

"De Philosophia Scotica" from the "Sources" Research Areopagus

The present text stems from the collective reflection of nine Brothers from the Sources research Areopagus. It is the result of several months of patient dialog, lively discussion and rigorous debate.

Week after week, seven projects were elaborated, criticized, amended, perfected and rewritten. The text below is worth what it's worth, but is proposed by its contributors in all sincerity. It is not a creed, a catechism, or a declaration of principle, and is still less the official expression of the Supreme Council of the Grand College of Rites. On the occasion of the bicentennial of our Jurisdiction, its sole ambition is to contribute to the debate about the (possible) significance of the AASR today.

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas[1].

"Don't throw a stone into the well from which you once drank..." (Talmud, Baba Kama, 92b)

Prolegomena

Is it possible to summarize the essence of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (AASR) in a « brief and pertinent » text, when about 30 000 works (and countless articles) have already been written on the subject?

Yet such is the ambition of the present work. Its aim is to rival, nolens volens, the accomplishment of Polish author Witold Gombrowicz who managed to present the whole history of modern philosophy, from Kant to Sartre, in his *Philosophy in Six Lessons and a Quarter*[2]. We are not at all sure of having reached our goal.

Scottish Freemasons often practice the AASR as Molière's Monsieur Jourdain practiced prose; so in all prudence and modesty we will simply parody Montesquieu by asking "How can one be Scottish?" in the year of True Light 6004?

Naturally, rigor would have us begin with the narcissistic question: "What is the AASR?", and its follow-up : "What is the use of Scotticism ?"

In order to keep the debate open, we shall each reflect on the following question: "What does the AASR say?"

Our first finding: the AASR is "universal" de facto[3]. To be more precise, wherever Masonry exists the AASR is present – in Symbolic Lodges, high grade workshops, or both. The importance of the AASR obviously varies from one country to another, but globally it is by far the most widely practiced high grade rite in the world. Incidentally, this situation was forcefully reaffirmed in the Final Declaration of the 16th Meeting of Scottish Jurisdictions (Paris, 18-20 May 2001) which emphasized «the vocation of universality, solidarity and independence of Scotticism, which is celebrating its bicentennial this year; its Rite, the most widely practiced on the planet at present, promotes an encouraging harmony among Masons...»

It should be noted that the AASR is also one of the three most commonly used systems in Blue Masonry, together with the York and Emulation rites, and that French Freemasons of all persuasions have practiced the AASR more than any other rite since the 1990s.

Both conceptually and emotionally, the AASR appears to be the most malleable of all rites – a quality which is partly due to its genesis, practice, and history. It's a «catch-all»[4] kind of system resembling an "assembly" of degrees (or "families" of grades), with a culture of dynamic syncretism. This is the consequence of three parallel processes:

- The formation throughout the 18th century of a vast corpus in the "encyclopedic" spirit of the age (everything "good" had to be included), heralding an approach that can be described as anthropological;

- The refusal to integrate overly radical ideologies, resulting in a good-natured tolerance which renders it antinomic to any attempt at « dogmatization », even though certain Anglo-Saxon and northern European Supreme Councils, at odds with the original spirit of Charleston, have their own (particularly Christian) interpretation;

- The cohabitation, juxtaposition and even synthesis of various (sometimes conflicting) trends : hermetism, rationality, illuminism, the Lumières, « primitive » Christianity, kabbalah, Greco-Latin philosophy, borrowings from the Far East, the Ancient and Modern rites[5].

These factors gave the AASR some of its characteristic features: adaptability to all climates and philosophical latitudinarianism. The AASR thus lends itself to a vast range of interpretations, speculations and reflections, in a spirit of tolerance.

Nevertheless, over the two centuries that the AASR has existed, it has become clear (to parody the Gospel of John) that there are many mansions in the house of the Great (Scottish) Architect of the Universe:

a) Some Supreme Councils, as indicated above, have interpreted the AASR in a strictly Christian sense. Their postulants (especially from the Rose-Croix Grade onwards) must profess the Trinitarian Christian faith; this excludes not only unbelievers, agnostics, polytheists and adherents of non-Christian religions but also deists, Christian theists, Unitarians and the faithful of various communities on the fringes of Protestantism.

b) On the other hand, the majority of today's Supreme Councils have remained more or less true to the latitudinarianism of the first Supreme Council (founded in 1801), although during the 20th century a majority of jurisdictions "recognized" by Charleston formulated certain regulating principles, notably during the International Conference organized in Baranquilla (Colombia, February 1970) by Supreme Councils who declared themselves "regular". Conversely, a new open-mindedness has been demonstrated over the last ten years or so in the « Scottish » community of North America – as illustrated by the Charleston Supreme Council's attitude towards France's liberal «Scottish» Freemasonry.

