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**Chosen Topic:** Topic 2

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“...the whole world is open”, we hear a whisper crossing oceans of time to reach us. The world is open, says Democritus, and we, as people of the postmodernist era, are able to understand why it is not a closed system as the modernists thought it to be. Jacques Derrida’s quest to “deconstruct” the world seems to have been successful: the center is but an illusion because it is both inside the circle (as its origin, or “arché”) and outside it (as its goal, its “telos”), therefore the idea of a closed system may as well be given up on.

The world is open, and this shows in a manifold of situations. For instance, one may paint, let us say, a violinist in a supposedly “realist” manner, green (like Marc Chagall does) or perhaps in a cubist fashion. Since there is no closed system, one may not hold that only the first one is following the rules of the game, while the others are ignoring them or willingly breaking them. If the world is truly open as we have assumed, then any interpretation is possible. “Philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways ; the point is, to change it”, Karl Marx tells us. Therefore, the world’s openness gives each thoughtful person, not just artists, the possibility of choosing their own interpretation of the world. In the same line of thought, Nietzsche claims that we are responsible for more of our experience than we imagine, “...we are more artists than we think”.

In other words, the thinking man comes to notice the world’s openness and takes advantage of it. By the same token, we might say that Edmund Husserl is almost “impressionist” when he asks us to bracket our experience and approach it without any preconceptions, Friedrich Nietzsche’s world is a vibrant, restless “Starry night” and Martin Heidegger, when he advises us to keep “silence about silence” on the grounds that it is the only authentic saying, is he not re-painting Kazimir Malich’s “White square on white background”?

At this point, one question nudges at us: what is a wise man?

Socrates insisted that “the unanalyzed life is not worth living”, and the much-respected Oracle of Delphi proclaimed him “the wisest man”. It seems only reasonable to think that the wise man guides himself after the scholastic “Nosce te ipsum!”.

If this truly is wisdom, what is the reason behind the need of knowing one’s self?

Observing one’s nature leads to a description of human nature itself, and Heidegger, in his quest for finding what Being is, holds that this enables us to understand Dasein and, through this, achieve our goal and access the ultimate wisdom: understanding Being. Dasein alone, of all beings, asks: “Why is there anything at all rather than nothing?”.

One might ask what is a being that is not concerned with the problem of Being and what risks does it run. These beings have a “they-self”, to put it in Heidegger’s terminology, which means that they are, but they do not exist, since they do not embrace their possibilities of existing, but follow without any critique a certain pattern of life and thus miss the world’s openness. One of Jean-Paul Sartre’s characters from “Nausea”, Jean Pacôme, has such a they-self, a social self established by others. “Not

a shadow of doubt had crossed those magnificent grey eyes. (...) He did his duty, all his duty and only his duty, his duty as a son, a husband, a father and a leader.”, Antoine notices disapprovingly. Why disapprovingly? This passive way of living, if we may call it so, is not a genuine life as it does not activate human’s latent potency of continuously becoming. It is but a state of “fallenness” (Heidegger), in which man is stuck in the world of “This” and “That”, a world of discontinuity par excellence, instead of enjoying the world of “I” and “You”, which, Martin Buber suggests, is a world in which nothing is separated, nothing is alone, all things interfuse and are in genuine dialogue. Husserl could second him, adding that people such as Pacôme live in a fact-world instead of a life-world and therefore miss out the very essences of the world, which cannot be perceived from the natural standpoint of the man whose religion is natural science or any other closed system. Plato would certainly agree, emphasizing that a man who has no intuition of the essences is unable to be “a good soul”, since he easily ends up ignoring the existence of the idea of good, of moral, of beautiful, of truth, which are the most important values for mankind. Such a man is no different from the one that sits in the comfort of the cave, afraid to follow the one that freed himself and saw the sun.

Wisdom, therefore, is being active in the world and towards it, engaging in an authentic dialogue with it. Things are no longer merely present-at-hand, they are right-at-hand (Heidegger), as if they are eager to spring in our help in this “fatherland” that the world becomes. The unauthentic dialogue is, then, a sign of a perverted will power, and Nietzsche strongly suggests another course of action: one must have a true “amor fati” and embrace “the whole world” fully, even its uncertainties. The wise man breaks the boundaries between himself and the world, which is no longer the fractal one of “This” and “That”, and comes to notice the brotherhood of objects which “the passive minds” (Wordsworth) fail to observe.

In our quest triggered by Democritus’s whisper, we have taken Socrates as our example of “a wise man”, not as a role-model, since we have agreed on the fact that wisdom is lived, not passively assumed or learned. Not long ago, we claimed that wisdom is a genuine discourse with the world that reveals itself and its brotherhood with man, and in this state of self-revealing, the world is a certainty because it is self-given in its essence (Husserl), it is open because there are no curtains hiding it anymore from the thoughtful man. The lack of such dialogue or its failure is due to irrationality, Michel Foucault underlines in his “Insanity and the society”, where he judges history of mankind to be the monologue held by reason to insanity or irrationality. A claim that seems reasonable enough to be laid is that the one who has no real reason, who is not “a wise man”, leads a life without questions (“Not a shadow of doubt...”), and, consequently, takes the world for granted.

What is the problem with such an attitude? Goethe warns us that he or she who does not know any foreign languages fails to fully appreciate his or her own. By the same token, if we do not learn the “languages” in which to discuss the world with itself, the “languages of wisdom”, one might say, we cannot fully estimate its openness and the importance of this feature.

Before we go on, we must first clarify an issue. A wise man does not make the world open, unless we say that he makes his own world open, but the world’s openness shines upon him the same way Being illuminates all beings. The world was open to begin with.

