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## Philosophy as a virtue and Way of Life: An Intellectual and Moral Battle against Modern World Crises

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### Abstract:

Ludwing Wittgenstein, despite having a great inclination towards linguistic philosophy kept a great deal of empathy towards the importance of ancient thought and philosophers who consider it as a virtue and way of life. As he famously put it; “[W]hat is the use of studying philosophy if all that it does for you is to enable you to talk with some plausibility about some abstruse questions of logic, etc., & if it does not improve your thinking about the important questions of everyday life.”<sup>i</sup>In other words, we must always show our deep sense of gratitude to ancient Greek philosophers and Indian saints and seers who gave us the big questions and philosophy in the form of a way of life to battle against any crisis. But the question is how far we preserved that legacy and moral standard? It is here we moderns have to show moral courage to respond to the ancient thinkers who have been asking the question symbolically and silently about what we have done with philosophy and how we used it to the development of world orders, facing any crisis (environmental, moral, personal and so on) and individual character and so on. The present paper is also an attempt to look back at the nature and legacy of philosophy which ancient philosophers and seers (Dārśanika) proposed for us to live a good life and maintain the holistic world order.

**Keyword:** Philosophy, Life, Crises, Intellectual, Moral

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There are diverse ways in which we might talk of a philosopher's preparatory point, and also the ways to look for it. It is also a fact that so many philosophers agree on how actually philosophical enterprise takes place, and in those ways, one of the most important bits of intelligence is that in which Aristotle spoke of wonder and big questions as the beginning of all philosophy – "it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize"<sup>ii</sup> Similarly, picking up in his *Metaphysics* on Plato's earlier remarks in the *Theaetetus*: "this feeling – a sense of wonder – is perfectly proper to a philosopher: philosophy has no other foundation."<sup>iii</sup> Succeeding the Greco-Roman and Indian insights, which are very close to each other, shouldn't we wonder about our modern way of life, the aim of it, rational foundations of major modern crisis? And most notably how we responded to them? One may encounter our approach a bit nihilistic and pessimistic, and it might be, but it is also a fact that our modern way of life is actually in an acute position as whole human endeavors are full of complexities. Pandemics, wars, religious conflict, environmental crisis,

social inequality, and so on have been challenging our thinking standards. We may say that we have paid for modernity and its facilities. Now we should weigh the crisis and facilities that modernity has offered to us in one way or another. And it is here the philosophy helps us with its all-encompassing nature as there is hardly any issue and problem left that can't be considered under its altruistic umbrella.

One may ask, with assurance, as it is a prerequisite tendency of philosophy (love of wisdom and truth), why we have chosen the philosophy of antiquity rather than the modern day of pursuing it? Pierre Hadot's following expression may help us grasp our intention:

*For the thinkers of antiquity, 'the mere word Philo-Sophia - the love of wisdom - was enough to express this conception of philosophy. In the Symposium, Plato had shown that Socrates, the symbol of the philosopher, could be identified with Eros, the son of Poros (expedient) and of Penia (poverty). Eros lacked wisdom, but he did know how to acquire it.'*<sup>iv</sup> (Hadot, 1995)

In other words, the answer may also encompass in the fact that ancient

philosophy, whether Indian or Greek, is quite inclusive as it can absorb the modern philosophical enterprise. In another word, obviously, we may grasp so many elements of Greek pursuit in modern time such as philosophy is a critical and rational enterprise which seeks into the fundamental concept of any notion, it seeks logical consistency and so on. But we need to look at who is more inclusive and who is not, who limit philosophy to the mere tool and who consider it as part of life as we consider our mind, who look into the deep questions of life which we mentioned above, and who limit philosophy to philology and linguistics and so on. On such a critical scale, the modern way of doing philosophy would seem alien to the ancient philosophy lover. As Pirre Hadot advocates:

*Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living," whereas "modern philosophy appears above all as the construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists."*<sup>v</sup> (Hadot & Davidson, 1995)

Or as stoic stalwart Seneca put it:

*There are indeed mistakes made, through the fault of our advisors, who teach us how to debate and not how to live. There are also*

*mistakes made by students, who come to their teachers to develop, not their souls, but their wits. Thus, philosophy, the study of wisdom, has become philology, the study of words.*<sup>vi</sup> (Holowchak, 2008)

