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KNOWLEDGE, SCIENCE AND ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY IN AN AGE OF TRANSITION

Man is essentially and preeminently a living being capable of knowledge: this is the real purport of the classical definition of man as a rational animal. That he is endowed with reason means that he is qualified to follow the articulation of things in their inner nature and complex interconnexion. Reason is precisely the faculty of grasping the reason of things, the point of their existence such as it is, of explaining the fact and the content of being, the that and the what it is, of penetrating into the Mystery of Reality at the secret core of Becoming. Human reason discovers there, and identifies itself with, cosmic Reason, the harmony of the World. Λόγος is the illumination of reality, the revelation of its inner form, it is Nature disclosed, it is the Light of the World, just as it is also fundamentally Godhead manifested, the radiant image of divine Hiddenness.

Knowledge is thus the ultimate power: divine Λόγος is the Might of God. From Magic to Science, Man's insatiable craving for wisdom stems from his instinctive search for fulfillment, but also aims at securing for him the most advantageous position in the course of events. Knowledge is the road to perfection and therefore the basic demand of human nature: just as again on a higher but parallel level, Truth and the Road to Salvation coincide. But Knowledge is simultaneously the sole, most effective means of ensuring stable domination. To know is to charter correctly in a given domain of things the nexus of substances, the field of their powers and the interplay of their activities: it is therefore to figure accurately the Law of the domain and to possess the key to its developments. Influence reaches thus the maximum possible, adjustment (capable of absorbing adverse visitations) is optimal: self-protection positive and negative, offensive and defensive control over the obtaining circumstances, flows from, and enhances, the intellectual and spiritual excellence which constitutes the ultimate well-being for humankind. The mental perfection is desirable both in itself and as means of attaining the supreme good for man, namely itself. It is an End in itself and also, unique combination, an End

for the sake of itself. In this virtuous circle, the case of Wisdom may rest safely.

There is no other principle but knowledge determining human action, in, and response to, reality. There is no distinct ethical principle. Morality is a special category of knowledge, knowledge i.e. pertaining to human nature with a view to what can be done and how one may be disposed. The connexion is simple to trace: that should be realised which has value; perfection alone carries ultimately real worth; nature itself defines its own perfection. Thus Ethics is reduced to Axiology, and this to Anthropology, the Ontology of Man-in-Nature. Value-judgements are a particular kind of factual-judgements, and are subjected to the same miscarriages as they.

Not even Divine Providence affects directly individual human endeavour otherwise than through knowledge. Knowledge revealed or discovered, and in either case argued, constitutes the dogmatic statement of faith; faith cannot be separated from its doctrinal content: it is a question of Truth always. The course of the World is evolved in accordance with the plan of divine Wisdom involved in preeternal Logos. Our ignorance of specific dispensations expresses the inability of partial reason to integrate itself in absolute, universal Reason. When this incompetency is mended in particular cases of prophetic inspiration, it is in fact extraordinary knowledge that is bestowed then by an act of spiritual grace, be it a knowledge of the Will of God.

Knowledge, therefore, from the experience involved in elementary natural production or artificial construction to the sublimest flights of philosophical speculation, artistic creation or divine contemplation, is the fundamental need and aspiration of humanity. Modern Science is a kind of Knowledge; as such, it may be profitably examined within the more general context of Man's cognitive achievements. This setting will help highlight its present ailment, and indicate the type at least of the appropriate cure or tonic to be administered.

Knowledge is essentially a certain repetition of reality; such an one as discloses its inner form, reveals its ground of existence; cognitive reason states the onto-logical reason, i.e. the reason of being. There is always involved in the notion of knowledge a strong causal element: to thoroughly know something, is to understand its cause. The deep and essential What-it-is presupposes the Why-it-is. Thus knowledge is an image of things in which the structure of reality emerges conspicuously, with the nodal points of its articulation emphasised, and the main phases of its genesis clarified. One can vividly illustrate what is in question by the example of ancient Greek, especially Archaic, statuary. By an adroit built up of external corporeality where structuring elements are elaborately, even manneristically formed (hair, the ears, xiphoid angle and abdominal muscles, genitals, the knees), whereas the more massive, connecting parts and the general configuration are vigourously shaped by bold, powerful, continuing lines (pectorals, back, sides, hands, legs), human body is artificially reproduced with an incredible life and enhanced naturalness, exhibiting the inimitable ideal realism of Greek Art. The secret lies in the proper in depth understanding of the visible structure of human bodylines. Knowledge is responsible for the achievement, the art of whose realization was appropriately called by the ancients (just as that of poetry and life) wisdom.

