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THINKING BEYOND BOUNDARIES
Towards the XXV World Congress of Philosophy

This issue of the journal *B@belonline* calls for *Thinking Beyond Boundaries* – disciplinary, cultural, social, etc. – in search of new categories and meanings for interpreting the present and imagining future scenarios. In doing so, it clearly takes up the challenge of the 25th World Congress of Philosophy, which will be held in Rome from 1 to 8 August 2024¹ and will focus on the theme *Philosophy across Boundaries*.

The choice of this theme dates back to 2019, when it was intended to mark a continuity not only with the Beijing Congress but, more generally, with the process of opening up the philosophical canon, by leading philosophical researchers to look at the complex intertwining of human civilizations, the plurality of traditions and systems of ideas, and new perspectives related to increasing gender diversity. Since then, much has changed. First came the pandemic, then war: a growing plight that, after devastating Ukraine, has revived – in the most horrific forms – the long-standing hatred that runs through much of the Middle East, with as yet unpredictable consequences. What sense does it make, in this scenario where unarmed men, women and children are being brutally slaughtered, to devote oneself to a philosophy conference? How are we to understand this title, with its strong exhortation to overcome all borders, and turn it into a concrete practice?

Holding a world congress of philosophy in times of conflict first of all means questioning the social, economic, political, technological and cultural fate of the contemporary world. Unlike other disciplinary congresses, the World Congress of Philosophy is not an exclusively academic meeting: it not only addresses philosophical issues, but aims to engage the public sphere as a whole, by opening up to the worlds of science, economics, information, business, health, technology, and institutions.

The Congress breaks down disciplinary boundaries that have become too rigid to do justice to the complexity of a world shaken and somewhat alarmed by an unprecedented technological revolution in human history. It compares ideas and traditions from all areas of our planet, taking on an intrinsic and very delicate political dimension, in the highest sense of the term.

In the interconnected and post-national world that is emerging, scientific communities have a task to which they are not yet fully accustomed: to keep the lines of intellectual and human communication and scientific channels open across geographical and political barriers. This will not be a temporary task: on the contrary, scholars around the

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1 The 25th World Congress of Philosophy is organized by the International Federation of Philosophical Societies (FISP), the Italian Philosophical Society (SFI) and Sapienza University of Rome. See: <https://wcprome2024.com/>

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world are entrusted with the mission of ensuring, through academic exchanges and global scientific networks, cooperative and increasingly less competitive ways of addressing problems common to most of humanity.

The ultimate goal can only be to overcome any narrow, constrained, self-referential point of view, in favour of a truly global, interdisciplinary and transcultural dimension that, through scientific research, ensures the permeability of boundaries increasingly marked by the mutual distrust between competing political systems.

In order to play this decisive role, philosophical research will have to overcome more and more disciplinary fences and learn to modify its contents and interpenetrate different – sometimes very distant – cultural perspectives, integrating other spheres, in a process of fruitful hybridization.

Thinking beyond borders, then, means overcoming the rift between an academic network that is becoming increasingly global and a field of research limited to a single tradition, a single cultural horizon, by abandoning once and for all the idea that philosophy is essentially and almost solely a Western phenomenon.

Thinking beyond borders, therefore, means learning (and teaching others) to move systematically through a plurality of systems in terms of ideas, civilizations, and even philosophical styles: it is no longer possible to know everything about a particular area of Western philosophy and ignore everything about Dasan, Wang Yanming or Iqbal. This is why it is necessary to project historical research – an area in which the Italian school of philosophy still excels – onto a variety of traditions of thought, opening it up to works and authors that do not belong to the canon of our traditional teachings. The cultural function of philosophers, and more generally of those working in the field of scholarly research, can no longer be separated from this transcultural openness. The latter is the decisive element when it comes not only to the distinction between belonging or not belonging to a constellation of academic communities integrated on an international scale, but also to the distinction between philosophical research that aspires to be a major component of contemporary cultural production and philosophy as a discipline that may be refined, perhaps, but is completely sclerotized, artificial and inconclusive.

The Italian Philosophical Society, Sapienza University of Rome and the entire Italian philosophical community, represented in all its disciplinary and institutional components by the Italian Organizing Committee², have eagerly taken up this cultural and organizational challenge, not without a sense of pride: the 25th World Congress of Philosophy will be the fourth of the World Congresses to be held in Italy, after those of Bologna in 1911, Naples in 1924 and Venice in 1958. This is a clear sign of the international philosophical community's recognition of the important contribution that Italy has made, and can continue to make, in the global philosophical debate.

Organizing this World Congress thus means encouraging philosophical research to address the great questions of the hard and soft sciences, medical research and economics, technology, sustainability, and information, through an attitude of intellectual openness and fruitful international cooperation, with the intention of creating lasting links beyond

2 See: <https://wcprome2024.com/italian-organizing-committee/>

any narrow-minded or violent claims to cultural, political and economic supremacy.

This Congress cannot disregard the strong involvement of the younger generations, who are invited to take the chair and to make the most of an atmosphere characterized by a multifaceted, daily exchange with scholars from all parts of the world. This can also be seen as a way of promoting an idea of politics as something that is not imposed from above, but is born and developed from below, through the development of civic awareness.

Finally, this is a congress that really wants to be an occasion for everyone's cultural growth, through the many side events and public debates organized in some of the most evocative archaeological sites and museums of Rome, a city which has always been a crossroads of cultures, and which is called to be open to exchange and hospitality³.

In conclusion, organizing and hosting a World Congress of Philosophy means providing a space and a time frame to build concrete cooperation, to reflect on the great questions of our time, and to design together a shared vision of the future. It is from this overall context and these challenges, which are emerging with increasing sharpness amidst countless doubts and many possible alternatives, that a World Congress of Philosophy derives its *raison d'être* and its significance.

3 To mention just two events already been scheduled, with the support of the Municipality of Rome, the opening ceremony of the Congress will take place on 1 August at the Baths of Caracalla (<https://wcprome2024.com/opening-ceremony/>), while a series of evening debates, open to the public and exploring five philosophical concepts, will be held at the Palatine Forum.