

6. CLASICAL GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND VISUAL ART AESTHETICS FORMING THE PERSONALITY

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Abstract: *In this essay the ancient Greek philosophy is regarded as the starting point towards the course of existential search of the human. The dynamic approach of the Visual art and aesthetic expression is displayed as a way of “becoming”, as the philosophic objective perception disseminates to the artistic experience. The value of the combination of Philosophy with Art is highlighted as far as the configuration of personality is concerned. This combination is becoming the vehicle which leads the person to the completion on the horizontal development as far as human relationships are concerned and also on the vertical development emphasizing on the internal search of the human. As a compass we use the approaches of specific intellectual men of Arts and Science, of Scholars of Ancient and Contemporary Greek Intelligentsia. Applying as criteria the timeless aspect and the universal spirit which underlies their works, we identify the points which suggest the Contemporary reality as distillate affecting the angle of many scientific sections totally.*

Keywords: *philosophy, Visual Art, personality, self-awareness, Intellectual, completion*

1. Philosophical approaches in Ancient Greece

“The Good is the highest example that the philosopher owns its knowledge in his soul” (Platon)

A time recursion helps us to comprehend the role of philosophy in life. How can we define the **“philosophy”**? The definition is given by Konstantinos Tsatsos²⁶⁵, according to which philosophy is a process of human consciousness to view the reality through the theory and the action on a total approach, as a unity, as a **“whole”**. Philosophy, is the objective materialization of spirit as a universal theory, applying the ultimate criteria of life, the ideas with absolute value, the **“unalterable and everlasting”**, the idea of **“Truth”**. (Tsatsos, The Social Philosophy of Ancient Greeks). As the scholar analyses the philosophy of Plato refers that the universe justifies its existence and evades the random when we perceive it as a materialized spirit. According to this the Chaos, the lack of universe, becomes universe world; it acquires unity under the light of spirit, where the **“whole”** exists. In a spiritual, ideological way in an evaluative way the spirit values itself. This is exactly the essence of philosophy, the self awareness of spirit, the self-consciousness, and the **“know thyself”**. Our theoretical self-awareness also causes our practical self-awareness and therefore the completion of moral reflection. The social philosophy in human’s life, as it is defined by philosophers themselves, reveals the position of human in the social unity, in the historic reality, and furthermore in the area of universe towards the ultimate, towards God (Tsatsos, p.13-88).

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²⁶⁵ Konstantinos Tsatsos (1899-1987), member of the Athens Academy, excelled as professor in the Legal Faculty Athens, Philosopher and Writer, also he was President of the Greek Democracy (1975-1980).

The Sophistic School

In pre-Socratic period with restricted schools, the old values, without the maturity of critical research, people did not have the worries of knowledge. During the first cosmological period of Greek and at the same time universal philosophy, the theoretical acquisition of the elements of the world limited every cognitive development. The “*whole*” was approached unilaterally, “*the objective*” world had fatally the need of “*subjective*” element in order the spirit to be led to its completion. During the period of Sophists the interest was focused on the subjective world and on the way of its connection with the objective one towards a single operating system covering in this way the philosophical gap.

About the seventh century B.C the “*ego*” became the creative, free and conformational element of existence of the word substantiating and defining its form. According to Sophists “*Felicity*” was defined as an ultimate criterion of life. But its changeable content covered the individual interests, disorganizing the physical equality in a society (Politic) and this was the weak point of Sophistic Ethics (Tsatsos p.52-70). During its evolution, it was revealed that in the sophistic school, the spirit denied itself and it was trapped serving and covering the needs of few people, so that a new fact had to balance the situation. Sophists’ freedom was leading to impunity. The antidote to the problem was sought in the truth of freedom itself, which was proposed as a law and “*the true law is always a law of freedom*” (Tsatsos p.72). The search of man for ideal society, of justice, of education, and freedom led him forward.

