

RYTŲ IR VAKARŲ KULTŪRŲ SANKIRTOS



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Power and Civilizations

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In numerous contemporary disciplines, including discussions of language, power is a “silent” background. The power of discourses, the political, economic, the power of prayer, not to speak of the constant wars popping up around the globe. The essay is not designed to contest such claims, but to investigate the way power as such is understood by different texts throughout civilizations. Such texts suggest how civilizations legitimate and justify power and, in some cases simply articulate the most efficient ways to employ it. The essay is designed to fill a “gap” in the West where power was explicated in a very diminished way.

Keywords: power, legitimation, arbitrariness, strategy, opportunity.

Introduction

A theoretical investigation into the nature of power and how it is communicated would seem to be redundant in face of the sciences and their explanations of this phenomenon. They are in a position to count the weapons, industrial capacity, psychological readiness, intelligence, allies etc., of nations and on the basis of the relative strengths of each, offer strategies for action. Today, such calculations extend to the psychological studies of the “will” to fight against overwhelming odds. Of course such studies depend on questions answered by fighters of diverse countries, groups, and beliefs, resulting in quantifiable “data” to be used for training purposes. Philosophy, then, would seem to lack an object of discussion. At best it could help clarify some issues, at worst it should be controlled from outside in the name of some presumed interests. We could recall the great debates concerning justice by classical thinkers such as

Plato only to discover that when it came to the question of power, Trasymachus announced that all decisions of justice depend on those who have power – case closed. Thus, if philosophy is relevant, it could be at least of practical service in the battle for the minds of populations by constructing some ideological justification for the use of power. A specific philosophy would be designed to envelope in an aura of truth some political expediency. The obvious result of such philosophy is a terrorism of thought. Here philosophy loses its essence – unconcerned freedom to range and probe, and to constitute itself and its object. This does not mean that it disappears; to the contrary, it enters its most aggressive and virile stage, the stage of its inauthenticity and arbitrariness, and serves the “reality” interests of some dogma or world view. In brief, it would become a clever and sophisticated rhetorical strategy to help control the thinking of populations. In turn, the virile stage appears in its cynical form as an

instrument that communicates power. This is specifically obvious in the age of science and technology which have reduced reason to *instrumental* reason. Our contemporary reality is a world brought about by science and constituted by technology, with all their possibilities and dangers. Modern world of globalization is formed by a growing interdependence between politics, economy and technology. Without cognizance that the world of science and technology is a result of specific philosophical inauthenticity, philosophies “feel left out” if they cannot keep up with the “latest” in the scientific and technical “progress.” While during the time of Nietzsche and even Marx, philosophy was still in a position to open new vistas and projects, although in already ideological sense, today such vistas are the domain of technocracies, leading in fact philosophy to regard itself as a set of learned logistic techniques for the analyses of formal problems.

Cosmic and social power

Among the numerous needs, interests, instincts, desires and even explanations of human behavior, ideal constructs, personality cults, mythical and mystical beings, the terrestrial, heavenly and demonic controversies, the drive for power seems to be preeminent. This may be premised on the assumption that all other interests and needs will be satisfied if one achieves a position of power. Those who possess power can dispense with favors or punishments and thus can find followers, servants and subjects required to maintain and enhance one's acquired power. The reason we focus

on power is quite simple: most, if not all anti-philosophical and un-philosophical movements – even those that are given credit as being philosophical – regard all thinking, all philosophical, scientific and even metaphysical positions to rest on some “interest” and the latter to be satisfied by power. It is currently in vogue to “explain” all that we are psychologically, genetically, physiologically, economically, and chemically. We are reduced to the “unknown” influences that dominate our activities. The unknown forces and powers are in many instances posed as “other worldly” entities, spirits, divinities, mysterious metaphysical presences that rule and dominate all events in this world. Countless volumes have been regarded as part of philosophy that extolled the presence of these extra-worldly beings, spooks, demanding that philosophy itself be subjected to serve the edicts of these beings. One well known version of this trend is the claim that philosophy is a “handmaiden” of theology. The latter is replete with all sorts of notions of the “will of god” and his power to punish and reward, to intervene in worldly affairs through the power of miracles, demanding human prayer, living on knees and submission to this will. Given this trend we propose first to follow the “logic” of power and its variations in order to find a limit that can be transgressed only on the grounds of philosophy. The latter will be seen as the major way of overcoming the logic of power and all the explanations of human thinking based upon it. It will have to be a counter to any arbitrary thinking or, to speak with philosophy, that man is the measure of all things.

The images of power, and specifically the images of those in possession of power, have fascinated the human from the first sign of self assertion and self reflection. The initial self assertion of power can be traced to magic and its field of associated meanings, such as making, ability, desire and power. The magical power is inherent in all living events and forms, a capacity of every living event to form itself and become any other event. The becoming another event requires that all events, inclusive of the human, offer themselves as vital, pre-psychic forces, capable of assuming the shapes of various living forms. In sacral terms, magic has been designated to be animistic. Animism signifies that the human can assume the powers of any creature by various means: partaking of the flesh and blood, ritual performance, initiation, acceptance of the animal's name, and trance. A hunter who dons the skin of a tiger in ritual dance, becomes the powers of the tiger – indeed becomes the tiger. In magic power there is no symbolic distance. The human does not signify, enact or perform some creature's power by theatrical imitation; to the contrary, the human becomes the very creature. The principle of magic power is identity. One does not have the powers; one consists of, one is the powers. The “knowledge” of the appropriate rites, whether of rain making or healing, is not something public, and not something learned as a practice; it is something that one becomes, submits to, and is inhabited by – if one can endure the trials of initiation, of complete transformation and loss of what one was. Such knowledge is immanent and secret, indeed “holy,” since it is identical with what one is and the powers one inhabits.

