FROM ANCIENT GREEK TO ASIAN PHILOSOPHY

Edited by
ELIZABETH HOPPE
RONALD WEED

ATINER
2007
From Ancient Greek to Asian Philosophy

Edited by
Elizabeth Hoppe
Ronald Weed
Table of Contents

List of Contributors  i

Introduction  1
_Hoppe, E._

PART I
ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY

1. Pre-Socratic Influences on Socratic Capacities (Dunameis)  7
_Paleologou, M._

2. The World According to Plato  21
_Hoppe, E._

_Romano, J.J._

4. Aristotle’s Metaphysics and Quantum Physics  51
_Glazebrook, T._

5. The Ergon – Energeia Perspective in the Interpretation of Aristotle’s Eudaimonia  69
_Festin, J.M.L.M._

6. Virtuous Character: An Approachable Ideal  85
_Homiak, M._

7. Democratic Envy in Aristotle: An Other-Centered Vice?  101
_Weed, R._

8. Aristotle and Brain Death: What Happens When the Master meets Modern Medicine?  113
_McEvoy, L. A._

9. The Providential Tourist: Epictetus on How a Stoic Travels  127
_Stephens, O.W._

10. ‘Who am I?’ The Platonic Dialogues and the _Upanishads_ on the Self  141
_Schiltz, E._
PART II
COMPARATIVE AND ASIAN PHILOSOPHY

11. Maya and Dike and the Principles of Eco-Justice
   Giancola, D.
   157

12. The Position of Logic in the Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence: An
    Analysis of Al-Ghazzali’s thought on his Book, Al-Mustasfa Min ‘Ilm
    Al-Usul (The Quintessence of the Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence)
    Hamat, F. M.
   169

13. Indian Yoni-Linga and Chinese Yin Yang: Conceptual Comparisons
    Ding, Z.J.
   183

14. Discoveries of the Original Meaning of the Tao Te Ching
    Wang, L.
   195

15. Fumbling the Flywhisk: the ‘Hidden’ Complexities of Buddho-Daoist
    Debate
    Thompson, M.J.
   211

16. The Politics of Philosophy: Mou Zongsan, the Kyoto School, and their
    Critics
    Tu, X.
   223
List of Contributors

Ding Z. John, Professor, California State Polytechnic University, USA
Festin J. Moises Lorenz Maria, Dean of Studies, San Carlos Seminary, Philippines
Giancola Donna, Associate Professor, Suffolk University College of Arts & Sciences, USA
Glazebrook Trish, Associate Professor, Dalhousie University, Canada
Hamat F. Mohd, Lecturer, University of Malaya, Malaysia
Homiak Marcia, Professor, Occidental College, USA
Hoppe Elizabeth, Associate Professor, Lewis University, USA
McEvoy L. Adrianne, Assistant Professor, Mansfield University of Pennsylvania, USA
Paleologou Maria, Lecturer, California State University, USA
Romano J. Joseph, Professor, Cabrini College, USA
Schiltz Elizabeth, Assistant Professor, College of Wooster, USA
Stephens O. William, Professor, Creighton University, USA
Thompson M. John, Assistant Professor Christopher Newport University, USA
Tu Xiaofei, Ph. D Candidate, Syracuse University, USA
Wang Liancheng, Associate Professor, BS M&B CO., LTD. Shenzhen, China
Weed Ronald, Assistant Professor, Tyndale University College, Canada
Introduction

The Athens Institute for Education and Research presented its first ever philosophy conference in June 1-3, 2006. Over 120 speakers gathered near Athens, Greece to present papers on a wide range of topics, two of which included Ancient Greek and Asian Philosophy. This volume highlights the main ideas that arose in these sessions. The first part on Ancient Greek thought includes papers on Plato and the Pre-Socratics up through Stoicism while the second part on Asian Philosophy covers ancient, medieval, and contemporary Asian thought. Despite the divergent topics, the papers interrelate through their investigation of basic philosophical problems, such as questions concerning ethics, knowledge, truth, wisdom, and the soul.

I. Ancient Greek Philosophy

This part begins with two essays that focus on Socrates and Plato. In noting that Socrates does not question what *dunamis* is, Lecturer Maria Paleologou from the California State University provides an in depth analysis on the Pre-Socratic usages of *dunamis* in order to demonstrate the ways in which Socrates conceives the term. While poetry, ethics, and science may at first seem quite unrelated to each other, Paleologou sifts through a variety of texts in order to reveal the common meanings of *dunamis*. The Associate Professor Elizabeth Hoppe from the Lewis University offers a consideration of a neglected aspect of Plato’s thought: the influence of geography on philosophy. Through a close reading of Plato’s dialogues *Phaedo, Critias* and *Timaeus*, Hoppe argues that Plato uses a geographical narrative in order to illustrate his own view of the limitations of philosophy. The spatial limitations inherent in geography provide an image of the limited scope of philosophy.

Several papers focus on Aristotle, two of which examine his metaphysics. The Professor Joseph J. Romano from the Cabrini College undertakes an investigation of Aristotle’s use of the term *arxē*, that is, principle, and its classical interpretation as either indicating a Platonism or a precursor to modern science. Romano’s purpose is to disambiguate “principle” from the epistemology and metaphysical problems arising from the Aristotelian claim that knowledge is universal and that universals are not separable from the world of changing entities. The Associate Professor Trish Glazebrook from the Dalhousie University in Canada presents a novel application of Aristotle’s concepts of actuality and potentiality. She explains three perplexing problems in quantum physics that are articulated in the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen thought experiment, in Bell’s inequalities, and in the delayed-choice experiment. She then argues that Aristotle’s understanding of actuality presents a framework against which some of the problems of quantum physics can be understood and clarified.
Four essays discuss ethical and political dimensions of Aristotle’s thought. In M. Lorenz Moises J. Festin’s paper who is Dean of Studies from the San Carlos Seminary in Philippines, he attempts to resolve two ongoing conflicts of interpretation concerning *eudaimonia*: whether contemplative activity is the sole constituent of *eudaimonia* or whether the latter is also constituted by other activities. His paper sheds light on this conflict by showing how the virtues of character are such that the distinctively human function (*ergon*) of their possessors is best served through their characteristic activity (*energeia*). The Marcia Homiak’s essay who is Professor from the Occidental College, responds to the objection by “situationists” that a virtuous character is almost impossible to attain and thus, is not a practical guide for the ethical life. Homiak surveys the situationist debate as it arose in the aftermath of Stanley Milgram’s psychological experiments in the 1960s. She challenges the reductionistic views of character that these studies assume and argues that virtuous character cannot be separated from the motivational elements that contribute to it. The Assistant Professor Ron Weed from the Tyndale University carefully investigates Aristotle’s *Ethics*, *Politics*, and *Rhetoric* in order to show how two seemingly divergent accounts of envy actually complement each other. While envy appears to be a self-centered vice, in which the person tries to attain something another already possesses, in other instances envy seems other-centered in that envy can drive people to deny the envied person some share of a good the envied one possesses. According to the Assistant Professor Adrianne McEvoy from the Mansfield University, many of the standard criteria for defining and diagnosing death generate difficulties that turn on what it means to be a person. McEvoy draws from Aristotle’s psychology and metaphysics to illuminate the range of raw and developed capacities and activities that are necessary and beneficial for human life. She concludes by showing that Aristotle provides a helpful framework for clarifying the strengths and weaknesses of the standard contemporary views, though he provides a more demanding requirement for human life than most of these views.

Part I of the volume ends with an account of Stoicism. By articulating a Stoic view of travel, the Professor William O. Stephens from the Creighton University examines such questions as why a person should travel, and what a person should do when faced with hardships during his journey. After canvassing multiple Stoic justifications for travel derived from the writings of Epictetus, Stephens concludes by pointing out that rationality is what makes tourism providential.

### II. Comparative and Asian Philosophy

The second part begins with two papers that focus on comparative philosophy. First, the Assistant Professor Elizabeth Schiltz from the College of Wooster, examines the interconnectedness between Plato and the *Upanishads* on the
immortality of the soul. Through her careful analysis, Schiltz reveals the close relationship between the two accounts. However, in showing how their notion of the self differs, she in turn demonstrates the problem with arguments that presuppose the primacy of individuality. Second, the Associate Professor Donna Giancola from the Suffolk University has written an essay that surveys early conceptions of justice in the mythical and philosophical traditions of ancient Greece and India and offers a basis for an ethics of eco-justice, human rights, and global responsibility. By tracing the radical roots of eco-justice and eco-feminism to their origins in early Goddess religions, she draws out their philosophical similarities and some of the principles necessary for an equitable and ecologically sustainable society.

The final section of this volume provides highlights of the history of Asian Philosophy. The Associate Professor Wang Liancheng from the University of China examines various misreadings of the *Tao Te Ching* in order to show the reader how we can eliminate some of the differences that have arisen in our interpretations of the text. By viewing certain words as codes, Liancheng shows us how to decode them in order to gain a more accurate understanding of the *Tao Te Ching*. At first glance, the Assistant Professor John Thompson from the Christopher Newport University attempts an account of a medieval Chinese debate that may sound like a topic that should be reserved for specialists in the field. However, in his investigation of the debate between two Buddhist lines of thought, the *benwu* ("original non-being") and *xinwu* ("non-existence of mind"), Thompson shows us the broad implications for anyone wanting to undertake cross-cultural philosophical studies. The Ph.D. student Xiaofei Tu from the Syracuse University has written an essay on Mou Zongsan highlights the problems associated with so-called liberal Western views on Chinese philosophy. While thinkers criticize certain philosophies as ahistorical or even proto-Fascist, the same critics are guilty of ahistorically taking their own views as given. Ultimately Tu shows us that humans are a long way from the multicultural fusion of perspectives that they claim to support.

Elizabeth Hoppe
Part I

ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY
In the early dialogues Socrates searches for principles of morality that would be independent of the capricious nature of human desires, preferences, and cultural background. During his various exchanges in the agora with self-professed, or widely accepted by the Athenian public, moral experts, Socrates makes it clear that morality, if it is of any value, has to be intricately connected to knowledge (Protagoras 361b). This kind of knowledge will consist of the essential characteristics of virtue in general or any particular virtue, so that if Euthyphro fails to know what piety is, then he fails to know the pious actions from the impious ones; or if Charmides fails to know what temperance is, then he fails to know that he is temperate. Socrates is preoccupied with this issue in the early dialogues; namely Socrates spends most of his time discussing what kind of thing this expert knowledge is. Attaining this knowledge entails what kind of things one can and cannot do. However, Socrates remains uncharacteristically silent when it comes to the most fundamental part of an implicit “golden rule” he appears to follow. Specifically, Socrates is adamant regarding what procedure one should follow in the discussion of important concepts related to morality; that is, one should be able to answer the following three questions: first and foremost what kind of a thing the concept in question is, secondly, what it is of, and thirdly, having the concept in question, what kind of things one can and cannot do. So when it comes to the concept of knowledge Socrates appears to have bent his own rule: he does not ask what this kind of knowledge is.

Recently, the Socratic literature has suggested that a plausible approach to the above puzzle would be to examine closely Socrates’ epistemological foundations. In other words, the proposal is to discover what things Socrates considers as the criteria of justification for holding a true belief with respect to virtue. One possible avenue to take, which is the one this paper explores further, is to look into a specific concept the philosopher predicates expert knowledge with. Several times Socrates, directly or indirectly, asks the interlocutor to demonstrate the dunamis of his wisdom (sophia), craft (techne),
or knowledge (episteme)\(^1\). He goes to great pains to discuss, as the textual evidence reveals, what \textit{dunamis} is a \textit{dunamis} of, and with this \textit{dunamis}, one can and cannot do specific things. But Socrates remains uncharacteristically silent in saying what \textit{dunamis} is. There are only a few instances, one of which appears in the \textit{Hippias Minor}, where Socrates does not explore, but rather confirms that \textit{dunamis} is the capacity to do specific things under specific circumstances.

But why doesn’t Socrates ask the question? Why does he assume that his audience knows what \textit{dunamis} is, so that he only needs to reconfirm rather than explore the concept? A plausible answer is that it is not that Socrates leaves the question unasked. Rather, whenever he thinks it is necessary to ask the question, the answer does not entail an investigation of the ontological commitments in regards to the concept in question. He is not predominantly interested in epistemological or metaphysical questions. Morality is his focus. So when the occasion arises for epistemological or metaphysical questions, he simply relies on inferences he draws from principles deeply embedded in the already existing philosophic tradition of which he is part. At least, this is what he does with the concept of \textit{dunamis}. So, to discuss effectively Socrates’ assertion regarding the relationship of knowledge and \textit{dunamis} and by inference of virtue and \textit{dunamis}, it is important to visit with the pre-existing philosophic tradition. Hence, the goal of this paper is to address the fundamental features of \textit{dunamis}, which inform Socrates’ understanding of the term with respect to knowledge and virtue in the philosophic tradition before and during Socrates’ time. In what follows, then, I examine the

\begin{itemize}
  \item D1. concept of dunamis as the necessary condition for any meaningful discussion of “that which is”.
  \item D2. distinction of being between a thing’s function (\textit{ergon}) and its \textit{dunamis}.
  \item D3. distinction between rational and non-rational \textit{dunameis}.
  \item D4. fundamental feature of \textit{dunamis} as the capacity to change, move and cause change.
  \item D5. fundamental feature of \textit{dunamis} as the potentiality to be or become something.
\end{itemize}

These points, which are explicitly or implicitly part of Socrates’ understanding of the concept of \textit{dunamis}, are traced back to the writings of Presocratic philosophy.\(^2\) It is not the goal of this paper to argue that the early philosophers had established a theory of \textit{dunamis}; their concern was merely to abandon the

\(^1\) To mention a few, Socrates asks both Euthydemus and Dionysodorus “to demonstrate the \textit{dunamis} of their wisdom” (\textit{Euthydemus} 274c6-d3); he also wants to know from the famous sophist, Gorgias, “what the \textit{dunamis} of his expertise is and what is that he both makes claims about and teaches” (\textit{Gorgias} 447c1-3).

\(^2\) This exposition will also reveal the role the concept plays within the Presocratic literature as well as its philosophical development.
mythopoetical elements of the existing cosmologies and provide a rational explanation for the genesis of the kosmos. So, at best what they say or assume about dunamis can only constitute the embryonic stages of a theory of dunamis.

This exposition will focus on two groups of thinkers. The first group includes the two epic poets, Homer and Hesiod, whom I call the ‘forerunners of philosophy’. Within this group I will briefly refer to the “Orphic poems” that were attributed to Orpheus and circulated as early as mid-sixth century B.C. in ancient Greece. Traces of their theogonic-cosmogonic narrative can be found in the Pythagoreans, or even in Plato’s Phaedo, and his doctrine of the immortality of the soul. The second group includes primarily a cluster of philosophers that were either Socrates’ contemporaries, or came before him, and whose pioneering contributions to understand the cosmos laid the groundwork for later thinkers to describe it more specifically. For both groups the universe was a dynamic one. A multitude of dunameis present in both animate and inanimate objects were the facilitators of change either in the thing itself or in another thing.

The Mythologists: The Forerunners of Philosophy

It is true that the works of the epic poets were not perceived as philosophy. Aristotle places them among the forerunners of philosophy, since he considers that “even the lovers of myth are lovers of wisdom”. Several times he mentions both Homer and Hesiod by name and uses their views on cosmogony as a reference point for his own theories.

Greek epic poetry went through three stages: development, maturity, and decline. Preserved records exist only from the second and third stage where Homer and Hesiod’s poems were produced. In both of Homer’s poems dunamis appears only twelve times in the text. All of them are found either in the nominative or accusative form of the noun, which does not carry the special meaning the dative form does. Several times, in the usual Homeric fashion, the term is used in fixed phrases that appear in one or both poems.

1 There are no fragments of the first period; reconstructed evidence from other forms of literature and the two Homeric epics reveals a gradual development of the epic metre and diction from crudity to maturity by the time of Homer. Hesiod’s poems are the products of the third period of epic poetry. He is the representative of a tradition found in Boeotia, Locris and Thessaly. Unlike the trend in Ionia and the islands that follows the Homeric tradition, Hesiod gives birth to a new epic form which is more focused on practical matter-of-facts such as the genealogies of man, agriculture, astronomy. He will abandon this style of poetry and gradually change it to one with more dramatic elements as seen in The Shield of Heracles.


3 The phrase ‘while our strength stays with us (hose dunamis ge paresti)’ is repeated in Iliad 8.295, 13.785; in Odyssey 2.62, 23.127. The same exact phrase appears in Hesiod’s Theogony.
In most cases, the Homeric *dunamis* is understood as physical strength. In all of the references *dunamis* is used to denote capacities that humans and their anthropomorphic counterparts, the divinities, have. According to the Homeric model, *dunamis* is the state that lends equally humans and gods the ability to do something. Hence, Achilles praises the superb ability of Atreus’ sons to throw the spear: “Atreus’ sons, we know how far you surpass all others in your power, how great a spearman” (*Iliad*, 23.890). The Homeric gods have various *dunameis*, among which is the ability to bestow *dunameis* on humans. In one case, Telemachus tells Nestor that he hopes the gods will give him the strength to avenge the wrongdoer: “O that the gods would clothe me with such strength, that I might take vengeance on the wooers for their grievous sin” (*Odyssey*, 3.205).

Philosophically, there is not much of a difference in Hesiod’s poems regarding the treatment of *dunamis*. There are only three instances of the term in all of his works. Similar to the Homeric assertions, *dunamis* is equally a characteristic property of humans and the divine and denotes the ability to change or cause change. For instance, the gods, who, following the Homeric motif, continue to be anthropomorphic, have powers to do things. Hence, Hecate has the power to bestow wealth upon those who have been generous in their ceremonial sacrifices in her honor:

> For even now, whenever any one of mortal men makes a handsome sacrifice in propitiation, according to usage, he invokes Hecate, and recompense abundant and lightly granted befalls that man whose prayers the goddess receives with favor, and she grants him good success, for hers is the power to do this (*Theogony* 415-420).

Unlike Homer and Hesiod’s divinities who have *dunameis* and bestow them upon objects, in the so-called *Orphic Rhapsodies*, *dunamis* is one of the Orphic deities. Namely, one of the three progenitors in the third stage of the Orphic theogonia, *dunamis*, is represented by Erikepaioi (*DK IB12*). Unfortunately, not much can be said from one single reference other than that the Orphic *dunamis* is some sort of creator, and as such I can only assume it can bring about change.

418. A slightly different version of the above statement ‘if I could and had the strength (*ei moi dunamis ge pareie*)’ is found in *Iliad* 22.20 and *Odyssey* 2.62 as well.

1 It is worth noting here, that although ancient Greeks had reserved a specific term for strength (*ischus*), nowhere in the Homeric text do the actual term, *ischus*, and its derivatives appear. The first three instances of *ischus* alone and no other forms appear in Hesiod’s *Theogony* 153, 823, 146.

2 The view that gods distribute *dunameis* to humans is also revived in the myth of Protagoras in *Protagoras* 320c9-322a3.


4 Orpheus’ existence has been debated by the ancients; Aristotle, for instance, did not believe he existed. The Orphic literature is thought to be a collection of writings of different periods and perspective, dating from sixth century B.C. The main reason I decided to include it in this
In examining the forerunners of philosophy, I admit that my interpretation suffers from the problems any other attempt does when it comes to insufficient evidence. Even so, the text reveals that the poets’ description of the people, their passions and travails, and their understanding of the surroundings incidentally brought into the picture the term *dunamis*. These *dunameis* are restricted only to humans and their anthropomorphic counterparts, the gods. Primitive in the philosophical sense, the term explicitly or implicitly is only used to show the ability to change or suffer change, which anticipates Aristotle’s strict use of the term.¹

This scenario slightly changes when we move to the Pre-Socratic philosophers. *Dunamis* becomes the central theme in their philosophies. It is either the underlying cosmic principle that can be applied over a whole range of things, one of the primary agents that set the *kosmos* in a harmonious motion, or it becomes one or the main characteristics of animate and inanimate objects. To be more specific, in what follows, I will selectively discuss some of the early philosophers’ assumptions about the term in an effort to show the gradual development from its crude beginnings to a philosophically significant concept.

Thales and the Pythagoreans

The Pre-Socratic universe was a dynamic one; a multitude of *dunameis* present in both animate and inanimate objects were the facilitators of change either in the thing itself or in another thing. The first reference to the term is found in the few preserved fragments of the founder of western philosophy and scientific culture, Thales of Miletus. According to Thales, Water is the primary source or the element (στοιχείωδος ύγρος) out of which all physical things are made.² It has divine qualities³ one of which is the *dunamis* to move. In a fragment by Aetius (I.7, 11), Thales is said to have claimed that water has

---

¹ For Homer human *dunamis* is identified with physical strength in the absence of a specific term for the actual quality. The two terms are distinguished for the first time in Hesiod’s works with the indirect implication that strength might be the factuality of a *dunamis*, or to use the Aristotelian terminology, the first actuality of a *dunamis*.

² It is not clear whether Thales held either that all things are made of water or that water is the source of all things. Holding the former would be more problematic, since he would have to explain the existence of things that oppose water. For more on this see Kirk, G.S., Raven, J.E., Schofield, M. *The Presocratic Philosophy*. Second Edition. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 90-94.

³ For ancient Greeks the main features of the divine are immortality and powers that extend beyond the human scope. Aristotle in *Metaphysics* 1.3 983b6 explains why water was thought to be of divine nature; actually most of his reasoning on this subject matter, by his own admission, is conjectural.
dunamis kinetiken, that is the dunamis to move. So, for the first time in philosophical literature dunamis is not only clearly considered an essential property of the universe, but also it is associated with the capacity to move (kinesis), which is one of the first fundamental features Aristotle considers for dunamis.

In the Pythagorean cosmology, dunamis plays a more prominent role. It makes its appearance in connection with the most fundamental element of their cosmology, i.e. Number. Philolaos is the first of the two Pythagoreans whose preserved fragments explicitly relate dunamis to number. In a genuine Pythagorean fashion, Philolaos conceives Number to be the cosmic principle that entails an effective force (dunamis) which permeates all things. He holds dunamis to be in the Decad (en te decadi), so that for anyone to have an understanding of its essential nature and what it is set over, one should look into its dunamis:

One must study the activities (ergon) and the essence (ousia) of Number in accordance with the power (katan dunamin) existing in the Decad (Ten-ness); for it (the Decad) is great, complete, all achieving, and the origin of divine and human life and its Leader; it shares ... the power (dunamis) also of the Decad. Without this, all things are unlimited, obscure and indiscernible (DK 11/I, 313f).

We gain insight into how dunamis is used here by first examining the grammatical form of the term in the text. In effect, there are two variations. According to the first one, dunamis is in the nominative which denotes in general a thing’s capacity to do something, and in this particular case it signifies the Decad’s capacity to bring things into existence and make them apparent:

You may see the nature of number and its power at work not only in supernatural and divine existence but also in all human activities and words everywhere, both throughout technical production and also in music (DK 11/I, 313f).

On the other hand, dunamis is used in a more specialized sense; it is part of an expression, katan dunamin, which merely denotes potentiality. Support for this approach is implicit in the wording of the above fragment where “one must study the activities and the essence of Number in accordance with the power existing in the Decad”. The essence (ousia) of the Decad, then, is to be

---

1 Besides the role of Number, for instance, the number ten (Decad) in Philolaos’ system, the Pythagoreans worked on the harmony of the spheres. Also all of them rejected the geocentric system, with the exception of Ecphantus who has the earth standing at the center of the universe.

2 We find the same expression in Aristotle’s Metaphysics IX.1 1045b32, which gets translated as potentiality.
potentially capable of producing an *ergon* pertaining to animate and inanimate substances. Philolaos’ language here is reminiscent, in a rather crude way, of Aristotle’s division of being with respect to its function (*ergon*) and potentiality (*dunamis*). Given this observation, equally rational and non-rational entities partake of the progenitor’s *dunamis*; so that “in all human activities and words everywhere” there should be assumed an underlying *dunamis*.

Echphantus, the Pythagorean from Syracuse, in the same manner considers dunamis to be one of the essential properties of the originally indivisible bodies (somata) the *kosmos* consists of, and out of which the sensible objects come. The remaining two properties are size and shape.¹

One Echphantus, a native of Syracuse, affirmed that it is not possible to attain a true knowledge of things. He defines, however, as he thinks, primary bodies to be indivisible, and that there are three variations of these, viz., size, figure, capacity, from which are generated the objects of sense…. And that bodies are moved (kineisthai) neither by weight nor by impact, but by divine power (ιύπό θείας δυνάμεως), which he calls mind and soul; and that of this the world is a representation; wherefore also it has been made in the form of a sphere by divine power (Hippolytus Refutations, I.15).

In his *kosmos* there also exists a “mastermind” mind or soul with a divine capacity to cause change. However, from the fragment above, it is not as clear whether in the realm of this divine *dunamis* there exists a real world out of which the world we live in is a representation (ιδέα); or the divine *dunamis* permeates every thing in the actual world, and thus there is a representation of this *dunamis* in some form in every thing in the world. If the latter holds, for anything that partakes of it, it also shares in the divine.

Empedocles

Empedocles, the first philosopher to reconcile the Eleatic and Heraclitean philosophy, chooses a similar avenue. His account of *dunamis* is more substantial in that it plays a pivotal role in his cosmology. The protagonists of the various processes in the Empedoclean *kosmos* are the four elements,² earth, air, water, fire, and the two original *dunamis*, Love and Strife.³ Elemental in

¹ The basic idea here is that the unlimited and indivisible have a temporal as well as a spatial aspect. For more on the topic see McKirahan, R.D. *Philosophy before Socrates*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994, pp. 79-115.
² Empedocles’ actual word is *rizomata* (ῥιζωματα) which literally means ‘roots’. Using this specific term, Empedocles wants to emphasize that the four elements are fundamental and irreducible and, like the roots of a plant, they are the source for everything else that is formed.
³ “Empedocles of Acragas, the son of Meton, claims there are four elements (*stoiheia*), fire, air,
their nature, the four roots are eternal, and they do not undergo any kind of change, that is, they do not come to be or suffer destruction. However, they come to mix and form mortal compounds which, unlike their progenitors, come to be and suffer destruction (DK 31B35). This fundamental process of mixing and dissolving of the original elements to form compounds is only possible by the intervention of the two original dunamis, Love and Strife respectively (DK 31B21).

Empedocles’ treatment of the concept of dunamis raises several interesting points. These are tied to his assumptions about the functions of the original dunameis, since there is no evidence to show that he uses any other dunamis in the different stages of his cosmology. At first glance, it appears that the two dunameis are immaterial in nature, which is in agreement with his predecessors. On the other hand, the two appear to have attributes that are usually assigned to material objects, such as spatial extension: Strife apart from them, equal in all directions and Love among them, equal in length and breadth (DK 31B17; emphasis mine; also DK 31B35). The first step in addressing the tension is to consider dunamis as a constituent element, that is, as a necessary condition of both Love and Strife, and not a necessary and sufficient condition. In that sense, other constituent elements of Love and Strife would allow for the spatial locutions. Unfortunately, the text does not provide much help.

It is not clear from the text whether, when Love and Strife, by being constantly present, allow for the elements to remain in a constant mix and never fall back into their original state, impart some kind of dunamis to them, i.e., the dunamis to accept them. Or, the elements themselves possess a dunamis kinetiken or dunamis pathetiken, to use Aristotelian terminology, so that when they come into contact with Love and Strife, they can remain in constant mix. Of course, it would be rather strange to think, as the Empedoclean account suggests, the two dunameis as the external source solely responsible for motion. This account would require that his specific four roots are merely inert matter, and this point would be at odds with the traditional view that understands change, and for that matter motion, as an inherent property of the primary substances. Aristotle, in an attempt to resolve the inconsistency, thinks that Empedocles’ language suggests that either motion is

water, earth and two original powers (ἀρχικὰς δύναμεις), Love and Strife, of which one [Love] unifies, the other [Strife] separates” (Aetius, I.3.20).


2 Theophrastus, in his commentary on Empedocles’ views on cognition and perception, discusses a different set of dunameis that are properties of the products of the mixture between the original elements and Love and Strife.

3 See for instance the Pythagoreans who gave their primary substance, Number, the inherent property of motion due to a dunamis. The same holds for Diogenes of Appollonia whose air has the dunamis to move.
a constitutive property of the four elements, “fire by nature is borne upwards”,
or that ‘chance’ and not Strife, is responsible for the motion of the roots.\(^1\)

For what it is worth, Theophrastus’ account of Empedocles’ views on sense
perception and thought, involves other *dunameis* that arise from the mixture of
the original elements.\(^2\) For instance, when the mixture is of the right
proportions and is in the tongue, then it gives rise to the *dunamis* of being a
skillful orator, or if the mixture is in the hands, the person is a skillful artisan.\(^3\)

But when the composition in some single member lies in the mean, the
person is accomplished in that part. For this reason some are clever orators,
others artisans; for in the one case the happy mixture is in the tongue, in the
other it is in the hands. And the like holds true for all the other forms of ability
(δύναμις δ’ ἐχει καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἄλλας δυνάμεις), *(On the Senses, 11)*. Within the
same context, Theophrastus objects that he finds this idea odd:

The special abilities (*dunameis*) of men are due to the composition of
the blood in their particular members, -as if the tongue were the cause of
elocution; or the hands, of craftsmanship; and as if these members did
not have the rank of mere instruments (24).

Again it is unclear whether these *dunameis* are offsprings of the original ones,
which would support the view that Empedocles intended the latter to be the
primary constituents of the four roots; or whether *dunamis* is a temporal entity,
meaning that as long as the specific mixture exists, the existence of this
particular *dunamis* is guaranteed. When the mixture is absolved, then that
particular *dunamis* ceases to exist.

Given these irregularities in his account, what are we, then, to conclude
regarding Empedocles’ treatment of dunamis? His account appears to entail
several inconsistencies. The two dunameis are originally assumed to be
inmaterial entities, yet in the same context they have material attributes. Their
role is that of the external agent of motion, yet at places they are presumed to

---

1 “Aither was borne upwards not by Strife, but sometimes he speaks as if it happened by
chance. For thus in its course it sometimes chanced to meet with the other elements in this way,
but often otherwise. And sometimes he says that fire by nature is borne upwards, but aither
sank beneath the deep-rooted earth” *(On Generation and Corruption, 2.6 334a1-5; also see:
Plato Laws X, 889b; adapted from Trevor J. Saunders’ translation)*. At this point it is unclear if
Empedocles meant to have both chance and the individual *dunamis* as elements in his
cosmogony; or if these are a much later addition by Plato and Aristotle who might have
had detected the potential inconsistency mentioned above. If the latter holds, any further
consideration of those elements would be a mere anachronism.

2 It is not clear, though, if Empedocles had sensed the problematic nature of the interaction
between the four elements and the two *dunameis* in his cosmology; thus, in his account of
cognition and perception, he amends it by ascribing further *dunameis* to the compounds. Or
Theophrastus, being aware of both Plato and Aristotle’s criticism, interjects his own solution.

3 I relate *dunamis* with ‘being’ rather than ‘becoming’ for in this particular passage the term is
associated with the infinitive of the verb to be, *einai*, rather than *gignesthai* the infinitive of the
verb to become. Whether Empedocles, assuming Theophrastus accurately reports on him, was
aware of these subtle differences in the interrelations of the term is unknown.
be constituents of the four roots. Is, then, Empedocles guilty of philosophic carelessness? We should question, though, how much philosophic maturity we should require from a thinker who, along with undertaking the task of explaining away the mythopoetic elements of early cosmogony, is faced with the limitations of a language that is gradually developing philosophically. Undoubtedly, the tension in his explanation of the genesis of the kosmos between the primary substances and the two dunameis will give his predecessors grounds for addressing a detailed account of the dunameis in inanimate and animate objects.

The Atomists

*Dunamis* is equally instrumental in the Democritean universe as well. Every event and change in the phenomenal world can be reduced to changes in the behavior of the eternal and unchanging atoms. These changes are ultimately traced to the existence of a *dunamis* in the substance which is of some specific atomic configuration that initiates the change. Such substance, in this case, would be the soul. Based on the testimonials by Theophrastus and Aristotle, the term *dunamis* appears only in reference to the functions of the soul.

Specifically, Democritus states that the presence of the soul separates animate from inanimate matter. It has a material constitution and the *dunamis* to produce thought; at least this appears to be the implication from the text below. In other words, thinking processes are not the product of a *dunamis* present in an independently existing entity called mind. Rather, because the mind and the soul are one and the same thing, they have the *dunamis* to produce thought.¹ The same claim is made in the subsequent fragment with the implication that since the soul is not divided into many parts, it is not of multi *dunameis* (*ou poludunamon [einai]*). Instead, it is one undivided substance, of specific *dunamis* out of which the mind (*to noein*) and what appears to be (*to aisthanesthai*) come:

Democritus claims that the soul is not of many parts or of many powers (*poludunamon*), claiming that the mind and what appears to be are one and the same thing and that they come from one and the same power (*dunameos*). (Philop. *De Anima*, 12; translation mine).

This however, seems to be problematic for two reasons. First, how is it possible for one and the same *dunamis* to yield two different objects/processes, such as perceptions of the mind and sense perceptions? Secondly, if the soul is a collection of atoms, does each one of them have a *dunamis*, so that all of them

---

¹ Democritus roundly identifies soul and mind, for he identifies what appears with what is true —that is why he commends Homer for the phrase ‘Hector lay with thought distraught’. He does not employ mind as a special faculty (*dunamin tini*) dealing with truth, but identifies soul and mind (Aristotle, *De Anima*, 1.2, 404a27).
collectively constitute the *dunamis* of the soul? If so, are the soul atom *dunameis* different from each other? The latter seems to be implied by what Democritus says, according to Theophrastus, with respect to the soul being in charge of sensation. That is, the various tastes are related to the various atomic shapes (DK 68A129), and the various tactile properties with the various atomic arrangements (DK 67A14, DK 68A135). Democritus’ association of the tactile properties with soul atoms was meant to explain, according to Theophrastus’ evaluation of the philosopher’s doctrines, the different *dunameis* involved in savor. Hence, the difference in savor is explained in terms of the different *dunameis* that the different atomic arrangements, i.e. shapes, exhibit. It is true, then, that if this is what Democritus intended to do by proclaiming the appropriate atomic arrangements for the various tastes, then, as Theophrastus points out, he has done a rather sketchy job: “when one attaches powers (*dunameis*) to figures and shapes the difficulties increase in magnitude and number” (3.1). One of the problems he notices is that Democritus’ account does not fully explain how a *dunamis* can bring about two different, actually opposite actions. To use an example, sweetness is defined by its specific atomic arrangement, and as such it has a specific *dunamis*. As is expected, organisms with tactile dispositions (*diathesis*) that exhibit the same atomic arrangement should be experiencing the same taste. However, this is not always the case. What is sweet to one organism could be bitter to another; that is, the same shape in two different sense organs has the *dunamis* to produce the impressions of sweet and bitter. Democritus’ account, though, does not explain whether this state of affairs is the product of more than one *dunameis* or an indication that the relevant *dunamis* fails to get fully actualized or even get actualized at all.

---

1 The concept of *dunamis* surfaces in Theophrastus’ critique of Democritus; nowhere in the other preserved fragments of the philosopher’s views is there mention of the term. Due to lack of other references, then, I intend to discuss his critic with some caution. Nonetheless, if Democritus’ intentions were indeed to elaborate on the *dunameis* using sensation, Theophrastus’ critic provides some insightful comments on what the philosopher failed to notice in his explanation. Some of his points, actually, echo Aristotle’s worries about his predecessors’ inability to capture the special notion of *dunamis*, namely, “that a thing may come to be without qualification from what is not”.

2 But perhaps this latter way of explanation too would be considered (as we said) to have the powers in view, since in accounting for the savor in this way, Democritus believes that he is giving the reasons for the powers themselves, the reasons why one savor has the power of puckering, drying, and solidifying, another that of making smooth and even and restoring to normal, another that of separating out and loosening and so forth (*De Causis Plantarum*, VI.2.1).
What is a Dunamis?

So far the aforementioned accounts on dunamis assume its existence mostly due to the tangible effects it has on the things with which it interacts. None of these accounts have been able to say what a dunamis is. Evidently, it is a spurious entity, in that it does not have any shape or color, any sensible properties to help to determine its existence. It seems, then, that the only way to detect its presence is by inductively reasoning from its effects. This was first brought up by Diogenes of Apollonia. Like any monist, all things in his world system are modifications of a single basic substance, in this case, air. As the creative substance, air is a dunastes that has incredible dunameis. These dunameis are not visible to sight, but as he clearly remarks they are visible to reason: Such then is the power [of the air] that it has in these things [τοιούτην ἐν τούτοις ἔχει δύναμιν], but it is invisible to sight [τó μὲν όμως ἄφαντός], though visible to reason [τó δὲ λογικῶ ὁμορφός]. Only to continue that the dunamis the air has can create strong winds that can uproot trees and create sea storms.

Diogenes’ account raises several interesting observations. First of all, air is not a dunamis; rather it has dunamis, which implies the capacity to move, though Diogenes does not explicitly say so. Secondly, dunamis is not an external agent which would create a problem given the nature of his primary substance. Hence, his making dunamis one of the necessary properties of air, Diogenes avoids the problems of Empedocles’ system. Thirdly, it is worth noting Diogenes’ choice of words for the attributes of the primary substance. Air, he claims, is a dunastes, a derivative of dunamis, because it has dunameis. It seems, then, that dunamis is a necessary and sufficient condition for being a dunastes. Finally, dunamis is a necessary condition for strength (ischuros); you need dunamis to be strong, but you do not need strength to be capable (dunatos).

Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that the concept of dunamis has been instrumental in the Pre-Socratic explanations of the genesis of the kosmos. Specifically, it is

---

1 Wind in bodies is called breath, outside bodies it is called air. It is the most powerful of all and in all (οὕτως δὲ μέγιστος ἐν τοῖς πάντοις δυνάμεις ἀστίς), and it is worth while examining its power (Ἅμου δὲ αὐτοῦ θηρασθεῖ τὴν δύναμιν). (Hippocrates De Flatibus 3.15-18; translation adapted from the Loeb Library).

2 “When therefore much airs makes strong winds (πολλὸς ὄηρ ἵρχηρόν ρεμα ποτήρ), trees are torn up by the roots through the force of the wind, the sea swells into waves, and vessels of vast bulk are tossed about”.

3 This last point is also raised by Plato in the Protagoras (350e-351a), where he explains that dunamis and ischus are two different entities and that the former is a necessary condition for the latter and not vice versa. He emphasizes the relation with an analogy, the gist of which is that as daring is to courage so is dunamis to strength; for all courageous are daring but not all daring are courageous.
clear from their accounts that any meaningful discussion of “that which is”, either animate or inanimate, would have by necessity to include the concept of _dunamis_. All of them understood the primary feature of _dunamis_ to be the capacity to change or cause change, e.g. movement. It is implicit in their accounts that having a _dunamis_ entails having some kind of potentiality to be or become something. Their account of the term, though, failed to explain how a _dunamis_ can bring about two actually opposite effects. This is one of the inconsistencies that Aristotle will address when he discusses _dunamis_ as potentiality. Socrates, in the early dialogues, invests in their observations to promote his account of morality as a kind of knowledge.

These thinkers did not ask the question “What is a _dunamis_?” and they did not address any specific theory of _dunamis_. Nevertheless, from what they said, the term is evidently quite instrumental to what they set out to do.

Except for Homer and Hesiod, all of the aforementioned thinkers ascribed _dunameis_ to animate and inanimate substances, a predecessor to Aristotle’s intricate distinction between rational and non-rational _dunameis_. Almost all of them understood _dunamis_ as the capacity to change, move or cause change.

In a more specific manner, in Homer and Hesiod’s works, the _dunameis_ are restricted only to humans and the anthropomorphic gods. The term, primitive in the philosophical sense, is only used to show the ability to change or suffer change. For Homer, human _dunamis_ is identified with physical strength in the absence of a specific term for the actual quality. _Dunamis_ and _ischus_ (strength) are distinguished in Hesiod’s works with the implication that strength might be what Aristotle calls the first actuality of a _dunamis_.

In Thales’ cosmological system, _dunamis_ for the first time in the philosophic literature is clearly connected with mobility (_kinesis_), which is one of the first uses Aristotle ascribes to the term. The Pythagorean Philolaos understands that the essence of the Decad is to be potentially capable of producing an _ergon_ pertaining to animate and inanimate substances. His approach reveals the embryonic stages of Aristotle’s division of being with respect to its function (_ergon_) and potentiality (_dunamis_). Empedocles treatment of the term is more detailed. _Dunamis_ is the crucial protagonist of the various processes in the _kosmos_, since it is the facilitator of the fundamental process of mixing and dissolving of the original elements. It also appears, according to Theophrastus’ account of Empedocles that _dunameis_ arise from the mixture of the original elements. For instance, the _dunamis_ of being a skillful orator comes from the mixture of the elements in the right proportions in the tongue. Finally, according to the Atomist Democritus, _dunamis_ is the protagonist in providing the appropriate atomic arrangements for the various tastes; however, his model fails to explain how a _dunamis_ can bring about two actually opposite effects. This is one of the inconsistencies that Aristotle will address when he discusses _dunamis_ as potentiality.
Bibliography


Freeman, K. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983.


any Plato scholars have devoted their attention to the relationship between *logos* and *muthos* in Plato’s dialogues. Often their accounts claim that Plato privileges *logos* over *muthos* in order to show the superiority of the former. At first glance it may appear that these interpretations are justified given Socrates’ criticisms of poetry, such as found in the *Republic*. But why else would one argue that myth holds an inferior position in Plato’s thought? Luc Brisson contends in *Plato the Myth Maker* that myth designates a discourse "that transmits unfalsifiable information and that gives rise not to certainty but to belief".\(^1\) Brisson also claims that "myth is about a beyond which must be located in a distant past or a space which is different from the one in which the narrator and his public reside" (ibid, 7). Because the information myth provides is unfalsifiable, Plato places it in contrast to a *logos* that is preoccupied with verification. Thus it appears to many scholars that Plato privileges *logos* because through it philosophers can discover truth.

However, I find that the relationship between the two concepts is more complicated than it first appears. In viewing the distinction between *muthos* and *logos* as oppositional, scholars have generally disregarded the role of other fields, such as history and geography, in Plato’s thought.\(^2\) At first glance that might not sound like a problem. After all what does geography have to do with philosophy? Plato himself broaches the subject in several dialogues including: the *Phaedo*, *Critias*, and *Timaeus*. In order to see the significance of geographical narrative for Plato, I suggest that we revisit these dialogues to uncover why geography is addressed.

---

1 (Luc Brisson. *Plato the Myth Maker*. Translated by Gerard Naddaf. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998], 11). As Gerard Naddaf states in his commentary on Brisson, unfalsifiable myth is "opposed to information which can be verified, that is, information which is preoccupied with truth or logos" (Gerard Naddaf, "Translator’s Introduction" in Luc Brisson. *Plato the Myth Maker*. Translated by Gerard Naddaf. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998], x).

One striking example of Plato’s use of geography occurs near the end of the *Phaedo*. Socrates’ final speech no longer attempts to give an argument for the immortality of the soul but instead provides an account of geography that in turn transforms into a myth on the afterlife. We find that the *Critias* is structured in a similar manner with its geographical account being framed by myth. Based on the role of geography in the *Critias*, *Timaeus* and *Phaedo*, I want to suggest that Plato uses geographical narrative to reveal the limits of philosophy. Perhaps more importantly, our disregard for geography indicates a problem for standard interpretations of the oppositional relationship between *logos* and *mythos*. Rather than subordinate myth, Plato shows how both myth and geography go beyond the limitations of the *logos*. In other words the problem of discovering truth is not simply a limitation of myth and geography. Rather, Plato shows us the impossibility of ascertaining the truth even through the *logos*.

What is Geography?

Perhaps the answer seems too obvious to discuss. But one should keep in mind that geography did not simply originate as a science, as James Romm points out in his book *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought*. Romm contends that geography can be seen as a form of literature that crosses the line between fact and fiction. Based on Romm’s arguments, we find that ancient accounts of geography were not simply factual descriptions of the boundaries of the earth. This feature of geography is apparent even at its earliest stages. As Romm points out, what united the archaic writers was their attempt to give the world boundaries, marking off a finite stretch of earth from the otherwise formless expanse surrounding it" (Romm, 10). Romm also claims that the earth had to be given boundaries in order for it to be made intelligible (Romm, 11). The issue of intelligibility becomes significant at the end of the *Phaedo*. With the death of Socrates we are at the limits of human intelligibility, and thus we find that the dialogue is as much about what we can know as it is about what we cannot know.

We should keep in mind that geography was not a term in use during Plato’s time. According to Romm, "the Greeks of the archaic and classical periods had no word corresponding to our ‘geography’; neither the noun *geographia* nor the verb from which it derives occurs before Eratosthenes of Cyrene, that is, before the third century B.C." (Romm, 9). However, this fact does not imply that geographical accounts did not exist prior to Eratosthenes. Instead we find that the lines between the different fields were not clearly

---

1 According to James Romm, "the remarkable range of ancient writers who were credited with a *periodos gēs* [round-the-earth journey] . . . helps illustrate the ease with which geographic writing crossed the boundaries between poetry and prose between fact and fiction" (James Romm, *The Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought*. [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992], 27). Socrates final account of the earth does the same. It is not merely myth, but rather, a combination of science and myth.
delineated. For example Herodotus’ *Histories* is also a text on geography, most notably his extensive account of Egypt. Herodotus justifies his lengthy discussion on Egypt because it has remarkable features and monuments (II.35). We find, then, that in the classical period various fields, such as history, geography, and literature often overlapped. We should keep in mind that Plato would not have made the same delineations between different fields of study that we make today. Thus, our interpretations of his distinction between *logos* and *muthos* may be more anachronistic than it might first appear.

Although geography was not a clearly defined field during Plato’s time, it was nevertheless a subject of investigation. One of the main problems for ancient geographers concerned their ability to verify the facts, especially when they claim to have knowledge of the edges of the world. In his account of India, the Roman geographer, Strabo mentions that the distant is difficult to disprove (XI.6.4). A few centuries earlier, Herodotus had raised a similar concern in his remarks on the Ocean. According to Herodotus,

> It is impossible to argue against the person who spoke about the Ocean, because the tale is based on something which is obscure (αφανείς) and irrefutable (οὐκ ἔχει ἐλέγχον). I do not know of the existence of any River Ocean, and I think that Homer or one of the other poets from past times invented the name and introduced it into his poetry (II.23).  

Although the various writers find value in discussing the limits of the known world, they also call into question the ability to ascertain accurate knowledge of the outer reaches of the earth. Interestingly, although they make similar claims about the problem of distant places, Strabo disputes Herodotus’ claim about the Ocean because Strabo finds Homer to be a reliable source of information. In the introduction to his twelve volume *Geography*, Strabo contends that "Homer declares that the inhabited world is washed on all sides by Oceanus, and this is true" (I.1.3). To the modern reader it might sound odd that a geographer uses a poet to prove the existence of Ocean. Because he sees Homer as the founder (ἄρχηγέτης) of geography, Strabo takes Homer’s statements about the earth at face value (I.1.2). In Strabo’s view, Homer can be seen as a reliable source since Homer supposedly traveled to the places he describes. The discrepancy between Herodotus and Strabo regarding Homer

---

1 We find the same issue arise in Eratosthenes’ account of Homer’s Ocean. As Romm states, "Homer had removed the wanderings of Odysseus into Ocean, Eratosthenes claims, because that region of the earth was εὐκατάψευστον, literally ‘easy to lie about’ (fr 1A, 14 and Strabo I.2.19)” (Romm, 173).

2 This claim is reminiscent of Socrates’ criticism in the *Protagoras* regarding poetry discussions. As Socrates claims, “when a poet is brought up in a discussion, almost everyone has a different opinion about what he means, and they wind up arguing about something they can never [refute] ἀδυνατοῦσιν εξέλεξαι” (Prot, 347e). We end up talking in circles about something we cannot refute.
and the Ocean indicates that there was no consensus regarding the truth about the boundaries of the inhabited world.

Rather than try to provide us with the truth about the earth’s limits, the geographical accounts often appeal to our human capacity for wonder. In discussing the race of one-eyed men, the Arimaspians, Herodotus claims that he is not convinced that such a race exists. However, he also states that "in any case, it is likely that the outermost reaches of the world, which encompass and enclose all the rest, contain things which strike us as particularly attractive and unusual" (III.116). Wonder is also significant when geographers describe the outermost reaches of the earth. In his account of Maxyes in Western Libya, Herodotus maintains that "there are enormous snakes there and also lions, elephants, bears, asps, donkeys with horns, dog-headed creatures, headless creatures with eyes in their chests (at least that is what the Libyans say), wild men and wild women and a large number of other creatures whose existence is not merely the stuff of fables (ακατάψευστα)" (IV.191). Although he often appears skeptical of reports, Herodotus apparently accepts the belief that the outermost reaches of the earth contain wondrous and unusual things.

Because questions of truth and wonder are relevant to philosophy, philosophy shares an affinity with geography, as well as other disciplines such as history. I want to suggest that Plato may have turned to geography because of this affinity. As I mentioned above, Plato’s most notable imitations of geographical narrative can be found in the Phaedo, Timaeus, and Critias. Through an investigation of their respective accounts of geography, I hope to show the significance of geography in Plato’s thought. Through its focus on boundaries, geography provides Plato with a means for showing us the limits of philosophy.

**Geography and the Phaedo**

The geographer’s sense of wonder regarding the outermost reaches of the earth mirrors Socrates’ final speech in the Phaedo. Although a large portion of the dialogue is devoted to philosophical arguments that attempt to prove the immortality of the soul, it is important to note that Socrates’ final speech does not address philosophy but rather geography and myth.

In order to see the relevance of geography, it is first of all important to note that none of Socrates arguments for the immortality of the soul succeed. In other words, Plato shows us that logos has its limitations. But, if Socrates’ efforts fail, then what is Plato’s purpose in writing the Phaedo? Although the

---

1 James Crooks views the relationship between muthos and logos as one of reciprocity (James Crooks. "Writing Conversion: Notes on the Structure of the Phaedo". Retracing the Platonic Text. Edited by John Russon and John Sallis. [Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2000], 156). In his account of the final part of the Phaedo, Crooks maintains, "Simmias remains unconvinced-in spite of his unqualified approval of Socrates’ arguments. The suggestion is that something other than, more than, theoretical argumentation is necessary for conviction. But what? Plato’s answer is clear in what follows: the muthos" (Crooks, 170).
proofs of immortality and Socrates’ account of the Ideas have traditionally been viewed as central to the dialogue, other aspects reveal that the traditional interpretation fails to capture some of the main issues. As Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem describe the *Phaedo*, "like all the other dialogues, it has its share of concealment, unresolved perplexity, omissions, exaggerations and deliberately contrived ‘bad arguments’-all meant to make us think in ways we are left to discover for ourselves".\(^1\) If we view the *Phaedo* in terms of its metaphysical aspect, we only grasp half of the story. Although Plato provides us with a sense of what might lie beyond our physical world, he also indicates that any such claims cannot be proven. I agree with the contention of Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem that "argument goes on and is, in a sense, deathless-not just because valiant souls keep it up, but because philosophic logos is itself inherently incomplete and never ‘meets its end’" (Brann, 18). This point is reminiscent of Socrates’ own account of the many things said about the earth. As Socrates maintains, "to show that they are true-that does appear to me too difficult for Glaucus’ art. And perhaps I would not be up to it, and along with that, even if I had the knowledge, it seems to me that my life, Simmias, is not long enough for the argument" (108d). Socrates’ statement is significant insofar as it helps to explain why logos is limited. Namely, because human life is limited in space and time, reason also has its limitations.

Although the main part of the dialogue focuses on philosophical argumentation, Socrates’ final speech concerns a geographical account of the earth that ends with a myth of the afterlife. Why would a philosopher turn away from philosophy in the moments before his death? Before addressing this question, I first want to show that the final speech should be divided into two parts: geography and myth. Most scholars simply label Socrates’ account of the true earth as a myth. For instance Brann, Kalkavage, and Salem claim that "Socrates now turns away from argument and from our trust and distrust in argument to his myth about the true earth. Like the myths Socrates presents in other dialogues, this one has as its central point the extreme importance of taking care of our souls now in our mortal lives" (Brann, 18). I agree that Socrates’ primary focus is to teach others to care for their souls. But by ignoring the geographical nature of the speech, scholars dismiss the role of geography at the end of the *Phaedo*.

Two difficulties surround my claim. First one may question whether or not Socrates’ narrative is in fact based on geography. The second issue concerns the significance behind my claim that the speech entails both geography and myth. In order to address the first problem, we can compare Socrates’ account of the earth with geographical narratives that arise in texts such as Herodotus’ *Histories*. Socrates begins by describing the earth as a sphere in the middle of the heavens (108e-109a). He maintains that "many and wondrous (θαυμαστοί)\(^1\)

---

are the earth’s regions (τόποι), and Earth itself is neither of the sort nor of the size it is held to be in the opinion of those who usually speak about Earth, as I have been persuaded by somebody" (108c). This claim is reminiscent of points made by geographers, such as Herodotus. In addition, in discussing the boundaries of the earth, Socrates maintains that "we live around the sea in a small portion of it between Phasis and the Pillars of Heracles" (109b).¹ Thus, this part of his speech is geographical insofar as it deals with an accepted account of the boundaries of the inhabited earth.

As he moves away from the known world, Socrates’ story of "that Earth beneath the Heaven" sounds like Herodotean accounts of the outermost regions. According to Socrates,

the blending of their seasons is such that those people there are without disease and live a much greater span of time than people here; and in sight and hearing and thoughtfulness and in all such things, they stand apart from us in respect of purity by the very same interval by which air stands apart from water and ether from air (111b).

Of course Socrates’ narrative has a mythical sense to it, and he even calls his account a myth at 110b. However, his description sounds no less geographical than any report that describes the limits of the known world. As I mentioned above, in his account of the race of one-eyed men, the Arimaspians, Herodotus claims that the outermost regions of the inhabited world are the most unusual. Herodotus also contends that they "were allotted the most attractive features, just as Greece has gained by far the most temperate climate" (III.106).² As in the case of Herodotus, Socrates attributes the best features to those who dwell with the gods.

Another example of geography has to do with the river Ocean. According to Socrates, four rivers are of note and "the biggest which flows on the outside (of the Earth) in a circle is called Oceanus" (112e). As I mentioned above, the problem of Ocean for many geographers concerns the fact that distant stories do not admit of refutation (cf. Histories, II.23). The inability to refute the Ocean theory parallels the problem for Socrates in the Phaedo. Alas, he cannot prove the immortality of the soul. But his view cannot be refuted either. He can however, provide a geo-mythical account of the afterlife beyond the boundaries of the oikumene in order to suggest that something exists beyond those limits. We have no evidence for what lies beyond our human realm, but

¹ According to Romm, "the Pillars have here [in Pindar] come to stand for the boundary of the human condition itself: to pass beyond them is the prerogative of god alone, or of mythic figures like Heracles who manage to bridge the human and divine" (Romm, 18).
² T. J. Luce explains that Herodotus has a tendency "to see physical features such as geography in terms of balance and order" (T. J. Luce. The Greek Historians. [London: Routledge, 1997], 30). As Luce maintains, "while the ends of the earth produce the finest things in size, scarcity, and value, Greece, lying in the middle, has the finest climate, a blend of the extremes one finds at the edges of the world" (ibid).
our speculation about such matters cannot be disproven. While searching for answers, we can use logic and reasoning to the best of our ability, but in the end we need to recognize the fact that some things cannot be known, if anything can be known with certainty.

While geography treads the boundary of the known and unknown regions, myth focuses on the unknowable realm of the gods. Toward the end of the speech (113d-115a), Socrates’ narrative turns into a mythological account of what happens after death. He maintains that "since such is the nature of these things, whenever those who have met their end arrive at the region where the spirit conveys each of them, they first submit themselves to justice-both those who lived their lives nobly and piously, as well as those who did not" (113d). His narrative sounds similar to other discussions of the afterlife, such as in Book X of the Republic and at the end of the Gorgias. This part of his account is mythical, rather than geographical, in the sense that Socrates no longer describes the earth, but rather something that is unknowable and irrefutable.

Although the lesson behind his discussion is the need to care for our souls, I find that another point arises in the non-philosophical frame of the dialogue. The Phaedo begins with Echecrates wondering about the final words of Socrates, and the dialogue in turn provides us with those words, at least as far as anyone can tell. We should keep in mind that Plato problematizes the reliability of the story by making himself absent from the final day (59b). At this initial stage of the dialogue, Echecrates mentions a point that is geographical in nature. We learn that no one from Phlia visits Athens at all nowadays, "nor has any stranger arrived from there in a long time who could report anything sure to us about it (σαφές τι αγγείλαι)-except of course, that he drank the potion and died-but as for the rest, he was able to tell us nothing" (57a-b). At first glance this statement seems to have nothing to do with geography beyond the fact that Echecrates mentions the city of Phlia. However, as in Echecrates’ desire for a witness to the death of Socrates, geography also stakes its claims on witnesses. The reliability of the witness is crucial for believing in the truth of the geographical narratives.

In recording information about the inhabited world, geographers do not necessarily think that the reports are accurate portrayals of the facts. For instance, in discussing a twelve cubit high solid gold statue, Herodotus says "I did not see it myself, but I am repeating what the Chaldeans say" (Histories, I.183). We find several examples of the problem with reports throughout the Histories, but perhaps the most striking instance occurs in Book VII. In discussing the question of whether or not Xerxes ever sent a message to Argos, Herodotus maintains, "I am obliged to record the things I am told, but I am

---

1 Ronna Burger makes a similar claim in The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth. According to Burger, "it is just to consider that, if the psyche is immortal, it is necessary to care for it not only for this time we call life, but for all time" (Ronna Burger. The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth. [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984], 188). Burger notes the hypothetical nature of the claim, and states that "the necessity of care for the psyche in what we call life is entirely independent of the question of our future existence" (ibid).
certainly not required to believe them—this remark may be taken to apply to the whole of my account" (VII.152). This statement is rather bold considering the fact that Herodotus often seems to believe some of the reports himself. For Herodotus, the primary point is to report accounts, not verify their truth. In spite of this problem, both the *Phaedo* and geographical narratives rely on eyewitness reports. Whether or not we should believe these reports is left for the reader to decide.

Although we find geographical elements at both the beginning and end of the dialogue, the question remains concerning the significance of geography in the *Phaedo*. I find that Plato’s imitation of the geographers shows that the final speech is not simply a myth. Rather, the use of geography highlights the difficulty of knowing where to draw the line between the knowable and unknowable, fact and fiction, etc. Perhaps more importantly, the problem of delineation belongs to philosophy as well as geography. Socrates’ four arguments attempt to prove something that cannot be refuted. But this difficulty is reminiscent of Brisson’s account of myth. Myths are unverifiable and leave us without a sense of certainty. Because of the unknown factor involved in the subject matter, such as immortality and the nature of the soul, philosophy cannot prove the truth of its claims, and like myth it cannot assure us of the truth.

*Plato’s Atlantis: The Undiscovered Country*

The *Phaedo* is not the only dialogue that presents us with a geographical narrative. The account of Atlantis portrayed in the *Timaeus* and *Critias* provides a similar sense of geography, one which in turn reveals the problem of truth.

It is quite obvious that Plato uses Herodotean elements in creating the Atlantis narrative. Almost duplicating the theme of Herodotus, Critias attempts to preserve an event in the distant past: the battle between the Athenians and the Atlanteans, and the remarkable accomplishments of both sides. Commentators, such as Vidal-Naquet, have noted the similarities between primeval Athens’ battle against Atlantis and the Greco-Persian wars, even though I find that it is unclear whether Atlantis is meant to represent Persia or Athens. Some commentators use the similarity between Atlantis and

---

1 One point of imitation can be found in Herodotus’ description of Ecbatana. This city contains “a huge impregnable stronghold consisting of concentric circles of defensive walls” (*Histories*, I, 98). According to Herodotus, “there are seven circles altogether, and the innermost one contains the royal palace and the treasuries” (ibid). Compare these statements with Atlantis. Critias claims that Poseidon created a well-enclosed hill for Cleito to live. Poseidon "made circular belts of sea and land enclosing one another alternately some greater, some smaller, two being of land and three of sea, which he carved as it were out of the [middle] of the island; and these belts were at even distance on all sides, so as to be impassable for man" (Crit, 113d-e).

