

THE SEARCH FOR ABSOLUTE VALUES

CLOSING PLENARY ADDRESS

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THE SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON THE
UNITY OF THE SCIENCES

November 27, 1977
Fairmont Hotel
San Francisco

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"Of what is great one must either be silent or speak with greatness," remarked Nietzsche. Nor may we forget Christ's absolute assertion "That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." (Matthew 12:36)

We are dealing with the loftiest matters, and now that one has decided to speak, one has no time for idle words. I therefore propose to speak plainly but lovingly.

How much the relativists of this age think relativism in metaphysical and moral matters is their own invention or discovery, I do not know. But some of them at least affect to believe that they are the first to put forward the arguments they urge. And even those of them who are quite conscious of the fact that they are only reviving certain elements in the relativist tradition hardly pay attention to the counterarguments that we already find in abundance in the great tradition which refute their position, or even when they treat them, they do not really meet them. The moral is that people either talk from ignorance or from willful disregard for the past.

There is hardly an argument that the relativists of this brave new age have elaborated that was not fully faced and refuted by Plato in his Dialogues. I refer in particular to the Protagoras, the Gorgias, the Theaetetus and the Sophist.

Socrates heroically struggled all his life against both metaphysical relativism--namely, that there is no truth, or that truth is only a matter of opinion--and moral relativism--namely, that there are no standards of goodness and excellence which absolutely judge human conduct. Both by the wonderful illumination of his intellect and the compelling example of his life he triumphed, at least partially, over both relativisms. It is not difficult to show that both relativisms mutually imply one another, so that if moral relativism were true, metaphysical relativism would also be true, and conversely, and if one were false, the other too would be false. By his unrelenting struggle and by his triumph, at least in part, Socrates initiated that phase of the spirit which impregnated all subsequent history up to this very moment. In this sense we are living today in a Socratic age.

We do not know what history would have been like had Socrates never existed or had he wobbled or faltered, but we do know that now that he did exist and did stand firm in the face of all sorts of sophistical relativism and despair, we are meeting today in San Francisco 2400 year afterwards in a sense under his aegis, wrestling with the very same problems he wrestled against. For the issues he raised, the methods he employed and the conclusions he arrived at, as taken up, refined and handed down to us by Plato and Aristotle, are decisively determinant of our life and destiny.

Exactly what was this epochal Socratic achievement? It was three-fold.

It was, first, the Socratic dictum "Know thyself." This

means: you are something definite in yourself which can be explored and known, but usually you conceal and cover up yourself, although your destiny, your call, is precisely to unconceal yourself, at least to yourself.

It was, second, his other dictum "The unexamined life is not worth living." This means, if we add also "the unexamining life," which he adds elsewhere and which, in fact, amounts to the same thing: if you really seek, you will find; if you really ask and keep on asking, you are bound to get an answer; if you persistently knock, it will be opened to you; but if you give up, whether in advance or in the process, or if you never seek or inquire or bestir yourself, especially about your own self or if you do these things only halfheartedly, then your life is as good as no life and you might just as well not have been at all.

It was, third, his greatest affirmation towards which he was groping all his life but which received its most striking and definitive formulation in a particular context in the Phaedo, when he shouted in the face of the naturalists (and how I wish we had the courage and conviction to shout in the face of our naturalists and analysts today!) that only beauty itself made beautiful things beautiful, only justice itself made just persons and just acts just, only truth itself made true statements true and truthful men truthful. How much fun began to be poked at this astounding proposition in the early modern age, and how much fun is still being poked at it today, I am sure all of you know. In fact we can say that the deepest characterization of the reigning

spirit of modern times ever since the two Bacons and Descartes is the total incomprehension by this spirit of this Socratic revelation. And yet I shout here categorically from the housetops that more than half of the decadence of this age stems from our having lost the profound sense of this proposition, and nothing is better calculated to enable us to regain sanity and solve at least half of our problems than to recover resolutely this lost sense, both in theory and in personal existence.

The epochal Socratic achievement, then, consisted in the unshakable conviction that truth in every domain of existence including, above all, matters human and moral, is there, that it belongs to the essence of truth both to conceal itself and to unconceal itself, that man is constituted precisely by the power of ferreting truth out of its self-concealment in every realm, and that it is the inalienable destiny of man to exercise this power in order that the countenance of the truth might shine upon him. And today universities exist, learning and research in every field are vigorously pursued, scientific conferences like this one are held, some hope continues to reassure man and enable him to bear the otherwise unbearable burden of existence, all because this achievement has slowly taken hold upon the fabric of civilized existence. Without the Socratic achievement I do not know where the world would be today and how it would look like. If the relativists and skeptics of Socrates's day had won, the relativists and skeptics of our own day would never have had the opportunity of arguing their case. Relativism, both metaphysical and moral, can never exist except in the joyful atmosphere of

Socratic freedom and certainty. Let us then gratefully acknowledge our indebtedness to our original sources.

