

# **ELEMENTS OF GESTALT PHILOSOPHY**

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1 – THE PATH TO GESTALT PHILOSOPHY

2 – THE NEW AGE IN PHILOSOPHY

## **Appendix 1**

### **THE PATH TO GESTALT PHILOSOPHY**

#### § 1- GENERALITY

##### **East versus West**

Rudyard Kipling once affirmed that “East is East, West is West, and never can they meet.” Indeed, facing the same problem, Asians and Europeans react differently. Asians think globally while Europeans analyze it analytically.

That’s the reason why East masters in metaphysics, mysticism and meditation while West excels in logical analysis, in technology and in sciences.

But today, Kipling’s allegation turns out to be false and more and more contradicts reality. East—going to the Western school—is mastering logic, technology and sciences while West learns expertise in mysticism and meditation.

## West going East

One can wonder: Asians must change to survive but what constraints Europeans to do so?

The truth is that there are many factors, amongst them three of major importance: First there are a series of technological breakthroughs that widen the range of their knowledge and incite Westerners to re-evaluate ideas contradicting his own.

Secondly, enlightened people of the East are going West to teach mysticism, propagate their faith and show that that the validity of some scientific premises are quite relative<sup>1</sup>.

Thirdly, three fundamental discoveries—in particle physics, in quantum mechanics and in relativity—shook up the Occidental knowledge to its foundation.

These events, wrecking havoc the base of their understanding, instigate Occidental thinkers—at first the pragmatist Americans—to question the validity of their knowledge. They arrived at the conclusion that they have to change their way of thinking.

## § 2- FACTORS OF CHANGE

Now let's look at the factors of change mentioned above in more details.

### 1 - Breakthroughs in various fields of activity

- The first breakthrough happened in 1912, when Wertheimer, Kohler and Koffka—three German researchers in practical psychology—discovered that the brain receives the visual signals transmitted by the eyes in integrated patterns they called gestalts.

This finding gave rise to a new school of psychology, namely Gestalt psychology.

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<sup>1</sup> The brain of a living man is always active, whereas he is awake or asleep. If his E.E.G. shows no signal, that means he is dead. Yet the E.E.G. of Zen master in the state of Samadhi (đĩnh) can show a signal perfectly flat.

- The second breakthrough happened in 1919, when Walter Gropius—a German architect—promoted the idea that one has to combine architecture with painting, sculpture, sciences and technology. His incentive opened the path to the Bauhaus Architecture.
- That open attitude of the mind spreads gradually to other countries and to other branches of activities. In medicine, the Americans—thanks to their pragmatist spirit—are the first to accept and legalize other methods to treat diseases they call “alternative medicines.”

## 2 - Contributions of the East

In the 1930's decade, two prominent masters in transcendental philosophy went to America to teach the way to meditate—one was a Hindu, Yogananda, the other Japanese, D. Suzuki. Under their supervision, American students experience the strange phenomenon of “transcendental illumination” and realize that enlightenment is a state of mind that anyone can attain regardless of belief—provided that he observes rigorously some mental rules.

## 3 - Scientific discoveries

But what turns upside down the way of thinking of Westerners are three fundamental discoveries, each one destroys the basis of our knowledge in its way.

Let's look at them, one by one.

- a. The discovery of the corpuscular nature of the matter shows that the true nature of matter is not something compact, solid, and immutable as one has at hand but an absolute emptiness with here and there an atom—similar to infinitesimal solar systems floating in the interstellar void.
- b. In the classical scope, everything is governed by the Newtonian mechanics. But the laws of quantum mechanics that rules the microcosm defy the Newtonian laws. A particle flying through a hole for instance does not go in straight line at the exact spot determined by the old dynamics. Instead it follows the laws of probability. Moreover, it reveals strange proprieties never seen

before such as: 1. wave-particle duality, 2. the leaping by quanta of the energy, 3. the principle of exclusion of Pauli, etc....

- c. But what puts into question the validity of the foundation of the whole knowledge itself is the discovery that the world obeys the strange laws of Relativity established by Einstein.

First of all, time and space—the basis of our knowledge, once considered as absolute—are not absolute at all. The time proper to a moving object will dilate while its proper space will contract—following the special transformation of Lorentz<sup>2</sup>.

