Selected High School Essay

Philosophy and World Problems

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To the question "What constitutes the scope of philosophy?", a witty response would be "What doesn't?" From the heated argument of a mother and a daughter over clothing habits to the very existence of reality, it is within the realm of possibility to take any problem, and philosophize it. Nonetheless, an area that has been dominating the minds and works of philosophers is the notorious "world problems". While philosophy is deeply influenced by the world problems, there exists a relationship between them in which philosophy is the tool used by humans to create concepts in order to find solutions to these world problems.

We face world problems in every area of life, and what ties them together is the characteristic of them to shift our knowledge and frameworks. World problems are often common to the whole of humanity but they are personal as well. This is because any of them is sure to catch attention of media or people around us, thus influencing our own knowledge as well. Even if they don't, we still live through the consequences of them. When climate change came to a point of no-return, existing paradigms regarding it have become altered forever and new approaches have come to be included in the scientific discourse. Some argued it was now impossible to solve it, some argued carbon-neutral systems should be the way to go and some even argued it didn't exist at all, because winter is still cold (Kroesen 277). Following this development, individuals also formed their own views regarding it and became more aware of the climate they are surrounded with. This shift in discourse and frameworks is what makes a problem global.

Knowledge could be interpreted as acquired in two different ways: Personal and shared. Shared knowledge is knowledge that we learn from books or from other people, any knowledge (be it the truth or unapologetic lies) that is accessible to the whole of humankind. Personal knowledge is unique to ourselves and is made up of every single experience of our own lives and every single thought that occurs to our minds as individuals. It's impossible to escape personal knowledge because every human has previous experiences which shape their understanding of the world and form biases, prejudices and their common senses. As Michael Polanyi has put it, no knowledge can truly be objective because we can't detach our rationality from any of these. From this perspective, world problems are such because they alter both shared knowledge and personal knowledge.

It could be argued that world problems are intrinsic to the course of history and have always been active in sculpturing philosophy and the very act of thinking. Opposing the Cartesian framework that it is possible to separate subject and object, and be completely free of any exterior influence; Heidegger developed his idea of "Dasein", which translates to "being-in-the-world" (Dreyfus 13). As humans who are present in the world right now, living through its mysteries; we are inseparable from any world problem and any action of ours is in relation to the world in which we live in and which we have created. This relationality is something existential philosophy is rather concerned about. World problems add new data, new information and new knowledge to the pile of shared knowledge, and naturally our way of living changes. What knowledge is accessible to us is altered by every single world problem. They shape our identities and beliefs perpetually. We are naturally inclined to philosophizing anything, due to our curiosity which we developed in a phase of evolution that lasted millions of years. Thus, any world problem or anything "in-the-world" is expected to influence the ideas of philosophers. It was his Spartan upbringing that caused Plato his contempt of democracy. It was the English Civil War and its bloodshed that made Hobbes a staunch defender of political absolutism.

We define our frameworks, our identity and our knowledge only in relation to the world and its problems we are facing. The sociologist Vilfredo Pareto has demonstrated this idea as a Machiavellian fable where lions who represent rationality, establishment and authority, and foxes who represent dissent, skepticism and disobedience are in a constant state of conflict against each other. Whenever either "foxes" or "lions" hold power, their paradigms of knowledge are held as "truth" (Sanford 346). Take, for example, terrorism. It's a word notoriously difficult to define and neither the UN nor any other intergovernmental organization has a shared definition it. Each dictionary and each state has a different definition. This is due to the different traumas each society faced due to terrorism, as well as disputes regarding what draws the line between being a terrorist or not. Often, it's the perspective and personal knowledge of an individual which makes them see an action as terror or not, due to biases and past experiences. Someone who believes in xyz, for the sake of the argument, would be more sympathetic to any act committed for the same belief. The same act done by a different group would be less appealing. Even if both cases were the same, it's our own beliefs that create the difference, which doesn't distort the exterior world but does our own understanding and interpretation of it. Today, right now, in a world where power is diffusing from authorities to the individuals due to the prevalence of technology and social media, knowledge is perhaps more contextual than ever. As world

problems unfold, so do new frameworks of philosophy and we cannot think of them free from the influence of each other.

Just as world problems influence philosophies of a time, philosophy also controls world problems and how humans approach to them. As we philosophize, we are creating new ways and paradigms to look at world problems and lead the direction to where they are going, for every concept and every aspect of world is really constructed by the human intelligence. We see similar objects, similar experiences and even similar humans, all tied by a shared property, and call them by a common name: "Tables", "sorrow", "philosophers". Take, for example, stock markets. A market could be a bull-market where stocks are going up or a bear-market where recession dominates. We, as individuals, assume that this problem is something out of our control but the very element that drives stock markets is our expectations: If we are faithful that the prices will go up, only then they will. This phenomenon isn't unique to finance. Any area of knowledge has similar experiences. Identity is a great example. As Foucault has demonstrated, identity is not something metaphysical and fixed but rather changing and in relation with the world. What makes us think it is fixed is the knowledge dictated by stakeholders of power, the aforementioned "lions". In order to control the bodies and minds of individuals better, they create mechanisms such as prisons, schools, shopping malls. The common property of all of these is that they promote a particular concept, a particular philosophical notion to better control us. Because we are the ones who construct these concepts, their meaning is up to us.

An example would be Covid-19, a tremendous world problem. A few years prior, entering a bank with a mask on would alert the security officers. Now, however, it is the natural thing to do. What triggers the security officer in the first case and soothes them in the second is the concept associated with masks based on the time and context, which is always changing. Even a single world problem's state at a moment changes concepts associated with it. Let's continue with the example of Covid-19. When mask mandates were lifted and the spread of Covid-19 started decelerating, it was found by experts in the field of psychology that the reason a lot of teenagers nonetheless kept using masks was to escape social anxiety by not showing their faces. As Massumi has put it, concepts are bricks with which one can build a courthouse of reason or break the glass, and throw it out of the window (Massumi xii). Concepts form our understanding of the world and give a meaning to it. From this perspective, the concepts philosophers create also influence our systems and thus, make the world a different place. As such, a role of philosophy is to help overcome world problems, because only philosophy is as strong as discarding and sculpturing concepts. It is philosophy that determines whether a sharp metal object saves or takes a life: When the

concept is removed, there is little difference between the scalpels of surgeons and knives of thieves.

In sum, philosophy is vastly interconnected with world problems. There's a cycle between them in which world problems constitute our understanding of the environment surrounding us (which includes personal and shared knowledge and philosophy) and philosophy creates ways to respond to the world problems, by creating concepts based on time and context. With this cycle, it could be seen why philosophy and world problems are deeply interconnected to each other.

References

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