2 In comparing Plato and Herodotus, Pierre Vidal-Naquet invokes this same passage in his essay "Athènes et L’Atlantide". According to Vidal-Naquet, "on peut même montrer, ce qui n’a
Persia to claim that Plato finds political *hubris* to be the cause of the Persian defeat. Although the Atlanteans do become power hungry, Plato has Critias concentrate on issues, such as the geography of Atlantis, that indicate *hubris* cannot be the main point of the Atlantis narrative.¹

As in the work of Herodotus, Plato goes beyond the political aspects of *historia* to include an account of geography. The main difference is that Plato’s geography concerns a land that exists beyond human experience, while Herodotus stops at the limits of the known world. For Herodotus, one of the endpoints is Ethiopia, a country that is the most remote to the southwest of the inhabited world. According to Herodotus, Ethiopia "produces gold galore, elephants in abundance, all kinds of wild trees, ebony, and the tallest, best-looking and longest-lived men in the world" (Hist, III, 114). Likewise, in describing Atlantis, Critias claims that it furnished all kinds of metals and, "it brought forth also in abundance all the timbers that a forest provides for the labors of carpenters" (Crit, 114e).² Atlantis also contained an abundance of the now lost metal orichalcum, or mountain-copper, a precious metal second in value to gold. According to Critias, the island included a sufficient amount of animals, both tame and wild, and like Herodotus’ Ethiopia, it contained many elephants (ibid). Obviously, in describing the limits of the earth, or in Plato’s case what transcends those limits, both authors leave us to wonder about strange lands that exist at the edges of the known world.

In his exaggerated account of the beauty of the island country, Critias’ remarks indicate the problematic relationship between geography and truth. For example, Critias describes a large plain that had a rectilinear shape. Because it was not a perfect quadrangle, the people dug a great canal around the plain in order to even out the shape (118c). While discussing the construction of the canal, Critias acknowledges that his account may appear unbelievable. According to Critias, "as regards the depth of this trench and its breadth and length, it seems incredible (άπιστον) that it should be so large as the account states, considering that it was made by hand, and in addition to all

---

¹ A. E. Taylor maintains that "the moral of the story is transparently simple. It is that a small and materially poor community animated by true patriotism and high moral ideals can be more than a match for a populous and wealthy empire with immense material resources but wanting in virtue" (*A Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928], 50). Taylor claims that it is likely that "Plato is consciously taking the history of the Persian wars and throwing it back into supposed prehistoric days with a free remodeling of the incidents in order to make the moral stand out in stronger relief" (ibid, 51). However, Taylor fails to take into consideration the fact that most of the dialogue concerns geography, not war.

² Concerning prior usages of the word ‘Atlantis’, John V. Luce refers to the fragments of Hellanicus of Lesbos, 5th c. B.C. According to Luce, he was the author of works entitled *Phoronis*, *Deucalioneia*, and *Atlantis*. Luce states that, "according to Lesky, Hellanicus aimed at closing the gap between myth and historical tradition in the modern sense" (John V. Luce. "The Sources and Literary Forms of Plato’s Atlantis". In *Atlantis Fact or Fiction?*, ed. Edwin S. Ramage, 49-78. [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1978], 72). Luce claims that Atlantis means "daughter of Atlas".
the other operations, but none the less we must report what we heard (ῥητέον δὲ ὃ γε ἕκοσμεν)” (118c-d). By creating such an exaggerated report of the features of Atlantis, Plato indicates the problem of verification. Plato’s text is reminiscent of the problem Herodotus confronts in recounting various reports about the inhabited earth. Namely, the geographer (or historian for that matter) needs to report even those stories that sound false. We have no way of verifying them, and for all we know the accounts could turn out to be true.

But we were probably not supposed to believe Critias’ narrative anyway. The question of truth had already become an issue at the very outset of the preview to his discourse in the *Timaeus*. Critias opens his discussion by asking Socrates to listen "to a narrative (λόγου) which, though strange (ἀτόπου), is entirely true (παντάπασι γε μὴν ἀληθοῦς), as Solon, the wisest of the Seven once declared" (Tim, 20d-e). Note that Critias does not claim to tell a *mythos* but a *logos*. Although Critias admits that his *logos* appears strange, he wants his audience to believe that it is not only true, but completely true. At first it may appear that the usage of *logos* may be of no significance, since *logos* after all can signify a story. However, note the use of *logos* at the end of the *Gorgias*. In the *Gorgias* Socrates makes a similar comment concerning his account of the afterlife. As Socrates states, "give ear then-as they put it-to a very fine account (καλὸν λόγου). You will think that it is a mere tale (μυθοῦν), I believe, although I think it is an account (λόγον), for what I am about to say I will tell you as true (ἀληθῆ)", (Gor, 523a). Socrates then provides a description of how the gods pass judgment on the dead. However, Socrates’ *logos* remains a myth insofar as his account involves an unverifiable issue: the afterlife (cf. Gor, 526d-e). Unlike the mythical account Socrates provides at the end of the *Gorgias*, the *Critias* attempts to describe an actual event from the past. Thus, the usage of the term ‘*logos*’ to describe the Atlantis narrative indicates that this discourse should be taken as historical, albeit an invention by Plato.

Although it claims to be a true account, the text provides evidence that the Atlantis narrative has a problematic relation to the truth. Critias’ speech becomes unverifiable almost as soon as he begins to recount how he recovered the story. One key problem is the lack of witnesses to the event itself. In the preview of his speech in the *Timaeus*, Critias tells his audience that Atlantis was completely destroyed by earthquakes and floods. But, in addition, he tells us that all of the Athenian warriors were killed as well. As Critias recounts,

> at a later time there occurred violent (ἐξαισίων) earthquakes and floods, and one severe day and night came upon them, when the whole body of your warriors was swallowed up by the earth, and the island of Atlantis in like manner was swallowed up by the sea and vanished (ἡφαίσθη), on which account also the sea at that spot has become impassable (ἀποροῦν)

---

1 Critias’ claim to report what he heard is reminiscent of the disappearance of Helice (c. 375 B.C.). Richard Ellis claims that "there were no survivors (and therefore, no eyewitnesses), so we must trust later historians who had to rely upon hearsay" (Richard Ellis. *Imagining Atlantis*. [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998], 242).
and unexamined (αδιερευνητον), being blocked up by the shoal mud which the island created as it settled down (Tim, 25d).1

The disappearance of Atlantis took place, not as the result of human means, but because of nature. The violence, or as it were lawlessness, of nature remains beyond human control. Despite our desire to preserve human events from being lost, there are no guarantees that we can succeed.

This issue is reminiscent of an account in Book III of the Histories in which a detachment of soldiers fail to reach their destination. The Persian ruler Cambyses wanted to launch three expeditions in Africa, one of which was against the Ammonians (III.17). He decided to send a portion of his land army to attack them (III. 26). According to Herodotus, the Persian detachment made it to a town, Oasis. In telling us that the name of the place in Greek is Isles of the Blessed, Herodotus suggests an unknown realm that transcends our earthly experience. Herodotus then states, "so by all accounts the army reached this place, but after that the only information available comes directly or indirectly from the Ammonians themselves; no one else can say what happened to them because they did not reach the Ammonians and they did not come back either" (III, 26). Herodotus provides a possible reason why the Persian army vanished without a trace.

The Ammonians say that somewhere between Oasis and the lands,-a great and violent (εξαισιον) south wind, carrying along with it heaps of sand, fell on them while they were taking their midday meal and buried them, and in that way they disappeared (αφανισθηναι). Anyway, that is what the Ammonians say about this army (ibid).

As in the account of Atlantis, the violence of nature prevents us from verifying the facts. In this case the only information came from those unable to witness what happened. Although Herodotus desires to preserve human events, his desire lacks any guarantee because of the limitations of human experience.

Plato creates a similar scenario by killing off the entire Athenian army after the battle against Atlantis. Because no one survived, the reader is left to ponder what may have actually transpired. But more importantly, one may wonder how the narrative on Atlantis could be recounted at all. Critias, of course, appeals to Solon and Egypt to help convince his audience of the truth of his narrative. According to Critias, Solon heard the history of Atlantis and Athens from Egyptian priests who were from Sais, the home of King Amasis, a lover of Greece-a point Herodotus himself makes during his account of Egypt (II.178). Critias claims that not only are the people of Egypt great lovers of

---

1 Romm states that the infinitude of the Ocean was not the only thing scaring away mariners. "Ocean’s stream was said to be thick or sluggish, holding back the progress of ships sailing on it; dense fogs and mists enveloped it; and giant sea creatures menaced passing vessels from its depths" (Romm, 20). As for the shallowness, Romm maintains that authors from Plato to Plutarch entertained such ideas (ibid, 22).
Athens, but in addition there is a kinship between the two places because both Athens and Sais were founded by Athena (Tim, 21e). This point explains why the Egyptian priests held Solon in high esteem during his stay in Egypt. It appears, then, that these points help validate the transmission of the account. But, Critias’ appeal to Solon and the Egyptians does not compensate for the fact that everyone involved in the war were killed by natural causes. This problem again indicates that human history is limited by the possible destructive forces of nature, as well as the passage of time in which records eventually disappear.

Critias’ narrative is rendered even more problematic once he indicates there was a time gap between the beginning of Egyptian and Greek history. Given the claim that Egypt preserved the ancient Greek records, one would assume that Egypt is the older of the two places.1 However, the Egyptian priest tells Solon that Athena adopted both the Egyptian and Greek land, but Athens came first "by the space of a thousand years" (Tim, 23d-e). In admitting the time gap, the priest has inadvertently shown us that Greek history cannot simply be preserved by an outside people, such as the Egyptians.2 An additional claim only emphasizes the problem. According to the priest, "the duration of our civilization as set down in our sacred writings is eight thousand years. Of the citizens then, who lived nine thousand years ago, I will briefly show you their laws and the noblest of the deeds they performed" (Tim, 23e). Not only did Plato kill off all the witnesses, he also created a one thousand year gap between the foundation of Athens and the place that supposedly preserved the records of Athens. Thus, Plato indirectly calls into question the plausibility of Critias’ true account.

The Timaeus and Critias reveal the complicated relationship between geography and truth. While Critias can claim that his narrative is completely true, we do not need to believe him. In fact Critias makes so many problematic claims that perhaps we should not trust him at all. Based on this problem, one might think that Plato uses geographical narrative in order to critique it. Once we get beyond the limits of the inhabited world, we can only speculate about what lies beyond it. Such speculation reveals the affinity geography shares with myth. As Brisson claims, myth concerns the unfalsifiable, and to an extent geography has the same dilemma when it comes to discussing what lies beyond our experience. However, the Critias shares a similar trait with the Phaedo.

1 For Brisson, the distant past is one of the elements of Platonic myth. According to Brisson, "in brief, for Plato, myth in the true sense of the word is a form of discourse which transmits all information that a community conserves in memory of its distant past and passes on orally from one generation to the next" (Brisson, 9). However, I want to suggest that Plato finds a problem with the attempt to preserve something so distant from us. No amount of writing or oral tradition will be able to preserve an event forever.

2 As for the problems with the dating, Rodney Castleden claims that Critias only refers to the city of Sais rather than Egypt as a whole (Atlantis Destroyed. [London: Routledge, 1998], 170). However, I find that if Plato had meant for the records to be preserved elsewhere in Egypt, he would have told us so.
After the discourse on geography reaches its limit, the speaker turns to myth. The question is whether or not Plato wants us to view this move critically.

**Philosophy, Geography, and Myth**

Above we saw that the geographical discourse in the *Phaedo* ends in myth. We find the same pattern in the *Critias* which leads me to suspect that Plato uses both geography and myth for a specific purpose within these dialogues. At the outset of his narrative, Critias claims that Atlantis was founded by Poseidon. We also discover that Poseidon fell in love with a mortal woman, Cleito, who was the daughter of earthborn parents (113c-d). Atlantis, then, was founded in the union of the mortal, albeit the offspring of an autochthon, and the divine. Obviously, Critias’ account has the form of a myth insofar as he describes the divine origin of Atlantis, an event which we humans cannot verify. Even as he turns to his geographical account of the island, Critias continues to invoke myth. For example, Critias claims that Poseidon “made circular belts of sea and land enclosing one another alternatively two being of land and three of sea which he carved as it were out of the midst of the island” (113d). Poseidon did all of this, Critias states, "so as to be impassable (άβατον) for man" (113e). Although Critias provides us with a geographical account of Atlantis, the facts of the matter are called into question by Critias’ appeal to the divine.

As he continues his account of Atlantis, Critias’ statements appear to mirror geography rather than myth. From 114d through 120d his account moves away from myth to geography (albeit fictional). For instance, Critias describes the minerals, the flora, and capital, including the shrine and temple of Poseidon. He also discusses in some detail the political organization of Atlantis and the rites of the kings (119c-120d).

But rather than continue the geographical/historical narrative, Critias returns to myth. In describing the downfall of the Atlantean rulers, Critias claims that Zeus wanted to punish the rulers who had become filled with ambition and power. Critias then states, "Zeus, the god of gods, who reigns by law, inasmuch as he has the gift of perceiving such things, marked how this righteous race was in this evil plight, and desired to inflict punishment on them, to the end that they might strike a truer note" (121b). In order to fix the problem with the rulers, Zeus was going to step in and bring them back to order. In his final statement, Critias claims", so [Zeus] gathered all the gods in his most honorable residence, standing as it does at the world's center and overlooks all that has part in becoming, and after he gathered them together, he spoke (συναγείρας εἶπεν)” (121b-c). The dialogue then breaks off without any completion to the story.

The speech of Critias begins and ends with a discussion of the mythical gods. The Atlantis narrative is thus framed by a mythical account of the
original inhabitants of the earth.\textsuperscript{1} We find that this point coincides with one made by Brisson concerning historical dates. According to Brisson, myth is characterized by "the absence of any precise dating, and especially the ignorance of what really happened".\textsuperscript{2} Although Critias attempts to provide dates for the founding of Athens, the role of the gods suggests a mythical element to the origin of civilization. By framing the \textit{Critias} with myth, Plato helps reveal why geography is an incomplete endeavor. We arrive at myth because there is no other way to describe what may lie beyond human experience. Even if an account sounds implausible, nothing prevents us from believing it to be true.\textsuperscript{3}

If geography is incomplete and unverifiable, then one may want to argue that Plato does in fact use geography in order to critique it. In order to solve this dilemma, we should keep in mind that Plato uses Critias' preview and subsequent narrative in order to frame another discourse: the Timean cosmology. Within the \textit{Timaeus} and \textit{Critias} philosophy arises, not in the account of Atlantis, but rather in the Timean discourse on the universe. Timaeus often invokes Platonic elements, such as being versus becoming, the Same and the Other, etc. He even begins his speech by distinguishing what always is from what comes to be. According to Timaeus, "now the one is grasped by intellection accompanied by a rational account, since it is always in the same condition; but the other in its turn is opined by opinion accompanied by irrational sensation, since it comes to be and perishes and never genuinely is" (Tim, 28a, Kalkavage translation). Because Timaeus makes well-known Platonic distinctions, it may appear that Plato wants us to accept the Timean discourse as true and reject the geographical/mythical speech as unverifiable at best.

However, keep in mind that Timaeus is not so sure of himself and the truth of his account either. At the outset of the \textit{Critias}, Timaeus prays to the god “that he grant the preservation of all that has been spoken properly; but that he will impose the proper penalty if we have, despite our best intentions, spoken any discordant note” (Crit, 106b, Clay translation). Not only does geography and myth share the problem of verification, but philosophy does as well. For instance, we have no way of ascertaining whether or not the Platonic Ideas are

\textsuperscript{1} Although Herodotus does not frame his work in myth, he does mention the mythical origins of some people, such as the Scythians. According to the Scythians, Targitaus was the first man in Scythia, and he was born of Zeus and a daughter of the Barythenes River. After describing this point, Herodotus adds, "but I myself do not believe it" (\textit{Histories}, IV, 5).

\textsuperscript{2} (\textit{Plato the Myth Maker}, 22). Brisson also claims that "myth is distinguished from true discourse about the past by its inability to precisely state when the events which it mentions took place" (ibid).

\textsuperscript{3} Perhaps getting its information from Proclus, the \textit{Oxford Classical Dictionary} claims that the belief in Atlantis is linked to Crantor (c. 335-275 BC), a philosopher of the early Academy. According to the \textit{OCD}, Crantor "is said to have accepted the truth of the tale, an indicator of ancient controversy about Atlantis as early as c.300 BC" (Hornblower, Simon and Antony Spawforth. \textit{The Oxford Classical Dictionary}. [Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996], 208).
true. Through his hesitancy regarding the truth of his narrative, Timaeus indicates the problem with philosophy as well.

But if philosophy has no privileged access to the truth, then why be a philosopher at all? While philosophy, geography, and myth share some similar traits, they do remain distinct from each other. Perhaps the main difference between philosophy and other fields concerns the question of truth. Philosophy alone questions the truth of its claims. While a writer, such as Herodotus, laments a person’s misguided belief in Ocean, Herodotus does not question the truth of his own endeavor. Likewise poets have stories to tell, and these stories do not provide accounts of truth. Perhaps out of all the various fields, philosophy is the one that can keep us humble. Through philosophy we learn that we do not know the truth, and at best we can only attain a partial truth about the world we habituate.

Despite my claims about geography and myth, one may still maintain that Plato is critical of geographical narrative. After all, geography is not the same thing as philosophy. In addition geography shares some traits with myth in that it often contains fictional accounts of the world. \(^1\) However, the similarity between Socrates’ account of the earth and geographical discourse shows that Plato does not denigrate geography, but instead uses its subject matter to mark the threshold of life and death. Just as geographers question what exists beyond the limits of the known world, so too does Socrates question what lies beyond the earthly realm. This issue is reminiscent of Romm’s account of narratives on Alexander the Great. In discussing Alexander’s journey toward the eastern edge of the world, Romm claims that "this trek is in part a quest for divinity: as in the myths of Heracles which Alexander’s legends often reenact, the voyage beyond the oikumene comes to symbolize mankind’s transcendence of the human condition" (Romm, 115). Socrates’ journey can be viewed in a similar light. Not only does his account of geography take place in a dialogue on the immortality of the soul, but also it arises at the moment when Socrates is about to confront the divine realm. Thus we find that geography is important to Plato because he uses the element of wonder to show us the limits of philosophy.

Perhaps a more important lesson applies to contemporary readers of Plato. In Plato’s use of geography and myth we often find overlap between different fields of knowledge. The crossing of boundaries indicates that the oppositional way of thinking of logos and muthos is based on a logic that does not belong to Plato. In other words, the tendency to separate myth from truth arises out of modern interpretations. I am reminded of bell hooks’ response to questions regarding which type of oppression, sexist or racist, is more important to address. According to hooks,

\(^1\) According to Paul Veyne, "the world cannot be inherently fictional; it can be fictional only according to whether or not one believes in it or not. The difference between fiction and reality is not objective and does not pertain to the thing itself; it resides in us, according to whether or not we subjectively see in it a fiction" (Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? Translated by Paula Wissing. [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988], 21).
all such questions are rooted in competitive either/or thinking, the belief that the self is formed in opposition to another. Therefore one is a feminist because one is not something else. Most people are socialized to think in terms of opposition rather than compatibility (hooks, 31).

What if Plato’s supposed subordination of *muthos* is based on our present way of thinking about philosophy? Nevertheless one may want to ask about the evidence for claiming that *muthos* is not opposed to *logos*. Immediately prior to Socrates’ death, Socrates no longer engages in philosophy. One should keep in mind that Plato, the author, could have allowed the dialogue to end with philosophy. But the problem is that philosophy had already completed its task in the four arguments concerning the immortality of the soul. If Plato were trying to show us the inadequacies of geography and myth, then he could have made Socrates indicate their deficiencies. At the end of the *Phaedo* we find instead our human deficiencies insofar as Socrates’ friends can no longer maintain themselves and end up acting like women.
Aristotle’s Theory of Principles: A Rationalistic – Empirical Ambiguity

Romano J. Joseph, Cabrini College

Aristotle’s use of the term “principle” (αρχη) reveals the unique aspect of his philosophy; a fundamental ambiguity in the nature of things – an ambiguity related to the basic epistemological question regarding the conditions under which human beings claim to have knowledge of reality. This ambiguity, expressed in Aristotle’s arduous concern over clarifying his meaning of “principle”, involves a relational use of this term whereby Aristotle wants to retain all the universal intelligibility of Platonic Forms, while at the same time acknowledging the obvious world of changing individuals. There is a studied ambiguity in his use of “principle” that allows for either rationalistic or empirical interpretations. However, such either-or renderings of Aristotle – in attempting to resolve the ambiguity – run the risk of denying Aristotle his sui generis integrational philosophy, which acknowledges that the ambiguity involves both reality and human understanding and that it is the notion of “principle” that reveals this ambiguity.

The purpose here is first to recount several classical interpretations of Aristotelian thought as either in the fashion of Platonic Idealism or as an empirical precursor of modern science. Second, to analyze the general meaning of Aristotle’s use of principle as a purely relational term that relates universal intelligibility to a real world of particular entities. Finally, the intention is to examine specific passages in Aristotle in which he utilizes this unique meaning of “principle” to resolve the puzzling epistemological and metaphysical challenges embodied in claiming that certain knowledge must be universal, while claiming also that universals are not separate from the changing world of individual realities.

Aristotle as Either Rational Idealist or Empirical Naturalist

Some classical interpretations of Aristotle claim that he is no less an Idealist than his mentor Plato. Others maintain that he thoroughly repudiates Plato’s Ideal World and in turning to the concrete world at hand, becomes the first great naturalistic thinker. Those in the former camp cite passages in which
Aristotle claims that “nature does nothing in vain”, or that “knowledge is of the universal”,\(^1\) an often repeated statement that on the surface appears to afford no significant values to perceptual experiences. George Boas, for example, surmises that Aristotle’s preference for universal knowledge necessarily binds him to a world of immutable substances that are as separate as any Ideal Forms of Plato. Consequently to classify Aristotle as an empiricist is extremely misleading, since we have his word for it that no knowledge is possible of what modern philosophers call experience.\(^2\)

Friedrich Solmsen had also claimed that Aristotle’s entire theory of archai grew out of Plato’s doctrine of hypothesis in Republic VI and VII, and that basically there is little difference between the two theories.\(^3\) Werner Jaeger, in tracing the development of Aristotle’s thought, suggests that Aristotle may have entered the philosophical arena firmly convinced of the Platonic Ideal of an all-embracing science; so that for Aristotle –at least in his Academy days -- it was simply a question of “Faith seeking understanding”.\(^4\) This sentence does not make sense. Is some portion omitted?

On the other hand, others cite Aristotle’s division of the sciences and the different principles that support those respective disciplines in order to show Aristotle’s rejection of a single unified ideal scheme of knowledge. Friedrich Woodbridge lends weight to a naturalistic and empirical Aristotle,\(^5\) as does John Anton, who claims that Aristotle’s investigation of nature foreshadowed the methodology of modern science in as much as Aristotle’s reliance on discreet principles as explanatory of distinct disciplines were the beginnings of scientific investigation.\(^6\) John Herman Randall offers, perhaps, the strongest argument in favor of Aristotle being the foremost pioneer of modern science in that he repeatedly attempted to fit observable data into orderly systems of proof.\(^7\)

Thus, when one emphasizes certain passages, Aristotle appears as a rationalistic philosopher searching a perfectly ordered universe that must be explained in universal and immutable principles. Ultimately, he would seem to

---

\(^1\) “Knowledge is of the universal” has dual meanings for Aristotle that resist a mere idealistic interpretation, as this paper will maintain.


\(^3\) Friedrich Solmsen, *Die Entwicklung der Aristotelischen und Rhetorik* (Berlin, 1929).


ground the entire cosmos upon an Absolute – the Prime Mover of the *Physics*, the Pure Actuality of the *Metaphysics*. In this context, Mind is the all encompassing principle. The heavens – in their eternal cycles – perfectly obey the attractive force of Mind, and the things of the earth follow through in their imperfect but orderly way of the constant and cyclical regeneration of the various species. The reasoning used in reaching such a conclusion is strict and rigid; deductive demonstration is absolute (απλως αποδειξις).

Other passages reveal a different Aristotle – one who criticizes Plato’s attempt to begin with an Absolute One instead of asking why there are so many different things that come into and pass out of being in changing patterns that are sometimes fairly ordered and at other times not so orderly. The Aristotle of these texts wonders about the splendid array of celestial bodies that seem so perfect, yet are material and are moving and therefore must in some way be natural as earthly things are natural. This Aristotle offers a First Cause (Prime Mover and/or Pure Act) that serves as a theoretical hypothesis that one can accept or reject without doing serious harm to his basic view of nature. In this case, reasoning is constructed according to postulates; demonstration is hypothetical (αποδειξις εξ υποθεσις). Rather than concede to a wholly inconsistent Aristotle that might explain the above contrary interpretations, I suggested above that the texts of Aristotle reveal an epistemological tension inherent in his use of “principle” that struggles between committing to a world of changing, individual, physical entities and acknowledging that this world of individual entities is rendered intelligible only through universal conceptual “forms” that alone give meaning to those objects. There is always a shifting of emphasis between the “world” and the mind’s expression of the world; between the ontic and epistemic interplay of reality and the knowledge of what it is that we call “real”. The term that embodies this polarity is αρχη principle. It is the term that links man with an understanding of what-is-real and it is a term that is basic to his entire philosophy.

“What is called wisdom is concerned with primary principles … since we are investigating this kind of knowledge we must consider what these principles are whose knowledge is wisdom”.  

A General Approach to “Principle” as a Reference Term

It is perhaps a difficult task to investigate the principles of a philosophical system, since the term as object of study precludes any explanation that could be expressed in more basic terminology. Yet an understanding of a philosopher’s starting point is indispensable to one’s understanding of that philosophy. From a linguistic point of view, the question “what is a principle?” might be considered a senseless question that commits a category mistake that

---

From Ancient Greek to Asian Philosophy

attempts to reify “principle”. Such reification would conjure up non-empirical spirits of occult entities, excluding any naturalistic understanding of the phenomena. Casting aside the occult, however, the term might signify a basic rule or norm or guide. Such meaning is best exemplified in an expression: “The chief principle of philosophy is to determine the precise meaning of words in a given statement”. Principle in this sense indicates that, “a proper philosophical attitude begins with…”. And again, “the source of philosophical clarity is found in …”. All of this is clear enough, but how would the term be understood if it designates a collection of unproved mathematical axioms that can be used to gain an understanding of other mathematical truths? For example, a principle of mathematics is: if a, b, c are natural numbers, and if a = b and b = c, then a = c (according to the principle that things equal to the same thing are equal to each other). In this example, the term “principle” means more than a norm or guide. It approaches the notion of axiom, indicating a basic unproven truth from which other mathematical truths can be derived. Also, it is not uncommon to speak of principles of geometry, such as in Euclidean geometry, given any two distinct points, there is at least one line containing them and at most one line containing them. Here in geometry, we are perhaps dealing with a less abstract subject matter than pure numbers because lines and planes and solids seem to correspond more directly with doors and walls and table tops than do numbers.

The isomorphic relation of “principles” to “things” becomes more apparent in speaking of the principles of Physics. To say in Newtonian terms that every action has an equal and opposite reaction is to set the meaning of “principle” in a more complex light. When we speak of principles in reference to moving bodies, are we using “principle” to denote a mere conceptual scheme? What does it mean to speak of “principles of moving bodies”? We are loathe to attribute reality to principles (to avoid the reification fallacy), yet we are equally reluctant to assign a mere conceptual existence to “bodies” (to avoid idealism). We want to say at once that principles are a conceptual and/or linguistic expression and that “bodies” are the real things made intelligible by those principles. This is what we mean when we speak of “principles of moving bodies”. “Principle” is a relational term. In and of itself it is devoid of meaning. By isolating the term in a definition, we can see the relational character. “Principle”: a beginning (implying a beginning of something to follow); “Principle”: a source (implying a priority of an impending posteriority). Thus, if one wants to retain the purely conceptual aspect of “principle” he does so at the price of existing things. For his principles must then be expressed as “principles of conceptual schemes”. These conceptual schemes may of course be called “bodies”, but is this what the physicist means when he talks about bodies? Is he talking about conceptual schemes or is he talking about a conceptual scheme about bodies – real bodies? And if the latter is the case, then is there really any difference between the phrases, “talking about bodies” and “principles of bodies”? In this case, the physicist’s “talking” is a basic intelligible scheme or a source of further knowledge about things. If
you want to admit that basic expressions are of real things, and if you want to
call these expressions “principles” then principles have a foundational
character. Principles have an ambivalent relationship between a conceptual
schema and an ontic reference. One need not admit the ontic ground of
principles. Principles may indeed be divorced entirely from an ontic reference.
But since “principle” is a reference term, it (as conceptual scheme) must be
referred to at least another conceptual scheme. “Principles of bodies” in this
case is a conceptual scheme of a conceptual scheme. It is “thinking about
thinking” or “talking about talking”. The basic assumption of Aristotle avoids
this denial of a real world. The merits of this assumption will be discussed, but
it must be acknowledged that it is the assumption of Aristotle and that it
involves an ambiguous notion of principle as simultaneously relating
understanding (epistemic pole) with reality (ontic pole). The texts of Aristotle
reveal the latent ambiguity within his very meaning of “principle” and
bequeath to subsequent thinkers the legacy of a fundamental singular
epistemological/ontological assumption that can only be expressed as dual
assertions, viz., “that there is an external world” and that “the world is
intelligible”. Aristotle’s repeated use of the term “principle” as a relational
term commits to that singular assumption and acknowledges the tension
between conceptual models of cognition and intelligible realities.

Aristotle’s General Notion of “Principle” as Relational

For Aristotle, principles are “explanations of …”. “We ask what the principle is
so that we may refer to something more intelligible”.1 From an epistemological
point of view, principles may be considered as rational schemes of
understanding. From an ontological point of view, principles express modes of
being – or aspects, or whatever term may best convey the notion that while
“real” may never be properly predicated of “principles,” individual entities
really manifest certain modes or characteristics. It is the individual entity that
is real. For Aristotle, this individual reality is grounded in a “principle of
actuality” which is simply one’s understanding of what something is as
opposed to what something may become. The actuality-potentiality principles
are not reified “things-in-themselves”. This is not to say that these principles
are merely conceptual. The puzzle of Aristotle’s principles seems to lie in the
ambiguity of linking principles to both a conceptual understanding and a real
world of that which is conceptualized. The archai are not physical; they are not
purely of the logical order. They are not completely independent of thought;
they are not solely dependent upon thought. The temptation to reify archai
conjures up difficulties of “occult causes” which seems to be contrary to the
spirit of Aristotle’s explanations of changing realities. For example, certain
Scholastic interpretations of Aristotle speak of “substance” as being the cause

1 Ibid., 1040 b 20-21.
of accidents, which modify the thing-in-itself substance; or, potentiality as being the cause of change and actuality as being the cause of existence. Such “causes” might well be occult. But it seems that what Aristotle most likely intends by his archai theory is a compromise that grew out of his critique of pre-Socratic cosmology and Platonic epistemology. The archai of the former were material elements and therefore not the basic structure of reality since a further division would always be possible. Plato’s archai (The Forms) offered the credentials for understanding (viz., universality), but were separate from the very explicanda. For Aristotle, principles as referential are an attempt to compromise these two views. He admits with pre-Socratic thought that archai are inherent in physical things, but denies that the basic archai are physical inherents. He agrees with Platonists that archai render things intelligible, but denies that they exist apart from intelligible things. Principles, therefore, are neither in things nor apart from things. Principles are of things, i.e., principles are relational or referential. Only a noun-obsessed language would reify principles into “its” and “theys”. The relational character of principles through which universal understanding is linked to individual existents is the fascination of Aristotelian thought in which Aristotle looks back to resolve past puzzles of pre-Socratic and Platonic philosophy and looks forward with principles servings as schemes for accommodating a combined theoretical and empirical approach to understanding physical phenomena.

Aristotle’s Predecessors and the Problem of Universal Knowledge

There are many instances in the writings of Aristotle in which he declares that “knowledge is of the universal”. This assertion has been seen by some to be problematic insofar as it is claiming that Aristotle could be empirically committed to a real world of individual beings. What is the precise meaning of his assertion that “knowledge is of the universal”? Certainly he disavows that knowledge somehow involves separate universal entities existing apart from individual things. He clearly states that this “separation of the universal is the cause of the difficulties we find in the Ideal Theory”.¹ This “separation of the universal” becomes the main bone of contention throughout Aristotle’s criticism of Platonism in Books XIII (m) and XIV (n). The problem is this: how is Aristotle going to save knowledge without losing sight of the real world? While he is willing to exorcise separate universals from his own philosophy, he is not willing to release universals from its necessary role in acquiring knowledge. “For without the universal we cannot acquire knowledge”.²

The philosophy of his predecessors weighs heavily on Aristotle. Highest knowledge was all encompassing knowledge – universal knowledge. The

---

¹ Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1086 b 7.
² Ibid., 1086 b 6.
Aristotle’s Theory of Principles: A Rationalistic – Empirical Ambiguity

Ionian pioneers in philosophical speculation expressed this knowledge of the whole – the One in formulating a universal world view. The Pythagoreans explained overall harmony in the universal truths of numerical values. Parmenides, in distinguishing the Way of Truth from the Way of Opinion, revealed the former as the intellectually conceived universality of Being in its permanent and complete structure. Thus, universality is more clearly aligned with “highest knowledge”. Even the Heraclitean notion of *Panta Chōrei* contains a left-handed expression of the all-encompassing view. Here too, Heraclitus grounds his universal change theory on an intellectual rather than perceptual basis with his “Word” or “Logos”. Not only is highest knowledge linked ontologically with universality, but also epistemologically two modes of knowing are distinguished -- intellectual cognition and sensory perception. Plato completes this two-fold task by distinguishing *episteme* from *doxa*, in which distinction the former attains to universals whereas the latter offers opinions of changing particulars.

Aristotle inherited these entangled views of knowledge/reality, and while he explicitly rejects any separation of universality from individuals, he does not explain his own view of universal knowledge in a consistent manner. An analysis of his use of principles as relational may render some plausible interpretations.

**Aristotle’s Specific Application of Principles to the Universality of Knowledge**

As mentioned before, Aristotle clearly states that knowledge is of the universal. But since universals have no separate existence, Aristotle is compelled to explain how it is that we *know* particulars in a universal way. Furthermore, if the sharp distinction between the senses and intellect is to be retained, then the question arises: how can we know particulars at all since these are objects of the senses and not of the intellect? Does the mind (*nous*), after all, grasp universal principles that are just as separate as Platonic Ideas? Aristotle is aware of these problems, especially after he has criticized Platonic theory and begins to outline his own view,

The Doctrine that all knowledge is of the universal, and hence that the principles of existing things must also be universal and not separate substances, presents the greatest difficulty of all that we have discussed.¹

In admitting this problem, Aristotle reaffirms the referential character of principles as the intelligible aspect of beings. His answer to the question concerning the cognition of things must involve principles. He says in effect that if knowledge is universal, then principles must be universal in some way.

¹ Ibid., 1087 a 11-14
How are principles universal? This is the greatest difficulty. Separate (universal) forms have been rejected. Now universality must be found in principles, not in things. In proceeding to address this difficulty, Aristotle first qualifies his earlier assumption that all knowledge is of the universal, “There is, however, a sense in which this statement is true, although there is another in which it is not true”.\(^1\)

The basis for this problematic distinction is found in the act-potency principles of perishable particulars and the knowledge of those particulars acquired through principles. Because of the act-potency aspects of individuals, knowledge has two senses: a particular-definite sense and a universal-indefinite sense. Actual knowledge is of a definite individual thing; potential knowledge is of a universal character, i.e., knowledge of what might be the case – an indefinite number of possibilities. The latter sense of knowledge is based on the formless “material” aspect of particular entities, which open them to any number of possibilities.

For Aristotle, then, universality is not separate from particulars. Universality is “in” particulars not as an entity but as a principle – principle of potentiality. And it is this potential aspect of particulars that explains the universal sense of knowledge,

Knowledge, like the verb ‘to know’, has two senses, of which one is potential and the other actual. The potentiality being – as matter – universal and indefinite, has a universal and indefinite object; but the actuality is definite and has a definite object, because it is particular and deals with the particular…it is clear that although in one sense knowledge is universal, in another it is not.\(^2\)

Any individual act of cognition has as its referent object an individual. But as Aristotle often asserts, universality is the sine qua non of knowledge and it is the potential principle of individuals that allows universal conceptualization. Aristotle is not perfectly clear on this point. Perhaps universality enters the cognitive act when a knower experiences other similar individuals whose potentialities are similarly actualized. Aristotle claims that “the potential and the actual are in a sense one”,\(^3\) insofar as principles are not entities themselves but are aspects of entities. It seems consistent then to locate the root of all generalizations about entities in a principle of possibility since only individual beings actually exist. This view of the universality of knowledge runs counter to the Platonic universality of Forms. Also, it is not consistent with the Scholastic theory of universal abstraction of forms from matter. Aristotle’s view here seems more suggestive of a modern conceptual scheme of forming loosely structured general theories rather than assigning absolute value to

\(^1\) Ibid., 1087 a 15
\(^2\) Ibid., 1087 a 16-25
\(^3\) Ibid., 1045 b 21
mental constructs. By analyzing individual cases, one can form general notions of what may possibly be the case concerning other individuals, or what may be other possibilities for this individual. In either case, universality always remains in the realm of possibility and never in the realm of actuality.

There are two other passages, in contexts different than the one above, in which Aristotle conveys a link between potentiality and universality. First, in the De Anima Aristotle applies his notion of the potential and actual aspects of beings as aids for understanding human instruction or learning (epistemon). There are three ways, he states, in which a man is said to be learned: (1) insofar as he belongs to a class of learned people who have knowledge; (2) insofar as he is well instructed in a specific area (e.g., grammar); and (3) insofar as he manifests his learning in the very act of knowing something. Aristotle claims that the first two meanings of “learned” involve a potential mode of being. The first is the general class of learned men. Aristotle likens this classification to “matter” rather than “form”, i.e., indefinite and universal rather than definite and particular. The second meaning involves potentiality inasmuch as the man is capable of divulging some knowledge provided there are no external impediments. The third meaning involves actuality. The man is actually manifesting his learning by knowing “this particular A”. Even though examples one and two offer different nuances of potentiality, nevertheless, in both cases potentiality as an explaining principle is grounded in universality. The third example relates actuality with particular knowledge of what is actually the case.

In the Metaphysics, while discussing the actuality-potentiality principles, Aristotle indicates how these principles are “in a sense the same”. Both indicate the presence of the thing, though not exactly in the same way. Potentiality denotes a thing’s presence by what can be conceived apart from the thing. One can say paradoxically that potentiality indicates something’s presence by what is absent. The statue is presented potentially in the wood from which it may be carved, or half of the line is potentially present in the whole line from which it can be extracted. Aristotle’s third example is that of a man who is called “scholar” even though he is not actually studying but is capable of studying. In terms of potentiality, the scholar is present potentially. Again Aristotle suggests the distinction of act-potency principles as two sides of the same coin, and more importantly, that there is a link between the potential and the universal. In explaining actuality as the presence of something on the “opposite side” of that same thing’s potential presence, Aristotle refuses to give a general definition of actuality and instead examines particular cases inductively; and (2) refuses to consider those particular cases apart from their general background of potentiality. The first refusal clearly aligns the actual with the particular; the second highlights the importance of a universal

2 Aristotle, Metaphysics, 1048 a 31-40.
(and potential) background for a better understanding of what actually is the case.

That which is present in the opposite sense to this (to potential presence) is present actually. What we mean can be plainly seen in the particular cases inductively; we need not seek a definition for every term, but must comprehend the analogy: as that which is actually building is to that which is capable of building, so is that which is awake to that which is asleep; and that which is seeing to that which has eyes shut, but is capable of sight; and that which is differentiated out of matter to the matter, and the finished article to the raw material. Let actuality be defined by one member of the analogy and the potential by the other.¹

The claim that “knowledge is of the universal” cannot mean that actual knowledge is of the universal and still be consistent with the three passages cited above. In those three instances, actual knowledge can be of particulars and nothing else. However, Aristotle seems to talk of actual knowledge involving universals, and that would run counter to the texts thus far examined. This apparent inconsistency arises whenever he distinguishes sense perceptions (aesthesis) from knowledge (episteme). When making this distinction, Aristotle implies that there might be two kinds of actual knowledge: the sensory perception of particulars and the intellectual knowledge of universals. This implication engenders another concern as to whether or not we actually know individuals or universals or both. If actual knowledge more properly applies to individuals, then this talk of “knowledge of universals” is meaningless. If, on the other hand, actual knowledge more properly refers to universals, then Aristotle’s critique of Platonism is empty. If both individuals and universals somehow find a place in the cognitive scheme of things, then Aristotle still must show how he avoids a separate realm of universals.

Aristotle’s Distinction between Sensory Perceptions and Intellectual Understanding

In distinguishing perceptual knowledge from intellectual understanding, Aristotle explains more carefully why “knowledge is of the universal”. In the Metaphysics he writes, “If nothing exists apart from individual things, nothing will be intelligible; everything will be sensible, and there will be no knowledge of anything -- unless it is maintained that sense perception is knowledge”.² Again, in the De Anima Aristotle would seem to exclude sensory perceptions from any definite claim to knowledge, “Actual sensations are of particulars,

¹ Ibid., 1048 a 35- 1048 b 1-6.
² Ibid., 999 b 1-3.
whereas knowledge is of universals”.1 And in the Posterior Analytics, he writes, “Since demonstrations are universal, and universals cannot be perceived by the senses, obviously knowledge cannot be acquired by sense perception”.2

Are these passages in which Aristotle distinguishes sensory perceptions from intellect and excludes the former from true cognition, consistent with his previous claim that actual knowledge is of the concrete individual entity? In the first passage (from the Metaphysics), Aristotle poses the notion of separate substances as a hypothetical question, suggesting a more Platonic view that sensible objects can be intelligible only insofar as there are separated intelligible entities. It is the passage that eventually leads him to identify the existence of separate universal forms as the greatest difficulty of all in trying to explain how one can have universal knowledge of a changing world of particulars. The second passage (De Anima), does not present the difficulty that might first appear. Aristotle is discussing the general character of sensation in which he tries to explain how sentient beings move from having possible sensations to having actual sensations. He insists that the efficacious cause of actualizing sensory powers must be found in individuals external to the thing having the sensation. Strictly speaking, one does not “think” individuals; one sees or hears or touches them. But this does not mean sensations cannot be included in the broader meaning of ‘cognition’. The expanded text reads as follows:

Actual sensation corresponds to the exercise of knowledge; with this difference, that the objects of sight and hearing (and likewise of the other senses) which produce the actuality of sensations are external. This is because actual sensation is of particulars, whereas knowledge is of universals. These (universals), in a sense, exist in the soul itself. So it lies in man’s power to use his mind whenever he chooses, but it is not in his power to experience sensations; for the presence of the sensible object is necessary.3

In short, there is not sufficient warrant for charging Aristotle with failing to “know” individuals. Sensations are really (actually) prompted by real individuals. Furthermore, there may be a way to “detach” these objects of sensations from their individuality and think about them in a general (universal) way. We can do this general thinking any time we please, but we can have direct sensory experiences only when confronted with actual individuals. Nor is all of this inconsistent with a realm of individuals whose actuality is set in a background of possibilities (mental or otherwise). One may note that Aristotle never sufficiently explains the disparity between the actual confrontation of particular things and man’s ability to generalize and classify.

---

1 Aristotle, De Anima, 417 b 22.
2 Aristotle, Posterior Analytics, 87 b 32.
One might also take issue with Aristotle’s descriptive “psychology”. But anyone who claims some share in a philosophical realism that strives for a unity of cognition and reality – while avoiding “answers” based on either grossly observed elements or fanciful abstract forms – must acknowledge some pioneering work in the face of great odds.

Neither does the third passage (Posterior Analytics) present an irresolvable inconsistency regarding how knowledge is possible if it must be universal and yet only individuals exist. In distinguishing sensory perception from intellectual understanding, Aristotle is referring to a specific type of intellection, viz., demonstration (apodeixis). He maintains that sense perception cannot obtain the reasoned fact. His example is that of a triangle having angles equal to two right angles. Even if one could perceive that this was the case, still the proof or demonstration of this fact would go beyond the scope of the senses. Furthermore, he tells us, what is demonstrated holds for all cases, i.e., it is universally true. Sense perceptions, on the other hand, put us in contact only with particulars. Only through reasoned demonstration can the universal implication of triangles be realized and since these demonstrated facts are universal, then “knowledge is of the universal”. This enigmatic expression, in this context, simply refers to the universal axioms arrived at by demonstrative knowledge and does not rule out any knowledge of particulars. Aristotle maintains the distinction between senses and intellect, and still acknowledges a world of changing particulars. The repeated use of the phrase, “knowledge is of the universal”, lends itself to rationalistic and/or idealistic interpretations and obscures Aristotle’s commitment to a changing world of individual entities.

Aristotle’s Use of “Principles” in Explicating Two “Types” of Universality

It may also be seen now, that there are two senses of “universals” implied in the Aristotelian texts that, properly grasped, avoids another seeming inconsistency. First, as seen above, there is universality rooted in the potentiality of individual things. Such individuals are actually known, but as Aristotle says, knowledge has two senses, viz., one sense rooted in the principle of potentiality and the other sense in the principle of actuality. The actual sense of knowledge ascertains the individual as an individual, i.e., as a particular this. But in the realm of perishables, individuals exist in a background of possibilities. Each particular this carries with it a universal potentiality. For example, a block of wood can be carved into many possible figures. While it is true that what is actually known is this individual, it is also true that this individual’s potential aspect contributes greatly to our actual knowledge of this individual. In fact, as mentioned above, Aristotle would not consider actuality apart from potentiality. Let us call this first type of universality that is found in the potential background of individuals, a metaphysical or ontic universality, since its value lies in anchoring human knowledge to a real world of changing particulars. In this sense, the expression,
“knowledge is of the universal”, refers to the latent possibilities of all individuals.
The second type of universality we will call logical or conceptual universality. This refers to the universal propositions and conclusions of demonstrations. That the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles is a universal actually known through a demonstrative procedure. Sensory perceptions are of no use with these logical universals, since individual cases do not enter into the demonstration. In this sense, “knowledge is of the universal” refers to the actual propositions of demonstration.

It may now be asked; what is the relationship, if any, between the potential universality of individuals and the actual universality of propositions? Aristotle never states explicitly how individuals become universalized in logical propositions. Nor does he say how universal propositions can be used to demonstrate truths about individual facts. He seems to assume that his type of deductive demonstration can be applied to the realm of individuals. What does seem significant is his relational notion of “principles” – a notion involving a meaning of polarity – which saves him from having to forsake either the universality that is necessary for knowledge, or the mind-senses distinction that he has made. In the bargain, Aristotle is consistent with his basic assumption of acknowledging a real and intelligible world of individuals. It is his notion of “principle” that supports his assumption, since principles are “expressions of the world”. Being relational, principles manifest a polarity that suggests, at the cognitional pole, rationalism, and at the pole of experienced reality, naturalism. Aristotle’s principles perhaps characterize human cognition as the constant attempt to “fix” the stream of experiences into a meaningful whole.

It is significant enough that Aristotle firmly grounds all human knowledge in experience (emperia) and then acknowledges the role of memory and intellection in establishing a unity of meaning. His intended purpose to acknowledge some kind of mental expression that imparts meaning to the flow of experiences has imparted a legacy to the study of human cognition. One can quickly call to mind Kant’s categories affording unity to the disparate sensations, Hegel’s “quiescent kingdom of laws”, where experiences are held still under scientific scrutiny; Whitehead’s actual occasions “fixed” in a background of eternal essences; Santayana’s skeptical but necessary forms that give us the only understanding we have of a real world that is fundamentally grounded in our animal faith. There is no intention of collecting these thinkers into an Aristotelian theory of knowledge. How similar and yet how different philosophers are is left to the richness of the history of ideas. The intention here is to indicate the solid position Aristotle has taken concerning our cognitional relation with experiences. First of all, he acknowledged the reality of an experienced world. He also acknowledged the importance and necessity of mentally framing those experiences in order to gain significant meaning. Although stated successively, these two sentences merge into one. There is a meaningful world of experiences. The Aristotelian concept that effects this merger – a relational concept – is “principle”.

49
n 1935, Bohr pointed to the "essential inadequacy of the customary viewpoint of natural philosophy for a rational account of physical phenomena of the type with which we are concerned in quantum mechanics", and accordingly called for "a radical revision of our attitude as regards physical reality". Aristotle's doctrine of potentiality and actuality provides the possibility of just such revision, although the idea that the quantum world consists in potentialities made actual in measurement is not new. Whitehead suggested the same in 1929. Yet the distinction between actuality and potentiality was originally drawn by Aristotle, whose analogy of being functioned usefully in modern physics when read by way of the categories. That is to say, the objects of physics have been taken to consist in properties that inhere in some substance. In QM, however, it is awkward to understand observables in this way. Hence in R. I. G. Hughes' quantum event interpretation of the mathematical formalism of QM, he replaces the word "property" with "latency". Latencies are analogous to

2 Bohr, “Can Quantum-Mechanical Description ...”, 151.
4 See for example, Franz Brentano's influential reading, *Von der mannigfachen Bedeutung des Seiendes nach Aristoteles*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960), originally published in 1862.
5 R. I. G. Hughes, *The Structure and Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics*, (Cambridge, MA:
properties in classical mechanics, but they are probabilistic and represented by a state vector. Heisenberg calls latencies "tendencies" and associates them by analogy with Aristotle's notion of potentiality, but he gives Aristotle only passing reference. I intend to read the analogy of being in terms of actuality and potentiality in order to apply it to specific problems in quantum mechanics (QM), namely, the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen thought-experiment (EPR), Bell's inequalities, and delayed-choice experiments.

The Promise and the Problem

A point in favor of the strategy of applying Aristotle's metaphysics to QM is the ready compatibility between the quantum event interpretation and actuality as understood by Aristotle. For Aristotle, "actuality is motion most of all", and motion is the actualization of a potentiality. Quantum events are measurement outcomes. In Hughes' analysis, measurement "involves the realization of a particular quantum event from the Boolean algebra of such events associated with the measurement apparatus". That is to say, apparatus makes certain measurements possible rather than others. For example, Bohr argues that apparatus can be arranged to measure position, or momentum, but not both. One must choose. Once apparatus is set up, one Boolean algebra of events has been selected from a whole orthoalgebra of events. The Boolean algebra describes probabilistically the outcomes of measurement, and when a measurement is made, a single outcome is recorded from the various possibilities, "realized" in Hughes terminology. Another way to articulate this process is to say that a wave function describes the superposition of all possible outcomes of measurement. Measurement collapses the wave function such that only one outcome is recorded. The quantum world can thus be conceptualized as a formal reality in Aristotle’s highest sense of actuality (separate substance), which contains all potentialities. Since a quantum event is a realization of one value from among the many possible outcomes of measurement, it is motion in Aristotle's sense: actualization of a potentiality.

Furthermore, Aristotle's metaphysics can readily accommodate one of the ontological difficulties of QM: wave/particle duality. QM takes it name from the idea that light is composed of discrete parcels, quanta. In the photoelectric

4 Hughes, The Structure and Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, 302.
5 Bohr, “Can Quantum-Mechanical Description ...", 147.
effect, for example, electrons emitted from metal hit by a beam of light are behaving like particles. The double-slit experiment, however, makes understanding quantum phenomena as particles difficult. In this experiment, an electron is passed through a barrier with two slits. The interference pattern generated is characteristic of waves. Physicists have grown accustomed to accepting wave/particle duality as a matter of course.

Aristotle is similarly a dualist concerning points and lines. A point is not for him a part of a line, but a limit (peras) which divides lines into smaller lines. The double-slit experiment, however, makes understanding quantum phenomena as particles difficult. In this experiment, an electron is passed through a barrier with two slits. The interference pattern generated is characteristic of waves. Physicists have grown accustomed to accepting wave/particle duality as a matter of course.

Aristotle is similarly a dualist concerning points and lines. A point is not for him a part of a line, but a limit (peras) which divides lines into smaller lines. The double-slit experiment, however, makes understanding quantum phenomena as particles difficult. In this experiment, an electron is passed through a barrier with two slits. The interference pattern generated is characteristic of waves. Physicists have grown accustomed to accepting wave/particle duality as a matter of course.

Aristotle has no trouble moving between mathematics and physics, and he takes physical reality also to be continuous: motion is not cinematographic; time, distance, and bodies are not composites of discrete indivisibles. Time and the moment stand in the same relation as lines and

---

1 He begins Physics VI by refuting that a line is composed of points (cf. 220a19; 241a4). If a line were composed of points, two points next to each other in a line would have to touch. But how is this possible? Points, if taken as the smallest unit of a line, cannot have parts. That is, a point cannot have a part that touches its neighbor, and a remainder that does not. The only way points can touch is by being exactly and only in the same place, that is, “if two indivisibles touched each other at all it must be in their entirety” (231b4). Cf. David Bostock, “Aristotle on Continuity in Physics VI”, Aristotle’s Physics: A Collection of Essays, ed. Lindsay Judson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 181-2. But then they are, for all intents and purposes, the same point, and a line does not consist of one point.


3 Physics, 232b25. Cf. 185b10, 200b17-20 and De Caelo, 268a6-7.

4 Hence the QM view is nothing like the ancient Atomists’ view. Aristotle rejected atomism. In De Caelo, he argues that the doctrine is self-contradictory since taking atoms to have a finite size or shape renders impossible an infinity of bodies, another atomist belief (303a25-b4), and that differences between elements cannot depend upon the shape of atoms since atoms cannot take their powers, properties and motions from their shape (306b3-307b24). At Physics IV.6-9, he rejects the existence of a void, and atomism requires a void to separate atoms. David Bostock has shown that Physics VI is an argument against atomism on the basis of a conflict with mathematics (David Bostock, “Aristotle, Zeno and the Potential Infinite”, Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 73 (1972-3), 179-212). The etymological origin of “atom” is t°mnein, which means to cut or divide, and the privative “a”. The Atomists are named for their belief in an indivisible, smallest quantity of matter. Since neither Aristotle nor QM accept the metaphysics of the Atomists, seeing what their metaphysics have in common is promising.

5 Aristotle says in the Physics that the difference between the physicist and the mathematician is that, although they study the same things, e.g. surfaces, volumes, lines and points, the mathematician “is not concerned with these concepts qua boundaries of natural bodies” (193b32). The mathematician separates them from bodies to consider them in the abstract, and Aristotle assures us, loses no truth in so doing.

6 He argues in the Physics that when it comes to continuity, the case will be the same for magnitude, time and motion (231b19), and that no magnitude whatsoever is composed of indivisibles (239b9). He claims in Books III and IV of the that the continuity of time depends on that of motion, and of motion on that of magnitude (207b22-5; 219b15).
points. Points break lines; the moment divides time. Likewise, Shimon Malin articulates the quantum physicist's view that the collapse of the wave function into a single measurement is "an atemporal process whose final outcome is the appearance of an event in space-time". For Aristotle a point breaks the continuity of a line and the moment breaks the continuity of time; in QM, particle detection breaks the continuity described by Schrödinger's wave equation. An Aristotelian account asserts that quantum reality is continuous and wave-like, until ruptured by measurement.

So Aristotle is compatible with QM in a preliminary way, though my project gives rise to an apparent difficulty. Aristotle holds that actuality is prior to potentiality. An application of Aristotle's doctrine to QM remains consistent with this priority, if quantum reality is taken to be a formal reality from out of which potential values can be actualized in measurement. The problem is that if quantum reality is immaterial form, it seems problematic to argue that potentialities inhere in quantum reality, as matter is potency in Aristotle's account. Yet separate substance is for Aristotle immaterial, and I am interpreting formal quantum reality as separate substance. I am not contending that the potentialities realized in quantum measurement are present materially in the quantum world prior to such measurement. Aristotle holds that substances have separate substance as their formal and final cause. Substances, insofar as they can, move toward separate substance in its unchanging, eternal existence as pure form (pure of matter, that is). Quantum entities tend toward formal quantum reality and resist actualization until measurement necessitates it. Thus I call the quantum world prior to measurement, which can be represented probabilistically as a superposition of all possible outcomes of measurement, "formal quantum reality", and interpret it as separate substance. "Actuality" in its highest sense is thus formal quantum reality, and particular quantum events that are the results of measurement are actualizations in the same way that substances are actualized when the form is realized in the matter. Aristotle's doctrine of actuality and potentiality is then, when applied to QM, a complex metaphysics that encompasses both formal quantum reality and events of measurement. The apparent difficulty of reconciling the relation between formal quantum reality and the materiality of the physical world arises because Aristotle’s analogy of being has been traditionally read by way of the categories. Reading the analogy instead by way of actuality and potentiality can resolve this problem.

1 Aristotle makes explicit at Physics IV that the line and the point are similar to time and the now. The moment is not a part of time (231b8, 239b8, 241a3; cf. 218a9), which cannot be divided into some smallest unit (220a32), but a boundary between the past and the future (218a24; 219a29; 220a10; 222a10-16; 222b2; 223a7).
2 Malin, "Delayed-Choice Experiments and the Concept of Time in Quantum Mechanics", 52.
Actuality and Potentiality: The Analogy of Being

According to Aristotle’s analogy of being, there are several senses in which a thing can be said to be. At *Metaphysics* V.7, he says that things can be said to be accidentally, by way of the categories, true or false, and actually or potentially. Each of these ways a thing can be said to be takes its meaning from a focal instance, as the many sense of "healthy" take their meaning from health. For example, diet, exercise, rosy cheeks, and Zena, Warrior Princess, can all be called healthy. Diet preserves health, exercise produces it, rosy cheeks are symptomatic of it, and Zena is capable of it. All these senses of "healthy" are meaningful because they refer back to health. Likewise, says Aristotle, 'being' is used in various senses, but always with reference to one principle, *ousia*, whose science is metaphysics. *Ousia* also appears, however, in the categories in that each other category predicates something that inheres in a substance. Hence reading the analogy of being by way of the categories is a sensible strategy.

What does it mean, however, to say that properties "inhere" in a substance? A novel way to formulate this question is to ask how potentialities "inhere" in quantum reality, and are actualized from "out of" it—not in the way, for example, spilled wax inheres in a table-cloth and could be separated out, and not in the way a shoe could be taken out of a box. Rather, this inherence is immaterial. By analogy, think of the sense in which possibilities "inhere" in a die: when a die is rolled, one result is realized "out of" the six possibilities. Accordingly, my account does not preclude reading the analogy by way of the categories, but it takes potentiality and actuality also to be integral to the analogy.

Aristotle claims that actuality and potentiality must be understood in opposition to each other, and grasped by example. Wood is potentially an actual statue, the half-line is potential in an actual line, the scientist not studying has the potential to be actually studying, the builder not at work could actually build. Actuality is to potentiality as the awake person is to the sleeping, the seer to someone whose eyes are closed, and the wrought to the unwrought. Although these senses of actuality and potentiality remain further undefined, it makes sense that Aristotle explains potentiality in this way. For he argues at *Metaphysics* IX.8 that actuality is prior to potency in definition. One defines the potential to see, for example, on the basis of what it means actually

---

1 *Metaphysics*, 1017a8-b9; cf. 1026a33-b1 and 1051b1-3.
2 *Metaphysics* IV.2. The following are my examples.
3 *Metaphysics*, 1003b6.
4 Aristotle has two terms for actuality: *energeia* and *entelecheia*, both of which are words that Aristotle invented. On why there are two, see George Blair, "The Meaning of *energeia* and *entelecheia* in Aristotle" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 7, no.1 (1967), 101-117.
5 *Metaphysics*, 1048a31-b5.
to see.\textsuperscript{1} To define not just a particular potentiality but the idea of potentiality itself by reference to actuality is hence consistent.

What must be seen here is that a potentiality is not nothing, but nor is it yet actualized. This is exactly the point I wish to bring to QM. In Newtonian mechanics, values are actual prior to measurement. But in the Copenhagen interpretation, Bohr's completeness theorem says that there is no value prior to measurement, since the system is described prior to measurement by a superposition (Hughes' orthoalgebra) which encompasses all possible outcomes of measurement. The metaphysical worry is that it seems that measurement creates value \textit{ex nihilo}. But Aristotle has provided a third way, as it were, between nothingness and actuality: potentiality. For what is potential is not actualized, but neither is it nothing. Quantum reality is the purest actuality because it is strictly formal; as such, it encompasses the possibilities for all subsequent actualizations through measurement. The quantum world is thus like the scientist while not studying. Stopping for lunch does not make the scientist no longer a scientist. The scientist is precisely capable of returning to her or his practice of science because she or he is actually a scientist, even while eating lunch. Reading the analogy of being by way of the categories, as I suggest Aristotle himself was wont to do, makes it seem that the second actualization, i.e. actually practicing science, is the highest actualization of the scientist. I argue, however, that the first actualization, i.e. having the training and experience that give one the potential to practice science, is the highest actuality of the scientist. For without that actuality, the potential to practice science would be absent. The formal actuality makes the concrete realization possible. Likewise, formal quantum reality is the highest actuality in the sense that it makes possible any actualized outcome of measurement. Thus reading the analogy by way of actuality and potentiality is compatible with QM, as I will show by applying this insight to the specific problems of EPR, Bell’s inequality and delayed-choice experiments.

