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### **A NEW INTERPRETATION OF A MAN AND ITS FUNCTION IN THE TEACHING OF SOPHISTS (FROM THE MODERN POINT OF VIEW)**

Already in Antiquity two main positions were distinguished regarding Sophists' teaching: 1. positive – citizens of Athens, especially the nobility, admired them, becoming their pupils and followers; 2. critical - this is, how the attitude of their contemporary philosophers can be characterized. Sophists were considered to be "clowns" or "sellers of knowledge", who turned the truth into a means of gaining popularity and wealth.

The picture has been partially changed in the following times. From the middle of the XIX century Plato's traditional presentation of the Sophists was vigorously debated. As Guthrie mentioned in *The Sophists*: "Zeller's *History* was the last to uphold unchallenged the view, that the teaching of even the best of the Sophists was bound in the end to reduce everything to a matter of individual preference and prejudice, and turn philosophy from the search for truth into a means of satisfying the demands of selfishness and vanity"<sup>1</sup>. Such a critical view was strongly held in German literature and Sophists were blamed even in demoralization of Athenians by corrupted teaching. Grote was the first, who opposed this view in his *History of Greece*<sup>2</sup>.

From that period of time, particular attention has been paid to Sophists and their teaching. Stalbaum, Joel, Gomperz, Laas and Nietzsche were among their defenders. Although, the negative attitude was overcome, and most scientists considered, that "the questions and controversies of that time have lost nothing of their actuality"<sup>3</sup>, the interest of scholars was mainly directed to the problems of social plane - the law, its theoretical basis, and the influence of their activity on the social life of Athens. Philosophical aspects of their teaching, is usually observed in the full context of the epoch and is not considered as an individual and highly valuable teaching. "Representatives of liberal and democratic thinking in Greece", Founders of the strongest intellectual movement<sup>4</sup> - that is, how Sophists are regarded by the scientists. Empiricism and skepticism are two main points thought to be the clue of their teaching and activity<sup>5</sup>.

Thus, it is doubtless, that many aspects of their thinking became influential for the following generations. But in the performed paper we'd like to stress problems particularly of philosophical meaning - problems of knowledge and cognition, self-cognition of a man, his concept and place in the universe. These problems, as we think, were adopted, consciously or unconsciously, by the new philosophy of middle ages.

What is the cognition and what is the object of it? Plato explains it as a sudden comprehension of the information, that has been empirically gathered and kept in our souls. There are ideas, that exist independently from a man. Moreover, the man himself is simply a reflection of the idea of "Mankind". Our soul adopts them by exercise and learning, and in a particular moment, through an unexpected inner enlightening the information changes into the knowledge of the truth and the man begins to cognise the surrounding world (Plat. VII Epist. 344b-c).

How do Sophists understand the phenomenon of cognition? At a first site, they believe, that it is a knowledge, obtained by thorough training and examinations. They, themselves, are universal teachers, systematizers of Greek literature, mythology, grammar, they are professionals in mathematics, medi-

<sup>1</sup> Guthrie W.K.C. *The Sophists*, Cambridge, 1979, p. 11

<sup>2</sup> Grote G., *A History of Greece*, v.7 London, 1888

<sup>3</sup> Schmid-Stählin. *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*. III Band. München, 1948, S., 216

<sup>4</sup> Lesky A. *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*. München, 1993, S., 388

<sup>5</sup> Popper K., *The Open Society and its Enemies*, London, 1966

cine, rhetoric, law and sometimes they try to set up an information that has no scientific value<sup>6</sup>. But, on the other hand, their contribution to the development of their contemporary and following philosophical thinking is more than evident. Protagoras states the concept of inherent ability of human being to cognise the world and himself, that many centuries later results in relativism and subjectivism. His basic statement, that the man is the measure of every thing, shouts to the words of our contemporary philosopher: There is no existence without cognition, self-cognition is the only way for human being to detect his own ontological position.<sup>7</sup>

