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# **PHILOSOPHY**

## **A COSMIC RESPONSIBILITY**





A cosmic responsibility.

## PHILOSOPHY: A COSMIC RESPONSIBILITY

Eight philosophers contributed to this issue of *the UNESCO Courier*, focusing on the role of philosophy today. Different approaches, varied concerns, but one certainty: philosophy can't stay in its ivory tower. It provides a weapon against dogma and manipulation. And, to cite one of Jostein Gaarder's ideas, philosophers have a cosmic responsibility.

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# PHILOSOPHY A COSMIC RESPONSIBILITY

Eight philosophers contributed to this issue of *the UNESCO Courier*, focusing on the role of philosophy today. Different approaches, varied concerns, but one certainty: philosophy can't stay in its ivory tower. It provides a weapon against dogma and manipulation. And, to cite one of Jostein Gaarder's ideas, philosophers have a cosmic responsibility.

They stand up against dogma and manipulative arguments. They express concern about intolerance and rising fanaticism. They remind us too that we are primates and our first task should be taking care of the planet. And they advocate philosophy that goes beyond mere words.

"I don't believe at all in what is commonly called today the death of philosophy," wrote French philosopher Jacques Derrida in 1972.

Nor do the philosophers in this issue. But they do recognize that philosophy's impact on society is not what it could be, and philosophers themselves are partly to blame. And how could they make themselves useful? "By avoiding speaking in a way that is abstruse, fuzzy, incomprehensible, to a few fans of sectarian modes of thinking who get off on sticking together and intellectually reproducing through incest," answers Michel Onfray (France), a resolutely down-to-earth philosopher.

Jostein Gaarder (Norway) would be the last to contradict him, being someone who advocates a philosophy that can help us write the instruction manual for spaceship Earth. "Philosophy is nothing less than a celebration of mankind's consciousness," he says. "So shouldn't a philosopher be the first to defend human consciousness against annihilation?" Here, the author of "Sophie's World" warns us, "We are the first generation to affect the climate on earth – and perhaps the last that won't have to pay the price for it."

As for Turkish philosopher Ioanna Kuçuradi, she explores the verbal domain to denounce a certain conceptual confusion, reigning notably in political discourse. She takes interest in the word "value", which she sees as a catch-all term, stating, "In an age in which the search for meaning leads people to become suicide bombers, fully grasping the concept of value and that linked to ethical values is another task expected from philosophers."

"Dictators rarely oppress whole populations; rather, they persuade

part of their population to help with the oppression of the rest, and they generally do this by presenting spurious arguments and flimsy but specious claims," notes Peter J. King (United Kingdom). Yet another philosopher who wants to clear up the verbal fog conjured up by simplistic non sequiturs and deception.

"In countries under the boot of authoritarian, not to say rogue, regimes," continues Mohammed Arkoun (Algeria), "the return of religion can be interpreted as the quest for refuge." And he underlines that religiosity is gaining ground in the richest societies too, resulting in the marginalization of philosophical thought and culture.

Let us abolish religion's authority over morality, admit we are not infallible, stop imposing our mores as universal law – we will stand a better chance of establishing a dialogue enabling us to avoid conflicts, adds Kwasi Wiredu (Ghana).

Woo-Tak Kee concurs. "There is a limit to the roles that religion and politics can play in resolving conflicts among human cultures. It's the philosophers who should provide solutions," writes the South Korean philosopher, who launches here a debate on a philosophy of universality, or, to put it another way, a philosophy in search of universality in the midst of cultural diversity.

It is precisely the diversity of our lives that produces humour, writes M. E. Orellana Benado (Chile) who chooses to tackle the question of philosophy from the angle of laughter. "Our human world is essentially incongruous," he says. "This is why it helps us in our survival to be able to extract the comic aspect of the incongruous."

Alongside this main dossier, *the Courier* presents two retrospectives: one is a collection of interviews we have previously published, "Philosophers' Corner"; the other focuses on "Philosophers celebrated by UNESCO."

Jasmina Šopova

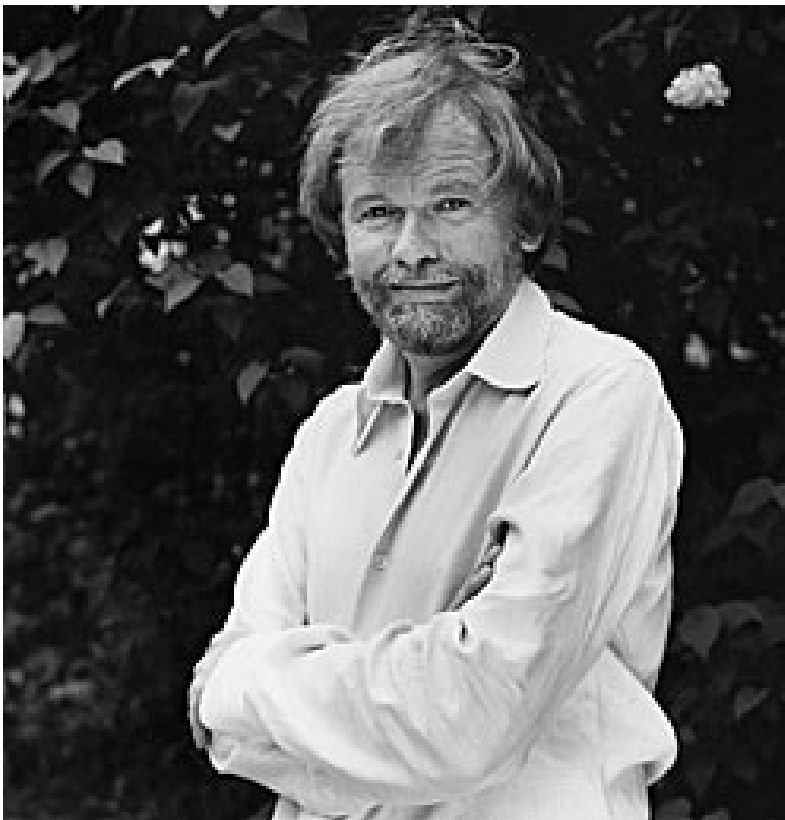


As pollution and climate change threaten human survival on our planet, Norwegian philosopher Jostein Gaarder –the internationally celebrated author of “*Sophie’s World*” – argues that philosophy can help us defuse the time bomb that is ticking away that is ticking away.

# JOSTEIN GAARDER

## A USER’S MANUAL FOR OUR PLANET

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Jostein Gaarder (Norway).

In his later years the German philosopher Immanuel Kant pointed out that it was a necessary moral imperative for every country to join together in a “league of nations” whose job would be to ensure their peaceful co-existence. As such, this German philosopher would seem to have first fathered the idea of the United Nations.

