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WISDOM IN SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY*

The tendency towards a unification or harmonization of the whole of human knowledge has always been strong, and today, owing to the specification of sciences it is a particularly interesting subject of epistemological investigations. J. Maritain also attempted to present a unified survey of three essential types of knowledge: scientific, metaphysical and mystical. He believed that a unifying factor was wisdom, which embraces and penetrates all kinds of knowledge¹. It seems that it is worth giving renewed attention to the role of wisdom in various types of human knowledge and especially in two epistemologically determined ones – the sciences and philosophy. However, it is necessary to discuss the principles and aims afforded to the above types of knowledge by modern philosophers of science. An attempt will be made here to provide solutions to the questions: why and how does wisdom function in the principles and aims of science and philosophy? Before proceeding with the discussion, let us define wisdom, science and philosophy.

Wisdom (*sapientia*=*sapida scientia*, palatable knowledge, that is choice knowledge) is an ambiguous term. It can even denote the second person of the Holy Trinity or an attribute of divine nature. Above all, it designates various kinds of human knowledge and also various kinds of ability to acquire or to apply knowledge. On account of its origin, wisdom may be either natural, if it is attained by the power of the intellect, or supernatural, if reached with the assistance of God's grace; in this case it is acquired through faith – *fides est initium sapientiae* (*sapientia formaliter revelata*) or through faith and reasoning (*sapientia virtualiter relevata*, that is, theological wis-

* Translated from: *Nauka i filozofia a mądrość*. „Roczniki Filozoficzne” 31 : 1983 fasc. 2 (to be appeared).

¹ See J. Maritain. *De la sagesse augustinienne* “*Mélanges augustiniens*”. Paris 1931 p. 385 - 411; *Distinguer pour unir*. Paris (1932) 1963⁷; *Science et sagesse*. Paris 1935; *Philosophy and the Unity of Science*. “Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association” 27 : 1953 p. 34 - 56.

dom); or wisdom may be a gift of the Holy Spirit — *donum Spiritus Sancti* (a contemplative experience of human and divine affairs on the basis of supernatural faith and love — that is, mystical wisdom). Supreme wisdom is attained in eternal life, beholding God face to face (*visio beatifica*).

Natural wisdom, on the other hand, is concerned either with the totality of human life without reference to eternity (*sapientia mundana*, that is, a skill that flows from an everyday experience of coping with life, or even smartness, shrewdness and foresight), or the totality of the world and man from the point of view of ultimate reasons and goals — *circa causam altissimam, primam; sub specie aeternitatis* (S. Th. I 14,1). This is wisdom in the strictest and most proper sense of the term, that is, the best intellectual understanding of reality, involving both the will and an absolute judgment on reality (theoretical or metaphysical wisdom), or the skill of posing and solving problems of this kind and applying such knowledge in life (practical wisdom). Thus, wisdom is not only a mass of information but also an indubitable intellectual understanding and contemplation (*sapientia comprehendit in se scientiam et intellectum*) and an ability to cognize the ultimate reason and aim of existence (*habitus quidam, quo mens nostra perficitur in cognitione altissimorum et huiusmodi sunt divina* — C. G. IV, 12). Moreover, wisdom is not only a deep insight into the order of human and divine affairs and an absolute and conscious judgment but also an involved knowledge which directs human behaviour (*non solum cognoscitiva sed etiam directiva; sapientis est ordinare*), and thus any human cognition (*dirigit omnes alias scientias, est caput scientiarum*). However, wisdom in the strict sense of the term is not to be identified with common sense (*phronesis*), which is also known as practical wisdom. Common sense is the power to discern correctly the good and bad in the life of an individual and, moreover, the efficient activity based on this discernment, that is, it is connected not with the choice of the ultimate aim of conduct but with the choice of means of reaching this aim ².

Scientific knowledge is a system of specialized knowledge of an explanatory (or justifying) nature or a process or skill of acquiring this knowledge. There have been in the past, and there are today, many different conceptions of scientific knowledge. On account of the method of explanation, they can be reduced to four fundamental types:

1° Aristoteles saw a model of scientific explanation in the discovery of essences (immutable forms) of beings and the hierarchic ordering of these forms. The scientific system constructed in such a way was to include objectively evident principles (discovered through intellectual intuition), from which all other statements are syllogistically inferred.

² See G. Luck. *Zur Geschichte des Begriffs "sapientia"*. „Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte“ 9: 1964 p. 203 - 215; Ch. H. Chen, *Sophia*. Hildesheim 1976; W. Gent. *Der Begriff des Weisen*. „Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung“ 20: 1966 p. 77 - 117; J. D. Collins. *The Lure of Wisdom*. Milwaukee 1962.

2° Galileo and Newton aimed at discovering a quantitative-temporal structure and principles of the dynamism of nature instead of qualitative supra-temporal forms. Scientific theory was constructed from first principles (reached by way of a mathematical formulation of observational data and idealization) from which empirically verifiable statements were deduced.

