



Absolute Values and The New Cultural Revolution

Fifteenth International Conference on the Unity of Sciences
November 27-30, 1986 • J. W. Marriott Hotel

Committee VI
Eastern Approaches to Knowledge
and Values, with an Emphasis on "QI"

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only

Discussion Paper on Dr. Henryk Skolomourski's Paper

The Mechanistic Clock and the Dancing Shiva

by

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Dr. Henryk Skolomowski attempts in his paper to get at a panoramic view in order to make general and significant comparisons between Eastern and Western Approaches to knowledge.

In his presentation, he speaks of basic human projects: the first, second, and third Western projects.

At the outset, he cites the parallelism between the legacy of Plato with Buddhism and Hinduism, where in both the Eastern and Western traditions, the mind is given much importance, in other words, right thinking, right assumptions are emphasized. He states that this element is not only found in Buddhism, but is seen also in Hindu tradition.

Quoting heavily from the Dhammapadam, a Buddhist text, and the Upanishads, the inspiration for the Hindu ways of thought and life, he is able to show the role of the mind, the importance attached to the mind. In essence, emphasis is put on that our life is the creation of our mind - for what a man thinks, that he becomes.

Similarly, he continues, in the Christian world view there is no divorce of knowledge from life - emphasizing that ignorance and stupidity are the causes of misery and human suffering. Emphasizing the conviction held by St. Augustine and Spinoza, he is able to put across a basic characteristic of the first human project, and that is, the idea of knowledge as enlightenment.



He goes to the second western project, where now there is a change of the Western mind, that is, focusing on a new conception of knowledge - From the idea of knowledge as enlightenment, now knowledge is power, in other words the use of power to make nature serve the ends of humankind.

Dr. Skolomowski in his presentation mentions two aspects of this second project: (1) the intellectual aspect is analytical knowledge that can be used to exploit and harness nature (2) the religious aspect - secularism which he calls a new religion of Western man. Here, the new form of salvation is the idea of fulfillment on earth - through our own effort.

Going through the various characteristics of the first and second projects, the evolution of the Western project is thus seen as changing from the idea of knowledge which brings about the liberation of the soul, to the idea of knowledge as power which brings fulfillment here on earth.

Another characteristic is that the first project is compatible with most Eastern traditions; and that the second western project separates itself from the spiritual traditions. Again, citing the Eastern traditions (p.5) he is able to show the radical separation from the spiritual traditions.

This change is neatly presented in his diagram (p.6) where in the first project, religion is presented as the source of it all - where cosmology inspired by religion



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defined the nature of knowledge. In the second project, however, knowledge and science have been elevated to a religious position, when man perpetuates the ideology of science. The scientific world view, as Dr. Skolomowski states, has been very powerful - assured by their perpetuation through educational institutions of the West.

One important point which Dr. Skolomowski emphasizes, is that Western ideology has created for us a pseudo-national reality. Violence, fragmentation, in other words Western nihilism is found, instead of fulfillment on earth.

In this confused mind the product of narrow rationality and fragmentation of the world, he asks:

Could now for the third Western project. A major characteristic is the search for integration, for wholeness, for values that sustain life. Not only is the new project ecologically oriented, he says, it is also a spiritually inclined project, without invoking any sort of God. New grounds for reconciliation is seen, ~~however~~ ^{it seems}, for those features have continually inspired the Eastern mind.

The question on how we can accomplish the reconciliation between East and the West, however, remains a fundamental ~~problem~~ one.

The strategy has been (from the 1960's - 1970's) the adoption of concepts and practices of the East to Western ways, with of course a noted change in the Western mind.



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Dr. Skolomowski goes on to present a neatly dichotomized comparison between the two approaches to knowledge (p.10). He is aware that there is no one Eastern system of knowledge nor one system of Western knowledge, but he presents a panoramic view in order to make general comparisons.

Obviously, these are two different descriptions. The basic question still remains, and that is, how to demonstrate that the subjective evidence and the objective evidence complement each other.

