

## Editorial: *Logos and Parole*

The Fire and the Sun were one and the same. The Air was a breeze across the decks of the *Hermes*. The Water was the waters of the Saronic Gulf, the Earth the coast of the Greek mainland and the islands of Aegina, Hydra and Poros. All four Elements were present and correct for the Sunday excursion of the Third International Symposium of the Greek Philosophical Society. Every prospect pleased, and during the languid hours of most of the cruise not even man was vile. The only reminder of original sin came in a two-hour session of philosophical papers in the ship's dining-room as we returned to Athens in the early evening. A single questioner, interrupted only by the chairman's voluble but ineffectual protests, was able to occupy the stage for the whole of what had been described in the programme as a discussion.

No member of the audience was surprised. We had all been prepared from the first day for the vigour and tenacity with which *la parole* was seized and held. The ration of time for the presentation of each paper was twenty minutes. After an early presentation had lasted more than half an hour, the chairman made a mild comment about the desirability of observing the limit. The response from the next speaker was indignant, ingenious and perverse. The subject of the whole symposium, he reminded us, was Justice. Now justice is rooted in equality. Hence there would be injustice if any one speaker were allowed more time than another. It followed that he too must speak for thirty-five minutes. Your reporter unhappily missed the occasion when an elderly and dignified Academician literally seized *la parole*—the microphone itself—from a speaker who was guilty of making false statements about Plato, statements proved to be false in writings by the indignant Academician that it was sinful not have read, imbecile not to have absorbed, and insulting not to have reproduced.

Human nature had shown itself earlier still. Madame Mercouri, Minister for Culture, had been detained in the House by a political crisis, and sent a junior minister to welcome the symposiasts. Professor Boudouris, President of the Society and Organizer of the Symposium, had escaped after six hours from an urgent university meeting just in time to deliver his Inaugural Address.

As always in Athens, there was the interpenetration of the temporary and the permanent, the One that remains and the many that change and pass, the *being* of Parmenides and the coming-to-be and passing-away of Heraclitus. From room 612 in the Omonia Hotel, even with one's

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head on the pillow, it was possible to see both the Parthenon and the giant crane that is helping to make its permanence last a few centuries longer. From the Dionysos café-restaurant, by choosing the right table, it was possible to see the temple without the crane. The Socratic word ELENCHUS survives, emblazoned in capitals on the arrivals gate of the airport, but it now portends not the examined life but only the inspected passport. For delegates concerned with Aristotle and the injustice of *pleonexia*—graspingness, taking too much—it was piquant to learn that the word *pleonektēmata*, in advertisements for new cars, does not even mean *extras*, but only *advantages*.

These and much greater matters of *logos* and *parole* were taken in their stride by the team of simultaneous translators who made most of the papers readily intelligible to the international audience. They sat in soundproof but windowed cabins above and behind the speakers, visibly outdoing them in the animation that they instilled into what was sometimes a spiritless discourse. It was almost possible to follow them without using earphones, their body-language and their hand-signals were so eloquent. They were soundproofed from each other as well as from us, and there were no windows between their cabins, yet it was manifest that it was the same text that was being turned into English by one of them and into French by another. The most graceful dumb-show of the week was put on when a right-handed anglophone and a left-handed francophone fitted like gloves, so that their pointing fingers, high above their heads, would have met if it were not for the partition between the cabins.

On Saturday evening the translators showed a sense of time that went beyond the professional synchrony of their instant prose. After repeated warnings to the chairman via microphone and headphones, they finally announced and enacted their departure from the hall. It was after half past seven, the scheduled end of the day's proceedings, and they could accept responsibility neither for the two-hour time-lag that had been accumulated by speakers seeking mutual equality, nor for the ensuing confusion of tongues.