

## PHILOSOPHY AND THE EUROPEAN SPIRIT\*

**Ruzica PETROVIC<sup>17</sup> PhD**  
**Preschool Teacher Training College**  
**Vrsac, Serbia**

**Abstract:** As a specific spiritual field, philosophy has its inner establishment and duration regulations. To attribute philosophical feature to a reflective activity, it is necessary for it to fulfil certain assumptions. At individual level, it is necessary for a spirit to make a shift through personal efforts from self-understanding to self-aware thinking; what is needed at general level is abundant historical, cultural and spiritual heritage. Various philosophies have been created in this context within the European space. The paper considers the possibility of their autochthonous and authentic grounding, as well as the issue of their permeation and intertwining from the traditional and contemporary aspect.

**Key words:** philosophy, science, technology, development

### Introductory Considerations

The validity of theoretical research which in its discourse problematizes the relation between philosophy and European spirit implies abstraction of the question significantly determining the mentioned relation. The question facing philosophy both at the time of its construing and today is the issue of its essence, sense and role. As self-understanding awareness, it has always had more expressed responsibility for its own establishment and existence. Through history of its existence there were epochs when it doubted the validity of its own existence, when as self-reflecting spirit in critical self-observation, it revealed insufficient philosophical attitude. What has marked its creation was the ontological need of spirit to think<sup>18</sup> being the basic value and the symbol of philosophical awareness.

For a spiritual activity to be characterised as philosophical, it has to fulfil all the demands facing this form of universal consciousness. This means that it should be

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<sup>17</sup> [prof.ruzica@gmail.com](mailto:prof.ruzica@gmail.com)

\*This is the result of research work on the project: "Pedagogical Pluralism as the Basis of Education Strategy" Philosophy Faculty in Novi Sad, from 2011-2014, supported by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of Serbia

<sup>18</sup> 'A man who has once enjoyed the fruits of philosophy, who has known its system and who has been unreservedly thrilled by them as the highest culture goods, cannot abandon philosophy and philosophizing.' Husserl, E: *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 25., Northwestern University 1970.

raised to the level of clearly articulated abstract thinking, striving for revelation of the essence of a matter through the discourse of mental cognition. (Adorno: 124) Only the mental activity that has managed to go beyond the world of material things and to step into the space of general truths can attain the pretension to being philosophical. Such mental activity implies speculative power of the mind, abstract understanding, logical judgement, as well as ability of the spirit to critically overcome the self-understanding attitude towards reality. Furthermore, philosophy reaches its comprehensiveness only in the unity of theoretical and practical attitude, since the freedom of spirit is necessary in the search for the truth, it attains its true value only in existential relationship. In other words, philosophy has its inner “regularities” of establishment and duration.

A question is raised in the context of the given topic: What is the relation between philosophy and European spirit? If we talk about the European space as a place where philosophical thought has been born and existed, we should start from the term of beginning. In existential sense, it represents individual effort of a spirit to get to reflexive insight. It is a shift from the immediate to self-aware thinking, which is a necessary high level of self-developmental maturity. In historical sense, the beginning of philosophical thinking was preceded by versatile and rich forms of mythical – religious contents. Hellenic philosophy as an outset of European philosophy had for its grounds rich historical spiritual heritage created within an absolutely autochthonous culture. From such a specific and creative potential as Hellenic used to be, a reasonable reflection with all the features of indigenouness could be differentiated. As a consequence, in spite of the fact that the Greeks used to go to the East in order to get broader and better education, before all from the fields of mathematics, geometry, astronomy, ship building and trade, they could not adopt anything that is even close to the philosophy they had created, since they could not find such a model. What is it then that the significance and merit for such a great, comprehensive and all-encompassing architecture of Hellenic philosophical mind should be attributed to? It is beyond dispute that extrinsic factors, like favourable natural conditions (climate, geographic position, wealth), social-economical and political progress, among others, enabled the appearance of a unique way of philosophising which had never existed before. These factors refer, before all, to the expressed sense of right measure that came into play in all creative products ranging from architecture, sculpture and poetry to the highest speculations and the comprehensive experience of the world present in the uniqueness of sensible and passionate creative powers.

### **Philosophical Idea of Europe**

Reflections on the idea of Europe as a specific, unique constitution of spirit has opened up the issue of the rising of such an idea. Although it has been created under the influence of ancient Hellenic philosophy, Hellenic philosophers did not immediately determine and differentiate the very notion of Europe. Nevertheless, the right of origin and primacy belongs to them since they were those who created the grounds of the new world according to their theoretical-abstract insight into the universal value of mental narration and action. Therefore it could be said that the

original ideal of European spirit was established and was growing through pan-Hellenic idea based on the awareness of the freedom of choice of the Hellenic people to think in an easy and comprehensive way about themselves and the world and to permeate their actions with their reason. Hellenic birth of European spirit was marked, before all, by the breakthrough of the aspiration for knowledge, not for special knowledge, but for the one referring to the interestedness in the structure of the world, its ultimate base and the sense of existence of everything.

