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Araştırma Makalesi /Research Article

STUDY OF DEATH: IOANNIS SYKOUTRIS*

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Abstract: Professor Ioannis Sykoutris (1901-1937) was a leading University Teacher and a brilliant personality for the intellectual life of Greece. In 1930 he was elected a professor at the University of Athens. His inaugural course was on "Philology and Life". Alongside the delivery of courses at the University and the popular lectures and seminars on various subjects, not only classical, but also modern Greek and modern European literature, he continued his scientific work. He took the initiative to organize the Hellenic Library series of the Academy of Athens, which would include annotated and translated editions of texts from ancient Greek literature. In 1934 he published the first volume of the series, Plato's Symposium, and began preparing the edition of Aristotle's Poetics, which was published in 1937 after his suicide. In 1936 he applied for the position of Professor of Ancient Greek Philology at the Philosophy School of the University of Athens. From that year, and on the occasion of the introduction chapter of Plato's Symposium that referred to sexual relations in ancient Greece, it began to receive many attacks from academic circles and then from various associations and from the Holy Synod of the church. Two lawsuits were filed against him for the same matter. Sykoutris, disappointed by his social environment and the polemic he received, shut himself up and finally committed suicide in Corinth on September 21, 1937.

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IOANNIS SYKOUTRIS'İN İNTİHARI

Öz: Profesör Ioannis Sykoutris (1901-1937), önde gelen bir Üniversite Öğretmeni ve Yunanistan'ın entelektüel yaşamı için parlak bir kişilikti. 1930'da Atina Üniversitesi'ne profesör seçildi. Açılış kursu "Filoloji ve Hayat" üzerinedi. Üniversitede verdiği dersler ve sadece klasik değil, aynı zamanda modern Yunan ve modern Avrupa edebiyatı olmak üzere çeşitli konularda popüler konferanslar ve seminerlerin yanı sıra bilimsel çalışmalarına devam etti. Atina Akademisi'nin, antik Yunan edebiyatından metinlerin açıklamalı ve tercüme edilmiş baskılarını içerecek olan *Yunan Kütüphanesi* serisini düzenlemek için inisiyatif aldı. 1934'te serinin ilk cildi olan Platon'un Sempozyumu'nu yayınladı ve intiharından sonra 1937'de yayınlanan Aristoteles'in *Poetika*'sının baskısını hazırlamaya başladı. 1936'da Atina Üniversitesi Felsefe Fakültesi'nde Antik Yunan Filolojisi Profesörü pozisyonuna başvurdu. O yıldan itibaren ve Antik Yunan'da cinsel ilişkilere değinen Platon'un *Sempozyumu'nun* giriş bölümü vesilesiyle önce akademik çevrelerden, ardından çeşitli derneklerden ve kilisenin Kutsal Sinodu'ndan çok sayıda eleştiri almaya başladı. Aynı konuda hakkında iki dava açıldı. Sosyal çevresi ve aldığı polemik yüzünden hayal kırıklığına uğrayan Sykoutris, kendini kapattı ve sonunda 21 Eylül 1937'de Korint'te intihar etti.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İntihar, Zeka, Klasik Antik Çağ, Hayal Kırıklığı, Depresyon.

Introduction

Ancient Greece is not the land of the joy of life. The Greeks deeply experience the tragedy of existence, which, after all, so many myths attempt to analyze. The ancient Greek writers dealt exclusively with the pain and the cruel face of human fate.

Euthanasia as a term appears for the first time in the comic poet Poseidippus who lived around 300 BC. The meaning of the term in ancient times meant painless and peaceful death but also death with virtue and heroic suicide on the battlefield. Euthanasia is not charged with the important meaning of today's era, but for the ancient Greeks, euthanasia was a wish, a term to describe a whole happy life. According to the etymology of the word euthanasia means to die well. Euthanasia therefore means "nice death" the "well die" like Sophocles' Antigone, the death for

virtue. Euthanasia is also the brave death, the heroic suicide on the battlefield, the good and graceful death of Homer of Hector¹.

In ancient Greece normal death, whether due to natural causes or murder, is inevitable. A paradoxical type of death is suicide. Suicide is defined as a tragic death, which is chosen by those who, pressed by necessity, find them the unbearable pain of a dead-end misery. By committing suicide, one punishes, relieves, puts an end to a miasma, preserves the dignity of the person who commits suicide. When a fault disrupts social norms then suicide follows. The fault may be due to society or to the individual but in any case suicide corrects it².

Three (3) ways of suicide were generally accepted and were also practiced in ancient Greece: the gallows, the hemlock and the chasm. In particular, women seem to choose hanging more often. This is explained if we consider that the rope or the belt is a means accessible in everyday life. Others kill themselves after falling. Stabbing (sword use) seems to be popular among warrior wives, who use either their husband's weapon to kill themselves (Dianeira), or the weapon that killed their spouse. Men, on the other hand, kill themselves more often by falling into the sea or river (drowning). Others choose the sword or the mace, weapons that men, especially warriors, had access to in ancient times³.

But what are the reasons and motivations that lead the Mythicals (*Nymph Alia, Glaucus, Eunice, Herigone, Niobe, Sthenevoia, Narcissus, Cephalus, Ariadne, Aegeus, Swan-Hyria, Aias, Polyxene*, etc.) or the heroes of tragedies (*Antigone, Jocasta, Aemon, Eurydice, Phaedra, Deianeira*, etc.) to commit suicide in Ancient Greece and they are summarized below as follows: shame and disgrace, grief, despair, rejection, madness, self-sacrifice, loss of political power, old age, rage and anger.

A motif, such as that of suicide, always has certain elements formed, which a poet can repeat unchanged, limit, increase or even modify. The way a dramatic poet exploits them is usually revealing about him and his work, because it shows us the degree of his originality and creative imagination. It also helps us to better understand the literary genre in which it moves. The presence of the motif of suicide in classical drama is very strong. The

¹ Thomas Potthoff, *Euthanasie in der Antike*, Munster 1982, ss. 22-21.

² Kharis Deligiorgi, "Gynaikes Autokheires stin Arkaiotita", *Arkhaiologia kai Tekhnes*, Teukhos 98, Athina Martios 2006, s. 72.