If this is the case, how can a “passive mind” come to realize this? Firstly, it has to leave the natural standpoint, taking off its “pragmatic glasses” and bracketing its experience of the world. One of Sartre’s heroes, Mathieu Delarue, tells us why the point of view of the passive mind is to be left: “Everything is outside. Inside, nothing – not even a puff of smoke. Me, nothing.” This tragic thought

can be overcome through bracketing, and this way he observes that “I am absolute freedom” because “I am nothing”.

The world now offers Mathieu countless possibilities, and William James would say that this is a reason for joy, since it means that man embarks on an exciting adventure every single day. To know that you can fashion your life to your liking because the whole world is open makes you understand what Nietzsche meant by saying “...we are more artists than we think”. We are our own creations.

The world is open, we have repeated numerous times. Let us spell this out in a bit more detail.

The world is no longer an outer world-subject that Rousseau’s natural man fears when in the “theological stage” of mankind (Comte), nor is it a world-object. In the second case, due to Cartesian dualism, the world opens a single possibility for mankind: to learn the world’s laws so as to better control its closed system (Laplace), as if we are to heal nature’s aching bones after we have made an X-ray. This would serve us the purpose of obtaining better life conditions, which, Dewey argues, is the absolute goal in a world where only scientific approximation is possible. A question imposes itself: why desire to live longer in a world that is but an object painfully indifferent to us, where no fatherland is conceivable? Such a life is absurd perforce, and Camus and Sartre insist that life can only be absurd. “Man is a useless passion” (Sartre), because he is doomed to live for eternity the life of a Sisif (Camus).

We do not agree with such a conclusion: wisdom, thirst for knowledge lends life meaning, it enriches it, even if we say, like Socrates, that “I know that I do not know anything”. The meaning of our lives is to understand – not know (which, we agree with Camus and Sartre, is impossible, thus absurd) – the numberless possibilities of the world, of the open world.

Sartre could ask, bitterly, why know anything at all if being omniscient is impossible (one cannot know everything, for everything implies himself, too, and for that he should be, in the same time, the subject and the object of his thought, so he could not know everything about himself). Blaise Pascal would then answer that it is in man’s nature to yearn for the truth, and Karl Popper would add that we are not so much interested in the truth, “just the truth”, but “the interesting truth”. A world-object can provide us with no truth interesting in itself, but merely with one as a means for achieving something.

Moreover, we do not wish for a world-object since modernism has shown us how deeply alienating a life in such a world is. Mihail Bulgakov’s “The master and Margarita” proves us that self-called “intelligent people” who have “purged from all illusions that made life endurable” (Sartre) face a terrible fate. First of all, they are alienated from the others, and the communication crisis is not restricted to fiction (Huxley’s “Brave new world”, to give just another example), but we all experience it even now, as people caught in the rat race. Secondly, they are alienated from themselves, living a life without knowing why, just as Kafka’s hero from “The trial”, K., dies without knowing why. In a world-object, you live and die seemingly purposelessly, truly like a Sisif. One humorous scene in the book manages to show one consequence of seeing the world as a closed system that we did not bargain for. In soviet Moscow, being an atheist is the norm, yet somehow swearwords live on in the language, having lost their original meanings and thus alienating the unauthentic man from his language as well. When the director of the theatre shouts angrily: “Get him out of here, the demons may take me!”, Behemoth, the demon in disguise, gives him a witty response in a world where words with empty meanings did not surprise anyone: “You want to be taken by the demons? Very well, if

you wish for it!". The point is that, in a closed system world, people are "objectified" as well and act mechanically, their words and actions losing their expressivity. This corresponds to what Heidegger calls "idle talk", that is, an approximation of knowledge before making the world your own, before acknowledging that it is your fatherland.

The conclusion of our quest seems to do justice to Democritus and to Bertrand Russels's words in "Philosophical problems", where he asserts that the man with love for wisdom breaks out the tight corset called "my interests" and, losing the initial aggressive view on the world, in which the motto was "It is me against the world", he escapes Hume's world of everyone's war against everyone. By breaking out of himself and embracing the world with a love for wisdom, with a thirst for knowledge, he interacts with the whole world, the open world, and is no longer restless, for he is, in Democritus's vein, in his fatherland.

The perspective of leading such a life, in "the whole world", although it means acknowledging the dark side of the world, as well, is by no means threatening. In fact, it is the world of Spinoza, we might say, where "a good soul" feels no tension, having understood that everything is a whole and evil is mere appearance, so he need not worry like the man who feels that it is up to him to shape a world adverse to him. In the fatherland, man feels finally at home.

This home, where "a good soul" rests in a pleasant dialogue with everything, is "the whole cosmos", and the very etymology of the word "kosmos" (since we have rejected the view on the world that made words lose their essential meaning) emphasizes the belief of the ancient man in the world's harmony. In this infinity that is the cosmos, the wise man may say, like Leopardi, that "...and so my thought is drowned, / And sweet it is to shipwreck on such sea". With wisdom, you are able to broaden your world, to open yourself to the totality and the totality to be open to you, escaping, in a sense, the Aristotelian sublunary world. In Leopardi's vein, the wise man needs not an island, stable and comforting for the savage, irrational man, for he is aware of the solitude that it brings with itself. Therefore, let us revolt against a fact-world and embrace the life-world with all our love for wisdom. "I revolt, therefore we exist", says Camus, showing us the way out of the fact-world and to the fatherland of the whole cosmos. We exist. "You" and "I" exist, while "This" and "That" can only be.