

**Spiritual Pragmatics:
New Horizons of Human Development, Social Transformations and Planetary
Realizations**

The Outline of a Dialogical Workshop at Copenhagen Business School

Venue Copenhagen Business School
Dalgas Have 15, room SØ.014
2000 Frederiksberg
Denmark

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Organized by Søren Brier,
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Introduction and Invitation

Pragmatism has been an important philosophical and socio-cultural movement in the US which has influenced our view of language, social reality and human condition. American pragmatism as cultivated by C.S. Pierce and John Dewey has influenced post-war continental philosophy in the works of seekers such as Kar Otto-Apel and Jurgen Habermas. But this has not been merely a one-way influence. In the works of Apel and Habermas we see a mutual dialogue between American pragmatism and streams in continental philosophy namely Kant leading to what is called Kantian pragmatism. Kantian pragmatism has influenced critical theory. Kantian pragmatism has opened up pragmatism to new realities and possibilities as a result of dialogue between American pragmatism and continental philosophy.

But this dialogue now needs to be broadened and needs to be part of what can be called planetary conversations. There is a need for dialogue between varieties of pragmatism and also for exploring spiritual horizons of pragmatism. For example, Confucianism does have an important emphasis upon practice and pragmatism. John Dewey did visit China and did get to know the Confucian streams of theory and practice. Pragmatism does also have a spiritual horizon and base as, for example, in many streams of Indian traditions there is a focus on transformative practice. In this context Sri Aurobindo in his *Life Divine* talks about a nobler pragmatism “guided, uplifted and enlightened by spiritual culture and knowledge.” In his *Human Cycles* Sri Aurobindo also talks about spiritual vitalism. Sri Aurobindo also urges us to look at language as *mantra* and cultivate the *mantra* dimension of language. This urges us to go beyond a simplistic view of language as reflection of society. This resonates with Martin

Heidegger's conception of language as way making movement.ⁱ In Sri Aurobindo and Heidegger we find streams of spiritual pragmatism in their meditations on language, self, being and reality which can also inspire us to explore the spiritual struggle in Wittgenstein's conception of form of life.ⁱⁱ

With a creative dialogue with Sri Aurobindo, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Habermas and Dewey, we can cultivate paths of spiritual pragmatism as a new way of looking at self, society, language and reality. In spiritual pragmatism new languages and practices are born of multidimensional *sadhana*, strivings and struggles touching both the social and spiritual bases of life and society. Spiritual pragmatism involves interpenetration of spiritual and material, immanent and transcendence, capability and transcendence. Spiritual pragmatism involves practical discourse as suggested in the critical theory and practice of Jurgen Habermas and practical spirituality suggested in the works of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo as well as in many transformative spiritual movements in societies and histories. Spiritual pragmatism thus contributes to strivings for realization of non-duality as an ongoing *sadhana* and struggle in life, culture and society. It must be noted that there is an important legacy of overcoming dualism in American pragmatism as well which we notice in the work of social philosophers such as Goerge Herbert Mead who urge us to go beyond the dualism of subject and object.

Spiritual Pragmatism, Spiritual Pragmatics and New Horizons of Human Development, Social Transformations and Planetary Realizations

With a broader philosophical and theoretical engagement with spiritual pragmatism we can come to spiritual pragmatics as a way of rethinking human development and social transformations. Spiritual pragmatics can help us rethink conventional notions of practice and engagement as well as models of human development. It can also suggest new frames of reference for thinking about narratives of change with regard to such epochal issues as climate change. Spiritual pragmatics can challenge us to rethink human development as both a political and spiritual process of transformation involving transformation of very modes and telos of power and not only acquisition of power. In our workshop, we discuss the following issues:

In our workshop, we wish to explore further issues of spiritual pragmatism in the light of concerns shared above. We want to explore the following issues as starting points for further dialogues and planetary conversations:

- a) Spiritual Pragmatism and Spiritual Pragmatics: Rethinking Human Development, Social Transformations an the Challenges of Planetary Conversations and Planetary Realization
- b) Spiritual Pragmatics and Transformation of Economics and Politics;
- c) New Horizons of Spiritual Pragmatics: Time, Suffering and Healing
- d) Spiritual Pragmatism: Practical Discourse and Practical Spirituality and Transformation of Leadership and Management

- e) Spiritual Pragmatism and the Contemporary Challenges of Theory and Practice exploring contemporary developments in cognitive sociology, pragmatic sociology, life sciences and new neurology
- f) Spiritual Pragmatism and the Calling of a Post-Secular Society: Overcoming the Pathology of Reason and Religion and Nurturing Spaces of Healing

You are most cordially invited to join us in this workshop. Pl send an abstract of your proposed paper or presentation within 250 words to Dr Ananta Kumar Giri and Professor Soren Brier at aumkrishna@gmail.com / sb.abc@cbs.dk by Jan 25, 2013

References Cited:

Heidegger, Martin. 2004. "The Way to Language." In idem, *Basic Writings*. London: Routledge.

