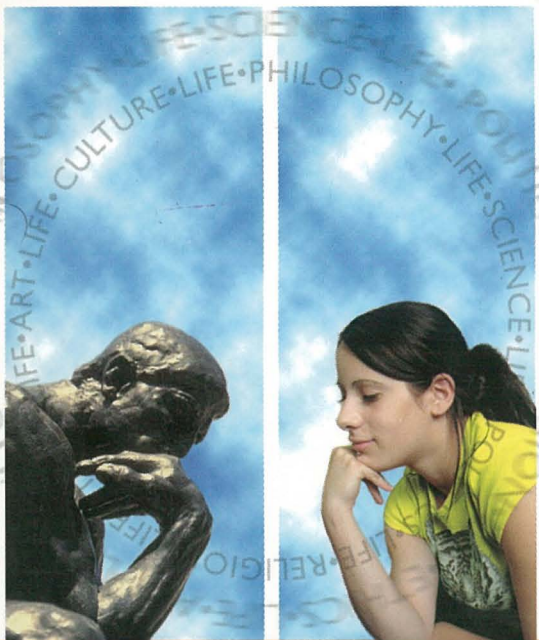
Joseph Gravina



Values *in* SYSTEMS OF KNOWLEDGE

An Introduction to the Main Themes of the First Year

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JOSEPH GRAVINA

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To

Dorianne, my wife,

Andrea and Daniela, my children

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I am deeply grateful to Dr. Mario Vella with whom in the past I had some fruitful, albeit short, discussions about some of the topics mentioned in the book.

I am indebted also to those students who are not afraid to contribute in verbal or written form their ideas and reflections about the themes raised. Such contributions are highly appreciated for a number of reasons. They show that the subject is relevant to students experiences even beyond its academic subject-matter. It is also clear from students' reactions that values education opens the gates to a widespread exchange of views. Students also help to make links amongst different subjects which otherwise would be experienced in isolation.

I would also like to thank Mr. E. Debattista, managing director, who willingly accepted this project, and also the staff of PEG who have been extremely helpful.

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FOREWORD

The main intention to write this book was to make available to the student (and others) a certain amount of basic background knowledge and argument that covers the major areas of the first year programme for Systems of Knowledge. Therefore the choice of themes was pre-selected by the syllabus-setters. An immediate reaction when one looks at the themes is the consideration (following a general belief) that they are the intellectual property of certain academic disciplines. The argument developed throughout this book is different. The belief is that although there is a lot to say for specialisation, there is similarly a lot to suggest that an interdisciplinary approach can be the best for the general reader, as well as for the main concern of the subject: the study of values.

The study of the different values has been presented in a way that makes clear, as far as possible, their interconnections. It is therefore a rather widespread study always on the verge of losing focus, balanced by the search for unifying ideas. The focus is also regained (at least those were the intentions) through the useful development of a historical background. At times this historical element may seem bulky but the preoccupation based on reflection from experience is that certain students lack such a background and so when they are asked to think about certain values they do so but then write a serious of howlers that destroy comprehension. This however is not an encyclopaedia. There are already many of these. This is an attempt to present those arguments about values that students are expected to tackle and reflect upon during their SOK course.

This book covers the topics associated with the first year of the syllabus. The main textbooks these last few years have been the **Apology** by Plato and the **Lives of the Artists** by Giorgio Vasari. These two texts are analysed through direct references and, sometimes, extensive quotes. This is one way of thwarting the risk of over-generalisation that accompanies the interdisciplinary approach. A focus on texts centralizes study and helps students concentrate better for examination purposes. Various other areas of study outside the sections dedicated to the textbooks are in fact of the literature review style. It is in practice extremely difficult for students to tackle arguments and the themes raised directly from the various sources and thus qualify better their understanding. The approach in this book will hopefully supplement this practical difficulty. As for the official texts, even if the two books are changed, as long as ethics and Renaissance art are included amongst the themes in the syllabus of SOK, they will still have a contribution to offer. They are easy to follow texts (and so especially welcome) even for the non-specialist. They also give rise to so many questions as a quick revision of previous public examination questions about the two textbooks in SOK can make evident.

