Identity and Values

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Edited by

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

This book provides an analysis of values and identity within the context of ancient, modern and contemporary philosophy. This issue is addressed from the viewpoints of intersubjective and individual experience. In this volume the authors try to answer the following questions: What are the lived-meanings of "values" and "ethics" from a philosophical, sociological and psychological perspective? How does society constitute its own life-word? What is the meaning of values? What is the role of values in defining self-identity? How does their meaning change within a political context? Do politics and aesthetics affect our moral identity? What is the role of values in the state of nature? How does art accomplish its primary task: raising human consciousness over and against the reified world of commodities?

This volume is an opportunity to reflect on these issues from a philosophical point of view and to look at the dialogue of philosophy with, sociology and psychology. Starting from the analysis of Plato and Aristotle, through Shabistari and Campanella to Marcuse and Adorno, the authors will provide an accurate and critical reflection on the significance of identity and values. Additionally, part of the volume will be dedicated to an appendix of shorter papers written by students on the same topic.

In the first part of the volume the authors reflect on the notion of *physis* in ancient philosophy. More precisely, they examine differences between pre- and post-Socratic philosophy from a Western and Eastern point of view. Marino and Ferrarello stress the differences between normativity and descriptivity, parts and whole within an ethical and political context.

The point of departure for Applebaum's chapter is the question of value and embodiment in Auerbach's (1946) discussion of the history of early Christianity. Auerbach locates the origin of an "antagonism between sensory appearance and meaning which permeates the . . . Christian view of reality" in the historical situation of the early church (p. 49). In this chapter the author will take this analysis as a starting point from which to contrast early Christian and Islamic views of the relationship between the world of embodied, sensual experience and the realm of meaning. The author will contrast Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians with citations from several chapters of the Qur'an, focusing on chapters 6 and 30, *An-Nisa* (The Women) and *Ar-Rum* (The Byzantines).

In both traditions, concrete phenomena or objects can play the role of signs referring to divine truths. The central difference between Paul's *tupoi* and Muhammad's *mathal* and *ayah*, he will argue, concerns the polarity between concrete facts on the one hand, and meaning on the other.

In the fourth chapter Jean-Paul De Lucca will focus on Tommaso Campanella's work. Written at a time of great scientific and political developments that were to shape the course of modernity, Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* is considered as one of the most significant early modern utopian writings. The reading offered in this contribution seeks to address the common yet ill-advised tendency of isolating this "poetical dialogue" from the author's life and from his dense corpus of works and ideas, which serve as its interpretative framework, with a view of elucidating the interconnectedness between "utopian" ideals and lived realities. Particular attention will be devoted to the passage from the text's reflective, critical underpinning to its future-oriented, non-instrumentalist scientific optimism and its call for dialogical communication on the cultural, political and religious planes. The view that emerges, of identity and alterity as mutually constitutive elements, will then be linked to some of its more contemporary expressions.

In Chapter Five Giacchetti and Huttala will reflect on the crisis of the bourgeois subjectivity as representing one of the crucial points of the philosophical reflection of Adorno. They will deal with Adorno's task that was at the same time to disclose the role of identity in the formation of subjectivity and to rescue the role of the subject as the ground of criticism. As Adorno states in the prologue to his Negative Dialectics, his task was "to break through the delusion of constitutive subjectivity by means of the power of the subject".

In the following chapter Marta Ubiali will tackle, from Arendt's viewpoint, the moral collapse of Western European society, in order to grasp its nature and implications. Thus, she will reflect first on the roots of the idea of morality itself and on what has traditionally been called the consciousness of good and evil. Secondly, she will discuss the consciousness of good and evil, which is for Arendt closely linked to the activity of thinking. Thirdly, she will interrogate the meaning of evil in relation to her analysis of the Eichmann case.

Finally, in Chapter Seven Magnus Englander will work on the notion of empathy in relation to the the experiential self. The purpose of this paper is to explicate the possibility of an essential relation between the minimal requirements for selfhood and the intentionality of empathy, as a means of valuing the other. Within the constraints of phenomenological psychology, empathy can be seen as the directedness towards the other

person's meaning-expression. As a professional (e.g., a nurse, a psychiatrist or a psychologist), utilizing the phenomenological psychological approach, it is possible to perceive the psychological meanings expressed by the other. Such a stance discloses the possibility to attend to and value the experiential point of departure of the other's self. Empathy, then, includes the value of the other's ownership of an experience.

In Chapters Nine to Twelve, the students Campisi, Faggin, Adams, Uchendu, Monet and Davis will explore the same topic of identity and values from a philosophical, sociological and psychological perspective and as with the work of the other scholars their papers will be in dialogue with antiquity, modern and contemporary philosophy.

In general, the aim of the book is to shed light on the issue of value and practical identity, moving beyond the common and unnecessarily dichotomizing view that either a positivistic or deontological perspective is required. In that sense, this volume offers a new way to explore this issue.