II

Another epochal achievement without which we would not be meeting here today, and meeting precisely on the question of absolute values, was that ^{of} the children of Israel and of Jesus Christ who sprang from them. Both the Jews as a nation and Jesus Christ as a person believed they were special in an absolute sense. The sense of the absoluteness of both of them is fully set forth in the Old and New Testaments and integrally preserved in the teachings of Orthodox Judaism and in the living traditions and teachings of the church. God himself, the creator from nothing of heaven and earth and everything in them, and the holder of the whole of history in the palm of his hands, chose in his own sovereign freedom to establish a special relationship first between himself and Abraham and then between himself and the children of Israel the descendants of Abraham. And Jesus Christ the Jew claimed that he as a person enjoyed a unique and absolute relationship to God. It is relevant here to remind you that hundreds of millions of copies of the Bible were sold or distributed this year in practically all the languages of the world, that the distribution of this book is on the increase every year, that there are plans for a target of distribution of a billion copies a year before long, that the Jews are still there, most active and creative in every sphere of human existence, perhaps as never before, and that there are more than a billion human beings who are, in

one way or another directly related to Jesus Christ.

Some of you probably know that when Frederick the Great one morning asked his barber Zimmermann to give him one simple clear proof of the existence of God, Zimmermann snapped back: "Your Majesty, the Jews!" Nothing is more miraculous than the survival of the Jews as a nation for 4000 years now, considering all that has befallen them both at their own hands, as their Prophets attest, and at the hands of others, including above all the Christians. Zimmermann the barber little knew, perhaps, that he penetrated to the heart of the matter more than did Saint Thomas in his five proofs. As a believing Christian who ponders Saint Paul, I know why this is so.

Never by concepts alone, but by experience, shouted Kant when it came to knowledge and truth. And believe me all great things today must be shouted, because people have closed their ears, or the cares and distractions of the world have closed their ears for them; and even when you shout they do not hear. and even when they hear they do not listen, and even when they listen they do not understand.

Never by concepts alone can you discuss relativism, absolutism, values and change. Never can you discuss them as though the two enduring achievements of Socrates and of the children of Israel and Jesus Christ did not exist. How can you know the truth of relativism and absolutism without knowing the truth of the concrete moments in history in which these things were sufferingly wrestled with and known and experienced and ascertained? And by "knowing" and "experiencing" here I mean something quite different

from what Kant meant by these terms; I mean personal, existential, inner appropriation and being. And the fusion of these two achievements in the Middle Ages, both Christian and Islamic, is another great achievement without which you can never discuss these things. You meet here and discuss relativism and absolutism and values in terms of concepts and ideas but hardly in terms of existence. You meet here and discuss these momentous questions as though Socrates and what he concretely meant in history did not exist, as though the Jews and their claim and what they concretely meant and continue to mean in history did not exist, as though Jesus Christ and his claim and what he concretely meant and continues to mean in history did not exist, as though Islam and its claim and what it concretely meant and continues to mean in history did not exist, as though the distinctive epochal fusions in the Middle Ages, on the one hand, of the Graeco-Roman and the Judeao-Christian traditions, and, on the other hand, of the Graeco-Roman-Judeao-Christian and Arab-Islamic traditions, did not exist. This is impossible. Of course you "can" "discuss" them and you do discuss them, but such discussion is woefully inadequate to the truth of relativism and the truth of absolutism. It is where these are in life, thought and belief that they can be found; their provenance is not in concepts and ideas, but in Socrates, the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims; so to find them, seek them existentially where they are. Pass that existential test to qualify for the discussion of relativism and absolutism, the test--as Buber would say--of really meeting face to face Socrates, the Jew, the Christian and the Muslim.

Islam falls within the Abrahamic tradition. This is

explicitly stated again and again in the Koran. The great Islamic synthesis in the Dark and Middle Ages, not only in matters of faith, but in science, philosophy, art, jurisprudence and the gathering in of an immense cosmopolitanism from Asia and Africa, is an historic accomplishment of the first order of importance. Islam is beginning on a world scale to be conscious of it, to reclaim it and justly to be proud of it. The most successful attempts in history at penetrating Asia and Africa spiritually from the West (for Islam came to Asia from the West and "the Middle East," relatively to Asia, is "Middle West") have been Islam in the Dark and Middle Ages and Marxism in our own days. Nor are the Abrahamic-Prophetic strains in Marx himself difficult to discern. Abraham--what a mystery!