Such knowledge was comprehensive and unique, having in mind that, apart from theoretical enquiries within the “true philosophy”, it encompassed scientific knowledge in its broadest sense: mathematics, medicine, practical knowledge and skills. The broadness of knowledge did not mean the aspiration to “learned all-knowing”, but to life wisdom confirmed by Hellenic people through the fulfilment of axiological principles. In spite of the fact that the readiness to learn, as an impulse of a curious mind to think, was not the basic drive of philosophy, in final result its function did not boil down to theoretical exercise of the mind, it rather addressed the deepest needs of man’s soul.

As such, Hellenic philosophy was built into the spiritual core of Europe. Imposing the need for a self-aware subject and its inner search for its own, not only personal, but also human essence, Hellenic philosophy established a new concept of life giving a significant place to education of spirit and ennobling of ethos... Pointing to the Hellenic character of European spirit, Hegel says: “An educated European is fulfilled by the feeling of belonging to a homeland in any encounter with Hellenic philosophy” (Hegel: 285). Hellenic revelation of mental principle as universal mediator between cosmos and a man and among people has been emphasized by Nietzsche’s standpoint: “Educated mind has made Europe what it is. In the Middle ages this mind was on the way to once again become a part and a pendant of Asia – i.e. to lose its scientific sense it owed to the Greeks” (Nietzsche: 244). The central place in being educated belonged to reflexive mind, out of which universal knowledge developed. Therefore neither original nor perspective sense of European values can be perceived beyond the context of Hellenic spirit.

Apart from speculative – mental dimension, European philosophical heritage has religious feature. At the outset, the breakthrough of the idea of Christianity was featured by not understanding or even rejecting philosophical knowledge as limited and ambiguous. Having undergone a dispute lasting for several centuries regarding the predominance between faith and knowledge, human wisdom and *God Revelation*, philosophy continued to live through a unique amalgam of religious and rational principles. In this temptation, philosophy managed to exist further due to the fact that through the long historical period of its existence it created a system of comprehensive knowledge, without which it was not possible to maintain longer survival of the ruling theological form of awareness. In other words, for religious dogmas to be accepted, faith was not sufficient. For their rationalization and apology, logical-philosophical knowledge was necessary already owned by philosophy. In interconnectedness and permeation of theology and philosophy a form of spirit was created having the characteristics of discursive thinking marked by Christian religiousness. What

connected philosophy with theology was its dealing with the issue of absolute grounds of everything existing in the world, according to which it entered the sphere of metaphysics; on the other hands, its narration was not sacral-dogmatic, but logical, within the limits of human thinking. Even though in its main historical course philosophy was deeply involved in “encompassing the whole according to the ultimate principle”, it still established itself according to the critical act of thinking, to strictly notional knowledge, showing closeness to scientific spirit.

The whole period of the middle ages in Europe was marked by the idea of the God and the aspiration of a man to reach the assumptions of becoming a godly creature through religious feeling, ascetic or mystical experience. Having faith in God, a man had spiritual orienting points, moral directedness towards goods of universal and general character. At theoretical level, great disputes were led regarding the way to find ontological proofs and justify the idea on supreme entity. When these strivings went beyond the circle of creative efforts and gained scholastic character, they became a strict dogma, not leaving behind anything of its original essence. Nevertheless, the comprehensiveness religion offered in its authentic meaning contained all the necessary assumptions for faith in spiritual and moral metamorphosis of a man in the world.

Philosophy and European spirit experienced another temptation at the turn of the New century when the development of sciences awakened the sense of security in a man, as well as faith and opened possibility to build his own world. This is when philosophy starts to doubt its own heritage and searches for new insights whose truthfulness and usefulness it proved through the use of mathematical-logical methods and their technical-practical application. In such a way knowledge was losing its educational sense and started to gain pragmatic sense. Through the demand for a “great renewal”, philosophy transformed itself into “comprehensive natural science” (*Mathesis universalis*). This is how the Hellenic model of education was embodied in the striving for essential knowledge and discovery of general truths about the world and about man, aiming at creating a virtue as ultimate happiness and eschatological hopes, transformed into concern “about many things” and aspirations for greater power over the outer worlds.