It's mass—also considered absolute in the old mechanics—is no more absolute: it increases at a fantastic rate as the object races at a near light speed.

- In short, all the golden rules of the classical physics are knocked down by the Special and General Relativity.

Matter can be transformed into energy—a near-nothingness thing—and inversely, matter can be created from “nothingness”.

- Going further in his philosophical mathematics, Einstein described the universe as a quadri-dimensional gestalt and reduced the universe to an elegant formula<sup>3</sup>.

Thanks to it, cosmologists now can go back to the dawn of time, and by so doing, erasing the boundary between physics and metaphysics...

### § 3- THE LAST STEP TO GESTALT PHILOSOPHY

The American philosophers had been considered too earthy by European standard—as they stick strictly to the reality—show at last their fore-seeing ability.

- In effect in 1943, at a symposium of American Educators they proposed 4 points:

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<sup>2</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica 2002: Special Relativity.

<sup>3</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica 2002: General Relativity.

1/ unification of thought of East and West, 2/ unification of all branches of knowledge, 3/ redefinition of democracy, 4/ re-evaluation of the role of philosophy. Their proposal is made public in a report published two years later, in 1945.

- But unknown to the foreign world, these issues had been treated in full by Lý Đông A, in 1943, in the form of a theory he labeled ZuyZan Doctrine.

But his master piece, “The Finest School of Thought”—a much more elaborate and complete version which he gave us the schema—is still awaiting that someday, someone will develop in its integrality...

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## **Appendix 2**

### **THE NEW AGE IN PHILOSOPHY GENERALITY**

In 1943—an ocean apart and unknown one from others—Lý Đông A (LDA) and American philosophers had the same idea about the role of philosophy: Unification of East and West, unification of knowledge. While the American made this proposal in their report, LDA developed in full his “Zuy-Zan Doctrine”.

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He was planning to develop a completely new kind of school of thought that would inaugurate an era of new thinking. But fore-seeing that monumental events would soon happen and shake the world, he drew in haste a guideline dubbed “Key to the finest Doctrine.”

But had he hardly finished the last lines of the “Key” that he was murdered by the Marxist Viets. The document—scarcely a dozen-of- page short—condenses yet the most profound thought a thinker can ever have.

- Indeed it raises the fundamental issues in philosophy that were never addressed thoroughly before:

- 1) Unification of everything;

- 2) Evolution of everything;
- 3) Dynamics of everything;
- 4) Theory of bases (standard?);
- 5) Theory of social dialectics, and so on...

If dealt with them properly, it would inaugurate a new age in thinking.

- But building from scratch a completely new school of thought is not an easy task as the guideline he left to us—his swan song—is often hard to read because of the special terminology he invented to express his original concepts.
- Fortunately, in the “Book of Comprehensive Knowledge”, he drew already the essential of his thought, so that by combining it with the “Key”, we can draw some important traits of his far-reaching theory.

## Chapter 1

# GESTALT PHILOSOPHY AS A SCIENCE OF KNOWLEDGE

### § 1- Gestalt knowledge

- The first problem raised in “The Key” is the unification of the different fields of knowledge:
  - 1) Nature, mankind and religion<sup>4</sup>;
  - 2) Philosophy, sciences and history;
  - 3) Ontology, normal conception and methodology;

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<sup>4</sup> Lý Đông A in *Key of Thang Nghia* (“Key to the finest doctrine” as translated by Phạm Khắc Hàm) wrote: “tự nhiên, tư tưởng và xã hội thống nhất” – similar to Fritjof Capra’s conceptual framework, “the unified view of life, mind and society”. Fritjof Capra in *The Tao of Physics*, preface to the fifth edition wrote: “During the last twenty five years I developed a conceptual framework that integrates three dimensions of life: the biological, the cognitive, and the social.”

#### 4) Idealism, materialism and vitalism...

- These subjects are permanent issues in philosophy and constitute our knowledge so that their unification gives rise to the knowledge in its integrality—what we call gestalt knowledge.

#### § 2 – Gestalt philosophy

- Sciences, philosophy and history—the core of our learning—have been developed as three distinct disciplines, each with its own objective, its own laws, its own method and its own way of formulation. Amid these disciplines, sciences are the work of the whole community and can be considered the purest expression of the human intelligence.