³ Arezina Asomatou, "Oi Autokheires stin Elliniki Mythologia", *Egkefalos*, Teukhos 53, Athina 2006, s. 82.

dramatic exploitation of suicide was equally used as a motif by all three great tragedians: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The motif of suicide is widely used in the Tragedy to give particular intensity to the dramatic passion. In the surviving works of the three great tragedies, Aeschylus exploits it in four plays (*Prometheus Desmotis, Perses, Iketides, Agamemnon*), Euripides in nine (*Alkistes, Andromache, Herakles, Hippolytus, Phoenices, Iketides, Orestes, Helen, Medea*) and Sophocles in everything. Suicide, either as a central or a secondary motif, is sometimes closely tied to the character, as for example in Aedes, and sometimes it bounces out of the new situations that arise⁴.

In Classical times and especially in the tragic poetry of the 5th century BC, the phenomenon of suicide was used very often in tragedies, where the fate of the heroes was directly linked to the knowledge of the Absolute imposed by the gods, that is, the eternal order of people and things. If man acted as a scorner of this order, he would push himself and his social surroundings to annihilation, thus overturning the established order. This fact, which characterized the infamy, often led him to commit suicide as the only means of enforcing purification⁵. Tragic knowledge is accomplished in the hero of tragic poetry. Not only does he experience misery, ruin, destruction, but he reaches the ultimate heartbreak, the climax of the purification of his soul trapped in the world. Tragedy seeks the purification of the soul. Purification concerns the being of man, it is an opening to the being that arises from the experience not just of sight but of personal involvement, an appropriation of the truth through the cleansing from the concealment, the obscurity, the superficiality of our existential experiences that they sadden us and blind us⁶.

We see that in literary texts of antiquity, suicide is described as a means that brings about purification. The motif of suicide is widely used in Tragedy to intensify the dramatic passion. In the surviving works of the three great tragedies, Aeschylus exploits it in four plays (*Prometheus Desmotis, Perses, Iketides, Agamemnon*), Euripides in nine (*Alkistes, Andromache, Herakles, Hippolytus, Phoenices, Iketides, Orestes, Helen, Medea*) and Sophocles in everything. A typical example is the tragic cycle

⁴ Andreas Katsouris, *To motivo tis Autoktonias sto Arkhaio Drama*, Didaktoriki Diatrivi, Panepistimio Ioanninon 1975, ss. 205-206.

⁵ Kharis Deligiorgi, “Gynaikes Autokheires stin Arkaiotita”, *Arkhaiologia kai Tekhnes*, Teukhos 98, Athina Martios 2006, s. 67.

⁶ Karl Jaspers, *Peri tou Tragikou*, Metafrasi Theodoros Loupasakis, Ekdoseis Erasmou, Filosofia 14, Athina 1990, s. 20.

of Oedipus: Jocasta, as prophesied by the Oracle of Delphi, married her son and from this marriage they had four children, violating natural, political and religious laws. So stigmatized by men and gods, Jocasta kills herself to cleanse herself of her sins⁷.

In Ancient Greece, on the other hand, there was a law according to which those who commit suicide did not receive the same burial as others, whose lives ended normally, but were buried outside the common cemetery and even without their hand, which held the murderous instrument and inflicted the violent and fatal blows and finally their death. The hand of the suicide was buried separately from the rest of the body. Furthermore, the suicide was considered unworthy to have a mark (gravestone) with his name written on it, so that no one would know who lies in that particular grave. Of course, at this point, we should emphasize that we do not know the scope of application of these practices, as the only written source for cutting off the hand of the suicide, at least as far as the city of Athens is concerned, is Aeschines' *Kata Ctesiphon*: and if someone kills himself, we bury the hand that did the deed separately from the rest of the body."⁸. The ancient Greeks considered suicide a great offense both for religious reasons and for political reasons. But when the moral and political ideas softened in antiquity, the Cynics and later the Stoic philosophers began to teach that "the characteristic feature of the wise man is indifference to life, and death, which is simple, separation, is the means to salvation of the independence of the soul"⁹.

Already from the 4th and 5th c. BC, Heraclitus and Democritus declare that this world is strewn with snares; the former discovers this with lamentation, the latter with laughter. Democritus fully agrees that life is a pitiful comedy, yet he prefers to laugh at it rather than mourn over it. It states that the world is a vast and timeless universe made up of individuals, ruled by lawlessness, while within it people move like neurotic puppets and cause heaps of trouble before their wretched deaths.¹⁰.

⁷ Andreas Katsouris, *To motivo tis Autoktonias sto Arkhaio Drama*, Didaktoriki Diatrivi, Panepistimio Ioanninon 1975, ss. 205-206.

⁸ Aiskhinois, *Kata Ktisifontos*, Metafrasi Filologiki Omada Kaktou, Ekdoseis Kaktos, Athina 1995, s. 244.

⁹ Giannis Souliotis, «Koita!...Petao!», *Pagkosmia Anthologia Autoktonounton Poiiton (6^{os} p.X. Aionas-2014 m.X.)*, Ereuna-Epilogi-Epimeleia-Metafrasi Giannis Souliotis, Ekdoseis Armos, Athina 2017, s. 304.

¹⁰ George Minoua, *Ī Istoria tis Katthlipsis*, Ekdoseis Narkissos, Athina 2010, ss. 25-26.

In ancient Greece the image of suicide in general is rather confusing. The suicide cause concern, especially the hanged man, because there is a widespread fear that he disturbs the other dead and with his act destroys the place. But does someone actually kill themselves from boredom, the well-known (*taedium vitae*) as the Romans called it? However, isn't every suicide by definition a person tired of life? With these limitations in mind, let us attempt an account. In his remarkable work *From Autothanasia to Suicide, Self-Killing in Classical Antiquity*, Anton Van Hoof studied some nine hundred and sixty cases of suicide in the Greco-Roman world and showed that suicide affected all social classes, from slaves to the richest. Based on the same study, a percentage of around 54% of suicides is attributed to shame or despair in terms of the possibility of salvation (*pudor et desperatio salutis*), pain (*dolor*) appears in only 13% of cases, discomfort (*impatientia*) in 5 % and the burden of life (*taedium vitae*) at 2%¹¹.

