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## Editorial

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The Fourth International Conference on “Ethics, Politics, Criminality: Perspectives from Greek Philosophy and Africa” was organised by the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities in cooperation with the International Association for Greek Philosophy, the University of Pretoria the University of South Africa and various other local communities and associations. The conference took place in the city of Tshwane, South Africa under the aegis of the Embassy of Greece and was mainly sponsored by the Peloponnesian Society of South Africa. It was held from Wednesday 4th to Friday 6th May 2005 and the official opening took place at the Hellenic Community Hall while the following two days most sessions were held at the conference centre of the University of Pretoria. The afternoon and evening sessions on Thursday 5 May were hosted by the SAHETI school in Edenvale, Johannesburg.

It was a successful conference owing to the co-operation between various associations and communities both locally and internationally and it was decided to publish selected papers read at the conference in both 2005 volumes of *Phronimon*. The present issue of *Phronimon* volume 6(1) mainly reflects the spirit of this conference as the academics’ contributions deal with appropriate themes. The Executive Mayor’s address raised challenging questions at the opening of the conference and is also included here.



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## **Address by Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa, Executive Mayor of the City of Tshwane, at the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities Conference on “Ethics, Politics, Criminality: Perspectives from Greek Philosophy and Africa”, Tshwane, 4 May 2005**

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Director of Ceremonies – Dr Ladikos, Your Excellency Mr Economides – Greek Ambassador to Our Country, Academics, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted that the Universities of South Africa and Pretoria are hosting a conference on issues which are often viewed as rather theoretical when they are in fact an important basis of societal transformation. Particularly pleasing is the fact that our universities are facilitating a colloquium in a discipline which is often erroneously associated with exoticism. I am, therefore, honoured to welcome you to the pre-eminent city of scholarship in Africa. Let me say upfront that we are discussing tonight perspectives of Greek philosophy and Africa – not contrasting two systems of philosophy. Africa would be at disadvantage.

The theme of your conference, “Ethics, Politics, Criminality: Perspectives from Greek Philosophy and Africa”, raises a number of challenging questions. That is why, besides being here as Executive Mayor to welcome you all to Tshwane, I found it necessary to be associated with this project.

As you know democratic South Africa, is essentially a newly liberated country and is grappling with issues relating to criminality, politics and ethics, especially in a context where the previous regime had a warped definition of ethics. Africa itself, through the African Union, is struggling with the consolidation of ethical practice, criminal dissuasion, and political reconstruction.

The tendency among analysts, commentators, researchers and academics is to interrogate all these concepts and their manifestation in historical and purely theoretical ways, far removed from material conditions, with “scientific distance and disinterest” cited as rationales thereof. For me the question, then, is whether the concrete realities facing our society will be factored into the discourse.

In that question, of course, is implied the further question of whether deliberations at the conference will be contextualised in the sense of addressing themselves to actual experience, or be at the level of exotic

discourse. What one is raising is the age-old question of philosophy as an exclusive discipline or as a popular interrogation of popular issues.

In my view this is not an easy question to answer, given the inescapable reality that the language and the practice of philosophy require levels of understanding beyond the popular level while at the same time the issues interrogated relate to life as lived on a daily basis. The questions of truth and the good, for example, as raised by Socrates, Aristotle and Plato, are matters of daily concern to all societies, but they are hardly interrogated to the extent that the Greek philosophers did, at least outside of the academia.

Another question in my view, is whether there is any connection, real or implied, between ethics, politics and criminality. The link between ethics and politics is immediately apparent. That between politics and criminality, as tacitly or subtly suggested by your theme, is not as immediately apparent. It might well be suspected by some, especially on the political front, that your theme has already concluded that inherent in politics is some criminality. That is an issue I would be interested to hear something about, especially against a background where there has been a tendency, notably by the media, to equate African governments, in particular, with corruption and criminality.

The enduring legacy of Greek philosophy is enquiry, genuine enquiry – as opposed to sophistry or casuistry (as later propounded by Jesuits) – to determine possible solutions to life's challenges. Of course most of the concerns of Greek philosophy seem abstract, though closer scrutiny reveals a direct correlation with matters concrete. Bringing the lessons learned from the Greek philosophers into our own enquiry into questions of right and wrong, and within the theory and praxis of politics, is something we must therefore welcome.

To infuse that interrogation with African experience, both philosophical and actual, is even more commendable.

The challenge of Africa is the challenge of underdevelopment and issues of poverty, unemployment, low levels of health, and other socio-economic ills. A valid question is the extent to which ethical lapses and criminality are traceable to these challenges. If they are traceable to them, the question is whether addressing these socio-economic developmental challenges will necessarily result in an ethical and criminality-free society. Or could it be that, as developed and wealthy societies suggest – at least by virtue of the incidence of crime and unethical behaviour even in them – ethics and criminality are not necessarily linked to material and economic conditions?

And would that apply *mutatis mutandis* to the question of history? Would it mean the history of nations and the material experiences of

societies have no bearing on the level of ethics and criminality in those societies? Would that, therefore, mean that those nations taking it upon themselves to impose their ideological and geopolitical designs upon other nations of different racial and religious beliefs are not in any way influenced by the colonial history which tacitly promoted the mindset that some races and religions are inherently inferior and can therefore be occupied even against their will?

That is a question of some relevance to Africa as certain countries, Zimbabwe being an immediate example, whose ethics may not be acceptable to some western powers, and who are actually perceived to be cases of criminality by those powers, are subjected to condemnation and criticism to a point where economic sanctions are being threatened.

In an essay entitled "Authors, Authority, and the University Curriculum" Christopher Kelly makes the point that "The anthropologists perform the immensely important function of reminding us, as they constantly remind each other, that we can hardly avoid seeing non-Western societies from Western eyes, interpreting them in a way that mostly reinforces our own views... In short it is all too likely that we will see in other cultures only what we choose to see or what we put there. To succeed in the project of understanding others we must be attentive to these dangers."

One can, therefore, make the point that the very analysis and unpacking of other societies and cultures is itself a question of ethics.

As you can hear, your introduction of politics into the equation is useful in that it makes it possible for us to speak beyond individuals and their ethical dilemmas to countries and nations. It is particularly useful in the South African context as inherent in nation-building, which is a project of the new democracy, are questions of ethics and criminality. Attesting to that fact is that, as we talk, a case of alleged unethical practice, allegedly on the strength of political connections, is going through the South African courts. No one knows, as yet, whether the accused is guilty or not of the charges against him, but everyone is aware that South Africa committed to what Nelson Mandela described as the RDP of the soul.

There is a sense in which our adoption of the African model of consultation, negotiation and democracy is also responsible for our preoccupation with issues of political morality as implied by our interrogation of national and individual ethics and criminality. Our take on the matter is that ethical conduct contributes to the common good, and that, therefore, any criminality ultimately compromises not only the individual but also the nation.

From an African perspective individual existence exists only in so far as people are physically separate and distinct from others. Beyond that people are people in communal environments and therefore questions of ethics, politics and criminality are communal, societal and national in character.

It is against that background that South Africa, for example, has moral regeneration as a programme of government, the intention being to create a moral character, a product of popular participation. It is also intended to demystify and translate them into everyday questions with which not only academics and government but also the general public participate.

The real test of this conference, from a South African perspective, then, is the extent to which it is able to disrobe these philosophical questions of any esoteric halo and bring them to the level of public and popular discourse. The big challenge is to take the discourse to the public realm so that it can influence the ethics, the politics and behaviour of our citizenry.

Based purely on the fact that the organisers have seen it fit to bring these issues to open discussion, I have no doubt that in some way they will be availed for broader dissemination and interrogation.

I wish you a very successful conference.

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# Is Protagoras' Moral Relativism Unavoidable Today?

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## Abstract

*Serious problems on crime, environment etc. exist today which can only be addressed successfully on an international scale. This is only possible if humans worldwide share many values of right and wrong. Protagoras (481BC) would have denied this downright. He claimed that the existence of universal valid truths and moral values as well as the capacity to find them is impossible. This view, for not exactly the same reasons, is also prevalent today. For Protagoras and other Sophists who focussed rather on ethics, arête = virtue was a wide concept. They claimed that they could teach a more virtuous life. This in a time when traditional ethical norms for Athenians collapsed: universal norms of good and right, and its religious foundations, were lost. It had no general validity. Nothing was put in its place. Protagoras' sceptical approach was derived from his epistemological approach. In place was individual moral relativism: what is good for me, is good for me. Callicles claimed eventually that right is the right of the strongest. The possibility of foundations was denied (e.g. religious foundations) – about the gods we can say nothing. The foundations are human devices depending on subjective and contingent conditions. Today several value systems, each with its own norms as to good and bad, is well known. We have no quick fix recipes and answers for serious worldwide problems like crime (terrorism, drugs, enslaving of children, etc), animal ethics, environment, cloning, and euthanasia. For the solving of these, worldwide action is logical. But it is hardly possible if common values are absent. To what will we appeal to combat crime like terrorism? Is this possible or shall we have to fall back on Protagoras' dictum of individual moral relativism? The possibility of a common shared foundation for morality had been seriously challenged in ethics. This in the name of antifoundationalism. Like Protagoras, it is denied that there can be absolutely secure insights grounding our moral (and epistemological) knowledge.*

*Like Protagoras, it is argued that insight is rather based on purely subjective and contingent experience. I also argue that a universal absolute secure foundation for morality is unlikely. However, I argue that a limited common foundation is quite possible. Substratums in an infinite regress (foundationalism) can be avoided. However, the term "foundation" can be used without a foundationalist connotation. I argue for foundations in a limited sense as providing good reasons for accepting a conclusion. This involves a limited basis of universally accepted shared values. These shared values can be known directly by any rational being.*

Apart from differences there are striking similarities between 5th century Greece and 21st century Western world. The relative more open attitude of democracy, not only led to critical thinking and science and philosophy, but also had a negative impact on religious values. Belief in the gods was almost everywhere discredited. WT Stace (107) attributes this to the worthlessness of the religion of the time: "Any action, however scandalous or disgraceful, could be justified by the examples of the gods themselves as related by the poets and mythologers of Greece. But, in greater measure, the collapse of religion was due to that advance of science and philosophy which we have been considering in these lectures". Like today the findings of science in eg. evolution, cosmology, neuro science, and a general more critical approach led to highly critical and even sceptical views on religion. So it was in these times in Greece. "The universal tendency of that philosophy was to find natural causes for what had been hitherto been ascribed to the action of the divine powers, and this could not but have an undermining effect upon popular belief. Nearly all the philosophers had been secretly, and many of them openly, antagonistic to the people's religion... No educated man any longer believed in divination, auguries, and miracles.. The age became one of negative, critical, and destructive thought. Democracy had undermined the old aristocratic institutions of the State. And science had undermined religious orthodoxy. With the downfall of these two pillars of things established, all else went too. All morality, all custom, all authority, all tradition, were criticized and rejected. Every restraint of custom, law, or morality, was resented as unwarranted restriction upon the natural impulses of man" (Stace:108).

It is against this background that Protagoras and other Sophists flourished. They were teachers of virtue, but virtue in a much broader sense than only morality (Stace:110). Protagoras of Abdera (480 BC-411) in conjunction with what we have said above, is said to have claimed: "As for the gods, I am unable to say whether they exist or whether they do not exist".

His book *περι θεῶν* involved him in a prosecution of blasphemy. Protagoras' relativism is explicit in his famous dictum "*Man is the measure of all things; of what is that it is; of what is not that it is not*". Protagoras denies and confuses the distinction between sense and thought: whereas other Greek non-Sophist philosophers would argue that my senses are personal, private, peculiar to myself and cannot be imparted to other people; that they bind no one to myself; reason I share with other rational beings, it is a law not only for me, but for all others; it is one and the same reason in me and other humans (Stace:114). Protagoras denies this: as measure of all things, the individual human being is the standard of what is true to himself. There is not truth except the sensations and impressions of each man. What seems true to me is true for me. What seems true to you is true to you (Stace:114,115). Protagoras transfers the problem of knowledge from the object to the subject (Zeller:81). We can see this in the critical attitude as to the Sophist's view that it is not necessary to have any knowledge of a subject to give satisfactory replies as against it – another Sophist, Gorgias ostentatiously undertook to answer any question on any subject instantly and without consideration (Stace:111). This shift from the object to subject is quite evident in all varieties of contemporary relativism.

Against this we may argue that the truth will not conform to our impressions, eg if my impression is that the earth is flat. Protagoras says no – there is no objective truth, no truth independent of the subject. There is no objective truth or moral good. So if I think the Earth is round and you think it is flat, it follows that two contradictory impressions must both be true. Protagoras did not flinch from this conclusion (Stace 115,116). All opinions are true, error is impossible, and that whatever proposition is put forward it is always possible to oppose to it a contradictory proposition with equally good arguments and with equal truth (Stace 116). These "opinions" for Protagoras would also include ethical views, influenced by Heracleitos' philosophy that all permanence is an illusion. Everything is in perpetual flowing; all things flow. What is at this moment is, and the next moment is not. Therefore as we shall soon see, Protagoras can claim as he does that if a society changes, so will the validity of its moral norms.

Protagoras' philosophy amounts to a declaration that knowledge is impossible. Something of this is clearly reflected in Richard Rorty's philosophy that epistemology is to be phased out. In its place "knowledge" becomes acceptable as something rather moral, namely ethical solidarity with the particular community. The subject (community of scientists) and not the object decides by consensus what is acceptable: "They view truth as... what is *good* for us to believe. So they do not need an account of a relation between beliefs and objects called 'correspondence'... This necessarily ethnocentric answer simply says that we must work by our own lights ..My

rejection of the traditional notions of rationality can be summed up by saying that the only sense in which science is exemplary is that it is a model of human solidarity" (Rorty: 22,38,39).

However we indicated that Protagoras' relativism is an individualist relativism. This is fairly generally accepted. But is this so? Not necessarily. He gives the impression that he was already thinking in the line of a more conventionalist cultural relativism as well. Zeller (82) claims that "There can be little doubt that Protagoras regards all morals and laws as only relatively valid, *that is binding only on the human community that which formulated them* and only so long as that community holds them to be good. There is no absolute religion, no absolute morality and no absolute justice" (own italics). From this follows a more moderate approach to crime. He said that punishment is indeed necessary, but must be admitted only as a means of improvement and a deterrent and rejected the idea of vengeance (Zeller:83).

Today several ethical value systems, many cultural contexts, each with its own norms as to good and bad, do not only exist, but are more in quantity and more explicit in expression. Serious problems on crime, environment etc. exist today which can be effectively addressed successfully only on an international scale. This is only possible if humans worldwide share many values of right and wrong. Protagoras would have denied this downright. He would argue that there is no such common basis for agreement. Today we have no quick fix recipes and answers for serious worldwide problems like crime, terrorism, drugs, enslaving of children, etc. The same applies to issues which are not necessarily crime related, like animal ethics, environmental issues, cloning, euthanasia. Most religious scripts of major religions (which seems to be more enduring than the Greek religion referred to of Protagoras' time), are millennia old. They all have moral codes, but they do not make any pronouncements on many a number of contemporary issues like cloning, artificial intelligence, euthanasia or abortion.

As said for the solving of these, worldwide action is necessary. But it is hardly possible if common moral values are absent. To what will we appeal to combat crime like terrorism? According to Protagoras there is no such an appeal possible. Shall we follow Protagoras here that it is not possible, and so fall back on Protagoras' dictum of individual moral relativism or ethical nihilism?

The possibility of a common shared foundation or basis for morality is being seriously challenged by a variety of relativist ethics today as in Protagoras' thinking. Morality for Protagoras as we saw just as nowadays is culture/religion specific. This in the name of antifoundationalism, a term coined in the 1970's (Bok:350, Bernstein:8-16). Like Protagoras, it is denied

that there can be absolutely secure insights grounding our moral (and epistemological) knowledge. Likewise it is argued that insights are rather based on purely subjective and contingent experience (Bok:350). Today it is argued that universal moral codes, would amount to an ahistorical matrix or reference. No such matrix can be said to exist. As Protagoras said, there is also no way for us to find it. There are no objective permanent universal moral values. What would foundations constitute? Examples are Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*. Other well known foundations are religious (certain moral values are divinely ordained), natural law (values are part of the natural order). This order may be practical reason (Kant) or "engraved in our hearts" (Cicero), Platonist or neo-Platonist claiming that it exists outside of us objectively. In all cases, their being is independent of us and therefore not subjective. In other words they are not agent relative even though it may be situated in agents. They are eternally valid and so timeless.

Contemporary relativists describe this as being tantamount to objectivism: there can be no secure foundation for morality whether religious or of a natural order or whatever (Bok:351, Bernstein). Neither can there be a common foundation when there are a plurality of cultural contexts. It is deduced that there are no cross cultural objective referees or norms. However contemporary relativists are mostly not individual relativists. Unlike Protagoras, they would not claim that there are no values that can be adhered to. They even would not claim that the values have no validity. Contemporary relativists would claim that values have validity, but in a strong sense only within a particular cultural or social context. Any values proposed to exist beyond these contexts, amount to foundationalism and so objectivism<sup>1</sup>. Relativism now means absolutely relative, dependent upon context. What is regarded as valid epistemologically or morally, is determined by cultural communities. What is right or good for one society need not be right or good for another, even when the situation is similar. The moral claim is that what is right or good in one case need not be right or good in another. This meta ethical relativism further claims that there are no objectively sound procedures for justifying one moral code or one set of moral judgements over against another (Nielsen:316). Two, three four different moral codes may be equally "justified" or "reasonable". There is no way of establishing what is "the true moral code" or what is the singly correct set of moral beliefs among conflicting sets of belief (Nielsen:316). For many like Rorty, true morality is reduced to solidarity with the ethnocentric cultural community.

Richard Rorty (23) distinguishes between three kinds of relativisms: 1) every belief is as good as the other. Self refuting 2). Morally good is equivocal, having as many meanings as there are procedures of justification. This he regards as eccentric. 3) Nothing is to be said about

either the truth or rationality apart from descriptions of the familiar procedures justification which a given society uses who share enough of one's beliefs to make fruitful conversation possible. This is the option that Rorty chooses, except he does not regard it as relativism.

The problem with relativism is that the possibility of a common universal morality is ruled out. Without shared values internationally, no common action is possible against many crimes. Recently (May 2005) the news reported that no laws exist nationally and largely internationally, to counter trafficking in human beings, including children. In South Africa alone about 3000 people disappeared which means about nine persons per day. These people are being lured by criminal syndicates and others by lies, threats, force and forced labor, and wages. Especially children are soft targets. What if there is no consensus that human trafficking is wrong? Although unlikely, there may be cultures who do not have a problem with and may argue that it is the right of parents to sell children. This is in their own interest. Mostly, however, the children and others disappear without any consent. Some may even not have a problem with telling lies or threats by force. So, it may even appear that in one cultural context child slavery or abuse may be regarded as morally commendable and in others not. This ties up with the relativist stance that cultural contexts and their moral value systems are incommensurable. There is no universal measuring yardstick or matrix to compare these incommensurable value systems and to find a common ground.

