" (1989), together make up a fourth volume titled *Contributions to Thought.* This book presents, in a very succinct way, what are for us the most important theoretical issues regarding the *structure of human life* and the *historicity* in which that structure unfolds.

The comments made so far should now make it possible to try to present an overall picture of the ideas that form the foundation of these various works, but I should note once again that it is in *Contributions to Thought* that some of these ideas are presented with the greatest precision.

Let us begin with some considerations regarding ideologies and systems of thought. The thinking that underlies these works does not begin by positing generalities but rather by studying the particulars of human life—the particulars of existence, the particulars of the personal register of thinking, feeling, and acting. This starting point makes our thinking incompatible with any system that begins from such things as Idea, or Matter, or the Unconscious, or the Will. This is so because any truth that claims to speak about humankind, society, history, and so on, must first begin with questions relating to the subject who is issuing those statements; otherwise, in speaking about humankind, we forget the one who is speaking, we replace or postpone dealing with that person—as though we wanted to leave the human being aside because its profundities make us uneasy, because its daily weaknesses and eventual death throw us into the arms of the Absurd. In that sense, the various theories about the human being have perhaps served to lull us, to distract our gaze from that *concrete human being* who suffers, enjoys, creates, and fails; that being who surrounds us and who we in fact are; that child who from birth will tend to be objectified; that aged person whose youthful hopes have been dashed. We learn nothing

from any ideology that presents itself as reality itself or pretends *not* to be an ideology, attempting to supplant the truth that exposes it as just one more human construction.

The fact that the human being may or may not find God, may or may not gain in knowledge and mastery of nature, may or may not achieve a social organization in keeping with human dignity, always places one term of the equation in each person's own register. And whether a person accepts or rejects a particular conception, however logical or outlandish that conception may be, it will always be the *person* who is accepting or rejecting, the person who is present, at issue, integrally involved. Let us speak, then, of *human life.*

When I observe myself, not from a physiological point of view but from an existential one, I find myself immersed in a world that is *given*, a world neither constructed nor chosen by me. I find myself *in situation* with phenomena that, beginning with my own body, are inevitable. The body as fundamental constituent of my existence is also a phenomenon that is homogeneous with the natural world in which it acts and that also acts upon it. But the natural character of the body has important differences for me from all other phenomena in that: (1) I have an immediate register of my body; (2) my register of external phenomena is mediated by my body; and (3) some of my body's operations are accessible to my immediate intention.

It happens, however, that the world presents itself to me not simply as a conglomerate of natural objects, but also as something articulated by other human beings, along with the objects and signs produced or modified by them. The intention I observe in myself is a fundamental element for the interpretation of the behavior of others, and just as I constitute the social world by an understanding of intentions, so am I constituted by it. Of course, we are talking about intentions that are manifested in some bodily action. It is through the corporal expressions or through perceiving the situation in which I encounter another that I am able to understand the meanings, the intentions, of the other. Furthermore, natural and human objects appear to me as linked to pleasure or pain, and I try to modify my situation in order to situate myself favorably with respect to them. In this way, I am not closed off from the world of natural things and other human beings, but rather what most characterizes me is precisely *opening.* My consciousness has been configured *intersubjectively:* It employs codes of reasoning, emotional models, patterns of action that I register as "mine" but that I also recognize in others. And, of course, my body is open to the world in that I both perceive it and act upon it.

The natural world, however, unlike the human world, appears to me as devoid of intention. Of course, I can imagine that the rocks, plants, and stars possess intention, but I find no way to achieve an effective dialogue with them. Even animals, in which at times I glimpse the spark of intelligence, appear to me as impenetrable and only changing slowly from within their own natures. I see insect societies that are rigidly structured, higher mammals that employ rudimentary technologies, but still only replicate such codes in a slow process of genetic modification, as though each animal born was always the first representative of its respective species. And when I see the benefits derived from those plants and animals that have been modified and domesticated by humanity, I see human intention opening its way and humanizing the world.

To define the human being in terms of sociability also seems inadequate, because this does not distinguish human beings from many other species. Nor is human capacity for work a distinguishing characteristic when compared to that of more powerful animals. Not even language defines the essence of what is human, for we know of numerous animals that make use of various codes and forms of communication. Each new human being, on the other hand, comes into a world that has been modified by others, and as the human being is constituted by

that world of intentions I discover the human capacity to accumulate and incorporate into the temporal. That is, I discover not simply the social dimension but the *historical-social* dimension of the human being.

With these things in mind, we can attempt the following definition of the human being: *Human beings are historical beings whose mode of social action transforms their own nature.* If I accept this definition, I will also have to accept that this is a being that can, intentionally, transform its physical constitution. And indeed, that is something we see happening. This process began with the use of instruments that, arrayed before the body as external "prostheses," allowed human beings to extend their reach, to extend and amplify their senses, and to increase their strength and the quality of their work. Though not endowed with the ability to function in aerial or aquatic environments, they have nonetheless created the means to move through these media, and have even begun to emigrate from their natural environment, the planet Earth. Today, moreover, human beings have begun to penetrate into the interior of their own bodies, transplanting organs, intervening in their neurochemistry, practicing *in vitro* fertilization, and even manipulating their genes.

If by the word "nature" we have wanted to signify something fixed and unchanging, then it's a seriously deficient idea, even when applied to what is most object-like about the human being, that is, the body. In light of this, it is clear that nothing of what is termed "natural morality" or "natural law" or "natural institutions" exists through nature; on the contrary, all of this is historico-social.

This concept of "human nature," which we reject, goes hand in hand with another very common idea that asserts the supposed "passivity" of the consciousness. This ideology looks at the human being as an entity that functions in response to stimuli from the natural world. What began as crude sensualism has little by little been displaced by historicist currents that, at their core, have preserved the same conception of a passive consciousness. And even when they emphasize the activity of consciousness in and transformation of the world over the interpretation of its activities, they still conceive of its activity as resulting from conditions external to the consciousness.

Those old prejudices concerning human nature and the passivity of consciousness appear today as neo-evolutionary theories, where natural selection is determined through the struggle for the survival of the fittest. In the version currently in fashion, this zoological conception, now transposed into the human world, attempts to move beyond prior dialectics of race or class by asserting a dialectic in which it is supposed that all social activity is self-regulated thanks to "natural" economic laws. Thus, once again, the concrete human being is objectified and submerged.

We are only touching on those conceptual schemes that, in order to explain the human being, have begun from theoretical generalities and maintained the existence of a human nature and a passive consciousness. In contrast to these ideas, we maintain the need to begin from human particularity, we maintain that the human being is a *socio-historical* and *non-natural* phenomenon and, further, that human consciousness is active in transforming the world in accordance with its intention. We view human life as always taking place *in situation,* and the human body as an immediately perceived natural object, which at the same time is subject to numerous dictates of the individual's intentionality.

The following questions therefore arise: (1) How is it that the consciousness is active—that is, how is it that it can operate intentionally on the body and, through the body, transform the world? (2) How is it that the human being is constituted as a *socio-historical* being?

These questions must be answered starting from concrete existence, so as not to fall once again into theoretical generalities and some consequent system of interpretation. To answer the first question will require us to apprehend through immediate evidence how human intention acts upon the body. To answer the second, we must begin from evidence of temporality and intersubjectivity in the human being, rather than beginning from general laws of history and society.

Let us look at the first point. In order to extend my arm, open my hand, and pick up an object, I need to receive information about the position of my arm and hand. I receive this information thanks to kinesthetic and coenesthetic perceptions—that is, perceptions from my intrabody. I am equipped with sensors that accomplish these specialized tasks in the same way that my external senses do through their tactile, auditory, and other sensory organs. I also gather visual data about the distance from my body to the object. That is, before extending my arm, I have assimilated complex information in what might be called a “structure of perception,” not in some aggregate of separate perceptions. Thus, as I prepare to pick up the object, I select some information and I discard other information that is not relevant. Any explanation of this phenomenon in which I am characterized as perceiving passively is not sufficient to explain how I am able to guide this structure of perception that corresponds to my having the intention to pick up the object. The insufficiency of such passive explanations is even clearer to me as I begin to move my hand and arm, adjusting my movements in response to feedback from the data that my senses are continually sending me. Nor can the action of putting my arm into motion and readjusting its trajectory be explained simply in terms of perception.

To avoid confusing the various registers in this experiment, I decide to close my eyes and locate myself in front of the object and to carry out the operations with my arm and hand. Once again I register the internal sensations; but, lacking sight, my calculation of distance becomes awkward. If I mistake the position of the object and represent or imagine it in a place different from where it actually is, my hand will not encounter it. That is, my hand will go instead in the direction that has been delineated by my visual representations. I experience much the same thing with the other external senses that bring in information on phenomena, and to which images correspond that are apparently “copies” of the perception. Thus, I have gustatory and olfactory images, images corresponding to other external senses, as well as images corresponding to internal senses such as position, movement, pain, acidity, internal pressure, and so on.

Following this line, I discover that it is images that impart activity to the body—images that, while they do reproduce perception, have great mobility, fluctuating and transforming both voluntarily and involuntarily. Here I should note that in the view of naive psychology, images were seen as passive, serving only as the basis for memory; therefore, to the extent that images diverged from the dictatorship of perception they fell into the category of senseless ravings, delirium devoid of meaning. At one time an entire educational system was based on the cruel repetition of memorized texts. Creativity and comprehension were minimized for, as we have said, consciousness was seen as being passive. But let’s continue.

It is clear that I also have a perception of the image, which enables me to distinguish one image from another, just as I distinguish among diverse perceptions. Or can I not call up images from memory, represent things previously imagined? Let’s see. If I now, with my eyes open, perform the action of picking up an object, I may not be able to perceive how the image progressively superimposes itself on the perception. But if, while looking, I also imagine the same object in a false position (different from where it actually is), then even though I am still

seeing it in its true position, I notice that my hand will tend to move toward the imagined object, not toward the one I see. It is, then, the *image* and not simple perception that determines my action toward the object. Some will counter this argument with the example of the short reflex arc, which bypasses the cerebral cortex, since it terminates at the level of the medulla, and produces a response even before the stimulus can be analyzed. However, if by this the critic means simply that there are automatic responses that require no conscious activity, then of course one can list a multitude of such involuntary, natural operations common to both the human body and those of many animals. But while such responses certainly exist, they explain nothing regarding the problem of the image.

I would add that this superimposition of images on perception is something that occurs in all cases, even though we cannot always see it with the same clarity as when we represented an imaginary object in a location beside the perceived object. We should bear in mind that the mere fact of visually imagining the movement of my arm does not make my arm move. My arm will move when an image that corresponds to internal perceptions of the appropriate level is fired off toward the intrabody. What happens with the visual image is that it delineates the path along which my arm will have to move. We can see this taking place in the state of sleep when, despite a tremendous proliferation of images, the sleeper's body remains still. In this case it is clear that the landscape of representation is internalized, so that the images go toward the intrabody and not toward the layers of musculature. While we are asleep our external senses draw inward, as do the paths traced by the images. If we were to consider the example of the agitation that occurs in "nightmares" or during somnambulism, we would say that from the level of *deep sleep* one passes to the level of *active semi-sleep;* the external senses are active and images begin to be present at a more external level, thus setting the body in motion. We will not go into the subject of the space of representation here, nor of the translation, distortion, and transformation of impulses; these subjects are, however, further developed in the essay "Psychology of the Image," which is included in the volume *Contributions to Thought.* With what we have seen so far we can move on to other ideas, such as those of *copresence,* the *temporal structure of consciousness,* the *look,* and the *landscape.*

Let us suppose that one day I go into my room, and upon seeing the window I recognize it—it is familiar to me. I have a new perception of it, but also at work are earlier perceptions retained as images. But then I notice that in one corner of the windowpane there is a crack. "That wasn't there before," I say to myself, comparing the new perception with what I retain from previous perceptions. In addition, I experience a sort of surprise. The "window" of former acts of perception has remained with me, although not passively like a photograph but actively as is characteristic of images. That which I have retained from past perceptions is acting when confronted with what I now perceive, even though its formation belongs to the past. This is a past that is always with me, always present. Before I entered my room I took it for granted that the window would be there, just as before. This is not something that I was *thinking*—it was something I simply took for granted. It was not that the window in particular was present in my thoughts at that moment; rather, it was *copresent,* it was within the horizon of objects contained in my room.

It is thanks to copresence, the retention that is made present and superimposed on perception, that consciousness infers more than it perceives. In phenomenon of copresence, we find *belief* functioning in its most elementary form. In our example, it's as though I told myself, "That's strange—I had thought that the window was fine."

Let's look further. If when I entered my room there had appeared a phenomenon belonging to a different field of objects—for example, an airplane engine or a hippopotamus—I would have found that surreal situation to be unbelievable, not because those objects do not exist but rather precisely because their appearance in my bedroom would be outside the field of the copresence corresponding to what I remember, what I retain, of my room. Now, I had gone to my room guided by an intention, guided by images of getting a pen. As I walked, perhaps momentarily forgetful of my objective, the images of what I was going to do in the immediate future (get a pen) continued acting copresently. The future for the consciousness was brought into the present, was part of the present. Unfortunately, I found the windowpane broken, and my original intention (to get a pen) was replaced by the need to solve this other pressing problem. Now, at any present instant of my consciousness I can observe the intersection of retentions and futurizations that act copresently and in structure. The present instant is constituted in my consciousness as an active temporal field comprised of the three different times. Seen in this way, things are very different from events in calendar time, in which today is not touched by yesterday or by tomorrow. On the calendar and on the clock "now" is clearly differentiated from "no longer" and "not yet," and, in addition, events are ordered in a linear succession, one after another. And I simply cannot claim that this grouping within a total series that I call the "calendar" is a structure. We will return to this theme when we consider the subject of historicity and temporality.

For now, let's continue with what we were saying about the way that consciousness infers more than it perceives; about the way that things coming from the past, as retention, superimpose themselves on present perception. In each *look* that I launch toward an object I see things in a distorted way. We are not saying this in the sense proper to modern science, which clearly tells us that we are unable to measure with certainty both the location and velocity of an atom or to perceive wavelengths above or below our thresholds of perception; we are saying it with reference to the way the images of retentions and futurizations, memory and imagination, superimpose themselves on perceptions. Thus, when I witness a beautiful sunrise in the countryside, the natural landscape that I observe is not determined in itself—I determine it, I constitute it according to an aesthetic ideal that I hold, perhaps related to a contrast with city life, and perhaps related to that special someone who is there beside me and the suggestion that this light awakens in me, like a hope for an open future. That special peace that I experience gives me the illusion that I am contemplating passively, when in reality I am actively superimposing many contents on the simple natural object. This is true not only for this example but for any *look* that I launch toward reality.

In "Historiological Discussions," the second essay in *Contributions to Thought,* I noted that the natural destiny of the body is the world, and it is sufficient to observe the body's shape and formation to confirm this. Its senses and its apparatuses for obtaining nourishment, for locomotion, reproduction, and so on, are naturally shaped to be in the world. In addition, the image launches its transformative charge through the body; it does so not to produce a copy of the world, to be a reflection of the situation as given, but quite the opposite—to modify that previously given situation. In this way, objects are limitations or amplifications of corporal possibilities, and bodies around me appear as factors that multiply those possibilities, to the extent that those bodies are governed by intentions that I recognize as similar to those that govern my own body.

Human beings need to transform the world and to transform themselves, because of the situation of finitude and temporo-spatial limitation in which they find themselves and which they

register as physical *pain* and mental *suffering*. So it is that overcoming pain is not simply an animal response, it is a temporal configuration in which the future is primary and that becomes a fundamental impulse of life, even though it may not be felt with urgency at any given moment. Therefore, apart from any immediate, reflex, and natural response, the *deferred* response to avoid pain is prompted by psychological suffering in the face of danger, and it is represented either as future possibility or as present fact when pain is present in other human beings. Overcoming pain appears, then, as a basic project that guides action. It is what has made possible communication among diverse bodies and intentions in what we call "social constitution." Social constitution is as historical as human life itself; it configures human life. Its transformation is continuous, but in a way that is different from that of nature, where changes do not occur due to intention. Social organization continues and expands, but this cannot occur solely through the presence of social objects which, even though they are carriers of human intentions, are unable to continue expanding of their own accord.

Continuity is given by generations of human beings, which do not stand "one beside the other" but instead continually interact with and transform one another. These generations, which allow continuity and development, are dynamic structures—they are social time in motion, without which society would fall into a state of nature and lose its character as society. It happens, in addition, that in every historical moment there coexist several generations at various temporal levels, with differing retentions and futurizations that configure differing landscapes of situation and belief. For the active generations, the bodies and behaviors of children and the elderly demonstrate the condition that they are moving from or toward. In turn, for the extremes of that triple relation, one can also determine corresponding extreme locations of temporality. But this structure never remains static, because while the active generations grow old and the elderly die, children are growing up and transforming and beginning to occupy active positions. Meanwhile, new births continually reconstitute society.

When in the abstract we "stop" this unceasing flow, we can speak of a "historical moment," in which all the members who are standing on the same social stage can be considered as contemporaries, living "at the same time"—but we observe that they are not, in their interior temporality, coetaneous with respect to their landscapes of formation and education, current situations, and future projects. In reality, the generational dialectic arises between the contiguous strata, which contend for the center of activity, the social present, in accordance with their own interests and beliefs. Historical becoming, then, is explained by this internal social temporality in which interacts all that the various generations have produced, and not as a succession of phenomena set down linearly, one after another, as in calendar time, as naive historiography would have it.