According to Diogenes Laertius, the majority of Greek philosophers, after a certain age, simply put an end to their lives: Speusippus at the age of 68, Epicurus at the age of 71, the stoic Zeno, Cleanthes and Anaxagoras at the age of 72. Diogenes at the age of 80, Pythagoras at the age of 82. With these iconic examples, the idea that the completion of a philosopher's life is sealed by suicide spreads and enshrines¹².

In the total of suicides from disgust for life and discomfort, it is observed that the number of men is three times the number of women. Lucian who had realized better than anyone the fundamental absurdity of the world and considered life a crude comedy in which fortune distributes the roles, making masters and slaves, sick and healthy, beautiful and ugly, is not at all tempted by suicide. Besides, utter pessimism may well end in laughter. Finally according to Yolande Griset: "*suicide from disgust for life, taedium vitae, as described and analyzed by Lucretius and Seneca was more extraordinary than we like to imagine: in the majority of cases reported by the ancients, suicide it was about escaping from a particular situation that paralyzed the appetite and desire for life rather than disgust for life itself*"¹³.

¹¹ Anton Van Hoof, *From Autothanasia to Suicide, Self-killing in Classical Antiquity*, Published by Routledge, London 1990, ss. 164-166.

¹² George Minoua, *Í Ístoria tis Katthlipsis*, Ekdoseis Narkissos, Athina 2010, s. 51.

¹³ Yolande Grisé, *Le Suicide dans la Rome antique*, Les Belles Letres, Paris 1983, s. 70.

For the classical Athenian tragic poet Sophocles, it is cowardice to live or seek to prolong an unhappy life. For the equally great tragic poet Euripides and the later ones, death is not the difficult but the easy solution that the common man must resist. Plato in his last work *Laws* (350 BC) criticizes anyone who kills himself because he does it out of cowardice. Plato distinguishes three cases in which suicide can be considered acceptable: when, firstly, some law of the city imposes it, secondly, the person has been so disgraced that he cannot live, thirdly, when he is pressed by some painful and unavoidable calamity. In any case, Plato in his entire work shows that he himself did not consider suicide wrongful only in the following cases: when it was deemed necessary by God (as, for example, in the case of Socrates), as well as in cases of incurable disease and unavoidably unbearable bad luck¹⁴.

For Aristotle, on the other hand, the condemnation of suicide was more clear and categorical. Suicide, according to Aristotle, constituted an act, no longer against the self, but against the city-state and the common good. Therefore, according to Aristotle, next to the gods as owners of the body of the individual, the city - state should also be added. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* considers that seeking death to avoid poverty, the sufferings of love or something else painful, is not a characteristic of the brave, but rather of the cowardly person. According to Aristotle the act of suicide is evidence of a mental weakness, softness and cowardice¹⁵.

Suicide was treated either in ancient Greece as a philosophical and political problem concerning the individual and the free citizen, or as a matter of honor and moral order, or as proof of the greatness and victory of love, or even as a result of dishonor and shame. More specifically, the Pythagorean philosophers explicitly condemned suicide as an act against the harmonious arrangement of the soul, despite the fact that Pythagoras himself had taken his own life, with the evidence for the circumstances of his suicide being at least controversial¹⁶. In any case, suicide was

¹⁴ The last two cases were referred to in Plato's works *Politics* and *Laws* respectively: John Cooper, "Greek Philosophers on Euthanasia and Suicide", *Suicide and Euthanasia. Historical and Contemporary Themes*, Editor B.A. Brody, New York: Springer, 1989, ss. 9-38.

¹⁵ Aristotelis, *Īthika Nikomakheia*, (1116^a), Metafrasi: D. Lypourlis, Ekdoseis Zitros, Thessaloniki 2006.

¹⁶ Although there are several versions of the circumstances of Pythagoras' death, they all agree that Pythagoras committed suicide at the age of 85: either he committed suicide by refusing to eat anything for forty days, while imprisoned in the temple of the Muses at Metapontium in Lower Italy, to save himself from his

condemned in the environment of the Pythagorean school; on the one hand, because as an act it negated the fact that the human body was the property of God, and, on the other hand, because it disrupted the numerical relationship that connected the body with the soul as the source of movement of the body, finally subordinating it to it, as argued by one of the most important Pythagoreans, Philolaus of Croton¹⁷.

Among the ancient philosophers were defenders of suicide the so-called Cynic philosophers, who openly advised the world to do two things: either acquire mind and prudence or end their lives. In Hegesias he is given the sobriquet Peisithanatos (He who incites to death) because of the strong pessimistic elements that prevail in his philosophical ideas. Hegesias, in the 3rd century BC, a student of the founder of the Cyrene School Aristippus, taught that life is something indifferent and unworthy. Hegesias, according to both Cicero and Plutarch, with his compendium *Apocarterine* and his lectures in Alexandria, is said to have encouraged his listeners to commit suicide as a means of avoiding the miseries of life, because, as he claimed, although the purpose of life is happiness, such a thing is unattainable, at least for most¹⁸. The result was that King Ptolemy A banned Hegesias's teaching due to causing a large wave of suicides among his listeners¹⁹. In the same perspective, the cynical philosopher Antisthenes urged the mindless to commit suicide, considering that a life away from the path of Prudence was without meaning and value. The Cynic philosopher Antisthenes even argued that it was better for the wise to remain alive, unless he himself judged that he had serious reasons to commit suicide²⁰.

persecutors; or while his disciples and friends threw themselves into the fire, in order to make a way of escape for Pythagoras, when the house where they were hiding caught fire, Pythagoras himself, as soon as he came out and saw that his companions were dead, fell and he on fire: Christoph Riedweg, *Pythagoras: his life, teaching, and influence*, Translator S. Rendall, Cornell University Press, 2005, s. 20.

¹⁷ Carl Huffman, *Philolaus of Croton: Pythagorean and Presocratic: A Commentary on the Fragments and Testimonia with Interpretive Essays*, Cambridge University Press 1993, s.334.

¹⁸ Elise Garrison, *Goating Tears. Ethical and Dramatic Aspects of Suicide in Greek Tragedy, Mnemosyne*, Edition: E.J.Brill, Kolonia 1995, σ. 523.

¹⁹ Kurt Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism. The Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life*, Princeton University Press 2015, ss. 20-21.

²⁰ Nikolaos Skouteropoulos, *Oi Arkhaioi Kynikoi. Apospasmata kai Martyries*, Ekdoseis Gnosi, Athina 2006, ss. 101-102.

