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NOTES ON THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR UNIVERSAL DIALOGUE

ABSTRACT

Neither for today's Russia, nor for the whole of the contemporary world is there, perhaps, a more important issue than the possibility of a civilized, peaceful dialogue between cultures, peoples, governments and individuals. The International Society for Universal Dialogue is one among other philosophical schools, societies and organizations which promote the idea of universal dialogue. It tries to solve problems associated with language and ideological barriers, strengthening professional and friendly ties and implementation, through joint efforts, of a peaceful and fair world order.

Keywords: intercultural communication, International Society for Universal Dialogue, *Dialogue and Universalism* (journal).

INTRODUCTION

In the summer of this year, it certainly will be recalled the event that happened thirty years ago: the opening of the border crossing corridor in the Wall between East and West Germany, its symbolic and real meaning and changes that followed not only in the European or Russian world, but also in global reality after November 9 when new rules for entry and exit from the German Democratic Republic were announced. Hundreds and thousands of Germans from both sides rushed to the border. Eyewitnesses emphasize that there was a feeling of a national holiday.

In November 2019, there will be a remarkable jubilee associated with this event: thirty years have passed since the International Society for Universal Dialogue (hereafter: ISUD), a cross-cultural philosophical organization, was born. It was created 30 years ago in Poland as a response of scholars from different countries to a global challenge. ISUD was initiated by the Polish philosophy professor Janusz Kuczyński and other scholars, among others from

Germany and USA. The main idea and driving force of ISUD was the promotion of intercultural dialogue as a means of cultivating the highest and richest human values in all spheres of life.

This is how Charles Brown, a witness and participant, recalls this event:

“In the spring of 1989—I was a young philosopher seeking to establish a research record—wanting to contribute to the great enterprise of philosophical thinking. I came across a Call for Papers—an invitation to present a paper at the ‘International Symposium of Universalism.’ This was intriguing for both philosophical and political reasons [...] I arrived in Warsaw after an overnight train-ride from Berlin. I was anxious to experience the political transformation that had stunned and inspired much of the world. A spirit of renewal was in the air and in the streets—a spirit of energy, creativity, and hope—a sense of a historical moment too young and too fresh to be completely understood ...”¹

This was a moment of optimism, big ideas, and hope for cultural renewal, Brown confirms—a moment of expectation of a more humane, peaceful, and just world through philosophical dialogue.

I learned about the existence of the ISUD in the winter 2012. In the same year I took part in the ISUD Congress held in the sacred place for any philosopher—ancient Olympia. In 2014 the ISUD Congress was held in Craiova (Romania), in 2016—in Warsaw; and in 2018, the Congress for the first time in its history took place in Latin America, in Lima. Besides, the ISUD section was present at the World Philosophical Congresses in Athens (2013) and Beijing (2018).

These cultural and historical events, being a manifestation and embodiment of globalization processes taking place in the world, gather usually more than 100 participants from Europe, Asia, the USA and, more recently, from Russia and Latin America. All our meetings are aimed at promoting the idea of intercultural philosophical and scientific, as well as sociopolitical contacts for the sake of discussing common problems existing in a controversial, conflicting, complex, uneasy world.

Proposals and studies presented by ISUD members are published in *Dialogue and Universalism* (hereafter D&U). This journal, which has become the main forum of the Society, has been published since 1973. Janusz Kuczyński was its founder and then editor for 41 years. Since 2015 Małgorzata Czarnocka has become the chief editor of D&U.

¹ Brown, Ch. 2016. “The Dialectics of Identity and Difference. Key address to the 11th World Congress of the International Society for Universal Dialogue.” *Dialogue and Universalism*, 26 (4).