Constituted socially within a historical world in which I am constantly configuring my landscape, I interpret that toward which I direct my *look.* This is my personal landscape, but it is also a collective landscape that larger human groups are also responding to at the same moment. As discussed before, several generations coexist in one present moment. As a very simple example, consider how in the same moment there are living some born before the transistor was invented and others born in the computer age. There are many generational configurations that differ in their experiences, in their ways of doing things, and also in their ways of thinking and feeling—and what, at one time, used to function in social relationships and in the mode of production, may slowly (or at times quite rapidly) cease to function. We were expecting one result in the future and that future arrived, but things did not turn out as we

expected. Neither earlier actions, sensibility, nor ideology coincide with the new landscape that is gradually imposing itself socially.

To round out this outline of the ideas contained in these books that are now being published, I will note that because of human beings' *opening* and their freedom to choose among situations, to defer responses and to imagine their futures, they are thus also able to deny or negate themselves, to deny or negate aspects of their bodies, even to negate themselves completely as in suicide, or to negate other human beings. This freedom has also made it possible for a few to illegitimately appropriate for themselves the social whole—that is, to deny freedom and intentionality to others, thereby reducing these other human beings to prostheses, to instruments of the intentions of those few. Therein lies the essence of discrimination, whether its methodology is physical, economic, sexual, racial, or religious violence. Violence can be established and perpetuated through the management of the apparatus of social regulation and control—that is, the State. As a consequence, social organization requires an advanced type of coordination that will be safe from any concentration of power, whether private or State. Ordinarily, however, the State apparatus is confused with social reality, and so we should make it clear that since it is society and not the State that is the producer of goods, the ownership of the means of production should, coherently with this, be social.

Necessarily, those who have diminished the humanity of others have thereby given rise to new pain and suffering, reintroducing into the heart of society that age-old struggle against natural adversity—but now as a struggle between those who want to "naturalize" others, society, and History on the one hand, and those who are oppressed and need to humanize themselves in humanizing the world, on the other. To *humanize* is to release ourselves from objectification in order to affirm the *intentionality* of every human being and the primacy of the *future* over the present situation. It is the representation of a possible and better future that allows the transformation of the present and makes possible all revolution and all change. Thus, the pressure of oppressive conditions is not in itself sufficient to mobilize change; people must be aware that change is possible and that change depends on human actions. This struggle is not one between blind, mechanical forces; it is not a reflection of nature. It is a struggle between *human intentions.* And this is precisely what allows us to speak of oppressors and the oppressed, of the just and the unjust, of heroes and cowards. It is the only thing that allows us to meaningfully practice social solidarity and to commit ourselves to the liberation of those who suffer discrimination, whether they are a minority or the majority.

Finally, as to the *meaning* of human actions, we do not believe that human actions are a meaningless convulsion, a "useless passion," an endeavor that will end in the dissolution of the absurd. We think that *valid actions* are those that end in others, going in the direction of their freedom. Nor do we believe that the destiny of humanity is fixed by prior causes that invalidate all possible effort. Rather, we believe that human destiny is determined by an intention that, as it becomes ever more conscious in the peoples of the world, opens the way toward *a universal human nation.*

Thank you very much.

Letters to My Friends

(*Cartas a Mis Amigos*)

Mapocho Station Cultural Center, Santiago, Chile
May 14, 1994

I wish to thank the institutions that have organized the First Conference on Humanist Culture for inviting me to present this book, *Letters to My Friends,* upon its publication in Chile. I appreciate the remarks by Felipe García as representative of the publisher, Virtual Editions, and I value the comments by Volodia Teitelboim. I hope one day to be able to respond in kind to the many brilliant concepts he has offered us today and to comment in the detail that they deserve. I am also very grateful for the presence of distinguished members from the world of culture, the press, and, of course, the many friends who are with us today.

In the brief remarks that follow I would like to provide some context for the book that is being presented here today, stressing that it is not a systematic work but rather a series of commentaries presented in the well-known and often used epistolary form. Since the time of Seneca's *Moral Epistles,* there has come down to us a long tradition of such works that have spread throughout the world and, of course, had varying degrees of influence and evoked varying degrees of interest. Today we are all familiar with "open letters" which, though addressed to one particular person or institution or government, are in fact written with the intention that they be read well beyond the explicit recipient—that is, they are intended for the public at large. The present work has been conceived with that same intention.

The complete title of this volume is *Letters to My Friends: On Social and Personal Crisis in Today's World.* And who are the "friends" to whom these missives are addressed? They include all those people who, whether they agree or disagree with our ideological position, share the genuine intention of coming to a greater understanding and developing more appropriate and effective actions in order to overcome the crisis in which we are now living. These are the people to whom the letters are addressed.

As for the subject matter, the letters outline the scope of the crisis in which both societies and individuals are now immersed. I use the word "crisis" in its usual sense—a situation that can be resolved in one of several possible directions, something that carries us from one situation into a new and different one that may in turn present its own problems. Although a crisis is popularly understood as a dangerous or perilous phase, out of it can come something either beneficial or harmful to those entities that pass through it; and in this case, those passing through the crisis include both society and the individual. For some it may seem redundant to include individuals, since they are implied when we speak of society, but from our point of view that is not correct, and the attempt to make either one of these terms disappear rests on an analysis that we do not share. These are my comments about the title of the book.

Now then, a reasonable ordering of this presentation would dictate that we begin with a consideration of the work's contents. Rather than following that conventional approach, however, I would instead prefer to examine the intention that shaped this volume as a whole—an intention to assemble in one place and present the ideas of New Humanism, ideas that bear on the situation we are presently living in. Today New Humanism is sounding a warning about the worldwide crisis our civilization is facing, and it proposes some minimal measures to be taken in order to overcome this crisis. New Humanism is conscious of the apocalyptic atmosphere that historically accompanies times such as these that mark the end not

only of a century but also of a millennium. We know that at such critical junctures of human time, those who would proclaim the end of the world will raise their voices and that those voices, translated within the context of distinct folklores, will announce the end of the ecosystem, or the end of History, or the end of ideologies, or the end of the human being as a slave to machines, and so on. New Humanism subscribes to none of these visions. It says, simply: “Listen, friends, we need to change the direction we’re going in!” But what if no one wants to listen? Or what if we’re mistaken? Well then, so much the better, because, if we’re mistaken, then things are already on the right track, and we’re even now on the path to a Paradise on Earth.

There are structuralists who tell us that today’s crisis is simply a readjustment in the established system, a necessary realignment of the elements in a system that is continuing to progress. There are postmodernists who maintain that it is a question of a nineteenth-century discourse that simply no longer fits, and that, thanks to current technological and communicational transparency, society’s decision-makers are making available increased power and pacification. And so, my friends, we can all rest easy, trusting in the New Order to bring peace to our world. We will see no more Yugoslavias, Middle Easts, Burundis, or Sri Lankas. There will be no more hunger or starvation—no longer will 80 percent of the world population live at or below the subsistence level. No more recessions, layoffs, or downsizing—we’ll see an end to the destruction of the sources of employment. From now on we’ll see governments that are increasingly honest and free of corruption; we’ll see rising levels of literacy and education, and declining crime and urban insecurity, along with decreasing alcoholism and drug addiction. In short, we’ll see growing harmony and happiness for all. And that’s good, my friends, for Paradise is at hand, if only we will be patient… But what if Paradise isn’t just around the corner? What if the current situation continues to deteriorate or even spins out of control? What alternatives will we have then?

That is the focus of the discourse in *Letters to My Friends.* And we trust that no one will be offended if we consider, simply by way of timidly offering our opinion, the possibility that all of this could have a less-than-happy ending. No one is offended that buildings are equipped with fire escapes in case of fire or that movie theaters and other public places are equipped with fire extinguishers and emergency exits. No one protests because sports stadiums have additional gates that can be opened if the need should arise. But, of course, when you go to the movies or enter a building you aren’t thinking about fires or catastrophes—all of this is simply part of being prudent. And if the building or the theater doesn’t burn down, if there’s no problem at the stadium, then so much the better!

The sixth letter contains the “Statement of the Humanist Movement,” which expresses our movement’s most general ideas, its alternative to the present crisis. It is not the statement of killjoys or fatalists, it is not a set of pessimistic ideas—it is simply a straightforward description of the crisis and a presentation of alternatives. When you read this statement, even those of you who do not agree with much of it, you should still be able to say: “Well, it *is* an alternative. We should listen to what these people are saying—societies, too, need their fire escapes. These people aren’t our enemies—they’re the voice of survival.”

The “Statement of the Humanist Movement,” found in the sixth letter, says the following:

> Humanism puts labor before big capital, real democracy before formal democracy, decentralization before centralization, anti-discrimination before discrimination, freedom before oppression, and meaning in life before resignation, complicity, and the absurd.… Humanists are internationalists, aspiring to a *universal human nation.* While

> understanding the world they live in as a single whole, humanists act in their immediate environments. Humanists seek not a uniform world, but a world of multiplicity: diverse in ethnicity, languages and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheist or religious; diverse in occupations and creativity. Humanists do not want masters, they have no fondness for authority figures or bosses. *Nor do they see themselves as representatives or bosses of anyone else*.

The statement then concludes:

> Humanists are neither naive nor enamored of declarations that belong to more romantic eras, and in this sense they do not view their proposals as the most advanced expression of social consciousness or think of their organization in an unquestioning way. Nor do they claim to represent the majority. Humanists simply act according to their best judgment, focusing on the changes they believe are most suitable and possible for these times in which they happen to live.

Isn't this statement filled with a strong sense of freedom, of pluralism, along with an awareness of its own limits? It seems to me that it can rightly be called an alternative—in no sense is it an overpowering or absolutist statement calling for uniformity.

And what is this process of crisis like? Where is it taking us? The various letters share a common concern that is centered on the single model—the model of the *closed system*—that began with the rise of capitalism, and was given further strength by the Industrial Revolution. Nation states in the hands of an increasingly powerful bourgeoisie began to contend for domination of the world. Colonies passed from crowned heads into the hands of private companies. And banks began to perform their tasks of intermediation, putting third parties in debt and steadily gaining control over the sources of production. The banks financed the military campaigns of the ambitious bourgeoisies, lending money to all parties in any conflict, running them into debt and managing to make money out of nearly every conflict. While the bourgeoisies of different nations were still viewing growth in terms of the harsh exploitation of the working class, industrial growth, and trade—always taking as their center of gravity the particular country in which each one operated—the banks had already begun to leap beyond the administrative limitations of the nation state.

Then came the socialist revolutions and the stock market crash, yet neither of these prevented the financial centers from continuing to grow and to concentrate ever greater wealth, even as they underwent adjustments. Then came the last nationalistic gasp of the industrial bourgeoisies and the Second World War. And finally it was clear that the world was now one, that the regions, countries, and continents were all interconnected, and that industry needed international financial capital in order to survive. By this time the national state was beginning to pose an obstacle to the global movement of capital, goods, services, people, and products. As a result, regionalization began, and with it the old order began to destructure.

The old proletariat who had long been the base of a social pyramid rooted in primary extractive industries gradually began to swell the ranks of the industrial workers, and thereby to lose uniformity. Secondary and tertiary industries along with an increasingly sophisticated service sector began to absorb labor in a constant conversion and reconversion of the elements of production. The old guilds, brotherhoods, and unions lost their class-based power, reducing their focus to short-term issues like salary and job benefits. The technological revolution

continued to produce increasing accelerations in a world of inequalities in which vast regions whose development had been held back grew more and more distant from the centers of decision-making. Those despoiled colonized regions, assigned in the international division of labor to be only the producers of raw materials, were obliged to sell their production for lower and lower prices, while having to buy at ever higher prices the technology needed for their own development. Meanwhile, the debts incurred on their behalf in order to participate in the model of development imposed on them continued to swell.

Eventually, there came a moment when companies had to become more flexible, to decentralize, to become more streamlined in order to compete and survive. Rigid structures in both capitalist and socialist worlds began to splinter, as increasingly onerous financial burdens were imposed in order to fuel the inexorable growth of their respective military-industrial complexes. All of this finally led up to one of the most critical moments in the history of humanity—the threat of nuclear confrontation—to which the socialist camp responded by initiating a process of unilateral disarmament. Only the future will tell whether that was an error, or precisely what saved our world from nuclear holocaust.

The sequence of events we have described is easily recognized, and it has led us to a world in which the concentration of financial power has finally laid prostrate before it all industry, all trade, all politics, every country, every individual. The phase of the *closed system* has begun in earnest, and in a closed system there is no alternative to destructuring. From this perspective, the disintegration within the socialist camp appears as but a prelude to a worldwide process of destructuring that is happening with dizzying speed.

Such is the moment of crisis in which we find ourselves today. Yet there are several possible ways in which this crisis can be resolved. For simple economy of hypothesis and to provide examples in broad outline, the letters sketch out two basic possibilities: on the one hand, the variant of increasing entropy within a closed system and, on the other, the *opening* of this closed system through the non-natural and intentional actions of the human being. Let’s look at the first alternative, which we will present in a descriptive, somewhat picturesque way.

As events unfold, it is highly probable that we will witness the consolidation of a global empire that will tend to homogenize the economy, law, communications, values, language, habits, and customs. This global empire, orchestrated by international financial capital, will not bother to take into consideration even the populations that inhabit the centers of decision-making. And in that concentration, the social fabric will continue unraveling. Political and social organizations, the administration of the State, all will be under the management of technocrats in the service of a monstrous Parastate that will tend to discipline the populations with increasingly restrictive measures as the decomposition intensifies. The capacity for abstract thought will be all but lost, as it continues to be replaced by the computational paradigm of analytical, sequential functioning. All notion of process and structure will be lost, giving way to simplistic studies along the lines of linguistics and formal analysis. Fashion, language, social styles, music, architecture, the plastic arts, literature—all will become destructured. And in every field this bewildering mixture of styles will be hailed as a great advance, just as has occurred at other moments of history with the eclecticism so characteristic of imperial decadence.

Then the ancient hope of bringing everything together in uniformity in the hands of a single power will vanish forever. This darkening of reason, this exhaustion of the peoples of the Earth, will leave the field wide open for fanaticism of every stripe, for the negation of life, for the cult of suicide, for unbridled fundamentalisms. No longer will there be science or great revolutions in thought. Everything will be reduced to technology, though it will then be called “science.” There

will be renewed virulence in parochialism, factionalism, and ethnic struggles, and the populations of those countries left behind by the developed nations will sweep over the centers of decision-making in a whirlwind in which the macro-cities, before so overcrowded, will become depopulated. Chronic civil wars will wrack our poor planet, on which people will no longer want to live. In short, this is a tale repeated in many civilizations that in their day believed in their own unending progress. And all of those cultures ended finally in decline and disintegration. But fortunately, when one fell, elsewhere in the world new human initiatives would arise, and in that alternation of falling and rising civilizations, the old would be surpassed by the new. It is clear, however, that in today's single, closed, worldwide system, there is no place "outside" in which another civilization might arise—leaving little possibility for anything other than a long and global Dark Ages.

If what is said in the letters regarding the foregoing turns out to be incorrect, then we have nothing to worry about. If, on the other hand, the mechanical process of historical structures is carrying us in the direction outlined above, then it's time we asked ourselves how human beings can change the current direction of events. And who will be able to produce this formidable change in direction if not the people themselves, who are precisely the subject of history? Have we reached a state of sufficient maturity to understand that from now on there will be no progress unless it is *by all and for all?* That is the second hypothesis explored in the letters.

If among the peoples of the world the idea takes hold (and it is good to repeat it) that there will be no progress unless it is *by all and for all,* then the direction of the struggle will be clear. In the last phase of this destructuring, new winds will begin to blow at the social base, at the grass roots. In ordinary neighborhoods, in the humblest workplaces, the social fabric will begin to regenerate. And this will apparently be a spontaneous phenomenon, which will be echoed in the appearance of a multitude of grassroots groups made up of working people, now freed from domination by their union leaderships. Great numbers of decentralized political groupings will appear and will clash with the established political organizations, which are led by increasingly isolated elites. Fresh debate will begin in every factory, every office, every business. Short-range demands will give way to a consciousness of the broader situation, in which labor will have greater human value than capital, and in which the risk of labor will be clearer than the risk of capital when it comes time to set priorities. People will easily come to the conclusion that a company's earnings should be reinvested in opening new sources of employment, or be applied in other areas where production is still increasing, rather than as now being diverted into speculation, which only winds up fattening the pockets of Capital while wiping out entire industries and leading to the general bankruptcy of the apparatus of production. Finally, businessmen will begin to realize that they, too, have been reduced to mere employees of the bank, and that in this emergency workers have now become their natural ally.

Social unrest will again intensify, unleashing an open, direct struggle between speculative capital in its stark character of an abstract, inhuman force, and the forces of labor—the true lever of transformation of the world. People will begin to understand that progress depends not on usurious debt contracted with banks, but rather that banks should grant credit to businesses without charging interest. And it will also be clear that there is no way to unblock the growing concentration of capital and power that is leading everything toward collapse, except through a redistribution of wealth to those regions of the world long left behind on the economic margins. Real, direct democracy based on plebiscites will then be a necessity, because people will want to move beyond the agony of non-participation and the constant threat of social unrest. The

powers of government will be reformed, as today's formal democracy, so dependent on financial capital, loses all credibility and meaning.

This second possible scenario will doubtless come about only after an incubation period in which the problems will continue to intensify. Then there will begin a period of two steps forward and one step back in which each success will be multiplied in a *demonstration effect* that will reach even the most remote corners of the Earth, thanks to instant means of communication. This is not about the taking of power in nation states but about a worldwide process in which these new social phenomena, which are the precursors of a radical change in the direction of events, will continue to multiply. In this way, instead of the process of change ending in the mechanical collapse we have seen repeated so many times before, we will see the will to change and the peoples of the Earth beginning to travel the road toward a *universal human nation.*

This second possibility is the alternative on which the Humanists of today stake their futures. They have too much faith in the human being to think that everything will end stupidly. And even though they do not feel themselves to be the vanguard of the human process, they are willing to accompany this process to the full extent of their powers and from the positions in which they happen to find themselves.