Socrates

The teaching of Socrates belongs to this point of time on conflicting to the Sophistic theory. The logical subject was the presupposition of every science. Socrates was teaching that the knowledge was free from perceptions which are given by senses and the knowledge lies at the logical function of consciousness, the “*meaning*”. Defining it as a fact which is subjective and granted by all people, the meaning was the basis of method of science, the Conceptual Art. For its acquisition, the man was performing comparative processes during his human relationships and in this way his cognitive consciousness was activated . The enlightenment of him was leading to self-consciousness, to “*know thyself*”, the self-awareness. The human acquires knowledge of “*Virtue*” through Science, very basic for his personality because “*only one who knows well what he does, is the one who acts in an ethical way*”. The concept that becomes the final aim of every action is, according to Socrates, the “*Good*” a unifying element as a common basis for every human being and the means for “*Bliss*”. “*He wanted to inflict the reason, the metre, his law in the social and political life*” (Tsatsos, p.78-79). In his apology Socrates stated that “*the uncontrolled life is unbearable life for man*”²⁶⁶ (Plato, Kouravelos ed. Zaxaropoulos p.88-89).

²⁶⁶ « δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ » is usually translated as “the unexamined life is not worth living”.

The constant control of self-led to the alert of mind, so that what human could do, it would be the appropriate, the good, the useful. The good as ultimate element free from practical and aesthetic needs became the vehicle towards the true freedom of personality. The good was namely the basis of Greek thought and spiritual life as it was recognized in the Art and Greek culture.

The philosophy of Epicureans

According to the philosophy of Epicurus the main aim was not the theoretical research but the solution of problems in life “*not the wisdom of theory but the wisdom of life*”(Tsatsos, p.291-299). Especially the Epicureans aimed at the catalysis of superstitions and the disappearance of awe which occupied people and made their life difficult, releasing the nature from Gods and daemons who controlled it according with the beliefs of that time. The physical determinism was based on their philosophy, operating through natural science practical purposes useful for human displaying the “*Calmness*” as a healing virtue. The person should be ready to forego any desire. Every positive pleasure should become the starting point of felicity leading to the right direction.

The bodily pleasures were reduced and the man should impose on them so that they do not dominate human's life. On the contrary the real thing that benefits man was the spiritual pleasures offering tranquility, serenity and calmness. This is the true interpretation for the philosophical approach of Epicureans and for the felicity through “*the pleasure*”, which stems as knowledge of genuine practice in life. A life with Wisdom and Bravery that elevates the man to a higher level.

The Stoic Philosophy

Epictetus (50-130 AD), was the main representative of Stoic philosophy. In his “Handbook” displays as the center of life the value of internal tranquility. He advocated that a man who was independent from the actions and the desire of the other people, he was really free. As a feature of the philosopher, he regarded the ability of “*tolerating and being abstainer*” so that the benefit was totally coming by himself. The philosopher urged the acquisition of fighting spirit in our internal struggle, the purpose of moral improvement. The Stoic philosophers claimed that the proceedings in accordance with the nature and the law, they could not be done in any better way emphasizing it was futile for human to seek the things to come in accordance with his own way. Although he had to accept them as they were meant to come. The “*Reason*”(“*Logos*”) was the regulator and motive force of the universe of nature and the whole observable universe. Whatever it was according to the reason had to be identified by living physically in a human's life. It was finding its completion on a practical-social level in the society and its law were in a way of Incarnate Word (Tsatsos 1980, p.282).

Marcus Aurelius (121 AD-180AD) was apprenticed next to the Stoic philosopher Juno Rosticus and he did not sidetrack from his philosophical attitude until his death. Although he knew the difficulties of the office of Roman

Emperor that he occupied, he proved with his life that the philosophical theory becomes action. Aspects of personality and his philosophy reflected in his book with the title “*about herself*” as a spirit of life. According to him, philosophy defines the way we control and dominate “*our daemons*”, our pleasures and pains, the lie and the pretense. Philosophy contains the resistances in order not to end up “*apostates of global nature*”. Preserving “*the self of ultimate soul*”, the ultimate spiritual force, living morally even though towards those people who are unfair or tell lies (Markus Aurelius’, p.11). Thanks to the values of truth and justice, man becomes invincible, ruler of himself. He acquires the strength with imperturbable heart awaiting death as a natural and not as a bad state (Markus Aurelius’ p.295).