I want to offer thanks to the people who made this volume possible. I would like to thank Roberto De Angelis who patiently assisted me in the creation of the volume; Jon Pinlac and Christopher Pipe for the English revision of the book; Susan Cavallo who supported and believed in this project; Stefano Giacchetti, Carla Mollica and all my colleagues and the staff of the John Felice Rome Center who helped me with the organization of the project; and even more I would like to thank my students for the energy they put into their philosophical work.

Susi Ferrarello

CHAPTER ONE

"ACCORDING TO NATURE": POLITICAL AND MORAL VALUES BETWEEN PLATO AND ARISTOTLE

SILVIO MARINO

What is nature (*physis*)? What is the relationship between the domain of nature and that of mankind? What is natural and what is artificial? Do boundaries between these domains exist? Many scholars have dealt with these notions of *kata physin* (or *physei* = "according to nature") and *para physin* ("against nature"), and we can observe that moral and political theories depend on what these two concepts mean. Furthermore, these notions are not involved simply in ethics or in politics but are of the utmost importance for scientific topics as well (e.g., for Aristotelian biology).

In this paper I will touch on a few points of this topic in order to show that there are two main meanings to the notion of *kata physin* arising from the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. The first builds a deontological perspective in which the "true" reality does not appear but is "hidden" (*Ph*[1]); the second is to be conceived as a sort of existential statement on what exists recognized as what (*Ph*[2]) has to be. This first consideration shows that for *Ph*[1] there could be a rift between what is and what has to be, whereas for *Ph*[2] there is a coincidence between what is and what has to be.

In the dialectics of these two conceptions I would like to stress the different solutions given by Plato and Aristotle for politics and ethics. In order to make this concise sketch, first of all I will deal with the notion of *physis* in Pre-Socratic philosophy, starting from the meaning and the etymology of this term.

Subsequently, I will discuss the notions of *kata physin* and *para physin* (against nature) in both Plato and Aristotle, trying to show that the conceptions of Plato and Aristotle give rise to two political and ethical perspectives – those of normativity and descriptivity. Concerning Plato, I

will analyse in particular the *Republic*, whereas I will consider the *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics* in relation to the Aristotelian criticism of Plato's political theory.

Physis and *Kata Physin* before Plato

The term *physis* (nature) is a topic that several scholars have analysed in depth,[1] and here I will try to propose neither a new interpretation of it nor an overview of the interpretations. I would simply like to clarify this notion in relation to its relevance for the political and moral theories of Plato and Aristotle.

Physis is a noun formed by *phy-* and *-si-*, this suffix for the *nomina actionis* deriving from the verb *phyein-phyesthai* (to beget, to engender; to grow, to spring up).[2] For Benveniste this term means the "achievement of a becoming" (Benveniste 1948, p. 78), and he claims that the meaning swings between the sense of "process" and that of "result". Naddaf states that *physis* "includes three things: the origin, the process, and the result, that is, the whole process of the growth of a thing from its birth to its maturity" (Naddaf 1998, p. 2). The meaning of this term is therefore linked to "growth",[3] "becoming" and "process", and it can refer to the "growth programme" every being has in its own "genome".

The first occurrence of "*physis*" in Greek literature is in a passage from the *Odyssey* and may help to clarify its sense in later Greek philosophers. The passage is from the tenth book when Ulysses arrives at the island of Aeaea, where Circe dwelt. After Circe enchants his companions, Ulysses goes to save them, but on the way he meets Hermes who gives him instructions on how to escape from Circe's sorcery. The god gives him a *pharmakon esthlon* ("a good drug"), an antidote for Circe's poisonous drugs (*pharamaka lygra*); it is a plant the gods call *moly*, which has a black root and a whitish flower. By doing this, Hermes shows him its nature (*physis*).[4] The meaning of *physis* in this passage is controversial and interpreted in different ways. Stanford suggests that Hermes showed the visible form of the plant,[5] linking the term *physis* to *phye* ("original form"). For his part, Heubeck[6] suggests that *edeixe* ("showed") refers not only to the visible aspect of the plant but also to the instructions given by Hermes in order to make Ulysses escape from Circe's sorcery. In other words, Hermes shows the power of the *moly*, what it can do and what its magical properties are. In this case the occurrence of *physis* can mean the power to do something in relation to a determined being; this meaning is very important if we consider the developments of both philosophy and science, fields in which "*physis*" will be connected with the term

"*dynamis*." We can agree with Naddaf when he claims that in this Homeric passage *physis* means not only the visible aspect of the plant but also its internal and hidden properties.[7] Thus *physis* can be interpreted as meaning: 1) the primordial matter, 2) a process, 3) the primordial matter and a process, 4) an origin, a process, and a result.[8]

With these introductory considerations we can analyse the meaning of *kata physin* in later authors, in order to outline the connection between the domains of physics and politics established by the notion of "according to nature". One of the first philosophers who employs this notion is Heraclitus, and he does so in a very meaningful passage. In the first fragment (DK22B1), the philosopher from Ephesus uses *kata physin* concurrently with *kata logon* (according to the *logos*):