ISUD: HISTORY AND MODERNITY

Since 2004, ISUD has been one of 150 full members of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP), a non-governmental organization and affiliated with the International Council on Philosophy and Humanity Studies (ICPHS) and UNESCO. The objectives of ISUD are largely consistent with the basic goals of FISP, ICPHS and UNESCO, namely: to promote philosophical education on a global scale, and to raise awareness of the social and global problems that we face in order to break the deadlock in which humanity found itself at the beginning of the 21st century.²

The 30-year anniversary is not just an informational occasion to consider the philosophical and scientific work of the scholars who are ISUD members. The activities of the Society meet the realities of our time. The political and socio-economic contradictions that are shaking humanity today have the most dangerous tendency to exacerbate. Years and decades passed; youthful inspiration was followed by questions; perplexity; disappointment—and new determination, too. At the ISUD Congress held in 2018 in Lima, Charles Brown underlined in his keynote speech: “Today, in 2018, the optimism of Janusz Kuczyński has withered. For many of us, it feels more like 1936 than 1989. Too many storms threaten our very lives today. Too many mad bulls have lost their way [...] trampling our institutions, eroding our optimism.”³

Indeed, the deadly nature of modern warfare and the threat posed by modern types of weapons, and on the other hand, decades of domination (perhaps exaggerated) of ironic and literary talented, charming postmodern paradigmatics, convincingly refuting the ideas and values of the modernity era, that is, the Enlightenment with its “naive” faith in reason, science, morality, justice, and progress, determine the basic social, spiritual, and intellectual traits of our time.

Our capacity for authentic public moral discourse, for shared and rational reflection on the genuine issues of humanity, once again fades, Charles Brown reckons. We *feel* a sense of uncertainty, urgency, and anxiety over our futures, the futures of our children, and the future of our planet. This sense of uncertainty, urgency, and anxiety rises as we sense, on some *primal* level, that we have lost our ability to *collectively imagine* a better future. We sense that we have lost our ability for authentic public discourse on issues of meaning and value. Utopian dreams from our past now yield to the dystopian nightmares of popular culture.

This sense of urgency does not rise because we recognize the dangers of rising seas and temperatures, nor does it come from the reality of ubiquitous pollution, or the tragedy of mass extinction. Nor does it rise because we witness

² Hicks, S. V. 2007. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 66 (1).

³ Brown, Ch. 2019. “Resisting Nihilism since 1989.” Keynote Address to the 12th World Congress of the International Society for Universal Dialogue, Lima, Peru. *Dialogue and Universalism* 2(1), 13.

increasing militarism and the spread of economic inequality. This sense of urgency does not even develop from losing our faith in the institutions that have sustained us. The pervasive spread of market practices and market logic into ever-greater arenas of social life becomes a way of life, a way of seeing the world. A market economy has metastasized into a market society and a way of life. Market practices and market logic become the assumed model for all social practices and relations. We admire competition and forget about the primacy of cooperation. The result is that resources, commodities, market practices, unapologetic dynamics of power and violence, and technological ways of seeing the world now threaten to *become our world*.

“The result is a new form of a global subjectivity [...]—the misshapen offspring of a lifeworld colonized by market practice and logic, colonized by a technological re-framing of the world and the dynamics of power; the result is a form of subjectivity shaped and mis-shaped by chasing the idols of profit, efficiency, constant growth, and power.”⁴

It seems rather natural that opinion leaders—philosophers, scientists, influential and responsible journals and journalists—should give an assessment and point out ways to solve the most acute socio-economic and political problems. And this should be a cross-cultural, or transcultural intellectual activity. But philosophy is now facing the threat of becoming the servant of all new forms of the dynamics of power and violence.

It is remarkable however, that, against the background, widespread in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, of original and fascinating postmodern ideas in various countries, ISUD proclaims a commitment to many educational ideals of the modernity era, since the “modernity project” remained unaccomplished. As a result of discussions about the nature of universalism, the ISUD Constitution, Article IV, states:

“The main goal of the Society is to promote in theory and in practice the ideals of universality as the most effective means of gradually realizing a decent, peaceful and fair world order. To achieve this goal, ISUD members should conduct scientific work, regional and international conferences, as well as personal and collective work to learn and share important knowledge and experience.”

This is probably an idealism—not philosophical idealism in the usual sense of university lecturers, but romantic idealism, which inspired and encouraged the philosophers who established ISUD. The constitution has been amended from time to time; however, the mission itself remains unchanged and is understood accordingly.

⁴ Brown, Ch. 2019, op. cit., 14.

Discussions will continue, including relations between man and society, different forms of social consciousness and being, science and education of citizens, philosophy and science, science and industry, science and capital, civilization and culture, common problems of social action and communication. A separate question is the responsibility of the “class of intellectuals” to society. However, on the whole, we are not entitled to put forward universal solutions for all of humanity.

