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### THE CONCEPT OF DYNAMISM IN HELLENIC CULTURE: THE SAMIAN PARADIGM

The Samian Melissus said: «If Being is divided, it moves; and if it moved, it could not Be»<sup>1</sup>. It is the very dynamism of change that is inherent in the finite world articulated by Hellenic philosophy in its measure of man, society and the absolute. The harmony of Greek cosmology, aesthetics and epistemology bears witness to this.

In this paper Samos is taken as a microcosm of the interdisciplinary harmony in Greek philosophy's quest for the meaning of man, society and the absolute. The Samian approach to the true, the good and the beautiful indicates the *dynamis* not only of matter, but also of man, «the measure of all things»<sup>2</sup> whose quest for knowledge never reaches full achievement because of the «obscurity of the subject, and the shortness of human life»<sup>3</sup>. Samos offers for metaphysical consideration the significance to the world of the legacies of Melissus, Aristarchus, Pythagoras, Polycrates and Eupalinus; its acropolis; and the famous temple of Hera as well as the Temple of Twelve Doors; its great baths where Cleopatra bathed; its paleontology museum; and its art museums at Pythagoreion and Vathy whose treasures have lately been shared with the Louvre in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

Recently a poet delivered a lecture in poetry because he felt that in stanzas the «... meaning's made more plain as sight by lenses».

1. Kathleen FREEMAN, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1956, p. 50. This is fragment 10 of MELISSUS of SAMOS.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 125, fragment 1 of PROTAGORAS.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 126, fragment 4 of PROTAGORAS.

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He added that «In verse you can be formal and say serious things with a lighter touch. The rhyme makes the thing dance a bit while with prose you have to walk»<sup>4</sup>. Assuming that there is truth in this statement, we summarize this paper before it is presented, and we do this with a poem by Richard Wilbur:

#### ICARIUM MARE

We have heard of the undimmed air  
Of the True Earth above us, and how here,  
Shut in our sea-like atmosphere,  
We grope like muddled fish. Perhaps from there.

That fierce lucidity,  
Came Icarus' body tumbling, flayed and trenched  
By waxen runnels, to be quenched  
Near Samos riding in the actual sea,

Where Aristarchus first  
Rounded the sun in thought; near Patmos, too,  
Where John's bejewelled inward view  
Discerned an angel in the solar burst.

The reckoner's instruments,  
The saint's geodic skull bowed in his cave  
Insight and calculation brave  
Black distances exorbitant to sense,

Which in its little shed  
Of broken light know wonders all the same,  
Where else do lifting wings proclaim  
The advent of the fire-gapped thunderhead.

Which swells the streams to grind  
What oak and olive grip their roots into,  
Shading us as we name anew  
Creatures without which vision would be blind?

This is no outer dark  
But a small province haunted by the good,  
Where something may be understood  
And where, within the sun's coronal arc,

We keep our proper range,  
Aspiring, by our lashed and irised sight,

4. Seamus HEANEY, Irish poet, "Versus for a Fordham Commencement", quoted in *The New York Times*, May 21, 1982, p. C 17.

To gather tokens of the light  
Not in the bullion but in the loose change;

This poem expressed more clearly than prose not only the dynamism of Greek culture and the philosophy of this culture, but also the harmony of a culture for which the measure of all things is man, who with his human measurer attempts to measure both the measurable and the immeasurable as «we grope like muddled fish» to strive

«To gather tokens of the light  
Not in the bullion but in the loose change».

The dynamism and harmony bears witness to an overarching anthropocentrism that lends itself easily to the speculation of metaphysics. Even the gods and the Hera Temple are for man who, in defying and appeasing the gods, edifies and appeases himself. Anthropocentrism here is not a centering of individual selfishness, but a grounding in the being of the self, society and the absolute. There is a real sense in which, on the island of Samos, which we have chosen as our model here, the spiritual overtones of art, of the aesthetic, and of the spiritual which is in great part the being of the aesthetic object, and of its relatedness to man, allow for a noble kind of anthropocentrism. The walk from the sea along the Via Sacra to the Hera Temple is not only a physical walk. Nor is it only a theological trek. It is a participation in the aesthetic. The spirituality of this aesthetic is, or at least can be, a progenitor of peace.

So vibrant is this aesthetic that Samos, perhaps an area near the Heraion, might be a good locus for a peace center. Two attempts have been made for centers for international peace in areas of Greek culture, where art, in this case, ruins are located. One was by Eva Sikelianos, the wife of a Greek poet, who tried to make the center for world peace at Delphi. She did not succeed in this, but she did achieve the revival of Greek tragedy in the ancient theater at Delphi (for the first time since antiquity). The other essay for a center for world peace in a land of Greek culture was at Bellapais, Cyprus.