c) In Latin Europe and Spanish-speaking America, two other "interpretations" came to light. In the late 19th century, in reaction against the positivism that had begun to dominate part of southern European and French-speaking Freemasonry, the fallacious idea emerged that the AASR was richer in symbolism than other rites. The Oswald Wirth School (1860-1943) and its review *Le Symbolisme* (1912) undertook to reread the AASR from an occultist perspective, even though this meant banishing traditional forms which did not suit their interpretation.

d) Finally, also in the late 19th century, various French-speaking jurisdictions, true to the original spirit of Charleston, the Convention of Lausanne (1875) and "liberal" Freemasonry, adopted an agnostic interpretation of the Rite. These included the French Grand College of Rites, and the jurisdictions present at the Scottish Congress inaugurated in Brussels in 1976.

This is an oversimplification of these four trends, which take an "ideal-typical" (Weberian) perspective, and are an inadequate reflection of the complex reality of the AASR. No doubt it is difficult to fully identify with any one or other.

Having said that, the spirit of the AASR is open to question: Is it obsolete? Is it a rite like any other? Does the fact that it is two centuries «old» oblige us to handle it with care? Can the AASR evolve? Is it adaptable? Can it, should it be rewritten and updated for the 21st century? It has flourished for two centuries because of its extraordinary malleability and open-mindedness. But in our day and age, fundamental scientific knowledge has progressed enormously, demonstrating the unity of the universe, the link between the infinitely large and

the infinitely small in the field of physics and the extraordinary interdependence of phenomena in all the diversity and complexity of their manifestations. Can the AASR integrate, absorb and digest these essential discoveries? How can they be introduced into the Scottish corpus? Would it be appropriate to do so?

Before developing this reflection we should specify that, although the AASR is the Masonic language we practice, we are concerned first and foremost with Masonry itself, which we hold to be a "spiritual and social body", a method for being (and for being on earth), an inspirational discipline, a school of thought, a form of brainstorming or of litotes, a cathartic method (through ritual practice), hermeneutics, ethics, morals, wisdom and, finally, a "(pneumatic) spiritual society which produces an egregore and a democratic society which produces social effects"[6]. Nothing can replace the individual practice of Masonic initiation.

In Regalia, one must therefore dare to affirm "the foundation stones of Masonry" :

- The discipline of silence in an oriented place;
- Benevolent listening to others, in due form;
- Refusal of direct dialogue ;
- "the art of litotes: suggesting a maximum by saying a minimum" ;
- "the art of syncope: not dotting the i's..."[7]

These original corner stones, specific to Masonry, must fit with the universal stones of tolerance, universalism, solidarity, justice and fraternity, values shared by all men of good will.

However, we refuse to turn Freemasonry into a "meta-method" which can deal with all manner of problems, or into a panacea for all ills. The 21st century is already here, but it has yet to be invented.... we cannot expect Masonry (still less the AASR) to provide recipes, ready-made formulas, cut and dried analyses, pseudo-secrets, exclusive procedures or mysterious methods to do the inventing for us. It is too easy to retain of the Lost Word only the thoughts that match our own. That is where dogmatism begins.

Above all, it would be a fine thing if Freemasonry, Scottish or otherwise, could form humble workers capable of tackling such an exalting task.

With this concern in mind, our investigation will focus on Scottish specificity within a Masonic hermeneutics.

A/ The AASR today, or how to comprehend the changes of our times.

Is the AASR the Masonic mode best suited to comprehending complexity[8]? By and large, Scotticism, a touch "Spinozian", induces three categories of knowledge. The first corresponds to sensory perception and experience, but the degrees of Perfection (which lead us towards cautious and discerning relativism) remind us that our senses mislead us, that opinions are diverse and contradictory, and that human experience is relative. The second category is "pure"[9] reason, which might be a legitimate foundation for every "construction"; yet the 20th century can be described as that of the crisis of "Reason". Indeed, this period has challenged the three pillars of "modern" thinking : the idea of a (hidden or apparent) "universal order", the notion of the separation of causes and the primacy of "absolute reason".

There remains a third kind of approach – a sort of global, intuitive perception acquired after a long progression, which helps us conceive of things in their unity and which, *mutatis mutandis*, resembles initiation and the symbolic cognitive method. Yet this kind of knowledge, in the nature of an intimate spiritual experience, is emotional rather than rational; it can be compared to that developed by the Arab thinker Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Malik Ibn Tufayl (1100-1181) in *The Self-Taught Philosopher*, which tells the story of Hayy ibn Yaqdhân, alone on a desert island in the Indian Ocean. This philosophical novel provides the

reader with an « initiatory » account in seven stages which leads the « seeker », The Philosopher without a Master, from perception through the senses to the «supreme illumination». This is also the spirit of Gotthold Lessing's Nathan der Weise (Nathan the Wise, 1779), a philosophical play about the idea of tolerance expressed through the parable of the three rings and the Gersprache für Freimaurer (Masonic Dialogues, 1780). It features, too, in Goethe's works Wilhelm Meister (1794-1796), Faust (which has constantly been reworked), The green snake, various poems such as Symbolum (1814) and the autobiographical tale Dichtung und Wahrheit (Poetry and truth, 1811-1814), all of which are stamped with the "Scottish" Masonic ideal in three respects : Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty.