I will not take up any more of your time in talking about this book that we have in our hands today, and I would simply like to thank you for the patience and tolerance you have shown in following this somewhat tedious exposition.

That's all. Thank you very much.

III. Talks

Humanism and the New World

Universidad de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, July 7, 1991

Today's subject of "Humanism and the New World" can benefit from a little context. When people speak of "Humanism," they are most often referring to the current of thought that, while contemporaneous with the development of the Renaissance, began in literature with Petrarch. We can also observe how, in other civilizations, even some far-removed from Renaissance Europe, many subjects are treated from a standpoint similar to that of the Renaissance Humanists. Those currents of Roman culture that draw their name from Cicero are an example of this. Humanists have traditionally conceived of the human being not simply as the subject and producer of the historical event, but as the center of all fundamental activity. The human being was also the highest rung in an axiology that might be summarized in this way: Nothing above the human being, and no human being above any other.

During the Renaissance in particular, we can see the full dimension of the word "humanism" in the struggle initiated by Art and Science against obscurantism. Though it would take too long today to talk about the contributions of historical figures such as Giordano Bruno, Pico della Mirandola and, of course, Galileo—who are venerated by contemporary humanists—all of these thinkers suffered persecution at the hands of a system in which the true dimensions of the human being were cut off, a system where, above everything else, stood a deity and its subsidiaries: first the Prince, then the State, then its Laws.

The eruption of Humanism onto the scene turned that old scale of values on its head, and suddenly there stood in the very center of the stage the soul and the body of the human being. This emerging current of thought, often borrowing concepts from Greek and Roman paganism and strongly imbued with Neo-Platonic and Neo-Pythagorean tendencies, unleashed a heated debate in the Europe of old.

Simultaneously, Europe was beginning to extend its influence over the Americas, colonizing and conquering, and, logically, carrying this out not with the progressive elements that were then gaining ground in courtly circles, but rather with the brutality and ideology that were still in season—that is, obscurantism and monarchy by divine right. The Inquisition and the persecution of free thought were thus exported to the new lands, but also, though silently in the beginning, came the ideas that would later ignite in the French Revolution and in the wars and revolutions of independence in the Americas.

It was the development of this humanist, anthropocentric vision that finally ushered in the modern age. This vision expressed itself not only in art and science, but also in the politics of the time, in the growing attempts to check the monarchy and ecclesiastical power. Irrespective of the acceptance or rejection Humanism met with during this period, special recognition must be given to the contribution this movement made to the thinking and events of the age that, at least in the West, ushered in the age of revolutions in all its dimensions.

Today, in the twilight of the revolutions, that vibrant humanism seems likewise to be in decline, facing as it is the rise of a technology that appears to have absorbed the revolutionary transformation of economic-social structures, to have stripped political discourse of all real

communication, to have replaced the ideas of Fraternity and Solidarity with the economics of competition and the market, with laws of self-regulation, with the cold variables of macroeconomics. An empty scale of values is being built in its place, where the concrete human being is displaced from the central position and the worship of money installed in its stead. Naturally, in this contemporary myth there is a justifying ideology—the ideology of the End of Ideologies and the End of History, in which we can recognize the chords of pragmatism that were first struck toward the middle of the nineteenth century.

In my view, this elementary pragmatism—based on a Neodarwinism that zoologizes society by characterizing it as underlain by a struggle for the survival of the fittest—has gained ground not because of any exceptional quality but because, due to many factors, the great systems of thought have collapsed. Today what we are witnessing is a vast emptiness, a vacuum left by the failure of structured systems and structured systems of thought, a vacuum that can now be filled by anything, no matter that it is of inferior quality, so long as it satisfies the interests of those who control the financial springs and levers.

I realize that what I have been saying must, of course, be more fully justified and substantiated, which would give rise to a long and wide-ranging discussion. Yet I have briefly underscored some points that seem to me important in understanding the situation of Humanism in the present moment. At any rate, I should stress that those currents of thought that have taken up Humanism in this century have in reality been very few.

We can recognize a reclaiming of the question in Sartre's *Existentialism* (*L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*) and in Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism," productions that, though in some way opposed, can both be located within the line of existentialist humanism. We should also mention the pseudo-humanism of a Christian stamp represented by Maritain, the Marxist counter-humanism of Althusser, and the dialectic in Marxism between bourgeois humanism and proletarian humanism in Aníbal Ponce.

I would like to comment very briefly on the currents of contemporary thought that attempt to reformulate humanism theoretically, and I will simply note the two principal variants: the Christian and the existentialist. The word "Humanism," however, has gone beyond that division and has become well accepted in the popular mind as though it simply denoted any attitude that favors the human being and opposes the advance of technology and the mechanization of the world. In this sense it appears today to be what we might call "in good taste" to profess a fashionable humanism, but in a way that has nothing whatever to do with its arduous and tragic development, and even less with its precise framing and context, regarding which I ask you to allow me to cite some essential characteristics:

1. The affirmation of human consciousness as *active,* as opposed to positions that consider consciousness to be a "reflection" of objective conditions.
2. The historicity of the human being and human productions, which means that the human being is not a *natural* being but rather a *social* and *historical* being.
3. The *opening* of the human being-to-the-world, through which the dichotomies of the individual and society, subjectivity and objectivity, are resolved.
4. The basing of human action and ethics on the human being, and not on any other authority such as a deity.

Today, any consistent humanism must therefore be libertarian, active, and characterized by its solidarity with and commitment to the social reality. In no way does humanism oppose art to science, nor does it make the error of identifying art with humanism and science with technology. It conceives both terms, art and science, as included within the process of human

cultural development, though it does see certain facets of technology as instruments in the service of those who would arrogate all economic power to themselves.

To center our discussion on the subject “Humanism and the New World,” let me say that the conquest and subjugation of the cultures of the Americas by the European powers had nothing to do with a dialectic between culture and technology, but rather reflects the social model that—for five hundred years from the first contacts until only a short time ago—flourished in the warmth of obscurantism and absolutist institutions. This was a historical, political, and social phenomenon, and not a long process to which the nations and popular classes of Europe were committed, since the working classes of Europe were, of course, every bit as oppressed as their counterparts in other parts of the world. Furthermore, both European humanists and later humanists of the Americas suffered the same persecution on both continents, until that moment when they were finally able to make their contribution to revolutionary change, also in both the Old World and the New.

But today, new dangers threaten Latin America, and particularly this country, Mexico, with its unique cultural profile. Shall we set in motion a misconceived dialectic between culture and technology, or instead place the emphasis on our vibrant distinctiveness and catch up with those other regions of the world that today seem to be monopolizing science and technology? These subjects, of such enormous importance, should not be ignored or passed over without reflection. That is why I propose the formation of a commission to study them, which can carry these concerns across the breadth of the Americas, with the proposal of establishing an ongoing conference to examine and discuss the relationship between culture and technology, hopefully beginning in the year 1992, the year that will mark five hundred years since the European arrival in the New World. Today, as then, a struggle is beginning that must be pondered and appreciated in all its dimensions, and I believe that this country, Mexico, should be the physical and cultural center of that debate.

Thank you very much.

Humanism and the Crisis of Civilization

Academy of Sciences, Moscow, June 18, 1992

I wish to thank the Academy of Sciences in Moscow, the Club for Humanist Initiatives, the representatives from the various fields of culture who are present today, as well as the translators and publishers of my works, and the many friends who have invited me to speak today. I thank the media who are here and, of course, I thank all of you for your presence.

You will, I am sure, forgive some of the difficulties related to the fact that my remarks must be interpreted into Russian, and thus appreciate the fact that I am obliged to limit the length of my talk because of the time that requires. Given these circumstances, more than one idea will have to be compressed or treated in a somewhat summary way.

Our subject, “Humanism and the Crisis of Civilization,” requires us, as a first step and before developing today’s theme, to examine the concept of “civilization.” Much has been written and much debated about the word “civilization.” In the early period of the Philosophy of History, an understanding developed regarding the various civilizations as historical entities, each with its own process, its own evolution, its own destiny. This entity, a civilization, was taken to be an ambit, a region of human behaviors that would allow us to identify nations or peoples with a certain mode of production, certain social relationships, a specific legal system, and a characteristic scale of values. In general, the idea of “a people” or “a nation” was not equated with that of “civilization”; instead, a number of peoples or nations, spanning borders and territories, could be grouped together within a common ambit. Traditionally, civilizations have been associated with what could be called “cultural spaces” that were generally rooted within certain geographical boundaries and viewed as having the ability both to radiate outward and to receive influences from other, more or less contiguous peoples or civilizations.

When we speak of the Egyptian civilization or the Greek civilization, for example, we are referring to those sorts of ambits of human behavior, and in no way are we implying that some more or less centralizing artifice such as a State is the decisive factor in the articulation of those ambits. The fact that the Macedonians or the Spartans played a role in Hellenic culture, without thereby being part of a league of city-states, and indeed the fact that they fought among themselves, shows that the State is not the essential factor in the definition of a civilization. And so it is that rootedness in a certain geographical space has traditionally allowed us to speak of the “Mesopotamian civilization” or “the civilization of the Nile” or “island civilizations,” and so on. Implicit in this type of classification, of course, is a conception of the nature of civilization in which every civilization is determined by geographical circumstances—just as when we speak of the civilizations of “the vine,” or of “milk and honey,” or the civilizations of “maize,” we are referring to them in terms of their food resources, and when we speak of “Neolithic” civilizations we are denoting the cultural stage of the civilization by its tool production and technology.

More important than this effort at classification, however, has been the work done since the time of Vico in attempting to understand and define the temporal stages of civilizations, the evolution and future of a given civilization as well as its destiny. From that *corsi e ricorsi* of human events that Vico, the genial Neapolitan, attempted to understand (on the basis of a general idea of historical development, a set of axioms, and a philological method), to the historiology of Toynbee (based on the concept of challenge and response, in turn anticipated by Pavlov’s physiological studies), a great deal of ink has been spent in trying to make a science out of these more or less vague and diffuse ideas. Naturally, these efforts have been rewarded

with greater and lesser degrees of success. Comte's "law" was that civilization passed from a heroic and theological age through a metaphysical stage to, at last, a positive moment of rationality, abundance, and justice. Hegel spoke of civilizations as manifestations of the dialectical stages of the development of the Absolute Spirit, and Spengler presented civilizations as biographical protoforms, entities that proceed biologically through the stages of birth, youth, maturity, and death.

Great effort has been expended in attempting to understand the functioning and the destiny of civilizations, but many of the researchers and philosophers who have undertaken those efforts have not gone deep enough into the basic and primary fact, the recognition that their questions and their answers all arise out of their own cultural landscapes, the particular historical moments in which they live. And if today we want to find a new response to this theme of "civilization," we cannot avoid the difficulty (or aid) of the cultural landscape in which we were formed and educated, or the historical moment in which we now happen to live. Today, if we truly want to understand the flux of civilizations, we must first ask ourselves about the conditions of our own lives, and in this way we will be *humanizing* the historical process upon which we are reflecting. We do this not by interpreting the events produced by the human being from the outside, as is typically done in a history book, but rather by understanding, on the basis of historical structure, that which gives meaning to human life, that which takes place in the situation we are living in. This focus will lead us to see the limitations that we face in formulating certain questions and in giving certain answers, because the very moment in which we live makes it difficult for us to break out of our own beliefs and cultural assumptions—and it is only by breaking out of our beliefs, only through the appearance of events that we believed to be impossible, that we will be able to advance toward a new moment of civilization.

As you know, we are talking about the vital situation of crisis in which we are immersed today and, consequently, about a moment of rupture in the beliefs and cultural assumptions that formed us. To characterize the crisis from that point of view, we might attend to four phenomena that directly impact us:

1. Driven by the technological revolution, the world is changing rapidly, causing changes that clash with the established structures and habits of life of both societies and individuals.
2. The mismatch between the speed of technological acceleration and the relative slowness of social adaptation to change is generating progressive crises in every field, and there is no reason to suppose that this process will stop—indeed, quite the contrary, it will tend to increase.
3. The unexpectedness of events prevents us from foreseeing what direction those events, the people around us, and in particular our own lives will take; it is not, however, change itself that concerns us so much as the increasing unpredictability of that change.
4. Many of the things we once thought and believed are no longer useful. But neither are there solutions in sight from society, institutions, or individuals—all of whom are suffering these same difficulties. And while we need signposts and references, our traditional references are proving to be obsolete and asphyxiating.

In my view, it is in this region of the world more than any other that the greatest acceleration of conditions for historical change is taking place—a confusing and painful acceleration out of which a new moment in civilization is being born. Here, no one knows today what's going to happen tomorrow, but in other parts of the world people naively assume that civilization will continue in a direction of predictable growth within a long-established economic and social model. Of course, that way of looking at things is more a matter of mood, something closer to

wishful thinking, than it is a position justified by the facts, because as soon as one examines what is happening one arrives at the conclusion that the world—the world as a whole, not schizophrenically divided between East and West—is moving toward increasing instability. To look exclusively at one type of State, one type of administration, or one type of economy in interpreting the flow of events demonstrates an intellectual limitation and a shortsightedness that expose the foundation of beliefs we have incorporated during our cultural formation. Moreover, we can see that the social and historical landscape in which we are living has changed drastically from the one in which we lived only a few years ago, but that the instruments of analysis we are using to interpret these new situations still belong to that old landscape. Yet the difficulties are even greater, because we also have a sensibility that was formed in an earlier time, and the evolution of this sensibility has not kept pace with events. It is surely for this reason that all over the world we see a growing separation, an alienation between those who hold economic, political, artistic, and other forms of power and the new generations who feel very differently about the function that institutions and leaders ought to serve in these new times.

I believe that now is the moment to say something that will probably strike the old sensibility as scandalous, and it is this: The economic or social model that is discussed day after day by the opinion-makers is not the central interest for the new generations; rather, they wish that institutions and leaders were not just one more encumbrance on this already complicated world. They are looking for a new alternative, because to them today's models seem worn out. Yet, at the same time, they are unwilling to follow ideas or leadership that do not coincide with their new sensibility. Many people consider this irresponsible on the part of the young, but I am not talking about responsibility—I am talking about a type of *sensibility* that must be taken seriously into account. And this is not a problem that can be solved with opinion polls or surveys to find a new way of manipulating society; it is a problem involving an overall appreciation of the *meaning of the concrete human being,* who until today has been appealed to in theory and betrayed in practice.

If someone would object to these comments by replying that in this crisis the peoples of the world want concrete solutions, I would say that it is one thing to *promise* concrete solutions and something quite different to *achieve* concrete solutions in practice. What is concrete is that people no longer believe in promises, and that is much more important as a psychosocial reality than more promises of solutions that people intuitively sense will never be kept in practice. The crisis of credibility is also dangerous, because it throws us defenseless into the hands of demagoguery and the charisma of any leader promising instant solutions and able to play upon people's deepest emotions. But all of this, though I've often pointed it out, can be difficult to take in, because of the impediment posed by our landscape of formation, in which we still confuse actions with the words used to speak of these actions.

We have reached a point at which it is clear that we need to ask ourselves once and for all whether or not the *look* that we have been using in order to understand these problems is adequate to the task. What I'm saying is not really so strange, since scientists in various disciplines have long since stopped believing that they were observing reality itself and have become concerned with understanding how their act of observation affects or interferes with the phenomenon they are studying. As we would put it, this means that observers introduce elements from their own *landscapes* that do not exist in the phenomenon being studied, and that the *look* we direct at the field of study focuses on a limited region within that ambit, so that we come to pay attention to questions that are not really of central importance. All of this

becomes much more serious when people attempt to justify political positions by saying that everything they do is carried out with the human being in mind, when in fact that is not what they have in mind at all but rather other factors that end up displacing human beings to a secondary position.

Similarly, in no way is it recognized that it is only through understanding the structure of human life that we can reach a full comprehension of the realities and the destiny of civilization. This leads us to realize that the theme of human life is much talked about but not truly taken into account, because it is believed, it is accepted, that the life of human beings is not the agent and producer of events but instead only the recipient of macro-economic, ethnic, religious, or geographical forces; because the assumption is that what must be demanded of people is, objectively, labor and social discipline and, subjectively, credulity and obedience.

Having made these observations about how we might consider the phenomena of civilization—while taking into account our landscape of education and formation, our beliefs, and our values—let's now to turn our attention to the central subject of this talk.

Our present situation of crisis does not involve separate civilizations, as was the case in earlier times when those entities could interact, while ignoring or adopting elements from one another. In the process of increasing planetarization that we are experiencing today, we must interpret events as occurring in a dynamic that is both structural and global.

Yet everything we see is being destructured, fragmented: The nation state is reeling from the blows it receives from below—separatism and parochialism—and from above—regionalization and planetarization; individuals, cultural codes, languages, and goods are all mixed up together in a fantastic tower of Babel; centralized corporations are suffering the crisis of having to become more flexible in ways that they can't manage to implement; an ever-widening gap is opening between the generations, as though in the same moment there exist subcultures separated from one another not only by their pasts but also by their future projects; family members, coworkers, political, labor, and social organizations are all experiencing the action of disintegrative centrifugal forces; ideologies, tossed about in this whirlwind, are no longer able to offer answers or inspire coherent action in human groups; traditional solidarity is disappearing from a social fabric that is continuing to unravel; and finally, individuals, while today they have—especially with the mass media—ever greater numbers of people in their daily landscapes, at the same time feel increasingly isolated and cut off from others.

