



Philosophische Winterakademie
13. bis 16. Februar 2018
Wettbewerb Philosophischer Essay



1. Platz

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Does science need philosophy?

"Learning without thinking is meaningless, thinking without learning is dangerous."
- Confucius, according to the Lunyu, German translation by Richard Wilhelm

Our modern world is based on science. Technology cannot come into existence without scientific research and technology now makes up a major part of our everyday life. The church's monopoly of explaining the world is broken for several centuries now and science got the role of modelling our view on the world. Although there can be no doubt that religion is present and important for many people still today, science definitely took over the role of religion in former times, at least the assumption of universality and meaning throughout the whole life. Science is the collection of information, accumulation of knowledge, basically learning about the world and ourselves as part of the world and object of scientific research as well allowing a huge development of human society. The success experienced in learning about this world lead to euphoric scientists who eager for their next Eureka. And further success proved them right to do so.

Philosophy, however, tends to be the grandfather of the young scientist full of energy. Much older, full of life experience, but tired and with boring tales to tell. Philosophy became unpopular - natural philosophy was replaced by science, ethics by law and who needs the rest? Ask a young person what he or she thinks about philosophy. The boring stuff from lessons, long texts you cannot understand; Kant as the best example for this.

Science is cool. Science builds computers, flies to the moon (whereas religion in skyscrapers as a common joke tells us...) and provides a standard of life our ancestors never dared to imagine. This comfortable world is based on knowledge, knowledge science acquired. Who needs philosophy? The human's self-understanding is based on biology and psychology, the understanding of the world on physics and cosmology. There is basically no space for philosophy, no niche left and just no necessity. What about the quote of Confucius in this case? If we assume science to be the learning and philosophy to be the thinking, Confucius could have talked exactly about the question to discuss. Translated: Science without philosophy is meaningless, philosophy without science is dangerous. Interesting.

Stephen Hawking said "Philosophy is dead." Philosophy as mean getting information is outdated - the world just does not consist of water (see Thales of Milet), of air (see Anaximenes) or fire (see Heraclit). The origins of science might belong to philosophy on nature, but speculations of this type must be considered as pseudo-scientific nowadays. It definitely could become dangerous to think philosophically - which does not automatically mean "good" or "reasonable" - without science as neutral point of view and base of facts. Social-Darwinism never turned out to be good because it ignored science and tried to argue pseudo-scientifically. A philosopher just cannot come up with such ideas. So he does need science, too, not only because his computer he writes his philosophical essays with is based on science.