A more personal conviction for writing this book was the need to give the students a book that will prepare them for discussion in class. It is not always so easy to simplify all subject matter and retain at least some of its essential meaning. So students need guidance intended to facilitate their learning. If they are given pre-selected extracts from this text to read for class discussion it will replace the laborious and deadening exercise of classroom dictation they have to go through, and so the time freed from such manual labour can be dedicated to open debate, where thinking and expression of ideas are central and not writing. If this works then the author will have reached a very important pedagogical target.

One last word about the students. They come in all types – a reflection of society after all. Some are interested others are not. Some already prefer to specialise at Sixth Form level, others are ready to wait. Some are oriented towards one area of study; others have no clear preference for any

particular area. All these and other characteristics can be useful to develop learning, as these students bring with them the knowledge they learnt elsewhere and 'negotiate' such learning with others, within the interdisciplinary approach of SOK. Students studying philosophy, art, sociology, literature, or any other area, will be able to develop further their academic study of these subjects from the point of view of values – a theme that does not necessarily find a place in the specialised areas of study.

It has to be pointed out finally that they have no previous experience with the subject like they have with other subjects. They are also afraid of the projects and the obligatory status of SOK. And yet – especially after they present the project, sometimes after they sit for the examination – but before they get the results, students do find ways of showing an appreciation for such a subject.

Junior College
University of Malta
13th June 2003

JOSEPH GRAVINA

Chapter 1

Systems of Knowledge: An Introduction

1.1 Historical contexts

In the syllabus of Systems of Knowledge there is a very broad spectrum of knowledge and concepts, generally taken to be the interest of separate academic disciplines: politics, culture, religion, ethics, art, science, technology, work and environment. Such a broad and varied spread demands a working method to enable the students to tackle the key concepts of the course. One such approach is to initially apply the topics in a historical context. However since the subject is not a surrogate of history or intended for students of history only, a certain precaution is necessary. Talking about the ancient Greek context, for example, without an explanation of basic historical differences – not only in time and place – will be more of an encumbrance than a help to anyone attempting to understand the subject matter. The explanation must be a critical evaluation of the historical context as a network of, amongst others, political, economic and socio-cultural features that are interwoven. Otherwise reference to the past – instead of integrating the approach – will bring about a confusion of ideas. One can in fact bring forward valid reasons supporting the idea that such a mental transfer into a past that is buried beneath centuries of history, unless tackled in the right way, can become a waste of time. It all depends on the goal one has, in other words

the purpose of bringing alive something that is of interest, relevance and ultimately worthwhile. But how can we ever come to terms with any of the events and the people, the intellectual and aesthetic values singled out for our attention? This 'coming to terms' is one crucial, if not the most fundamental, end of such a subject as Systems of Knowledge, and will be a major concern for anyone thinking of subject assessment.

There is an awareness of a common heritage, rooted in the ancient world of the Mediterranean, which later spread to the rest of the European continent and eventually through colonial influence reached out to many other parts of the world. In terms of our subject matter this basically means the Ancient Graeco-Roman Mediterranean world, a heritage that throughout the centuries was studied and reshaped to serve the interests of the ages that followed: interests that ranged from antiquarianism to attempts to match up to the purported values of the ancients. We dedicate a lot of attention to this 'world' because as we discuss ethics, the Christian religion, democracy, even art, we retrace our steps back to it. Another point to note is that the various ages that followed Antiquity have been given a name, a choice that says more about the people who selected the title and their overall vision of the age than anything else. And yet in studying history, like other scientific research, one has to (as Robert Pirsig would say) 'chop the world up' to be in a position to understand (and control the subject-matter) better.[1] As far as history is concerned this means, amongst others, categorising the past into different periods. This demands selection, a little pruning of the content, and as we said before, a name to represent the different periods, such as 'Antiquity', 'Middle Ages', 'Renaissance', the 'Modern world', and the 'contemporary world'.

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[1] Robert Pirsig writes: "There is a knife moving here. A very deadly one; an intellectual scalpel so swift and so sharp you sometimes don't see it moving. You get the illusion that all those parts are just there and are being named as they exist. But they can be named quite differently and organised quite differently depending on how the knife moves." *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (London: Vintage, 1974), p.81.

