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INTERPRETATION OF THE CONCEPTS OF ΦΥΣΙΣ AND ΝΟΜΟΣ IN SOPHISTS' TEACHING

The dichotomy "νόμος-φύσις", as one of the central problems in Greek dialectics, is being formed in Socrates' contemporary philosophy as the issue of crucial significance. Although, because of its wide and multifarious character it often varies depending on the school or philosophical movement it developed within. The dichotomy is also presented in Sophists' teaching and in Plato's dialogues, concerning origin of language or state organization.

How controversial and mutually exclusive are the two parts of the dichotomy, how separated are φύσις and νόμος from each other? According to traditionally accepted explanation, φύσις is regarded as a natural principle, true and "divine" element, while νόμος is considered as the law artificially established by human beings that lacks natural grounds and is based on pure convention.

Nevertheless we suggest, that the concept of νόμος embraced much more then simply the "human law". Just like many other terms, it gained different meanings in different fields of human activity, although did not lose its original sense that could be found in the teachings of ancient Greek philosophers.

Any νόμος implies convention, although not necessarily among human beings. Νόμος is the very force that brings order in φύσις and withdraws it from chaos with the efforts of νομοθέτης (i.e. lawmaker). Although, any kind of order implies two parties of convention – the νομοθέτης, who sets the laws and a human being, who becomes a subject of the laws and executes them. Such explanation clearly indicates that νομοθέτης, by its essence should be a superhuman force, Zeus, as the Lord of Gods and humans, or λόγος, philosophical reflection of creative force.

Νόμος necessarily considers system of rules and rituals that could be set both by divine principle, nomoqevthõ or a human being. The rules become

obligatory for the society that accepts them and consequently, lose their artificial conditional essence and turn into a natural order, cosmos, which, in fact, creates new reality beyond the φύσις. Such conventional reality becomes a basis for myth, ritual, game. The mentioned game is the very phenomenon, where the dichotomy φύσις-νόμος loses its contradictive character and the two elements transform from mutually exclusive into interdependent and correlative ones – the God, φύσις, like a child, playing with stones (Heraclitus, DK, B2), creates the world without rules and laws, but from the very moment of creation it acquires definiteness, establishes its own norms and frames, its own rules of logical development. In fact, new, determined reality emerges – the only form of living, which is perceivable for human being. The phenomenon of game is not alien or artificially implanted in Greek philosophy. But in the period of Sophists and Socrates it gains a special importance. Not to mention the method of philosophical inquiry usually used by Socrates, when he hooks his victim in meshes with complicated play on words, the artistic and dramatic form of dialogue presented by Plato, necessarily implies such a game, such conventional reality – we may say that Plato's dialogues represent works of dramatic art, and drama itself is nothing else but a play, performance, which substitutes extraneous and unacceptable reality by familiar, mutually agreed images.

Regarding the Sophists, thanks to the mentioned method of play on words they had reached heights of rhetoric art. No doubt, it would be unreasonable to argue, that Greeks did not understand significance of the rhetoric before – it is used already by Homer; But Sophists contributed to the practice by creating a theory of literature and speech, so-called ὀρθόεπεια.

This was the very angle they considered the language as well – they were interested not only in grammatical analysis or description, but also in attempts to enhance it and reveal the rules of its development[1] (1, p. 68), in other words they included rhetoric and literature within the frames of their fame – linguistic game.

It is not accidental, that for their oratorical exercises Sophists often referred to mythological plots and heroes (see for example, Gorgias, Enconmium of Helen and Defence of Palamedes). The myth, that in the epoch of since it is familiar and acceptable for every Greek – fiction, so close to the thinking of each ordinary person, that can easily substitute the reality. Gorgias operates with this "fairy reality", thus creating frames of new, "as if real" world – destroys traditional flow of the plot and presents his own myth. Unlike Hesiodus, who considers mythology to be a serious source of informa-

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[1]   Kerferd G.B. The Sophistic Movement. Cambridge University Press. 1981. 68.

tion (moreover, Hesiod would have never dared to produce his own, free interpretation of myth, which for him consists of holy, sacred reality), Gorgias a priori suggests, that everything is just a game and joke. After admitting such a new reality, comes the most spectacular, most dramatic part of the performance – the apology itself.

Language is the best means to establish this conditional reality, although, at first sight it is only a tool to describe the world, but in fact, fails to express it, just like λόγος that fails to substitute the objects of reality – as far as the objects have their own existence, while the λόγος exists in itself, as a separate object. The only thing that can be expressed through speech, is the λόγος itself, as one of the objects existing in the reality (these issues are discussed in Gorgias's treatise *On nature or What is Not*). There is an insuperable verge between λόγος and other objects, thus any attempt to express them through λόγος will already imply falsification, ἀπατή. But this cannot be regarded as a simple delusion, because when a person deliberately admits the deceptions, he immediately becomes involved in a convention between him as the addressee and his interlocutor, the deliverer, regarding the issue of an insuperable gulf between λόγος and objects, language and the reality and considering them as mutually substitutable items.