Sisela Bok (357) makes use of a myth that John Locke refers to in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* about the foundation of the world. I adapt this myth somewhat: It claims that the world is supported by a great elephant. When asked what the elephant rested upon, the answer was: a great tortoise; but being again pressed to know what gives support to the broad-backed tortoise, he replied another tortoise, and another one, and another one. And all these tortoises? Something, he knew not what. In other words the tortoises must inhere in another more substantial tortoise or a substance of a kind. The metaphor of the elephant calls for an infinite regress of tortoises. Are there tortoises, foundations all the way down? "Show me the foundations all the way down, or admit that there are none!" (Bok:352). Bernstein (16) sees in this search "downwards" a need for an absolutist rock bottom, a search for foundations an anxiety: everything is going to crumble, all fall down if there is no firm ground below. He calls it a "Cartesian anxiety", that "underneath" everything that is not to be regarded as merely arbitrary, there must be something else. The inference then lies near at hand that either the need for some impossible absolutist "rock bottom" or else infinite regress threatens any foundational claim (Bok:352).

Descartes in his *Meditations* tells of a journey of the soul, a meditative

journey of reflection on human finitude which is eminently fallible and subject to all sorts of contingencies. The terrifying quality of this journey is reflected by allusions to darkness, madness, dread if awakening from a self deceptive dream world, the fear of having “all of a sudden fallen into very deep water” where “I can neither make certain my setting my feet on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the surface – dread, fear anxiety (Bernstein:17,18). Is Descartes’ thinking on this not still applicable to our times?

Yet in our global community, practice demands practice. It is forced upon cultures and societies to decide and act upon at least some actions as just or unjust, humane or inhumane wherever they occur. A problem is that within a relativist approach it is not clear why we should stand unflinchingly for our convictions realizing that their validity is only relative.

I also argue that timeless, permanent, unchangeable, absolute secure foundations are unlikely. Now, does this mean that there are no foundations? Does the postulating of foundations necessarily imply a series of tortoises all the way down? I do not think so. The situation in epistemology where the issue is truth and so much good and right, is somewhat different, and I leave that now.

So, when it comes to ethics, I would argue that *limited common foundations* are quite possible. Substrata, tortoises in an infinite regress (foundationalism) can be avoided. So, my point is that the term “foundation” can be used without a foundationalist connotation. In a limited sense we can still talk about foundations without seeking tortoises, unchangeable foundations all the way down. It is rather a search as arguing, debate, dialogue. Search for certainty yes, but not absolute certainty. We do not provide an unchallengeable basis for belief<sup>2</sup>.

Foundations or grounds would rather be an issue of, what Kuhn, Bernstein and Ziman would say: “giving good reasons for...” Not only just to place or set the ground, but to substantiate, to justify with good reasons. Our conclusions would be considered judgements. These considered judgements, including the firmest among them, do not have a *sui generis* ontological status which would render them unchangeable (Nielsen:317).

Yet we cannot do without bases: it is indispensable for communication and deliberation about moral matters. Apart from the practical need, I think it makes sense to claim that in addition to the particular local values, common universal values are in principle possible. A pointer to this is the fact that there is a massive number of mundane beliefs and desires and concerns which run together with ours. Normal people like ourselves, in all cultures, times, see as do we the sun rising and hear the wind and feel the rain on them and the sun warming their skin. They also believe they need food to eat, water to drink and have a need for sleep, some will have young

and will realise that these young for a time need to be cared for in order to survive, they also believe there is such a thing as getting dark and it is getting light and so on. People die, people mostly do not respond with joy, but grieve. Burial rituals abound in all cultures. If we do not assume such commonplaces about other cultures than ours, we would not even understand what it is for them to have a language for us to interpret or understand. We have a common situation, common human nature, we are creatures who have beliefs, desires, intentions, needs and interests.

These communalities prepare the ground for giving us a good reason to think that one could move towards values that are held in common by all human beings and cultures. Its application can be worked out in all human societies and cultures. This basis of morality calls for no permanent matrix or guarantees of objectivity and absoluteness. It rather provides a common framework as a footing upon which to undertake dialogue, debate and negotiations within and between otherwise disparate traditions: a set of values that can be agreed upon as a starting point for negotiation or action. It is a stable component of what they can hold in common. This means that cross cultural judgements may be possible (Bok:354). Constraints on certain practices such as lying, promise-breaking, non-torture, murder and other forms of violence, would be very strong candidates for such common conclusions (Bok:354,356). Without some such basis for debate and dialogue, collective responses to threats to survival, posed by wars, environmental issues, epidemics that recognize no linguistic or cultural boundaries, would not be possible. It means that we can universally transcend agent relative values, where the specification of the reason ineliminably refers to the agent herself – Nagel calls it agent neutral, and so objective real reasons (Nagel in Hills:17). Such agent transcending morality would contribute to the value of the world (Comp. Hills:17). When we construct from whatever starting point, and sometimes within starting points like cultural contexts, rational beings presuppose that his/her proposed knowledge is not private opinion and to remain as such, but to appeal to all in principle. It has a universal intent. I therefore agree with Alison Hills (4) when she says “Reasons must, in a sense, be universal”.

Does this mean that all cultural, social and religious contexts ought to be abandoned or replaced? I do not think so. It does not follow. Reason is situated reason. In working for a critical morality, to make sense of issues like cloning, our cultural context, our traditions, are good starting points, but also returning points. There can be no simple stepping out of our cultural traditions and societies, no stepping out of our life world. We will never be without more or less local identities. We have come to be who and what we are through our own historical tradition. We are all born into cultures.

But on the other hand we are not imprisoned by contexts. We need not

be ethnocentrically hobbled by them (Nielsen:320). No belief is in principle immune to criticism and traditions can be repaired, transformed and changed. We are inescapably enculturated into our traditions as the initial situation, but here Socrates is in this contemporary respect also right that an unexamined life, is not worth living. We have the capacity to question or react in various ways. Still we need to have first been enculturated into a tradition, before we would even be able to react. In a sense tradition is the first word. We do not want an unquestionable cosy set of beliefs; we need to examine them from time to time. This examining sometimes leads to a puncture of cosy beliefs.

Furthermore, just as we are part of our life worlds and local contexts, we are also part of the world community and context. The latter is not an abstraction, but would become one, if the local contexts are denied or ignored. Many things will remain culturally religiously dependent or relative to it. This means many values are indeed culture specific and so relative to cultural/religious/social contexts. My point, however, is that this relativity to cultural contexts need not be relativism's relative to contexts. It also need not presuppose a total incommensurability.

This is where I think our limited foundations come in. Even as situated reason, our starting points can be cultural prejudgements. Gadamer would say these judgements, prejudices, in trans cultural fusion of horizons can and ought to be critically scrutinized. So, from them and in many instances without them, we can move towards a limited foundation for judgements on crime, terrorism, cloning etc. With a cluster of arrived considered moral judgements we can start to match them with our more general cultural or religious principles to see whether they are consistent with them, eg view on value of life. It is a weaving process. After examining them, we sometimes winnow out those which are no longer acceptable or perhaps inconsistent (Nielsen:317). We critically weave and unweave the fabric of our beliefs until we get for a time, but only for a time, the most consistent and firm stable package which best squares with everything we reasonably believe we know, and to which we, on reflection, are most firmly committed (Nielsen:317,318). We will arrive at extensively fixed points, points which always may obtain everywhere, anywhere, anywhen, but they are still provisional fixed points: they are in principle never beyond question, if they turn out not to fit in with the web of our beliefs and reflective commitments, commitments which will not be extinguished when we take them to heart under conditions of undistorted discourse (Nielsen:318)<sup>3</sup>.

Together with Nielsen (319) I would call this an attempt to forge a critical morality. We all have our starting points of background beliefs, cultural contexts. To scrutinize our background beliefs as well, would be what Socrates would have said an examined life more worth living. Because

this has to do with our lives. On this critical moral ground there are no unexamined ultimate, final appeal. There are no final foundational elements hidden or explicit. We seek to shuttle back and forth between considered judgements, moral principles, moral contexts, social theories until we get a firm point that would meet our reflective expectations and hopes (Nielsen:320). For example, people from many cultures may arrive at a firm moral view on drugs, rape, terrorism, child abuse. These firm views, when accepted, can be consistent with local cultural, religious value systems even though these systems may differ in many respects. For a time, and only for a time, a stable reflective balance fixed point about crime, will come to exist. But, this is part of the unending dialectical process of weaving and unweaving the patterns of our belief in order to make sense of our lives, to see things as comprehensively and connectedly as we reasonably can, and to guide our conduct.<sup>4</sup>

Saying all this we are not going for scepticism, because we do not go for merely a consensus, but a rational consensus. We will have good reasons for undistorted discourse (Habermas). This is the critical morality or fallibilism, and not relativism. In fact a critical morality would be impossible if relativism is true. There would be no comparison across cultural schemes, and we could not in principle get our considered judgements into wide effective balance. Relativism is an incoherent picture of the world in which there is an undifferentiated reality or content, conceptualizing different ways by incommensurable totalizing and ubiquitous conceptual schemes. It makes no sense to speak of alternative realities each with their own truths untranslatable into another way of thinking. "The idea that there could be wholly untranslatable conceptual scheme radically distinct from ours which would conceptualize reality in a radically different way is an incoherent picture" (Nielsen:331).

However, our reason being led by intuition, we may intuitively sense something of value and construct it rationally. A good example is human dignity and human rights which are sensed intuitively. This explains why it is accepted by all cultural contexts today. In a personal and recent (2003) conversation I had with the philosopher Jürgen Habermas, he told me, upon a question, why it is so that human rights are accepted by so many cultures, he told me that he thinks it is an issue of intuition. In so many words he said that it is something universally human. And I do not think that saying this it is an appeal to foundationalism, neither is it a fall back to modernity. Human dignity and right have long ago emancipated themselves from unchallengeable modernist grounds or foundations. To say that we can intuitively discern something or use reason as we do now in a critical morality, is a way of proceeding and not stating foundations. The idea that there could be a wholly untranslatable cultural context radically distinct from

ours, is an incoherent picture. We are not inescapably relativised. We need not fall back on Protagoras' relativism, but rather on Socrates' dictum of an unexamined life that is not worth living.

Protagoras' value in this issue is that even though he represents an extreme point of view, this view eventually evoked additional extremes such as foundationalism and objectivism. My arguing for a critical morality, for non-foundationalist foundations, could be said lies somewhere in the middle. In this Protagoras has contributed indeed much to the current debate.

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## Endnotes

1. Take note that this is the relativist understanding of objectivism. I myself would rather distinguish between objectivity and objectivism. Objectivism would indeed imply a total independent world outside us, out there. Our knowledge of it are copies or mirror images. Objectivity would imply a dialogue between subject and object where none is completely independent from each other. This dialogue is dialectical. Relativists however equate objectivity with objectivism. This is why I have a problem with Rorty's usage of the term "dualism".
2. Sisela Bok prefers to speak of a minimalist approach. She argues for the possibility of arriving at a few moral principles which are not foundationalist and not timeless ahistorical. I argue for the same, as far as the latter is concerned. However, I disagree as far as the first is concerned: What would "limited" mean? It seems she has in mind a number of moral principles which cannot be exceeded. I argue to the contrary that a non-foundationalist approach need not be minimalist. Rather it can be open ended. Surely it cannot be a mass quantity of principles, because then one could find it difficult to reconcile a large number of principles with a cautious rational critical way of moving.
3. Unlike Nielsen who prefers to avoid the term foundations or bases, and rather uses the expression "fixed points", I see no contradiction in using both: a non-foundationalist foundation is indeed a fixed point, firm and stable—but in principle can change. There are good reasons why they are stable.
4. Nielsen describes his critical morality as coherentism and that we (in a Rortian fashion) must see things in our own lights. I do not have a problem with the coherent

approach when foundationalism is avoided. However, I think more is involved than coherence. Coherence indeed makes our claims more convincing, being more rational. However an opposing claim may at the same time also be coherent. I would prefer the role of intuition. We intuitively know that a rational (and coherent) construction about child abuse being morally wrong is preferable above the opposite that this abuse is morally commendable. As I will point out later, humans from different backgrounds can intuitively know many things in quite the same way. This indirectly links up with so many common mundane beliefs I referred to a while ago.

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# The Common Good, Moral Education and Criminality

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## **Abstract**

*In this article we support the view that putting the common Good above the right and the private is the necessary element of proper political philosophy that moves within the framework of liberal, open and democratic societies. Common Good does not only concern the society, but the wider political community as well. This common Good needs to be considered according to the prescriptions of Greek political philosophy (Plato and Aristotle) and not in the limited, narrow sense of contemporary communitarians. Thus, the most important common good for the state is education, which should be provided to all free of charge and based upon the ethical character of the Good, and not simply upon the putative social-political correctness. Such education, especially during the first years of one's life, unites the state and presents a strong preventive and averting weapon against every kind of criminality. However, such education cannot be provided by a morally neutral and allegedly impartial and non-committed state. That is why the principle of neutrality of the state in contemporary political philosophy seems like a medicine given to the patient only in order to preserve her/him in life and not to cure her/him. Of course, such political community is not capable of dealing with any kind of criminality as long as the main body of the state remains eroded by the private and by misconceived personal interest.*

The fact that the present Conference is being organized and held here in Pretoria by the SASGPH (South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities), in an age overridden by violence, international terrorism and criminality, where people are searching for the grounds and the environment for living their life; this fact is of exceptional importance. It is also important that we are all here in a friendly country such as South Africa, where enlightened political leaders admirably succeeded in directing this big country on the path of free, democratic and open societies. Of course, the

responsibility is always on the majority and on those in power, and for that reason public commendations to the former president Mr. Nelson Mandela and the incumbent president of South Africa, Mr. Thabo Mbeki, are in order for the work they have accomplished and are still carrying out for all the citizens of this country. I remember that, at the official opening of the First Conference at the Pretoria Opera, President Mbeki was present together with his assistants. I wish to believe that since then the situation has changed for the better and that the SASGPH is giving its contribution to the establishment and consolidation of democracy, justice and the character of a state in which it is worth living.

By examining one of the major contemporary problems, our Conference reaches for the light and wisdom of Greek philosophy, for the views articulated then remain valid today as well, and because the time distance may enable us to see things more objectively.

What, then, do Greek classical philosophers have to tell us about common good and what is the importance and relevance of their views for the moral education of citizens in relation to criminality? I shall deal with these issues in the present paper.

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues and Conference Participants.

The well-known debate between the liberals and the communitarians in contemporary political philosophy is articulated in the works of John Rawls, R. Dworkin, Robert Nozick, on the one hand, and those of A. MacIntyre, Ch. Taylor, M. Walzer, M. Sandel, etc on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, different representatives of liberal ideas endorse the following positions:

1. The individual as self has priority over the community.
2. Man, as an autonomous being, knows by himself what he ought to do.
3. Men are free and equal among themselves. Their freedom extends as far as it does not harm others (*negative freedom*).
4. The right is prior to the good. Putting one good before the other means that equality and freedom of others are in danger.
5. The state is neutral with respect to good (that is, it does not decide what is good or which good ought to be promoted).
6. Men as citizens adopt the principle of tolerance.
7. The decisions of men-citizens should be based on reason, understood either as a loose reasonableness or as a strict rationality or logicity.

To these positions of the liberals (libertarians or liberals of socialist provenance) are opposed the views of the communitarians, which are, again generally speaking, the following:

1. The *polis* (community) has priority over the individual.

2. Man as a soul, as self, is communally structured and therefore his/her autonomy has no priority.
3. Men are free and equal, but occasional intervention of the political community is necessary to secure this situation, so that the citizens have the resources and be able to act autonomously towards the good.
4. The Good is prior to the right.
5. The state ought not to be neutral and indifferent regarding the Good, but rather adopt positive attitude towards real goods.
6. Men as citizens should not simply adopt the principle of tolerance for others, but should get involved in a moral dialogue and deliberations as to which is the real good in every particular case and how it should be protected or fairly distributed to all.
7. Men as autonomous beings are able to decide on the basis of their preferences, which however ought not to be arbitrary nor, of course, to be considered as completely identifiable with the good. They are the result of a dialogue, intense deliberation and strong arguments with reference to the essential good and the just secured by the political order.

From this schematic opposition of the views of liberals and communitarians it is obvious that they promote conflicting conceptions of the meaning, structure and functioning of political community. In practice the differences may not be so intense, since things present such opposition only schematically and theoretically. In the social-political environment, every time for different reasons, a mixture of conditions instead of a clear distinction may prevail (as it sometimes happens).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, R. Epstein,<sup>3</sup> as the subtitle of his book shows (*Reconciling individual Liberty with the Common Good*), believes that compatibility between Liberalism and the principle of Common Good is not impossible. This is important and must be taken into account every time that the limits be drawn in relation to property, freedom and individual rights. Yet, theoretically small differences may have grave consequences for the development of certain political community in time. Still, these issues, however important they may be, are not the questions of the hour. To save time, we shall focus our attention here only on some of the views mentioned above, and will particularly refer to the priority (or to secondary importance) of the state against the individual, to the neutrality of the state regarding the good, and generally to the conception of common good in relation to moral education of the citizens and criminality.

In the first place, we should notice the great gap between the classical political philosophy of the Greeks and the modern and contemporary political theory and philosophy. Greek political philosophy regards politics as the highest art, as the architectonics, which aims at the regulation of the relationships and conditions of the political community; whereas, in straight opposition to that, until recently (1971) the liberal political theory and philosophy, influenced by positivism and particularly by the conception of the division between facts and values, denied its very existence and limited

its work simply to a meta-political and meta-ethical discussion about the meaning of terms used in ethical and political discourse. In addition, for mostly historical reasons (feudalism, totalitarianism, despotism, etc.), modern political theory sets the individual as the starting point of its reflections and not the community (or the state), to which it is indeed considered to be opposed. This situation had certainly been aggravated in the middle of the last century, since the division of the world into two opposed social-political camps (into the free states and the illiberal socialist political entities) had led to an incontestably strong preference for the principle of liberty and of individuality over the socialist position in the Western World.

Today, things have changed. They are more comfortable conditions and the philosophical dialogue can be productive and might have (as it does) better results. I would indeed say that this situation makes Greek political philosophy actual again, as it is an undoubtedly important intellectual capital and beacon in our troubled times.

In the political philosophy of the Greeks the first principle that becomes universally accepted as self-understandable, even though not widely discussed, is the principle of liberty. The whole political thought of the Greeks unfolds and *breathes* in the air of liberty, understood as political condition/situation and an unsurpassable belief. However, this principle may acquire specific content every time, either in the sense of elevation and greatness of the individual against the state (as, for example, happens with the individualism of the Sophists) or in the sense of importance and autonomy of the self against the body, as appears in Plato's *Phaedo*,<sup>4</sup> where the ethical self-determination and self-rule of the agent is established, and where Socrates' dedication to the city of Athens is simultaneously emphasized.<sup>5</sup> Freedom for the Greeks is not only *negative* but also essentially positive, whenever the completion of the deeds that promote education and the common good in the state is decided.

