

Philosophy under the Sign of Crisis Situations

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Abstract: According to Plato, philosophy was born out of the amazement, out of the impact the contemplation of the grandiose and harmonious nature show and its regular cycles had upon the human mind. However amazement is only one of the impulses that determine one to search for intelligible answers to the questions of a reflexive mind when coming into contact with a reality that causes amazement.

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Much more powerful is the impulse generated by the uncomfortable situation, in which old answers turn out to be insufficient when compared to recent data of human experience or when one and the same reality generates totally opposed explanations. According to Karl Jaspers (1986, p. 7), „*doubt, as methodical doubt, is the source of critical examination of any knowledge. Therefore, authentic philosophy necessarily implies radical doubt*”.

But precisely such circumstances characterize the crisis situations that human knowledge and human life experience may at certain moments reach.

A brief overlook on the history of world philosophy reveals that the beginnings of the philosophical reflection proper in European culture are connected to the conflict between the various religious representations on structure and dynamics of the surrounding world, and the relations of the human being to this world. Greeks from colonies neighboring the Orient discovered with amazement that the Oriental peoples had other representations of divinities and of the way they interfered in human life and nature course. This amazement of the Greeks led them into a desire of getting to know these people better and comparing their ideas to the ones from their own communities. Knowing various interpretations on one and the same issue

triggered the natural impulse of comparing these interpretations so as to establish which one was better. However, these comparative analyses also had other consequences, such as emphasizing the fact that the interpretations under consideration were contradictory not only when compared to one another, but were also contradictory in themselves, which obviously led to the desire of seeking and finding more coherent interpretations, in accordance with reason and historical experience.

After replacing exclusively religious interpretations with attempts of finding materialistic naturalist explanations by the first Greek philosophers, representatives of the Ionian School, one could easily notice that each solution to an old problem generated in its turn new and more difficult problems, contradictions and critical moments that would however stimulate searches in the direction of overcoming such conflictual situations. For example the hypothesis of ancient atomism may stand for an attempt to understand contradictory relations between one single primordial element and the qualitative infinity appeared as a result of its metamorphosis, as well as the hypothesis that the number, i.e. the quantitative determination is responsible for the qualitative features of things and of the whole world.

Also interesting is the philosophical way in which the polytheism was replaced by a rigorous monotheism, which would eventually become a pantheism generating visions that would seriously affect the trust in the images provided by the human senses on the surrounding world. First and foremost, Xenophanes of Colophon observed that the way in which people represented gods was totally opposed to the notion of God, as the Supreme Being responsible for the genesis and order of the world. Absolute perfection was the fundamental feature of the God and therefore all his other features had to concord to this. Also based on this perfection the God had to be only one and everything had to be subject to him. Therefore Xenophanes concluded: *“if divinity really exists and has a godly nature, the God must be only one. Otherwise, if there were more, the God could not do all he wanted; it can but be only one”*. (Pseudo-Aristotel, 1979) He is not only the creator, but also the master of the world, which actually implies his permanent presence and this conditions may be fulfilled only if the God were confused with the world. This is how Xenophanes reached his famous conclusion that the God and the world were one and the same thing.

Starting from this ontological unit Parmenides developed the fundamental features of the world, understood as a supreme material existence. These features obviously contradicted the ones perceived by human senses. Whereas senses revealed a diverse and constantly changing world, reason - operating with the concept - came to the conclusion that the world was nothing but a compact body, uniformly distributed, with perfectly spherical shape and absolutely immobile. This situation was not only new and surprising, but also scandalous, since reason supported things and facts that were totally contradicted by experience. And for the time being there was only one solution to this: contesting either the authority of reason, or the credibility of the information provided by the senses. No philosopher would however doubt the certitude of the results reached by a constant reason, which meant that experience was sacrificed.