> Of this Word's (*logos*) being forever do men prove to be uncomprehending, both before they hear and once they have heard it. For although all things happen *according to this Word* (*kata ton logon*), they are like the unexperienced experiencing words and deeds such I explain when I distinguish (*diaireon*)[9] each thing *according to its nature* (*kata physin*) and show *how it is* (*frazon hokos ekhei*). Other men are unaware of what they do when they are awake just as they are forgetful of what they do when they are asleep.[10]

In Heraclitus's philosophy the term *logos* can be translated and interpreted in many different ways. It is a crucial concept that can mean "the speech of Heraclitus" and "the book", but it can also mean the immanent and eternal law, *ratio*, which rules everything. *Kata logon* (according to the Word that rules everything) shows the principle and the structure of the entire *kosmos*, of the entire universe, by which everything happens in a determined way and not in a different way.[11] Besides this reference to the structure of the *kosmos*, we find *kata physin* in relation to the plane of knowledge and to that of the "inquiry of nature" (*peri physeos*): the explanation (*diegeumai*) implies the distinction of each thing according to its nature. Yet the act of distinguishing entails a previous recognition of the *physis*, that is, the structure and the properties – to do something or to undergo something – that everything has in its own "DNA".

The distinction made on each thing *kata physin* shows what each thing is. On the one hand there is *diaireon* (distinguishing), on the other there is *frazon* (showing) *hokos* (how) *ekhei* (it is). In this way we know that the explanation deals with the structure of a being and that this structure is precisely the nature of that being:

I distinguish each thing *according to its nature*.

I show *how [each thing, scil.] is*.

These two statements show the connection between *kata physin* and the condition of a thing,[12] and we may say that the explanation "according to nature" is necessary to understand the inner structure of each thing. Yet, *a parte objecti*, we can furthermore claim that *physis* is the constitution, the set of characteristics, the structure that a being has got and by which it is determined.

It is in this meaning that we find the term *physis* in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*. Indeed, one of the most important aims of Hippocratic authors was the recognition and the classification of the different natures (*physeis*) of human beings, in relation to food and drink, to the environment, and also (from a psychical point of view) to the political constitutions they live in.[13] From this medical point of view, *physis* is the nature an individual has in his "DNA", that is, the original proportion of the different humoral properties (*dynameis*), their original and physiological balance. Most Hippocratic therapies aim at restoring the *physis* in a patient, that is, the correct physiology (the correct balance) of the humors. It is important to underline that in these authors "*physis*" is inflected in the plural "*physeis*," and it is important because for these authors the unity of human nature is broken in order to consider and give prominence to the single kinds of corporal constitutions.[14]

The Hippocratic analyses of the different natures (*physeis*) of mankind considered in relation to physiology and pathology gave many theoretical tools to philosophy: Plato, above all, used many medical concepts to identify, clarify, and explain the problems he faced (e.g., for the conception and the changes of the soul as well as for dialogical and political theories).[15]

The inquiry on nature (*historia peri physeos*) by ancient philosophers as well as by Hippocratic authors is a crucial starting point not only for naturalistic researches but also for moral and political conceptions, which start from a previous interpretation of nature – the whole *kosmos* – to set mankind within it, giving to humans their own place among the different animals and the different beings (*ta onta*).

We have developed this very short introduction concerning the term *physis* and the concept of *kata physin* in order to show the meaning of the first discussions that arose in early Greek thought and to stress the relationship between the naturalistic plane and the political one, a relationship we find in later authors such as Plato and Aristotle. The reference to *physis*, however, is not a neutral move because there was not – and there still is not – a sole concept of nature shared by Greek thinkers; in

these philosophies, indeed, we can find a process of a constant invention and reinvention of *physis*.[16]

Considering these premises, I would like to expose the core of philosophy between the fifth and the fourth centuries BC. This core is precisely the difference between the Platonic and the Aristotelian conceptions about ethics and politics, two conceptions by which we could analyse most of Western philosophical tradition. For the sake of brevity I will only take into consideration the *Republic* for Plato and the *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics* to show Aristotle's criticism of Plato's political thought.

I would like to centre this topic on the difference between normativity and descriptivity because I think that these two categories could guide both the studies of ancient philosophy and, more generally, those of the history of ethical and political theories. The issue of the good will help us to focus better on the difference between these two perspectives.

Dealing with ancient ethics and politics means at the same time dealing with the concept of nature, in which ancient authors identified the foundation of both physical processes and ethical values. These two conceptions, the normative and the descriptive, (which concerns political phenomena) depend indeed on a prior consideration of nature. Then the question is about the difference between the respective conceptions of nature of these two perspectives.