However, freedom itself is not enough to constitute a political community. Rather, one needs other principles to properly construct it and to enable the citizen to live his/her life in a dignifying way within this community. One such principle is *justice*, which ought to be understood as founded upon the Good, and not as provisional and occasional opinion and product accepted as *correct*, or as the so-called political correctness. Aristotle says that: "Justice ... is an element of the polis (state); for judicial procedure, which means the decision of what is just, is the regulation of the political partnership."<sup>6</sup>

As such, justice is established by the statesman according to the principle of Good or the common good of people, which is *well being* (*eudaimonia*). It is not simply a question of what people sense as just and

right at a given moment; that is, of what has been accepted *as ethos* or temporarily preferred. Rather, it is a question of something deeper that stems from the dialectical relationship between the right and the Good (or the kinds of good, the good and virtuous life), and of the conditions which Aristotle regards as the flourishing of human life, i.e. as happiness or prosperity. This condition essentially consists of living in accordance with virtue.

In order to clarify this point let us give a historical example:

It was correct (that is, an established and accepted criterion) and therefore customary just for the Athenian generals to take care of the dead in a battle and to bury them afterwards. Yet, Socrates does not agree to condemn the generals of the naval battle at Arginousai for not collecting and burying the dead because of the storm. This action of theirs was not an expression of disrespect, meanness or indifference, and generally did not constitute a breach of the principles of a virtuous life, because that which did not take place was imposed by the logic of things and did not mean a denial of good moral intentions on the side of the generals. The customary right does not prevail over Goodness. For Plato and Aristotle, therefore, justice as correctness has no axiological priority over the Good. The Good takes precedence and ought to be understood as the metaphysical principle that sustains justice and the state in general. Already the early Plato discerns between different kinds of goods, just as common sense partially accepts it. Such goods are hierarchically considered to be:

1. the goods of the soul (virtues): wisdom, justice, temperance, courage, piety
2. the goods of the body: health, strength, beauty
3. the social goods: wealth, reputation, positions and honors.<sup>7</sup>

Without such classification and evaluation human life becomes unstable and the unity of a political community may certainly be put in danger (especially in critical situations). But if it is easy to make such hierarchies still both Plato and Aristotle understand that the distinction of *relationships* and the confirmation of values regarding what is *Good per se* (not just the functional good) is quite difficult to accomplish and cannot be done by just anybody. That is why the philosophers guardians, the statesmen *per se*, the wise politicians have their place within the political community and in the state which distinguishes itself by the quality of life of the citizens, by the good and just order of things and by the prevalence of the good life over the unjust and erosive conditions.

Thus, what is every time superficially considered to be right by a particular social whole should not have priority over the good. Besides, Plato<sup>8</sup> clearly distinguishes between the Idea of Justice (founded upon the Good) and the demotic virtue (or demotic justice) that definitely stands on a lower level (which does not mean that it is always opposed to the idea of

justice). Therefore, that which makes the powerful cohesive substance of a political community is the Good and the life in accordance with it. Life of a political community should not be a life of excess, of hedonism and pleasure, but the life of virtue and indeed of justice, which is thought by Plato not only as a legal and political principle, but as the condition that shows the moral integrity and completeness of man's being.

Therefore, Plato in the *Republic*<sup>9</sup> gives strong arguments in support of the view that Goodness or the idea of Good cannot be identified with its occasional particular samples and much less with particular opinions about the good, but transcends them all as the guiding first principle. Aristotle as well, although he says that "the good is diversely called," still does not equally value all particular opinions on the goods, for according to him human good is ultimately well being (*eudaimonia*), that is "the Good of man is the active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with virtue, or if there be several human virtues, in conformity with the best and most perfect among them. Moreover, to be happy takes a complete lifetime."<sup>10</sup>

Apart from this, as is shown by Plato and Aristotle's great interest in the *kinds* and *ways* of lives within a political community, the preference and promotion of the Good does not lead to restriction, suppression and oppression of the *ways* of life that individuals within a political community may choose. (The principle of liberty is not refuted, except if it clashes with the principle of goodness.) So, there may exist a variety of ways of life of the citizens that are incorporated in a common framework of a dominant *form of life*, so to speak, as it generally happens today with many states which follow or accept values cognate with the European or western form of life.

Thus, the non-preference of the Good and the neutrality in the contemporary liberal political thought are not only opposite to the classical Greek political philosophy,<sup>11</sup> but definitely unfounded, because they are based on weak propositions:

First of all, it accepts the equal value of all beliefs held by citizens, it does not intervene and does not seek to discuss them critically nor to prefer some value against some other, arguing that such a thing could endanger the equality of citizens.

But this position means that it should also accept as equally valid the values and views that turn against freedom and tolerance for other valid beliefs. If it accepts this position, then it discredits itself. If, however, it excludes such a case, then it will have to provide ethical or metaphysical reasons for doing that and thus necessarily be allied to Greek philosophers.

Furthermore, it is not correct to say that, because we live in an axiologically plural political community (in which there are people who have personal differences regarding beliefs, values and conceptions of the good) and because in this situation (on account of pluralism) it is neither possible

nor easy to practically define something as common good, the state must really be neutral. The existence of many and opposite values within the society is certainly at times an empirical fact, but that alone does not mean that we necessarily have to accept pluralism as a value. This situation may show the multiple division of a community, but one needs arguments of a different kind in order to accept the pluralist position as a value in itself (and such arguments are related to the structure, the goal and the axiologically consistent life of the members of a political community, and that does not support the neutrality of the state).

In addition, for this reason some liberal thinkers have adopted the view that it is necessary to construct a theory about what constitutes human good in a free political community, and also to express consistently the relevant views. The fact that at times their views take similar Aristotelian positions and speculations as their point of departure is the sign of the time as well as of the vitality of the classical Greek political philosophy.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from that, the Stagirite philosopher authoritatively and categorically expressed the view (thus in a way recapitulating the earlier philosophical thought) that *polis* has priority. He says:

“Hence it is evident that the polis is the creation of nature and that man is by nature a political animal ... Further, the polis is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual.”<sup>13</sup>

This means that human good, the well being (*eudaimonia*) of man, which consists of development of all his potentials, of the flourishing of his life and mainly of a virtuous life, can only be realized within the political community, which possesses regulations that aim at the Good.<sup>14</sup>

In this way, the priority of polis is teleologically founded, since human nature is taken into account. That is why the *human good* cannot remain indifferent or opposite to the goals of the state and the common good, nor of course can the state act against human good. Similarly, Plato emphasizes that the state does not aim at securing the good or the well being (*eudaimonia*) of just one portion of its citizenry, but of all of them. The Athenian philosopher says in relation to that the following:

“For we shall say that while it would not surprise us if these men thus living prove to be most happy, yet the object on which we fixed our eyes in the establishment of our state was not the exceptional happiness of any one class but the greatest possible happiness of the city as a whole. ... Our first task then, we take it, is to mold the model of a happy state – we are not isolating a small class in it and postulating their happiness, but that of the city as a whole.”<sup>15</sup>

This means that, as he clearly states in the *Republic*, all the citizens ought to enjoy common education and upbringing and to regulate their life

according to the imperative of justice (in the soul) and to the Good. That is why the Athenian philosopher proceeds to criticize the values, beliefs and conceptions of his predecessors and emphasizes the importance of upbringing and moral education for the young people in the state.

This education aims at inculcating the proper axiological beliefs and conceptions about life, world and political community in the souls of the young; this education constitutes, so to speak, the well-woven tissue that unites and strengthens the political community.

This education is, among other things, the exercise and the acquisition of virtue and consists of providing knowledge and truth about things as well as of successful harmonization of the faculties of the soul of the young, that is, of the balance and harmony of the faculties of the soul under the guidance and domination of the intellect.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, although the human self possesses metaphysical value, still its priority without the acquisition of content and form through education can simply remain an entity with potential abilities realized and expressed only by chance. That is why Plato constructs the state in analogy to the soul, and although he accepts the unity of the soul, he still distinguishes the existence of faculties or kinds (gene) within it that acquire their meaning from the structure and the content they take.

Thus, for the classical Greek philosophers, it is not the individual ego that has absolute priority and value, but rather as ego or the soul, since the latter is communally and axiologically educated and structured. Therefore, individualism or supremacy of the ego that does not include social content according to the principle of the Good, is equal to the nakedness and barrenness of the soul and is disconnected from the proper social-political reality. The ego or the soul necessarily takes the building material for its being from its social environment, and only later on, when man acquires his critical ability, may criticize and revise the beliefs, conceptions and values he has already accepted. The basic position of man, as Ludwig Wittgenstein<sup>17</sup> noted, is that of *acceptance*. We accept many things as right and we can later investigate them critically and revise our views, always moving within the framework imposed by existing conditions.

For this reason, any liberal, strictly individualistic conception of man and his relation to the community is not well-founded and certainly is deviating.

And if indeed today the liberal, individualistic view seems to be powerful and further strengthened by the domination of competition and the market mechanisms, that still does not mean that this should be accepted. The notion of competition is founded already in Greek thought from the age of Homer and Hesiod. But competition itself does not present a solution to the problems of political society, as was realized by Heraclitus, Solon, Democritus, Plato and Aristotle, who all undoubtedly accept the principles of

freedom, of equality of speech (isegoria) and before the law (isonomia), of meritocracy, democracy, justice, dialogue, philosophy; and who, in opposition to certain Sophists, accept the priority of the state and the common good over the peculiarities of the individual.

Within these boundaries, the citizens may of course freely choose what they desire, which does not mean that their choices and preferences are always the right ones. Thus they choose their way of life and may even determine their path so as to turn to deviation and criminality. What dimensions such a phenomenon can acquire does not only depend on the biological heritage and the idiosyncrasy of every individual, but also on the education he/she will receive, especially during the first years of his/her life. That is why Plato and Aristotle attribute great importance to the moral education of youth. Nothing that, directly or indirectly, contradicts the advanced morality of people should be taught. (For this reason Plato, following the example of Xenophanes, subjects the whole educational and mythological material of the Greeks from Homer onto moral criticism and so to speak to purification.)

Having deep knowledge of the power of education, Plato states clearly in the *Republic* that, if it is guarded "in the great," that is in education and upbringing, the unity and prosperity of the state are secured.<sup>18</sup>

The young should be educated so that no disrespect, impiety, fear, cowardice and generally all the conditions that go against the moral and virtuous life reside in their soul. Rather, their being should be imbued with pure virtue, justice and goodness instead of superficial and unfounded demotic morality.

It is obvious that such a decision about proper education of the young can be taken only by mature citizens and authorities of the state, which means that the principle of neutrality of the state and the preference of the right over the good is meaningless.

Within such a framework of education of the citizens, the Socratic propositions that "we ought neither to requite wrong with wrong nor to do evil to anyone"<sup>19</sup> and that the wrongdoer who remains unpunished is more miserable<sup>20</sup> than the one who is punished, acquire meaning and exceptional importance.

Criminality is thought as performance of actions for which one can be condemned for causing damage to others. Men and women that have been educated with proper values and principles do not even think of doing such deeds and naturally make the guardians par excellence of legal order and justice. That is why, in the long run, the unity of the state and the effacement of indigenous criminality can be accomplished only through education in a state that is free, democratic and accepts justice and the principle of virtuous life.

The neutrality of the state and the preference of the right over the

good, strengthened today by competition and market mechanisms, can eventually be equal to the protection of those in power, to the preservation of inequalities and the undermining of the quality of life in the state. The state that does not intervene where it is necessary for the prevalence of the just in accordance with the imperative of the Good for Greek classical philosophers has no reason to exist, or we would simply say that it leads to a degraded quality of life and does not rouse enthusiasm in its citizens.

And today here in the pluralistic and multi-dynamic South Africa one could argue that political differences and social practices are in need of protection and show great tolerance for differences. However, this does not mean that the principles of the Good life, common Good, social justice and moral education of the citizens should be left defenseless. Indeed, for particular reasons, criminality is on the increase. Its curbing in the long run, as we have said, depends on the work of moral education and on the degree to which a wise and enlightened politics will be adopted, a politics which will emphasize the value of the communal and *public* over the *private*, the priority of the common good, and which will not leave anything to chance nor to the defense by alleged market laws that are actually favouring the established and powerful interests that may damage the whole.

In a state that respects the man (which is interlaced with our Christian tradition as well as with the Greek and Kant's moral philosophy), that promotes common good against the private, that accepts justice as the major order of political community and provides proper education to all, the life of men acquires meaning and becomes alluring. Undoubtedly, sooner or later, criminality will be limited or will completely disappear, and the citizens will be able to live in safety and order, will be able to enjoy the fruits of their work and honest efforts, and have reasonable hopes for a better future. On this path classical Greek philosophers can be real allies and supporters in their laborious and long work.

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## Endnotes

1. The classification of opposing groups is, of course, completely schematic and eventually does not correspond to reality.
2. M. Sandel, for example, complains about being characterized by others as a "communitarian," whereas, as his work shows, he has no intention of defending the strict communitarian views. See M. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Greek translation: Athens 2003, pp. 67-70.
3. R. Epstein, *Principles for a Free Society. Reconciling individual Liberty with the Common Good*, Perseus Books, 1998, pp. 2-5.
4. In the *Phaedo*, Plato establishes the ethical autonomy of the subject (the soul, the self) in an unparalleled way and transcends every possible biologism or causality. (See *Phaedo* 98c2-99b6.)

5. Socrates says in relation to this: "I did ... think it was better and nobler to endure any penalty the city may inflict rather than escape and run away" (*Phaedo* 99a2-4).
  6. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a37-39.
  7. See also G. Santas, *Goodness and Justice*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2001, pp. 21-22.
  8. It is obvious that one such conception of the Good and its precedence is not cognate with any communitarian view in the contemporary sense.
  9. See Plato, *Republic* 508e1-509b10.
  10. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a15-16.
  11. Which, of course, does not endorse the communitarian position.
  12. Let us refer here to the views of W. Galston (*Liberal Purposes*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 174), M. Nussbaum, A. McIntyre and others.
  13. Aristotle, *Politics* 1253d2-3 and 1253a18-19.
  14. This is followed by the neo-Aristotelian thinkers, such as W. Galston, who defines the conditions that constitute human good (*ibid.*, pp. 173-177), M. Nussbaum (in Galston et al.) and others.
- In relation to the latter, Laura Westra correctly notes that the views of M. Nussbaum may well be her own and just take Aristotle as a point of departure, but do not in any way present the correct interpretation of Aristotelian philosophy. According to Westra, M. Nussbaum misinterprets Aristotle's concept of well-being (*eudaimonia*), which is a single-meaning position and is not a sum of many factors (see Westra's paper at the 14<sup>th</sup> ICOGP). See also R. Kraut, *Aristotle on the Human Good*, Princeton University Press, 1989, p. 354.
15. Plato, *Republic* 420b1 and 420c.
  16. *Republic* 443c9-444a1.
  17. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, (see translation into Greek by K. Boudouris, Athenian Library of Philosophy, Athens 1989, paragraph 344.
  18. *Republic* 428e1-4.
  19. *Crito* 49b8-c3.
  20. *Gorgias* 472e4-7: "in my opinion, Polus, the wrongdoer or the unjust is wretched anyhow; more wretched, however, if he does not pay the penalty and gets no punishment for his wrongdoing, but less wretched if he pays the penalty and meets with requital from gods and men."



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# Plato's Ethical Values

## What lessons for today?

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### **Abstract**

*In this article is postulated a set of ethical guidelines, derived from Plato's philosophy, capable of serving as a template or model for everyday conduct and decision-making by modern business persons and professionals. This Platonic Model ('PM') of ethical conduct is founded on the key values and virtues of reason, lawfulness, justice, temperance, wisdom, and courage. These are the universal values and virtues which Plato presents in his dialogues as the foundation of ethical human conduct at all times and in all places. While the ethical norms contained in the PM never change, their application must of course be tailored to meet the needs of a particular age and society. Thus this article gives empirical examples to illustrate the role which the PM can play in the modern African business world.*

### **Introduction**

Plato's philosophy has stood the test of time: it remains one of the richest treasures in our inheritance from the ancient world. But it has seldom been looked upon specifically as a repository of ethical directives which can provide practical guidance and inspiration in modern life. It is the purpose of this article to synthesize, from the abundant storehouse of principles contained in Plato's dialogues, an ethical model capable of serving the needs of persons in the modern business world. While the business sector represents only one facet of modern life, it provides a convenient stage on which human conduct can be closely observed. I have therefore chosen this sector to exemplify the playing-out of Platonic values in our daily life.

The modern business environment is beset by moral and ethical dilemmas of many sorts. A report by the African Union says that corruption is one of the main reasons why Africa is so deeply in debt and poverty. The African Union (AU) estimates that corruption on the continent has increased the cost of goods by as much as 20%. Capital flight from Africa between the end of colonialism and 2003 reached \$148bn (*Business Day* newspaper, Johannesburg, 14 October 2004: "Corruption sucking Africa dry, says AU").

Not all of this corruption, however, is business-related. There is evidence to show that corporate crime is costing South Africa about \$7bn a year. This is more than the country's annual income from tourism (*Business Report* newspaper, South Africa, 5 November 2004). According to a recent survey, almost all incidents of workplace fraud committed by employees in South Africa are repeat offences. In one out of every six cases of fraud, other employees were aware of what was taking place. These data point to a widespread and pressing need for ethical guidelines in the workplace.

The ethical model proposed in this article will be referred to below as the Model of Platonic Ethical Norms, or MPEN: it comprises a set of six norms or values drawn from Plato's dialogues, including the *Republic*, the *Laws* and the *Crito*. These norms are reason, lawfulness and the four cardinal or Platonic virtues of justice, temperance, wisdom and courage. The model will be constructed step-by-step by examining each of these six norms or values in turn. The examination in each case involves two stages: in the first or theoretical stage, I seek to determine the precise meaning and scope of the concept, as it is presented by Plato. In the second stage, the practical application of the norm, with particular reference to the modern business world, is examined. The MPEN, when fully constructed in this manner, is proposed as a template for business conduct. Such conduct, if it is to comply with the proposed model, must be reasonable, lawful, just, temperate, wise and courageous. When the MPEN has been fully constructed, it will be evaluated and attention will be drawn to various features of the model.

Plato's notion of one absolute, transcendent, universal Truth is alien to our modern subjective, relativistic mindset, which requires that "you work on your underlying assumption and I'll work on mine". For Plato, justice, beauty, equality and truth are eternal, unchanging values, valid in all ages and in all places. Adoption of the MPEN requires us to be open to the possibility that such values, derived from ancient texts, may be capable of serving as useful practical guidelines for the conduct of business today. While the values contained in the MPEN never change, their practical application must of course be modified to meet the needs of modern business.