Never by concepts alone but by experience and being. Socratic absolutism has been variously appropriated by Judaism (Philo, Maimonides) Christianity (Augustine, Aquinas) and Islam (Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd). Therefore, so far as being and actual historical existence are concerned, we are left with three absolutes instead of four: three absolutes stemming from one source, Abraham. It is to these three absolutes that you must existentially go if you really want to get to the heart of the problematic of this conference.

Three lived and experienced and existing absolutes from one source?! One original absolute breaking up into three! This is most disturbing. And so what do we do? We refuse to go there; we try escapingly to get around the disturbance, either by creating a fourth living absolute, or by withdrawing into the realm of mere

concepts and setting up in that spectral realm a false unity which no sooner is it constructed than it evaporates into thin air under the merciless blows of actual existence. And so we fall back again on the three existing absolutes. Abraham--what a mystery!

It would be too hasty to see in the three absolutes a triumph for relativism--to conclude that we are here dealing with three tribal gods. The one Abraham lurking in the background refutes this facile tribalism. The hollowness of this triumphant relativism is demonstrated by the fact that no matter how much you preach it to the existing believing Jew, the existing believing Christian, and the existing believing Muslim, they will go on dedicated to their respective absolutes as though you did not exist. You began by taking no notice of their existence; now they take no notice of your existence. The triumph, if triumph it be, is only in the realm of concepts.

How the one absolute breaks up into three that continue existing as though nothing had happened, is a mystery. I do not understand it. I am crushed by it. The original absolute so unstable and impotent in itself that it must break up into three or more! These are thoughts that border on insanity. To remain suffering the existing mystery is far better than to escape it into the safety of a false conceptual monism, or to compound the mystery by multiplying the existing absolutes, or to let go into a hasty cry of triumphant relativism. For there is an alternative to these three modes of escape. Patient waiting belongs to the essence of being, as both David and Heidegger emphasize.

The search for absolute values thus takes you, not conceptually, not dialectically, but historically, actually,

existentially, to the Middle East, the land par excellence of the three absolutes. You understand nothing of the momentous drama unfolding there today if you do not keep in mind that in the final analysis it is a question of the three absolutes themselves striving for some order of peaceful coexistence. You must suffer and endure the situation to be able to understand it--and understand the infinite pathos of the three absolutes and the meaning of absolute values. Only Abraham can intercede and bring unity and peace. Abraham--what a mystery, what an impenetrable mystery!

III

The fact that the search for absolute values continues unabated argues that there is an imperative about this search. And the fact that there are and there always have been respectable great minds who believe in and vigorously argue for the existence of absolute values, despite their own unworthiness, which they frankly confess (and frank confession is a value), so far as the embodiment of these values in their own lives is concerned, clearly demonstrates, in the order of being and not in the order of concepts, that relativism leaves the question of absolute values quite open. It has not proven its case; there remain great open minds quite unimpressed and unconvinced by its arguments; the matter then is not intellectual and cannot be delivered to the judgment of reason alone. It seems then that the absolutes of Socrates and his tradition, Moses and his tradition, Christ and his tradition, and Muhammad and his tradition, have left an

indelible impress on the human mind which can never be forgotten or abstracted from.

Both facts argue for at least a certain measure of absolutism, or for the relativism of relativism itself. And if the relativists retort by saying that these two facts also argue for a certain measure of relativism, to wit, the relativism of absolutism itself, inasmuch as the champions of relativism themselves continue to be as aggressive and vociferous as the votaries of absolutism, I agree. There remains then between us only to determine the measure and kind of relativism and the measure and kind of absolutism to be allowed for in the realm of values, and the ordering of these two measures and kinds between themselves. And this we can, I think, amicably settle between ourselves, provided the settlement is to be attempted, not in the order of concepts, but in the order of being. And this could turn out to be a very formidable task.

IV

The Weltgeist today, the entire climate of thought, in manners and morals, in art and literature, in politics and international relations, in philosophy and even in certain aspects of religion, appears to be determined by a radical antagonism to and rebellion against the Socratic and Abrahamic absolutes. The Weltgeist loathes nothing more than these absolutes even when it replaces them by absolutes of its own. Why this is the case, why it belongs to the nature of things that it be the case, why the absolutes of Abraham and Socrates necessarily call forth, and will always call forth,

this radical rebellion and antagonism, is the most fascinating question that can be asked. Jesus understood and expressed it perfectly and Augustine treated it fully in his City of God. This is the meaning of the Christian Cross, which the world, that is, the Weltgeist, can never understand.

Here are some ingredients in the climate of thought and life today which conduce to relativism and the worship of change.

