

SPARTA AND PHILOSOPHY

Lord Snow's current, deep and sharp divide between the "Two Cultures" (represented by "scientists" on the one hand, "literary intellectuals" on the other), has, in various ways, a long and prestigious pedigree. Humanities and Sciences bifurcate the educational system and resonate in differing harmonies of even practical politics today. Giambattista Vico created his *Nuova Scienza* of humanity based on "poetic wisdom" (poetic metaphysics, logic, morals, economy, politics, history, even poetic physics, cosmography, astronomy, chronology and geography) and the discovery of the "true Homer". The contrast to the mathematical and experimental New Science of Newton and Galileo is revealing. In philosophy itself (and theology) the new style of Cartesian methodology cuts an altogether different road for basic thinking from the previously dominant and continually influential (Platonic and) Aristotelian way.

In classical antiquity a Gigantomachy was going on between Poetry and Philosophy. The ridicule poured on philosophers by comic poets is significant. Archetypal in this respect is Aristophanes' "Clouds". The battle extended to rival schools of cultural formation in Athens herself: Platonic Academy and Isocrates' institution represent consciously and deliberately competing ideals.

Pindar sums up the whole point. Philosophy reaps an imperfect fruit of wisdom, without the Muses human mind is blind. By its very name, philosophy aspires to wisdom, doesn't "have" it. Poetry, art, "music", Olympian myth, have it.

We should also connect all this with the fundamental bipolarity that runs through the entire field of classical antiquity, esp. in the formative archaic times. Continental Greece and Archipelagos, mountain and sea, Dorian and Ionian present markedly differing physiognomies within the overall unity of Hellenism. On the one side are, characteristically, lyric and melic poetry, holistic conception and pregnant expression, and "a-historicity", on the other epic, philosophy and discursive thinking, history. (Nous and Logos are

after all contrasted in Aristotle). We may say that the Dorian principle is pure form, the Ionian form applied to time.

An existential experience underlies the Dorian phenomenon, that of indifference and carelessness with regard to the necessities of time, and hence to death. The logic of time has to do with usefulness in satisfying the triple basic demands of life, procreation, survival and security (out of which marriage and morality, economy and wealth, control and dominion, are evolved). This utility aims at the continuation of life in time, at duration. But the ultimate end (“telos”) is that which exists and is desired not for the sake of something else, but for itself alone. And such is perfection of one’s own nature, beauty of form. Speaking philosophically, herein lies the proto-awareness of a-temporality, of eternity. In historical terms, we have to do with a culture of the joy of existence at its own perfection, the cult of the cosmic flower, a life spent in the feast of eternity, of the smiling Kouros even as a funereal monument.

Sparta, and this is her world-historic achievement, created and materialized the new Gospel of Beauty, of perfection of body and spirit in their identity, which is distinguished only in time as youth and ripe age. Apollo possesses wisdom and all the secrets of time by being eternally young and beautiful.

Very appositely, as a poetic revelation, it is just what the Grecian urn, the “silent form” that “teases us out of thought as doth eternity”, told Keats:

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all

Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know”.

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