EPR

Einstein’s most successful challenge to Bohr’s Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory was the Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen thought-experiment.\textsuperscript{2} Einstein suggested a counter-example to the principle of complementarity. Complementarity says that two things are mutually exclusive. You can't have your cake, and eat it too. Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle, a special case of complementarity, says that \textit{either} the position \textit{or} momentum of a particle can be known with certainty, but \textit{not both} simultaneously. Einstein argued that if particles A and B interact and are then sent far apart, one can measure the

\textsuperscript{1} \textit{Metaphysics}, 1049b12.

position of A and the momentum of B. Using the conservation theorem of momentum, A’s momentum can be calculated on the basis of the initial conditions and the value measured for B. Hence one can in theory know simultaneously both the position and the momentum of particle A. The uncertainty relations are accordingly breached.

Hence Einstein, Boris Podolsky and Nathan Rosen argue that quantum theory is incomplete. Some element of reality is missing in the description given by the wave function. They define an “element of reality” in the following way: "If, without in any way disturbing a system, we can predict with certainty (i.e., with probability equal to unity) the value of a physical quantity, then there exists an element of physical reality corresponding to this physical quantity".¹ Under this definition, the momentum of particle A is an element of reality. As EPR shows, it can be predicted with certainty on the basis of the momentum of particle B and the conservation theorem of momentum. Yet complementarity says that the momentum of particle A cannot be known with certainty as long as its position has been determined. Measurements are made by means of interaction between a particle and measuring apparatus. This interaction is a collision, which changes the other value for the particle. Hence there is some element of reality in this example, the momentum of particle A, that quantum theory leaves undescribed.

Bohr’s response is to argue that the “quantum-mechanical description of physical phenomena would seem to fulfill, within its scope, all rational demands of completeness".² He rejects EPR’s "criterion of reality" as ambiguous. What does it mean to say “without in any way disturbing a system”? He reverts to the idea that measurement determines value. Talking about a quantum event prior to measurement is senseless. Making a measurement entails "rational discrimination between essentially different experimental arrangements and procedures which are suited either for an unambiguous use of the idea of space location, or for a legitimate application of the conservation theorem of momentum".³ Measuring a particle’s position changes its momentum so that the value for momentum at the time the position is measured can never be recovered. Measurement of position is thus precluded by measurement of momentum, and likewise measurement of momentum is made impossible by measurement of position. Quantum theory can, in Bohr’s view, give a full description of reality in that it can give a description of any aspect of reality. But when it comes to position and momentum, the event of measurement is such that the physicist must choose one. Each can potentially be measured, but only one can actually be measured. The question at stake is the ontological status of unmeasured values.

It would seem then that Bohr is arguing that complementarity is a thesis concerning the nature of knowledge, that is, constraints on experimental

¹ Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen, “Can Quantum-Mechanical Description …”, 138.
² Bohr, “Can Quantum-Mechanical Description …”, 145.
³ Bohr, “Can Quantum-Mechanical Description …”, 149.
arrangements, not the nature of reality. Yet Bohr calls for revision of the classical notion of reality, and thus implies that what is at stake is a point of ontology. Are Einstein, Podolsky and Rosen ambiguous about their “criterion of reality”? Or is Bohr ambiguous about whether the uncertainty principle is ontological or epistemological? Indeed, Bohr is committed to a metaphysical point. Aristotle’s distinction between actuality and potentiality comes to his assistance here. Prior to measurement, a value is potential, not actual. Initial interaction between particles establishes their potential values. Once the particles have interacted, they can no longer take any value at all. Their potential values have been limited in exactly the sense intended by calling them “correlated” particles. If one particle is measured for momentum, all its potential values are now precluded except the actualized one which is the measurement outcome. Any correlated particle will consequently have a potential value correlated to the actual value measured for the other particle. Note that this potential value remains potential unless measured in this account.

Borrowing from Aristotle’s answer to the Megarians at Metaphysics IX.3, one should not fall into the trap of thinking that something is only if it is actualized, that is, that a thing has potency only when it acts. Bohr and Einstein are in a Megarian deadlock. In their debate, either quantum particles are real, or they are not. For Einstein, they are real, that is, predictable with certainty and, by implication, they have a determinate value independent of measurement. Hence quantum values are potentially measurable for Einstein because they are already actual. For Bohr, they are not real, that is, they have no determinate value prior to measurement. Hence they have no potential value until measurement actualizes them. Aristotle’s dunamis is a middle road between these two options. Quantum particles have values for position and momentum potentially prior to measurement, and actually upon measurement. Measurement, by determining the actual value for one particle in a correlated pair, has an impact on the potential value for the other particle. It limits it to the correlated potentiality. Hence a quantum measurement has no impact on the actuality of a correlated particle, but has an impact on the whole system, in that it reduces the range of possibilities for the correlated particle. Correlated particles are potentialities that belong in a single system. The whole arrangement of potentialities is affected when the one particle's possibilities are disrupted by an actualizing measurement.

Furthermore, the particles that initially interact are taken to be continuous, i.e. the same as, the particles later measured, despite physical discontinuity. This is part of the odd metaphysics of QM. An electron emitted from a source and then detected at a screen does not follow a continuous trajectory between the source and the screen. It is actual at only those two locations, and potential between.¹ This commitment to continuity is consistent with Aristotle’s analysis at Physics I.7 of the causes (aitia) and principles (archê) of nature.² He argues

¹ Think here of Zeno’s Arrow.
² Physics, 190b17.
that the principles of nature can be construed simply, or as composites. In either case, change requires an underlying substance that persists throughout. Hence substantial change must be treated as a special case. Aristotle retrieves, however, continuity at Metaphysics XII.2 when he argues that “every substance is generated from something which has the same name”. Likewise, there is continuity between the quantum events at the source and at the screen. An electron participates in both events, and in the second event, it takes its name from the first event. Otherwise there is no sense in which the particle at the source can be identified with the subsequent measurement at the screen. The situation is analogous to Aristotle's account of substantial change. Formal quantum reality persists between source and screen, but particles exist therein only potentially.

The position Bohr takes, that position and momentum are complementary, can thus be accounted for by suggesting that both are potential values until one is measured, at which point either the position or momentum, whichever one chooses to measure, becomes actual, and the other is irrevocably doomed never to attain actuality. In Aristotle's account, there are many potentialities that are never actualized, and even a potentiality, infinity, that can in principle never be actualized. To put this point back into the context of QM, no measurement need be taken. But if a measurement is made, only then is the value actualized, and furthermore, only then is the observable actual. Actualities do not arise ex nihilo, but from potentialities.

Interpreted this way, EPR does not threaten special relativity. Under EPR, measurement of one particle actualizes its value, and hence the value that accrues to the other particle is communicated immediately, apparently faster than light can travel. Under the Aristotelian account, there is no faster-than-light information exchange, nor any mysterious deus ex machina hidden variable to explain how one photon knows what the other measured so it can correlate itself accordingly. Rather the whole system of potentialities has been affected. There is, however, a further threat to special relativity from EPR. Measurement is frame-relative. That is, because there is some distance between the measured particles, special relativity says that there is a frame of reference in which measurement of particle A precedes measurement of particle B, even if the measurements are made simultaneously in the laboratory frame of reference. Quite simply, time is required for light to propagate from one particle's location to the other, so an observer located next to particle A will see the measurement of particle B take place later. Likewise, there is a frame of reference in which the measurement of particle B takes place first, that for an observer at particle B. The worry is not that the quantum physicist cannot experience simultaneous measurement of both particles by having a single laboratory frame of reference. The observer can stand in the middle. The

1 Physics V.1.
2 Metaphysics, 1070a5.
problem is that from the frame of reference of each particle, the measurements cannot be simultaneous, but of course, measurement of either must simultaneously affect the other.

Hughes resolves this issue by pointing out that in a sense, because special relativity works both ways. That is, from the frame of each particle simultaneously, if measuring A changes the state of B prior to B's measurement as far as A is concerned, nonetheless, as far as B is concerned the impact of A's measurement is simultaneous with B's measurement. Hence he concludes that there "is no outright inconsistency here",¹ but that the bitter pill of a change in a latency being frame-relative cannot be sweetened. He is prepared to accept this offence to the spirit of special relativity because of other difficulties that the quantum event interpretation resolves, for example, conditional probability relations between quantum events.

Aristotle's doctrine of actuality and potentiality, however, removes the difficulty. In each framework, measurement affects the potentiality of the correlated particle, which appears subsequently actualized consistently with that influence. If measurement of one particle affects formal quantum reality by disrupting it, it does so by affecting the potentialities of the system, not the actuality of the other measurement. Hence quantum events are perhaps necessarily frame-relative, but special relativity entails this fact, and is thus not threatened by it. That light travels at a finite speed makes sense of the fact that from the frame of reference of any quantum event, a change in potentiality for a correlated particle precedes actualization of that particle, again from the frame of reference of the first particle. That each particle is, as far as it is concerned, measured first, makes perfect sense given special relativity and accounts for how there can appear to be faster-than-light communication. The Aristotelian account does not conflict with special relativity, but rather entails it. The Aristotelian solution to EPR threatens neither Einstein's realism, nor Bohr's antirealism, but accommodates both.

Bell’s Inequality

J.S. Bell removed EPR's status as a thought-experiment by devising a performable version based on his calculation of the Bell inequality. Bell's experiment makes two other changes to EPR. First, Bell's experiment measures many particles rather than an isolated pair. Secondly, it sets the experiment up in terms of spin rather than position and momentum. Spin is handy to work with, compared to position and momentum, since the latter are continuous spectrum variables, that is, they can take many different values. Spin values are discrete; there are only two: up and down. Quantum particles have spin along three possible axes. The physicist can measure spin along one axis, but not simultaneously with a measurement of the other two components of spin, for

¹ Hughes, *The Structure and Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics*, 304.
which the equipment must be rotated. Particles that have interacted will
demonstrate an anticorrelation such that if one measures “up” along one axis of
spin, the second particle will measure “down” on the same axis. Particles that
exhibit such anticorrelation are said to be in the singlet state. The Bell
inequality predicts anticorrelation of spin between paired particles on the basis
of statistical probability.

Experiment shows that the anticorrelation is actually higher than predicted,
that Bell’s inequality is violated. Why? As with EPR, one explanation is that
there is instant communication between paired particles, which conflicts with
special relativity, and another suggestion is that there is some hidden variable
at work that affects the measurements.¹ This is the realist suggestion, much
like the original point of EPR: nothing peculiar is going on here—the account
is simply incomplete and missing some crucial piece of information about an
element of physical reality. The trouble is that the Bell inequality is deduced
from realist principles. Violation of the inequality therefore suggests that
realists must be prepared to give up at least one of their assumptions. Hidden
variables cannot salvage realism intact from the Bell inequality. I will deduce
the inequality, and then apply Aristotle's distinction between actuality and
potentiality to the problem.

The inequality can be grasped by a simple thought-experiment. Imagine a
measuring device that can measure all three components of a particle’s spin
simultaneously. No such device exists, but if it did, many particles could be
measured and a number, N, recorded of particles which measure “up” on the A
axis and “down” on the B axis. This number is written as N(A+B-). Of these
particles some, probably but not necessarily half, will measure C+ and the
remainder C-.

Hence the following relation holds:

\[ N(A+B-) = N(A+B-C+) + N(A+B-C-) \] (1)

Likewise, the particles which measure B-C+, must include all the particles that
also take a value of A+ and all the particles which also take a value of A-:

\[ N(B-C+) = N(A+B-C+) + N(A-B-C+) \] (2)

Hence, from (2):

\[ N(B-C+) > N(A+B-C+) \] (3)

The move from (2) to (3) appears conceptually difficult, but really just says
that if \( x = y + z \), then \( x \) must be bigger than \( y \), or equal to it in the case of \( z = 0 \).

¹ Cf. David Bohm, "A Suggested Interpretation of the Quantum Theory in Terms of 'Hidden'
Variables, I and II", Physical Review, 85 (1952), 166-93; L. de Broglie, An Introduction to the
Further, the particles measuring A+C- include the ones that also take a value of B+ and the ones that also take a value of B-:

\[(4) \quad N(A+C-) = N(A+B+C-) + N(A+B-C-)\]

Hence, from (4):

\[(5) \quad N(A+C-) \geq N(A+B-C-)\]

Substituting the left-hand side of (3) and (5) into the right-hand side of (1) results in the following inequality:

\[(6) \quad N(A+B-) \leq N(B-C+) + N(A+C-)\]

The number of particles that measure A+B- cannot be greater than the sum of the number measuring B-C+ and the number measuring A+C-. But the measuring device required to test this inequality is imaginary. How can it be verified or falsified experimentally?

If particles interact such that there is an anticorrelation, i.e. the particles are in the singlet state, then the inequality can easily be tested. The particle paired to one having spin values of A+B- will have values of A-B+. Hence one can measure particles in a singlet state, one along the A axis, one along the B. The number of pairs of particles measuring A+B- can be written as \(n(A+B-)\). This is the most conceptually difficult moment for Bell's inequality. One cannot measure two axes of spin for one particle. But one can measure correlated particles, one for spin along one axis, one for spin on the other. Since the particles are correlated, each particle that, were it possible, would measure A+B-, for example, is part of a pair in which the first measures A+ and the second, B+. This can be measured. Hence (6) can be translated from the N notation to the n notation:

\[(7) \quad N(A+B-) = n(A+B+)\]
\[(8) \quad N(B-C+) = n(B+C+)\]
\[(9) \quad N(A+C-) = n(A+C+)\]

The left-hand equation represents an measurement of one particle’s spin along two axes by an imaginary machine, the right-hand equation represents the actual measurement of different components of spin belonging to a pair of anticorrelated particles. Substituting the equations from the right-hand side of (7), (8) and (9) into (6):

\[n(A+B+) \leq n(B+C+) + n(A+C+)\]
This is Bell’s inequality. And it has been violated in experiment on many occasions. $n(A+B^+)$ is bigger than it should be. How is it possible that there is a higher incidence of paired particles than there should be according to the realist determination of statistical probability?

According to Bernard d’Espagnat, the Bell inequality is based on the three assumptions that make up realism: 1) regularities in experimental results are caused by regularities in nature; 2) nothing, including information, can propagate faster than light (local realism); and, 3) induction is methodologically legitimate.\footnote{Bernard d’Espagnat, “The Quantum Theory and Reality” Scientific American 241, no. 5 (1979), 158-180.} Given Bell’s results, which tenet of realism must go? None, I suggest, when Aristotle's metaphysics are brought to bear. Realism is simply an inappropriate metaphysics for quantum reality. For the realist, values are actual or non-existent. Not so in the quantum world where Aristotle's doctrine of actuality and potentiality can be applied to suggest that spin values are actual or potential, that is, measured or unmeasured respectively. Under this Aristotelian account, induction can stay. Nor need special relativity go—still nothing propagates faster than light. And regularities in experimental results can be taken to indicate regularities in nature. What must go is not a tenet of realism, but rather its metaphysical commitment that reality consists only in actualities. Realism is not wrong, just incomplete.

The Bell inequality is based on a random statistical outcome of measurement. A far simpler version can be conceptualized using the game of backgammon. In backgammon, one can predict that double-six will be rolled once in every thirty-six rolls of the dice, as statistical probability says. If someone rolls double-six every ten rolls, the opponent is not entirely unjustified in suspecting that the dice are loaded. But the suspicion is not that the board is affecting the outcome of rolling the dice. Likewise, for Bell's inequality, if the initial interaction that pairs the particles establishes a greater correlation than should be achieved randomly, the question for the physicist should not be what hidden variables affect the correlation, but why are the particles being correlated in a non-random way in the initial interaction? That is, if the initial interaction established actual values for spin, it should not be possible for Bell's inequality to be breached. If, on the other hand, the initial interaction is an actualization that establishes the potential values for all subsequent measurements, then the potential values are correlated in a non-random way during the initial interaction. Aristotle's metaphysics of potentiality and actuality have made available a new way of looking at the problem.

To draw further upon the analogy to backgammon, it is a game of luck in that every roll of the dice is as likely as any other. There are 36 possible rolls altogether. To calculate the probability of any particular roll, one divides the number of possible outcomes that represent the role in question by 36. There is only one configuration of outcome for getting a double, in which both dice
show the same number. But there are two configurations for rolling a five and a
two, i.e., the first die can show 5 and the second 2, or the first 2, and the second
5. Thus one is twice as likely to roll a five and a two, since there are two such
possibilities, as one is to roll any double, for which there is only one
possibility. One is most likely to roll a seven-combination, since that is the
outcome for which there are the most possibilities, i.e., six and one, five and
two, three and four, each of which has two possibilities. Because there are six
possibilities for rolling a seven, the chances of rolling a seven are 6/36, which
equals a 1/6 probability. Rolling eight has only five possibilities, while nine has
four, and ten has three. This is to consider the game only in simple,
probabilistic terms, analogously to the Bell inequality. The skilled player
knows, however, that there are arrangements on the board for which more rolls
will be useful and hence look like lucky rolls. An inexperienced player may
place pieces such that the only helpful roll is double-three, for example. A
better player places pieces so that many possible outcomes for the next roll will
be desirable. This person will look lucky, that is, it may appear that he or she
has introduced some outside factor, perhaps cheated somehow, because good
rolls consistently occur. Yet the skilled player has beat the odds not by
influencing the dice, but by maximizing the potentialities—potentialities are
realized in actual moves that make a greater rather than a lesser number of
potential rolls of the dice look good for subsequent moves. Likewise, in formal
quantum reality, potentialities may be maximized so that the results of an
experiment testing the Bell inequality appear luckier, that is, show a higher
correlation that they should statistically. Delayed-choice experiments suggest
that in fact potentialities are maximized in the quantum world until a
measurement necessitates an actual outcome.

Delayed-Choice Experiments

The last problem in quantum physics to which I wish to apply Aristotle's
doctrine of actuality and potentiality is the delayed-choice experiment. The
experiment itself is quite simple.1 It is a thought-experiment in which a beam
of light is passed through a half-silvered mirror. The beam is split and half goes
directly to another mirror. The other half of the beam is deflected ninety
degrees to an angled mirror, which deflects it another ninety degrees to a
second angled mirror, which deflects it to the final mirror where it rejoins the
first half of the beam. The photons of light thus have two possible paths
between two points, along one side of a quadrangle, or along the other three
sides of the same quadrangle. If the intensity of the beam is lowered until one
photon at a time enters the apparatus, the question arises, which path does the

1 For another model of a delayed-choice experiment, cf. William C. Wickes, Carroll O. Alley,
and Oleg Jakubowicz, "A 'Delayed-Choice' Quantum Mechanics Experiment", Quantum
 photon take? Nothing in the apparatus indicates a chosen path, so the principle of superposition, that all possible outcomes can be statistically described as co-existing, says that the photon follows both paths simultaneously. This is easy to detect since an interference pattern will be observed when the photon reaches the end of its journey.

Now comes the delayed-choice. Once a photon has entered the apparatus, the second angled mirror is mounted on a spring that makes it sensitive enough to vibrate if hit by a photon. This is, of course, a thought-experiment—a spring could not be installed that quickly or sensitively. Now, however, it is possible to detect if the photon chose one path over the other. If the angled mirror vibrates, the photon chose that route. If it does not, the photon chose the path directly from the first mirror to its final destination. What is strange about this experiment is that the photon is forced to choose a path after it has entered the apparatus. It seems that an event in the present has determined the past.

Using Aristotle's distinction between actuality and potentiality, one can simply say that the photon is potentially on either path. Until the measurement is made, in the form of a vibration or non-vibration of the angled mirror, there is no actual photon in the apparatus, only the potential for a photon. Actualization is a choice on the part of the experimenter, not on the part of the particle. Under an Aristotelian account, there is no backward causation here, and no disruption of time's arrow. The undetected particle remains potential. In fact, were this experiment a real experiment, it would have to be the case that the photon is detected every time by the angled mirror on a spring, since under the Copenhagen interpretation, the detection process makes the potential photon actual. This would violate a statistical prediction that the photon would take each route randomly, that is, half the time. In fact, actually performed, the experiment should produce results markedly similar to a violation of Bell's inequality. The measuring mirror should vibrate much more than statistical probability predicts, since the vibration of the mirror is a measurement that actualizes. But the photon has nonetheless under the Aristotelian account not been involved in backward causation any more than a backgammon player who wins more than half the time is cheating (although I do not attest to global honesty on the part of backgammon players).

Conclusion

Aristotle's *Physics* is superficially unmathematical, with the exception perhaps of the geometrical considerations surrounding the finitude of rectilinear motion in Book VIII. His analysis of nature simply does not overflow with calculations, like many contemporary texts in physics. Yet Hussey argues that Aristotle was a mathematical physicist. Furthermore, Zeno's paradoxes of motion, which can be read as putting into question the mathematization of

---

nature,¹ are resolved by Aristotle through the application of more precise mathematical notions. Aristotle rejects the Dichotomy, for example, by suggesting that infinity is an ambiguous notion that can taken with respect to divisibility or extension.² At Physics VI.9, Aristotle uses the same argument to refute the Achilles, and he deals with the Moving Rows by means of a mathematical argument in which he contends that Zeno's error lies in equating half with double.³ At II.2 he argues that the difference between the mathematician and the physicist is that the former abstracts surfaces, volumes, points and lines from matter, while the physicist treats them as limits of a physical body. He rejects accounts by the exponents of the theory of forms because they fall into the error of abstracting the objects of physics from matter.⁴ Physicists must, in Aristotle's account, use mathematics only insofar as it concerns bodies. Not to do so is to be an idealist with respect to nature. The quantum physicist assumes, however, with Galileo that the universe “is written in the language of mathematics”.⁵ Hence quantum theorists are in the extraordinary position of having achieved consensus on the mathematical formalism of the theory without coming to agreement on a physical interpretation. They have not heeded Aristotle's methodological advice that when doing physics, mathematics is derivative from physical reality rather than prior to it.

Bohr pointed out in 1935 that the issues at stake in quantum physics are neither technical nor mathematical, but rather metaphysical. Fundamental assumptions about the nature of reality are at stake. Crucially at issue is the question of the relation between mathematical formalism and physical reality. Hughes' quantum event interpretation differs from the Copenhagen interpretation in one important respect. Bohr takes the probability space underlying quantum measurements to be classical, that is, under Hughes' description, as "coarsely partitioned, each member of the partition being the event that a particular measurement occurs".⁶ Once a measurement is made, there is no access under the Copenhagen interpretation to the probabilities of other related events. Once spin along one axis has been measured, for example, the probabilities for spin-values along the other, incompatible axes find no place in the account. Hence the Copenhagen interpretation gives no ability to talk of the probability of one quantum event conditional upon another. It is as if observables incompatible with what is measured do not exist. EPR shows that the whole arrangement of potentialities is affected when a superposition describing one particle's potentialities is disrupted by an actualizing

---

² Physics, 233a25.
³ Physics, 240a1.
⁴ Physics, 194a1.
⁶ Hughes, The Structure and Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics, 309.
measurement. Accordingly, the Aristotelian account is consistent with Hughes' demand that conditional probability hold between quantum events. Hughes' quantum event interpretation "leads naturally to the concept of latency".\(^1\) Ascribing latency to a system assigns probabilities to values for a family of observables and uses the full representational capacity of a Hilbert space. Hence the quantum event interpretation assumes a metaphysics in which unrealized values are present in the system latently. I argue that Bohr's metaphysics, despite his acknowledgement that a new conception of reality is called for, remains entangled in the metaphysics of classical physics in which observables are realized values of a system. Bohr makes the Megarian error of holding that only actualities exist, while Hughes' quantum event interpretation "grants ontological status to these remote and shadowy quasi-attributes",\(^2\) his "latencies". I suggest that the quantum event interpretation, though as inherently mathematical as the Copenhagen interpretation, is constrained by the behavior of the physical insofar as it renders a mathematical account designed to accommodate results of measurement which seem paradoxical under the Copenhagen interpretation, like EPR, Bell's inequalities and delayed-choice experiments. It undermines the idealist separation of mathematical formalism from physical reality, and treats QM as a theory of physical reality rather than as an a priori mathematical formalism. Accordingly, Hughes has adhered to Aristotle's methodological principle of not separating the mathematical from the physical in doing physics. "Physical" is a funny word to use here, since what Hughes is talking about are latencies, not realized values. Nonetheless, latencies carry the ontological weight of Aristotle's potentialities. They are not actualized elements of physical reality, but neither are they nothing. Hence there is not as much distance between Aristotle's potentialities and Hughes' latencies as Hughes suspects. Indeed, Aristotle's metaphysics are a rich resource for grappling with unruly quantum phenomena.

\(^1\) Hughes, *The Structure and Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics*, 309.
\(^2\) Hughes, *The Structure and Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics*, 305.
CHAPTER FIVE

The *Ergon-Energeia* Perspective in the Interpretation of Aristotle’s Eudaimonia

Festin J. Moises Lorenz Maria, *San Carlos Seminary*

Eudaimonia or happiness represents an important issue in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹ In this work Aristotle endeavors to clarify its constitution by pointing out that this ultimate end of human being consists in an activity of the soul in accordance with excellence.

Aristotle’s discussion, nevertheless, raises a number of difficulties that continue to divide commentators. Most significant of these difficulties concerns the very interpretation of what Aristotle means by the idea that eudaimonia is primarily a contemplative activity. One interpretation, the Dominant or Intellectualist Interpretation, claims that for Aristotle contemplation alone constitutes eudaimonia, while the Inclusivist Interpretation would include in it activities other than contemplation.

In this paper, I would like to introduce a perspective that has been ignored for the most part by the Dominant and Inclusivist interpretations. I will argue that the ergon-energeia (translated function-activity in English) perspective can help us see the debate in another light.

I have divided this paper into four sections. First, I begin with some introductory remarks about *NE* and the main ideas presented therein insofar as this concerns eudaimonia. Afterwards, in the second section, I will discuss the significance of the excellences or virtues (*aretai*) that Aristotle closely relates with ergon and energeia. The third section will then be an exposition of the different ways of interpreting Aristotle’s thought about human being’s ultimate good. Finally, in the fourth section, I will present my own interpretation of the issue at hand, exploiting the significance of two related Greek words, namely, ergon and energeia.

Preliminary Remarks on the Nicomachean Ethics

The *Nicomachean Ethics* is one of the three works on ethics attributed to Aristotle. The two others are *Eudemian Ethics* and *Magna Moralia*. There is some doubt regarding the authenticity of *Magna Moralia*,¹ this being regarded as a work of a student of Aristotle.² Only *NE* and *Eudemian Ethics* are considered actual works of Aristotle, and the question as to which of these Aristotle wrote first is a problem that remains subject to dispute.³

Of the three works mentioned, *NE* is so far the most studied, such that it is usually referred to as *the* Ethics of Aristotle.⁴ It is probably the most studied of all the works of Aristotle,⁵ which gives us an idea as to how central and important *NE* is in understanding Aristotle’s philosophy.

Aristotle’s ethics is often viewed as a pioneering attempt to systematize a science of ethics. This implies that prior to Aristotle, ethics was viewed merely as a branch of one among the many disciplines. The French commentators, Jolif and Gauthier, in their work, *L’Éthique à Nicomaque*, suggest that Aristotle’s achievement in this regard is the creation itself of a science of ethics independent of politics. They maintain that *before* Aristotle, the individual person’s good, which is the primary concern of any science that deals with the end of the human person, is dissolved in the wider context of the communal good of the society to which he belongs.⁶

---

³ Concerning this problem, Hutchinson comments, “The Eudemian Ethics (including the common books) is the earlier work, according to most recent scholars, and the Nicomachean Ethics (excluding the common books) transmits a later version of Aristotle’s ethical thinking; but the difference between the two are usually relatively minor”; D.S. Hutchinson, “Ethics”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 198.
⁵ Düring makes the following remark: “Keine Schrift des Aristoteles ist in unserer Zeit so intensiv studiert worden wie die Nikomachische Ethik, und zu keiner Schrift besitzen wir eine so stattliche Reihe von ausführlichen Kommentaren”; Düring, *Darstellung*, 438.
⁶ Commenting on the content and the given title of the ethical writings of Aristotle and suggesting that these writings could have been notes for lectures, Gauthier and Jolif write “Ce fait est d’une importance capitale: il constitue l’acte de naissance de la science morale. On a objecté, il est vrai (cf. Ross, *Aristote*, p. 262) qu’Aristote n’emploie jamais absolument l’expression hé éthiké, ‘la science morale’; mais dans les *Seconds analytiques*, 1, 33, 89 b 9, il emploie (dans un texte qui se réfère au livre VI de l’*Éthique à Éudème*, c’est-à-dire à la version eudémienne du livre VI de l’*Éthique à Nicomaque*) l’expression d’éthiké théoria, et il semble hors de doute que l’expression désigne bien la science morale, car elle est employée conjointement avec celle de phusiké théoria, qui ne peut désigner que la science physique...
The German commentator, Ingemar Düring, however sees no difference between Aristotle’s ethics and what may be regarded nowadays as politics. Claiming that Aristotle himself maintains that the end of the individual is identical with that of the social being, he points out that Aristotle’s ethics is fundamentally social ethics, and therefore, politics. Nevertheless, he too accepts the idea that Aristotle’s enterprise constitutes an attempt to systematize ethics into an independent science, though not independent of politics.

What then is Aristotle’s primary purpose for writing the *Nicomachean Ethics*? And what is his basic concern in this work? It is hardly an overstatement to say that Aristotle’s teleological ideas permeate his ethical doctrine. The very first words of *NE* already suggest the orientation of the whole work, setting the tone of the subsequent discussion. It says: “Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice aim at some good; and for this reason, the good has been declared to be that at which all things aim.”


3 Jaeger writes, “The connexion between ethics and happiness had been traditional since Socrates and Plato, and the *Nicomachean Ethics* also retains it as starting and closing point. But the latter work is much more modern in prefixing to the discussion of happiness a chapter which derives from the general system of ends the formal conception of a necessary end of all human effort”; Jaeger, *Fundamentals*, 232.

4 That is, *NE* 1.1.1094a1–3.
Aristotle commences his discussion in *NE* by speaking of *telos* (or end) both in sciences and in art, as well as in other nonhuman realities. Ultimately however he directs his attention to one particular *telos*, namely, human being’s ultimate end. Having surveyed what almost everyone says about such an end of human being, he remarks that it is *eudaimonia*.

*Eudaimonia* in a way articulates and identifies human being’s *telos* or ultimate end. But that does not amount to anything, for people are not of one opinion as to what this ultimately consists in. Aristotle writes, “Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function [*ergon*] of man”.¹

Why does Aristotle refer to human being’s *ergon*? What is in this *ergon* that makes it so central to his account of human ultimate end? Why should Aristotle ultimately base human being’s *eudaimonia* on his *ergon*?

The statement of Aristotle that we have just quoted actually leads to a very important passage in *NE*. He continues,

> For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function [*ergon*] or activity, the good [*agathon*] and the ‘well’ [*eu*] is thought to reside in function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function.²

Aristotle in this passage draws a parallelism between human being *qua* human being on the one hand and the other agents—both human and nonhuman—on the other. Human being is like plants and animals in the sense that he has a basic *ergon* that is characteristic of him. If a carpenter has a particular task, that is, to build houses, or if our senses have their own specific functions, for example, the eye sees, the nose smells, what specific *ergon* can we attribute to human being?

The answer is quite explicit in what follows in the text. Aristotle identifies it as “an active life of the element that has a rational principle”.³ In other words, human being’s characteristic *ergon* is one that is essentially rational.

Nonetheless, in the final analysis, what makes human being’s performance of his proper *ergon* constitute his *telos* is the manner in which such performance is done. And here Aristotle once again draws a parallelism between human being *qua* human being and other agents to illustrate his point. A lyre-player achieves his end not simply by playing the lyre, but by playing it well.⁴ Our eyes achieve their end not simply by allowing us to see, but by enabling us to see well. Similarly then human being can achieve his *eudaimonia* or his *telos* not merely by exercising his *ergon*, but by exercising it

---

¹ *NE* 1.7.1097b 22–25.
² *NE* 1.7.1097b 25–28.
³ *NE* 1.7.1098a 3-4.
⁴ See *NE* 1.7.1098a 11-12.
The Ergon - Energeia Perspective in the Interpretation of Aristotle’s Eudaimonia

well, or ultimately by doing it in accordance with excellence or aretê. “Human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete.”

From this it appears that excellence or aretê is always tied up with a certain ergon. Aretê is always aretê of some ergon.

The Problem of Excellence vis-à-vis Ergon and Energeia

Aristotle’s elaboration of the concept of excellence or aretê, however, is not that simple. Having established in NE 1 that human being’s ultimate telos, or his final good or eudaimonia for that matter, is the exercise of his proper ergon in accordance with his proper aretê, Aristotle embarks on a tedious endeavor of explaining the complexities involved in the account of such an aretê—the excellence which is, or better yet which must be, characteristic of human ergon. And the first thing he does in this regard is to distinguish the two rational parts of the soul.

In NE 1.13, Aristotle states that there are two parts of the soul that have to do with reason. Commenting on the case of incontinence, whereby one experiences difficulties in following the dictates of reason, Aristotle suggests that there must be some other element in the soul which struggles against reason. He says, “we must none the less suppose that in the soul too there is something beside reason, resisting and opposing it”. Taking into consideration then the case of continent man, Aristotle is quick to add that it may likewise have a share in reason. “Now even this”, he says, “seems to have a share in reason ... at any rate in the continent man it obeys reason—and presumably in the temperate and brave man it is still more obedient; for in them it speaks, on all matters, with the same voice as reason”. Aristotle in effect distinguishes in the soul two divisions in possession of reason, “one subdivision having it in the strict sense and in itself, and the other having a tendency to obey as one does one’s father”. The division that Aristotle makes here is of absolute importance because they constitute the basis of his distinction between moral and intellectual aretai. Moral excellence pertains to that part of human being’s soul that can either agree or disagree with reason, while intellectual excellence refers to that part which performs what we can describe as the properly rational activity of human being.

There is thus not just one single excellence or aretê that corresponds to the rational ergon of human being. On account of Aristotle’s distinction between

1 NE 1.7.1098a 16-18.
2 NE 1.13.1102b 23–25.
4 NE 1.13.1103a 2–3. See also Eudemian Ethics 2.1.1219b27–31
the two rational parts of the soul, one can see why there have to be both moral and intellectual excellences.

But neither is there only one single excellence or aretē corresponding to each of the two parts. On the contrary, in NE, we are presented with a multiplicity of both moral and intellectual aretai. This implies either that human being’s ergon must be a complex one or that human being has as many erga as there are aretai that can be attributed to him. For as pointed out earlier, an aretē is always an aretē of an ergon.

Does human being therefore have as many erga as there are aretai that can be attributed to him? Or is his ergon so complex that it can correspond to a multiplicity of aretai? The first possibility seems to be readily ruled out by what Aristotle states in NE. For in fact, Aristotle assigns only one ergon to human being qua human being.

Of course, one may consider a person according to his ergon as a particular human being. A carpenter, for instance, has an ergon that is characteristic of him, namely, building houses. But in such a case, we don’t consider human being as human being, that is, under the aspect of his humanness, but as a carpenter or under the aspect of his profession. Such an ergon is obviously different from other erga that he may have, like playing the piano if he is a pianist, or teaching if he is a teacher. All these are erga, but erga that are not said of human being qua human being. The only ergon that can be assigned to human being qua human being is that which we have already mentioned, namely, that activity which implies a rational principle.

In his individual discussion of the various moral aretai, Aristotle likewise does not refer the different aretai to different erga of human being. In fact, Aristotle is not keen to explicitly mention the ergon on which these aretai are based. Instead it seems that he presumes his readers to understand that these moral aretai are all referred to the ergon of human being qua human being. For in his account of each of the moral aretai, Aristotle consistently and constantly mentions the significant role which reason plays in the energeiai in which these moral aretai are exercised. In the treatment of the excellence of temperance, for instance, he says, “the temperate man is ... the sort of person that right reason prescribes”.

Aristotle certainly acknowledges that reason has a significant part in moral aretai. In fact, right before he embarks on the individual discussion of each of the moral aretai, he underlines the essential elements that characterize every aretē. He writes,

With regard to the excellences in general we have stated their genus in outline, viz. that they are means, and that they are states, and that they tend by their own nature to the doing of the acts by which they are
produced, and that they are in our power and voluntary, and act as right reason prescribes.\(^{1}\)

It seems then that the *ergon* at issue in the discussion of moral *aretai* is the very *ergon* of human being *qua* human being. This means that there is only one common *ergon* being actualized in the exercise of moral *aretai*\(^{2}\) and that there is a variety of *aretai* corresponding to one *ergon*. Moral *aretai* are clearly proper to human being *qua* human being. The *energeiai* in which these *aretai* are exercised should thus be characterized by that which is peculiar to human being.

Similarly, there is a multiplicity of intellectual *aretai* in Aristotle’s account. At first one may think that this is because of what Aristotle does to the strictly rational part of the human soul, that is, he distinguishes it further into two divisions.\(^{3}\) He writes,

> Let one of these parts be called scientific and the other the calculative; for to deliberate and to calculate are the same thing, but no one deliberates about what cannot be otherwise. Therefore the calculative is one part of the faculty which possesses reason. We must, then, learn what is the best state of each of these two parts; for this is the excellence of each.\(^{4}\)

Considering the last sentence in this text, that the best state of each of the two parts is the excellence of each, one would expect Aristotle to proceed to presenting the two best states or excellences corresponding to the two parts. But actually Aristotle presents five intellectual *aretai*,\(^{5}\) each of which he explains individually. In effect, he attributes more than one *areté* to each of the two rational parts of the soul.

We may ask then, what is the difference between the two divisions of the strictly rational part of the human soul? The answer is somehow already suggested in the text. Aristotle says, “to deliberate and to calculate are the same thing”.

In *NE* 6.2, Aristotle says decisively that the *ergon* “of both the intellectual parts is truth [*alétheia*]”.\(^{6}\) Quite clearly, this statement declares once and for all that, although Aristotle differentiates between the *erga* attributed to the two rational parts of the soul, the two ultimately are referred to one common *ergon*. Although he says, “of the intellect which is contemplative, not practical nor

---

\(^{1}\) *NE* 3.5.1114b26–30.

\(^{2}\) See also *NE* 7, esp. Chapters 3, 4, 6 and 7 where this is more extensively discussed.

\(^{3}\) It must be recalled that Aristotle identifies two parts in the human soul that has to do with reason. One is that which is capable of agreeing or disagreeing with reason, the other “having it in the strict sense and in itself”. As pointed out, Aristotle further divides the latter into two.

\(^{4}\) *NE* 6.1.1139a11–16.

\(^{5}\) See *NE* 6.3.1139b14–17.

\(^{6}\) *NE* 6.2.1139b12. See also *Eudemian Ethics* 2.4.1221b30.
productive, the good and the bad state are truth and falsity ... while of the part which is practical and intellectual the good state is truth in agreement with right desire”,¹ one can see that the erga of both parts are essentially the same, namely truth or alétheia.

But is alétheia or alétheuein (to use the verbal form, which could be translated as reaching truth) the very ergon of the rational parts, as such? Does not alétheia or alétheuein represent instead an ergon which already indicates the presence of the corresponding areté? For even before being regarded as the ergon of the rational parts,² alétheia is already associated with to eu or the “well” which, as we have pointed out, is very much identified with areté itself. Aristotle states,

Of the intellect which is contemplative, not practical nor productive, the good [to eu] and the bad state [kakós] are truth [t’aléthes] and falsity [pseudos] (for this is the function of everything intellectual) while of the part which is practical and intellectual the good state is truth [alétheia] in agreement with right desire.³

Although Aristotle suggests in the bracketed English phrase that truth is the ergon of everything intellectual, the main idea in the text is still that truth already concerns the “well” and thus the excellence or excellences in question. The eu and the kakós describe the two possible manners in which the ergon can be exercised, and alétheia represents the eu-performance of the ergon of everything intellectual. When we say that alétheia is ergon, we understand this ergon already in the sense of the good performance of the rational parts of the soul.

Accordingly, the more accurate reference of the ergon of the human soul’s rational parts would still be reasoning. This is what the rational parts of the human soul characteristically do. Alétheia and alétheuein, of course, may still be taken as descriptive of the ergon of rational parts, but only insofar as they are in their best hexeis or states. That is why, when Aristotle in NE 6.4, contrasts art (technē), which is one of the five intellectual aretai, with its opposite (atechnía), not only is it evident that the difference lies in the fact that one involves truth while the other falsity, it is also clear that both involve reasoning. Aristotle says,

Art [technē], then, as has been said, is a state concerned with making, involving a true course of reasoning [hexis tis meta logou aléthous poiëtikē estin], and lack of art [atechnia] on the contrary is a state concerned with making, involving a false course of reasoning [meta

¹ NE 6.2.1139a 27–31.
² See NE 6.2.1139b12.
³ NE 6.2.1139a27–31.
logou pseudous poiétiké hesis]; both are concerned with what can be otherwise.¹

From what we have discussed, we can see that human being’s ergon has to do with rationality. Such an ergon is a complex one, in that it corresponds to a multiplicity of human aretai. One thing we can say therefore about human being’s rationality is that it is exercised, or at least is involved, in the energeiai proper to these aretai. Human being’s ergon or characteristic task is not the same with the ergon of any other agent. Unlike the functions of senses or of animals, human ergon is the foundation not just of one areté but of many. These are what Aristotle calls the human aretai.

Different Models of Interpreting Aristotle’s Eudaimonia

The foregoing discussion might imply that Aristotle’s idea about eudaimonia may readily be understood in terms of human being’s ergon and aretai. Basing ourselves on the initial definition of human being’s ultimate telos as “the activity of the soul in conformity with excellence”, we can interpret Aristotle as saying that human being’s eudaimonia consists in the good performance of his ergon according to the many excellences or aretai attributable to human being.

And yet this interpretation seems to break down when one reads what Aristotle says in the tenth book of NE:

If happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be in accordance with the highest excellence; and this will be that of the best thing in us. Whether it be intellect or something else that is this element which is thought to be our natural ruler and guide and to take thought of things noble and divine, whether it be itself also divine or only the most divine element in us, the activity of this in accordance with its proper excellence will be complete happiness. That this activity is contemplative we have already said.²

Again, at NE 10.8, Aristotle says, more explicitly, “in a secondary degree the life in accordance with this kind of excellence is happy; for the activities in accordance with this befit our human estate”.³ Here, what Aristotle seems to be saying is that contemplation alone constitutes eudaimonia.

This apparent inconsistency in Aristotle’s account in regard to the constitution of eudaimonia presents a seemingly irresoluble problem. Until recently the difficulty as to what should be included in human being’s ultimate

¹ NE 6.4.1140a20–23.
² NE 10.7.1177a12–18.
³ NE 10.8.1178a9–10.
good has divided commentators into two major schools of thought. One school of thought claims that *eudaimonia* consists in a single activity, while another says that *eudaimonia* includes many other activities.

It was Hardie who coined the terms Dominant and Inclusivist Interpretations to refer to the two basic positions. According to the Dominant Interpretation, citing the passage in *NE* 10.7, human ultimate good consists in contemplation (*theória*) or in the exercise of one intellectual *areté*, that is, *sophia*. The Inclusivist on the other hand says that it includes not only contemplation but also the activities of all other human *aretai*, including those of moral *aretai*.

There are two main points that usually surface in defense of either position. One is the emphasis given to the finality of human ultimate *agathon*, that is, the idea that *eudaimonia* is that for the sake of which (all) things are done. This has greater importance among those who hold the Dominant position. Anthony Kenny, for example, says,

> The argument essentially concerns Aristotle’s view of the hierarchy of choice: that is to say, the structure to be given to the pattern, in human life and striving, of one thing’s being done for the sake of another, of A’s being chosen for the sake of B.

Kenny maintains a Dominant Interpretation. Citing the passage at *NE* 1.7.1097a30–34, where Aristotle talks about *eudaimonia* as that good which is never aimed at for the sake of something else, Kenny underlines that *eudaimonia* is a supreme or an “endy” good.

Nevertheless, the same emphasis on the finality of *eudaimonia* is employed to support an Inclusivist Interpretation. J.L. Ackrill, for instance, makes use of the for-the-sake argument to point out that this is exactly why *eudaimonia* should be viewed as consisting not only in a single activity. He writes,

Now the idea that some things are done for their own sake and may yet be done for the sake of something else is precisely the idea Aristotle will need and use in talking of good actions and *eudaimonia*. For *eudaimonia*—what all men want—is not, he insists, the result or outcome of a lifetime’s effort; it is not something to look forward to (like a contented retirement), it is life, enjoyable and worthwhile all through. Various bits of it must themselves be enjoyable and worthwhile, not just means for bringing about subsequent bits. That the primary ingredients of *eudaimonia* are for the sake of *eudaimonia* is not

---

3 See Kenny, *Perfect Life*, 16.
incompatible with their being ends themselves; for *eudaimonia* is constituted by activities that are ends in themselves.¹

Although Ackrill is using a similar line of argument here, his point is entirely different. He distinguishes between activities that are mere means to an end and those that are constituents or parts of an integral end.

The other main point that usually surfaces in defense of either position concerns the component or components that constitute *eudaimonia* itself. In the same work cited above, Kenny asserts: “The position of NE 10 is surely that the contemplative possesses the moral virtues, but that their exercise will not constitute part of his happiness. That will be constituted by contemplation alone”.² Ackrill, on the other hand, stresses the completeness of *eudaimonia*. Aristotle, according to him, is saying “that *eudaimonia*, being absolutely final and genuinely self-sufficient, is more desirable than anything else in that it includes everything desirable in itself”.³

The debate between the Dominant and the Inclusivist Interpretations indicates a deeper issue. From the various versions of both positions, it seems that a more fundamental question concerns the perspective from which *eudaimonia* is understood.

From what commentators of NE 10 propose, we can gather at least three models of viewing *eudaimonia*.

First, there is the *means-end* model. In this model what is emphasized is the finality of the telos. The tendency here is to accentuate the distinction between what belongs to the means and what is proper to the end. Thus, it adopts a linear perspective in which the means is prominently that which leads to the telos. *Eudaimonia* is that which is the last in the series of means and ends. Since *eudaimonia* is identified with intellectual *energeia*, there is a tendency in this model to look at moral activities as mere means to intellectual ones. Nussbaum, for example, would say, “According to the view expressed in 10.7 friendship and excellence of character could not have intrinsic value; if we chose to pursue them, it would only be because, and insofar as, they seek to maximize contemplation”.⁴

The second model may be designated as the *part-whole* model. Here the emphasis is what is included in *eudaimonia*. In this case, the tendency is to include many activities other than what is strictly intellectual. If *eudaimonia* is to be a complete telos, one must look at it as consisting in various and different

---

energeiai, including moral activities. These energeiai are then to be regarded as parts of a whole. Eudaimonia, according to this model, may be compared to playing basketball. Just as playing basketball includes energeiai like dribbling and shooting the ball,¹ so eudaimonia would consist in different goods, that is, it includes the energeiai of both intellectual and moral aretai.² Unlike the first model, this model tends to compartmentalize the energeiai that comprise eudaimonia. Furthermore, the process that may sometimes be implied in the realization of this telos through certain means is ignored altogether.

The third may be called the contribution model. It may be seen as a compromise between the means-end and the parts-whole models. This maintains the idea that eudaimonia is a case of a telos realized through certain means while it also suggests that those that contribute to the telos could well be regarded as comprising the telos itself. A good illustration of this notion of eudaimonia would be the relation between sharing a meal with someone (A) and having a friendly relationship with him (B). Certainly, we can look at A here as a means to B. We can claim that we share a meal with this someone (A) in order to develop a friendly relationship with him (B). But A can also be regarded as part of B in the sense that sharing a meal with this person is itself an instance of this friendship. Similarly, according to the third model, energeiai of moral aretai form part of eudaimonia itself. Evidently, this interpretation is inclusivist.

The Ergon-Energeia Model

What I propose however may be called the ergon-energeia model. In this model the question of means-end is not emphasized, although the idea that eudaimonia is a case of a telos is maintained. Eudaimonia is regarded as a telos, but a telos that is distinctively activity or energeia, an activity that should be seen as a realization of an ergon.

The term activity or energeia is crucial here because it itself is central to understanding eudaimonia. In Greek the word activity or energeia indicates that something is being actualized or realized. It is opposed to potency or dunamis. In Aristotle’s account of eudaimonia in NE, human being’s ergon emerges as the potency while the exercise of it is the actuality or actualization. Indeed, the word energeia is employed here to signify actuality or actualization.

In a passage we quoted earlier, Aristotle practically bases his account of human being’s ultimate good on his characteristic ergon: “To say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it

¹ See Ackrill, “Eudaimonia”, in Essays, 19.
² Indeed, what is emphasized in this model is the idea that eudaimonia is complete and self-sufficient, as stated in NE 1.7. According to Ackrill, Aristotle is saying that eudaimonia, “being absolutely final and genuinely self-sufficient, is more desirable than anything else in that it includes everything desirable in itself”. Ackrill, “Eudaimonia”, in Essays, 21.
is is still desired. That might be given, if we could first ascertain the function [ergon] of man”.¹ But towards the end of that account, Aristotle would define human being’s ultimate good as an energeia: “Human good turns out to be activity [energeia] of soul in conformity with excellence”.²

The Greek terminology is itself indicative of how we should understand the Aristotelian eudaimonia. Human being’s ultimate good has both a basis in ergon and a description of being an energeia. And the word energeia is undoubtedly related to ergon. Energeia therefore means to be in function. It literally means “in function” or “in operation”. When we claim that something is “in function”, we are saying that it is being exercised, realized or actualized.

This is precisely what Aristotle himself states in Metaphysics. He writes, “[For] the ergon is the telos, and the energeia is the ergon. Therefore even the word energeia is derived from ergon, and points to the fulfillment”.³

The term energeia, however, has another significance that can further enrich our understanding of human ultimate good. Energeia indicates an essentially complete activity in contrast to one which is never complete in itself, until it has reached its determined end and until it is terminated. And if energeia in the sense of actuality is contrasted with dunamis, which signifies potency, energeia in the sense of complete activity is contrasted with kinesis, which signifies movement.

Consider, for example, the difference between seeing a thing and building a house. The act of seeing a thing will always be an essentially complete activity while the act of building a house, as long as it is being done, is incomplete. When we see something, the object of that act is already there, fully united with that act. It is essentially complete. On the other hand, when we build a house, as long as we are still in the process of building the house, the end is not yet achieved and thus the act will always be incomplete. It will only be complete when the house has already been built and when the act of building has already ended. Aristotle thus writes in NE 10.4,

> Seeing seems to be at any moment complete, for it does not lack anything which coming into being later will complete its form; and pleasure also seems to be of this nature. For it is a whole, and at no time can one find a pleasure whose form will be completed if the pleasure lasts longer. For this reason, too, it is not a movement. For every movement (e.g. that of building) takes time and is for the sake of an end, and is complete when it has made what it aims at.⁴

We can actually distinguish the difference between energeia and kinesis by using what Terry Penner calls the tense test.⁵ Of the energeia of seeing, we

---

¹NE 1.7.1097b22–25.
²NE 1.7.1098a16–17.
⁴NE 10.4.1174a14–21.
⁵Terry Penner “Verbs and the Identity of Actions—A Philosophical Exercise in the
can, without contradicting ourselves, say, “We have seen the thing”, while we are still seeing it. But of the kinesis of building a house, we can’t say, “We have built it”, while we are still building it.

Another test that will allow us to distinguish between energeia and kinesis is the use of the adverbs, slowly and quickly. For while we can say that we are building the house quickly or slowly, we cannot say without being irrational that we are seeing the thing quickly or slowly.1

Aristotle’s specification of human being’s ultimate good or eudaimonia as energeia, therefore, is not without reason and purpose. Aristotle defines it as energeia and not merely as kinesis to emphasize the idea that human being’s ultimate good is not an end product that is achieved only when we have finished performing the activity involved. That eudaimonia is an energeia implies that the telos is not separate from the energeia, but that the energeia itself is the telos and not a mere means to an end. Accordingly, energeiai that are in accordance with moral aretai are to be viewed not as means towards human being’s ultimate good but as constitutive elements of what human eudaimonia signifies.

Similarly, the significance of energeia as actuality has a very important consequence. Inasmuch as human being’s characteristic ergon is one that implies rationality, we must, in defining his ultimate good, take into consideration the manner in which such an ergon is actualized.

Intellectual activities by nature are activities that involve our reason. If there is therefore an activity that will at once be included in eudaimonia as an energeia, it will be his intellectual activity. Of course, the more difficult question is, are activities pertaining to moral excellences included in this human ultimate end?

If we adopt the ergon-energeia model, we will arrive at an affirmative answer. Moral acts will not only be an exercise of moral excellences but will also constitute the realization, the actualization, the energeia of human being’s ergon or of his eudaimonia. For moral activities are no mere moral. They also are rational, in that they constitute the exercise of reason as well. And this is evidenced specifically by the involvement of the intellectual aretè of practical wisdom in moral aretai.

1 According to Aristotle, the quick-slow description can apply to a kinesis but not to an energeia. In NE 10.3.1173a29–b4, for example, speaking of pleasure, he remarks, “they assume that the good is complete while movements and comings into being are incomplete and try to exhibit pleasure as being a movement and a coming into being. For speed and slowness are thought to be proper to every movement, if not in itself (as e.g. that of the heavens) then in relation to something else; but of pleasure neither of these things is true. For while we may become pleased quickly as we may become angry quickly, we cannot be pleased quickly, not even in relation to some one else, while we can walk, or grow, or like, quickly. While, then, we can change quickly or slowly into a state of pleasure, we cannot quickly exhibit the activity of pleasure, i.e. be pleased”. See also Aristotle, Physics 4.10.218b13–20; 6.1.232a20–21; 6.2.232b20–23; 6.2.233b19–22.
The focus therefore in what I propose or in what I call ergon-energeia model is not what leads towards the end but what comes out of it. Eudaimonia appears to be not so much an ensemble of activities as some ergon expressing itself well (eu) in different activities in accordance with excellence or in energeiai kai'aretén. To be happy according to Aristotle would be to be both intellectually and morally active in excellent way. To achieve the human ultimate good signifies to be both intellectually and morally good.

There are nonetheless difficulties which the tenth book of NE seems to present and which may go against our ergon-energeia argument.

First, Aristotle remarks in NE 10.8 that animals and other nonhuman things are incapable of eudaimonia because they have no share in contemplation. Sometimes this passage is cited to support the claim of the Dominant Interpretation that eudaimonia consists solely in theória. However, if this is taken in an absolute sense, then in the first place neither should the moral activities he mentions in the same chapter of NE 10 be called happy, even if only in the secondary degree. It seems that eudaimonia, the human good, refers not only to the activity of sophia, or theória, but to human being’s proper ergon itself to which both intellectual and moral aretai are referred. And this is consistent with the idea that the energeiai of moral aretai do actualize the ergon proper to human being insofar as they imply the rational principle which defines such an ergon.

Second, Aristotle distinguishes theória at the beginning of NE 10.7 as eudaimonia in the first degree while he simply describes at the beginning of NE 10.8 the energeiai of other (obviously moral) aretai as eudaimonia in the second degree. He writes, “in a secondary degree the life in accordance with the other kind of excellence [that is, moral areté] is happy; for the activities in accordance with this befit our human estate”. This is emphasized by the Dominant Interpretation. But again this does not run counter to the ergon-energeia argument. If eudaimonia is understood as an energeia in the sense of the unfolding of ergon, then one sees that such actualization of ergon, though it takes place in the exercise of both types of areté, is more immediate and obvious in theória than in the energeiai of moral aretai. And this might as well explain why Aristotle regards theória as eudaimonia in the first degree and the other energeiai as eudaimonia in the second degree. In any case, such energeiai of moral aretai can still be regarded as instances of the actualization of human being’s ergon, which NE identifies as eudaimonia.

1 See also NE 1.9.1099b32–1100a5; 1.10.1111b8–13; Aristotle, De Anima 428a18–23; 432a5–11; Physics 2.6.197b1–8.
3 NE 10.8.1178a9–10.
What we do in the *ergon-energeia* argument is to look at *eudaimonia* from another standpoint. The usual perspective adopted by those who engage in the Dominant-Inclusivist debate (especially Models 1 and 3) centers on the means-end relationship. Presupposing that *eudaimonia* is an end, they are preoccupied with what appertains to the means and what is proper to the end. But this is only one side of the whole picture of *eudaimonia* as end. The normal tendency is to focus on the *kinesis* or movement towards the achievement of this end, and therefore to take for granted, or even to totally forget, that this end is an *energeia*, an unfolding, that is, of human *ergon*, an actualization of the *ergon* proper to human being, a self-expression of *ergon*.

Viewed according to the *ergon-energeia* perspective, the Dominant-Inclusivist debate becomes extraneous. Seen as self-expression of human being’s proper *ergon* (which is characterized by rationality), *eudaimonia* or the ultimate human *agathon* will find actualization not only in purely intellectual or rational activities but also in *energeiai* done *in accordance to moral aretai*, since according to Aristotle himself these *energeiai* are in accordance with right reason.

This paper does not intend to discredit the Dominant-Inclusivist debate. It simply takes another approach to the question of the constitution of *eudaimonia*. If the debate sees a linear *kinesis* towards *eudaimonia* and endeavors to answer what properly belongs to the teleological endpoint that *eudaimonia* represents, the present study sees a centrifugal *energeia* from human being’s proper *ergon* in which there is no longer a question of what is included in *eudaimonia* but only a distinction in degree and immediacy in the actualization of that *ergon*.

---

1 Nussbaum for example tends to look at activities that are not strictly contemplative as mere means for *thória*. She writes, “According to the view expressed in 10.7 friendship and excellence of character could not have intrinsic value; if we chose to pursue them, it would only be because, and insofar as, they seek to maximize contemplation”; Martha Nussbaum, “Aristotle”, in *Ancient Writers*, 403.
Recently philosophers have begun to discuss the implications of work in social psychology for the study of ethics. Among the most important and frequently cited work in these discussions are the experiments on social influence done by Stanley Milgram in the 1960’s. Some philosophers (they have come to be called “situationists”) have drawn radical conclusions from these experiments and have called into question the notion of character, the possibility of acquiring it, and the viability and value of virtue ethics. But other philosophers (often working in the tradition of virtue ethics) have objected that the situationists are working with a simplified view of character that ignores the role of practical reason. Hence, these latter philosophers claim, the experiments pose no danger to the notions of virtue and character found in, for example, the ancient Greek moralists.

I don’t wish to add to this particular debate. I believe that the virtue ethicists are correct and that the situationist philosophers do work with a simplified view of character that ignores the role of practical reason (or practical wisdom). Still, the situationists might reply that the dependence of virtue on practical wisdom amounts to an admission that virtuous character is an ideal achievable by few. If so, then one might rightly wonder how useful virtue can be as a practical guide in moral life or as an adequate foundation in moral theory. If virtue cannot guide us, then perhaps, as the situationists suggest, we are better off thinking in terms of narrow traits specific to situation types (such as burning-building-courage) rather than the broad traits of traditional virtue ethics (such as courage).

In this paper I’ll offer a different response to the situationists’ challenge. Rather than focusing on the importance of practical reason, I’ll offer an interpretation of virtuous character that emphasizes its motivational elements.

---

In my view, these are key to understanding virtue. I find these motivational elements emphasized not only in Aristotle but also in modern philosophers such as Marx, Mill, Rousseau, and Rawls. In addition to Aristotle, I’ll use Rawls’s views to indicate how, even though virtue is an ideal, it is nevertheless approachable in our lives. And I’ll suggest how this combination of Aristotle and Rawls can give us a way to understand the moral failure of some of the participants in Milgram’s studies.

The Experiments and Their Interpretations

I’ll begin by briefly describing just a few of the relevant experiments in social psychology, to give a sense of how the situationists interpret them. Then I’ll summarize some of the objections that are frequently made to the situationists’ interpretations of these experiments.

(i) One much discussed study done in 1972 contrasts the helping behavior of persons who found a dime in the coin return slot of a payphone with the helping behavior of persons who did not. Persons who found the dime were more likely to help another person pick up dropped papers than persons who did not find the dime. The study is taken to show that extremely minor factors that are not of moral significance can affect people’s moods and thereby their helping behavior. (ii) Another study is of Princeton seminary students who agreed to give a talk about the importance of helping those in need. On the way to the building where their talks were to be given, they encountered a groaning man slumped in a doorway. Those who were told they were already late for their talks were much less likely to help than those who were told they had time to spare. Here, as in the payphone example, a minor factor without moral significance (being in a hurry or not) was strongly correlated with persons’ helping behavior. (iii) Among the most well-known of the experiments are those conducted by Stanley Milgram in the 1960’s. In these experiments the great majority of subjects were willing to administer what they thought were increasingly severe electric shocks to another person who they thought was also a subject (but who was actually a confederate of the experimenter). Of the original 40 subjects, 26 were willing to administer the most severe shock possible, even after the confederate had, at a lower shock level, pretended to scream in pain and had demanded to be released. These experiments are usually taken to show that persons of presumably decent character are willing to cause others severe pain, even to the point of causing unconsciousness or death.