It is also the spirit of the AASR, capable of leading to a Stoic art of living with certain degrees of perfection, of refuting the illusion of worldly pseudo-happiness with the Knight of the Rose-Croix, of expressing the spiritual quest in a secularized form at the 28th degree, or of expressing an evolutionist, encyclopedic and dialectic approach, as suggested by the ladder of the 30th degree.

In our world, there is an imperious necessity to find a thought system (or systems) and/or method which can hunt out the potential errors of certainty, separation and "logic" without falling into the erring ways of uncertainty and the "incorrectly inferred".

Where do we stand on the mosaic pavement? Perhaps being oneself – existing – means first and foremost learning to discover errors, falsities and misinterpretations, to denounce illusions, chimeras and superstitions, and to avoid digression, erring and confusion. It means asserting the primacy of the critical mind, it means believing in the indefinitely progressive nature of knowledge : «Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them : the starry sky above and the moral law within».[10]

So what matters is to find an approach that consists of constantly coming and going between these two poles.

Hence the need for a dialog between arts, letters, all the human and the so-called «exact» sciences, in order to give greater coherence to the way we understand the world. Modernity is characterized by the explosion and fragmentation of knowledge and skills, together with the growing complexity of reality and the omnipresence of uncertainty.

But how can we appropriate scientific knowledge that is ever greater and more dispersed, and combine it with knowledge acquired from other sources? Such are the pillars of today's great Masonic project, a modern-day venture that can only be understood and elaborated through the archetypal human being, considered as the axis mundi (axis of the world).

Since we can no longer be universal (unlike Pico della Mirandola), we have to establish a new "organization of thought"[11] or a project for a University of all knowledge[12]. This has always been one of the (at least implicit) characteristics of the AASR "philosophy".

Isn't this complexity[13] (defined as what both links and divides) identical, nolens volens, to the "mechanics" of the AASR's construction? Provided one interprets the AASR anthropologically, this very complexity renders it capable of comprehending the world.

Today's world is also characterized by "globalization" (which one may challenge, wholly or partly), by an unprecedented technical and scientific revolution, a society of networks and a transformation of habits, cultures, fashions and daily life[14].

In our Scottish language, isn't the expression Holy Empire the symbolic and Masonic way of referring to the Oikoumene (the unity of humankind and the whole inhabited earth)? On this inhabitable earth (or which needs to be preserved as such), it is important to strongly reiterate that there should be no room for wars, socio-economic and moral misery, oppression, pandemics, ignorance and fear. We should be wary of viewing the future of the world from

the perspective of the middle and upper classes of the « Northern » countries alone, especially as they bear a certain (albeit indirect) responsibility for this situation.

In the face of this Promethean hope and need, where should we place our response and our action? Somewhere between Marx's prophecies ("Men make history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing") and François Ascher's ironies ("These events are beyond our control, let's pretend we have organized them")? Masonic action is situated at another level.

The idea is not to transform Freemasonry into a club (still less a political intermediary), but to help Masons propose a philosophy of life, so that everyone – at his own level, with his own tools, faith and hope – can be a living stone in the Temple of humanity and can take part in the vast construction (at every level from the human micro-cell to humanity in its entirety) of the will to live together and of living together.

This project presupposes that each person builds his inner Temple, within his Workshops. This task must be planned, enriched and matured in the accustomed form so that, when the Mason is of age, it can contribute to the universal construction. The idea is not to appropriate (or even seek out) recurrent issues from the profane world, to yield to the siren song of popularity ratings, but rather to draw from the bosom of Masonry with its customs, legends and rites (notably the AASR) the very substance which can and must (for the benefit of all) be taken outside the Temple in order to «spice up» the fare. The Knight of the Rose Croix must feed the hungry. Every Mason, Scottish or otherwise, should try to be the salt of the earth: «But if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? ».[15]

If we are in darkness – the darkness referred to in the Gospel of John – we may curse the night (to no avail) or dream of the flames of Revolution. But we can also believe in a dawn (faith) which will inevitably arrive (hope), and, while waiting, light a candle, no matter how humble (charity). The AASR can be one of the many lights that guide mankind on this quest. We repeat that this requires the anthropological dimension of the AASR to be analyzed, understood and used. "Scottish" Masons are modern, because the AASR is an archetypal rite: it is of today, as it is of yesterday and of tomorrow. Its thirty-three degrees encompass eternal and ubiquitous values. It is neither a small-scale model of a world nor a syncretic ideology of an age, but a utopian project (therefore something to be hoped for and attempted) for structuring human groups – an art of living together. By integrating the anthropological structures of the Scottish Temple into his inner Temple, each Mason can contribute his stone to the construction of humanity.