Knowledge is no mere image (idol) of reality on a mental mirror. It is a selective representation of objects in differing ways calculated to explain the reality of the thing or process concerned, to give in intellectual reason its reason of being. (The lexical root of λόγος is employed to signify gathering choosing, preferring, picking out). In knowledge, the secret of existence is revealed: the structural and causal make up of being is disclosed.

Such representation entails a distancing from the reality represented more significant than the

normally assumed one as occurring between knowing subject and known object. In a World-view where soul and mind are genuine, organic parts of the World, constituted from elements and principles that also exist in the cosmic Whole at large, the opposition of subject to object is bound to be subdued. In fact, in a true apprehension of reality thinking must somehow coincide with being, the thought becoming identical with the object thought. Yet, as a representation of reality, knowledge in a thinking mind is different from the object known. The combination of these two apparently contradictory conditions defines phenomenologically knowledge as identity in diversity. The explanation of this essential description is aptly conveyed by the Neoplatonic triadic law of reality: thinking presupposes a movement away (πρόοδος) from being (όν, οὐσία), which is halted by a contrary movement towards it (επιστροφή). In the resulting state of equilibrium, mind (νοῦς) is constituted in correspondence with reality and the illumination of knowledge ignited. The double tension produces the required identity-in-diversity, and provides thus a causal definition of knowledge.

As noticed above, the difference of knowledge from the object known does not exclusively or primarily consist in the mere otherness of thought from the reality thought of: if that was the case, the unalterable reproduction of reality as in a mirror image would by itself count as some sort of root thinking; and the computer might consequently be misleadingly imagined to know the information stored in it. Far more important aspect of the diversity between subject and object of knowledge is the variation in the content itself of knowledge when shifting from the real to the conceptual plane. Intellection brings out the salient structural and causal features of the object known; it articulates it from within; it enters into its essential core and reveals it. Authentic knowledge is a representation of reality from the point of view of its inner nature. The Ideal is the essence of the Real: here is the underlying, fundamental ancient Greek philosophical experience in a nutshell. It is a tremendous issue: the theoretical aspect of knowledge, that is its explanatory force, relies on the Return-moment (επιστροφή) in the constitution of the thinking process, and does not follow a further carrying out of the progression (πρόοδος) away from Being, which grounds intellectual cognition in the first place. In effect, adequate knowledge is achieved when the emergence of mind out of being is in an important sense cancelled, and the movement away from reality reversed. The distancing implicit in the former moment permits the dissociation from the object as it appears; while the immersion into being called for by the latter attitude identifies thought with the essential form of the object as it is: in returning to being the mind sees through it to its inner nature; it extends and attains to it: it grasps and conceives reality.

The implications of such a philosophical experience are multifarious, far-reaching and crucial. Reason is not a methodological principle, but the Law of Reality. In cogitation one does not search the inner shrine of the Subject; on the contrary one plunges into the deepest roots of objective Being. To think is to think of being, we tend to assume at the most; it is to think in being said Parmenides, the arch-exponent of Noeticism in a Greek context. All Subjectivism, whether of the absolute, transcendent, transcendental or immanent type, is thereby undermined.

The Subject of knowledge does not carry with it, as from a principle other than Being itself, the conceptual apparatus through which it understands reality. Such framework of apprehension is not Mind's patrimony in the sense of a possession whose source lies outside the cosmic manifold, beyond the realm of objective existence. More generally, the subjective contribution to knowledge is less than is readily supposed by modern philosophical developments. Being is revealed to Mind, rather than discovered by it; but for this to happen intellection must return,

turn back to Being, and not persist in turning its back to it.

