Knowledge and Human Liberation
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Towards Planetary Realizations

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For M. S. Swaminathan
S. N. Eisenstadt
Sang-Jin Han
Piet Strydom
Des Gasper
P. V. Rajagopal
Ashgar Ali Engineer
Betsy Taylor
and
Herbert Reid

who are engaged in inspiring efforts to make knowledge part of our current multi-dimensional sadhana and struggles for liberation.
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We should do our utmost to encourage the Beautiful, for the Useful encourages itself.

—Goethe

By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave non-perishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a “divine” nature.

—Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958, 19)

Oh People! Behold, we have created you all out of a male and female, and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another.

—*The Quran* 49: 3

…Why should the hermeneutic model of understanding, which is derived from everyday conversation, and since Humboldt, has been methodology refined from the practice of textual interpretation, suddenly break down at the boundaries of our own culture, of our own way of life and traditions?

—Jürgen Habermas, *The Divided West* (2006, 17)

My desire for knowledge is intermittent, but my desire to bathe my head in atmospheres unknown to my feet is perennial and constant. The highest that we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. I do not know that this higher knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise on a revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called Knowledge before – a discovery that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy. It is the lighting up of the mist by the sun… Live free, child of the mist – and with respect to knowledge we are all children of the mist.

—Henry David Thoreau “Walking” (1947, 623–4)

Human liberation is an epochal challenge now which means not only liberation from oppressive structures but also liberation from the oppressive self. It is a multi-dimensional struggle and aspiration for realizing beauty, dignity and dialogues in which knowledge – self, social as well as spiritual – can play a transformative role.
The present book in our hands, *Knowledge and Human Liberation: Towards Planetary Realizations*, undertakes such a journey of transformation and seeks to rethink knowledge vis-à-vis familiar themes such as human interest, critical theory, enlightenment, ethnography, ethnocentrism, democracy, pluralism, rationality, ethics, aesthetics, secularism, spirituality, and cosmopolitanism, among others.

The book brings together my engagement with these issues over the last two decades. In this period it has been inspiring for me to have been in communication and conversation with nine seekers of our Mother Earth who have dedicated themselves to pursuit of knowledge and human liberation in inspiring ways – M. S. Swaminathan, S. N. Eisenstadt, Sang-Jin Han, Piet Strydom, Des Gasper, P. V. Rajagopal, Ashgar Ali Engineer, Betsy Taylor and Herbert Reid. M. S. Swaminathan is the noted scientist and public intellectual of our world who has continuously striven to enrich human lives through innovations in science, technology and appropriate public policy. For Swaminathan, “We should neither worship nor discard technologies because they are old or new. What is important is to use knowledge and skills in manners that children can be born for happiness and not just for existence. We need an ecology and technology of hope and not of despair.” In his dialogue with Daisaku Ikeda, *Revolutions: To Green the Environment, To Grow the Human Heart*, Swaminathan also tells us: “The movement towards multilateralism and globalization must be not merely economic, but also spiritual. What we need most is spiritual globalization… By spiritual globalization, I do not mean that every one should belong to the same religion. I am speaking of building security in the wider sense of human dignity and gender equity.” In his recent works, Swaminathan talks about realization of biohappiness through “sustainable and equitable use of natural resources for more jobs and income.” At 87, Swaminathan continues to embody inspiring vision and strivings. In all our meetings I have been inspired by his indefatigable energy, enthusiasm and generosity.

S. N. Eisenstadt was a great seeker of humanity who has explored so many dimensions of sociological knowledge. Until his very last moment (he passed away on 2 September 2010) he was active in his quest and he so kindly nurtured so many individuals and institutions around the world for more seeking and for thinking beyond the box. His latest project of “Multiple Modernities” has generated creative research work and debates around the world. I first met him in his home in Jerusalem in July 2002, and since then until his very last days Eisenstadt was such a kind source of support and encouragement.

Sang-Jin Han is a creative and critical sociologist from Korea who took part in the struggle for democracy there and plays a key role as a public intellectual in the post-authoritarian Korea. It has been enriching on my part to have been in communication and collaboration with him over the years. I first saw his edited book *Habermas and the Korean Debate* in the library of the University of Kentucky where I was a visiting fellow, in fact working with Betsy Taylor and Herbert Reid, in the fall of 2002. I then emailed him. We met; his work is a model of sociological engagement with knowledge giving rise to rigorous empirical work, grounded normative vision such as his concept of “middling grass-roots” (as different from mere “middle class” animated by a vision
to transform existing conditions in society) and public enlightenment. Piet Strydom similarly is a model of silent dedication to sociological knowledge and the creation of a more and differently enlightened world. I first read a moving essay by him, “The Challenge of Responsibility for Sociology,” in 2001. I emailed him and visited him at University College Cork in May 2002 where the lead essay of the book was presented as a seminar in his Department of Sociology. Piet continues to explore new horizons of knowledge and sociological practice and his seminal work, *Discourse and Knowledge: The Making of Enlightenment Sociology*, has been a source of inspiration to me as well as to many seeking souls around the world. He himself is an example of sacrifice for the sake of human dignity. He protested against the apartheid regime in South Africa and had to leave his mother land.

