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When all the world was Europe: the tasks of the sciences and arts in the global millennium

Peter Caws, The George Washington University

Let me begin by thanking the organizers of this conference for the opportunity to address all of you in the context of the “study of European ideas.” European ideas are of course not confined to Europe; ideas are not in the first place regional or national, and I have had occasion in the past to argue the right of scholars and critics from anywhere to analyze and challenge ideas arising anywhere else. I have taken comfort in this claim from a small point in the Platonic corpus, namely the assignment of the main voice in the last of the dialogues to the “Athenian stranger” (1), from which I have derived what I take to be a general principle, namely that the philosopher should be a stranger in his or her own country, even in Athens, the original home of philosophy. But this is no alienation: as I once put it, I may be a stranger in Athens, but at the same time I can be at home in the universe.

I want nevertheless to reflect for a moment on my, and our, special relation to Europe. We find ourselves today in the corner of the Mediterranean where, between Greece and Asia minor, philosophical thought first flourished. I myself grew up peripherally European, as it were, in the United Kingdom, with its complex history of belonging and not belonging in Europe (given the recent problems of the euro zone, its reluctance to embrace the common currency begins to seem prescient). But I have spent the whole of my working life in the United States, that gigantic and often clumsy offshoot of Europe which on more than one occasion has come to Europe’s rescue and has just as often been Europe’s despair. In this address, as in my own life, there will be a certain amount of coming and going as between Europe and America.

My title today is a variant of something that John Locke once said about America: “Thus in the beginning all the world was America, and more so than that is now; for no such thing as money was anywhere known” (2). (The money will come back later.) It fell to me in 1976, the 200th anniversary of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, to organize a symposium in New York devoted to American philosophy as an American phenomenon. I was not at that time an American citizen, but I had come to admire not only the serious contributions that American scholars had made to philosophy, but also and more especially the way in which the political foundations of the United States rested on the European philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries. I was proud to be associated with that tradition. In the introduction to the Proceedings of the symposium I referred to Locke’s hopeful vision of America as “a fertile land whose bounty precluded the greed of private property,” but I ended on a more reflective note: “if Locke could say that in the beginning all the world was America, there have also been, it is true, those who have prophesied with gloom that in the end, too, all the world will be America: Americanized, flooded with American mass culture and American technology. But it may be that in these respects, as in the revolution itself, America was only, and accidentally, a few steps ahead along a path the rest of the world was sooner or later to follow in any case” (3).

There is something uncanny about the way the United States, always considered by Europeans a “new” country (and sometimes very sensitive to that adjective) has had a habit of leading the rest of the world, not only by having its Revolution before the French one (and before the British Reform Bills) so that it counts as the oldest constitutional democracy in the world after Iceland, but also in having its Civil War before what I have come to think of as the European civil wars: the Franco-Prussian War and what became known as the First and Second World Wars. I call these “civil wars” by hindsight: they were, like the War between the States, violent and bloody conflicts essentially between relatives (think how many of the heads of state in World War I were related to Queen Victoria), the eventual outcome of which was the consolidation of a Union. For there can be no doubt that behind the negotiations entered into by Jean Monnet and others in the early days of what is now the European Union lay a resolve not to allow future examples of the kind of internecine struggle that had wrecked Europe and decimated its generations. It should be remembered, at a time when the internal politics and economics of Europe have become so strained, that this resolve has been largely rewarded.

Let me complete, then, the citation I just interrupted: “it may be that America was only, and accidentally, a few steps ahead on a path the rest of the world was sooner or later to follow in any case, whose end is not yet in sight and whose direction may be changed by rational action.” That was 36 years ago. Perhaps I was too optimistic, at least in the short run. But there is a long run too, not just the Keynesian one in which we are all dead but one we are well placed to contemplate at this particular moment of history: a moment of crisis (but then what historical moment isn’t? “crisis” being after all only the Greek for “decision,” and decisiveness being a recurrent need) but also a moment of reflection. My title also speaks of “the global millennium,”

and that may give you a hint as to the kind of perspective I want to encourage. Let me dwell on that last thought from 1976: “whose end is not yet in sight and whose direction may be changed by rational action,” an evocation on the one hand of the course of world history, and on the other of rationality itself.

