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Philosophy beyond Science

In our attempt to understand ourselves as beings that constitutively challenge, by thinking, that which is given, and whose ultimate horizon is always that of creation, that of searching a *novum* that may reach a radical emancipation from the sameness of the world, we must first analyze the course taken in our days by "thinking" as such, which is epitomized in the current state of philosophy.

For many, the heyday of the scientific view of the world and its incontestable epistemological success has led to a gradual "cornering" of philosophy, the "love of wisdom" which can only be "freedom to think." This apparent "victory" of the natural sciences manifests, in our view, an extremely limited paradigm on the most genuine role of philosophy. Philosophy is guilty, in any case, of the emergence of this restrictive perspective, because it has normally conceived of itself either as the "explanatory force" of the world or as the "interpretative instance" of reality.

In the beginning, philosophy did not compete with science to provide an explanation of the structure and the functioning of the world, because the latter (which is principally defined on the basis of its methodology) had not been yet born. Science is the "beloved daughter" of philosophy, and when it downed, it subsumed a vast part of philosophy in its booming domains, behaving like a child who "devoured" his own parent. The philosophical disquisitions on the universe, nature, and the human mind gradually appeared as empty speculations that were to be superseded by a genuinely scientific vision of the world, by the "Comtian"

stage that might purify archaic conceptions of its unverifiable metaphysical elements through a strict working methodology (as the one assumed by the natural sciences). However, philosophy found its precious "refuge," its comfortable winter quarters, its perpetual "immunity" in the task of "interpreting" the world. Philosophy thus believed that it was the sole possessor of the sphere of "sense," and in its monopoly of this arcane area it excluded the natural sciences from any search of "understanding" (Dilthey's *Verstehen*), of seeking a meaning of that which the natural sciences themselves discover.

However, our time radically mistrusts the possibility of deciphering a meaning that always escapes us, because it is indebted to the present interpretation of the world and it is ultimately captive of a certain scientific conception about how the world works. The influence on the question of the meaning of human existence of Copernicus sun-centered thesis, of Darwin's theory of evolution (with the discovery of the absence of a "special" biological character of the human species within the dynamism of life), and of Einstein's ideas on the physical world has far surpassed the impact of the deep and subtle disquisitions of philosophers. In any case, the reflection on the "ontological position" of humanity within nature (cultivated by authors like Thomas Huxley, Max Scheler, and Helmut Plessner) should not be disdained. The fact that we are a late link in the evolutionary chain of life should not induce us to forget the extraordinary importance that the birth of culture with *Homo sapiens* possesses, even in pure evolutionary terms.

The idea of "meaning" is always dependent upon the current state of our knowledge of the world and of ourselves. Philosophy should attempt neither to explain the world nor to understand that which science reveals about nature but to formulate a hypothetical meaning: philosophy must aspire to become the creative force of world and meaning. Philosophy has to create its own world.

The disenchantment of thinking is its worst tragedy. Instead of mistrusting the world and history, the past and the present, thinking surrenders to the incorrigible tendency towards sameness.[1] It renounces the critical questioning of that which is given, on the basis of a future that cannot be anticipated.

1. In this work, we will constantly use the word *sameness* as a philosophical concept. Its equivalent terms in other European languages are *identitas* (in Latin), *mismidad* (in Spanish), *Selbstheit* (in German).

After the death of thinking, only two options remain. The first one consists of a selfless capitulation to the natural sciences. Philosophy will serve the natural sciences. It will systematize its claims in order to strengthen the scientific view of the world, and it will try to extrapolate its methodology the field of both the social sciences and the humanities; a task that, somehow, has been carried out by analytical philosophy in the Anglo-Saxon world.

The second one is the interpretation of human realm on the basis of its past, through the (permanently unfinished) exegesis of the different visions of humanity which have been proposed over the centuries. Philosophy inexorably becomes history of philosophy, and the human sciences constrain themselves to "revisiting" the different possible approaches to the products of human activity in space and time. However, this option is extremely weak. Its fragility stems from the latent danger of becoming absorbed by the natural sciences.