Ancient Greek has two expressions to mean what happens "according to nature"; to mean, in other words, what is correct, physiological, and just: *kata physin* and *physei*. Generally, the expression *kata physin* means the "normal course of nature", and in this sense it is opposed to two other expressions: *tykhei* and *tekhnei* (two datives). *Tykhei* means "what happens by the work of chance", an indeterminate causality that twists the "natural" course of events and of physical phenomena. Instead, *tekhnei* means "what happens by the work of art, of a human knowledge able to direct differently natural processes". These three expressions are the three fields of all the things that are and exist;[17] that is to say, if something exists, it does so because it derives from chance, nature or art:

> It is stated by some that all things that are coming into existence, or have or will come into existence, do so partly *by nature* (*physei*), partly *by art* (*tekhnei*), and partly *owing to chance* (*dia tykhen*).[18]

It is essential to emphasise that in this concept, which makes the origin of a being derive from three principles, nature and chance create the greatest things, whereas art derives its own principles and primary products from nature:

> It is evident, they assert, that the *greatest* (*megista*) and *most beautiful* (*kallista*) things are the work of nature and of chance, and the lesser things that of art, – for art receives from nature the great and primary products as existing, and itself molds and shapes all the smaller ones, which we commonly call "artificial" (*tekhnika*).[19]

In the different contexts in which it is used the expression "according to nature" can mean, more specifically, "what differs from human organizations"; this is the classical question of the conflict between *nomos* and *physis*, a widely debated topic in Sophist times. It is not a coincidence if both Plato and Aristotle pay much attention to anchor their political speculations on the boundaries of nature and not on those of the *nomos*, the different human institutions; otherwise ethical and political principles would be founded on relativism (e.g., that of Protagoras).

Plato

In Greek culture, the question characterizing the fifth and the fourth centuries BC is: "What is the just?" Clearly, the issue of justice is strongly linked to the issue of the good, because justice is an aspect of the good and of the good man (*kalokagathos*).

With sophistic teaching and Periclean democracy, the issues of the *agathon* (the good) and of the *dikaion* (the just) become a common matter of discussions for a large number of people (the citizens, the *politai*). For Plato, the biggest problem of Athenian democracy[20] is caused by the fact that everybody could discuss and decide about the common good, even if nobody knows what the good for the city and for the citizens (that is, the *parrhesia*, the freedom of speech) is.[21] Plato's first move against relativism and democracy is to anchor philosophical speculation to beings (entities) that could not be subject to changes in order not to fall into a relativistic perspective, where Protagoras also placed politics (cf. *Theaetetus*). Through these entities, and especially through the idea of the good, Plato builds a political constitution able to solve the problem represented by relativism. What is important to point out is that the Platonic idea of the good determines the other ideas, because it gives them existence and essence (reality, *ousia*).[22]

In this context individual and political acts are founded on the knowledge of the good, of what makes human acts just. Plato's famous claim "no one errs willingly" is related to this concept of knowledge, and the foundation of this statement is that everyone, "according to nature", tends to the good and avoids the bad (*to kakon*). The idea that man does wrong in order to reach happiness is refuted in *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*,

two dialogues that show that only a wrong evaluation can produce the belief that doing injustice is better than suffering from it. However, what is the relationship between the idea of the good and the concept of nature?

In the Platonic perspective we can comprehend that "tending to the good according to nature" is not a common belief shared by Athenians, and especially that "tending to the good" has not a descriptive value but a normative one. First of all Plato links "tending to the good" to a certain and necessary knowledge, whereby whoever knows what the good is can produce good acts: this means that a science of the good does exist. Secondly, Plato refuses the *communis opinio* by which the unjust man is or can be happy (identifying the good with pleasure and power).[23] For Plato what we can observe through sensible experience (i.e., the *communis opinio*) can not be the norm for elaborating a political theory.

We can remark that Plato actually unifies the fields of the *physis* and of the *techne*,[24] whereby if it is true that everyone tends to the good, it is also true that to express a human tendency to the good it is necessary to use a technique, an art, which allows man to correct human behaviour and the political institutions of the Greek city. Then, what is "according to nature" cannot be, for Plato, what we can observe in the *status quo* of moral and political realities, subject to change, erratic and unstable. *Kata physin* means, in this way, a "reorganization of reality" operated by the only valid instrument of analysis for both knowledge and action: ideas. It is simply by means of ideas, especially that of the good, that Plato can unify the two planes of reality and of science (*tekhne*, *episteme*). At the same time, through this operation the principle for moral and political actions becomes not the "fact" itself (*pragma*) but what qualifies an action as good or bad, which is the good itself.

Plato characterizes the concept of "*kata physin*" in a particular sense, which assumes the meaning of "what must be" ("*to deon*") and of "what really is" (*ontos on*), which is not of course what can be observed in direct experience.[25] By doing this Plato splits the plane of being: on the one hand there are the things that change, exist, and, in a certain sense, are. Then on the other hand there are the things that "really" are (*ontos onta*), that is to say, ideas. The crucial point of Platonic thought is that these entities – the ideas – are real and cannot be reduced to concepts: they are dynamic centres (*dynameis*) that act and produce what they have to produce according to their single "natures".[26] This is the very connection between *physis* and ideas: since *physis* is the structure of a being (that is, what a being "really is") and ideas are what really are, there is an assimilation between the domain of *physis* and that of ideas.