The sense of magical power still pervades much of what the West calls “Oriental philosophies” and the entire history of Mid-Eastern and Western personality cults such as Judaism, Jesuism, and Islam. In the East, magic is not something one learns as a textual material for logical analyses and debate; rather, the practical sayings, rituals and performances are transmitted solely as a gift of living power and only to a select few are capable of guarding the secrets of this practice. The practice is not innocent: it is what the human becomes through arduous practice, and what he lives in daily existence. Yoga exercises, appropriate diet, meditation, performance of one's duties, and above all the guarding of the secret knowledge as the greatest power. The truth here is not known and not even debated, but directly seen in every deed, and the deeds that are true have the power to become any event. But magical rituals are not something in the past; they are practiced every day, for example, in the cults of Judaism and Jesuism, where at birth an infant must be transformed by a ritual called baptism. It is deemed that the infant is born guilty and the ritual will absolve the infant of guilt. This, of course, is not the end of the story, since the rituals extend through person's life. He must become one with the body of the founder of the cult. Hence, one must drink the blood and eat the flesh of the founder and continuously become a Christian – one with Jesus. Of course the guardians of the secret ritual, the priestly members, have the power to grant or deny this identity to a person by declaring that one is either forgiven or not.

We know from the doctrines of Vedanta that the study of truth is a practice, an attainment of a higher state of being and not a thought or verbal acuity. Such a state of being is pervaded by the magic power of truth and the wise person is called *adhikarin*, meaning “having a right to authority, power, fit for, a master.” The ultimate seer – *vidya* – is the master of his own mind and body, his passions, reactions, meditations and visions. Such a person has a power to transcend the daily illusions and preoccupations, wishful thinking and attachments. He feels no challenge or defeat in fortune or misfortune, and is beyond the touch of destiny. Such a *vidya* has its own special power that has to be guarded if for no other reason than for the sake of those who would neither appreciate, understand, nor be able to master it. For them the power of *vidya* would be wasted and lead to disasters.

If such practice is the highest power, then it must be guarded most strictly and transmitted only appropriately. Its power can even compel the powers of gods to respond. The Vedic tradition was thus guarded and no outsiders were permitted to enter its secrets and rituals. But even the subsequent speculations of India took on the same aura of power and authority and they too were kept under a tight control of the masters. The transmission of Jainism or Buddhism required such a submission to the power of authority of the teacher, that a return to a former mode of life or state of being became impossible. And the higher the realization of the secret formula, the higher is the power. In India the magic power of Mahatma Gandhi is to be understood in this sense. For the Indian he expresses an

identity between the ascetic and transcendent wisdom and politics of daily existence – he is *mahatma*, whose essence is being great, i.e. he in whom a supra-personal power that pervades the universe resides and has grown to such a grand magnitude as to have become completely pervasive and dominant. All limitations of personal individualism and weakness have been swallowed up by the greatness of the cosmic power that changes one’s daily outlook and attracts the populations without using a single weapon. Gandhi is known to be a man who was transformed by his knowledge which he radiated as “holy power”.

But there is the verbal magic – *aitareya brahmana* – the dying round the holy power. The latter phrase is a translation of *brahmanah parimarah*: the root *mar*, meaning “to die” – mortal – and the prefix *pari*, meaning “round” and the ending *ah* which when added to the root forms a verbal noun, is a formula for numerous sayings evoking natural powers. “He who knows the dying round the holy power, round him the rivals that vie with and hate him die.” Or, “he who blows here (the moving breath of the macrocosm, the vital breath – *prana*) is the holy power (brahman), and he who knows thus – *yo evam veda* – participates in the vital principle’s relentless strength, and in his own restricted sphere can enact its overwhelming role.” Thus “He who practices the charm or ritual of the dying round the holy power, this magic performance – *karma* – which constitutes part of the way of ritual deeds – *karma marga* – for the attainment of a superhuman status, should say at the death of lightning: “let my enemy die, let him be concealed, may they

not perceive him.” While the ritual extends and includes other powers, such as fire – *agni* – all are designed to perform magic to injure or abolish the enemy. Thus Maitreya proclaimed the dying round the holy power to Sutvan, and round him died five kings and Sutvan attained greatness – *mahat*; he became *maha-raja*, having reduced all other rajas to vassalage or forced allegiance. Here we have the initial conception of “the way of knowledge” – *jnana marga* – which is actually a verbal ritual as an action for effect, a power against the enemies: such knowledge of words is power, and power leads to “greatness.” This is the *vedic Aryan* feudal age during which the entire aristocracy annihilated itself in incessant wars. This slaughter and this knowledge as power is well depicted in the epic *Mahabharata*.

It should be carefully noted that the ultimate – *Brahman* – is holy not because it is some passive and kind entity, but because it is power. The stem *brah*, occurs in a shorter form as *brh*, and both formations appear in the vedic deity *brhas-pati*. It is a personification of ritual skills, inventiveness of cunning devices. The Sanskrit ending *pati* means lord (Greek *posis* as a husband-master and *potnia* as a mistress-queen) and literally the potent one, one with the power of wielding *brh*. And the latter means to make great, to grow, increase. *Brahmayati* means an art of increasing life-strength in weak people, of “fattening” the thin. Thus divinities become *brhmita*, “swollen, puffed up, fattened” by hymns and praise, and *brahana* is power, strength. In subsequent centuries it became associated with *shakti* meaning “force, energy, potency, power.” Indra, the king

of gods, is *sak-ra*, the potent one, and his queen, Indrani, is *saci*, the potent female. Besides the root *brah*, the stem *man* is a formation of a noun of action; thus *karman*, with the root *kr*, connected with *kratu* – power – means to work, action performance.

He who knows this power, can not only address it, but assume it and become it. The power can be found everywhere and can assume many forms. It abides with the human not in the external appearance, but as an innermost source. From there it wells up, increases and floods into all parts, such as into the mind as visions, or into the tongue as potent spells. But above all, *Brahman* is the supreme cosmic power, and knowing of it, being able to tap into it, the human too is the supreme power. In principle, the human is *atman* breath (still resonating in German *atem* to breed, while *brahman* still present in English breath), is the cosmic breath into which the human will merge and become one with its power. “As a ring dissolves into gold, as a wave dissolves into ocean, so the universe will dissolve into me: wonderful am I, adoration to myself – Brahman am I”. thus *Mahatma* – *great atma*, *Gandhi*, is *one with Brahma*. The entire Indian knowledge is practical and is an effort to yoke this power not as a contemplation, but as a real acquisition and use. While this seems ancient, we shall show that its practice continues in the West under the sacred name of “science.” Thus we cannot assume that the “modern man” has somehow developed beyond the power of verbal magic, of secret formulas and scientific rituals.

