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THE ANCIENT MODELS OF HUMANISTIC EDUCATION AND THE MODERN WORLD

Abstract: The Ancient Greek models of education have a long tradition and profound influence on Western culture. In the Classical World there were two main kinds of higher education: philosophical and sophistic one. The philosophical education has developed a hierarchy of subjects where the philosophical ideas as harmony, measure and balance in the human world are most respected. On the opposite side of this concept is educational system of the ancient sophists where on the top of the educational hierarchy are the ideas of personal success, effectiveness and profit.

During the development of the particular and practical sciences in the Modern times, the model of sophistic education prevailed, but the risk of ecological disaster in the second half of the XX century woke up the consciousness of the scientists and philosophers. The essential questions rose once more: What values do we prefer? Economic prosperity at any price or prosperity based on principles of harmony, balance and tolerance in the world?

Key words: *ancient education, humanistic education, European crisis, philosophy, sophists, harmony, measure, balance.*

On this occasion I would like to draw attention to the educational models that stem from Ancient Greek education, but can be accepted as traditional models with a long history and a profound influence on the so-called Western culture. I am addressing this subject in the belief that certain aspects of the European crisis today can be understood in this context.

In the Ancient Greek World there were mainly two kinds of higher education: philosophical education on the one hand, and Sophistic education on the other. Both of them are a product of the special concept of the world and the position of man in it.

I will take the philosophy first. The starting point of philosophical education from the very beginning was the idea of harmony (*harmonia*), between the world

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as a whole and the human being as a part of it, i. e. harmony between the macro- and the micro-cosmos, between the world soul (*psychē tou cosmou*) and the human soul (*psychē tou anthrōpou*).

According to the mainstream ancient philosophy (from Pythagoreanism to Stoicism), the world is understood as an Order governed by the supreme law of Reason (*Logos*). In this context the other basic ideas can be explained by interpreting the Ancient philosophical concept of the world. For instance, Pythagoras speaks of the *limited* (*peras*) as something good as opposed to the *unlimited* (*apeiron*) as something bad (Cf. Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* B 5, 1106 b 29): *For evil belongs to the unlimited, as the Pythagoreans conjectured, and good to the limited*).

Heraclitus explains this idea as a measure (*metron*) which has a cosmic dimension. He says that *Sun will not overstep his measures; otherwise the Erinyes, ministers of Justice, will find him out* (fr. B 94 D/K). To keep the measure means to keep a cosmic balance, that is harmony (*harmonia*), recognized as a mutual dependence of the divergent parts of everything. Kirk and Raven [3: p. 194] explain: *there is a connexion or means of joining (the literal sense of harmonia) through opposite tensions, which ensures this coherence – just as the tension in the string of bow or lyre, being exactly balanced by the outward tension exerted by the arms of the instrument, produces a coherent, unified, stable and efficient complex*.

In modern times this means taking care of diversity in the world.

The consciousness about the strong connection between all things in the world in Stoicism is expressed with the term *world sympathy*.

Now, what represents the end of humanistic education (*paideia*)? In general, it is the understanding of harmony in the world as a whole and in the human being as a part of it. But, the establishing of and caring about harmony presupposes knowledge. In this respect, the Ancient philosophical education has developed a hierarchy of educational subjects, such as mathematics, music, astronomy and so on. Philosophy is at the top of this hierarchy, encompassing not only logic or dialectics, but also ontology, ethics, aesthetics and theology. Jaeger [2: p. 295] says: *The essence of philosophical education is 'conversion', which literary means 'turning round'. 'Conversion' is a specific term of Platonic paideia, and indeed an epoch-making one. It means more specifically the wheeling round of the 'whole soul' towards the light of the Idea of Good, the divine origin of the universe... On the other hand, as conceived by Plato, it is absolutely free from the intellectualism of which it is often wrongly accused.*"

The natural science (*physica*) and arts in Pythagoras' or in Plato's educational systems are a part or means of higher philosophical understanding of the world and the human being in it. The knowledge of many things (*polymathia*) helps men discover the secrets of this world (cosmos), and understand God. This is a way of development and self-perfection of the human soul in its effort to become closer to God. Consequently, the philosophical education is *psyches therapeia* – preparation of the soul for its final salvation in this world.

On the opposite side of this concept stands the educational system of the Ancient Sophists. They appeared in Greek society under the influence of the new democracy in Athens following the Persian War. When young people asked to enter

politics or simply to be powerful, rich and respected citizens, the Sophists didn't know what to do with the philosophical ideas as harmony, logos, measure or with the Platonic idea of Good.