1. The more or less sudden concrete disclosure, especially after the Second World War, of the fact that the world contains as a matter of fact a bewildering variety of cultures and systems of value, and the increasing bearing of these cultures and systems upon the course of events. Thus the peoples of Asia and Africa have recovered their independent identity and are vigorously asserting it, at the United Nations and elsewhere, in the face of Western civilization, whose values appear then to be only one set among many. Cornered and challenged and put in their place in this fashion, Europe and the West in general begin to doubt themselves and question the ultimacy of their own values, and this is precisely the spiritual soil in which relativism sprouts and flourishes. One's faith in oneself is then decisively put to the test.

2. Time there was when a dominant intellectual class could speak with authority, and when it spoke people listened with respect. The values of "progress," higher and higher standards of living, economic and social justice, "democracy," "one man, one vote," quantitative equality, and the like, have leveled down every quality and excellence, and now everyman thinks he is

the measure and the judge of the noble and the true. There is no nobility in itself, there is no truth in itself, there is no thing-in-itself, and it is not by beauty that beautiful things are beautiful, nor by nobility that noble men are noble, but beauty and nobility are defined according to the caprice of the individual human person.

3. Consider the state of the mind and spirit in the universities. Scholarly research and productivity are probably at their highest in all history; there are strict norms for science and research, but hardly any norms for personal life and conduct. Scholarship is tended and watched, life is let loose. How much scholarship can still retain its integrity while life loses its own, is the question. The excellence of the mind is wholly separated from the excellence of character and being. You can be and believe virtually anything provided only your product conforms to the established rules, which, as I said, are on the whole excellent, probably the best in history. I said "virtually anything," but there is an exception, and that is to be a practicing believer in Jesus Christ. This is a decided handicap today. Christ would find himself unwanted in university circles more than anywhere else in contemporary existence. And yet it was in the womb of the church that the universities were founded. How I love to read the magnificent statement prefacing many an Islamic scholarly work today and in the past: "In the name of God, the merciful and compassionate." Such reverence is missing from all Western intellectual products. And of course they call it "progress." I infinitely prefer this

"backwardness" of the Muslims to this "progress" of the Christians. Immanentism, universal relativism, human self-sufficiency, profusely breathe in every lecture and every textbook. There is no transcendental reference constitutive of the subject matter whatever. And even in theological seminaries you should see what they call God! The gods have defaulted, have departed from us, as Heidegger laments. And we are left wallowing in the morass of immanentism, relativism and despair. And life is the will to power; its only good is to push ruthlessly, by hook or crook, by cliquing and intriguing, for position, recognition and advancement.

4. Technological civilization with its infinite variety of gadgets and its worship of the instrumental and useful has driven out the moral, the personal, the restful. The accent is on novelty and change and not on sameness and being. Thus infinitely distracted and perfectly unhinged, man tends to lose his sanity and balance, and many men do.

5. Probability, statistics, the rule of averages--these too un hinge the mind, and cause it to believe that everything is only probable and relative, and a matter of statistics. In this way it forgets that every probability rests at some point on something absolutely solid, or else you slide into an infinite regress which will make your probability itself improbable, if not altogether meaningless; it forgets too that the individual item in every statistics is itself not statistical at all, or else your statistics itself rests on nothing.

6. Of course materialism and psychologism issue in relativism and despair, but ask the materialist whether, if composed

ultimately only of atoms and molecules in motion, he accepts being called mean or a coward or a bore or a liar, and ask him how on earth matter as such can be resentful or fearful or anxious or ashamed or scheming. And since Freud never interprets his dreams in his dreams, but must be fully wide-awake to be able do so, it is the intellectual forms of wakefulness which have nothing to do with dreams that can understand the matter of his dreams, and in the regress of psychoanalysts psychoanalyzing one another you must stop somewhere or else the first analysis will itself be based on nothing.

7. Atheism only means that the claims of the four original absolutes are rejected, and this, as we saw, belongs to the nature of things and is always to be expected. There will always be such rebellious rejection, and the man of faith takes it in his stride. The pride of self-sufficient man is original and inveterate, and will always pop up. A man may live an atheist, but I doubt if at no point in his life, with the Socratic absolutism and the three Abrahamic absolutisms vibrating vigorously down the ages and all around us today he did not doubt his own atheism. One man of faith alone in the world, even if all other men were atheists, is enough to cause the whole of the rest of the world doubt its atheism. Faith as in the case of Abraham began with only one man, and look where it is today! That has always been the case, and that is why the fate of faith is not in its own hands, nor in the hands of the atheists.

8. Nihilism is rife. This is the nihilism which Nietzsche, "the first nihilist," as he called himself, predicted and described.