First, world history, and a millennial perspective. Our sense of history is corrupted by an unfortunate system of dates, which gets everything out of proportion. It is the year 2012, the beginning of the third millennium A.D. - that “A.D.” should trouble us more than it usually does - and the foreshortened perspective induced by that date makes us regard a mere couple of thousand years as a very long time. So we think we ought to respect the antiquity of the major sacred texts, Jewish or Christian or Islamic, all of which are on the one hand trivially recent in the light of what is known of the life of human beings on earth, while on the other they embody beliefs that are crude and primitive in the light of what has been discovered since about those human beings and their life and the earth on which they live it. We have a similarly short-term view of the future, taking various scenarios - World War III, the Second Coming of Christ, the colonization of space, and more recently the economic collapse of the European Union - as somehow looming. The more practical and prudent attitude is to settle down to deal with things as they are, without unrealistic expectations. I am suggesting that our system of dates makes this harder than it should be. The third millennium would still be only the second if we were to follow the tradition of the Prophet, and it would already be the sixth if we were to follow the rabbinic tradition, which developed as a reaction to the calculations of Dionysius Exiguus in the sixth century when he worked out the current A.D calendar (as I read the situation the rabbis were alarmed that Christianity seemed to be claiming world historical status, and decided to construct their own timeline).

But even the sixth millennium makes all our history much too recent. So I make a modest proposal (the echo of Swift is not unwelcome, though mine is less gruesome): why should we not add ten thousand years to our present system of dating, which would make our new millennium not the third but the thirteenth? (It is actually about the 150th in terms of the story of Homo sapiens sapiens, but nothing much was happening for most of that time). This change would be very simple - we would just put an extra 1 in front of all our years, so this would be 12012 instead of 2012. The extra ten millennia would take us back roughly to the end of the last Ice Age, which was about when civilisation had a chance to get started, instead of to the sort of miracle story that now anchors all the dominant world histories - geriatric sex, virgin birth, angels talking to shepherds.

Then we could take a longer view. The prospects for humanity would not be end-stopped by some looming fate, or by some fantasy about an escape to the stars (that might happen very many years from now, but not for many people and certainly not for any of us – and it might also happen that with prudent management the earth would be enough for us and our descendants into the indefinite future), So far we have only used up twelve years of what I am calling the global

millennium, and for the first time we really are in a position to understand the long-term processes that affect the Earth – its atmosphere, its geology, its climate, and its fauna - and to confront, if only we could find the will to collaborate with one another, the large-scale problems that face us. One of these is obviously global warming, but in my mind two others take precedence over it: the population problem and the education problem.

It struck me the other day, with the force of a new realization (though in a way I must have known it all along) that while when I was born the population of the world was two billion, it is now seven billion – and that is just within one brief lifetime. The education problem is clearly linked to the population one, in that the understanding of the consequences of unlimited procreation, and of the methods of bringing it under control, is dependent on levels of literacy and the dissemination of medical technology. With the changed time-scale of my thirteen millennia we could begin a truly long-term project to see if, given sufficient forethought and adaptability, we could actually achieve something like a stable and sustainable world over the next few hundred years.

Of course I don't really expect anyone to adopt my numbering scheme – we have enough problems already without the chaos of adjustment and record-keeping that it would entail. But I would like you to take the idea behind it seriously, as I work through the connections between ideas and problems. Most people talking about Europe these days, I think you will agree, are more likely to be focusing on problems than on ideas, but we in the academy are fortunate to have the opportunity, I might say the luxury (but also the duty), to think calmly about their relevance to one another, and about the need to bring the ideas to bear on possible solutions to the problems. This challenge is implicit in the call for papers of our conference, which even suggests that it is at bottom an ethical challenge, and it is reflected in the middle part of my title, in which I refer to the tasks of the sciences and arts. I note here that the conference call specifies “Three Narratives - Art, Science, and Philosophy,” not just two, and that its overall thematic statement opposes the “literary-artistic” to the “scientific” as, in effect, fiction to fact. Both are assumed to be modes of arriving at relevant conclusions about aspects of the world we live in. Using the language of the “three-narratives” view, art and philosophy seem to belong to the former mode, science (obviously enough) to the latter. The tripartite division suits the situation better than the dualistic one just formulated, but it lends itself to another duality in which philosophy and science stand over against art as seeking cognitive closure in contrast to openness to new experience. By “closure” I do not mean any sort of definitive end to inquiry, only the establishment of provisional resting-places in which fresh investigations can find their points of departure. The difference between novelty in science and philosophy on the one hand, and novelty in art on the other, is that in the former case the inquiry must always be aware of the limitations imposed by the complementary structures of mind and world, whereas in the latter the whole thrust of activity is directed to transcending these limitations.