Physis has thus an eminent normative value, since it is the correct structure of the interactions among individuals. Yet, there is also a very strong relationship between normativity and the concept of the just (*to dikaion*). In the *Gorgias,* Socrates explains Callicles' perspective on the just "according to nature", a perspective based on a conception of men as "naturally pleonectic animals":

> Now, go right back and repeat to me what you and Pindar hold justice (*to dikaion*) according to nature (*kata physin*) to consist in: is it that the superior should forcibly despoil the inferior, the better rule the worse, and the nobler have more than the meaner?[27]

This conception, which "oligarchic anthropologies" are based on and which can be viewed as a "descriptive perspective" on morality, shows the importance of the relationship between nature and justice. It also shows one of the standpoints Plato had to consider in order to deconstruct both "oligarchic" and "democratic" views on "human nature" and, of course, politics. This passage, however, is also important because it introduces the very question of the *Republic*, that is, the power and its "pathological" mechanisms. This topic could lead us very far from our discussion, but it is worth highlighting that in the Platonic view *pleonexia* (greediness, exceeding, to go beyond one's own limits) belongs not only to the political level but also to the psychical one, and at this level we find precise indications whereby to understand what normativity means in Platonic philosophy. In dealing with injustice in the tripartite soul Socrates defines it as such:

> Must not this [injustice, *scil*.] be a kind of civil war (*stasis*) of these three parts, their meddlesomeness and interference with one another's functions, and the revolt of one part against the whole of the soul that it may hold therein a rule which does not belong to it, since its nature is such (*physei*) that it befits it to serve as a slave to the ruling principle?[28]

Justice therefore means doing what one's own nature prescribes. In this context it is also worth stressing that justice and injustice are compared to health and disease, and the concept of "according to nature" is used and opposed to that of "contrary to nature" (*para physin*):

> But to produce health is to establish in a body a mutual relation of dominating and being dominated by one another according to nature (*kata physin*), while to cause disease is to bring it about that one rules or is ruled by the other contrary to nature (*para physin*)." "Yes, that is so." "And is it not likewise the production of justice in the soul to establish among its

> parts a mutual relation of controlling and being controlled by one another according to nature (*kata physin*), while injustice is to cause the one to rule or be ruled by the other contrary to nature (*para physin*)?[29]

Several times in the *Republic* Plato invokes the concept of *kata physin* to claim that the constitution (*politeia*) the interlocutors are developing for the city (*polis*) is the correct and the only means that can make the city a just one. That occurs in the *Republic*:

> Our legislation, then, was not impracticable or utopian, since we established the law according to nature (*kata physin*). Rather, the current institutions are opposed to those we proposed, and are, as it seems, contrary to Nature (*para physin*).[30]

The idea of the good (*to agathon*) is very important for the Platonic conception of the city and of values, because it involves another aspect, still linked to ethics in Plato, which is the truth. As Socrates claims in the *Republic*, the idea of the good gives truth to being.[31] At this point of our brief journey through the *Republic*, we can see that in Plato normativity gives rise to a plane in which "logical," "moral," and "political" levels are all interrelated. In this perspective there are three concepts of the utmost importance: the being (considered in a deontological sense), the truth, and the value; through them we can see that politics and ethics always carry within themselves an ontology and an epistemology. As Mario Vegetti remarked, this triangle determines that each concept involves the other two.[32]

Aristotle

Much as with Plato, Aristotle places the issue of the good within the field of politics (*EN* I, 1) and, like Plato, Aristotle claims that every action tends to the good. Yet for Aristotle the good is not the same as the Platonic idea that structures the whole eidetic world and towards which the world we live in has to tend. Aristotle analyses what the good itself is and deconstructs this Platonic idea by the method of definition. For him, the idea of the good can be included in the category of the being (thus becoming "substance"), in that of quality, of quantity, and so on. The consideration of this idea determines two options to choose between: either the good is one, a unique entity, and then we have to identify it with the god, the intellect; or it is divided into different goods that each art produces (for example, health through medicine). In the reconsideration of

this concept Aristotle claims that, even if the good itself exists, it can not be something man can achieve.[33]

I would like to add further considerations on the concept of the good itself and its relationship with the analysis of political institutions, because in this way we can get a clearer idea of the opposition between the Platonic and the Aristotelian perspective. To identify the good itself with the Intellect (the prime mover) means that there is no need to conform the existent (that is, the existent reality) to true reality, because in this way there is a coincidence between the existent and what has to be (*to deon*).[34] From this standpoint the good has no normative characteristic, but it has an eminent "descriptive value." In this way Aristotle neutralizes the apparatus of the Platonic *kata physin* and, from his point of view, he can refute the construction of both the Platonic *kallipolis* and its ethical principles.