In sum, the experiments are interpreted to show that persons do not have the kind of broadly-based, stable, consistent traits of character that are of interest to philosophers working in virtue ethics. At best, people have narrow traits that are not unified with other traits into a wider behavioral pattern. If this is what the psychological studies show, then, the situationists say, philosophers would be better off leaving virtue ethics behind.
These interpretations of the experiments have been challenged both by psychologists and philosophers, especially by philosophers working in the tradition of virtue ethics, who claim that the character traits called into question by situationist psychologists and philosophers have little to do with the notion of character at the center of traditional virtue ethics. The objectors say\(^1\) that the situationists rely on an understanding of character traits as isolated and often non-reflective dispositions to behave in stereotypical ways, whereas the view of character associated with traditional virtue ethics includes how we reason and what we value and is a more or less consistent and integrated set of desires and beliefs.

Take the payphone and seminarian studies, for example. It is obvious that one cannot respond to all appeals for help, and it is doubtful that any reflective person, even one who holds a position like that of the early Peter Singer, thinks one should. This suggests that being a helpful person may require some thinking about what is most important in one’s life, for calls of help can justifiably go unanswered if the individual believes that responding will interfere with her doing something else that she takes to be of higher moral importance. The point is that being helpful can’t be understood in isolation from other values, aims, and traits that the individual has.

Or consider the Milgram experiments. During the experiment, many of the subjects protested even while continuing to obey the experimenter’s commands. In post-experiment interviews with subjects, Milgram noted that many were completely convinced of the wrongness of what they were doing. In interviews Milgram conducted with people who did not know the results of the experiments, interviewees (graduate students, people in the street, and professional psychiatrists) indicated across the board that they thought only a very tiny percentage of subjects (6%) would continue to shock the confederate up to the maximum point. His interviewees thought that most people would see that administering extreme shocks under these conditions is wrong and that they would not do it. From the standpoint of virtue ethics, then, many of Milgram’s subjects are best described as incontinent. They have character, but it is neither virtuous nor vicious. According to traditional virtue ethics, many people fall into this group: they recognize what is right to do but they nevertheless do not do it.

In sum, we see that the interpretations of these experiments that call character into question rely on simplified views of character. They may hold (as in the payphone and seminarian studies) that one can read off a character trait from a single type of behavior stereotypically associated with that trait. They may think that character traits can be understood in isolation from other traits. Or they may think that someone who is continent or incontinent has no character. According to traditional virtue ethics, the performance of behavior

---

that is stereotypically associated with a virtue is rarely sufficient to indicate the presence of that virtue. For having a virtuous trait of character is a matter of responding appropriately – in action, but also in thought and feeling. A virtuous person is taken to have the ability to deliberate well about what conduces to the good life in general, and that ability guides her beliefs, values, and desires. In short, the objectors say, these interpretations of the experiments in social psychology ignore the role of practical reason (or, in the case of virtuous character, practical wisdom).

I think these general responses to the situationists are correct. But to me they seem unsatisfying. For if being virtuous requires the subtle combination of deliberation, feeling, and action that is practical wisdom, then, on the traditional view, few (if any) will manage to achieve it. On some conceptions of moral knowledge, such as that proposed by Plato in the Republic, acquiring the knowledge necessary for virtue takes over 50 years of psychological and intellectual training. On Aristotle’s conception of practical wisdom, acquiring and sustaining virtue requires that one be a citizen of an ideal state. One might wonder how useful Aristotle’s and Plato’s views on virtuous character can be, if acquiring virtuous character is a long and difficult process that is only made possible by social institutions that do not yet exist. What do we do in the meantime? The situationist might take the existence of these problems as support for his view that we are better off thinking in terms of “narrow” traits (such as in-dire-circumstances-helpfulness) rather than the broad trait of helpfulness.

In this talk I offer a different response to the situationists’ challenge. As I indicated at the start, I offer an account of Aristotelian virtue that is not focused on the subtleties of practical wisdom and the difficulties of acquiring it. Rather, I focus on the motivational elements of virtue and how these aims and desires are shaped by political, social, and economic institutions. In contrast to the situationists, I think it is precisely because virtuous aims and desires are shaped by institutions that virtue is approachable in ordinary life, for, as both Aristotle and Rawls indicate, the circumstances of ordinary life can, and sometimes do, provide the institutional background that is crucial to the development and maintenance of virtue.

**Aristotelian Virtue in Brief**

According to Aristotle, virtue enables us to live well and to flourish. So to see what virtue involves, we need to look at Aristotle’s views on the well-lived life. I begin with a traditional reading of these views.¹ I take it that a flourishing human life consists in the full realization of the distinctive human

---

powers, which are rational or cognitive powers. These powers are, roughly, the abilities to think and to know, to figure things out on the basis of reason. Aristotle means, I assume, that only human beings think in ways such as these: we deliberate about what to do, about what kind of life to lead, and about what sort of person to be. We look for reasons for acting or living one way rather than another. It is important to note that the activity of figuring things out on the basis of reason is realized in quite ordinary experiences, as when we listen to music, watch a play, or participate in sports. A well-played game is often one that requires players to make smart decisions, quickly, about which strategies to use to win a point. These various ways of figuring things out are examples of so-called practical reason. In addition, we think about the nature of the world, about why it behaves as it does, and we construct theories (again looking for reasons in favor of one theory or another) to explain how the world works. These ways of thinking are examples of so-called theoretical reason. In both types of thinking, we make reasoned judgments among alternatives. In all these ways, both ordinary and grand, we deliberate, form theories and explanations, and reflect about our own lives and the lives of others.\(^1\)

How is it that we realize these powers fully? It can’t be that we become adept at every kind of activity in which deliberating and judging on the basis of reasons is called for. Then we’d have to master almost everything. Aristotle’s idea is, rather, I believe, that we develop them to the extent that we enjoy most the exercise of our deliberative powers in what we choose to do; we become true “self-lovers”, lovers of what is most human about us (NE, IX. 7-8). When we reach this point, we enjoy and value the realized exercise of our rational powers in a wide variety of different and even seemingly unconnected activities.\(^2\)

According to Aristotle, the state’s function is to further the human good, the full realization of the human powers, so the ideal political community needs to organize human activity in such a way that the human good is possible for citizens. Aristotle thought this required that some be exploited in order that others (a small subset) live fully realized lives. The state needs manual laborers, but they ought not to be citizens, for manual labor, he thought, impedes the full development of the human powers. Aristotle is often criticized for thinking that manual labor impedes the development of the human powers. Surely this is just a prejudice in favor of intellectual work. But consider unskilled work. Housework is a good modern example. Housework, like other forms of unskilled work, is routine, monotonous, and provides little room for personal style and self-expression. Other things being equal, we don’t choose

---

\(^1\) I follow Kraut in thinking that practical and theoretical reasoning are not different in kind, and that Aristotle does not envision that citizens of his ideal state must be philosophers in order to flourish. See *Aristotle on the Human Good*, p. 59 and *Aristotle: Political Philosophy*, sec. 3.11 and 6.3.

this kind of work – we do it because it is necessary or we do it to survive. Aristotle calls such a life whose main activity is this type of work the money-maker’s life. He says it is forced in that it is not chosen for its own sake. (NE 1096a5-7) More interestingly, Aristotle thinks that even if someone does skilled manual work – work that does call for the use of the human powers -- it may still be unfree. If the exercise of the worker’s powers is constrained by others’ decisions and desires, then the worker cannot fully express her own ideas about how the work is to be done. (cf. *Rhetoric* 1367a32-33) Aristotle’s comments suggest that for work to promote the full development of the human powers, the worker must not only have some control over the type of work that is done but also over the conditions under which it is done.¹

I’ll refer to work that meets Aristotle’s conditions as “meaningful work”. Suppose Aristotle is not misguided in thinking that many forms of manual labor don’t meet the conditions of meaningful work and as a result that these forms of work may impede a realized life. His official political solution to this problem -- to create an ideal political community in which manual laborers are exploited so that others can live fully realized lives – does not seem to me to follow. What follows, it seems to me, is a quite radical view – that in an ideal political community the conditions of work must be re-organized so that no citizen need live a life whose main activity is manual labor performed under conditions of dependence. (cf. *Politics* 1333a9-11) Providing for meaningful work, then, would be one way in which the state could further the human good. There are other ways that Aristotle explicitly mentions. For example, he thought that the state should provide for a system of public education for all citizens. This recommendation is commonplace now, but was radical for his time. In his time, no Greek city had ever provided a public education system. The aim of the educational system was to develop citizens’ cognitive powers, so young people learned not only to read and write, but also to appreciate the beauty of the world around them and to gain some knowledge and appreciation of how the universe works.² Aristotle thought that if education succeeds in developing citizens’ powers, then young people will want to use these powers in deciding, judging, discriminating, and so on. They will develop a taste for active, rather than passive, leisure activities and won’t be interested simply in consumption (as citizens did in some of the states he criticized). So education, in his view, is transformative. Citizens’ education will serve them well when it comes to governing the city. Because citizens have developed their powers to deliberate practically, it makes sense for citizens to take turns ruling and being ruled. So all citizens are members of the assembly, where important decisions about community life are made. In addition, because of sortition and a system of office rotation, all


citizens have an equal chance to participate in political decision-making at other levels of government. Of great importance is the fact that the city’s economic policies are designed to support the aim of the political institutions. Aristotle recommends that the state distribute parcels of land to all, for citizens need material resources if they are to participate fully in public life. There is no need to establish economic equality, as long as existing inequalities are not large enough to promote the formation of elite groups or to provoke justified anger or envy. These various policies – educational, office-holding, economic – make it possible for a sense of justice to pervade the state, because they serve to confirm that citizens are valued as equal practical deliberators and citizens.

One might rightly ask what all this has to do with virtue. To see the connection, consider Aristotle’s descriptions and accounts of the various virtues and vices. There are patterns to these accounts. Morally vicious people don’t have the proper estimation of their own value. They are not true self-lovers in Aristotle’s sense. They may think too highly of themselves in relation to others, or they may not value themselves enough in relation to others. Sometimes people who don’t value themselves enough act in ways more appropriate for “grazing animals” (NE 1095b20): what they do doesn’t make appropriate demands on their use of their cognitive powers. So they might be self-indulgent or cowardly. Or their underestimation of their own value might take the form of overestimating the opinions others have of them. So flatterers want the favor of the more privileged, and vain people want the honor others can bestow. Vulgar buffoons need to have others’ attention. On the other hand, if individuals think too highly of themselves, they might act in ways that endanger the good and pleasure of friendship and social life. They might be churlish, cantankerous, or insensitive.

Aristotle’s true self-lovers won’t act in these vicious ways. For they have a strong sense of their own worth that is based on their own achievements as evidenced in the exercise of their developed powers. Their self-worth is not overly dependent on others’ opinions and achievements, nor is it contemptuously independent of others’ views and activities. For proper self-love is not an individual accomplishment. To be preserved over time, it requires that we cooperate with other self-lovers in shared activity in a specific type of political community. The self-lover’s positive view of himself and his ability to identify with the good of others as they work to achieve common goals produce stable ties of friendship, affection, and trust.

Aristotle thinks that, if proper institutions are in place, these attitudes and behaviors emerge naturally, as a result of psychological tendencies we experience in the course of ordinary life. For, other things being equal, Aristotle thinks it is natural for us (it is part of our psychology) to enjoy the exercise of our realized powers, and it is natural for us to enjoy the realization

of others’ powers, too. (NE IX.7-9) So if we are fortunate enough to live in a community that provides us with an educational system that develops our abilities to think and to know, a community that offers us opportunities to use our developed abilities in shared activities with others, and that provides the material goods we need for realizing our powers and for participating in civic life, we will develop a healthy self-love and attachments to others in which we care about them for their own sakes.

A Modern Use of Aristotelian Ideas

At this point one might wonder about the relevance of Aristotle’s ideas to the circumstances of modern life. Even if Aristotle had good reasons to think that the beliefs and attitudes he associates with virtue will emerge naturally when proper institutions are in place, we presumably do not want to replicate the economic and technological naivety of an ancient city-state nor can replicate the full-scale participatory democracy that he had in mind. So how can his views be of use to us now? Moreover, one might think it is simply a mistake to give formal political endorsement to “character building” as Aristotle does. To a modern liberal who believes it is unacceptable for the state to promote a particular way of life or a particular conception of the good, this route, as some situationists have emphasized, seems troubling.¹

But I think that a modern liberal political theory can endorse an Aristotelian view of character and its formation. If so, that suggests that an Aristotelian approach to virtue is appropriate to, and is approachable within, modern life. Let me explain briefly by considering the use made of Aristotle’s ideas in John Rawls’s political philosophy.

Rawls writes in the introduction to The Law of Peoples that the great evils of history (unjust war, oppression, starvation, poverty, persecution, and so on) are the result of political injustice. He goes on to claim that once the most serious forms of political injustice are eliminated, these great evils will gradually disappear. (LP, 6-7) These remarks suggest that the state has profound and lasting effects on people’s actions, desires, and character. In A Theory of Justice Rawls puts this “perfectly obvious” point as follows: “. . . the social system shapes the wants and aspirations that its citizens come to have. It determines in part the sort of persons they want to be as well as the sort of persons they are. . . . Since economic arrangements have these effects, and indeed must do so, the choice of these institutions involves some view of human good and of the design of institutions to realize it. This choice must, therefore, be made on moral and political as well as on economic grounds” (TJ, 229).²

¹ For more discussion, see John Doris, op. cit., 125ff.
What then is the view of human good that Rawls’s just institutions are designed to realize? Rawls begins with what he calls a “political conception of the person”, according to which individuals are free and equal. This conception is meant to be “freestanding”. That is, it does not depend for its justification on a particular conception of the good, such as a Kantian view that accords value to ends only if they are the result of autonomous choice. However, Rawls does acknowledge that one role of political institutions (or of the basic structure) is to publicly exhibit and encourage, and so to educate, citizens to gain this conception of themselves and of each other as politically free and equal. How do political institutions do this? The answer Rawls seems to offer is that they do so by providing the social bases of the primary good of self-respect. Here is where Aristotle enters the picture: Rawls’s understanding of the nature of self-respect is much like Aristotle’s understanding of true self-love, and Rawls’s view of the social bases of self-respect is much like Aristotle’s understanding of the institutions needed to promote and sustain true self-love.

Rawlsian self-respect has two components (TJ, sec. 67): (i) first, that a person believes her aims are worth carrying out, and (ii) second, that a person has reasonable hopes of achieving her aims. To believe that her aims are worth carrying out and hence that she herself has worth, a person’s life-plan should satisfy what Rawls calls the Aristotelian principle – that is, it should give a central place to the exercise of one’s realized abilities. Since realized abilities require the development of our human powers of thinking and knowing, plans should give a central place to the development and exercise of these characteristic human powers. So a plan that gives a central place to boring, repetitive, and monotonous work will not satisfy the Aristotelian principle. Moreover, to have a sense of our own value, we must associate with others in such a way that we, and what we do, are appreciated and confirmed by others who have our respect. This is the so-called “companion effect” to the Aristotelian principle. We are reminded of Aristotle’s view that self-love is not an individual accomplishment, but requires that we participate in shared activity with others who enjoy and value the exercise of our realized powers. Hence the importance of there being a variety of associations in which citizens are able to exercise them.

How do political institutions provide the social bases of self-respect and thereby educate citizens to their conception of themselves as equal? For Rawls, they do so by satisfying the two principles of justice (the equal liberties principle, and the distributive principle, which itself has two parts – Fair Equality of Opportunity and the Difference Principle).

First, consider the equal liberties principle. The provision of equal liberties in accordance with the first principle of justice enables citizens to form the associations in which their common aims and ideals can be pursued. These associations are required for self-respect to be produced and maintained. The provision of fair equality of opportunity under the second, distributive, principle of justice prevents excessive accumulation of property and wealth and
maintains equal opportunity of education for all, enabling everyone with similar motivation and ability to have roughly equal prospects of culture and achievement. (TJ, 63) Taken together, these two principles ensure that persons have reasonable hopes of achieving their aims. Finally, the difference principle serves to ensure everyone a decent standard of living. If the basic structure satisfies the difference principle, then the society in question has agreed that socio-economic inequalities must be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members, so it has agreed to guarantee to individuals a decent material level of well-being no matter what individuals’ social position, natural talents, or fortune may be. The difference principle, Rawls writes, corresponds to the “idea of not wanting to have greater advantages unless this is to the benefit of others who are less well off”. (TJ, 90) The equal liberties principle, in combination with the two parts of the distributive principle, amount to a publicly acknowledged recognition that each citizen has equal worth.

Toward the end of TJ, Rawls explains that once the institutions of the basic structure satisfy the two principles of justice, citizens will develop an attachment to these principles and a desire to act in accordance with them and to be a just person. (TJ, sec. 72) He believes that envy, as a form of rancor where we are willing to deprive others of their advantages even when doing so harms us, too, will not occur. (TJ, 466-467) For hostile envy to emerge, citizens would need to lack a confidence in their own value and a reasonable hope of achieving their aims. (469) But the two principles of justice serve to affirm citizens’ equal worth, and socio-economic institutions are arranged to make the development of ability and the achievement of culture available to all who desire it. The result is that existing inequalities are not “excessive in practice”. In phrasing reminiscent of Rousseau, Rawls writes that existing inequalities are not visible, or painfully so, since the greater dispersion of talent and skill encourages the plurality of associations in which citizens realize their particular aims and acquire a secure sense of their own value. In sec. 79 of TJ, Rawls describes these smaller associations as “social unions”. Social unions are characterized by “an agreed scheme of conduct in which the excellences and enjoyments of each are complementary to the good of all”. The associations of work, then, will need to be organized so that the “excellences and enjoyments” of each member can be publicly expressed and acknowledged. Then the worst aspects of the division of labor, which are injurious to self-respect, can be overcome. ¹ “[N]o one need be made to choose between monotonous and routine occupations which are deadening to human thought and sensibility” (464).

Both Aristotle and Rawls aim to explain how political institutions can affect individuals’ motivations and aims so that citizens develop a desire to act virtuously (Aristotle) or justly (Rawls). Both suggest that for institutions to

¹ For a detailed discussion of these injuries and of the various suggestions in Theory of Justice for surmounting them, see Gerald Doppelt, “Rawls’ System of Justice: A Critique from the Left”, Nous 15, 1981, 259-307.
succeed in this way, they need to make it possible for citizens to develop a sense of their own value that is based on their own accomplishments and their status as equal citizens, rather than on their position as more advantaged relative to others. The psychological root of vice lies in the absence of true self-love (Aristotle) or self-respect (Rawls), as the psychological root of virtue, justice, and a well-lived life in the presence of (Aristotelian) self-love and (Rawlsian) self-respect. I think a similar case could be made for Marx and for J. S. Mill. In the more egalitarian of modern societies (such as the Scandinavian societies) we already see examples of appropriate institutions in place, and we can contrast the relative peacefulness of these societies with the violence of less egalitarian ones.

Back to the Milgram Experiments

I want now to return to the Milgram experiments that I described at the beginning of this talk. These are the experiments that seem to pose the greatest problem for the philosophical usefulness of the notion of character and virtue. For the results of these experiments suggest that ordinary persons, of reasonably decent character, can choose to administer electric shocks of such severity to innocent persons as to cause unconsciousness or death. We saw that, according to interviews conducted with subjects after the “learning” portion of the experiment was concluded, many of the subjects who administered these shocks were doing what they believed to be wrong. So it makes sense to think of them as weak-willed (or morally weak).

Our task is to see whether we can offer any more specific explanation of their moral weakness, given that we don’t know have much information about them as individuals that might be relevant. We don’t know anything about their specific aims and goals in life; we don’t know the extent to which they enjoy their lives, what the nature of their relations with family and colleagues might be, and so on. We have nothing else available to us to suggest that they have any other particular character traits. But in the case of the Milgram experiments, we may not need this information. For I think that what is more relevant to our understanding the ethical importance of the Milgram experiments is that they are set up to defeat, or at least not to encourage, what is central to an Aristotelian conception of good character.

Milgram himself drew strong and disturbing conclusions from the experiments. He thought that the experiments suggested that “a substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority”.

---

them for opposing it. So, in Milgram’s view, the experiments confirmed the presence and effect of harmful social institutions in the US – harmful because they produced “the kind of character . . . that cannot be counted on to insulate its citizens from brutality and inhumane treatment at the direction of malevolent authority” (189).

At the end of *Obedience to Authority*, Milgram briefly examines other examples of shocking and destructive behavior carried out by everyday people who are following orders. Milgram published *Obedience to Authority* in 1974, as the war in Vietnam was coming to an end. He was aware of the many inhumane acts performed by American soldiers (the use of napalm, burning of villages, defoliation of land, massacres of hundreds of unarmed civilians). He thought the infamous massacre at My Lai of men, women, children, and babies (all civilians) was an especially good example of people performing unconscionable acts because they were told to do so by someone they considered a legitimate authority. How was it that presumably decent people reached this point? Milgram points to the peculiarities of military training to explain how this could happen. Although the ostensible purpose of basic training is to provide recruits with military skills, the real aim, Milgram claims, is to “break down any residues of individuality and selfhood”, “to eliminate any traces of ego”, to ensure obedience to the authority of the military trainer. In aiming to remove traces of individuality, training defines the soldier’s action so that it is connected to larger values and ideals. So recruits are told that they are fighting against enemies who oppose the very values (freedom, liberty, the pursuit of happiness) upon which their nation was founded. They are told their cause is just, not merely by military officers of all ranks, but also by top level government officials, including the President himself. Once they are in the field, though some individuals do disobey or desert, the situation in which they are placed makes this difficult, and there are severe penalties for disobedience and desertion. Given that military service is linked to the preservation of values Americans hold dear, disobedience and desertion signal disloyalty to those ideals and cowardice.

The Milgram experiments mirror some of the more salient features of the military experience. First, there is the idea that the subjects, by participating in an experiment in which many others have participated, are advancing the aims of science by contributing to our knowledge of human behavior. The goals of the experiments, on the surface at least, seem valuable and worth pursuing. Moreover, subjects are instructed by an experimenter who appears to affirm these goals by exhibiting qualities we tend to associate with scientists: the experimenter seems competent, objective, and convinced of the merit of the experiment. Unfazed by the agitation and resistance of some subjects, the experimenter calmly and matter of factly instructs them to continue. (“The experiment requires that you continue”. “You have no choice; you must go on”). The experimenter appears to be endorsing the experiment without doubt or concern for the state of the confederate. These aspects of the experiment portray the experimenter as promoting a dispassionate, objective commitment
to the ongoing scientific investigations of human behavior. As the experimenter is portrayed as having a duty to run the experiment, so too the subject is given the sense that he has a duty to act in accordance with the instructions given.

Aside from the experiment’s being set up to promote subjects’ connection to admirable scientific values and goals and aside from the experimenter’s portrayal as committed to these values and goals, the experiment is reminiscent of military training in another way. The experiment does not make it easy for the subject to discontinue shocking the confederate. For to discontinue would amount to violating an alleged duty to proceed, and it would amount to rejecting the higher values of the scientific enterprise. Moreover, discontinuing is especially difficult as it means confronting the experimenter who represents these respected values and goals. So the subject who discontinues would be facing possible moral condemnation by the experimenter. Even if such condemnation is unexpressed (in keeping with the objective and dispassionate behavior of the experimenter to this point), the subject could easily think that the experimenter will be disappointed or worse. Interestingly, Milgram’s view of what the results of the experiments showed has not accepted by either psychologists or philosophers. The psychologists Ross and Nisbett, whose work is often cited by situationist philosophers, claim that the Milgram experiments provide no evidence that people are disposed to obey authority figures unquestioningly, much less to the point of performing cruel and inhumane acts. As support for their view, they offer their own pedagogical experiences – despite much urging, they say, their students don’t keep up with the reading, don’t write drafts of papers, don’t see them during office hours, and don’t prepare properly for exams, and this is not because Ross and Nisbett aren’t viewed as authority figures. Rather, they claim, the Milgram experiments show that “subtle situational forces” can “overcome people’s kinder dispositions”.1 More recently, other psychologists have suggested that fear of embarrassment is the key motivating factor. When people find themselves in circumstances where their sense of what is right clashes with an authority’s view, and they are without allies, they are confused and inhibited by the anticipation of embarrassment they would feel were they shown to be wrong.

A recent philosophical response suggests that a better [helpful?] way to view the Milgram subjects is to think of them as torn between conflicting dispositions – a disposition to obey and a disposition not to harm.2

Is Milgram’s explanation, then, without merit? I think not. We remember that the Milgram experiments are set up in such a way that it is not easy for the subjects to discontinue shocking the confederate. They risk being condemned for rejecting the values and goals of a higher scientific enterprise and for

---

2 Kamtekar, op. cit., 473-474.
violating an alleged duty to proceed with the experiment. So if the subject’s views about what should be done clash with the authority figure’s views about what should be done, the subject needs the confidence to counter the commands of the authority figure. To have such confidence, he needs to believe that he has enough value as a moral deliberator to challenge the authority of the experimenter.

Now it is precisely one’s confidence in oneself as a moral and practical deliberator that the social bases of Aristotle’s self-love and Rawls’s self-respect are designed to promote. In my earlier discussions of Aristotle and Rawls, I emphasized the effect that institutions have on an individual’s sense of his own value and on the confidence he has in himself as an equal participant and deliberator in public life. I have also suggested how other institutional arrangements (some political, some economic) can block the development of this sense of an individual’s value. Among these arrangements are broad economic and legal policies (such as taxation schemes and legal privileges) that permit wide disparities in the ownership of property and wealth. Another critical institution is the organization of work. If work is such that tasks are routine and monotonous, if workers have little say over how work is done, and if there are no opportunities for advancement or for increasing their skills, then a worker’s sense of her own value is undermined. In a report done by the department of Health, Education, and Welfare near the time of the Milgram experiments, researchers reported that what workers wanted most was “to become masters of their immediate environments and to feel that their work and they themselves [were] important”, which the researchers labeled “the twin ingredients of self-esteem”.1 The report went on to attribute a variety of social problems to, in part, the injuries to self-esteem produced by the kind of work that does not offer workers opportunities for skill development or autonomy2.

Of course, in the case of the Milgram participants we don’t have the information we need to determine whether the subjects’ lives afforded them meaningful work, or a level of material resources sufficient for their having reasonable hopes for achieving their aims, or an education that stimulated the growth of their cognitive powers. We don’t know whether they came to the experiments with a well-grounded sense of their own value. But the fact is that many of the participants did not have the psychological strength necessary to disobey the experimenter’s commands even though their behavior indicated clearly that they thought they should disobey. Aristotle’s views, and their modern extension in Rawls, offer a picture of how one can come to acquire a confidence in one’s own value and aims. I expect that persons whose desires and aims have been formed by reasonably egalitarian social and political arrangements will have the confidence needed to resist morally objectionable demands. I would not be surprised if the obedient Milgram participants had

---

2 See the discussion in Doppelt, op. cit., 280-281.
been found to be among the many Americans in the 1960s who lived under institutions that undermined rather than supported a confidence in their own aims and value and their status as equal participants in their society’s culture. In concluding, I suggest that a kind of situationist insight is confirmed – that people’s moral behavior is affected by circumstance. But not by “subtle situational forces” that seem wholly unconnected to traits of character. Rather, by socio-economic and political institutions that form and shape our character.
Aristotle’s treatment of envy ($\phi\psi\varrho\nu\omicron\omega$) as a vice is an intriguing flashpoint for harmonizing his ethical and political theories. Envy emerges as a central source of factional conflict ($\sigma\tau\iota\omicron\omicron\omega$) between oligarchic and democratic groups in his Politics book 5. According to one interpretation of envy in Aristotle, it drives its possessor to secure the wealth and honor of those who are the object of it. This is a special problem for a democracy because insofar as all citizens consider themselves equal without qualification anyone is a viable envy candidate. Therefore, on this account, envy may drive democratic citizens to be especially acquisitive and ambitious since there are so many ostensible equals who happen to have more wealth and honor. But according to another interpretation of envy in Aristotle, it is a more other-centered vice. It drives its possessor to deny the envied person some share of wealth and honor, not in order to gain that share, but rather to spite the person who has it. While this version of envy may also be nurtured by democracy, it drives factional allies to thwart the gain of their rivals more so than redistributing it. Can both interpretations be reconciled in some way as envy or should there be a separate disposition altogether that accounts for (what I’m referring to here as) the second interpretation of envy? I argue that when one considers the major features of envy (dispositional, emotional and desiderative) in the context of distributional conflicts, both interpretations turn out to be central aspects of envy that arise in complementary ways in the circumstances of envy.

There are three fields of envy that Aristotle’s practical thought gives us a view to. His political works, especially Politics 5, depicts some of the political conflicts through which envy is manifested. His ethical work articulates a moral psychology by which we can understand the dispositions, goals, motivations and patterns of deliberation of those prone to envy.\(^1\) Aristotle’s discussion in Rhetoric 2 provides an apt reconstruction of envy that is sensitive

---

\(^1\) On the political dimensions of his ethics, see Bodéüs, *Political Dimensions of Aristotle’s Ethics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).
to the immediacy and details of the emotional phenomena while also capturing intelligently the rich character dimensions of those drawn into intractable political conflicts.

Democratic Envy in its Political Context

Aristotle introduces a political context for envy in the struggle between oligarchs and democrats over the distribution of wealth and honor. While most agree that justice is the proportionately equal distribution, they disagree about what the proportionately equal distribution is in many cases. The oligarchs believe themselves deserving of a greater distribution, whereas the democrats consider that greater distribution to be unfair and demand a more equal and therefore a greater distribution for themselves.

Thus democracy arose from men's thinking that if they are equal in any respect they are equal absolutely (for they suppose that because they are all free they are equal absolutely), oligarchy arose from their supposing that if they are unequal as regards some one thing they are unequal wholly (for being unequal in property assume that they are unequal absolutely); and then the democrats claim, as being equal to participate in all things in equal shares, while the oligarchs as being unequal seek to have a larger share, for a larger share is unequal. All these forms of constitution then have some aspect of justice, but from an absolute point of view they are mistaken; and owing to this cause, when each of the two parties has not got the share in the constitution which

---

2 All passages from Aristotle's Politics will be drawn from W.D. Ross Aristotelis Politica. (Oxford, 1957), 5.1.1301b26-27. All passages from Nicomachean Ethics will be drawn from Burnet, ed., Aristotelis Ethica Nicomachea, (Oxford,1894). All translations from these editions, unless otherwise indicated, will be my own. Now proportionate equality depends on at least two things. It is necessary now that, the just be both a mean and proportionately equal, and in relation to something, and for certain persons. As a mean, it lies between certain things (and these are the greater and the less); as proportionately equal it is, in respect of two things; and as just it is in relation to certain persons. The just then must depend on at least four things; for the persons to which it happens to be just are two, and the things are distribute into two parts

[fστι δ′ τ∫ σον λαξστοι δυσσυν. νυ γυνη τοςνν τ∫ δηκαιν μμνον τε κα= ζσ νν εμμαι κα= προ α τι κα= τηενν, κα= ν μν μμνον, τυντν (ταια δηστε πλεον κ ακ= λαττον ), ρο δο σν, δυονν, δη δηκαιν, τιςενν. νυ γυνη πα τ∫ δηκαιν μμνον λαξστοι εμμαι τηττερον νε ιπο ρη δηκαιν τυγχανει νν, δο στε,κακ= ι οσα, τη πρ ημεστα, δο] (EN 5.5 1131a15-20).

accords with the fundamental assumption that they happen to entertain, factions form.

Aristotle maintains that both views of justice are mistaken and that the democrats are driven by envy to acquire more wealth and honor, whereas the oligarchs are driven by vanity to deny their rivals and the people an equal portion of those goods.

The one class [the poor and common born, the democrats] is envious; the other [the well born and wealthy, the oligarchs] are contemptuous.

Aristotle presents this view in the backdrop of his discussion of the moral psychology of factional conflict. Vanity and envy seem to be the vices that best explain the drive of factionaries for the ends that they each desire as citizens in the regime: wealth and honor.

What the condition is when they engage in factional conflict, then, has been spoken of. As for the things for which they engage in faction conflict, these are gain and honor and their opposites (for they may engage in factional conflict in cities in order to avoid dishonor or punishment either for themselves or for their friends).

So, the general cause of their factional organization is a desire for greater wealth and honor, but sometimes they organize simply in response to others having more in the way of wealth and honor.

And the causes and starting points of the changes by which men are affected in the manner already discussed and concerning the objects [discussed] are by one account seven in number, but according to another [account] more. Two of them are the same as those discussed previously, although not operating in the same way. For it is because of gain and honor that men are incited against one another, not (as we said

---

1] (δομομινιαν τιναν εχειται δειμναι διαλογομενεν διαλογομενεν ετελεσιν την
κρατημενον πεπερατον μεταξυνην: τι δν μιν εχειται μεταξυνην, "μαρτηματικαι δε
πληπνω εσοσιν) (Pol 5.1 1301b27-35).

2 The views of justice in general and in particular should not be confused with the virtues of particular justice (δικαιοσυνη), including distributive justice (διαναμητικον), corrective justice (διορθωτικον) and reciprocal justice (τινιπεποστικον). Nor should these views of justice be confused with Aristotle account of justice as a whole. The views or beliefs about justice, whether in general or in particular, are only one feature of a person's disposition. Aristotle treats a virtue or vice as a disposition that shapes one's beliefs and desires.

3 Pol 4.9 1295b22-25.

4 EN 1302a31-33.
before) in order that they may aggrandize themselves, but because they see others (some justly, others unjustly) getting more.1

While envy isn’t the only disposition that could explain desire and related motivations concerning wealth and honor in distributional struggles, Aristotle does highlight it as playing quite a significant role in this context. But whatever role envy plays in illuminating sectional political conflicts, his treatment of the later can surely illuminate the ambiguities of Aristotelian envy.

For such distributional conflicts already suggest two possible versions of envy. In some cases the agents who engage in factional conflict perceive a dramatic gap between the distribution they think they deserve and their actual distribution. They therefore organize into factional associations and use factional conflict as a means to secure into the goods that they desire but lack. In other cases, the agents who engage in factional conflict are less interested in gaining the good they lack as much as they are blocking the excessive acquisition of rival factions. In this case, factionary A doesn’t even aim to block his rival’s excessive acquisition in order to obtain eventually some appropriate good. Such effects might even frustrate his attempts to secure just those goods.

The starting points for these kinds of distributional conflicts are similar. The agent perceives a rival to have more than is apparently deserved. In one case this perception triggers the affected agent’s desire to have more of the goods that the rival has. In other cases, this perception triggers the affected agent’s desire to deny the rival those same goods. Such distributional quagmires frame very appropriately the versions of envy that are latent in Aristotle’s moral-political thought: Does the sight of a rival’s success inspire a desire to gain more for oneself or less for one’s rival?2

The Ambiguities of Envy in Aristotle’s Moral Psychology

This ambiguity concerning envy is also present in Aristotle’s major treatments of envy in *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Rhetoric*. Envy (φιλνομον), is a vicious

---

1[αγκαταικινεται και καλειται περιπατεικόν λόγον καὶ σέβεται. Ἐν τοῖς ἐπερτίθεσιν καὶ ἐπηγείρσισιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων τραπετοις, ἐφετεροτρίκλισι, ἐντείνεται τὸ πρὸς τὸν ἐξαίρετον. ἀπὸ τοῦτο τοῦτο, ἐν τοῖς παραδότησις καὶ τοῖς παραδημάτοις, ὁ στρατηγός στενοχωσίς, διὰ τῆς σιγής, καὶ τοῦ παρατηροῦντος τῆς προσέγγισις, διὰ τῆς διαφοράς, διὰ τῆς μικροπόλεως, ἐν τοῖς παραδότησις καὶ τοῖς παραδημάτοις. Τὸν ἐπιπλήσιον καὶ τὸν τάχους καὶ τὸν παραδότησις (ἡπεῖρον στασιτοῦ) Pol 5.2 1302a35-1302b8).

extreme connected with the virtue of righteous indignation (νϒμεσιω). Aristotle treats righteous indignation as a virtue that causes its possessor to be appropriately pained by the good fortune or success of others when it is undeserved.

Again, Righteous Indignation is a mean between Envy and Malice, and these qualities are concerned with pain and pleasure felt at the fortunes of one’s neighbors. The rightfully indignant man is pained by undeserved good fortune; the envious man exceeds him and is pained by all the good fortune of others; while the malicious man so far falls short of being pained that he actually feels pleasure.

So, Aristotle treats envy as the vicious extreme where one is pained by the good fortune of others, especially when it is not undeserved.

---

1 Aristotle doesn’t develop his discussion of this moral virtue in his expanded treatment of the virtues in EN 1115b7-1138b11. This description of righteous indignation doesn’t capture all the fields of motivation associated with a virtue (e.g. how it enables one to be affected appropriately by an emotion, above and beyond a painful sensation; how it enables a desire for some good end). But his initial discussion still provides a helpful framework for understanding the nature of the vice and its motivational scope. Moreover, it remains a character state that poses a plausible contrast to the vice of envy.

2 “…indignation is being pained at the sight of good fortune that is apparently undeserved…” (…τ∫ νεμεσν λυπε⇑σψαι ⁄π⇐ τ® φαινομϒν⊗ ναϕ⇔ϖω ε⎡πραγε⇑ν...) (Rh 2.9 1387a9). “Now what is called indignation is the antithesis to pity; for the being pained at undeserved good fortune is in a manner contrary to being pained at undeserved bad fortune and arises from the same character.”

3 There are a few difficulties with simply understanding righteous indignation as a virtuous disposition that is the mean between the extremes of envy and malice. First, there is a glaring incongruity between the extreme dispositions that righteous indignation is between. Most of Aristotle’s virtues are between extreme dispositions, where for the purposes of making a coherent description, all other factors are held equal. For example, courage can be understood as a character state that enables one to be moved appropriately by the emotions of fear and confidence and driven well by its related desires under conditions of mortal danger in a noble battle. However, it would be difficult to appreciate how courage is a mean between the dispositions of cowardice and rashness, if the background conditions were shifted. Consider the implications of this example. Courage would be described under conditions of grave danger, yet cowardice would described as a state where one tends to be overly affected by fear and under affected by confidence during conditions of peace, where the affected person only perceives a mild possibility of danger. Rashness could also be described under background conditions that are more intense than grave danger, perhaps a condition of impending doom. The virtue of
Aristotle describes the motivation and object of envy as follows. “The envious man…is pained by all the good fortune of others…” 2 He continues “that is, one might envy that which one deserves but doesn’t have or that which someone else should not have. We feel envy also if we fall but a little short of having everything; which is why people in high places and prosperity feel it—they think everyone else is taking what belongs to themselves”. 3 With this in mind, let us consider a fuller account of the vice of envy in Aristotle.

Envy is a state of character where its possessor tends to be overaffected4 by the emotion of envy1 and driven by an inappropriate and excessive desire for righteous indignation is a mean between extreme dispositions that are described incongruously, along the same lines. Righteous indignation is a tendency to be appropriately displeased by the undeserved success of one’s neighbor; whereas envy is a tendency to be excessively pained, not by the undeserved success of one’s neighbor, but rather, by a success that may very well be deserved. Similarly, he presents malice as a tendency to be deficiently pained by the undeserved suffering of one’s neighbor, instead of as a dispositional deficiency that is described under the same background condition set in his description of righteous indignation. The condition that triggers the emotion and desire is crucial to an understanding of the disposition. So, it is difficult to compare fully the virtue with its extremes when all three dispositions are not presented with similar prompting conditions. Second, Aristotle doesn’t use the full range of motivations that he uses in most virtues and vices. Aristotle usually describes the emotions that the virtue appropriately enables as more than just pleasure and pain, although they always include pleasure or pain. These problems do not make Aristotle’s discussions of these dispositions unhelpful. They only pose a challenge to understanding righteous indignation as a virtuous mean. Even if objection one were granted (problem two is only a problem of underdescription), Aristotle’s account of envy as a vicious disposition could still be maintained since one might not need to know what disposition would be a corrective of a bad disposition in order to know that such a disposition is bad. Moreover, there are some emotions and desires that are always bad to have. So, the fact that there is no disposition that enables one to be affected appropriately by an inherently pathological emotion doesn’t mean that such a tendency cannot be condemned as a bad disposition. On the plausibility of vices that lack clear-cut correctives see R. Hursthouse in Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics (ed.) A. O. Rorty (California: Calif. University Press, 1980) and Virtue Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

1 See EN 2.7 1108"1-3 and Rh 2.8 1386"19-20; 2.9 1387"27-30; 2.9 1387"34-1388"2; 2.10 1388"21; 2.8 1386"19-20; 2.10 1388"17-18. 
2 [(\(\delta \phi ωνερο\rhoο\piαπαται\)) (EN 2.7 1108"1-3)]. 
3 [(και\(\alpha\)\(\sigma\)\(μ\)\(λ\)\(α\)\(λ\)\(η\)\(ε\)\(π\)\(ε\)\(π\)\(ε\)\(ι\)\(ν\) (\(δ\)\(\sigma\)\(μ\)\(ε\)\(γ\)\(ι\)\(α\)\(πρ\)\(τ\)\(τ\)\(ν\)\(τ\)\(ε\)\(ω\)\(κα\)\(\alpha\)+\(\delta\)\(τ\)\(υ\)\(ξ\)\(ο\)\(ν\)\(τ\)\(ε\)\(ω\)\(φ\)\(ω\)\(ν\)\(ε\)\(ρο\)\(ς\)\(\epsilon\)\(\epsilon\)\(σ\)\(ιν\) (\(π\)\(\nu\)\(τ\)\(ε\)\(ω\)\(κα\)\(\alpha\)+\(\delta\)\(τ\)\(υ\)\(ξ\)\(ο\)\(ν\)\(τ\)\(ε\)\(ω\)\(φ\)\(ω\)\(ν\)\(ε\)\(ρο\)\(ς\)\(\epsilon\)\(\epsilon\)\(σ\)\(ι\(ν\) (\(\eta\)\(\varepsilon\)\(\varepsilon\)\(ν\)\(θ\)\(υ\)\(ε\)\(ι\)\(ν\) (\(R\)h 2.9 1387"27-30))]. 
4 References to excess and deficiency with respect to emotion can be misleading unless significantly qualified. One important aspect of a good or bad character state is how it is affected by emotion. And Aristotle considers all vicious character states to be either deficient or excessive in some important respect. But the viciousness of being wrongly disposed to an emotion does not refer to the quantity or intensity of the emotion, as such. See, J.O. Urmson, “Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean”, Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics, ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pgs. 160-162). As Urmson clarifies, there are many times when an appropriate reaction involves very little emotion, such as when someone mispronounces one’s name as opposed to a very strong reaction if a family member were tortured. So, these are obvious cases where being appropriately affected cannot be a quantitative mean. But it is in some sense accurate to refer to an excessive or deficient reaction. Urmson stresses that what counts as an excessive or deficient reaction must always be understood primarily in reference to the character state. So, the excessive anger of the irascible...
wealth and honor under conditions where others, especially peers, apparent equals or rivals receive some greater level of wealth or honor.\(^2\)

The emotion of envy shares the general features of emotion in Aristotle. An emotional occurrence involves: 1) a sudden painful or pleasurable feeling that is 2) triggered by an image of an object that appears bad or good to the affected person. As a result the person 3) desires something that may diminish the pain or sustain the pleasure.\(^3\) In the case of the emotion of envy, there occurs a feeling of pain that is triggered by the affected person’s image of another’s good fortune, such as money, honor, glory, reputation, and property. Someone who is disposed to be affected by this emotion already desires excessive portions of honor and wealth. This person may already have much and desire

---

1 Aristotle presents envy as a vice of excess (περβλλϖν) where the person is pained by the [not undeserved] good fortune of others (EN 2.7 1108\(^b\)1-3). But, the way that the vice of envy causes one to be overaffected by anger in some way. His state is an excess because it causes him to exceed whatever would be an appropriate expression of anger in some situation. And it would be difficult to deny that the irascible person doesn’t exhibit too much anger in some sense. But the excess of the irascible agent’s reaction does not imply some precise measurement of that excess. So, it is appropriate to refer to an agent as being overaffected or underaffected by some emotion, so long as the above qualification is maintained.

2 Aristotle presents envy as an excessive desire for both goods of wealth and property as well as reputation and honor. In reference to envy as an excessive desire note: Rh 2.9 1387\(^b\)23; 2.10 1388\(^b\)1, 3-4, 14, 21,23. In reference to its object being property or wealth see, Rh 2.9 1387\(^a\)1; 2.10 1387\(^b\)27,30; 2.8 1386\(^b\)13), honor (Rh 2.10 1388\(^a\)6; 10) or honor and wealth (Rh 2.9 1387\(^b\)23; 2.10 1388\(^b\)17).

3 “To take envy next: we can see on what grounds, against what persons and in what frame of mind, we feel envy. Envy is a pain at the sight of good fortune in regard to the goods mentioned; in the case of those like themselves; and not for the sake of a man getting anything, but because of others possessing it. For those men will be envious who have, or seem to have, others equal to them. By ‘equals’ I mean equals in birth, relation, age, dispositions, reputation, and possessions”
even more in that domain or have little and simply want more than is appropriate. The occurrence of the emotion reinforces this inappropriate and excessive desire.

Envy is triggered by certain kinds of objects. According to Aristotle, the objects that typically trigger the emotion of envy are those individuals who are perceived equals in some sphere, especially those who seem near to one in time, place, age or reputation. The envious person may be especially concerned with goods that are enjoyed through activities that are particularly important to one. Moreover, when such a person possesses goods such as reputation, honor or fortune, while the affected person thinks that he deserves those same goods, it triggers envy. And envy is most likely to occur when the envied person obtains a good that puts his rival—the envious person—just behind him, especially when his obtaining it would have put him just ahead of his rival.

The rivalry that arises between perceived peers is a central feature of envy in Aristotle. One usually doesn’t envy an object that one is indifferent to or that one has little prospect of achieving. The average person doesn’t envy the Gods. The average small business owner doesn’t envy Bill Gates. A common soldier doesn’t envy Achilles, though he might envy a fellow soldier who has the chance to train alongside Achilles. Aristotle’s envy concerns perceived peers who share common ends that they each desire. “So too we compete with those who follow the same ends as ourselves: we compete with our rivals in sport or in love, and generally with those who are after the same things; and it is

---

1 The persons Aristotle has in mind may have much in different domains. Some individuals are among the highest of social status, but still grasp after any remaining source of status that would further distinguish them (Rh 2.9 1387b28). Similarly, those who are ambitious (Rh 2.9 1387b31) for a better reputation in some endeavor (Rh 2.9 1387b33) envy that reputation. Even those distinguished for wisdom may envy the reputation of being wise (Rh 2.9 1387b29-32).

2 Aristotle doesn’t rule out the possibility that one might envy someone who isn’t a perceived equal. But envy is most common due to comparisons with those who are equals or plausibly equals (Rh 2.9 1387b23-24), whereas, one never envies someone who is overwhelmingly better or worse in some sphere (Rh 2.10 1388a11-12).

3 Rh 2.10 1388a6-7.

4 Envy is especially common among those who are rivals in some competitive activity such as in sports (Rh 2.10 1388a13), vocation (Rh 2.10 1388a16), or love (Rh 2.10 1388a13).

5 Aristotle highlights goods such as wealth (Rh 2.9 1387b27-28), honor and reputation (Rh 2.10 1388a6-7), and social distinction (Rh 2.9 1387b26).

6 “So too we compete with those who follow the same ends as ourselves: we compete with our rivals in sport or in love, and generally with those who are after the same things; and it is therefore those whom we are bond to envy beyond others. Hence the saying: ‘Potter against potter

7 Rh 2.10 1388a4.
therefore those whom we are bond to envy beyond others. Hence the saying: ‘Potter against potter’. \(^1\)

But even the most basic ends of citizens are not immune to envy. The ultimate peer we have in civic life is that of our fellow citizen. For Aristotle, fellow citizens exercise their citizenship by sharing in some way in the deliberation and decision-making of the regime. But the wealth and honor that any citizen would want and make decisions about as a citizen are objects that any fellow citizen may envy. This is the envy that can plague civic life and fuel very harmful conflicts among the citizenry. This is especially the case in democratic regimes where all citizens are considered equal in some fundamental sense. This means that any citizen is within one’s perceived peer group as a citizen and therefore a valid candidate for envy. When it comes to the common ends that citizens share, no one is immune from being or engaging in envy. According to Aristotle, citizens with a standard notion of democratic equality would view the greater wealth and honor that another citizen garners through public service as an advantage that stems from their equal status as a citizen. Along these lines, the average citizen may very well envy the political influence and material advantages that a Senator Bill Gates may gain in office, while not envying the goods that stem from his stratospheric corporate status – a status which is not perceived by most citizens as that of a peer. Democratic equality can breed envy in civic life because the range of envy candidates proliferates in the mind of those who want more, but have less and see themselves as equal to nearly all those who have more. Moreover, inequality doesn’t vanish as a democratic ethos takes hold in a regime. So, one challenge for a growing democracy is that there is an ever greater supply of materially unequal citizens to envy and a more widespread democratic pretense that justifies and emboldens that envy.

Reconciling Two Versions of Democratic Envy: Envy as Self-Centered or Other-Centered?

The above features of envy seem to reinforce its ambiguity as either a self-regarding or other-regarding vice. The objects of a democratic envy have a much wider range. In this sense, envy is an equal opportunity vice, enabling its possessor to aspire to acquire nearly any desirable object within its purview. The person with the envious disposition, therefore, is inclined to desire objects that other apparent equals may have, such as greater wealth and honor. The satisfaction of the desires for these objects seem quite achievable to the envious. Along these lines, envy may drive democratic citizens to be especially

---

\(^1\)Rh 2.10 1388’11-16.
acquisitive and ambitious since there are so many ostensive equals who just happen to have more wealth and honor. Democratic envy emboldens desire to achieve a wider base of objects and cultivates concomitant beliefs that exaggerate its prospects for satisfaction. Envy is preeminently self regarding in all of these ways.

An other-regarding view of envy is far from altruistic in motivation, yet it is not concerned to gain the goods that the envied person has. This version of Aristotelian envy is concerned about the excessive goods possessed by the envied party. The excess that the envious agent perceives in the envied party is magnified by just the features of envy mentioned above. Democratic envy assumes that all citizens are equal in a very substantial sense. And one would only envy one’s apparent equal. When any person with great wealth, power or fame seems just like you and me to you and me, then there is far more inequality to resent and mobilize against. The perception of excess has much to do with the disparity between the envious agents’ expectation of a more equal distribution of goods among apparent equals and the actual inequality of goods possessed among equals. The envious disposition lends itself to this belief and so creates the conditions for perceptions of this sort when inequality inevitably occurs in democratic settings. Here the perception of others –especially rivals possessing the goods that one desires and has too little of – activates a more spiteful impulse on the part of the agent. This form of envy seeks to diminish or even deprive the envied party of the goods he has or hopes to have. This envy especially in its more vicious forms is highly other centered.

In order to reconcile the two interpretations of envy a couple distinctions are necessary. First, one must consider a particular event or circumstance that provokes envy in an agent inclined to be envious. In such a circumstance the envious agent perceives some apparent peer to possess or receive some desirable good that he himself also wants and/or doesn’t want the envied party to have. The image of this event is what triggers the pain of envy in the affected agent. The agent may very well be mistaken about what the envied party receives its status and its context. But it is the perception of that circumstance that is all important in triggering the affect. We might refer to agent’s perception of that circumstance as the immediate or proximate cause of the envious reaction.

Second, the affected agent then has a desire to achieve some end that his envious disposition inclines him to have. The envious desire is usually for the object of his envy, whether that be more honor, wealth, power, status, etc. So, the desire that occurs when the envious agent is provoked may be to gain the good that the envied party has through any number of means ranging from competition, dedication, hard work, cheating, stealing, or political mobilization and factional struggle. Similarly the more spiteful form of envy may provoke the occurrence of a desire for the end of undermining the acquisition of the envied person regardless of its impact on the one’s own acquisition. In the case the end too may be more self regarding or other regarding.
Let us now reconsider the intractable distributional conflicts that so aptly depict the problem of envy and do so in light of his treatment of envy in its dispositional and emotional features. While both interpretations seem compatible with the features of the vice of envy in *Nicomachean Ethics*, his discussion of the emotion of envy in *Rhetoric* supplies a crucial basis for harmonizing both interpretations. In his description of the emotion of envy (φψονω) he distinguishes the perceived circumstances that trigger the pain of envy and the ends for which the envious strive. The vice of envy shapes both the factionary’s reaction to envious circumstances and the acquisitive desire for ends such as wealth and honor. Aristotle description of the more spiteful, other-centered version of envy picks out the initial motivation trigger for factional struggle—a pain at the perceived success of an apparent equal, whether the envious person has any prospect for gaining the good of the envied person or whether the failure of the envied person would have benefited the envious person in any way. The other version of envy captures the desiderative aspects of the vice of envy. The envious person who organizes into a factional association may initially be motivated by the spiteful aspect of envy, but he forms factions with like-minded citizens due to his desire to gain the ends of wealth and honor -- ends that they each desire and which together as a group they are more likely to achieve.

The two accounts of envy can be reconciled in this way. The initial stimulus for the envious agent is the success of another, whereas it is the desire for the agent’s own success that translates his envy into action—factional action.
Aristotle and Brain Death: What Happens When the Master Meets Modern Medicine?

Adrianne L. McEvoy, Mansfield University of Pennsylvania

This came out of several talks I gave on campus regarding the importance of advanced directives for end of life care as well as two ethics courses (health care ethics and ethical theory) where I was trying to bring my students to an understanding of both Aristotle’s metaphysics and issues surrounding the ontological status of death.

We still carry the historical baggage of a Platonic heritage that seeks sharp essences and definite boundaries. Thus we hope to find an unambiguous “beginning of life” or “definition of death,” although nature often comes to us as irreducible continua.

Steven Jay Gould

At approximately 5:40 am on the morning of February 25, 1990, a 911 call was made: Theresa Schiavo had collapsed from cardiac arrest, which was later blamed on hypokalemia (low potassium). The paramedics arrived on the scene 12 minutes later and began aggressive resuscitation efforts. Unfortunately, her hypoxia was severe enough that she never regained full (if any) consciousness. After remaining in a coma for a little over a month, she lapsed into a vegetative state. On March 31, 2005, fifteen years after she collapsed, 41 year old Theresa, “Terri”, Schiavo died of dehydration.

According to credible neurological experts, Schiavo was in a Permanent Vegetative State (PVS). Renowned neurologist Ronald Cranford notes that her EEG from October 2002 indicates no brain activity and the CAT scans “demonstrated massive atrophy of the cerebral hemispheres, indicating irreversibility (permanency) of the patient’s clinical condition, and the EEGs showed no cerebral activity, confirming the fact that the patient was unconscious and unaware (vegetative state)” (2005, p. 365). The clinical diagnosis of PVS was confirmed with “the highest degree of medical certainty” (ibid).
To most laypersons caught up in the drama, this clinical diagnosis appeared to be in diametric opposition to the video clips, which were shown repeatedly on the news broadcasts. The clips, put together by Terri’s parents, Robert and Mary Schindler, were meant to prove to anyone watching that Terri responded meaningfully to external (especially auditory) stimuli. Indeed, if Terri were conscious, aware, and responsive it would give one pause as to whether it was appropriate for her husband to stop her artificial feeding and hydrating. A Living Will or other form of advance directive would have helped matters significantly. But, alas, there was no such document. Michael Schiavo repeatedly gave “clear and convincing” evidence (the evidentiary standard necessary in Florida) that his wife would not want to be artificially maintained in this manner. Terri’s parents, on the other hand, steadfastly argued that their daughter would never make such a request (although, strangely, they never claimed that she made the opposite request: to be kept alive through artificial measures).

At some points Cranford claims that the Schindlers used the video clips to “mislead much of the media and public” into believing that their daughter could “meaningfully and cognitively interact” with her parents and others, and thus to show that she was not in a vegetative state” (p. 369, 2005). He goes on to say: “This strategy of misinformation was extraordinarily successful because of lack of education and experience on the part of the public and media, who had no way of recognizing the typical features of someone in a vegetative state” (p. 369). While I agree that the videos did, in fact, mislead most people watching the repeated (ad nauseam) clip, I don’t think the Schindlers actually intended to mislead anyone so calling it a “strategy of misinformation” is probably taking it too far. Nevertheless, they really and truly believed that their daughter was not vegetative and was capable of some level of cognitive recovery; even worse, they mistakenly believed their daughter was consciously and emotively interacting with them. What the brief video clip, taken from over 600 minutes of videotaping, does show fits a 1990 American Medical Association report of how PVS patients respond to environmental cues. 1

Unless current neuroscience is wrong 2, the autopsy findings 3 and CAT scans

---

1 Despite an ‘alert demeanor’, observation and examination repeatedly fail to demonstrate coherent speech, comprehension of the words of examiners or attendants, or any capacity to initiate or make consistently purposeful movements. Movements are largely confined to reflex withdrawals or posturing in response to noxious or other external stimuli. Since neither visual nor auditory signals require cortical integrity to stimulate brief orienting reflexes, some vegetative patients may turn the head or dart the eyes toward a noise or moving objects. However, PVS patients neither fixate upon nor consistently follow moving objects with the eyes, nor do they show other than startle responses to loud stimuli. They blink when air movements stimulate the cornea but not in the presence of visual threats per se. “Persistent Vegetative State and the Decision to Withdraw or Withhold Life Support” JAMA Jan 19, 1990; 263 (3): 426-430. found at: http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/upload/mm/369/ceja_report_019.pdf
2 A point Alan Shewmon makes repeatedly in his later writings.
3 According to the Chief Medical Examiner, Jon Thogmartin, “Schiavo’s brain showed marked global anoxic-ischemic encephalopathy resulting in massive cerebral atrophy. Her brain weight
Aristotle and Brain Death: What Happens When the Master Meets Modern Medicine?

of Terri’s brain show conclusively that she was neither aware nor capable of emotive experience. Those parts of her brain had irreversibly atrophied.

The Schindlers were on nothing less than a crusade to keep their daughter alive. Convinced that she was conscious, aware, and capable of meaningful recovery, for years they repeatedly filed court actions against Michael Schiavo, Terri’s husband, to have him removed as guardian based on (unfounded) allegations of abuse. These legal actions began in 1994 and continued for over 10 more years, making this the longest right to die case in American law (Cranford 2005, p. 365).1 The feud, which should have stayed between Mr. Schiavo and his in-laws, was paraded in front of millions of onlookers. It was “taken to the media, the courts, the Florida legislature, Florida governor Jeb Bush, the U.S Congress, and President Bush”. Before it was over, “an event unique in American politics occurred: after more than a week of discussion, . . . Congress reconvened two days after the feeding tube was removed to consider emergency legislation designed to apply only to Terri Schiavo” and “was notable primarily for its uninformed and frenzied rhetoric . . . Congressman Dave Welden (R-Fla.) remarked that, on the basis of his 16 years of medical practice, he was able to conclude that Terri Schiavo is “not in a persistent vegetative state” [without having ever examined her]. Congressman Phil Gingery (R.-Ga.) agreed, saying “she’s very much alive”.2 Indeed, there has never been “a more extensively litigated case in the history of right to die cases in terms of the length of the entire litigation itself, and the extensive medical testimony during the elaborate evidentiary hearing of 2002, and the thorough review of this medical testimony by the appeals court” (Cranford, 2005).

The case of Terri Schiavo, much like those of Karen Ann Quinlan and Nancy Cruzan before her, provided me an opportunity to re-evaluate issues that I, for one, felt were well-settled. What I learned surprised me. In fact, in some ways it sent me stumbling right into cognitive dissonance.

[615 grams] was less than half of the expected weight. Of particular importance was the hypoxic damage and neuronal loss in her occipital lobes, which indicated cortical blindness (Medical Examiner District Six, Pasco & Pinellas Counties, Report of Autopsy, case # 5050439, Theresa Schiavo). Her remaining brain regions also show severe hypoxic injury and neuronal atrophy/loss. No areas of recent or remote traumatic injury were found. . . . Postmortem findings, including the state of the body and laboratory testing, show that she died of marked dehydration (a direct complication of the electrolyte imbalance brought about by the lack of hydration). . . . Mrs. Schiavo suffered a severe anoxic brain injury. The cause of which cannot be determined with reasonable medical certainty. The manner of death will therefore be certified as undetermined. (autopsy, pp. 35-36)” [this is relevant because throughout their ‘vigil’ the Schindlers claimed Terri could see them, and followed their movements throughout the room; a seemingly impossible task for someone who is blind].

2 Annas, p. 1712-1713 “Culture of Life Politics at the Bedside – the Case of Terri Schiavo” NEJM.

Problems surrounding conceptualization of death and the dying process are prevalent throughout medical and philosophical literature. The Schiavo case, and the public policy decisions discussed or enacted as a result of that fiasco, illustrates the importance of understanding the ontological status of death. A large part of the problem is that there is no widespread agreement as to either (1) the criteria we use to diagnose death or (2) the concepts we use to define death.

