Chapter 10

MAY THE WHOLE EARTH BE HAPPY¹
Loka Samastat Sukhino Bhavantu

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Abstract: Appreciation of different viewpoints is the starting point for better management

Key words: happiness, systemic and harmony

10.1 INVOCATION

West Churchman and I have been friends since we met at the first international conference on operational research in Oxford in 1957. About twenty-five years ago, he was staying at my house in Surrey outside London, and roamed around my library. After he had left, I found that he had written on the fly-leaves of my copies of his own books.

In his influential book Prediction and Optimal Decision² he thanked me touchingly for my critical review essay, which had appeared in the American journal Philosophy of Science.³ Let us recall that his subtitle was Philosophical Issues of a Philosophy of Values. This is a far cry from the technique oriented aridity that we have later come to expect under titles concerned with either forecasting or optimality. Churchman is surely the outstanding modern philosopher of systems theory; and his concern with

ethical questions has never been an academic preoccupation. His book appeared as the turbulent sixties began - a decade of grave moral disquiet: civil rights, Vietnam, and "free speech" were all matters that split the American nation. Churchman the activist emerged from behind the dreaming spire of the Berkeley campanile to run personal risks which others will catalogue but I remember.

His (then) new book was *The Systems Approach*, I dare say that it became equally influential. Churchman wrote in my copy of this a brief testimonial of friendship "without the necessity of frequent 'feedback' because of love". And so it has worked out ever since. What do we know about any such mode of communication? It has nothing to do with E-mail, for certain: psi-mail, maybe. What do we know about the brotherhood of love itself? Very little, it would seem, as we look around the devastation of our world today. But Churchman has devoted much of his practical effort to the causes of love and peace.

As the Churchman oeuvre attests, West is a great expert - appropriately enough - on western philosophy. In this essay I put forward some recent thoughts that are based on ancient Vedantic philosophy. They are transmitted from East to West in the hope that he may enjoy them, in the spirit of his messages to me. It is appropriate to take as title an ancient invocation of which he would surely approve: "May the whole earth be happy". In the Sanskrit: "Loka samastat sukhino bhavantu".

Lokham refers to the world - to Gaia herself, as we might say, and taken to include all living species whose habitat is here. Sukham, "happiness" in brief, is close to what Aristotle later called eudemonia, well-being; but it encompasses the satisfaction of needs that are not only physical and mental, but aspire to spiritual truth. It seems to me that the dictum offers a comprehensive invocation of what we sanctimoniously call the Quality of Life. We may even link these ancient Eastern ideals to our (less) ancient Greek heritage through the words satyam (truth) sundaram (beauty) and sivam (goodness), upheld in both cultures as cynosures of civilization. I apologize for knowing neither the Sanskrit nor the Greek for "gross national product per capita".

10.2 MANAGEMENT AS ACTION

Each of the three approach lanes to my remote cottage in the Welsh hills runs through a small farm, each of which in turn is guarded by sheep dogs.

5 Murthy, P.N., 1988, "Towards 2000 and Beyond", Thirtieth Sri Mokshagundam Visvesvaraya Memorial Lecture, Institute of Engineers (India).