3° Comté and the positivists rejected explanations through the essence of beings and limited their investigations to the discovery of laws of fixed relations between facts. Laws were reached inductively from dogmatically accepted data from external experience and verified empirically on the basis of the theory of probability. The development of logic led to a perfecting of inductual procedure and of the structure of the scientific system (the language of theory was formalized).

4° Two factors were responsible for the formation of a new conception of scientific explanation: the investigational methods of the physicalists (eg. Einstein's) and the rationalistic philosophy of science (eg. Popper's). This new approach postulated a discovery of the most fundamental model (as far as possible a mathematical one) to which the system of theses about explained reality may be reduced. These hypothetical models were exposed to criticism (especially attempts at falsification) in order to select a logically simple model that is intensively rich. Such a scientific theory is fallible, since facts obtained from experience are accepted hypothetically and criteria for the acceptance of these models are relative³.

The term philosophy etymologically denotes a love of wisdom. However, this was realized in various ways. In Ancient times philosophy embraced the whole of rational knowledge and in particular sought the fundamental essence, the reason and sense of existence (the so-called *causae*) of reality and also ultimate principles of evaluation (the classical conception of philosophy). The formal criteria of philosophical theory were determined by the Aristotelian conception of knowledge. Later, scientific disciplines began to break away from philosophy. New forms of philosophical knowledge appeared:

- 1) a purely speculative construction of the most universal principles of the structure and development of being;
- 2) an irrational contemplation of the essential problems on the borderland between religion and scientific knowledge;
- 3) a discovery of the practical principles of man's conduct and his destiny.

Alongside the specification of scientific disciplines and a growing differentiation in the evaluation of investigational results, a new philosophical problematic developed. The aim of solving these problems was a clear explication of fundamental concepts and an ultimate explanation of assumptions accepted without justification in

³ Humanistic interpretation, which usually prefers either a genetic or a structurally-functional explanation was rarely distinguished from scientific explanation. For a more detailed survey of the conceptions of scientific knowledge see: S. Kamiński. *Pojęcie nauki i klasyfikacja nauk* (*The Philosophy of Science. Selected Problems*). Lublin (1961) 1981³.

scientific disciplines; moreover, ultimate conditions and criteria of valuable knowledge were sought (an epistemological conception of philosophy)⁴.

In the 19th century, on the basis of a positivistic theory of knowledge, a scientific conception of philosophy was formed. According to this conception, philosophy is not knowledge that is autonomous as far as subject and methods are concerned, but is a universalization, a crowning, an encyclopaedic harmonization, an inventive synthetization – to a greater or lesser extent – of the results of scientific investigations and the whole of human experience. This is brought about either by following a key idea or by ideological requirements. Another variant of this conception of philosophy is, in the 20th century, a reduction of philosophical knowledge to universal metascience, especially to a logical analysis of scientific language (the neo-positivists) or to a pragmatic or therapeutic analysis of philosophical language (the linguistic philosophers). Finally, drawing on the epistemological conception of philosophy and the trend towards an anthropocentric and irrational style of thinking, a conception of philosophy was formed as an interpretative reflection of human existence (treated axiologically, semiologically or historically), with the aim of finding an ultimate sense of existence or an ontological position or external forms of expression of existence; moreover, attempts were made to acquire a conscious world view or attitude towards life.

The first conception of rational knowledge set forth the attainment of wisdom as its ultimate task, for at that time ultimately practical goals were proposed for epistemologically developed knowledge. Truth about man and the world was sought not for itself, but in order to obtain principles of directing human conduct in the best possible way. There had been a similar trend in the Middle Ages and even in the period of the Renaissance. Descartes, in forming the modern conception of science, had concentrated on wisdom rather than erudition or a technical applying of knowledge, since a sapiential standpoint allowed him to construct a harmonized system of science (including philosophy!). Nevertheless, from the 17th century on there was a general tendency to set primarily technical goals for science – the controlling and transforming of nature. This tendency became more marked when the achievements of natural science gave it a dominant position in culture. Today, actual planning of investigations takes place mainly from the point of view of their technical and economical effectiveness, with little regard for the postulates of humanism in culture. Science, on account of its technical, economical and military-political effects appears to have turned its attention away from man and, having gained independence, has enslaved him; what is worse, having outgrown the biological and psychic possibilities of mankind, it is an impending threat to the human race. The auto-destruction of man and his proper environment is imminent.

⁴ Here, philosophy is reduced to the theory of knowledge. This conception will be developed by the phenomenologists, who treat philosophy as a peculiar type of analysis and an eidetic description of data of human consciousness and how it is given; no previous theoretical knowledge should be employed in analyses.