All of this demonstrates that even these destructuring and paradoxical events respond to the same process, which is worldwide and structural. And if the old ideologies cannot give answers to these phenomena, it is because they, too, are part of the world that is vanishing. No doubt there are many people who think that these events mark the end of ideas and the end of History, of conflict, and of human progress. For our part, this is indeed what we call "crisis," but we are very far from viewing this crisis as some final decline, because we see that in reality the dissolution of the previous forms is like outgrowing clothing that has now become too small for the human being.

These events, which have begun to occur with greater acceleration in some places sooner than in others, will soon affect the entire planet, and in those places where an unjustified sense of triumph still persists we will see before long phenomena that will be described in everyday language as "incredible." We are moving toward a *planetary civilization* that will present us with a new form of organization and a new scale of values. And it is inevitable that it will do so by taking as a point of departure the most important issue of our time: knowing whether we wish to

live, and in what conditions we wish to do so. Surely the plans and projections of that small circle of the greedy and provisionally powerful will fail to take this issue into account, though it holds for every small, isolated, and powerless human being. On the contrary, the powerful few will continue to believe that macro-social factors are what is decisive. Given their ignorance of the needs of today's concrete human being they will be taken by surprise—in some cases by the extent of the social despair, in other cases by the violent unrest, and in general by the escapism and fugue that take place every day through every imaginable form of drugs, neurosis, and suicide.

There can be no doubt, however, that their dehumanized projects will be bogged down in practical implementation, because twenty percent of the world's population will be unable to maintain much longer the widening gap between itself and the eighty percent of humanity urgently in need of the minimum conditions of life. As everyone knows, this situation cannot be made to disappear simply through the ongoing activities of psychologists, pharmacists, sports spectacles, or the advice of opinion-makers. Although the sensation of the absurdity and meaninglessness of life is accentuated through the action of a powerful communications media coupled with the gigantism of public spectacle, they will not succeed in convincing us that we are ants or mere numbers and statistics.

I believe that within this crisis of civilization that we are living through today there are many positive factors that we must take advantage of, just as we take advantage of technology when it comes to health, education, and improving living conditions, and even as we reject its application in destructive directions (precisely because these directions divert it from the objective that gave it birth). Similarly, current events are contributing in a positive way, for they are leading us to reconsider everything we have believed until now, to evaluate the history of humanity from another optic, to launch our projects toward another image of the future, to look at each other with a new compassion and tolerance. Then, a new humanism will open a way through this labyrinth of history, in which we human beings have so many times believed ourselves reduced to nothing.

Today's crisis is exploding in all directions across the entire planet and is not found simply in the Commonwealth of Independent States or in Moscow, which in their time were the most notable regions of expression of this crisis. The global civilization that is already in motion today cannot do without the initiatives of this great people, because it is upon the solutions this people finds to its problems that the future of all of us, inasmuch as we participate in the same worldwide civilization, depends.

We have spoken of the concept of civilization and how we would characterize the civilization of today that is becoming planetary; we have also touched upon the subject of crisis and the beliefs on which we rely to interpret this moment in which we are living. As for the concept of "Humanism," which is an integral part of the title of this presentation, I only want to mention a few points. In the first place, we are not talking about historical Humanism, the Humanism of Arts and Letters that constituted the driving force of the Renaissance and broke the obscurantist bonds of the long medieval night. That historical Humanism has precise characteristics, and it is these that make us feel ourselves to be a continuation of that current—in contrast to the hollow claims of certain religious currents that today give themselves the title "Humanist," for there can be no Humanism where any other value is placed above the human being. I should also emphasize that Humanism derives its explanation of the world, values, society, politics, art, and history fundamentally from its conception of the human being; its understanding of the structure of the human being is what gives clarity to its focus. One cannot proceed in any other way, one

cannot arrive at the human being from any starting point other than the human being. One cannot start from theories about matter, the spirit, or God—one must start from the structure of human life, its liberty and intentionality. And logically, no determinism or naturalism can transform into Humanism, because in its initial assumptions the human being is an accessory.

Today's New Humanism defines human beings as *historical beings whose mode of social action transforms their own nature.* Here we find the elements that, duly developed, could justify a theory and a practice capable of producing an answer to the present emergency. To go further into considerations of this definition would take us far afield, and there is not enough time to do so.

It can escape no one's notice that the brief description I have given of civilization and today's crisis takes as its starting point a consideration of the *structure of human existence,* and that this description is precisely that of contemporary Humanism, applied to the present subject matter. The terms "crisis of civilization" and "Humanism" become linked when we propose a vision that can contribute to overcoming some of today's difficulties. Though we go no further in characterizing it, it should be clear that we are considering the theme of Humanism as a set of ideas, a practical project, a current of opinion, and a possible organization that can carry forward the objective of both social and personal transformation, embracing and including concrete and distinct political and cultural particularities, without these particularities disappearing as forces for change—particularities that are diverse and yet convergent in their ultimate intentions. In this moment of change, of decentralization and clamor for the recognition of what are real particularities, it would not be helpful for anyone to insist on the hegemony or universality of any single tendency.

I would like to end with a very personal consideration. During these days I have had the opportunity to attend meetings and seminars with cultural figures, scientists, and academics. On more than one occasion I seemed to sense a climate of pessimism when we exchanged ideas about the future that we may soon be living through. At the time I did not feel tempted to make naive pronouncements or to declare my faith in a happy future. And yet now I believe that we must make an effort to overcome this disheartenment by remembering other moments of grave crisis that the human species has lived through and overcome. In this regard, I would like to recall those words, whose sentiment I fully share, that found voice in the very beginnings of Greek tragedy: "When all roads were apparently closed, the human being has always found the way out."

Thank you very much.

A Contemporary View of Humanism

Universidad Autónoma, Madrid, April 16, 1993

I wish to thank the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid for the opportunity you have given me to express my views here, and to thank the Humanist Forum for the invitation to speak today. I also want to thank you, professors, students, members of the press, and friends. Thank you all for coming.

The last time I spoke publicly in Madrid was on November 3, 1989, in El Ateneo. On that occasion I spoke about a book of mine that had just been published here in Spain. Today we will not talk about literature or poetry, though. Instead, we will consider a current of thought called Humanism. In light of the profound social changes that are occurring, this current with its proposal of transformative action has begun to be taken seriously. I'd like to review very quickly its historical background, its development, and the situation in which it finds itself today.

The word "humanism" commonly has two meanings. In the first place, it is used to indicate any tendency of thought that affirms the value and dignity of the human being. With such a broad definition, Humanism can be interpreted in the most diverse and contrasting ways. In its other and more limited meaning, which locates Humanism within a precise historical context, the word is used to indicate the process of transformation that began in Europe between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries and that, in the sixteenth century under the name of the *Renaissance,* dominated the intellectual life of Europe. Names such as Erasmus, Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Nicholas of Cusa, Thomas More, Juan Vives, and Charles de Bouelles remind us of the diversity and scope of that historical, or Renaissance, Humanism. The influence of this historical Humanism continued throughout the seventeenth and well into the eighteenth centuries, leading ultimately to the revolutions that opened the doors to the modern age. Following these remarkable events, this current seems to have slowly waned, until the middle of the twentieth century when Humanism once more began to appear in debate among philosophers and thinkers concerned with the social and political issues of the day.

The basic aspects of historical Humanism were, in brief, the following:

1. It embodied a reaction against the way of life and values of the Middle Ages and the beginnings of a profound recognition of other cultures, particularly those of Greece and Rome, in art, science, and philosophy.
2. It set forth a new image of the human being that exalted the human personality and its transformative action.
3. A new attitude toward nature emerged, in which nature was accepted as the environment or setting of the human being and no longer simply as a "lower" world filled with temptations and punishments.
4. There was a new interest in experimentation and research on the surrounding world, with a tendency to seek natural explanations for things without the need for reference to the supernatural.

These four aspects of historical, or Renaissance, Humanism converged toward a single objective: to build faith in the human being and human creativity, and in viewing the world as the kingdom of humanity, which the human being will master through a knowledge of the sciences. From this new perspective arose the need to construct a new vision of the universe and of history. In the same way, the new ideas and approaches of this humanist movement led people to reformulate the religious question in terms of its dogmatic and liturgical structures as well as

its organizational structures, which had permeated the social organization of the Middle Ages. Humanism, in correlation with the changing economic and social forces of the time, represented a spirit of revolution that was becoming increasingly conscious and increasingly oriented toward questioning the established order. But the Reformation in the German and Anglo-Saxon worlds and the Counter Reformation in the Latin world attempted to hold back these new ideas, in order to reimpose, in an authoritarian fashion, the traditional Christian world-view. This crisis then moved from the Church into the structures of the state. And ultimately, empire and monarchy by divine right were eliminated as a result of the revolutions that took place at the end of the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century.

Following the French Revolution and the wars of independence in the Americas, however, Humanism virtually disappeared, though it left an underlying social foundation of ideals and aspirations that continues to feed economic, political, and scientific transformations. Humanism was pushed back by concepts and practices that took hold with the end of colonialism, the Second World War, and the bipolar alignment of the world between the two superpowers. It is in this situation that concerned men and women have reopened the debate on the meaning of the human being and of nature, on the justification of economic and political structures, on the orientation of science and technology, and in general on the direction of historical events.

It was the philosophers of existence who gave the first signs of this new round of questioning: Heidegger, in his “Letter on Humanism,” dismissed Humanism as just another metaphysic; Sartre defended it in his lecture *Existentialism* (*L’Existentialisme est un humanisme*); and Luijpen, in his *Phenomenology and Humanism,* attempted to give it a more precise theoretical framework. On the other side were noteworthy efforts by such authors as Althusser, who, in *For Marx,* maintained a clearly anti-humanist stance and Maritain, who, in *Integral Humanism,* attempted the appropriation of Humanism by its antithesis in Christianity.

After the long road it has traveled, and in light of these more recent debates in the field of ideas, it is clear that Humanism needs to define its contemporary position, not simply as a theoretical concept but also in terms of action and social practice. With this in mind, we will rely on the recent foundational document, the “Statement of the Humanist Movement.”

Today, any discussion of the status of the question of Humanism must be approached taking into account the conditions in which the human being lives. These conditions are not abstract, and consequently it is not legitimate to derive Humanism from some theory of nature, a theory of history, or from a faith in God. The human condition is such that the immediate encounter with pain and the need to overcome it are inevitable. This condition, common to so many other species, finds in the human being the additional need of seeing how, in the future, pain may be overcome and pleasure achieved. This foresight is based on both past experience and the intention to improve the current situation. Human labor, accumulated in social productions, is passed down and transformed from generation to generation in the continuing struggle to overcome the natural and social conditions in which the human being lives. It is because of all this that Humanism defines the human being as a *historical* being whose mode of social action is capable of transforming both the world and the human being’s own nature. This point is of capital importance, because if we accept it we cannot later coherently affirm some natural law, or natural property, or natural institutions, or lastly a future human being that is the same as that of today, implying that the development of the human being has been completed once and for all.

Today, the old question concerning the relationship between “man and nature” takes on new importance. In revisiting this question, we discover that great paradox in which the human being

has no permanent character, no nature, while at the same time we observe in the human being one great constant: historicity. That is why, stretching the terms a bit, we can say that *the nature of human beings is their history, their social history.* Consequently, each human being who is born is not the same as the first member of its species, not simply genetically equipped to respond to its environment; each human being is, rather, a *historical* being, unfolding his or her personal experience in a social landscape, in a *human* landscape. And it is here, in this social world, that the common human intention to overcome pain is negated by the intention of other human beings. We are saying that there are those who, in negating the intentions of others, *naturalize* them, converting them into objects to be used.

Thus, the tragedy of being subject to natural physical conditions gives impetus to social labor as well as to science (whose new insights overcome those conditions), while the tragedy of being subjected to social conditions of inequality and injustice impels the human being to rebel against such situations, in which we observe not the interplay of blind forces but rather the operation of other human intentions. And challenging such intentions—those that discriminate and divide people from one another—takes place in a sphere that is far different from that of natural tragedy, in which there is no intention. That is why in all discrimination there is always a monstrous effort to establish that the differences between human beings are given by nature, whether physical or social, and that the interplay of those natural forces takes place without the intervention of human intention. That is, there are some who try to establish racial, sexual, and economic differences based on supposed genetic or market laws, but in all those cases we see distortion, hypocrisy, and bad faith at work.

These two basic ideas that we have discussed—first, the human condition as subject to pain, and the impulse to overcome it; and, second, the definition of the human being as a social and historical being—frame the state of the question for today's humanists. For a fuller treatment of these subjects, I refer you to the work *Contributions to Thought* and the essay "Historiological Discussions."

The "Statement of the Humanist Movement," the foundational document of the Humanist Movement, declares that we will pass from prehistory to the true history of the human being when the violent, animal appropriation of some human beings by others is no more. In the meantime, we cannot start from any central value other than that of the human being, fully realized and fully free. The affirmation "nothing above the human being and no human being below any other" is a synthetic way of expressing this core idea. If one places as the central value God, the State, Money, or any other entity, one necessarily subordinates the human being, and thus creates conditions for the subsequent control or sacrifice of human beings. Humanists are very clear on this point, and while Humanists include both atheists and believers, we do not start from atheism or from religion as the basis for our vision of the world and our action—we begin from the human being and from the immediate needs of the human being.

Humanists raise the fundamental issue: knowing whether we want to live, and deciding on the conditions in which we want to do so. All forms of violence—physical, economic, racial, religious, sexual, and ideological—that have been used to block human progress are repugnant to Humanists, who condemn all forms of discrimination, whether overt or hidden.

That is the line we draw between Humanism and Anti-Humanism. Humanism gives priority to labor over big capital; to real democracy over formal democracy; to decentralization over centralization; to anti-discrimination over discrimination; to freedom over oppression; and to meaning in life over resignation, complicity, and the absurd.

Because Humanism upholds the belief in *freedom of choice,* it possesses a valid ethics. And because Humanism upholds the belief in human intention, it distinguishes between error and bad faith.

In this way, Humanists take clear positions. We do not feel that we have sprung from nothing, but rather that we are tributaries of a long process and collective effort. We are committed to the present, and we envision a continuing struggle toward the future. We affirm diversity, in open opposition to the regimentation that until now has been imposed based on the argument that diversity sets the elements of a system in dialectic, and that respecting all particularities gives free reign to centrifugal and disintegrating forces. Humanists believe the opposite, affirming that now, during just such times as these, the leveling and obliterating of diversity will lead rigid structures to explode. For this reason, we stress a convergent direction and a convergent intention, opposing both the idea and the practice of eliminating supposedly dialectical conditions from any given group or collectivity.

In the “Statement of the Humanist Movement,” we acknowledge the antecedent of historical Humanism and draw inspiration from the contributions of many cultures, not only those that now occupy center stage. We fix our gaze on the future, while striving to overcome the present crisis. We are optimists. We believe in liberty and social progress.

As Humanists, we are internationalists—we aspire to a *universal human nation*. While understanding the world we live in as a single whole, we act in our immediate surroundings. We do not seek a uniform world but one that is multiple and diverse: diverse in ethnicity, language, and customs; diverse in local and regional autonomy; diverse in ideas and aspirations; diverse in beliefs, whether atheistic or religious; diverse in work and creativity.

Humanists do not want masters—we have no desire for authority figures or bosses, nor do we see ourselves as leaders or bosses or spokespersons for anyone else. Humanists want neither a centralized State nor a Parastate in its stead. Humanists want neither a police state nor armed gangs as the alternative.

New Humanism turns directly to disputing economic conditions. It points out that today we are no longer dealing with feudal economies, national industries, or even regional interests. Today, the question is how whatever has survived until now will accommodate to the dictates of international financial capital, a speculative capital that is growing ever more concentrated worldwide. Thus, even the nation state depends on credit and loans in order to survive. All must beg for investment capital and provide guarantees that give banks the ultimate say in decision-making. The time is fast approaching when, just as occurred with both cities and agricultural areas, the corporations themselves will fall under the indisputable control of the banks. The time of the Parastate is coming, a time in which the old order will be swept away.

At the same time, the traditional bonds of solidarity are fast dissolving. We are witnessing the disintegration of the social fabric, and in its place find millions of human beings living disconnected lives, indifferent to one another despite their common suffering. Big capital dominates not only our objectivity through its control of the means of production, but also our subjectivity through its control of the means of communication and information. Under these conditions, those who control capital have the power and technology to do as they please with both our material and our social resources. They are able to deplete irreplaceable natural resources and to act with increasing disregard for the human being. And just as big capital has drained everything from businesses and the state, so has it emptied science of meaning, reducing it to technologies that produce poverty, destruction, and unemployment.

We Humanists do not overstate the case when we contend that today the world is technologically capable of rapidly resolving the problems that exist across vast regions of the planet, which involve the need to provide employment, adequate food, health care, housing, and education for all people. If this possibility is not being realized, it is simply because the monstrous speculation of big capital is preventing it. By now, big capital has already exhausted the stage of market economies in the developed countries, and in its technological conversion is beginning to discipline society to face the chaos it has itself produced. Growing unemployment, recession, and the outgrowing of traditional political and institutional frameworks mark the beginning of a new period in which the old social strata and organization of leadership are being replaced and adapted to the new times. These changes of schema, however, represent only one more step in the general crisis of today's System as it moves toward planetarization.

But in the face of this growing irrationality, it is not, as might be expected, voices of reason that we hear raised in dialectical opposition—instead, we hear the voices of the darkest forms of racism, fundamentalism, and fanaticism. And if collectivities and entire regions will increasingly be guided by this neo-irrationalism, then the margin for action by progressive forces will diminish day by day. On the other hand, millions of working people have come to realize that the centralized state is as much an unreal sham, as false, as capitalist democracy is. And just as workers are standing up against corrupt union leadership, more than ever citizens are now questioning traditional political parties and governments. But it will be necessary to give a constructive orientation to these phenomena, which will otherwise simply "spin their wheels" in nothing more than spontaneous protests that lead nowhere. To take this constructive direction, it is necessary to address the central issue: the factors of production.