Apparently, some continental and post-modernist thinkers exasperated to revive the ancient inclusive and practical tendency, but they also failed at comprehension and clarity. So the question of inclusiveness definitely arise, and again any Greek and Indian philosophy lover may ask the modern thinkers (who often detach oneself from the Philosophical problem like we try to detach from parasite and then analysis and consider that they are the philosopher) that who are they to distort the whole business of philosophy which help us to "live a good life and also prepare for dying well"(Plato, Republic). We may even circumspect and inquire which modern thinkers, except few continental and post-modernist, ask the question of life and death. And where would they put such questions? Anyway, instead of idealizing philosophy only, we should get back to the subject matter as a philosophy seems beautiful when do its work i.e. to encounter critical problems and makes life and world

better to live. And it is what we know in the Greeks language as a way of life. As Martha Nussbaum put it:

*What is distinctive about the contribution of the philosophers is that they assert that philosophy, and not anything else, is the art we require, an art that deals with invalid and sound arguments, an art that is committed to the truth. These philosophers claim that the pursuit of logical validity, intellectual coherence, and truth delivers freedom from the tyranny of custom and convention, creating a community of beings who can take charge of their own life story and their own thought.<sup>vii</sup>* (Nussbaum, 2013)

For a longer period of time, humanity was served with religion as we hadn't the resources to answer the great riddle and problems of life. God, myth, rituals, prohibitions, and so on were the main sources of guide to humanity. Obviously, the intention behind the creation of religion would have been pure but it is a matter of great research what it gave to the world. In other words, we can find arguments from both sides, in favor and disfavor of religion, but Meta - religious inquiry would suggest that we need something higher in value and spirit that can transcend human

mortality and so on. However, philosophy would question this approach and would employ the critical approach to get us to know the big question. It will ask us – what it means to be human , how can we live a good life, how can we treat other well, how can we make the world as a better place to live, do we relay need some transcendental entity such as a god or whatever to live in this world – and so on. It is the beauty of philosophy that guides our life without deciding our fate, ideology, and mindset as such preordered designs makes us pathetic in one way or another. Philosophy helps us to burst the myth by which live and deceive others. In addition, it is what we know as the virtue which provides us the holistic excellence to live a good life. As stoic thinker Seneca echoed about the relation between philosophy and the good life;

*Philosophy is no trick to catch the public; it is not devised for show. It is a matter, not of words, but of facts. It is not pursued in order that the day may yield some amusement before it is spent, or that our leisure may be relieved of a tedium that irks us. It moulds and constructs the soul; it orders our life, guides our conduct, shows us what we should do and what we should*

*leave undone; it sits at the helm and directs our course as we waver amid uncertainties. Without it, no one can live fearlessly or in the peace of mind. Countless things that happen every hour call for advice; and such advice is to be sought in philosophy.*<sup>viii</sup> (Seneca, 2016)

Coming to the modern world crisis when we are facing great challenges in all around the life and world, philosophy as virtue dares us to know our position and power in the world. It asks us to introspect to get the idea of what would we do if we face the same problem that others have been facing? What would we do with our house and precious surrounding if we face a similar situation as our nature and environment have been facing? What is our responsibility towards others who are writhing in pain? Philosophy, being a critical pursuit, overcomes the self-contradictions. Let's grasp it with the great Indian epic Mahabharata's epilogue:

*Atmanah pratikulani paresham na samacharet*<sup>ix</sup> (Mahabharata 5.15.17)

— What is not good for me cannot be meted out by me to others. What is not good for me would not be good for others also, because others are like me in every respect. In other words, it asks

us to introspect and remove the contradiction which has secured a temporary place in our heart due to ignorance and selfishness. Just for a thought experiment, imagine yourself a doctor who is on vacation and go for a trip to relax in a new city. But as you reach the city and find yourself amid a pandemic like covid -19 what would you do? Would you convince yourself that it is neither your creation nor it is your city so why should you employ your skill? Or you would philosophize and apply the humanistic approach that being a doctor it is your responsibility to help the needy in all times and places. So asking deep and philosophical questions actually helps us to relieve the great problem of life. But it is a sad thing that we hardly give time to it as it requires great virtues such as patience, persistence, courage, and so on.