Its use is direct, practical, and in most instances for the attainment of power in war. This attainment is worked out in detail

by Canakya Kautilya in the *Arthashastra*. It reveals the way that an ultimate tyrant should maintain power. The impact of this writing comes from the various experiences with absolutist rulers, inclusive of the Ba-sileus of ancient Persia. In fact the empire established by Cyrus and subsequently lost by Darius was used in India as an example for the attainment of a king of kings. The attainment is through sheer military might. Within three generations (521-486) the Persian armies shattered all the known kingdoms in every direction and of most diverse peoples and civilizations. Only the Scythians and the Greeks could not be defeated. The “super king” residing in his capital Persepolis had “eyes and ears” everywhere – spies, agents, informants were strewn across the entire empire in a tight network. Most of the work was in the hands of a suspicious, ruthless, and mutually mistrustful bureaucracy, each branch spying on, conniving against all of the others; secret agents following and informing even on the highest officials. Kautilya’s writings can be understood given the background of such an empire. Perhaps it could be suggested that the other side of Indian practognosis, the search for release, for complete vanishment, nirvana, is premised on a life in an empire. In whatever variation, empires reveal this basic unphilosophical trend of obtaining, maintaining and proliferating absolute power.

What is required, and all that is required, to achieve and maintain power, is a kind of total commitment without any scruples, regard to life, and an establishment of an intricate bureaucratic machinery under total control. The popu-

lations need not be considered, and if one is to pay any heed to them, there are ways of obtaining legitimation in accord with the customs of a given conquered population: thus Darius made a claim to have a mandate from all the gods, including the highest Persian divinity called *Ohura-Mazda*. And of course the divinity, in accordance with the meaning of its name, was quite “active.” Legitimation through divinization is nothing new. The Chinese emperor is the son of heaven – *tien-tse* – incorporating not only the royal but also the priestly principle. If he is overthrown, then it is a sign that heaven itself withdrew its power. Peculiarly, the Hindu conception of royal power was not open to such a supreme legitimation; the power was sanctioned only by *sri laksmi* that was a minor divinity similar to what the Latins called *fortuna*. It is fickle and undependable; the magic of power of the Hindu royalty was radically pessimistic. We must recall that the obtaining of secret power in Vedanta was not seen as legitimation of some ruler’s position, but simply an acquisition of power and becoming one with such power. Legitimation by divinities is mainly Mid-Eastern design, stemming from Persian Empire.

Autocracy

The term *revolution*, has become a norm for any change, from “revolution in genetic science”, to Islamic, Russian, and sexual revolutions. Meanwhile, the task of philosophy is to search for the most fundamental principles which are tacitly taken for granted, but not fully disclosed. This brief discussion is a way to point to, if not

completely illuminate, such principles. This implies that the autocratic and democratic modes of civilizational organization of human relationships might be dramatically and essentially different. No doubt, there are a variety of autocratic social organizations, from monarchy, aristocracy, plutocracy to theocracy, but a common feature appears when each is pushed to the limit: in the final instance who determines who does what, who gets what and why. An exemplary case would be a Middle Eastern tradition, in the form of Persian empire; it was completely autocratic, despotic, lending itself solely to an “imperative ordering” by the autocrat. While it is possible for an autocrat to be benevolent toward the population, his benevolence depends purely on his momentary dispositions, and the latter can coincide with the power of the laws the autocrat prescribes; he is a sole owner of everything and everyone – body and soul – in his empire. Those who fail to obey the autocrat’s will are destined to various degrees of punishment: we hear the chains from Siberia, the cries of holy wars from middle east, and Middle Ages, and the torture cries from the dungeons of the theocratic papacy. Even the West has imported, or accepted an exportation and imposition of a Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition stemming from, and completely correlated to the Persian autocratic mode of exercising power.

The power can be spread by the sword and become a specific form of colonization. Of course, apart from militaristic colonization, Judeo-Christianity and Islam correlated militarism to verbal, i.e. textual colonization. Peoples had to be converted into believers of imported texts. If they re-

fused, they would be regarded as false and evil, and hence abolished. The refusal means a rejection of being a property of a specific religion; in principle, the latter assumes that a human being belongs to the lord of lords, king of kings. There is a close correlation of universalization of particular “eminent text” (such as Judeo-Christian bibles, or Islamic Koran), proclaiming an absolute truth, with militaristic colonialism. This is well reflected in one, among numerous others, structural designs: imperial Persia and the divinities signifying such a structure. To understand this correlation we must attend briefly to the question of legitimation, allowing the treatment of the population as property, at the pleasure of the lord, owner.

Legitimation

The ambiguity of legitimation of possession of everything and everyone as property can be dispelled mainly with respect to story imagery. The story is peopled by figures that are structurally isomorphic with the power inhabiting the solar-imperial palaces. There is the celestial Lord-King, his Queen, their retinue, their subservient supplicants and worshipers, each with a sign of appointed and anointed rank, and hierarchical position given by the lord. This is precisely the imperial regality. In principle, the story composition coincides with the ruling composition. This is to say, there is no legitimation here, since the story does not justify the imperial claims and deeds but is identical with them. The emperor can claim, without a fear of contradiction, that “we are divine.” Thus we find that the Persian imperial morphology and the

Judeo-Christian-Islamic composition also coincide. The ruling emperor is the law giver and the law, and there should be neither deviations nor questions concerning the power of such law. The language here is one of edicts and imperatives, couched at times in the pronouncements of prophets. The latter are there to ensure that the highest authority is once again installed and recognized without interrogation. All that lives and exists must obey and be subordinate to the edicts, indeed must act in ways that would constitute a support and enhancement of the edicts. No one can question the imperial force of the law, specifically when the law coincides with the mythical power of the divine “maker of the world.” At this level, we are faced with an understanding of verbal power that becomes coextensive with making, and indeed with an indistinction between word and event. The power holder’s every uttered wish becomes coextensive with deed and reality. A variant of this principle is the “divine right of kings” such that the king is also the head of the church. This was and continues to be the practice in Russian empire where Putin is the head of state and church and, despite rhetoric to the contrary, an owner of everything and everyone.

We must point out that the coincidence between the ruling powers and the divine allows the ruling powers to claim universality and, by extension, colonialism. Our divinity rules over all, and hence demands us to rule over all. This trend toward universality is still prevalent in stronger or weaker forms in current Islamic, and Judeo-Christian practices. Each claims the universality of their texts and the right either to proselytize

it by verbal colonization, move into specific lands because they are promised, or to have a holy war against all who are incapable of recognizing the sole and universal master. The unbelievers are evil by definition and hence destined for total destruction. It is of note that Europe was colonized by one of the proclamations of universal truth – the Judeo-Christian – both by word and at the cost of millions of lives.