Aristotle

According to Aristotle, “*it is not enough for someone to be virtuous but he should be fully aware of the purpose of his actions*”. Whatever happens in the soul according to Aristotle, are three elements, the emotions, the abilities and the habits. The “*Virtue*” aims at the means and the human should choose this habit because “*we can become good by one way but we can also become bad by all bad ways*” (Nicomachean Ethics p.117-125). Plato in “*Republic*” displayed the true philosophy as the force that forms and completes man. Participating in the true society, “*Ideal Society*”, he reached up to the light. The education was the only realistic possibility with the purpose of bringing human back to the truth (N. M Skouteropoulos p.520).

2. Philosophy and Art

Art is a lifestyle functioning as a lens which aids the understanding of reality by affecting, deconstructing and recreating it. The humanly trait of the phenomenon of Art is lying on the influence it causes to the internal nature of the person and the relationship of this person with the surrounding environment. It enables the act of separating and exceeding the spirit from its material substance. Art functions decisively in molding the human personality by promoting an esthetic and philosophical acceptance of it, something that is proven by the whole spectrum of human historical presence. According to Beardsley²⁶⁷ (p.34), Art holds a very important part in educational responsibility the way this is defined in Plato’s theory, and allows the educational process to be separated to actions with “*good tendencies*” and “*bad tendencies*” respectively. This explains how Art affects the spiritual, psychological, social and cultural evolution of each person and results to a connection -based on logical arguments- between the righteous way of life and the nature of art, considering it as an indissoluble relationship. Men always

²⁶⁷Beardsley Monroe C. 1989, *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present- A short History*, (p. 34). His work in aesthetics is best known for its championing of the instrumentalist theory of art and the concept of aesthetic experience. Beardsley was elected president of the American Society for Aesthetics in 1956. He taught at a number of colleges and universities, including Mt. Holyoke College and Yale University, at Swarthmore College and Temple University. He and his wife were over-all series editors for Prentice-Hall's "Foundations of Philosophy,"

considered Art as the least important thing to take into account when putting the spirit to a process of philosophical and internal quest that aims to welfare, progress and completion. Art harmonizes the human existence with the powers of the Universe and settles things in order via a regulating, cleansing and organizing process. According to Plato and Aristotle, Art is the embodiment of the “*Ideal Beauty*”, of the “*Beautiful*”, of the “*Divine Archetype*” on earth. The Ancient Greek Art projects a dominating freedom against the outside world, with the deeper objective of the eternal pursuit of the essence of the common laws of the world and the spirit. We see this pursuit realized in Greek Art from the beginning of the last one’s history in the Geometrical Times around 1000 B.C.

In our approach, very important data are provided by the studies of Konstantinos Tsatsos, regarding the relationship of Man in Ancient Greece with Nature in the context of a spiritual challenge. All aspects of nature were determined in size, color, power, measure and order by harmony. The total was becoming a source of inspiration for the Great Art and that same Art was becoming a confession of spirit and material substance, object and subject, a dominant of the surrounding environment, an overflow of conscience by the “*Beautiful*” (“*Oreon*”) as it was inserted into art and it was finally upgraded to a way of life. Whatever was connected to the beauty of the soul and the body or to any image and representation of them, was functioning as a memory that recalled the divine place from where the soul came, satisfying the heavenly love that exists inside each human.

In Art, it is forever accepted that every element, symbol of the aesthetics vocabulary, integrated to the total, offers services to it and then “*the totality becomes harmony*”. People’s relationship with Art on a base like this is the essence of freedom and liberation of the spirit which leads each person to spiritual completion. Through art, symbols, myths and the esthetical expression of the world, men are able to deepen their thinking and rest in beauty, reaching contemplative maturity. They acquire a spiritual way of seeing and perceiving the world around them, a world that liberates and uplifts them. “*But there where freedom was born, it comes as natural aftermath that great Art was born, along with clear thinking and the Word*” (Tsatsos 1989, p. 33-34). Through Art we are led to knowledge of the Word according to the phrase “*in the beginning was the Word*”. This philosophical outlook safeguards the “*ego*” and leads to the self-discovery of the spirit and to self-awareness, in other words, to the process of “*know thyself*”.

