Chapter 7

Will Wisdom Save the Human Project?

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate whether humans are wise enough to save their civilization from the threats of internal conflicts or natural (even cosmic) disasters. Humans have gained wisdom through life experience and philosophical investigations for the last 2,600 years. In this investigation, we would like to find whether philosophy can be helpful in defining a wise strategic solution which has the potential to sustain civilization indefinitely. If the current state of philosophy cannot accomplish this, it will be necessary to offer a new philosophy to undertake this task. This is important in these times, when other social sciences are aware of civilization crisis and have influenced the formation of many foundations and centers which aim for a more harmonious development of civilization.

If humans are not wise enough to save civilization, then the human project in the universe will collapse. More on the future of civilization is provided in Targowski (2009, p. 395).

FROM MYTHS TO THE WISDOM OF CIVILIZATION

Western Philosophy as a Source of Survival Wisdom

The more that civilized humans populate Earth, the more they threaten civilization, given the increasingly complex systems that are developed and subsequently affect the Earth's ecosystems. The 21st century will be particularly critical when the global population reaches eight billion people.

Civilization is about 6,000 years old. During this time, life on Earth has appeared safe, with the exception of some religions that predicted the end of the world. Many religious doomsday scenarios were metaphors rather than possible events. From the very beginning, humans were very interested how the world and people were formed (*cosmogony*) and always saw it in God's hand (*teogony*).

For the last 2,600 years, one can observe the systematic development of philosophy, the discipline associated with "love of wisdom." The synthesis of the development of human wisdom is illustrated Figure 1, which indicates that it took humans about 3,400 years to learn life skills and later they spent 1,200 years looking for eternal happiness. During the Middle Ages they found that there is no contradiction between faith and reason, and the latter should drive the search for knowledge and wisdom on Earth.

Based on this foundation, 500 years ago humans began searching for knowledge about the world and life, offering rules and laws which promote wise choices and actions. In this period, philosophers defined many approaches towards knowledge and wisdom, emphasizing cognition (e.g., Descartes, Hume, Kant, Darwin, Peirce, Einstein, Whitehead, and Carnap) and looking for better existence (e.g., Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre).

Thousands of intellectuals are taking part in this great cerebral movement, discovering laws of nature and civilization, mostly having in mind how to act wisely. On the other hand, the more knowledge humans discover, the more we are lost in it and sometimes lose the art of wisdom.

For example, philosophy between the 20th and 21st centuries entered a period of looking more for objective methods and information about world perception than for wise and committed solutions that are expected by societies. Although the philosophy of action rises to attack, the question is: How do we live wisely day by day? Furthermore, the philosophy of social universalism offers ideas of how to be wise and good, which should limit social and state confrontations. This latter philosophy observes the dramatic challenges of the contemporary world, which in the 20th century contributed to the deaths of 200 million people. In the 21st century, these challenges threaten to kill even more in civilization wars and with all kinds of "bombs." Skolimowski (1981) even claims that current philosophy is detached from life, socially unconcerned, mute about individual responsibility, politically indifferent, and mostly language-oriented (rather than oriented toward life and its quality).

Maxwell (2005) states that knowledge rather than wisdom is at the center of the academic inquiry and cannot solve the problems of wars, global warming, poverty, and so forth. He thinks that we need a revolution in science and humanities to move from knowledge to wisdom and that the first aim of education should be to learn how to acquire wisdom. Since scientific and technological progress massively increases our power to act, we need wiser institutions, customs, social relations, and a wiser world. Brown (2005) wants to transform our attitude from eco-phenomenology to eco-*logos* based on wisdom, which should include everyday experiences in developing dwellings. Servomaa (2005) claims that the essence of the beauty of nature should lead towards wisdom. In order to achieve wisdom, first we need to love beauty, which can contradict the rush for greedy gains and egoistic pleasures which destroy wisdom.

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