General novelty, developed by Sophists was the rejection of the basic principles of presocratic philosophy of nature - that is, searching ἀρχή, the initial cause of the universe. A man, a human being becomes an object of sophistic observation. He measures the reality, he determines the truth, so he is the only one, who can be blamed, that the universe exists. There is no sense to search any independent, objective truth somewhere in the world of real things. A man can not cognise and comprehend the world without himself, merged from his own position of observer. Thus, we can assume, that there is no world without human being, without observer, who observes and through observation, creates the world hic et nunc. The truth, as well as the objective reality, is relative and depends on the view of observer. A human being can not perceive the past, the period of time, when he did not existed. So, he can not judge about any initial cause of the world unless this cause is himself. Even logos, the primary word, an original power, considered by Heraclitus as a basic pivot of the universe, is humiliated from the divine, highest idea, to a simple technical mean of rhetoric, that is wholly subordinated to the man and his will and serves for him as a tool of creation. It loses its supernatural character and becomes a part of a linguistic game, helping subject to comprehend an objective reality. All mentioned above doesn't mean, that Sophists reduced the importance of this powerful tool. They nearly worship it not for its divinity, but for its ability to unite, express and confirm totally different and mutually exclusive opinions about the same thing or event. This principle of "Double Argumentation" is the act, when the essence of any object loses its independence and becomes entirely subordinated to the opinion, expressed about it, to the angle of observation, to the man, his internal world and his will. Such a disregard of any supreme power is the only way for the man to determine his ontological position and to get free from the shackles of objective reality.

Such an attitude towards the language and the word can explain the fact, that Sophists revealed only philosophical interests and did not considered any aspect of the philosophy of language.

All the above mentioned greatly affected self-comprehension and self-evaluation of a human being. If, in a mythological system he considering himself as a mythological character, an unworthy benefactor of the brilliant generations of Gods and Heroes, in a new philosophy he recognized to be a central figure of the universe. This was the basis for the strong feeling of respect, that characterized the citizens of Greece and especially the Athens in that period.

The experiment of "Double observation" or "Double Argumentation" developed by Sophists, brought out the opposition between man and nature, that can be generalized as the dichotomy of Νόμος-Φύσις, a key problem of the Greek thought in V-IV cc. It covers a great range of questions - theological aspects, problems of law and πολιτεία, some ethical problems, and, generally, the opposition between artificial and natural. In a philosophical meaning, the dichotomy covers anthropological problems - the place of a free man in the universe, relationship between natural and human laws, between law and free will. Protagoras explains the dichotomy by a new interpretation of an old myth of Prometheus: the central character of the story is a man, and not a the God, the man, who, despite the prohibition of Zeus, receives a sacred flame from Prometheus and through it receives a supreme knowledge, τέχνη, professional skills, an empirical experience and ability to comprehend and learn. But Prometheus divine gift had one big disadvantage - the man loses his innocence and is merged from the nature, being not more the part of it. By receiving the prohibited gift he rejects the God's divine protection and is left alone - opposed to the obscure forces of the nature and the God. Although the man always aspires to get closer to the nature and the God, there is no way back - once started, the process of cognition can not be stopped. That is the moment, when νόμος starts functioning.

Plato mentions in *Legges*: Sophists say, that the most beautiful and important things are created by nature, and κάϊρος, while the less important - by art. Indeterminity and accidentality are the characteristics of the God. Only the free will, that acts without any objectives, can truly create. The art is

<sup>6</sup> Лосев А.Ф. История Античной Эстетики, М., 1969 стр. 23

<sup>7</sup> Мамардашвили М. Картезианские Размышления, М., 1993. стр. 39

mortal, and it consists of mortal elements. It is just a play, a game, that has nothing common with the truth. There are no laws and orders in nature, as initial creative elements (Plat. Legg. 888e-889e).

Protagoras stated a man to be a king of the universe. This statement was strongly debated among his contemporaries, as well as among the thinkers of the following ages. Thanks to his brilliant intuition, Protagoras discovered a principle, that became fundamental for the new philosophy - every human being carries the part the idea of the God in his soul, he is not only a measure of things, but their creator as well. By evaluating and investigating, he creates the every-minute world, that is the only reality - the subjective reality. We do not try to confirm, that Protagoras went so far in his conclusions - it was impossible in that period of time, when the influence of polytheistic mythology was so strong - actually, the mythology was the main source for artists or philosophers. Many centuries later, by the representatives of the new philosophy, the moment of ἀρχή, the objective initial cause of life, had been overcome and adopted the idea of the God inside each of us.

Skepticism - that's how the scholars title Sophists' teaching. Of course, it can not be named as pure subjectivism or relativism, although the two in many respects are linked to it. We think, that "Intuitionist subjectivism" will fully express the basic points and ideas of the philosophy of Sophists, that, thanks to their skepticism and nihilism, changed our attitude to any objective truth as well as the whole world of reality.