If we are successful, according to Dr. Skolomowski, we shall be able to show that the Buddha mind can also be seen as objective, that each articulation is part of the unfolding of the evolutionary process. With the New Physics, which allows us to see the cosmos as one magic dance of Shiva, I think Dr. Skolomowski has so poetically entitled his paper "The Mechanistic Clock and the Dancing Shiva."

The above remarks are my understanding of Dr. Skolomowski's major points in his paper. I now turn to an appraisal based on that understanding.

I should like to point out, however, that there has been a continuing spiritual tradition in the west, as far as I know, which has been preserved in its great literature and achievements in the humanities and which are not necessarily dissimilar in character to those of the east.

I agree, however, with Dr. Skolomowski's thesis of the dichotomization in knowledge, which is aptly described by C P Snow in terms of two cultures; that of the humanities and that of the sciences.

The first real break was the disastrous founding of the Royal Society of London several hundred years ago, when the natural sciences broke off from the rest of human knowledge, thus establishing a model for a relatively autonomous human enterprise. This is the symbol of the second project which Dr. Skolomowski describes. There is, however, a growing revolt even in the western world of this kind of compartmentalization of knowledge and which is growing stronger with time.

In other words, while the scientific analytical project of humanism remains pervasive, there is an underlay of a longer spiritual tradition that has been preserved which I believe is still very much alive.

The question is whether or not the situation will permit of closer integration of the two cultures. Obviously, this third project of Dr. Skolomowski does not have to rely exclusively on eastern resources even if

there is a tendency to do so in recent times.

This is not to say that Eastern sources are unimportant nor to be regarded as alien to the third project. The resources of mankind represents a single effort towards the exercise of human intelligence, and it takes many forms in different places and different times, and, sometimes in the same places and same era.

Even now, the world of science is busy retranslating many of the very highly mature exercises dating from Eastern teachings towards a spiritual and psychological development. For example, such work in the area of biofeed back and tranquil life styles have received many distinct emphasis in scientific work, and Buddhist as well as Hindu practices have been alluded to very frequently. We must realize that these exercises have been perfected over 2,600 years ago, and they seem valid up to the present day.

Another approach to the problem of the third project is to trace the antecedents of modern day spiritual development in the West. It is possible to show the continuity of western religio-philosophical evolution to its present form, from, and therefore has never really lost touch historically with, the eastern tradition, even if it has taken a different form and emphasis.

The organic nature of human knowledge is not to be denied, and there are efforts in this

direction throughout all of modern history. A very good example of this is this conference which ^{we} are now holding here.

The entire dialectics of history points inevitably to the third project of Dr. Skolomowski. That is the redeeming feature of human nature. We only have to stay long enough in the particular state of human inadequacy or error in order to discover a better direction in our effort to maintain the integrity of the human enterprise.

If I may give another example of this kind of pendulum oscillation from the perspectives of the organic and wholeness in world view in more recent times, let me give the example of the social sciences as well as philosophy which for some time now have been moving into the model of physics in its method and conception of subject matter. Philosophy of science for sometime dealt w/ a conception of knowledge the material example of which were drawn from mathematics and physics.

Now, there is a distinct move on the part of the social sciences to return to the humanities for its conception and inspiration of life, and therefore also for the refinement and enrichment of its methodology.

Phenomenological procedures have so acquired a contemporary significance that the literature and the

arts have been frequently involved in the understanding of the human sciences.

For example, again, it has been mentioned that contemporary novel as well as poetry are excellent indicators of the pathologies and sufferings of society and are rendered in much greater detail and great depth and into something that even the ordinary man can understand and this last point of understanding by the common man is extremely important — if only for the fact that that understanding is the perceived base of human action.

I end finally with the note that Dr. Skolomowski's paper, brief and succinctly to the point as it is with respect to his thesis, contains many ideas that can be pursued with great profit. Thank you.