There is no real harm in this if it is kept in mind that this structured periodisation of European history from Mediterranean Antiquity to the present is mainly intended as an aid to organise our understanding. The choice to start from Antiquity however indicates the status this historical period holds amongst the people who select the content.

Nevertheless the consideration that world history is not only the history of Europe, and even more so not the history of Western Europe, is another argument that demands our attention. In this case however the practical limits imposed on anyone interested in the subject, to cover in a relevant manner the areas of knowledge and the sets of values included, do not allow any room for over ambitious projects – at least not in any profitable way. So limits have to be imposed. And yet the danger that the world is conceived in terms of Europe is a consideration that seeps throughout historical (and not only) documents. From the fear of the barbarian in the ancient Roman world, which extended around the Mediterranean but included also Western Europe, to the need to keep the outsiders out of the European Union today there is a long history of 'us and them'. Not that at times this does not make sense – solidarity does not necessarily mean accommodation – but one side-effect of such an attitude is that almost all the others are seen in a very strange light, indeed they may be considered to pose a threat. If pre-electoral political campaigns are serious indicators of political values at a particular time, one will not find it too difficult to understand that the 'us-and-them' theme is a popular and divisive theme.

1.2 Attitudes

In a subject such as Systems, a consciously-taken decision to 'glide over' the rest of the world takes us effectively into the debate regarding basic values before we have even started. It can lead to project an attitude towards 'other' people and cultural contexts as if they simply are bizarre, colourful or queer, a good source for a project at school. Or they can become the people and places that provide us with the cheap goods we

import. Perhaps the people are all taken to live in desperate conditions waiting for our help in their periodic crises. They are of course less 'developed' than us and can only do so if they are ready to follow our example of technological development. The images we have of them make them look quite poor but – we believe – it is most probably their fault. They are the ones who come to our shores uninvited, sometimes floating dead along our coasts. If we take the argument a little bit further, such prejudice ends up entangled with and giving fuel to a racist or xenophobic agenda. The assumed existence of clear-cut racial distinctions leads to contrasts and comparisons that inevitably lead to establishing superiority and inferiority scales. Their culture – not as an unbiased description of a way of life but as a judgmental consideration of an inferior 'quality of life' – means regress or inferior achievements on their side, and eventually if the argument is once again pushed to the limit, it can be used to justify the subjection of the inferior to the superior.[2]

The influence on attitudes can be analysed from another equally instructive point of view. Intentions emerge not only by assessing what is left out – the 'others' – but also considering what is brought in the subject-matter. Systems of Knowledge focuses on a set of values related to such areas as politics, religion, art, technology and others, and this increases the need to verify the way the content selected and the methods adopted to facilitate the students' learning impinge on their attitudes. There may be a choice

[2] Closely associated to this argument is the concept 'modern', a term we use very often. Like all terms it hides as much as it exposes (the disagreement will be about where to place the balance between the hidden and the exposed). The modern world can come to mean the western world when in fact it is not the same concept. When we mention the two terms interchangeably, we are confusing minds. To this we can add as a quick explanation that there are many people who do not belong to anything close to what the 'west' signifies, but who have access to 'modern' technology. Of course this is not a mental scheme that we all have to fall into but it is a danger that we have to be aware of especially when, in our case, the focus of the syllabus is so much Europe-oriented.

that has to be made here. Are we aiming at teaching values or do we intend to teach about valuing? The answer may not necessarily be an option to choose one to the exclusion of the other – but nonetheless they are two separate concerns. A promotion of sets of values, concentrating exclusively on the content of the values themselves may not be the best approach to learn values. Coming to terms with values depends a lot on the need to learn how to value, on the process that goes on in valuing.[3] This means asking ourselves whether we are free to choose, whether there are valuable alternatives, and whether we have thought about consequences of the decisions taken. It is proposed that questions set about the subject take these into consideration. Discussions about euthanasia and abortion, the treatment of women throughout history, the projection of the human body by artists and their sexuality, the gulfs that separate people in the same society in taking up opportunities provided by society, genetic manipulation and environmental degradation, alienation at work and during leisure, and other themes, are not trivial matters ... unless of course one is numb or simply does not care. I do not believe anyone wants our students to be numb.