As Lynn and Cranford (1999) have pointed out, regardless as to whether we use traditional cardiopulmonary criteria, cortical criteria, or whole brain criteria, each patient has four points in time that are important in the determination that his death has occurred: T1: when the patient actually loses the critical function; T2 when the critical function is known to be lost; T3: when the loss of the critical function becomes irreversible; and, T4 when the irreversibility of the loss becomes known (p. 104). The time chosen as “the time of death” has important policy implications: if Schiavo had died at T1, when she actually lost the critical functions of her brain – and, of course this assumes that the critical function here is higher-brain function, not brain stem – then the decision to remove artificial feeding and hydration becomes moot: she’s already dead – why feed a corpse. Now, of course, this is a BIG “if”, and I have to return to it later on. But it makes my point: there need be no media fiasco, legislative action, brutal argument between family members: if she’s dead – she’s dead. The problem that would arise with Schiavo’s case is which criteria to use: cardiopulmonary, cortical, or whole brain. This is where Aristotle becomes relevant.

In his 1985 piece, “The Metaphysics of Brain Death, Persistent Vegetative State, and Dementia”, Shewmon uses a Thomistic account to give a theoretical analysis of the states in question (brain death, PVS, and dementia) a question he rightly labels as “philosophical” (as opposed to the practical, “medical” issues related to determining whether any given patient is actually in such a state - issues that Shewmon later (1987) claims inherently impossible to validate with certainty (“The probability of inevitability: the inherent impossibility of validating criteria for brain death or “irreversibility” through clinical studies”)). Shewmon writes:

According to Aristotle and St. Thomas, all existing things are what they are in virtue of two co-principles of being: prime matter (pure potency) and substantial form (specifying the essence of the thing). These constitute the substance. This, together with the accidents (properties), constitutes the actual existing thing. This conception of physical nature is called hylomorphism. In the case of living things, it is the substantial form which specifies their essence precisely as living; i.e. substantial form is the vital principle which organizes the material components into a functioning unity, which cannot be reduced to the mere sum of its parts. (p. 37) . . . Substantial forms which convey the property of vitality to matter are called by Aristotle and St. Thomas “souls”
Aristotle and Brain Death: What Happens When the Master Meets Modern Medicine?

(animae), which term is used in a broader, more technical sense than we are accustomed to in modern everyday parlance. Depending on the level of complexity of the organism, souls may be vegetative . . . animal . . . and human. . . . Although these levels of functioning are conceptually quite distinct, they are not three different souls in a human being, but one soul, which harmoniously unites the vegetative, sensitive, and spiritual levels into an individual person. When one material substance is transformed into another, a substantial change takes place. The original substantial form vanishes (reverts to the potency of prime matter) and a new one instantaneously supersedes it (is educed from the potency of prime matter). Substantial changes are brought about through a sequence of critical accidental changes. (p. 39) In a compound substance, the “virtual presence” of the more elementary substantial forms is defined as an “active potentiality” i.e., in contrast to the “passive potentiality” of prime matter to any form, the “active potentiality” of the elemental forms virtually present in a compound is responsible for the natural tendency for things to change in only certain ways, as opposed to randomly or chaotically (p. 42).

Shewmon has gradually changed his position from one that advocates some type of cortical criteria to one that sets aside entirely any brain criteria in favor of irreversible cessation of cardiopulmonary function. He’s gone back to the traditional criteria for determination of death – although now it is much more aggressive a definition because today we have the ability to maintain cardiopulmonary function for years before the body itself dies.

As Gervais (1980) notes, our decision to declare death in terms of biological events or circumstances, for example the cessation of spontaneous respiration and heart beat, is based on a number of metaphysical considerations:

The death of a person is a metaphysical event with a wide range of moral implications: it erases social ties; it radically reconstitutes individuals’ relationships, responsibilities, and rights. As a result, there is at least the pragmatic necessity to delimit, in the biological process of death, a single event or cluster of events which will serve as a signal that a particular personal existence has ended, and that the appropriate and necessary social, legal, and moral restructuring may now begin. Clearly, then, any approach to human death that allows us to speak in terms of the moment of death presupposes that one moment in the biological process of the dissolution of an organism has greater significance (for metaphysical and moral reasons) than the others (Redefining Death, p.4)

One problem inherent in choosing from one of the several current definitions of death is our inability to agree on what personhood entails. If we cannot
agree on what it means to be a person, it will be unlikely that we will agree on what it means to be a dead person.

Up until about 50 years ago, when we declared a person dead it was due to our observance that her heart and lung activity had stopped permanently. That biological activity of the organism (e.g. growth of hair follicles, finger and toe nails) continued for a considerable amount of time afterward was not relevant to determination of death. In fact, it still isn’t relevant.

Bringing Aristotle’s conception of essence into the discussion allows individuals a clearer way of determining what it means to be a person, as well as what it means to be alive. Based on what he wrote in De Anima, Physics, Metaphysics, and De Partibus Animalian, clearly it is only through the workings of the soul that we can understand the difference between a living and a non-living creature: where there is no soul, there is no life.

Of course, Aristotle never explicitly states what the criteria is for a person to be a person; we are want to find a definitive understanding of human qua human explicitly laid out in any of his works. Even De Anima doesn’t explain the nature of the human soul, as compared to nonhuman souls. Rather, the focus is on the difference between living and nonliving entities. We can infer from his discussions that he would understand a person to be a human being who is capable of self-nutrition, reproduction, appetite, sensation, imagination, and understanding – either potentially or actually. I argue from this that he would support a view of death that takes into primary consideration the complete and permanent inability for a human being to function qua human being, even though parts of that human being are still alive.

In each of his works, Aristotle treats the subject matter as a kind of science. This is true even when he discusses the practical sciences of ethics and politics. The theoretical sciences deal with knowledge pursued for the sake of its attainment. For Aristotle, in order to have true, scientific knowledge about something, it is not enough to simply know it to be true. One must also be able to explain why it is true. It is therefore essential to have an understanding of the primary principles involved in the science.

In matters of nature, he was first and foremost concerned with understanding the idea of change. Change, he says, is the actualization of the potential. It is “the fulfillment of what exists potentially, in so far as it exists potentially, is motion” (P 201a10-11). He sees four types of change: (1) change in place, (an object’s locomotion) (2) change in substance (an object’s coming to be or passing away), (3) change in quantity (an object’s increase and decrease) and (4) change in quality (P 201a10-14). If something changes, it needs to either be changed by some other object or by an inner principle of change. This inner principle of change is what differentiates the living from the non-living (P 192a6-25); it is what Aristotle later calls soul (DA 413b11-13).

Take, for example, perception. Perception has to be understood in terms of change for two reasons. First, when an animal perceives an object X, it has a change in cognitive function. This change must be assigned to some external cause, specifically the object X. That which potentially has a certain form (the
animal’s mind) is caused to go through a process of taking on that form by an external agent (object X) that already has this form (Leary, 102). It is the soul that enables these changes; the soul as the cause of such changes.

There are four different Aristotelian causes: material, formal, efficient and final (P 194b24-33 and M 1013a24-35). The material cause is the actual subject of the change, the thing present throughout the process of change that undergoes the change. The formal cause is whatever makes the object what it is, its essence, what the object has after the change that it did not have before. The efficient cause is what effectively brought about the change, the source of the change. The final cause is what the object has become after the change, the end or the “what it is for”.

A natural object, as opposed to an artifact, is an object that moves itself in one or more of the four types of change. The nature of an object is what causes it (in the sense of efficient cause) to behave in a certain way, not how the object actually behaves. From this, Aristotle holds that since it is the formal cause that makes a natural object the particular kind of object that it is, the form of a natural object can be identified with the efficient cause inherent in it (Robinson, 27). In other words, the efficient and formal causes are, in natural objects, the same.

This is important to bear in mind when reading Aristotle’s comments on soul because he equates soul with the formal cause, with the essence, of the living creature: “it is the ‘essential whatness’ (DA 412b12). Living beings and non-living beings are vastly different. Artifacts and non-living beings can have an essence of sorts but cannot have soul because they are not objects that have in themselves principles of motion and rest (DA 412b16-18). They are not alive: “what has a soul . . . displays life” (DA 413a21). Aristotle often uses examples of artifacts in explaining the four causes as well as soul, which can be misleading because artifacts have function while natural objects have behavior. It is, however, sometimes easier to understand what Aristotle means by essence or soul with analogies to artifacts provided we keep in mind that artifacts are, by their very nature, totally different from natural objects. Take for example his analogy of an eye, used to clarify what he means by soul:

If the eye, for instance, were an animal, sight would be its soul. For sight is the eye’s substance that corresponds to the account, while the eye is the matter of sight; if an eye loses its sight, it is no longer an eye, except homonymously, as a stone eye or a painted eye is. We must apply this point about the part to the whole living body; for what holds for the relation of part [of the faculty of perception] to part [the body] holds equally for the relationship of the whole [faculty of] perception to the whole perceptive body, insofar as it is perceptive. The sort of body that is potentially alive is not the one that has lost its soul but the one that has it; and the seed or fruit is potentially this sort of body. Being awake, then, is a [second] actuality, corresponding to seeing. The soul is [a first] actuality, corresponding to the [faculty of] sight . . . and the
body is potentially this. And as an eye is a pupil plus sight, so is an animal soul plus body (DA 412b19-413a3).

Any organism that has an internal potentiality and principle through which it grows and decays (changes) is living (DA 413a22-413b1). It is this internal potentiality and principle which Aristotle calls soul (DA 413b9-14). The soul is the principle of change, the end, and the essence of living beings: “it is (a) the source or origin of movement, it is (b) the end, it is (c) the essence of the whole living body” (DA 415b10).

The power of self-nutrition is the “originative power the possession of which leads us to speak of as things as living at all”, but it is the possession of the additional power of perception that leads us to speak of organisms as animals, even if they lack locomotion (DA 413b1-3). If an organism has the power of perception, it must have at least the power of touch (DA 413b4). Whatever has perception must also have desires (DA 414b1). An animal has nutritive and appetitive powers, as opposed to a plant which has only nutritive powers (DA 414b1-18). Aristotle goes to great pains in emphasizing that perception is merely potential, not actual: “the perceptive part is [what it is] by merely potential, not actual, [perceiving], and so it does not perceive [without an external object]” (DA 417a7). In other words, what is important is that the animal has the potential for perception, not that it is actually perceiving at some given time. This allows for the continuation of the soul when the animal is asleep or otherwise not actively perceiving. The animal is still a living object if it has the potential for perception, even if it is not actualizing that potential. But what does this notion of potential mean?

It is sometimes difficult to conceptualize what Aristotle means when he uses the term potential because he uses two senses of the term. Passive potential is the capability of matter to receive form; active potential is the ability of a substance to act, to do something (DA 417a22-417b1). Activity is the actualization of the potential. There are, thus, three levels: passive potential, active potential, and activity. The following example clarifies this: Adrianne can play chess in the sense that, although she has not yet been taught the rules and strategies, she has the capacity for learning the game. Potentially, Adrianne is a chess player. Now let’s say that in the past two months, Adrianne has read several books about chess, has bought a computer chess playing program, and elicited the advice of several decent chess players. In Aristotle’s terms, this represents a state of ignorance being replaced by a state of knowledge (Robinson, p. 105). Let’s say that I call her up on the telephone to inquire how she is coming along and she responds: “Great! I can play chess now”. At this stage, she has a developed state of her soul that she can exercise at her will. However, she is still only a potential chess-player because, while she claims to have learned the game, she is not in fact playing chess while we are conversing. When Adrianne is actually playing chess, she has gone from potential chess-player to actual chess-player. The playing of chess is an activity, an actualization, but it is not a change in the state of her soul. Going
from the first-level potentiality (before she learned to play chess) to the second-level potentiality (actually knowing how to play chess) is where the state of her soul changes.

If Aristotle believes that being alive means having the potential for carrying out certain activities (nutritive, appetitive) (*DA* 413a21-25), and soul is what is responsible for an organism’s being alive (*DA* 415b8), it follows that the soul is what is responsible for these activities: the soul is the nature of living things, the inner principle of change (*DA* 415b8-28). The soul is an active potentiality which has been received by specific matter (the body) which possesses the passive potential for receiving such a form; it is that which enables an organism to carry out activity (Robinson, 45). Again, the soul is the principle of change, the end, and the essence of living beings. The soul is the cause and principle of any living thing; it is the formal, efficient and final cause (*DA* 415b9-28). The body is the material cause of the living thing and the matter of a living organism seems to depend on being ensouled for it to be the matter that it is (Leary, 98 and *DA* 415b25-28). Only with both body and soul can an object be understood *qua* object and the combination is necessary to consider that object alive (*DA* 414a14-21, 416b9).

The human soul consists of the nutritive, the appetitive and the intellectual. What distinguishes men from beasts is the power of understanding and imagination in man’s soul. The “contemplation of the world” both shows the intelligibility of the world and reveals what man most truly is (Lear, 117). Man is, by his very nature, a creature that has the capacity to understand himself as well as the world around him. This capacity, as well as its actualization, is lacking in all other natural things. Acquiring knowledge as well as using this knowledge is the end of human life: “all men by nature desire to know” (*M* 980a). Man is capable of practical thought, imagination, speculation, judgment, and reasoned discourse (*DA* 427b7-15). He is a thinking thing.

In 1968, an Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School developed a new criteria for death based on neurological grounds. These criteria are the basis of what has become the medical and legal standard to diagnose death (at least in the U.S.). These criteria are called Whole Brain Death (WBD) criteria. WBD is the result of massive damage to either of the hemispheres or the encephalic truck (brain stem) resulting in the inability for the individual to carry out organic functions (Salvi, 1996). Even if the respiratory and cardiopulmonary functions can be maintained through external (mechanical) measures, when the brain stops functioning, according to WBD criteria the individual is considered dead.¹

In 1981, the President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical and Behavioral Research (USA) developed standards for the determination of brain death which, with some modifications, ¹ This point is important to remember because there have been several instances where a pregnant woman was determined dead via this WBD criterion yet her organs were maintained until such a point that her fetus was viable and removed via cesarean. At this point, the mechanical support was removed and her organs “died”.

121
are accepted worldwide.\(^1\) This acceptance is due, in part, to the realization that death can be diagnosed effectively through these standards. In other words, these very strict criteria are empirical, provable and irrefutable: once an individual is declared dead through satisfaction of WBD criteria it is not possible for her to regain the inner capacity to organically function (swallow, breathe, move, etc.) not to mention any semblance of consciousness (sensation, cognition, etc.). She cannot with current medical technology at any rate, regain these functions, even if her organs continue to function through external, mechanical measures. A healthy individual has both a neural capacity for respiration and heartbeat and the actual activity. An individual suffering damage to the brain stem, as seen in WBD, lacks this capacity. In other words, her respiration will fail not because her lungs are damaged but because her brain has lost its ability to tell the lungs to function. This is why organ donations typically come from individuals diagnosed with WBD: their organs are functional, if not completely healthy; it is the brain that is damaged beyond repair and, therefore, considered “dead”.

In higher brain, or cortical death (CD), a different part of the brain is damaged than in WBD. In CD, there is irreversible damage to the cerebral cortex although the functions of the brain stem can continue. The cortex is considered to be the area of the brain responsible for higher-order thinking, providing us the ability to engage in abstract thought.\(^2\) With CD, the individual is incapable of knowing, feeling, voluntary movement and perception/sensation. These individuals are in a permanent vegetative state (PVS). They have permanently lost that which is essential to humans:

---Unresponsiveness: The patient is completely unresponsive to external visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli and is incapable of communication in any manner.
---Absence of cerebral and brain stem function • Pupillary responses are absent, and eye movements cannot be elicited by the vestibulo-ocular reflex or by irrigating the ears with cold water. • The corneal and gag reflex are absent, and there is no facial or tongue movement.
• The limbs are flaccid, and there is no movement, although primitive withdrawal movements in response to local painful stimuli, mediated at a spinal cord level, can occur. • Apnea Test: An apnea test should be performed to ascertain that no respirations occur at a PCO2 level of at least 60 mmHg. The patient’s oxygenation should be maintained with giving 100% oxygen by a cannula inserted into endotracheal tube as the PCO2 rises. The inability to develop respiration is consistent with medullary failure. • Nature of coma must be known • Known structural disease or irreversible systemic metabolic cause that can explain the clinical picture must be ruled out (e.g., body temperature must be above 32 C to rule out hypothermia; no chance of drug intoxication or neuromuscular blockade; patient is not in shock)
---Persistence of brain dysfunction: Six hours with a confirmatory isoelectric EEG or electrocerebral silence, performed according to the technical standards of the American Electroencephalographic Society • Twelve hours without a confirmatory EEG • Twenty-four hours for anoxic brain injury without a confirmatory isoelectric EEG
---Confirmatory tests (not necessary to diagnose brain death) • EEG with no physiologic brain activity • No cerebral circulation present on angiographic examination (is the principal legal sign in many European countries) • Brain stem-evoked responses with absent function in vital brain stem structures. (See Reis)

\(^1\) The Criteria for determining WBD include the following:
---Unresponsiveness: The patient is completely unresponsive to external visual, auditory, and tactile stimuli and is incapable of communication in any manner.
---Absence of cerebral and brain stem function • Pupillary responses are absent, and eye movements cannot be elicited by the vestibulo-ocular reflex or by irrigating the ears with cold water. • The corneal and gag reflex are absent, and there is no facial or tongue movement.
• The limbs are flaccid, and there is no movement, although primitive withdrawal movements in response to local painful stimuli, mediated at a spinal cord level, can occur. • Apnea Test: An apnea test should be performed to ascertain that no respirations occur at a PCO2 level of at least 60 mmHg. The patient’s oxygenation should be maintained with giving 100% oxygen by a cannula inserted into endotracheal tube as the PCO2 rises. The inability to develop respiration is consistent with medullary failure. • Nature of coma must be known • Known structural disease or irreversible systemic metabolic cause that can explain the clinical picture must be ruled out (e.g., body temperature must be above 32 C to rule out hypothermia; no chance of drug intoxication or neuromuscular blockade; patient is not in shock)
---Persistence of brain dysfunction: Six hours with a confirmatory isoelectric EEG or electrocerebral silence, performed according to the technical standards of the American Electroencephalographic Society • Twelve hours without a confirmatory EEG • Twenty-four hours for anoxic brain injury without a confirmatory isoelectric EEG
---Confirmatory tests (not necessary to diagnose brain death) • EEG with no physiologic brain activity • No cerebral circulation present on angiographic examination (is the principal legal sign in many European countries) • Brain stem-evoked responses with absent function in vital brain stem structures. (See Reis)

\(^2\) Mahowald, 1997.
consciousness. PVS patients retain the physical capacity for many bodily functions (swallowing, limb movement), because regulation of these is found in the brain stem, but these reflexes can no longer be controlled by the individual. PVS patients must be artificially fed and hydrated, for example, because while their gag reflex is intact, they are incapable of willing themselves to swallow. PVS patients have no sensation. They have no desires. They have no cognitive function. They are often referred to as “shells” because that essence which made the individual who she was (Beth qua Beth) no longer exists. All that is left of “Beth” is a body. Many argue that the permanent lack of consciousness, as understood by the lack of potential as well as actual consciousness, ought to be the defining criteria of death rather than the stricter WBD definition. They meet strong opposition.

One of the reasons WBD definitions are preferred to CD definitions is the inherent difficulty of proving that a PVS patient will not recover. There are cases where individuals who have been comatose for many years have awakened, fully functional. It is difficult to determine what level of coma an individual is in. Patients who suffer severe brain stem damage, however, are tested by empirically valid criteria. Such criteria simply do not exist for PVS individuals: “the degree of certainty about diagnosis of this syndrome is less absolute [then WBD] . . . there is no broadly accepted set of specific medical criteria with as much clinical detail and certainty [as WBD criteria and] . . . there are no specific laboratory studies to confirm the clinical diagnosis of the permanent vegetative state”. The problem here - the part that really gets to the heart of my points - is that it isn’t entirely clear that even WBD definitions reflect the reality of the situation. As Shewmon repeatedly points out, there are individuals who have been diagnosed as dead using WBD criteria who have, nonetheless, continued to “live” on life support for as long as 14 years. Shewmon considers these patients alive.

Supporters of the WBD definition also believe that the shortage of available organs for donation maliciously underlies the desire for change. It should be pointed out that Shewmon and his supporters say the same of WBD

1 For example, see the following:

definitions. Others are concerned that a change in definition will allow the scope of “dead” to encompass individuals suffering from mild or severe dementia. The Presidential Commission rejects a CD definition advanced by individuals who define personhood as the complex of capacities and activities “such as thinking, reasoning, feeling . . . which makes the human different from, or superior to, animals or things” and who define death as “the loss of what is essential to personhood” because that definition assumes there is little, if any, agreement “about what is essential to personhood”, about what characteristics are essential to being a person.¹

When I first began researching this topic, the overwhelming evidence was that WBD criteria are strict enough so that it is impossible to misdiagnose death, either accidentally or as a means to another end (organ procurement, for example), and clearly explain the difference between a living and dead individual.² Come to find out that that isn’t exactly accurate.

Proponents of the CD definition declare WBD definitions to be too strict. Essential to supporters of a CD definition is the fact that the essence of humanity is found in the higher regions of the brain. Anencephalic infants literally lack a functional cortex; there is physically no possibility for them to develop mental capacities. In fact, they rarely survive out of the womb more than a few days or weeks. Anencephalics appear to have no potential to develop anything essential for humanity even though they are genetically human.³ PVS patients as well lack this potential. Any concern that a change in definition will somehow incorporate senile and retarded patients is unfounded because these individuals are suffering from diminished cognitive function (dementia) while anencephalics and PVS patients have a complete lack of cognitive function (amnesia).⁴ According to the CD definition, anencephalics as well as PVS patients are dead.

What would Aristotle say about all of this? First, it is clear that he would agree with the WBD definition. This is because in an individual who has irreversible brain-stem damage, the powers for self-nutrition, reproduction⁵,

² Just one example: “To epitomize, the likelihood that patients in a vegetative state will never regain consciousness is probabilistic, not absolute. The accurate diagnosis of brain death, by contrast, is absolute. Clinical Standards and Technological Confirmatory Tests in Diagnosing Brain Death”, Fred Plum. In Younger, Arnold, Shapiro: The Definition of Death: Contemporary Controversies.
³ It wasn’t until I read Shewmon’s papers that I realized that what is generally bantered around as “accepted medical science” isn’t in fact so. Shewmon points out that anencephaly and hydroencephaly are diagnoses that exist on continuums. He has met and interacted with hydroencephalic children who appear to have intentional behavior and basic cognitive functions. This evidence bodes poorly for CD supporters also, although they don’t necessarily insist on the certainty or permanence of the PVS.
⁴ Lizza, p.363.
⁵ This aspect is tricky because there have been several documented cases of pregnant women who have severe, irreversible brain-stem damage, who meet WBD criteria, that have been
perception, desire, and rational thought processes are missing. They are not simply potentials waiting to be actualized. They are non-existent in potentia. If what differentiates a living being from one which is non living is the principle of change, through any of the above powers, it is clear that individuals who meet the criteria set for WBD are not alive. The individual is matter only. There is no form, no essence, no soul. “Beth” has ceased to exist and all that remains is a body which was once hers.

That Aristotle would be sympathetic to a CD definition is a little harder to immediately see. Assuming that he would only agree with the WBD definition because of the complete lack of animating or potential in the individual, we would have to say that if some animating principle (principle of change) exists, the individual is still alive. This would rule out a CD definition because the brain-stem is still functional and the individual still has some potential for activity/change, if only of respiration, circulation and other reflexive movement. True, there is no rational or perceptive ability, but there are still nutritive and reproductive capacities.

Or are there? The “pathology” of a PVS patient (who could qualify under CD definitions) is that she cannot feed herself. The primary method of “letting die” those individuals in a PVS state is the removal of artificial food and hydration, without which, any natural thing cannot exist. That she is incapable of actualizing the power of self-nutrition could be understood as her no longer being alive. If this seems to be stretching it a bit, let us turn to the faculties of reason and appetite.

If it is the potential for rational thought that differentiates man from animal, it is clear that permanent vegetative states preclude us calling the individual “human” regardless to the material form present. This is what advocates of a personhood argument for CD advance. That the individual has no capacity for thought, feeling, or voluntary motion- no capacity for consciousness or choice, is evidence enough that the individual is no longer a person and should be considered dead. Even those who oppose CD often allow that it is morally permissible to remove PVS patients and anencephalics from artificial support. They do not believe the individual dead, but do believe the person, the “Beth as Beth” to be gone. They may not go as far as supporters of CD, but they often suggest the same result: “the soul, the essence of Beth is gone; let her body go too”.

It is possible to understand Aristotle as going a step further than this. Any object which does not have a soul is not alive. The soul of the species “human” artificially maintained so that their fetuses can reach a point of viability. One might argue that this is in some sense “reproduction” but it is a difficult argument to make. There was also a well documented case of a woman who was impregnated and gave birth while in a PVS state. Here it is clear that the reproductive functions are present and working. However, calling this state “alive” on this basis alone would mean calling any artificial womb “alive” even though, by definition, an artificial womb is not a natural (alive) object. Presumably this is what stops people from taking seriously the idea that life (especially human life) is merely a biological and chemical process.
is the first-level actuality of the powers of self-nutrition, perception, and intellect. If an object does not have one of these powers, for Aristotle, it is not human. PVS patients and anencephalic infants are not members of the species “human” because they do not have the defining characteristics of “human”. It is neither human \textit{qua} human nor alive \textit{qua} human. This is a stronger stance than the CD proponents suggest because Aristotle would not be concerned with when the individual ceases. He would be concerned with the movements of potentiality to actuality; it is more than there being no actuality- there is not even a potential. As such, neither would be the proper subject to understand the commonalities of man. In cases of WBD, they are not alive because they are not manifesting the potential for actual soul. In cases of CD, they are still missing this potential to actualize. Whereas WBD is a broader definition, Aristotle would agree that CD definitions are acceptable: “The sort of body that is potentially alive is not the one that has lost its soul but the one that has it” \textit{(DA 412b19)}.

So what would Aristotle Say about Schiavo?

Based on the overwhelming empirical evidence, including the autopsy report and scans of her decomposing brain, Schiavo was in a permanently vegetative state. Lacking the means to re-grow her brain cells, which literally liquefied in some places, it isn’t medically possible to “bring her back”. Nor is it possible, based on what today’s medical science evidences, that she had any semblance of consciousness. The Schindlers’ claim that she could meaningfully – intentionally – interact with her parents and others is simply false. Based on this evidence – and Aristotle was big on empirical evidence – the rational part of Shiavo’s soul is gone. That which made her human, prior to her collapse in 1990, ceased to exist – potentially or actually. Schiavo’s body was clearly still alive, although one might argue that the inner principle of change was sustained by external interference, but that which made her Terry – that which made her human – had died somewhere along the way. Her material substance had changed: Terry \textit{qua} Terry – \textit{qua} human – was dead, perhaps long dead. All that was left was a living shell that carried her name.
CHAPTER NINE

The Providential Tourist: Epictetus on How a Stoic Travels

William O. Stephens, Creighton University

Macon Leary is the title character of Anne Tyler’s 1985 novel *The Accidental Tourist*. Macon writes guidebooks for people forced to travel for business. The irony of his vocation is that, like his readers, Macon hates to travel. So in contrast to the deliberate tourism of those eager to explore the distinctive flavors, smells, sights, sounds, and geography of exotic cities and foreign countries, and equally eager to meet the unfamiliar people of those places, Macon’s tourism is accidental. His goal is to insulate himself as much as he can from the unusual and alien facets of the places he is forced to visit. The concern Macon and his readers share is how to pretend they had never left home. By methodically packing only essential items and seeking out only familiar food, beverages, amenities, and surroundings amidst foreign cities, Macon determines to spin himself inside a solitary cocoon of sameness. The logo on the cover of his guidebooks is a winged armchair. The accidental tourist travels clinging to the comforting illusion of never leaving his living room. Macon’s upbringing greatly influenced his adult attitude toward travel. He and his three siblings were moved around a great deal as children, so they never acquired a fixed point of reference. As a result, they all suffered from geographic dyslexia; they “wandered forever in a fog—adrift upon the planet, helpless, praying that just by luck [they] might stumble across [their] destination”.

In the ancient world of the first century C.E. land and sea travel each carried risks. Sea voyages in the winter were considered exceptional and

---

2 Tyler, 10.
3 One medium gray suit for all occasions and to hide dirt, a minimum of clothing, travel-size packets of spot remover, deodorant, shoe polish, detergent (so as to avoid falling into the hands of foreign laundries), a book to read (so as to avoid conversation with others), all fitting into a single carry-on bag (since checking luggage is asking for trouble) (Tyler, 21).
4 Tyler, 9.
5 Macon approves of the experience of planes, for example, because you couldn’t tell you were moving and so you could pretend you were sitting safe at home (Tyler, 26).
6 Tyler, 106.
dangerous.\footnote{Skeel, Caroline A. J. \textit{Travel in the first century after Christ, with special reference to Asia Minor.} Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901: 93; Casson, Lionel. \textit{Travel in the Ancient World.} Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994: 149–150.} Even in the summer seafarers were subject to storms that blew them off course, violent winds that stalled progress, and shipwreck.\footnote{Skeel, 94.} Piracy flourished in distant seas, but also occurred occasionally in the Mediterranean.\footnote{Skeel, 97–99.}

On land, brigands raided caravans in mountainous or remote areas\footnote{Skeel, 71 and Casson, 149. In \textit{Discourses} 3.13.9 Epictetus comments on the safety provided by Caesar, where there is no large scale brigandage (\textit{lēistēria megala}) or piracy, thus allowing travel by land at any hour and sailing from dawn to dusk. In 3.24.28–29, by contrast, he remarks that it is routine for someone to be waylaid by a brigand or for journeys by land or sea to involve winds and all kinds of dangers.} and sometimes assaulted or murdered the hapless. All such accidents, it seems plausible to think, gave ancient travelers cause to feel as anxious and defenseless as Tyler’s fictional character Macon Leary.

Interestingly, two features of Macon Leary’s philosophy of travel resemble the ancient philosophy of Stoicism. First, Macon’s goal is to attain and preserve \textit{calmness}. Second, he focuses his concern on those aspects of his travel that he thinks he can \textit{control}. But the aspects Macon expends so much energy on are all features of his external environment.\footnote{“Life was so full of things you couldn’t do anything about; you had to avert what you could” (Tyler, 15).} The calmness that Macon strives to protect by preserving the familiar elements of his daily routine while traveling is doomed to crumble, however, since his environment is ultimately and necessarily beyond his control. Thus travelers like Macon are only pseudo-Stoics because they are in reality “anxious and defenseless”\footnote{Tyler, 83.} afloat upon the sea of contingencies and uncertainties of the external world they traverse. The accidental tourist\footnote{Montiglio, Silvia, \textit{Wandering in Ancient Greek Culture.} Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005: 198 interestingly describes the wanderer Dio Chrysostom as an “accidental philosopher” because others, not knowing what to make of him, took him to be a philosopher. Moreover, like Macon Leary, Dio is no Stoic.} has not learned that the only reliable serenity comes entirely from within, derived from one’s own mental discipline, virtue of character, and wisdom. Wisdom about what is truly up to us and what is not, about what is good, what is evil, and what is indifferent, about the happy life and the life of misery, is the special possession of the providential tourist. The providential tourist is the Stoic traveler.

Is anxiety about the uncertainties and hazards of travel inevitable? Can anxiety about travel be overcome? What judgments guide decisions to travel or not to travel? Is tourism justified? How does travel fit into the good life? My task in this essay is to sketch answers to these questions by reconstructing a philosophy of travel from the first century C.E. lectures of the masterful Stoic teacher Epictetus.
Religious festivals and athletic competitions attracted pilgrims and tourists in the ancient world. In discourse 1.6 Epictetus addresses a student who is eager to see the famous gold and ivory statue of Zeus at Olympia fashioned by the artist Pheidias.

[23] But you travel to Olympia to behold the work of Pheidias, and you each regard it as a misfortune to die without seeing such sights. [24] But when there is no need to travel at all, and where you are already, and Zeus is present in his works—will you not desire to contemplate these things and understand them? [25] Will you never perceive either who you are, or for what you have been born, or the purpose for which this vision has been given to you?

From the Stoic’s perspective, the entire natural world is a spectacle worthy of study and admiration. The earth, the sky, and all of nature’s wonders in between provide those who are circumspect with plenty to see and appreciate. Epictetus urges the fellow who is dying to travel far to eye glitzy statuary to recognize that he was not born and given vision for the purpose of being entertained at a remote tourist destination. Even the most impressive man-made artifacts of gold and ivory pale in comparison with natural wonders imbued with divine craftsmanship. Epictetus’ interlocutor replies with the complaint that some unpleasant and difficult things happen in life. Epictetus responds:

[26] And don’t they happen in Olympia? Don’t you grow hot? Aren’t you crowded? Don’t you bathe poorly? Don’t you get soaked when it rains? Don’t you have your fill of noise and shouting, and other discomforts? [27] But I imagine that, setting all this beside the value of the spectacle, you endure and put up with it.

So if the determined sightseer does travel all the way to Olympia, then he ought to appreciate the spectacle of the artwork and tolerate the discomforts of the tourist destination. If the trip is judged to be worth the trouble, then the Stoic takes the hassles in stride, preserving his equanimity without complaint.

A vacation can be defined as an escape from the daily grind of one’s workplace or home to pursue pleasure, either in the form of entertainment, relaxation, or both. The Stoic does not need a vacation because he is content with the sights all around him. As such he needs no escape from his daily

---

1 Casson, 147 identifies six basic motives for Romans to travel: (1) business, either one’s own or the government’s, (2) health, (3) pilgrimage to an oracle or shrine, (4) to attend well-known festivals, (5) holiday vacation (for the wealthy) from town to the shore or the mountains and back, and (6) in a very few cases, to see the world.

routine. He perceives in the sights before him orderliness and good management, and he understands that his power of vision is to be used for the very purpose of detecting this providential governance. Contemplating the natural marvels within his immediate ambit is entirely up to him. The Stoic does not yearn to glimpse what lies beyond the horizon of his prohairesis (volition). Non-Stoics, in contrast, desire many things that are not solely up to them to get and keep.

Remember that it is not only a desire for riches and power that makes you abject and subservient to others, but also a desire for quiet and leisure, and travel and learning. For the value you place on an external object, whatever it may be, makes you subservient to another (4.4.1).

By desiring to possess external objects (e.g. riches, power) or to control circumstances beyond his control (e.g. quiet, leisure) the non-Stoic enslaves himself to those who have power over those externals. In contrast, by focusing on matters completely within his power—having certain kinds of desires—the Stoic enjoys mental freedom and self-sufficiency.

Which desires secure the Stoic a free and peaceful mind? Just as the Stoic does not desire sightseeing tours, neither does he resist traveling when it is required. Where one is, after all, is not completely within one’s power. In discourse 4.4 Epictetus cites with approval the willingness of Socrates to be sent on campaign and leave Athens. Socrates was too wise to set his heart on leisurely conversations with young men in Athens when military service required him to leave his polis. He was content to follow the will of god. Thus Epictetus invokes the saying of Cleanthes:

[34] ‘Lead me, Zeus; and thou, O Destiny’. Is it your will that I should go to Rome? Off to Rome. To Gyara? Off to Gyara. To Athens? Off to Athens. To prison? Off to prison. [35] If you once say, ‘When can one get to Athens?’, you are undone. This desire, if it be unfulfilled, must necessarily render you disappointed, and if fulfilled, vain about something that should not elate you: then again, if you are hindered, you incur misfortune, by falling into something that you do not wish. …[45] Mindful of this, rejoice in what you have, and be contented with what the moment brings…[48] If you are brought up to reason in such a way, how can you enquire any longer as to where you will be happy, and where you will please god? Are men not equally far from god wherever they are? And wherever they are, do they not equally behold what comes to pass?

The Stoic message is that wherever one travels in the cosmos, one can be happy and please god. The Stoic does not make himself anxious by anticipating what his destination will be. Nor does he fret about when he will get there. Confidence that Zeus determines his destination and the time of his
arrival allows the Stoic to rejoice in what each moment brings on each step of his journey. Zeus pilots the Stoic on his trip.

In discourse 2.7 Epictetus repeats the visual simile to explicate the importance of making good use of the impressions (phantasiai) that come our way rather than wishing to see some things rather than others. He cautions approaching diviners with either desire for or aversion to a particular outcome.

[10] What should we do, then? We should come to them without desire or aversion, just as a traveler asks somebody he meets which of two roads to take, without having any particular desire to travel on the right-hand road rather than the left; for he does not wish to travel on one of them in particular, but on the one that will lead him where he wants to go. [11] It is in this way also that we should approach god as a guide, just as we make use of our eyes, not calling on them to show us things of one kind rather than another, but accepting the impressions of whatever they display to us.

The Stoic traveler is as indifferent to the route he takes as he is to his destination and time of arrival. Understanding this is ingredient to approaching god as a guide. Yet here a problem arises. If the Stoic is content to go wherever Zeus leads him, and he is indifferent to the route, the destination, and the time of arrival, then how and when does he set out? He wishes only to go wherever it pleases Zeus. But how does the Stoic figure out when and where Zeus wills him to travel?

The beginning of an answer to this question is found in discourse 3.24. This discourse requires extensive exegesis. Its principal aim is for Epictetus to show that his students should not allow what is contrary to nature for someone else to become their own evil. His interlocutor has parted from somebody who is upset by the departure. Judging such a departure to be upsetting is contrary to nature. Epictetus asks his interlocutor:

[4] And why did he consider what was not his own to be his own? Why did he not reflect, while he was pleased at seeing you, that you are mortal, that you are liable to go on a journey? Thus he is simply paying the penalty for his own foolishness. [5] But to what purpose or for what cause are you yourself lamenting? Have you too failed to study these things? But, like women of no worth, did you rejoice in all the things you delighted in, the places, the persons, the conversations, as if they were to last for ever? And now you sit crying because you do not see the same people, nor live in the same place.

The stern reminder is that the grieving friend is suffering from his own foolish judgment. His grief is therefore self-imposed. Epictetus’ interlocutor repeats his friend’s foolishness by judging another’s (self-inflicted) grief to be his own evil. Epictetus can tell that his interlocutor is just as upset by being parted from
his friend as the friend is. So why does Epictetus seem harder on his student than on the other fellow? His student has heard Epictetus many times teach the importance of distinguishing between what is one’s own and what is not, and not making the mistake of wanting the latter. The student of Stoicism ought to know better than to duplicate the foolish judgment of another. That is why Epictetus is tough on his student for having failed to remember this vital lesson. His student foolishly believed his enjoyment of certain people and places would not end.

The berating of the foolish student continues. Since the foolish judgment is entirely of his own making, the student bears full responsibility for his resulting misery.

[6] Indeed, you deserve to be so affected, and thus to become more wretched than ravens or crows, which, without groaning or longing for their former home, can fly where they will, build their nests in another place, and cross the seas. [7] ‘Yes, but they react in that way because of their want of reason’. Was reason then given us by the gods to bring us unhappiness and misery, to make us live our lives in wretchedness and lamentation?

Epictetus insists that the power of reason enables human beings to be at least as happy as ravens and crows, who are never homesick and relocate without distress. Notice that it is not wings that make such birds capable of traveling and establishing new homes without misery. They can do so even lacking the degree of reason human beings possess. It is their nature as animals that migrate freely and without anguish.\(^1\) Nature has similarly made human beings animals that locomote.

[8] Or should everyone be undying, and never leave their homes but remain rooted to a spot like plants? And, if any one of our friends should leave his home, should we sit and cry, and when he comes back, should we dance and clap our hands like children? [9] Shall we never wean ourselves, and remember what we have heard from the philosophers [10] (unless we listened to them simply as weavers of tales): that the world is one great city, and the substance out of which it is formed is single, and there must necessarily be a cycle of change, in which one thing gives way to another, and some things are destroyed and others come into being, and some things remain where they were and others are moved.

\(^1\) Montiglio, 212 thinks that in 3.24.6 Epictetus represents migratory birds as the ideal of freedom, since they can choose to fly (wander) wherever they want but we have no such freedom. This misunderstands Epictetus’ conception of real freedom, which is the internal mental disposition of desiring only what is in one’s power always to achieve, not the physical ability to move about in space unhindered.
Women of no worth (ta gunaia taoudenos axia) wrongly believe their enjoyment of people and places will last forever (3.24.5). Children get overly excited when reunited with friends (3.24.8). The sensible adult, in contrast to such women and children, has taken to heart the teaching of the Stoic philosophers that we all inhabit a single cosmopolis. Changes within this one cosmopolis include day and night, four seasons, coming to be, passing away, and movement. From the perspective of this Heraclitean cosmology, travel is never worrisome, because wherever one ventures, one remains at home within the cosmos. The Stoic traveler cannot be alienated from the cosmic city that embraces all earthly locales. The Stoic cosmopolitēs can never become lost.¹ Cosmopolitanism also explains why exile is no evil for the Stoic. Banishment from a particular earthly municipality in no way unsettles his residence in the cosmic city.²

Not only does the idea of the cosmopolis provide geographical comfort to the Stoic traveler, it also provides solidarity among its residents. Discourse 3.24 continues:

[11] And the world is full of friends, first the gods,³ then also human beings, who are by nature made akin (oikeiomenōn) to each other; and some must remain with one another and others depart, and we should rejoice in those who are with us, and not be grieved at those who depart. [12] Humankind, besides possessing a natural greatness of mind and contempt for things outside the sphere of choice, is formed not to be rooted or attached to the earth, but to go at different times to different places, sometimes on urgent business, and sometimes for the sake of the spectacle.

The gods are the kind of friends that can accompany the Stoic traveler everywhere. So the rhetorical query in 4.4.48 about human beings being equally far from god wherever they are can, in light of 3.24.11, be reconceived as the invitation to the Stoic cosmopolitēs to keep the gods equally close wherever he goes. The gods are the only friends whose companionship can be ubiquitous and at all times within one’s reach. But this is not the only reason why Epictetus judges the gods to constitute the primary circle of friends.

Consider the following passage from the longest of all the extant discourses. Its topic is freedom. Epictetus has argued that to be free is to live as one wills, without restraint, without hindrance, without frustration of one’s desires, and without falling into one’s aversions. Consequently, those who are unhappy, miserable, or grieving are not free. They lack the knowledge that would free them from being captive to the desires that cause their misery. This

¹ For a discussion of what “getting lost” means in the relationship between wandering and knowledge for Odysseus and Dio Chrysostom, see Montiglio, 202 and ch. 3.
² See Disc. 2.6.20–25. The same holds for prison.
³ In Disc. 4.3.9 Epictetus urges the modest and self-respecting man to say “I am a free man and a friend of god” (eleutheros gar eimi kai philos tou theou).
is the knowledge of what is up to us and what is not. Diligently limiting one’s concern to what is up to oneself, one’s assent and decisions, secures freedom.

[4.1.91] This is also the way the more cautious of travelers act. One of them has heard that the road is beset with robbers; he does not venture to set out alone, but waits for the retinue of an ambassador or quaestor or proconsul, and, attaching himself to their company, goes along in safety. [92] Likewise in this world does the wise man (ho phronimos) act. Many are the gangs of robbers, and tyrants, storms, tribulations, and occasions to lose the things we most value. [93] Where can someone flee for refuge? (he asks himself) How can he escape unrobbed? What retinue shall he wait for to make his way through safely? To whom shall he attach himself? [94] To some rich man or proconsul? And what good does that do me? He himself is stripped, groans, laments. And what if my fellow-traveler himself should turn against me and rob me? What shall I do?… [97] Is it impossible to find a fellow-traveler who is safe, trustworthy, strong, and incapable of treachery? [98] He thinks things over in this way and realizes that, if he attaches himself to god, he will journey along safely. [99] – ‘How do you mean, attach himself?’ So that whatever god wills, he wills too, and what god does not will, he does not will either. [100] ‘How, then, can this be achieved?’ – Why, how otherwise than by considering god’s purposes and his governance? What has he given to me to be my own and subject to my own authority? What has he reserved for himself? He has given me whatever lies within the sphere of choice (ta prohairetika), and made that over to me free from all hindrance and restraint.

The gods are safe, trustworthy, strong, and incapable of treachery, and so their reliability as fellow-travelers is total. Human beings remain fallible, frail, and fickle, and thus they fall short of such perfect fidelity. Their perfect fidelity is thus the second reason why the gods are counted as the first group of friends.

This is not to suggest, however, that Epictetus generally distrusts people. To the contrary, social oikeiosis knits all human beings together into a second community of friends (3.24.11). Epictetus’ belief in the beneficial power of reason is expressed in his teaching that the Stoic should rejoice with those people who are present without grieving when others depart. Unlike the ravens and crows that do not miss their abandoned nests—perhaps because they either cannot or do not remember them—human memory, fortified by a healthy, reasoned belief in cosmopolitanism, enables us to remember absent friends while judging the travels that separate them from us as inevitable and not regrettable. The rational Stoic can celebrate with whatever company he has, and is content with no human company at all.1 Strangers encountered along a

---

1 See Disc. 3.13.1–6 where Epictetus defines desolation (erêmia) as the condition of being bereft of help and vulnerable to injury rather than the condition of being alone. Stoics must
journey should not be feared as threats, but welcomed as friends. Stoic cosmopolitanism thus precludes xenophobia, racism, and ethnic or cultural provincialism.

Now the problem raised above concerning how the Stoic can determine Zeus’ will about when and where he should travel can be addressed. What calls the Stoic to relocate to a new polis, to take a trip and return, or to stay put? Analysis of the texts examined reveal five factors that determine travel. First, the Stoic’s role as friend to the gods or to human beings.¹ Second, obligations arising from his familial role or roles. Third, obligations arising from his social, civic, or professional roles. Fourth, the need to tend his own mundane affairs. Fifth, acting the role of an intelligent cosmic spectator. Let us explore each in turn.

Friendships provide the Stoic with reason to travel or stay put. But what kind of trip would be necessitated by friendship with the gods? They certainly need no one’s help. Epictetus considers the special vocation of the Cynic to be a sort of lifelong journey for the sake of one’s friendship with the gods. Sent by Zeus as part messenger and part scout for human beings (3.22.23–25), the Cynic’s mission is extraordinarily demanding for the many reasons Epictetus explains to his students. The point of particular relevance here is that it is the only role Epictetus discusses that requires constant travel. The rigors of the Cynic’s calling make it the wrong choice for nearly everyone, including the Stoic.² The student willing to undergo the tough training (askēsis) of Stoicism need not also live without family, friends, spouse, children, fellow citizens, public offices, or income.

The friendship of human beings, on the other hand, is a common occasion for travel. Epictetus explicitly rejects divination because many use it to neglect many of their responsibilities. He clearly thinks there are circumstances when it is necessary to risk one’s life for one’s friend, and circumstances when one ought to die for one’s friend (2.7.1–3). Though Epictetus does not provide in this discourse an example of a circumstance in which one must risk one’s life for a friend, he does cite the example of Maximus sailing all the way to Cassiope during the winter with this son, in order to see him on his way (3.7.3).³ If a father ought to accompany his son on a risky sea voyage, it stands to reason that a similar occasion would call for someone to travel with his friend. So just as one’s friendships with other people can warrant travel, so too can one’s familial responsibilities.

Notice that being and acting as a friend and being a father, son, or brother and acting accordingly are examples of social roles that carry with them clear obligations and motivations.⁴ Epictetus uses a military simile to illustrate

---

¹ Cf. Disc. 1.1.16–17; 2.5.9–12.
² See Montiglio, ch. 8 and ch. 9, 204–213.
³ As noted above (Skeel 93; Casson 149–150), sea voyages in winter were especially dangerous.
⁴ On obligations (kathēkonta) being measured by social relationships (skheseis) see Ench. 30.
other roles that guide conduct. He says that the business of life is like a campaign (strateia). Consequently, one must be ready to perform whatever task one is assigned, including travel, since it is not possible for all to stay in the same place, nor is it better (3.24.31). “Everyone’s life is a kind of campaign, and a long and complicated one. You must observe the character of a soldier and perform each act at the bidding of the general” (3.24.34; cf. Ench. 17). One reason that our lives are complicated is that we each have multiple roles at any one time and different, shifting sets of roles over the course of our lives. These multiple roles often enough compete by pulling us in different trajectories of action. Thus it is a serious and ongoing challenge for us as agents to manage and balance the weights of these competing roles appropriately. Determining when one course of action dictated by one role must be postponed or even replaced by another course of action dictated by another role requires careful adjudication and deliberation. Indeed, Epictetus seems to hint that juggling our various roles at times requires us to subordinate some to others when he remarks that the affairs of one’s household require little time, and most of the time one has to be away commanding, being commanded, serving some official, serving in the field, or sitting as a judge (3.24.36). So although attending to the affairs of one’s household (oikonomein) takes little time, it nevertheless would seem to count as a distinct (fourth) type of justification for travel.

One could complain that in speaking of life as like a campaign in which we ought to act as good soldiers by obediently performing each task as it is assigned to us by the general, Epictetus is again appealing to Zeus’ will, and so we return to the problem of how confidently to discern Zeus’ commands to us. Indeed, this aspect of the simile suggests that acting out our social, civic, and professional roles is in fact at the same time being friends to the gods. By occupying a wider range of public, civic, and military offices than the Cynic, Stoics dutifully obey their divine general no less than the divine messenger-scout the Cynic does. But each new role emerges from a pre-existing web of prior roles and relationships. Consequently figuring out what tasks we are “assigned” turns out not to be some kind of mysterious process of divination. Rather, we can take stock of our strengths, talents, and natural abilities and make a sensible judgment about whether we are suited to a particular task, role, or position.¹ Self-knowledge of this kind is not difficult to achieve, and so selecting tasks that match our abilities is as much a process of canny self-assignment as it is a discernment of Zeus’ commands. Zeus’ will is written plainly enough in what nature displays to our observation.

The fifth justification for travel is to be an intelligent cosmic spectator. Returning to 1.6.23–27, we can understand that a trip to Olympia to behold

¹ Disc. 3.15 is instructive here. When considering whether to undertake some task or project, Epictetus urges his students to consider (1) the practices involved in the enterprise, (2) the sacrifices that must be made to engage in those practices, and (3) one’s own natural abilities to succeed in those practices. Specifically, he notes that few have the talent for oratory of a Euphrates, and few have the burly physique of wrestlers.
Pheidias’ famous statue of Zeus is not in itself illicit, so long as it is undertaken with due caution and the right (Stoic) motive. The right motive is to behold and appreciate the wondrous, enduring spectacle of Zeus’ cosmos as a whole from the perspective of any one of its local parts. The wrong motive would be to want to gawk at a flashy, cunningly crafted statue with the false belief that such an impermanent artifact, wrought by human hands, remotely approaches the beauty, grandeur, or wise governance of Nature. If beholding Pheidias’ work of art reminds the Stoic spectator of the providential splendor of Zeus’ crafted cosmos, then this kind of sightseeing trip is legitimate.

Identification and analysis of these five reasons to travel establish a substantial basis for understanding how travel fits into the Stoic account of the good life, that is, the life in accordance with nature, reason, and virtue. But it would be misleading to think that Epictetus considers travel simply as one activity among many, and of no greater significance than the others, that occupy a Stoic’s life. A deeper significance to one of Epictetus’ travel similes emerges from the next set of texts.

Consider the following text in which Epictetus discusses choosing among things of value. He notes that externals can be powerful distractions that deflect the Stoic from the destinations to which his roles direct him.

[2.23.35] We ought, for instance, to take care of our eyes also, but not as the highest thing, but only on account of the highest; because that will not preserve its own nature unless it uses the eyes with reason and chooses some things rather than others. [36] What is the usual practice, then? People behave like a traveler, who, returning to his own country, comes across a good inn on the road, and because the inn pleases him, remains there. [37] Have you forgotten your intention, man? You were not traveling to this place, but only through it. ‘But this is a fine inn’. And how many other fine inns are there, and how many pleasant meadows? But only to be passed through on the way. [38] Your business is the other thing; to return to your country, to relieve the anxieties of your family, to perform the duties of a citizen, to marry, to have children, and to hold public office. [39] For you have not, I think, come into the world to pick out the most charming places, but to live and act in the place where you were born, and of which you have been appointed a citizen.

Montiglio interprets this passage as follows: “Since we have no control over the journey and the journey has no otherworldly aim…, we should not have any intended destination other than our internal disposition, which, apart from suicide, is the only controllable goal of the journey: not where to travel but how to travel. Indeed, Epictetus identifies Odysseus’s ‘home’ as the right mental disposition. The man who makes progress is a traveler who uses all the facilities that he finds along the way for the sake of the moral purpose, by
reaching which he returns to his ‘native country’ (2.23.38)”.¹ Montiglio describes the right mental disposition as the Stoic’s destination, and if we construe ‘destination’ as a metaphor for goal, then this claim is accurate enough.² However, she oversteps by plumping a symbolic interpretation of pa/tra that is not supported by the text in 2.23.38–39. Epictetus explicitly states that the prescribed task (to prokeimenon) is to return to one’s country, help one’s family, perform the duties of a citizen, marry, have children, and hold office. Fulfilling these familial, civic, and public roles at one’s city of birth is clearly the concrete manifestation of the virtuous mental disposition of the Stoic traveler. Montiglio also errs in collapsing the Stoic’s reasons to travel or stay put with Epictetus’ complex account of when choosing to depart from life is and is not justified.

Many of Epictetus’ students, we should remember, are also travelers away from their homes in Rome. So this text also serves to remind them that after receiving their education in Stoicism at Epictetus’ school in Nicopolis, they must return to their homes and carry out their familial and civic responsibilities. Their purpose in leaving their homes in the first place was to remedy their pathologies of irrational judgments, false beliefs, and frustration-causing desires for things beyond their control by leaving behind the old habits at home that produced these pathologies.

³[3.16.11] It is for this reason that philosophers even advise us to leave our country, because old habits distract us, and prevent us from beginning to develop new ones…. [12] Thus physicians send patients with chronic disorders to a different place and a different climate; and rightly so. [13] And you also should adopt different habits. Fix your opinions, and exercise yourself in them.

Epictetus’ school is a hospital for his students’ philosophical therapy. Their Stoic training in new, healthy habits of thought frees their minds of disturbances and equips them to help their parents and fellow citizens at home (3.21.5–9).

The simile of travelers at an inn (pandokeion) quoted above (2.23.36–37) is repeated several times in the Discourses because it serves as a powerful lesson in Epictetus’ pedagogy. Epictetus uses this simile to illustrate how his students ought to think about all externals in their lives, including their loved ones.

Never say about anything, ‘I have lost it’; but rather ‘I have given it back’. Is your child dead? It is given back. Is your wife dead? She is given back. Is your farm taken away? Well, that also is given back. ‘But the person who took it was bad’. And does it matter to you through

¹ Montiglio, 209.
² For her insightful discussion of Epictetus’ celebration of Heracles and Odysseus for their inimitable wanderings, coupled with his view that Stoics are too modest to set themselves up as divine overseers of the deeds of others as Cynics do, see Montiglio chs. 8 and 9.
what means the giver demanded it back? For so long as he gives it to you, take care of it; but as something that is not your own, as travelers treat an inn (Ench. 11; cf. Disc. 4.1.107).

Since our family members are with us week after week and month after month, we foolishly come to expect that they will continue to be with us for years to come. This expectation is pernicious, however, because it typically leads to the further belief that the people closest to us belong to us as ours. Epictetus wants to cure his students of this false and harmful belief. One’s own beliefs, judgments, intentions, decisions, and desires are the things truly one’s own because only such internals are by their very nature always and completely within one’s power. In sharp contrast, one’s possessions, one’s body,1 and other people are externals that one can never possess and so never lose. If, when, and how such externals come into our lives is essentially not up to us, as are when and how such externals are ‘given back’. Externals are not and cannot be constituents of one’s psychic, volitional life, so they are not and cannot be elements of one’s self-identity. That is why Epictetus urges that we take care of all such externals as things that are on temporary loan to us, as travelers treat an inn. Travelers are free to enjoy the amenities of their inn fully, so long as their unbridled enjoyment is coupled with the clear realization that those amenities will be returned to the inn-keeper.2

While the travelers at an inn simile in Ench. 11 invites reflection on the mortality of beloved others, Epictetus employs a naval metaphor to invite reflection on one’s mortality.

When you are on a voyage, and the ship is at anchor, if you go ashore to get water you may pick up some small shellfish or vegetable on your way, but your thoughts should be fixed on the ship, and you should look back constantly in case the captain should call; and, if he calls, you must cast all these things aside, if you want to avoid being thrown into the vessel with your legs bound like the sheep. This is the case in life also: if, instead of a vegetable or a shellfish, a wife or a child is granted you, this need not hinder you; but if the captain calls, leave all these things and run to the ship without even looking back. And if you are old, never wander far from the ship, so that when the call comes, you will not be left behind. (Ench. 7)

The common theme in both of these last two texts is that if one is granted a wife or child, one is not thereby hindered. Unhindered living here means wisely remembering that people are temporary (mortal) gifts in our own mortal lives, they do not belong us, and we should love them on those terms.

---

1 See Disc. 1.24.14.
2 For details on Roman inns of the time, see Casson, 185.
The kind of emotional detachment from loved ones urged by Epictetus is one of the most difficult aspects of his Stoicism for us moderns to accept. We may, after all, be disinclined to believe in divine providence. We may even doubt that there is a ‘captain’. Is Epictetus’ philosophy of travel practicable if our scientific views of cosmology and evolution undermine belief in a providential deity? A final text from the Discourses can shed light on this concern.

[2.18.29] Remember god, call upon him to help you and stand by your side, just as voyagers in a storm call upon the Dioscuri. For what storm is greater than that stirred up by powerful impressions that unseat reason? As for the storm itself, what else is it but an impression (phantasia)? [30] To prove this, just take away the fear of death, and then bring on as much thunder and lightning as you please, and you will realize how great is the calm, how fair the weather, in your ruling principle (hēgemonikōi).

Epictetus was confident that reason had the power to dispel false beliefs, foolish judgments, and groundless fears, thereby equipping the Stoic traveler with peace of mind (hēgemonikon) amidst the storm of uncertainties of life. But whereas Epictetus also believed that Zeus governs the cosmos, bestowed human beings with reason (logos) as the most valuable part of his divine nature, and provides rain, plants, and animals to us as resources,¹ a modern-day Stoic need not share these beliefs. The modern-day Stoic need only share Epictetus’ confidence in the power of reason and rigorously apply Stoic wisdom about what is up to us, what is not, what is good, what is evil, and what is indifferent to our lives in order to become tranquil and content. If so, then the Stoic traveler need not believe in Zeus’ providence in order to escape the anxious, accidental tourism of Macon Leary. Flight delays, cancellations, turbulence, and the rudeness of other passengers are all beyond the control of the airline passenger, after all, and so need not disturb him. Treating airline personnel and fellow-passengers with courtesy, on the other hand, is up to the Stoic traveler and is his responsibility. The maintenance of one’s automobile and driving it safely are up to the motorist, whereas the weather, road conditions, traffic, and road rage of other motorists are not. The latter challenge one’s equanimity, but the motorist is responsible only for the former. One need not believe in Zeus to find such considerations eminently reasonable. One need only be convinced that reason is itself sufficiently providential for any tourist.

¹ See, for example, Disc. 1.19.11 - 12 and 4.1.100 - 105.
In the spirit of Kipling’s “East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet”, many contemporary scholars have emphasized the differences between the practices and theories of the Greek and Indian philosophical traditions - some even going so far as to deny that both are engaged in the same project. However, investigation of the tantalizing similarities between the two, and especially of their foundational texts, reveals their significant continuities on topics which have broad implications for our understanding of the two traditions and of the philosophical project itself.

In this paper, I will engage in this comparative project by identifying and considering one particularly tantalizing and seminal instance of similarity: the claims of the Platonic dialogues and the *Upanishads* about the nature and proper function of the self. While each remarkably presents an image of the self as a chariot, and asserts that the essential self is immortal and transmigrates through physical incarnations until it is freed by the attainment of a certain type of knowledge, the conception of this self differs. The Platonic *psuchê* is characterized in the *Phaedrus* as roughly the individual, “inner” self, essentially distinct from the body, and characterized by the individual’s reason, desires, and *thumos*. The Upanishadic *atman* is different. It is part of a higher Self which exists distinct not only from the individual’s body, but also its mind and intellect: Consideration of these two texts, with their apparent and deep continuities, reveals much about the traditions, as well as about the philosophical search for the self itself.

While the remarkable similarities between the *Phaedrus* and the *Katha Upanishad* certainly give rise to a great many fascinating historical and literary questions, in this paper I focus upon the philosophical work done by these two chariots. I have elsewhere argued that the two reflect a shared philosophical

---

1 Perhaps the most tantalizing literary, or historical, question which I have set aside here concerns the reasons for the choice of the chariot as the most appropriate image - especially in light of the further appearance of analogies between the self and a chariot in the Buddhist texts *Milindapanha* and *Visuddi-magga*.
project: that of identifying and justifying the best life.¹ I read the *Phaedrus* and the *Katha Upanishad* as providing a real response to the challenge of the life spent in the pursuit of sensual desires. In introducing the two chariots, each text argues that the nature of the self is such that the life spent in pursuit of wisdom is choiceworthy in itself. I wish to expand this inquiry and engage directly with these conceptions of this “self”, and ultimately to ask the essential question: Who am I?, or, better: who am I, really?

