Information

PROFESSOR JEAN-JACQUES SALOMON DIED (A Tribute to 40 Years of Friendship and Cooperation)

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The distinguished scientist Professor Salomon, a leading philosopher and historian of science and technology, a world renowned researcher, and also a great friend of Czech science and culture, died on January 14, 2008. He was the author of two dozens of books and hundreds of other works published not only in his native French but also in English and translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Greek and other languages. His monograph *Technological Destiny* has also appeared in Czech. Jean-Jacques Salomon, the student of the eminent thinker Raymond Aron, established the science policy division at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). He was appointed professor of the famous French technical university CNAM where he founded the Centre for Science, Technology and Society. He was also a visiting professor at many foreign universities, among others at the renowned Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He visited Prague on several occasions to attend scholarly conferences and at the invitation of this country's Academy of Sciences. His book *Technological Destiny* appeared in the Czech translation issued by the publishing house Filosofia.

The work of Professor Salomon was highly acclaimed already during his lifetime. He was awarded the title Officer of the Legion of Honour and a medal for his involvement in the resistance movement in World War II. In recognition of his assistance and support to the Czech science during

the totalitarian communist regime he received the Jan Patočka medal, awarded by the Academy of Sciences. He was holder of many decorations and high distinctions bestowed by other countries, for example Brazil's highest honours.

Professor Salomon's extensive and inspiring work offers a remarkable example of what is justifiable described as wisdom in the original sense of the word, i.e. a combination of profound and often very detailed knowledge, general principles as well as individual facts and events in the history of science and technology on the one hand, and a sweeping command and understanding of human and social contexts, coupled with an awareness of responsibility for further developments, steps and possible impacts, especially for eventual risks and other dangers, on the other. His main themes eventually made it imperative to establish Collegium for the Prevention of Technological Risks attached to the French Presidential Office, i.e. an institution providing for preventive assessment of the concepts, plans or projects of large-scale technological investments, of which he was a long-standing chairman. As a result, France became one of the first European countries to apply the methods and procedures of comprehensive assessment of prepared or anticipated technological projects.

Salomon's work, his research projects and their results have substantially expanded and primarily enriched the traditional insights into the development of science and technology, focusing on the paths and directions of learning, on creative work in science and technology and its results. Naturally, Salmon himself perceived and sensitively recognized the overall significance and role played by those results, but he never ignored either their authors or the subjects of their recipients and users, their relationship to the surrounding social, cultural and political milieu. That was also why some of his first works explored the relations between science and politics, setting their sights on organizations associated with the actual thematic focus of research systems. In most of his works, he rejected those standpoints and positions, which are usually summed up

by the term "technological determinism", i.e. views according to which the rhythm and direction of technological changes are predetermined, while simultaneously determining the rhythm and directions of social developments. With a great deal of vehemence Salomon rejected–and also fully justified his rejection of–the well-known cliché that the water mill and windmill determined the feudal society just as the mill and steam engine determined the capitalist society. In this sense, he developed the traditions of thought historically substantiated by M. Weber and many other researchers, including his own mentor R. Aron.

Quite indisputably, Jean-Jacques Salomon figures prominently among the leading lights of those distinguished researchers and thinkers of the past decades, who formulated some serious warnings against attempts at playing down or underestimating reflections of the future destiny of the human species, against cheap optimism, and an indestructible faith in the unequivocally optimistic course those trends, usually described as scientific and technological progress, were taking. This also serves to explain the general characteristic of man's creative activity in the field of science, technology and development, i.e. the concept of "uncertain quest". Seen in this light, the genuine creative driving spirit of science and technology is far removed from exaggerated self-complacency or the arrogance of self-assurance. At the same time, it is necessary to recall that there is not–and probably will not be in the future either–any other path leading to the preservation and maintenance of human values and sustainable life of the next generations.

Professor Salomon's extensive work has yielded many major impetuses and a good deal of inspiration in the field of scientific and technical thought. His Paris-based Centre for the Research of Relations of Science, Technology and Society has grown to be a model and a stimulating example for the establishment of research institutions with a similar thematic focus in the United States and a number of other European countries.