There is a terrific metaphysical hatred of being; what is, for no other reason than because it is, must be demolished. This too belongs to the nature of things, both from the point of view of God and the point of view of the devil; and in this respect Nietzsche could not claim the honor of being the first nihilist. A thousand years from now the principal characterization of this age is likely to be that it was an age of revolt and revolution under the banner of so-called "progress," namely, of the worship of the future as the only transcendental dimension still open to man; we may not need to wait a thousand years; perhaps we already sense that; but I believe not fully, nor critically in relation to "progress" and "the future." The only way to meet nihilism, revolution and revolt is not to wish them out, because they are going to remain with us until the end of time, nor to close our eyes to them and do nothing, because that is not meeting them at all, but to stand resolutely in their way when all they mean is pure destruction, and above all to increase faith and respect for being. But that comes from outside man altogether.

9. And because being is radically hated, history too must be destroyed. In their terrific will to power and control, it is the making of history that people wish to engage themselves in, and not the loving contemplation of it. But why should I disdain the toil and tears of the ages, why should I set myself apart from them? This is impossible for us in the Middle East, the cradle of history, where history hits us in the face from every mound and monument. People destroy history either by losing themselves in

it without drawing from its own entrails, and not from their own mind, transcendental norms with which to judge it as a whole; and you love only that which you keep yourself appropriately aloof from. Or by chopping it up into all sorts of arbitrary beginnings, by all these celebrations about this or that revolution, or this or that act of independence, or this or that birthday; as though the revolution was more than a mere episode in the over-all continuing process, the independence was a total break, and the birthday did not disclose, by its very dating, the wider historical sweep into which it itself was set. Or by forgetting about it altogether and plunging into the enjoyment of feeling and pleasure, both bodily and mental, as though feeling and pleasure alone did not put us outside the sphere of man altogether and therefore outside history. Or, finally, by concentrating on the immediate tasks alone; as though our ancestors did not exist and we suddenly came upon the scene from nowhere, and the findings and visions and wisdoms they sufferingly handed down to us were valueless and of no avail. It is only the tried and tested values of the past, thankfully acknowledged and lovingly appropriated, that can steady our path against the barbarous inroads of relativism. History is living in us in a thousand ways, and to destroy this living ground of our being is to commit spiritual suicide.

V

10. Nietzsche has been misunderstood, and of course he lends himself lavishly to misunderstanding. He is the inspirer of all rebels and all smashers of value and of God and man. I

thank Professor Kaufmann for painting a more worthy picture of this most remarkable man.

I do not believe Nietzsche's eternal recurrence has been adequately pondered. He himself says it is the crown and climax of his thinking. Eternal recurrence therefore must be his last word, his testament.

Of course eternal recurrence fits in well with the dozen or so principal doctrines of Nietzsche--will to power, the overman, self-mastery, etc. But it is a separate thing altogether from all doctrines. Nor is it something "speculative" or "metaphysical" or "cosmological" about aeons or individuals or things repeating themselves indefinitely in all eternity. Nietzsche knows very well that he really knows nothing about these things; and if he thought he did, if even he thought he could bring these things about by the sheer power of his will, he would be ridiculous; and you can be sure Nietzsche is anything but ridiculous. Nietzsche is farthest from being cosmological although his cosmologizing here and there is most misleading. Nietzsche is not talking about "far-off empty space" or about "remote epochs" the way Whitehead talks when he cosmologizes in the grand style; Nietzsche is through and through personal-existential even in his occasional and most unauthentic cosmologizing; in eternal recurrence Nietzsche is talking about Nietzsche.

If eternal recurrence turns out to be a complete and absolute reversal of everything he stood for, then we are in the presence of one of the most astounding repentances and retractions in human history.

The following thesis is based on a close study of eternal recurrence. Because of lack of space and time I withhold the demonstration. I am not discovering anything about eternal recurrence that any careful student will not find in Nietzsche's published works. The words I use are mine but I put them on the mouth of Nietzsche. Every proposition can be demonstrated from Nietzsche.

"I, Friederich Nietzsche, spent all my life attacking, attacking---destroying, destroying. I stormed the most sacred and replaced it by something else of my own creation. I stand by my destroying and my building. I stand by my Nay and my Yea. But here I propose to make a clean slate of my life by confessing that I am full of resentment, vengefulness, hatred, venom, disgust against and about and with practically everybody and everything,

although I have denied that in my portrait of my self. I attacked others for qualities which seethed in me in abundance. I willed practically everything out and willed only my own values in, but since I too abounded in what I willed out in others, in willing them out in them, I willed myself out too. I see this now very clearly and so a conversion has occurred in me. I had willed myself out by implication, but as I now realize this very clearly, I overcome myself by willing myself out explicitly. No God, no Christ, no Spirit brought this conversion about. I alone am responsible for this conversion, I willed it myself. From sheer will to power I have all my life hated much, resented much, grudged much, willed away much, destroyed much. Now by a final

