

THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SOPHISTS' ACTIVITY

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The modern world is characterized by intense globalization processes. The content and orientation of these processes involves formation of common informational space as well as maintaining the human individuality of its participators. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of civilized society is to develop its communicative culture.

Informational Age society can be characterized as an individualized community (U. Beck) which consists of autonomous actors. That's why, it is number of individual skills in sphere of communication, rhetoric, logic, methods of formation, processing and broadcasting of information which is especially in demand today. In this situation an urgent social need for people who know how to think independently, express and defend their own position, persuade and motivate people to action, taking advantage of the only logical tools is evident.

The implementation of aforementioned tasks requires not so much technical methods as special means of "art", including elements of philosophy, logic, psychology and rhetoric. In the history of culture such kind of ambitious educational and cultural project has been already realized. It was aimed at intellectual and verbal human capabilities, their cultural meaning and necessity to rethink different aspects of social life. Ancient Greek Sophists were the initiators of this great project.

The significance of sophistic activities was often neglected and contrasted the philosophical achievements of their legendary critics and opponents, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The aim of this article is to do objective analysis of the Sophists' contribution to the formation of Western science, philosophy and value system.

The Sophists are well known intellectuals, who took an active part in social and cultural life of Ancient Greece in the middle of the fifth - the beginning of the fourth century BC. The most famous Sophists are Protagoras, Hippias, Gorgias, Prodicus, Antiphon, Thrasymachus.

The Sophist is a positive term meaning wise, experienced or just an expert. However, unusual for ancient Greek lifestyle, voluntary attitude to tradition and established values, innovative approach to education and training, depreciation for classical canons of scientific rationality has formed a negative image of the Sophists in the history of European culture.

It should be considered both negative and positive aspects of sophistic innovations to determine the contribution of the Sophists in the evolution of Western culture and science.

The most criticized disadvantages of sophistical practices are the following: conscious violation of logical laws and invention of different logical and rhetorical tricks, denial of objective truth as the goal of cognition and focusing on issues of knowledge utility, moral relativism, criticism of religion, cosmopolitanism and vagrancy and charging tuition fees as well.

Each of these negative features can be contrasted with the thesis that points to the positive aspects of sophistical practices. In the words of the culture historian Sergei Averintsev, the Sophists enriched Greek culture and contributed to “victory over inertia of pre-reflective cultural mode”.

1. Sophism demonstrated the advantages of words in comparison with arms. Logical tricks were a kind of provocation and motivation to learn language and its instrumental possibilities.

2. The Sophists neglected searching for truth that's why we can't consider them to be philosophers. However, the pragmatic setting of their tuition improved the links between theoretical and practical knowledge.

3. Renouncement of traditional values expanded freedom, developed the idea of equality for all of the people and maintained their individual moral choice. Protagoras' anthropological image of "man as a measure" involved not only the conflict with established morality, but also a formation of responsible person.

4. The cosmopolitanism of the Sophists anticipated the modern era globalization, marked by crossing the boundaries, free exchange of information, and creation of common space for traditionally isolated “atomic” cultural worlds.

Professional teaching, civilizing activities, raising the educational level of contemporaries and researches in the fields of logic, rhetoric, linguistics emphasizing the practical aspects of knowledge show us the significance of the Sophists' contribution to European culture.