Two Chariots and One Question

The action of the *Phaedrus* occurs as Socrates and Phaedrus walk, and then recline, under a shady plane tree by a cool brook outside the walls of Athens. From the very beginning of the discussion, Socrates asserts the priority of investigations into the self over the development of scientific accounts of natural phenomena:

> I myself have certainly no time for the business: and I’ll tell you why, my friend: I can’t as yet ‘know myself’, as the inscription at Delphi enjoins; as so long as that ignorance remains, it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters. Consequently I don’t bother about such things, but accept the current beliefs about them, and direct my inquiries, as I have just said, rather to myself, to discover whether I really am a more complex creature and more puffed up with pride than Typhon, or a simpler, gentler, being whom heaven has blessed with a quiet, un-Typhonic nature.²

In the *Phaedrus* this inquiry is carried out in terms of a consideration of the soul (*psuchê*), and begins with an argument that the soul is immortal. Socrates reasons that: the first principle, or “self mover”, cannot come into existence or be destroyed (for the first principle to be mortal would be self-contradictory, and would entail the end of all motion), and self-motion is “the essence and definition of soul”. Thus, according to Socrates, “all soul (*psuchê pasa*) must necessarily be immortal”.³ Further, he claims that individual souls transmigrate: all unembodied souls naturally exist in the heavenly realm of the forms, near the “plain of Truth”. However, while divine souls are able to stay in this realm, blissfully contemplating the forms, imperfect human souls are unable to remain and are forced into a series of bodies from which they try to return. Most human souls are not able to return to the heavenly sphere for ten


³ Ibid., 245c - 246a. The precise import of this "*psuchê pasa*" is a matter of some debate - it is not clear whether the phrase is meant to be read as collective or distributive. I follow Hackforth’s reading: “My own belief is that the distinction between collective and distributive senses is not here before his mind, any more than it need be in the case of *pao soma* at 245e4, where either sense is equally appropriate”. Hackforth, 64.
thousand years. The soul of a philosopher, however, whose pursuit of wisdom makes it “ever near in memory to those things a god’s nearness makes him truly a god”, may escape the cycle in three thousand years. Still, the question persists: what, exactly, is this psuchê?

As “what manner of thing it is would be a long tale to tell, and most assuredly a god alone could tell it”, Socrates likens the soul to a winged chariot in which a charioteer drives a team of two steeds. On the one hand, the first horse is noble and of good breeding: white with black eyes, he is "on the more honorable side". He aims at "glory", but his pursuit is temperate, and he remains obedient to the charioteer. The horse "consort[s] with sôphrosunê (moderation) and modesty", and "needs no whip, being driven by the word of command alone". On the other hand, the second horse is ignoble and of poor breeding. Black with gray eyes, he is "a massive jumble of a creature. He aims at the satisfaction of sensual desires; rash, "hot-blooded", and tending toward hubris, this horse is "hard to control with whip and goad". The charioteer, finally, pursues truth. He is "the soul's pilot" who directs the soul "aloft to the region where the gods dwell", where the soul may reach wisdom, the "soul's proper food". Unpacking this chariot-image of the immortal soul will move us toward Plato’s account of the “true self”, his answer to the “Who am I?” question.

Socrates’ chariot-self is not, however, alone. As has often been noted, the Upanishads provide a striking corollary to the Platonic account. The Katha Upanishad presents a fascinating dialogue between Naciketas, a young Brahmin, and Yama, the god of Death, who, in classic style, owes him three wishes. Naciketas requests understanding of the self’s status after death as his final boon. Yama, however, tries to evade the query. Pointing to the “subtlety” of the knowledge, he offers Naciketas a “replacement” boon: “Choose sons and grandsons who may live a hundred years, choose herds of cattle, choose elephants and gold and horses, choose the wide expanded earth, and live thyself as many years thou listest”. Naciketas persists in his questioning: “Some say (the soul) exists after the death of man, others say, it does not exist. This I should like to know, instructed by thee…”.

The two interlocutors appear to share the presupposition that individuals are on a cycle of transmigration. Even before the dialogue with Yama, Naciketas already assumes that individuals carry on through successive lives: “Like corn, the mortals get ripe, like corn they are born again”. The questions in the Katha Upanishad, then, are about the nature of the “self” who undergoes this transmigration and about the best means of freeing oneself from the cycle of rebirth. The answers to these questions are inextricably linked. The true knowledge of the self is that which frees one from the cycle: “by means of the

1 Ibid., 249c.
2 Ibid., 256b, 253d - 254e.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., I, 6.
union of the intellect with the soul thinking him, whom it is difficult to behold, who is unfathomable and concealed, who is placed in the cavity, whose abode is impervious, who exists from times of old - [he] leaves both grief and joy”. Thus, Naciketas’ request is for this vital knowledge: what is this essential self?

As part of his answer to Naciketas’ question, Yama also likens the individual to a chariot. On his account, the chariot itself is compared to the body, the charioteer to the intellect, the reins to the mind, the horses to the senses, and the road to the objects of the senses. He concludes: “the enjoyer is the self endowed with body, sense and mind; thus say the wise”.1 This conception of the self has implications for the behavior of the truth-seeker: “But whoever is wise with the mind always applied, has the senses subdued like good horses of the charioteer…the man, whose charioteer is wise, the reins of whose mind are well applied, obtains the goal of the road, the highest place of Vishnu”.2 This, then, hints at an account of the “true self”. While the individual (“man”) is characterized by body, senses, intellect, and mind, a higher self exists distinct from these things. Still, the question remains: what is the nature of that self? Again, “who am I?”

Plato’s Self: The Psuchê

Both in the Phaedrus itself and throughout the Platonic dialogues, Plato clearly holds the view that the most important concerns about the individual are properly understood as concerns about the psuchê (the soul). As early as the Apology, Socrates describes his life’s work as impressing the Athenians with the importance of the care of the soul: “For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies or your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls”.3 Further, he identifies this soul as both the source and locus of good and evil in the individual: “for all good and evil, whether in the body or in the whole man, originates in the soul, and overflows from thence…”4 The psuchê is identified as the seat of knowledge in the Protagoras, and is tasked with the “management, rule, and deliberation” of life as expressed in the function argument of the Republic. Perhaps most strikingly, in the Republic, he treats the soul as the “true self”. As Socrates states, “is there not illiberality and avarice in robbing a corpse, and the mark of a womanish and petty spirit to deem the body of the dead an enemy when the real foeman has flown away and left only the instrument with which he fought?”.5 While it is clear that Plato

---

1 Katha Upanishad, III, 3 - 4.
2 Ibid., III, 5 - 9.
3 Apology 30b. See also the Protagoras 313a, where the soul is “something on whose beneficial treatment your whole welfare depends”.
4 Charmides 156d-157b. See also the Crito, in which this soul is the “that part of us which is mutilated by wrong actions and benefited by right ones”.
5 Republic 469d. See also the Protagoras, in which Socrates moves directly from consideration
conceives of the soul as the most important aspect of the individual, what is less clear, however, is what this *psuchê* is and how it performs the functions attributed to it through different incarnations.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato asserts that the soul and body are distinct things that together form an individual: “the composite structure of soul and body is called a living being”.1 However, the partners are in no way equal. While the soul, “more than any other body part, shares in the divine nature, which is fair, wise, and good”, the body is “that prison house within which now we are encompassed withal…”.2 Taken together with the evidence of other dialogues, these claims reflect Plato’s dualist position. Thus, as he explains in the *Phaedo*, the soul and body are made of distinct kinds of substances: the soul is made of stuff that is “divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable”, which serves to animate the “human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent” stuff of the body.3 Further, the incorporeal nature of the soul is taken to be support for its special status. Because it is “of a kindred nature” to the “realm of the pure and everlasting and immortal and changeless”, it “reasons”, “reaches out after reality”, and ideally “reaches truth”.4 Thus, Socrates appears to assert that the soul (at least the philosophical one which is not “penetrated”, “dragged away” or “infected” by the body5) is wholly reasoning, and he concludes that this affinity to the forms and essential unity constitute the basis of arguments for the immortality of the soul. Thus, the individual’s “true self” continues to exist after death, and, in the case of the philosopher, exists as a pure, reasoning substance.6

Even if we were to accept the *Phaedo’s* arguments and their conclusions, and that is an awfully big “if”, we are left with an odd sort of personal immortality and even odder sort of self. As Owen Flanagan asserts:

What we think of as our unique individual selves consist of the integrated set of traits we reliably express and embody, the dispositions of feeling, thought, and behavior we reliably display, as well as a certain kind of psychological continuity and connectedness that

\[1\] *Phaedrus* 246c.
\[2\] Ibid., 246d.
\[3\] *Phaedo* 80a – b.
\[4\] Ibid., 81d, 65b.
\[5\] Ibid., 80e.
\[6\] While this is the conclusion of the argument, the *Phaedo’s* account of the judgment and reincarnation of the soul seems to describe the souls as possessing other faculties beyond reason. Bostock argues that this is not indicate that Plato himself did not accept the conclusion: “The belief in a reasonably ‘full’ mental life after death is common, and from Homer onwards all those who have pictures it have pictured the souls of the dead as having the shape of human bodies, and as doing just the kind of things that ordinary living human beings do. Upon reflection one has to admit that this picture is not to be taken literally, but we continue to use it because we do not know any better picture to substitute for it…We do him an injustice if we think he took the picture seriously”. David Bostock, *Plato’s Phaedo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 28 – 29.
accrues to embodied beings by virtue of being-in-the-world over time. When we think or talk about ourselves, our aim is to describe these patterns.¹

However, this “center of narrative gravity” is precisely what we do not get on Plato’s account.² As Sarah Broadie notes, the essential and persisting self is wholly rational, and “the paradigm exercise of intelligence is theoretical…it deals in universals and abstractions, it is conducted at leisure from practical life, and it has no palpable effects except on the thoughts of oneself and a few interlocutors”.³ Thus, this reason which characterizes us and persists is largely divorced from the way we think about ourselves, and from the way we “manage, rule, and deliberate” our lives. It is universal, while we, and precisely that which we think is required for meaningful personal identity, are particular. As David Bostock notes, this sort of reasoning is “so small a part of [our] total personality that it is unreasonable to identify it with [us], and difficult to say in what sense it can even be identified with [our] soul”. He continues:

Socrates says, ‘Cheer up! This is not the end of me. I am going from here to a better place’. It would surely be less comforting if he had said ‘This is, after all, the end of me, but some bits of me will survive: my bones will last for a little while yet, and my reasoning capacity will be disporting itself elsewhere’. But although it is clearly a personal survival that Plato envisages, we can only say that he has not really seen the problems that this involves.⁴

If this is an account of the “true self”, or what is the essential and characteristic of us as unique individuals, it is a strange and unsatisfying one, indeed. In the Phaedrus, while Plato continues to treat the soul as the incorporeal and thinking “true self” of the individual, this is not the full picture. As the chariot-image suggests, the souls of the Phaedrus are multifaceted: composed of, or “characterized by”, reason (the charioteer), desire (the ignoble horse), and thumos (the noble horse). This complex is that which transmigrates. Thus, the psuchê appears to be some kind of “inner person”. It reasons, but also has the full compliment of other faculties and attributes that we associate with our personalities: desires and emotions, and perhaps even behavioral traits and memories as well. Conflicts within the individual are no longer between the body and soul, but between the disparate elements of the soul. As T.M. Robinson asserts, the “soul is seen as a counter-person, or ‘double’ of the person known to us in the present life. It qualifies for the name of ‘person’ because it is shown as a free and responsible moral agent, capable of good and

---

² Daniel Dennett, quoted in Flanagan, 162.
⁴ Bostock,39.
evil even in its discarnate state". Based on the Phaedrus’ chariot account, this incorporeal thing is the “true self” and transmigrates.

While this new position addresses the worries about the uniqueness of the individual, it also appears to cause a great deal of trouble for the arguments concerning the immortality of the soul as presented in the Phaedo. In particular, the claim that the soul’s “intelligible” and “uniform” nature renders it “indissoluble” and immortal is challenged by an account of the soul which contains desires and apparently distinct and un-uniform parts. Plato has a response: while complex, this soul is sumphutos dunamis – a “natural union of powers”. The soul constitutes a unity, on which each element is necessary for its pursuit of reason: while the charioteer is clearly intended to be in charge, he would be powerless without the strength of the horses. By itself, then, reason is a “relatively impotent moving force”. The charioteer requires the energy of the horses and is even described as nourishing them. Thus, the soul’s self-motion, which is the “essence and definition of soul”, as well as the foundation of the Phaedrus’ argument for its immortality, is located in, and requires, the interaction of each of the powers of the soul.

At the same time, the image of the wings stresses that the motion of this unity is still toward the common, “natural” goal of truth. As the natural function of a wing is to “raise that which is heavy and carry it aloft to the region where the gods dwell”, the soul is to seek the forms. There, in the realm of the forms, “true being dwells, without color or shape that cannot be touched; reason alone, the soul’s pilot, can behold it, and all true knowledge is knowledge thereof”. Thus, while the soul of the Phaedrus is no longer wholly rational, it is still characterized by its desire for knowledge.

Socrates’ account of the soul leads to his normative conclusions. Our chariot-souls necessarily desire the vision of the forms. This is the “soul’s proper food”, and experience of it is “fraught with the highest bliss”. A divine soul is able to inhabit the heavenly realm and contemplate these forms because it is “well-ordered”. Its charioteer easily controls the two noble horses. Human souls, by contrast, lack this good order. Their charioteer struggles to control the ignoble horse of desire. The goal of human souls, then, must be to strive for good order, to cultivate reason, and control the desires, so that the soul no longer experiences conflict. Thus, in his discussion of philosophical, or “Platonic”, love, Socrates provides an account of the training of desire, on which the charioteer repeatedly, and harshly, restrains the ignoble horse until it is controlled. “And so it happens time and again, until the evil steed casts off

---

1 T. M. Robinson, Plato’s Psychology. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 128.
2 Phaedrus, 246a (Griswold translation).
4 As many commentators noted, Plato is decidedly ambiguous about what exactly is winged here – it is not at all clear whether he intends there to be one set of wings for the entire soul, or whether each part is to have its own wings.
5 Phaedrus, 246b.
6 Ibid., 247c.
his wantonness; humbled in the end, he obeys the counsel of his driver, and when he sees the fair beloved is like to die in fear. Wherefore at long last the soul of the lover follows after the beloved with reverence and awe. Thus, on this account, the “invariable” and “self-consistent” soul actually changes.

In the Phaedrus, then, Plato answers the “Who am I, really?” question by pointing to the psuche. He claims that our individual and unique “true self” is an immortal “inner person”, characterized by distinct, and sometimes conflicting, elements, which we should change for the best in order to contemplate the forms and end the cycle of transmigration. However, at this point, we have fallen precisely into the dilemma which, according to Owen Flanagan, is inescapable for the “soulophile”:

> Either what makes me, me is purely structural and impersonal, in which case it explains absolutely nothing about what makes me the unique person I am; or the soulophile allows my arch-ego to be somehow constituted by some (or all) of the features of my character and my life that make me, me, in which case what makes me, me, is mutable, and so on. So either the soulophile grants me an impersonal soul that makes me according to her lights, but says nothing about what makes me the actual person I am, or she concedes that there is nothing about me that is immutable, indivisible, permanent, and so on. Pick your horn.

While it is Flanagan’s conclusion that we should reject the idea of a soul altogether, the Katha Upanishad provides an alternate account which points out the presuppositions which lie behind this assessment.

The Katha Upanishad’s “Self”

First, a programmatic note: It is useful, and perhaps, given the texts, fitting, to approach the “Who am I?” question in the Katha Upanishad in terms of “Who I am not?” We need to identify what is essential to the self through progressive elimination of things which are not essential to the self. To put it more precisely: we will proceed in terms of progressively deeper levels of analysis of the “true self”.

We find the text most clearly asserting that the “true self” of the human individual is not the body itself, but is something distinct from it. As we have already seen, the distinction between the self and body is presupposed by the questions Naciketas raises: “Some say (the soul) exists after the death of man, others say, it does not exist”. In order for this question to make any sense at all, there must be some thing which is distinct from the body which may or may not persist after the body’s death. Yama confirms and expands this idea by

---

1 Ibid., 254e.
2 Flanagan, 238.
3 Katha Upanishad, I, 24.
asserting that there is a self, which is indeed distinguished from the body in its immortality:

The wise one (vipascit) is not born, nor does it die; it was not produced from anyone, nor was any produced from it; unborn, eternal, without decay, ancient as it is, it is not slain, although the body is slain. If the slayer thinks “I slay”, if the slain thinks “I am slain”, then both of them do not know well. It does not slay, nor is it slain.¹

As in the Platonic dialogues, the “true self” is not the body. But, the question remains: what is it?

The Katha Upanishad directs us to consider the “royal passenger” of the chariot-image. Separate from the senses (horses), body (chariot), the mind (reins), and even the intellect (charioteer), “the enjoyer is the self endowed with body, sense and mind; thus say the wise”.² While distinct from the body, this self “enjoys” the empirical world through the body and its faculties, as well as through the characteristics and qualities, or “limiting adjuncts”, and pleasures and pains of the individual. At this level of analysis, the self is a unique and personal self.

This account of the “empirical self” is celebrated in the Katha Upanishad: “having heard this, comprehended it, having distinguished the soul as endowed with qualities from the body…the mortal rejoices”.³ However, numerous passages suggest that this account is not the ultimate answer to the “Who am I?” question. Rather, at a deeper level of analysis, this self can be seen in its true nature, as that which is active in the empirical self. While this self is frequently described in spatial terms, it is “seated in the cavity of the living being” or even, “of the size of a thumb [and] always residing in the heart of a man”, it is not, properly understood, a “thing” or even a particular type of substance.⁴ Rather, it is consciousness itself, or that “by which everyone knows of form, of smell, of sounds, of touch, of love”.⁵

Troy Organ asserts that this is one of the “primary innovations” of the Upanishads: the view that the self is “dual”. He points to a poem which appears initially in the Rg Veda, and is repeated in the Mundaka and Svetasvatara Upanishads: “Two birds associated together, and mutual friends, take refuge in the same tree: one of them eats the sweet fig; the other, abstaining from food, merely looks on”.⁶ He explains that the two birds can be taken to represent both the empirical, or lower, and the higher selves:

The tree is the human body. The bird that eats the fruit is the self that enters fully into the experience of physical life...the bird that does not

¹ Ibid., II, 18 – 20.
² Ibid., III, 3 - 4.
³ Ibid., II, 13.
⁴ Ibid., II, 20 and VI,17. See also II, 12 and IV, 12.
⁵ Ibid., IV,3 and IV, 5.
⁶ Rg Veda I.22.8.20.
eat the fruit but merely watches the activity of the first bird is the second Self which accompanies the first. The second refrains from any entanglement in bodily pursuits...when the first self compares its own helplessness with the greatness of the second Self, it grieves and turns from its life of sorrow and bondage.1

This account makes some sense of the enigmatic claim in the Katha Upanishad itself: “the supreme and inferior souls, [one] drinking the due reward from [its] work in this world, entered both the cave, the highest place of the supreme (soul). The knowers of Brahman call them shadow and sunlight”.2

Like sunlight, this higher self is not unique to the individual. It is not simply the inner power of the empirical self, but of all selves: “He is one, the ruler, the inner soul of all beings, who renders his one nature manifold. The wise who behold him as dwelling in their own selves, obtain eternal bliss, not others”.3 Thus, the “true self” is Brahman: “He whose creation is this universe, who cherishes all desires, who possesses all odors, who is endowed with all tastes, who encompasses all this universe, who is without speech, who is unconcerned – He (such a Brahman) is my Self. Into Him, I shall enter, on departing hence”.4

This, then, is the highest level of analysis of the self, the end of the “Who am I not?” questions, and the ultimate answer to the “Who am I?” questions: “Higher indeed than the senses are their objects, higher than their objects is the mind, intellect higher than the mind, higher than intellect the great soul. Higher than the great one the unmanifested, higher than the unmanifested the soul (Purusa) higher than the soul is nought, this is the last limit and the highest goal”.5

As knowledge of the self frees one from the cycle of transmigration, this conclusion about the “true self” has normative implications. Unlike the Phaedrus, and its “proof” for the immortality of the soul, the Katha Upanishad explicitly asserts that “this Self is not to be obtained by instruction, nor by intellect, nor by much learning”. Rather, this higher self is inherently unsensible. It is “without sound, without touch, without form, which does not waste, which is without taste, which is eternal, without smell, without beginning and without end”.6 We are instead directed to “seek not the stable among things which are unstable here” – to recognize that this self is not itself an object of empirical inquiry, but is rather “that whereby one perceives both the sleeping state and the waking state”.7 Understanding of this truth comes from a state wherein the intellect has stilled the senses and the mind and is open to the self-luminous nature of Brahman: “When cease the five [Sense-]

---

2 Katha Upanishad, III,1.
3 Ibid., V, 12.
4 Chandogya Upanishad.
5 Ibid., III, 10–11.
6 Ibid., III, 15.
7 Ibid., IV, 3–4.
knowledges, together with the mind, and the intellect stirs not. That, they say is
the highest course...Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can He be
apprehended. How can He be comprehended otherwise than by one’s saying
‘He is’?\textsuperscript{1} Thus, the intellect (the charioteer) should use the mind (reins) to
control the senses (the horses), and the desires which are predicated upon them,
to pursue higher knowledge. Thus, the means of attaining that truth requires a
fundamental reorientation of priorities, away from a desire-driven one which is
consequent upon understanding the self as primarily bodily or even primarily
individual, and toward an understanding of the self in its relationship to
Brahman. It concludes: “Whoever is wise with the mind always applied, has
the senses subdued like good horses of the charioteer...the man, whose
charioteer is wise, the reins of whose mind are well applied, obtains the goal of
the road, the highest place of Vishnu”.\textsuperscript{2}

Immortality here is of an utterly different sort from that of Plato. The Katha
Upanishad asserts that, upon understanding this truth, upon overcoming the
ignorance by which we understand the self in terms of the body or empirical
manifestation, one exists as one with Brahman: “The wise by means of the
union of the intellect with the soul thinking him, whom it is difficult to behold,
who is unfathomable and concealed, who is placed in the cavity, whose abode
is impervious, who exists from time of old – leaves both grief and joy”.\textsuperscript{3}
The self attains union with Brahman: a state in which “all concern for the world
ceases”, “all desires cease”, and “all the bonds of the heart are broken”, in
which the self is “without passion and immortal” in “eternal bliss”.\textsuperscript{4}

Thus, the Katha Upanishad answers the “Who am I, really?” question by
engaging in progressively deeper levels of analysis. At one level, we find an
empirical self, experienced as a unique individual with specific attributes and
experiences, one not unlike the self of the Phaedrus. At a deeper level of
analysis we find a higher self, consciousness itself, which transcends the
individual. While the empirical self is transitory, the higher self is immortal.
Elliot Deutsch provides an Advaitin reading of these claims:

Phenomenally, as individual conscious beings, we are multi-
personalities. We become the roles and functions we perform; we
become the kinds of persons we conceive ourselves to be; we become
the many identifications we form of aspects of our self. Although we
recognize the forces and conditions that act upon us, social as well as
physical and psychological, we remain their victims: we ascribe
ultimacy to them because we know of nothing to take their place...We
are ignorant so far as we make of our physical, our biophysical, and our
mental and emotional vestures something substantial, real, and

\textsuperscript{1} Ibid., VI, 10 – 13.
\textsuperscript{2} Ibid., III, 5 - 9.
\textsuperscript{3} Ibid., II, 12. Here, I am giving a self-consciously Advaitin reading of the text Adherents of
other traditions – even other Vedantan traditions – read these passages in other ways.
\textsuperscript{4} Ibid., V, 6, VI, 14, VI, 15, VI, 18, and V, 13.
ultimately valuable – without realizing that all being, reality, and value are grounded in, and arise from, our true Self….The Self is One, it is not different from Brahman….It means that man is essentially spiritual; that in the most profound dimension of his being he is no longer the “individual” that he ordinarily takes himself to be, but that he is precisely Reality itself.1

This, then, is a response to the “soulphilie’s dilemma” identified by Flanagan. The Katha Upanishad chooses the “impersonal” horn. It does not answer the “Who am I?” question with an account of what makes us unique as individuals. Instead, it suggests that such an account is not sufficiently profound, and that it must be sublated by one conducted at a deeper level of analysis.

For those of us who hold that an account of the “true self” must be an account of what is essential and characteristic of us as unique individuals and its immortality, even this account will also be ultimately unsatisfactory. As Bostock asserts:

Suppose we think of a soul merely as a kind of animating agent that makes a body live, and not specially connected with [individual] consciousness, much as an engine may ‘animate’ a car. The same engine may be transferred from one car to another – cars of very different shapes and sizes, and very different performance on the road….Similarly for souls. If what now animates me will one day animate an astronaut, but there is no continuity of [individual] consciousness between me and that astronaut, then it is quite unreasonable to regard his life as another life for me.2

Bostock is right. However, the unexamined presupposition in his, or rather, Plato’s, work is that an account of the “true self” and immortality in terms of the individual is the goal, and we need only work out its details. The value in the comparative work is, among other things, that it highlights this presupposition, and provides an impetus for us to consider and carefully evaluate it.

Selected Bibliography


2 Bostock, 38.


Part II

COMPARATIVE AND ASIAN PHILOSOPHY
From Ancient Greek to Asian Philosophy
Maya and Dike and the Principles of Eco-Justice

Giancola Donna, Suffolk University College of Arts & Sciences

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how our earliest conceptions of justice in the mythical and philosophical traditions of ancient Greece and India can form the basis for an ethics of eco-justice, human rights and global responsibility. Recently, the idea of eco-justice has emerged in many levels of discourse and within a variety of disciplines ranging from feminism, deep ecology, ethics and social ethics. By tracing the radical roots of eco-justice and eco-feminism to their origins in the early Goddess religions I intend to draw out the philosophical similarities and principles necessary for an equitable society and ecological sustainability. It is my contention that any notion of restorative or eco-justice must necessarily arise from a meta-patriarchal context.

Goddess mythologies were our earliest means of understanding the order of life and genesis of the universe. In both ancient India and Greece the role of the Mother-Goddess is prominent in the establishment of cosmic and meta-cosmic relations; affirming life, fertility, and moral order. In ancient India the Goddess Maya (Maya-Shakti-Devi) symbolized the cosmogenic powers of the Great Mother Goddess in her role as “the cosmic second”. Likewise, in ancient Greece, the mighty Goddess Dike functioned to carry out the decrees of the Mother-Goddess Moira or Fate whose power bound both humans and gods. In both traditions justice is seen as an embodiment of the great Mother- Goddess representing a cosmological/elemental force higher than law, higher even than the gods. As alive and divine, justice is organic, embodied in nature, and in the universe itself - denoting a fragile balance between the human and cosmological moral orders. The presence of the Goddess in both traditions tell us that justice is the way of being, indicating that moral responsibility is not an abstract principle but a living reality and an interconnection, both in socio-political relations and in human relations to the earth, environment and the universe as a whole.

Before commenting on the problems of eco-justice, it might be helpful to outline the earliest emergence of justice and its subsequent transformations. The notion of justice as a dynamic cosmic principle, alive and divine, and manifest in nature is part of the great mythical and historical heritage of both ancient Greece and India. It is my contention that there were really two notions of justice which began to emerge in the Ancient world. The older view, the one...
that we have almost forgotten, was rooted in the early Goddess religions. The other view developed later in the dominant patriarchal Aryan culture of norms and laws.¹

The situation in the Aegean basin, the cradle of Greek thought, parallels in many ways that of early India which, in the late Neolithic Age saw a migration of semi-nomadic herding, androcratic-warrior Aryans into an area whose indigenous population was primarily agricultural and gynocentric. But, as the modern science of Ethnology is revealing, indigenous cultures are not so easily obliterated: the “world-view” and ways of a subjugated people as preserved in their art and religious rituals and especially their myths, is not so easily erased. Worship of the divine feminine principle is the oldest religion in the world. These earliest religions were centered on the worship of a single “Triple-Goddess”, so-called because of her three phases as maiden, nymph and crone corresponding to the three seasons of spring, summer and winter. Since the reproductive cycles of plants and animals are governed by these seasons, she was also identified with Mother Earth.² These Neolithic civilizations, centered on agriculture with a corresponding gylanic (emphasizing fertility) and peaceful world-view, were subjected to a series of invasions, by herding peoples whose culture was basically androcratic: patriarchal, patrilineal and militaristic.³ Beginning about 3,500 B.C.E. this history can be viewed as the struggle of indigenous people to preserve their customs and religion, art and mythic lore, in the face of successive waves of invaders. Thus, the earliest myths testify to the struggle of the Aryan patriarchal culture to subdue the matriarchal elements of the indigenous traditions.

We know that one of the very earliest appearances of justice in ancient Greek civilization was as a Goddess. Her function was to judge humans; either to punish or reward conduct in relation to the Divine Principle. This may be called the “religious face” of Justice. We also know that a quite different notion of justice became explicit in Classical times, centered in human law and quite likely first articulated by the mathematico-pragmatic (in contrast to the religeо-

¹ According to Guthrie, op cit., p. 30, “the two main types of religion which appear among the classical Greeks, and so often give an air of paradox to their expressed beliefs, are represented by the Olympians of Homer on the one hand, and on the other, by the kind of cult of which we have an example...in the Eleusian mysteries. These were celebrated in honor of Demeter, the Mother of life, whose worship in the lands of the eastern Mediterranean goes (to quote Sir John Myres) ‘as far back as either records or monuments carry us’. Wherever that culture penetrates”, he writes, speaking of the ancient, pre-Indo-European culture of Anatolia, [it expresses] the kind of nature-worship which finds classical expression in the cults of the Great Mother of Asia, in completest contrast with the father-gods who are central in all unsophisticated forms of the Indo-European religion”.

² While this is the position of a number of authorities such as Gimbutas (The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe), London: Thames and Hudson, (1974), and Robert Graves (The Greek Myths), New York: Penguin Books, (1960), the majority opinion is expresses by Walter Burket: “Matriarchy in the true sense has not been shown to have existed anywhere in the Aegean or Near Eastern prehistory...” Greek Religion, trans. John Raffan, Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press, (1989), p. 351 n. 22).

mystical) wing of the Pythagoreans; certainly most clearly articulated by Plato and Aristotle. This scientific-rational view of justice has culminated today in the conception of humans as isolated observers of an impersonal cosmos.

Already in the sixth century, with the advent of the first great philosophers of Ancient Greece a fissure began to appear between the two cultures which underlay the Greek world, between what some modern-day historians have called, perhaps too simplistically, the religious outlook of the Greeks and an emerging rationalism. It is within this larger historical background that justice comes into view in the ancient Greek world.

The oldest “recorded” appearance of justice in ancient Greece is found in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer. Homer uses the Greek words (“justice”) and (“right”) to designate "custom" or "way of behavior" which accords with what is ordained by law, with emphasis on human decrees.¹ Thus there is to be found in Homeric mythology the notion of justice as a regulative principle or law which encompasses the social and moral order of human affairs. At the same time, however, Homer preserves the tradition of the primal Mother/Goddess under the guise of Fate/ Moira. It is she who rules the universe and whose power binds both humans and gods. Her power, if ignored or challenged, brings retribution. Thus, *themis/dike* represents a force higher than the law, and higher even than the decisions of the gods.

By way of contrast, the Homeric notion of justice as law or judicial decree finds its philosophical expression in Plato and Aristotle, as universal ideal or standard of virtue. Their world-view, however stands in contrast with the earlier indigenous culture worship of the “Great Mother” which, “was utterly different from the masculine, Homeric relationships between man and god and its shadowy, bloodless life and death”.² Thus, along with “justice” as an abstract law or ideal there was another Justice, very much alive, so much part of the character of the Mother-Goddess that it was not until very late that she was separated-out and perceived as a distinct identity.

The first recorded appearance of Justice as a divine personage occurred in Hesiod’s *Theogony* wherein, drawing not only on the socio-religious consciousness of his time, but also on many of the earlier cult-religions, he described the forces of the universe as cosmic divinities. Hesiod portrayed *Dike* as the daughter of Zeus and *Themis* (daughter of Uranus and Gaia) with her other siblings, *Hora* (Hours), *Eunomia* (Order), and *Eirene* (Peace). Her role was to “mind the works of mortal men”.³ The enemies of *Dike* were *Hybris* (excess and distortion), *Eris* (strife), and *Dysnomia* (disorder). *Dike* executed

¹ *Dike* is used five times in the *Iliad* and eleven times in the *Odyssey*, and with the exception of one instance, is always used in regards to some accepted norm. *Themis* is referred to thirty-five times, and is more consistently seen as righteousness or judgment. For exact reference in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, cf. Richard John Cunliffe, *A Lexicon of Homeric Dialect*, Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, (1988). For further discussion of the origins of Themis and Dike, cf. Hirzel, *Themis, Dike and Verwandtes*, Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung (1966).
the law of judgments and sentencing and, together with her mother Themis, carried out the final decisions of Moira.\(^1\) For Hesiod, Justice is at the center of religious and moral life, who independently of Zeus is the embodiment of divine will.\(^2\) It is important to note that in Hesiod Moira, Themis and Dike are the divine descendants of the Great Mother Goddess. This personification of Dike will stand in contrast to justice viewed as custom or law, and as retribution or sentence.

It is among the natural philosophers that an understanding of justice as a distinct power first appears. Justice is seen as a cosmological and ontological necessity inherent not simply within human affairs, but within the structure of the universe itself, as nature. Parmenides, Anaximander and Heraclitus all speak in some way of the balance of forces, the harmony of opposites and in at least one instance, the necessity of retribution. In Anaximander's most notable fragment, we see the notion of cosmic justice: “according to necessity, for they give justice and make amends to one another for their injustice according to the ordering of time”. Anaximander's notion of retribution in a harmonious universe requires a sense of cosmic measure, so that all things are ordered according to their proper limits and set by cosmic balance and equilibrium. Anaximander's cosmology, in spite of its pre-scientific claims, has its fundamental roots in mythological representation. This primal order for Anaximander as essentially moral was not originally intended in any judicial sense, but rather with reference to the elements in the cosmic whole as the necessary way of nature. As Heidegger points out on his commentary on Anaximander’s fragment we are accustomed to translate dike as “right” and adike as that which is “out of joint”. But as Heidegger asks, out of joint with what?

But where are there jointures in what is present?...Or where is there even one jointure? How can what is present without jointure be out of joint?\(^3\)

It is evidently with Solon that the laws of the king/state first become codified and objective; justice, thereby, is no longer seen as aspect of the living earth Mother/Goddess, but as the superimposition of human law. Dike comes to be seen in the workings of human affairs within the context of law, as universally applied equality.\(^4\) However, as Martin Heidegger has pointed out, if dike is

taken for the modern abstract term “justice”, i.e., as moral or judicial, it misses the original metaphysical sense of that ancient Greek word.\(^1\)

As a result we have lost the face of justice as the Triple Goddess. For example, earliest images of Athene as the Triple-Goddess were those of an unadorned woman whose peaceful character, wisdom were symbolized by the olive branch and the owl. But as J. E. Harrison rightly described the story of Athene's birth from Zeus's head as

a desperate theological expedient to rid her of her of matriarchal conditions. It is also a dogmatic insistence on wisdom as a male prerogative; hitherto the Goddess alone had been wise.\(^2\)

Thus her power as a cosmological principle is essentially denied and she is reduced to serving patriarchal ends as love and war goddess. As Hesiod remarks; “gone are the days when not even the sun would dare to step out of its measure”.

It is in this context of our ancient conception of morality where dike means the way of righteousness that is similar to the mystical notion of measure and harmony that we find in the Eastern tradition of the Vedas in the concept of Rta, as “what is adjusted, fitted together”.\(^3\) The Eastern Vedic notion of Rta emerges in the early hymns of the Rg Veda as the standard of justice, as cosmic order or eternal law, and helps to form the foundation of the ethical claim of dharma. Rta is not personified as one of the gods/goddess of Vedic mythology, but is repeatedly recognized in hymns (to Agni and Varuna, the dispenser of law), as righteousness or the unity of reality. Rta, literally understood as “the course of things,” represents eternal law of the universe. Virtue, then is conformity to the cosmic law.\(^4\)

It should be remembered that the gods/goddess of Vedic myths and hymns, like those in Homeric Greece represented a superhuman/cosmic order, and were the recipients of prayers, rituals, and sacrifices.\(^5\) In India, however, the notion of the gods/goddess as separate and different deities representing the manifold aspects of the universe developed into an understanding of the one deity that subsumed the various aspects of polytheistic deities into a comprehensive unity. The personification of Justice as a separate deity does not exist in early Vedic mythology. Justice is seen as a function within the role and symbolism of the Great Mother traditions.

The early pre-history of India corresponds in many ways with that of ancient Greece, where, again, the Aryans (“the people of sky”) invaded the

---

early matriarchal gynocentric culture of the Dravidians (which can be traced back as early as 3,000 B.C.). Here we can see the similarities to the early Greeks in terms of their matriarchal beliefs and rituals in their Paleolithic caves and mounds. The earliest Great Mother cults of Asia were earth-centered, focusing on fertility and life-giving energy. Their rituals included celebrations of nature and the offering of plants and herbs to the source of creation. With the conquest of the Aryans, the religious focus shifted from that which was immanent in nature to the transcendent sky gods with rituals involving fire and smoke. The early Goddess religions attempted to assimilate the patriarchal gods into their culture and, for some time after the initial invasion, the Goddess was worshipped as one of the primary deities. Yet, as was the situation in ancient Greece, this adaptation soon gave way to the superimposition of patriarchal gods and conception of Brahman as ultimate reality. With the conquest of the Aryans, Rta as the way of nature became subsumed under the law of karma. The role of Rta as regulative moral principle came to be symbolized in the recurrent activities of man and nature, where “the river flows Rta,” “the year is the path of Rta”, “the gods themselves are born of Rta”, and “the sun is called the wheel of Rta”. The wheel best symbolizes the regular recurrence of the order and right of Rta. Thus, we can see the importance of Rta for the ethical formulation of the dharma, as “what holds together”.

In Indian philosophy, the Vedic and early Buddhist schools have much the same notion as that of the ancient Greeks where justice, as dharma/karma, is a living-ethical force inherent in the structure and creation of the universe. In the Eastern schools of Non-dualism, Maya is traditionally understood as illusion, as unreality. However, Maya, is identical to Brahman, understood as manifesting, as well as partially revealing, various “levels” of Being. Maya also has the connotation of discrimination or measure: “Maya from the root ma, to measure, to form, to build”. In Maya, we find the image of the World-Mother as the cosmic “second” which conceals and reveals all divine experience.

The worship of the Goddess as such was integrated rather late into the elite Sanskrit tradition. The Epic period (Mahabharata and Ramayama) is one of transition for ancient goddess worship into the Hindu pantheon. Here the Goddesses figured strongly in mythology but not as a major deity. Usually goddesses were portrayed as wives of the gods or consorts, but there was little emphasis on their cosmological or ontological significance. It is during this period (400 CE) that goddesses as individual deities began to emerge in Sanskrit literature in the Brahmanical tradition. Goddesses who were paired as consort to the gods became instrumental in their partner’s activities or even dominant over them. Moreover, there was a growing tendency to conceive of an independent cosmic goddess, Devi or great goddess, Mahadevi who contains

---

1 Francis MacDonald Cornford, From Religion to Philosophy, (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), p. 175.
3 Heinrich Zimmer, Philosophies of India, p.19.
within her all goddesses and is the Supreme Being. Eventually, (by the period between 400 and 800 CE) a full blown cult of the Mother Goddess had formed and became the basis of the Sakta tradition.

Properly speaking the great Mother-Goddess or Mahadevi is not a single deity but represents many major indigenous religious forms. This can be seen on two levels. On the one hand she exemplifies of how many of the early goddesses were subsumed into the Sanskrit tradition. In the light of the Vedas she restores cosmic order revealing her creative and destructive aspects. On the other hand she is also a vehicle onto herself. The Goddess embodies not only feminine qualities but also masculine qualities as well, making the male gods superfluous. Ultimately She is understood as the Divine creatix of the entire universe, including the gods. Although transcendent, she is also immanent in the physical universe. While seemingly taken on a multitude of forms she absorbs all into Herself and is the ground of all that exists and beyond.

As the “Mother of all Life energy”, she is the discerner and judge as to whether the one seeking enlightenment is deserving of the full truth. There are innumerable manifestations of this play of Maya as the World Mother. She is the “second” and, as such, expresses “the mode of divine dualistic experience”.\(^1\) She is the triple goddess Shakti-Maya-Devi, mythically recognized and understood as the “mother of all Life Energy”.\(^2\) Our present state of ignorance and bondage is due to the illusion of Maya's creative energy, and yet, as Zimmer rightly points, “were this not the case we would not be individuals at all”.\(^3\) Accordingly, it is through Maya-Shakti that we realize our essential identity. Swami Muktananda, in his book Play of Consciousness, pays homage to the goddess Shakti as the discerner and sustainer of the whole universe. Shakti Kundalini is beyond dualistic distinctions. She is both the perceiver and that which is perceived, identical with all life energy. As he states “the perceivable universe is the outer expression of Her inner pulsation”.\(^4\) Ultimately, good and evil belong to Shakti-Maya-Devi. Maya, then, like Dike both reveals and conceals the divine One, but She is also that same One.\(^5\)

Mythically understood the great Mother-Goddess generates all forms and is identified with Vishnu’s second wife the earth (bhumi) or with nature/matter (prakti). She can appear in many forms in natural phenomena or in human form as wife, mother, young girl, or old women. Some of her main representations

---

1. Ibid., p. 460.
2. Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization, (New York, Pantheon Books, 1963), pp. 183-221. According to Zimmer, the Goddess is referred to as “The Fairest Maiden of Three Towns”. This is a symbolic representation of the Vedic conception of the universe and its three worlds; earth, middle space, and sky. She is also described in the Markandeya Purana in “The Text of the Wondrous Essence of the Goddess”.
3. Ibid., p. 195.
5. Ibid., p. 208. “Maya screening the true divine reality, screening the self. . . . and under the display of the universe is somehow that self, that very Absolute . . . Maya is simply the dynamic aspect of the Absolute”.
are as Durga, the “difficult to access” slayer of the buffalo demon, as Kali, the warrior who personifies the wrath of women, as consorts or energies (sakti) of the gods, (particularly, Sarasvati, Parvathi and Lakshmi). These representations tell us that MayaDevi is matter (prakti), power (sakti), creative illusion (maya) and the worldly cycle itself (samsara). Sakta theology describes a Mother-Goddess who encompasses light and sound, name and form, purity and impurity, auspicious and in auspicious, creation and destruction. Binding all beings her power both enslaves and liberates. She is Shakti, the divine energy that generates all forms. She is identified as earth (bhumi) and with nature or matter (prakti). She is accessible, immanent and worldly. She absorbs all Saktis into herself. For her devotees she is the ultimate reality who embraces the totality of what is.

The examples from the above mentioned mythical representations tell us that not only does the great Mother-Goddess take on many feminine forms to form a great Goddess but also what the great Goddess has inside her that creates her inner most nature. The most prominent form the feminine principle takes is the consort of Shiva. This Sakti-Siva (male/female energy) is the personification of the dynamic and dyadic powers of being and becoming, actual and potential. Yet as we learn, this polarity is not a mere balance of opposites. The Sakti principle as feminine energy is what is essential for all life. Vishnu dreams the dream of creation and his power lies coiled, dormant, asleep. The male power is inert, passive and requires female energy to awaken it. Without female kinetic energy there is no creation and no evolution.

If we trace the roots of Justice or eco justice to its early mythical Indo-European sources, we find the face of the Triple-Goddess in both traditions. The pre-historical sources confer that one of the functions of the great Cosmic-Mother is as the guardian/manifestation/mediator of Being. The body of the Great Mother is not separate from the universe. She is the very measure of Being. As the judge and discerner of reality, one of her functions is to balance the polarity of opposites, being and non-being, reality and illusion, good and evil.

As we have also seen, the great Mother Goddess is portrayed in both cultures as the “gate keeper”, to truth, enlightenment, being and non-being. She is the giver of life, and as such the law-giver. As was previously mentioned this was the origionally face of Justice. Her law is the law of creation and cannot be superimposed as an objective standard, indeed, her law is beyond convention, where Dike is the avenging force of Fate, and Kali wears a necklace of human skulls to remind us of the didactic power of creation. In ancient Greece, the ordinace of the Goddess superseded even Zeus, and in India, it was Earth Mother herself who sanctioned the Buddha’s enlightenment. Accordingly, She is the judge of All and, in both traditions, Her decrees are seen as necessarily inviolate.

In the Great Cosmic Mother, Monica Sjöö states that “this form of the Goddess is always the law giver, the order of time, the judge of dead, the
As the primordial mother of all life energy, her justice is alive and divine. Regulatory principles prescribed by society miss the mark of integration, interconnection and embodiment, and fragment being from itself. It is extraordinary how current ideas of justice have become so distorted from their ancient conceptions. Matriarchal notions of justice reflect spiritual and cosmological structures rather than political or military.

For example, consider the fact that the giver of life as deity was replaced with a male tribal god. Since then, patriarchal war gods have been warring for centuries. The place of honor which was originally held by the giver of life was replaced, by way of violence and domination, with a throne of power for the taker of life. Because the warring tribal culture recognized that men through battle could take life, the premise for first principals changed from justice, necessity and nature to fear and greed. Immoral anthropomorphic deities form the standards of morality where death becomes life and war is holy.

Prior to the onset of patriarchy, women were the healers, the magicians, prophetesses and the high priestesses. In terms of the ancient Mysteries, all power, initiation and knowledge came from a direct encounter with the Goddess herself. All life comes from woman, from the womb, from breath and gestation. The ancient myths of the great-Goddess tell us how to re-construct the mystery. The ancient myths from, Greece, India, Sumer, Babylon, and Egypt all share the same topography and ontology. The myths of descent and return, creation and destruction are played out in the life cycles of every woman.

In ancient mythologies, from around the world the message is clearly articulated that Justice is the way of Being. As an original manifestation of the Great Mother, her role was to stress the non-duality of what is. Her presence indicates that Justice is not seen as separate from reality, nor as imposition/duty but indeed as the necessary limit/measure of creativity, not fragmented as part of a social construction, but as the whole embodiment of energy. This idea runs through all the earliest manifestations of Indo-European pre-history and indigenous religions. Further, her role as the avenging Goddess is to ensure the dynamic of Being, as the initiator of judgment. Her pronouncements ensure meta-cosmic justice, indeed, the unity which encompasses all life. She is the personification of the dynamic and dyadic powers of being and becoming, actual and potential. The principle of feminine energy is what is essential for all life. Without female kinetic energy there is no creation and no evolution. Theoretically, it seems obvious that the great Mother goddess inherent in all world religions is one and the same. Her presence and rituals in world religions allow us to experience the primal connection between the human and divine. Her presence is perhaps what can elevate the concurrent problems of corruption, destruction, superimposition and its corresponding corollary of idolatry.

1 Ibid., p.155.
For women’s energy to change the world we must move beyond patriarchal conceptions of good and evil with their accompanying social and religious schisms\(^1\) into a radical understanding of our own gynocentric nature and interconnection with the earth. Modern societies based on patriarchal religions and myths of power have turned away from the ancient archaic values and as a result of loosing/repressing female energies are now on a path of global-self destruction. As Mary Daly writes, the women’s movement is “the greatest single hope for survival of spiritual consciousness on this planet”. The loss of the sense of the living oneness of the universe is likewise the loss of the feminine component in today’s world views and mores and can account for much of our global destruction and present age crisis. Much feminist work has been done on the subjugation of women and nature so that now we may realize the ontological necessity of re-claiming women’s ways of knowing and being.

Indeed, many advances have been made on international levels in terms of human rights, social justice and ecological awareness. International communities, like the United Nations, and women’s organizations and conventions have forced governments to ratify certain acts against injustice and discrimination.\(^2\) However, while the awareness of the problems facing us is at an all time high, there are many faults in the methods, tools and thinking used to combat our global problems while religious and cultural factors serve as impediments to change. There is much work to be done in order to continue what seems to be some momentum towards global and ecological thinking.

Contemporary eco-feminists and activists around the world are proceeding along these lines precisely. Facing the alternative of engaging in a moral-political debate about the ecological well-being and fate of our planet without the platform of mythical, cultural, political and philosophical familiarity afforded by embracing religious paradigms and models, movements have long embraced the practice of reinterpretation. Counterproductive, hyper-contextual

\(^1\) As Mary Daly states in *Beyond God the Father*, Beacon Press, 1985, p.33, “One of the insights characteristic of the rising woman consciousness is that this kind of dichotomizing between cosmic power and personal need not be. That is, it is not necessary to anthropomorphize or to reify transcendence in order to relate to this personally. In fact, the process is demonic in some of its consequences. The dichotomizing-reifying-projecting syndrome has been characteristic of patriarchal consciousness, making ‘the Other’ the repository of the contents of the lost self. Since women are now beginning to recognize in ourselves the victims of such dichotomizing processes, the insight extends to other manifestations of the pathological splitting off of reality into falsely conceived opposites”.

\(^2\) Countless organizations have sought to bring global issues of injustice and discrimination to light on an international level, including: Amnesty International, United Nation’s Development for Advancement of Women, National Organization of Women (in the U.S.), the Commission for Investigation of Mistreatment of Women (in Spain), People Opposing Women’s Abuse (in South Africa), National Women’s Political Caucus (in the U.S.) and other governmental and non-governmental, national and international organizations. The benefits of such international efforts have culminated in the World Conference on Human Rights, the Fourth World Conference on Women, United Nation Conference on Environment and Development, whose policies towards equality and non-violence are reflected in various treaties, covenants and UN initiatives ranging from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. See also, [www.un.org/womenwatch](http://www.un.org/womenwatch).
or superficial nuances and social protocols may be peeled away to highlight and make room for the core positive, pro-active message resonating from ancient text, myth and oral traditions. Rather than throwing the preverbal baby out with the bath water, a significant sense of heightened ability as well as responsibility for preserving the earth can be garnered from the pre-patriarchal concepts of the Goddess and feminine energy as preserved and illustrated in ancient myth. To be sure, this is the great function myth generally affords society; to be re-formed and re-formed again, yet preserving some notion of commonality and sense towards ontological principles, esoteric though they may sometimes be. As Ruether points out in her discussion of the “Greening” of Hinduism, Vandana Shiva is one of many female treehuggers in India engaging in this process of re-interpretation, refusing to conform to the Hindu feminine roll of a submissive, naming “Hindu concepts of Shakti and Prakriti as the basis for her ecological struggle”.¹ In Mary Daly’s terms, such efforts might be seen as reversing the patriarchal reversal.²

Shiva’s work goes further though, than merely preserving the positive and powerful kinetic assets of the goddess, and clearly illustrates the legacy of the Maya-Shakti-Devi principle at work in the eco-feminist movement. Shiva’s activism is holistic and inclusive, interconnected. Shiva’s holistic approach leads to ecological and human rights minded political activism by demanding personal responsibility from the governance of political organizations and entities, as well as private entities and corporations. Quintessentially such activism reflects a concept of embodied justice. Shiva’s message includes a reminder that nature is the inventor, that she holds the trump card over all patents, and that a loss of biodiversity caused by man kind’s attempts at reigning in her force will be countered by an equally destructive response. Utilizing the mythical conceptualization of the Goddess as the force of nature, as the wilds, and as the Earth, dramatic attention is drawn to the effects of such patriarchal colonization practices.

In our present day of social, economic and ecological crisis we can ill afford to fragment the reality of being from itself. The divisions that separate us are superimposed and have perpetuated the justification for domination and destruction of the earth and ourselves. We have lost the connection of justice to the earth as that which binds Being together as a relationship of microcosm to macrocosm, as part to an organic whole. We have allowed for abstract principles to override concrete relations and we therefore search for justice everywhere but in ourselves. The challenge of eco-justice is the resurrection of the ancient belief that justice is embodied; embodied in the earth, the stars, the galaxies and in ourselves. We are guilty of greater hubris than even the Greeks could have imagined. We have lost touch with the sacredness of life, with

² Daly generally refers to the effect of patriarchal subjugations as “reversals” through out most of her work. In myth, for instance, the snake or serpent, which pre-patriarchy was a symbol of feminine life-giving power, because of its similarity in form to the umbilical cord, was re-interpreted by patriarchal religions as evil or demonic.
proper balance and proportion, with a living connection to the cosmos. The call of eco-justice is the movement beyond superimposed patriarchal law codes to an embodied understanding of the energetic fact of our connections and interrelations with the All that is.
CHAPTER TWELVE

The Position of Logic in the Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence: An Analysis of Al-Ghazzali’s thought on his Book, Al-Mustasfa Min ‘Ilm Al-Usul (The Quintessence of the Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence)

Hamat F. Mohd, University of Malaya

The position of Logic\(^1\) in the discipline of knowledge is an interesting issue that has been debated among Philosophers, theologians and Muslim scholars. It was first raised by the classical Greek scholars starting from Aristotle to the time after him and continued till the rise of Islam. In this paper, the author will look at this issue in the perspective of al-Ghazzali based on his introduction in the book, al-Mustasfa min ‘ilm al-Usul (the Quintessence of the Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence), a masterpiece which synthesized Logic and the Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence (‘Ilm Usul al-Fiqh”). This paper will also include his point of view on this issue in his other scholarly works. Al-Ghazzali has elaborated that, there are four types of knowledge which could be synthesized by the Principle of Islamic Jurisprudence; two types of introductory knowledge and two types of comprehensive knowledge. The two types of introductory knowledge are; firstly, Logic that is the science of verifying an evidence with condition until the al-burhan\(^2\) that is verified can

---


\(^2\) Al-burhan is a method of proving used by philosophical scholars and it becomes their pride. Al-Ghazzali, who renews and argues "Ilm al-Kalam" based on tariqah al-muta’akhirah, also uses al-burhan as the proving method to replace dialectic method (al-jadal) which is widely used by Muslim theologian scholars previously. The use of this term in the Classical Logic also means to a statement whereby its premise is only based on the principles of certain knowledge.
produce a correct and accurate conclusion, and secondly the science of Language and Arabic Grammar (*al-Nahw*). The other two types of comprehensive knowledge are, firstly, the science of abrogating rules contained in the Qur’an and Hadith, also known as *nasikh* and *mansukh*. The second type is the science of Hadith, particularly related to the methods or techniques of narrating a Hadith and the differences between the correct (*sahih*) and incorrect hadith.

Before analyzing al-Ghazzali’s work, the author will first translate and annotate a passage which is related to the issue that is going to be discussed and the portion that explains the sub-topics of the discussion. Logic here refers to the Classical Logic or Formal Logic that was arranged by Aristotle and also known as “Aristotelian Logic”. This comprises two major topics; concepts (*al-tasawwurat*) and judgments (*al-tasdiqat*). In discussing the judgment aspect, al-Ghazzali related this topic by his Arabic term ‘*al-nazar*’, which is ‘the ascertaining process that shifts from a specific premise to a conclusion’. If a premise used in an argument is taken from data that are assumed to be true based on the majority point of view, then it is called as ‘analogical deduction’ (*qiyas khitabi*). But if the premise is taken from the data which consist of the definite truth from which a reliable conclusion (*‘ilm al-yaqin*) can be produced, then the *al-nazar* is called as *al-burhan*. *Al-Burhan* method is the common method used in Theology and Philosophy. Al-Ghazzali has discussed on the fundamental features which consist of important data suitable to take as the premise for *al-qiyas/al-burhan* where the resulting conclusion produced in through the argument is up to the standard of *‘ilm al-yaqin*. The data referred to are axioms (*al-awwaliyat*), internal sensory data (*al-musyahadat al-batinah*), external sensory data (*al-mahsusat al-zahirah*), empirical data (*al-tajribiyyat*) and transmitted data (*al-mutawatirat*). The fundamental difference in this preface characterizes *al-nazar* itself. This makes the art of syllogism uniquely inherited from the Greek scholars.

In this paper, the author will conclude that al-Ghazzali is more likely to agree with the majority (*jumhur*) of scholars who say that Logic is the ‘intellectual instrument’ and ‘preface’ to knowledge. From here, he tries to use Logic as his driving methodology in discussing the theoretical Islamic sciences like ‘*Ilm Usul al-Fiqh* and Islamic Theology (*‘Ilm al-Kalam*). Undoubtedly, adding Logic as a ‘preface’, ‘instrument’ and ‘research methodology’ is a contribution in strengthening the sciences that cultivate the Islamic civilization. Their acceptance of Logic for this reason illustrates their selective commitment to the modes and manner of the earlier wisdom whereby some of them feel and make *ijtihad* that it was a missing but essential belonging which must be collected wherever they encounter it.
Translation of the preface discussing the position of Logic

“We mention in this preface (of this book) on the matters that are reasonable or achievable by mental faculties (madarik al-‘uqul) and its limit to the concept of definition (al-hadd) and concept of demonstration (al-burhan). We [also] will mention in it the requirement of the definitive al-hadd4 and the definitive al-burhan with the explanation on both of them [al-hadd and al-burhan] based on the simpler method as compared to our explanation in the book, Mihak al-Nazar5 and Mi’yar al-‘Ilm.6 This preface actually is neither included in the...
collection of *'Ilm Usul al-Fiqh* nor being the special introduction to the discipline\(^1\). It has been the introduction to all disciplines\(^2\). Those who do not know this (understand the Logical methods discussed in it), then the knowledge he possesses cannot be trusted. [Therefore], those who do not want to write [take into consideration] this preface, he should start [read] the book from the first part because that part is [considered as] the starting point to *'Ilm Usul al-Fiqh*. [Not only *'Ilm Usul al-Fiqh* on its characteristics as the theoretical knowledge which needs such this preface], but it is also needed by all [other] theoretical knowledge\(^3\) (*al-'ulum al-nazariyyah*), as what is needed by *'Ilm Usul al-Fiqh*.

Let us understand that perception (*iddrak*) of something can be divided into two types, [firstly] the perception on simple substance, for example, you can know the meanings such as ‘mass’ (*jism*), ‘movement’ (*al-harakah*), ‘universe’, new (*al-hadith*), ‘eternal’\(^4\) (*qadim*), and other meanings that are towards Logic which is treated as a scale measure or standard to knowledge. See, al-Ghazzali (1990), *Mi'yar al-'Ilm fi al-Mantiq*, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, p. 222.

\(^1\) This statement clearly expels the Logic preface from being taken as a part of *'Ilm Usul al-Fiqh*. This is because the scope of the discussion on *Usul al-Fiqh* as explained by al-Ghazzali in the introduction part of the book only evolves around four parts, excluding the introduction itself. See, al-Ghazzali (1997), *al-Mustasfa*, j.l. edited by Dr. Muhammad Sulayman al-Asyqar, Beirut: Mu’assasah al-Risalah, p.35.

\(^2\) This is because Logic can clearly be an ‘instrument’, a ‘tool’ or ‘methodology’ to all theoretical knowledge, for example *'Ilm al-Kalam*. There are some Muslim theologian scholars (*mutakallimun*) who emulate al-Ghazzali after he places the arguments on the simplified Logic methods in their works of *'Ilm al-Kalam*. Among them are, al-Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi in *Muhassal Afkar al-Mutaqaddimin wa al-Muta’akhirin* (*The Outcomes of Previous and Present Muslim Scholars’ thinking*), al-Imam al-Baydawi in *Tawali al-Anwar min Matali al-Anzar* (*The Rise of Light from the Horizon of Knowledge Surveillance*) and al-Imam al-Iji in *al-Mawaqif fi 'Ilm al-Kalam* (*The Perspectives of *'Ilm Kalam*). Taking al-Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi’s fondness for example, see Mohd Fauzi bin Hamat (2000), *Mantik Aristotle dalam Karya Ulama: Satu Analisis Terhadap Beberapa Bahan Penulisan al-Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi* (*Aristotelian Logic in Muslim Scholars’ Works: An Analysis of Some Works of al-Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi*) in *Journal of Usuahdin*: no. 11, p. 5-10. In fact, some scholars see this fondness shows that those scholars are influenced with the specific Aristotle’s philosophical method brought by al-Ghazzali. See, Martin, Richard C. and Woodward, Mark R. with Atmaja, Dwi. S. (1997), *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu’tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, p. 1.

\(^3\) Theoretical knowledge is a science or knowledge in the form of theories. Aristotle named three types or divisions of it; Physic, Mathematic and Metaphysic. See, Grene, Marjorie (1963), *A Portrait of Aristotle*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, p. 67. The theoretical knowledge too is not limited to these three divisions but also comprises of all other sciences or knowledge where their topics of discussion is theoretical, including *'Ilm al-Kalam*, *'Ilm al-Fiqh* etc. The Muslim philosophers who are influenced by the philosophical thought also classify knowledge into two types; theoretical type of inquiry and practical type of inquiry, similar to the classification made by the philosophers of Greek. See, Morewedge, Parviz, “Analysis of “Substance” in Tusi’s Logic and in The Ibn Sinaian Tradition” in Stern, S.M. et. Al (Ed.) (1973), *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, p. 162.