Between universalism (The Temple of Humanity) and the right to difference (You are my Brother, but I accept your difference), how can we live together in the Holy Empire? How can we define a new cultural democracy capable of associating respect for otherness and tolerance, policies of preferential treatment and universal values? Should we begin with sense, in order to reconstruct social ties? After the breakdown of family models, what modes will we find to be (as François de Singly so aptly coined it) "free together"[16] ?

How can we define work in the 21st century? With most people's current experience – no work, unsatisfying work, disappointing work or work which has lost its sacred character – can we hope that tomorrow will bring "autonomous" (outside the realm of necessity) work for all by reducing the individual's "heteronomous" work (dictated by society's requirements) ? Will free time (for whom? how?) be the symbolic change of the Holy Empire (kadosh) ? Have we (in the « North », needless to say) attained the leisure civilization? How could the "symbolic" (but assertive) heirs to the operative Masons disregard this question[17] ? How can a Mason and a Knight envisage these data within his symbolic field? Should we glorify leisure instead of work?

We should be wary of this pseudo-modern reinterpretation, the scourge of today's Masonic structures. In Masonry, words have specific meanings. Masonry does not honor work

in the usual sense of the term, but great works, the “Œuvre”. It is not enough to possess a watch (even a Swiss one); we must take as much time as is necessary. In the Lodge it is not GMT that counts, but time as it is authentically experienced. Masons work outside profane time and space, in a different temporality and spatiality.

However, this labor requires clarity. The Masonic path leads from the construction of the inner to the outer Temple. In order to progress from our partially decoded («enlightened») singular to a comprehensible universal and a hope of Order, we should first decipher the Chaos, sound and fury within ourselves. A “fairer” society does not necessarily make an individual “better” and “more enlightened”. One can only accede to knowledge of oneself, of others, of the world and of the Wholly Other by exploring one’s inner self, by working the rough stone, by giving relevance to V.I.T.R.I.O.L (Visitate Interiora Terrae, Rectificandoque, Invenies Occultam Lapidem = Visit the interior of the Earth, and by rectifying [by knowing the world], you will find the hidden stone [your inner temple = Gnothi Seauton). Freemasonry in general, and the AASR in particular, reveal to the individual what he cannot discover alone, but what he is capable of receiving from himself (according to Socratic maieutics). Collectively, Masonry (through the intermediary of the various structures) can only express general orientations regarding generous universal values. Every Mason is free within his heart of hearts. In the profane world, he thinks and acts “freely”, as he sees fit:

«Do what you have to, come what may».

It is worth repeating that no outer temple can be constructed by Masons whose inner Temple is unsound. When disorder reigns within, it is foolish to suppose that one can change the world. The action to which we refer originates in patient initiation into the thirty-three Scottish degrees, and is essentially concerned with the domain of spirituality[18]. A Mason must progress from having to being. According to the symbolism of the ladder, this ascending progression is concomitant with descent into the very depths of one’s being (each to his own path, be it psychoanalysis, self-analysis, various forms of introspection, asceticism, mysticism, etc.) Then can the Mason act, and the action becomes self-evident. The (archetypal) Scottish Freemason clearly does what he has to do: death to the old world (Entered Apprentice), tireless traveler (Fellow Craft), witness to the sacrificial violence (Master), internalized duty (degrees of Perfection), through true love (Rose-Croix), pure in heart, «bearer of pure arms» (Kadosh), «without hatred or weakness», discerning Justice and Equity (31th), exoteric chivalrous action and the eschatological message understood (32th). What will be will be, but the Mason is serene, because he knows that his action here and now will fit into a future that both encompasses and exceeds him, from Alpha to Omega, Ordo ab Chao, in the service of the Order, itself minister (i.e. etymologically servant) of humanity.

B/ « Scottish » hermeneutics, or in favor of an alternative to "metanarratives"[19]

Freemasonry is also a "metanarrative". When analyzed anthropologically, the AASR is one of its most significant versions. But the Masonic narrative poses more questions than it provides answers. The fact is that the Masonic myths are «true false narratives», albeit truer than ill-understood reality. Freemasonry is therefore more of a hermeneutics than a globalizing ideology. Through its myths, rites and grades, it refers to the origins, development and blossoming of thought. It both interprets today’s world and lets itself be interpreted by it. Masonry prepares for the future without claiming to «reveal» it. Within the art of hermeneutics (tekhnê hermeneutikê), perhaps the AASR is one of the most pertinent forms of Masonic interpretation of the observable phenomena of reality.