The point of departure in any discussion of Plato's values is always the individual, and never the group or aggregate, such as the state, or society at large, or a particular community, or a corporation, or some other business vehicle. Virtue in any form, according to Plato, invariably starts with the individual, and from the individual it passes, by what could be described as a process of assimilation or osmosis, into the group or collective (*Republic* 435e: Jowett, 1953 II, p 288–289). It follows that if ethical conduct is to grace the public life of a state or the dealings of a corporation, ethical values must first, through proper education, have been inculcated in the individuals of whom that state or that corporation is composed (*Laws* bks 1

& 2 *passim*: Jowett, 1953 IV, p 189–242). Too often, the response to unethical conduct takes the form of measures which address it at the collective level, whether within or outside the corporation. It is primarily because the individual is taken by Plato to be the ultimate source and origin of all ethics that, in applying the Platonic norms to modern business practice below, I shall adopt the point of view of a director, manager or other employee of a corporation, rather than that of the corporation as a whole.

I proceed now to construct the MPEN by considering in turn each of the six Platonic ethical norms of reason, lawfulness, justice, temperance, wisdom and courage.

## **Construction of the Model of Platonic Ethical Norms (MPEN)**

### *Reason*

Reason is the foundation of Plato's philosophy and the fountainhead of all his ethical values (*Laws* 631e: Saunders, 1970, p 55). Every action by an individual, whether in or outside business, must therefore in the first instance be reasonable.

The starting point for a proper understanding of Plato's notion of reason is *Laws* 644e–645c (Jowett, 1953 IV, p 210–211). In this key passage, Plato speaks of reason as a "sacred and golden cord" which exists in every one of us and pulls us in the direction of truth. He enjoins us to grasp this cord and never to let go, but to pull with it against all the other cords within us. These other cords, if left to themselves, pull us in the direction of untruth and ignorance. Thus the individual ought to act according to the pull of reason. Plato calls the golden cord of reason the common law of the state. The connection between reason and law which Plato demonstrates here is significant for present purposes: the first two norms in the MPEN are reason, which is presently under discussion, and lawfulness, which will be treated next. Thus already at this early stage it is clear that Platonic norms and values are not separate, unrelated entities; on the contrary, they overlap considerably, to the point of constituting a unity. The unity of the Platonic virtues is a theme which we shall revisit later.

Reason is the highest element in man (*Timaeus* 90a–c: Jowett, 1953 III, p 777–778; *Republic* 500c: Jowett, 1953 II, p 351). Reason is the reflective element in the mind (*Republic* 439d: Lee, 1974, p 215). Reason, the golden principle, supported and reinforced by the element of resolution, ought always to rule us, because it is reason alone which possesses the wisdom and foresight to act for the whole (*Republic* 441e: Jowett, 1953 II, p 296).

But how does all this translate into a workable norm or standard which an individual in business may apply in her everyday dealings? According to

Plato: “[I]f our desire for gain and our ambition will follow the guidance of knowledge and reason, and choose and pursue only such pleasures as wisdom indicates, the pleasures they achieve will be the truest of which they are capable, because truth is their guide...” (*Republic* 586d-e: Lee, 1974, p 412–413). This passage contains the practical pointers: Plato does *not* require that the profit motive (or other desires) be suppressed or denied. Instead, the individual must ensure through constant vigilance that this desire is subjected to the dominion of reason. Reason requires that in seeking wealth, the individual harms no one. Thus, if a company manager is faced with the opportunity of making an improper gain – for example, he is offered a bribe – a critical moment will generally arise. This moment is critical, because it is the moment of choice: either reason, reinforced by resolution will restrain the desire and the offer will be declined, or the desire to make the improper gain will assert itself and harmful consequences will ensue. Only alert, detached observation of his inner state at this critical moment will enable an individual to act reasonably in such circumstances. Again, the operation of reason at the critical moment will restrain other, equally improper desires, such as the desire to embezzle, to steal, to break an agreement, to reveal a trade secret, or to underpay an employee.

### ***Lawfulness***

Respect for law today appears to be increasingly on the decline. From executive fraud, political corruption, and match-fixing in sport to hijackings and rape, lawlessness in its many guises is everywhere in evidence.

Obedience to law by the individual is the foundation of every stable, cohesive society or organization. It follows that the individual's duty to obey the law, whether it takes the form of national legislation, a municipal regulation or an employer's code of ethics, ought to be uncontroversial. But this is far from being the case today: the question “Why ought we to obey the law?” is a vexed one in contemporary jurisprudence. This question is hardly new: Plato's answer to it, which occurs in his dialogue *Crito*, is as startling as it is pertinent to the conduct of modern business. I proceed now to summarize his treatment of the question (see Domanski, 2000).

In the key passage of *Crito*, the personified laws of Athens address Socrates as follows (*Crito* 51d–e: Jowett, 1953 I, p 381):

[W]e ... proclaim to any Athenian by the liberty which we allow him, that if he does not like us, the laws, when he has become of age and has seen the ways of the city, and made our acquaintance, he may go where he pleases and take his goods with him. None of us laws will forbid him or interfere with anyone who does not like us and the city, and who wants to emigrate; ... he may go where he likes, with his property. But he who has experience of the manner in which we order justice and administer the state, and still

remains, has by so doing entered into an implied contract that he will do as we command him.

Thus, to the question: "Why ought we to obey the law?" Plato's cogent and compelling answer is: "Because, whether you realize it or not, you have by your conduct agreed to do so." The laws of Athens go on to warn Socrates that the citizen who commits a breach of this implied contract by disobeying them is wrong, because (*Crito* 51e–52a: Jowett, 1953 I, p 381):

... having made an agreement with us that he will duly obey our commands, he neither obeys them nor convinces us that our commands are unjust; although we do not ... require unquestioning obedience, but give him the alternative of obeying or convincing us.

In the case of a modern company employee, the basic implied contract enjoining his obedience to national law is reinforced by his express consent, if any, to abide by terms contained in a letter of appointment or a code of conduct. Conversely, it follows from the passages quoted that the citizen's contractual obligation to obey the law is subject to two qualifications: first, he must in law be free at any time to emigrate and take his goods with him (The freedom offered by Plato is greater than that afforded by certain modern states, which place restrictions on the amount of money that an emigrant may take with him). Secondly, the citizen must in law be free to campaign for reform of a law to which he is opposed.

For the individual in business, the most obvious and immediate demands of lawful conduct are surely simple honesty and being true to one's word. The keeping of promises by individuals is the very lifeblood of commerce. No enterprise whose employees ignore these precepts can ultimately prosper.

The Financial Services Board (FSB) is responsible for regulating South Africa's financial services industry, which looks after more than \$700 bn through retirement funds, collective investment schemes, life assurance policies, and the stock and bond markets. Financial service providers recently came under attack from the FSB for their lack of integrity and ethics as well as their disregard for the law. Offending members were warned that if they do not clean up their act, they could lose their licences to conduct business. The chief executive of the FSB said that one of the pillars on which sound regulation rests is the instilling of a culture of ethical behaviour, which means having the courage to do the right thing (*Saturday Star* newspaper, Johannesburg, 18 September 2004, "Obey the law or kiss your business goodbye").

The code of conduct of one South African financial institution enjoins obedience to law upon its employees in these words: "Bankorp employees shall always perform their duties to meet the requirements of the relevant

laws of the country. This precept may under no circumstances be departed from, even if an employer is of the opinion that it may hold financial gain for Bankorp or its clients to break or circumvent the law. It is important that Bankorp's employees be seen as law-abiding businessmen and businesswomen".

## *Justice*

Justice (*dikaiosynē*) is the first of the four Platonic or cardinal virtues. The others, discussed below, are temperance (*sōphrosynē*), wisdom (*sophia*) and courage (*andreia*). Plato defines virtue as the general concord of reason and emotion (*Laws* 653b: Saunders, 1970, p 86). Thus virtue has to do with striking a proper balance between reason and emotion. Plato sees the four cardinal virtues, not as discrete, separate entities, but rather as facets of virtue as a whole. Virtue, for Plato, is one, whole and indivisible (*Laws* 630c–631a, 688b: Saunders, 1970 p 54, 135).

Justice is the central theme of Plato's dialogue, the *Republic* (see Domanski, 1999). The meaning of justice and of the other three virtues in the Platonic sense bears little resemblance to modern understandings of these terms. Modern thinking links justice to such ideas as equity, fairness and equality. Plato, however, holds that justice is to do the thing that is appropriate in any given moment, to the exclusion of everything else; it is to do one's own duty at the right time; it is to refrain from interfering in the function or work of another (*Republic* 433 ff: Jowett, 1953 II, p 285–288). Staying within one's own sphere is thus what Plato means by justice. An important example of Platonic justice in the modern political sphere is the doctrine of separation of powers. Drawing examples from the economic sphere, Plato says that a farmer will not make his own plough or other implements of agriculture, if these are to be good for anything. Neither will the builder make his own tools (*Republic* 370c–d: Jowett, 1953 II, p 212). By analogy, Platonic justice would require that the organs, office-bearers, departments and employees of a modern business organization perform their own functions, and do not encroach on the functions of others. Justice in this sense is clearly indispensable to the efficiency of every business enterprise, for the interchange and commingling of one employee's function with that of another must ultimately spell its ruin (*Republic* 421a, 434b: Jowett, 1953 II, p 270, 287).

Plato proceeds to apply his definition of justice to the specific activity of producing goods. He says: "[A]ll things are produced more plentifully and easily and of a better quality when one man does one thing which is natural to him and does it at the right time, leaving other crafts alone" (*Republic* 370c: Jowett, 1953, II p 212). This formulation of Platonic justice and the

one given earlier have a crucial element in common, namely the element of timing. It is not enough that an individual performs the function to which she is naturally fitted: that function must, in addition, be performed at the right time. Consider the case of a manufacturer of shoes. Plato's definition of justice requires of the manufacturer, first, an aptitude for and a dedication to his craft, to the exclusion of any unrelated occupation. Secondly, the manufacturer's skills have to be deployed in the service of his customers, at the time when they have need of his products, and at no other time. This may sound trite, but the point is that if the manufacturer neglects this principle by producing shoes for which there is no demand, his conduct is not merely wasteful or uneconomic, but unjust: if pursued, such conduct must eventually result in the failure of his enterprise.

The dictate of Platonic justice, then, whether in business or in any other sphere of activity, is simply that the individual respond to the present need before her, to the exclusion of every other consideration. Meeting the need of the present moment may well require her to deviate from, or even to abandon, instantly if necessary, her predetermined course of action, plan or agenda. Thus the hallmarks of Platonic justice are flexibility, openness and responsiveness. This leaves no room for rigid, mechanical action.

Here is one final, hypothetical example to illustrate the practical operation of Platonic justice in the business sphere. John, the managing director of a large company, is due to attend a board meeting. Minutes before the start of the meeting, he learns that workers at the company's manufacturing plant are about to embark on a major strike. John decides to miss the board meeting and proceeds directly to the plant, where he addresses the workers. What he says has the effect of averting the threatened strike. His action saves his company from suffering a substantial financial loss. This is Platonic justice in action.

### *Temperance*

Plato first addresses the subject of temperance in his early dialogue *Charmides*, but his developed thinking on the subject is to be found in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. The word has a faintly Victorian ring, but the Greek original *sōphrosynē* embraces a vast range of meanings of contemporary relevance. These include restraint, moderation, impartiality, objectivity, order, equilibrium, harmony, measure, self-control, stability and balance. All of these meanings are to be found in the *Laws*. In the *Republic*, temperance is described as "harmony and symphony", "the ordering and controlling of certain pleasures and desires", and the condition of "a man being his own master" (*Republic* 430e: Jowett, 1953 II, p 282–283). In relation specifically to the individual, Plato defines temperance as the habitual self-control of a

soul that uses reason (*Laws* 631d: Saunders, 1970, p 55. See also Domanski, 2003). Thus temperance, like the other virtues, is under the dominion of reason, which, as we have seen, is the highest norm and governs all the other norms. Like the other virtues too, Platonic temperance originates always in the individual; from the individual, it passes into and extends throughout the collective (such as the state or a corporation), producing a consonance of all its elements from the weakest to the strongest (*Republic* 432a: Jowett, 1953 II, p 284). A striking expression of Platonic temperance is the "Golden Rule", which is expressed in the Bible as follows: "All things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Mt 7:12, Authorized Version). This rule "continues to stand as a universal expression of the highest ethic, an encoding of natural moral law, and a fulfilment of both the Mosaic and the Christian ideals of behaviour" (Cunningham, 1998, p 108).

In the business sector, Platonic temperance can manifest in a number of apparently unrelated ways. Consider, firstly, the description by Mohandas K Gandhi of the true relationship between a business enterprise and its customers: "A customer is the most important visitor to our premises. He is not dependent on us, we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption of our work; he is the purpose of it. We are not doing him a favour by serving him; he is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to serve him". Secondly, Platonic temperance requires that the rights of employees be carefully balanced against their duties and responsibilities. Thirdly, it is temperance in the form of self-control which restrains a manufacturer from abusing a monopoly or a dominant market position, for example by increasing the prices of his goods without objective justification. Fourthly, legislation governing the relationship between landlord and tenant must strike a fair balance between the interests of the parties. In some countries, landlords have walked away from apartments which they own, because their tenants have failed to pay rent for many months, and there are no effective legal remedies available to evict them.

The rationale for the existence of competition laws is Platonic temperance in the form of balance – balance between, on the one hand, the financial power of large companies and, on the other hand, the vulnerability of consumers and of smaller, weaker businesses. And the part played by Platonic temperance in the field of competition does not end here: David Lewis, the chairman of South Africa's Competition Tribunal, has recently pointed out that local competition authorities are being faced with challenges which their international counterparts are spared. Thus he asks: Should Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), a vital ingredient of current government policy, take precedence over competition in South Africa? According to Lewis, there is a national, South African reality, including

government policy objectives, which has to be balanced against competition concerns. Such a balancing act can be very difficult at times. (*Sunday Times* newspaper, Johannesburg, 29 August 2004).

Another area in which Platonic temperance has a key role to play is the proper balance to be struck between industrial development and environmental protection. Recent South African legislation imposes stringent penalties on companies and developers who flout environmental regulations. Said a Member of the Executive Council for Gauteng province: "Our ecosystem and our quest for a better life in a sustainable environment are under pressure because of the activities of uncaring industries and land developers" (*Business Day* newspaper, Johannesburg, 9 March 2005).

Platonic temperance can also manifest as an attitude of contriteness and humility on the part of business enterprises which have provided their customers with less than satisfactory service. Such an attitude, however, is seldom to be found. Neville Melville, the South African banking ombudsman, has noted the reluctance of banks to apologize for their errors. In one case, a delinquent bank chose to make a substantial payment to its customer rather than to tender an apology.

Finally, a vital field for the operation of ethical norms, particularly Platonic temperance in the form of moderation or restraint, is advertising. Ethical advertising emphasizes the positive attributes of a product, but does not exaggerate or make false claims. The problem here is the slippery slope by which puffery can quickly descend into lies (<http://www.ethics.org>: 17 September 2003). The field of operation of Platonic temperance in business is indeed vast, but the few examples given here will suffice for present purposes.

### *Wisdom*

According to Plato, this virtue involves knowledge not of any particular activity or thing within the state, but of the wholeness and unity of the state (*Republic* 428d: Jowett, 1953 II, p 280). Thus a city renowned for the skill of its carpenters could not be considered wise (*Republic* 428c: Jowett, 1953 II, p 279), because wisdom requires an all-encompassing view which includes every facet of the life of the state. The people most likely to possess wisdom in this sense are those entrusted with the rule and care of the state. Plato calls them guardians, and says that if they possess this knowledge of the big picture, then the state as a whole, being constituted in accordance with nature, will be wise (*Republic* 429a: Jowett, 1953 II, p 280).

By analogy, a business corporation (or other collective) will flourish when the vision of its directors is whole rather than partial. Such wholeness of vision would embrace, for example, the wellbeing of all employees rather

than only certain classes of them; it would include the adoption of policies which tend to unite rather than to divide the organization.

The absence of Platonic wisdom at the political level is well described by a South African commentator (Johnson, 2004, p 232):

[South Africa] has always been ruled ... by elites which seek their own group self-interest rather than that of the country as a whole. Only when it at last acquires a ruling elite which thinks and feels for the whole of this beloved country, will this sad cycle change. This is what guarantees Nelson Mandela a special place in South African hearts. He alone for a brief and precious moment seemed to promise at least the possibility of a common South Africanism.

The second King Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa holds that governance in any context ought to reflect the value system of the society in which it operates. Thus corporate governance in Africa ought to observe and take account of the African worldview and culture. More particularly, companies and boards operating in South Africa need to take account of the country's wide range of value systems and rich diversity in defining their corporate ethos and conduct – both internally and externally. Some aspects of the African worldview, as set out in the Report, are the following (King Report, 2002, par 38):

- Spiritual collectiveness determines the communal nature of society, in which households live as an interdependent neighbourhood.
- An inclination towards consensus rather than dissension helps to explain the loyalty of Africans to their leadership.
- Humility and helpfulness to others takes precedence over criticism of them.
- Co-existence with others is highly valued. The essence of *ubuntu* (humanity), a pan-African value which is enshrined in the South African constitution, is that a person can be respected only to the extent of her cordial co-existence with others.
- There is an inherent trust and belief in the fairness and goodwill of all human beings. This attitude is made manifest in the predisposition towards universal brotherhood.
- Optimism runs deep as a result of a strong belief in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent superior being, in the form of the creator of mankind.

Platonic wisdom requires that business leadership in Africa should, in formulating policies and operating procedures, adopt this worldview. The King Report adds that successful corporate governance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires companies to adopt an inclusive rather than an exclusive approach. Companies must be open to institutional activism. There must be greater emphasis on the sustainable or non-financial aspects of its performance. Boards must apply the tests of fairness, accountability, responsibility and transparency to all acts and omissions. The thread of Platonic wisdom runs through all of these requirements.

## *Courage*

Plato's early dialogue *Laches* deals with courage, although it is inconclusive as to the nature of this virtue. More helpful is the treatment in the *Republic*, which defines courage as a "universal saving power of true opinion in conformity with law about real and false dangers" (*Republic* 430b: Jowett, 1953 II, p 282). Thus Platonic courage is not an impulsive, uninstructed response to danger. On the contrary, it is the product of evaluation and reflection; it is the ability in all circumstances to judge safely, correctly and in accordance with law, what is and what is not to be feared (*Republic* 430b: Lee, 1974, p 200).

The scope for application of Platonic courage in business practice is very wide indeed. Consider first the hypothetical scenario of a company's board of directors who, after careful deliberation, decide on a radical change in policy direction. For example, they decide to launch a new product, which represents a departure from the company's traditional range. The new policy involves a considerable degree of short-term financial risk. The directors believe, however, that their decision, which is strongly opposed by certain shareholders and by market analysts, will ultimately redound to the benefit of the company. Such a decision typically displays Platonic courage.

