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ΑΡΧΑΙΑΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΙΑΣ

PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, HUMANISM

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Philosophy is not only a systematic narration of ideas and philosophical systems that takes place at a University class. Philosophy is essentially the persistent theoretical and practical oscillation of the mind, which places emphasis either on the subject in an idealistic or metaphysical dimension or on the object, in a realistic dimension consisting mainly the philosophy of action and experience.

The philosophical contemplation, as a dynamic reference to the universe - according to Aristotle, the human being desires by nature to learn- tries to investigate the essence of the natural and historical reality, to *(a)* provide a whole theory about the laws and the principles that govern the *being* and the *becoming* and *(b)* define, throughout history, the position of the human being in the natural environment as well as its relationship to it. Therefore, philosophy represents a universal science that utilizes and supplements all other natural and theoretical sciences, to eventually provide a holistic account of the universe and the human.

This forceful extroversion of the human consciousness is also considered as a dialectical introversion, since the contemplation returns to itself as self-consciousness; that is, as knowledge of itself as subject that differentiates itself from the object that wants to explain. At the same

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time, though, the subject evaluates the content of its activities in all fields. This evaluation takes place in the moral dimension of consciousness, which is precisely where the humanistic meaning of the human existence lies. Hence, philosophy dictates the planning of what is to be done according to humanistic criteria and becomes the compass of every theoretical and practical activity.

Philosophy, going deep into the interior of man - philosophy of individuality - is equivalent to the formation of personality, the latter including the notions of *freedom of the will* and of *responsibility*. These notions are related to the senses of *cooperation* and *sympathy*, both of which are considered to be essential social values that constitute the web of benevolent reference to the fellow being.

Given that the dialectical relation between the scientific perceptions and the empirical reality is mediated by the human will, the results of scientific applications become fluid and in accordance with the desires of the subject that uses them. In such an ontological context, the role of philosophy today is of prime importance and particularly demanding, as it must protect the meaning of life as well as the human dignity, that are sacrificed at the altar of the absolute scientism. At this point it is worth to mention the timely remark of I. Theodorakopoulos - one of the latest Greek philosophers - who aptly argued that ‘‘our era hadn’t reached to a dialogue with itself, because philosophy hasn’t still taken the control of things. We indeed have a lot of knowledge, but what we lack is the one, the universal, dialectical knowledge’’.[1]

[1] I. Theodorakopoulos (1967), *Philosophy and Life*, Athens, pp.232, 233.

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In all probability, the ideological adventures and the historical facts of humanity would reasonably have to lead to cultural balance. Such a thing would ensure the necessary conditions for a rationally structured life, under the patronage of the scientific spirit. However, the contemporary reality disappointed those who hoped that *knowledge*, *truth* and *action* would inevitably serve the human well-being in conformity with the essence of his existence. In fact, historical experience proved unable to consolidate those humanitarian ideals that set the basis of noble ideas and valued actions.

There can be no doubt that the atrocities of the two World Wars, committed world wide on a daily basis, have shown the intense brutality of the human nature. This has degraded the value of life and has undermined the ideals and the sacrifices of those who fought throughout the centuries for a life worth living. Taking this into account, the modern man, unstable without the proper ethical bases, but also inclined by an inherent tendency towards ease and comfort, tries to restore balance by indulging into the tangible products of technology. As such, people enter into a new era of vague aims, despite the means they managed to have at their disposal. According to the critical approach of the Greek philosopher E. Papanoutsos, ‘‘science within its intensions has dispelled the mystery of the world, and technology comes to replace the miracle. A new phase of our history makes a beginning, a new page of the human destiny’’.[2]

Along these lines, Karl Popper stresses the instability of science: ‘‘the empirical basis of objective science has thus nothing ‘absolute’

[2] E. Papanoutsos (1958), *Philosophy and Education*, Athens, p. 235.

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about it. Science does not rest upon solid bedrock. The bold structure of its theories rises, as it were, above a swamp. It is like a building erected on piles. The piles are driven down from above into the swamp, but not down to any natural or 'given' base; and if we stop driving the piles deeper, it is not because we have reached firm ground. We simply stop when we are satisfied that the piles are firm enough to carry the structure, at least for the time being''.[3] The parallelism used by Popper also demonstrates the dynamic nature of science, which has offered human society the ability to get rid of the political and the religious dogmatism that is responsible for the historical fate of humanity for centuries.

