

## PHILOSOPHY IN THE COMING MILLENNIUM

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The way to philosophy in the new millennium is a way through and with an analysis of the past. Clear compartmentalization and absolute categorization with an emphasis on exclusion dominated the cognitive world in the last century. The logo-centric bias divided knowledge into true or false, *i.e.* the either/or format. Logic cannot accommodate the proposition: 'whoever loses wins' (Derrida, p. 457) or 'humanity is both beautiful and not beautiful' or rather that 'human beings are both good and evil' for it cannot both be and not be at the same time. It would only amount to a contradiction and that of course is fallacious and invalid. Thus, the intellectual world stood divided. This neither fosters inclusiveness nor diversity, for if the world is diverse and complex, so is knowledge. The next millennium shall herald plurality which must be accepted and acknowledged with meaningful niches for several world-views. This is not to advocate a fragmented *weltanschauung*; rather it celebrates the entire kaleidoscope of different voices. This shall avoid the reductionist fallacy or the mistake of reducing diversity to unity. It shall also circumvent the fallacy of over-simplification or the error of trying to subsume the many into one, or the complex into the simple.

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In the past, strict absolutism only led to dogmatism. The new millennium shall endeavour to de-dogmatize for there are no hard and fast lines but rather only a continuum of knowledge. Albert Einstein, the person of the millennium, confirms this when he says:

“The literates of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will not be those who learn to read and write but those who learn to learn, unlearn and relearn.”

The next millennium therefore shall entertain no constant or eternal constructs but shall continue to de-construct and re-construct endlessly.

Eclecticism has been a slur word with negative connotation in the past but a holistic perspective is the philosophy for the coming millennium. Eclecticism however is not the great melting pot for there is no a priori philosophizing, neither is it a compendium of encyclopedic information. Rather it is the gestalt that accommodates differences. In any case thinkers of the past have only looked for confirmation of their own theories. As Popper points out:

“The most characteristic element in this situation seemed to be the incessant stream of confirmations, of observations which verified the theories in question.”  
(*Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 99)

He goes on to say:

“It is easy to obtain confirmations and verifications for nearly every theory, if we look for confirmations.”  
(*Ibid*, p. 100)

Popper thus allows for refutability or falsifiability and sets the tone for the coming millennium.

Eclecticism is not just gathering of diversity either but more ... just as a collection of writings of female professors of philosophy would not constitute a feminist philosophy neither would mere accumulation of different views constitute a philosophy. The gestalt dictum that the ‘whole is more than the

sum of its parts' reminds us that such a philosophy needs to have a clearer agenda and better defined objectives.

Is such a telos possible or desirable? Are we not becoming victims of dogmatism again? Must we be haunted by the wish or the need to attain certainty? Will we never be able to exorcise the ghosts from our past? Will we be able to accept the others as an extension of the self or will we continue to exclude and differentiate and discriminate? Will there be a further deterioration of relationships? Will we compete rather than cooperate? Will we fight rather than share? Will there be animosity rather than intimacy? Does the future hold only an apocalypse? If egoism be the dominant philosophy and altruism just an elusive wish we shall soon be writing not only the epitaph of philosophy but the end of humanity as well. Philosophy in the coming millennium has to be more integrative. On the cognitive front it shall continue to combat obsolescence and on the social front it shall have to become more humane.

If plurality, diversity and heterogeneity be the key concepts, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has already developed appropriate technology to disseminate the same. Information is at our finger tips – all ideas are available together in a compendium, within a second; all methods of judgement can be applied to them in no time; all processes analyzed or synthesized, defused or clarified.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century claimed to be for 'knowledge workers' (Peter Drucker) working in an information-based economy but the new millennium shall realize the need for critical thinking not just information gathering. In the age of technology, the value word was productivity and in the cyber-age the value word was prosperity through the information super-highway. If the coming millennium does not herald an ongoing self-critical attitude however we shall slide down to obsolescence sooner than the previous frameworks of knowledge.

The change itself is reaffirming that one may not suspend judgement on existing values; continuing skepticism shall stand us in better stead. The computer does not alienate the same way that other machines did. It does not eliminate human endeavour.

It does not exclude or dominate human freedom. The computer is only as efficient as the visualizer. To borrow from Francis Bacon's metaphor who says:

"It is hardly possible at once to admire an author and go beyond him; knowledge being as water which will not rise above the level from which it fell." (p. 210)

We in Pakistan in the post-colonial period – the Muslims of the 3<sup>rd</sup> World – remain computer illiterate and if we do not come out of our nostalgic cocoon of past grandeur we shall become as extinct as the dinosaurs of yester years.

The buzz words these days are: if you cannot provide a solution, you become part of the problem. This fosters solution finding which encourages action and is therefore commendable. But if no solution is available and solutions we are bent on finding the only resort is comforting or coping mechanisms. This is not to suggest that solutions ought not to be sought but that our obsession with problem solving triggers fear. To allay this anxiety a make-belief solution seems to be the best alternative but this is akin to Sactre's 'bad faith' for we are living in virtual reality rather than actuality. It seems more like a world of fantasy, if not story-telling and myth-building.

On another plane "the challenge for the new millennium is to construct a world that is not only sustainable but desirable ..." (McLean, p. 145). Professor J. F. McLean laments that the hope and claims of scientific knowledge, which were to solve all human problems by human effort, have been a mirage. If this be a call that reason is not enough and that a critique regarding the competencies and limits of reason be undertaken, let it be so. This would herald the start of a positive human project to self-evaluate and self-analyze. It is possible to obtain answers only to questions which have been posed. So we must articulate and make explicit our concepts and our discourse. And if this requires that we state and re-state ad-infinitum ... so be it.

On the political front a bottom-up movement of the people is bound to replace the power structures which have remained top-down. De-centralization of authority and knowledge shall be the

hallmark of the new millennium where individual freedom and human dignity shall be restored to each and all. And if knowledge be the real power, the future shall let all drink from this well without discrimination or hindrance. The past shall then be transformed with a new, variable agenda for humanity ensuring equality, equanimity, equability and peace.

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