Suicide was praised more by the Stoic philosophers, who considered life and death to be indifferent things and taught that anyone can give up his life as soon as he realizes that his life is becoming difficult and unbearable. For the Stoics, suicide was a legitimate choice not for the mindless, as the Cynics claimed, but for the wise. If one is mindless, it is paradoxical to expect that one would attempt to look deeply into things and their relationship to oneself, only to ultimately end up making the decision to kill oneself²¹. Thus, the founder of the school of Stoic philosophy, Zeno the Citieus, committed suicide after being injured in an accident following the Stoic maxim, that is, the belief in the inseparable connection of human happiness with the dictates of the word of Nature²².

Finally, the attitude of the Epicureans could, at first sight, be characterized as disapproving, or even condemning, against suicide, since Epicurus's main belief was that for the wise, death can never be premature or painful, but nor capable of causing any good or evil, since it comes by definition at a time when the senses are absent. But precisely because the senses could not provide any reliable testimony, the Epicureans could ultimately neither urge suicide, nor prevent it by persuasive arguments²³.

At this point, it should be noted that at the center of this opposition between the Pythagorean views on the condemnation of suicide and the views on its acceptance that dominated the greater part of the philosophical thought of the classical and Hellenistic periods is placed an event of enormous historical impact and weighty theoretical importance: the condemnation and death of the philosopher Socrates²⁴. It is an event that demonstrated, as Jacques Derrida summarizes in his last interview, the fact that: "*learning to live, that should mean learning to die, taking into account, in order to accept, absolute mortality (no salvation, no resurrection, no redemption- neither for yourself nor for the other). From Plato onwards, it is the old philosophical saying: to philosophize is to learn to die*"²⁵.

The philosophy of Classical Antiquity aimed at an attempt to learn about life and death, and the last philosophical lesson of Socrates is summed up

²¹ John Rist, *Stoic Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press 1969, ss. 233-235.

²² John Sellars, *Stoicism*, Acumen, London 2010, ss. 107-134.

²³ James Warren, *Facing Death: Epicurus and His Critics*, Oxford University Press 2004, ss. 199-212.

²⁴ Carlo Pelloso, *Sokratis, Ī Dimokratia enantion tis Eleutheris Skepsis*, Ekdoseis Pedio, Athina 2021, s. 89.

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Mathainontas na zeis en telei, Synenteuksi me ton Jean Brinbaum*, Metafrasi: V. Mpitsoris, Ekdoseis Agra, Athina 2006, s. 27.

in the following phrase: "*those who philosophize correctly die studying (those who philosophize correctly actually practice dying)*"²⁶. This is, of course, the infamous phrase in the famous Platonic dialogue *Phaedo* or *On the Soul*, the text that immortalizes the last moments of the life of the absolute protagonist of Western philosophy²⁷. The philosopher then only has hope of reaching the realization of this ideal, when he tames and subdues the physical needs, frees his soul from them, leading a purely spiritual life. Therefore, since death is the separation of the soul from the body, the philosopher rejoices when he dies and is freed from the corpse of a useless body²⁸.

Ancient Greek philosophy is indeed a study of death, as already defined by Plato. In the Platonic work *Phaedo (On the Soul)* the role of philosophy is precisely to release, as we mentioned above, the human soul from the prison of the body. The purest state of the soul is when it is completely freed from the foam of the body, that is, when the person dies. True philosophy feels contempt for the body and its desires. Philosophy aims at the purification of the soul from the body. This is the main study of philosophers. Philosophy is the study of death and aims to free the soul from the suffering caused by the body²⁹.

²⁶ Platon, *Faidon i Peri Psykhis*, Metafrasi Filologiki Omada Kaktou, Ekdoseis Kaktos, Athina 1993, 67e.

²⁷ As Socrates characteristically argues: "*For me it is natural for a man who has truly devoted his life to philosophy not to faint when he is about to die and to hope that, when he dies, he will have the greatest goods there. (...) those who engage in philosophy properly there is a good chance that others will not get word that the only thing they are engaged in is dying and death*": Platon, *Faidon i Peri Psykhis*, Metafrasi Filologiki Omada Kaktou, Ekdoseis Kaktos, Athina, 64a.

²⁸ Platon, *Faidon*, Klasiki Vivliothiki, A. Arkhaioi Ellines Syggrafeis., Apodosi V. Moskovi, Ekdoseis Nomiki Vivliothiki, s. 216.

²⁹ Platon, *Faidon (Peri Psykhis)*, Prolegomena Tasos Falkos-Arvanitakis, Eisagogi, Metafrasi, Skholia: Theodoros G. Mavropoulos, Ekdoseis Zitros, Athina 2007, ss. 217-218: Cleombrotos the Ambrakiite committed suicide by jumping from a high wall and not because he was troubled by anything but "because he read a book, Plato's *On the Soul*", as Callimachus writes in his related epigram: Kallimakhos Kyrinaios, *Epigrammata*, Ekdoseis Kardamitsa, Athina 1997, s. 25. *But Plato's involvement could also be identified in the suicide of Philosophy Professor Ioannis Sykoutris, as also in the cases of Karyotakis and the highly emblematic presence of the writer Pericles Giannopoulos. Besides, let's not forget that the book of the aforementioned Platonic Dialogue was found next to the corpse of the Professor who committed suicide. On the other hand, in Professor I. Sykoutri's famous book *The Heroic Way of Life* there is a point that fully*

The only certainty mortals have is the certainty of death. In the Platonic dialogue *Phaedo*, Plato is not content to support the immortality of the soul and its supremacy. It views the body in a suspicious and hostile manner and generally completely degrades the physical condition of man. His teacher Socrates died happy freeing his soul from the shackles of the body. The role of philosophy is precisely to free the human soul from the shackles of the body. The human adventure is understood as the struggle of the divine soul to impose itself on the earthly body. In the Platonic dialogue *Phaedo* it is understood as removal and solution and liberation from the body. In the present Platonic dialogue any care for the body is harmful to the soul³⁰.