Back then to the connection between ideas and problems. The task of the sciences (the

plural is deliberate) is surely to generate and apply the ideas that will illuminate and with luck alleviate the problems. This brings me to the other theme of my Bicentennial meditation, the prospect of change by rational action. Reason as logos was the trademark of early Greek philosophy (I note in passing, but will not have time to develop, its competition with that other logos, from the opposite, non-European, shore of the Mediterranean – Alexandrian rather than Athenian, in Philo rather than in Plato and Aristotle - though that too is relevant to contemporary problems). Rationality, along with a capacity for politics, was taken to be a defining property of the human. In both cases – humans as rational animals and as political ones, in Aristotle’s language – the trait in question has to be cultivated. My focus for the moment is on the case of rationality.

It seems to me useful to distinguish two types of rationality, unevenly distributed in the population. One of them, which I call “problem-solving rationality,” enables the rational agent, when confronted with a problem, to come up with a solution to it. This is a comparatively rare gift. The other, however, is much more widely shared; it doesn’t enable agents to solve the problem for themselves, but it does equip them to judge, of a proffered solution, whether or not it really is a solution, and sometimes, as a variant, to judge as between two proffered solutions which is the better. I call this “solution-recognizing rationality.”

Now it must be obvious that a condition for deploying solution-recognizing rationality is the availability of some statement of the proffered solution or solutions. Without this the agent has nothing to judge. I have sometimes maintained that the whole business of education can be summed up as making the majority of the members of each generation (who can recognize solutions but do not have the ingenuity to arrive at them unaided) aware of all the candidate solutions discovered by their predecessors or contemporaries who were lucky enough to be endowed with the talent for devising them, and who were diligent enough to make use of their gifts and industrious enough to test and record their discoveries. If only we had access to all that accumulation since the beginning of civilization, and could agree on the criteria for the better solution in cases where there are more than one, we would conceivably be in better shape than we are.

What I now want to suggest is that the history of European ideas does in fact offer us candidates for the solution of many of our problems, and I propose to cite a number of basic texts to support this thought. I could have added in some American candidates – there is a rich trove in the work of Franklin, Jefferson, Emerson, James, Peirce, Dewey, and Rawls – but the Europeans will be enough to keep me going for this evening, and enough to sustain the pretense, not so far from the truth, that all the world might be still considered Europe. America was after all overrun by the English, the Spanish, the French, and the Portuguese – these at any rate were the major players, though there were some minor settlements (for example Swedes and Finns in Delaware, Dutchmen along the Hudson River, and Germans and Scandinavians in some Middle Western and Western states and provinces). All the dominant languages in the Americas are still

European - and still just those four. All the major American philosophers, well into the 20th century, were trained in Europe. It is worth remembering that “Europe” originally denoted only central Greece, and then by 500 BC the surrounding land, by which time the Greeks had opened up the Mediterranean coast (the continent lying behind was mainly explored by the Romans). So we are back to our present locality.

I begin my exploration of European ideas with a scene from fifth century Athens, in which Socrates is worried about the fact that states do not seem to be very well governed. This may sound familiar. He thinks there must be a better form of government, and “what [he asks] is the smallest change that would bring a state to this manner of government, preferably a change in one thing, if not, then in two, and failing that, the fewest possible in number and the slightest in potency?” (4). The underlying idea here is a minimalist one, which might well even today serve as a maxim of practical politics. This is worth a small digression. Everyone has heard of the “*great* ideas” of philosophy, but this way of speaking sometimes seems to me intimidating rather than inviting, putting philosophy on a height inaccessible to ordinary people. For myself I am content to claim that philosophy has had some rather *good* ideas. Socrates seems to suggest that if we aim too high we may do more harm than good: if we strive to do the most, thinking that we must have the best, we may achieve less than if we seek to agree on the least, in order to avoid the worst. This is the basic minimalist maxim, and I will come back to it later on.