For Humanism, labor and capital are the principal factors of production, though speculation and usury are often present as well. Today it is essential that the absurd relationship between labor and capital be totally transformed. This relationship has until now been governed by the rule that capital receives the profits while workers receive a salary—an inequity justified on the basis of the "risk" assumed in the investment. But this does not take into account the risk that the worker bears in facing the uncertainties of unemployment and crisis.

Apart from the relationship between labor and capital, there is also in play the management and decision-making power in the business. The fact of the matter is that profits not reinvested in the company, not directed toward its expansion or diversification, are diverted toward financial speculation; profits not used for creating sources of new jobs flow into speculation. Consequently, the just and possible struggle of workers will consist of demanding that capital be used for its maximum productive yield. But this cannot happen until management and decision-making are shared. How else will we avoid massive layoffs, closures, even the loss of entire industries? Because the greatest harm comes from underinvestment, fraudulent bankruptcies, forced indebtedness, and capital flight.

And if some should persist in calling for the expropriation of the means of production on behalf of the workers, following nineteenth-century teachings, they must also bear in mind the recent failure of "Real Socialism." As for the objection that to treat capital in the same way that work is treated will only speed its flight to more profitable areas, it should be very clear that this cannot go on much longer, because the irrationality of the present scheme is leading to saturation and worldwide crisis. And that argument, apart from accepting something that is radically immoral, ignores the historical process of the growing transfer of capital to banks, which is resulting in even the owners of businesses gradually being reduced to the status of employees of the bank, stripped of the power to make decisions within a lengthening chain of

command in which they maintain only the appearance of autonomy. And as the process of recession continues to deepen, these employers and businesspeople themselves will increasingly come to recognize their predicament.

Humanist action cannot be limited solely to support for labor or union demands. Instead, broad political action is needed to prevent the State from being nothing more than an instrument of worldwide financial capital, to assure that the relationship among the factors of production is just, and to return to society the autonomy that has been stolen from it.

In the political field, the situation today shows to what extent the edifice of democracy has fallen into ruin as its cornerstones—the separation of powers, representative government, and respect for minorities—have eroded. The theoretical separation of powers is, in practice, seriously compromised. In every part of the world, even a cursory examination of the origin and composition of the various branches of government reveals the intimately interwoven relationships that link them together. And it could hardly be otherwise, for they all form part of a single System. In nation after nation we see crises in which one branch of government gains supremacy over the others, in which functions are usurped or overlap, in which corruption and irregularities surface—all corresponding to the changing global financial and political situation of the countries.

As for representative government, with the extension of universal suffrage people came to believe that there is but a single step, a single act involved, when they elect their representative and their representative carries out the mandate of the people. But as time has passed, people have come to see clearly that there are in fact two acts: a first act in which the many elect the few, and a second act in which those few betray the many by representing interests foreign or contrary to the mandate they received. This evil is nurtured within the political parties, which today are reduced to little more than a handful of leaders totally out of touch with the needs of the people. Through the party machinery, the powerful interests finance candidates and dictate the policies that these candidates are to follow. All of this reveals a profound crisis in both the conception and implementation of representative government.

Humanists propose to transform the practice of representation, placing the greatest importance on consulting the people directly, through referenda, plebiscites, and the direct election of candidates, because in many countries there are still laws that subordinate independent candidates to political parties, there are subterfuges and financial restrictions that keep candidates off the ballot—all measures that prevent the free expression of the will of the people. All laws that prevent the full ability of any citizen to elect and to be elected make a mockery of real democracy, which must be above restriction by any such laws. And in order for there to be true equality of opportunity, the mass media must be made fully available to the people during the time of elections, allowing candidates to explain their proposals and positions, and giving all candidates exactly the same opportunities to communicate with the populace. Furthermore, to address the problem that elected officials regularly fail to carry out their campaign promises, *laws of political responsibility* must be enacted, which will subject any elected officials who do not keep their campaign promises to being stripped of their legislative privileges, impeached, or expelled. The other expedient—the only one available today—under which individuals or parties who do not keep their promises risk rejection at the polls in subsequent elections, does not deter in any way that second act, the betrayal of those represented. As for directly consulting the people on urgent issues, every day there are greater technological possibilities for implementing this idea. That does not mean simply giving greater priority to easily manipulated opinion polls and surveys—what it does mean is making real

participation in government easier and implementing direct voting through today's advancing electronic and computer technologies.

In real democracy, all minorities must have the guarantees to which their right to true representation entitles them. In addition, all measures must be taken to foster, in practice, their full inclusion, participation, and development. Today, minorities the world over, increasingly the targets of xenophobia and discrimination, cry out in anguish for recognition. It is the responsibility of humanists everywhere to bring this issue to the fore, raising it to the level of the most important debates of our time, and everywhere leading the struggle until all such neo-fascisms, whether overt or hidden, are overcome. In short, to fight for the rights of minorities is to fight for the rights of all human beings. But today it also happens that in the supposed melting pot of a country—under the coercion of a centralized state, today little more than an unfeeling instrument in the hands of big capital—entire provinces, regions, or autonomies suffer the same discrimination as do minorities. And this will come to an end when people support federative forms of organization in which real political power is returned to the hands of those existing historical and cultural entities.

In summary, to bring to the fore the issues of capital and labor, real democracy, and the decentralization of the state apparatus, is to set the political struggle on the path toward creating a new type of society, a flexible society in constant change, in keeping with the dynamic needs of the peoples of the world—now suffocated more each day by their dependency on an inhuman system.

In today's confused situation, it is important to discuss the issue of spontaneous or naive humanism and to see it in relation to what we understand as *conscious Humanism.* We can observe that humanist ideals and aspirations in general are awakening in our societies with a vigor that was unknown only a few years ago. The world is changing at great speed, and this change, aside from sweeping away old structures and old references, is obliterating the old forms of struggle. In such a situation, spontaneous phenomena of all types arise, and they bear a closer resemblance to catharsis and social unrest than to processes with real direction. That is why, when we consider progressive groups, associations, and individuals to be broadly humanist, even though they do not participate in this Humanist Movement, we are stressing and supporting a union of forces all tending in the same direction—not some new hegemony that is simply a continuation of old, worn-out approaches and procedures that seek to impose uniformity.

We believe that it is in the workplaces and in the homes and in the neighborhoods of working people that simple protests will grow into a conscious force oriented toward the transformation of the economic structures. And there are many other activities that bring together combative members of union and political organizations. Humanism does not at all suggest that these members should resign from their organizations in order to join our Movement, but quite the contrary. The struggle to transform their leadership, to cause them to direct their efforts beyond simple, short-term issues, will set those progressive elements on a course of convergence with Humanist proposals. And the great numbers of students and teachers who are already sensitive to injustice will also become more aware of their will to change, especially as the general crisis touches them directly. And surely, members of the press, in such close contact with the daily tragedies of our times, are now more able to act in a humanist direction, as are sectors of the intelligentsia whose productions dispute the rules of this inhuman system. In addition, there are many approaches that base their action on combating human suffering, inviting other like-minded men and women to join them in

disinterested action on behalf of the dispossessed and those who suffer discrimination. A wide array of associations, volunteer groups, and important sectors of the population mobilize from time to time and make positive contributions. Certainly, one of their contributions lies in exposing these problems and in generating greater awareness of them. However, these groups do not define or plan their actions in terms of transforming the social and economic structures that give rise to these wrongs. These positions might better be referred to as Humanitarianism than conscious Humanism *per se,* although there are in them valid protests and specific, focused actions that can be deepened and extended.

Just as there exists a broad and diffusely defined sector of society that we might call the "humanist camp," the sector that might be called the "anti-humanist camp" is no less widespread. Unfortunately, today there are millions of humanists who have yet to begin moving in a clear direction of transformation, while at the same time we see regressive phenomena reappearing that everyone had thought were long since overcome. In the measure that the forces that orchestrate big capital continue to asphyxiate the peoples of the Earth, incoherent positions arise and gain strength by exploiting that discontent, channeling it toward various scapegoats. At the root of all such neo-fascisms lies a profound negation of human values. Similarly, in certain aberrant environmentalist factions, nature is set in first place, above humanity. No longer do they preach that environmental disaster is a disaster because it endangers humankind—instead, to them, the only problem is that human beings have damaged nature. According to such approaches, the human being is somehow contaminated and therefore contaminates nature. It would be better, they argue, had medicine not been successful in combating disease and prolonging human life. "Earth first," they cry hysterically, recalling Nazi slogans. It is but a short step from that position to discrimination against cultures seen to "pollute" or against "impure" foreigners who "dirty our cities." Such movements should be considered anti-humanist, because at bottom they abhor the human being. And their mentors display this self-contempt, reflecting the nihilistic and suicidal tendencies so in vogue today.

On the other hand, there is a significant sector of society made up of perceptive people who join environmental movements because they understand the gravity of the problems that environmentalism uncovers and denounces. And if that environmentalism can take on the humanist character that befits it, it will direct the struggle against the specific entities that are actually producing the catastrophe: big capital and its chain of destructive industries and businesses, so closely linked to the military-industrial complex. Before worrying about seals, we must face the problems of hunger, overpopulation, infant mortality, disease, and the lack of even minimal housing and sanitation in a great many parts of the world. And we must focus on the growing unemployment, exploitation, racism, discrimination, and intolerance in the developed world—a world that, while technologically advanced, is generating serious environmental imbalances in the name of its own irrational growth.

It is not necessary for us to dwell at any length on the role played by the Right in its many forms as political instruments of Anti-Humanism. In the right wing, bad faith reaches such heights that periodically some even proclaim themselves spokespersons for "Humanism." So shameless is their bad faith and semantic banditry that these representatives of Anti-Humanism attempt to cloak themselves in the name "Humanist." It would be impossible to inventory the full range of resources, instruments, tools, forms, and expressions that Anti-Humanism has at its disposal, but having shed light on some of its more deceptive practices should help naive or "spontaneous" humanists in rethinking their ideas and the meaning of their social practice.

As for the organization of the Humanist Movement, it supports and mobilizes action fronts in the fields of labor, housing, unions, politics, and culture, with the intention of becoming an increasingly broad-based movement. By proceeding in this way, it creates conditions of inclusion so that a wide range of progressive forces, groups, and individuals can participate and work together, without losing their own identities or particular characteristics. The objective of such collective action is to promote a union of forces that will thus be capable of influencing ever larger sectors of the population, and through these actions provide orientation and direction for the transformation of society.

We Humanists are not naive, nor do we praise ourselves with empty words. In this sense, we do not consider our proposals to be the most advanced expression of social consciousness, nor do we think of our organization in unquestioning terms. And we do not pretend to represent or speak for the majority. What we do is simply to act in accordance with our best judgment as we strive for the transformations we believe to be most suitable and possible for these times in which we live.

To conclude this talk, I would like to communicate to you a personal concern of mine. I do not at all believe that we are moving toward a dehumanized world, like that presented by some science fiction writers, some salvationist movements, or some pessimistic currents. I do believe that we are standing at exactly the point—as has occurred time and again in human history—when we must choose between two roads that lead to opposite worlds. We must choose in what conditions we want to live, and I believe that at this perilous moment humanity is poised to make its choice. Humanism has an important role to play in support of the better of these two options.

Thank you very much.

The Conditions of Dialogue

Academy of Sciences, Moscow, October 6, 1993

Honorable Vice President of the Russian Academy of Sciences Vladimir Kudriatsev, respected professors, and friends:

The distinction conferred upon me by the Russian Academy of Sciences at the session of the Scientific Council of the Latin American Institute on September 21 is of the greatest importance to me. Only a few days after receiving the news, I find myself here with you to express my gratitude for this recognition and to reflect upon the dialogue I have been holding over the course of several years with academics from a number of institutes in your country. This exchange, which we have carried out through personal contact, correspondence, and books, has demonstrated clearly the possibility of establishing a certain foundation of shared ideas, provided, as in this case, that the dialogue is rigorous and free of prejudices. In contrast, I would like to speak today about certain difficulties that can obstruct the free flow of dialogue in general and not infrequently lead it down blind alleys.

I have used the word “dialogue” almost in the Greek sense of *dialogos* and the later *dialogus,* which expresses the same idea and always implies an alternating conversation between people who express their ideas or emotions. But a dialogue, even when it meets the formal requirements, sometimes doesn’t work, and the interlocutors will fail to reach a full understanding of the subject under discussion. The philosophical and scientific form of thinking, unlike the dogmatic form, is essentially dialogic, and it bears a close relationship to that dialectic structure presented to us by Plato as an instrument for approaching truth. Contemporary scholars have once again begun reflecting on the nature of dialogue, especially since the introduction of Phenomenology and the formulation of the “problem of the Other,” whose most illustrious representative is Martin Buber. Collingwood had already made clear that a problem cannot be solved if it is not understood, and that it cannot be understood if the class of question it poses is not known. Question and answer take place within the hermeneutic dialogue, but no answer closes the circle—it only opens the circle to new questions that in turn require reformulation.

The thesis that I will defend today can be stated in the following way: *There can be no complete dialogue without a consideration of the pre-dialogic elements on which the need for the dialogue is based.* To illustrate this statement, let me use some everyday examples that involve me personally.

It sometimes happens that when I am asked to explain my thought in a lecture, a text, or a statement for the press, I have the sensation that both the words I use and the thread of my discourse are such that they can be understood without difficulty, and yet they do not “connect” with these listeners, readers, or members of the press. And these people are not in any worse condition to understand than many others with whom my discourse *does* connect. Naturally I am not talking about those disagreements that can arise regarding the proposals I formulate and the objections the other party may make—indeed, it seems that in that case there is a perfectly good connection. I have noted that kind of connection even in the midst of heated argument. No, I am talking about something more general, something that has to do with the *conditions* of dialogue itself (which would include this exposition—understanding it as a dialogue with another who accepts, or rejects, or doubts, my assertions). I have this sensation of non-connection most strongly when I can see that what I’ve explained has been understood, and yet the person goes

on to ask the same question again and again, or focuses upon points unrelated to what has been said. It's as though a certain vagueness, a certain lack of interest, accompanied their understanding of what I've said; as though their interest lay beyond (or closer at hand) than what has been expressed.

Here we are taking *dialogue* to be a relationship of reflection or discussion between people, between parties. Without being overly rigorous, we might clarify certain conditions that are necessary if that relationship of dialogue is to exist or an explanation is to be reasonably followed. Accordingly, for a dialogue to be coherent both parties must: (1) agree on the *theme* to be discussed; (2) accord the theme a *similar degree of importance;* and (3) possess a *common definition* of the important terms to be used.

When we say that the parties need to agree on the theme of the dialogue, we are referring to a relationship in which each person takes into consideration the discourse of the other person. We should note that to define the subject does not mean that it cannot undergo some change over the course of the discussion, but in all cases each party must know at least minimally what it is that the other person is speaking about.

The next condition tells us that the parties must give the theme a similar weight or degree of importance. We are not necessarily talking about an exact congruence, but simply a similar quantification of the importance each places on the subject, because if one party holds that the subject is of primary importance, whereas for the other party it is trivial, then there may be agreement about the object under discussion, but not about the interest in or function of the discourse as a whole.

Finally, if the key terms of the discussion have different definitions for the two parties, this can have the result that the object of the dialogue, and even the subject dealt with, will be distorted.

If these three conditions are satisfied, then it is possible to advance and for the parties to be in reasonable agreement or disagreement with the sequence of arguments that are being expressed. But there are many factors that can hinder these conditions of dialogue from being met. I will limit myself to looking only at some of the pre-dialogical factors that affect the importance conferred on a given subject.

In order for a statement to exist, there must be a prior intention that allows the person to choose the terms and the relationship between them. It is not enough to say "no man is immortal" or "all rabbits are herbivorous" for the other person to understand what subject it is that I wish to consider. The intention that precedes the discourse sets the ambit, the universe, in which the propositions will be stated. And that universe is not genetically logical, it involves structures that are pre-logical, pre-dialogical. And the same applies to the person receiving the statement. The universe of discourse must coincide both for the person speaking and the recipient of that speech. Otherwise, we would say there was a non-coincidence in the discourse.

Until quite recently people thought that the conclusion derives from the interaction of the premises. And so one would say: "All men are mortal; Socrates is a man; therefore, Socrates is mortal." And it was assumed that the conclusion derived from the foregoing terms, when in reality the person organizing these statements already had the conclusion in mind. There was, then, an intention launched toward a certain result, and that intention in turn allowed the person to choose his or her statements and terms. This is what occurs not only in everyday discussions, but even in science the discourse goes in the direction of an objective previously formulated as a hypothesis. In this way, when a dialogue is established, each party may have a different intention, aim for a different objective, and may even place a different overall level of

importance on the subject. But that “importance” is not given by or in the theme itself—it is given by a whole set of prior beliefs, valuations, and interests that each party brings to the discussion.

For example, in taking “meaning in life” as the subject of their dialogue, two people might agree in the abstract that this is a theme of the greatest importance, and yet one of the parties might be convinced that treating this subject is of little use, that it will solve nothing, and that, lastly, it has no practical importance for daily life. That this skeptical interlocutor may nevertheless follow the arguments of the other party, or participate actively in the dialogue, is explained by other factors, but not by the subject itself, whose substantiality the first party has rejected from the outset. In this way, the pre-dialogic elements set not only the universe of the subject but also include the *intentions* of the parties, which in this case lay beyond (or this side of) the topic.