supreme act of will I overcome my insatiable will to power. I am now reconciled to everything, what I willed out and what I willed in. I look on both with the utmost serenity and love. I say to the things I hated, attacked and destroyed--the Christians, the slaves, the resentful, the vengeful, the weak, the decadent and degenerate, the sick and unfit, the ugly, the misshapen, the mangled and botched, the mutilated and maimed; I say to Wagner, to Schopenhauer, to David Strauss, to St. Paul; I say to everybody and everything I maligned and hated and attacked and willed out: I repent, I am sorry, forgive me, I did you wrong. I say to all of them, now I will you all back in your full plenitude--just as you are, "without subtraction, exception or selection." I now so bitterly repent that I will you all back not only in the sense that I withdraw my attack on you and beg your forgiveness and bless you for what you are and have been without one single Nay-word any more about you, but I wish you would remain exactly as you are eternally, and since some of you have perished and the rest are inevitably going to perish, I wish you back again and again and again, an eternity of times. Although I called it my will to your eternal recurrence, I realize now it can only be a wish on my part, expressing only in reality my act of repentance, my act of contrition, my begging your forgiveness. I love you all, the erstwhile objects of my attack and nihilation--believe me I love you. How better can I express my love for you than by assuring you of my will to your eternal recurrence! I have this will but I do not have the power, but I assure you did I have the

power I would have brought about your eternal recurrence. In affirming now in this act of contrition both what I spent all my life denouncing and denying and and what I spent all my life affirming, resides my tragic fate. My amor fati consists in my accepting willfully this fate, that is, in my willing it now upon myself, and this will is both my supreme act of self-overcoming of all I said and stood for before and my present act of repentance and contrition. I say Nay to my previous Nays and even to my previous Yeas if I meant them as existing outside my brain. I now say Yea to everything, exactly as it is 'without subtraction, exception, or selection.' This is my act of total humiliation for all eternity."

And so Nietzsche would say to the youthful enthusiasts of our day who put him on and follow him:

"You are perhaps too young, too immature to be sobered by eternal recurrence. But when you grow older and mature you will find that all your kicking against the pricks is to no avail--existence recurs eternally and your kicking will have no effect. You cannot change the world much. Repent therefore and perform your act of contrition--in this alone you will be my real followers. I reproached Christ for dying too early and too immature; had he lived longer he would have changed his doctrine, he would have become less pure. You are too pure for my taste. Look at me who died a bit older than Christ; even I with my greater maturity and experience still wrote just before I broke down the Antichrist in which the spirit of eternal recurrence, which is the spirit of utter repentance, is hardly evident. Zarathustra asks: "Hath the Will become its own deliverer and joy-bringer? Hath it unlearned the spirit of revenge and all teeth-gnashing?"

Alas my Antichrist was full of this spirit; my will to overcome myself, to unlearn this spirit, was too weak. So do not imitate me. Imitate me in my eternal recurrence spirit because this is my last testament. I counsel you, do not be overzealous with your rebellion. Enjoy your rebellion while it lasts, but it will not last long, nor will it make much difference even if it lasted. You will discover one day that vanity of vanities, all is vanity, as cried the Preacher. Read Ecclesiastes. I could have written Ecclesiastes myself but I could not have ended it the way it ended. Believe me I wish now I could. If you call yourselves my disciples remember you cannot be my disciples against my will; neither Zarathustra nor I want you to be our disciples. But at least you can do one thing, and this I ask from you: do not falsify me; and when you say you are Nietzschean, remember that Nietzsche said eternal recurrence is his loftiest teaching, towering even above the will to power and the overman. And eternal recurrence means no resentment, no revenge, no envy, no rancor, no hatred, but total reconciliation to everything and everybody; it means repentance with dust and ashes. In this imitate me. Therefore always remember eternal recurrence--always, always."

My interpretation of Nietzsche will be ridiculed. I put it forward here only as a thesis. I have not demonstrated this thesis, except hintingly here and there. The full demonstration of it is in my possession, and how Nietzsche was haunted by Christ and loved him, and Christ loved Nietzsche too.

VI

It is evident, then, how the ten components of the whole climate of thought of the present militate against absolute values. This is an age of flux and change, an age of excitement and mediocrity, an age in which absolute distinctions blur and disappear, an age of relativism and socialism, an age of compromise and adjustment, an age of despair and total immanen-tism, an age in which the momentous proposition "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" has ceased to call forth any response or to lighten up any understanding, an age in which death is the last word, an age of total final meaninglessness. In the search for absolute values a built-in hostility bedevils every step. You are ridiculed, you are out of step, you are likely to find no place for you in "the social structure." I know these statements are exaggerations, but the exaggeration in them is intended to point up the truth they contain.