In the case of government Socrates thinks he has an idea about how it might work: “There is one change” he says, “which I think that we can show would bring about the desired transformation. It is not a slight or an easy thing but it is possible. “ When pressed by his interlocutor, Glaucon, he hesitates to come right out with his idea - he may be washed away, he says, “by the greatest wave of paradox ... on billows of laughter and scorn.” His suggestion, when they finally get it out of him, is audacious: he says that philosophers should be kings. Or that is what people think he says. In fact it is a bit more complicated than that. “Unless either philosophers become kings in our states [he says] or those whom we now call our kings and rulers take to the pursuit of philosophy seriously and adequately, and there is a conjunction of these two things, political power and philosophical intelligence, while the motley horde of the natures who at present pursue either apart from the other are compulsorily excluded, there can be no cessation of troubles for our states, nor, I fancy, for the human race either” (5)

And that is the simplest change? Therein lies the genius of Socrates – for yes, it is. And it is generalizable, not only to kings but also to parents (those little kings and queens) and to other individuals. One of the most striking passages in all of Plato occurs in book IX of the Republic, where the same Glaucon suddenly realizes that the ideal city Socrates has been constructing may in fact never be realized in this world. That hardly matters, says Socrates, because anyone can live his own life in it and abide by its laws whether anyone else does so or not. The startling corollary of this, of course, is that if everyone did so the ideal city would thereby have become a real one. But it can only be populated one soul at a time. It is easy to see

where Christianity got the idea of the kingdom not of this world, and of individual conversion as the condition of entry to the City of God - everyone a philosopher, for Plato; everyone a believer, for Augustine. But there is a world of difference.

What I am stressing here is, again, the minimalist aspect of the argument, the least change that will lead to the eventual solution of the problem. Other minimalist recommendations of this sort are to be found here and there among the European ideas we have inherited from the culture that began here in the eastern Mediterranean so long ago, representing candidate solutions that invite acceptance by our solution-recognizing rationality if only it would turn itself in their direction. So now come the other texts in my series; they will, I hope, build to a coherent position in terms of which we can confront the problems and possibilities of our global millennium.

I resume with a second Platonic passage, which will serve as an anchor for my whole presentation today. It concerns a contrast which is obvious enough but not sufficiently stressed, either in our public discourse or in our schemes of education. In the dialogue that bears his name the young Euthyphro is appealing to the judgment of the gods, but Socrates doubts whether the gods are all in agreement with one another, and he draws a distinction which I take to be basic to our understanding of the sciences. The question is just how we come to agree, and about what. "If you and I were to differ about numbers," asks Socrates, "would a disagreement about that make us angry at each other, and make enemies of us? Should we not settle things by calculation? Right and wrong, the noble and the base, and good and bad: are not these the things about which we differ, till, unable to arrive at a decision, we grow hostile, when we do grow hostile, to each other, you and I and everybody else?" (6). To make a rather long story quite short, I will claim that in this passage Socrates is anticipating a fundamental difference between what many of us recognize as the natural sciences on the one hand, and what some of us call the human sciences on the other.

The aim of any science is among other things what I characterize as "object constancy among knowing subjects," which is another way of saying that when we try to reach firm conclusions we had better be sure that we are talking about the same thing. In the natural sciences it is reasonable to suppose that the object in question is to be found in some form or other in the natural world, so that the search for object constancy could be satisfied if we could find it and observe it and measure it, the case that Socrates envisages when he says "should we not settle things by calculation?" But in the human sciences - which I wish to claim need be no less scientific than the natural ones - the object in question is not to be found in the natural world but in the world that human thinkers have as it were superadded to the natural one. We have not simply acts, but right or wrong acts, not simply habits but noble or base habits. The objects of the human sciences are not physical or even perceptual; they are, to borrow a term from the phenomenology of Franz Brentano, intentional objects. These things cannot be observed in the external world, but they can be found, and achieve the desired object constancy, if we look for

them in the life worlds of human subjects. There are also mixed objects, perceptual but overlaid with intentionality – for example a branch becomes a club and a club becomes a weapon; the concept “weapon” is purely intentional and can be realized in many different ways, whereas the branch is a physical object, which when used as a weapon acquires an intentional overlay.

In the natural sciences we come to agreement by observation and calculation, while in the human sciences we come to agreement by what I call “mutual instruction under mutual criticism.” And whereas the natural sciences are backed by what I call a realist hypothesis (according to which there really are in some definite form or other rocks and trees, and tables and chairs, out there in the world), the human sciences are backed by what I call an “other minds” or “co-intentional” hypothesis (according to which their objects are sustained by being thought of, in many cases by great numbers of people at once).