Plotinus in “*Enneads*”, as Virgil Gheorghiu²⁶⁸ mentions (Goerghiou Virgil, p.78) encouraged men to seek the beauty inside them by observing themselves. And just at the same way the sculptor carves the sculpture, Plotinus suggested we all apply the same process to ourselves aiming to the refinement of the beauty of the soul. By deducting whatever unnecessary, carving and cleaning all

²⁶⁸ Georghiou Virghil, (Porquomir’ a-t-onapellé Virgil, 7th edition in Greek: «Ένα όνομα για την αιωνιότητα», Εκδόσεις Τήνος, Αθήνα, p. 78). He was Priest of the Orthodoxe Rumanian Church in Paris and Writer.

the dark places inside us, he prompted us to: “do not stop shaping your own sculpture until the godly light of moral virtue appears and until you see abstinence occupying its sacred throne” (Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1, 6, 9, 7).

3. Characteristics of Greek Art

“Height is an echo of a great soul”, Dionysius Logginos.

In Ancient Greece, Art was closely connected to life and life was an expression of celestial sanctity in all manners of its expression. Dr. Karouzos²⁶⁹ (1981, p.9-19) in his scientific studies mentions that the new and until then unknown trait that Greek spirit brought and passed on to human History was the awakening of the personal conscience, the fact that “*the person is mirrored deliberately in his conscience*”. What the Greek “*Morfes*” (“*Shapes*”) project, is the real willingness as a cardinal mental need and the response to Visual Arts was decisive. This fact led to specific esthetic demands: 1) Art forms should entail the feeling of stability, i.e. of duration along with the feeling of movement. The vividness of the form, different as a concept from that of naturalism, was a necessity for a work of Art. The form should create the feeling of life, beyond any comparison with the real prototype. The beautiful in the form was radiated from the feeling of lively (Karouzos, 1981, p.12). The preconditions for the existence of the above mentioned qualities were the assurance of stability though the architectural structure of the form along with architectural mobility which was achieved via the order. Order managed to keep even the liveliest movement of the form under architectural stability. Until then, in the Archaic sculptures, architectural stability was exterior, with “order” being transformed to an interior skeleton, a “*poise*”. 2) The form should give away the feeling of a dynamic surface “*born from a cell full of power and spirit*”, with the spiritual depth of it being released from its most intimate places. On the word of Plato, order, eurhythmics and consequently harmony were deduced from the number and quality, whereas the parts in concord were subdued and tamed by the total (Ghikas²⁷⁰, 1987 p.145).

The portrait

Phidias’ Art, even though had avoided the personal portrait, bestowed to spiritual men the conscience for the internal value of individual characteristics. It became the basis for the aesthetic viewpoint of the 4th century B.C. until the times of Alexander the Great. According to Christos Karouzos (1981, p.185-187), it was then that the need for a personalized portrait was born; a portrait

²⁶⁹ Christos Karouzos, 1900 – 1967, was a Greek archaeologist and academician. Existed director of the Greek National Archaeological Museum. Was nominated *Honoris causa* Dr of University of Basileia (Switzerland). In 1955 elected member of the Bavarian Academy of Sciences and the Athens Academy. Was granted to him the *Seneschal of Palm*, while existed also member of Archaeological Institutes of Berlin and Vienna.

²⁷⁰ Hadjikiriakos-Ghikas Nikos, 1906 – 1994, (in Greek: Χατζηκυριάκος – Γκίκας Νίκος), was a leading Greek painter, sculptor, engraver, writer and academic, also was a founding member of the Association of Greek Art Critics, AICA-Hellas and International Association of Art Critics.

that with the bearing and physical traits of the depicted person in conjunction with their mental and spiritual substance, would reveal their character and ethics. The realistic elements employed by the artist- but only those he considered useful- did not escape the final goal, that is give to the portrait a permanence and fixity, along with the ethics that is derived from the lifetime and actions of a person and not just this person's random variances. As stated by the researcher himself, artists: *"whether they depict spiritual people or politicians, they emit a special spirituality where the relation between the specific case and the general rule and world order can be identified."*

Heraclitus throughout his times of schooling used the phrase: ***"I investigated myself"***. With this phrase he concentrated in a sole sentence the radical change in Greek thought, where the leading role was given to personal conscience by determining the birth of the portrait as a momentous fact in human civilization (Karouzos, 1981, p.187). Dionysius Logginus in his study *"On the Sublime"*, (*Περὶ ὕψους*, *"Peri Epsus"*), placed the value of height as the one feature that brings people close to divine nature. The really high sense of virtue has the power to call the soul and through personal experience uplift it by *"standing up and filling with joy and pride"* (Logginos, p.77), at the same time when active experience uplifts men's souls. Every creation and creature reflects its creator and thus, a work of high spiritual value also reveals the mental height of its creator. According to Logginos, studying and exercising help geniuses to obtain self-discipline and guard them from dangerous slips, by making a clear separation between *"passion" and "height"*.