Indeed, Aristotle claims that the good is what politics analyses; then he inverts the Platonic assumption, considering the fact – that which exists – as the principle for ethical theory: "For the fact is the starting-point, and if this is sufficiently plain to him, he will not at the start need the reason as well."[35]

Therefore the fact (*to pragma*, *to hoti*) becomes the norm and the principle (*arche*), and to comprehend how to behave we only need to be well educated. At this point, a problem arose for Aristotle about moral and political norms. To walk away from Platonic normativity[36] means that moral and political theory becomes a "phenomenology of ethics", as Pierre Aubenque commented. By trying to solve a problem – that of the reality of the good itself – Aristotle opened up an inquiry about the source of morality. If the fact is the principle, the starting point for ethics, is every fact acceptable as a norm? Can every "natural" behaviour be considered ethical? For Aristotle the issue was how to convert his descriptive approach into a system of philosophically founded and justified norms.[37] In order to attain a solution he needed to shift the existing reality to a different plane, and the solution he found was the elaboration of a "global conception of nature" that could encompass the planes of anthropology, of politics, and of biological processes.[38]

Aristotle makes two moves in this direction. First, he provides a definition of man: "Man is an animal that lives in the city."[39] There could be no man living outside society because if it were not so he could not be a man but something more (a god) or something less (a brute). Even *logos* (rationality, language) belongs to the political realm, as human language serves to communicate what is just or unjust. In other words, man's own characteristic concerns his political nature. The second move he makes is

related to the city: the *polis* is and exists "according to nature".[40] Here, Aristotle is clearly referring to already existing Greek cities, and not to an eidetic paradigm. Thus, the city assumes a crucial role in ethics: it is the purpose of the natural process of generation and life.

In this system there are three levels of complexity. The first is the one of the family (*oikos*), which operates according to nature and helps in daily needs. Then there is the village (*kome*), which is the combination of several families; finally, there is the level of the *polis*, which is the perfect community. Even if one may think that the *polis* comes after the other two levels, Aristotle stresses that the *polis* is prior to family and village.[41]

These two planes, the anthropological and the political, are set on the plane of the *physis* and are universal definitions and conditions that can not be altered. According to this perspective, we can find the normativity Aristotle needs to define man: the good man is the man that achieves his purpose. In this plane there is no external normativity (like the idea of the good for Plato) to which man has to refer; the principle of ethics is already in mankind's DNA. However, the paradigm of the good man exists in concrete reality: it is the *spoudaios aner* – the excellent, serious man – who is the living norm of ethics.[42]

In order to clarify the two different perspectives on politics, I would like to point out that Aristotle's criticism of Plato's political theory stresses the impossibility of Plato's *kallipolis*. For Aristotle the Platonic city cannot exist simply because it does not correspond to nature's dictates ("according to nature");[43] it did not exist, it does not exist, then it will not exist.

I would also like to underline the strength of Aristotle's recourse to the concept of "according to nature", not only from a political but also from a biological point of view. From this conception the existence of something "against nature" (*para physin*) is totally excluded. In *De generatione animalium* Aristotle deals with monstrosity, something that seems to break natural laws:

> A monstrosity, of course, belongs to the class of "things contrary to Nature," (*para physin*) although it is contrary not to Nature in her entirety but only to Nature in the generality of cases. So far as concerns Nature which is always and is by necessity, nothing occurs contrary to that; no, unnatural occurrences are found only among those things which occur as they do in the generality of cases, but which may occur otherwise.[44]

If Plato conceived nature as an eidetic reconstruction of the existent, Aristotle presents a conception of nature that aims at showing the stability, "naturalness" and "correctness" of the existent. From this point of view,

Aristotle builds not only ethics and politics but also a biology, in which the principle is not separate from sensible entities but is the perfectly accomplished individual, one who has completely developed his own nature, his own DNA.

Conclusion

Having briefly exposed the difference between Plato and Aristotle concerning politics and ethics, I would like to call attention to what derives from normativity and descriptivity even in our times. Indeed, "democracy" has become for modern citizens a sort of "untouchable" principle, since it is "the" right, "the" just and "the" best political organization.[45] If we view descriptivity as the principle for political theories, we can remark that it considers the existent as inalterable and, from a theoretical standpoint, as the only possible source for constitutions in Western civilization. Normativity, on the contrary, is based on a theoretical reconstruction of reality, by which one may "imagine"[46] that actual reality is not the "only" reality that could exist. The challenge for political theories is therefore, in my view, to reconsider these two perspectives, because on them depends even the concept of man we have.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE VALUE OF THE WHOLE IN THE IDENTITY OF THE SELF: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON SHABISTARI AND ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

SUSI FERRARELLO

"Why, then, 'tis none to you,
for there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.
To me it is a prison"

(Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* Act II, 2)

1. Introduction[1]

How do you conceive the relationship between one and many, or the whole and the parts? How can a part of the whole be a part if it is a whole in itself?

If I consider this computer with which I am writing now, I can say that it is made of many parts: keyboard, screen, keys. It can be called a computer because it is made of parts and yet each of its parts is a whole in itself. The keyboard is made of keys, plastic, colours, etc.; it exists as a part of the computer, but at the same time as a whole in itself.