Des Gasper is an inspiring seeker of our times who has quietly and calmly dedicated himself to the pursuit of new horizons of human development, human security and development ethics. Ever since our first meeting in 1995, we have walked together many a time and have felt the call of a wider vocation of learning and scholarship. Des’s range of scholarship and nurtured friendship is amazing and he continues to inspire all of us who meet him to be an embodiment of trust, integrity and devoted commitment to scholarship and human excellence.

P. V. Rajagopal and Ashgar Ali Engineer are two inspiring activists and visionaries of our times, whose vision and work assure us that even in the dark times we must not lose hope and walk together for peace, beauty and dignity. I first met with Rajagopal in the 2007 *Janadesh*, which was a month-long walk from Gwalior to Delhi for the cause of land for the landless people of India. We walked together for two days and what was touching was that, like thousands of co-walkers, Rajagopal was sleeping on the street along with his kind and inspiring wife Jill. Rajagopal continues to lead non-violent struggles for dignity and transformation in India and the world, and I have met many in Europe who are inspired by his vision and practice and have started dignity walks in their communities. For example last July (2010) I took part in the Dialogue of Humanity in Lyons, France, in which many walkers from surrounding communities took part, and they were inspired by Rajagopal. It is an example of the creative reverse globalization and planetary realization with which this book is concerned. Similarly, Ashgar Ali Engineer embodies deep commitment to knowledge and human transformations. He has been one of our most creative and inspiring practitioners and interpreters of Islam whose practice and interpretation of Islam as a religion of peace and compassion is a source of inspiration as well as a challenge for co-learning for all of us concerned. It has been enriching for me to have been in communication and grow in fellowship with this remarkable gift of the Divine, who continues to do his *tapasya* of love and transformation without fear, despite many attempts on his life.

Betsy Taylor and Herbert Reid embody a deep political and spiritual commitment to recovering our commons and transforming our existing discourse of alienation and annihilation; creating a world where we grow with beauty, dignity and dialogue. Both of them have gone beyond the domains of professional academy and have built creative bridges with the activists. Their dedicated work is a source of inspiration to
me as well as many people around the world. In dedicating this book to them as well as to seven fellow dedicated practitioners of knowledge, I not only pay my personal tribute but also what we all owe to these inspiring seekers of our times who constitute the navaratna, the nine jewels, of our fragile Mother Earth.

I am grateful to all the friends and institutions mentioned in the following section of Acknowledgments where we have co-nurtured these thoughts. A special thank here is due to my dear friend and soul-brother Ivan Marquez, who taught at Bentley University, Massachusetts, and is currently based in Ireland, for his kind comments and generous help. I am grateful to Professor John Clammer for his kind foreword and Professor Fred Dallmayr for his inspiring afterword. I am grateful to kind and generous friends in Anthem Press, Tej P. S. Sood, Robert Reddick and Janka Romero for their nurturance of this project and to Professor Makarand Paranjape of Jawaharlal Nehru University for making initial communication between Tej and myself possible. Finally I hope this work contributes to the contemporary processes of formation of liberatory knowledge and sadhana, and struggles for self and social transformations.

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15 August 2012 – Independence Day of India
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The chapters in this book build on essays published in different journals and presented in seminars and at conferences. I am grateful to the editors of the respective journals and the organizers of the seminars and conferences for their consideration and generosity.

Chapter One

This is the revised version of a paper first presented at the international conference on “Knowledge: East and West” held at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, 14–16 December 2000, and subsequently presented at: University College, Cork; University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign; Committee on Social Theory, University of Kentucky; and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. My thanks are due to all the participants in these seminars for their comments and interrogations, especially to Professors Piet Strydom, Linda Connolly, Jan Nederveen Pieterse, Betsy Taylor, Christopher Zurn, Pat Cooper, Theodore Schatzsazi, James Peacock, Rev. Chris Platt, Beth Powers and Arturo Escobar. This chapter was later published in the European Journal of Social Theory (2004) – Professor Gerald Delanty and the anonymous reviewer for the European Journal of Social Theory have been more than generous with their comments and encouragement and my grateful thanks are due to them.

