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# A New Narrative for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Inspiring the World by the Delphic Spirit of Humanity

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, humanity has entered into a territory for which we do not have the proper spiritual equipment. Due to an unprecedented growth of knowledge and technological capacity humans soon will be able to generate rational machines and super-intelligent algorithms, to extend their lifespan by biotec-innovations and human enhancement-technologies, and probably to even overcome death by transferring human consciousness to digital media. But at the same time, we actually observe severe global crisis: climate change caused by unlimited exploitation of natural resources, contamination of soil, sea and air caused by aggressive neoliberal economy, rise of fundamentalism, crime and violence, increasing rates of psychic diseases and the spread of a global pandemic. So the one hand we are lured by IT-prophets who promise us to make the world a better place by technology, on the other hand we are shocked by a reality which leaves no doubt about the inconvenient truth that humankind navigates towards stormy times.

Given this – what can be done? One thing is for sure: Neither social technology (as proved by the 20<sup>th</sup> century) nor IT technology (as becomes more and more evident) will solve our problems. The more we merely rely on technological skills the deeper we shall get entangled into a mindset which only prolongs the sources of the current crises. What really matters is the loss of spirit. What

matters is the absence of a common, global narrative which inspires people to break with the current mindset shaped and coined by the dramatically insufficient doctrines of liberal economy and its anthropological self-concept of *homo oeconomicus*: the constant selfish agent of a lifelong competition struggling only for his own egoistic interests and needs. The innovation urgently required is a new paradigm, a new major narrative sketching an image of what life really means, radiating so brightly that everybody gets attracted by the vision of a flourishing life in accordance with nature.

The most compelling answer to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is the rise of a new religion – a religion which differentiates in almost every aspect from what we know as institutionalized religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam or Buddhism: a religion that refers to what 'religion' originally means: *re-ligio* (lt.) = re-connection with the profound dimension of life from which sense, meaning, beauty and inspiration evolve. But where, for heaven's sake, shall we discover a new religion?

The answer is simple: at the place where once upon a time the Spirit of Humanity entered into the western sphere: Delphi, a tiny village located on the southern slopes of Mt. Parnassos in Central Greece. In ancient times Delphi was considered the navel of the world, both geographically and spiritually. The first claim may be doubted, the second not. Within a couple of centuries since 1000 B.C. Delphi had not only become the cradle of philosophy, democracy, arts and science – it also became the gravitation spot of the whole Mediterranean kosmos. The unique success of Delphi was caused by a simple but powerful spirit which was spread by the Delphic oracle and priesthood: a spirit which didn't refer to an almighty creator of the universe or a serious legislator

revealing commandments to humans. It didn't even talk about a transcendental world. On the contrary: Delphi fostered a narrative which celebrated life in all its aspects: physical aspects, mental aspects, emotional aspects and spiritual aspects. Delphi painted a picture of life's genuine beauty encompassing both joy and suffering, both flourishing and wilting. By this, Delphi gave birth to an extraordinary culture from which humans still profit in many respects.

Now, the blossom of Delphi occurred 3000 years ago – and time can't be turned back. But nevertheless the Delphic spirit still exists: the Spirit of Humanity – the Spirit of humans who strive for good life in resonance with other humans and with the natural world, who strive for harmony and beauty, who celebrate life by living according to its very principles. These principles are Delphic principles. They articulate the Delphic spirit of humanity and they can easily be translated to a plausible contemporary language. A life according to these principles not only is attractive for every human being still aware of its basic and original needs, it also has the brightness to enlighten and guide people all over the world on their quest for real fulfilment. They actually indicate the major features of a new narrative for a better world inhabited by humans, not by cyborgs or robots and machines. The Delphic principles are ten in number:

### *1. Celebrating humanity*

It is well known that in the entrance hall of the Apollo-temple in Delphi the words γνῶθι σαυτόν (Know who you are!) were engraved. The ancients took this famous inscription as an appeal given by the God himself: the appeal to realize the infinite value of human existence. Know who you are – this meant:

Realize that you are a human being! Find out what it means to be fully human! Unfold the potential of humanity which is slumbering deep within you. Live your life in a proper way by which you prove that you're worth being considered as a human being. This is how the Delphic Spirit fostered the blossoming of the ancient Greek culture and the rise of we can call the first humanism.

### *II. Relying on the power of wisdom and conversation*

Γνῶθι σαυτόν was not merely understood as an appeal to become fully human, it was also understood as an invitation to participate in a conversation with the world. Ancient sages and philosophers such as Socrates took the *Delphic imperative* as the appeal to constantly question one's own convictions and doctrines; as an invitation to join a never ending conversation with the world; as the calling for positive solutions and decisions which suit reality; as the promise to become wise by being receptive to the gifts and challenges of life. It was in this way that the Delphic Spirit nurtured the rise of philosophy and science.

### *III. Fostering the intrinsic measure of life*

Next to γνῶθι σαυτόν in the pronaos of Apollo's temple was written: μήδεν ἄγαν (Nothing in excess!) which corresponds to the famous Delphic quote μέτρον ἄριστον (Measure is best!). Through this the key-issue of Apollonian ethics is expressed: the insight into the very principle of life and existence: Everything alive strives for inner and outer balance and harmony. Every cell, every plant, every creature, even the *kosmos* itself is ruled by this one major principle: Existence requires a well-balanced, harmonious arrangement of its organs, elements or parts. Life is both *diversity in unity* and *unity in diversity*. Life is

*wholeness* – and good life is harmonious wholeness. Given this, the only transgression is *hybris*: the attempt of mortals to ignore the very measure of life and to shape the world according to their own interests and desires for profit or progress. In this way the Delphic Spirit initiated a morality which is not based on religious commandments but on the very reality of life and nature.