Let's categorize more, as a mother helps her child instinctively, without any further desire, then we move forward and helps others intuitively. For an instance, we intuitively help any drowning child, hungry man, and helpless/ handicapped man irrespective of any limited barriers. Even we often get

ready to protect the animals. And then reason comes to decide what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad, and so on. In the present crisis, we need to install all the above categories, only then we would be able to cope up with the great challenges. Fear, lure, and ignorance will come in the way, but we will have to listen to our rational intuition to grasp our genuine call to help the needy in whatever way we can.

This is the power of philosophy as it can help us in a variety of ways and validities. But it never means that challenges are not there. There are many, take for instance news and the modern post-truth world – News is made of something new and novel which we don't already know. Nowadays, when we see some altruistic and empathic acts of humanity that becomes great news because that seems something Novel to our mind which we don't do frequently. Earlier, some cruel and Brutal acts used to be considered news, but the current pandemic has given us a chance to rethink our standard. What we used to like to watch on television or read in newspapers is quite shameful for us as our mind got used to

the negative things. Therefore some philosophical questions follow: is it not a serious humanistic defect that we consider positive humans acts something news rather than a way of life, Shouldn't we introspect more that the thing which must be a virtue is rare in our life and so on.

Adding to the humanistic crisis, it may sound a little crude, but apparently during the whole covid-19 period, for so many people, this time was pronounced to practice evil in any form. For such cruel people, the act of altruism and humanism is quite far as they didn't even perform the duty they were assigned to. I think if one can learn new skills for crisis and essential for the one's duty for which one is paid for, and if s/he doesn't acquire that skill then it should be considered immoral actor even illegal too. So many people gave excuses they don't know how to use technology and social media to teach, share, or whatever. so many teaches didn't teach, researchers didn't contribute to the ideas, private hospitals were looting the people, black marketing of medicine was at high and so on due to some confined and selfish attitude. What can we think of such people except learning the fact that

how far we can degrade if we don't use our philosophical tendency to question our myths and biases.

To conclude, we would like to cite Kalidas :

*purāṇamityeva na sādhu sarvaṃ na cāpi  
kāvyam navamityavadyam |  
santaḥ parīkṣyānyataradbhajante mūḍhaḥ  
parapratyayaneyabuddhiḥ |* <sup>x</sup>

The classical interpretation of this Kalidas sloka from Malavikagnimitram suggests that all that is old or classical is not good, nor is poetry bad because it is new, good or bad is decided by a philosophical man, only through proper inquiry as a fool and conformist mind may be led by the judgment of others. But in modern time, we need to reinterpret it because so many factors have included in society which led to so many crises including moral crisis. It is the time when we need to think that all is not rejected because it is old and not everything is condemned because it's new. It is now a trend but a crisis as well, in the name of novelty, whatever is old is obsolete and useless and new is considered to be trending. But can it be true about ethics and morality? Can it be applied to the ancient philosophy of life? Is it a good approach to reject the

old pearls of wisdom and values because we don't find their followers or don't find any implementation? I think its flawed reasoning to reject something on such blunder scales as it could be our fault if we couldn't apply those values in our life. Therefore, it doesn't make them obsolete. We can't consider the ancient intellectual and moral legacy obsolete because we don't find any implementation of their teaching and reasoning on the ground level, instead of we ought to introspect that it might be our failure that we couldn't apply those moral standards due to weakness of will and lack of moral courage.

## References and Endnotes

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<sup>iii</sup> Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. R. A. H. Waterfield (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 155d. p.11

<sup>iv</sup> Hadot, Pierre, and Arnold I. Davidson. *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. 110n15, attributed to Epicurus. 1995

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<sup>vi</sup> Holowchak, M. (2008). *The Stoics: A Guide for the Perplexed*. United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic.p.53

<sup>vii</sup> Nussbaum, M.C. (2013). *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*. Princeton University Press .p. 38

<sup>viii</sup> Seneca. I. Gummere , R.M. (2016). *Letters from a Stoic* .Create Space Independent Publishing Platform. letter no-16, p.79

<sup>ix</sup> (Mahabharata 5.15.17)

<sup>x</sup> in Kalidasa , *Malavikagnimitram* , vol-1,sutra-2