But there are absolute values. If you do not see them they are nevertheless there. Courage, manliness, self-mastery, justice, friendship, truthfulness, magnanimity, integrity; neighborly love, mutual trust, self-denial, humility of spirit, forgiveness, endurance, patience, suffering; one of St. Paul's lists: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law"; some of the values revealed to Nietzsche: love of the remote, radiant virtue, strength of character, exuberance of spirit, overflowing fullness, stillness, self-overcoming,

personality, rank and order, nobility, creativity; these and many other modes of being of man mean each something very definite, very concrete, something full of matter and content; something which can be scientifically described and perfectly understood; and if you are a master describer, your description will be read a thousand years from now and fully appreciated; just as we read and perfectly understand today the masterful philosophical descriptions of such values by Plato and Aristotle, and the masterful dramatic descriptions by Shakespeare (e.g. the character of Hamlet) or Goethe (e.g. the character of Werther) or Sophocles (e.g. the character of Antigone). Indeed, no matter how much ages and cultures may vary, there are always products by master minds which are universally recognized as classics in their respective spheres. The phenomenon of the actual existence of classics in every realm is itself the demonstration of the existence of absolute values.

People may lack the ability to appreciate these values, but that does not make them relative or non-existent; it only means that people then are either ignorant or uncultured or obtuse or mysteriously rebellious. For man's freedom to see the truth and, for some dark reason, still rebel against it is never affected or detracted from by the absoluteness of values. Values do not overwhelm man, nor do they cripple his freedom: they only reveal themselves to him. Of course values are relative to man, but only in the sense that they are valid only for him, but never in the sense that any one of these values can be other

than itself. Not even God can alter the character of truthfulness or mercy or courage; not even God can make me truthful if I am a damn liar, or merciful if I show no mercy, or a man of courage if I am an abject coward.

The fundamental energizing presupposition of all zest and effort and every investigation in every department of knowledge since Aristotle, is precisely the Socratic finding which Socrates stubbornly achieved literally with his life, namely, that solid, objective, given truth is there, hidden in the womb of things, that this truth can be sought and ascertained, that all health and strength, and indeed all joy and happiness, consist in discovering or unconcealing this truth and appropriating it, and that the people who lag behind in this destiny-determining pursuit must inevitably reckon with occupying an inferior status in the scale of being, no matter how much they may succeed in deceiving themselves about it.

The problem of absolute values becomes then only a part of this fundamental Socratic affirmation. Just as the truth of nature and matter and motion and human nature and the course of events is there to be investigated and ascertained and appropriated, so the truth of sincerity, honesty, courage, truthfulness, magnanimity, nobility and friendship is there to be investigated and ascertained and appropriated, no matter how much people, including the investigators themselves, may be insincere, dishonest, cowardly, untruthful, mean, ignoble and unfriendly. For only honesty makes honest people honest, only magnanimity makes magnanimous people magnanimous, only nobility makes noble people

noble. And the question, how may a dishonest person become honest, an insincere person sincere, a morose person cheerful and sociable, etc., is a legitimate and natural question; but it is a different matter altogether from the being and truth of honesty, sincerity, cheerfulness, etc. The very naturalness of this question, in so far as it really expresses a heart burning for these things, reveals that the Ought is inherent in the very essence of these values, and has nothing to do with any Kantian subjective judgment of reason or the understanding.

Of course social justice is a great value, and when people wake up to its absence, they will rise up in revolt. Of course human dignity is a great value, and when my dignity or your dignity is compromised or despoiled, we will protest and defend ourselves--and please don't tell me that your conception of your dignity differs much from mine, or from that of the Indian or Chinese. Of course freedom is a great value, and nobody wants to be a slave--and please again don't tell me that some clever sophistical semantics can prove to a slave that he is free, although the oppression of slaves could last for millennia. The motive principle of human history is man acting under the lure of value. Aristotelian teleology belongs to the essence of all history.

It took us three years at the United Nations to elaborate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and every nation, every culture, every legal system, every religious background, participated in the process. And when at the end I had the honor, as Chairman of the Committee that gave the text its final

definitive form, of presenting it to the General Assembly for approval and world proclamation, not one negative vote was cast against it. What does this mean? It means that there is a pervasive fundamental apriorism subsisting among all nations and cultures, which after three years of the most intensive world discussion and debate they all came to and agreed upon. It means that without the actual existence of this apriorism there is no hope for unity and understanding among men. It means that when President Carter, with this Declaration as a principal background of his thinking, urges the case of human rights today both on America and the world, and when, as a result, people are moved and disturbed, they are moved and disturbed not by something that does not exist, but by something very, very real although in part unrealized, and because it is partly unrealized though absolutely real, they are moved and disturbed. It means that the existing universal apriorism of absolute values is today earth-shaking.