No act in business calls for more courage than whistle-blowing, provided it is not prompted by malice or some other improper motive. Whistle-blowing has in recent years been the subject of extensive scrutiny in the South African media. The whistle-blower's greatest fear is typically that a rift with his employer may jeopardise his subsequent career prospects. He may fear that potential future employers will see him as a trouble-maker. He may fear that he will experience hostility rather than receive support from his colleagues. He may fear victimisation or an act of revenge by the person whose corrupt or dishonest conduct he has exposed. He may fear that he will have to give up time to co-operate in a criminal investigation and give evidence in court. All these fears must be consciously faced and evaluated, by the employee who decides to take a stand by blowing the whistle. Provided he acts in good faith and in the best interests of the company, his act will be a manifestation of Platonic courage. The need for such courage is underlined by the fact that in South Africa, even specific legislation designed to protect the whistle-blower has so far largely failed: very few people have come forward, because there are powerful intimidatory forces operating within companies and government departments. For example, the senior accountant of the Northern Cape transport department was recently dismissed on charges of "gross insubordination and a contravention of public service regulations" after he blew the whistle on departmental corruption.

Nevertheless Louis de Koker, a prominent economic analyst, has spoken out strongly in favour of whistle-blowing, saying that the problem lies in South Africa's culture of not backing those who disclose misconduct. Whistle-blowing, he says, is an effective management tool which must be encouraged: although the company's share price will initially be dented, the disclosure could save the organisation substantial sums of money in the long run. (*Business Ethics Direct*, Issue 248, 21 September 2004, p 3: "Culture of whistle-blowing should be encouraged") This is all very well as far as the company is concerned, but it does little to allay the typical fears that a whistle-blower has to face. Only courage can enable him to overcome those fears.

## **Evaluation of the MPEN**

The construction of the MPEN is now complete. At this stage, I shall evaluate the model as a whole, and draw attention to certain key features.

In treating of ethics, Plato makes little or no express mention of certain values which feature prominently in modern constitutional and business practice: these include honesty, accountability, responsibility, sustainability and dignity. Yet can it be doubted that the employee who puts the MPEN into practice will inevitably incorporate these contemporary values into her conduct? Indeed, it is arguable that reason (the overarching ethical standard) and wisdom together would, without more, sweep all of these modern values into their compass.

A major advantage of the MPEN as a practical business tool is that it is free from religious or sectarian bias of any kind. The Platonic norms are universal and thus applicable to people in all ages and in all places.

How difficult would it be to implement the MPEN in everyday business activities?

Can persons in business be trained in the values and virtues contained in the MPEN? The question is critical: if the answer is "no", there would be little point in proposing these norms as a basis for business practice. The question whether virtue is teachable is vigorously debated in a number of Plato's dialogues (in particular *Meno*, *Protagoras* and the *Laws*). It is not easy to extract or synthesize a clear-cut answer, and the extensive modern scholarly literature sheds little light on the matter. The thrust of Plato's teaching is that virtue can indeed be taught, but not in the sense of instilling or implanting some desirable quality from outside. Instead, virtue is an innate, immutable characteristic of every human being, and the teacher's sole function is to draw it out of the student, to provide the guidance which will enable the student to manifest what was hitherto obscured by layers of accumulated ignorance. Thus the teaching (and learning) of virtue is a process of inner cleansing which dissolves and removes impediments. An

appropriate analogy is the polishing of a silver goblet which has over time become coated with grime: the removal of the grime does no more than reveal what was always there, but hidden from view. It follows from this that the virtues and values of the MPEN already lie latent within every one of us. The ethical training of persons in business ought therefore to be directed solely to making manifest these hidden qualities.

Here, in conclusion, is Plato's description of the individual who has succeeded in realizing and harmonizing these virtues within his own being (*Republic* 443d–444a: Lee, 1974, p 221):

[He] will in the truest sense set his house to rights, attain self-mastery and order, and live on good terms with himself. When he has ...become fully one instead of many, he will be ready for action of any kind, whether it concerns his personal or financial welfare, whether it is political or private; and he will reckon ... such action just and honourable if it contributes to and helps to maintain this disposition of mind, and will call the knowledge which controls such action wisdom. Similarly he will call unjust any action destructive of this disposition, and the opinions which control such action ignorance.

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# Ethics, Politics, and Criminality: Plato's Cosmological Perspective

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## Abstract

*In the Laws Plato argues that no one who believes in the gods would voluntarily commit a crime. Plato's view on the nature of the gods is radically different from the traditional Greek view which portrays the gods as human beings writ large. He advanced the opinion that the gods are not jealous, vindictive, greedy, and corruptible, but rather morally virtuous, incorruptible, and happy. This is reflected in Plato's law on impiety in Laws 10, which contends that any lawless, impious, or criminal act is due to one of three possible misunderstandings about the gods: 1. that the gods do not exist; 2. that the gods exist, but do not care for us; 3. that the gods are corruptible. While Plato is of the opinion that the third heresy is the worse of all, since the gods are (or must be) the models of virtue and happiness for the political community, he must first demonstrate that the gods exist and then that they care for us. The atheism that Plato confronts was a consequence of natural philosophy or more precisely, of the way it developed following the birth of philosophy. While the notion of divinity was inherent in the concept of "phusis" (nature) from the very first Greek cosmologies, the fact remains that for the "phusiologi" the order that makes our world a cosmos is natural, that is, immanent in nature, and thus explicable without recourse to an intentional cause. In the Laws, Plato asserts that atheism is a disease that recurs periodically and that afflicts a certain number of minds. The cause of atheism is not, according to Plato, the inability to master pleasures and desires but rather the "phusiologi" and their writings, which contend that the law and morality guaranteed by the gods do not exist by nature but derive from convention. An influential part of the intelligentsia seized upon these theories and concluded in word and deed that one's egoistic passions should not be restricted and that the behaviour of the gods of traditional religion did indeed constitute models to follow. In this article, an attempt is made to show how Plato's ethics, politics, and cure for crime in the Laws are grounded in his counter-cosmological perspective, which he feels is based on arguments that will be acceptable to all.*

The *Laws*, Plato's last and longest work, has been called the "first work of genuine political philosophy in the Western tradition" in the sense that it combines "an investigation into the foundations of legislation with the concrete elaboration of detailed laws."<sup>1</sup> In contrast, in the *Republic* legislation is almost entirely absent and for good reason. The state of the *Republic*, Callipolis, is governed by the unfettered discretion of philosopher kings, who exercise direct and total political control contingent on expert knowledge of certain suprasensible, eternal, and immutable realities called Forms. The *Republic*, of course, is perhaps the most radical political system – from even a theoretical perspective – ever devised, and it is not surprising that little if anything has been retained in modern political theory and practice, at least in light of present-day democratic thinking.

The *Laws*, on the other hand, articulates for the first time a number of positive philosophical concepts that have proved of enduring value. These include the rule of law, the mixed constitution, the legislative preamble, punishment as a cure, and the notion that absolute power corrupts absolutely. It is not clear Plato ever realistically thought that the cure of human ills was contingent on philosophers becoming kings or kings philosophers. What is clear is that in the *Laws* the idea of a state governed by the unfettered discretion of philosopher-kings is treated as wishful thinking (712a, 739a-b, 875c-d; see also *Politicus* 293c-d, 301d).<sup>2</sup>

Plato calls the Magnesia of the *Laws* *deuteros timia* or "second best" in comparison to Callipolis, the ideal city of the *Republic*.<sup>3</sup> What Plato understands by "second best" is a written code of laws. Thus in Magnesia the real hero is not the philosopher king wielding absolute power but rather the *nomothetes* or legislator,<sup>4</sup> who in Plato's scheme abdicates after formulating the code of law. It is left to future administrators of the laws to work out the details of the laws' application through experience (772b2). After every detail has been worked out, Plato argues, the laws must be made immutable (*akineta*, 775c5, see also 798b1, 846c7, 890a-891b, 957b4).

The laws, in other words, must become as unchanging as the cosmic principle governing the movements of the heavenly bodies (822a).<sup>5</sup> In this article, I want to follow Plato's thinking on this point and show how Plato's ethics, politics, and cure for crime in the *Laws* are grounded in cosmology. I wish to show that Plato's purpose in doing so is to ground law in the science of astronomy – that is, in information that, unlike the Forms which only a few elect philosophers can apprehend, is accessible to some degree to everyone.

Let's begin with the type of constitution that Plato proposes for Magnesia and then examine how Plato proposes to educate the citizens so that they conform to this model, then on to punishment.

The first word to appear in Plato's *Laws* is *theos*, or god, and it soon turns out to be the foundation of his legislation. Although Plato does not use

the word "theocracy" to characterize the constitution of Magnesia, it is clearly indicated in the following passage: "The state is named after the ruling class in each state. Now if that's the sort of principle on which your new state is to be named, it should be called after the god who really does rule over men who are rational" (*Laws* 4. 713a). What Plato understands by "God" here is *nous*, that is immortal "reason" or "intelligence." Humans meanwhile share in this divine reason, and "reason" we are told, is what distributes "law" to humans to enable them to run their states (law is thus the embodiment of reason). Whence this famous quotation: "We should run our public and our private life, our homes and our cities, in obedience to what little spark of immortality lies in us, and dignify this distribution of reason with the name of 'law'" (*Laws* 4.713e).

In his initial address to the future colonists of Magnesia (715e-718a), the legislator reminds them that "God" rather than "man" is the measure of all things (716c), and what "God" recommends first and foremost is the principle (*logos*) of moderation (*sophron*, 716d1). The principle of moderation is arguably the central virtue of Magnesia. However, from a political perspective, Plato argues that this principle of moderation can only be maintained in the context of a "mixed constitution," that is, one in which there is a judicious balance between the authority of the ruler and the liberty of the subjects (693d-e; 756e, 759b). Since rulers and subjects must see the political *metrion* as distinct from their personal wishes, the laws will be the real sovereign of such a state, for they express the conditions of the *to koinon*, that is, the "common good."

Human beings, unlike the God (or gods), are a combination of soul *and* body and, as such, are composed of both rational and irrational elements. Plato insists that man's holiest possession is his soul (5.726eff). Soul, our divine immortal element, is both stronger and superior to the body and is thus its master. There are "goods" proper to the soul and goods proper to the body, and the former must always be considered superior to the later. The legislator *knows* what these goods are and so his recommendations and advice *must* be followed (727c).

The legislator of the *Laws* is a political demiurge analogous to the craftsmen-demiurge who creates the world in Plato's *Timaeus*. In both cases, the craftsman has a model and fashions his materials so that they conform to it. In both instances, it seems that the craftsman knows his materials well, but, because the materials "pre-exist" the intervention of the craftsman, there is always a degree of recalcitrance or resistance in them. In response to the potential for resistance, the legislator-demiurge searches for institutions (such as assembly and council) which the future citizens of Magnesia find acceptable but which can be improved upon. As an example, Plato skilfully creates an acceptable political mediation by blending the democratic

institutions which assure the participation and representation of the entire citizen body with monarchical institutions which guarantee the exercise of competence. In conjunction with this, the vast majority of magistrates are selected through elections in which the entire citizen-body participates.<sup>6</sup>

The ultimate end of man and the state is *eudaimonia* or happiness and *eudaimonia* is dependent on *arete* or moral virtue. Indeed, for Plato the highest good is to become and remain as virtuous as possible, that is, as godlike as possible (707d). This is the case for the entire citizen body, and not just, as in the *Republic*, for the philosopher kings. The primary object of legislation is thus the moral education of the citizens (*Laws* 631a).<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the real task of the legislator is not to make laws but to educate the citizens (see 857c-e). The minister of education is to be the most important magistrate in the state (765e), and the laws themselves will be the primary educational text. But how does the legislator-demiurge propose to do this?

Plato contends that “when men investigate legislation, they investigate almost exclusively pleasures and pains as they affect society and the character of the individual” (*Laws* 636b).<sup>8</sup>

Education is first and foremost about “control” of pleasure and pain.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Plato is quite explicit that it is through pleasure and pain that virtue and vice enter the soul, and since these are the earliest sensations to which a child is exposed (653a), education is the correct formation of pleasure and pain (653c). Education is thus a matter of channeling pleasure and pain in the correct direction before a child can even understand the reason why (653b), and when he does understand, reason and emotions must agree in telling him that he has been properly trained with the inculcation of the appropriate habits (654b). Consequently, virtue is characterized as a concord of reason and emotion. We have been correctly educated when we hate what we ought to hate and love what we ought to love, that is, what the legislator endorses from beginning to end (653c).

Plato compares man to a marionette (*tauma*, 644d). In the famous analogy, pleasure and pain, that is, our irrational impulses, are presented as rugged and inflexible iron-like cords that pull us in all directions. However, there is also the “golden cord” of reason (*logismos*), that Plato identifies with the “common law” (*koinos nomos*) of the city. Since the “golden cord” is gentle and nonviolent rather than tough and inflexible, it needs assistants or servants (*huperetai*) so that “the gold in us may prevail over the other substances” (645a). In other words, for the citizens to be motivated to accept the “rational principles” on which the laws are based, and consequently to follow the laws themselves, their feelings must be aligned to assist their laws, so that all the cords, as it were, pull in the same direction. This is one of the primary functions of the legislative preamble (to which I will return), but he also has other devices in mind.

Plato contends that the best way to ensure that pleasure and pain are experienced in relation to the appropriate objects is through song and dance (653e-656b). All young things find it virtually impossible, Plato notes, to keep their bodies still and their tongues quiet (644e; 789c-d).<sup>10</sup> However unlike other animals, humans can translate this natural restlessness into a sense of order through rhythm and harmony, which he sees as a gift of the gods. Song and dance are thus natural.

As I noted at the beginning of this paper, for Plato, all laws must become immutable like the unchanging movements of the heavenly bodies. Because such immutability depends upon writing, all laws must be “written laws.” It is not then surprising that Plato insists that the future citizens of the state must learn to read and write when they are children (810b). Reading and writing will help the children to “memorize” the code of “written laws” (see *Protagoras* 325e-326c). They also assure that there is *no* room for improvisation (722c, 798a-c). But what is surprising is that Plato then insists that the written laws must be set to music – a music that, like the laws themselves, must *never* be changed – and not only sung but also danced to in a chorus with the accompaniment of the lyre, which is compulsory for all (812a-e). In other words, the written laws must be poetized and set to music and therefore “performed” in a fashion reminiscent of Homeric oral poetry.<sup>11</sup> Songs and dances are so important as an instrument of education that Plato defines the educated man as one who has learned to sing and dance well (654b).

Plato informs us that the inspiration behind his “innovation” of setting law to music is Egypt – we thus have an African connection here – where political and moral stability are intimately connected with the fact that the Egyptians displayed in their temples the musical *and* political laws (*nomoi*) to which the citizens had to adhere (656d). Plato clearly wants to follow the Egyptian model (657b). He is convinced that there ought to be an intimate connection between the laws of a people *and* the songs that it sings (722d-e, 799e, 800a). Thus at *Laws* 800a, the legislator says: “Let’s assume we’ve agreed on the paradox: our songs have turned into ‘nomes’ (or laws) ... let’s adopt this as our general agreed policy, no one shall sing a note, or perform dance-movements, other than those in the canon of public songs, sacred music, and the general body of chorus performances of the young – any more than he would violate any other ‘nome’ or law.”<sup>12</sup>

As I noted above, one of Plato’s positive lasting ideas is the legislative preamble, that is, the notion that each and every law proper must be preceded by a preamble. Contrary to the law which constitutes a command or a prohibition, preambles, which are meant to defend the prescriptions, are explanatory and their language is meant to be informative and persuasive.<sup>13</sup> Although Plato often employs the word “enchantment” to

characterize this type of "persuasion," in the final analysis there is a fusion, as Morrow notes, between rational insight and emotion.<sup>14</sup> The preambles constitute a compromise of sorts between the rational and irrational elements (Laks 277). There are, to be sure, other forms of enchantment in the art of leading the souls (*psuchagogia*) toward a virtuous and happy life. These include (but are not restricted to) the effective use of public repudiation (or shame), praise, blame, myths, and both argumentative and non-argumentative forms of discourse.

One can get the impression that the citizens of Magnesia are so thoroughly conditioned by education and training that they would never commit an injustice. However, although Magnesia is in a sense an "idea," it is nonetheless realistic and practical and it can thus anticipate having crimes and criminals. The state thus requires a penal code, and Plato devotes a considerable amount of space to this enterprise.

I would like to focus briefly on Plato's innovative approach to punishment. The purpose of punishment for Plato is not primarily to deter the offender by the prospect of further suffering but to cure him of a "psychic" injustice, a "disease" that like a medical disease he cannot have chosen to contract.<sup>15</sup> For bad moral states, like bad physical states, are disadvantageous to their possessors; therefore, "no one is evil voluntarily" (860d, 734b, 731c).<sup>16</sup>

The Magnesian jurors must always ask with regard to a convicted offender: "What does the damage or injury tell us about the state of his soul and what penalty does he deserve to undergo to cure it?"<sup>17</sup> Despite the forward looking, medically inspired language of cure that permeates the penal theory, to cure the offender, *any* measure, whether painful or not, may be used.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, some crimes are seen as so abominable, such as temple robbing (854a-855c), that the crime is seen as "incurable" and thus merits the death penalty.<sup>19</sup>

The worse crime which Plato's medical penology seeks to deter is atheism, for atheism by definition contests the very essence of a theologically based legislation. This brings me to Plato's cosmological perspective.

In *Laws* 10, Plato contends that people would never *voluntarily* commit any lawless or impious act unless they held one of three possible misunderstandings about the gods: (1) that the gods do not exist; (2) that the gods exist, but do not care for us; (3) that the gods are corruptible. While Plato is of the opinion that the third heresy is the worse of all, since the gods *are* (or must be) the models of virtue and happiness for the political community, he must first demonstrate that the gods exist and then that they care for us.<sup>20</sup> Plato explicitly notes that "such a demonstration would constitute just about the best and finest preamble our penal code could have" (887c).

According to Plato, atheism is a disease which recurs periodically and which afflicts a certain number of minds (*Laws* 888b). The cause of atheism is not the inability to master pleasures and desires (*Laws* 886a-b) but rather the ancient and modern speculative theories to which the atheists appeal. According to these theories, law, morality and the gods are in no way natural, but merely the products of human convention (888d-890a).

In other words, atheism is not so much a sign of moral failure as it is of intellectual confusion. It is therefore necessary to persuade and to teach the atheists by means of sufficient proofs (*tekmeria ikana*) that the gods exist (*hos eisi theisi*: *Laws* 885d2-3).