#### *IV. Promoting harmony and balance in any field*

It is well documented that Delphi made an impact on the political life and economy of ancient Greece. Evidently Delphic politics aimed to transfer the Apollonian principle of harmony and balance into the political sphere. The first steps towards the Athenian democracy by Kleisthenes and Solon were inspired by Delphi. Delphi tried to mediate between Athens and Sparta during the Peloponnesian War. Delphi influenced philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle whose ethics promote the value of harmony in terms of justice in politics, sustainability in economy, modesty in terms of the individual art of living; thus the Delphic Spirit inspired the invention of liberal, republican politics.

#### *V. Respecting the limits of mortality*

Another famous quote mirroring the Delphic Spirit is *θνήτα φρονεῖν* (Remember your mortality!) It indicates the Apollonian consciousness of the importance of limits. Everything has its own genuine measure, everything has its own intrinsic limits. Life is mortal, and it's nothing but the plain fact of our finiteness that warrants our dignity. From a Delphic point of view humans' most crucial error is their greed for infinity – as it is currently displayed by the *Trans-humanistic* ideology of American IT-Technology Corporations promising to

generate immortality through human-enhancement-technology. From a Delphic point of view these efforts are pure perversion violating human dignity.

#### *VI. Appreciating individuality*

Besides γνῶθι σαυτόν and μήδεν ἄγαν a third word was engraved in the walls of Apollo's temple in Delphi. It is one letter only: ε. Ancient authors, such as Plutarch, wondered what this might signify and wrote whole books on the issue. The common reading says: ε means *you are!* This perfectly suits the Delphic Spirit, for doubtlessly Delphi encouraged our ancient ancestors to appreciate *individual* life. The simple ε addresses everyone in a very personal way. It says: You are the one who has the capacity to become truly human. You have the potential to become godlike if you resist the temptation of *hybris*, strive for harmony and respect the limits of mortality. Whereas oriental religions always doubted the value of individuality, the Delphic Spirit celebrates it and invites humans to be fully alive in one's own special way.

#### *VII. Establishing a sense of integration*

In prehistoric times Delphi most likely was a major sanctuary of the Great Goddess called Gaia or Ge. Later on it was inherited by the God Apollo. Astonishingly, however, the new Olympian or Apollonian Spirit didn't wipe out the prior matriarchal tradition but integrated the ancient rites and cults. The famous oracle and its female priest called Pythia were thus preserved. This can be understood as an indication of the Delphic sense of integration: Harmony and balance are not generated through eliminating others but through integration and inclusion. Therefore, Delphic principles honour traditions instead of

extinguishing them – an attitude which is an urgently required anti-dote to current fundamentalism, racism, and terrorism.

### *VIII. Honouring the earth and nature*

By integrating the cult of Gaia, the Delphic Spirit reveals its reverence and respect for earth and nature. The modern western separation of mind and nature is completely alien to it. On the contrary the Delphic Spirit holds nature in very high esteem, being the all-encompassing source of life; and it promotes a lifestyle which perfectly suits the needs of nature. It's not an exaggeration to uphold the fact that Delphi is the origin of modern ecology. To foster the Delphic Spirit means to commit to an ecological lifestyle of harmony and balance finding its fulfilment by living a natural way: unfolding from the darkness of the earth towards the light, growing, maturing, flowering, bearing fruit, withering and dying.

### *IX. Connecting structure and chaos as major principles of life*

The Delphic sanctuary was dedicated both to the god Apollo and to the god Dionysus. These gods were opponents: Apollo is the personification of the principle of harmonious order whereas Dionysus represents the principle of dissolution, catastrophe and chaos as unavoidable preconditions for the continuous innovation of life. The pinnacle of Delphic wisdom is the reconciliation of these two principles, demonstrated through an ancient crater which shows Apollo and Dionysus shaking hands. The equal esteem bestowed on both these gods is the very mystery of the unrivalled blossoming of ancient Hellenic culture. By the symbiosis of Apollonian and Dionysian culture, Delphi inspired the ancient Greeks to be fully alive.

### *X. Celebrating arts, beauty, and creativity*

In ancient times the Delphic Spirit was celebrated in the Pythian Games which took place every four years in the Delphic sanctuary. Competitions in fine arts, music, dance, theatre were held in honour of Apollo. In the 1920s this idea was revitalized by Angelos and Eva Sikelianos who twice performed modern Delphic Games in the ancient theatre in Delphi. Since then further effort had been made to revitalize the tradition of Pythian games, not merely by *The Isadora Duncan International Institute* but also by the *International Delphic Council* located in Berlin. In this way the ancient idea of promoting mutual respect, harmony, and balance between people through performing arts lives on.

Reconnecting with the Delphic Spirit, celebrating it by Delphic Games, and promoting it through new media and publications might be the proper endeavour to face the challenges of our times. In order to take some first, humble steps into this direction, on my initiative in January 2020 a New Platonic Academy (akademie\_3) was founded in Germany, which has the mission to explore new forms of expression and language for the Delphic Spirit. A short [film](#), which completes this presentation, informs about this.

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