Unlike economical form of universalism (= globalism), the ISUD philosophical vision begins with recognition and respect for a multitude of cultures and philosophical traditions. From the very beginning it was based on the spirit of dialogue that would cover the widest possible segment of humanity; it would not offer a definitive “dictionary,” would exclude an “epistemic closure” and would not have claims to universal legislative power.

“The notion of ‘universalism’ seemed contrary to the prevailing ethos of pluralism within contemporary philosophy [...] Traditional universalism had been the target of widespread philosophical critique. It was common to hear that traditional universalism called for a single worldview for all that always ended in dogmatic views of truth, freedom, and justice—dogmatic views that were asserted to be final and complete. Traditional forms of universalism came to be seen as threats to swallow up all cultural differences—and if necessary, to do so by power or violence. The result of such a monologue expressed itself as colonialism, Euro-centrism, and other justifications of elitist power. And yet *this* call for papers seemed to suggest a *new form* of universalism—one that began and ended in dialogue—a new form of universalism that offered resistance to the temptation of premature epistemic closure and the corresponding attitude of universal legislative authority.”⁵

The “apple of contention” between the positivist philosophy of facts and the humanistic discussion of values is an understanding of culture and responsibility, i.e., dispute about professional “skills” and citizen-sense. Should, say, a university graduate be a narrow specialist with a set of “competencies”—or a thinking, whole person? Is mastering specialized knowledge more important than the ability to cultivate a universal way of thinking and responsible collective action?

Generally speaking, these “questions” look like antinomy-problems for postmodern consciousness. For a man of Renaissance or Enlightenment, as also, I hope, for the man of the future, these are not genuine problems. However, there is no doubt that ideas and values should be constantly reflected upon, clarified and re-evaluated by each new generation.

⁵ Brown, Ch. 2016, op. cit.

Let me refer to a famous Russian expert in the field of theory of knowledge and philosophy of culture, Professor Mustafa I. Bilalov (Makhachkala). In his paper *Philosophy of Truth in the Polylogue of Cognitive Culture*, devoted to his approach to truth *based on the communicative space of cognitive cultures* he claims that the highest values of humanity, i.e., first of all, the fundamental ideals of freedom, human rights and society, value rationality and democracy, are the result of dialogue (and polylogue). I fully agree with him.⁶

PROBLEMS OF INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY

All the ISUD congresses were devoted to the problems of man and society, the unity and differences of the cultural values of mankind, inter-civilizational and intercultural communication. I mention here only the last three, held in Romania, Poland, and Perú. The following topics were discussed in the dialogue mode: *The Human Being: Its Nature and Functions* (the University of Craiova, Romania, 4–9 July, 2014); *Values and Ideals: Theory and Practice* (Warsaw, Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 11–16 July 2016); *Philosophy in an Age of Crisis: Challenges and Prospects* (the Pontifical Catholic University of Perú, Lima, July 10–15, 2018). All the three congresses gathered hundreds of participants practically from all parts of the world.

The 10th Congress held in Craiova was preceded by the following preamble: Our shrinking planet can no longer afford to ignore the premises of our human nature, physical, mental and spiritual. At the same time, we can no longer afford to ignore the philosophical, broadly conceived as the understanding of all human activities, approach to these momentous problems. The more science and technology dominate our lives, the more necessary it is to place their remarkable achievements in a humanistic context. Philosophy remains an indispensable tool in this endeavour. Our theme as it is understood and analyzed by the conference participants promises to illuminate at the very least the conditions for reasonable approaches to the problems of 21st century civilization.

The following themes were analyzed during the congress: various worldviews which are based on myth and religion, the future of religion as an influence on human beliefs and values, the scientific explanation of reality, the problem with scientism; the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life, the continued exploitation of the earth by human beings, the role of morality on human behaviour, virtue theory versus duty theory, i.e., theory based on principles or rules, animal instincts, such as the sex drive, which drives procreation, overpopulation, how to plan cities, towns and farmland for the future, the effect

⁶ Bilalov, M. I. 2016. "Philosophy of Truth in the Polylogue of Educational Cultures." *Journal Club Intelros "Credo New,"* 4.

of the global economy on human life and values, and perhaps the most difficult issue of all, namely, human knowledge from a human perspective.

