THE TOWER OF BABYLON
A problem of International Humanism

Misunderstandings are nearly inevitable in international relations. 'Hear, hear', the Esperantists will say, 'that's why everyone should learn Esperanto'. Maybe, but the difficulties I am pointing at, are definitely not of a strictly linguistic nature; they belong to the field of cultural semantics.

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The problem is not merely the knowledge of the meaning of words, but rather the understanding of the cultural context of concepts. All kinds of misunderstandings can be caused by negligence of this context. Let's take e.g. the word *philosophy*. On the European continent it means virtually exclusively academic discipline: One can speak about Kantian, Hegelian, existentialist philosophy, or about philosophy of ethics, science, history. But in Anglo-saxon idioms it can also mean *outlook, conception* of man and world, *conviction* of life (German: Weltanschauung). If one does not realize this difference, great confusion can be the result. The same can be the case with other concepts.

For this reason I think it might be useful to point out the meaning of some key-words in humanist ideology, as a preparation for the discussions at our third international congress in Oslo next summer. Let me try and draft a small practical vocabulary of humanist locutions without much scientific pretension. It will not prevent us from misunderstandings, but it may help us to overcome them. Here it is:

Empirism. Scientific or practical attitude, characterized by willingness to continuous search for factual data and to revision of opinions, should facts demand it. It must be discerned from *empiricism* which is a philosophical system, stating that knowledge can be completely conceived as a result of perception (without previous merely mental judgments). Empirism is a general (humanistic) approach; empiricism a specific (theoretical) approach.

Ethics. In European idiom nearly exclusively: a philosophical theory of morals. As to practical behaviour the word morals or morality is used. Americans understand by *Ethical Culture* a conception, centered around moral thinking and behaviour, and not necessarily based upon a common

theory or faith. The term cannot very well be used in European idioms.

Humanism. Derived from latin humanus (human). Originally used to denote classical studies (studia humaniora) as against theological knowledge. Furthermore it is connected with philosophy and history, and in modern times with social sciences, psychology and biology. Since the beginning of the 19th century it is becoming the overall term for non-theistic thinking and behaviour, although in Europe it remains closely connected with Linguistics. In Anglo-Saxon countries it is often related to a scientific approach: *scientific humanism.* In order to make clear that this does not exclude a moral emphasis, the term *ethical humanism* has been adopted (including ethical culture). According to the dominant emphasis it is sometimes also indicated as social, evolutionary, rational op philosophical humanism.

Philosophy. See introduction above.

Philosophical humanism is based upon a philosophical conception of man and world, be it idealistic, ethical or existentialist. To a certain extent *evolutionary* humanism may also be mentioned under this heading, as it is based upon the conception of evolution as an all-embracing principle.

Positivism. It denies the validity of judgements that cannot be tested in an empiric way. It relies on science as the source of genuine knowledge. *Neo-positivism* depends highly on logical or linguistic analysis; the method is sometimes referred to as general semantics.

Rationalism. It has its origin in the 'enlightenment' and it appeals to the universal character of human *reason* as a means to communication and understanding. Sometimes it stresses the logical, ethical and aesthetic faculties in man and draws near to a philosophical conception; sometimes it emphasizes the human capacity of adjustment by means of trial and error, and then it is closely related to positivism.

Religion. Probably derived from latin religere, to fear, to respect. Sometimes exclusively used for theistic beliefs, sometimes in a general (humanistic) sense, particularly the adjective: religious. In that case it indicates a thoroughgoing and deeply rooted harmonizing of the 'I' and the world; the power to bring about a deeper and more lasting adjustment to life (Dewey). Or: a connection of ideas and emotions by which man is related to his destiny (Huxley).

Science. Sometimes science denotes the physical, technical and mathematical studies as against the humanities or 'humanism'. Humanism itself does not discriminate between science and humanities. Scientific humanism depends on the impartial assimilation of experience by means of *scientific methods* which include in this connection ideas like liberty, equality and responsability.

Secular. Secular or naturalistic are adjective denoting a non-theistic humanism. In Dutch the term autonomous is sometimes used to the same end and in French the term 'lay humanism' (humanisme laïque).

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