The AASR invites us to "understand and act" as suggested by the Ritual of Kadosh. But if the Masonic field is that of symbolic decoding, Freemasonry is also an art of living, a "meditation" that can help us accept the "here and now". The encyclopedism of the AASR enables us to link it with Epicureanism, Platonism, Stoicism, the Christian tradition, gnostic

trends, Jewish and Muslim mysticism, oriental philosophies, the humanism of the Renaissance, the spirit of the Reformation, Cartesianism, the legacy of Newton, the Lumières, and many more besides. Yet we should be wary of substituting only literature or, even worse, pseudo-encyclopedism, narrow positivism and blinkered scientism, for Anderson's project structured around the liberal arts and practices, customs and techniques attributed to the builders of the Temple of Solomon (Old Charges). The strength of Masonry lies in its symbolic tools.

So the AASR can help us learn to live and thus to die, to enjoy life and thus to suffer, to be, to be with and to be within, i.e. to have the strength, lucidity and hope to distinguish between the changeable and the permanent, to perceive "the things that depend on us and those that do not" (as indicated by the Manual of Epictetus – actually written by Arrian – whose "philosophy" is largely apparent in the grade of Secret Master). At stake with the AASR is as much the construction of an ideal city as the edification of the inner Temple, thus of the self: "I am who I am. I am what I am. I am"[20]. The AASR might then be one of the Masonic tools for this deconstruction/construction of the ego. This is perhaps the essence of "Masonic humanism" and the spirit of the AASR.

One can also see in it great hope in mankind's consubstantial quality, although the 20th century has amply demonstrated that Homo so-called sapiens, individually or collectively, is capable of the worst.

One can also put forward the idea that humanism is a notion which should reflect on the legitimacy of the rules that govern the desire to live together. Humanism must affirm not only the individual's dignity and the principle of autonomy, but also the preservation and reinforcement of social ties and values that go beyond individuals. This is upheld by a certain humanist tradition from Rabelais and Montaigne to Ricoeur, from Maimonides to Levinas, from Ibn Rûshd Averroës to Ibn Khaldun [21], and which is also expressed (in all modesty) by Scotticism.

Although the AASR remains an authentically Masonic method, hermeneutics and anamnesis (a recollection of the past and/or pathos brought to a conscious level), it can help contemporary societies to better express their questioning. There are four main tracks open to whoever has already built his own path in his head:

a) The departure from clericalized religions, the secularization and/or metamorphosis of beliefs must allow for the emergence of a veritable secular spirituality capable of opposing the resurgence of new « sectarian » religious forms and outbreaks of fanaticism[22]. If we avoid making it worldly or pseudo-esoteric, Masonry can propose a universal mode of reliance (religare).

b) The notion of shared, diffuse, interactive power should be incarnated in a political, cultural, social and economic democracy founded on equal rights and duties, and in « fairer and more enlightened » societies from the family to the global village.

c) The elimination of illiteracy from the world and the invention of appropriate transmission of knowledge should make for equal opportunities for all. Masons, Scottish or otherwise, take a certain pleasure in the fact that "intellectual leaders" have tended to disappear over the last three decades. An eclectic attitude to knowledge is emerging, along with prudence and diversity of approaches and the rejection of a single model to explain reality. Reading, deciphering, understanding, acting from within oneself towards the exterior, remain fundamental Masonic principles.

d) Will the 21st century be that of morality? No matter, the Mason must find his inspiration and insist on the message of the Presbyterian minister Anderson: that men of high moral values, who might otherwise never have met, should be united through Freemasonry. Having said that, we should not be afraid to reconsider the great classical questions: What are

the natural foundations of morality? And of its social origins? Is there a universal morality? How can we define Good and Evil?

Alongside the great permanent themes, practical questions arise in relation to recent discoveries, the most important of which is bioethical reflection[23]. Practical ethical issues now arise in new areas such as economics, business, leisure, and culture. Command of the new techniques, especially those of life technology, should help mankind signify the wish to define and construct the conditions for a new way of living together. A vast domain of responsible behavior opens up to the Masons – or, to be more precise, Masons should use the tools they have always had to work on mankind’s eternal questions, here and now.