About 200 years later we were able to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And there was good

reason to celebrate this milestone, as human rights still need to be protected against infringements and brutal violations. The only difference now is that, for more than fifty years, we have had an institution and an instrument with which to defend these rights.

Perhaps the Universal Declaration of Human Rights represents the greatest triumph of philosophy so far. For human rights were not bestowed on us by higher powers, nor were they plucked from thin air, but

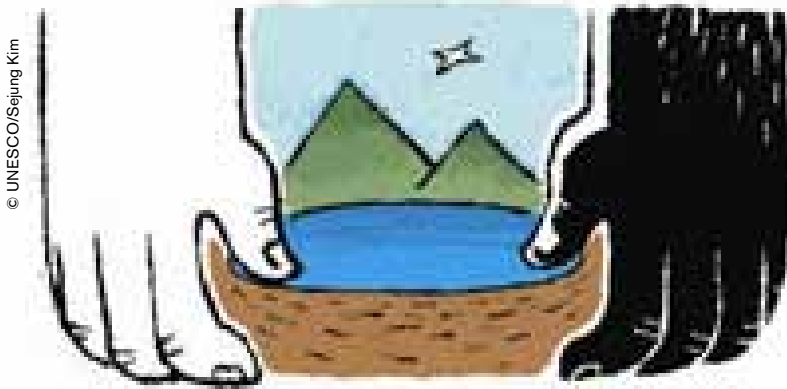
rather they represent the culmination of a thousand-year maturing process, a process which to a large extent was carried forward by the written word. Behind this humanistic tradition were flesh and blood individuals who, at certain times of their lives, sat down to think and write – and they thought on behalf of the whole of humanity.

### ***Towards a Universal Declaration of Human Obligations***

The question that faces us at the start of a new millennium is how long we can go on talking about rights without simultaneously focusing on the individual’s obligations. Maybe we need a new universal declaration. Perhaps the time is ripe for a Universal Declaration of Human Obligations. It is simply no longer meaningful to talk about rights without simultaneously stressing the individual state’s or person’s obligations.

An important bedrock of all ethics has been “the golden rule:” Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Immanuel Kant defined this reciprocal principle by pointing out that the right action is the one we would want everyone to perform in a similar situation. Two hundred years after Kant’s death we have just about begun to get used to the idea that the reciprocal principle must also apply between rich and poor countries. In addition, it must include the relationship between the generations.

The question is whether we would have wanted previous generations to cut down more forests and rain forests. Would we have preferred it if our ancestors had exterminated even more plant and animal species? If not, we are duty bound to preserve biological diversity. We cannot even be sure that Kant would have tolerated our high consumption of non-renewable energy sources. We must



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Preserving the biological diversity is a duty.

first make sure that we would have wished our ancestors to burn the same amount of coal and oil per head as we do.

We are the first generation to affect the climate on earth – and perhaps the last that won't have to pay the price for it.

**We are primates**

It has been said that the problem with Spaceship Earth is that it didn't come with instructions. But in that case, why don't we get on and write an instruction manual? For that we will need philosophy!

We are often told that ideologies are dead. But isn't consumerism also an ideology? And is this really the only possible model?

One important question for philosophy at the beginning of the third millennium must be: what shift in consciousness do we need? What is a sustainable wisdom? Which qualities of life are the most important? Which values are the true values? What is

the good life? And importantly: what kind of mobilisation is possible in the global village?

Today, many of us understand the challenges facing the planet. But we feel paralysed by political and economic systems. Politicians, too, have a far greater insight than might appear from their practice. And this is the paradox: we have sufficient insight – and we know that time is short – but we aren't able to turn things round before it will be too late. Philosophy will have to play a decisive part if we are to succeed in negotiating the sea change necessary for our survival. In the same way that philosophers and authors have constituted an avant-garde in the fight for human rights, so they may form a vanguard in the struggle for human obligations.

According to an old parable a frog that is dropped into boiling water will immediately jump out again and so save its skin. But if the frog is placed in a pan of cold water that is gradually brought to boiling point, it will be

unaware of the danger and be boiled to death.

Is our generation like that frog? Is modern philosophy such a frog? We may not know, but it really is down to us to decide. We can't count on any outside help. We're not likely to be saved in the final second before boiling point – either from outer space or by some form of supernatural intervention.

Human beings are largely social creatures. We are in addition pretty self-centred and vain. But we can't continue only to relate to each other. We also belong to the earth we live on. That, too, is a significant part of our identity.

To a large extent we modern human beings have been shaped by our cultural history, by the actual civilisation that has nurtured us. We say that we have a cultural heritage. But we have also been formed by the biological history of the planet. We also pass on a genetic inheritance. We are primates. We are vertebrates.

It took several billion years to create us. But will we survive the third millennium?

Human beings are possibly the only living creatures in the universe with a universal consciousness. And so our responsibility to preserve the living environment of this planet is not only global but cosmic.

Philosophy is nothing less than a celebration of mankind's consciousness. So shouldn't a philosopher be the first to defend human consciousness against annihilation?

**Dr Jostein Gaarder,**  
Norwegian philosopher

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The parable of the frog.

From art and politics to bioethics, religion, the internet and the odyssey of tea, French philosopher Michel Onfray focuses on a multitude of issues that concern contemporary humanity in his numerous books and lectures. For Mr Onfray, philosophy must be effective on the existential plane.

# MICHEL ONFRAY

## A PHILOSOPHER OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT



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Michel Onfray (France).

*Interview by Jasmina Šopova.*

**You once said that philosophy doesn't fall from the heaven of ideas, but rises up from earth. Would you explain?**

There is in fact a multitude of ways to practice philosophy, but out of this multitude, the dominant historiography picks one tradition among others and makes it the truth of philosophy: that is to say the idealist, spiritualist lineage compatible with the Judeo-Christian world view. From that point on, anything that crosses this partial – in both senses of the word – view of things finds itself dismissed. This applies to nearly all non-Western philosophies, Oriental wisdom in particular, but also sensualist, empirical, materialist, nominalist, hedonistic

currents and everything that can be put under the heading of “anti-Platonic philosophy”. Philosophy that comes down from the heavens is the kind that - from Plato to Levinas by way of Kant and Christianity - needs a world behind the scenes to understand, explain and justify this world. The other line of force rises from the earth because it is satisfied with the given world, which is already so much.