Of course, these pre-dialogical elements are also pre-*logical,* and act within the horizons of the era and of the society, even though individuals often mistake these simply as products of their own personal experiences and observations. And this creates a barrier that cannot easily be overcome until the sensibility of the age—that is, the historical moment in which we live—has changed. It is precisely for this reason that many contributions in the field of science and other areas of human activity have become accepted as being completely obvious and true only later on. But until we have arrived at that “later on,” those who offer these ideas and activities find themselves in a dialogic vacuum, and not infrequently facing a wall of hostility raised even at the possibility of their publicly discussing these new points of view. Once the initial turbulence has passed, and one or perhaps several new generations have made their way onto the stage of history, the importance of those contributions that were “ahead of their time” comes to be recognized by everyone, and people are surprised that those contributions were ever rejected, their importance ever denied or minimized.

Thus, when I express my thought (which does not coincide with certain beliefs, valuations, and interests belonging to the universe of the present age), I understand the disconnection that I encounter with many of my interlocutors, even those who in the abstract would appear to be in perfect agreement with me. In my work of disseminating Humanism I encounter these difficulties with some frequency. Even when one explains the ideas of New Humanism and does so clearly, that alone may not result in a satisfactory connection with many interlocutors, because there are still hindrances in the form of beliefs from prior stages that lead some listeners to place greater importance on questions or factors other than the human being. Of course, many people will say that they are “humanist,” because the word “humanism” can be simply ornamental, while it is clear that such people do not have any genuine interest in understanding the message or proposals of this current of thought and this social practice.

If one considers that any organization of ideas into a system is an ideology, and current fashion dictates “the end of ideologies,” then it is clear that systematic formulations of Humanism will tend not to be taken seriously. Instead, in a contradictory way, the preference will be for instant, piecemeal answers to problems that are global and general, and any systematic answers will seem to be overly broad generalizations. Although it happens, in this age of planetarization, that the fundamental problems we are living through are structural and global, people do not easily grasp this; therefore, we find ourselves facing an agglomeration of destructured answers that, by their very nature, lead only to further complications in a chain reaction racing out of control. This occurs, of course, because the economic interests of the privileged circles manage the world, and more than that because the vision of the world of this privileged few has taken hold even in the most wronged and underprivileged sectors of society.

It is pathetic to hear in the discourse of the average citizen the echo of the same chords we have heard struck only the day before in the news media by those who represent the dominant minorities. And this state of affairs will persist, and neither profound dialogue nor concerted global action will be possible until the final failure of all piecemeal attempts to resolve the growing crisis that has been unleashed in the world.

At present, people still believe that today's prevailing global economic and political system should not be challenged, thinking it is something that can be perfected. We believe, quite the contrary, that today's system is not perfectible, that it is not something that can be gradually reformed, and that piecemeal, destructured solutions will not lead to reintegration or renewal. While these two opposing positions may engage in dialogue, the pre-dialogical elements that act in each position are irreconcilable, both as systems of belief and as sensibilities. Only with the continuing failure of piecemeal solutions will we come to a new horizon of questioning and conditions that are adequate for a dialogue. It is then that these new ideas will gradually be recognized and that those sectors today most bereft of hope will begin to mobilize. Today, even when some claim they will improve some aspect or other of the current system, the feeling that is becoming widespread in the populace is that things will only continue to worsen. That diffuse sensation in people is not indicative of some simple-minded apocalyptic millenarianism—it reveals a pervasive and deep-seated disquiet that, born as a "gut feeling" in the voiceless majority, is gradually extending into all levels of society. Meanwhile, amid all this we continue to hear people reassuring us, contradictorily, that this system can be perfected in a piecemeal way.

Dialogue, a decisive factor in all human construction, cannot be reduced to the rigors of logic or linguistics. Dialogue is a living thing in which the exchange of ideas, emotions, and experiences is tinged with the irrationality of existence. This human life—with its beliefs, fears, and hopes, with its hatreds, aspirations, and ideals of the age—is what acts as the foundation for all dialogue. When I said that *there can be no complete dialogue without a consideration of the pre-dialogic elements on which the need for the dialogue is based,* I was referring to the practical consequences of this formulation. We will see no full dialogue on the fundamental questions of today's civilization until we, as a society, begin to lose our belief in the innumerable illusions fed by the enticements of the current system. In the meantime, the dialogue will continue to be insubstantial and without any connection to the profound motivations of society.

When the Academy notified me of the distinction it had conferred on me, I realized that in some latitudes of the world something new has begun to move, something that, beginning in a dialogue of specialists, will slowly begin to move into the public square.

I wish to express my gratitude to this great institution, to all of you, and my fervent wish that a fruitful dialogue will deepen and spread beyond the cloisters of academe into the world at large.

Humanist Forum

Moscow, October 7, 1993

My friends, it is the goal of this Humanist Forum to study and develop positions on the global problems affecting the world today. From this point of view, the Forum is a cultural organization in the broadest sense, concerned with developing structural relationships among the phenomena of science, politics, art, and religion. The Humanist Forum considers freedom of conscience and freedom from ideological prejudice to be the indispensable conditions for this work of understanding the complex phenomena of the contemporary world.

In my view, the Humanist Forum—in addition to aspiring to become an instrument for information, exchange of ideas, and discussion among people and institutions from the widest possible spectrum of the world's cultures—can play a permanently active role in which all pertinent information circulates rapidly among its members.

One might ask whether today there aren't numerous institutions already in existence that—given their experience, their financial solvency, and their professional and technical resources—might not be able to carry out this work with greater success. One could think that universities and their continuing education programs, private and public foundations, and even the cultural organizations of the United Nations might be appropriate avenues for important research of this kind and for the dissemination of conclusions reached, supposing that they were of some value. While we do not disregard the possibility of collaboration and interchange with all such entities, we do require a high degree of independence, a great liberty of judgment in the formulation of questions and in establishing areas of interest, and these concerns are not so simple to address in the case of institutions that have their own dynamics and, of course, their own existing material and ideological dependence.

The Humanist Forum would like to lay the foundations for a future, worldwide dialogue. But it must not discard, *a priori,* the important contributions that have been and are being made by many diverse currents of thought and action, independent of the practical success or failure they have had. It would be of much greater interest to consider those many positions and to try to understand that, in this planet-wide civilization that is beginning to be born, a diversity of positions, value systems, and ways of life will certainly prevail in the future, despite the onslaught of those currents that wish to make all things uniform. In that sense, we aspire to a *universal human nation,* which we recognize as possible only if diversity exists. No central hegemony that dominates the peripheries, no lifestyle, no system of values, no ideological or religious agenda imposed at the cost of the abolition or disappearance of other forms of thought and being, will be able to sustain itself. Today we can see clearly that centralization tends to generate secessionist responses, because it does not respect the true integrity of peoples and regions that might be able to come together perfectly well within a real federation of collectivities. Nor should we think that economic control somehow works miracles. Or are there still people who believe that if they are going to grant loans for development, this entitles them to dictate changes first of the State, next of the legislature, and then of the mode of production, and later on changes concerning customs and social habits, and finally changes regarding dress, food, religion, and even thought?

Even as this naive absolutism meets with greater and greater difficulties in its attempts to impose itself, it is, as in the case of the secessionist movements noted earlier, contributing to a hardening and radicalizing of positions in all fields. If through the dictatorship of money we could

in fact arrive at a fully realized society, it would be worth discussing the subject a little more. If, however, it is necessary, on top of everything else, to accept conditions that lead to regression in human development, the result will be only an increase in disorder and general misfortune.

The Humanist Forum must not lose sight of the principle of diversity or study other cultures from the standpoint of a zoological primitivism that declares one's own culture to be the zenith of an evolution that must be imitated by others. But while it is far more important to recognize that all cultures make their contributions to the great edifice of humanity, the Humanist Forum does need to establish some minimum conditions. The first is that it does not admit the participation of those who foster discrimination or intolerance. The second is that it does not allow the participation of those who foster violence as a methodology of action for imposing their concepts or ideals, no matter how elevated these concepts and ideals may be. Beyond these, there is no need for any other restrictions.

The Humanist Forum is internationalist, but does that mean that because of its ecumenicism it must reject the regional, the local? How can we reproach someone because they love their people, their homeland, their customs, their traditions? Should we really simply label such people with the epithet "nationalist" so that we can then dismiss them? To love one's roots is also to be generous in valuing the work and the suffering of the generations who have come before. That "nationalism" only becomes distorted when the affirmation of one's own nation or people is made at the expense of, or discriminating against, other collectivities, other peoples. What right would this Forum have to disparage the contributions of those who identify, for example, with socialism, with the ideal of creating a society that is egalitarian and just? What would the Forum be rejecting but one of the many possible models in which that ideal has been distorted through a tyrannically imposed uniformity. Why would this Forum ignore that liberal who considers his economic model an instrument for the well-being of all, and not just of the few? On what basis would this Forum discriminate against either believers or atheists on the basis of their respective approaches? Could in good conscience the Forum assert the superiority of some customs over others? In short, I believe that the limits set by the Forum should be the two and only the two mentioned above: the rejection of discrimination and intolerance, and the rejection of the methodologies of violence. In this way the Forum will be based on the inclusion, and not the exclusion, of human variety.

I do not wish to take up any more time with this speech; I would simply like to mention some issues about which all of us would like to have a clearer understanding and regarding which we need to find the best practical formulae for action. These issues are, in my view: growing racism and discrimination; the increasing intervention by putative peacekeeping entities in the internal affairs of other countries; the manipulation of human rights as a pretext for intervention; the true state of human rights in all parts of the world; the growth in unemployment worldwide; the increase of poverty in many places and various sectors, even in wealthy societies; the progressive deterioration of health care and education; the activities of secessionist forces; the increase in drug addiction; the increase in suicide; religious persecution and the radicalization of religious groups; the psychosocial phenomena of alteration and violence; and the real threats of environmental destruction, duly prioritized. We would also like to have a clear picture of the phenomenon of *destructuring* that, beginning in larger social and political entities, ends up affecting everything, even down to the level of interpersonal relationships, the articulation of culture, and every project of common action among human groups.

In closing, I would like to point out, for those of you who will be putting together the various working groups, that the functioning of this Forum will not require a complex

organization—rather, what is key is some mechanism that will allow ongoing contact and circulation of information. Nor will it need large resources in order to function, and the problem of funding will not be decisive for a group of this kind. It should have some sort of periodical, more in the style of a bulletin than a formal journal. It will need to find ways to make connections among people and institutions who could work together but may be hindered by distance. And finally, it will need to have an active corps of translators. Perhaps one committee of the Forum could be made up of the World Center for Humanist Studies, which will give some permanence to all these activities and, establishing priorities, maintain a schedule of the tasks being carried out.

I would like to extend a fraternal salute to the members of this Forum, and to express my best wishes to all of you for the work that is beginning today.

What Do We Understand Universalist Humanism to Mean Today?

Community Emanu-El, Headquarters of Liberal Judaism in Argentina, Buenos Aires, November 24, 1994

I wish to express my thanks to the Emanu-El community and to Rabbi Sergio Bergman for the invitation to speak here today. I would also like to thank those who are here today, the members of the community, the other speakers in this series, and also the friends of humanism who are present.

The title of this talk affirms the existence of a *universal humanism,* but, of course, this affirmation needs to be proven. To do that, we will first have to examine what we understand by the word "humanism," given that there is no general consensus on the meaning of this word. Second, we will have to discuss whether humanism belongs to a single region or place, a single culture, or whether instead it lies at the roots and is the heritage of all humanity. But before beginning, we should make explicit our interest with regard to these issues, since if we failed to do so it might be thought that we were motivated simply by historical curiosity or by some desire to pursue cultural trivia. For us, humanism has the compelling merit of being not only history but also the project of a future world and a tool of action for today.

We seek a humanism that contributes to the improvement of life, that makes common cause with those who stand up against discrimination, fanaticism, exploitation, and violence. In a world that is rapidly globalizing—and throwing diverse peoples together as it shrinks ever smaller—we see growing symptoms of the resulting clash between cultures, ethnic groups, and regions. Such a world needs a *universalist humanism*—a humanism that is both plural and convergent, diverse and unifying. A world in which countries, institutions, and human relationships are becoming destructured must have a humanism capable of impelling a rebuilding of social forces. A world in which the meaning and direction of life have been lost needs a humanism capable of creating a new atmosphere of reflection, in which the personal is no longer unrelentingly at odds with the social, nor the social with the personal. We seek a humanism that is creative, not repetitive—a *new humanism* that will encompass the paradoxes of the age while aspiring to resolve them. These ideas, in some cases apparently contradictory, will emerge in more detail as I go on.

In asking "What do we understand by *humanism* today?" I want to address both the origins of humanism as well as its current state. Let's start with humanism as it is historically recognized in the West, while leaving the door open to what has taken place in other parts of the world where a *humanist attitude* was present well before the coining of such words as "humanism," "humanist," and similar terms. That humanist attitude, which is a position common to humanists of all cultures, has the following characteristics: (1) placing the human being as the central value and concern; (2) affirming the equality of all human beings; (3) recognizing personal and cultural diversity; (4) tending to develop new knowledge beyond what is accepted as absolute truth; (5) affirming the freedom of ideas and beliefs; and (6) repudiating violence.

As we look more deeply into European culture, particularly that of pre-Renaissance Italy, we note that the phrase *studia humanitatis* (the study of the humanities) referred to a knowledge of Greek and Latin, with special emphasis on the "classical" authors. The "humanities" were comprised of history, poetry, rhetoric, grammar, literature, and moral philosophy. These

disciplines dealt with generically human questions, in contrast to the subjects studied by "jurists," "canonists," "legists," and "artists," which were meant as specifically professional training. Of course, elements from the humanities formed part of the subject matter in these fields, but were aimed more at practical applications appropriate to their respective occupations. As time went on, the difference between the "humanists" and the "professionals" grew more pronounced, as the former stressed classical studies, the investigation of other cultures, and an interest in things human—in everything that had to do with the human being. This tendency continued to such a degree that it finally made inroads into fields quite distant from those that up until that point had been considered the "humanities," leading eventually to the great cultural revolution of the Renaissance.

In fact, the humanist attitude had begun to develop long before this, and we can see signs of this in the themes sounded by the Goliard poets and the *êcoles* of the French cathedrals in the twelfth century. But the Italian word *humanista,* which designated a certain type of scholar, did not come into use until 1538. On this point I refer you to an article by Augusto Campana titled "The Origin of the Word 'Humanist,'" published in 1946. My point is simply that the first humanists would not have recognized themselves by that name, which came into being only much later. And here, according to studies of Walter Rüegg, one would also have to include such related words as *humanistische* (humanistic), which began to be used in 1784, and *humanismus* (humanism), which began to spread with the work of Niethammer in 1808. It was not until about the middle of the nineteenth century, in fact, that the word "humanism" began to form a part of almost every European language. We are speaking, then, about recent words and recent interpretations of phenomena that were no doubt experienced very differently at the time from the ways they have been interpreted by historiography and the cultural histories of the nineteenth century. This point is not, in my view, trivial, and I would like to come back to it again in a few moments when we consider the traditional meanings of the word "humanism."

If I may be permitted a digression, I might point out that at present we still find that same historical substratum and still encounter those differences between the studies in the humanities that are imparted in institutions and colleges and the simple attitude that people may exhibit, defined not by their particular profession or academic specialty but rather by their stance with respect to the human being as the central concern. When people define themselves as humanists today, they tend not to do so on the basis of their studies—in much the same way as students or scholars in the humanities do not necessarily consider themselves humanists. The humanist *attitude* is vaguely understood as something broader, almost all-encompassing, and generally extending beyond the confines of academic specialties.

In Western academe, the term "humanism" often refers to that process of transformation of culture that began in Italy, particularly in Florence, at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, and which, with the Renaissance, expanded throughout Europe. This current was initially linked to the *humanae litterae* (those texts that dealt with "human matters"), in contradistinction to the *divinae litterae* (those texts that stressed things divine). And that is one of the reasons that its students and scholars were called "humanists." From this standpoint, humanism is, in its origins, a *literary* phenomenon, with a clear mission to recover the contributions of Greek and Latin culture, which had been suffocated for ten centuries by medieval Christianity. We should note that the sudden eruption of this phenomenon was not due solely to an endogenous change in economic, social, and political factors in Western society, but also to the fact that this society was receiving transformative influences from other regions and cultures. Intense contact with the Jewish and Muslim cultures, a broadening of geographical

horizons—all these formed part of a context that fostered a concern with that which is generically human (rather than narrowly Italian or even European) and with discoveries of "things human."

I believe that Salvatore Puledda is correct when, in his book *On Being Human: Interpretations of Humanism from the Renaissance to the Present,* he explains that the medieval, pre-humanist world of Europe was, from the temporal and physical points of view, a closed environment that tended to deny the importance of the contact that did in fact take place with other cultures. History, from the medieval point of view, was the history of sin and redemption. For this view, a knowledge of other cultures and civilizations that were not "illuminated by the grace of God" held no great interest. The future was simply a preparation for the Apocalypse and the judgment of God. In that Ptolemaic cosmogony, the Earth was the unmoving center of the Universe, surrounded by the spheres of the sun and the planets moving under the impulse of angelic hands, and beyond those, the sphere of the fixed stars. This system ended at the Empyrean, the throne of God, the Unmoved Mover of all. And the social organization of the Middle Ages corresponded to that vision: It was a hierarchical, hereditary structure that kept nobles rigidly separated from serfs. At the apex of this pyramid stood the Pope and the Emperor, sometimes allied, sometimes locked in struggle for hierarchical preeminence. The medieval economy, at least until the eleventh century, was a closed system based on the consumption of products at the place of their production. Money circulated only in the most limited way. Trade was slow and difficult. Europe was a continental power, cut off from much of the world because the sea lanes lay in the hands of the Byzantines and Arabs. But the journeys of Marco Polo and his contact with the cultures and technologies of the Far East; the centers of learning in Spain, from which Jewish, Arab, and Christian teachers spread new knowledge; the search for new trade routes that would avoid the barrier posed by the warring Byzantine and Muslim fleets; the formation of an increasingly active merchant class; the growth of a more powerful bourgeoisie; and the development of more efficient political institutions such as the Italian *seignories*—all these phenomena produced a profound change in the social atmosphere, and that change allowed the development of the *humanist attitude.* Nor should we forget that this development was marked by many advances and retreats, only after which it finally became a truly *conscious* attitude.