Having submitted to this truth, and having become, in turn, the propagators of this truth, the Europeans became Neo-Colonials. At the same time, being called to spread this truth, the Europeans, at one level of their civilization, became colonizers. Anywhere they went, they claimed the lands and the populations to be the property of their divine king. This level of colonization extends all the way into fascism, communism and current claims, in some quarters of the United States, that this continent is the promised land to the white Christian believers. We can only mention that this sort of colonization is nomadic. The bearers of the truth, of the “good tidings,” go everywhere and establish their rule (fortresses, temples, castles and enterprises) and compel the indigenous populations to submit (with slavery as one mode of such submission). Such nomads rule either as divinities, or as direct representatives of divinities. Moreover, since they have a higher task to perform – preoccupied with spreading and then maintaining, enforcing, and enhancing the master’s will, they must leave the mundane labors, such as tilling the land, planting and reaping, in general, producing, to the lesser beings.

The higher officers, who were closest to the ruler, could be trusted the least, since they knew the ruler's weaknesses and resources. They were therefore always on the lookout for mobility and were constantly exposed to royal disfavor. The ministers who served the ruler had to demonstrate their efficiency, and at the same time secure their own position against the ruler they served. Thus if the defense minister is to maintain his position, there must be spies everywhere, as well as some support for the ruler's opposition. In other words, there must be enemies if there is to be the power of police, and even if the enemies win, one should not expect the result to be anything else but another despotic ruler favoring his own clan – for the moment. After all, they too will create their “enemies.” In the modern West we know the extension of these practices in fascism and communism (practices mirrored in current trends toward autocracy). Both had leaders anointed either by heaven or by history who practiced the many ancient strategies of maintaining power: spies spying on spies, ministers plotting against other ministers, changing allegiances, and complete disregard of the population. The birth of the Soviet Union was nothing more than an opportunist deposing a despot and ruling the same empire from a position of an absolute autocrat – of course “anointed” by the rhetoric of scientific materialism and historical inevitability.

Power

Among the various ways of achieving and maintaining power discussed so far, there appear two trends concerning the suprema-

cy of one form of power over another. Initially, the first form of power, at least with respect to society, was aristocracy which could at times be centered in monarchy. It has been suggested by numerous writers, including Kautilya and Sun Tzu, that aristocracy is more beneficial to the population than any other form actually available at that time. The reasons for such a suggestion include 1) the interests of the rulers in their peoples and populations, even if the interests were selfish; 2) the aristocratic code of duty both to one's own peers and to the population, i.e., to the defense of the population against external violators; 3) the stability of the rulership due to an orderly transmission of power to the successor. Although this might at times involve family squabbles, the population would not be devastated because of point 1); and 4) the absence or at least the minimalization of opportunism. No other group could hope to usurp power and claim legitimation; only the aristocrats were legitimate power holders, and hence their *modus operandi* did not require them to grab power, get all they could, and run. Their power was sanctioned by family and tradition, while the opportunists were interested only in plunder for their own immediate benefit and – if successful – the prolongation of their power.

What this suggests is a difference in psychological attitude toward power and its use. The aristocratic self-esteem is taken for granted by “birthright” and hardly depends on accumulated riches (even if the latter are required to maintain a lucrative style of life), while the opportunist, not made secure in his position by a tradition, must

accumulate some signs of his prestige and standing. Such an accumulation requires not only plundering the population, but a warlike attitude against all. Since the opportunist acquired power not through the legitimation of a tradition but through cunning and the use of any possible means, he is fully aware that others like him regard his position as “fair game” and attainable by the same cunning and devious means. Hence there emerge the ruthless power struggles and constant changes of such rulers. The only relationship that the latter have to their populations is that of extreme exploitation to acquire all that one can get in order to maintain power against other opportunists, and in a more or less certain probability of losing power, to be able to escape with a sufficient fortune to some remote corner for some comfortable years. According to these arguments, although the aristocrats are absolute rulers, they are more benevolent than the opportunists. The former have “their” land and people, their tradition and duties, their honor and self-esteem, while the latter must disregard their people, their land, their honor, and strike when opportunity beckons anywhere and anytime. This psychological type constitutes the “independent” and “self-reliant” power player. He has nothing to start with and nothing to lose. His only way is “up” at any cost.

In the context of Kautilya’s writings, it is obvious that the opportunist, unbound by any tradition or custom, rules with complete arbitrariness, unpredictability, and disregard for anyone or anything unless they fit his momentary plans for the increase of power. Seeing enemies everywhere,

he has no choice but to constantly expand his power in order to secure his “future” and to prevent his enemies or competitors from getting an edge over his position. This constant need to expand power in order to maintain its edge is another reason for the tyrannical rule of the opportunist. He constantly needs more wealth, more persons to serve him, more armies to field, and more power vacuums to fill lest they be filled by his enemies. There is no holding back once one wrests some power from others and begins the arduous trek “to the top.” The very logic of power requires this expansion and terrorization. Kautilya, of course, saw this rule by power in its purity. The logic of the opportunists, in their initial activity of destroying all institutions (as was done by fascists and communists, and currently by conservatives in the West), also accepts this level of pure power – the destruction of all opposition. What will come after the destruction is, for the time being, not yet clear.

We come to the Russian – Byzantine – empire; purely autocratic where the head of the empire is also the head of church. In brief, when he speaks – god speaks. The Tsar is also the head of a family and a ruler of aristocracy; the latter swore allegiance to the Tsar, and he appointed them to serve in various posts of the state. As in all autocracies, those closest to the emperor were most dangerous – they knew the weaknesses of their Lord. Also, as in all autocratic empires, there were family murders and ascent to the throne by another family member – it was simply a tradition. The emperor spread his power and territory as much as his finances and cunning could bear. After all, Russian empire expanded

both east and west (incorporating the Baltic states). All is well, but the Tsar should have studied Kautyla's writings, warning about opportunists. And they came, till Lenin concentrated them under his domination and total discipline, allowing him to overthrow the Tsar, his family and aristocracy, and become an autocrat of the same empire. The first task is to eliminate all the vestiges of claims to the throne by the old aristocracy, by the educated, the talented, the productive, and hand the reigns of power to the dull, illiterate and allow them the pretense that they are "the people" in whose name the new autocracy is empowered to be masters and lords over everything. As an opportunist, Lenin and his cohorts appropriated all the wealth of the entire empire, subjected the population to total control by his opportunists, creating a system of suspicion where everyone might be a spy for the new autocracy. The so called "collectivization" for economic equality and benefit was a veil; in reality collectivization was the best means to herd the "people" (those who survived mass murder) so they could be watched, controlled, punished and become completely subservient and docile. *There was no Russian revolution: in principle, a traditional autocracy was overthrown by opportunistic autocracy without any essential changes for the population. In fact, the opportunistic autocracy was more ruthless and arbitrary.*