And what the Eleates presented merely as a hypothesis - that experience might be misleading - Sophists proclaimed as indubitable reality, starting with Protagoras who enunciated his principle that "*Man is the measure of all things: of all things which are, that they are, and of things which are not, that they are not*"¹. Applying this principle in a somewhat limited, reduced manner, in that not man in general, but each man in part is the measure of all things and in achieving this one uses senses, which not only differ from one individual to another, but actually change the information sent from one moment to another even in the case of one individual, the followers of Protagoras concluded that senses could not possibly be a source of authentic data. The Sophists however, as opposed to the Eleates, did not take in consideration the role of reason, which was why they ultimately questioned the possibility of human knowledge in general and not only the certitude of sensorial knowledge.

However Sophists, based on the already mentioned principles, ended up questioning the truth of all interpretations and explanations of that time, as well as the moral principles, values and norms of their epoch. They questioned especially those norms and values based on tradition, whose basis had never been subject to a critical analysis so far. In doing so, Sophists actually caused the greatest crisis in the field of philosophical knowledge and reflection, leading to unprecedented emphasis on spiritual efforts to overcome this limit situation. Therefore, the twist taken by ancient Greek philosophy with Socrates, Plato and Aristotle was obviously influenced by the crisis towards the 5th century B.C.

¹ Platon, *Theaitetos*, 152 a.

Relevant for the direct connection between crisis situations and spectacular leaps in the way of tackling and solving philosophical problems was also the evolution of philosophy in modern age. As is it already widely known, modern age stood under the sign of the searches for a safe method of knowledge, thus exploring possibilities provided by the inductive experimental knowledge in the field of nature sciences and mathematics. The results of the philosophical efforts in this matter would lead to the appearance of the two fundamental theoretical orientations – empiricism and rationalism, each of these going up to the end in valuing the own cognitive potential.

Consistent empiricism, up to its ultimate consequences, needed to accept the idea that according to its principle position, only the knowledge based on exclusively sensorial experience was justified. Yet here was an analysis on the conceptual treasury of human knowledge, no matter how brief, that revealed that human knowledge operated with concepts that were not justified by data provided by sensorial experience, such as causality, but without which any human knowledge was impossible. David Hume also reached this idea in his research on identifying concepts which did not derive from experience to be eliminated from knowledge; according to empiricism only the ones supported by sensorial experience were valid. (Hume, 1987, p. 149)

The situation of empiricism in its attempt at being consistent in applying its principles marked its profound theoretical crisis, in pronouncing that the principle of John Locke, according to which everything that was in the intellect was previously in the senses, was disapproved precisely by daily experience, that experience itself was not possible in the absence of principles not deriving from it.

In its turn, rationalism reached a similar situation in asserting that reason, invoked as exclusive source of necessary and universal truths, such as the ones in mathematics, was unable to achieve similar performances in matters of metaphysics. The principle of innatism – an otherwise fundamental principle in classical rationalism – lacked consistency in the confrontation with issues derived from the explanation of the certitude of mathematical truths, as well as of the possibility of applying these truths, considered to be the exclusive product of pure reason in knowing and understanding an objective outer reality.

Therefore, whereas rationalism got stuck in clarifying issues on the capacity of reason of reaching necessary and universal truths, though supporting that such truths may be reached only by means of reason and without any intervention

whatsoever from sensorial experience, empiricism found itself in a similar situation when it had to justify the way in which experimental knowledge was possible. One may thus notice that the crisis situation, in which approximately at the same time both rationalism and empiricism reached, was generated by the operational incapacity of the two paradigmatic models when compared to the recent issues and matters emerged in the horizon of knowledge.

Interestingly enough precisely the one philosopher trying to overcome this crisis of modern philosophy, Immanuel Kant successively experimented with and took the path of rationalism, as well as the path of empiricism, in order to find answers to the way in which safe and secure knowledge may be reached, which actually gave him the possibility to know from the inside the limits of both trends, finally concluding that neither was capable of providing viable answers to such questions.