I can't pack a whole treatise on the human sciences into an hour! not if I want to get to my other candidate examples. So I will fast forward to a much later European figure to whom in my view we owe the most lucid distinction between the natural sciences and the human ones. Wilhelm Dilthey explained the opposition I have just been sketching in terms of “facts of nature” and “mental facts,” “Mental facts [he says] are the highest boundary of facts of nature; facts of nature constitute the lower conditions of mental life” (7). Perhaps I can make this vivid by putting it in an evolutionary context. Consider that, given the special conditions of life on earth, there has come to be a natural development of physical complexity up to the level of the human brain, and then consider the things with which human beings with brains populate their worlds: not just machines and furniture (which, though they bear the marks of human creativity, still obey the laws governing objects in the natural world) but also laws and legends, art and poetry, hopes and predictions. Imagine now that the natural world is represented by a pyramid whose apex is the human brain (which after all is the most complex single object in the known universe), and then imagine that the human world, with all its non-natural objects of common attention, is represented by an inverted pyramid whose apex touches the other so that they constitute an angular hourglass figure. Imagine your own history, beginning far down in the material world with the formation of the elements necessary for life, and finding its way up the lower pyramid through your conception and on to the development of your brain. Remember now the first emergence of your own mental life in the infantile recognition of objects and people, and think how it has expanded into the inverted pyramid, the top of which is open to all the riches of human experience, the life of culture and society.

The distinction between the natural sciences and the human sciences (note that I do not say the social sciences, which raise a different question) is therefore of fundamental importance. One of the dangers of not recognizing this distinction is that people may be tempted to solve problems in the human sciences by means and methods appropriate to the natural sciences, and on the other hand to allow imaginations and prejudices that belong in the domain of the human sciences to determine outcomes involving the objects of the natural sciences. Here is a case in

point from a text of Lucretius, in which he gives an account of the sacrifice of Iphigenia to Diana in order to secure a favorable wind for Agamemnon's ships. He evokes the deception by which Iphigenia is led to the altar, expecting to be married but only to collapse in terror at the sorrowful face of her father, and the knife hidden in the hand of his attendants (but she must have been able to see it!), and the tears of the people. "To such an extent was religion able to persuade to evil," says Lucretius - "*tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*" (8). According to a note in my Loeb edition Voltaire believed that this line "would last as long as the world" (though I don't know whether he meant the timelessness of Lucretius's text or the persistence of the toxic power of religion). The standard translations of Lucretius usually render *religio* as "superstition," which I have always supposed to be a defensive move on the part of the clerical scholars to whom we owe many English versions of classical texts; it seems quite clear that Lucretius meant the institutionalized religion of his time, and I want to align myself with a comparable position at the present day. Just as in the Euthyphro Socrates imagines the gods as squabbling over what pleases them, so the major religions and their contentious subdivisions continue today to interfere with the lives and fortunes of millions of people.

To take just one salient point: I referred a moment ago to what I have come to think of as the "two billion / seven billion problem," and when I reflect on the medical and technological advances, many of them developed in the United States, that might have partially mitigated this disastrous explosion of population if generally shared, and then at the same time on the benighted fundamentalism that has prevented the expenditure of any public money on disseminating them, the line from Lucretius seems as relevant as ever – with this difference, that there is now no excuse.

Theology, the study of religion (sacrifices to offended gods!), is one of the disciplines of the human sciences; meteorology, the study of the weather (fair winds for sailing!) one of the disciplines of the natural sciences. One of the tasks of the sciences in my title is to understand the relations between these two and not to confuse them. My next pair of texts are concerned with two other domains in which such confusion may be dangerous. One deals with war, the other with money, and these two topics, with religion, generate an unholy triad of problems with which we are obviously still struggling. Here then is Aeneas, recounting to Dido the chaos and tumult following the Greek infiltration of Troy. Houses are burning all around him, and there is shouting and confusion and an urgent need for action. Aeneas instinctively reaches for his weapons, and Virgil gives him this remarkable line: "*Arma amens capio, nec sat rationis in armis*" - "mindlessly I take up arms, yet there is not enough reason in arms" (9). The thing about weapons is that they are physical and obey the laws of the natural sciences, but they function in a setting that can be understood only in the light of the human sciences. Yet those who make use of them habitually forget this, and wield them all too often – in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in the violence of the criminal world – without enough rational reflection. And once again they find their sacrificial victims.