Going beyond the first step, which is the fundamental task to get the students' attention, an education in values has to aim higher: students' active response and a strong effort in imagination. It is not simply a quantitative data input that we are concerned with. Going beyond external acquaintance with the issues means for example being concerned with human dignity and prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. Facts (and even this term has to be considered) alone do not necessarily bring about a change in attitude but empathic learning can achieve this and the arts, listening to music, observing a painting, reading a novel help. The potential of art to overcome cultural boundaries, thus widening the horizons of people who otherwise would have very little to say to us in

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[3] This is one of the highlights of Louis E. Raths *et al's* work *Values and teaching: Working with values in the classroom* (Columbus, Ohio: C. E. Merrill, 1978).

any meaningful way can be enlightening, even useful. There is a transfer of experiences and sometimes understanding from one cultural context to another that can break down prejudices. It is also up to a certain extent an attempt to channel the critical development of values outside their 'natural' haphazard development or (what for some is even worse) the modern media barrage of model-setting, into a consciously worked-out programme of education. One always hopes that the themes will be challenging but it will always take an effort at the level of the imagination to arrive at a certain mental 'flexibility'. Reflecting one historic context on another gains from a proper use of our imagination. Thus we can notice how the radical political institutions of ancient Athens may throw into a rather peculiar light our present models of *demokratia.* There is another aspect of the challenge that the SOK themes provide: our emotional reaction. It is very difficult for example, once the conditions of learning are proper, not to expect an emotional response when one reads through the death scene of Socrates as narrated by Plato.

1.3 Skills

Being taught things at school, one learns, runs the risk of turning subject matter not only into something dead but also unreal. Efforts to relate the subject to the students' experience are not easy and not always successful. The situation is not any better when one remembers that the subject is compulsory.[4] Beyond the attitudinal concerns mentioned previously, it

[4] These are the thoughts of Mary Warnock who was not commenting about Systems of Knowledge but her words of warning can still be relevant: "Being taught things at school normally turns the subject-matter into something not only dead but unreal. Efforts to be up-to-date, or to relate the subject to the child's experience have little effect. The only result is that more is sucked into the death chamber. The moment something is a school subject, particularly if it is compulsory, then it is inevitably connected with the yawning, aching boredom of the classroom." 'The Times Educational Supplement', 19/12/80.

is a continuous balancing act between facts, which no matter what counter-arguments suggest, are a basic ingredient of any programme of studies, and exercises in critical thought and analysis. Grasping basic concepts demands skills such as for example basic language skills. This is linked to what may seem a more abstract quality such as "the ability to apply or indeed to misapply a concept, to extend it to new cases, to abandon it in favour of an alternative concept, to invoke the concept in the absence of things to which it applies and so forth."[5] Without over-extending our case, it is important that students are put in a position where they can best develop the 'tools' for conceptual development such as for example to recognise the relevance of establishing connections amongst the various themes discussed and to distinguish facts from other facts, and facts from opinions. This falls within the wider sphere of educational programmes that aim at educating students to become autonomous citizens able to promote and protect their freedom from any 'controlling' agency. It is to use a catchy phrase the promotion of learning to learn. All this can be achieved with the ability to investigate people, events and values from different angles, and an important first step to achieve this is conceptual clarity because these concepts are the stones, foundation stones included, with which we build our image of the world. We use them to observe and understand, and we also use them to argue with.

The project work associated with the subject, once amplified to include participative skills, will give a wider projection and further the possibilities open to the students to achieve something beyond the classroom and beyond the skills associated with written examination assessment. Values are also important because they help us in deciding how to live with ourselves and with others. The more students associate their Systems of Knowledge course with activities outside the mere academic or school

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[5] Bede Rundle, 'Concept'. In, Ted Honderich (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1995), p.146.

confines the more it is possible to raise the relevance of the discussions in the subject. Voluntary work in the social and physical environment can be rewarding since it dispels the shortsighted vision of school subjects as having a purely academic or career-oriented significance. This is where non-governmental groups can be an added incentive. It means taking the Systems of Knowledge student (or any student at that) outside, so that the content – the large mass of factual input that is basic in order to make sense of values – does not become an accumulation of 'stuff' that simply has to be memorised. Sometimes failure to get the students to understand may result from the impossibility to 'experience' themes under study. If successful certain meanings exposed in the subject in terms of the values chosen can increase (deepening and/or broadening) the understanding of the social environment whilst active participation in it exposes its apparent and hidden manifestations.