Now, what if I apply this example to myself as a human being? How could I describe myself? I am a whole made up of my body, my psyche, my feelings, but they would exist as a whole independently. A body does not need me in order to exist and the same is true for a psyche or feelings. Are then these parts really mine? How can we really conceive of the relationship between the parts and the whole? What is a whole? What does this whole mean in relation to our identity?

In this paper, I will reflect on the introduction and the first inquiry of the fascinating poem, the *Garden of Mystery* of Shabistari and will compare his thought with that of Parmenides and Heraclitus.

In doing this I have a twofold task: on the one hand I want to show how fertile and close is the dialogue between Eastern and Western traditions; on the other I want to discuss the conception of highest value as it was presented in both traditions and relate it to the notion of our psyche and self-identity.

As it concerns the purpose of this essay it is important to specify that I do not aim to prove a direct historical connection between the Presocratics and Shabistari – in other words I am not arguing that Shabistari was directly acquainted with the Presocratic thinkers who I will discuss. The literature tracing the history of Hellenistic thought's influence upon central figures in Sufism such as Ibn al Arabi, Qūnawī, or Shabistari (e.g., Baffioni 2011, Lewisohn 1995, Chittick 1992) is extraordinarily complex and involves historical and hermeneutic scholarship far beyond the scope of this essay.

Instead, this essay is a thought experiment in which I will compare the ideas Shabistari attributes in the *Garden of Mystery* to unnamed thinkers to specific Presocratics, in order to highlight those ideas themselves.[2]

2. Shabistari and the "Predicament of the Human Being"

I will start by discarding the usual arrogance of philosophical writing: writing a philosophical paper on Shabistari is nonsensical. Experiencing the truth is not the same thing as writing about it. For this poet, as well as for a certain stream of Sufi thought, philosophical reasoning is illusory and even misleading if it is not accompanied and informed by a deeper theophany of the truth itself that goes beyond the limits of purely rational understanding. In the Islamic context mysticism has traditionally been intertwined with the notion of *Ḥikmah*, which is at once both wisdom and philosophy (Nasr 1996). "One of the main reasons that Shabistari's *Garden of Mystery* ranks as one of the greatest masterpieces of Persian literature is that it encapsulates . . . the main philosophical doctrines of post-Ibn 'Arabian Persian Sufism" (Lewisohn 1995, p. 143). Philosophy, if understood exclusively as logical reasoning, is foolish. Shabistari compares this kind of philosopher to the "Fool, who for the sake of the brilliant sun, / wanders the desert seeking it by the light of the candle"[3] (v. 94). Thus, I will do my best to not be a fool and make my reasoning loyal to the principles embodied in Shabistari's poem.

Mahmud Shabistari (1520) lived in Persia, today Iran, during the time of the terrible Mongol invasions of the region. Yet, as was the case with Stoicism, it was during a period of political repression that the Golden Age of Persian Sufism flourished. Shabistari's work can be considered as the poetic expression of the Sufi Ibn Al Arabi, who came in contact with the philosophical Western tradition through the filter of the "Epistles of the Brethren of Purity" (a compendium of 52 epistles offering synoptic accounts of philosophy, logic, science etc.).

Shabistari's *Secret Rose Garden* (the *Gulistan-i Raz*, which has been also translated as *The Rose Garden of Mystery*) is considered to be one of the greatest works of Persian Sufism and it was written as a reply to the questions posed by Dmir Syad Hosaini.

Shabistari, like Parmenides, decided to use poetic language to state a *Weltanshauung* that I would define as philosophical. As S. A. Kapadia wrote (1921), his readers can feel put out or even repelled by the familiarity Shabistari uses with Deity and his apparent disregard for human and divine laws.

In this poem Shabistari references the message of the Prophet Muhammad, writing that seven hundred years ago Mahmud (Muhammad) planted his garden with Love and Adoration of Reason and of spiritual Illumination, and that since the time of the Prophet, many have wandered there, lingering in the secret paths and plucking the blossoms to carry back into the world of shadows and unreality.

Human beings tried to plant these seeds in the unreal world out of a desire to feel no more pain; but they kept on feeling pain because they used to live in the phenomenal world, the world of appearances. They did not know what the real was and were stuck in the world of illusion in which they were cut off from the underlying unity and source of all things. Thus, the garden is a metaphor of that mystery that human beings need to grasp in order to live in serenity. Its mystery is the mystery of the unity with the reality of Being. What is the color of these roses? What is their lasting form and their perfume? How can their form be lasting? The garden is the metaphor for Being and its parts *known* as reality but yet *thought* as illusion. The human being needs to overcome the illusion and walk into this garden in order to recover her peace.

How does Shabistari solve the mystery of the whole? How can the roses *have* their lasting form and perfume as well as *be* their lasting form and perfume?

2.1 The Inquiry

The powerful One in a wink of the eye, with letters
BE, made to appear both of the worlds (v. 3).

According to Shabistari the world, the real one, is a divine whole. Here I would invite the reader to consider the word divine in almost Spinozan terms. As Brown remarks (1956, pp. 147–8) Ibn ‘Arabi and Shabistari, unlike the majority of the Sufi tradition, share a view of the Divine as the eternal, perfect, self-sufficient, immutable whole. Once the One becomes a Being, the *worlds* appear, that is, the plurality comes into being too.

