From the Consolation to the Isolation of Philosophy: A Critique of Contemporary Tymocratic Teleology

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Abstract:- For a long time in the West, philosophy marched along placidly as the undisputed mother of all learning. Controversy arose when theology attempted to divest philosophy of her title. The result was an uneasy coexistence affirming the Humanities as the source and moral torchbearer of the emerging social and natural sciences. Thus the link was established between ethics, education and civilization. The slow ascent of the natural sciences to the apex of education today coincided with the steady erosion of democracy and its substitution by tymocracy. Contemporary tymocratic teleology has set humanity along the trajectory of ethically indefensible but preventable self-destruction. The consequence remains the disturbing subordination of human dignity to the sovereignty of money. Despite its isolation from the architecture of contemporary education, philosophy never lost its power and mission as the consoler and guide whenever human reason strayed from the path of wisdom and chose folly. The isolation of philosophy today, reminiscent of Boethius, is an ironic reaffirmation of its urgency and relevance to the age of the deadly sovereignty of money, weapons of mad destruction and omnicidal environmental destruction. The thesis defended in this essay is that philosophy, as an intercultural dialogue of the human race, is vital for the restoration of ethically defensible learning orientated towards individual and collective survival of humankind. Only in this way can humanity vindicate its claim to wisdom and civilization.

1. Introduction

There are as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers. Quite often the definitions focus on the object of philosophy and thence proceed to determine its "nature" and functions. This procedure tends to create distance between philosophy and "reality"; between the philosopher and other human beings. It feeds the idea that philosophy is "abstract" and not down to earth. Accordingly, it separates the philosopher from other human beings as though only the philosopher has got privileged access to the knowledge of "abstract" things. It is not the purpose here to examine the validity of this argument. My intention is limited to suggesting that the argument may not be taken at face value and thus requires analysis.

It is also my intention to suggest that seldom is philosophy defined in terms of the activity of the subject, that is, providing an understanding of what it means to philosophise. Adopting this perspective could ultimately illuminate the point that there is philosophy in all human beings even though some may be recognized as professional philosophers. "At the conclusion of a reflection which at first isolates him, the philosopher, in order to experience more fully the ties of truth which bind him to the world and history, finds neither the depth of himself nor absolute knowledge, but a renewed image of the world and of himself placed within it among others. His dialectic, or his ambiguity, is only a way of putting into words what every man knows well – the value of those moments when his life renews itself and continues on, when he gets hold of himself again, and understands himself by passing beyond, when his private world becomes the common world. These mysteries are in each one of us as in him. … The philosopher is the man who wakes up and speaks. And man contains silently within himself the paradoxes of philosophy, because to be completely a man, it is necessary to be a little more and a little less than man."[1]

On the above reasoning, the isolation of the philosopher or philosophy can hardly be meaningful

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at all. Yet, history is replete with examples of the isolation of philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle until his philosophy was metamorphosed to support christianity.[2] Also, Boethius was isolated. It was during his isolation in exile awaiting execution that Boethius wrote *The consolation of philosophy*, a treatise that speaks to the inextricable living interconnection between the philosopher and the actual world of the time. Like Socrates before him, Boethius raised anew the question of justice human relations. The isolation of philosophy is generally based on a misunderstanding of philosophy on the one hand. On the other, it is the reaction to the unease that philosophy engenders in human relations as well as the relation between the human being and "nature".

The point I wish to underline by the preceding observation is that philosophy cannot be isolated since it is everywhere where there are human beings. Neither can the philosopher be isolated because the wakeful speech of the philosopher derives from the inextricable living interconnection between the philosophy and the actual world of the time. Thus philosophy is not and cannot be at the center of human relations because human relations, like the universe,* have got no center. Accordingly, philosophy has got no special privilege in the sphere of human relations. The dignity of philosophy lies in the recognition that "there is a tension in the relation of the philosopher with other persons or with life, and that this uneasiness is essential to philosophy".[3] I should like to focus on this tension with particular reference to the contemporary tymocratic teleology.