Interpretations, inextricably connected with the exercise of subjectivity, raise suspicions in those disciplines which feel closer to the scientific view of the world, whose goal is no other than that of overcoming the intellectual vulnerability of the humanities. Increasingly relegated to a subsidiary role and incapable of articulating a project for humanity, philosophy cedes its own realm to the natural sciences and the analytic discourse. Philosophy renounces the enunciation of claims, the elucidation of the future, the creation of a *novum*, and it thus succumbs to the overwhelming pressure of the natural and the social sciences. The quantitative dimension and, within the social sciences, the thorough study of historical phenomena and the access to the sources from the past through the cultivation of philology (on whose methodological centrality to the sciences of the spirit Dilthey deeply meditated at the end of the nineteenth century) become the common aspiration of all branches of knowledge.

This oppressive dichotomy faced by philosophy can only be solved by vindicating the legitimacy of thinking turned towards the future. Since the future is intractable for the natural sciences (and for the kind of philosophy which, just as analytic philosophy, surrenders to the scientific methodology and does not aspire to create), it offers a scenario of inexhaustible freedom that rescues us of any potential methodological rigidity. Thinking can then demand a legitimate place within the universe of science, for it is referred to a horizon that, by its own concept, always remains alien to the scientific understanding of the world. Thinking can now revisit the past and the present without raising suspicion, because it does not pretend

to offer a scientific explanation of them but to challenge them. However, and in order to accomplish this goal, it has to understand the past and the present in the most accurate way. It therefore needs to use the instruments provided by both the natural and the social sciences in their multifaceted forms. In any case, philosophy does not seek to "exhaust" any possible understanding. Its goal consists of thinking, *id est*, of opposing any possible "conclusion," any potential "sameness." Therefore, it never becomes petrified in the analysis of that which is given in past and present: it incessantly moves towards a future that is always new.

Philosophy is creation; philosophy is offering; philosophy is proposal. It constitutes, thus, an attempt to open thought to the future, to that which is not given yet in the *hic et nunc* of history. Upon thinking, human beings expand the energies of life, and they become the vanguard of being. Philosophy does not intend to replace the natural sciences in its laborious longing to clear the structure and operation of the universe. Philosophy does not pretend to substitute the scientific view of the world, by claiming a "deeper comprehension" of that which the natural sciences, by virtue of a transferable and communicable methodology (whose "objectivity" stems from its presuppositions, so that once an agreement has been convened on them, they do not only explain the present state of things in the world but also predict future situations) have achieved in the last centuries.

Philosophy does not seek to identify a sense where the natural sciences only discover causes, effects, and an inextricable combination of chance and necessity. Philosophy aims to *create*, that is, to *innovate*, to glimpse the possibility of a *novum*, a new meaning of insight, a different approach to the human realm and the world itself. Philosophy shines as the expression of the longing for growth that fills the human spirit, which experiences a constant desire for freedom, for self-affirmation against "that which is given." Thinking, as an insubordinate goal, constitutes an eminent manifestation of this will to liberty.

Nevertheless, philosophy cannot remain alien to the dynamism of the natural sciences. It should not look for a perennial refuge against the scrutiny of science and technique. Rather, it should become imbued with the spirit of the natural sciences in order to expand the horizon of its understanding and to reach higher pinnacles of depth and freedom. The provisional character of scientific statements means that it is not possible to exhaust the knowledge of the world. Nevertheless, there is no legitimacy in using this indeterminacy as a fragile excuse to ignore the results of the natural sciences. Rather, the provisional nature of scientific statements

should be regarded as the fruit of a common phenomenon that also affects philosophy: the incessant capacity for acquiring a deeper understanding of reality. If science is to a certain extent provisional, the human intellect is susceptible to growth, so that a given understanding of the world will not indefinitely constrain its scope. In this way, the provisional character of philosophical statements recalls not only the perspective of an "unclosed" history (which Dilthey examined in his writings)[2] but also the human capacity for growth, for challenge, for emancipating itself from any given "sameness." The provisional nature of philosophical statements is a source of freedom and encouragement to show confidence in the future and the human power to create.