Before beginning his demonstration, Plato briefly explains the position of his adversaries in the form of an *historia peri phuseos* (an account which describes and explains how the present order of things, that is, the world, humanity, and society, originated and developed from a primordial state, see *Laws* 888d-890d).<sup>21</sup> According to his adversaries, whom he considers atheistic materialists, the present order of things emerged by chance (*tuche*) from four primary *inanimate* (*apsucha*) elements or principles: earth, air, water, and fire (889b). This is what the materialists understand by *phusis* or nature (891c). In order to demonstrate divine existence and providence – the true guarantors for the State and its laws – Plato has recourse to versions of two famous arguments, the cosmological and the physico-teleological, both of which are needed to defend his position.<sup>22</sup> Plato employs the cosmological argument to show that the soul (*psuche*), which his adversaries hold to be a product of the four elements, is in fact prior to them. Indeed, Plato connects *phusis* more with soul than with the four soulless (*apsucha*) elements. Soul is movement that moves itself, and only such a movement can be the primary source of generation; for it is prior, in existence and in dignity, to the series of movements transmitted by bodies. Consequently, if the universe was really generated, it is impossible according to Plato that the present order of things was able to emerge from its initial state without the initial impetus of a moving principle, a principle which is identified with *phusis* as *arche* (or nature as principle) and which, if it were to cease to act, would bring about the end of the universe (*Laws* 895a5-b1). In short, without soul, the primordial state of things would forever remain inert.

However, this first argument is not sufficient, for soul is not the supreme principle that Plato has in mind when he thinks of God. Indeed, soul is neutral and as such it is susceptible to good or evil depending on the circumstances. Now since God or the divine is by nature good, Plato must determine which principle will assure the goodness of the soul. This principle is obviously *nous* (reason or intelligence), which is exhibited in the harmony it establishes and sustains in the visible motion of the natural world (see *Laws* 966e).

This, however, remains to be demonstrated, and doing so is precisely the aim of the physico-teleological argument. This demonstration depends essentially on one thing: its ability to prove that the movements of the heavenly bodies are of the same nature of those of *nous*, that is, circular, uniform, and constant (898a-b). But how does one go about this? Plato supposes that a simple observation of the heavenly bodies will suffice to convince one that their movements and those of the intellect are identical and, consequently, that it is the *ariste psuche* or the "best soul" (identified with God) which cares for the entire universe (897c; 898c).

However, in reality, the demonstration is much more complex. Observational astronomy reveals that the movements of the heavenly bodies are not regular, but wandering. Mathematical astronomy, on the other hand, can show that the heavenly bodies move in circles or, what amount to the same thing, intelligently. Indeed, in *Laws* 821e Plato affirms that the paradox of the irregular motion of bodies has only recently been resolved and that astronomy can now be considered as a science which is "noble, true, beneficial to society and completely acceptable to God." Mathematical astronomy successfully demonstrates that each planet has a geometric trajectory that corresponds to the movements determined by observational astronomy. In the final analysis, it is astronomy which enables the physico-teleological argument to prove that the soul which animates the heavenly bodies is necessarily good, something the cosmological argument could not successfully prove.

Astronomy now confirms the conviction of those who believe that the universe as a whole is the product of a rational design. Once this demonstration is assured, Plato can affirm, as he did in the *Timaeus*, that the rule of life consists in imitating, as perfectly as possible, the sensible world that surrounds him. In sum, the human soul must imitate the movements of the world soul, which are manifested in the form of the perfectly circular and uniform movements of the heavenly bodies: the visible gods.<sup>23</sup> This is also what the legislator-demiurge is endeavoring to do in the *Laws* through education.

Plato meanwhile is not convinced that his arguments for the immortality of the soul and for God's existence suffice to demonstrate divine providence. He feels that another argument is needed to account for the relation between the universe and ourselves. This argument is dependent on the cosmological (and teleological) argument.

Plato begins with the reminder that the argument that the *ariste psuche* or "best soul" takes care of the universe (900d) demonstrates, on the basis of empirical evidence, that there is a divine providence, and that the gods are good (*agathoi*) and necessarily virtuous. As for shameful and impious acts, these can only be attributed to humans. But we still do not know if the

gods neglect small things (i.e., us) in favor of big things (i.e., the heavenly bodies). We do know, he contends, that the gods by definition know, see, and hear all things. Consequently, if the gods were to neglect the little things, this could only be due to negligence or indolence; but these are qualities that are unworthy of gods; they must therefore take care of the little things. Moreover, he continues, just as a mason knows that big stones don't fit well without little stones, the neglect of small things by the gods would lead to a failure of the whole. We can thus conclude that the gods do indeed care for us.

The same ideas are found in the eschatological myth which follows these arguments (903b-905d). Indeed, the myth is an integral part of this preamble and is again grounded in Plato's cosmological perspective. While the previous arguments are meant to appeal to the rational element of the human soul, the myth is meant to appeal to the emotional/irrational element. The myth begins with the reason for which the gods *must* take care of us: each part, as insignificant as it might be, is made with the perfection of the whole in mind and, by virtue of our common origin, each one of us is part of this whole (903d2-3; see also 902b4-5). Consequently, just as the State does not exist for the sake of the individual, but the individual for the state, the whole does not exist for the sake of its part (or of the individual), but the part for the sake of the whole (903c5). Humans therefore have no privileged place in the universe. From this perspective, a sort of providential determinism (or rigorous necessity) governs the universe. God is described as having a synoptical vision of what is best for the universe as a whole (904a).<sup>24</sup> Thus, according to Plato, providence has taken steps in deciding the sort of position (*poian hedran*) and in what regions (*tinis topous*) our souls should reside after death in order that the victory of good and the defeat of evil will be assured throughout the universe (904b).<sup>25</sup>

Providence does not, however, prevent each individual from being responsible for his or her voluntary actions (*tais boulesesin*, 904c1). Thus, during terrestrial existence, individuals must learn to dominate the mortal parts of their soul that determine their character. Likewise, the relocation of souls is always determined according to the quality or character of the soul at the time of death. Souls automatically move about according to the order and law of destiny (904b7; 903e1). According to the description that Plato provides, the soul moves to that area of *physical space* that corresponds to the character for which it has assumed responsibility during its life (904e6-905a1).<sup>26</sup> Punishment and destiny are in a certain sense natural (904e7) and thus an integral part of the cosmological perspective.

This in a nutshell is what I understand Plato's cosmological perspective to be. It is this grounding of ethics, politics, and criminality in cosmology that

is of paramount importance to our comprehension of what I consider Plato's most original work on political philosophy.

In guise of a conclusion, I would like also to respond to Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa's challenge in his opening remarks with regard to how the participants in this congress (in particular, I assume, those working in the area of ancient Greek philosophy) can go beyond the normal esoteric theoretical discussions and actually influence in a positive and practical way, the politics, ethics and behaviour of the citizens of Africa in general and South Africa in particular. More precisely how can the average citizen in an impoverished country profit from this congress. For the case at hand, I can only talk for myself.

Plato is too often associated (sometimes exclusively) with the ideal state of the *Republic* in which the state is governed, as I noted above, by the unfettered discretion of philosopher kings who wield absolute political power based on expert knowledge of immutable realities called Forms. What can be more esoteric! Indeed, the *Republic* is often portrayed as defending a totalitarian regime and given the socio-political structure that it advocates, it could be interpreted as supporting a regime that has similarities with the apartheid past of South Africa. There is however a tendency to ignore that Plato himself suggests that the people are correct (and history is on their side) to assume that absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Plato strongly advocates – and this is accessible to the population at large – that the rule of law is the only fair and reasonable solution in a country or a world in which no individual can be entrusted with unfettered absolute power whatever their credentials. Plato associates “law” with the dispensation of “reason” and “reason” is a faculty in which “all” human beings participate. In conjunction with this, Plato argues (from historical experience) that the most important political virtue is “moderation” and that the best constitution is the one that blends the democratic and monarchical institutions so that while the entire citizen body is represented and participates in the political process, the magistracies which are elected and not appointed, will fall to those who have demonstrated the highest moral integrity and intellectual competence. As Plato notes, this is only achievable if *all* the citizens have access to the same and best possible political and moral education. This is not a piece of “esoteric” advice! In fact, when I read over and ponder Father Smangaliso Mkhathshwa's opening remarks I am struck by the surprising number of overlapping fundamental practical applications for the African experience that are found in Plato's *Laws*. Plato and Father Mkhathshwa both put the accent on the common good; both see injustice is a disease of the soul; both agree that the accent must be placed on communal rather than individual existence; both agree (or would agree) that song and dance are crucial educational devices; both would agree that

an imbalance in the distribution of wealth is a recipe for disaster and so on. In fact, I am confident that they would both agree that the rhythms of nature are testimony to a special guiding power. But on this important point, I am purely speculating! In any event, I agree with Father Mkhathshwa that learned papers can and often do turn out to be esoteric theoretical discussions in particular as they concern the average citizen. This was certainly not Plato's intention in the *Laws* and I hope, for my part, to have also avoided the pitfall.

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## Endnotes

1. See André Laks, "The *Laws*," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. Christopher Rowe and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 258.
2. Plato also contends that Callipolis has *nomoi aristoi* (739b8-c1) or the "best laws." This seems odd if we consider, as noted above, that legislation in the *Republic* is almost nonexistent due to the unfettered freedom of the philosopher kings (*Republic* 4.425a-427a).
3. *Laws* 739a4; 739b3; 739e4; 875d3; it is also noted in the *Politicus* (297e and 300c) that a good code of laws is the "second best" form of government.
4. Even when the well-behaved *turannos* was in power, the legislator was to be his guide (*Laws* 710c-711a).
5. In the *Politicus* (293e, 297c, 301a) we are told that laws are to be imitations of truth that is, of the best constitution and as such they should not be changed. Plato's *Politicus* has in fact prepared us somewhat for the shocking novelty of the *Laws* in which law is to supreme. The person with expert knowledge of the political art (that is, the philosophical statesman) would always be justified in overriding a code of law because laws lack the necessary flexibility to cater properly to the multifarious conditions of human life (as an analogy, Plato uses the example of doctors and steermen and the consequences were they to operate solely by the book). However, if there is no true and expert statesman available to revise a code of law, it is best to maintain and enforce without any variation the existing code, that is, the code that preserves the "traces" of the expertise of the philosophical statesman (*Politicus* 301e). My interpretation, which draws its inspiration from Rowe ("The *Politicus* and Other Dialogues," in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, ed. Rowe and Schofield, 246-50; see also J. B. Skemp, *Plato: The Statesman* [London: Routledge 1952], 49) is that unless the imitation draws its inspiration from the best and thus the expertise of the philosophical statesman, it is difficult to reconcile the notion of an imitation of the best with those who lack the necessary expertise (see *Politicus* 300c-e).
6. A notable exception is the famous Nocturnal Council. For a discussion see, Luc Brisson, "Le Collège de veille (*nukterinos sullogos*)," in F. Lisi, ed., *Plato's Laws and its Historical Significance: Selected Papers from the I International Congress on Ancient Thought* ([Salamanca] Sank Augustin: Academia Verlag, 2000), 161-77.
7. In the *Republic* human happiness or *eudaimonia* is contingent on possessing virtue or *arete*, and to possess virtue requires knowledge of its Form, which, in turn, is a philosophical activity. (Ditto for the "ideal ruler" in the *Politicus*.) Morality and politics are

thus dependent on philosophy. There is a sharp difference, as Trevor Saunders correctly notes, in the *Laws* ("Plato's Later Political Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato*, ed. R. Kraut [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002], 465).

8. "Pleasure and pain," he continues, "flow like two springs released by nature. If a man draws the right amount from the right ones at the right time, he lives a happy life; but if he draws unintelligently at the wrong time, his life will be rather different. State and individual and every living being are on the same footing here" (*Laws* 636d-e trans. Saunders).

9. Plato characterizes pleasure and pain as "a pair of witless and mutually antagonistic advisors" and connects them with "confidence" and "fear" respectively (*Laws* 644c-d).

10. This is also found in the *Timaeus* (42a-b, 43a-d, 44a-b), where the same theme is again related to pleasures and pains. The initial state of a child's soul is not unlike the state of the universe before the intervention of the demiurge.

11. For the details, see Gerard Naddaf, "Literacy and Poetic Performance in Plato's *Laws*," *Ancient Philosophy* 20(2000): 339-50.

12. Musical compositions were originally called *nomoi* in ancient Greece.

13. As André Laks ("The *Laws*," 277) notes: "law is [thus] a form of violence imposed by reason on the irrationality of the desires."

14. Glen Morrow, *Plato's Cretan City: A Historical Interpretation of the Laws*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960, 557-58.

15. As Trevor Saunders shows in his seminal *Plato's Penal Code: Tradition, Controversy, and Reform in Greek Penology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), the aim of punishment is to make the criminal a better man, that is, to change the criminal's conduct and character. There are no restrictions on the appropriate measure to attain this end; they include: honor, gifts, speech, suffering, and disgrace.

16. The famous Socratic paradox "no one does wrong willingly" depends on two assumptions: (1) that doing wrong is less advantageous to the agent than doing right; (2) that the state of mind that leads to wrong action, therefore, cannot have been chosen by him. Any wrong act that he commits is therefore involuntary, in that it springs from a state of mind that has been acquired against his will, i.e., his "real" will (or soul) as it would have been if he had *known* that that mental state was not in his interests. I borrow here Saunders's succinct summary (*Plato's Penal Code*, 143).

17. Saunders, *Plato's Penal Code*, 473.

18. Plato borrows much from contemporary Attic law and so the penalties are at times not exactly forward looking. For the details, see Saunders, *Plato's Penal Code*.

19. The source of this incurable sacrilege is connected with an unjust act that occurred in a previous life and remained unexpiated (854b-c). Indeed, given the education that a citizen would have enjoyed, Plato believed that it is inconceivable that he/she could commit such a crime. It is precisely because slaves or foreigners would not have enjoyed the same education that they are not condemned to death (854d).

20. Given the amount of social control in Magnesia, it is unclear how atheism (or even agnosticism) would have been able to germinate. But since Plato's state is contingent on a belief in a wholly good providential God, Plato may have felt compelled to demonstrate it with acceptable arguments. However, as we shall see, it is also true that

astronomy (a study of which is mandatory to some degree for all), will replace dialectic as the discipline par excellence.

21. On the meaning of *historia peri phuseos*, see Gerard Naddaf, *The Greek Concept of Nature* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005). I develop in detail what follows in another forthcoming book on Plato and the concept of nature. A taste of this can be found in my recent "Plato: The Creator of Natural Theology," *International Studies in Philosophy* 36, no. 1 (2004): 129-54.

22. In the final analysis (as we will see below), Plato wants to demonstrate two doctrines which encourage the belief in god and which are summarized in *Laws* 12 966e: (1) that the soul is older than any created thing, and that it is immortal and controls the entire world; (2) that reason (*nous*) is the supreme power in the universe.

23. The structure of city of the *Laws* is circular because it is based on the movements of the celestial bodies and therefore on the cosmological model (*Laws* 745b-e).

24. He is called the king (*basileus*, 904a6), checkers-player (*petteutes*, 903d5-6), world supervisor (*ho tou pantos epimeloumenos* 903b3-4).

25. Plato summarizes at 904c the three positions he defends in this myth: (1) all things that have soul change; (2) the cause of this change resides in our choices; (3) in changing, the soul moves in conformity with the ordinance and law of destiny (after death).

26. Judgment after death is in fact eliminated, for the "mover of the pieces" or checkers player. (*petteutes*, 903d5-6) merely weighs the souls (P.-M. Schuhl, *La fabulation platonicienne* [Paris: Alcan, 1947], 105-108). But how does the soul move in space (*chora*) after death? If, during its earthly life, the soul has only experienced minor character changes, it will move horizontally. If it led a truly unjust life, it will set out on the path to the depths of Hades, that is, in the lower regions (*topoi*) of the universe (904d). Alternatively, if it led a life of divine virtue, it will follow a holy path to a higher or superior region (*topos* 904d8; see 904b).



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# Plato and Vedanta

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## **Abstract**

*The relationship between Plato's conception of the existence of a soul as compared to the Vedantic view of a soul will be analysed. Vedanta philosophy holds in agreement with Plato that there is a magazine of knowledge and power within us already. By amalgamating the thinking of Plato and Vedic philosophy I will attempt to show how philosophical thinking is universal. This universality allows one to critically appraise knowledge from multiple perspectives providing a lever for a new understanding of oneself and thereby challenging one to broaden his/her own perspective, enabling one to see, whether one likes it or not, what s/he has become, and can through self-analysis become. My purpose in this paper is to develop a capacity to see the world multi-dimensionally, integrating, enlarging, and expanding our artificially restricted horizons. A combination of methods and a receptive attitude toward knowledge has widespread implications for the interpretation of the lives we live. It is my purpose to demonstrate the validity and necessity of an examination of multi-cultural dimensions of reality, in this instance the Greek and Hindu perspectives and teachings. The ability to make moral distinctions can be linked to an evolutionary progression of one's soul's journey. The implicit, intrinsic nature of consciousness to the mind – body duality will be analysed. I will propose that the elevation of one's consciousness in the search for a perfect state of being is the common thread in both Plato and Vedanta.*

## **Introduction**

Philosophy proper as instituted by Socrates – the love of wisdom rather than merely of knowledge and argumentation<sup>1</sup> – is virtually absent in certain contemporary contexts, but it does exist peripherally where thinkers have moved beyond the technical, logical, rational mentality to a truly holistic approach. This results in one actually taking the consequences of what one teaches and applying the lessons of unity and wholeness in practice to one's daily life. The dichotomy here lies in the diametric approaches science and

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spirituality adopt to certain key issues in regards to their methods or standards of truth.

Questions such as, "Does the evidence and testimony sufficiently prove the accused was in fact responsible for the murder?" are questions of value which are ethical in nature and can only be answered by an evaluation of the facts, which can be established through scientific empiricism. But the question "Ought we to return a verdict of guilty?" is really not a scientific or legal question... it is a moral one that no number of facts can solve.

In comparing the teachings of the philosophies of Plato and the Vedas the idea of an incorporeal, formative cause which guides our moral assumptions and enables us to have self knowledge which is sustainable and consistent will be expounded. My argument is that we essentially are consciousness and are "ensouled" beings although we have bodies and use matter to express our life work. My objective is to show we are not merely extremely intricate organisms, but that the highest expressions and aspirations of humankind are spiritual, not material or social. It is part of my purpose here to demonstrate the validity and necessity of such a turnaround in assumptions and to trace something of what it implies for the health of a more understanding and holistically intelligible kind of consciousness. It is my view that consciousness needs no physical substructure to exist.

Before I proceed to a discussion of the comparisons, I believe, it is imperative to contextualize the two schools of thought.