2007. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ananta Kumar Giri is currently on the faculty of Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai, India and has taught and done research in many universities in India and abroad including University of Kentucky, USA; Aalborg University, Denmark and University of Freiburg, Germany and MSH, Paris. He has an abiding interest in social movements and cultural change, criticism, creativity and contemporary dialectics of transformations, theories of self, culture and society, and creative streams in education, philosophy and literature. Dr. Giri has written and edited around two dozen books in Odia and English, including *Global Transformations: Postmodernity and Beyond* (1998); *Sameekhya o Purodrusti* [Criticism and the Vision of the Future, 1999]; *Patha Prantara Nrutattwa* [Anthropology of the Street Corner, 2000]; *Conversations and Transformations: Toward a New Ethics of Self and Society* (2002); *Self-Development and Social Transformations? The Vision and Practice of Self-Study Mobilization of Swadhyaya* (2008); *Mochi o Darshanika* [The Cobbler and the Philosopher] (2009); and *Knowledge and Human Liberation: Towards Planetary Realizations* (2013). For his contribution to knowledge and society, Dr. Giri has been awarded the Barata Jyoti (India Glory) Award in 2012.

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Endnotes:

ⁱ What Heidegger writes in his essay, "Way to Language" deserves our careful attention: "*What unfolds essentially in language is saying as pointing*. Its showing does not culminate in a system of signs. Rather, all signs arise from a showing in whose realm and for whose purposes they can be signs" (Heidegger 2004: 410). Furthermore, "What is peculiar to language thus conceals itself on the way, the way by which the saying lets those who listen to it get to the language" (ibid: 413). For Heidegger, "the way to

language is the [...] way-making movement of appropriation and usage” where “appropriation appropriates human beings for itself, [...] appropriation is thus the saying’s way-making movement toward language” (419, 418):

What looks more like a tangle than a weft loosens when viewed in terms of the way-making movement. It resolves into the liberating notion that the way-making movement exhibits when appropriated in saying. It unbinds the saying for speech. It holds open the way for speech, the way on which speaking as hearing, hearing the saying, registers what in each case is to be said, elevating what it receives to the resounding word. The saying’s way-making movement to language is the unbinding bond, the bond that binds by appropriating (ibid: 419).

What Heidegger speaks about language as saying as part of “way-making movement” is suggested in tradition of people’s enlightenment in Europe namely the folk high school movement and people’s enlightenment patiently cultivated by Grundtvig and Kristen Kold. Both of them challenged us to realize language as “living words”--words that could enliven and energize us. This is also akin to Sri Aurobindo’s suggestion to create poems which would work like *mantra*.

ⁱⁱ Veena Das building upon Stanley Cavell shares some insightful reflections here:

When anthropologists have evoked the idea of forms of life, it has often been to suggest the importance of thick description, local knowledge or what it is to learn a rule. For Cavell [Stanely Cavell, the noted contemporary philosopher] *such conventional views of the idea of form of life eclipse the spiritual struggle of his [Wittgenstein’s] investigations*. What Cavell finds wanting in this conventional view of forms of life is that it not only obscures the mutual absorption of the natural and the social but also emphasizes *form* at the expense of *life* [...] the vertical sense of the form of life suggests the limit of what or who is recognized as human within a social form and provides the conditions of the use of criteria as applied to others. Thus the criteria of pain do not apply to that which does not exhibit signs of being a form of *life*—we do not ask whether a tape recorder that can be tuned on to play a shriek is feeling the pain. The distinction between the horizontal and vertical axes of forms of life takes us at least to the point at which we can appreciate not only the security provided by belonging to a community with shared agreements but also the dangers that human beings pose to each other. These dangers relate to not only disputation over *forms* but also what constitutes *life*. The blurring between what is human and what is not human sheds into blurring over what is life and what is not life (Das 2007: 15-16; emphasis added).