In passage 80d of the Platonic dialogue *Phaedo* ³¹Socrates reminds us that the soul is distinguished, separated, gathered into itself only through the experience of *studying death*. The soul is nothing but the concern of dying. In fact, the soul philosophizes right from the beginning; its philosophy lies in this vigil for death. The soul as life, breath of life, spirit, appears only on the basis of this multifaceted discounting of mortality. Discounting this vigil already looks like a temporary mourning, with one night. With Platonism the ego acquires an important specificity: on the one hand it

illuminates the influences he received from Plato and in general from Ancient Greek Philosophy: "(...) the heroic man spends his entire life on the dangerous front of the war. Short, because he is always, driven by his fate and alone, amorous. He marches towards death not to rest, not because he is tired of life, not because he is humbled by it, not because of withering and exhaustion of his powers. The heroic man does not suffer death; it is the last act, with which he seals all other acts. It gives them meaning, because all Life is a constant beginning, and the beginning derives its meaning from the end, of which it is the beginning. And death is the end, but also the end": Ioannis Sykoutris, *Filosofia Zois, o İroikos Tropos Zois*, Eisagogi-Epimeleia tou Nikolaou Karra, Ekdoseis Pelasgos, Athina 2013, s. 126.

³⁰ Platon, *Faidon (Peri Psykhis)*, Prolegomena Tasos Falkos-Arvanitakis, Eisagogi, Metafrasi, Skholia: Theodoros Mavropoulos, Ekdoseis Zitros, Athina 2007, ss. 213-218.

³¹ Platon, *Faidon*, 80d: “ So the soul, this invisible thing that goes to another place, similar to it, noble and pure and invisible, to Hades as it is truly called, to the good and sober god where, if the god wills, my soul must soon descend” : Platon, *Faidon (Peri Psykhis)*, Prolegomena Tasos Falkos-Arvanitakis, Eisagogi, Metafrasi, Skholia: Theodoros Mavropoulos, Ekdoseis Zitros, Athina 2007, ss. 518-519.

becomes free, it decides freely, consciously, on the other hand this freedom is referred to and connected to death³².

The Czech Philosopher Jan Patočka (1907-1977) gives his own shocking explanation of the Platonic Study of death: "*the Platonic philosopher triumphs over death in the sense that he does not avoid it, that he really looks it in the face. His philosophy is the **study of death**, the care of death; the care of the soul is inseparable from the care of death, which becomes the authentic care of life; eternal life is born from this gaze which aims directly at death, from triumph upon death. However, all this means the realm of responsibility, and, by extension, of freedom. The soul is absolutely free, it chooses its destiny.*"³³.

Therefore, the death of the philosopher Socrates, whose name divides the history of Western philosophy into a before and an after, constitutes an event that not only sparked theoretical disputes as to whether Socrates' decision not to escape, as urged by his students³⁴, and to obey the court's decision to drink hemlock is suicide or not, but it was a model attitude to life causing two of the most famous suicides in Antiquity: Cleombrotus in Greece and Cato in Rome³⁵.

So let us isolate the last words of Socrates, the philosopher who declared that philosophy is the preparation and study of death, the philosopher who refused to escape the death unjustly imposed on him by his fellow citizens, so that they ring out in all their paradox: "*We owe, Crito, a rooster to the*

³² Jacques Derrida, *Thanaton Didonai*, Metafrasi, Simeioseis, Epimetro: Vaggelis Mpitsoris, Ekdoseis Ropi, Athina 2022, ss. 27-28.

³³ Jan Patočka, *Essais hérétiques sur la philosophie de l'histoire*, Metafrasi Erika Abrams, Ekdoseis Verdier, Parisi 1999, s. 115.

³⁴ In the prologue to the Crito Dialogue the old Crito comes to the prison, before the sun even rises, to announce to his peer friend and teacher that the sacred ship has returned from Delos and therefore his death sentence will be carried out the next day. Crito entering the main theme (Chapter 3) begs Socrates to escape. Socrates begins to reconstruct Crito's arguments (Chapters 6-8). He cannot betray the moral principles he has supported his whole life: Plato, *Apologia Sokratous, Kriton*, Klasiki Vivliothiki, A. Arkhaioi Ellines Syggrafeis, Apodosi V. Moskovi, Ekdoseis Nomiki Vivliothiki, ss. 133-135.

³⁵ Cleombrotus from Ambracia is one of the persons who, as mentioned by Plato, was absent at the time when Socrates drank the hemlock. According to Cicero and Augustine, citing a poem by Callimachus, Cleombrotus, after reading the Phaedo, influenced by Socrates' moral stance, committed suicide: James Warren, «Socratic Suicide», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 121, 2001, ss. 91-106.

*God Asclepius. Give it to him, don't neglect it*³⁶. In his last words, Socrates cures both Crito and himself of the disease of following wrong opinions rather than the truth. It is the belief in the opinions of the many and not in the truth of the good that threatens their health and for this they owe a sacrifice to the patron god of medicine. Therefore, concludes Foucault, "*it is the principle of self-care that Socrates bequeaths to his students on his deathbed.*"³⁷, a heritage that establishes philosophy as the supreme science of truth. Shamelessness carries the serious risk of exposing the life of the shamelessness to death, as happened with Socrates, who as a teacher must practice shamelessness in order to set an example for his students regardless of the price³⁸.

Bellerophon, Aias, as well as historical figures such as Empedocles, Socrates, Plato and to varying degrees great minds of antiquity were melancholic by nature. Ancient Greek and modern Greek writers took their own lives, proving that sometimes a charisma can use its stinger and sting its host, perhaps in return for the gift it was given. It would not be an exaggeration to say that sometimes this genius darkens and sinks into the bitter well of its heart³⁹.

Dostoyevsky proclaims the majesty of grief in the voice of Raskolnikov, the student in Crime and Punishment ⁴⁰: *Suffering, pain are faithful companions of a high intellect, a great heart. Truly great men must, in my opinion, experience immense sorrow on earth* ⁴¹.

³⁶ Platon, *Faidon i Peri Psykhis*, Metafrasi Filologiki Omada Kaktou, Ekdoseis Kaktos, Athina 1993, s. 118.

³⁷ Michel Foucault, *Le courage de la vérité. Cours au Collège de France*, 1983-1984, Hautes Études, Ehess Gallimard Seuil, s. 104.

³⁸ A.g.e., s. 105.