Just one century after Petrarch (1304–1374), knowledge of the classics was ten times greater than it had been throughout the entire intervening thousand years. Petrarch pored over the ancient codices for knowledge, trying to correct a distorted cultural memory, and in doing so he initiated a tendency toward reconstructing the past and brought forth a new perspective that recognized the flow of history—a perspective long blocked by the immobilism of the Middle Ages. Another of the early humanists, Gianozzo Manetti, in his 1452 work *De dignitate et excellentia hominis* (*"On the Dignity of Man"*), reaffirmed the worth of the human being against the attitude of *contemptu mundi,* contempt for the world, preached by the monk Lothar of Segni, later Pope Innocent III. In a subsequent work, *De voluptate* (*"On Pleasure"*), Lorenzo Valla attacked the ethical concept of pain that prevailed in his time. And so, as economic change took place and the social structures were transformed, humanists continued to make this process an increasingly conscious one, generating an avalanche of productions that further shaped and defined this current that was already extending beyond the ambit of "the cultural" and was soon to call into question the very structures of power of the age: the Church and the monarchy.

Many specialists have noted that a new image of the human being and personality had already appeared in pre-Renaissance humanism. This human personality or existence was

constructed and expressed by means of action, and it is in this respect that special importance is given to the Will over speculative intelligence. In addition, there emerged a new attitude toward nature. Nature was no longer simply God's creation, a vale of tears for mortals, but rather the setting and environment for the human being and, in some cases, the seat and body of God. And lastly, this new stance vis-à-vis the physical universe supported and strengthened the study of the material world in its various aspects, and it led to explanations of that world in terms of a set of immanent forces that could be understood without recourse to theological concepts. This shows that there was already a clear tendency toward experimentation and a drive to master natural laws. The world was now the "kingdom of man," and the human being was to master it through a knowledge of the sciences.

It was within this general framework that nineteenth-century scholars gave the name "humanist" to more than just the many literary figures of the Renaissance. Side by side with figures like Nicholas of Cusa, Rudolph Agricola, Johannes Reuchlin, Erasmus, Thomas More, Jacques Lefèvre, Charles de Bouelles, and Juan Vives were included others such as Galileo and Leonardo da Vinci.

It is well known that the influence of many of the themes and ideas first introduced by the humanists of the Renaissance continued down through the years, eventually inspiring the French *encyclopédistes* and the revolutionaries of the eighteenth century. But after the French and American Revolutions there began a decline in which the humanist attitude sank out of sight once more. Critical idealism, absolute idealism, and Romanticism, which in turn inspired absolutist political philosophies, rejected the human being as the central value, converting humankind into an epiphenomenon of other powers. This object-ification, this "it" instead of "you" or "thou," as Martin Buber astutely put it, became the reigning view of the human being throughout the planet. But the tragedies of the two world wars shook our societies to their very foundations, and there arose once more in the face of the Absurd a questioning of the meaning of human life. This can be seen clearly in the so-called "philosophies of existence." I will return to the contemporary state of humanism toward the end of my talk, but for the moment I would like to point out several fundamental aspects of humanism, among which we find its opposition to all forms of discrimination and its tendency toward universality.

The theme of mutual tolerance and the resulting convergence to which it can lead is very dear to humanism, and so I would like to place before you once more the explanation given by Dr. Bauer in his talk on November 3:

> In Muslim feudal society, and particularly in Spain, the situation of the Jews was quite distinct. There was no social marginalization worth mentioning, just as there was none to speak of for Christians. And only rarely did those tendencies that today we would call "fundamentalist" arise. The dominant religion did not identify itself with the prevailing social order to the same degree as in Christian Europe. Nor can one in any way use the term "ideological division" here, despite the fact that different religions, in parallel and with mutual tolerance, did exist. Everyone went, together, to the official schools and universities—a thing that would have been inconceivable in the Christian society of the Middle Ages. In his youth, the great Maimonides was a pupil and friend of Ibn-Rushd (known to the West as Averroës). And if later on the Jews, and Maimonides himself, suffered pressure and persecutions at the hands of the fanatics who had come from Africa and assumed power in Al-Andalus, these same fanatics did not spare the Arab philosopher, whom they considered equally heretical. During this

time the atmosphere was such that a broad and deep humanism could and did arise on the part of both Muslims and Jews.… In Italy the situation was similar, not only under the brief empire of Islam in Sicily but afterward as well, and for a long time even under the direct rule of the Papacy. A monarch of German descent, the Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, living in Sicily and himself a poet, even had the audacity to proclaim for his rule a tripartite ideological foundation: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and even, through this last, a continuity with classical Greek philosophy.

Here the quotation ends. There is no great difficulty in tracing humanism in the Jewish and Arab cultures. I will simply quote now some observations made by the Russian scholar Artur Sagadeev in a talk he gave in November 1993 in Moscow. In that talk, “Humanism in Classical Muslim Thought,” Sagadeev pointed out the following:

The infrastructure of humanism in the Muslim world was shaped by the development of the cities and the culture of the cities. If we look at the following figures, we can judge the degree of urbanization of that world: The three largest cities of Savad—that is, southern Mesopotamia—and the two largest cities of Egypt contained almost twenty percent of the population. On the basis of the percentage of the population living in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants, we can see that in the eighth and ninth centuries Mesopotamia and Egypt surpassed even many nineteenth-century Western European countries—including the Low Countries, England, Wales, and France. According to careful calculations, Baghdad at this time had 400,000 inhabitants, and the population of cities such as Al Fustat (later Cairo), Córdoba, Alexandria, Al Kufa, and Basra ranged from 100,000 to 250,000.

The concentration in cities of great resources derived from trade and taxes brought about the emergence of a large class of medieval intelligentsia, a dynamism in spiritual life, and considerable accomplishment in science, literature, and art. The central focus in all of this was the human being, both as human race and as unique individual. It should be pointed out that the medieval Muslim world knew no cultural division such as that between the culture of the city and a culture opposed by its axiological orientation to the city’s inhabitants (an anti-urban culture represented in Europe by the inhabitants of the monasteries and feudal estates). In the Muslim world the bearers of theological education and the social groups that were analogous to the European feudal class lived in the cities and experienced the powerful influence of the culture formed among the wealthy urbanites of the Muslim cities.

As to the axiological orientation of the wealthy inhabitants of Muslim cities, we can judge it by the reference group they aspired to imitate, which was to be the embodiment of the qualities of a distinguished, well-educated figure. This reference group was made up of the Adibs, people of broad humanitarian interests, knowledgeable, educated, and of high morals. The Adab—that is, the ensemble of qualities belonging to the Adib—entailed ideals of urbane, courtly, refined behavior and self-possession, and was an ideal that in its intellectual and moral function was synonymous with the Greek word *paideia* or the Latin word *humanitas.*

The Adibs thus embodied ideals of humanism and were at the same time proponents of humanistic ideas that sometimes took the form of carefully polished phrases such as “Man is the problem of man,” and “He who crosses our sea—for that man there is no shore that is not himself.” An insistence on the earthly destiny of the

human being was characteristic of the Adibs, and it led them sometimes to a religious skepticism, even to the extent that some fashionable members of the group would flaunt their atheism.

Adab initially meant the etiquette of the Bedouins; but it took on its humanist character thanks to the fact that the Caliphate, for the first time since Alexander the Great, welcomed the existence of distinct religious groups and became a kind of crossroads between different cultural traditions. Thus, the Mediterranean was linked with the Indo-Iranian world. During the period in which medieval Muslim culture flourished, Adab involved the need to know ancient Hellenic philosophy, on the one hand, and to absorb the educational programs developed by Greek scientists, on the other. The Muslims used enormous resources to advance these proposals. Suffice it to say that, according to the calculations of specialists, in Córdoba alone there were more books than in all of Europe outside of Al-Andalus.

The transformation of the Caliphate into a center of reciprocal influences with other cultures in a mixture of various ethnic groups contributed to the formation of yet another feature of humanism: *universalism*—the idea of the unity of the human race. In reality, the formation of this idea was rooted in the fact that Muslim lands extended from the Volga River in the north to Madagascar in the south and from the Atlantic coast of Africa in the west to the Pacific coast of Asia in the east. Although with the passage of time the Muslim empire disintegrated, the small states that formed from the rubble were very much like the fragmented possessions of Alexander the Great's successors. However, the Islamic faithful were still united by a single religion, a single common literary language, a single law, a single culture, while in their daily lives they communicated and lived with the cultural values of differing and very diverse religious groups.

The spirit of universalism reigned in scientific circles, in meetings (the *madjalis*) that drew together Muslims, Christians, Jews, and atheists who shared common intellectual interests and came from many corners of the Muslim world. They were united by the "ideology of friendship" that had previously united the Stoics, the Epicureans, the Neo-Platonists, and other philosophical schools of antiquity, and later on the circle of Marsilio Ficino in the Italian Renaissance. On the theoretical plane, the principles of universalism had already been formulated within the framework of Kalam, and later became the basis of the conception of the world for both rationalist philosophers and the Sufi mystics. In the debates organized by the Mutakallimi theologians (the Teachers of Islam), in which representatives of many religions took part, it was the custom to support one's thesis not with references to sacred texts, because these references had no basis for the representatives of other religions, but to ground it instead exclusively in human reason.

The text I have just read you from Sagadeev's talk does not do full justice to the wealth of description he gives us of the customs, daily life, art, religious sensibility, law, and economic activity of the Muslim world during its period of humanist splendor. I would like to look now at another work, also by a Russian scholar, a specialist in the cultures of the New World. Professor Sergei Semenov, in his monograph of August, 1994, titled "Humanist Traditions and Innovations in the Spanish-American World," takes a completely new approach to tracing the humanist attitude in the great cultures of pre-Columbian America. Here is what he says:

When we speak of humanist tendencies in the Spanish-American world, we can analyze them above all from the standpoint of the material left us in artistic productions, the work of the masses, and the work of the trades and professions, which we see not only embodied in the monuments of the culture but also engraved in the memory of the people. There are many possibilities for applying this interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of the concrete manifestations of humanism in the Spanish-American world, which is pluralistic to a high degree, exemplifying the phenomenon of cultural synthesis that has occurred on both sides of the Atlantic, on four continents. Of course, the principles in the Spanish-American world are markedly different from the traditions of the Euro-Asiatic world, but in various peoples of the Spanish-American world they approached a universal recognition of the original underlying unity of all human beings, independent of the tribe or society to which they belonged.

We can see these notions of humanism in both Mesoamerica and South America in the pre-Columbian period. In Mesoamerica we find the myth of Quetzalcóatl, and in South America the legend of Viracocha—both deities who rejected human sacrifice, which was commonly practiced against prisoners of war who belonged to other tribes; such human sacrifice was prevalent in Mesoamerica before the Spanish conquest. But indigenous myths and legends, Spanish accounts, and material monuments of culture tell us that the cult of Quetzalcóatl, which appeared sometime between the years 800 and 900, is associated in the consciousness of the peoples of this region with a struggle against human sacrifice and the affirmation of other moral norms that condemned murder, stealing, and war.

According to a number of legends, Topiltzin, the Toltec ruler of the city of Tula, who adopted the name of Quetzalcóatl and who lived in the tenth century of our era, possessed the qualities of a cultural hero. As told in these legends, he taught the inhabitants of Tula the art of goldsmithing, forbade them to engage in human and animal immolation, and permitted only flowers, bread, and fragrance to be offered as sacrifices to the gods. Topiltzin condemned murder, war, and stealing. According to legend, he had the appearance of a white man, though with dark rather than blond hair. Some say that he went away across the sea, others that he left in a burning flame that ascended into the sky, leaving the morning star as a promise of his return.

This hero was said to have exhorted the peoples of Mesoamerica to the humanist way of life, the *toltecayotl,* which was adopted not only by the Toltecs but also by the neighboring peoples who inherited the Toltec tradition. This style of life was based on the principles of the brotherhood of all human beings, perfectibility, esteem and respect for labor, honesty, keeping one’s word, the study of the secrets of nature, and an optimistic outlook on the world.

The legends of the Mayan peoples of the same period relate the activities of the ruler or priest of the city of Chichén Itzá and founder of the city of Mayapán, a person named Kukulkán, who was the Mayan analogue of Quetzalcóatl. Another representative of the humanist tendency in Mesoamerica was the ruler of the city of Texcoco, the poet-philosopher Netzahualcóyotl, who lived from 1402 to 1472. This philosopher also rejected human sacrifice and preached friendship among all human beings, and he exercised a profound influence on the culture of the peoples of Mexico.

In South America we can observe a similar movement at the beginning of the fifteenth century. This movement is associated with the names of Pachacuti Inca

> Yupanqui, who took the name Pachacutéc or “reformer,” and his son Topa Inca Yupanqui, and with the expansion of the cult of the god Viracocha. As in Mesoamerica, Pachacútec, like his father Ripa Yupanqui, took the title “god” and called himself Viracocha. The moral norms by which the society of Tahuantinsuyo was officially governed were linked to his cult and to reforms instituted by Pachacutéc, who like Topiltzin had the qualities of a cultural hero.

And here I will end the quotation from this monograph, which, of course, is part of a long and substantive work.

In reading these two excerpts, I have wanted to bring to your attention examples of what we call the *humanist attitude* in regions that are far removed from each other, and also to show that we can, of course, find this attitude in distinct periods of various cultures. I say “distinct periods,” because this attitude seems to advance and retreat in a pulsating way over the course of history, and many times even to disappear altogether, generally at moments preceding the collapse of a civilization. You can understand that establishing correspondences between civilizations on the basis of their humanist “moments” or periods is a vast undertaking, something of great scope.

If today ethnic and religious groups are turning within themselves in order to find a stronger identity, then what is underway is a kind of cultural or regional chauvinism that threatens to produce clashes with other ethnic groups, cultures, or religions. And yet, if all persons have a legitimate love for their own people and their own culture, then they can also understand that in their people and its roots there exists or has existed that “humanist moment” that makes them by definition universal, makes them of a kind with that “other” culture or religion or ethnic group they are facing. Thus, what we have are diversities that cannot be erased by one side or the other. These diversities are not a hindrance or a defect or something backward—rather, they constitute the very richness of humanity. The problem lies not in diversity but in how to achieve a *convergence* of all those diversities, and this is what occurs in a “humanist moment,” and is what I mean when I speak of “points of convergence.”

Finally, I would like to pick up the thread of my argument on the state of the humanist question at the present time. I have said that after the catastrophes of the two world wars, the philosophers of existence reopened the debate on the subject of humanism, a subject that had been thought dead and gone. But this debate took as its starting point the conceiving of humanism as a *philosophy,* when in reality it had never been a philosophical position but rather a *perspective* and an *attitude* toward life and things.

If, in this debate, the nineteenth-century description of the human being was taken for granted, then we can hardly be surprised that thinkers such as Foucault should accuse humanism of being part of that whole nineteenth-century philosophical approach. Even earlier, Heidegger had expressed his anti-humanism in his “Letter on Humanism,” in which he dismissed humanism as just another “metaphysic.” Perhaps the discussion was influenced by the position of Sartrean existentialism on humanism, which posed the question in philosophical terms. But viewing all this from the perspective of today, it seems to me exaggerated to accept an *interpretation* of something as though it were *the thing itself,* and then, based simply on that interpretation, to go on to attribute certain characteristics to the thing itself.

In their works, Althusser, Lévi-Strauss, and many structuralists declared their anti-humanism, just as others defended humanism as a metaphysics or, at the least, an anthropology. In reality, however, Western historical humanism had never, in any instance,

been a philosophy, even in Pico della Mirandola or Marsilio Ficino. The fact that many such philosophers manifested a *humanist attitude* in no way implies that this attitude was itself a philosophy. Furthermore, if Renaissance Humanism displayed an interest in the subjects of "moral philosophy" as it was called, that concern should be understood as part of efforts aimed at dismantling the manipulation of that field practiced by medieval Scholasticism.

From those errors in the interpretation of humanism—taking humanism to be a philosophy—one can easily arrive at any number of positions, including naturalistic positions such as those expressed in the "Humanist Manifesto" of 1933 or social-liberal positions such as those in the "Humanist Manifesto II" of 1974. In this way, authors such as Lamont have defined their humanisms as naturalist and anti-idealist, affirming an anti-supernaturalism, a radical evolutionism, the non-existence of the soul, the self-sufficiency of the human being, free will, an intraworldly ethic, the value of art, and humanitarianism. I believe that people have every right to define their particular conception in this way if they so choose, but it seems to me unwarranted to go beyond that to claim that Western historical humanism moved within these same directions. I further believe that the proliferation of various "humanisms" in recent years is perfectly legitimate, as long as those movements present themselves as particular manifestations of humanism, without claiming to stand in some absolute way for all of humanism in general. And lastly, I also believe that today humanism has reached the conditions to become a philosophy, a morality, an instrument of action, and a style of life.