A brief reminder of the ways an opportunist functions in relationship to his gang of supporters and conspirators. Beginning with Lenin, any of his supporters, who showed any deviation from his momentary edicts as a challenge to his authority, were

eliminated – the case is with the sailors who won military battles for Lenin, and who requested a participation in public decisions, were destroyed – as were millions of peasants. After Lenin's death, Stalin had trials to condemn just about all the leading party members for "betrayal" and, of course, as a possible threat to his total rule. Poor Trotsky, who escaped to Mexico, could not avoid Stalin's power. After all, Trotsky was one of the leading members of the party and thus a threat to Stalin. Hitler and his "party" were extremely adept at finding opportunities to take over Germany and then to destroy all "enemies" internal and external. In Russian empire (Soviet Union) and in Germany (The Third Reich), there were purges and elimination of any sign which would threaten the "leader" and his absolute power. There is no need to go into the cunning of forming "alliances" or even treaties as somehow valid; valid yes – for momentary convenience to lull the "enemies".

But the way of power requires a total annihilation of the opponent by various tricks: flattery, sharing in the spoils of victory, giving aid, and even feigning fear. Recent modern history testifies to these tactics. Hitler and Stalin are the more pronounced examples. The former signed a pact with Poland, and hence isolated Poland from its French allies; then the Poles were "invited" to share in the spoils when Hitler invaded the neighboring Czechoslovakia. All these "friendly" gestures were a shield that hid the knife. The annihilation of the enemy is well noted in the communist eradication of the "bourgeoisie" and "revisionists," and the fascist eradication

of all of the “enemies” of the people. As the saying goes, a surviving remnant of the enemy is like a remnant of smoldering fire or unpaid debt; all are bound to increase with time. Hence the best policy is total annihilation. This includes “inconvenient” party operatives, generals, and trusted officials of one’s own group. This is not a novelty. If one reads the biographies of the Roman emperors, or the accounts of ancient Persia, Muslim records of the caliphates at Baghdad, Cairo, and the histories of the Ottoman power, one comes to a conclusion that power for its own sake has this logic. Everyone is always endangered, exposed to expected, although unsuspected attacks, even when one is armed to the teeth. No one is fully a master of the situation, and with time, no one is a master at all. One is doomed from the outset, yet one pretends to be “on top.” fratricide, poison, and the dagger comprise the order of social power. And the daggers can come in most numerous forms, from steel to money to the mere words of accusation and enticement to riot.

The pessimism is radicalized with the following question: what is more potent and most decisive in the struggle for power, personal valor, commitment, or a fatal turn of time? It is the *virya*, the virile-virtuous, against time. The argument favors the power of the latter: many valorous warriors fought to the last, and all in vain, against the rising tide that has swept them away, while persons of comparably little ability and valor, have sat in the seat of the conquering hero. Their very faults, deficiencies, and weaknesses turn to their advantage. And the great, backed by superior power, struggle in vain against the efficient. Time –

kala – the supreme power, favors the latter. If their action happens to coincide with the right time, nothing can stop them. The same happens with the battle of gods against the titans. The gods win not because of their superiority or valor, but because they picked the right time. But they too will be swept away from their high thrones, and the demons will sit on the seats of supreme power – for a while.

Once this power of time is recognized, one must realize how brief is the victory of human arms. Thus there arises an acceptance, sober and courageous, against this inevitable background, without illusions, obfuscations, and comforting ideals. Neither gods nor the posited community as an illusion of survival by the sacrifice of individuals, can stay the tide. The king, with all of his power, is a wounded animal from the start, and his fame will hardly outlive his career. And all of this is for the sake of a lack of resistance. Even Napoleon had noted that when he was cast by his destiny, nothing could turn his tide, but when his time had run its course, a straw tossed by a child would suffice for an emperor’s fall. It is unique that the power seekers of the West regarded themselves to be at the service of some grand design, even if the design was such a banal thing as evolution – one is selected by evolution as the fittest. One is an incarnate *fatum*, a carrier of civilization, of world spirit, a protagonist of social forces, divine vessel, advancing the aim of history, at the service of race, and an instrument of providence. Indeed, these could be legitimization ploys, except for the strange internalization by the power seeker of such a view – he believes his story. No

such mandate from “above” adorns the Hindu despot. He is the sole and actual holder of power, not carried by an idea of a new mission, new dream of grander human affairs or history with which his age would be ripe. He stands solely for himself and for those he can buy, bribe, gain through favors, or force to comply. When he falls, it is he who is vanquished with those who depended on him and he on them.

No doubt, the royal institution was part of *dharma*, i.e. the universal plan, but the occupants of the throne could be anyone who had the cunning and audacity to occupy it. Soldiers of fortune, foreign invaders, a crafty minister who was tired of managing the affairs of the king. Like the military emperors of Rome during the period of Roman decline, or the Byzantine rulers, the heads of states were completely exposed to internal and external strife. The populations cared little about the “affairs of the state.” They had their own struggles for daily bread and taxes to pay. The ruler could either be ruthless or magnanimous, but in either case he did not count for support from the population. The momentary supporters of the power were mercenaries who had to be lavishly paid, and who would desert the ruler for any other ruler with a better offer. One lost battle in ancient India almost inevitably spelled a kingdom lost. The higher officers, who were closest to the ruler, could be trusted the least, since they knew the ruler’s weaknesses and resources. Resultantly they were always on a look out for mobility and were constantly exposed to royal disfavor. The ministers who serve the ruler had to demonstrate their efficiency, and at the same time secure their own

position against the ruler they served. Thus spies everywhere, and at the same time a support to the ruler’s opposition had to be maintained, if the minister is to maintain his position. There must be revolutionaries if there is to be the power of police, and even if the revolutionaries win, one should not expect them to be anything else but another despotic rulership favoring the revolutionaries – for a moment. After all, they too will create their “enemies.” In the modern West we know the extension of these practices in fascism and communism. Both had leaders anointed either by heaven or by history who practiced the ancient strategies of maintaining power: spies spying on spies, ministers plotting against other ministers, changing allegiances and complete disregard of the population.