\(^4\) This word is borrowed from the Arabic word ‘*qadim*’ which means “existing on its own, that is no beginning in its existence, in other words, indeed Allah does not start at ‘nothing’ (*'adam*) and he is everlasting”. See, al-Ghazzali (1990), *al-Iqtisad fi al-I’tiqad*, edited by Dr.
shown by singular nouns, [meanwhile] the second category is the perception on
the relation (*nisbah*) between a singular noun which is being related or
combined with other singular noun, either in the form of affirmation or
negation*(al-nafy wa al-ithbat)*.

This means [the above statement], firstly, one must know the meaning of
the nouns such as ‘nature’, ‘new’, and ‘eternal’, and then each can be related to
other nouns either in the form of affirmation or negation. For example, the
noun ‘eternal’ is related to the noun ‘universe’ in the negative form and the
statement that ‘this universe is not eternal’ (*laysa al-’alam qadiman*)
Alternatively, the noun ‘new’ is related to it [the noun ‘universe’] in the
affirmation form and the statement that ‘this universe is new’. The last part [of
these two categories] may be proclaimed as a true or false statement.

Indeed, the first part [from the two categories, that is the singular noun
category], can neither be agreed upon or disagreed upon because that
agreement or disagreement could only be made upon a statement that has a
declarational element*. This kind of statement at least consists of two parts of a
singular word; an adjective or descriptive word (*wasf*) and the thing being
described (*mawsuf*). When an adjective is related to a thing that is described
either in the affirmative form or negative form, then the statement can be
agreed or disagreed [on its truth].

Indeed locutions that use a singular noun such as ‘new’, ‘mass’ and
‘eternal’, cannot be agreed or disagreed upon. It is not problematic to use
multiple terms [to refer to the meanings of both categories] to clarify these two
rationally acceptable categories of knowledge. This is because the things [or
the meanings of things] that are different certainly may be stated through
different expressions so long as they convey the same meaning. This is because
the position of the statements is in line with their meanings, where the meaning
must be parallel to the statement used or said [to refer to its meaning].

---


1 Here it means that the combination or composition between the two singular nouns will create
a statement that could be judged, either in positive or negative form.

2 The statement means that a noun that is associated with another noun till it creates a
proposition consists of subject and predicate can only be determined whether it is true or false
based on how far the proposition is accurate with the reality.

3 It means cannot be related to the value of true or false.

4 It means that judgment (*tasdiq*) can only be related to the proposition that consists of
declarative sentences (*jumlah khabariyah*). It is not part of proposition which has the
exclamatory sentences (*jumlah insya‘iyyah*) such as questions (*istifham*), exclamations (*nida‘*),
or commands (*amr*).

5 This means that an expression used to clarify a meaning of something should be able to
explain a perfect understanding of something until the listener does not understand any other
meaning besides the meaning that the speakers intends to convey when it is being expressed,
for example, the expression ‘al-kitab’ which refers to a bound book, not a sheet of note, a
working paper, journal etc.
Logicians (*al-*mantiqiyyun) refer to the singular noun as a ‘concept’¹ and the relationship² between subject (*mawdu‘*) and predicate (*mahmul*) as ‘judgment’³. To explain the meaning, they refer to knowledge (‘ilm) in the form of a concept or judgement. Some scholars⁴ name first knowledge (the earlier knowledge) ‘cognition’ (*ma’rifah*) and second knowledge (the second category) as ‘knowledge’ (‘ilm). This is because they seem to follow the footsteps of the Arabic philologists (al-nuhat) who maintained that a cognitive science needs only an object, for example one may say “‘araftu Zaydan” (I knew Zaid), even though an opinion science⁵ (al-zann) needs two objects, e.g. “zanantu Zaydan ‘aliman” (I think that Zaid is a knowledgeable person). One cannot say “zanantu Zaydan” (I assumed Zaid) or “zanantu ‘aliman” (I assumed/believed a knowledgeable person). Since ‘ilm is part of al-zann, therefore one must say “alimtu Zaydan ‘adlan” (I know Zaid is just)⁶ because it needs two objects.

These meanings can be coined with various terms from common practice. If one understands the difference between the two categories then the differences will not be a question anymore. Therefore, we declare that the perception of something revolves around ‘cognition’ (‘tasawwur’) and ‘knowledge’ (‘tasdiq’). Essentially, any knowledge that can be proven true or false must begin with the understanding of the two ‘cognition’ (two ‘tasawwur’) (something which forms the statement itself). If one does not know [how to conceptualize clearly] the meaning of a singular noun, then one cannot know the meaning of a complete statement formed by a subject and a

---

¹ This term which is borrowed from the Arabic language ‘tasawwur’ means “the knowledge on the conceptual features on the essential of something as said through single expression without being given any fixed judgment on it”.
² The term ‘relationship’ here means the relationship of the narration built after a singular predicate is correlated with a singular subject. The effort to connect between the predicate and the subject can explain a narration that is related to the singular noun.
³ This term can also be translated as ‘verification’. It means ‘the knowledge on the relationship between something with something else as a result of the combination between a subject and predicate which form a proposition’.
⁴ The scholars mentioned here refer to the mutakallimun who were involved directly in conferring some logical methodology.
⁵ The term ‘al-zann’ here refers to ‘an opinion towards something that is not certainly truth, but is more likely to be true’. In this translation, the author uses the term ‘opinion’ to refer to the meaning.
⁶ Based on this statement, it is understood that the mutakallimun are more likely to imitate the term expressed by the Grammarians by looking at the use of the term ‘ma’rifah’ produced from the verb ‘arafa’ whereby it only needs one object in a sentence, while the term ‘‘ilm produced by the verb ‘alima’ needs two objects. This is because its usage is the same as the use of the term ‘zann’ from the verb ‘zanna’. This shows clearly that designating ‘ma’rifah’ which means ‘cognition’ to replace ‘tasawwur’ and ‘ilm to replace ‘tasdiq’ is based on the scholars whose perspectives see that there is a similarity between the interchanging terms. It refers to the similarities between ma’rifah and tasawwur from its necessity scope and its focus on something or singular noun only. Meanwhile, the similarities between ‘ilm and tasdiq are their necessity scope and their focus on two things needs to be related to make sure the expression used is easily understood by the listeners.
predicate. If one does not understand the meaning of ‘universe’ and ‘new’, then how will he understand the meaning of the statement “the universe is new”?

The first category of knowledge [tasawwur] can be divided into two types; firstly, the basic concept (tasawwur al-awwali), and the acquired concept (tasawwur al-matlub), in which the meaning needs to be thought out and analyzed in detail. The first type (awwali) is the knowledge on the meaning of a singular noun that can be pictured in one’s mind without analyzing its meaning (it can be understood easily), for instance the meaning of words like ‘exist’, ‘thing’ (al-syayr) and other common things [that can be understood by human senses]. Meanwhile the second type (al-matlub) is the knowledge on a singular noun that shows the collective meaning (jumli) and its meaning is not detailed and defined [clearly]. This kind of meaning need to be interpreted using the al-hadd [method]. The same goes for the second category of knowledge (al-tasdiq). It can be divided into two types, [firstly] the basic judgment (al-tasdiq al-awwali), for example [knowledge about] the essential things and [secondly] the acquired judgment (al-tasdiq al-matlub) (that needs to be observed and analyzed in detail)\(^1\), for example [knowledge about] the theoretical things.

Knowledge on al-tasawwur al-matlub can only be achieved through the method of al-hadd, while knowledge on al-tasdiq al-matlub\(^2\) can only be achieved through the method of al-burhan\(^3\) method. This means that al-burhan and al-hadd methods are instruments used to achieve all the knowledge [types] that have the matlab quality [either from tasawwur or tasdiq]. It is clear that the introduction outlined here to explain the knowledge that can be perceived by human intellect consists of two [main] divisions or categories; al-tasawwur and al-tasdiq.

---

\(^1\) The classification of knowledge either for tasawwur or tasdiq into two types; basis and theoretical was also talked about by the mutatakallimun. They also differentiated between two categories of knowledge named as fundamental knowledge (‘ilm daruri) and theoretical knowledge (‘ilm nazari). ‘Ilm daruri is innate and produced naturally by human mind. A person is born with this knowledge and he does not acquire it through experience. Meanwhile, the theoretical knowledge is acquired through inference (istidlal), therefore it needs to be learned or acquired (matlub/muktasab). See, Louay Safi, Dr. (1998), Asas-asas Ilmu Pengetahuan: Satu Kajian Perbandingan Kaedah-kaedah Penyelidikan Islam dan Barat (The Principles of Knowledge: A Comparative Study between Islamic and Western Research Methods). Translated by Nur Hadi Ihsan, Kuala Lumpur: The International Institute of Islamic Thought (Malaysia) & Thinkers Library, p. 79-80.

\(^2\) In the original text, it is “wa al-matlub min al-‘ilm al-ladhi yatatarraq ilayhi al-tasdiq wa al-takhdhib…” (the matlab category from which the knowledge can be related to the agreement or denial of truth…). However, the author has simplified the meaning here because it has been explained earlier.

\(^3\) Al-Ghazzali only uses the term al-burhan to refer to the method of proving in the preface or preamble of al-Mustasfa even in another book, Mihak al-Nazar, he uses another term that is synonymous to one of the syllogistic divisions. See, al-Ghazzali (19960, Mihak al-Nazar, Beirut: Dar al-Nahdah al-Hadithah, p. 9-10.
Text Analysis on the Position of Logic as the Preface to Knowledge

In the explanation of the translated text, al-Ghazzali clarifies the position of Logic as ‘the preface (starting point) to all sciences (knowledge)’. Knowledge here means the theoretical knowledge, as recognized through the specific explanation in the next paragraph which considers its importance, including the ‘Ilm al-Usul Fiqh itself towards Logic’. Here al-Ghazzali emphasizes the proper logical methods to be used in all fields of theoretical knowledge, whether it is related to worldly or religious affairs.

In fact, al-Ghazzali’s point of view in al-Mustasfa was not his new idea in perceiving the issue of position of Logic in the discipline of knowledge. It was only to strengthen his similar perspective on this matter, as presented in Mi’yar al-’Ilm. In the book, he declared that the logic method was very useful to all theoretical knowledge, either rational knowledge or ‘Ilm al-Fiqh. He further added that the verification process and intellectual observation known as al-nazar in the rational knowledge (al-’ulum al-aqliyyah) was similar to the process in ‘Ilm al-Fiqh, in both composition technique and the conditions. The only difference is the approach for preserving the premise alone. This is because al-nazar used in al-Fiqh can consist of a proposition of al-masyhurat.

---

1 Ibid, p. 45
2 ‘Al-nazar’ here means the ascertaining process which shifts from a specific premise to come out with a conclusion. If a premise used in an argument is taken from data that are assumed to be true based on the majority point of view, then it is called as ‘analogical deduction’ (qiyas khitabi), but if the premise is taken from the data which consist of the definite truth from which a reliable or certain conclusion (’ilm al-yaqin) can be produced, then the al-nazar is called as al-burhan. Al-Burhan method is the common method used in Theology and Philosophy.
3 Al-Ghazzali, Mi’yar al-’Ilm, p. 184. This means that if a premise is taken from the definitive knowledge, its conclusion is called as ‘analytic’. If it is based on someone’s opinion, in which its truth is acceptable, then its conclusion is called ‘dialectical’, while the introduction that is based on a person’s simply words/purely verbal, that is without any reliable basis, then its conclusion is called as ‘sophistic’. See Brumbaugh, Robert S. (1981), The Philosophers of Greece. New York: Albany State University of New York Press, p. 187. Syamsuddin Arif (2000), “Intuition and Its Role in Ibn Sina’s Epistemology” in al-Shajarah, vol. 5, no. 1, Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, p. 101. Al-Ghazzali has discussed on the fundamental features which consist of important data that are suitable to take as premise for al-giyas/al-burhan where the conclusion produced in an argument is up to the standard of ‘ilm al-yaqin. The data referred are axioms (al-awwaliyat), internal sensory data (al-musyahadat al-batinah), external sensory data (al-mahsusat al-zahirah), empirical data (al-tajribiyat) and transmitted data (al-mutawatirat). See, al-Ghazzali, al-Mustasfa min ‘Ilm al-Usul, n.p., p. 94-7; Mohd Fauzi Hamat (2001), Ketokohan al-Ghazzali dalam Bidang Mantik: Suatu Analisis Terhadap Mukaddimah al-Kitab dalam Kitab al-Mustasfa min ‘Ilm al-Usul (The Prominence of al-Ghazzali in Logic: An Analysis of Muqaddimah al-Kitab in al-Mustasfa min ‘Ilm al-Usul) (PhD thesis, Academy of Islamic Studies, University of Malaya), p. 455-68. In the other work, al-Iqtisad, he introduces other terms such as pure reason data (al-‘aql al-mahd) and perceived data [from al-syari’] (al-sam’iyyat), see al-Ghazzali, al-Iqtisad fi al-I’tiqad, p. 132-4.
4 ‘Al-masyhurat’ premise here means a premise or opinion which contains a famous or popular view in a society and approved by everyone in the society, or acknowledged by a part of them or recognized by prominent scholars among them that is not denied by the majority of the
al-maqbulat (opinion that can be considered true) and al-maznunat (things that are most probably true or assumed to be true)\textsuperscript{1}.

There is some disagreement among philosophers in concerning the position of Logic, whether it is an instrument for philosophy or a part of philosophy itself\textsuperscript{2}. The majority of philosophers say that Logic is an instrument or a tool for philosophy and, based on what had been written by al-Ghazzali in \textit{al-Mustasfa}, it is obvious that he agreed with their opinion. He perceived Logic as a methodology, a preamble and prologue to knowledge. This opinion is similar to Aristotle’s\textsuperscript{3}, who was responsible in organizing the law of Logic and he was named as the first teacher in this field\textsuperscript{4} because of his contribution. In Philosophy, he placed Logic as the starting point for all philosophical analysis and this shows its importance in knowledge\textsuperscript{5}. The translation of Logic into Arabic language was also driven by a recognition of its importance as a methodology of thought and tool for the acquisition of knowledge\textsuperscript{6}.

What has been said by al-Ghazzali in \textit{al-Mustasfa} regarding the position of Logic is also the well-known opinion of the leading Muslim logicians such as

---

\textsuperscript{1} al-Ghazzali, \textit{Mi’yar al-’Ilm}, p. 184. The fundamental difference in this premise characterized al-nazar itself. This makes the art of syllogistic unique inherited from the Greek scholars. Verification that based on al-masyurat premise is named as \textit{qiyas khitabi} while verification based on al-maqbulah or al-musallamah premise is named as \textit{qiyas al-jadali}. See Ibn Taymiyyah, Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halim (1949), \textit{Kitab al-Radd ‘ala al-Mantiqiyyin}. Bombay: al-Matba’ah al-Qayyimah, p. 5, Brumbaugh, op. cit., p.187.

\textsuperscript{2} Debates and disputes on these issues had begun since the time of classical philosophers until the time of Ibn Sina. Platonist school of philosophy (\textit{al-Aflatuniyyun}) believes that Logic is one of Philosophy branches and at the same time it is also an ‘instrument’ to it. While, Peripatetic school (\textit{al-Masya’iyyun}) believes that Logic is an instrument to Philosophy, the Stoics followers believe that Logic is only a branch of Philosophy. For further details, see, Ibn Sina (1984), \textit{Remarks and Admonitions: part One: Logic}, translated by Shams Constantine Inati, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1984, p. 9-10. See also, Barnes, Jonathan, “Logic and Language” in Algra, Kiemle, et. al., (ed.) (1999), \textit{The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy}, 1st ed., London: Cambridge University Press, p. 67. Kneale believes that these debates are simply the quarrel about words and each opposing party agrees that Logic should be the first knowledge to be learned by a Philosopher. See, Kneale, William & Kneale Martha (1978), \textit{The Development of Logic}, 7th ed., London: Redwood Burn Limited Trowbridge, p. 737.

\textsuperscript{3} In the sciences formed by Aristotle, he did not take Logic as a branch of Philosophy but perceived it as an “organon” or ‘instrument’ for a true thought. See Jancar, Barbara (1966), \textit{The Philosophy of Aristotle}. New York: Simon and Schuster Inc., p. 29.


\textsuperscript{5} Zainal Abidin Baqir (1998), \textit{The Problem of Definition in Islamic Logic}. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought. p. 1. Based on this statement, there are scholars who term Logic as “instrumental knowledge” that uses language to proof something. See Brumbaugh, \textit{The Philosophers of Greece}, p. 187.

al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Baghdadi, Ibn Rusyd (Averos), and others. Al-Farabi, for example, suggests that the law of Logic should be used as instruments or a tool to analyze the truth of a reasonable thing based solely on human reason. Without any help or guidance from those it may cause deviations in human thinking and sometimes failure in identifying the ‘truth’ of things, as is what happens with measurement devices1.

Ibn Sina too has taken a similar position. According to him, Logic is the essential preface to philosophy, especially to those who do not have a clear interest in philosophy [that is, those who are not specialists], and those who are not able to reason appropriately using the common senses. Indeed, those who can reason properly with the senses (i.e. those with an inborn disposition or instinct (al-saliqah) for it), do not need Logic. The metaphor is similar to the situation where Bedouin Arabs who do not need ‘Ilm al-Nahw (Arabic Grammar) in speeches because they can speak in virtue of their instinct, natural strength and established language facility2.

The agreement among the Muslim scholars on this issue shows that they tend to accept Aristotle’s logical position on the hierarchy of knowledge. Their recognition of the role of logic for clear thought and the fostering of wisdom (al-hikmah)3(Ibn al-Haytham4) as well as for certain knowledge (al-Ghazzali5), significantly motivates their approach to the discipline. Even though al-Ghazzali agrees with most of the Muslim scholars before him in saying that Logic is an intellectual instrument or tool for evaluating knowledge, al-Ghazzali is actually the most distinctive and unique among them. For he attempts to use that ‘instrument’ to spread the Islamic sciences (e.g. consider, ‘Ilm al-Kalam and ‘Ilm Usul al-Fiqh aims for strengthening the Islamic doctrines through this ‘instrument’ use of logic. This is different from the major interests of the previous logicians who prefer to use Logic to argue on the philosophical theories. Al-Farabi, for example, attempts to use Logic as a ‘philosophical method’ to set up and harmonize philosophy with religious

5 al-Ghazzali (1936), Maqasid al-Falasifa, Cairo: Dar al-Taba‘ah al-Mahmudiyyah al-Tijariyyah, p. 6. The term “‘ilm al-yaqin” also refers to a part of the meaning of ‘hikmah’ that is the truthful knowledge which describes an information clearly without any doubt or the possibility of being wrong in it. See, al-Ghazzali (1964), al-Mungidh min al-Dalal, Cairo: Maktabah al-Anglo al-Misriyyah, p. 13-14.
teachings. According to him, philosophy and religion can get along well if both of them are well understood\(^1\).

Al-Ghazzali’s role has been a success in strengthening the central Islamic sciences set up by the previous scholars such as al-Imam al-Syafi’i, al-Imam al-Asy’ari, al-Imam al-Juwayni and others. Based on the perception that Logic is only an ‘instrument’ or a ‘tool’ to philosophy, he strives hard to put it as a separate science from the philosophy itself. Later, he attempts to adjoin Logic, as a sole discipline by itself, with other Islamic learning.

In fact the birth of the book, “Mi’yar al-‘Ilm” before “al-Mustasfa” was his early plan to bring out Logic as an ‘instrument’ and a ‘scale measure’ for knowledge. Indeed the book was written for that purpose as can be understood in the following statement:

“….Understanding the methods of thinking and perception (al-nazar) and explaining metaphorical ways and methods of deriving conclusions...”\(^2\)

As mentioned earlier, after writing al-Mi’yar with the purpose of taking Logic as the ‘instrument’ and the ‘scale measure’ for him to reject those philosophical views that are not in line with Islamic theology (‘aqidah), he then writes “al-Qistas al-Mustaqim” (The Just Balance). This writing also treats Logic as the ‘instrument’ and ‘scale measure’ of knowledge. If in al-Mi’yar, al-Ghazzali uses the term “mi’yar” which means ‘scale measure’, but in al-Qistas al-Mustaqim, he changes the term to a new term “mizan” which means ‘scale of balance’. If ‘Mi’yar’ rejects philosophical views that conflict with Islamic theology, then al-Qistas al-Mustaqim is written to introduce the method of thought based on the ‘just balance’ or ‘scale of balance’. This contrast is roughly parallel to views of the Shii’tes who hold to the concept of sinless or infallible of imam (Islamic leaders) and to the Muktazilites who depend more on human reason than revealed sources\(^3\).

The birth of al-Mustasfa is part of the effort to develop Logic as an ‘instrument’ that is not only suitable for arguments in philosophical theories, but also useful in elaborating the principles in Usul al-Fiqh. That is why according to the author’s point of view, al-Ghazzali uses much of al-hadd and al-burhan as important method in discussing Usul al-Fiqh in the book. Some of the examples have been mentioned in the introduction of al-Mustasfa, that is, when he explains the Logical methods which become the preface to the book.

Moreover, it is important to highlight al-Ghazzali’s declaration in the preface which states, “Whosoever does not know Logic, his knowledge cannot

---


be trusted". This statement cannot be seen as one that is made by a Muslim scholar who is ‘too fascinated’ by the profundity and greatness of the Aristotelian Logic -- wherein he must be criticized. It should be taken as a statement that reminds them of the need for a methodology that would ensure that their *ijtihad* (a method used by Muslim thinkers to interpret legal questions based on their independent judgment) will produce legislation from the syari’ah sources and not deviate from the truth. This reality can be well understood in his statement as follow:

“….Indeed a mujtahid (a person who makes *ijtihad*) will be right [in his *ijtihad*] if he is able to do a complete and perfect al-nazar….“

The above statement explains that a mujtahid needs to be proficient in using the method of *al-nazar* that is formulated based on the law of Logic -- something not possessed exclusively by the Greek scholars only, but by all of mankind, including Muslims. Logic is one of the four sciences that is must be possessed by a mujtahid to enable him to produce legislation from the syari’ah sources. According to him, if a mujtahid wants to know more on the science completely, he can refer to the Logical preface or preamble as written in *al-Mustasfa*.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that al-Ghazzali is likely to assume and highlight Logic as an ‘instrument’ or ‘methodology’ for elaborating the Islamic sciences, especially ‘Ilm Usul al-Fiqh, In *al-Qistas al-Mustaqim*, as mentioned by Dr. Muhammad Mahran, he attempts to apply the deduction method that is based on the Islamic theological principles (*`Aqidah*) taken from al-Qur’an, in *al-Mustasfa* he attempts to apply the law of Logic, including deduction in discussing Usul al-Fiqh.

As mentioned earlier, this interest does not uncontrovertial among the previous Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. This shows not only al-Ghazzali’s excellence as a great Muslim scholar in general, but also particularly shows him to be a noble and profound scholar of Logic. Moreover, his decision to introduce Logic in the preface of *‘Ilm Usul al-Fiqh* was quite

---

1. Al-Ghazzali, *al-Mustasfa*, j. 1., p. 45. Ibn Taymiyyah and al-Imam al-Suyuti were among the prominent Muslim scholars who strongly criticised al-Ghazzali on this issue based on their own opinion.
3. Four types of knowledge here; two types of introductory knowledge and two types of comprehensive knowledge. Two types of introductory knowledge are, firstly, Logic that is a science on verifying an evidence with condition till *al-huraran* that is verified can produced a correct and accurate conclusion, and secondly a science on Language and Arabic Grammar (*Nahw*). In the meantime, two comprehensive knowledge are, firstly, a science on abrogating rules contained in the Qur’an and Hadith, also known as *nasikh* and *mansukh*, and secondly, a science of Hadith, particularly related to the methods or techniques of narrating a Hadith and the differences between the correct (*sahih*) and incorrect hadith. See, al-Ghazzali, *al-Mustasfa*, j. 2., p. 385-7.
appropriate. This is because those people who possessed al-saliqah, and so, able to produce legislation from the Qur’an, without methodological support would have been in decline.

During the companions’ (al-sahabah) period there were many scholars who were able to solve various legislative problems without using Usul al-Fiqh method or the established logic. They could think precisely because they had a very clear understanding on the Qur’an and Hadith as the main sources of Islamic Syari’ah. Assuming that their intelligence was not as great as those of the philosophers, their unique ability to understand the content of the revealed sources nevertheless enabled them readily to produce laws from those sources. This happened to Ibn ‘Abbas and to some of the other companions.

Furthermore, even though Logic in the time of al-sahabah was not considered by the early Muslim generation to be a science, logic was widely employed. Some may think that it impossible that the law of Logic could have been employed if there was so little of it in the Arabic works of that time. But in my opinion, their thinking has fulfilled the basics of logical thought as discussed by logicians and the Prophet (pbuh) himself who was a rational man. Additionally, he was informed by basic principles of logical thought as they arise in the Qur’an, especially al-burhan. This was shown by al-Ghazzali when he successfully derived ‘mizan al-haqq’ from the Qur’an, as was mentioned in al-Qistas al-Mustaqim. The companions of the Prophet (pbuh) that were guided directly by him were exposed to the way the Prophet (pbuh) thought as he was directly lead by Allah s.w.t. through revelation.

Based on this point of view, I think the following statement of al-Ghazzali in al-Mustasfa should not create confusion among the Muslims: “anyone who does not understand Logic, therefore his knowledge cannot be trusted”. This is because al-Ghazzali knows well enough the position of the earlier generation, especially the al-sahabah generation who were able to discuss the laws and legislations related to al-nazar (ahkam al-nazar). Therefore, he attempts to highlight the importance of Logic in the preface of his book, al-Mustasfa.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that al-Ghazzali is more likely to agree with the majority (jumhur) of philosophers including Muslim philosophers who say that Logic is the ‘intellectual instrument’ and ‘preface’ to knowledge. From here, he tries to use Logic as his research methodology in discussing the theoretical Islamic sciences like ‘Ilm Usul al-Fiqh and ‘Ilm al-Kalam. Undoubtedly, adding Logic as a ‘preface’, ‘instrument’ and research methodology is a great contribution which strengthens the Islamic sciences and which also cultivate Islamic civilization. Their acceptance of Logic for this reason illustrates their selective commitment to the modes and manner of the earlier wisdom whereby some of them feel and make ijtihad that it was a missing but essential belonging which must be collected wherever they encounter it.
Indian Yoni-Linga and Chinese Yin-Yang: Conceptual Comparisons

Ding Z. John, California State Polytechnic University

Dao gave birth to the One; the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand things. These ten thousand things contain Yin and Yang, and through this blending of Qi (vital energies or powers) it reaches harmony.

Laozi, Dao De Jing

The Purva Mimamsa tells us that scriptural statement (sriti) indicatory mark (linga) and syntactical connection (vakya) are of greater force than subject-matter (prakarana) and these three means of proof confirm the view that the fires are independent meditation.

The Brahma Sutra

Indian philosophy of Yoni-Linga may be examined as a parallel to the Chinese philosophy of “Yin-Yang”. But what are the similarities and distinctions between the two kinds of dichotomies? For the sake of the theoretical formulation, some conceptual, analytical and cross-cultural perspectives appropriate for reasoning and explaining “Yoni-Linga” and “Yin-Yang” should be reconstructed for establishing a more complete examination. This paper will make semiological, aesthetical, ontological and theological comparisons between these two of the most famous pairs of conceptual antonyms.

Semiological and Aesthetical Comparisons

According to The Brahman Sutra, Linga or Lingam, a term from the Sanskrit, is the indicatory or inferential mark, “The Purva Mimamsa tells us that scriptural statement (sriti) indicatory mark (linga) and syntactical connection (vakya) are of greater force than subject-matter (prakarana) and these three means of proof confirm the view that the fires are independent meditation”.

Linga means phallus and represents the half unity of consciousness while Yoni

1 According to Chinese language usage, we apply yin-yang, not yang-yin, but this word order has no specific philosophical meaning.
is the female sexual organ. *Linga* is always combined with its counterpart, *Yoni*, which forms the base from which the *Linga* rises. *Yoni-Linga* is a sexual symbolizing unity for positive and negative polarity.

Etymologically and semantically, Chinese *Yin* means: 1) the moon or cloudy 2) dark or shadow 3) female or pistillate 4) vagina or menses 5) cold or wet 6) death or hell 7) secret or invisible 8) silence or gloomy 9) north of mountains or south of rivers, 10) shady or inside. *Yang* means: 1) the sun or sunshine 2) light or bright 3) male or “masculine 4) phallus or semen 5) warm or dry 6) living or recovery 7) I or myself, 8) clear or melodious 9) eyes or visible 10) south of mountains or north of rivers 11) exposed to the sun or outside. Significantly, we may find that *Yin-Yang* really symbolizes the natural and physical objects or phenomena rather than the spiritual ones.

Both *Yoni-Linga* and *Yin-Yang*, as the metaphors, are some “signs”, “marks”, “symbols”, “characteristics”, “models”, or “patterns” of certain things or ideas. Most particularly, they are also some “signs” of gender, sex or generative power. Same with Indian *Yoni* and Chinese *Yin* which are “icons” of the female organs of generation, Indian *Linga* and Chinese *Yang*, as the phallic symbols or emblems, designate “phallic worship”.

Like *Yin* and *Yang*, when associated with each other, *Yoni* (vulva/vagina) and *Linga* (phallus) become a typical symbol of the divine procreative energy. By emanating its all-producing energy to the four quarters of the universe, *Linga* is frequently stylized though and more austere rather than appearing in its literal form as a sex symbol in an erect position. Similar to other civilizations, through ring-stones and clay figures, *Yoni-Linga* displaying male and female sex organs, which have been found among the urban remains of the Indus Valley. When depicted alone *Yoni* is referred to as a chalice (argha) or water-vessel (jalahari), sometimes shaped like a conch-shell, or represented by a downward pointing triangle. *Linga* is depicted as rounded at top and bottom to show that it does not stand or arise from anywhere in our space or time; it may look egg-shaped, and recall the Cosmic Egg, which size is generally determined by the size of the temple housing it.

Generally speaking, *Yoni-Linga* has much more aesthetical significances and emphases than *Yin-Yang*. *Yoni-Linga*, colored in ochre with flowers of libations of holy water, has multiple statues, carvings, and pictures. The sacred sculptures of *Sakti-Siva* or *Yoni-Linga* can not only be found in temples all over India and Nepal, but also as abundant phallus ornaments (usually made of stone) in the streets, courtyards and houses. Every day, people bring offers of

---

1 According to Nyaya philosophy, *Linga* is one of three parts of the inferential process. *Linga* may be a medium of a sign or a focal point from which something may be inferred; or which indicates a boundary or distinction between two or more objects; or as the *Linga-vyapta* (a term in logic) which represents the invariable mark denoting the connection between two phenomena, like fire and smoke, the latter being the sign (*linga*) of the presence of fire. Like *Yin-Yang*, *Yoni-Linga* can be used to express contrast and distinction. (See Tigunait, Pandit Rajmani. 1983. Seven Systems of Indian Philosophy. P82-83).
2 For instance, the male sexual organs can be called “*Yangju*” in Chinese.
flowers, rice or fruit to these erect penises as sacred symbols of Siva in order to add merit to their prayers.

In Indian history, a large number of artistic works about Yoni-Linga have been created. We may find 12 great Lingams of Siva in India, which are on mountains or rocks, and also in temples. For example, there is the Kedaresa in the Himalaya, a huge and shapeless mass of rock. As R. Shridhar says, “The Linga artifacts, dating from the first century BC to the third century AD are shaped like realistic phalli. Thereafter the shape becomes progressively more abstract. By mediaeval times, its observable portion, rising from the yoni, forms a round block with domed apex”.¹ For example, a number of polished stone Lingam, replicas of the erect phallus have been discovered, mostly small but ranging up to two feet in height, at Indus sites. A stone carving from Mathura around A.D. 150 shows two men wearing Kushan clothing worshiping a Lingam, the later omnipresent symbol of Siva. Siva-Linga is included among the abstract symbols of the deity, which is shaped like a post with a round top, made of clay or stone, varying from a few inches to several feet in height.

Then, you also have statues or woodcarvings of the Goddess which are regularly touched, even kissed - certainly not merely by men but also by girls and other children. And last not least, there are even a few temples completely dedicated to Yoni, at one of which there is a yoni-shaped rock from which - once every year - rusty red water appears (by a freak of nature) so that people regard this as the place where Mother Earth is menstruating.

Relatively speaking, as a sign or symbol, Yoni-Linga is more artistic, concrete, solid, cubic, vivid, multi-colored, and three-dimensional. For example, Yoni-Linga shows the combined shape of the male-female sexual organ artistically, solidly and colorfully. Linga is an oval form, mostly made from stone, metal or gold. Yoni is a triangle with downward apex (see the Figure 1). On the contrary, Yin-Yang is more semiological, abstract, plane, black-white colored, and two-dimensional. For instance, one way to write the symbols for Yin and Yang are an open or broken line (Yin) and a whole or solid line (Yang) which could be divided into the four stages of Yin and Yang, further divided into the eight trigrams, and finally divided into hundreds, thousands, even innumerable diagrams. The symbol shown by the figure 2, entitled Taijitu (The Diagram of the Great Ultimate), is another way to show Yin and Yang: the mostly black or dark portion, being dim, is Yin, and the mostly white or light portion, being brighter, is Yang.

Ontological and Theoretical Comparisons

It is more significant then to examine Yoni-Linga and Yin-Yang in ways of the ontological and theological comparisons since we have studied them semiologically and aesthetically.

Sakti-Siva mythology is an inexhaustible source of Indian philosophy about ontology, cosmology, morality, sexuality, human relations, and religious practices.¹ A male-female symbol representing the union of Sakti and Siva is in

---

¹ The epics and Puranas (Books of the Ancients) tell how a great flame-phallus appeared from the cosmic waters, and from this flame Linga, Siva emerged to claim supremacy and worship over Brahma and Vishnu, when he was castrated because he seduced sages' wives in the pine
form of their sacred genitals—Yoni and Linga. The Male-Female union in the form of “Siva-Linga or Yoni-Linga” consists of a feminine base (the vagina) and a rising masculine portion (the phallus or penis, and explains fundamentals of existence through “positive and negative” aspects of nature and society. In a final analysis, “supernatural” Yoni-Linga worship is ultimately linked to the worship of nature.

According to The Book of Changes, the combination of Yin and Yang constitutes Dao (Tao), “Master (Confucius) says: “The trigrams Qian (Heaven) and Kun (Earth) may be regarded as the gate of changes. Qian represents what is of Yang; Kun what is of Yin. These two unite according to their qualities, and there comes the embodiment of the result by the strong and weak. In this way we have the phenomena of heaven and earth visibly exhibited, and can comprehend the operation of the spiritual intelligence”.¹ For Chinese philosophy, Yin and Yang belong to the category of “substance”, and also of “attributes”. Substantially, they are Qi or Chi (vital energy) which produces ten thousand things; attributively, they are the forms and characteristics of those things; as Wing-tsit Chan states: “The YIN YANG doctrine is very simple but its influence has been extensive. No aspect of Chinese civilization—whether metaphysics, medicine, government, art—has escaped its imprint. In simple terms, the doctrine teaches that all things and events are products of two elements, forces, or principles: Yin, which in negative, passive, weak, and destructive, and Yang, which is positive, active, strong, and constructive. The theory is associated with that of the Five Agents (Wu-Xing, metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth) which may be taken an elaboration of the Yin Yang idea but actually adds the important concept of rotation, i.e. that things succeed one another as the Five Agents take their turns”.²

Laozi says, “Dao gave birth to the One; the One gave birth successively to two things, three things, up to ten thousand things. These ten thousand things contain Yin and Yang, and through this blending of Qi (vital energies or powers) it reaches harmony”.³ For this great founder of Daoism, Yin and Yang, as two kinds of Qi and also as the attributes of Tian (Heaven) and Di (Earth), formalize ten thousand things. Yin-Yang associated with the Five Elements may be regarded as Chinese metaphysics and cosmology. The Chinese philosophers thought about universe as Qi, which is mean for interaction between universal powers of Yin and Yang.

---
¹  I Ching (Book of Changes), Xici I (The Great Treatise, Section I). and Xici II (the Great Treatise, Section II).
³  Laozi, Dao De Jing (The Book of The Way and Its Powers), Chapter 42.
Zhuang Zi (Chuang-tzu) says: “Yang or element of expansion in them is too much developed. Are they exceedingly irritated? The Yin or opposite element is too much developed. When those elements thus predominate in men, (it is as if) the four seasons were not to come (at their proper times), and the harmony of cold and heat were not to be maintained; would there not result injury to the bodies of men?”¹ Like Yin-Yang, Yoni-Linga is the positive and negative mode of transcendental power. But unlike Yoni-Linga, Yin-Yang always describes creative, dynamic or dialectical relationships, interactions and transformations. In Chinese cosmology, Yin is a negative or passive principle in nature which happens to be feminine, and Yang is a positive or active principle in nature which happens to be masculine. Yin-Yang finally represents the Five Material Agents or Elements and all things such as Heaven and Earth, moon and sun, water and fire.

From Lu Shi Chun Qiu, we may read: “The Great One produces the two poles (Heaven and Earth), which in turn give rise to the energies of the dark (Yin) and the light (Yang). These two energies then transform themselves, one rising upwards, and the other descending downwards; they merge again and give rise to form”.² As the fundamental power of the universe, the unification, combination, harmonization and interaction of two opposites—Yin and Yang produce all things for both procreation and production. For example, a single thing may at one moment show Yin characteristics and at another become a Yang thing aflame with energy, because its inner activity has transformed from one mode to another; although there may be objects in which either the Yin and Yang remains a deeply dormant mode of being. Yin-Yang is more substantial, naturalistic and energetic. Yin-Yang signifies the dialectic and dynamic process of interactions or transformations as mutual arising, equally important and complementary opposites rather than absolutes, which describes the changes between the phases of a cycle such as rest and motion, dark and light, death and birth.

According to The Brahman Sutra, prana-linga-sarana is one of the six stages signifying the acquisition of knowledge which leads to equality with Brahman. Siva is worshiped as Linga which is the unseen background of the universe. Anyone initiated in the pasupata-vrata wears not only bhasma but Linga. He who wears the Linga on his body will have no more rebirths.³

In 13th century, there arose a Saiva sect, whose followers can be called Lingayats because they worship the Siva-Lingam. Interesting enough, a Lingayat always carries with him a small linga in a reliquary suspended in his neck. Yin-Yang is the central conception of Chinese Daoism and Neo-Confucianism. Similarly, Yoni-Linga is the central conception of Hindu Saivism. The main idea underlying the Siva-Linga in its most primitive aspect is undoubtedly phallic. In fact, the supreme emblem of the Siva-Linga as the

---

² Lu Shi Chun Qiu (Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals). Book 5, Chapter2.
father-god is the principal object of worship in Saiva shrines, but not the anthropomorphic forms of Siva; or in other words, the god symbolized by the Siva-Linga is meditated upon by the worshiper in his anthropomorphic form. The saiva has his preferences for the phallic form as an abstract representation of Siva as the Lord and would even go to the extent of worshiping other deities in a clay Linga. There is a regular daily schedule in temple worship of Siva-Linga which is followed as strictly as the schedule is followed in the worship of the family deity in the home. For example, the awakening ceremony is followed by the bathing ceremony of Linga an hour or so after sunrise in Siva shrines. For the religious practices of women, they worship Siva and the clay Siva-Linga daily if they choose, take their ceremonial bath, and give gifts and observe vows.\(^1\) Surely Siva can be considered the source of the universe, and applied to describe the he with his Linga as Mahadeva—the Great God.

However, unlike impersonalized Yang, Linga represents a kind of personalized supernatural being or cosmic creative power—the phallic symbol worshiped as representative of the god Siva.\(^2\) As the Lord of “destruction”, Siva is one of the Trimerti (Three-Gods in-One) whose universal symbol is the Lingam. Siva is the Lord of the erect phallus urdhvalinga. Siva is also the only god whose creatures bear either his symbol—Linga or his wife’s symbol—Yoni. One of Siva’s many forms is Ardhaniarismvara, the god who is half-man-half-woman. As the divine image form, this Lingam is always set in a key hole shaped base representing Yoni—the female aspect of Siva’s creative power, because “when the Goddess is invited to take her place, before the moment of worship, the yoni mudra is made, since the yoni, the female organ, is her pitha or yantra. The yoni can never be regarded by a Tantric adept otherwise than as an altar”.\(^3\)

In a sense, Siva himself can be called the Lingam at the heart of universal creation. As the Divine Yogin and the Eternal Creator, both of Siva’s yoga powers and creative powers are associated with Lingam. According to the Hindu legends, Siva is involved in two stories with his most important symbol—Lingam. One is that he is said to be the great creator who cuts off his Lingam by deciding his creative powers are no longer needed; in the other, he is described as the creator of all living beings and the only god whose Lingam is worshiped by men.\(^4\) For example, as the ideal Pasupata yogin, so-called Lakulisa is the incarnation of Siva in a corpse; although the body is dead, but the penis is alive and erect as the Lingam—the symbol of Siva and his power, which is not a sign of sexual excitement but of sexual restraint as the visible symbol of the tapas or energy stored up by the withholding of semen. As T. J.

---


\(^2\) Accordingly, Linga can also be worshiped as impersonalized representative of the productive or generative power of nature; associated with Linga, Yoni is the phallic symbol used in the worship of the supreme female energy of nature.


Hopkins says, “Indus religious interests seem, in summary, to have revolved around the worship of male animals raised to sacred status, the parallel worship of a horned figure represented as Lord of (male) Creatures, worship of Lingam as the supreme symbol of male powers, and a conservative emphasis on order, restraint, and purification by bathing. Worship of the female power of fertility and fecundity may have constituted a subsidiary cult at the popular or domestic level”.

As a religious practice, Yoni Puja is the worship of the female sexual organ requiring absolute discipline after Nyasa—the ritual consecration of a woman’s body, which is in self-control and not for sexual gratification. Similarly, Linga Puja is the worship of a man sexual organ after Nyasa.

According to Hindu philosophy, there are two kinds of self: the essential self (Atman) and the empirical self. So-called Maksa (the final liberation) is the combination of Brahma (the Ultimate Reality) and Atman. The Linga-sarira is the carrier of karma and assumes a body which, though different from the present one, is not altogether discontinuous with it. The body to which the essential self is supposed to be attached as a result of the action of original ignorance is of three kinds: physical, subtle, and causal. Among them, the subtle body becomes equivalent to the vital, mental, and intellectual functions together. These functions are possible only because of the presence and direct awareness of the essential self and thus the subtle body serves as Linga—the indicatory mark of the presence of the self.

For the above reasons, Both Yoni-Linga and Yin-Yang are signs or symbols of the gender (feminine/masculine), the abstract creation and procreation, the unity of two opposites, the Ultimate Reality (or the Final Being, Supreme Powers or Primal Forces), and the supernatural functions/relations, harmonization or balancing system, mystical and artistic objects. However, Yoni-Linga may be regarded as dissolution of ideality, subjectivity and spirituality, but Yin-Yang, dissolution of materiality, objectivity and neutrality.

According to I Ching, there are more of Yin lines in the Yang trigrams, and there are more of Yang lines in Yin trigrams, because Yang lines are odd (undivided or whole lines), and Yin lines are even (divided or broken lines). We may find that Yin and Yang can be considered the dialectic and dynamic process of interactions or transformations as mutual arising, equally important and complementary opposites rather than absolutes, which describes the changes between the phases of a cycle. Yin and Yang can be rearranged or reorganized into a higher “whole” or a lower “parts”, and even can be transformed into one another as some parts of their opposites. One power grows in another power overcoming it till the final transformation is done and

---

4 *I Ching (Book of Changes)*, Xici II (the Great Treatise, Section II).
then immediately there is the same motion in an opposite direction. This is an everlasting process, because there is eternal motion in the universe.

All things from natural being or human being to the entire universe may be determined by the balance or lack of balance of Yin and Yang, and considered as its opposite when viewed from another perspective. The idea of everlasting transformation and interaction of two opposites can be viewed in figure image of Yin and Yang, as dark and light parts of the circle. The light part represents Yang and the dark part represents Yin. The little dark circle on light side means that Yang gives birth to Yin and the little light circle on dark side means that Yin gives birth to Yang. A decrease of Yang part leads to an increase of Yin part in the bottom of the big circle and the contrary, a decrease of Yin part leads to an increase of Yang part in top of the big circle.

In a sense, Yin-Yang emphasizes the unity of non-self, but Yoni-Linga pays attention on the unity of self (the lower and the higher) and Śakti-Siva.

Conclusion

We may find six similarities between Yoni-Linga and Yin-Yang: both of them are 1) the external, visible, mystical and artistic signs or symbols 2) the integration or the togetherness of original genital parts or gender functions as the points of revelation or enlightenment 3) two opposites as the purported existence 4) interdependent, intersupportive, interactive and intertwined 5) foundational and metaphysical forces and related to many parts of the universe 6) involved with creation and correspond indirectly with the Ultimate Reality/the Supernatural Being, the ultimate creative and reproductive power of the cosmological universe, or directly with physical energy in nature, which also signify or represent so-called final and intangible internality or spirituality.

We also may find eight differences between them: 1) Yin and Yang can be divided into their own subparts, but Yoni and Linga not 2) Yin and Yang can be parts of their opposites, but Yoni and Linga not 3) Yin and Yang can be transformed into one another, but Yoni and Linga not 4) Yin and Yang can be described or applied through the numerical divination and geomancy, but Yoni and Linga not 5) none of Yin and Yang can be considered absolutely dominate or more important, totally depending on their balance, harmony and proper proportion, but Yoni and Linga not 6) Yin and Yang can be represented as the sign of time, space, weather, directions, numbers, or medical treatments; but Yoni-Linga not 7) Yin and Yang can be considered the dialectic and dynamic process of interactions or transformations, but Yoni-Linga not 8) Yin and Yang is indicated the impersonalized Ultimate Reality/Supreme Being, but Yoni and Linga is based on the personalized Supernatural/Superhuman Being, and

---

1 But for Chinese Qigong practice, we may find some emphases on interaction, transformation and harmonization between the inside (self, mind and internal organs) and outside of the body through Yin and Yang.
applied as a sign or symbol for the worship of Siva who is one of the Hindu Trimurty (Three Gods in One).

To sum up, Yin-Yang and Yoni-Linga have been developed by later Sino-Hindu philosophies and theologies as human worldviews widened and deepened with Eastern civilization.

Table 1. Similarities of Yoni-Linga and Yin-Yang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yoni-Linga</th>
<th>Yin-Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of gender (feminine/masculine)</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of gender (feminine/masculine)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of abstract creation and procreation</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of abstract creation and procreation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of unity of two opposites</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of unity of two opposites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of Ultimate Reality, Final Being, Supreme Powers or Primal Forces</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of Ultimate Reality, Final Being, Supreme Powers or Primal Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of supernatural functions/relations</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of supernatural functions/relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of harmonization or balancing system</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of harmonization or balancing system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of mystical and artistic objects</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of mystical and artistic objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of negative/positive and passive/active</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of negative/positive and passive/active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of the merging of the particular in the universal</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of the merging of the particular in the universal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of the beginningless, endless, and limitless</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of the beginningless, endless, and limitless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sign or symbol of the essence of all attributes and forms</td>
<td>Sign or symbol of the essence of all attributes and forms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2. Differences of Yoni-Linga and Yin-Yang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yoni-Linga</th>
<th>Yin-Yang</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personalized Deity (<em>Sacti-Siva</em>), Holy Symbol of the God-Goddess</td>
<td>Impersonalized Supernatural Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodiment of the divine male-female energy or holy genital organs of the dual creator--<em>Sacti-Siva</em></td>
<td>Material elements and all things such as Heaven and Earth, moon and sun, water and fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Sign of Time such as night and day, evening and morning, winter and summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Sign of space such as north and south</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Sign of weather such as cool and warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Sign of numbers such as even and odd (6 and 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Sign of dialectic and dynamic process of interactions or transformations (as mutual arising, equally important and complementary opposites rather than absolutes) which describes the changes between the phases of a cycle such as rest and motion, dark and light, death and berth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Sign of directions such as left and right, backward and forward, downward and upward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Sign of Qigong, marshal arts, medical treatments or food functions such as soft and hard, slow and fast, cold and hot, wet and dry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Linga</em> is a oval form, mostly made from stone, metal or gold  <em>Yoni</em> is a triangle with downward apex</td>
<td>The white (Yin) part of the diagram increases as the black (Yang) part dec-reases. When one part is at its height then the other is at its lowest ebb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissolution of ideality, Subjectivity and Spirituality</td>
<td>Dissolution of materiality, objectivity and neutrality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity of self (the lower and the higher) and <em>Sacti-Siva</em></td>
<td>Unity of non-self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>Within <em>Yin</em> is the seed of <em>Yang</em> and vice versa, and as such, they form two complementary, yet also opposing forces. Together <em>Yin</em> and <em>Yang</em> make a whole, neither one is more important than the other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not</td>
<td>All things from natural being, human being to the entire universe may be determined by the balance or lack of balance of <em>Yin</em> and <em>Yang</em>, and considered as its opposite when viewed from another perspective.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Discoveries of the Original Meaning of the Tao Te Ching

Wang Liancheng, BS M&B CO., LTD.

Tao Te Ching, which is also known as Lao Tzu, is one of the oldest and greatest Chinese philosophical classics. However, it is also one of the works with the greatest numbers of different versions and interpretations. Because of its long history, its concision, and also the different interpretations given by annotators in the successive dynasties, the unity among the various versions is almost completely lost. Some modern Chinese annotators do so-called “modern interpretations” and “elaborated interpretations with new meanings”, without considering the background and the characteristics of the ancient Chinese language. As a result, the meaning and the value of the great work becomes doubtful, at least to some extent.

In the past two centuries, the book has drawn a great deal of attention from international readers, and therefore, various translated versions have appeared in countries all over the world. According to recent statistics by Knut Walf, a Dutch sinologist, by the end of the nineteenth century, the total number of translated versions of Tao Te Ching in Western languages had reached 252, involving 17 European languages in all, which includes 83 English versions, 64 German versions, 33 French versions etc. This statistic would have been a good thing if the domestic annotation level had been high and if the domestic scholars and foreign sinologists had communicated well. Unfortunately, many misreadings arose from one generation to the next, perhaps due to the reason that in ancient times the annotators usually did not have well edited dictionaries at hand, and they had to interpret the text completely according to their own knowledge from one generation to another, and each successive generation had believed excessively in the annotations of their older generations. Therefore, until now no perfect annotation has been obtained at all. Under such circumstances, how can we expect a perfect version translated into a foreign language? This problem has directly affected the dissemination of the great ancient Chinese classics internationally, for the great differences among different versions and the uncertainty in each version have given the readers a sense of looking at flowers in a dense fog.

The aim of my paper is to eliminate the many differences and uncertainties in interpreting Tao Te Ching. In order to achieve the goal, we need an overall decoding of important words and expressions (codes, practically) on the basis
of the whole text as well as a re-translation done chapter by chapter from the ancient Chinese to modern Chinese and English based strictly on pre-Qin Dynasty Chinese. This paper is a simplified version of my book, *Decoding Tao Te Ching*, which will be published in the near future.

The “Codes” in *Tao Te Ching* and the Process of Decoding

Is there any “code” in *Tao Te Ching*? Generally speaking, the so-called codes are systematic modifications of a language into word groups or symbols for the purpose of brevity, secrecy, or the machine processing of information. Because *Tao Te Ching*, written by Lao Tzu was a creative work, there must have appeared some new concepts which needed to be disseminated by mouth before they were widely accepted as recognized terminology. Before they were generally recognized, these newly created concepts worked just like codes that could be understood only within a very small group of people. Suppose what is recorded in *Shiji* is true, then, when Lao Tzu finished the “five thousand words”, he must have taught the whole meaning of *Tao Te Ching* to Yin Xi, and therefore, they both understood the meaning of the “codes”.

1 It is imaginable that after this time Yin Xi again taught the meaning of the piece to some of his students, and again his students to his students’ students, and so on. Through this process, deviation must have occurred, and different versions of *Tao Te Ching* would have appeared. By the time of Hanfeizi (about a hundred years later), it was necessary to make annotations to *Tao Te Ching*. As a matter of fact, from that time on, misreadings have never been separated from *Tao Te Ching*.

There are actually many “codes” in *Tao Te Ching*; however, those which affect the comprehension of the whole text (that is, inter-chapter meaning) are as follows: Tao ( ), You ( ), Wu ( ), One ( ), Two( ), Three ( ), Image( ), micro-entity( ) and corpuscle ( ). All of these terms are connected with Lao Tzu’s cosmogony. Therefore, we will first decode the meaning and inter-relations of these “codes”. As for the others, we will list some important ones as examples due to the length limitation of this paper.

(i) *Decoding by means of the relationship within the text*

By comparing and analyzing the chapters including these “codes” repeatedly, we firstly recognize that Tao is equal to Wu. Hence “*Wu Wei*” (无为) is actually “the behavior of Tao” (道之为) or “doing things according to Tao”. Most annotators have believed that it means “doing nothing”, a rather passive

---

1 Vol. 63 of *Shiji* (or *Historical Recordings*, a famous ancient Chinese history book) records that when Lao Tzu wanted to leave Zhou state, the frontier officer Yin Xi asked him to write a book for him, otherwise, he would not let him go. Lao Tzu wrote about five thousand words on morals (Tao and Te), and then left Zhou. No one knew where he was or when he died.
thought. Arthur Waley translated it as “actionless activity”;\(^1\) X. Y. Z. translated it as “without interference”.\(^2\) Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall made a better translation: “noncoercive action that is in accordance with the de (Te or 德 in Chinese) of things”.\(^3\) (It is a pity that they used a de, instead of Tao.). James Legge simply translated it as “without doing anything”.\(^4\) Even those who do not agree with the viewpoint cannot provide a forceful reason to deny them.

Through a comprehensive analysis of chapters 1, 21, 25, 42 and 51, we obtain the following relationship among some of the concepts:

\[
\text{Tao} = \text{Wu (1) (metaphysical rules or laws)} + \text{Wu (2) (invisible materials)} = \text{Wu} ≈ \text{Wu (2) (invisible materials)} = \text{One} = \text{Image} \quad (5)
\]

Wu (无) is generally translated as “Not-being” which I think is not accurate in terms of ontology, a point I will discuss in more detail in part three of this paper. For Lao Tzu, visibleness and invisibleness is the watershed of You and Wu. This does not only explain why Lao Tzu called Tao as Wu (Not-being), but also explains why he called Tao “entity” (道).

In Chapter 21, Lao Tzu wrote:

As an entity Tao seems uncertain and indefinite.
Seemingly indefinite and uncertain,
Yet within it images can be seen latently;
Seemingly uncertain and indefinite,
Yet within it micro-entities can be seen latently;
Seemingly dark and deep,
Yet within it corpuscles can be seen latently.
The corpuscles seem very real,
Upon them information may be read.

The reason why Lao Tzu said that Tao is an entity is because in Tao there are “images”, “micro-entities” and “corpuscles”, all of which are invisible materials with different sizes. Among them the smallest is one. As for

---

\(^1\) *Tao Te Ching* (Chinese-English), translated by Arthur Waley, Foreign Languages and Research Press, Beijing (1999), 5.


\(^5\) Among the concepts, Lao Tzu only used Wu, One, Image to refer to Tao, rather than You, Two, Three, micro-entities, or corpuscles, because One and Image are the basic, or original states of substances. They co-exist with the metaphysical part of Tao in the original state. In these cases, Lao Tzu used a part of Tao (Wu (2)) to refer to the whole Tao or the other part of Tao (Wu (1), the metaphysical part of Tao only). When Two, Three or micro-entities, corpuscles were produced, the formation process of the Universe began.
“images” they are the phenomenon of One, which is the basic, original material of universe.

In annotating the Chinese character xuan (玄) (Chapter 1), Li Angang wrote that the earliest character was found in ancient texts inscribed on bronze objects.\(^1\) Its shape was just like a thread whose two ends are held together and twisted in order to make a cord. Its original meaning is “spinning and changing”. This meaning is in accordance with what Lao Tzu had said in Chapter 21: as the original materials (Wu (2)) change under the control of Wu (1), the sizes of them grows, from the imaginary images to more real micro-entities, and again, to what seems true (corpuscles).

Without knowing the composition of Tao, one may go astray. Liu Xuezhi believed that “when Lao Tzu defined his Tao, he exposed something that we have to point out as a contradiction in logic—he sometimes described the body of Tao with substances in it, sometimes not”.\(^2\) Sometimes he said “Tao gave birth to One”, sometimes said “Tao is One”. In the latter case, the author has misread the meaning of “giving birth” (生 (sheng)). Many people have believed that One is born from nothing. For example, Chen Guying claimed that when Lao Tzu used both Wu and You to refer to Tao, he used these two different names of Tao (actually, Lao Tzu had never said that You is another name of Tao—noted by author) to express the process of the implementation of everything from the metaphysical Tao.\(^3\) Consequently, Lao Tzu has been accused of being an “objective idealist” in modern China. Of course, this “verdict” is unjust, because in this world nothing is born from nothing. A seedling, for instance, is born from a seed, as it grows it absorbs nutrient substances from the soil. Therefore, the real meaning of “giving birth” (生) always means “transformation”, and the “transformation” is always regulated by Tao (Wu (1)). In the sense of chemistry, One can be the basic substance, but this does not mean that it comes from nothing, because even while it cannot come from any smaller kind of substance, it may still come from a more complicated substance. That is to say, it may have decomposed from a more complicated substance.

According to the following statements of Lao Tzu: “Wu is called the beginning of Heaven and Earth, You is called the mother of all living things” (Chapter 1), “All the living things came from You, and again You came from Wu” (Chapter 40), and “Tao gave birth to One, One gave birth to Two, Two gave birth to Three, and Three gave birth to all the living things” (Chapter 42). We can conclude that You refers to “Heaven and Earth” and that “Wan Wu”

---

(万物) refers to “all living things” on Earth after Heaven and Earth had formed:

You = Three = Heaven and Earth
Wan Wu (万物) = all living things

We must pay attention to the first equation above which expresses one of the two main meanings of You by Lao Tzu, used only in the sense of Lao Tzu’s cosmogony. In this case, Lao Tzu had differentiated You (Heaven and Earth) from “all living things” (Chapter 40: All living things came from You). This You is different from those Lao Tzu mentioned in Chapter 2 and 11, in which “all living things” also belong to You (“You and Wu give rise each other”).

Until now, we have basically decoded One and Three, but what on earth is Two? Many annotators used yin and yang to account for it because their number is exactly two. At the time of Western Zhou, yin and yang were considered as two opposite kinds of qi, which is consistent with the view of Lao Tzu who believed that yin and yang are two opposite factors influencing the growth of all living things (“All living things carry yin and yang on them, and the interaction of the two makes them harmonious” (Chapter 42). They are not substances formed before the formation of Heaven and Earth. Similar evidence is provided in Taiyishengshui (or translated as The Great One Giving Birth to Water, see next part). Therefore, it is certain that yin and yang are not the Two in Tao Te Ching.

As we have mentioned previously, in Chapter 21 Lao Tzu used only three concepts —no more, no less—concerning micro-objects at the different developing stages of cosmogony. Did this happen only by chance? Let us now take a closer examination:

Images (imaginary, virtual) → Micro-entities (solid) → Corpuscles (true)

In spite of the transformation, they still belong to Wu according to Lao Tzu’s standard; that is, they are still invisible. This is why he used words like “uncertain”, “indefinite”, “dark”, and “deep” in Chapter 21. In English versions, Arthur Waley translated jing (精) into “force”, which is not in the transforming chain and is not a form of substance. Most translators had translated it as “essence” which is not a concept with dimensions and size, though it may be considered as some kind of substance. In ancient times, jing meant very fine grain particles, for example, in Chuang Tzu we find the saying: “winnowing fine grain with a small winnowing fan” (鼓絃播精). Therefore, jing means very fine particles that are difficult to identify with eyes, and according to which we translate as corpuscles in terms of physics rather than of biology. We think it adequate to compare the size of corpuscles with that of “crystalline seeds” in modern physics, which is difficult to see with the eyes, but when the crystals grow, they will soon become visible.
In ancient Chinese cosmogony, the universe was not formed by an explosion, as in the modern assumption of physics, but developed from a state of Chaos which filled with original substances (One). When the first “crystalline seed” had grown up to be visible, it meant that the Earth had formed tentatively and separately from Heaven (Chaos began to diminish). In this sense, Heaven and Earth must have formed simultaneously and the corpuscles must have been the closest predecessors of Heaven and Earth (Three) though they still belong to Wu. Only three concepts are mentioned in Chapter 21, among which Images equal to One and corpuscles are very close to the beginning of Three micro-entities (物) should be equivalent to Two.

(ii) Decoding According to Some of the Ancient Chinese Literature

Firstly, one of the most important pieces of literature is Taiyishengshui, which had been unearthed for the first time in 1993 along with the Guodian Lao Tzu (or Tao Te Ching) written on bamboo slips. Some scholars speculated that it might be a natural part of Lao Tzu based on the fact that the form of the bamboo slips of Taiyishengshui was exactly the same as the C group of Lao Tzu.