**You define yourself as a hedonistic philosopher. What does this term comprise for you?**

Hedonism is one of the philosophies not compatible with Judeo-Christianity and therefore cast

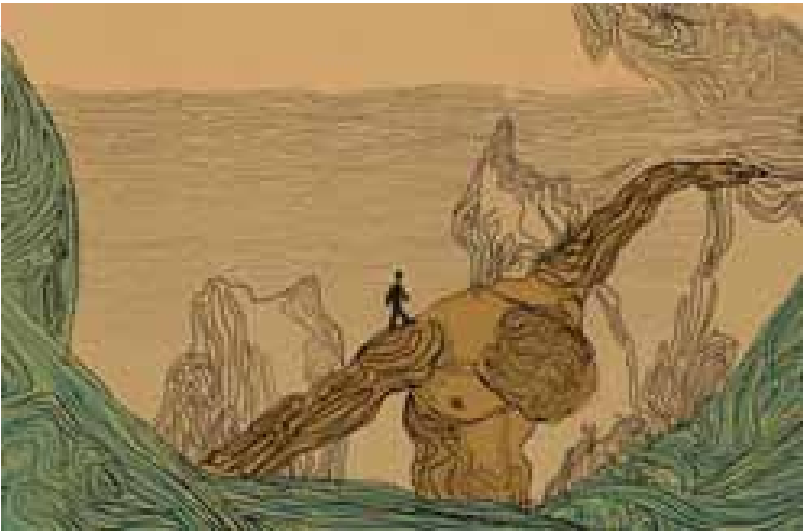
aside by the dominant historiography. In opposition to the ascetic ideal advocated by the dominant school of thought, hedonism suggests identifying the highest good with your own pleasure and that of others; the one must never be indulged at the expense of sacrificing the other. Obtaining this balance – my pleasure at the same time as the pleasure of others – presumes that we approach the subject from different angles – political, ethical, aesthetic, erotic, bioethical, pedagogical, historiographical... I have written books on each of these facets of the same world view.

**You've been attacked virulently for your atheistic stance, to the point of receiving death threats. How do you respond?**

I note that believers prove me right when I state that monotheism is intrinsically intolerant, vindictive and intellectually exterminating.... If someone threatens to kill you for saying their religion is intolerant, they prove what I'm saying is unfortunately true. In Europe, we live under democratic regimes; elsewhere, in other times and other places, there wouldn't have been these threats, I would have had my head chopped off directly.

**You are an action philosopher who fights on every front. How can a philosopher make himself “useful” today?**

By radically turning your back on the academic, doctoral way of proceeding, that is to say by avoiding speaking in a way that is abstruse, fuzzy, incomprehensible, to a few fans of sectarian modes of thinking



How can philosophy make itself useful ?

who get off on sticking together and reproducing intellectually through incest. Therefore by expressing yourself clearly and simply, like Seneca or Cicero...And then by ceasing to lecture everybody, and by being content to remain only in the realm of the verb, where things are so easy, and yet trying to produce philosophical effects on the existential level – there too like the ancient philosophers – in places organized for that purpose, like for instance in “universités populaires” \*.

**Can we compare the “Université populaire” in Caen, which you launched in 2002, to the school in the Garden of Epicurus?**

I started a second one in Argentan, in Normandie (France), my home town, which is a sub-prefecture damaged by the harshness of the free market, and which is habitually ignored by the powers-that-be in the capital, but also by the regional and departmental authorities. What I wondered, in fact,

was what a micro-resistance to the micro-fascisms of our era could be like, in an open community inspired by an Epicureanism in touch with our post-industrial modernity.

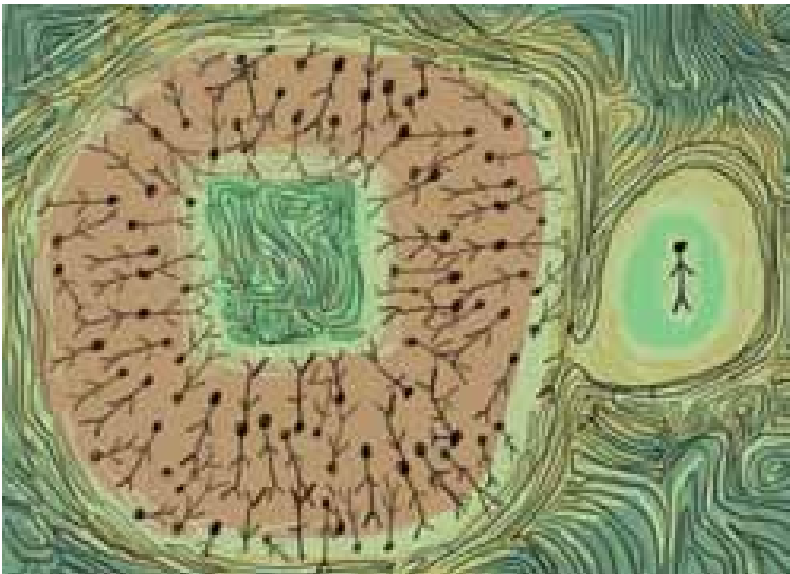
**For you, nothing is universal. Can this idea be identified with that of cultural diversity, as advocated by UNESCO?**

No, some things are universal. I believe, for instance, a man is worth the same as a woman, a white person is worth a black person, a doctor of philosophy is worth a peasant on the Nile, an atheist is worth neither more nor less than a devout Jew, a handicapped person is worth a sports champion, in other words one being is worth another being, whatever they both are. That's the first universal thing I believe.

The second one is that a happy human being is better than an unhappy human being, and everything must be done to increase the universal dose of pleasure and reduce the dose of pain as much as possible.

Finally, of course I believe in the diversity of cultures and the need to safeguard them, but I also believe that some cultures are better than others. I do indeed think a civilization is more worthwhile where little girls are not genitally mutilated, rather than one where their wholeness is destroyed; a civilization in which you can say the opposite of what your country's spiritual and temporal powers think, rather than one where you're sent to the gallows because your thinking doesn't match the norm. I believe that a civilization that gives homosexuals the same rights as heterosexuals is better than one that jails them, etc.

I'm just a philosopher of the Enlightenment who thinks the Light is preferable to the Darkness and the Declaration of Human Rights superior to legal texts drawn from age-old mythologies...