It ought to be taken as model to the other branches of learning.

- In our essay, philosophy is our primary concern so that our problem is to unify it with mathematics. One way to do so is to treat it as the mathematics of the general principles, that means:

[1] We have re-formulated its definition, its principles, its method and its content as completely, precisely and concisely as possible. In short, we will “mathematically zing” philosophy.

[2] In the process, philosophic principles will be stated as mathematical theorems so that they can be used as scientific laws in different domains of knowledge.

- In this perspective, philosophy study will include:
  - 1/ The universal principles which govern everything;
  - 2/ The principles particular to diverse fields of knowledge;
  - 3/ An overview of the march of the progress and so on.

#### § 3 – Science of knowledge

- By mathematically zing knowledge, gestalt philosophy will have the appearance of a scientific theory. If one goes further and develops its

principled side, it becomes Science of Knowledge. Therefore—according to the way we emphasize its philosophic or principled side—gestalt knowledge remains a philosophy or becomes a science.

- In consequence, the new school of thought differs from the old one as it widens the scope of knowledge and deepens its meaning—giving rise to an era of better mutual comprehension and more tolerance in the human community.

## **Chapter 2**

# **GESTALT PHILOSOPHY AS AN UNIVERSAL DISCIPLINE**

§ 1- Gestalt philosophy, a jewel of the intellect Gestalt philosophy—as a glance over the progress of the know-ledge—is the answer to our desire to know where we stand. In this viewpoint, it is the most beautiful creation of the intellect.

But apart from this aesthetic side, the new school of thought is a wonderful instrument of investigation of universal use.

§ 2- Gestalt philosophy: a versatile instrument of investigation

Indeed a researcher can use either:

- The Lý Đông A (LDA) dialectics;
- The dialectics of other schools or
- The gestalt philosophy itself as a tool of inquiry.

Let's have a brief look at them.

### 1- LDA dialectics

- LDA dialectics is the universal law of evolution that proceeds by cycles, each cycle comprehends three steps with their specific law:



a/ Intrinsic law of the prime entity;

b/ Law of mutual interaction {entity□□environment};

c/ Law of evolution specific to the new gestalt {entity + environment}.

- Applied to the universe, LDA dialectics reflects the genesis of the cosmos some picoseconds from the “Big Bang”:

A- The radiative stuff of the ‘primeval atom’ followed its intrinsic law and generated the fundamental particles called quarks and anti-quarks;

B- Quarks and anti-quarks in turn followed their own laws and interacted with their neighborhood, formed clusters called baryons and mesons;

C- Baryons followed their specific law, interacted with the environment and gave rise to hydrogen atoms...

The process of cyclic evolution—becoming more and more complex—went on for eons and gave rise to the present world.

## 2 - Means of investigation of other schools

As gestalt philosophy embraces all branches of knowledge it makes its own the means of inquiry of other schools. The researcher of the new wave has at hand a great variety of instruments of dissection.

## 3 - Gestalt philosophy, method of research

- But no one can guess that the most powerful and handy method of research is the gestalt philosophy itself. Its usage is very simple: one has only to examine the object in question from every angle and in the light of all fields of knowledge.
- This method had already shown his power when applied to the critic of Marx and his doctrine in our main study: thanks to it, we have uncovered the hidden side of Marx’s personality and the flaws of his famous theory.
- But we can use the gestalt philosophy in another way, as a means of discovery—and maybe more stunning—as an instrument to peer into the future.

Indeed, in our research on LDA philosophy<sup>5</sup>, we had used it to study the four ensuing issues:

- 1/ The “orthodox” Vietnamese philosophy;
- 2/ Critic of the pragmatic philosophy of Hu-Shih, a Chinese thinker of the new generation;
- 3/ The “orthodox” Chinese philosophy;
- 4/ A model of evolution of our knowledge in the far-future

We will recall briefly the result of our researches in the sections below.

### § 3- Gestalt philosophy as a means of discovery

#### 1- The “orthodox”

##### Vietnamese philosophy

- The Vietnamese scholars are used to say that Viet Nam has no philosophy of its own, because they found no specifically Vietnamese theory in the Vietnamese literature.