The intention of a subjectivistic approach to knowledge is to get directly at the hypothetized fountainhead of truth, the pure eye of consciousness, shortcutting objective reality. In effect however, since there does not exist such extrareal reality, the factual outcome of such an approach is to create an artificial system of understanding. Its artificiality is engendered by its very determining character, which consists in the combination of two parameters. First, the system is not phantastic, since however exclusively one searches in the subject, it is real Being that is found there directly or by representation. Secondly, the system is distorted because of the disorientation caused by the phantasm of the intellectual autonomy of the Subject. The deformation is caused, in Neoplatonic parlance, by the continuing process of turning away from Being instead of re-turning to it. The linear progress towards a spurious Ideality posed as Subjective Pole of reality is here contrasted to the cyclic process of going forth and coming back to Being in the quest of its essence, its real ideality.

Modern Philosophy exhibits strong subjectivistic predilection. In one form or another, the Subject dominates the scene. Knowledge proceeds from the Subject just as in antiquity, contrarywisely, it emanates from the object. Mind, it is felt in the modern experience, faces the World with a network of its own weaving by means of which it strives to catch, to ensnare Being as something opposed and alien. Reason in such an outlook tends to degenerate into mere logicity instead of constituting, and, in the case of human reason, following, the formative principle of the World, as, characteristically, in Heracleitus and in Christian doctrine.

Mathematics becomes a static sequence of analytical truths interconnected through the relation of logical inference, gaining apparently in necessary validity by loosing in physical content - a paradoxical situation for ancient mentality, where necessity is the trademark of real power. The study of the natural foundation of reality, Physics, stands often enmeshed in its own advantage, when its powerful organ, Mathematics (fossilised and with loosened grip on reality) gains the upper hand and impedes instead of furthering the main purpose, which is no less than penetration into the secrets of Nature - a typical predicament of Means becoming End in itself. Thus Physics ceases being Natural Philosophy. Biological Sciences are on the other hand hampered by a too close modelling on the Physical ones, an external imitation excluding dynamic mutual assimilation and fertilization of corresponding ideas. Even worse is the case with the Anthropological and Social sciences, in which not even the elementary presupposition of essential, systematic knowledge (a common, accepted framework of conceptual reference) has yet been consolidated, and, consequently, violent analyses alternate with biased syntheses.

There occur stages in History where the lurking artificiality of the conceptual apparatus devised by a strongly subjectivistic World-experience comes to the fore. An increasing disintegration of the spiritual landscape sets then in. Human creativeness is more and more segregated into distinct, unconnected compartments. One begins with general divisions: Religion, Philosophy, Science, Art, pursuing their independent courses with no common ground and only spasmodic attempts at interaction. Gradually the departmentalization-process extends downwards to an increased specificity. Initially work runs in parallel streams, but eventually progress is halted in the different areas, one after the other, and stagnation spreads everywhere. The paralyzing effects of unwholeness lower Man's existential tone (the Stoic tension of being) and cause the disorientation of his essential drives. The resulting unbalance affects equally human thinking and action. Hence theoretical hesitation and practical indecision, moral uncertainty over Ends and intellectual resignation regarding Truth, (both masquerading as tolerance and honesty);

most grave, finally, a manifest fear of reality, and a consequent suppressive attitude towards Nature, in short, the Glass-Tower syndrome. Man stands in danger of collapsing together with his fragile protection, with which he tends imprudently to identify himself. Creativelessness in vain imposes itself as security. Spiritual depression assumes menacing dimensions.