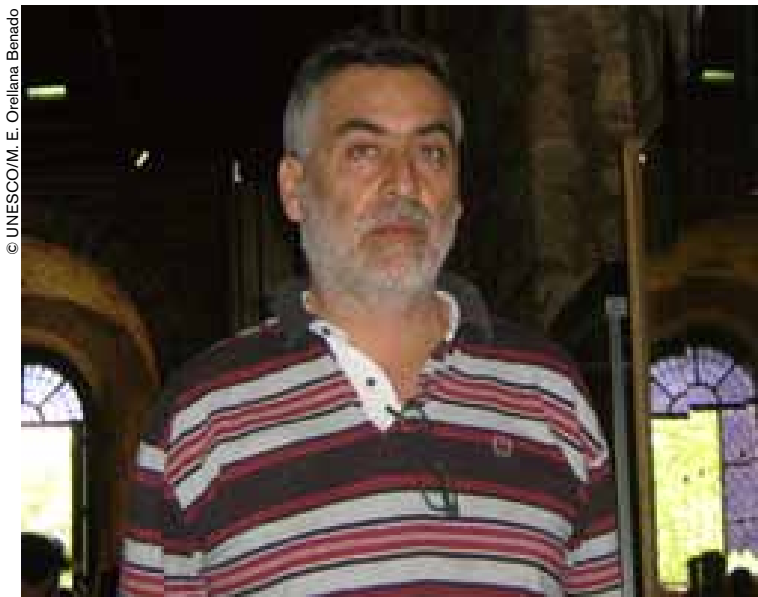


The Epicurean Garden.

\*(like folk high schools or adult education centres)

# M. E. ORELLANA BENADO : THE HUMANITY OF HUMOUR

“There is nothing so ridiculous but some philosopher has said it,” Cicero argued. Chilean philosopher M. E. Orellana Benado for his part postulates that humour “has more to do with the diversity of ways in which we live (that is to say, with our identities), than with the way we reason and think (that is to say with our nature as human beings).”



© UNESCO/M. E. Orellana Benado

M. E. Orellana Benado (Chile).

Compare the rhetorical impact of the following claims:

1. “Prof. Dr. B. might be the greatest philosopher alive today, but she lacks a sense of humour”

and,

2. “Prof. Dr. O. might be the greatest thief alive today, but he has a sharp sense of humour”.

Lacking a sense of humour diminishes the value of a person’s achievements, whereas its possession rescues the humanity even of those whose behaviour is despicable. In this article I propose to discuss the role of humour, the humanity of humour as I prefer to call it.

The birth of Greek philosophy was completed when a field of reflection and debate appeared in which authority arguments were not allowed [i.e. ad baculum arguments in which authority takes the place

of reasoning]. This is what is meant by Socrates humorous claim: “Only one thing I know, and that is that I know nothing”. The Oracle had said that he was the wisest of men. But when his fellow Athenians came to him with this piece of news, Socrates forced them to realize that they still had to make up their own minds. The coming of age of European university philosophy is marked by Kant’s equivalent claim in “Was ist Aufklärung?” when he sums up the Enlightenment in the maxim: Sapere aude! Dare to think (for yourself)!

## ***Some are more equal than others***

Humour permeates humanity. More, humour is both the most penetrating of our theoretical capacities and the most human of our practi-

cal abilities. By “theoretical” I mean capacities directed to the contemplation or perception of the world; by “practical” I mean those that allow us to manipulate it or to bring it into existence. Our human world is essentially incongruous. This is why it helps us in our survival to be able to extract the comic aspect of the incongruous as well as to perceive the comic when we face it. But, why is the human world incongruous?

The reason is as simple as it is unavoidable. Things human need to be approached in two opposite ways. According to a luminous and basic truth: All human beings are equal. Different grounds have been offered for this abstract postulate: that we all are God’s creatures; that we are all free; that we all have the same nature and are thus liable to suffer and, to cut short the list, that we have the same human rights.

But concrete experience shows an approach based on another luminous truth, ironically formulated by George Orwell as “some are more equal than others”. The grounds advanced for this vary: only we belong to the true religion or, indeed, to no religion; to this or that country, gender, social class, political party or, to this or that profession, and so the list goes on.

We need to speak of ourselves as having different identities or lifestyles. The concept of prejudice is closely linked to that of identity or, if you prefer, lifestyle. There is no identity without its foundation of prejudices. In the case of personal identity, each individual human being is only equal to him or herself. All cultures rightly signal the birth and





Some are more equal than others.

death of their members in a special fashion. Every time a new human being is born something unique has come into existence. And each time one of us dies something unique has gone out of it.

**Humour:  
mirror of our identities**

Among other things, human equality means that we are all liable to suffer. This is where Black Humour enters the stage, in its two forms. One manifests itself when we laugh at incongruities related to our own suffering so as to distance ourselves from it. This human capacity has been widely documented. Even in Nazi extermination camps, some prisoners joked about their pre-

dicament. The other form of Black Humour involves laughing to come close to the suffering of others. Such was the case, for example, with the jokes about anthropophagy made by Chileans in 1973 when, over two months after their plane crashed in the Andes, a few surviving members of a Uruguayan rugby team were found. Chileans were laughing with the young survivors, and not laughing at the victims of such a horrible experience. Black Humour reflects human equality, under which lurks the reality of human suffering.

Exit Black Humour, and enter its counterpart: Prejudiced Humour. The interaction between different human identities often presents as

ridiculous the peculiar practices of different lifestyles. Take Schopenhauer’s story about the “White Man” and the “Red Indian”. Upon seeing him leave food on his ancestor’s grave, the former asks whether the tribe expects the deceased to return from death and eat it. After smiling silently for an instant, the “Red Indian” replies: “Sure, the same day your ancestors will return from death to look at the beautiful flowers your tribe puts on their graves”. By laughing with Prejudiced Humour at alien practices we keep a distance from human identities or lifestyles different from our own.

Rational argument only becomes possible between those who, to an extent, share the same sense of humour; that is to say, agreement on what is worth taking seriously and what only deserves a laugh. But what is serious and what is comic has more to do with the diversity of ways in which we live (that is to say, with our identities), than with the way we reason and think (that is to say with our nature as human beings). Perhaps this is what Cicero suggested when he claimed that “there is nothing so ridiculous but some philosopher has said it.

**Dr M. E. Orellana Benado,**  
Associate professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Chile.



Ridiculous or just different?

Philosophy cannot make people honest, believes British Professor Peter J. King, author of *100 Philosophers: a guide to the greatest thinkers of humanity*. But it gives us the tools to defend ourselves against those who are neither benevolent nor truthful ...who wish to manipulate us.

# PETER J. KING

## PHILOSOPHY AGAINST MANIPULATION

The term “philosophy” is used in a wide variety of ways, even in academic contexts; in what follows I shall use it to refer to a particular kind of approach to questions, concepts, problems, and issues. As I understand it, then, philosophy is an activity, a process not a product; it aims at clear, impartial analysis and argument. Its subject matter is extremely varied, but in general it deals with matters at a higher level of abstraction and generality than other disciplines. Thus while, for example, a physical scientist makes observations, devises experiments, develops theories, etc., the philosopher of science tackles such matters as the analysis and examination of the nature of observation and theory and the relationship between them, the role of experimentation, and the very nature of the scientific enterprise.