4. Response to modern reality

"The soul that is free from passions is a real acropolis of the spirit" Marcus Aurelius

Through Art, the scientific analysis that regards our times tends to overlap with the approaches of the ancient times' men. Art pulses on the rhythm of the universe *"since even she is nothing but rhythm"* (Hatzikiriakos-Ghikas, 1987, p. 83). The sanctity which pervades even the last practical object in the Ancient Greek world is the reflection of the agony of the human spirit and the way it seeks to be defined. A human seeks the universal relationship with the *"Godly"* and its position in the world which surrounds him with his entire inner world. Art, from antiquity to our days, expresses the human effort to solve this mystery.

Christianity did not nullify all that which was inherited from the Ancient intellectual elite; to the contrary, it defined clearly the relation of every person with himself and the universe. According to Cristos Giannaras²⁷¹ the relationship of a person with God is *"a reason for erotic ecstasy"* (Giannaras, 1996, p.180)

²⁷¹ Cristos Giannaras, (Greek: Χρήστος Γιανναράς; born 1935 in Athens) is a Greek theologian, Ph.D. Professor of Philosophy at the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences in Athens. Doctor of Philosophy, honoris causa, at the University of Belgrade and at St. Vladimir's Seminary, New York and the Holy Cross School, Boston. He holds also a Ph.D of the Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines of the University of Sorbonne (Paris). Christian Orthodox Philosopher and Author of more than 50 books, translated into many languages.

which will be mutual and manic. The way for the meaning of life to be revealed is “*the beauty - a call for communion to empirical searches, beyond ideologies and moral and educative purposes*” (Giannaras, 1996, p.31). It is disclosed in every form of Art and it is presented to and communicates to us “*the Word*”. As a result, the biological individuality becomes the vehicle which breaks the bonds of time and space and leads to liberty, defeating death.

“*The mind cannot be subjected to God if the body is not subjected and crucified to the mind, in other words the one acting by itself be subjected to the reasonable*” (Isaac of Syros, p.73-103). The challenges strengthen the relationship between humans and God, whereas through prayer and modesty humans accept the gifts of the Holy Grace: cleverness, peace, reasoning and then they can incorporate and mirror them in every action of theirs. The deprivation of modesty denies perfection from humans, as Saint Isaac Syrus²⁷² assures us in his work “*Ascetics- Regarding the ways of virtues*” and through his personal life and experience.

Conclusions

The interactive association of Philosophy and Art creates the key elements of aesthetic quality and taste, straightforwardness and the meaning of **Beautiful** which are filled with **Ethics** and **Virtue**. The holiness in expression and the freedom of spirit empower spiritual clarity, abstinence and also disengage from the material substance through studying and exercising, aiming at moral uplift. The cathartic power of Art contributes to the work of self-awareness and the exemption of people from passions. Contemporary researchers dedicate their studies due to this aspect. (Rusu M. 2013²⁷³). According to Xatzikiriakos-Ghikas “beautiful is what achieves to correspond to such an intimate harmonious layout” –as it is described above- “and what satisfies the architectural design of the soul with its proportions” (Xatzikiriakos-Ghikas, 1987,p.173). It is possible for every person to be trained so that he can identify the beautiful and beneficial things for his soul. Aiming to completion, he can, through philosophy and art, discover the holiness of life. The perfecting of a person makes him a harmonious part of a whole, defeating death and raising him to perfection for the benefit of all humanity.

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²⁷² Isaac Syrus, was a 7th-century Assyrian bishop and theologian best remembered for his written work. He is also regarded as a saint in every apostolic Church: the Church of the East, the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church and among the Oriental Orthodox Churches. His feast day falls on January 28.

²⁷³ Rusu Marinela, researcher, PhD, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch, Institute ”Gh. Zane”, dedicating her research on the aspects forming the human personality.

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