The problems discussed at the 10th IUSD World Congress anticipated the theme of the XXIV World Congress of Philosophy, which took place in the summer of 2018 in Beijing: “Learning to be human.”

The 11th Congress held in Warsaw was welcomed by the FISP Secretary General, now the President of this World Federation, Luca Maria Scarantino:

“Dear Colleagues, It is a privilege to share with you, albeit in absentia, the joy of ISUD’s return to Warsaw where it was founded 27 years ago, as well as an honor to address you at this 2016 World Congress of ISUD. In the present time, few efforts are more urgent and mandatory than the efforts to engage in dialogue, to reach mutual understanding, and to be guided by generosity in addressing each other’s views. These efforts are at the core of our moral world, and they can hardly be conceived on any scale other than a universal one. On behalf of the scholarly community gathered in FISP, we, as philosophers, are therefore proud of ISUD’s mission of expanding philosophical dialogue to an ever wider audience. May I ensure you that FISP fully supports your endeavor in pursuing this highly necessary and important task. A future opportunity to practice dialogue, openness, and mutual understanding may also be found at the upcoming World Congress of Philosophy, to be held in Beijing in August 2018. FISP is honored to extend to you all an invitation to join us there, and to make the presence of ISUD, of its network and its constitutive views, as visible and influential as possible. Thank you.”⁷

The following topics were discussed at the congress in Warsaw: 1. Dialogue on the Issues of the Contemporary World; 2. Philosophical Ideals for a More Decent Human World; 3. Cultures—Their Ideals and Values; 4. Ecophilosophy for the Human and More Than Human World; 5. Ideals and Values in Social and Political Life—from Theories to Praxis; 6) Ideals and Values in Religion and Myth; 7. Ideals and Values in Arts; 8. Values and Ideals of Science and Value of Science; 9. Human Values and Ideals. Their Role in Personal and Cultural Identities; 10. Moral Systems and Moral Practices.

The world we live in today faces many urgent issues that require sustained and productive cross-cultural dialogue. At the XII ISUD Congress in Lima, 2018, the following main goal was set: to promote dialogue on various vital philosophical issues in the modern world, to explore the role of philosophy in our complicated times and to involve more scholars of the Latin American continent.

⁷ Luca Maria Scarantino. *A Message to the 11th Congress of ISUD*. Milan, June 15th, 2016.

Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de Philosophie (International Federation of Philosophical Societies); www.fisp.org

The world in which we live today is indeed facing many pressing issues that require sustained and productive intercultural dialogue. The ideals of global peace and security remain elusive, and a sense of uncertainty permeates the dominant institutions of contemporary life. Traditional human values that underlie our social and political institutions are constantly transforming as a result of new developments in the field of information technology, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and the drive for economic efficiency. Although the globalization of trade and technology has brought people together as never before, our various attitudes, differing outlooks, habits and ideologies continue to separate us. As philosophers, we should neither lock ourselves in “ivory towers,” nor engage in “armchair” philosophy. We have to face the problems that define this moment in history. We, as philosophers, are obliged to work towards promoting intellectual insight, creative imagination, social responsibility and justice.

The following issues were addressed at the Congress in Lima: 1. Philosophic innovation in a Promethean era. 2. The ivory tower and social involvement. 3. Cross-cultural dialogue and the building of common humanity. 4. Learning to be human in an age of crisis and uncertainty. 5. The digital revolution and the post-human. 6. The benefits and threats of technicization and science. 7. The status and roles of knowledge in the contemporary world. 8. Religion, philosophy, and society. 9. Art and morality in the contemporary world. 10. Nationalism, populism and the challenge to universalism. 11. Globalization, anti-globalization or *glocalization*. 12. Cultural diversity and universal harmony. 13. Cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. 14. Ecology and environmental justice. 15. Gender issues in family, workplace, and cultural contexts.

The ISUD Congresses speak of the great contribution of members of society to the development of intercultural philosophy. However, this information could simply be gleaned from the program materials. So we turn to highlight the lectures and speeches held at these congresses in the years since Olympia.

Dialogue and Universalism appeared earlier than the Society for Universal Dialogue; however, since 1989, it has remained the unchanged ISUD journal. The journal is wholly open; it also publishes articles by scholars who are not members of the Society.