The best foreign policy is two sided: on the one hand, lull the enemy, placate him, be the most trusted friend, and on the other, marshal your forces secretly and at the opportune moment destroy him. As the advice goes, carry your enemy on your shoulder until you got from him what you want, then throw him off and shatter him like a jar against the rocks. This accords with numerous examples of Hindu history. A young prince proceeded from his palace with his army to meet and honor his father who was returning from victories and conquests. The son set up a lavish city of tents to greet, honor, and entertain his father. After the feasts, when the father with his generals was resting, his tent collapsed and he with his entire staff got crushed. This constitutes an advice for internal power relationships. One cannot count even on one’s family, since the members of the latter

are also greedy for power and nostalgic for glory. In this sense Kautilya's advices are most numerous: how the ruler should relate to his own family, especially to his queen, for, hidden in the queen's chamber his brother slew king Bhadrasena, hiding beneath the bed of his mother, the son killed king Karusa, and mixing fried rice with poison, as though with honey, his own queen poisoned Kasiraja. The account is endless. What is crucial for the ruler to know is his own treasury, since there are forty ways of embezzlement, and it is impossible for an official of the king's bureaucracy not to stuff all he can from the treasury. Such deeds are to be permitted with discretion.

Such power relationships are partially founded on the Indian notion of *maya* or appearance. All that we experience is *maya* and it is founded on our own ignorance that we ourselves create the appearances by our own desires and attachments. The father could be easily tricked by his desire to be honored and loved by his son. His son knew how to create the appearance that would constitute the father's attachments, and hence make the father drop his guard. He accepted the appearance, but the acceptance was equally his doing: he fell prey to his own desires and wants. The Indian mind is fascinated by the play of *maya* and how everyone, knowing its source, nonetheless falls prey to it, submits to its power of enticements and sufferings. The king knows that it is he alone who weaves this *maya*, and yet he lets himself be lulled by all of the appearances. He even knows that his desire for power creates his enemies who want to wrestle the power away from him. If he refused his desire for power and simply

disappeared into the forest to live on berries and fruit, his enemies would also disappear; they would look for someone else who wants and has power. This is not to say that the enemies are somewhat more intelligent. They too are driven by their desire for power and hence are already creating their own enemies. For modern Western trends this is expressed in somewhat diminished sense by Hobbes announcement that life is a war of all against all.

But the way of power requires a total annihilation of the opponent by various tricks: flattery, sharing in the spoils of victory, giving aid, and even feigning fear. Recent modern history testifies to these tactics. Hitler and Stalin are the more pronounced examples. The former signed a pact with Poland, and hence isolated Poland from its French allies; then the Poles were "invited" to share in the spoils when Hitler invaded the neighboring Czechoslovakia. All these "friendly" gestures were a shield that hid the knife. The annihilation of the enemy is well noted in the communist eradication of the "bourgeoisie" and "revisionists," and the fascist eradication of all of the "enemies" of the pure race. As the saying goes, a surviving remnant of the enemy is like a remnant of smoldering fire or unpaid debt; all three are bound to increase with time. Hence the best policy is total annihilation. This includes "inconvenient" party operatives, generals, and trusted officials of one's own group. This is not a novelty. If one reads the biographies of the Roman emperors, or the accounts of ancient Persia, Muslim records of the caliphates at Baghdad, Cairo, and the histories of the Ottoman power, one comes to a conclusion

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According to Indian tradition there are seven ways of dealing with one’s neighbor. First is the *saman*, conciliation or negotiation, a way of appeasement, soothing and charming. The most terrible and powerful can be soothed and charmed, including chants, music, prayer, praise, magic songs to win the grace of the powerful and the superhuman. *Saman* literally means melody. One “sings the right tune” and constantly bows and scrapes, and does so every day in meeting people: How are you, nice to see you, extended to social practice it becomes “non-aggression” pacts, division of the spheres of influence, etc. The opposite path in maintenance of power is *danda*, punishment, attack, stick and uplifted hand. The third is *dana*, a giving – donation – and in power relationships a bribery, a division of the spoils of war as well as presents, medals, decorations of generals and spies. The fourth is called *bheda* as splitting, dividing, disturbing, treachery, sowing dissention in the land and among the supporters of the enemy. Divide and conquer. Fifth is *maya*, concerned with trapping the neighbor in appearances, illusions, ideals, myths,

ideologies, and a screen of smoke, all sanctioned for attainment and maintenance of power. Sixth is *upeksa* concerned with overlooking, ignoring, such as paying no heed when one’s allies are making violent incursions into neighboring lands, or using all means to oppress their own peoples. One proclaims that these are the “internal affairs” of other states in which one has no legitimate right to mix. Seventh is *indrajala*, a net of tricks and appearances, such as building of fake fortifications or an amassment of troops, while attacking in a different direction.

If one seeks power then the last word of social wisdom is, never trust. As clouds change from moment to moment, just so your enemy of today becomes even today your friend, and whoever desires success must be prepared to make deep bows, swear love and friendship, speak humbly, and pretend to shed and wipe away the tears. The only rule is: aspire to be strong, because all things belong to the strong. Might is above right, and the latter follows the former, and without the former the latter has no command. Right is in the hand of the strong, and whatever flows from strength is pure. Be a heron in calculating your advantages, a lion in attack, a wolf when you prey, a hare when you must take flight, but always try to lift yourself up resorting to pious as well as cruel actions. If you are not prepared to kill, then abandon all hope of success, for men will think that you are soft and will despise you; hence when it is time to be cruel, be such, and when it is time to feign piety, be pious.