Modern philosophy acted too self-confidently, ostentatiously celebrating “its beginning” like an absolute novelty. Detaching itself from scholastic philosophy, it distanced itself from Hellenic philosophy, as well, starting its transformation into “pure science”. This further led to the narrowing of the notion of practice to pragmatic dimension, as well as boiling the notion of theory down to methodological framework, deprived of any value content. In the great renewal of philosophy, the accent was put neither on theoretical observation or contemplation, nor on educational course of good life, i.e. the life dedicated to improvement of spirit and character. The Hellenic concept of creation for one’s own enjoyment was replaced by the care for survival. What used to be considered unworthy for a free man, what was proper only for a slaving soul has become the imperative of life.

Philosophy has not imposed itself as its highest aim the revelation of general truths for the sake of the truths, in order to enjoy the pure joy of cognition, it has rather been turned to study of mathematical structures in the world of nature in order to gain

applicable knowledge, useful for life. Just like philosophy went through radical changes adjusting to the demands of science, science, on the other hand, torn out from the wing of philosophy, suffered a radical change having become non-philosophical (Nehamas: 132) Strivings for technical knowledge, knowledge which increases man's power over things have outbalanced the aspirations for essential knowledge determining the right measure and value of things. In the process science has undergone significant structural changes. With the predominance of technical spirit over speculative, there has been increasingly less space for knowledge uniting ontological-ethical dimension. The highest subject of theoretical reasoning no longer is well-being of man, neither the reasoning itself is the highest form of good life. What is instead of these values in its prime is practical and functional task of science to increase technical knowledge and powers in order to realize the interest of "better life". It has turned out that the world of modern technology is not the world of versatile fields of possibilities, but a world of uniform sense of the all-encompassing that knows only for a single world and negates the inherited cultural differences (Patocka: 201)

The breakthrough of technological spirits in all the pores of human life implies that knowledge has failed its original aspirations when it ceased to act according to regulations of humanity. The pragmatic dimension of knowledge has to a great extent denied the ethical limitations and abolished the "binding norms" in which a man used to find his foothold. At the outset of 20<sup>th</sup> century European spirit underwent the inner destruction bringing about the radical break with the original self-understanding of a European man educated in the spirit of the highest heritage of old Greek and modern philosophy. Deep change has been announced by the loss of transcendent point of support a European man used to have, leading to the decrease of life strength and energy and more expressed feeling of anxiety and uncertainty. It is not a rare case that failures and sufferings occurred, but nevertheless "people still believed in a secret place of spirit where it is written where a man comes from and where is he heading to, they believed that there is a metaphysical world of unchanged shape due to which a man can arrange his life with hope and trust in this changing and decaying world" (Djuric: 329).

On its way of history European philosophy has gone through various challenges it managed to resist due to its universal spirit according to which it critically adopted and united religious, scientific and artistic values. Nowadays a question has been raised referring to reestablishment of a unique philosophical concept to unite discursive-intuitive mind, logos-experiential awareness, scientific exactness and creative inspiration. (Koslovski: 131), Dissipation of philosophy into its partial forms of awareness requires turning back to original self-understanding so that through the relation with its highest achievements it could theoretically determine and design solutions of basic anthropological issues.

The ground according to which European culture was built was clear notional differentiation between a being and pretence, between truth and fallacy. Getting back to this pattern would demand thoughtful reflection on the structure of the existing European spirit and identification and definition of new categories. Furthermore, what should be born in mind is the position a modern man is in, his distance from the God,

the lack of all-encompassing principle, his loss of faith in absolute values, making him deprived from the feeling of security and aspiration for model forms of life (Ulmer: 320). Eternity is not a challenge for a contemporary man; he does not strive for something which is above him; he does not address his primeval need to prevail the feeling of being mortal through the aspiration for religious union with the God; he rather compensates it by the increase of material wealth. A man of modern civilization in general, and thus a man of European civilization, occupied with the influence of technical creations has lost the sense of cosmic harmony beauty and stepped out of organic unity with the world as a whole; he has come to terms with the lack of righteousness in the world, he has suppressed human protest of conscious against evil, he has laughed at the inclination towards eternal life. In general subordination to worldly wishes and plans, it is the spirit of interest, revenge, destruction that has prevailed in the world.

### **Conclusion**

The sense of anxiety and worry, since it started to overcome a European citizen, until now, has not ceased to multiply and deepen. Great minds who have anticipated the “disease” were clearly aware of its causes and that is why they could almost prophetically see its inevitable consequences. What philosophy is nowadays faced with as its main task, according to which its sense and justification has been judged, is its ability to identify these issues and the possibility of their resolution. Philosophy will be able to be an important part of European identity and it will become its spiritual expression if it manages to overcome its own crisis, i.e. to leave the sphere of sterile explications of outmoded categories and renew the cult of nurturing aspirations towards the truth and if it makes the language of its narrations not only notionally less ambiguous, but also more applicable in searching for new way of life.

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