Thus, the entire recent philosophical debate with a historical and, moreover, localized humanism has been wrongly posed. The debate in fact is only now beginning, and henceforth Anti-humanism will have to justify its objections in light of the positions of today's universalist New Humanism. We also need to recognize that this entire discussion has been a bit provincial, and that the idea that humanism was born at a certain time and place, was debated in a certain time and place, and some perhaps wished to export it to the world as a model of that time and place—that idea has gone on long enough. Let's concede, then, that the "copyright," the monopoly on the word "humanism" is held by a single geographical area. And we have, of course, been talking about a humanism that is Western, European, and to some degree Ciceronian. But since we have maintained that humanism was never a philosophy but rather a perspective and an *attitude* toward life, can we not then extend our investigation into other regions and recognize that this humanist attitude also manifested similarly in places other than Europe? If not—if we insist on defining historical humanism as a philosophy and, in addition, a specifically *Western* philosophy—we not only err, but we also throw up an insurmountable barrier to dialogue with the expressions of the humanist attitude that exist in all the cultures of the Earth. If I insist on this point, it is not only because of the theoretical consequences that such errors have had and still have, but also because of the their immediate practical consequences.

In historical humanism there has existed the strong belief that knowledge and the mastery of natural laws would lead to the liberation of humankind, that this knowledge existed in various cultures, and that one should learn from all of them. But today we see that knowledge, science, and technology are manipulated, and that knowledge has often served as an instrument of domination. The world has changed, and our experience has grown. Some have believed that religion has clouded people's minds and, paternalistically, have sought to impose freedom by attacking religions. Today, however, we are witnessing violent religious reactions that show no respect for freedom of conscience. The world has changed, and our experience has grown. Some have viewed all cultural differences as "divergent," insisting that all customs and lifestyles

be made uniform. Today we are witnessing violent reactions as some cultures attempt to impose their own values with no respect for diversity. The world has changed, and our experience has grown…

Yet today, in the face of this tragic submergence of reason, in the face of growing symptoms of the neo-irrationalism that appears to be invading us, we can still hear echoes of the primitive rationalism in which a number of generations have been educated. They seem to be saying: "We were right in wanting to do away with religions, because had we succeeded there wouldn't still be all these religious wars today! We were right in trying to wipe out diversity because, had we succeeded, today the fires of ethnic and cultural conflict wouldn't be flaring up anew."

But those rationalists have *not* managed to impose their own particular philosophical cult, or their own particular style of life, or their own particular culture—and that's what counts.

What counts more than anything is the discussion to resolve the serious conflicts developing today. How much longer will it take us to realize that there is no one culture whose intellectual or behavioral patterns are models that all of humanity must follow? I say all this because perhaps now is the time for us to reflect with some seriousness on changing the world and ourselves. Of course, it is easy to say that *other* people ought to change—the problem is that those people think the same thing, that *other* people should change. Isn't it time, then, that we began to recognize the humanity of *others,* to recognize the diversity of *you,* of *all* of us?

I believe that today, more than ever, there is an urgent need to change the world, and that such change, if it is to be positive, is indissolubly linked to personal change. After all, my life has meaning if I want to live it, and if I can choose or struggle to attain the conditions I want for my existence and for life in general. Living with this antagonism between the personal and the social has not yielded very good results—instead, we must discover whether it might not make more sense to bring these two terms—the personal and the social—into a convergent relationship. Living with this antagonism between cultures has not led us in the right direction—instead, we need to go beyond lip-service recognition of cultural diversity to reexamine the real possibility of convergence toward a *universal human nation.*

Finally, many defects have been attributed to the humanists of various times. It has been said that Machiavelli, too, was a humanist striving to understand the laws that govern power, that Galileo displayed a sort of moral weakness in the face of the barbarity of the Inquisition, that among Leonardo's inventions were numbered advanced weapons of war that he designed for the Prince. And in that vein it has been said that numerous contemporary writers, thinkers, and scientists have displayed just such weaknesses. Surely in all this there is much truth. But we must be fair in our appraisal of the facts. Einstein, for example, had nothing to do with the fabrication of the atomic bomb. His merit lies in his explanation of the photoelectric effect, from which the photoelectric cell and so many resulting industries have arisen, including video and television. But his genius stands out, above all, in the formulation of a great physical law: the theory of relativity. And Einstein showed no moral weakness in the face of the new Inquisition. Nor did Oppenheimer, who was given the Manhattan Project to construct an artifact that, as a purely deterrent weapon never to be used against human beings, would put an end to all conflict worldwide. Oppenheimer was unconscionably betrayed, and then he raised his voice, calling out to the moral conscience of all scientists. For that he was fired, and for that he was persecuted under McCarthyism. Many moral shortcomings attributed to people who have embodied a humanist attitude in reality have nothing to do with their stance toward society or science, but rather with their behavior and attitude as human beings in facing pain and suffering. If, for his integrity and moral fortitude in facing martyrdom, the figure of Giordano Bruno is the paradigm

of the classical humanist, then in contemporary times both Einstein and Oppenheimer can in the same way justly be considered true humanists. And why, outside the field of science, should we not consider Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King to be genuine humanists? Was Schweitzer not a humanist?

I am certain that millions of people the world over embody a humanist attitude toward life, but here I cite only a few well-known figures, because they constitute models of the humanist position who are recognized by everyone. I realize that in these individuals some might be able to object to a certain behavior, or to a certain way of doing things, or to their timing, or to their tact, but what we cannot deny is their commitment to other human beings. In any case, I am not one to pontificate on who is or is not a humanist—I wish only to give my opinion, with all the limitations that apply, about Humanism. But if someone should insist that I define the *humanist attitude* in today's world, I would simply reply, in few a words, that *any person who struggles against discrimination and violence, creating new alternatives that make liberty and freedom of choice a reality for all human beings—that person is a humanist.*

Thank you very much.

The Theme of God: Seminar on Philosophical-Religious Dialogue

Power and Light Workers Union Hall, Buenos Aires
Argentina, October 29, 1995

I will try, in the twenty minutes I've been given, to communicate my point of view on the first of the topics suggested by the organizers of this event, which is "the theme of God."

The theme of God can be addressed in various ways. I will choose the historical and cultural ambit, not because of any personal affinity, but out of consideration for the implicit framework established for this seminar. This framing includes other topics such as "the religious sentiment in the contemporary world" and "overcoming personal and social violence." The object of my presentation will be, accordingly, "the theme of God," and not "God."

Why should we be concerned with the theme of God? What interest can this subject hold for us, men and women almost of the twenty-first century? Did not Nietzsche's pronouncement "God is dead" put an end to the matter once and for all? Clearly, this question was not put to rest by that simple philosophical decree. And it has not been put to rest for two important reasons: first, because the significance of this theme has not been fully understood and, second, because placed in historical perspective we see that this issue, until only recently considered *passé,* is once again inspiring new questions. And this questioning echoes, not in the ivory towers of philosophers and specialists, but in the street and deep in the hearts of ordinary men and women.

Some might say that what we are observing today is simply a growth of superstition or a cultural expression in peoples who, in defending their identities, return fanatically to their sacred books and spiritual leaders. Some might also say, pessimistically, in keeping with certain historical interpretations, that all of this signifies a return to the Dark Ages. However one prefers to view it, the theme of God remains with us, and that's what counts.

I believe that Nietzsche's pronouncement that God is dead marks a decisive moment in the long history of the theme of God, at least from the point of view of a negative or "radical" theology, as some defenders of this position wish to call it.

It is clear that Nietzsche did not locate himself in the space of the dueling ground habitually marked out for their debates by theists and atheists, by spiritualists and materialists. Instead, Nietzsche asked himself: Is it that people still believe in God, or is it that a process has begun that will do away with belief in God? In *Thus Spake Zarathustra,* he says: "And thus the old man and the young man went their separate ways, laughing like children.… But when Zarathustra was alone, he spoke in this way to his heart: 'Can it be possible? This old saint in his forest has heard nothing of the death of God!'" And in the fourth part of that same book, Zarathustra asks, "'What does everyone know today? Perhaps that the old God in whom everyone once *believed* is alive no longer.' 'You've said it,' replied the saddened old man. 'And I have served that God to his last hour.'" In addition, in Nietzsche's *The Gay Science,* there appears the parable of the madman seeking God in the public square, who says, "I will tell you where God is…God has died! And he's still dead!" But his listeners do not understand, and the madman explains that he has arrived prematurely, that the death of God is *still* happening.

It is clear from the passages I've cited that Nietzsche was referring to a *cultural process,* to the displacement of a belief, and leaving aside any exact determination of the existence or

non-existence of God *per se.* The implications of the displacement of that belief are of enormous consequence, because that belief carries along with it a whole system of values, at least in the West and in the time that Nietzsche wrote. And that "high-water mark of nihilism" Nietzsche predicted for the times that were to come has as a backdrop his announcement of the death of God.

Within this conception, one might think that if the values of an age are based on God, and God disappears, then a new system of ideas must of necessity arise, a system that accounts for the totality of existence and justifies a new morality. Such a system of ideas must give an account of the world, of history, of the human being and the meaning of the human being, of society, of coexisting with others, of good and bad, of what one should and should not do. Now, ideas of that sort had begun to appear long before their culmination in the great constructions of critical idealism and absolute idealism. And, in that case it made no difference whether a system of thought was applied in an idealist or materialist direction, because its framework, its methodology of knowledge and action, was strictly rational, and in any case it could not account for the totality, the entirety, of life. But in the Nietzschean interpretation, things happened in just the opposite way: Ideologies arose out of life itself in order to give justification and meaning to that life.

We should recall that Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, both engaged in struggle against the rationalism and idealism of their time, became the forerunners of existentialism. However, the description and comprehension of the structure of human life had still not appeared on the philosophical horizon of those authors, as this would occur only later. It was as though in the background there was still at work the definition of man as the "rational animal," as nature endowed with reason, and this reason could be understood in terms of animal evolution, or "reflection," or other such ideas. At that time one might still legitimately think that "reason" was the most important thing or, conversely, that instincts and the dark forces of life governed reason. This latter belief was the case for Nietzsche and the vitalists in general. But following the "discovery" of "human life" things have changed… And here I should apologize for not developing this point further, but there is simply not sufficient time to do this today. I would, however, like to relieve a little the sense of strangeness or uneasiness that we may experience when we hear that "human life" is a recent discovery that only recently has begun to be understood.

In two words: Since the first human beings we have all known that we *live* and that we are *human;* we have all experienced our life. And yet in the field of ideas, the understanding of *human life* with its own particular structure and its own particular characteristics is very recent. This is like saying: We humans have always had DNA and RNA in our cells, but it was only recently that those molecules were discovered and their function understood. In this state of affairs, concepts such as *intentionality, opening,* the *historicity of consciousness, intersubjectivity,* the *horizon of consciousness,* and so on have only recently been defined in the field of ideas, and with this *we have begun to see not the structure of life in general, but the structure of "human life," and this has resulted in a definition of the human phenomenon radically different from that of the human being as "rational animal."* Thus, for example, animal life, natural life, begins at the moment of conception—but when does *human* life begin, if it is by definition "being-in-the-world," which is opening and social environment? Or consider, is consciousness simply a *reflection* of natural and "objective" conditions, or is it rather *intentionality,* which configures and modifies the given conditions? Or, for example, is the human being "completed," finished once and for all, or instead a being capable of modifying

itself and constructing itself not only in the social and historical sense but biologically as well? Thus, with endless such examples of the new problems raised by the discovery of the *structure of human life,* we may well have to move beyond the ambit of the questions that were asked within the historical horizon in which the definition of the human being as "rational animal" was still the prevailing one—the epoch of "God is dead."

To return to our subject, if, with the death of God, no replacement appeared that could give a foundation to the world and human activity, or if a rational system was forcibly imposed in which the fundamental thing—life itself—escaped, then chaos and the collapse of values would ensue, dragging down all of civilization along with it. Nietzsche called this "the high-water mark of nihilism" and on occasion "the Abyss." It is clear that neither his studies in *On the Genealogy of Morals* nor his ideas in *Beyond Good and Evil* managed to produce the "transmutation of values" he so earnestly sought. Instead, seeking something that could surpass his nineteenth-century "last man," he constructed a Superman who, as in the most recent versions of the Golem legend, came to life and began to walk about out of control, destroying everything in its path. Irrationalism was on the rise, and the "will to power" came to stand as the highest value, constituting the ideological underpinning of one of the greatest monstrosities history has ever recorded.

There was no new, positive foundation of values able to resolve or overcome the pronouncement "God is dead," and the great philosophical constructions found themselves now, in the early part of this century, at an impasse, unable to accomplish this task. Today, we still find ourselves immobilized in the face of these questions: Why should we exercise solidarity toward others? For what cause should we risk our future? Why should we struggle against injustice? Simply out of necessity, or for some historical reason, or because of some natural order? Is the old morality based on God, yet today without God, perhaps felt as a need? None of this is sufficient!

And if today we find ourselves with the historical impossibility of new all-encompassing systems arising that could serve as a foundation, the situation seems to grow even more complicated. Remember that the last great philosophical vision appeared in Husserl's *Logical Investigations* in 1900, the same year as a complete vision of the human psyche was proposed by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams.* The view of the universe in physics was shaped in 1905 and 1916 in Einstein's theories of relativity; the systematization of logic was given by Russell and Whitehead in *Principia Mathematica* in 1910 and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in 1921. And then in 1927 Heidegger's *Being and Time,* an unfinished work that proposed to lay the foundations of a new phenomenological ontology, marked the beginning of the period of rupture in great systems of thought.

Here, we must stress, we are not talking about an interruption in thinking itself, but rather the impossibility of continuing the creation of grand systems capable of giving foundation to everything. The same impulse of that earlier period was also felt in the grandiosity of works in the field of aesthetics: Consider the examples of Stravinsky, Bartok, and Sibelius; Picasso and the muralists Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros; writers like Joyce, who tried to fully capture the onrushing steam-of-consciousness; epic filmmakers such as Eisenstein; the Bauhaus architects led by Gropius; the urbanists and monumental architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier. And has artistic production lagged in the years since then? Of course not, but it occurs under a different sign: It is modular, it deconstructs, it is adapted to its surroundings, it is carried out by teams and specialists—it has become technical in the extreme.

The soulless political regimes that came to power in those days, and in their moment gave the illusion of monolithic completeness, might well be understood as factive throwbacks to delirious romanticisms, titanisms of the transformation of the world at any price. They inaugurated the era of high-tech barbarism, the suppression of human beings by the millions, nuclear terror, chemical and biological weapons, and large-scale environmental pollution and destruction. This is the high-water mark of nihilism that, in Zarathustra, heralded the destruction of all values and the death of God!

What do people believe in today? Perhaps in new alternatives for life? Or do people simply let themselves be swept along by a current that now seems to them irresistible and completely independent of their intentionality? The predominance of technology over science, the exclusively analytical vision of the world, and the dictatorship of abstract money over the concrete realities of production—all these are now firmly entrenched. In that swirling magma, the ethnic and cultural differences believed overcome in the process of history are once again being revived. Systems of any kind are rejected by deconstructionism, postmodernism, and structuralist currents. The frustration of thinking has become a commonplace among the "philosophers of weak intelligence." The hodgepodge of styles that swiftly supplant one another, the destructuring of human relationships, and the perpetration of all manner of fraud and deceit recall the eras of imperial expansion in ancient Persia, Greece, or Rome…

I do not mean by any of this to propose a kind of historical morphology, a spiral model of a process that is fed by analogies. I am simply trying to point out certain aspects of today's world that we find not in the least surprising or difficult to believe, because they have flourished at other times in history, though not in the present context of globalization and material progress. Nor do I wish to transmit a sense of inexorable mechanical sequence in which human intention counts for nothing. Indeed, I believe the opposite—I believe that with reflection, inspired by humanity's experience down through history, we are today in a position to begin a new civilization, the first truly planetary civilization. But the conditions for that leap are extremely challenging. Think of how the gap between the postindustrial information societies and the societies of hunger is widening. Think of the growth of marginalization and poverty even within the wealthy societies, and the yawning generation gap that appears to be bringing to a halt the historical march in which the new surpasses the old. Think of the dangerous concentration of international financial capital, mass terrorism, sudden secessions, ethnic and cultural conflicts, increasing environmental imbalances, and population explosion with megalopolises teetering on the verge of collapse. In thinking about all this, even without becoming apocalyptic, you will have to agree that the current picture presents many difficulties.

In my view, the problem lies in the difficult transition between the world we have known until now and the world that is coming. And as at the end of any civilization and the beginning of another, we will have be alert to possible financial collapse, possible administrative destructuring and breakdown, possible replacement of nation states by parastates or even gangs, the possibility of widespread injustice, disheartenment, the diminishing of the human being, the dissolving of bonds between people, loneliness, growing violence, and emergent irrationalism—and all of this in an ever-accelerating, ever more global setting. Above all, we have to consider what new image of the world to propose. What kind of society do we want, what kind of economy, what values, what kind of interpersonal relationships, what kind of dialogue between each human being and his or her neighbor, each human being and his or her soul?

Nevertheless, for each new proposal that could be made, there are at least two impossibilities: first, that no complete system of thought will remain standing in a time of destructuring; and second, that no rational articulation of discourse can be carried on beyond immediate matters of practical life or matters of technology. These two difficulties impede the possibility of laying the foundation for any far-reaching new values.

If God has not died, then religions have responsibilities to humanity that they must fulfill. Today they have a duty to create a new psychosocial atmosphere, to address themselves as teachers to their faithful, and to eradicate all vestiges of fanaticism and fundamentalism. They cannot turn away and remain indifferent to the hunger, ignorance, bad faith, and violence in today's world. They must contribute vigorously to tolerance and foster dialogue with other beliefs and every person who feels a sense of responsibility for the destiny of humankind. They must open themselves—and I hope this won't be taken as irreverence—to manifestations of God in the many cultures. We are waiting for them and expecting them to make this contribution to the common cause in this exceedingly difficult moment.

If, on the other hand, God has died in the heart of religions, then we can be sure that God will return to life in a new dwelling, as we learn from the history of the origins of every civilization—and that new dwelling will be in the heart of the human being, far removed from every institution and all power.

Thank you very much.