When the *P* of His power breathed onto the Pen
Thousand of images filled the tablet of nonbeing (v. 4).

When the whole comes to being its plurality is called nonbeing or just phenomenal.

The hidden and the apparent become one thing (v. 12).

The divine one or the real is given to our understanding together with the phenomenal; it is hidden in the phenomenal, in the illusion. What is apparent is plural and cannot be confused with what is hidden, that is, Being as the one. That is why when the One manifests phenomenally, the One is hidden in the apparent. Within the tradition of Ibn al Arabi that Shabistari conveys, the mystical path is envisioned as unveiling the One within the apparent: through this process the human being discovers both the One and the source of his own identity. In the *hadith qudsi* (extra-Koranic revelation) we can find this intention of self-articulation and determination of the Essential (Darr 1998, p. 15).

The material and spiritual worlds here become one
One becomes many and is again reduced (by unification) (v. 14).

What we consider as parts, the material and the spiritual, the many and the one, are just phenomena (or illusions) and source of desperation. The separation from the Being is the most painful and desperate feeling we can experience. “What am ‘I’?” What is ‘I’? Is it ‘I’ a being or a not-being? Is it myself the illusion of being part of something or am I something? Am I a part of something larger than me, or am I something in my own right? If the many are illusions, am I illusion too? If so, what quality of illusion would I be?

He now saw the world as a fictitious manifestation
Like "one" diffused through the many numbers. (v. 9)

The metaphor of number that Shabistari is using here is found throughout the history of human thought, from Pythagoreans through Spinoza up to Husserl. Number is a conventional unit for counting other units, but these other units are themselves the same: units or whole. 1 is part of 2 and it is part of 1003 but yet 2 is different from 1 and from 1003 although it participates its being as being a unit of both. "The one is diffused through many numbers", which are fictitious, and disappears in them.

Thus the issue becomes, how can we discover the one in the two? Even more importantly, will this discovery of the real show my self as a fictitious two? Will I be "me" after this discovery?

2.3 "I am the Real" – Shabistari in dialogue with the Greeks

I am the Real![4] (v. 25)

From this verse on, Shabistari presents the viewpoints of those philosophers, especially Greek, who tried to give their answer to the question of Being – yet "people have found it difficult to understand the matter" (v. 30) – apparently with not enough clarity.

Here he seems to criticize Aristotle because "from the contingent he tries to prove the Necessity / So he remains perplexed about the Essence of the Real" and arguing with Orphics and Plato oper their nearsightedness "Transmigration of soul is but vain heresy / Since it is product of nearsightedness" (104).

He seems to criticize Aristotle because, as I stated at the beginning of this section, Aristotle is the example of one who philosophizes without wisdom (*hikmah*), that is, without 'being' in what he writes. He is the fool who uses the candle because the sun is too bright. He uses a contingent tool – the reason – to grasp what is necessary and beyond any contingency. He cannot succeed in his attempt.

Shabistari dismisses metempsychosis too because it would attach human beings to the world of illusion. Although Shabistari seems to share with the Orphic-Pythagorean tradition the view of contemplation as form of reflection on the real, he does not agree with the idea that contemplation helps us return to our Source.

On the other hand, he does not seem to argue against Heraclitus and Parmenides' positions.

> One spoke openly about the parts and the Whole
> Another referred to the temporal and the Eternal. (28)

In the next sections I will describe Heraclitus' and Parmenides' views and I will compare their answer to the problem of the many and the one with Shabistari's. From this comparison it will be clear how Shabistari's viewpoint differs from the Aristotelian and Platonic views as well as the interrelationships between these two traditions of thought.

3. Heraclitus' *Logos*

> Of this Word's being forever do men prove to be uncomprehending, both before they hear and once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Word they are like the unexperienced experiencing words and deeds such as I explain when I distinguish each thing according to its nature and declare how it is. Other men are unaware of what they do when they are awake just as they are forgetful of what they do when they are asleep. (DK22B1)

Heraclitus, Greek philosopher of the sixth century BC, whom we know unfortunately only through fragments, criticized human beings because most of them sleep-walk through all their life, without understanding what is going on about them, especially when it comes to the *word* being.

The *logos* (word) is an ordering principle for Being. Philosophy as a discipline that operates through *logos* helps to sort out and shed light upon the things as they are. Philosophy does not provide the answer to the mystery of being, but operates within its limit to find the path in which we can sort out our insights.

> Listening not to me but to the Word it is wise to agree that all things are one. (DK22B50)

The *Word* is the tool of Being or the One to manifest itself. The job of the philosopher as a prophet of Being is to make manifest the secret laws of the world.

3.1. Heraclitus' Theory of Opposites

> "Would that strife might perish from among gods and men [Homer, *Iliad* 18.107]" for there would not be harmony without high and low notes, nor living things without female and male, which are opposites. (DK22A22)