But this also demands serious preparation such as in social skills whereby students are able to build personal relationships during their voluntary work that are positive, recognising differences, and enhancing their ability to express themselves in an appropriate manner within a social group whilst at the same time contributing constructively to what are the pre-established objectives. Action skills demand taking responsibility, participating in group decision-making, and others such as the ability to work out one's way through difficulties, where possible trying to find solutions to problems. It is for the student with the necessary guidance to notice and work upon the transformation of the subject-matter from academic to social relevance. The learning of skills needed to work within groups implies knowledge and a knack to be able to actively perform some task. Once students are intended to participate in society at large, such an experience will enable them to identify with the community, getting first hand experience of its shortcomings. This attempt to translate thought and words into action assumes that perceiving and writing about environmental degradation is one thing, doing something about it another. The words of Freire an exponent of this view can render the argument better. It is an introduction to the process of conscientisation, "the process

in which people, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociohistorical reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality."[6]

But participation is not an end in itself. If it was it may stand a good chance of turning the students into disillusioned actors. This orientation to learning, carefully planned and approached with responsibility, will allow the growth of self-confidence and a sensitisation to values. Having said that does not make it any easier. Only secure guidelines, clear objectives and co-ordination amongst the people concerned along with the various skills associated with SOK will increase the chances of a positive outcome. Of course it is not realistic to pretend that the subject covers more than it can, and then it cannot cover even all that ground alone. Other resources need to be organised, both in human as well as intellectual resources. In fact the interdisciplinary nature shows, for example, how important the contributions of other subjects are with their more specialised emphasis. The co-operation of so many people is also essential.

1.4 Interdisciplinary Knowledge

Systems of Knowledge is not, as we said at the beginning, a course in history but it is not even a course in science, technology, art, philosophy or any other discipline in a specific sense. The rationale that it seeks to develop is interdisciplinary. The problem to establish a unifying framework of knowledge with contributions from a number of different disciplines is literally a *fundamental* problem. It is clear for example that both within as well as amongst the different faculties of a university, or any other school with separate departments for that matter, members may feel cut off from

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[6] Paulo Freire *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Educational Review and Center for the Study of Development and Social Change, 1970), p.27.

other members. The causes for this may be many but one is definitely the specialised jargon and methods of research that accompany and separate one discipline from another.[7] The attempt to integrate the (sometimes rather) arbitrary distinctions between disciplines can provide a more significant framework for the study of values. A solution to the networking aspect of this problem can be the search for deeper philosophical reflection within each specialised sphere of knowledge that leads to a sharing of common ideas amongst them. This is not the imposition of philosophy over the other areas but an attempt to establish a search for the basic underlying ideas of the different disciplines. Discovering such ideas is essential for the proper study of the single areas themselves, but even more so, it is the preliminary phase to achieve a common area for a coherent interdisciplinary programme such as Systems of Knowledge.

The interdisciplinary character of the subject makes it broader than other school disciplines. For example the great curriculum divide between science and art is bridged. This was the earliest aim of Systems when the subject was meant to ensure that "there would not be a total divide between science and arts studies."[8] Both areas are still part of the syllabus and such an aim is still valid. Different approaches and techniques related to different areas of knowledge can be exploited. For example it becomes clear that what counts as evidence in one area does not in another. Galileo Galilei had very serious problems when evidence in one area, science, was dogmatically disallowed and refuted on precepts pertaining to another area, religious faith. If science and mathematics could prove the Ptolemaic geocentric system wrong why should, and how could, others continue to defend it? Different strategies are adopted in the presentation and accumulation of knowledge. Throughout the course of this study an

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[7] The segregation even works within the same department separating those bearing new studies, approaches, etc. from others with already established studies.