But if philosophy is simply a matter of thinking clearly and without bias, practitioners of other disciplines are surely justified in protesting that they are as able to do that as is the philosopher. One response is that indeed they are – but having the ability is one thing, having the time and the inclination is another. Philosophical education is in large part a training in patience, rigour, and thoroughness; the philosopher must be prepared to take great and often lengthy pains to work through complex analyses of concepts and arguments – and most people have neither the time nor the temperament to do that. Another response

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Peter J. King (United Kingdom).

is that, while other disciplines typically involve techniques of thought and analysis specific to a certain subject matter or goal, as well, of course, as a mass of knowledge of facts, theories, practical skills, etc., philosophy is wholly general, aiming to prepare its practitioners to investigate anything.

Of course, neither philosophical ability nor the willingness to use it are confined to professional philosophers; indeed, when non-profes-

sionals philosophise they are quite capable of producing results at least as important as those of their professional counterparts.

***Thinking is one thing, thinking clearly quite another***

In fact professional philosophers, as a result of many pressures, not least the intense pressure to publish, too often find themselves delving into increasingly technical treatments of

increasingly narrow issues, the result generally being notable only for its triviality and aridity.

It might also be objected that, if philosophising is just a matter of thinking about things, then all human beings are philosophers. Aren't we all *Homo sapiens*? Don't we all think? Thinking, however, is one thing, thinking clearly, dispassionately, and disinterestedly quite another. A quick trip to the Internet will bring this home. Look at almost any discussion in any forum, and you will find not only prejudice and partiality, but also a failure on the part of most participants to develop sound arguments of their own or to understand the arguments of others. Not only are many people unwilling to listen to, understand, and consider the positions and arguments of those with whom they disagree – they seem simply to be unable to do so. Astonishing non sequiturs are commonplace, as are the confluences of distinct positions, simple logical fallacies, and an inability to spot such flaws in the arguments of others.

**Philosophy as a protection**

The ability to philosophise is useless, however, without the right aims and objectives. For example, the philosophising of a good person may help her to perform the right actions, but no amount of rigour, patience, and analytic ability

will turn a bad person into a good one. The philosophical method is simply a tool, which can be used – expertly or inexpertly – to do good or ill. Philosophy, as Socrates and Plato discovered the hard way, cannot make people good or truthful; education won't turn a dictator into a philosopher king, but may simply turn him into a more efficient dictator. Dictators rarely oppress whole populations; rather, they persuade part of their population to help with the oppression of the rest, and they generally do this by presenting spurious arguments and flimsy but specious claims. Politicians in democracies use the same techniques to try to win elections. What philosophy can do is help us to defend ourselves against those who wish to manipulate us, against those who are neither benevolent nor truthful. It cannot make people honest, but

it gives us the tools with which to discover their dishonesty.

Of course, philosophy offers great scope for the enrichment of the philosopher's life, and many would argue that this is its most important feature. (It can also be extremely absorbing, and even fun.) Moreover, its breadth and reach mean that it has many roles for us today, some potential and some actual. With regard to the world beyond itself, though, whether in the field of politics or of religion, of commerce or of ethics, its usefulness lies primarily in the protection it offers against those who would, intentionally or otherwise, cloud our thoughts and lead us into error..

**Dr Peter J. King,**  
Pembroke College, Oxford



A discussion forum on the internet.



Philosophy gives us the tools to discover dishonesty.

The confusion prevailing in particular in political discourse makes it possible to claim “the right to offend”<sup>1</sup> or to ascribe different meanings to the same terms: freedom of expression, laïcité, terror etc. Philosophy can provide the tools against this misuse which has crucial results for practice, believes Turkish philosopher Ioanna Kuçuradi.

## IOANNA KUÇURADI: A SISYPHEAN TASK



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Ioanna Kuçuradi (Turkey).

Interest in philosophy has increased all over the world in the past few decades. To deal with philosophy, especially with so-called applied philosophy and ethics, has become fashionable. Thus philosophy has moved out of its ivory tower into the open air.

This development is double-edged. On the one hand it helps increase the number of people who try to reflect on what is going on around them, but on the other this popularization of philosophy, can be dangerous: any unscrutinized or confused thought dares present itself as philosophy. The main role of philosophy is, I think, to shed a strong light on what is going on in the world –a light that also makes it possible to see the ethical el-

ements inherent in all human relations and action– and thus help us better understand what has to be done –or what can be done– in a given concrete situation, so that human beings can live with dignity. If philosophy wishes to play this role, what are philosophers' special tasks?

### **A mish mash of words**

One of the issues that philosophers are expected to deal with is the conceptual confusion prevailing in all areas of human endeavour, but above all in political and semi-political discourse. This confusion makes it easier to use words expressing certain concepts and ideas, in order to hide interests. To fight this misuse of words we need clear concepts.

It is widely assumed that, in the social and human sciences, there cannot be any “definitions accepted by everybody”. The lack of such definitions has crucial results for practice. For example, it makes it possible to speak of “the right to offend”<sup>1</sup> or to ascribe different meanings to the same terms according to interests, as often happens at present with terms like freedom of expression, laïcité, terror etc. Perhaps there are no epistemically justifiable definitions, but this does not mean that none can be made. And making them is a typical job for philosophers. Another term fraught with problems is “value”. People –including many philosophers– call value what they assume to be “good”. In an age in which the search for meaning leads people to become suicide bombers, fully grasping the concept of value and that linked to ethical values is another task expected from philosophers.

An urgent task for philosophers at present is to explain the different kinds of norms. If we are aware of the

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Conceptual confusion prevails.



Philosophers face a Sisyphean task.

epistemological differences among them, we can no longer put human rights norms and cultural norms in the same pot, and consequently claim

that human rights are “European values” that are quite different from “Asian values”.

### **Clear concepts and ethical values**

To produce norms is not a task for philosophers. However, it is their task, and an inexhaustible task, indeed – to develop philosophical ethics, i.e. to put forth philosophical knowledge of the human ethical phenomenon.

We can force people to behave according to norms, but we cannot force them to act ethically, i.e. to treat others as ends in themselves and not only as means to an end. To act ethi-

cally, individuals have to come to grips with themselves, through knowledge of philosophical ethical values. One of the aims of philosophical education should be to help people do so.

Philosophy needs to provide clear concepts and knowledge of ethical values for mankind, so that individuals become able to grasp the problems in what is going on in the world, reflect on the problems and, if they can manage it, take ethical decisions and act ethically.

**Dr Ioanna Kuçuradi,**

President of

the Philosophical Society of Turkey.

“Islamizing” modernity instead of modernizing Islam – preposterous! worries Professor Mohammed Arkoun. A refuge in poor countries, a rejection of “tele-techno-scientific reasoning” in rich countries, religiosity is spreading in the world at the expense of humanist values and philosophical thinking.