At the beginning of Taiyishengshui, it reads:

In the Great One giving birth to the waters, the waters collaterally assist the Great One, thereby, producing the heavens. The heavens collaterally assist the Great One, thereby producing the earth. The heavens and earth again assist each other, thereby producing the spiritual and numinous. The spiritual and numinous again assist each other, thereby producing yin and yang qi. Yin and yang qi again assist each other, thereby producing the four seasons. The four seasons again assist each other, thereby producing the hot and the cold. The hot and the cold again assist each other, thereby producing the moist and the dry. And the moist and the dry again assist each other, culminating in producing the yearly circle.¹

Li Xueqin believed that “the Great One giving birth to the waters” is equal to “Tao gave birth to One”, “the waters collaterally assist the Great One, thereby producing the heavens” equals the “One gave birth to Two”, and “the heavens collaterally assist the Great One, thereby producing the earth” equates to “Two gave birth to Three”.² According to this view, the Great One is different from One, for the former refers to the metaphysical part of Tao (Wu (1)), and the latter refers to the physical part of Tao (Wu (2)).

¹ The English translation is quoted from Daodejing: Making This Life Significant by Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, Xueyuan Press, Beijing (2004), 284.
² Guodian Laozi & Taiyishengshui, translated and edited by Xing Wen, Xueyuan Press, Beijing (2005), 250.
Is “the waters” the same concept we use today? Modern science told us that if so, it must have appeared after the formation of Heaven and Earth. Therefore, “the waters” here might refer to a certain state of the original substances in ancient China, except for its normal meaning. Hitherto, in modern Chinese there are still some concepts that have something to do with the character of “water” 水 that refers to some states of substances, such as moshui 墨水 (ink), which is a solution with coloring agents, or tieshui 铁水 (molten iron), which is a state of iron under very high temperatures.

By comparing the two pieces of literature, we find some common ground but also some great differences between them. Therefore, we believe that Taiyishengshui was not written by Lao Tzu considering of the following facts:

1. In Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu always wrote Heaven and Earth together when speaking of cosmogony, which implied that they formed simultaneously, not separately.
2. Lao Tzu said that yin and yang were carried by all living things, not produced by them. That is to say, they are not in a relationship of giving birth or being born unto each other.
3. Lao Tzu did not mention the formation of the four seasons, the hot and the cold, or the moist and the dry, which are all phenomena of Heaven and Earth rather than substances. Hence, Tao Te Ching is more rigorous in logic than Taiyishengshui.
4. Unlike Lao Tzu’s Tao, the Great One is not a composition of Wu (1) and Wu (2), but purely composed of Wu (1). This cannot only be seen from “the Great One giving birth to the waters”, but also from “thus it is that the Great One is hidden away in the waters, and travels with the seasons”. (Taiyishengshui). Lao Tzu’s One and the Great Image belong to Wu (2), instead of Wu (1), but it is interesting that Lao Tzu used them to refer to the metaphysical part of Tao (Wu (1)) as an approximation.

In the first part of this section, we have translated wanwu 万物 as “all living things”. We find potential evidence in Taiyishengshui, which pointed out that after the formation of heavens and earth, shenming 神明 is formed. In the translation of Taiyishengshui that we quoted above, the word was translated as “the spiritual and numinous”, which we think is wrong. Xing Wen had discussed this important concept in his paper On the Great One and Guodian version of Tao Te Ching and concluded that “the shenming here simply means shenqi 神祇 (the god of heaven and the god of earth).” Actually, shenming has

---

1 Guodian Laozi and Taiyishengshui, translated and edited by Xing Wen, Xueyuan Press, Beijing (2005), 233-236.
two different meanings: god, or the spiritual state of human or animals. Therefore, it refers to the latter, that is, all living things with spiritual abilities (lives).

Secondly, another important classic of Taoists (Huainanzi•Tianwenxun) wrote that “Tao is called law, which begins from One. Without the function of Tao, One will remain unchanged, therefore, it is divided into yin and yang qi, which again combine to form a harmonious qi that produces all living things. For this reason, it is said that ‘One gave birth to Two, Two gave birth to Three, and Three gave birth to all living things’”. In the same book, One is also called taishi (太始), which stands for a state of Chaos. The “Tao” here is the same as “the Great One” in Taiyishengshui, but not the same “Tao” in Tao Te Ching when Lao Tzu spoke of cosmogony. In this book, the authors had misread Two and Three as yin and yang qi and a harmonious qi. This mistake illustrates that misreading Tao Te Ching began very early in its history because Huainanzi was written about only 300 years later.

Finally, Shuowen (《说文》, one of the earliest Chinese dictionaries) explained One in a very similar way to Tao Te Ching: “At the very beginning, Tao created Heaven and Earth on the basis of One by separating the Chaos and transformed all living things”. In this explanation, Tao, One, Three (Heaven and Earth), and all living things are all mentioned, except for Two, which is an intermediate state between One and Three. This “Tao” again, refers only Wu (1), which co-exists and regulates One.

In summary, we can say that Lao Tzu’s Tao has two different meanings: one is Wu (1) + Wu (2), which represents his view of ontology and cosmogony. Another meaning, Wu (1) only, represents the normative function of Tao on You (Heaven and Earth, and/or all living things) after the formation of Heaven and Earth, and has nothing to do with cosmogony. Therefore, there are no so-called “logical contradictions” in Tao Te Ching at all.

Other Misreadings and Corrections

In part I, we have decoded some important “codes” that hinder the comprehension of the whole text. However, many other “codes” in each chapter hinder our comprehension. As there are so many of them, we choose only those which are relatively important to us, and demonstrate them in a list for the sake of conciseness. Examples of misreadings are selected from Arthur Waley’s translation which is widely accepted in China. However, this does not mean that it is the worst version among the translated versions since each existing version has its own problems, including existing Chinese versions of the text.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ch. No.</th>
<th>Original Sentences in Chinese</th>
<th>Misreading</th>
<th>Correct Meaning and Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Truly, only he that get rid of desire can see the Secret Essences, he that has never rid of desire can only see the outcomes.</td>
<td>Therefore, the everlasting Wu is for observing its secrets; and the everlasting You is for observing its outcomes. [Note] Wu is invisible, so one can only ascertain its secrets; You (Heaven and Earth) visible, so one can observe its outcomes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Therefore the Sage relies on actionless activity, carries on wordless teaching.</td>
<td>This is why the sages act according to Tao, and teach without speaking. [Note] Wu is Tao, therefore, “” is Tao’s behavior or activity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The Way is like an empty vessel that yet may be drawn from without ever needing to be filled.</td>
<td>Tao is deep and harmonious, therefore, it cannot be overflowed. [Note] Tao has infinite capacity in controlling things.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Whereas the force of words is soon spent. Far better is to keep what is in the heart.</td>
<td>It is better to follow in the confines of Tao, than to issue decrees one after another and hope that finally some of them will take effect. [Note] “” means to hope things come to an end; “” refers to Tao.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Can you keep the unquiet physical-soul straying hold fast to the Unity and never quit it?</td>
<td>In concentrating your soul to stick to One, Can they never be separated from each other? [Note] “” here is a verb, which is misread as a noun by all the annotators.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>He who in dealing with the empire regards his high rank as though it were his body is the best person to be entrusted with rule; he who in dealing with the empire loves his subjects as one should love one’s body is the best person to whom one can commit the empire.</td>
<td>Therefore, he who pays attention to work for his country by his status may be entrusted with the power of ruling the country; he who treasures to work for his country on his positions may be placed hope on ruling the country. [Note] “” has another meaning in ancient China: status or position. Because of the misreading, all of the annotators in the history of China believed that “” (love one’s own body) is one of the main thoughts of Lao Tzu.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Push far enough towards the Void, hold fast enough to Quietness.</td>
<td>The deviation from Tao must be reduced (exactly) to void, the extra desires must be reduced (exactly) to zero. [Note] “” and “” are two criteria to examine the difference of one’s behavior or thought from Tao, rather than Tao itself.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>The saying ‘what others avoid I too must avoid’, how false and superficial it is!</td>
<td>Public opinion is fearful to everybody, and it must be fearful to us. The perplexedness of the opinions never comes to an end. [Note] “” means to be perplexed in ancient China.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Truly, ‘the perfect man is the teacher of the imperfect; but the imperfect is the stock-in-trade of perfect man’.</td>
<td>A perfect man is the teacher of the imperfect, and imperfect men are the source of students of the perfect. [Note] “” here means only the potential students for the perfect man, that is, the relationship between the perfect man and imperfect men is that of teacher and students.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>To Tao all under heaven will come as streams and torrents flow into a great river and sea.</td>
<td>The function of Tao to the world is like that of riverbeds to the water of rivers and seas. [Note] Lao Tzu used riverbeds as a metaphor of the normative force of Tao.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Great Tao is like a boat that drifts; it can go this way, it can go that.</td>
<td>What great Tao controls seems overflowing, yet it can control them with ease. [Note] “” means to control here. Tao has both a normative function and a great capacity of management rather than a boat drifting randomly on sea.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Page</td>
<td>Text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>The ‘power’ that stands firmest looks flimsy. The cultivation of virtue looks like sneaking. [Note] In establishing one’s virtue, he should not show off his virtue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Learning consists in adding to one’s stock day by day; the practice of Tao consists in subtracting day by day. Subtracting and yet subtracting, till one has reached in activity. But by this very inactivity everything can be activated. In learning, one’s knowledge increases day by day; in practicing Tao, one’s subjective will decreases day by day. One decreases it and decreases it until the point that he acts precisely according to Tao, and at this state he gets everything done. [Note] In original text, what should be increased and what should be decreased were omitted, therefore, it is difficult to translate. “” is not “inactivity”.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>The Sage, in his dealing with the world seems like one dazed with fright; for the world’s sake he dulls his wits. The Hundred families all the time strain their eyes and ears, the Sage all the time sees and hears no more than an infant sees and hears. The Sages in the world are self-disciplined, for the world’s sake they make their minds plain; the common people pay their attention to the Sages’ words and deeds, and the Sages show their example to them as though they are children. [Note] The relationship between the Sages and the common people is that of models and imitators. This is an example of “to teach without speaking” (“” see Chapter 2).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Tao in the Universe is like the south-west corner of a house. It is the treasure of a good man, the support of the bad. Tao is the Kitchen God of all human beings. It is the treasure of good men and the appeasement of bad men. [Note] “”: Kitchen God; “”: to foster, tend, appease. Here it means to transform a bad man to a good one.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>To know when one does not know is best. To think one knows when one does not know is a dire disease. The Sage’s way of curing disease also consists in making people recognize their diseases as diseases. Only he who recognizes this disease as a disease can cure himself of the disease. He who is of wisdom but does not show it off is noble; he who is not of wisdom but tries to show as if he is so is shameful. The Sages are not shameful because they hate to be shameful. It is only because they hate to be shameful that they are not shameful. [Note] “” = “”; “”: The character has both meanings of “to hate” and “being shameful” in ancient China. It is clear that Lao Tzu here was discussing moral problems instead of medical or scientific ones.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>He whose braveness lies in daring slays. He whose braveness lies in not daring gives life. He whose braveness is out of wild fancies will die. He whose braveness is not out of wild fancies will survive.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Simplified Philosophical Considerations on *Tao Te Ching***

*Tao Te Ching*, though it consists of only approximately five thousand words, contains very deep philosophical meanings. To make a complete discussion of it philosophically seems rather impossible especially due to the limited length of this paper. Therefore, I will abstract some main ideas from my book *Decoding Tao Te Ching* which will be published in China in the near future.
(i) Lao Tzu’s cosmogony and ontology

Cosmogony is the theory of the genesis and growth of the cosmos, which is one of the main theoretical issues of Pre-Socratic philosophy. Unlike any pre-philosophical mythical and religious cosmogonies among the ancient Greeks, Egyptians, and Babylonians, the Pre-Socratics sought the origin of the world on a rational basis without appealing to a supernatural force. In comparison, we find that Lao Tzu’s thought was also rational but more sophisticated than all of the others.

Lao Tzu’s cosmogony is mainly reflected in chapters 1, 21, 25, 42 and 51, from which we can obtain a clear picture of his thought of cosmogony: Wu (1) acted on One which produced images and enabled it to produce Two (micro-entities) and then corpuscles and Three (Heaven and Earth) and thereafter, all living things (See Fig. 1).

![Figure 1. A Picture of Lao Tzu’s Cosmogony](image)

Wu (1) represents pure metaphysical laws, which is a kind of invisible metaphysical Being; Wu (2) represents invisible physical Being; You represents visible physical Being (Heaven and Earth); and “all the living things” represents visible Beings with life (plants for instance) or that with both life and consciousness (animals or human beings).

We have proved by analysis in Part I that both Wu (1) and Wu (2) are things-in-themselves that co-existed before the formation of Heaven and Earth. In order to answer the origin of universe more convincingly, we have to do a more detailed speculative analysis on the basis of modern science and technology.

In quantum physics, a conservational relationship exists between mass and energy- if we view the whole universe as an isolated system. If there is no complete elimination of matter, then how can we talk about the origin of matter? For instance, in boiling a kettle of water, the water in it can be thoroughly boiled up, but the water molecules in the kettle are not eliminated in
the universe. At first, they became a stream of steam escaping into the air, and then, they seem to disappear without any trace. As a matter of fact, at this moment the aggregate water molecules in the steam have evaporated into separated water molecules and escaped into the air. We can consider this as a form of Wu (2) because they are beyond our vision. But they still exist as water molecules somewhere in space, and under certain conditions they will be condensed into water again on the Earth. The whole transformation process is regulated by Wu (1) (the pure metaphysical part of Tao). Universe too, works just like this. According to the big bang model of the universe, as energy accumulates, the temperature and pressure of the system got so high that it exploded fiercely. After millions of years, the earth and stars formed, and then living things generated on the earth. However, what human beings experienced is only a very short period in the history of the universe, and they have to use their speculative capacity to explore its origin. As the universe expands, the living conditions of humankind will deteriorate, and due to the dissipation of energy of fixed stars, black holes will form somewhere in the universe. As the universe continuously contracts, all of the black holes will fall into the one with the greatest mass.1

However, the black hole is not the end of the universe. As a “universe in a nutshell”, it is still a form of the universe. Nor is it the end of Tao (Wu (1)). Hawking predicted that “in the black hole there must be an infinitely great density and a singular point of curvature of time and space. This is similar to the explosion at the beginning of time, and it is merely the end of time of the collapsed object and the astronaut. At this point, scientific laws and our ability to predict the future all seem ineffective”.2 If Lao Tzu had lived today, he would not agree with Hawking’s point of view because his Tao described in Chapter 21 seemed very similar to the black hole, but he believed that Tao (including Wu (1)) still existed at this state.

As the whole universe is one isolated system, the dissipated energy must have been absorbed by some other substance in some other form. At a certain point of contraction, it will release again under the continuously increasing pressure, and hence, the temperature of the system will increase again, just as before the previous explosion, and finally another cycle of the universe will begin. We believe that what Lao Tzu described in Chapter 21 is no less impressive and concrete than that of any modern physical theorist.

From Lao Tzu’s cosmogony, his thought of ontology is shown very clearly. In answering “What is or what exists?”, Lao Tzu’s reply is that both Wu (Wu (1) and Wu (2)) and You (including “all the living things” generated after the formation of Heaven and Earth) are there and exist. In addressing “What kind of thing exists primarily?”, Lao Tzu’s reply is that Wu (Wu (1) and Wu (2)) exist primarily. In answering “How are different kinds of being related to one

---

another?”,” Lao Tzu’s reply is that “Tao (in this case, Wu (1) only) gave birth to One, One gave birth to Two, Two gave birth to Three, and Three gave birth to all the living things” (Chapter 42). “The function of Tao (Wu (1)) to the world (You) is like that of riverbeds to the water of rivers and seas” etc. (Chapter 32).

In terms of thermodynamics, Hawking’s theory seems to contradict the second law of thermodynamics which states that entropy will tend to increase in an isolated system. According to this principle, the universe cannot contract at all if we see the universe as an isolated system because in such a system, the universe tends to expand continuously. To enable it to contract, the energy dissipated by the universe must be absorbed by some other objects outside of it. This means that there must be more than one universe, or what we mean by “universe” is actually only one part of the universe. In the Chinese tradition, the universe was not formed by an explosion, but from a state of Chaos. Lao Tzu’s Tao (Wu (2) or One) was in such a state. According to the principle of entropy, as the universe expands, the end of it must be a Chaos again. Then, who is the first mover or initiator of the next cycle of universe? Lao Tzu’s reply was that Tao give birth to One, Two, Three, and all living things.

(ii) The metaphysics of Lao Tzu’s philosophy

The term “metaphysics” came from the name of a book by Aristotle which was edited by Andronicus in the first century AD. The corresponding term in Chinese (周易) used to translate it originated a little later than Tao Te Ching, which means “beyond the form”, rather than “after physics”. Zhouyi Xici said that “What beyond the form is called Tao; what beneath the form is called utensil”. According to this, “form” is the line of demarcation of Tao and utensil, which is more reasonable than taking “physics” as the line of demarcation because in latter case, “physics” includes both the concrete objects of observation and the scientific laws obtained from the observation on the objects, which should be classified as “metaphysics of nature”. In fact, we believe that the ambiguous character of “metaphysics” has already caused confusions in philosophy. For example, many people have confused the concept of ontology with that of metaphysics. Now, let us make a distinction between the two important concepts by comparing Lao Tzu’s ontology and metaphysics.

As we analyzed in Part (1) of this section, both Wu and You can be attributed to Being in terms of ontology. However, not both of them can be attributed to metaphysics. In a strict sense, Wu (1) is pre-metaphysical, but Wu (2) and You are purely physical. This is exactly the difference between ontology and metaphysics. Based on Tao Te Ching, we obtained an illustration which shows clearly the relationship between the two concepts (See Fig. 2).
In modern Chinese, the concept of morality is composed by Tao and Te (道德), in which Tao, or the way of Man, (it is different with the general Tao in Tao Te Ching) represents a system of normative force (virtue) and Te represents a system of evaluative standard (good).¹ In Tao Te Ching, Lao Tzu established the relationship between the virtue of nature and that of Man. He pointed out that “Man follows the law of Earth, Earth follows the law of Heaven, Heaven follows Tao, and Tao acts spontaneously” (Chapter 25). “The way of Heaven diminishes superabundance and supplements deficiency, and the opposite is the way of man—it diminishes deficiency and by means of which supplements superabundance” (Chapter 77). The Te (good) proposed by Lao Tzu represents the property of Tao, as Tao gave birth to Heaven, Earth and all living things, it transferred Te to them at the same time.² Lao Tzu believed that the goodness of a new born baby is the highest and purest because it comes from Tao directly. While for an adult, his goodness has been affected by the reality of society; therefore, he has to concentrate to decrease his shortness day by day.

It is difficult to understand that though Lao Tzu initiated Tao and Te in Tao Te Ching, he severely lashed out at the assertion of “benevolence and justice” (仁义) of the Confucianists (See chapters 18 and 19). This seems to be a problem of the difference between the reality of society and its ideal, but inherently it involves the problem that if “benevolence and justice” can be attributed to the category of metaphysics, then it is generally believed that they cannot be attributed to the category. Zheng Kai³ concluded that “benevolence and justice” belong to the physical category rather than the metaphysical one, for they have “names” though they have no “form”, quoting an ancient Chinese scholar, Yin Wen, and his theory of form and name. In our opinion, taking

² All scholars believe that Te cannot be translated into “virtue” in English. However, Aristotle used it for both characters of objects and men; Lao Tzu used Te to refer to the property of Tao, You and all the living things. Therefore, they are very similar to each other.
“name” as a criterion for determining whether a concept belongs to the category of physics or metaphysics is very dangerous, because even Tao which is, of course, a metaphysical concept, can be named coercively.

In order to settle the problem, we proposed “a theorem for cardinal virtue selection” in ethics. The principle of the theorem is that in order to determine whether a virtue is a cardinal virtue in terms of ethics, we apply the virtue to be tested onto a just person and an unjust person respectively to see if it is justified for both parties. We examined Plato’s four cardinal virtues in the process of constructing the moral tree and Mencius’ four cardinal virtues in Decoding Tao Te Ching. For simplification, we will discuss one important virtue in Chinese philosophy — sincerity.

Sincerity is a virtue which is usually advocated in any society for its great importance on stability and harmony. Among just men, they should be sincere to each other, but it is clear that between a just man and an unjust man, they cannot trust each other, otherwise, the just man might be victimized. According to this situation, we conclude that sincerity is not a cardinal virtue of ethics. This is why Lao Tzu said that “in ruling a country just measures should be taken; in resorting to arms (with enemy) queer strategies should be adopted” (Chapter 57).

The significance of the theorem for cardinal virtue selection in ethics is to verify a concept’s universality—only those concepts with universality can be attributed to the category of metaphysics. It is a supplementary theorem in identifying confused concepts in the “gray zone” (See Fig. 2) which concern concepts related to human sentiments.

As a final statement, we take from the many meanings of “benevolence” of the Confucianists the most important one: “he who constrains himself so that his behavior will be in accordance with ritual is benevolence” (The Analects). We see that here “benevolence” is identical to “autonomy”. Hence, “benevolence and justice” can be written as “autonomy and justice” which is completely consistent with the result of the cardinal virtues in the moral tree. Accordingly, we can say that “benevolence and justice” can be metaphysical, for the real effect of men’s practice of them is a separate thing. As another support of our conclusion, in Tao Te Ching we cannot only find that Lao Tzu refused “benevolence and justice” due to his detestation towards the reality of the society, we can also find that in many places he had advocated “benevolence and justice” by means of a metaphor which shows that as an ideal they are actually the concrete contents of his “way of Man” (virtue). For instance, in Chapter 7, he said that “The sages put their persons back (in front of interests) and yet they are the best benefited; defy their personal safety (in front of just causes) and yet they are the most safe” (后其身而身先，外其身而身存。).
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Fumbling the Flywhisk: the “Hidden” Complexities of Buddho-Daoist Debate

Thompson M. John, Christopher Newport University

The early middle ages mark a fascinating period in Chinese history. Coming between the Han (206 BCE-220 CE) and the Sui dynasties (581-618), it was a time of both political chaos and intellectual creativity. With Han “Confucianism” (a synthesis of Confucian, Daoist and Legalist teachings grounded in a cosmology based on the dynamic interaction of yin-yang and the wu-xing) thrown into disrepute, other philosophies rose to the fore. Among these competing schools of thought were xuanxue (lit. “dark learning”, philosophical Daoism) and Buddhism, although adherents of these schools borrowed so freely from each other that it is often impossible to distinguish between them.

Members of the scholarly classes (the “literati”) in this period often held debates to demonstrate their intellectual prowess, and it was during one such exchange that a famous but puzzling incident occurred. According to historical records, adherents of two Buddhist “schools”, benwu (“original non-being”) and xinwu (“non-existence of mind”), debated in 365. The consensus is that the proponents of benwu won, but there are many questions surrounding this event, not the least being why this was a “victory”. I believe that re-examining this debate in its proper context will provide us a clearer understanding of what was really at stake. My view is that previous scholars have misunderstood this debate because they overlook ritual nature and thus have missed the central importance of “rules” that guided philosophy in medieval China.

1 Jizang (549-623), our best source, claims there were seven schools -- Benwu (“School of Original Non-being”), Benwu yi (“Variant School of Original Non-being”), Jise (“School of Form/Matter as such”), Xinwu (“School of Non-existence of Mind”), Shihan (“School of Stored Impressions”), Huahu (“School of Illusory Transformations”), Yuanhui (“School of Causal Combinations”) -- although he describes the views of eight teachers. Aνγηο (763-814), a later commentator, follows Jizang. See the Zhong guan lun su, (“Commentary on the Middle Treatise”), T.1824 – 29a: 4-b: 16, and the Zhonglun su ji (“Subcommentary on the Middle Treatise”, ca. 801-806), T.2255 – 92c: 12f.
In order to understand this debate, we need to bear several things in mind. First, we must grasp its general socio-historical context. When the Latter Han dynasty ended, “China” essentially dissolved into several small states which were often at war with each other or with non-Chinese (“barbarian”) peoples. The collapse of the Han central authority provoked a cultural crisis, and various scholars, distrustful of government service in such circumstances, “retired” to private life. These thinkers gravitated to Daoist texts (the Laozi and the Zhuangzi) since these works seemed to offer an escape from the trials of the world. This cultural movement has been dubbed “Neo-Daoism”, a broad term that actually encompasses several competing literati trends. Many Neo-Daoists were bureaucrats who, disillusioned with mainstream Han views, turned to Daoist texts to find the true basis of reality in an uncertain era. Others sought escape through artistic pursuits, drunken reveries, and qingtan (“pure conversation”, philosophical and poetic exchanges emphasizing clever turns of phrase). However, despite their reputations as eccentrics who flouted traditional social constraints, for most Neo-Daoists this was more a rhetorical pose than anything else. Certainly many were very public figures engaging in the sort of scholarly and cultural activities associated with stereotypical Han dynasty scholar-officials.

Second, it was precisely during this time that a new, albeit “foreign” social and cultural movement appeared in China – Buddhism. Although scholars still argue the complexities of its introduction, one thing is certain: with the coming of Buddhism, both Chinese traditions and Buddhism changed. The former became much more ontologically oriented whereas the latter became sinified, i.e. altered to fit the larger cultural parameters. The religious aspects of the various currents of “Neo-Daoism” also helped pave the way for Buddhism’s more spiritual side, and quite a few Chinese were drawn to teachings of meditation. In short, Dharma, the Buddhist body of teachings aimed towards nirvana, became Dao, the Chinese “way” of personal, social, and cosmic harmony. Several “Buddho-Daoist” schools arose in this context, a phenomenon encouraged by the tendency of Buddhist monks and scholars to

---


borrow terms from one another, thus further blurring the differences between the traditions. Such free and easy doctrinal mixing became a main way for the Dharma to spread and for the Chinese to understand it.1

Third, in China, scholarship has traditionally been a very social activity, from antiquity down to the present. In part this practice is related to the powerful aura surrounding wen (“writing”, “culture”). One of the hallmarks of Chinese civilization, wen is more than just “literature” since it includes all of the arts (music, painting, calligraphy etc.) by which a typical “raw youth” was transformed into a refined “gentleman” and scholar. As such, wen came to represent the best of Chinese culture and has become the principle the locus of Chinese collective identity. Study (nian) of wen was traditionally done orally, in the company of others. Lectures and learned discourses were (and still are) widely attended events. While it is true that historically speaking attendance and participation in such events were reserved for literati rather than commoners, they still were communal rather than strictly individual affairs. Sometimes these events were rousing scholarly exchanges; debates staged for entertainment as well as for intellectual and spiritual edification. In fact, debate as the oral form of philosophizing was a primary medium for exchanging ideas and an integral part of Chinese intellectual life, much as in medieval Europe, where debate (disputatio) was a major means of teaching and learning theology.

We have evidence of debates between proponents of different schools of thought in the Pre-Han era, a practice which continued through the middle ages.2 Rooted in traditions of “pure conversation”, debates allowed scholars to show off their intellectual agility and their command of wen. Participants in debate had to think on their feet, demonstrate understanding of abstruse doctrine, and be able to memorize and recite vast amounts of textual material. Not surprisingly, these debates could become heated exchanges where rivals tested each other’s mettle and were not above trading personal insults. Moreover, Buddhist scholar-monks, contrary to stereotypes of being “removed from the cares of the world”, regularly joined in these debates with gusto.3

---

1 For examples see Feng Youlan, A History of Chinese Philosophy, vol. 2, 240 ff. It is important that we differentiate this broad-based way of interpreting Buddhism through xuanxue concepts from the practice of geyi (“matching meanings”). The latter was a more specialized practice used to compare lists of categories from Abhidharma texts with similar numerical lists in Chinese texts.


The *Prajna* Schools and their Debates

The so-called “πραϕνα schools” of the fourth century are prime examples of the Chinified Buddhism that came to dominate learned circles during the early middle ages. Based on early translations of the Πραϕναπαραμιτα (“Perfection of Wisdom”) στρασα and usually numbered at six or seven, these schools represent Chinese attempts to grapple with Buddhist teachings of “emptiness” (*sunyata*) and “no-self” (*anatma*) using traditional Chinese philosophic categories. Reconstructing the schools’ tenets is difficult, as surviving sources are fragmentary, but for the present purposes we need only focus on the *benwu* and *xinwu* schools, as these were the ones involved in the debate of 365.¹

The doctrines of the *benwu* school derive primarily from the views of Wang Bi (226-249), one of the most important *xuanxue* thinkers whose well-known commentaries on the *Laozi* and the *Yijing* articulate an ontological scheme of reality in which all existing things arise from non-being. The leading proponent of *benwu* teachings was Daoan (312-385), a scholar-monk who taught that emptiness was the “original non-being” that existed before the myriad things evolved.² When we realize the truth of this teaching, our ignorance comes to an end.³ *Benwu* teachings probably represent the more or less “orthodox” Buddho-Daoist position. There does seem to have been a related “subschool” (*benwu yi*, lit. “Variant School of Original Non-Being”) led by a monk named Fashen (286-374) but it remains unclear to what extent this school differs from Daoan’s.

*Xinxu* teachings differ considerably, apparently originating with a monk named Zhi Mindu (fl. 326-342).⁴ This school seems to teach that emptiness is a “subjective” (epistemic) experience. One should have a non-deliberative (*wu*) mind towards things. Things themselves are not non-existent, and scriptural claims of such are really meant to encourage detachment; it is not the case that external things are empty. This is very close to view espoused by another *xuanxue* thinker, Guo Xiang (d. 312), who, in his famous commentary on the *Zhuangzi* speaks of the Sage as “void” (detached) while in contact with the world.⁵ Other figures associated with this school were Daoheng (d. 417) and a Dharma master named Zhu Fawen (fl. ~374).

¹ For details on the schools see Tang Yongtong, *Han Wei liang Jin Nan Bei chao Fojiao shi* [History of Buddhism during the Han, Wei, Jin and Northern and Southern dynasties], Vol. 1 (Peking: 1938), 229-277.  
² Other teachers associated with *benwu* ideas include Zhu Fatai (320-387), a colleague of Daoan’s, as well as Huiyuan (334-416) and Zhi Dun (Zhi Daolin, 314-366), both of whom were leading Buddho-Daoist scholars. Huiyuan’s *benwu* views were similar to Daoan’s. See Tang, *History*, 239. Zhi Dun’s *benwu* views can be found in a preface he wrote that is preserved in the *Chu sanzang j jì*, T.2145 – 55ff.  
⁴ According to one account he concocted it with some other monks while crossing the Yangtze (ca. 326-342) – a rather dubious story. See Mather, *Shih-shuo Hsin-yu*, 447.  
In examining their views, we can easily see how the adherents of these schools were guided by Chinese concepts in their interpretations of \( \text{πραϕνα} \) teachings. Benwu may be the most obvious example. The phrase “benwu” clearly points to the basic \( \text{xuaxue} \) ontological scheme first articulated by Wang Bi in which one realizes the “non-being” (\( \text{wu} \), lit. “not-having”) at the very heart of “being” (\( \text{you} \), lit. “having”, i.e. “having a definitive existence”). While some thinkers conceived this as a temporal process (e.g. Fashen’s benwu yi school) others seem to have realized that the two aspects are always together.

As for the xinwu school and its teachings, we realize emptiness by “emptying our minds”. This detached way of engaging with the world is similar to that advocated in the \( \text{Πραϕναπαραμιτα} \), but it is also very Daoist and is probably based on the notion of \( \text{wuxin} \) (“no mind”), a sort of “non-deliberative” way of comportment. We have no indication, however, that xinwu thinkers grasped the emptiness of ordinary “things” or \( \text{δηαρμασ} \) (the momentary phenomena of existence). Thus, they seem to have missed the full ontological import of the \( \text{Πραϕναπαραμιτα} \).

We should be aware, as well, that the various “Buddho-Daoist” schools constantly interacted with each other and evolved over time. Whalen Lai, for one, convincingly argues that the six (or seven) \( \text{πραϕνα} \) schools represent a three-stage dialectical process in which the Chinese were gradually coming to grips with the full import of “emptiness” as it pertains to both “things” and “self”.\(^1\) However, even Lai admits that the actual historical specifics involved are rather muddled. In any case, while it seems from a strict Buddhist perspective that proponents of both of these schools make mistakes (e.g. viewing \( \text{πραϕνα} \) cosmologically as a moment in creation, or as a psychological state rather than the true nature of all things), we should not dismiss them as “un-Buddhist”. Rather, it seems that that in fourth century China there were multiple understandings of Buddhism (“Buddhisms”), the very sort of situation in which debate thrived.

The Actual Debate

Surviving accounts of the benwu-xinwu debate of 365 are rather sketchy. The most complete record is in the biography of Zhu Fatai (320-387) preserved in the \( \text{Gaosengzhuan} \) (“Biographies of Eminent Monks”), a sixth century collection of 257 biographies of Chinese monks compiled by the scholar-monk Huijiao (497-554). Unlike other sources on these early Buddhist schools, the \( \text{Gaosengzhuan} \) account provides no information on the specific doctrinal issues at stake in this debate, preferring to focus on other details: date and time, the parties involved, the character of the exchange, and its aftermath. This relative silence on matters of doctrinal “substance” may, in and of itself, be an

important clue for understanding how the Chinese understood what was at issue. The account of the debate runs thus:

At that time, the sramana Daoheng, an immensely gifted man, was propagating the xinwu theory in the Chingzou [region] with great success. [Dharma Master] Zhu Fatai said, “This heresy must be defeated”. Therefore, he organized a large conference of famous monks and ordered his disciple Tanyi to contend with him (i.e. Daoheng). [Tanyi] expounded theories based on the sutras and the debate became increasingly heated. Heng brandished his arguments [like swords], unwilling to accept defeat. As the day ended [they separated], only to join again the next morning. Huiyuan, who was also present, repeatedly attacked [Heng] and tempers flared. Daoheng himself felt that his theory’s line of reasoning was mistaken. He became flustered, his flywhisk struck the table and he hesitated in giving answer. [At this] Huiyuan remarked, “[You wish to] ‘make haste yet not hurry’, yet what’s going on with your weaving shuttle?” The assembly erupted into laughter, and after this nothing more was heard of the xinwu theory.1

Walter Liebenthal, a noted scholar of early Chinese Buddhism, points out that the last statement in the above account is incorrect since other proponents of the xinwu school turn up later on.2

Analysis – the Role of the li

Based upon the above account, this debate was a most curious exchange. To begin with, although the major participants are each singled out by name, we are given precious little information about them. Perhaps the author (Huijiao) assumed his audience would be familiar with them—a reasonable assumption given his circumstances and the relatively small circle of literate people in China at the time. In addition the details he provides primarily concern the external aspects, i.e. the readily discernible actions and persons involved. The only internal (psychological) information we are given concern Fatai’s motive (to stamp out the xinwu “heresy”) and Daoheng’s apparent realization that his own reasoning was flawed. The latter point may indicate that the account is biased towards the benwu (“orthodox”) position, a conclusion further bolstered by the fact that the account presents the entire debate as being organized by benwu proponents with the purpose of defeating a rival doctrine.

---

2 Walter Liebenthal, Chao Lun: The Treatises of Seng-chao, 2nd rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1968), 136.
The curiosities do not stop there, however. Fatai’s plan is carried out through an intermediary, his disciple Tanyi. Was this meant as Fatai’s way of testing his protege? During the actual debate we are not informed of the specifics of doctrine or the sources Tanyi (and Daoheng) refer to, save that their points are based on “the sutras”. Nonetheless, we are told (however briefly) of how the fight went and how it turned out. On the second day, Huiyuan, one of the most renowned monks of the day, suddenly appears to join the fray. Was he kibitzing on the side? Did he spell Tanyi, whose disciple status may indicate he was youthful and inexperienced? We cannot tell. What seems to be the case, though, is that Huiyuan “wins”, not by refuting Daoheng, but by making a sarcastic remark occasioned by the latter’s bumbling.¹ Not only does Huiyuan capitalize on Daoheng’s mistake, he pokes fun at him while simultaneously demonstrating his own wit and erudition. Apparently ridicule was an accepted part of these debates, and vanquishing an opponent was enough to defeat his position.

So then, what are we to make of this debate? Obviously we are going to have to read between the lines. Most contemporary scholars have viewed the benwu “victory” as an instance of Huiyuan engaging in an ad hominem attack against Daoheng.² And this does seem to be the case at first blush. Could we then say that this written document is simply an account of an intellectual mugging? Not at all, for there is no indication of any surprise “attack” and, in fact, Daoheng held his own ground in the debate for over a day. He thus would appear to have been a worthy champion, one so skilled that it required two adversaries, Tanyi and Huiyuan, to defeat him. The fact that the Gaosengzhuan account, partisan though it may be, claims he was aware of his “faulty reasoning” only underscores his argumentative skill.

However, scholars have overlooked a key detail: Daoheng, apparently under increasing duress (understandable after a full day of debate), got flustered and banged (dropped?) his flywhisk on the table while fumbling with his answer, or perhaps even answering out of turn.³ At this point Huiyuan saw his opening and dispatched Heng with a witty yet cutting remark, comparing his dropped flywhisk to a loom’s shuttle (presumably gone awry) while also underscoring Heng’s obvious lack of proper (sage-like?) skill in weaving his arguments. It was, then, not so much a defeat on substance as it was style. Daoheng performed admirably for awhile (especially for someone arguing from the weaker position) but eventually became clumsy and so lost. We should not, then, view this debate as a contest of “brute” intellectual strength but more like a scholarly fencing match. In point of fact, the early medieval literati commonly spoke of these debates through the metaphor of duels.⁴ Touché, Huiyuan!

¹ Huiyuan ironically refers to a passage from one of the appendices of the Yi Jing that describes the mysterious workings of the cosmos: “Spirit-like, it makes haste by not hurrying”.
³ As per Liebenthal’s translation. See Liebenthal, Chao Lun, 136.
⁴ Kieschnick, The Eminent Monk, 125.
This use of fencing metaphors is a significant matter that warrants close attention. Although in Pre-Modern China the sword was a weapon of war, for the literati it had strong associations with the aristocratic heritage of the Zhou dynasty (~1040-770 B.C.E.), the idealized source of many of the most enduring values of Chinese culture. Thus, although the scholars viewed debate as “armed conflict”, it was a form of civilized conflict engaged in by refined gentlemen. While fencing itself was a martial art of aristocrats governed by detailed rules of engagement, verbal fencing was its more cultured counterpart, and so was an even more rule-bound, ritualized practice. Apparently these rules were known by the participants (hence Huijiao never spells them out), and these mattered more than the purely intellectual merit of the scholars’ arguments. Why would this be? From a Western rationalist perspective privileging style over substance make no sense. However, I argue that it does make sense in the traditional Chinese philosophic context where li, ritualized action and comportment, were an essential concern.

As is well-known, Chinese philosophers have had a long-standing concern with ritual performance and its meaning. Rooted in the ritual code of the warrior aristocracy of the ancient Zhou dynasty, the li were lifted up as central within the Confucian tradition in particular. Han Confucian dominance set in place an idealized view of the li as one of the distinctive Chinese cultural ideals, and this ritualistic concern suffused Chinese society, especially at the elite levels. On the whole the medieval literati sought to identify themselves with this ideal so much that, in the words of one scholar, “they made an absolute fetish of these rites”.1 Indeed, it appears that the early medieval literati often were exceedingly exacting in their observance of li, holding themselves seriously accountable for any violations of them.2

Since the time of Confucius, the Chinese scholar was a “gentleman” (junzi, lit. “son of a prince”), a man of intellect, breeding, and good character. A primary way of demonstrating that one was such a person was by his observing the li. Moreover, adherence to the li was always public; the li were always observed in concert with others, comprising, as they did, the choreography of the “social dance”. A literatus was always to behave properly and elegantly, with such effortless action (wei wuwei) providing irrefutable evidence of his elevated status.

So a true scholar was refined rather than just “smart;” he knew the li, meaning that he was educated in the social graces and could comport himself properly in all circumstances. Such well-mannered behavior was itself a strong implicit argument that a scholar had, in fact, found Dao, the way. Such a person was, in the words of David Hall and Roger Ames, a master of the ars contextualis (“art of contextualizing”) in which the agent acts within the larger socio-cosmic field with the aim of harmonizing its various constituent

---

1 Holcombe. In the Shadow of the Han, 82.
elements. The traditional Chinese scholarly life was an aesthetic rather than purely intellectual ideal.

As in all aesthetic enterprises, learning the scholarly art required patient effort in mastering a formalized body of practices passed on from teacher to student. The emphasis was on form and imitation, not innovation. In this sense, traditional Chinese scholarship was an exercise in ritualization. Indeed, it appears that the early medieval literati life developed into a highly ritualized affair, despite the reputation some Neo-Daoists cultivated for flouting social conventions. Engaging in the give and take of “pure conversation” required mastery of a large body of ritual as well as intellectual knowledge. Thus, for instance, we find the literatus Wang Sengqian (426-485) admonishing his son:

> You have read only about five feet each of the scrolls of the Laozi and the Book of Changes. You have neither known what Wang Bi and Ho Yan had to say, nor the differences between the commentaries of Ma [Rong] and Zheng [Xuan], nor [Wang Bi’s] [Laozi]zhiliue and [Zhouyi] liliue. And yet you have picked up the flywhisk and self-styled as a Conversationalist. Nothing is more dangerous than this... Pure Conversation is like a game of archery: the player must always be aware of the marks already hit by others. A player who knows nothing about them simply loses the game.

Ever the good “Confucian” father, Wang warns his son to study harder in order to be better prepared for the scholarly life. What is particularly fascinating, though, is how he compares the intellectual exchange of “pure conversation” to a contest (“game”) of archery. Like fencing, archery was a sport originating in combat that over time had become a distinctly stylized type of “fighting” bound by all manner of rules and regulations. By the early middle ages it was, in short, a form of ritual combat in which contestants were more performers judged on skill and poise rather than actual combatants. In other words, it belonged in the general category of li.

Lest my insistence on the ritualized nature of Post-Han Chinese philosophy seem overblown, let us note that in the letter to his son, Wang mentions the flywhisk, the same object that Daoheng fumbled when losing his debate. What exactly was this thing anyway? The actual term, zhu weiyi, is a way of rendering the Indian word “chowry” into Chinese. The chowry was a flywhisk made from the tail of a sambar, a large deer that inhabited the mountains of Southeast Asia. Accounts of early medieval scholars are filled with references to their

---

3. Quoted in Yu, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement”, 142. Note that I have substituted pinyin for the Wade-Giles rendering of Chinese terms and names.
chowries and the uses to which they were put.\textsuperscript{1} Overwhelmingly they were used in debate and discussion to emphasize points or even illustrate certain teachings. Often, chowries themselves were things of great beauty and admiration. In some cases it seems scholars were even buried with their chowries in their hands. No true literatus was complete without one.

The chowry was vital to the literati, and, as in all aspects of literati life, its proper use was essential. We can compare the chowry to an orchestra conductor’s baton, an instrument that marks time, directs attention, stresses points, and aids in achieving harmony. In fact, it seems that to qualify as a “pure conversationalist”, one had to be trained in all manner of ritual arts including how to gesture properly with the chowry while speaking.\textsuperscript{2} It is no stretch to say that the chowry was an emblem of literati status, an accessory without which no self-respecting scholar would dare appear in public. Interestingly, in an account of a military officer of humble birth, he admonishes his son for his impudence in even carrying a chowry, and states: “the flywhisk is something belonging exclusively to such distinguished families as the Wangs and the Xies. It is not the sort of thing you should carry around”.\textsuperscript{3} For a literatus, a chowry symbolized his power and prestige, much like the swords of the legendary Japanese samurai. We could even say that for the literati the chowry was sacred.

In light of the towering importance of the chowry, we can now understand what Daoheng did wrong: he disrupted what should have been a harmonious cultural ceremony by violating the rules of ritual decorum. By fumbling his flywhisk, he essentially engaged in behavior unbecoming of one of his stature, committing a gross social foul. Such failure to maintain proper form and composure, momentary as it may have been, “proved” he (and by implication his philosophical position) was out of synch with Dao. Such loss of face in public was, indeed, very bad. What was even worse, though, was that by improperly handling a primary symbol of his esteemed status, he by extension profaned all literati. Such a situation could not stand; it had to be set aright. Huiyuan, thus, did much more than “win” the debate. While he most certainly further embarrassed Daoheng, he did not cause the former’s defeat. Rather, he merely administered the coup de grace and in so doing, symbolically “rescued” his class by censuring one who so negligently treated its regalia. We do not know what happened to Daoheng, but it seems likely he never recovered from such a large-scale social blunder.

Revising Our View of the Early Buddhist Schools

There are several important lessons to draw from this re-examination of the benwu-xinwu debate. First, it highlights the tremendously dynamic quality of the “Buddho-Daoist” movement and its influence on later Chinese philosophy.

\textsuperscript{2} Yu, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement”, 142.
\textsuperscript{3} Quoted in Yu, “Individualism and the Neo-Taoist Movement”, 148, note #100.
Certainly their teachings are decidedly unorthodox by Indian standards, something not surprising since the Chinese could only access Buddhist teachings by way of early (and rather clumsy) Chinese translations of only a few Πραϕναπαραμιτα συτρας. Yet despite such handicaps, Chinese scholars devised a fairly wide range of interpretations and expended a great deal of energy arguing over them. Not only were there several different “schools” of early Chinese Buddhism, some of them included various subschools that appear to have differed widely on certain points.¹ Thus, there were many “Buddhisms” in China at this time, just as in India. Such a plurality of competing Buddhisms has been a prominent feature of Chinese history down to the present, and parallels the various Daos of the Warring States era. The πραϕνα schools, thus, are far more important than are generally recognized, for even if they were rather short-lived, they established the precedent of having a variety of recognizably different versions of the Dharma within the Chinese context.

The benwu-xinwu debate also prompts us to take a closer look at the political nature of such contests. This subject warrants our close attention, as it has heretofore received rather scant attention. For as Michel Foucault and others have shown, unmasking power relations is an integral part of critical scholarship. We cannot forget that the πραϕνα schools arose in the midst of great political instability. “China” at the time was a patchwork of small states riven by internal and external conflicts. The monks of the πραϕνα schools were caught up in these same conflicts since they derived support directly from state governments and wealthy aristocrats. The rivalries between these schools thus have a strong political sub-text, and undoubtedly mirror the oppositions among the powerful clans and the beleaguered imperial courts of their day.

Clearly, our revisiting the benwu-xinwu debate proves the untenability of the late Wing-tsit Chan’s characterization of the πραϕνα schools as being based on “individual philosophers and isolated theories without any systematic philosophy”.² Not only were these schools not the products of isolated thinkers pondering the mysteries of πραϕνα behind cloistered walls, they were part of a lively cultural conversation, a true conflict of interpretations with lasting repercussions. Moreover, this conflict appears to have been the intellectual side of explicit socio-political clashes.³ The benwu-xinwu debate is not “dead” by any means, for despite being an event anchored in the distant past, it serves as an important window on the intellectual world of early medieval China. In particular it underscores the vital place of the li in attaining and maintaining Dao, the way of elegance and harmony.

¹ Benwu is probably the most obvious example. Wang Qia (323-358), an educated layman, expresses great confusion over the various benwu teachings in a letter preserved in the Guang hengming ji, T.2103 – 323a: 7-13.
² Wing-tsit Chan. A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, 343.
³ The adherents of the πραϕνα schools were well-connected politically, and they (and their aristocratic patrons) often disliked each other intensely. Undoubtedly conflicts between schools were influenced by these rivalries. The “politics of πραϕνα” in early medieval China requires more investigation if we are to understand the πραϕνα schools.
Larger Implications

While the topic of this paper may seem of concern only to specialists, it has broad implications for understanding Chinese thought and, indeed, for engaging in all forms of cross-cultural philosophic study. When it comes to philosophical problems and puzzles, attention to context is crucial. Without delving into the complexities surrounding a problem, we cannot achieve anything like a full understanding of the particular issues involved. While there is always the danger of going overboard here,¹ without anchoring ourselves in the specifics, we risk becoming like Socrates in Aristophanes’ “The Clouds”, lost in a realm of vague generalities and abstractions.

In the case of Chinese philosophy, invariably ritual deportment trumps many other concerns. The general goal of philosophy in China is, after all, attaining Dao. This is an on-going process of careful discernment and appropriate response, a life of creativity forever open to new situations. How one achieves it is at least as important as what one does. Within such a perspective, propriety and decorum are paramount, and the good life will necessarily be highly ritualized. If we overlook these facts, we will never understand much that is so vital in Chinese philosophy and, in turn, fail to see how it illuminates various dimensions of our own lives.

Perhaps we would do well, in addition, to reflect on the extent to which academic life in general and philosophy in particular is a ritual activity. We “philosophers”, while allegedly dedicating ourselves to the pursuit of knowledge, have been schooled in all manner of techniques and practices. To what extent might thinking itself be bound by certain rules and conventions rather than a means of discovering final and absolute Truth? When it comes to such questions, maybe the Chinese have much to teach us.

The Politics of Philosophy: Mou Zongsan, the Kyoto School, and their Critics

Tu Xiaofei, Syracuse University

It was the winter of 1994. Lying on a hospital bed, Mou Zongsan felt his strength was draining away from him, that there was none left for him to speak a single word. To communicate with the students tending to him, he used a pencil and a note pad. Sometimes he wrote down the feeling of irresistible physical fatigue and his irritation at those who did not seem to understand. A few notes read: “I’m so tired”, and “you folks keep feeding me, I don’t want food, I just want to sleep”. Other notes seemed more interesting to the students of New Confucianism who were keen to know what Mou was thinking during the final moments of his life. A couple of notes have the same dribbled words that carry a sense of desperation “unfiting” for a philosopher: “All is lost!” But following these is a note, written in tortuous lines and hard to make out, that suggest the modern Confucian’s belief in something beyond the absurdity and desperation of human life: “But this is [what matters in] history: moral idealism, moral idealism”.1

To understand Mou’s moral idealism, it seems apparent that Mou’s book bearing the same title would be indispensible. Curiously, this book has not received sufficient attention from students of New Confucianism. The situation is understandable in Mainland China because of the overt political overtone of the book. In the English speaking world, as will be made clear below, the same political leaning of Mou has made even his sympathizers reticent about this part of his thought.

What distinguished Mou Zongsan from his contemporary Chinese philosophers, including some of his fellow New Confucians, was Mou’s opposition to the dominating political forces as well as the prevalent ideologies of his time, from both the right and the left. Indeed, Mou witnessed the tumultuous moments of twentieth century China. Ever since the opium war, the imperialist aggressions sowed in the hearts of the Chinese youth the senses of humiliation and urgent need for changes. The KMT (Kuomingtang, or Nationalist Party of China) was a product of the rabid nationalistic fervor that was agitated by the quite probable prospect of a colonized China. Saturated in

---

1 I read these notes at the library of the New Asia College in Hong Kong during my visit in 2004.
nationalistic ideologies, the KMT was, ironically, often chided by overzealous public opinion, which would not tolerate even the slightest political and diplomatic compromises with foreign powers, as the traitor of Chinese interest and sovereignty. The CCP (Chinese Communist Party), on the other hand, was considered to be the only hope left for the nation according to leftwing intellectuals and idealist students. On the spiritual side, as indigenous traditions lost respect and foreign religions carried suspect imperialist ties, joining the CCP became the chief rite of passage to maturity among rebellious young people who were resentful of social injustice and eager to express themselves. However, Mou stood against the trend. In *Moral Idealism*, Mou told the following story. When Mou was ready to leave the Mainland as the political and military victory of the CCP became inevitable, his students found it hard to understand why Mou chose to go just when a bright future was on the corner. One of his students actually followed him to the railway station attempting to persuade him to stay. Mou said to him tersely, “You think you are a progressive? Someday you will regret about this”. Seeing that he could not convince his teacher, that student gave up by saying “then we are taking separate paths”. Mou retorted “Do you have a path to take”?  

This anecdote tells us much about Mou’s political attitude. However, to see what it has to do with Mou’s philosophy as a whole, we need to look briefly at the basic orientation of New Confucian metaphysics. One of the foundational philosophical assumptions of the twenty century New Confucians is the homology between the cosmic process (“heavenly principle”) and human morality (“heart/mind”), a proposition first systematically articulated by the Sung Confucian thinkers. Appropriating this Confucian tradition, Mou’s teacher Xiong Shili affirmed that the unpolluted human heart/mind is both the foundation of the universe and the Truth. The Confucian theory of “harmony of heavenly and human virtues” is not only lofty philosophical speculation, but has roots in the “existential” concerns of the Confucians to wrestle with the dilemma between the finiteness of individual self and the infinite. I wish to argue that this philosophical formulation of “moral idealism”, as Mou calls it, is diametrically opposed to the materialistic explanation, which sees humans and the world exclusively in terms of economic interest and class relations. Furthermore, it was precisely this moral idealism that decided Mou’s political orientation and his reading of the political situations of twentieth century China.

The symbiotic relation between the so called “ultimate concerns” and political philosophy is not limited to the case of Mou Zongsan, but can be easily discovered in such New Confucians as Liang Shumin and Tang Junyi. However, to broaden the scope of this paper, I should like to reach beyond

---

1 See, for instance, , 1977
2 An example is ’s autobiographical account , 1998
3 , 1959.
4 Comes to mind is Liu Zongzhou’s concept of “great body” that he believed to overcome the limitedness of human existence.
New Confucianism and draw a parallel instead to the thought of the Kyoto Philosophy. One of the most salient characteristics of Kyoto Philosophy is the “existential” propensity common to all its members, which distinguishes it from philosophies as mere intellectual exercise. Nishida Kitaro insists that “in the end, scholarship is for the sake of life. Life comes first, without it scholarship is useless”. One should note that what Nishida meant here by scholarship is not the objectivistic study of any data available but a religiously informed philosophy. Nishitani Keiji concurs that “my life as a young man can be described in a single phrase: it was a period absolutely without hope. My life at the time lay entirely in the grips of nihility and despair. My decision, then, to study philosophy was in fact -- melodramatic as it might sound – a matter of life and death”. For Nishitani, religion begins when the ordinary encounter with personal limits turns into a conscious question about the whole of one’s own life. The original questions – why did this happen to me? What can I do about it? – are transformed into the questions: who am I? Why do I exist? Nishitani call this conversion the realization of nihility. Awakening to one’s true nature as nothingness is a kind of death to the self, what Zen refers to as the great death. However, it is a rebirth at the same time. This rebirth is not a freeing from death or a being reborn in another world. Rather, it is a freeing of oneself from the prejudices one has towards the self and the world, or again in Buddhist terms, a nirvana in samsara.

In Mahayana Buddhist terminology, what makes this freedom possible is “Buddha nature”, whose concept has had a long history of mutual influences with the Confucian notion of heart/mind. Such approaches based on “human nature” are out of favor with the heightened awareness of historicity in today’s academia. Nevertheless, no one can deny that historically they have been the backbones of some most enduring and most acclaimed philosophies. In any event, such approaches prohibit one to see “matter” as the essence of existence, or “interest” as the driving force for human life. In this spirit, Nishida avers that materialism is a philosophy of death.

It is no secret that New Confucianism and the Kyoto Philosophy have been greeted with criticisms in North American academia. This is especially true in the case of the Kyoto School. While New Confucianism has received its share of attack as an intellectual movement, fortunately (or unfortunately) for Mou Zongsan, he has not been a target because no one in North American universities is reading him. Nevertheless, following the logic of these criticisms, they can easily be applied to Mou Zongsan as well. For their critics, the New Confucians’ and the Kyoto Philosophers’ emphasis on a universal “human nature” or “existential conditions of humans” amounts to an “ahistorical” approach, which disembodies and spiritualizes Confucianism and Buddhism, and glosses over the socio-historical factors that shape the same

---

2 Ibid. 191.
3 Ibid. 220.
traditions. According to the critics, these “manufactured” traditions serve as tools in supporting both destructive nationalisms and the formation of a dominating global capitalism.¹ Those criticisms come at no surprise. With the deepening of Western scholarship in Asian studies and more accurate information about Asian thought being available, the initial warm fuzzy feeling of Westerners about “Eastern wisdom” has subsided. More importantly, the political and ideological differences between the Asian cultural conservative thinkers and the largely progressive Western academe play a part. Below I attempt to answer briefly the above criticisms.

First of all, the criticism regards the lack of historical consciousness in New Confucianism and the Kyoto School. In current academic and public vocabulary, being “ahistorical” is not only a scholarly error, but it also carries ethical implications. The alleged anti-semitism in Mel Gibson’s film The Passion of the Christ is said to be the result of Gibson’s “ahistorical” reading of the Bible. The extremist Islam Militarism is reported to be rooted in an “ahistorical” understanding of Islam teachings and history. The problem, however, is that the historicizing approach itself also needs to be historicized. That is, we need to understand such an approach as produced and shaped by certain social and cultural conditions rather than taking it for granted.

Second, would the spiritualized understanding of human existence by New Confucianism and the Kyoto Philosophy forbid us to look at the real cause of human sufferings and therefore serve the interests of the powers that be? Attributing human suffering to the absurdity and limitedness of human existence by the New Confucianism and the Kyoto Philosophy is for me a form of radical religious realism, although it is a quite a different issue whether the spiritual solutions that they provide are convincing enough. The ethical implications of such a brutally realistic worldview are certainly open to discussion. However, the alternative view that all human sufferings can once and for all be remedied by certain social and political arrangements seems not to be corroborated by historical evidence. The moral high road claimed by such political ideologies often proves to be self-righteousness and self-deception.

Moreover, a questionable pattern has emerged in the works of these critics that promulgate a dichotomy between agricultural society/industrial society, tradition/modernity, religion/reason, even Fascism/democracy, and thus “cultural nostalgia” carries the connotation of being reactionary. For instance, Robert Sharf has highlighted the fact that Zen koans are set up in a context of idealized agricultural society. Another example of the recent hostility towards traditional non-Western cultures, in a little bit different context, is Tony

Stigliano. Criticizing the cultural nostalgia of Mircea Eliade for Romanian East Orthodox tradition, Stigliano claims: “Although myths and religious practice of other cultures are not in themselves Fascist, their use by foreigners contains that threat”.1

Finally, the presumptions of our critics include a positivistic functionalism and a Marxist ideological analysis, which exclusively see religion and philosophy as weapons wielded by different social groups in order to legitimize or contest the distribution of social, economic, and political privileges. Arif Dirlik, among others, stands out as the staunchest in this criticism of New Confucianism. Paradoxically, these critics are mirroring the characteristics of their target. Are these Marxist influenced authors not guilty of an ahistorical reading of Marxism? That is, a historical, Europe-originated political movement with a tainted track record has been presented as a purely idealistic indignation against social injustice, and a universally valid spirit of critique. The result is that such a disembodied Marxism of the Western academics is hardly recognizable by any of the “practicing” Marxists around the world, just as New Confucians’ and the Kyoto Philosophers’ revamped traditions do not necessarily resonate with many of their fellow Confucians and Buddhists.

Conclusion

It is often argued that Confucius’s thought was a response to the political and moral chaos of the late Chou time, and Neo-Confucianism was a similar reflection on the fate of the overthrown North Sung Dynasty. Evidently, twentieth century Confucianism has also been a product of the world-shattering events of China in the same century. The Confucian philosophy has always been intertwined with politics. More specifically, Confucian thinking focuses on individual and collective responsibilities facing such difficult situations. Thus, the question is also an existential one: how does a finite human being (and this applies to his fellow human beings as well) cope with an absurd world into which he has been thrown? The answer to this question offered by the Sung Neo-Confucians and New Confucians including Mou Zongsan stresses the moral perfectability of individuals and the solution begins with each individual’s effort in self-cultivation. Many people, such as Wang Anshi, the political and intellectual rival of Neo-Confucianism, would think such an approach moralistic and pedantic. They believe that all problems lie in political arrangements and that the first step toward solving the problems is to gain political power in order to change the defunct political structure. At the risk of overgeneralization, one could argue that this disagreement exists between Confucius and the Legalists, between Sung Confucians and Wang Anshi, as well as between Mou Zongsan and ideologues of both the KMT and the CCP.

Furthermore, as we discussed above, the same difference of opinions existed between the Kyoto Philosophers and their critics. In a time of the global village (cliché as it may sound like), we desperately need more cross-cultural mutual understanding and a fusion of perspectives (self-evident as it may seem). This is easier said than done. I have constantly been amazed by the fact that some Western academics and Asia experts, despite their cosmopolitan lifestyle, could be very ideologically strident and culturally narrow-minded; while the supposedly “simple” people who never traveled to other parts of the world often have a bigger heart than the cultural elite. Ironically, some of the American and European academics who most indignantly denounce the Western hegemony piggyback on the very dominance they attack, benefiting from the prestige that Western scholarship enjoys in, and the huge advantage of the Western academic industry over the rest of the world. Like the early Christian missionaries to Asia who were abhorred by the pagans’ inability to accept Christian truth, today’s critics of Eastern traditions lament that the latter fall short of the Western progressive ideals, and demand that people living in a different era or a different context conform to contemporary Western political sensitivities. No matter how sincere these academics reproach the intellectual shortsightedness of the early missionaries, I regret to say that they share the same kind of mentality.

Bibliography