5. Richard Wilbur, "Learium Mare", *The New Yorker*, June 19, 1979, p. 34.
6. *Ibid.*

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Here there was to be the harmony of theology, the intellect, and the spiritual of art. Ambassador Zenon Rossides of Cyprus proposed this at a party where Mrs. Sikelianos expressed loss at the hope that there would one day be a center for peace in the area of her homeland. Archbishop Makarios gave land and money. Ambassador Rossides also gave money. Cressie Crosby contacted R. Buckminster Fuller who went to Bellapais several times to measure and plan. In fact, on one occasion he went with Mrs. Teresa Rossides, the Ambassador's wife. U Thant of the United Nations was also eager for a center in that part of the world. The center, he felt, could serve as an annex for the United Nations. Circumstances prevented the founding of this center near the ruins of the old Abbey in Bellapais, but what is important for our purposes is the suitability of such centers in areas of Greek culture where there is a harmony of disciplines, a philosophy of proper anthropocentrism, and of the dynamism and power of being to unfold its potentialities. Michael Lekakis, an artist of Greek descent, offered to have one of his sculptures enlarged three times and cast in bronze placed in Bellapais. It is not irrelevant to state that this work, *Apotheosis*, is now in the Ethniki Pinakothiki Museum in Athens. This exaltation of man seems to be part of the creative process in Greek sculpture which began with Cycladic art 6000 years ago. Even in Cycladic art there was anthropocentrism, harmony, and the articulation of a great dynamism both of the artist and of the marble that he forced to reveal itself.

Everything in Greek art has to do with a dynamism, with something very much like the articulation of the essences of Plato and the substance theory of Aristotle. This dynamism went through different stages, for example, the theocentric, geocentric, heliocentric and anthropocentric. *Dynamis* is power, it is potency, it is the *sine qua non* of change and becoming. It is, indeed, the very becoming of the ever-to-be-achieved man not only of Plato as well as of John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead. Greek culture from 4000 B.C. in the time of the great cycladic sculpture that has influenced so many through the years, including Constantin Brancusi, was anthropocentric<sup>7</sup>. In Samos, even the great temples, including those on the acro-

7. Barbara Rose, "Talking About Art. Coming to America: Secrets of the Cyclades", *Logue*, May 1979, p. 90.

polis, the Twelve Doors<sup>8</sup>, and the world-renowned Hera Temple, were built more for man than for God<sup>9</sup>. The ground plans of these temples always had the proportions of the human figure. This proportion of the human figure was worked out not only in Greek temples but also in Egyptian temples. Cycladic art has the human figure sectioned off. Primitive art in Greece went through all the transformations of the human figure. Sometimes the torso is raised, or the legs are smaller or longer in relation to the head<sup>10</sup>. One may compare these changes to a kind of conjunction of forms or of planets moving together.

Pythagoras, the great mathematician was born in Samos. Though he worked in the southern part of Italy, the mathematical work accomplished in Samos has been incredible. The town where he was born, Pythagoreion, formerly Tigani from the sixteenth century and Pythagoreion since 1955, has been of architectural importance since the sixth century B.C.

"... When the majority of Greek cities were still unfortified, the Samian city already was surrounded by a strong ring of walls: a mighty land wall which encircled the mountain of the city measuring 235 meters in height; a sea wall in the south; and a wall around the harbor which was much larger during antiquity. These three parts of the wall total almost 6.5 kilometers in length, enclosing an area of approximately 1.2 square kilometers. The city wall must already have been built before 525-524 B.C. because the historian Herodotus, who spent several years on the island around 460 B.C., investigating the local history and monuments, recounts the following: a group of Samians who were in opposition to the famous tyrant Polycrates and wanted to overthrow him asked Sparta for help in their endeavor. The Spartans besieged the well fortified city for 40 days, but could not overcome

8. This is probably the most perfect ruin as a ruin that I have ever seen. It was a temple, became a basilica, and now has beautiful trees growing out of its roof. It is surrounded by pastureland and inhabited only by an occasional goat and many olive trees.

9. Cf. Manolis ANDRONIKOS, "Samos: the Heraeum", in E. V. Miltas, ed., *The Greek Experience*, New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. 1974, pp. 179-189.

10. Cf. Greek Art of the Aegean Islands, catalogue for an exhibition of the same name at Louvre in Paris and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, April 26 to Sept. 3, 1979 and Nov. 1 to Feb. 10, 1980, respectively, pp. 43-87. The exhibition was sponsored by the government of the Republic of Greece complemented by a loan from the Musée du Louvre.

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the city wall and returned to Sparta in 524 B.C. with their mission not accomplished<sup>11</sup>.

Pythagoras, we must remember, was in his prime in 530 B.C. Though he left no written works, he has left a permanent mark on Samos, just as did the ancient city's architects<sup>12</sup>, including Eupalinos the builder of the famous aqueduct. We must recall also the tenacity of Aristarchus and the folly of those who did not believe him in the second century. Aristarchus, who said that the earth revolved around the sun, was accused of impiety because his theory troubled «the repose of the gods»<sup>13</sup>. Giordano Bruno, Galileo and Copernicus owed him a great debt.

In Vathy, there is a Melissus Street, Odos Melissou, commemorating the second Samian philosopher who tried to put order into the universe or who tried to establish the whariness of the universe. We should remember, too, that Thales and Heraclitus lived a short sail away at that time.