Chapter Two

This is the revised version of a paper first presented at the international conference “Beyond East and West: Europe in a Changing World,” held at Schloss-Elmau, Bavaria, Germany, 4–7 April 2004, and which now appears in Futures (2008). I am grateful to Professor Gerard Delanty for his kind invitation and to Piet Strydom for helping me with many of his seminal papers on evolution. I also wish to thank Dr Tattwamasi Paltasingh, then at Tata Institute of Social Sciences and presently at the Sardar Patel Institute of Social and Economic Change, Ahmedabad, for finding me some crucial books from her institute’s library, and P.S. Syamala for help in word processing this essay. I am grateful to Mr Rakesh Kapoor and the anonymous reviewer of Futures for their comments on this paper.

Chapter Three

This chapter builds upon my introduction to The Modern Prince and the Modern Sage: Transforming Power and Freedom (New Delhi: Sage, 2009).
Chapter Four

This was first presented at the session “Philosophy and Anthropology: Border-Crossing and Transformations” that Terry Evens of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and myself co-convened at the EASA (European Association of Social Anthropologists) biennial meeting in Vienna, 2004.

Chapter Five

I am grateful to Professor Ronald Walters of the Department of History at Johns Hopkins University for his help with and comments on this paper when it was first prepared as a term paper for a course with him on American history in the spring of 1988. This has been previously published in Review of Development and Change (2006).

Chapter Six

This is a revised version of a paper presented at the national seminar on “Rationality and Tribal Life” organized by the Department of Philosophy at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong in September 2001, and which was subsequently published in the Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research and the book Rationality and Tribal Thought, edited by Sujata Miri (Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004). I am grateful to Professors Jagatpal and Sujata Miri for their very kind invitation and hospitality and to all the participants, especially to Professors Mrinal Miri, C. A. Agera, B. K. Agarwala, Archana Barua and Suryakanta Maharana for their insightful comments and enriching fellowship. This paper was revised when I was a visiting fellow at the Center of Social Studies at the Jacob-Blaustein Institute of Desert Research, Ben-Gurion University, Negev, Israel, and I wish to thank Professor Gideon Kressel and Tal for their kind hospitality.

Chapter Seven

This chapter appeared as “Rethinking Modernist Historiography” in Creative Social Research: Rethinking Theories and Methods, edited by Ananta Kumar Giri (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004).

Chapter Eight

This chapter was first published in the book Rule of Law, edited by Professor Danilo Zolo, and subsequently published in Man & Development (March 2002).

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

This is a revised version of an essay first presented as “Normative Pluralism and Rights and Law: The Challenge of Transformations and a Non-Dual Embodiment of Responsibility” in an international seminar on “Normative Pluralism and Human Rights” at the University of Florence, 6 December 2002. I thank Professor Danilo Zolo for his invitation and Filippo Ruschi, Helena Tagesson and other participants of the seminar for their comments and suggestions. This essay has also been presented subsequently at the Seoul National University and I thank Professor San-Jin Han and Ms Park of the Korea Foundation for their helpful suggestions and kind hospitality. This essay has been published in the Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research (2004).

Chapter Eleven


Chapter Twelve

This is a revised version of a paper presented at an international seminar on “Political Consumerism,” held in Stockholm from 31 May to 3 June 2001. I thank Dr Michele Micheletti of the Department of Political Science of Stockholm University for her invitation and to all the participants for their comments and criticism. The paper was subsequently published in the Journal of Human Values 10 (1) (2004): 41–51.

Chapter Thirteen

This chapter builds upon my presentation at the Hind Swaraj centenary seminar “Social Development and Human Civilization in the 21st Century,” 12–14 February 2009, organized by the Council for Social Development, Delhi. I am grateful to Professor Manoranjan Mohanty, the main organizer of the seminar, for his kind invitation and encouragement. The chapter also builds and expands on a text I wrote for an edited volume on Hind Swaraj edited by Vinod Chandra.

Chapter Fourteen

This is the revised version of a paper first presented at the symposium on “Civil Society and the Paths of Modernity in India” at the annual meeting of the German Sociological Association, Munich, October 2004. I thank Dr Martin Fuchs and Professor Monika Wohlrab for their kind invitation to take part in this symposium. This has been subsequently published in the Sociological Bulletin (2008), and I thank the anonymous reviewer and Professor N. Jayaram, its managing editor, for their comments.