### **Plato's conception of the existence of a soul**

Although we have been accustomed to study things in apparent isolation, we must shift to the one-world perspective and see Plato as a one world philosopher. If we see Plato in the perspective of the total development of world history up to his time, he takes a position as if at a fulcrum in the history of ideas. Plato lived in 5<sup>th</sup> century Greece. He was roughly the contemporary of the Buddha, Mahavira and Confucius. Human culture was being developed and the basic ideas that have shaped human destiny ever since were being formulated. It is my view that Plato's thinking has influenced religious and social thinking in every part of the globe. " He has always been regarded as one of the greatest (Western) philosophers, by some as the greatest of them all".<sup>2</sup> Perhaps Plato almost bridges Being and Becoming, but there remains according to him, (logismos nothos) "bastard reasoning" which is the opposite of true rationality even though it appears to be rational. It is the rationalizing we do after the wrong has been done in order to try to make it right when it really is not. There is an unaccountable factor of brute discord inherent in the universe which always obstructs perfection and reason in every human and cosmic enterprise. Rationality and irrationality are the human

manifestations of this basic imperfection of the universe. For humankind it is this bastard reasoning which makes Becoming necessary as an effort to overcome imperfection and to return to the perfection of Being or Perfect Idea. For Plato, faith (*pistis*) as the response to *Eros* (love) fulfils this function. Although this faith cannot eliminate or harmonise imperfection, it does lead to striving and thus to expansion. When the Demiurge created the world he had only imperfect matter with which to make the “copies”. This idea of an inherent deficiency in matter is the basis of the early Upanishadic concept of “*maya*”: thus Plato’s Becoming is very much like this *maya* (illusion, the cause of material creation)<sup>3</sup>. Man, for Plato remains a child in spite of his capacity for reason. Plato’s greatest achievement was the capacity to think multi-dimensionally and in his view, knowledge had no practical use, as it existed for the abstract good of the soul. To Plato philosophy is not a doctrine or even a “method” in the modern sense of the word, but a mode of life, a perspective from which to view the world, or at least the search for such a perspective. After his “enlightenment”, Plato’s philosopher, like the *jivan mukta* (liberated while still in the body by means of discrimination) in the Vedas, dutifully returns to deal with, or even to rule in, the “second best”, the world. Besides his keen interest in the problem of immortality, Plato treated the things concerned with human destiny almost as sacred mysteries not to be approached without purification, preferably the purgation by Socratic dialectic.

The Idea of Perfection forever inspires us or even entraps us, as well as the universe, in a sort of inevitable entelechy. *Eros* (love) is to be worshipped devoutly as the Inspirer-toward-the-Good. For Plato, there is no question as important as the question of *eros* because it is the basic force of not only human life, but all living beings. Plato does claim that the journey of *theoria* is both fueled and sustained by *eros*<sup>4</sup>. The Greek concept of piety was expressed by two words, *eusebes*, which means being fearful of and reverential toward the gods, and *hosios*, which means being hallowed or sanctioned by divine prescriptions and prohibitions. Even the justice and injustice of one human being to another are matters of piety, if they concern divine prescriptions and prohibitions<sup>5</sup>. The aspect of the sacred and the belief in a divine existence were also an intrinsic part of the Vedas. The similarity in regard to Plato’s influence over Greek society and thought is exemplified in the Vedas and its influence on Hindu adherence and belief in the Vedic texts.

## **What are the Vedas**

The sanskrit translation literally means knowledge, sacred teaching. Taken collectively it is the oldest text of Indian literature, to which orthodox Hindus

ascribe superhuman origins and divine authority. This vast complex of scriptures, in length constituting six times the bulk of the Bible, is divided into four parts:

1. The Rigveda – the Veda of poetry
2. The Samaveda – the Veda of songs
3. The Yajurveda - the Veda of sacrificial texts
4. The Atharvaveda – the Veda of Atharvan, a priest of the mystical fire ceremony.

Orthodox Hindus regard the Vedas as their highest written authority. Any subsequent scripture, if they were to regard it as valid, must be in agreement with them: it may expand them, it may develop them, and still be recognized, but it must not contradict them. The Vedas, are to a Hindu as nearly as any human document can be, the expression of divine truth. In the words of Dr. S Radhakrishnan, "The appeal to the Vedas does not involve any reference to an extra- philosophical standard. What is dogma to the ordinary man is experience to the pure in heart".<sup>6</sup>

The object of a deep study of Vedanta philosophy is to give the right nourishing food to the body, mind and soul.

## **Plato and Vedanta view of Reality**

The beginning of philosophy is the insight that appearance and reality are not the same. Because the evidence for the origins of philosophy is so limited, though any number of elaborate constructions have been based on it, the historian of early Greek philosophy may be cautious today in his employment of myth to explain the beginnings of philosophy, but he is likely to reject a causal role for myth with the same confidence as did John Burnet at the turn of the century.<sup>7</sup>

The question of the nature of the state of reality, whether there exists something permanent, behind this ever-changing flux is not unfamiliar to both the Vedas and Plato. Plato points out the weakness in assuming flux and change to be ultimate. If they were, knowledge would be impossible. His impatience with the later Heracleiteans – "All things whatsoever are in change" is expressed in the *Theaetetus* where he has Theodorus go so far as to call the followers of the doctrine maniacs since they cannot even stand "still to attend to an argument or a question". (*Theaetetus*, 179c-183c)<sup>8</sup>. The Vedas, like Plato, sought to find the state beyond flux. The term symbolizing this aspect of flux in the Upanisads (a portion of the Vedas) is *turiya*, or transcendental consciousness.

According to the Vedas circumstances of our lives, our pains and our pleasures, are all the result of our past actions in this present existence, and in countless previous existences, from time immemorable. The Vedic term for

this is *karma*. The Vedanta doctrine of *karma* is a doctrine of absolute, automatic justice. One should remember that Plato also believed in the Vedic principle of *karma* because he did not think that offering to God or Gods could do any good to man.

According to Vedanta teachings *maya* is quite pitiless. We get exactly what we earn, no more, no less. If we cry out against some apparent injustice, it is only because the act that brought it upon us is buried deep in the past, out of reach of our memory. Once we become conscious, even dimly of the Atman, the Reality within us, the world shows itself in a very different aspect. It is no longer a court of justice but a kind of gymnasium. Good and evil, pain and pleasure, still exist but they seem more like the ropes and vaulting horses and parallel bars which can be used to make our bodies strong. *Maya* is no longer an endlessly revolving wheel of pain and pleasure but a ladder which can be climbed to consciousness of your spiritual freedom.

In Vedantic philosophy behind the objects of this phenomenal world lies a changeless, permanent reality, the supreme *Brahman* (the Supreme Being); and behind the fleeting senses and mind of an individual human being is the Self, also a changeless, permanent reality; and the supreme *Brahman* and this Self are one. Every individual houses within her/himself the Eternal Spirit, the immutable, timeless self-existence; and though this Eternal Spirit dwells within all, and all beings exist in *Brahman*, *Brahman* is not tainted or affected by the thoughts and actions, good or evil, of individual persons. Knowledge of the immutable, eternal, timeless, self-existence is called, *Brahma-nirvana*. It is not to be confused with intellectual concepts, nor with a method of thinking. It is a direct, immediate experience, in which the spiritualised consciousness sees God more directly, more intimately, than the physical consciousness see the objective world. This view of reality can be compared to Plato's distinction between knowledge and opinion in the Republic<sup>9</sup>.

Human beings according to Vedantic teachings are trying to annihilate time and space, the dimensions of the ego-idea, and thus uncover the Reality which is nearer and more instant than the ego, the body, or the mind<sup>10</sup>. A person is trying to be aware of what he already and always is, and this awareness is not an aspect of consciousness, but consciousness itself. The illumined seer does not merely know *Brahman*, s/he is *Brahman*, s/he is Existence, s/he is Knowledge. *Brahman*, Knowledge and Freedom are not things to be found anew.

All the earliest Hindu scriptures and all the subsequent systems of philosophy not only express their conception of spiritual truth but also offer practical methods for realizing the Divine consciousness. These methods, however, receive but casual mention in the Vedas, the Upanisads, and other early works, and whatever references there are to them deal with the specific

and detailed processes of Self-realisation handed down orally generation after generation from teacher to disciple. The same processes have been followed even to the present day. All aspirants after spiritual awakening must practice them if they would want to acquire personal experience of the truth they are seeking.

In the Upanisads, the word *Om* was held sacred by sages and seers, being regarded as a symbol of Brahman. From Vedic times until the present day it has been understood in this manner, and it has been employed as an aid in meditation by all aspirants after Brahman. It is accepted both as one with *Brahman*, and as the medium, the Logos connecting man and *Brahman*. It is *Brahman*, and by its aid man can realize *Brahman*. The entire history of the syllable is in the revelations of the Vedas and this history in the hands of the later philosophers developed into what became known as *sphota-vada*, or philosophy of the Word. The similar doctrine of the Logos can be seen in the Greek metaphysicians. The Greeks first conceived of the Logos as a bridge over the gulf that separates man and God, the known and the unknown. The Logos was identified with one or another of the physical elements, according as one or another was thought to be the ultimate substance of the universe. Heraclitus, who lived in the sixth century BC, was the first who tried to break away from a purely physical conception of creation, substituting for the material first cause of his predecessors a principle which he called intelligence. This principle of intelligence was the Logos. The advance Heraclitus made, however, was rendered somewhat equivocal by his identification of the Logos with the physical element fire.

In the hands of Plato the theory of Logos underwent a complete transformation. He regarded the Logos as the cosmic purpose, the highest idea, the supreme Good, under which all lesser ideas, that is, eternal archetypes of things, relations, qualities and values, are subsumed. According to him, these ideas are arranged in a logical order, and are governed by the Logos: thus the universe is a unity in diversity, a rational, organic whole.

The philosopher depicted in the Analogy of the Cave is an idealized figure who makes a journey that no human being could ever accomplish.<sup>11</sup> In the Analogy of the Cave, Plato illustrates how the philosopher looks away from the terrestrial world and directs his "eyes" to the region of true reality. For a time he is blinded by the light of the sun that shines there. But his eyes slowly adjust, and eventually he is able to gaze upon the beings in this metaphysical realm, including the Being that illuminates this region, the sun-like Form of the Good. The philosopher makes his way towards the direct contemplation of the Form of the Good, a vision that renders him a perfected soul akin to the Gods. The philosopher moves beyond the human realm and this adjustment and realignment of his "vision" with time enables him to transform his soul and his perspective of reality.<sup>12</sup>

## Plato and Vedantic analysis of ethical conduct

The analysis and discussion of ethics played a significant role in the Vedas. Ethics in the language of the Vedas is the formulation of the science of conduct in relation to society as humankind faces multifarious activities as social beings. Hindu ethics as explicated in the Vedas does not only concern itself with outer human activity, but extends to the inner life as well. Every teaching is conditioned by the phrase “in thought, word and deed”. Ways of achieving right conduct are explicitly revealed – ways, which if followed, will enable one instinctively to live the ethical life. Emphasis is laid upon ultimately transforming the whole being and rising above the injunctions of moral codes. The wise man is not troubled, we read in the Upanisads, by thoughts like these: “Have I done right?” “Have I done wrong?”<sup>13</sup>

Vedanta is not a philosophy of escapism, nor does it look down on life as a seat of sin. The word detachment (*Vairagya*) in Vedantic teaching is often misunderstood. The world is a school where the soul is to be trained to mount higher and higher, the goal being the realization of God as the universal consciousness within. What is condemned in the world is the assumption that there is nothing above or beyond it. It is a mistake to think that wealth, sex-relationship, power and name have any real value. The duty of human beings is to know the nature of the Self and to help their fellow-beings. This end is achieved not by hatred of the world but by withdrawal from it together with absorption in benevolence, universal love and knowledge of the Self. In the words of Shankara, “We are all pilgrims to the temple of eternal light which is within the soul”. According to the teaching of the Vedas as long as one is devoted to material objects and one’s own narrow interests, people cannot avoid war, revolution and mass destruction. *Vairagya* (detachment) is needed today. It is of value not as an end in itself but as a preparatory step to the achievement of truth. If this great principle is adopted in daily life hatred will give way to love.

This can be compared to Plato’s discussion of distance and detachment in the *theoria*. As Plato indicates, in the dialogues of *Theoria*, the detached activity of contemplation transforms the philosopher, rendering him wise and truly free, this in turn, enables him to play the role of a virtuous and impartial “outsider” in his own city. For Plato this detachment is a necessary precondition for philosophical contemplation as well as for virtuous action in the world.

Plato describes the education of the theoretical Philosopher as the “turning” of the eye of the soul away from the world of becoming and towards that of being, from darkness to light; this turning around of the soul effectively turns it away from the human world and redirects it to objects in the realm of true being. In the activity of seeking and “seeing” the Forms,

the philosophic soul turns its back on “a day that is like night” and looks towards “the true light of day” (521c)<sup>14</sup>.

Plato uses the metaphor of the soul’s capacity for “vision” or sight again and again. By using the phenomenon of vision as an analogue for the apprehension of the Forms, Plato clearly conceptualizes the attainment of knowledge as “seeing” of Being.

From reading Plato one can come to the conclusion that he preferred oral or “living” discourse to the disembodied voice of the written text and that for Plato, philosophic wisdom must be enacted by a living soul in a human body.

Like the prisoners in Plato’s famous cave who, having never been outside, deny the possibility of anything so absurd as daylight or the sun, the stricter adherents of empirical materialism are those who deny the existence of either non-physical or spiritual phenomena per se.

### **Moral enhancement of consciousness**

The realities of contemporary society create a strain on the individual to foster a balance between the awareness and perception of one’s individual being or individuality and the social relations within changing cultural contexts. This becomes a moral challenge since awareness of one’s identity strains social relations if there is a perceived conflict between values and interests between yourself and your fellow beings. One should evaluate one’s moral conceptions and motivations not only in relation to oneself, but also how they relate to others and to one’s society generally in order to justify one’s decision both to oneself and to others.

In his discussion of the Doctrine of Forms, Plato distinguishes between eternal and temporal being, while in his discussion of motion in the universe being generated by souls, for example, with particular reference to Laws X, the motion of *nous* is a “revolution” which actually resembles circular motion. This aspect of motion has strong similarity with the description of Lord Indra in the Rigveda. I would like to quote a verse from the Rigveda depicting Indra as the soul of the World: “He (Indra) of whom all this world is but the copy who shakes things moveless, He, O men, is Indra.” (Rg. II, XII - 9)<sup>15</sup>

The likeness of Plato’s views of souls generating motion in the world and the role of Lord Indra is comparable to the assertion in *Timaeus* that the soul is self-moving motion, and that it is the “primary” causal principle in the created universe.

The importance of this research is that it is an attempt to show how consciousness unites the mind and body. Our consciousness is not a sense – empirical phenomenon but is an inner dimension of being. It is part of a greater reality which is available to our intuition as consciousness. It is an

inner source which can be equated to a consistently expansive and present reservoir of a collective awareness. This state of being is accessed and one becomes conscious of its potential through an evolutionary progression of one's soul's journey. This itself lends much credence to the Platonic assertion that a world of unchanging forms or archetypes somehow 'exists' independently of individual minds. The level of development of one's consciousness enables one to endeavour to make moral distinctions which in my estimation would be aligned to virtuous actions and intentions.

The Vedantic *akasaor* (all pervasive) which is the subtlest mind force that penetrates everything and contains a complete record of everything has been described as the non-corporeal realm and has been part of Vedic literature since time immemorable. It is my view that consciousness is the interconnecting aspect or glue between the mind and body. It is not generated by any mental or physical inception but is a kind of genetic DNA which our minds have evolved to or with which we are *karmically* endowed with at birth. This exemplifies the idea of reincarnation of souls through various life cycles. These cycles I want to postulate are a very intrinsic and necessary part of the evolutionary trajectory of our consciousness. This view is also very similar to Plato's theory of *anamnesis* (recollection) where we could aspire to the ideal of the Form (perfection) once the awareness has been attained not in one lifetime but through several.<sup>16</sup> Plato's *Meno* lays the foundation for this enterprise in that it demonstrates that objects of knowledge are found through the process of recollection<sup>17</sup>. In the questioning of Meno's untutored slave, Socrates proves that learning is but recollection of knowledge gained by the soul before its incarnation in a body (ibid: 45). Socrates says there must be "something" which enabled the slave to come to the solutions of the questions posed to him. This "something" is a knowledge absorbed by the soul before its incarnation, which question and answer has enabled it to recollect (ibid: 45). This something is what I call consciousness.

What exactly is the connection between consciousness, a complex functioning of our mind's to my assertion that it bridges the mind-body quandary. I believe because of its very phenomenal nature consciousness cannot be relegated to only the mind or thinking component. There is an intrinsic, intuitive and implicit causal connection between certain aspects of our cognitive and conceptual makeup and our bodily functions that are mediated by this connective and continuing "something" deep seated within us which as already stated I call consciousness.

## **Conclusion**

The Vedic concepts *karma* (justice) and *turiya* (transcendental consciousness) and Plato's *anamnesis* (recollection) seem to indicate that human conduct in

terms of our virtuous and moral inclinations is dependent on a logic of values and actions which are inexplicable. I propose the moral significance of an individual's decision or action is a direct result of their level of consciousness, whether they are aware of it or not. The moral choices an individual embarks upon may appear as a random outcome or unavoidable series of accumulative events or even an impulse without reflection, however, I believe the course chartered is neither. Due to the individual's ignorance or state of *maya* there are cycles of these repeated moral vagaries until there is a significant enhancement in the level of consciousness, which results in a desire to abstain from this unwholesome and unworthy behaviour and consciously engage in morally upright deeds. This is the commencement of self-analysis. This works in close association with enhancement of one's consciousness and is a very important element in the cognition of the reality within. The intuitive, instinctive or reflective cognition of one's inner reality whether it is constituted or felt is conceived as consciousness once the individual being's soul has life. This is an eternal process and each and every person is endowed with the ability to be awakened to this dimension of self-analysis or enlightenment. This is an extremely gradual and even painstaking process because of the *maya* we are persistently shrouded by. Until the gross and carnal desires are quelled and totally negated, the evolution of one's consciousness is almost nominal. It is my belief that we are reaching and searching, in the language of Plato (by *anamnesis*) for a perfect state of being. This is attainable through our consciousness and its elevation and evolution. When this evolutionary process commences, an individual's mind and body, unity and connectedness are as sweet as nectar and regardless of any diversions (*maya*) one is confronted with, the mind and body yearns for this quiet contemplative quality of being – a silence amidst the chaos of life.

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# One more time: Views on Aristotle's philosophy and Intercultural Philosophy

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## **Abstract**

*In my view a philosopher is a person of wisdom who produces a guide to life, providing us with some tools for dealing with practical problems and survival issues on at least five adaptation domains. These are a) metaphysics: man's relationship to the cosmos; b) politics: man's relationship with others; c) ethics: man's relationship with himself and his behaviour toward others; d) epistemology: man's relationship with his mind and his method of thinking; and e) aesthetics: man's relationship with and appreciation of beauty. This paper is destined to mainly present an unshackled response to the informed and well-versed papers by Anastasios Ladikos titled Revisiting the virtue of courage in Aristotle; and Murray Hofmeyer: The Promise and Problems of Intercultural Philosophy; (*Phronimon – Journal of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities –Volume 5(2) 2004*). My concern with Aristotle's ideas stems from the fact that his propositions are connected to ancient battlefield circumstances and conditions, as well as the Spartan Culture of his time. If juxtaposed with scenes of violence in our time we can draw many parallel behavioral patterns that can pass as valid and reliable characteristics of modern-day soldiers in mortal, face-to-face combat or victims of crime in violent confrontation with rapists, murderers and assaulters.*

## **Introduction**

My interest in philosophy stems from my undergraduate reading of practical philosophy and many subsequent self-initiated studies for empowerment and enlightenment. I view myself as a novice and an animal that has yet won neither a consolation, nor a major prize at a show. It follows that I am willing and ready for the slaughterhouse.