³⁹ Simon Critchley, *Simeioseis peri Autoktonias*, Metafrasi: Myrsini Gkana, Ekdoseis Potamos, Athina 2018, s. 66.

⁴⁰ All of Dostoyevsky's work consists of an incessant treatment of the content, causes, and forms of this grief. Their heroes are desperate people struggling against their suicidal crush and nihilistic rebellion, people who never learn whether or not there is a God after all. He himself chose God, but fully aware that it was a pointless personal choice, and so he commissioned his heroes to express, and indeed with wonderful eloquence, the choice of the atheists, the choice of desperate rebellion: Georges Minois, *Η Ιστορία της κατάθλιψης*, Εκδόσεις Νάρκισσος, Αθήνα 2010, σ. 407.

⁴¹ Fiodor Dostoyevsky, *Egklima kai Timoria*, Metafrasi Sarantopoulos Andreas, Ekdoseis Zakharopoulos, Athina 1998, s. 98.

Arthur Schopenhauer names this category of individuals who differ from the common mind as: "*possessors of this higher consciousness: This is how this vivacity, bordering almost on the tumult, which possesses geniuses is explained. They cannot be content with the present but perhaps little, because it cannot fully satisfy their conscience. This is also due to that tireless curiosity, that incessant search for new and interesting things, as well as that constant almost unsatisfied desire to come into contact with their peers. It has often been observed that genius and insanity are two sides of the same coin, and that they blend together; and poetic enthusiasm has even given a name to this kind of insanity: Horace calls it *amabilis insania* "loveable insanity" (Od. III,4) and Wieland, in the introduction of Oberon holder Wansinn "pleasant madness". Similarly, Aristotle, according to Seneca, (De Tranquillitate Animi, xv. 16 {xv ii, 10}), is said to have said: *Nullum magnum ingenium sine mixture dementiae fuit: There is no genius without a dose of insanity.* Plato also expressed the same with the myth of the dark cave, saying that those who came out of the cave and saw the true sunlight and the really existing things (the ideas) are no longer able to see into it, because their eyes have become unaccustomed to the darkness and cannot properly distinguish the shadowy figures down there - which results in them becoming the laughing stock of those who never left it. In fact, in the Phaedrus (245a), he claims that without a certain insanity there cannot be a true poet, and (249d) that anyone who can discern eternal ideas behind temporal things will be passed off as insane."⁴²*

Schopenhauer's pessimism and Kierkegaard's anguish merge in the expiration of the century: the rational belief that the world should not exist and, at the same time, the agony of existence within the world lead to the desire to destroy the world. According to Schopenhauer the suffering experienced by each individual is an expression of a deeper suffering, the suffering of life itself. Life swings like a pendulum, from right to left, from pain to boredom, these are the two essential elements that make up life. Every human life is an inescapable succession of boredom and suffering; man escapes the one to become entangled in the net of the other. Our course is merely an incessantly interrupted agony, a moment by moment repulsed death; our spiritual activity is minute by minute pursued boredom. With each exhalation we expel air but death invades us. We march towards a goal death, which we push as far away as possible, animated by a

⁴² Arthur Schopenhauer, *Megalofyia kai Parafrosyni*, Prologos-Metafrasi Giannis Pediotis, Ekdoseis Iridanos, Athina 2016, s. 10.

mysterious, inconceivable force, the will to live, which subdues even the most miserable⁴³.

Albert Camus, in turn, emphasizes the involvement of other sciences in order to finally explore the mystery behind the act of suicide: "*Thus, through sciences so disparate, the cry at the end of their course resonates with the same way. We feel that there is a common climate in the minds of great thinkers. (...) Living under this suffocating sky dictates that you must leave or stay. You need to know how to leave, in the first case, and why you stay, in the second. This is how I define the problem of suicide and the interest that someone can show in the conclusions of existential philosophy*"⁴⁴.

Such a special spirit was Professor of Philology Ioannis Sykoutris, a heroic and at the same time tragic form of Greek letters and thought, an explosive nature, always unsatisfied and unreconciled⁴⁵. Sykoutris was a classical philologist but his interest in Greek and foreign poetry as well as his effort to raise the spiritual level of the place moved the people of modern Greek literature who had special love and admiration for him. Sykoutris's interest in modern Greek literature is documented by his lectures on Kostis Palamas' Dodecalogue of Gyphtos, his article on the mandatory teaching of Modern Greek Literature at the University and in Secondary Education and his suggestion to the Academy of Athens about the need for critical editions modern Greek literary works starting with Dionysios Solomos⁴⁶.

The suicide of Sykoutris was identified with his ideology, his personal philosophy towards the phenomenon of existence and remained in the memory of the world as an act of protest against the academic establishment that refused to accept him in its bosom. Sykoutris committed suicide in September 1937 at the age of 36. Sykoutris saw death as the vindication of a heroic life. Long before making the decision to kill himself, he proclaims the following: "*The life of a heroic man (..) can only be short. (...) Short, because the heroic man spends his entire life on the dangerous front of the war. Short, because he is always, driven by his fate*

⁴³ George Minois, *Î Istoria tis Katathlipsis*, Ekdoseis Narkissos, Athina 2010, s. 389.

⁴⁴ Albert Camus, *O Mythos tou Sisyfou, Dokimio gia to Paralogo*, Ekdoseis Kastanioti, Athina 2007, ss. 48-49.

⁴⁵ Dionysios Alikaniotis, *Ioannis Sykoutris, Î Zoi tou 1901-1937*, Ekdoseis Kaktos, Athina 2008, s. 23.

⁴⁶ Petros Khartokollis, *Îdanikoi Autokheires, Ellines Logotekhnes pou Autoktonisan*, Ekdoseis Vivliopoleion tis Estias, Athina 2003, ss. 93-94.

*and alone, amorous. He marches towards death not to rest, not because he is tired of life, not because he is humbled by it, not because of withering and exhaustion of his powers. It is the last act, with which he seals all his other acts. And death is the end, but also the end.*⁴⁷.

