Preface

There is a domain of reality which is the material world. There is a means of acquiring knowledge about this domain, which is the human mind with its tool of reason. Then there are the many causalities that the human mind seeks to unveil in the material world or physical reality. The modern era has been distinguished by an ever-increasing acquisition of information about the physical universe. This plethora of information and the technological wonders it has produced are inextricably bound up with the idea of human "progress" through material enrichment and empowerment.

What then is "progress"? Can it be "proven"? Any dictionary will tell us that progress is a kind of advancement toward a goal, an improvement, a development from a lower state to a higher one. A simple look into the world of nature will show us many examples of it: in the unfolding of the seasons, in the course of all natural life. But can the idea of progress rightly be applied to the human state as such? Modern thought, beginning roughly with the Renaissance, tells us that it can. Whether implicitly or explicitly, its basic assumptions are the following:

- The centrality of material or physical reality.
- The primacy of the rational faculty and the experimental method as the means of human knowledge.
- The definition of the human vocation, and its ultimate well-being, as the quantifiable understanding of "how" material reality functions.[1]

The above principles have led us to the "age of reason" and to the "age of science"—to a knowledge of the material world by means of human reason applied to the search for the "how" of the world's existence and operation. In this anthology, we want to analyze and

1 Galileo stated that, in his search for causalities in the material world, he did not seek for answers to the "why" of phenomena. Instead, he stated that he sought answers to the "how" of phenomena.

reflect on the consequences of this approach. Some of the questions that we seek to answer are:

- Is material or physical reality the only form, or the central form, of reality?
- Is the rational faculty the only faculty, or the central faculty, of human knowledge?
- Is the most profound and complete definition of human nature given by our knowledge of material reality?

The answers to these questions have an importance that is far from being abstract and merely theoretical: for these answers have consequences that reverberate through all aspects of human life and its environment. By our nature, we seek for an inward image of our ultimate goals. Based on our understanding of what the world is and what human beings are, we look for happiness, for a sense of purpose in life and a sense of both wonder and order in the world around us. But if we are basing ourselves on a conception of things that is incomplete, we will not be successful in finding what we seek. We want to know not just the measurable dimension of the "how" of existence; we have a deep thirst for answers in the dimension of its "why." Without answers to the "why" of life, our information on the modalities of its "how" will be of little use to us and may even prove harmful.

There is a great deal currently being written about the limitations entailed in the three principles outlined above. Many are involved in the task of examining the practical consequences of technocracy for our lives and our environment. Through the essays collected here, we wish to examine the modern image of humanity and the universe from a more philosophical point of view. Presenting the problem is the first step. There are essays here from several philosophers, scientists, an economist and an agriculturist-poet. They are all asking the same question: Are there limits to what the science of the material world can offer us, and thus to "progress"? And their unanimous answer is "yes."

Seeing a problem, we normally seek for a solution. Where should we look? The purpose of these chapters is less to insist upon one particular "answer" than to offer alternative points of departure to the premises of modernism that permeate our culture so thoroughly. And again, there is a consensus among our authors. Human beings are capable of discerning between knowledge and ignorance; and within the domain of knowledge between that which is essential and

that which is non-essential. Both have their importance, but if words have any meaning, we have to give primacy to what is essential. Said in another way, there is Truth and then there are truths. There are many truths that pertain to the "how" of existence, and modern science offers them in abundance. But these should not be confused with Truth, which pertains to the "why" of existence and to its "final cause" as described by Aristotle—and even more profoundly by Plato. This Truth is the domain of spiritual reality and the traditional wisdoms which have been its repositories from time immemorial. We may ignore spiritual Truth, or even temporarily suppress it; but we do so at our own peril, for It is finally as ineluctable as the forces of nature that manifest It.

The word "science" comes from the Latin *scientia* or *sciens*, which means, "having knowledge." Science bases itself on objectivity: one should weigh all the data before arriving at a conclusion. Modern science has incontestably brought to light a dazzling array of information unknown to previous generations. But the contemporary belief in an endless progress tends toward an almost total rejection of spiritual wisdom's worldviews as being naïve, outmoded and contrary to empirical evidence. Is it not possible that the glaring spectacle of technology's prodigies has caused us to lose sight of something which is in fact crucial? The purpose of this anthology is to provide access to information that is worthy of our consideration in evaluating this question.

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