If we try to define the teaching of Sophists and especially the 5th century Sophists in one word, the most appropriate term would be "conventionality". On the one hand it is strange, but on the other it seems quite logical that in the 5th century Athens, the heirs of Hesiod and Aeschylus were such skeptics. Although we have to mention, that skepticism does not imply one specific teaching or static philosophical system, this is a movement in Greek philosophy, originated in the 5th century and covering the period up to Hellenistic epoch[2].

Citing Kerferd, development of Sophistic doctrine was determined by social and political situation in their contemporary Athens: "There are no facts and no truth, only ideologies and conceptual models and the choice between these in an individual matter, perhaps dependent on personal needs and preferences or perhaps to be influenced by the thinking of social groups"[3].

Knowledge, which should derive from experience of the world perception, implies objective information about the external reality, but condition of consciousness, that characterizes a human being, is not a pure knowledge, but impression, idea, opinion; knowledge, as an objective datum, is incommen-

[2]   Sedley D. The Motivation of Greek Skepticism. The Skeptical Tradition. Edited by Myles Burnyeat.. University of California Press 1983, 10.
[3]   Kerferd, 78.

surable with consciousness, which is subjective in its essence. This subjectivity creates an impression that it overrides λόγος, controls it and makes it a descriptive tool of reality[4]. Recalling the other meanings of λόγος (besides the "word", Heraclitus uses it mainly in the meaning of "cosmos, order"), we'll derive to the "theory of ludis". Λόγος sets up the rules and margins of new, conditional reality (and at the same time it is the very rule and margin), where not objective, but subjective being, impression, independent from the existence of a human being, perfect, absolute and objectified, starts functioning.

What are the basic meanings of λόγος? In linguistic sphere it may be linguistic formulation, speech, discussion, description, statement, argument, metal process, thinking, explanation; or it might be defined in a broader sense as cosmic principle, structural principle, formulation, natural law[5].

It is worth to mention, that the above separation of meanings became completely defined in the teaching of Skeptics, especially in Epictetus (Dissertationes, I, 9,6). Epictetus distinguishes "internal λόγος" (λόγος ἐνδιάθητος), which, as a demon, divine principle or essence existing in each individual, occurs as emanation of divine mind and "expressed λόγος" (λόγος προφορικός), which is a symbolic reflection of the first one. Epictetus names λόγος ὀρθός, as well, the "sacred word" or the "sacred mind" (recta ratio), which is the way for human being to communicate, assimilate and be equated with God[6].

Sophists generally do not separate so distinctly the meanings of λόγος, but we suggest, that is to say the semantic variety of the term leads us to the relativism, which is one of the fundamental features and achievements of sophistic philosophy.

Already in the ancient sources Protagoras is named as initiator of "double λόγος" theory (Diogenes Laertos, DK, 80A1, Seneca Ep., 89, 43). A famous aphorism is ascribed to him, that "Man is a measure of all things" (Plato, Theatetus, 16c, Sextus Empiricus, DK 80A1). Despite various interpretations of the passage, it is commonly considered as unclear and insensible. Some scholars think, that this passage contains a key to explain the whole sophistic movement of the 5th century[7].

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[4]   Kerferd, 81.
[5]   Kerferd, 83.
[6]   Н.С.Трубецкой, Учение о Логосе., М., 1906, 297.
[7]   Kerferd, 85-86.

Regarding the above mentioned, we can consider λόγος as essence, that perceives φύσις, sets the rules of conditional reality, acceptable for human beings, referred by Plato as νόμος φυσέως (Plato, Gorgias, 483 e3). In this case the νόμος-φύσις dichotomy itself gains a slightly different tone: φύσις is not only a nature, but the source of the objects, that have not started there existence in reality, have not been included in any conventional system and have no characterizing features yet. Φύσις is a transitional condition of object, the process of its growth from the very moment of origin until it acquires any function (see Aristotle Metaphysics, 1015 a 13-15), while νόμος is a convention, the system which has not descriptive, but rather normative purpose[8]. It shows direction to human beings and determines their behavior and activity.

Interpretation of λόγος that derives from the teaching of Sophists has greatly influenced further development of philosophy of language. Considering λόγος as a coordinative tool between human beings, conventionality, that converts an incognizable internal world of each individual into objective, cognizable, understandable and acceptable for another individual, we may suggest, that Sophists were first to raise an issue that became one of the core problems of Descartes' philosophy and was further developed by Wittgenstein and Saussure – namely what is correlation between a real object and an image occurring in mind, as well as correlation between subjective perceptions of two individuals. Sophists correctly groped for the merge that exists in both cases. Protagoras gave answer to the question by his formula "Man is a measure of all things", thus establishing relativism and extreme subjectivism, while Gorgias addressed the question by his treatise *On Nature or What is Not*, which is one of the most outstanding works in rhetoric, as well as in philosophy.

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[8]   Kerferd, 112.