In 1919, he retroactively enrolled as a sophomore in the Philosophical School of the University of Athens, from which he graduated in 1922. During the years of his studies, financial problems continued, but he met his needs by working as an assistant in the Study Room of the Philosophical School. In 1925 he was awarded a doctorate and left to study Classical Philology in Germany, where he remained until 1929. He studied at the universities of Berlin and Leipzig under great philologists such as Ulrich Vilamowitz and Werner Jaeger. Those years were the most productive in philological studies which he published in many philological journals. After his return to Athens he began to teach in Arsakeion and in 1930 he was elected professor at the University of Athens. His inaugural course was on Literature and Life. Alongside the delivery of courses at the University and the popular lectures and seminars on various subjects, not only classical, but also modern Greek and modern European literature, he continued his scientific work. He took the initiative to organize the Hellenic Library series of the Academy of Athens, which would include annotated and translated editions of texts from ancient Greek literature. In 1934 he published the first volume of the series, Plato's Symposium⁴⁸, and began to prepare the edition of Aristotle's Poetics, which was finally published in 1937 after his death.

Two years after the publication of the Symposium in 1936, he applied for the position of professor of Ancient Greek Philology at the Faculty of Philosophy. In this particular year there is a violent attack against the chapter of the introduction of the Symposium, but especially against Sykoutris himself who was unjustly accused of atheism and defamation of the ancient ancestors. In the spring of 1937, Sykoutris publishes a pamphlet entitled The Campaign against the Symposium, with which he tries to

⁴⁷ Ioannis Sykoutris, *Filosofia tis Zois, o Íroikos Tropos Zois*, Ekdoseis Pelasgos, Athina 2013, s. 126.

⁴⁸ Minos Kokolakis, «Symposiaka, to Khroniko mias Ekstrateias», *Anti*, Periodos B', Teukhos 160, 2309/Athina 1994, ss. 40-52: where there are numerous favorable reviews and comments from foreign and Greek philologists and writers, including the Professor of Theology Grigoriou Papamichail, the Director of the Estia newspaper Achilleas Kyros and the journalist Spyros Melas, who had spearheaded the protest against the magazine Anemoni for the daring poems of young people of his associates, mainly Napoleon Lapathiotis.

demolish all the baseless accusations of his critics. Frustrated by his social environment, by the university community and by the polemic he received, he closed in on himself and eventually committed suicide⁴⁹.

Ioannis Sykoutris committed suicide in Corinth on September 21, 1937. Next to his body were found the medicinal bottle containing the poison he had consumed, as well as Plato's book entitled *Phaedon* or *On the Soul*. The suicide of Sykoutris was connected with his ascent one autumn afternoon to Acrocorinthos, where he sat down and wrote a short introduction to the hitherto unpublished *Poetics* of Aristotle, translated and with interpretative comments by his old teacher Simos Menardo. The text of the introduction, as it is written in the third person, creates the impression that it was written by a man who wanted to distance himself from the subject he was concerned with, or who saw himself from the position of a man who had already crossed over to the other side. The way in which this last text of Sykoutris ends reinforces the impression that it was written by a man who considered himself already dead: "*He hoped that they would arrive... But the love of death is stronger than any love: love of people, love of education, love of earth and light (...)*"⁵⁰. Returning to his hotel room in Corinth he ended his life.

But what was it that made Sykoutris commit suicide? The common impression is that he bent morally, psychologically and physically after the persecution he suffered from the conservative majority of the professors of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Athens. This persecution was attributed to the jealousy of the professors who did not want Sykoutris among them in any way. Grigorios Xenopoulos writes characteristically about the above unjust attitude of the professors of the University of Athens: "*In no way do they want Mr. Sykoutris as a regular professor of the University of Athens. First, because Sykoutris accepts both languages (Katharevousa-Dimotic), secondly because he admires Palamas and truly loves our new literature and thirdly because he has value, great value, as perhaps no one else has among the younger ones. Well, how can they deny him this value? But they can perfectly say: yes, good, but what should we*

⁴⁹ Petros Khartokollis, *Ídanikoi Autokheires, Ellines Logotekhnes pou Autoktonisan*, Ekdoseis Vivliopoleion tis Estias, Athina 2003, ss. 98-99.

⁵⁰ *Aristotelous Peri Poiitikis*, Metafrasi Simou Menardou, Eisagogi, Keimenon kai Ermineia ypo Í. Sykoutri, Akadimia Athinon, Elliniki Vivliothiki, Arithmos 2, Ekdoseis Í. Kollaros, Athinai 1937, s. 148.

*do with him who is an atheist, antichrist, immoral, leftist, communist and the pan-Hellenic public opinion has revolted against him?*⁵¹.

As with Karyotakis, the voluntary death of Sykoutris could have had the meaning of protest. Like Karyotakis in his last letter from the beach of Preveza, Sykoutris from the heights of Acrocorinthos, gazing at the sea, is convinced that fate, life, people are chasing him from everywhere, slowly dragging him into an abyss. With his suicide, Sykoutris wants to preserve what he considers most valuable in his life, his values and his struggle for a higher, richer and more intense form of life⁵². In any case, however, Sykoutris had his soul directed towards a higher aristocracy of the spirit⁵³.

The place of Professor Sykoutri's suicide is not random, in fact it was consciously chosen by him. In 1936, a year before his suicide, he was preparing the opening speech he was going to give in the ancient theater of Corinth for the Beethoven festival, which was eventually postponed. In the aforementioned speech he speaks with words of praise and special admiration for the Tyrant of Corinth Periander⁵⁴, who were among the seven sages of Ancient Greece and for the myth of Arion⁵⁵.

⁵¹ Ioannis Sykoutris, *Meletai kai Arthra*, Ekdoseis tou Aigaiou, Athinai 1956, s. 23.

⁵² Petros Khartokollis, *Ídanikoi Autokheires, Ellines Logotekhnes pou Autoktonisan*, Ekdoseis Vivliopoleion tis Estias, Athina 2003, s. 123.

⁵³ Dionysios Alikaniotis, *Íoannis Sykoutris, Í Zoi tou 1901-1937*, Ekdoseis Kaktos, Athina 2008, s. 287.

⁵⁴ Periander of Corinth (668 BC – 584 BC) was the second tyrant of Corinth. Periander's reign brought enormous prosperity to the city, with his able administration Corinth became one of the richest city-states in Ancient Greece. Some sources record him as extremely brutal and violent, others as a wise and just king who eradicated injustices and distributed wealth fairly among the inhabitants. The memory of his wisdom in the 6th century BC. it was preserved over many centuries to the extent that it was ranked among the 7 sages of antiquity. The remaining six sages were Thales, Solon the Athenian, Cleovulus, Chilo the Lacedaemonian, Byas the Prieneus, and Pittacus. He protected letters and the arts and made his yard a center of intellectual and artistic creation. It hosted the poet Arion from Lesbos, held many festivals and built many buildings in the Doric style: Carlos Gomez, *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, United Kingdom: Amber Books Ltd 2019, σσ. 89–92.