I will proceed by sketching the interconnection between democracy and money in ancient Athens. This is in order to show that the problem of contemporary tymocratic teleology has deep roots in human history. The choice of Ancient Athens is to recognize the dominating influence of the West with regard to the concept as well as the forms and functions of money. Such domination does not necessarily mean the complete and total elimination of indigenous concepts of money and its use in other parts of the world. Second I will situate and describe the contemporary tymocratic teleology and, third I will provide a critique thereof. My critique will be predicated on the recognition that: "We have difficulty because we live in a world in which the monetization first observable in the early Greek polis has had, despite periods of setback, several centuries to develop. We have by now thoroughly internalized the metaphysics of money – at its crudest consisting of two beliefs: first the belief that money is a *thing* (rather than a social convention) and that as a thing it must, like the weather, constrain our sense of what is possible, and secondly the belief that we are primarily individual agents and only secondarily (if at all) members of a larger entity, whether defined by kinship, politics, religion, or anything else. But this internalization finds it hard to shake off a lingering sense of arbitrariness, of there being something indefinably unsatisfying – despite its inevitability and the massive progress it has achieved – about the individualist reification of money and the injustice and alienation thereby produced".[4] My critique will address this condition in defence of the thesis that the multiple and varied divisions or boundaries between and among human beings in the name of money or race undermine the ineradicable oneness of the human family and are an obstacle to the realization of justice in human relations.

2. Democracy and Money in Ancient Athens

Ancient Athens knew and practiced democracy though it condoned slavery. Money was among the elements that facilitated social interaction in the democracy of ancient Athens. Focusing on the Early Greek mind, Seaford provides us with a useful description and insightful analysis of the specific features of money.[5] I consider the features as an integral part of the understanding that "in the abstract, money is often defined primarily as a means of exchange, while on a concrete level the word refers to those classes of object commonly used to perform this function".[6]

One of the major problems of ancient Athenian democracy was the fact that there was no limit to the desirability and accumulation of money. This was understood as the universal aim allowing of no exceptions. And so, Socrates was told to charge a price for his valuable conversations. He replied "that just as charging for physical beauty is prostitution, so too wisdom should not be exchanged for money".[7] The reply caused consternation and unease because it challenged the conventional view that everyone without exception must desire and accumulate

money. It isolated Socrates, the philosopher, from the majority of the citizens in the polis. The conventional view affirmed that money permeated and suffused human relations. This led to the enslavement of the "poor citizens and threatened the polis. … Solon's observation that the desire for *chremata* is *unlimited* suggests that the *chremata* is money. It was this new unlimit that created the severe crisis of indebtedness that he was appointed to resolve".[8] It would seem that there is need to have yet another Solon to resolve the current "world economic crisis". "Solon himself, who was the first to point to the unlimited desire for wealth, also insists that there are limits to its desirability and its power".[9] But the Solonian insistence appears to have been overshadowed by the idea that money was the universal aim. Everyone ought to aim at accumulating money even at the expense of friendship, justice or virtue. "For the mass of humankind the only virtue is money, compared to which self-control, knowledge, rhetoric, speed of foot are of no account, for money has the greatest power. … Money is said to be the most honoured and powerful thing among men, to be what they all toil for, to 'enslave' and 'defeat' them".[10] The desire and accumulation of money thus became the *telos*, the purpose or aim towards which everyone ought to strive. Money thus became a god venerated and adored by the poor and the rich alike.

This apotheosis of money prefigures the apposite commentary on our time, namely, that "At present – as in the period of decline in Greece and Rome – and far beyond the inner state of the individual, the whole aspect of life, the relationships of human beings with one another and with objective culture are coloured by monetary interests. It may appear as an irony of history that, as the moment when the satisfying and ultimate purposes of life become atrophied, precisely that value that is exclusively a means and nothing else takes the place of such purposes and clothes itself in their form. In reality, money in its psychological form, as the absolute means and thus as the unifying point of innumerable sequences of purposes, possesses a significant relationship to the notion of God – … The essence of the notion of God is that all diversities and contradictions in the world achieve a unity in him, that he is – according to a beautiful formulation of Nicolas de Cusa – the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Out of this idea, that in him all estrangements and all irreconcilables of existence find their unity and equalization, there arises the peace, the security, the all-embracing wealth of feeling that reverberate with the notion of God which we hold".[11] Money has thus become the "god" more immediate and most powerful than the "God" of religion in whom all diversities and contradictions achieve unity. It had undermined democracy in ancient Athens thereby becoming the new sovereign.[12] In this way tymocracy surreptitiously dethroned democrary.