## MOHAMMED ARKOUN : PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION, BETWEEN EXCHANGE AND TENSION

Philosophical thought and religious thought have a long history in common in the Mediterranean world. Since they emerged respectively in Greece and in the Middle East, they have affronted, confronted and enriched each other. The exchanges and tensions between them continue to this day, but there are nonetheless signs of exhaustion versus the triumphant free market and computer civilization.

Concerning exchange, the two great philosophical bodies of knowledge, the Platonic and the Aristotelian, were key for the construction of Jewish, Christian and Islamic theologies, beginning with the circulation of the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament) established between 250-130 B.C. in Alexandrian Judaism



Mohammed Arkoun (Algeria).

and the transmission in Greek of the Gospels deemed authentic by the Christian church.

And as far as tension between philosophical reasoning and theological reasoning, it also marked the three currents of thought – Jewish, Christian and Islamic – as illustrated in the works of Averroes (1126-1198), Maimonides (1135-1204) and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274).

In Islam, the rise of the brotherhoods beginning in the 13th century brought about a regression of theological reasoning and the elimination of the Greek philosophical culture. The latter is still struggling to get “reacclimatized”, even at university level. In Latin and Christian Europe, it was philosophy that gained ground to the point of marginalizing theology when the revolution of the Enlightenment came about, and even more after the separation of church and secular state.

In Christianity, theological thought is increasingly forced to follow in the wake of human and social sciences. This is not the case with Islam, where the apologetic and fundamentalist currents reject colonial and Western sciences as destructive forces against Islamic tradition. To the point that they espouse the idea of Islamizing modernity rather than modernizing Islam.

### **Marginalization of thought**

The multiple revolutions introduced by computers and population growth in poor countries have overturned what sociologists call the

social frameworks of thought and knowledge. Considerable gaps continue to widen between rich countries and countries left at the mercy of the negative side-effects of the free market and consumerism.

In countries under the boot of authoritarian, not to say rogue, regimes, the return of traditional religion can be interpreted as the quest for refuge, social protection and moral and psychological reference points. Religion is a refuge, including for the opposition, a springboard to satisfying social and political ambition. The result is deterioration of spiritual values, which are deprived of critical cultural and intellectual support.

But we can see that populist and superstitious religion is on the rise even in the richest societies, such as the United States. The undisputed victory of “tele-techno-scientific” reasoning reinforces the expansion of religiosity in rich and super-developed countries, and the marginalization of thought and philosophical culture.

Recently-published statistics on the distribution of baccalaureate degrees in France show that 52% of the students who earned degrees in 2007 came from scientific curricula, and only 16% from literary education. France and Italy are the only two countries I know of where philosophy is taught in high school. There is as much disinterest for this discipline as there is for history, another key discipline in what used to be called the humanities,

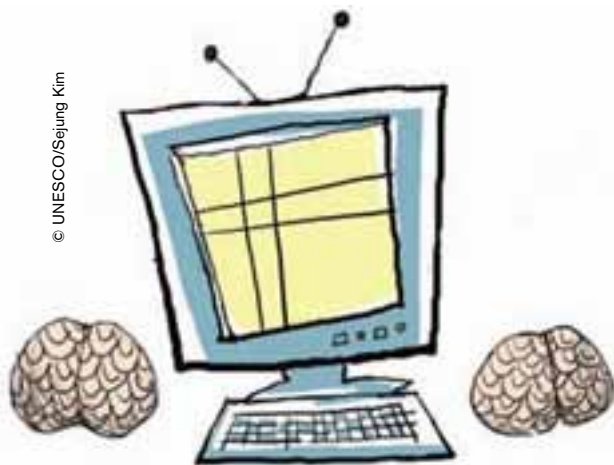
referring to culture and humanist comportment. According to other statistics from countries that are trying to develop, many of the young people involved in Islamist combat groups have scientific backgrounds. Everywhere the state encourages this orientation to promote economic development and fight against unemployment.

### **A widening gap**

As a historian of Islamic thought, I can testify that between 1970 and 2000, I could measure from year to year at the Sorbonne the increasing impoverishment of historical knowledge and historical, sociological and anthropological reasoning. I also noted an almost total lack of everything that nourishes epistemological criticism in the whole of scientific production. When this criticism does manifest itself, it is too technical for readers to feel involved. These are all factors accelerating the primacy of “tele-techno-scientific” education and the victory of the knowledge of experts versus humanist concerns that are inseparable from philosophical disquiet.

It is true that most professionals in philosophy don't offer writing that is easily accessible to the general public. Those who do are treated condescendingly by the guardians of philosophical gravitas. The conferences in which I've taken part at UNESCO and elsewhere have led me to feeling certain that the gap between the general public's expectations and innovative philosophical production is more likely to get wider than narrower in the near future. This observation applies just as much to pragmatic cultures as it does to societies that are the victims of the rise of ritualistic religions with populist tendencies.

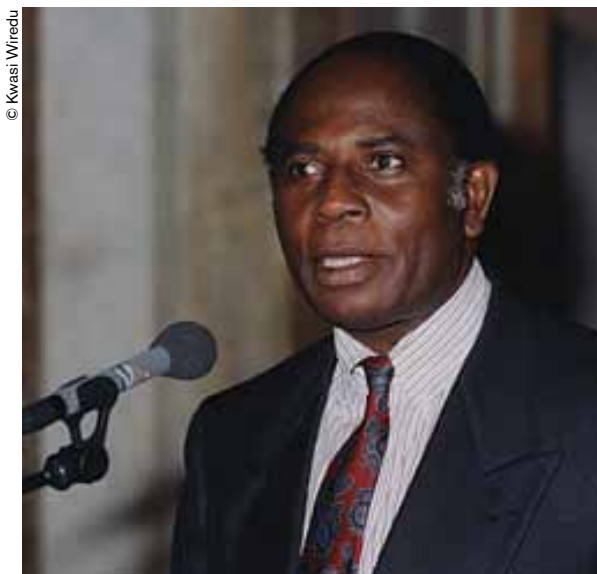
**Dr Mohammed Arkoun,**  
(Algeria), historian of Islamic thought, teaches at the Sorbonne Nouvelle University in Paris.



The victory of “tele-techno-scientific” reasoning.

# KWASI WIREDU : FOSTERING INTERCULTURAL UNDERSTANDING THROUGH DIALOGUE

If the logical independence of morality from religion were to be generally understood, some of the ferocity of current conflicts might be reduced, says Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu.



© Kwasi Wiredu

Kwasi Wiredu.

Ideally, philosophy is both a critical and reconstructive discipline. Being critical does not just mean being apt to criticize the beliefs and reasonings of other people; it also means being self-critical, in dialogue with oneself. This implies also being in dialogue with others, be they members of one's culture or one's school of thought or of other cultures or schools of thought.