Every Freemason should join this battle as he sees fit, in accordance with his principles and convictions, not forgetting that other Brothers can take up the fight in different but equally legitimate ways. The universal Republic of Masons should be a model for (rather than a copy of) profane political constructions. Masonry adheres to the project of a center of the Union, and the AASR’s universality should constantly remind Scottish Masons of this. Masonry cannot become the spokesman for any one philosophy, group or association, no matter how eminent in the profane world. Moreover, although the various structures, secular associations, must observe authentically democratic practices, the profound «nature» of the Order and the Lodge is fraternal isonomy (such perfect equality/equivalence among Brethren that they become «interchangeable» - which is true equality - rendering electoral competitions and suchlike useless). In its jurisdictions, the AASR demonstrates that Masons are (should be) «equivalent», even though the initiatory progression is differentiated and graded. There is no contradiction. The AASR is an «elective brotherhood».

C/ THE QUEST FOR MEANING.

Does being a Mason mean, above all, looking for meaning (even though this quest can easily acquire prescriptive connotations)? We presume that Freemasonry – notably through the AASR – encompasses the four Kantian questions:

1. What can I know? (Philosophy)
2. What should I do? (Ethics)
3. What may I hope for? (Political philosophy)
4. What is man? (Philosophical anthropology).

For a Mason, referring to Kant (though without idolatry) means believing in the notion of practical reason which does not wait in vain for the progress of knowledge to define Duty (an essential theme of the degrees of Perfection). It is a safeguard against the illusions of scientism, « stupid » subjectivism and simplistic relativism.

Being a Mason means rediscovering and enriching (not parodying) this fourfold cognitive approach.

Being a Mason means attempting to make a constant social requirement of this quest for meaning.

When the AASR is well understood, it can provide a perspective and a context (further to Kantian analysis) for the above-mentioned questioning:

In philosophy, being a Mason means working to enrich the humanism that opposing forces sought to dismiss throughout the last century.

In ethics, despite our previous presuppositions, we have to admit that Kantian universal morality is partly obsolete. Being a Mason, therefore, means accepting that there are no absolute criteria for defining an ethic or moral code.

In political philosophy, being a Mason means thinking out (but especially experiencing for oneself) both the permanent and the recent conditions of life in society.

Finally, being a Mason in the 21st century, means bringing the anthropological structures of the Masonic imagination to life and making them pertinent:

«The construction of the Temple begins within oneself and leads outwards»[24].

In response to these various questions, the thirty-three degrees of the AASR seem to say (implicitly or explicitly) that one should search not for meaning but for the errors to be avoided. Is the world as we see it? As we "re-construct" it?

Meaning is always produced, constructed, relative, random and provisional. The AASR emulates Nathan the Wise[25] who preferred the impulse that leads us to seek the truth to the notion of "absolute truth". Freemasonry – child of the Enlightenment and illuminism, of gnosis and the cogito, of positivism and esotericism, of Christianity and Stoic atheism, of Protestant latitudinarianism and Newtonian physics – and the AASR – born of Franco-American adventurers – appear to provide no definite answers to our essential, existential questions. The Widow and her Scottish offspring (now grown up) doubt everything, even doubt itself (and beware of Masonic dogmatism and clericalism when this is not so!). Yet it is impossible for a Master Mason (and a fortiori for a Scottish Knight), to avoid these questions, unless they simply endure existence (that of rough stone). Meaning is both «orientation» and signification (intentional expression). We do not attain meaning intentionally; it steals into our minds as if through incidence[26].

Yet the quest for collective and personal meaning cannot dispose of individualism, avatar of modernity. Indeed, in the tradition of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, this is not a question of egoism but of finding and constructing one's inner self. Nowadays, however, personal choices seem to have supplanted structural constraints and collective destinies. We must combat the hedonistic, egoistic, autistic, self-congratulating individual in favor of the autonomous subject who takes an active role in his own life but whose goal remains collective solidarity, while reminding each and everyone that rights and duties go together.

However, contemporary individualism does not necessarily mean withdrawing into oneself. It can lead to active involvement in the world. It refers to the theory of "self-government" developed since Greco-Latin philosophy. It features in various degrees of Perfection (Intimate Secretary, Provost and Judge). The AASR is in line with the emergence of an altruistic individualism, born in the West. The Opus Magnum is to make a human being – in the fullest sense of the term – out of a rough stone.

Apart from that, we should get away from identity conflicts through (and for) self-discovery. Psychoanalysis has put an end to the unified notion of the ego, and the Cartesian cogito is now considerably weakened (as demonstrated by Antonio Damazio[27]). Yet everyone feels the need to give his existence unity, which Ricoeur calls "the narrative identity"[28]. This is one of the objectives of initiation:

«And so long as you have not grasped it

This : die and become !