In my view a philosopher is a person of wisdom who produces a guide to life, providing us with some tools for dealing with practical problems and

survival issues on at least five adaptation domains. These are a) metaphysics: man's relationship to the cosmos; b) politics: man's relationship with others; c) ethics: man's relationship with himself and his behaviour toward others; d) epistemology: man's relationship with his mind and his method of thinking; and e) aesthetics: man's relationship with and appreciation of beauty (Runes et al 1964).

With the passing of time I have come to discover that every generation add something of value to man's philosophy and well being. This truism has been driven home by repetition when Anastasios Ladikos prompted me some time ago to contribute an article to *Phronimon*. Thus I came across two articles, one by Ladikos and one by Hofmeyer, which meet my expectations.

### **Hofmeyer's idea of contextual culture**

(*Phronimon*, Vol 5(2) 2004: 61-74)

In his discussion of intercultural philosophy Hofmeyer highlights a number of sensational conclusions in respect of human frailty, interaction, and meaningfulness, some of which I would like to re-state here for the record:

- a) nothingness belongs essentially to being human; the universal is lack, and thus open (p. 70)
- b) what Kimmerle calls intercultural philosophy, Hofmeyer calls contextual philosophy (p. 71)
- c) Contextual philosophy proceeds from the assumption that all philosophy is contextual (p. 71)
- d) contextual philosophy takes the whole of its context into account, including culture (p. 72)
- e) contextual philosophy has its roots squarely in critical theory (p. 72)
- f) contextual philosophical dialogues are necessary to solve problems on a planetary scale and to know adequately (p. 72)
- g) if any philosophy failed to seek dialogue it is a sign of aporia – a theoretical difficulty or puzzle; a lack and incompleteness that is universal (p. 74)
- h) no philosophy is absolutely true; all are subject to modification or improvement (p. 61).

For the natural and social sciences Hofmeyer's propositions are fully acceptable and grounded. For one thing, they are compatible with the principle of uncertainty in science and reflect a belief in open systems of knowledge and a resolve to carry on and continue the hunt for truth.

For another, his proposed contextual philosophy lends a new dimension to culture, id est. the recognition that smaller contextual cultures are present within the expanse of ruling or powerful cultures. These 'parasite cultures' create their own time-space niches in order to meet their own unique cultural needs and eccentricities.

To illustrate this social phenomenon I quote from my *Ms I am because you are* which is due for publication, the following paragraphs under the heading 'Narrow, specific relations versus broad, diffuse ones'.

### **Narrow, specific relations versus broad, diffuse ones<sup>2</sup>**

'In days gone by relationships were not as specialized as they are today. People performed many functions for one another, without expecting to be paid or to be rewarded. In modern times urban residents seem to enter mainly into contractual relations with their neighbors and those they come into contact with. They try to shun spontaneous shows of goodwill and love for others.'

'This is especially true of citizens who live in comfort within big cities. They are content to mind their own business and detest meddling in one another's affairs. This type of aloofness spurns cultural islands of indifferent cliques and snobs in the communities and in society at large, while some other islands are generated for many other reasons, to wit:

- a) *young Turks* (at work we mix with all age groups, but tonight I want to be associating with my own kind);
- b) *intellectuals* (during the day I have to suffer many a fool gladly, but in my own private time I am free to suffer none gladly);
- c) *artists* (each day I take in the vibes of the people at large: I listen, look, smell, feel and observe what life is really all about; but at night I retire with other artists and great minds to rethink the blight and the plight of those who struggle, all in vain, against the blistering wind, with hungry bellies and dry mouths);
- d) *holier-than-thou groups* (we are here to praise God, to pray for those in sinful bondage, unwilling to make amends and convert themselves. As surely as the day follows night, the end is nigh);
- e) *sub-cultural cliques* (we love to relax with people who belong to our own race and creed, speaking the language we speak in my place of origin, singing the songs we sing, drinking the wine and beer we drink, and ...);
- f) *professional/organized syndicates or gangs* ( we do business for profit by entering into illegal enterprises, criminal transactions, fraudulent schemes, counterfeit operations, and racketeering); and
- g) *pleasure hunters* (let's be happy and reap the nice benefits of the seven deadly sins before the dawn is due: **one**, partake and reward yourself with *pride* among your fellow drunkards – shout with joy that you are not like your 'holy' brothers who saint it in public and sin it in secret; **two**, *covet* your brother's wife or your father's new girlfriend because they will never split on your advances; **three**, openly show your *lust* for men or women and rape or sodomize them if they refuse to fall for your charm; **four**, strike out in *anger* at the one who has spilled a drink on your whoring girlfriend's evening gown; **five**, fill your *gluttonous* belly to the brink with liquor and food, and abuse the magic incense of cocaine and marijuana in tandem with the sweet injections of speed and LSD; **six**, *envy* the rich and hate their guts to the extent that you burgle their homes, ransacked their offices, rape their wives, and kidnap their children for ransom; and **seven**, rejoice in your *sloth*: be proud of your laziness,

indolence, reluctance to better yourself or to make an effort to help or support others; be indifferent to your family's or friend's needs; if they trip over their feet or stumble in life, do not hesitate to make their fall even harder by shoving them smartly.'

## **Ladikos on the virtue of courage in Aristotle**

(Phronimon, Vol 5(2) 2004: 77-92)

In his glowing exposition and critique of the thoughts and teaching of Aristotle in regard to the virtue of courage, Ladikos records the following pertinent observations and thoughts of and on Aristotle and states his own interpretation of the philosopher's ideas that are forthwith repeated for easy reference.

- a) 'Aristotle defines virtues (areta) in terms of the passions which they involve and the kind of context and conduct in which they are displayed' (p. 77)
- b) 'Acts of virtue bring honour to an individual (but) acts of vice, dishonour' (p. 78)
- c) 'Virtue, like nature, has the quality of hitting the mean' (p. 78)
- d) 'Aristotle holds that every ethical virtue is located ... between states of excess and deficiency' (p. 79)
- e) 'Courage is the mean between fearfulness and fearlessness' (p. 80)
- f) 'Reckless people cannot be people of courage because they lack fear' (p. 81)
- g) 'Aristotle distinguishes between moral/true courage on the one hand and five kinds of courage inappropriately so-called, on the other: 1) political courage; 2) professional courage; 3) courage of passion; 4) courage of good hope; and 5) courage of ignorance.' (pp. 81-82)
- h) 'Fear and confidence are apparently inversely correlated ...' (p. 83 and p. 88)
- i) '...death is the most fearful of all things; for it is the end, and nothing is thought to be any longer either good or bad for the dead' (pp. 83-4)
- j) 'It is only on the battlefield that the brave man is concerned with death – in the greatest and noblest danger' (p. 84)
- k) 'if a person fears too much, he is a coward; if he fears too little, or not at all, he would be a sort of madman or insensitive to pain. The courageous person is the person who fears the right things, and from the right motive, in the right way and at the right time' (p. 83)
- l) 'Socrates believed that ...'the virtue courage was a form of knowledge that could be taught and that '... nothing is so appalling as the prospect of losing one's integrity'; while Aristotle believed that courage was more of a disposition that each individual possessed and cultivated' (pp. 84-5)
- m) '... he (the soldier on the battlefield) is knowingly losing the greatest goods, and this is painful. But he is none the brave, and perhaps all the more so, because he chooses noble deeds of war at that cost' (p. 85)
- n) '... a distinction is drawn between a willingness to risk death in battle and a desire to seek death in battle.' (p. 87)
- o) 'Urmson holds the view that Aristotle made two errors: he failed to distinguish (i) two kinds of fear and (ii) two triads: a) cowardice, bravery, and foolhardiness; and b) overconfidence, caution, and over-cautiousness. (p. 88)

## Notes

The warning Ladikos sounds that different semantic fields are covered by different authors is valid.

In my dictionary . . .

- overconfidence equals arrogance, brashness, foolhardiness, as well as shortsightedness
- caution equals attention to safety, prudence, and carefulness
- over-cautiousness equals being vigilant, discreet, guarded, and
- excessively cautious

Before attempting to air some thoughts on Aristotle's ideas on the virtue of courage, his definition of the Spartan situation needs to be highlighted as well as my own reflections on it.

### **Some thoughts on the definition of battlefield situations**

Aristotle's arguments as portrayed by Ladikos, center on the types of soldiers encountered in fatal warfare: experiencing severe stress, but nevertheless actively looking for or shunting death and displaying either a willingness to risk death, or a desire to seek death.

a) Eurytus represents the citizen soldier because, although totally blinded by severe eye infection, chose to enter the danger zone, knowingly and voluntarily. He was driven by noble thoughts of loyalty to his fellow soldiers and honour to defend the people of Spartan - come what may. So he died tragically with the rest of the army.

b) Aristodemus represents the cowards, the opposite pole of the citizen soldier, those who flee or abstain from entering the battlefield and to fight and emerge victorious. The fact that Aristodemus endured the scorn and humiliation heaped upon him by the Spartans and fought bravely in another battle not long after that fateful day of shame, did not move the Spartans to redefine their feelings of total rejection towards him.

The absolute way in which the Spartans defined the battlefield situation reflects a bifurcation that is in need of further division into secondary branches or sub-types. One such classification may divide the category *cowards* into i) correctly and ii) incorrectly labeled cowards. The correctly labeled cowards may feature those soldiers that stop *fighting* and *freeze*, or *flee* when confronted with death. Those who are labeled incorrectly do belong to the citizen soldier category and do not warrant a separate category.

Before attempting to portray the different types graphically, another attempt must be made to refine the proposed categories in the dendrogram.

## **Aristotle's philosophy of ethics**

(Runes et al 1964: 20-24)

In the *Dictionary of Philosophy* (1964) by Dagobert D. Runes and 72 authorities, Glenn R. Morrow refers to Aristotle's philosophy of ethics and the principles he applied to solve the question of human good.

According to Morrow the ancient philosopher reckons that the good for man is a realization (awareness or actual experience) of the distinctive faculties of man/woman, as unique and characteristic only to homo sapiens. However, human excellence or supremacy shows itself bilaterally: on the front side man/woman displays 'habitual subordination ... to rational rule and principle'; and on the flipside, 'exercise of reason in the search for and contemplation of truth'.

The former type of virtue is expressed in moral virtues (ethos), as in law-abiding behavior and acts of compassion towards those in our communities and societies in need of care, serious attention, protection, and respect. The latter type of virtue is expressed in intellectual (dianoetic) virtues as applied for example in scientific research.

### **The highest good for man**

(ibid: 22)

In *Politics* Aristotle defines the political community as the '... source and sustainer of the typically human life'. Nevertheless, he goes on to say that the highest form of life is neither to be found in political life, nor in any other form of practical activity. It is only to be found in 'theoretical inquiry and contemplation of truth.'

For him the reasons are obvious and definitive: a) theoretical inquiry into and contemplation of truth alone brings complete and continuous happiness; b) this activity constitutes the highest part of man's complex nature; c) it is least dependent on outside sources (externals); d) it empowers man to participate '... in that activity of pure thought which constitutes the eternal perfection of the divine nature'.

### ***Comment***

From these assertions made by Aristotle it follows that the Spartan soldier was subjected to a political definition of a situation that was finite and absolute – one which left no room for conjecture or deviance. It was so effective and binding that one of the blinded soldiers (Eurytus) entered the fray with 298 of his fellow soldiers to die an instant death. However, for the other one who stayed behind it didn't hold: he opted out to his shame and

detriment. Aristodemos was willing to risk death in 'normal' or run-of-the-mill conditions, but not in abnormal or in a state of deprived faculties, such as being blind and unable to protect himself or those around him. Thus he would have posed a risk for others as well as for himself. He took rational stock of the situation and made a rational decision.

A person's willingness to risk death in battle and his desire to seek death in battle are altogether two different issues which do not sit on polar positions on a continuum of opposite degrees. The act of risking death does not necessarily mean that the soldiers are having a desire or urge to seek death.

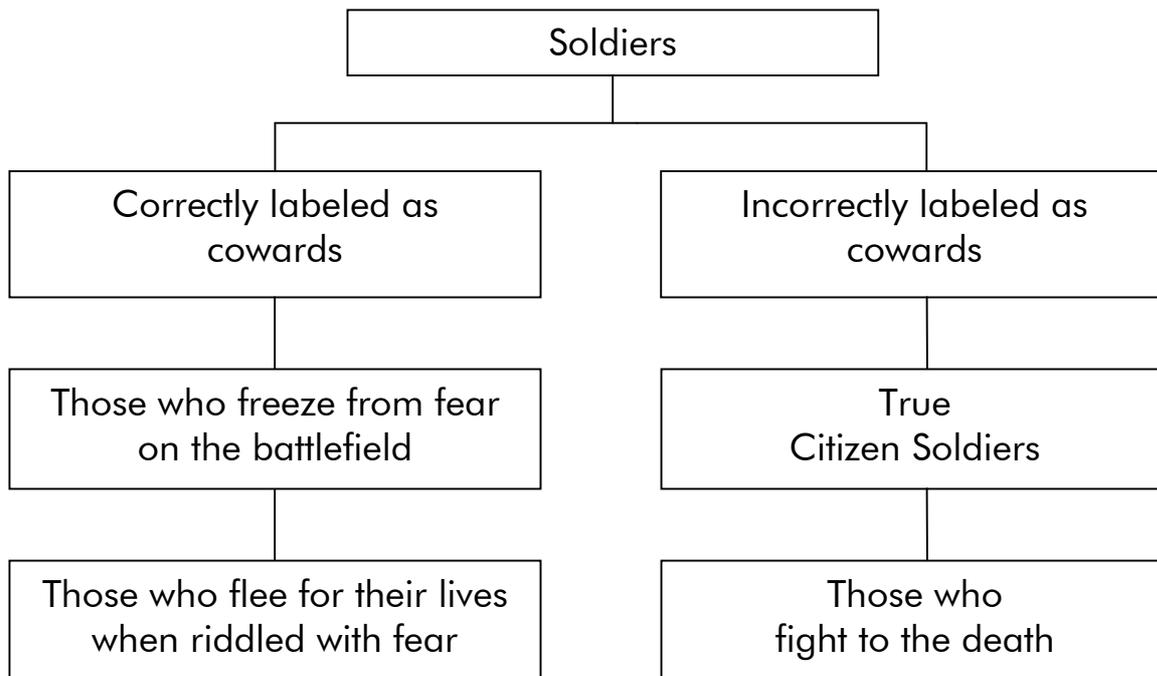
As a matter of professionalism, a soldier's job – to fight and defend his country – does not allow him to make the kind of decisions mentioned in the paper under review. The risk of going into battle and thus of taking the risk of losing his life in battle, is real when he joins up as a professional soldier; and subsequent thoughts of suicide or reckless subjection or exposure to sudden death only happen at some later stages.

It is fair to assume that the soldier's willingness to risk death in battle and his desire to seek death in battle – if present in the form of driving forces – are time-spaced divorced and totally unrelated as such.

On the other hand, a soldier's willingness to avoid death is dependent on his a) awareness of impending danger; b) propensity to take calculated risks; c) confidence in his own skills and capacity to ward off fatal attacks; d) confidence in his fellow soldiers to cover his unguarded flank; e) confidence in his section to win the battle; f) his ambition to achieve success and honour; and g) his determination to survive the onslaught.

However, Aristotle's philosophy that death is the most fearful of all things for a Spartan soldier is disputed by none other than Socrates who reckons that '... nothing is so appalling as the prospect of losing one's integrity'. My contention is to go along with this. The fear of nothingness, no eternal consciousness, or total extinction after death is the ultimate threat for human beings, despite their creed or craft; although I must admit that the majority trained Spartan soldiers would have willingly and gladly entered the great unknown abyss in exchange for glory and reverence after the final battle was over.

Aristotle's assertion in his *Rhetoric* that '... fear involves pain and disturbance aroused by the expectation of impending evil is naturally expressed in flight' (Ladikos 2004: 89) is not a complete picture of the reaction of man and beast to impending danger that threatens life and limb. The most immediate reaction is to freeze, made powerless and motionless through fear, adopting a physical state as though arrested in time, and/or immobilized and paralyzed with apprehension of an impending horrible death.



*Graphic portrayal of the way in which soldiers may differ from each other in battlefield situations*

One's next reactions would be to fight or to flee, depending on the perception one has of the situation at hand. If the odds are very slim to escape alive, flight would be the chosen option to take, otherwise one's professionalism, training and conditioning in warfare would prevail.

What strikes one here is that Aristotle is sometimes willing to recognize the principle of uncertainty that characterizes all science, but not throughout his writings, to wit a) '... a certain amount of fear is medial or right on one occasion but may not be medial or right on another occasion' and '... there is no uniform criterion of medial fear for all circumstances'. *ibid*: 89) and b) 'it is only upon the battlefield that a man faces and fears the terrible danger of having his own life taken from him by another man in mortal combat' (*ibid*: 84) (Cf. crime situations in which hundreds of residents are annually killed by burglars and robbers)

### **Aristotle on medial values**

Aristotle propagates the idea of an ideal mean between two opposites: for example a) 'virtue, like nature, has the quality of hitting the mean'; b) '... every ethical virtue is located ... between states of excess and deficiency'; and (c) 'courage is the mean between fearfulness and fearlessness' (*ibid*: 78-80).

According to this set-up the mean is looked upon, not so much as an arithmetic mean, but a type of mode or median – thus a qualitative value or worth and desirability of the trait in question; in stead of a quantitative

assessment or valuation or the measurement of the magnitude of countable degrees or differences (Van der Westhuizen 1982: 87-109).

Then again in *Eudemian Ethics* 'fear and confidence are apparently inversely correlated so that there as just two vices: a coward feels more fear and less confidence while a reckless person feels less fear and more confidence, than is proper. This may suggest that fear and confidence are distinct emotions, but opposed poles of the same emotional range' (Ladikos 2004: 83).

With this assertion it becomes clear that Aristotle's mean could very well qualify as an arithmetic mean and not just as a balance point on the scale of natural emotions – a value that is quantifiable and measurable and therefore amenable to comparative studies and distribution analyses.

## **In conclusion**

In conclusion I would like to stress that in my book Aristotle's philosophy (as opposed to Plato's) has laid the foundation of natural and social science and still guides us on our way to comprehension and understanding of our essential relationship with our own thoughts and feelings, our inner selves, other people, things of beauty and the cosmos that includes not only the universe but also the sum total of our experience and the ordered systems of our ideas.

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