However, the provisional nature of its statements is much more severe in philosophy than it is in science. The scientific understanding of the world is aware of its provisional scope, and it rarely succumbs to a nostalgic remembrance of old theories. The object that unifies the scientific task remains "inalterable" (Parmenides) in its perpetual movement (Heraclitus): the universe. Any hypothesis is but the expression of a common attempt at elucidating the structure and functioning of the universe that "is there" as inescapable frame of reference. Nevertheless, for philosophy, the transitory nature of its statements becomes the most painful uncertainty. The fact that we are historical beings implies that our understanding of the human world cannot entirely detach itself from the historical moment under whose light those ideas have emerged. Human nature does not cease to experience the intense affections of history. Our historical life provides us a higher power of penetration, a deeper capacity for "descending" into the meaning of human existence, but it is also a sour source of confusion and distress before the huge piling of events, ideas, proposals, and feelings that inundate the course of times. We can fall captives to melancholy for ancient archetypes imagined *in illo tempore*, but we shall always realize that the light coming from the past, as brilliant and fascinating as it may be, will be insufficient for the orientation of thinking in our days.

The "pending rest" between past and present (history) raises an insurmountable barrier. Undoubtedly we can find inspiration in the thoughts of our ancestors, in the words of the greatest masters of philosophy, science, and art, but we shall never discover, even in their most powerful rays of wisdom, a valid torch for today. We must think; we need to look at history with hope and courage: we have to create our own world

2. Cf. Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften*, 237.

and we have to take possession of the inheritance that we have received. Tradition, the sentiment of belonging to a common creative desire which binds us to our forefathers, can offer support against any threat of despair. As unintelligible as the present history may seem, and as darkened as our creative capacity may appear, we shall always dispose of the legacy of wisdom, beauty, and love which we have inherited from the immense efforts made in the past. In it shall we find a fountain of inspiration, from whose waters we can drink without ever exhausting it. *Gratitude*, veneration for the grandeur of the past and the intellectual and artistic depth that it has bestowed upon us, leads to the firm desire to move thought forward. The love of wisdom is the will to think and to participate in the same longing for understanding and creation that invaded the spirits of times past. The love of wisdom demands the inauguration of the future.

Science discovers the fountain of the excess of energy that we possess. However, it does not reveal its aim, its ultimate possibilities. It does not unfold the goal to which we must commit the gift of life, complexity, intelligence, and sentiment. Philosophy must offer a free "elucidation" of the destiny of our capacity for enlarging the frontiers of being and to expand the horizons of life. Philosophy, as offering, as longing for "newness" and interpretation, is not subject to a goal alien to the act of creating. Philosophy recalls love of wisdom, love of life, love of novelty: love of the deepest possibility that the human being possesses. Philosophy must shine as love, detachment, commitment, courage, and confidence, as the *novum* that emancipates us from the inexorable concatenation of causes and effects, of instrumental reasons that cannot foresee an end goal. It must therefore overcome necessity. It must express our longing for authenticity and immediacy, for an *a priori* that may be a real *alter* to the world. Philosophy constitutes the vivid proof of our unwillingness to constrain ourselves to the contemplation of the world in its sameness: we want to create and to inaugurate room for freedom; we wish to *think* in a genuine sense; we seek to edify our own world.

The epistemological "prerogative" of the natural sciences, which emanates from their explanatory success of the structure and functioning of the world, is the result of a certain methodology, of the existence of a way to "contrast" its statements. However, science does not elucidate how we should face the future. Science examines the sameness of the world, its "self-identity," but it does not teach us how we should create our own world, how we should live in community, how we should imagine the future. Science does not emancipate our mind from the tyranny

of instrumental goals. It does not offer a pure, unconditioned end. Its gnoseological triumph (the sonorous criticism of the "despotism" of science and its destructive power, leveled in the past decades, is only a timid complaint, which does not address the "core" of the insufficiency of science: its submission to mediated reality, to the concatenation of causes and effects that fills the natural universe, to the sameness of the world) cannot conceal the existence of severe challenges, which show the limit reached by our scientific understanding of the world.