3. Tymocracy

Some contemporary authors use the spelling tymocracy or its variant, *tymotracie* instead of timocracy. According to Wikipedia, the spelling *tymotracie* belongs to Chaucerian Middle English. Here tymocracy is understood from the point that property or wealth determines and defines the nature and extent of political power. Because of the centrality of money in the accumulation and creation of wealth, tymocracy is here construed as a money-based form of government.

The heritage from ancient Greece

The concept of money does not necessarily originate from ancient Greece. "It is now recognized that tribal societies have integral forms of social development in their own right, and that we should not assume that Western concepts of money also underlie apparently analogous phenomena in other parts of the world. Thus it would be wrong to assume that salt money or feather money were used in the same ways and for the same reasons that the Western tradition, say, has tended to use coins and paper money. One of the main differences between tribal and Western systems is the extent to which commercial considerations determine the reasons for making payments of various sorts. By no means all societies are so centred on trade and exchange as are those of the West. Indeed, it is arguable that Western culture and its money systems, far from being 'normal', are actually an historical anomaly in their fixation on the commercial. If this is right, it would be an even greater mistake for Westerners to interpret other monetary systems as a more primitive version of their own".[13] Although the concept of money does not by necessity originate from ancient Greece, "the political and economic domination of large areas of the world by coin-using societies has certainly had a

profound effect on indigenous money systems everywhere. But intruding merchants and colonial powers also had to adapt themselves to local systems in order to do business with the societies that they wanted to exploit".[14] The experience of colonization by the West serves as the historical and conceptual link between ancient Greece and the rest of the world with regard to the concept of money as well as its forms and functions. Money is the "god" of our time as it was in ancient Athens. Money has deposed democracy and become the new sovereign of our time as it was in ancient Athens.

4. The Rise of Contemporary Tymocracy

On January 17 1961, outgoing President Eisenhower of the United States of America inaugurated the age of tymocracy in his farewell speech. He declared that "in the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist".* If he were to rise from the dead, would the President explain the American led invasion of Iraq under President George Bush junior in these terms? Today there is little doubt of the complex and intricate connection between the military industrial complex and government in many countries. The influence of the latter has moved from "potential" to actual with often "disastrous" consequences for both government, citizens and third parties. The proximity of the military industrial complex to the councils of government and its attendant considerable influence upon them has encouraged the proposition that government monopoly over the use of armed force should be shared. The outsourcing of the security of the citizens has thus raised fundamental concerns over democracy and the legitimacy of government. "In fact, the concerns over outsourcing functions central to a society's protection and stability is that reliance on outside firms might undermine the social contract. When government is no longer responsible for aspects of security, the rationale for citizen loyalty is thus weakened. Indeed, to the extent that it fails to impose its own monopoly of force, a regime's very legitimacy is contested. Politics are now directly and openly linked with economic interests (in normative terms, a return to a tymocratic or money-based system of governance), which can lead to breakdown of respect for governmental authority, and also delegitimizes its right to rule".[15] Steadily, sturdily and stealthily tymocracy has once again deposed democracy in our time. The deposition is extensive covering even the area of education.

Contemporary education is marketized in the sense that quasi-market principles are applied to education. One of the arguments against the marketizers is that they "are confused as to the sort of thing that education *is* – and that this confusion leads to all sorts of errors in the systems that are devised for its 'delivery'. … Arguments have thus been addressed against the wider range of commercial and production line language which has come to be applied to every aspect of education, so that education becomes a commodity and schools production lines, 'educated' students the products, and teachers rewarded on the basis of their productivity. Such language, …, systematically distorts our understanding of the nature of education and the relationship between students, teachers, and the selections from culture with which both are engaged. It turns intrinsic values and essentially moral and humanistic relations into instrumental ones".[16] The power of money overruled these arguments. It ordained the privatization of education.

