

## Welcoming Address

Yolanda Espiña

Dear Delegates,

I would like to welcome you to this meeting, and to thank in the first place all those who have helped us, especially the president of the Catholic University of Portugal in Porto, Prof. Afonso Vaz, and former presidents, Prof. Carvalho Guerra and Prof. Joaquim Azevedo, as well as the organizations that have offered us their help, namely the Institute of Douro and Porto Wines, and the Porto Commercial Association. Most significant is the High Patronage of the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic, which kindly wanted to be associated with this internationally renowned event. I would also like to thank the valuable collaboration of Dr. Maria Lopes Cardoso and her highly professional team. And a special thanks to our assistants, wonderful students of this university.

Of course, nothing would have been possible without the drive, experience and permanent interaction and advice of the ISSEI central organizational committee, coordinated by Prof. Ezra Talmor, founder and president of ISSEI, and Dr. Edna Rosenthal with the most valued collaboration of Rachel Ben-David. I would also like to thank very especially Prof. David Lovell and Prof. Heinz-Uwe Haus for their availability and wisdom in tackling unavoidable or unforeseen incidents throughout this whole process. I also have to mention Prof. Marianna Papastephanou, co-organizer of the previous ISSEI Conference in Cyprus, for her friendly advice, and Dr. Veronica Mehno, always helpful for translation issues.

At our University, the Catholic University of Portugal, in its regional center of Porto, we welcome the 14th (fourteenth) edition of the bi-annual conference of the International Society for the Study of European Ideas. As has already been sufficiently explained, and as we will experience in these next few days, the function of this Society is to think of Europe from its most varied perspectives, facing its diversity in a framework of reflection that is capable of understanding diversity and at the same time emphasize what unites us, starting from the common rationality that is explored in the various traditions and diversities that meet and are found here.

On this occasion, there is a theme which bonds us, that is, “Images of Europe: Past, Present, and Future”. I want to be very brief, but in the few minutes which have kindly been granted to me, I would like to consider three aspects of our theme which are intimately linked.

In the first place, I will refer to the idea of image, a notion which serves as the framework for the reflection of this conference and which also invokes the question of what here will be called “referentiality”.

I will also refer to the idea of rationality, which brings with it the understanding of what is common to us, a speculative notion which interacts with the real, but which in that interaction becomes immediately ethical.

And finally I will refer to the university, that is, to the university institution as such, and to the university as a place of welcoming and of acceptance.

1. Let us begin with the notion of image. Indeed, image implies simultaneity of presence, a unifying presence. It implies therefore a unity that immediately refers to an essential discontinuity with what the image is not. At the same time, the term itself, image, immediately suggests a reference. Image is always image of, but at the same time the image is something we can identify in itself. What we can call “referentiality” implies a universe of connections, or more clearly, of relations, because if we consider the image alone, isolated, we find ourselves questioning the very significance of denoting something without any other (apparent) reason than its very presence. But then, why should we call it image?

There is a well-known statement in Aristotle’s *De Anima* (cf. 427b-434a). As he tries to show the importance of the individual, as a basis for the universal, and of the empirical, as a basis for the intelligible, he speaks about a common sense or (common) sensibility, which specializes in five senses but is one only. And this first unity is concrete and known. It is image! As Aristotle states, instead of sensations, the intellectual soul uses images. We cannot forget in this respect another aspect of the Aristotelian theory: the identity between content and thing in the agent intellect. In fact, Aristotle states that the soul, in the act of knowing, turns itself (in a way) into what is known. That is why the soul in itself is empty: because if it had its own form, it would not be able to perceive things (an alterity, other than itself, other than the soul) as known. Therefore there is a continuity between matter and form, between senses and intellect, between substance and accidents.

But this continuity can be expressed only under the form of an intersection, and the important point here is that this moment of intersection is precisely the image. Image is the unity (discontinuity) which, in its very presence, summons the continuity that is capable of uniting knowledge and reality. Located here is what can be called

a multidimensional logos. The image convokes, therefore, the question of truth - a notion intimately related to the very notion of logos - since through image logos does not remain self-referential.

2. Let us now consider the second mentioned aspect, rationality, which is another way of speaking of logos. The need not to remain on a self-referential level qualifies rationality in yet another meaning, a rather surprising meaning: rationality is found in ethics. Let us recall the eternal question of Socrates which Plato offers us in his dialogue the *Gorgias* (474c): “which of the two seems to you, Polus, to be the worse—committing injustice or suffering injustice?”

Thousands of readings have been given to this sentence, from all possible perspectives. But we are not interested here in the answer, at least not in this brief reflection. What is of interest here is the fact that the question was formulated. We certainly know very well Socrates’ response. The response is intended to be much more than rhetorical: everyone, and not only Socrates, can consider that it is better to suffer an injustice than to commit an injustice.

But we are interested here in the question itself, because it recalls in a foundational way the second dimension of our argument: because in this strange question of rationality, the latter finds itself, suddenly, as grounding itself in what much later would be called conscience. And what is surprising of this strange question of rationality is that it only appears when one’s own rationality is projected outside of oneself. And in that projection, rationality examines itself before the need for action, which can only be action in the world.

Injustice is only committed or suffered from the standpoint of justice. To perceive an injustice implies perceiving an injustice as such, and therefore, to speculatively attend to the asymmetries of reality in a dynamic which summons the rationality of man who is capable of distinguishing an injustice from justice. Or what is the same, therefore capable of distinguishing evil from good.

Now, one suffers the injustice of another, or does an injustice to another. The rationality that is capable of abandoning its own self-referentiality arises as an exploration of the experience of the other and of the experience with the other. That experience is genuinely ethical, and in it rationality finds itself, since it attests to its universality. The Socratic question deals with that rationality that finds itself when it goes out from itself. But the answer is its vocation to the truth, an arduous task

through the paths of history, trying always to distinguish justice from injustice and thus to know what the better thing to do is.

3. We arrive then at the University. The University is an institution fully born in Europe, solid from the 13th (thirteenth) century. Its origin integrates diversity in a unity, but in the first place not so much uniting a diversity of knowledge, but rather uniting people, *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*. The further consolidation of the curricula was mediated by different developments, originated to some extent by the contact with Ancient sources through translations and also by the growths and need of consolidation of certain disciplines of theoretical nature, like philosophy or theology. Furthermore, the contact with older traditions and, in a way, forgotten questions, gave rise, in the Europe of that time, to a flourishing exchange, not exempt from arguments, which would prepare the Old World for its intellectual encounter with the challenges that the New World, at the end of the fifteenth century, would present.

As stated in the invitation of this edition of the ISSEI, we find ourselves in a situation of profound changes. What is certain is that we are also presented with characteristics which are in a certain way very similar to those of the very founding of university institutions, many of which have lasted to this day and of which we have today numerous representatives: The university as a place of meeting, as a place of rational discussion where argumentation is the fruit of study and of abundant and independent analysis; the university institution as the focal point of stable reflection, as opposed to the instability of the events of the life of the world; and also as a place which exists because it carries out its ethical vocation in the life of the world.

In this sense, the university institution is also a place of welcoming, of acceptance. This is what we would like the Catholic University of Portugal to be for all of you during these days.

Thank you very much for coming here!

Yolanda Espiña.  
Associate Professor of Aesthetics.  
School of Arts.  
Catholic University of Portugal in Porto, Portugal