

PHILOSOPHY OF THE EMERGING WORLD

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■ Summary

We are leaving one world and entering another. We are going through one of the most important revolutions in the history of humanity. But the revolution is still hard to detect, almost imperceptible. We know something about it, but our knowledge remains abstract; it has not yet acquired an existential dimension. The revolution is caused by human actions, but people do not know it is happening. Nobody conceived it, planned it, or wished for it, and yet the outcome depends on mankind, on our individual and collective awareness of it. The outcome of this revolution is uncertain. Where will it lead us? We do not yet know. What we do know is that humanity is at a crossroads and our destiny depends on choices we make now.

It is at this depth, that of human self-questioning about ways of being, thinking and acting, that a philosophy of the emerging world (i.e. of human beings and their world) is called for. It will be a matter of rethinking what we are, the way we consider things, the objects of our will, and also the way we produce and consume, the dramatic imbalances between different parts of the world, the rule of injustice which is getting stronger under cover of reassuring talk about global justice, the risk of transnational despotism lurking behind warm words about good governance. A philosophy of the emerging world, then, is not restricted to a particular domain; it involves all dimensions of individual, social, political and juridical existence. It is one of the most urgent tasks of our time.

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It was long thought that nature reproduced itself cyclically through an indefinite process of self-reconstitution and self-resilience, according to the rhythm of the seasons and the generation and decay of natural resources and living species. It was thought, in correlation, that human activity only had a superficial effect on nature, that it did not change its immutable order. It is true that the capacity of human art to accomplish or destroy has always been known, but that capacity (positive in one way because it actualises all sorts of natural potentials, negative in another because it destroys natural beings) seemed to have no profound effect on nature, which was known to be good at repairing or reforming whatever mankind had damaged or deformed. Such were the convictions of the former world. Today we know that natural resources are finite and thus can be exhausted, that natural processes can be modified sometimes beyond the point of no return, that shrinking biodiversity is changing the face of the earth, that the build-up of toxic waste is putting whole populations in danger, and so on. In the end we know that no one is spared by these changes; what is done at the local level has repercussions at the global level. We know, then, that the effects of human action on nature are not superficial; they can damage and compromise the natural balance for a long time or even for ever. In our present time it is the very conditions of human existence which are under threat, not just the course of events.

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Philosophical questioning about new environmental problematics needed to be, and was, done quite early on, not as a circumstantial bit of thinking resulting from the encounter between two separate, foreign domains, but in terms of the very dynamics of philosophy on one side and the environmental sciences on the other. First of all philosophy could not remain indifferent to new concepts put in place by environmental science. Concepts like «ecosystem», «biodiversity», «sustainable development» and others in fact involve a conception of nature, living milieux, human ways of life, etc. More directly, these concepts (like that of the environment itself) require us to go beyond the nature/culture duality.