And since neither of the two paths could lead to optimum results in finding a solid base for indubitable knowledge, Immanuel Kant tried a new solution, that of placing the ground of necessary and universal truths entirely in the way of structuring human cognitive faculties. One understood here the capacity to structure - from a spatial and temporal point of view - the contents of sensorial intuition, whose source did indeed lie outside, but whose shape depended entirely on this capacity, as well as on the systemization of the twelve categories of the pure human intellect. Yet such a solution seemed to be unavoidably threatened by going down the path of an absolute subjectivity, a situation otherwise noticed by the ones who would become familiar with Kant's first attempt of valuing the hypothesis of apriorism in his 1770 inaugural dissertation as *profesor ordinarius* at the University of Königsberg.

Kant then tried to shed light on the way in which forms of sensorial intuition and categories of pure intellect, provided they have an exclusively *a priori* character, worked together. Efforts in this matter would take, as it is well known, eleven years of work but would eventually lead to a profound revolution of philosophical thinking. Kant's fundamental conclusion after all his efforts in order to explain the way in which intuition and intellect worked together, surpassed the unilateral character not only of modern empiricism, but also of classical rationalism: there was no exclusively sensorial knowledge, as empiricism thought, but there was also no purely rational knowledge, as rationalism would postulate. In reality – according to Kant – any knowledge is in fact the result of the permanent interaction between intuition and intellect, since the intellect necessarily interferes in all

moments of sensorial knowledge and the sensorial knowledge is present, as pure intuition, in any act of thought, including so in the process of acquiring mathematical knowledge, considered by rationalism the exclusive result of pure thought (Kant, 1969, p. 42). Furthermore, by demonstrating this necessity of the permanent interaction between intuition and intellect, Kant puts an end to any metaphysical speculations, since *a priori* forms of intellect are applicable only to realities existing in time and space.

That crisis situations appearing all along the evolution of knowledge are extremely beneficial for its real progress is also proved to a great extent by the way in which the crisis of physics towards the end of 19th century and beginning of the 20th century was reflected in the evolution of philosophical thought, in other words after the discovery of the characteristics of corpuscle and wave of elementary particles, characteristics which though deeply antagonistic, occurred at the same time. Under these circumstances the classical deterministic – causal model in physics, which had its specific correspondent in the field of philosophy, turned out to be non-operational in the case of the new phenomena revealed by the micro-cosmos physics.

The answer to this model took the shape of the indetermination or imprecision relation, formulated by Werner Heisenberg, a formula assimilated to the principle of indetermination and severely criticized by the self-proclaimed materialistic - dialectical philosophy. In touching upon this subject, its incapacity in finding adequate answers to the evolution registered in micro-cosmos physics emphasized the negative consequences of the ideological limits of the philosophical mind. It was therefore obvious that the solutions were to be foreseen by the philosophical mind benefitting from total freedom of movement, this being anyway the necessary condition of any real progress in the area of knowledge.

Among the original and at the same time deeply creative solutions found to the paradoxical situation of quantum physics at the beginning of the 20th century there was also the one belonging the French philosopher originating from Romania, Ștefan Lupașcu, who was the only one to foresee that mankind stood before an unprecedented challenge, which would also push the doors wide open towards knowledge. The result of the really creative manifestation in philosophy was the elaboration by Ștefan Lupașcu of a new logical paradigm, in the form of *the dynamical logics of contradiction*, which emphasized the unimagined valencies of the principle of antagonism. From an ontological point of view Ștefan Lupașcu

reached the model of the three matters, to which three corresponding logical paradigms were associated; in this way new characteristics of the three levels of existence were emphasized.

In conclusion, the philosopher can find his path even in the most complicated situations that may arise in the field of knowledge; these situations may actually turn out to be beneficial, stimulating the philosopher to search for new solutions and to come up with challenging theoretical and methodological models.

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Platon, *Theaitetos*, 152 a.