The general feeling of the Age and paramount incontrovertible signs betoken the entrance of a major Crisis of Artificiality in History, analogous perhaps to that which ushered Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation. The above-delineated necessary features of a Subject-Culture are aggravated. Informations are accumulated but knowledge does not grow commensurately: there is only computer-like manipulation of what is already known, combinatorial arrangement and rearrangement of rather shallow factuality. Gravely ominous is the remarkable absence of significant breakthrough in Theoretical Physics (the test-case of basic Science) for half a century now. The intellectual and artistic edifice of the modern times, becoming soulless relic, is demolished: Post-Modernism de-structures effectively what is anyway obsolete. The process begun earlier in the previous century, and first affected Art: Modernism itself was, in effect, post-modernistic, starting the work of dissolution. But what was then implicit, has now reached consciousness. Arbitrary, simplistic or utopian Ideologism is dead. The ensuing relativism or, rather, Neutralism, is, hopefully, the indispensable preliminary of a new cultural birth.

Contemporary Philosophy has failed scientific inquiry and the quest for knowledge; it has failed Man's aspirations. Detained in the dudgeon of unreal subjectivity it could only aggravate the general abashment. At one end, as Existentialism, it pushes the ailment to its extreme logical consequence, a veritable reductio ad absurdum of Subjectivism: the Subject becomes God, in fact a God above God as he creates even his own essence. The movement away from Being attains its aim of false ideality, the unreal pole opposed to reality, which, in an utopian ecstasy of liberation from the chains of essentialism, is even imagined to generate reality. At the other end, Analytical Philosophy proclaims triumphantly its irrelevance to vital knowledge. Conceptual clarifications (if that is the proper way to call them) in Ancient Philosophy provided the basic content as well as the form of Physics and Biology and Anthropology and Sociology. Cosmogonical speculations regarding the Beginning of Things, and thorough analyses of the spatial and temporal continuum on the one hand and the elements of being on the other are two striking examples.

What is needed to reverse contemporary spiritual recession and initiate a novel phase of cultural development is to start the movement of Return to Being. The pendulum has gone too far in the other direction, Man has fallen victim to the pursuit of a chimaira. One cannot mend a system suffering from artificiality by increased organizational interference; this will simply compound its malfunction and instability. On the contrary, drastic measures are expected in re-real-ising our spirituality in Being; a pioneering, Archaic attitude is called for. Safe guide and potent catalyst on this process of revitalization can only be Classical Philosophy. For a fully-fledged Philosophy is imperatively required, strong and healthy, immersed in reality, and reflecting its dynamic Law, attuned to the essence of things, productive of driving ideas capable of equally reinvigourating different departments of knowledge - not a mere general Science in the Contian sense, but a veritable Matrix of Science binding together all Sciences from within into an indissoluble net. Human Reason must once more be reborn as a real comprehensive (in both senses) principle in Man, symbolic and scientific simultaneously, sensitive and robust receiver of all signals from reality, an integrated sensor involving all apprehending feelers, a living faculty able to move in perfect conformation to objective Being: a reason adjusted to the

cosmic Reason, the inner Law of World-Harmony. Similarly, Mathematics must decisively abandon the game of pure Logistics; its task is not exhausted in mere quantification. Genuine Science is real, fully blown knowledge and no mere Algorism of reality. Coordination between Sciences should extend to actual interpenetration, especially at the level of fundamental, formative, potent realities constituting lawfulnesses in different fields and fecundating their specific growth. Again the demand is for physical Mathematics, biological Physics, anthropological Biology and theological Sociology: we must recapture the speculative experience which e.g. saw the Erinnys chastising transgression in Sun's movement and the seasonal year as well as in human behaviour, divine guarantors of solar regularity and social order alike - a religious projection interpreted metaphysically and applied everywhere: the excess by itself generates the tendency to deficiency, and tension in one direction causes necessarily forceful movement into the opposite, as in the Harmony of the Lyre and the Law of Talion.

Of such vibrant vitality in thinking we stand sorely needful. True Philosophy alone, with Reason conceived in the womb of Reality, can satisfy the want. The regeneration of Science (as ἐπιστήμη) is at stake - and much more. The highest expectations accompany therefore this solemn inauguration. That the Institute for Basic Research was graced with such noble hearth in Italy may be highly significant: the new Renaissance expects its own counterpart to the Florentine Platonic Academy. Let the auspice today be: the good work shall be done here.

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12-VI-1995