C I R E T

CENTRE INTERNATIONAL DE RECHERCHES ET ÉTUDES TRANSDISCIPLINAIRES

VENICE DECLARATION (1986)

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Final Communiqué of the Symposium

SCIENCE AND THE BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE :

THE PROLOGUE OF OUR CULTURAL PAST

Venice, 7 March 1986

The participants in the symposium "Science and the Boundaries of Knowledge: the Prologue of our Cultural Past", organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the Giorgio Cini Foundation (Venice, 3-7 March 1986), in a spirit of openmindedness and enquiry concerning today's values, have agreed on the following points:

1

We are witnessing a very important revolution in the field of science brought about by basic science (in particular by developments in physics and biology), by the upheavals it has wrought in logic, in epistemology and in everyday life through its technological applications. We note at the same time, however, a significant gap between a new world view emerging from the study of natural systems and the values that continue to prevail in philosophy, in the human and social sciences and in the life of modern society, values largely based on mechanistic determinism, positivism, or nihilism. We believe that this discrepancy is harmful and indeed dangerous for the very survival of our species.

2

Scientific knowledge, on its own internal impetus, has reached the point where it can begin a dialogue with other forms of knowledge. In this sense, and while recognizing the fundamental differences between Science and Tradition, we see them as complementary rather than in contradiction. This new and mutually enriching exchange between science and the different traditions of the world opens the door to a new vision of humanity, and even to a new rationalism, which could lead to a new metaphysical perspective.

3

While not wishing to attempt a global approach, nor to establish a closed system of thought, nor to invent a new Utopia, we recognize the pressing need for truly transdisciplinary research through a dynamic exchange between the natural sciences, the social sciences, art and tradition. It could be said that this transdisciplinary mode is inherent in our brain through the dynamic interaction of its two hemispheres. Joint investigation of nature and of the imagination, of the universe and of man, might thus bring us closer to reality and enable us better to meet the various challenges of our time.

4

The conventional way of teaching science by a linear presentation of knowledge masks the divorce between today's science and world views which are outdated. We stress the need for new educational methods to take into account current scientific progress, now coming into harmony with the great cultural traditions, the

preservation and in-depth study of which appear essential. UNESCO would be the appropriate organization to promote such ideas.

5

The challenges of our time - the risk of destruction of our species, the impact of data processing, the implications of genetics, etc. - throw a new light on the social responsibilities of the scientific community, both in the initiation and application of research. Although scientists may have no control over the applications of their own discoveries, they must not remain passive when confronted with the haphazard use of what they have discovered. It is our view that the magnitude of today's challenges requires, on the one hand, a reliable and steady flow of information to the public, and, on the other hand, the establishment of multi- and transdiciplinary mechanisms for the guidance and even the carrying out of decision-making.

6

We hope that UNESCO will consider this encounter as a starting point and will encourage further reflexion in a spirit of transdisciplinarity and universality.

Participants

D.A. **Akyeampong** (*Ghana*)

Ubiratan **d'Ambrosio** (*Brazil*)

René **Berger** (*Switzerland*)

Nicolo **Dallaporta** (*Italy*)

Jean **Dausset** (*France*)
Nobel Prize for Physiology et Medicine

Maitreyi **Devi** (*India*)

Gilbert **Durand** (*France*)

Santiago **Genovès** (*Mexico*)

Susantha **Goonatilake** (*Sri Lanka*)

Avishai **Ma**

Yujiro **Nak**

Basarab **Nic**

David **Otte**

Abdus **Sal**
Nobel Pri

Rupert **Sheldrak**

Henry **Stapp** (*Un*

David **Suz**

Participating Observers : Michel Random (France) and Jacques Richardson (France - United States of America)