



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

1st Dialogue on Science - October 23 – 25, 2002
Engelberg, Switzerland

Welcoming address

Dr. Klaus Hug, President of the
Academia Engelberg Foundation



Never before in the history of mankind have the opportunities for helping the population of the planet along the path to happiness actually been as good and as great as they are today. Almost every day, science is progressing in leaps and sensational bounds. Never before were the scientific and technological reports in the media as numerous and as interesting as they are today. Biotechnology and neurotechnology are opening the doors almost to the last secrets, the control centres, of life. They are enabling us to crack the genetic codes of humans and to change these codes, to identify disease in the genes, even to physically modify and possibly copy humans. Science can offer many resources to effectively combat hunger in the world, and to relieve poverty. – With the fall of communism 13 years ago, it was expected that we would witness the full triumphant march of capitalism, or rather the market economy. The strategy maps of the world were redrawn and handed around with peace and prosperity in mind.

The age of the subjunctive, full of ifs and buts... Instead of taking the path to prosperity, the market economy produced seductive bubbles which can be heard today bursting all around us leaving substantial human and social damage in their wake. At the political level, the “grammar of violence”, as Herfried Münkler calls it, is producing completely new and cruel texts. Fundamentalism in various camps is returning with a vengeance.

We are not managing to guide the potential blessing of human powers of discovery and development – viewed not without criticism and measured by ethical standards and morals – into the political arena to establish a congruence of progress. On the contrary, while science strides forwards, political and cultural behaviour are falling back into positively archaic ways. One cannot help but be impressed by a comparison of the painting of the “Tower of Babel” by Pieter Breughel the Elder with the infamous photo depicting the ruins of the Twin Towers in September of last year.

WWW - world wide web. Three letters that could equally stand for “we want the world”, as the history of civilization (especially since the Age of the Renaissance as the start of the modern era) shows Man’s huge effort to take centre stage as thinker and actor in the theatre of life. Such *Experimentum medietatis* is personified in Dr. Johann Faust, of whom it was said in the famous history of Faust published in 1587 that he wanted to explore “every reason, in Heaven and on Earth”. (Thus the introductory text to the book “*Grundfragen des 21. Jahrhunderts*”).

We may have come a long way in research since then, but we are still a long way from our goal. Unfortunately however – in spite of networking and globalization – the faculties of perception appear to have declined with regard to the interdependencies in life. Specialization is “in”. After all, it has been responsible for most scientific achievements. And yet, the world as a whole will not get any further if “the one-sided predominance of dissecting, analytical reason as an instrumental approach to thinking is not joined by a reason of synthesis and a mode of reasoning that addresses questions of meaning: What are we doing and why? By what means? Where do we come from? Where are we going?” (Ibid.)

With its autumn conferences, the Academia Engelberg seeks to make its contribution to the development of a reason of synthesis, to reveal the interdependencies in life, to enrich the dialogue of science – in short, they are an attempt on the one hand to pour the progress of science into the vessels of culture, society and politics, and on the other to direct attention over the gulf of global inequity towards a solution for those global problems which not only lead to injustice, inhumanity, misery and death, but themselves form the root of the new “grammar of violence”.



On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Academia Engelberg I would like to welcome you most warmly to this monastic village. The “First Engelberg Dialogue of Science” is a challenge not only for organizers and conference management, but even more so for the participants, who want to make their contribution to the dialogue. The discursive method will serve to affirm Karl Popper’s belief that, in this way, one can at least closely observe the arguments of the experts and examine their conclusiveness. Yet, as Popper added, this is no doubt a relatively harmless occupation, and if an expert or anyone else should make the effort to refute the criticism laid at his or her door, then one would be more than happy and would feel honoured.

We indeed are happy and honoured that you have made the journey to Engelberg, and I wish you two most intensive and challenging, but hopefully also relaxing and enriching days.