

EDITORIAL

The Role of Higher Education in the Building of a New Europe

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It is clear that we find ourselves at the end of a process, which began, with the gradual decline of the old ontological frames of reference for mankind, the final result of which is the cheapening of life and finally even the existence of mankind. The gradual abandoning of the old philosophical foundations of society - or philosophical traditions of society - hasn't produced new philosophical foundations but, on the contrary, has given its place to a new kind of mankind which, at least in appearance, is not based on any kind of meaning of life, in other words on no cultural proposal which goes beyond the new perception regarding happiness and development or progress which comes from the conversion of consumption to almost ontological levels, and today we equate with culture.

Culture, first of all, gives meaning to life and orders our priorities, which result from the way we view human existence, the world and history. The gradual decline in religions - as we call today the old ontologies that were a foundation and frame of reference for nations - from the beginning of the modern period that is from the 15th century, had as a result the *first disappointment of the world*, as Kastoriadis said. The various *political ideologies* of the 19th and 20th centuries attempted to fill the gap, that is the gap left by the decline in the old ontologies, however their limits were soon revealed many times in a tragic way - the pinnacle being the breaking up of the Soviet Socialist Republic, the betrayal of its people leading to the *second disappointment of the world*, which seems to be the last; the market economy - what a misused word if we compare it to the ancient Greek market - and the free market show it to be an almost obvious and final result of politics - the politics which at one time expressed and put forward large, collective goals of society which aimed at the expansion of the range of their time and area and the giving of higher aims of existence to man. Production and consumption *here and now*, because there is no *later* in today's deprivation from man of a larger range of life. Mankind it

seems has arrived at its final destination; the end of thought, the end of Politics, the end of history, if with this term we characterize man's continuous striving to capture or be reconciled with the Enigma of Existence, of Space and Time, of Life and the World.

This new foundation for society has obviously led today's mankind to dramatic social and ecological dead-ends, which threaten mankind's existence on our planet; *development at all costs*, with the aim being man's happiness - with the meaning that no political ideology doesn't disagree or is indifferent about the victims which will be created in its movement towards this new *kind of progress*, that is its ideal of the highest production possible for the highest possible consumption. It is indifferent to those who can't follow or accept it in its crazy course, which is basically inhuman and unsocial. It is indifferent to the environment, which guarantees the existence of future generations. We are talking about a new *western type* of fundamentalism, which more and more is unhesitating in its service of the new ontology - and for that reason we talk about *fundamentalism*.

However more and more, we see a turning of nations to various metaphysical beliefs and mysticisms, or in the best case we see them attached to their traditions, a sign of their determination in the search for a larger range to their lives. Furthermore, the redefinition of scientific development up to this point puts back into the game the big ontological questions forgotten by the West. There are many calls from European and American intellectuals for the need for the non-cultural leveling of nations, in favour of the prevailing western culture and calls for the need for a multi-cultural society. Obviously a new cultural proposal is being sought; we are witnesses to a revaluation by the West of local customs in its area, customs which up to now had either been ignored or underestimated, and in which lost values are now being sought. Modern physics, as the only remaining philosophical science, introduces us to a new examination of reality, of Space and Time, of Truth and of the World.

Today's education system, from the basic level to the highest, appears, worldwide, to have submitted to the prevailing perceptions regarding development and progress. At the level of higher education especially, the aim of the educational institutions is to serve the market economy. Continuously and more and more Universities are judged - by the state but also by society - by the degree to which their graduates are absorbed into the prevailing *job market*. Indeed in recent years the Universities, as educational as well as research centres, are judged mainly by 'private enterprise' criteria: indeed shortly they will be funded by the state to the extent to which they give a return, that is to the degree to which their graduates will contribute to the 'economy' of the state more than the cost to it of their studies. For this reason students will study only as much as is necessary in order to learn the skills demanded by *production* and nothing more. What is worse is that we identify Culture with this *production* and the potential for consumption and prosperity, in accordance with the new perception regarding happiness.

The role of Europe in the worldwide need for a new cultural proposal must be decisive. This is what its history urges and what it seems everyone expects

from it. This intellectual contribution will support its education system. Europe however, which openly tries to compete with the American economy, mistakenly believing that there lies not only the world's but also its own problem, tries to impose the model of education which was first established there - in truth without very great success, at least not yet. The latest rule reforms, which appear, with the famous Treaty of Bologna as a guide, obviously aim to reinforce Europe in its competition with the American model for development, the economy and life. Moreover they see educational institutions as if they were businesses, which should function profitably with private enterprise criteria. No effort is made for students to acquire judgment and roundedness in facing whatever profession: this will not only be costly in teachers and years of study, but it will also be harmful to the prevailing way of existence of societies. The only purpose being the economically profitable way of producing good and trustworthy *learning operators*, who do not think any further than that, rather like the machine operators in the age of the industrial revolution. The inevitable outcome of course is the transference of the responsibility of *Education* from the official state, which is prescribed by governments and politicians who supposedly are concerned to satisfy collective goals, to the responsibility of the carriers of production - businesses, factories, companies, firstly *private* but perhaps we see them under the cloak of a *socialised carrier* or *in the public interest*. Besides it is self-evident that *private insurance* will predominate, wherever it hasn't already predominated and which will also perhaps be covered in the cloak of a socialized carrier but will have exactly the same *private enterprise* mode of functioning.

We owe it to the new Europe, which is now being formed as a unified continent, to attribute to it the historical role, which it deserves, that is the role of the leader of a worldwide cultural renaissance. Indeed we recognize the historical contribution of its achievements to date, the direction of the West up to now. This however has a tendency to be cancelled out and reversed by the dead-ends which it has created itself. We want neither to tarnish it nor to halt it. We simply wish for its fulfillment with the re-birth of Culture *via* a new perception regarding Education: Education in Europe should again set the great goals, which traditionally placed it as a leader of the world's cultural events.

This matter is Political, with Politics certainly not in the meaning it has nowadays in its simple administrative, practical form, but in the one that has culture as its central aim. There are many calls for a return to these Politics, the subject however collides harmfully with the philosophical foundations of today's societies. Despite these things, it is necessary to by-pass whatever difficulties there are by persuading and asking from the state the promotion of an Educational system where the main aim is Culture, without at the same time being sidelined and cut off from current needs and requirements. Lately it is often heard about the need for Europe to enter dynamically into world events, and into the current globalization of the economy, culture and way of life - indeed many talk of the need for a global administration - which promotes democracy and peace and sustainable development. These things however are not founded on economic agreements and negotiations. They require a new Culture. This however can only be based on an Education system suitable for this.

It is certain that a smaller range of educational institutions can function in direct connection with *businesses and production*. It is enough that at the forefront of large, overall planning there will be found strong, publicly accountable educational institutions, mainly in *higher education*, to which all can have access with well-defined, merit based criteria, from whatever educational background they come from, which, however, as we said, must not lose their attractiveness by being cut-off from the current professional only be ready to cover in the best and most advantageous way possible the current reality, but moreover, to direct it and not the other way around. Reality: on the contrary, these educational and research centres should not.

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