In today's world, dialogue between people of different cultures and schools of thought is an urgent necessity. Dialogue is needed not necessarily to bring about agreement but at least to bring about an understanding of the plurality of belief and non-belief and respect (not just tolerance) for them in principle. Just think of the consequences of the absence of dialogue in international and intra-national conflicts in the world today.

## ***Dialogue is not just an exchange of ideas***

Philosophers need to argue not only the necessity for dialogue but also explain its nature. Dialogue is not just the exchange of ideas. A quarrelling group may be actively exchanging ideas, but will be far from dialogue; so would a group indulging in mutual admiration. In both cases the discussions are not dedicated to acquiring knowledge about truth or goodness for the sake of desirable human relations. These, then, are necessary conditions of dialogue. But there are other necessary conditions. Dialogue must be based on rational discussion. Such a discussion is impossible unless the parties acknowledge the possibility that they might be wrong and the other right. We all know this attitude of mind does not come easily.

One of the severest impediments

to dialogue is dogmatism, and it is, or ought to be, the role of philosophers to find an antidote to it. Dogmatism is not just holding a belief with a strong conviction; rather it is holding it with a conviction so strong that it rules out the possibility of error. It can be encountered in all spheres of human thinking, including philosophy (in the broad acceptance of this term). And ridding human thought of dogmatism is one of philosophy's objectives, in the strict conception of the discipline.

## ***An antidote to dogmatism***

As matters stand now, conflicting dogmatisms fight interminably. When, for example, contending parties armed with mutually incompatible divine 'revelations' as to the nature of the good life engage each other, the refractory character of the situation is due in large measure to a shared sense of infallibility.

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Dialogue must be based on rational discussion.

There are at least three layers of error here.

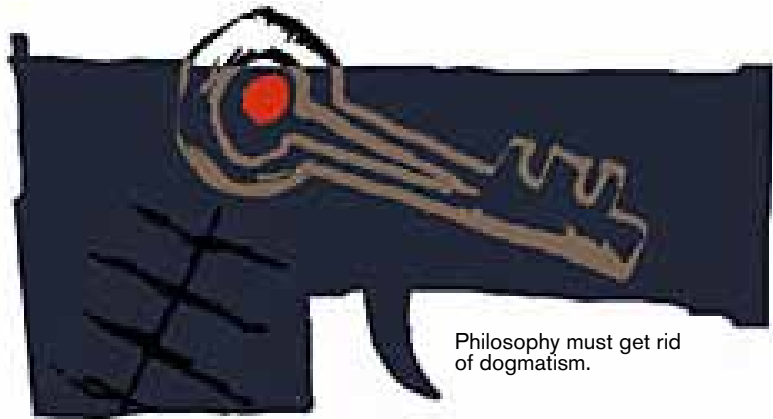
First, allegedly infallible individuals are not supposed to have any need of dialogue among themselves, and the fallible, presumably,

have no standing before the infallible. But Philosophy has the duty and ability to dismantle the pretensions to infallibility, for the claims here are human, all too human. And the fact is that “To err is human.”

Second, a great many of these conflicts arise when the contingent customs of one group’s life-style are made into universal laws of recititude mandatory for all. To generate an adequate appreciation of this distinction would be half the battle of intercultural understanding won. This, to be sure, is a philosophical task.

The third layer of error is the most difficult to deal with. It is the subordination of morality to religion, known in contemporary Western philosophy as the divine command theory of morals. In sum, it says that what is morally right is, by definition, what is commanded by God.

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Philosophy must get rid of dogmatism.

Socrates in Plato’s Euthyphro tried to discourage such a conception by pointing out, in his dialectical manner, that it involved the absurdity that an action’s moral quality has nothing to do with its nature. On this score, Socrates has been generally persuasive among philosophers, but not among some leaders of opinion.

Even though the subordination of morality to religion is not unchallenged in the Western world and is, in fact, non-existent in some

non-Western cultures, such as in at least some parts of Africa, philosophy still has plenty of work to do in this matter. Perhaps, if the logical independence of morality from religion were to be generally understood, some of the ferocity of current conflicts might be reduced.

**Kwasi Wiredu,**

Distinguished Professor  
in the Department of Philosophy  
at the University of South Florida,  
Tampa, Florida).

## WOO-TAK KEE : TOWARDS A PHILOSOPHY OF UNIVERSALITY

It is the philosopher’s task to “recover humanity” believes South-Korean philosopher Woo-Tak Kee who recommends a world philosophy for a world community. A philosophy that should play an important part in the universality within cultural diversity.

© UNESCO/Michel Ravassard



Woo-Tak Kee (Republic of Korea).

In the world’s spiritual history, what era could have made philosophers agonize as much over the issue of human nature as the current one? Various crimes caused by the contempt of human lives throughout the world - the 9/11 terrors of 2001, recent massacre at Virginia Tech, threats from nuclear weapons and the almost daily occurrences of carnages in Iraq – are calamities brought upon humans by other humans. They should have been inconceivable in the civilized society of the 21st century. In the face of these tragedies, philosophers must provide a solution. Life,





Humanity stands somewhere between divinity and bestiality.

whether it is your own or another's, is equally precious. Manslaughter is the worst case of obliterating human nature and an extreme rejection of peace.

We can't help but search for the cause of this destruction of humanity in the innate duplicity of human nature. This duplicity while it gives humans an unflagging will for the good, also gives way to their weakness when tempted to seek "the radical evil" tenaciously lurking within human nature. Therefore, there can be few, if any, objections to the assertion that a key proposition of this era should be the "recovery of human nature."

Confucius said: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others." And Immanuel Kant said: "Always recognize that human individuals are ends, and do not use them as means to your end." According to these teachings human nature is noble and subject to reverence.

## Recovering humanity

The secret in the recovery of human nature is evasive, as humanity stands somewhere between divinity (morality) and bestiality. It is thus an important task of today's men and women to cast away their bestial (carnal) inclinations elevate themselves to moral characters and maintain balanced personalities by encouraging reflection on human nature.

The philosophy of "recovering humanity" through nurturing mo-

ph, and for this purpose, I think it very important for the three East Asian nations of China, Japan and Korea to pursue the integration of a common cultural sphere and jointly examine how to evaluate modern values contained in the heritage of Confucian culture, as represented by the teachings of Confucius and Mencius.

There is a limit to the roles that religion and politics can play in resolving conflicts among human cultures. So it's the philosophers' role to provide solutions. They should elaborate a philosophy of universality for global villagers to prevent war and to serve as the basis for individuals' rights.