When the power logic of the *Arthashastra* first became known to Western philo-

logists, the commentaries were peculiarly Western and “pious.” It was deemed that the text is from a bygone age, untouched by the blessings of the European civilization. Even Machiavelli was seen as a good Christian in comparison to the far away pagans until, of course, one began to note that the West had as much a right to the honor of “naked power” as the East. When one drops the obfuscations such as “divine right of kings,” or “ruling in the name of the people,” or “at the service of historical destiny” one also notes that all such obfuscations are merely efforts to legitimate ones unabashed striving to attain and maintain power. The difference between Machiavelli and Kautilya is one of patriotism. Machiavelli was hoping for a ruler who would unite his native Italy and not only abolish the little wars that were tearing Italy apart, but above all expel the foreign invaders, the French and the Germans. With Kautilya things are a bit harder: no patriotism is relevant unless under its piety the ruler could expand his power. Yet by the twentieth century, with the final consolidation of power by large enterprises, all such sentimentalities as patriotism had vanished for the Western rulers, except in cases when such sentimentalities were conducive for the promotion of some power interest. By World War I the Westerners who had their eyes opened, could easily claim that there is a total Asiatization of social life. The same genius that invented the game of chess, has recognized the larger game of rule, power and war, and set down the rules by which this game is played.

As Kautilya was writing his *Arthashastra*, Sun Tzu was composing his thoughts on

war, with a conscious recognition that war is not only a grave concern of the state that would have to be faced periodically, but a phenomenon which is inextricably tied to human life. In whatever distribution, power is basic to both the cosmic and human processes. If it is inevitable, then its use should be carefully planned for success. But success for Sun Tzu could be attained by means which had to be combined quite differently than was done by Kautilya. It is better to attain power without war by the use of spies, agents, bribed officials, who would gather information, sow dissension, nurture subversion. The enemy should be isolated and demoralized, and his resistance broken. Thus without battles his armies were conquered. Only if the enemy cannot be conquered by this kind of war that armed forces should be used. But a victorious war could be waged only if there is an established national unity. The latter can be obtained only when the ruler is devoted to the people’s welfare. Sun Tzu is concerned with more than a brief victory. He sees the maintenance of power as a complex affair involving a fair and equitable treatment of the population, appropriate finances, long range strategies, high moral of the troops who would have to be convinced that their cause is just, that the opponents consist of barbarians, uncivilized and unjust exploiters, and mercenaries. There are various suggestions and devices on waging a war that have become classics in modern revolutions and minor wars. Even Mao-Tse Tung was constantly consulting Sun Tzu for his revolution against the nationalist forces. Apparently the old masters strategies worked well in modern warfare.

Among the various ways of achieving and maintaining power, discussed so far, there appear two trends of valuation of the supremacy of one form of power over another. Initially, the first form of power, at least with respect to society, was aristocracy that could be at times centered in monarchy. It has been suggested by numerous writers, including Kautilya and Sun Tzu that aristocracy is more beneficial to the population than any other form actually available at that time. The reasons for regarding it in this light are (1) the interests of the rulers in their peoples and populations, even if the interests were selfish, (2) the aristocratic code of duty both to his own peers and to his population, i.e. the defense of the population against external violators, (3) the stability of the rulership due to an orderly transmission of power to the successor. While this might at times take on family squabbles, the population would not be devastated because of point 1, and (4) the absence or at least the minimalization of opportunism. No other group could hope to usurp power and claim legitimation; only the aristocrats were legitimate power holders and hence their modus operandi did not require to grab power, get all you can, and run. Their power was sanctioned by family and tradition, while the opportunists were interested only in plunder for their immediate benefit.

What this suggests is a difference in psychological attitude toward power and its use. The aristocratic self-esteem is taken for granted by “birth-right” and hardly depends on accumulated riches – even if the latter are required to maintain a lucrative style of life – while the opportunist, not

secure in his position by a tradition, must accumulate some signs of his prestige and standing. Such an accumulation requires not only a plundering of the population, but a war like attitude against all. Since the opportunist acquired power not through the legitimation of a tradition, but through cunning and any possible means, he is fully aware that others like him regard his position as “fair game” and attainable by the same cunning and devious means. Hence there emerge the ruthless power struggles and constant change of such rulers. The only relationship that the latter have to their populations is an extreme exploitation to acquire all that one can get in order to maintain power against other opportunists, and, in a more or less sure probability of the loss of power, to be able to escape with a sufficient fortune to some remote corner for some comfortable years. Most recent case would be Marcos. Moreover, the opportunists, who were the order of the day at the time of Kautilya’s writing, had a psychological attitude for power and possession that could not be satiated. Coming to power from the “lower” rungs of society through struggles and cunning, having worked themselves into positions of wealth, they tend to concentrate on acquiring as much as they could. Unsure of their future, having access to material acquisition through power, they take full advantage “before it is too late.” These are the autocratic opportunists of our day – Hitler, Lenin, Stalin, Mussolini.

According to these arguments, the aristocrats, while absolute rulers, are more benevolent than the opportunists. The former have “their” land and people, have

their tradition and duties, their honor and their self-esteem, while the latter must disregard their people, their land, their honor, and strike when opportunity beckons anywhere and anytime. This psychological type constitutes the “independent” and “self-reliant” power player. He has nothing to start with, and nothing to lose. His only way is “up” at any cost. Later on we shall contrast these two types, i.e. the aristocratic and the opportunistic with the modern understanding of the “duty bound” citizen of enlightenment and the “opportunist” of capitalism-communism, aiming at the establishment of personal empires for their own benefit and on the basis of all available means.

In the context of Kautilya’s writings, it is obvious that the opportunist, unbound by any tradition or custom, rules with complete arbitrariness, unpredictability, and disregard for any one or anything, unless they fit his momentary plans for the incrementation of power. Seeing enemies everywhere, he has no choice but to constantly expand his power to secure his “future,” and to prevent his enemies or “competitors” to get an edge over his position. This constant need to expand power in order to maintain its edge is another reason for the tyrannical rule of the opportunist. He constantly needs more wealth, more persons to serve him, more armies to field and more power vacuums to fill, less they be filled by his enemies. There is no holding back once one wrests some power from others and begins the arduous trek “to the top.”

We arrive at the constitution of the tyranny of opportunity and ultimately a will to arbitrariness. Various factors might

comprise the conditions for such a tyranny of arbitrariness. First, the dissolution of any ontological, traditional, social, and even mythological norms that once tended to legitimate the social relationships. Second, the “expulsion” of the individual from a social fabric, i.e. his cosmopolitization in the sense of a loss of allegiance to any land or place, lending priority to his will for opportunity. Third, opening up of the social arena to any action for the individual’s aggrandizement without any rules, except for the rule of “success” in acquiring power and with it social prestige. Fourth, the mobility of the members of a society across all rungs and other societies, thus opening up opportunities to be pursued without restriction. And fifth, the general social attitude in which signs of success are posted in terms of power, wealth, control, and exploitation.