However, the so-called sciences of the spirit (Dilthey's *Geisteswissenschaften*), "personified" by philosophy, should not pretend to monopolize the realm of understanding. Their task does not reside in turning any attempt at "interpreting the world" into their sole patrimony. Rather, they must promote the continuous *hermeneutic growth* of humanity, so that interpretations may become deeper and more edifying, in order to acquire a greater awareness of everything at stake in each concept, idea, and proposal. The search for a certain "totality," that is to say, the quest for a way of binding the parts into their whole, does not constitute the sole goal of the sciences of the spirit. The natural sciences seek to discover how the parts intertwine in the world as "totality," as their whole.

Science does not need a "spokesman," be it of philosophical or sociological nature, to act on its behalf. Science itself, on the basis of its method, establishes its own and more reliable understanding. The fact that science (both on account of its degree of development and of the frontiers erected by its own method) is incapable of covering all the realms of human life is a different matter. There is no science of art, politics, ethics, and religion, if by "science" we understand the application of the hypothetical-deductive method, in which empirical contrast plays an essential role. In an analogous way, there is no "science of science," that is to say, no hypothetical-experimental study of scientific activity itself. An "excess" of understanding always remains, even in the scientific accomplishments concerning the unfolding of the structure and functioning of the world, because the question about the meaning of scientific discoveries "for us" cannot be silenced. This "mystery" does not correspond to a quest for objectivity: it is a display of subjective creativity.

Philosophy should not seek to replace science, whose method has been proven as the most efficient strategy to find explanations in terms of causes and effects (even if through "probabilistic models," "patterns of inference," "justified generalizations") of the vast majority of phenomena in the world (by virtue of the "happy conjunction" of experimental

observation and hypothetical-deductive reasoning, supported, in the fundamental disciplines, by mathematical language). Philosophy must pose questions. It needs to delve into the meaning of scientific discoveries for mankind. However, it should not impose, *a priori*, a certain conception on science. Philosophy must come into a critical dialogue with science, in order to remark its limits and challenges, its *ignoramus*, even if this task seems to repress the premature enthusiasm of many scientists. Philosophy can offer a broader, "more holistic," perspective, which may be useful for science itself, as it manifests the whole scope of that which remains to be explored. In addition to this, philosophy can show certain directions that science might take in its attempt at answering the numerous questions still at stake. In different occasions, philosophy has not constrained its activity to offering a synthetic perspective. Rather, and by virtue of fine and detailed analyses of the human life, philosophy has granted a series of enlightening considerations for science itself. An example of this "philosophical service to science" is the study of human emotions by the different phenomenological schools.

The vigor of the great philosophical questions has promoted the scientific enterprise. Philosophy succumbed to itself, and it perished to the intensity of its own fire. The quest for explanations of cosmic phenomena, without the need to point to supernatural, mythological, and superstitious entities, planted the beautiful seed of modern science.

Both science and philosophy share a common goal, sometimes explicitly stated, yet normally assumed in an implicit way: to alleviate human suffering. Behold their convergent (yet not exclusive) responsibility. By satiating our longing for knowledge, science mitigates our suffering, our grief before the orphanhood of answers and the vastness of our questions. Philosophy and the humanities expand the horizon of our thought, and they offer us a critical mediation on history and the possible forms of social organization, so that we may edify a world in which the capacities of all individuals can be fully displayed.

Philosophy is called to foster a fruitful exchange with the natural sciences by broadening their scope. Philosophy must listen to science with humility, because it does not enjoy any kind of epistemological privilege. The task of philosophy resides in propitiating a deep reflection about the foundations, scope, and challenges of science, especially with regard to its role in society and our understanding of ourselves.

The relationship of science to philosophy must be governed by a principle of "hermeneutic solidarity": philosophy should not remain

alien to scientific discoveries in its interpretation of world, history, and mankind, but it should also perceive the necessity of contributing to the acquisition of a deeper conscience of the limits of science and the provisional nature of many of its statements. Science will provide a "material basis" on which to establish philosophical reflection, whereas philosophy will offer a "hermeneutic perspective," whose goal consists of interpreting scientific findings with regard to a possible understanding of the human life. On the one hand, philosophy should not act as a "science in parallel" to the elucidation of the material structure of nature. Rather, it should pay attention to the achievements of the various scientific disciplines. In any case, philosophy should always be aware of the provisional character of most scientific enunciations and their insurmountable limitations. Science, on the other hand, will not be able to supplant philosophy in the human search for "creative interpretations," bound to different cultures and historical moments, whose reference is the meaning of scientific advancement for mankind, both individually and collectively.