Their allegation is a misunderstanding because the Vietnamese have a non-written philosophy of life.

- In effect, we find an indelible imprint of an implicit philosophy of life in recorded history, in traditions as in spirit of Vietnam—completely different from Chinese schools of thought. LDA calls this inherent wisdom “orthodox philosophy”.

To uncover it, we use in our analysis two laws pertaining to the gestalt principle—the law of structure and the law of coherence.

- The results are shown below:

- a- The ancient Chinese historians noted with scorn that “Vietnamese people don’t know the sacred rite that men and women are forbidden

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<sup>5</sup> Pham Khac Ham: Triết Lý Lý Đông A - Phu Luc (LDA philosophy – Annex pp. 209-363).

to take bath together in the same river ...” But in the eyes of modern sociologists, what the Chinese called sacred rite is a pure hypocrisy of the ancient Chinese rulers to keep their women away from temptation. Moreover, to preclude any velleity to revolt, these “wise men” invented a perfect way to deny any role and responsibility to women—the sacred rules of “Three Followings”<sup>6</sup> and “Four Virtues”.

b- As counter-point, Vietnamese traditions accord to women their due respect. In a Vietnamese family, “wife’s commands often have more weight than husband’s”.

- In Vietnamese history, women often have a role more than honorable.

Indeed, 2.000 years ago, when Vietnam was occupied by China, the first persons to rise and sweep away the invaders were the two sisters Trưng. Three centuries later, another woman—the nineteen year old girl Triệu—raised an army to beat back the Chinese. These women are later deified and worshipped throughout the country, along other Vietnamese heroes.

c- Vietnamese law also treated women more humanely than Chinese one. For instance Chinese law offered husband “7 reasons to repudiate his wife at will” while denied women of any means to defend themselves. By contrast, Vietnamese Hong Duc law accorded to women “3 reasons to contest the repudiation”.

- These facts prove that from the start—thousands years ago—Vietnamese culture had more respect for human value than Chinese one.

- Also, we are not hypocrite to mask a gender egotism under a guise of “noble” ethics.

Isn’t the respect of human rights—without regard to gender—the best criteria to evaluate the degree of civilization?

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<sup>6</sup> Three Followings: As a maiden, a woman must follow her father; as a wife, she is required to follow her husband; as a widow, she has to follow her son. So during her whole life, woman is treated legally as an immature person.

d- A Vietnamese popular joke relates that “in a trial, a judge agrees in the same times with the plaintiff, with the defendant and with his wife who contests his bizarre position.”

Seen under the light of the gestalt philosophy, this stand—legally indefensible—reveals yet a profound reality, that any truth is always multifaceted and multi-layered.

## 2- Critic of the pragmatic philosophy of Hu-Shih

Hu Shih—a disciple of John Dewey—after making a rigorous critic of the ancient master-pieces, advanced a theory that the Chinese philosophy attained its apogee with Mo Tzu (Mặc Tử) and alleged that if Chinese people followed the school of thought of Mo Tzu, China would become a country of prominent scientists from the antiquity. But Chinese philosophy declined afterwards, due—not to the persecution by Emperor Ch’in Shih huang-ti—but to four cultural factors: skepticism, utilitarianism, dogmatism and occultism.

- It’s in fact a remarkable scientific work but after a careful analysis we have some reservations:

- We contest his view about the impact of Mo Tzu philosophy on Chinese culture because it violates the law of coherence in gestalt philosophy. Mathematics requires an analytical spirit at its highest degree while Chinese people are by their nature “synthesistic” as too artistic.

Indeed, to develop algebra for example, one has to invent symbols in their purest forms—that means made in one or two strokes at most—such as: +, -, x, : , =, ∫, √ , Δ

The artistic nature of the Chinese prevents them to do so.

- In the other hand, pragmatism is only a way to see anything while the reality is always multi-faceted, multi-leveled, multi-stated and so on. So that, by definition, The pragmatic historicism of Hu Shih is only a part of our gestalt historicism.

## 3- The “orthodox” Chinese philosophy;

- Everyone knows that the “Four Classics” and “Five Canons” contains the core of the official Chinese philosophy. But we discover that besides them,

there is another source that condenses the thought of the Ancients—that is the Chinese writing.