You will only be a gloomy guest

On this dark earth...»[29]

Thus, on the long initiatory path, the individual can (must?) (re)construct himself. But there is nothing more difficult than being «free» - master and creator of one's own human adventure. Perhaps this is the ultimate illusion. In any case, it requires each individual to have the means to assert (or attempt to assert) his freedom.

Finally (perhaps most importantly), it is worth (re)affirming that "Happiness is [still] a new idea"[30] for the world, though we should remember that absolute happiness is "not an ideal of reason, but of imagination" according to Kant's formula. Happiness is not a bellhop, at one's beck and call. It is like the evening visitor and perhaps belongs to the realm of Grace. No doubt it has to do with the Lost Word – an essential theme in Scottish Masonic mythology. It is certainly not the accumulation of money, power and prestige. It tells us that the Coming (Advent) is never definitively past, but that it is always possible to create (here and now, inside one's head) utopia and uchronia – a place beyond space and time.

In order to glimpse and sometimes grasp this, one should avoid always living « elsewhere », indulging in nostalgia for an embellished past or for a lost or future paradise, hoping for uncertain tomorrows[31]. One should also resist the crypto-pessimism of a neo-Celinian intelligentsia, and refuse forced adherence to anti-humanist thought systems, religions that are dogmatized by clerics and ideologies of pseudo-happiness that inevitably drift towards some kind of Gulag or the totalitarian consumerism[32] conveyed by advertising and caricatured by programs such as Big Brother. It is also important, however, not to let the various Masonic structures become «worldly».

We should prefer sobriety to glitter, meditation to public debate, the discretion of the true servant to gaudy display.

Perhaps happiness is to be found in nature[33]? Or on the mosaic pavement ? Nothing to do with conventional happiness Ibiza-Bangkok-Hollywood style, nothing to do with the gloomy litany of man's exploitation of man (Wall Street, the rat race, the hypertrophy of the ego, the American way of life, the chimeras of televisual glory, dining out, the desire to play God). It is still possible to dream of simple happiness in the twofold tradition of Oriental and Greco-Latin wisdom, and of the ethics of the Book. This joie de vivre depends on the transformation of one's vision of the world, the exercise of one's freedom, and love for others. It develops through personal appropriation, by borrowing widely in order to shape one's own vision of existence. According to individual temperament, desires, hopes and tastes, it means discovering the true pleasures of the table and the body – cycling round the world if you so desire, constructing your life like a novel, helping (loving) your neighbor, taking a child by the hand, giving everything away like the widow in the Gospel[34], fighting for a better world, or reconstructing it in your head, and then, like Cyrano de Bergerac, «one evening, under the pale, red rose sky», dying while «cracking a good joke in a good cause».

Even more important is to be, to be what one really is : «In every human being, there is an optimum of what he could become. There are things that he could never become, and so many people waste their lives trying to become what they cannot be, while neglecting to be what they could become. This is a waste of time and a failure. So in the first place a person should have a certain image of what he could and could not become, what are the limitations and what are the possibilities...»[35]

If we better ourselves a little, mankind will be a little less mediocre. This is the greatness of every Mason who seeks; this is the perennial strength of the Order.

This is where we realize the significance of the Royal Art (the operatives' building work, symbolic work through secret geometry) in general and of the AASR in particular. Everything is symbol here – no popularity ratings, no press releases about everything and anything, no showy parades. The very uncertainties of these Masonic structures recommend them, as we can be almost sure that their exoteric "answers", at least, will not lead us astray: the "errors" of Freemasonry are rarely dangerous, being usually merely "ridiculous" (and as we know, ridiculousness never killed anyone). Finally, this is the only "real" promise of Freemasonry, the Socratic promise, the universal reign of ironic reason, the «truth does not contradict truth» of Ibn Rûshd (Averroes), the Guide for the Perplexed by Maimonides, the "marrow" of the Abbey of Thelema, Montaigne's « What do I know ? », Descartes' "methodical doubt", Kant's "critical philosophy"[36], Nietzsche's «The Gay Science» and the "implacable law" of happy (therefore hidden) lands such as the Realm of King Pausole whose «Book of Customs" was reduced to a two-part (very « Kadosh ») proclamation: "Do no wrong to your neighbor. Observing this, do as you please".

«There is never a last word. Continuous space and the need to adapt to every new circumstance: such is life.

True initiation is constant apprenticeship. We have to relearn what we thought we had understood, and it is not always certain that we can take what we have experienced for granted...»[37].

So let us humbly say by way of a very provisional conclusion, that among the many philosophies, thoughts, systems, myths, doctrines and "wisdoms" that concern being, and being in the world, there is a little Masonic tune, and among the rites, régimes, grades, degrees and persuasions of the Res Latonarae***, a little Scottish music makes itself heard – our little Scottish tune.