Aristotle in his *Physics* speaks about Melissus:

«If one signifies an 'indivisible', ...it excludes quantity (as well as quality); and therefore, the One Being not being a quantum, cannot be 'unlimited' as Melissus declares it to be; nor indeed 'limited' as Parmenides has it, for it is the limit only, not the continuum which it limits, that complies with the condition of indivisibility»<sup>14</sup>.

St. Thomas Aquinas, in his *Commentary upon the Physics of Aristotle*, says that, if we say that being

«is substance only without accident, consequently, there is no quantity, for quantity is an accident, and this is against the position of Melissus. He, indeed, said that being is infinite, and consequently, it is quantified, because the infinite, strictly speaking is only accidentally, i.e., to the extent that they are simultaneously with quantity. Since Melissus posits infinite being, he cannot, therefore, posit substance without quantity. If, therefore, it is substance and quantity together, it follows that

11. Cf. Renata TOLLEKASTLINGER, transl. Ellen C. Riemschneiber, "Excavations on the Acropolis of Samos", *Archaeolog.*, vol. 32, No. 3, May/June 1979, pp. 6-14.

12. FREEMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

13. *Petit Larousse*, Paris, Librairie Larousse, 1962, p. 1161.

14. ARISTOTLE, *The Physics*, transl. by Philip H. Wicksteed and Francis Cornford, New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1929, p. 25.

there is not only one being, but two; but if it is substance alone, it is not infinite, because it will have neither magnitude nor quantity. What Melissus says, viz., that being is one, can, therefore, in no way be true»<sup>15</sup>.

St. Thomas believes, of course, that beings are many and that being is many and not one only, and that being can have many meanings. In Chapter 5 of Book I of his commentary, he devotes the whole chapter to refuting the argument of Melissus. Could Aristotle's interpretation have been wrong?

Could it be that on an island where there was a great interdisciplinarity of disciplines, where archaeology, architecture and theology met in philosophy, that Melissus might have seen more than Aristotle thought? Could it be that the great blast of being thrust upon the noetic and ontological landscape by the teacher of Melissus, namely Parmenides, had more meaning in Melissus than has been thought until now? Perhaps his conclusion that being is «one, infinite and immobile»<sup>16</sup> allows for mobility within the immobility. Melissus was a «Samian general who conquered the Athenians in 442»<sup>17</sup>. He could not have believed in immobility in the literal sense.

Frederick Copleston says:

«Aristotle tells us that the One of Melissus was conceived as material. Now, Simplicius quotes a fragment to prove that Melissus did not look upon the One as corporeal, but as incorporeal. «Now, if it were to exist, it must need to be one; but if it is one, it cannot have body; for if it had body, it would have parts and would no longer be one». The explanation seems to be indicated by the fact that Melissus is speaking of an hypothetical case. Burnet, following Zeller, points out the similarity of the fragment to an argument of Zeno, in which Zeno is saying that if the ultimate units of the Pythagoreans existed, then each would have parts and would not be one. We may suppose, therefore, that Melissus too is speaking of the doctrine of the Pythagoreans, is trying to disprove the existence of their ultimate units, and is not talking of the Parmenidean One at all»<sup>18</sup>.

15. Florence M. Hetzler, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nature: Book I of the Commentary upon the Physics of Aristotle*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 1959, pp. 39 and 50-55.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. I, New York, Harper Torchbooks, 1958, p. 30.

18. Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. I, Westminster, Maryland, The Newman Bookshop, 1946, p. 53.

Why not take the fragment of Melissus which says: «If Being is divided, it moves; and if it moved, it could not be», and conclude from that we are all divided. We move. We have being. We are not being. We are dynamic, and we are trying to put together the parts so that we can be real *anthropoi* in the world where there is harmony. We, like the Greeks, must rediscover that harmony and its power. The Greek legacy of culture and philosophy is there to be rediscovered with new meanings and insights. The spirituality of aesthetic objects, the worship of Hera, the building and the talking of baths, and the looking at the heliocentric universe will revalidate a healthy anthropocentrism with ever new power for more human becoming. The study of Greek anthropocentrism and humanism may force the world to look more carefully at the necessity for a freeze on the proliferation of nuclear weapons. This would be a penultimate legacy. May posterity be the judge, if it is not already too late for the existence of posterity. Prof. Evangelos Moutsopoulos has seen the dynamism of Greek culture as a source to be considered in a search for a renewed morality today. He has said: «Because of its universality, classical Greek humanism would be appropriate in order to meet, at least under a remodelled aspect, moral needs of the near and remote future»<sup>19</sup>. A further study of the Samian paradigm may reveal the dynamism of the aesthetics of harmony as the model for the cosmic morality that is the quest of man in his desperate attempt not only to find his meaning, but to survive.

Research into and the rediscovery of the power of this interdisciplinary harmony may change and may clarify the words of Diotima who told Socrates of the single science of beauty everywhere that will help bring forth and nourish true virtue.

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19. Cf. Evangelos Moutsopoulos, *New Morality in a New World. Diotima*, 9, 1981, pp. 117-126.