Money is another one of these objects of the human sciences, although it has some special properties: it always belongs to someone, and has stable existence only when there is agreement about who that is. In this it resembles other forms of property. Think of proper names – these are tags that accompany individuals at various points in their lives, and they again can have consequences in the natural world (consider for example what has come to be called “identity theft”). In the case of money, and the human science of economics, these consequences can be painful. In the intentional domain it doesn’t matter much if I have ten dollars and you have a million – as I sometimes say it doesn’t bother me if people have all those extra zeroes on their bank statements – but in the physical domain it does matter if you can afford a private jet and I can’t afford dinner for my family. Marx, with his polemical interest in private property (remembering that “private” for one person is usually “deprivation” for another) sees with his customary bluntness that economics has something in common with religion, and puts the point brilliantly: “real dollars have the same existence imagined gods have” (10).

There’s not time now for the elaboration that quotation deserves – I’ll work towards a conclusion by remarking again that beliefs in gods and dollars have often had devastating effects on actual human individuals, and that one of the tasks of the sciences, broadly speaking, must surely be to address the injustices this situation represents. Is there a minimalist strategy for this? What is the equivalent in the moral domain of Socrates’ suggestion in the political one? My candidate solution here comes from Kant’s categorical imperative, in what is known as its second formulation: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end” (11). Nothing simpler: whoever you are, politician, entrepreneur, banker, administrator, always remember that the seven billion (while we might wish they were fewer, now that they are here they all deserve what any of us deserves) are all individual human beings, with their own worlds and their own wills and their own wants. Take that into account in all your decisions, don’t treat them like abstract units in the population or the workforce, to be moved about at will.

I need hardly point out to you how little this advice is being followed at the present time. Whatever we may say about the improvidence of those who were seduced into mortgages they couldn’t afford, for example – and that is astonishing, it is true, a massive failure of education – it remains that not only they but millions of others have been affected in their possessions and their livelihood by forces as remote from them as the gods were for the Greeks. One preferred strategy now is “austerity,” which again means in practice “deprivation.” But I remember seeing recently in Portugal, during a general strike, a poster that said “Impoverishment is not the solution.” It doesn’t take a whole lot of solution-recognizing rationality to see that.

I have tried to suggest that from their beginnings, when Europe was all the world (and if my title puts the time when all the world was effectively Europe in the past tense that is mainly because of the demands of multiculturalism, which would take another lecture), European ideas have given hints for minimalist solutions of most of the major human problems. There have

been philosophers, among them Edmund Husserl, who have taken seriously the responsibility to think through these problems: “In our philosophizing, then, – how can we avoid it? – we are *functionaries of mankind*. The quite personal responsibility of our own true being as philosophers, our own personal vocation, bears within itself at the same time the responsibility for the true being of mankind” (12). Perhaps this overstates the case, but I like the idea that one of our tasks may be to be servants of our fellows.

My last text, from Jaspers, I include again because I like it and feel its force. Rather than dwelling on it I will let it speak for itself as the challenge it is to all of us: “One can take courage to try to do that which passes beyond his strength from the fact that it is a human problem, and man is that creature which poses problems beyond his powers. And also from this, that whoever even once thought he heard softly the authentic philosophic note can never tire of trying to communicate it” (13).

I revert finally to the advice I offered to conflicting parties at the beginning of this talk: Let us agree on the least, so as to avoid the worst. Simple as it is – and simplicity is a virtue, even a necessity, in any proposition one hopes to be widely understood – it could be effective as a motto if borne constantly in mind. The essential thing is to be open to finding a point of agreement (the advice won’t work for intransigent dogmatists, though it would be helpful if they could be persuaded to see themselves as such). Even a small point of agreement, even far from the center of the dispute, will do as a start. If the only thing the parties can agree on is the desirability of avoiding the worst, that offers at least a basis on which to negotiate.

In the same spirit of glaring but neglected simplicity I offer a last recommendation: It would be better for everyone if everyone thought about what would be better for everyone. Note “better,” not “best” – and not even “good.” Think of the better for everyone, not all the time but often enough – teach children to think of it, and try to persuade all the others for whom thinking of it would be better than thinking only of what would be better for themselves. The difference between an allowable self-interest and a ruthlessly selfish interest lies in this simple reminder.

Well, we have a thousand years ahead of us, 988 anyway, so there’s no rush. In our work and in meetings like this one let us keep our expectations minimal, but our eyes always on the better. Only so will our descendants have a chance of realizing the promise of the global millennium.

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