After the ISUD Congresses in Romania, Poland and Peru, D&U published many articles on the role of intercultural philosophy in society, the essence of communication in private and public spheres, the importance of philosophy, science, art and religion for the existence of mankind as a whole.

Starting from D&U issue 4, 2016, begins publishing materials from the 11th ISUD World Congress “Values and Ideals. Theory and Praxis.” The Editorial provides the background for these concerns:

“ISUD’s socially oriented mission promotes philosophical dialogue as a means toward building a more decent human world [...] ISUD believes that philosophical dialogue may help illuminate and free human minds impris-

oned by the ideologies of mass culture or simply weighed down by the mundane chores of life. These numerous destructive factors are accompanied by the more and more frequent breaks of communication—between nations, religious communities, and within previously stable social groups. At the same time, the problem of cultural diversity and the need to cultivate dialogical relations between nationalities and cultures is too often set aside ... The state of the world today calls for a robust inter-cultural dialogue to develop and explore a more authentic understanding of human needs and aspirations. Critical and creative rational thinking is an opportunity for humankind to resist the lies and illusions of ideological manipulations that serve as instruments of enslavement and oppression. ISUD's vision of philosophy as an expression of human rationality offers a chance to free people's awareness, to open their minds, and to extend their possibilities of thinking and acting."⁸

Keynote addresses at the Warsaw Congress were made by John Rensenbrink, Charles Brown, Steven Hicks, Michael Mitias, and Mugobe B. Ramose. At the Warsaw Congress, as many times before, prizes for the best works were awarded, established by the sole sponsor of ISUD: the Jens Jacobsen Trust.⁹ Prize winners were chosen through official competition, as a result of a double "blind" reviewing. Here we list only some of the Prize winners' articles: Robert Elliott Allinson "Integrative Dialogue as a Path to Universalism: The Case of Buber and Zhuangzi," Andrew Fiala, "Transformative Pacifism in Theory and Practice: Gandhi, Buber, and the Dream of a Great and Lasting Peace," Dilipkumar Mohanta, "Interreligious Dialogue and Vivekanand's Vedantic Model of Pluralism," Keqian Xu "Confucian Philosophy of Zhongdaology and Its Practical Significance in Resolving Conflicts," and Jonathan Chimaconam "The Value of Dialogic Thinking in Building a Dignified Peace: The Perspective of Postcolonial Africa Sub-Saharan Africa." The materials of the XI Congress have also been published in issues 1–4/2017.

CONCLUSION

Philosophy can serve and serves very seriously an important task of establishing and facilitating intercultural communication. By its very nature, starting with the dialogues of the *Seven Sages* and Plato, philosophy is aimed at debate and discussion, comprehensive joint discussion of the most important questions of being and knowledge, science, ethics, aesthetics, mythology and religion, social and political issues. Ideological disagreements of philosophers do not and should not lead to the transformation of analysis into biased rhetoric, and

⁸ Czarnocka, M., Ch. Brown. 2016. "Editorial." *Dialogue and Universalism*. 26 (4), 5–6.

⁹ Jens Jacobsen was a friend of Janusz Kuczyński.

polemics into war. Philosophical discussions, even the hottest ones, differ from national and religious wars in the fact that no philosopher killed any other philosopher for a different worldview.

ISUD held its first World Congress in 1993. Prior to this, a number of international symposiums were successfully held in Berlin, London and Montreal. ISUD congresses were held in different cities, states and on different continents: in Poland, Finland, Canada, USA, Japan and other countries. And in spite of everything, we still feel that the possibility of a better world is real. ISUD unites in its ranks many scholars, mainly philosophers, from various countries and continents. The goal of the Society is to evoke and revitalize the global consciousness—that is, the existential awareness that all peoples of the world belong to the same species, the human species, and, accordingly, have the same fundamental stock of needs, aspirations and abilities. It should be recognized that these needs, aspirations and opportunities cannot be adequately realized under selfish competition, violence and exploitation, but only in conditions of peace, cooperation and freedom. In addition to this, it is necessary to recognize responsibility to other species and for the preservation and restoration of the health and beauty of all ecosystems on the planet. (ISUD Constitution, Article IV.)

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