Instead of philosophical ideas, they taught their students rhetoric which helps not to be wise, but to be alike to wise men. Guthrie [1: p. 45] describes the image of the most famous sophists like this: *Hippias prided himself on his polymathy and versatility. He not only taught mathematics, music and astronomy (which Protagoras derided as useless for practical life) and had perfected his own system of memory-training, but claimed mastery over many handicrafts as well. It has been said of the sophists that they were as much the heirs of the Presocratic philosophers as of poets.*

Philosophy was also one of the disciplines they taught, but here educational hierarchy was changed. Rhetoric was situated at the top and philosophy was just one of its auxiliary means.

In fact, the philosophical ideas were replaced by the Sophistic principles of success, acumen, effectiveness, profit and so forth. Of course, all these things represent a certain level of knowledge, but they are not true philosophical wisdom. The well educated young man in light of these new developments had to be powerful, successful, respected, and of course – rich as a proof of his cleverness or acumen.

Finally, the rhetorical education as an answer to the ambition and desire for success, effectiveness, and profit is opposed to the concept of philosophical education conceived as a moral care of the soul (*psychēs therapeia*). On one side we have “useless” philosophers, and on the other we have successful professionals or experts.

As it is well known, Roman higher education accepted the standard Greek pattern (trivium and quadrivium) where philosophy was once again one of the inevitable disciplines, but in practice, rhetorical education was much more popular than the philosophical. The central philosophical ideas (*logos, peras, harmonia* or *metron*) were forgotten because they did not correspond to the practical ambitions and pragmatic spirit of the Roman Empire. In other words, Roman higher education mainly followed the Sophistic model.

During the Middle Ages it was the Church that provided the higher education, but in the Byzantine World there is a continuation of the Ancient Greek or classical educational philosophical tradition. Mango [4: p. 128] says: *In addition to rhetoric, which formed the standard content of higher education, a few more technical subjects were available. Philosophy (including in principle what we understand today by science) flourished at Athens and Alexandria.* Simply put, there was no major educational confrontation between philosophy, as a part of theology, and science.

The most serious confrontation between science and philosophy, and also between the corresponding education, arose during the development of the natural sciences in modern Europe. New European universities established new educational principles, such as: knowledge is power, nature should be conquered, success in practice is a final motive of all of our endeavours, and so on. The question about the sense of this competition with nature was neglected. The final goal of this ambitious project was uncertain.

The risk of ecological disaster in the second half of the XX century woke up the scientists, philosophers and some other authorities. Old philosophical questions rose once more, but this time they were more challenging than ever. Where are we going? What do we have to do? And more importantly, what is the purpose and perspective of the humanistic education regarding the new developments?

The most prominent dilemmas may be interpreted as choosing among priorities. What values do we prefer? Endless economic prosperity at any price or prosperity based on principles of balance and tolerance in the human world and nature?

On the educational level, speaking from the standpoint of the abovementioned distinction between the two ancient models, it was necessary to make a choice between the Sophistic and the philosophical education. Of course, it was a difficult task to prove that the philosophical idea of measure is more valuable than the Sophistic principle of personal success and prosperity, that human wisdom (*sophia*) is better than acumen and mastery of some skills, that the profit is not *summum bonum*.

As a result of the reasons mentioned above, a few new disciplines emerged under the name of philosophy, such as bioethics, philosophy of environment and similar. It seems that after long absence, philosophy and the proper humanistic education return among the experts of the natural sciences and that the ancient educational balance will be restored. It becomes obvious that the natural sciences need philosophy. The new philosophical disciplines have to answer the questions intimately connected to the goals, methods and results of science.

But at the same time with this extension of philosophy in new fields we realize that it suffers from unusual segmentation. Philosophy gradually loses its independence and becomes a part depending on particular sciences. There are many examples: management philosophy, philosophy of economics, marketing philosophy etc. We are under the impression that philosophy on this way of segmentation transforms itself in some new kind of particular science or maybe worse – auxiliary science without its own core.

Do we need philosophy which in reality becomes *ancilla scientiae* or maybe a substitute for the original ancient idea of philosophy as the highest point of human wisdom and education? Philosophy of economics, philosophy of ecology et cetera are all important, but not sufficient to solve our complex problems today. I believe that we need the unique ancient philosophy and its model of philosophical education. We need the general humanistic ideas developed by the great philosophers as a viewpoint for our understanding of the modern world.

At the beginning of this paper I mentioned the European crisis. The experts define it as a debt crisis. But, if we are talking about debts, are we talking only about financial crisis or maybe about a moral crisis too?

I agree with the participants of this meeting who spoke of the European crisis as a fundamentally moral crisis. This crisis is a result of neglecting the fundamental humanistic values.

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