The privatization of education focused primarily on the marketability and the profitability of the entire educational system. Under the aegis of globalization, the problem was the redefinition of the goals of education in order to enhance marketability and profitability.[17] Thus the market and not the university or society dictated the priorities of education.[18] In this situation the dogma of the employable graduate was born. According to this dogma, the graduate should of necessity be open to life-long learning since this is the only way to ensure one's marketability. Having rejected Marx vision of the "all round man", globalization resurrected it in different words. The human being, despite the interminable sermons on "human rights", was reduced to a bundle of actual and potential skills ready for use by the holders of unrestricted financial power. In these circumstances, the erstwhile collaboration among and between the various academic and scientific disciplines collapsed. It degenerated into non-cooperation and turned into outright competition for funding. The privatization of

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university faculties or ever an entire university changed from a distinct probability to reality.[19]

Against this background the drive for privatization has resulted in the closing down of philosophy departments. The closure, despite the loss of employment, was once again the vindication of philosophy as the speech that does not take conventional "truth" for granted. "So too philosophy as an activity stands opposed to our characteristic modern (and modernist) assumptions: that any worthwhile discipline of thought will deliver *answers*, will tell us 'what works', will prove its merit by the criterion of effectiveness. It is at odds – and we need to be clear that this is so – with an age that seems to believe that nothing has value unless it has demonstrable, quantifiable outcomes. It does not only fit ill with, *but constitutes an act of resistance to*, what we have learned to call, following Lyotard, the culture of performativity: a a culture that behaves as if in education as in everything else the highest good is to maximize the ration between input and output, as if economy with resources (larger class sizes and standardized lessons) and better results (as measured by test scores and examinations) automatically mean better education. To the mentality that fetishizes the performance – indicator the Socratic dialogue is likely to remain a lasting puzzle".[20] And so philosophy has been isolated in the name of money and, with it, the proper and integral education of the citizen. "The good citizen is a citizen of the world because thinking about humanity in its many manifestations is a valuable source of self-knowledge. Seeing our own ways in relation to those of other reasonable people enables us to see ourselves and our customers more clearly. Over and above its role in enabling self-knowledge, the awareness of the world citizen enables imaginative public deliberation, unconstrained by 'cramped partisanship'".[21] To attain to this philosophy has a critical role to play; the role indeed of criticism,[22] of engendering unease for the sake of justice. It must provide both consolation and liberation as it did to both Socrates and Boethius when they needed these most.

5. Critique of Tymocracy

The surreptitious usurpation of democracy by tymocracy is the deepening of division and alienation among human beings. The alienation cannot be justified merely by reference to the apparently overwhelming power of money. Money is a human invention clothed with specific conventional uses. The fallacy that we all ought to desire and accumulate money without limit, even at the expense of justice must be replaced by the recognition that humanness is the quality that all human beings share equally. This equal sharing of humanness is virtually a matter of common sense especially when we consider artificial divisions and boundaries erected in the name of ethnic group, geographic separation, cultural differences and even race. All these boundaries are dissolved by biology, especially in the sphere of human sexuality. In this domain sexual intercourse between a pitch black man from Africa and a Japanese, Chinese, European or Amerindian woman does, other things being equal, result in the birth of a human being in the first place. The other adjectives such as German, Russian of Libyan are simply an addition which confirms but also unduly conceals the common humanness that we share despite our fixation to artificial boundaries mistakenly described as "natural". Tymocracy feeds on such concealment and adds money as yet another criterion of division and separation between and among human beings. In this way it subordinates human beings to money whereas it is money which must be in the service of justice and cooperation among human beings. Tymocracy undermines justice and serves as a pertinent reminder that democracy is only a means but not an end in itself. We learn from ancient Greece that the limit is the antidote of unlimit and this must be seen to be done for the sake of the preservation of human life governed by justice. In this way we can move towards durable peace and security for all.

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