Therefore, the creation of world philosophy is more urgent than anything else. It implies first of all breaking the wall between Eastern and Western philosophical traditions and facilitating mutual understanding and communication between the two heterogeneous cultures. To give shape to "World Philosophy", a proper fusion of Western and Eastern values is necessary. In other words, if Western values stand for liberalism and individualism, Eastern values are closer to collectivism and communalism. Still, this dichotomic analysis can never be absolute, as Western values contain elements of Eastern values and there can be Western characteristics, too, within the components of Eastern values.

## Against philosophical exclusivity

To resolve such cultural conflicts, it is first necessary to form a pan-Asian philosophy as the premise for establishing World Philoso-

phy, and for this purpose, I think it very important for the three East Asian nations of China, Japan and Korea to pursue the integration of a common cultural sphere and jointly examine how to evaluate modern values contained in the heritage of Confucian culture, as represented by the teachings of Confucius and Mencius.

The discussion of the Universality of Philosophy is based on the global village theory to form a global community. The progress in today's information and transportation technology, and the sweeping wave of globalization have made the fences of nationalism and regionalism not tenable any longer. Philosophy must adapt to the new information society and the pursuit of cultural globalization and universality should emerge as the grand proposition that brings together today's philosophies, a prerequisite for the birth of the Universality of Philosophy.

The role of the Universality of Philosophy will be to seek, above all, harmony and unity that enable humans to escape from cultural antagonism and conflicts as well as to avoid philosophical, religious and cultural exclusiveness in their search of universality amid cultural diversity.

**Dr Woo-Tak Kee,**

Professor at the Hong-Ik University,  
Seoul, Republic of Korea.



Philosophy must recover humanity.

# Philosophers' corner

Over more than a decade, "The UNESCO Courier" spoke with some of the world's leading thinkers and collected their views about the major issues we must contend with today. Here is a selection of their insights.



Peter Paul Rubens, self-portrait with Justus Lipsius, Philip Rubens, and Jan Woverius, known as The Four Philosophers.

## **Edgar Morin, January 2004**

The challenges of communication in today's complex world are explored in a conversation with this French sociologist and philosopher.

## **Fernando Savater, July-August 2001**

The Spanish Basque philosopher speaks out against minorities whose violent ideology is fragmenting humanity and undermining the rule of law.

## **Michael Walzer, January 2000**

The French historian reminds us of the important contribution of Arab-Islamic thinkers to the development of medieval European philosophy.

## **Alain de Libera, February 1997**

The French historian reminds us of the important contribution of Arab-Islamic thinkers to the development of medieval European philosophy.

## **Umberto Eco, June 1993**

Writing since the 1950s, the Italian author rose to world fame when his 1980 novel *The Name of the Rose* was translated into 22 languages. In this interview, he talks about his other major interest, semiotics.

# Philosophers celebrated by UNESCO

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Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Balkhi-Rumi.

## 800th anniversary of the birth of Rumi (1207-1273)

"I do not distinguish between the relative and the stranger," said the illustrious Persian-language poet, thinker and spiritual leader Mawlana Jalal-ud-Din Balkhi-Rumi. Born in 1207 in Balkh, now Afghanistan, he lived almost all of his life in Konya, presently Turkey, where he died in 1273. He remains one of the greatest thinkers and scholars of Islamic civilization.

## 100th anniversary of the birth of Ladislav Hanus (1907-1994)

Ladislav Hanus, Slovak philosopher and theologian, is best-known for his major work *The Philosophy of Refinement*. After spending 16 years in jail under the communist regime during which he was prevented from writing, he resumed his philosophical and theological endeavours when the regime fell and published two substantial books, "Church as a Symbol" and "The Principle of Pluralism."

## 150th anniversary of the death of Danzanravjaa Dulduitiin, philosopher (1803-1856)

A Buddhist thinker with many talents, ranging from music to architecture and philo-

**Since 1956, UNESCO celebrates the memory of eminent personalities from all over the world. In the last five years, it has taken part in commemorations of several philosophers from various cultures who have influenced the thinking of humanity down through the ages.**

sophy to the theatre, Danzanravjaa Dulduitiin exerted an important influence on thought and culture, well beyond the borders of Mongolia. After studying art, letters and philosophy, he took up residence in the 1820s in the Galbyn Uul monastery, which became a local centre for education, culture and art. He also founded a theatre troupe, a library and a school in the Khamar monastery, near which now stands a museum commemorating him.

## 200th anniversary of the death of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

A major 18th century philosopher, Immanuel Kant is a pillar of Western philosophy. A disciple of Hume and Rousseau, he wrote notably "Answering the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in which he wrote "Enlightenment is man's emergence from self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity and dependence are the inability to use one's own intellect without the direction of another. One is responsible for this immaturity and dependence, if its cause is not a lack of intelligence, but a lack of determination and courage to think without the direction of another. Sapere aude! Dare to know! is therefore the slogan of the Enlightenment."

## 600th anniversary of Leone Battista Alberti (1404-1472)

An Italian Renaissance humanist, Leone Battista Alberti was an author, philosopher, painter, architect and art theoretician. He is known primarily for his treatises, including *De picture* (1435), considered the first scientific study of perspective. Giorgio Vasari, author of *Vite*, the first art history work in Europe, wrote in 1550 about Alberti that he was a highly civilized and very cultured person, a friend to the talented, affable and liberal towards all: he lived honorably as the gentleman he was.

## 100th anniversary of the birth of Theodor Adorno (1903-1969)

German philosopher, sociologist, composer and musicologist, Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund-Adorno was one of the first to think about the memory of Auschwitz as a fundamental element of German identity, and even European identity. Nazism, he said, imposed a new categorical imperative on humanity: to think and to act so that Auschwitz would not repeat itself, so that nothing similar could happen."

## 1000th anniversary of the birth of Nasir Khusraw (1003-1087)

Abu Mo'in Hamid ad-Din Nasir ibn Khusraw al-Qubadiani (Iran) or Abdulmuiddin Nosiri Khosrav (Tajikistan), eminent philosopher, poet and theologian in the Persian language, produced more than 40 treatises that exerted great influence on Persian culture and thought. His most famous work is "Safarnama", or "Book of Travels." In the book, which has been translated into over 30 languages, Nasir Khusraw describes the places he visited (Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem, etc) and portrays the people he met, against a background of philosophical, religious and humanist reflection.

## 900th anniversary of the birth of Khodja Abdulkholiq Al-Gijduvoni (1103-1079)

Khodja Abdulkholiq Al-Gijduvoni, founder of the Sufi school Khodjagons Tarigot (dervish path) in Central Asia, is famous for having taught the ways of tolerance and peace. His writings include philosophical and moral works as well as poetry. He was born and lived in Bukhara, Uzbekistan.



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