The abolition of restrictions in the above five factors reveals a basic composition of action in a society, and indeed across societies: arbitrariness. The form that arbitrariness assumes in the context of power is an irrational drive that becomes self contradictory. Initially, the actions of the seeker after power seem to be unpredictable, spontaneous, and risky, yet subsequently they assume a precisely decipherable “logic.” While the latter is “predictable,” its predictability is what comprises its vulnerability and resultantly demands increasing devices which would cover over the predictabilities and expectations. The increasing devices could be regarded as “strategic reflexivities” in the sense of supervening functions designed to create double appearances: first, the pretense that the action will follow

the expected logic for the attainment of power, and second the hiding of the true action by the first pretense. Obviously once the “opposition” catches on to the trick, it too will have to take a supervening step to guess what is behind the pretended action in order to counter the “real intent.” The continuous expansion of strategic reflexivities requires an increasing complexity of the rules of the power game, leading to an increasing bureaucracy and the expansion of its power.

Arbitrariness in this context turns out to be a necessary set of functions which cannot be determined precisely, although there is an unavoidable certainty that the confronting powers will devise some “trick” to deceive one another. Not governed by any law, the power game has its flexibility and indeed creativity that match the most devious and calculating talents. For the latter the game requires numerous maneuvers on both sides with the hope that the flexibility of the maneuvers will snare the opponent and reap victory. This is to say, the opportunists have to regard arbitrariness not in terms of total chance, but along the flexible options with every strategic reflexivity. An extremely pronounced arbitrariness appears in the social fabric of populations which are exposed to the power confrontations of the “players.” For the population, such as agrarian, there are necessities dominated by nature, e.g. seasons, crops, breeding time of stock, and regularities of the exchange of commodities. In terms of these required necessities, the imperial pursuit of power can be justifiably called arbitrary, since such a pursuit will design “the best” plans for defeating the enemies, and such plans will hardly match

with the required regularities of the life of a society. Generally speaking, arbitrariness appears when two incompatible practices clash, specifically in cases when one has the power to disregard the other. In this case the imperial powers, the rulers, are in a position to disregard the necessities of the practical logic of another group. Such a disregard can extend all the way to the destruction of the human both directly and by the destruction of the required environment.

The clash of two logics, at least in cases of the logic of the imperial power and the praxis of an agrarian society, shows an appearance of two rationalities: one that follows the course of terrestrial patterns, such as seasons, topographies, gestation, and thus it is capable of accommodating and respecting the needs of these patterns to which one also belongs, and the other overlooks or disregards the former in favor of a calculating rationality that places itself “above” the terrestrial patterns and simply serves the logic of autocratic power. As we shall note subsequently, while modern philosophy claims to be based on reason and even call itself “rationalist” it has not, in principle, surpassed the trend of power; after all, its rationality is “instrumental rationality.” In this sense rationality is not the ruling principle, i.e. it does not regard the world as rational but rather as something to be submitted to power controls and reason to be used for the enhancement of controls and mastery. This constitutes yet another sense of arbitrariness whereby rationality is forced to transcend the world of daily needs and terrestrial patterns in order to impose itself without submitting itself to such patterns. The opportunist, the power

seeker, seems to be exposed preeminently to such a rationality. This is perhaps one of the sources of mythological conception of the “transcendent maker” of the world. After all, the ruler need not submit to any law; he is the power that is above the law. We shall speak of this later in the context of Mid-Eastern personality cults.

Conclusion

The being above the law, and being a maker of the law that has direct effects not only through the exercise of power but being identical with the power, lends legitimation an ambiguity. On the one hand, the usual view rests on the assumption that the ruling powers, from time to time, wish to justify their position by the use of mythological and ideological constructs. As mentioned above, this tendency was very much prevalent in the medieval and modern West, using such tandems as “destiny,” or “divine providence,” “at the service of civilization,” or “at the service of history,” etc. Such tandems suggest that the ruling powers are not in charge; they are mere “instruments” of higher purposes behind the backs of the powers. The ultimate expression of such views would be Hegel’s notion of “world spirit” where the will to self-realization of the would be ultimate being is manifest in human action – the cunning of reason. This is an aspect of the anti-philosophical trend of absolute power premised on metaphysics of will. On the other hand, the ruling powers might understand themselves within the magical-power context wherein the word is the “maker” of the events, the law which is at the same time the deed. The

ones who are in power and operate within this magic context can indeed claim “divinity” since their word is the deed. In this sense, their proclamations that they are sanctioned by some mythological entity is a direct expression of their self-divinization as the ultimate makers of the world. This is to say, there appears an identity between the divinity and the ruler. Perhaps this is one of the backgrounds that allowed the pharaohs of Egypt, emperors of Rome, tzars of Russia, kings of England, popes of Rome to claim divinity or at least to speak with divine power. The mythical entities were not used for legitimation, but were expressions of the direct identification of verbal magic with the ruler.

Such an identification is, moreover, made possible by the very logic of power discussed so far. All that is done within the “ring of holy power” is self-warranting and self-enhancing” without an appeal to any “external” rules. The functioning rules are coextensive and, indeed, identical with their effectiveness. There is no “understanding” within the context of power logic that is distinct from power and that would allow one to perform an act of legitimation that would not be recognizable as another mode of power expression. Stated simply, the power context has no “exteriority” and cannot grasp itself as possessing any checks against it that are not themselves an expression of power. Any conception of “legitimation” is here power, where the very words that incantate legitimation are identical with the power of the cantor.

All that has been said, so far, must reveal a principle common to the great variety of conceptions of power, from human cun-

ning, through imperial positions and divine imagery to their metaphysical core. A principle, as we noted in our introduction, is the stance which cannot be denied without a contradiction and without it being the very ground of the denial. Hence, what we have discovered across the variations of power claims that, in all cases power seeks to proliferate itself as a support of all sorts of need fulfillment. But this function of power has not yet revealed its principle. The “for

the sake of” is instrumental and its aim is support of some presumed need for survival. It is to be noted that in modern terminology “survival” is one of the grounds for the use of power. Everybody struggles for survival and hence must use power – as Nietzsche had noted. While the thesis of survival has assumed universality, it cannot be taken for granted as philosophical. It is one Western modern theory that emerged with the appearance of “progress.”