- The difference between the two sources is that the historians who drafted the Classics and Canons were courtier officials and were not free to record what they knew, while the men who invented the writing were free to express their thoughts and feelings when creating pictographs and ideograms. That is the reason why we are convinced that the structure of the Chinese characters reveals undeniably the secret mind of the Chinese people.

- For example the word “wicked, perfidious” [gian] can be written in two ways {姦} {奸}: either with the picture of “three women gathered together” { } or with the picture of a woman {女} (radical part) paired with the word cane {干} [can] (phonetic part).

In the same way, the word “greedy” {婪} [lam] is the picture of a woman {女} (radical) paired with the word forest {林} [lâm] (phonetic part).

The word “slave” [nô] {奴} is the picture of a woman {女} [nữ] paired with the picture of a hand {又}.

- These examples show how much Chinese tradition despises women.

- In other hand, the word “people” {民} [dân] is symbolized by a water caltrop drifting on water. This shows how Chinese ruling class had low esteem of the commoners.

- Denying women—half of the humanity—of their natural rights by male egotism, denying people—the commoners—of their civic rights because they are weak—under the pretense of sacred ethics—these traits make Chinese culture apart from Vietnamese tradition.

- It’s the reason why Chinese scholars—who praised their culture as the most advanced on the planet—look down on their neighbors...

#### § 4- Gestalt philosophy, A means to peer into the future

- Witnesses the dizzying pace of the progress, one often wonders: if it retains the same rhythm for a long time—and nothing seems to prevent it—

what will happen to humanity in 10.000 years, in 100.000 years, in 1.000.000 years? Will human live for centuries, even millenniums? Can he cross the cosmos, land on another world as Sirius—through a “worm hole”?

It’s sure that everything has a limit, but where is the limit?

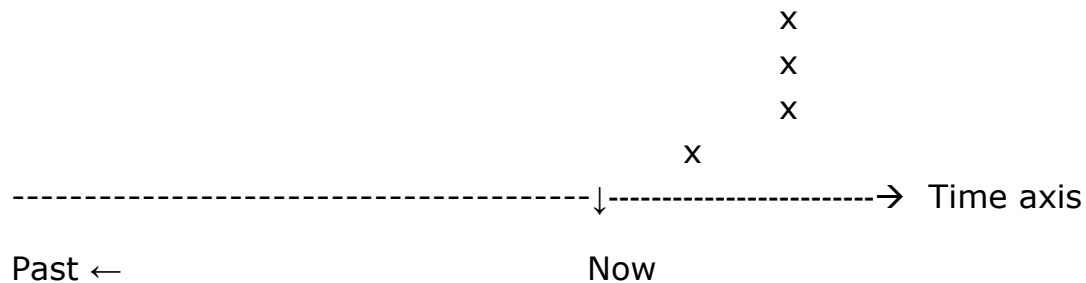
- How about trying to have a glimpse—even the fuzziest one—on this far away future?

We satisfy this natural drive, we attempt to figure out a logical vision of the evolution of the human knowledge.

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- For millenniums, human knowledge developed very slowly.

Its progress can be visualized by a symbolic graph—a straight line nearly parallel to the time axis. But from the 19th century to today, it progresses at an incredible speed thanks to an explosion of discoveries and can be represented by a curve going upward like a portion of a hyperbola.



- The problem is: “How long the explosion of discoveries can sustain this rate or will it die some day?”

How to draw the symbolic graph further?

- We try to figure out a logical answer by looking at the issue at various angles—first by finding the significance of the explosion phenomenon, then the laws that govern it and finally the constraints that condition it.

Explosion phenomenon

That means the fortuitous occurrence of three fundamental discoveries that happened almost simultaneously, namely the discoveries of:

1/The corpuscular nature of the matter, 2/The laws of quantum mechanics that govern it and 3/The gestalt nature of the cosmos in Special and General Relativity.

- Theoretically, these discoveries belong to three distinct fields of knowledge but their applications are often mixed together and help each other. Each discovery triggered a shower of secondary discoveries, as each secondary discovery will provoke a tertiary shower of its own. It's the well-known snow-ball effect and the result is the "avalanche" phenomenon. In physics, they call the latter "chain reaction".

The three avalanches excite mutually, combine their effects that result actually in an infinity of practical innovations.