Science provides the hermeneutic clue for unfolding the material order of the universe. However, the fact that science is capable of unfolding the mechanisms that allow human beings to stand as a "challenge against the world" does not confute the reality of our challenge to the world. Science offers the possibility of explaining the origin of this capacity for defying the world. The so eagerly expected scientific explanation of the genesis of human subjectivity may account for the origin of our mental powers, and it will surely expand our current conception of matter (just as quantum mechanics has forced us to broaden our present ideas on the nature of matter). However, the explanation of the origin of something does not exhaust the understanding of the full range of its possibilities. There is a *semper plus* to any scientific explanation: science can unveil the mechanisms behind the emergence of subjectivity, not the very nature of *my* subjectivity, especially in those aspects that concern how I can make use of my subjectivity. The task of philosophy is condemned to a perpetual lack of resolution. The principal questions posed by Kant (What can I know? What ought I to do? What can I hope?), summarized in this mystery, "What is man?," are ultimately unsolvable. The enigma posed by very individual subjectivity, by every individual consciousness, by every human being, will always remain.

Neither the natural nor the social sciences (which are incapable of explaining my subjectivity, unless it is done on the basis of subsuming it into patterns that will always generate some "explanatory darkness"), not

even the attempt at returning to the transcendental subjectivity of a Hegelian universal spirit displayed in history, of whose inexorable development I constitute a mere moment (because this spirit cannot be "myself," while at the same time being "someone else": our subjectivities would vanish in a lethal net of objectivities), might crown such a peak. This irretrievable incapacity nonetheless opens a potentially infinite space of reflection for philosophy, and it is deeply connected with the essence of artistic creativity, because there are infinite possible subjective experiences, whose most eminent "incarnation" takes place in aesthetic works. Science can unfold the objective dimension of subjectivity (as a process of the central nervous system), but this accomplishment shall not conceal the need for creative interpretations of that which scientific understanding cannot exhaust.

Philosophy seeks to understand the human world in every historical stage. It also aims to "anticipate" the future, which always remains open. Philosophy can helpfully pose the question of how we should edify the time to come, so that it may correspond to the demands that every age poses. Philosophy, as offering and commitment to the possibility of creating, addresses the necessity to think of our place in the world, and to discuss the way in which we should use the excess of energy that we possess. It therefore highlights the depth of the mystery of how we should live, and of how we should unveil that meaning for which many eagerly long as creation, as *novum*, as challenge to the sameness of the world.

Philosophy interprets the world. Moreover, it seeks to create its own world. Philosophy should neither intend to compete with the natural sciences in the elucidation of the structure and functioning of the world, nor constrain its task to interpreting that which is already given. Philosophy must open itself to the future, to a *novum*, to creating that which shall be subject to interpretation. Inspired by the legacy of both the scientific view of the world and its own tradition, it must fuel the flame of novelty. Philosophy converges with aesthetic creativity: it offers the possibility of creating something new.

Philosophy is committed to challenging that which is given. However, it must, first of all, understand the nature of "that which is given" and its relationship to consciousness. Thinking about the world seems therefore equivalent to displaying its full possibilities in our minds, by contemplating in it a fountain of incommensurable inspiration for imagining newness and for crossing the gates of a universe of purity: the realm of the unconditioned, the kingdom of freedom. Philosophy shines as criticism of

the world and fascination for the creative power of life. Thus, it becomes passion, *enthusiasm*, love of wisdom and longing for creation.

The vocation of philosophy is none other than thinking about human life. The paradoxical "presence" of the future gives us the possibility of creating a way of understanding that may propitiate our growth, the broadening of our interpretation of world and history. Behold the opportunity to gain new freedom.