It seems that in order to prevent this there must first be a return to the sapiential sources, motivations and tasks of science. Only then will science cease to tyrannize man and will restore his wounded dignity. The whole of culture (science being a domain of culture) should become personalistic, that is, it should not merely be an instrument for manipulating the whole of reality (including man). Moreover, the foundations of science will be firmer if wisdom is employed as a motive force, for in the external bases a defined hierarchy of values and defined ontological and epistemological theses are accepted implicitly. Only knowledge through wisdom allows a proper base to be selected. Scientific knowledge itself will be more complete if wisdom provides a link between intuitive and constructional thought (Aristoteles, *Eth. Nic.* VI, 7) and fulfils the role of a factor ordering various strictly specialized scientific disciplines.

Mutual co-operation between the sciences and philosophy (especially classical philosophy) is necessary for the realization of the above postulates⁵. For this reason the dialogue between scientists and philosophers that has been replaced by the demands of technology and a short-sighted economy should be brought back. In addition the role played by philosophy in metascientific reflection and in the entire study of the progress of human knowledge should be increased. Science presupposes philosophy and does not merely render it possible. Moreover, the tasks of science must be set in such a way that it provides a route towards wisdom and not so that it leads man away from wisdom or leads to the dehumanization of man. The explanatory role of science must not be diminished in favour of an exclusively instrumental treatment of science, which leads to industrialization. Attainment of truth commits man to apply this truth.

Philosophy, as the etymology of this term reveals, was always closely connected with wisdom. In Ancient times, the question of whether the aim of philosophical knowledge was to attain wisdom was not discussed, but rather how this task was realized. Aristoteles, identifying metaphysics (*prote philosophia*) with fundamental knowledge (*prote episteme*), stressed that an important feature of both these types of knowledge was their demonstrative nature. However, philosophy is a particular way of attaining theoretical wisdom, since it reaches the ultimate cause (*aition*) of being by means of intellectual intuition (*nous*) and through contemplation involves man in the deepest truth he has acquired about the universe. In the centuries to follow philosophical knowledge approached wisdom when the role of "nous" and contemplation was emphasized in such knowledge or when it was connected with theory and practical knowledge.

St. Augustine, placing emphasis on the intellectual and contemplative styles of philosophizing, identified them with the attainment of wisdom. Linking philos-

⁵ The metaphysical part of classical philosophy — as we shall see — may be identified with theoretical wisdom. Co-operation between scientific knowledge and philosophy is postulated, since scientific knowledge provides premises for wisdom.

ophy with theology, he even claimed that the only reason for philosophizing was the achievement of supernatural wisdom – *nulla est homini causa philosophandi nisi ut beatus sit, nisi finis boni* (De Civ. Dei XIX, 1); for true wisdom is based on truth, which enables us to see and possess the supreme Good (De lib. arbitrio II, 9). A similar view was propounded by Alexander of Hales, who defined metaphysics as *sapientia ut scientia* and theology as *proprie et principaliter sapientia [...] ut sapientia*. St. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, held that metaphysics was scientifically systematized theoretical wisdom (*In Met.* XI, 1). Later, when the classically apprehended function of “nous” in philosophy and its contemplative and practical character was rejected, wisdom ceased to be the task of philosophical knowledge. Only those philosophers who accepted the conception of so-called Christian philosophy emphasized the sapiential nature of philosophical knowledge. Maritain, for example, noted that the greatness of metaphysics lies in the fact that it is wisdom, and its misery in the fact that it is human knowledge⁶.

It seems that, while ascribing to philosophy a depth of knowledge and a supra-temporal view of the object, metaphysics should be treated not only as a route to be taken towards wisdom but also as knowledge provoked by wisdom. Ideally apprehended wisdom is a necessary model in beginning and ending a study of philosophy. Fully developed metaphysical knowledge is not merely an ultimate explanation of reality. Revealing the deepest truths about the world, it does not eliminate an axiological standpoint but leads to an involvement; truths become a good which must be realized. Moreover, wisdom in philosophy allows the spheres of natural and supernatural knowledge to be linked. Showing God as the First Cause of all being and as the Supreme Good governing our aspirations, he advocates a search for God in the aspect of His own life, which may only be achieved in a supernatural way. In order for wisdom to fulfil all these functions in philosophy, philosophical knowledge should become the ultimate explanation and an ontically justified axiological view.

⁶ See S. Bernadete. *On Wisdom and Philosophy*. “The Review of Metaphysics” 32 : 1978 p. 205 - 215, A. Epping. *Seraphische Weisheit*. “Franciscan Studies” 56 : 1974 p. 221 - 248; S. Rosen. *Wisdom: the End of Philosophy*. “The Review of Metaphysics” 16 : 1962 p. 181 - 211; H. Reinhardt. *Weisheit als gemeinsame Artikulation von Denken, Glauben und Handeln*. “Philosophisches Jahrbuch” 81 : 1974 p. 121 - 134.