Values are there. They may be concealed but they can be unconcealed. They can then be perfectly described. They have been unconcealed and described. History moves under their lure. Nothing moves by nothing. Values are the cement of all community. All social existence lives and moves and has its being under their wings. They wing history on. We take infinite care about our reputation and name and nobody wants his epitaph to read: "Here lies a swindler, a murderer, a thief, a liar, one who dishonored his parents, one who neglected his family

and children." Why? Part of the greatness of Nietzsche consisted precisely in concentrating the problematic of his entire life on the question of value and in seeing that it is all in the end a matter of what the individual human person amounts to. The overman was the substance of this infinite concern. And when he realized it was impossible for rotten man to achieve by himself the miracle of the overman he fell upon the desperate hope of some chance concatenation of conditions and circumstances in infinite time bringing him about. And then the crash which is eternal recurrence occurred which changed everything. For "eternal recurrence" is the anguished cry: "What is the use?!"

VII

We spoke of history being moved by values. We spoke of nothing being moved by nothing. We spoke of values constituting the fabric of community. We spoke of the desperate hope of change bringing about miracles.

Everything depends on nothing and on chance. Chance means faith in magic and nothing means orientation towards total darkness. And both applied to man mean man can save himself from his rottenness by himself.

The most important primary distinction is between original, personal, existential orientation towards Being and original, personal, existential orientation toward Not-Being. The first says with Moses "in the beginning God," the second says with Hesiod "in the beginning chaos." So you pin your ultimate hope either on chaos or on God. Even those

who take pride in man as "the first," ask them, "Whence man himself?," and press your question, and you will find that they too inevitably orient themselves either towards Being or towards Nothing.

There is no escape whatever from either the given fullness of being which is God or Nothing.

Every man, every thinker must sooner or later in his own life and thought, and in his own individual way, face this decisive either-or, and, if he is honest, "in his life" infinitely more than "in his thought," and "in his thought" only because the facing has already occurred "in his life."

A personal decision of the greatest mystery is inevitable.

But don't think the decision is a simple one; don't think you just sit down, reflect on the matter, and then make up your mind.

You decide because a decision has already been taken for you. And this has a name: it is called election.

You do not elect faith in God; God himself elects you to have faith in him.

This is the greatest mystery--why some people are touched by God and believe, and some are not. Those who are not end up either in despair or in "eternal recurrence," and the two are the same. Eternal recurrence is a fantastic surrogate for despair. Eternal recurrence means: "What is the use?!" and that is exactly despair. If only at the moment of despair you do not despair! This is the secret of the prophets and saints.

In the prevailing atmosphere of rationalism, naturalism, hedonism, immanentism, economism, will to power, faith in science and progress, social justice, man's technological assertion of his supremacy over nature--and, he thinks, over himself!--, it is impossible to raise the problem of election. It is total nonsense.

But it is the total nonsense today that must be raised precisely because it cannot be raised.

Why some men invincibly orient themselves in the end towards Nothing, some towards Being? Why some people are touched by God and some are not? Why some people are inveterately proud and rebellious even, nay especially, in their humility, and some have a broken and contrite heart? Why some are palpably honest in seeking and seeking and keeping on seeking, and some have already made up their mind that "What is the use!?"? Why some have an open, some a closed, mind? Education? Background? Conditions? When you say that, are you really satisfied?

There is a doctrine of election in every great religion. The thing then is very serious.

The atheists too speak of fate, but fate belongs to the language of those who are fundamentally oriented towards Nothing, election to the language of those who are fundamentally oriented towards the fullness of existing Being.

To say this is all nonsense and you and your modern civilization have long since outgrown this nonsense is only to say that you and your civilization have already elected Nothing. This

time you made the decision, and neither Nothing nor God.

I am only begging you to raise the problem and wonder at it. Beware of trying to solve it because it cannot be solved. The greatest and deepest problems are those that cannot be solved. The things that can be solved are already in your power and therefore are child's play, but it is the things that are not in your power that are truly great.

The rule is: live in the mystery of the questions that cannot be solved, enjoy their mystery, suffer the fact that they cannot be solved; but raise them all the same.

And I wish to assert that the question of the search for absolute values can only be really raised when the question of election is itself raised and pondered.

For these things are there already and they must "lift up the light of their countenance upon you" first.

The thing has a name: it is the Beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Purity of heart is everything.

I end therefore with the title of one of Kierkegaard's books: "Purify Your Hearts."

Rabiya, Lebanon

November 11, 1977