

In Pursuit of Wisdom

For thousands of years, we human beings have been aware - or could discover, for ourselves - a certain wisdom, a particular conscious knowledge concerning our own nature.

From Aeschylus to Sophocles to Siddhārtha Gautama, from the mythos of the *Μοῖραι* [1] to the postulate of samsara, from the notion of Fate to the Sermon on the Mount, and beyond, we have had available to us an understanding of *Δίκη* [2]: of how we human beings are often balanced between honour and dishonour; balanced between *ὑβρις* and *ἀρετή*; between our animalistic desires, our passions, and our human ability to be noble, to achieve excellence; a balance manifest in our known ability to be able to control, to restrain, ourselves, and thus find and follow a middle way, of *ἀρμονίη*.

For several Aeons, this understanding, this middle way, was of two essential things. First, of how such a middle way enabled us to avoid causing or contributing to that suffering which our own *πάθει μάθος* - our learning from the sorrows of personal experience - informed us was unwise because contrary to the natural balance (the numinosity) that such *πάθει μάθος* intimately revealed to us. Second, of how this balance - this self control - was preferable for us, as individuals, since to upset this balance - for example to go beyond the limits established by our ancestral customs - was: (1) to invite a personal retribution (or misfortune) from the gods; or (2) to invite punishment from a supreme deity; or (3) condemn us to be reborn again and thus have to toil yet again to obtain reward (karma) enough to progress in accord with the *bhavacakra*.

As Sophocles wrote, over two thousand years ago - *ὑβρις φυτεύει τύραννον* [3]. That is, *ὑβρις* (hubris) plants the *τύραννον*, although the sense of *τύραννος* here is not exactly what our fairly modern term *tyrant* is commonly regarded as imputing. Rather, it refers to the intemperate person of excess who is so subsumed with some passion or aim or a lust for power that they go far beyond the due, the accepted, bounds of behaviour and thus exceed the limits of or misuse whatever authority they have been entrusted with. Thus do they, by their excess, by their disrespect for the customs of their ancestors, by their lack of reasoned, well-balanced, judgement [*σωφρονεῖν*] offend the gods, and thus, to restore the balance, do the *Ἐρινύες* take revenge. For it is in the nature of the *τύραννος* that they forget, or they scorn, the truth, the ancient wisdom, that their lives are subject to, guided by, *Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες*.



Λυκοῦργος and the Ἐρινύες

Thus the knowledge that our pride, our arrogance, our uncontrolled desires, our lack of *σωφρονεῖν*, are the genesis of the disruption of the natural balance - both within ourselves, and exterior to ourselves.

Or, as Dante Alighieri expressed it in the terms of one particular mythos:

The infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile,
Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
The mother of mankind.

The received wisdom was personal avoidance of the error of *ὑβρις* because we, we individuals and possibly our immediate family, would suffer: either in this life (by for example receiving bad luck, inviting misfortune, or having some tyrant foisted upon our community) or in some afterlife we believed in. Hence what we would now describe as ethical behaviour, for individuals - our control of our instincts, our desires - essentially derived from something supra-personal, such as ancestral customs, some belief in some gods, some faith in some supreme deity, or acceptance of some postulate such as karma or nirvana. In the terms of Christian theology, the belief being that we need to replace the guidance, the temptations, the guile, of The Infernal Serpent with the guidance, the love, of Christus Redemptor.

More recently, we human beings have committed a new kind of ὕβρις. Or more correctly perhaps, our ὕβρις has acquired a new form, new manifestations. That is, we have manufactured causal abstractions - ideals, ideas, *-isms* and *-ologies* - which we have identified with and/or striven to attain, both for ourselves, and for others; so that it has become apposite to write that causal abstractions are the genesis of suffering, for both ourselves, and for others. because such abstractions disrupt the natural balance of Life [ψυχή]: the life within us, within other sentient beings, and the Life that is presented to us as Nature, leading thus to a loss of ἀρμονίη. This kind of ὕβρις also plants the τύραννος, but the impersonal kind of τύραννος that lives in the practical implementation of such abstractions, internally and externally - so that, for instance, we allow ourselves to become subjects of some *-ism* or some *-ology* (whether described as or deemed to be political, social, or religious) or we become actual subjects of some impersonal entity such as a State, controlled, constrained, by laws, taxation, and the ever-present threat of the use of force by the 'officially appointed' minions of such an entity, so that such an impersonal entity has, in all but name, usurped our older gods, our Μοῖραι, our God, our karma.

Thus, the reality now is often of either (1) obedience to the *dictat* of some entity such as The State, our government, or the mandates of some supra-national body such as the United Nations, because to dissent would render us liable to punishment; or (2) a belief in - an acceptance of - such entities as the provider of 'good fortune', of 'justice' [4], and of prosperity, for us and our family.

Here, the threat of exterior, practical, punishment - the always present threat of imprisonment, the use of force against us by such entities as the Police, and ultimately the armed forces - has largely replaced the interior threat we hitherto might have imposed upon ourselves by our acceptance of such things as retribution from the gods, or punishment from some supreme deity. That is, ethical behaviour, for individuals still essentially derives from something supra-personal involving an *us* and *them*, the others.