⁵⁵ **Arion** was a lyric poet from Mithymna (Molyvos) in Lesbos. Arion left Lesbos early and lived near the Corinthian tyrant Periander (625 - 585 BC). He was the best guitar player of his time and contributed to the development of the dithyrambus, the hymn of the Dionysian cult, which was the forerunner of tragedy.

The place of the suicide in Corinth was chosen by Sykoutris and for another important reason because of the presence of the sea which the Professor literally loved to gaze at: "*The sea, the far and vast sea, I am drawn to look at it from afar and from away from hearing its wild roar. (...) This is why I am more drawn to the sea than a land landscape, even the most beautiful. While the sea... impersonal and monotonous as it is, it is the ideal background to project on stage everything that lives inside you. It gives you the peace, the external isolation, the nostalgic mood of the soul, which is needed for all thoughts to take shape and voice. Its waves resemble the movements of our soul, the steps of our fate*"⁵⁶.

It is believed that suicide, even when the person who resorts to it is in despair, is motivated by a desire to take revenge on someone or people with whom he is angry because he feels that he has been betrayed, rejected or abandoned. Something like this could be true in the case of Sykoutris. Professor Sykoutris, like the writer Pericles Giannopoulos and the poet Napoleon Lapathiotis, did not want to explain his decision to commit suicide with a confessional note, as Karyotakis did, perhaps because he had openly proclaimed his ideas about death. For Sykoutri only death can offer redemption from the shackles of the perishable body, it is the only truth, the only true reality for a philosopher, whose "life is but a daily study of death"⁵⁷.

There is a story about his life, which is more like a fairy tale, and it was bequeathed to us by Herodotus. Once Arion decided to travel to Sicily to collect money. There, after having collected a lot of money and wealth through his art, he started the return journey in a Corinthian ship. During the voyage the sailors decided to rob him and throw him overboard. Arion offered to give them money to save his life, but they refused. Then, he begged them to do him one last favor. To let him sing before his death. The sailors accepted. Arion, after putting on his good clothes, took the guitar in his hands, stood on the bow of the ship and sang the "standing law", a hymn to the god Apollo. Then, jump into the water. A dolphin, which was considered the sacred animal of Apollo, took him on its back and took him out to Cape Tainaro. From there Arion went on foot to Corinth, where he reported everything to Periander. He, having first verified what Arion had narrated to him, ordered the arrest of the sailors, who had meanwhile returned to Corinth, and ordered them to be put to death: Anna Gkertsou-Sarri, Arion, *Apo to Mytho stin Ístoria*, Agrotikes Synaeristikes Ekdoseis, Athina 1980, s. 151.

⁵⁶ *Me Filian Pantotinín kai Adolí*, *Grammata tou Íoanni Sykoutri stis Mathitries tou (1933-1937)*, Eisagogi A. Khristodoulou, Ekdoseis Morfotiko Ídryma Ethikis Trapezis, Athina 2014, ss. 55-56.

⁵⁷ Íoannis Sykoutris, «Apospasma apo tin Eisagogi eis ton Faidona», *Nea Estia*, 63 (738), Athina 1958, s. 517.

The inner tension, the conflict of various ideas in his soul and the eventual choice of suicide are idealized and justified in his philosophical way of perceiving life. And while Ioannis Sykoutris tried to hold on to the love of his students, he could no longer fight against the path to death. He could not bear the weakness of the life of the common man, he desired the tragic power of the hero who himself decides the limits of his life, so as not to see it ultimately debased⁵⁸.

Let's not forget the last words of the farewell letter of another great, charismatic Professor of Philosophy, a fan of the Platonic work of Dimitrios Liantini who committed suicide saying: "I am leaving voluntarily. I disappear standing, strong and proud. I have prepared this hour step by step my whole life, which has been many things, but above all it has been a careful study of death"⁵⁹.

Well-known modern Greek writers such as Antonios Kalamogdartis, Ioannis Karasoutsas, Kleanthis Triantafyllou, Periklis Giannopoulos, Kostas Karyotakis, Napoleon Lapathiotis, Penelope Delta and many others chose without the slightest hesitation the act of suicide as a sign of resistance to submission and to the blind decrees of fate. Suicide ultimately proved for them to be an act of freedom and of shaking off every tyrannical bond and imposed exterminating compromise. The fate of all these suicides as the poet Kiki Dimoula rightly observes: "*It is called the fate of the exception, of the rarity*"⁶⁰. These are charismatic personalities with high intelligence born by divine right (Jure Divino) and not even Time itself and God yet can destroy them.

Conclusion

The suicide of Professor Sykoutris reminds us that there are heroic figures in this vain world who cannot easily accept injustice, mediocrity and in no way can compromise with anyone and anything. There are charismatic personalities who stand out from the common mass, and jealousy drives some people to make it their life's purpose to dull the brilliance of these people. They may partially achieve their purpose, but they forget that these charismatic personalities are destined to overcome the barrier of time and remain immortal forever. Sykoutris's fame after his suicide did not fade, on

⁵⁸ *Me Filian Pantotinin kai Adoli, Grammata tou Ioanni Sykoutri stis Mathitries tou (1933-1937)*, Eisagogi A. Khristodoulou, Ekdoseis Morfotiko Idryma Ethikis Trapezis, Athina 2014, s. 303.

⁵⁹ Dimitris Alikakos, *Ezisa Erimos kai Iskhyros: Liantinis*, Ekdoseis Eleutherpudakis, Athina 2016, s. 344.

⁶⁰ Kiki Dimoula, *Ekklithin Omilitria*, Ekdoseis İkaros, Athina 2022, s. 69.

the contrary, it did not decrease even today his scientific work is studied in all the universities of the world with unquenchable passion and respect. The work of Professor Sykoutris went down in history, while on the other hand no one remembers his slanderers and those who harmed him and eventually led him to commit suicide.

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