[1] Virgil, *The Georgics*, II, 489. «Happy is he who is able to know the causes of things»

[2] *With a preface by Francesco Cataluccio*, Paris, Rivages Poche. *Petite bibliothèque*, 1996. Cf. also *Un tour d'horizon philosophique en 1 heure 12* by Jean-François Dortier, in *Philosophies de notre temps*, Auxerre, Ed. Sciences humaines, 1999, p. 1-40.

[3] *Modesty compels us to point out that the de facto internationalism of the AASR does not imply an intrinsically universalistic Scottish «nature».*

[4] *In the positive sense of the term, as used notably by American political analysts*

[5] *Contrary to the implication of the term «ancient», most of the higher degrees in the AASR come from the tradition of the Moderns*

[6] *Report by the 3rd Commission : is Masonic spirituality an answer to contemporary problems ? Research work by the Sources Areopagus*, Paris, 2000, p. 32

[7] *On this theme, see Travaux de Sources*, 2000, op. cit., p. 39 and Bruno Etienne, *Une voie pour l'Occident. La Franc-Maçonnerie à venir*, Paris, 2001, p. 173-174

[8] *For a first approach to this problem, see (among a rich and high quality bibliography) the collective work Philosophies de notre temps*, Auxerre, Sciences humaines éditions, 2000.

[9] *We have already indicated on several occasions that the AASR is also rather Kantian. In the Critique of Pure Reason, in answer to the question what can I know, Immanuel Kant explains that the field of knowledge (i.e. that of the competence of the sciences) is the only possible domain of experience. Scientific knowledge has its place within our investigation, although we restrict our inquiries to the links between the brain and thought*

[10] *Immanuel Kant, The Critique of practical reason*, 1788 ; Paris, Grasset, 1985, p. 12.

[11] Cf. Edgar Morin, *La Méthode*, Paris, Seuil, 4 volumes, 1977-1991.

[12] *See on this subject, the project carried out at the Paris Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers, of which the various volumes are regularly published by Odile Jacob.*

[13] Cf. Edgar Morin, *La complexité humaine*, Paris, Flammarion, 1994.

[14] *On this subject, consult the review Sciences humaines HS n° 34, October/November 2001.*

[15] *Gospel of Matthew*, V, 13.

[16] *Title of the collective work he directed: Libres ensemble. L'individualisme dans la vie commune*, Paris, Nathan, 2000.

[17] *The excessive use of the interrogative form in this text may cause some surprise, but we believe that Masonry does not provide contingent collective answers. We believe that Masonry is a privileged place where each Mason comes (in the company of others, but of and for himself) to find, forge and polish the tools he will use as he thinks best in the profane world, as a citizen of that world.*

[18] *With or without God, the spirit, «produced» by matter or a principle independent of it, must «exceed» matter*

[19] Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*, Paris, Minuit, 1979

[20] Cf. various verses from Exodus, notably, as God said to Moses : *Ehyeh asher ehyeh [I shall be : I am]* (Exodus, III, 14).

[21] *This very short list is simply intended to demonstrate the extent to which humanism belongs to all cultures*

[22] Cf. Jean Baubérot, *Pour un nouveau pacte laïque*, Paris, Seuil, 1990

[23] Anne Fagot-Largeaut, *L'Homme bio-éthique*, Paris, Maloine, 1985

[24] Bruno Etienne, *Une voie pour l'Occident. La franc-maçonnerie à venir*, Paris, Dervy, 2001, p. 259

[25] Gotthold Ephraïm Lessing, *Nathan der Weise*, 1779

[26] Denis Piveteau and Jean-Baptiste De Foucauld, *Une société en quête de sens ?* Paris, O. Jacob, 1995

[27] *L'erreur de Descartes. La raison des émotions*, Paris, O. Jacob, 1995

[28] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris, Seuil, 1990

[29] Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, *Selige Sehnsucht (Nostalgie bienheureuse)*, Weimar, 1809..

[30] Cf. *The dossier on Happiness : De la philosophie antique à la psychologie contemporaine*, in *Sciences humaines* n° 75, August-September 1997, p. 18-41.

[31] *Psychopathology which has nothing to do with the creative strength of Utopia.*

- [32] *Pascal Bruckner, L'euphorie perpétuelle. Essai sur le devoir de bonheur, Paris, Grasset, 2000.*
- [33] *As suggested by the title of Etienne Chatiliez's film, « Le bonheur est dans le pré »..*
- [34] *Mark, XII, 41/44 et Luke, XXI, 1-4.*
- [35] *Eric Fromm, Entretiens avec Le Monde, vol. 5, Paris, La Découverte, 1985, p. 46.*
- [36] *] Cf. Jean-François Dortier, op. cit., L'école du doute, p. 2/6.*

[37] *Jean Mourgues, op. cit., 1982*