The Pursuit of Wisdom

Despite these approaches, ancient and modern - that is, despite the ethical behaviour these two approaches encouraged and even demand, or tried to encourage - human beings, *en masse*, do not seem to have significantly changed. Thus, the world is still replete with individuals who cannot control their desires and who thus commit dishonourable deeds, the error of ὕβρις. For every minute of every day, year following year, human beings are

murdered, brutalized, bullied, raped, injured, tortured, humiliated, abused - just as deception, theft, robbery, fraud, and malfeasance, occur with monotonous regularity.

The world is still rife with bloody murderous conflict, except that new causes of conflict have been added to the ancient ones of personal greed, personal dishonour, and the desires of some *τύραννος* or other. For the new entities that we have manufactured - such as nation-States - have themselves caused suffering, of a magnitude arguably greater than caused by some *τύραννος* and far greater than could be caused by individuals unable to control their dishonourable urges, their greed. For example, conflicts between the modern nation-States of the West, and internal conflict within such States, have resulted in the deaths of an estimated one hundred million human beings in just over a century [4].

Thus, it seems as if the ancient wisdom of *Δίκη* has remained the preserve of a minority, and thus that the accumulated *πάθει μάθος* of millennia - manifest in such things as literature, Art, music, ancestral culture, and spiritual Ways of Life - has little or no relevance for or been a significant influence upon the majority, even in those modern States which have had, for nigh on a century, compulsory education for children. [5]

Since murderous conflict, the error of *ὑβρις*, and a lack of reasoned judgement, and thus suffering, remain - despite a variety of middle ways over millennia to divert us from such things, and despite numerous individuals over millennia, in their own ways, understanding *Amr bil Maroof wa Nahi anil Munkar* [6] - it is perhaps pertinent to consider if there is, or might be, a better expression of that wisdom, that particular conscious knowledge, concerning our own nature and how we might find and express that balance which enables us to restrain ourselves and avoid the error of *ὑβρις*.

That is, is there a Way which does not mean or imply a belief in some ancient mythos, or demand of us some faith in some supreme deity and some afterlife, or involve us in obedience to some supra-personal entity whose authority ultimately derives from the threat or the use of force or acceptance of some suffering-causing *-ism* or *-ology* whose nature is enshrined in the cliché that the abstraction of happiness, the abstraction of the welfare, the abstraction of the security, the abstraction of the prosperity, of the majority is more important than the fate of some individuals, and that thus for such abstractions to be obtained, in some (mythical) future the suffering of some or even of many individuals is an 'acceptable price' to pay?

In brief, a Way which does not of necessity involve us in considering matters as we have hitherto almost invariably done: by whether or not we, as individuals,

are rewarded or punished (in this life, or in some believed in afterlife). That is, which does not of necessity posit some personal abstraction for us to accept or believe in - be such an abstraction some personal prosperity or some peace (in this or some next life such as Heaven or Jannah), or some supreme deity, or some notion such as nirvana or even some mythos such as *Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες*.

For such things - and the middle ways derived from them in the past - are, correctly appreciated and thence understood, only pointers toward a deeper truth, which is that of the error of the self, and an error revealed by the nature of the causality implicit in this individual desire to seek some reward and avoid punishment, or, in Buddhism, avoid the periodicity of samsara.

Even in Buddhism, where this truth concerning the self has been dis-covered, revealed, in a rather rational manner, the practical reality for the majority is of *individual* striving, and the assumption of a goal for individuals. Hence the reason of the individual doing what they do - meditation, giving alms, striving to avoid causing suffering, for example - because they themselves seek liberation, nirvana; because they are concerned about *their* karma. Thus there is still a judgement based on the concept of individual reward. Hence, also, the striving for a posited goal, a striving exemplified by the *bhavacakra*.

The Error of The Self and The Natural Balance of Empathy

The error of the self is the error of a simple cause-and-effect predicated on the separation of living beings and upon a separate goal which the separated individual could attain by a given causal process.

Thus, and for example in Buddhism, the goal is nirvana and the process the Eight-Fold Path; in Christianity the goal is Heaven and the process is acceptance of Christus Redemptor; in Islam the goal is Jannah and the process is complete submission to Allah (and acceptance of Quran, Sunnah, and Shariah); in Hellenic culture the goal was *ἀρετή* (and thence a good place in Hades) by means such as avoidance of *ὑβρις*. In modern times, for the plethora of agnostics and atheists, the goal is happiness/prosperity by means such as The State, whether actively or passively accepted [7].

This assumption of self - of the separation of living beings, and such a causal process - is inherent in most if not all hitherto spiritual Ways which posit and require a praxis, and in the modern abstraction of The State, and also forms the basis of the ethics deriving from such Ways as well as the ethics of that

modern abstraction. That is, either (1) The State defines what is moral, by means such as enforceable laws, or (2) such spiritual Ways posit what is moral based on their particular given goal and their given causal process and praxis of achieving that goal.