However, nowadays the rapid evolution of technology has been the sole objective of society. People's lifestyle and behavior are adopted uncritically, enslaving individuals under the authority of scientism. The deification of technology and the subsequent idealization of materialism as moral standard threaten the very survival of the human race.

It is common ground for the philosophers and the scientists of our times that science, despite its specialization, is unable to completely conceive the complexity of the world; scientific theories are continuously tested and revised by the empirical reality. In particular, Popper's principle of *falsifiability* excludes the application of strict laws in the interpretation of social phenomena. For instance, Galileo and Einstein's theories indicate that science is not built on rocks. Besides, the human will is a factor that presents the scientific achievements in a relative and contemporary way depending on the way they are used.

[3] K. Popper (2005), *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Routledge, Taylor and Francis, e-Library, pp.93, 94.

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Assuming science as an ultimate value and criterion for the organization of social life is immediately related to the alienated face of modern civilization. Technological growth is linked to the liberal and competitive structure of the economy. As a result, the pursuit of profit maximization, which is based on increased production and consumption, has led to a contemporary affluent society. In this society, people spend all their energy on striving for more and more material goods only to eventually become hostages of a perpetual increase of inessential needs. It appears that people´s life revolves around the criterion of quantity, instead of quality. The ethical values have lost their meaning and have been submitted to the pursuit of financial profit which seems to dominate every human activity.

At the same time, the pursuit of continuously increasing production and consumption necessitates extreme specialization, strict organization and automation of labor which, however, inhibits human creativity and imagination and eventually leads individuals to feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction. It is common ground that the lack of creativity in combination with unemployment and financial austerity, inevitably generate social turbulence. Undoubtedly, the dominant financial and industrial paradigm of today's society favors those who use the scientific achievements purely for profit maximization purposes.

In such an unfriendly environment, where money holds the central role, people are packed into the crowded metropolitan cities under the promise of potentially better living and working conditions. This contemporary industrial and economic system causes *massification* by enforcing uniformity in society, where people are treated en masse, loose

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their personality and get trapped within the narrow limits of individualism. For this reason, social contacts become increasingly more superficial, competitive and self-centered, triggering feelings of distrust and leading people to turn into themselves. Under these circumstances, however, it is very unlikely for the individual to enjoy the benefits of a genuine social interaction. This alienated nature of metropolitan areas becomes even more evident by the monotonous and impersonal architecture of buildings as well as the lack of greenery and free space. It arguably derives that people have sacrificed humanity just to get indifference and cruelty in return.

The moral decline of modern society is also responsible for the over-exploitation of the natural environment and, most importantly, for the imbalance of the ecological system; nuclear experiments and atomic weapons threaten our planet to the extent of total destruction.

Nevertheless, in the recent years, the scientific community seems to be gaining back its self-consciousness and humanistic mission. Scientists have increasingly started to adopt methods that are friendlier to the natural environment, trying to generate progress with a sense of responsibility and respect for the human value. To this end, scientists must also focus their activities on advancing ecological consciousness. Alternatively, future historians will inevitably associate a potential catastrophe with the role of scientists and subsequently science overall.

From now on, people need realize that they have lost control over the evolution by believing that science is omnipotent and infallible. In essence, they have lost the '*measure'* (Greek: *μέτρον*) - or the golden balance - and yielded to the relativity of technology. The meaning of the

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measure has been discussed at length by ancient Greek philosophers and reflects a philosophical and educational principle of great importance for the assessment of our every day actions, protecting us from extremities. It is perhaps the only way out of today's humanitarian crisis.

The absolute eschatological perspective of the scientific advancement - as excess of *measure* - dissociates science from its ethical basis: the basic principle of humanism that raises man to the highest level of the values hierarchy has been violated. Man is the measure of all things; in other words, he consists the centre of values and an end in himself. According to this principle, human interests, values and dignity predominate in every thought and activity for the welfare of all mankind. Consequently, the critical philosophical consciousness poses the question of re-examining the meaning of life. The pursuit of human happiness is only possible to be achieved by satisfying both the biological and the spiritual needs; every step towards scientific knowledge has to serve this unique, ever-lasting truth.