- The ensuing question is: Can the avalanche continue forever?

Certainly nothing can go on for ever. In effect, the chain reaction in an atomic bomb stops dead when all the uranium is consumed as the most violent forest fire dies after having burned everything.

So the discovery explosion will stop someday, and from this moment, the progress regains its "crawling pace." The symbolic curve will be again a straight line parallel to the time axis until a new avalanche happens. Then the progress shoots up again for a time before coming back to a snail pace. This way of development will repeat itself again and again...

- This halting process can be represented by a series of broken lines alike to the steps of a ladder, so that we call it development by ladder steps.

~ # of discoveries

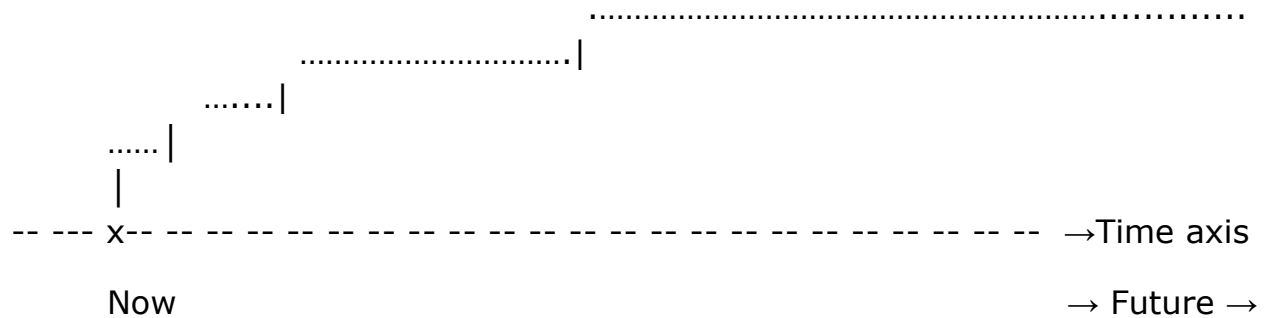


Model of development by ladder steps

## Economic constraints

One must do experiments to make discovery. In 19th century, they were simple and not expensive, but later become more and more complicated and more and more costly. Today some project is so high priced that no nation can fund it alone. In some case they have to pool the resources of many countries to carry it out.

Under these economic constraints, fundamental discoveries will become more and more far apart.

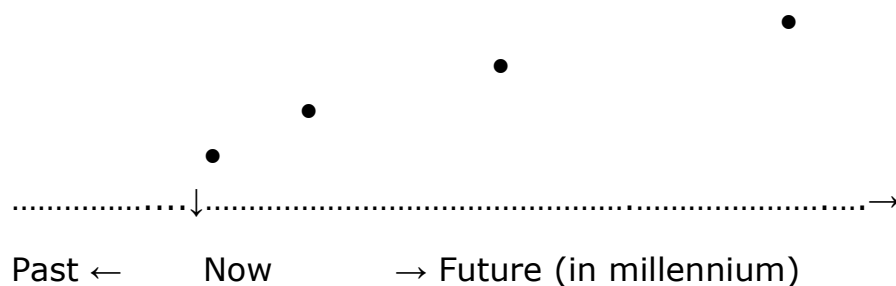


## Model of increasing intervals between avalanches

In short, the progress obeys two rules:

- 1- limited duration of the avalanches;
- 2- Increasing interval between two successive avalanches.

In consequence, when we peer into the future, the symbolic curve is a series of broken lines upper-bounded by a logarithm-like graph.



## Model of a logarithmic development



## **Conclusion**

Along with Ly Dong A, the American philosophers promoted the unification of the East and West and of the knowledge.

Although LDA was murdered before he began the first line of his philosophic project, his preliminary work inaugurated already a new age in philosophy.

He invited thinkers to oversee the human progress as well as the ascending path that man follows from the dawn of the time to today—that made him more and more “humane”.

By following the same path, philosophers of the modern age would revive the tradition of the ancient wise men “to be the conscience of the humanity.” Like the Antiques, they would be the implicit keepers of the triple jewel of the human race: “human, humanism, humanity”.

At peace with themselves they could then consider with serenity, the infinite future of the humanity.

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