Why is this assumption of self an error? Because of empathy, which uncovers the nature of Being and beings that has hitherto been obscured by such spiritual Ways and by abstractions such as The State. For empathy - the innate (if still little used and underdeveloped) human faculty of *συμπάθεια* [*συν-πάθος*] - reveals the separation of living beings for the assumption, the limitation, it is.

For empathy reveals the *a-causal* nature (the numinous nature) of living beings - and the nexions that they are to Being, thus establishing a human ethics independent of the hitherto assumed cause-and-effect of separate human beings striving for some assumed goal by means of some given causal process.

Empathy thus establishes a new (or possibly a re-expressed older) understanding of our human nature - both existing and potential - and a new (or possibly a re-expressed older) knowing of how we might avoid *ὑβρις* and thus the suffering that *ὑβρις* brings. This understanding and knowing is of the numinous manifest in the indivisibility of living beings: of how the joy, the pain, the sorrow, the suffering, the very life, of what has hitherto been causally perceived as *the-separate-others* is in essence our joy, pain, sorrow, suffering, and life. For this, this natural balance, this *ἁρμονίη*, is what empathy, in the living moment, reveals - or rather what empathy by its very nature naturally and wordlessly and effortlessly moves us toward: what empathy brings-into-being.

Hence the empathic human being avoids Al-Munkar (and thus avoids causing suffering), and inclines toward Al-Maruf, just by being human - by using the faculty of empathy in the same way the faculties of sight, smell, taste, touch are used. That is, naturally as wordless perceptions of what-is, and not of what is assumed or believed. There is thus no naming and no ideation necessary or involved in this use of empathy; only a living in the transient moment. For it is not correct to give names to - to denote by names and terms - some-things, some existents; since such naming, such denoting, implies the causality of separation between subject and object, and it is this causality that empathy transcends.

There are therefore no given or assumed causal means - no techniques, methods, or teachings, no praxis, no texts, no faith in some-thing or some-one - as there is no goal, assumed and/or to be striven for. There is only empathy, and its development and use: only the empathy of the living changeful

transient moment, and *us-as-Being* (The Numen, the acausal Unity, The Cosmos) presenced, temporarily, as one living nexion (*one being*) on one planet orbiting one star in one Galaxy.

How then to develop, to cultivate, empathy? By letting-go of all abstractions (all *-isms* and all *-ologies*). By ceasing to denote living beings by causal terms but instead perceiving them wordlessly in the moment of our perception. By ceasing to prejudge other human beings, either by some outer perceived form/appearance or by some assumption or assumptions manufactured or made by others - and instead relating to them as hitherto newly-known beings in the natural immediacy of the moment of our meeting with them. By placing ourselves in The Cosmic Perspective - that is, by an acceptance of ourselves as but one fragile fallible microcosmic nexion only temporarily presenced on one planet orbiting one star in one Galaxy in a Cosmos of billions of Galaxies. This is the essence of *wu-wei* - a knowing, a feeling, of Being; a knowing, a feeling, of The Numen, the acausal Unity, the Cosmos itself; and a knowing, a feeling, once described in that ancient wisdom termed Tao, and yet which even then, as now, could not and cannot be described by or contained within that one, or any, particular term.

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Notes

[1]

τίς οὖν ἀνάγκης ἐστὶν οἰακοστρόφος.
Μοῖραι τρίμορφοι μνήμονές τ' Ἐρινύες

Who then compels to steer us?
Trimorphed Moirai with their ever-heedful Furies!

Aeschylus (attributed), *Prometheus Bound*, 515-6

[2] In respect of Δίκη, see for example my essay *Quid Est Veritas?*

[3] *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 872

[4] The modern notion of an impersonal abstract 'justice' - said to be obtainable by the making and enforcement of laws - has replaced the older, wiser, personal notion of the natural balance which was manifest in Δίκη and in the Ἐρινύες.

[4] For example, sixty million people in the Second World War, sixteen million in the First World War, and over twenty million in the Soviet Union mostly as a result of Stalin. Estimates of the number of people killed by the Mongol tyrant Genghis Khan range from a possible fifteen to twenty million, to a speculative eighty million.

[5] For an overview of the failure of the modern State, refer to my polemical essay, *The Failure and Immoral Nature of The State*.

[6]

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

(Quran, 3:104) " Let there rise among you a group Calling others to Al-Maruf [the honourable] and forbidding Al-Munkar [what is dishonourable], for these are the ones who will achieve success [Jannah]." Interpretation of Meaning

[7] Such happiness/prosperity of the majority - together with what is termed their 'security' - may be said to be the stated or the assumed *raison d'etre* of The State. Given that in modern times most human beings live in areas where States have assumed or obtained 'authority' over them, by whatever means, it might well be argued that The State with its aims and goals (based on some and various *-isms* and *-ologies*, including that of δημοκρατία) has, for those uncommitted to spiritual Ways, become an idealized weltanschauung supplanting more spiritual Ways, and a weltanschauung when not actively affirmed is at least passively accepted by a majority of such uncommitted, non-religious, ones - and even by many religious ones in agreement with that modern abstract division between State and Religion which many supporters and/or theorists of The State assume exists or believe should exist.

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