[8] Prof. Rev. P. Serracino Inglott, Foreword. In, Joseph Giordmaina (ed.) *Systems of Knowledge: a guide book 1.*

attempt will be made to present instances of these '*part*-icular' approaches. For the time being, sticking especially to the later years of the life of Galileo Galilei, we notice how personally absorbed he was with the tense relations that may result from the rapprochement between different areas of knowledge. Galileo himself pointed out that science was one branch concerned with truth whose ultimate test resided in the physical world, whilst faith was based on authority whose ultimate test lay in the bible. Separation however does not mean mutual annulment: for many, God is after all still revealed in nature as described by science.

An overall glance at the areas of study clearly shows the daunting task of mastering at least in an appreciable way the knowledge content. This knowledge is necessarily and for practical reasons associated to some particular religious, ethical, political, economic, artistic, scientific or technological *product* of man. *Products* considered central in the development of human creativity are studied and appreciated. The focus on values however should guarantee the attempt does not end up seeming a museum of dead picturesque products. The ability to think constructively and critically about the way such products reflect upon and are the reflection of personal and social, political and cultural, scientific and artistic interaction offers a wider vision, perhaps more complex, of our own reality. If it works, our ability to recognise our context, not just the personal and immediate, increases. Certain intellectual products like alienation, social class, ethical foundations, the relationships between science and philosophy, religion and politics, art and the truth, culture, the individual and the community, all have an amazing potential to open a wide-ranging debate about issues we face whenever we attempt a meaningful analysis of human life. Such concerns do not reside exclusively within the confines of single subjects.

1.5 The title at the end: What is Life?

The awareness and reflection on ethical, political, religious, aesthetic, scientific values serves as a unifying factor in this boundless subject. The

limits – practical and useful – help to focus better. The changes in the course of transformation Systems has undertaken are in a way the result of external changes within the broad educational system but also a consequence of the search for novel ways to render unity to the subject from 'within'. So a search for a title may be considered a waste of time – after all the subject already has a title. Still, going through the different themes that make up the subject it is easy to feel the pressure to find that unifying factor. And that is how one may notice the impression the title (and content) of the book ***What is Life?*** written by Erwin Schrodinger had on Francis Crick – so much in fact, to make him focus firmly his scientific interests on the gene. Crick was known as a person who chased any idea that could be chased. For Crick, who together with his scientific partner James D. Watson managed to solve theoretically the structure of the DNA molecule, the title of Schrodinger's book was a fundamental question.[9] The same question can easily be posed (by widening the area from genetics) throughout the different areas of Systems of Knowledge, enjoying in the mind of the present writer, a focal interest in the subject.

Our focus is life with an invitation to deepen our reflection and thus enlarge our horizons. Once we reflect upon values it becomes clear they are not fixed forever – they are recreated all the time. The pace and complexity of present life it seems has made our search for meaning increasingly difficult to manage. This is added to the consideration made by the present author that it is totally incomprehensible to go through a course dealing with values and never come up with some issue that raises controversy. It is within the nature of the subject to deal with highly debateable concerns over which most people will never agree. Do we have enough time to decide what is good or right and what is desirable? How best can we spend our time and energy? What is worthwhile from amongst all the choices and opportunities we are faced with? Is it a matter of time

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[9] James D. Watson, *The Double Helix* (London: Penguin, 1968).

or is somebody 'covering up' controversial themes? In SOK, moral, aesthetic, political and other values are presented so that for some time at least we sit down and see what – in an extremely concise way – we may miss otherwise. The underlying concern is that life does not only consist of the immediate and the material interests of life, or as Socrates put it at one point, being only interested in "acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour," not even the concern "for your bodies or for your possessions," because there may be more to life than all that.[10] The material chosen for this book will amply show that the major protagonists mentioned throughout have not found the going easy and they had to struggle to develop their ideas and get on with their work, and eventually be remembered for it.

[10] Plato *The Last Days of Socrates* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.5. Are these preoccupations still central to contemporary man?

Chapter 2

Man And Culture

2.1 Man And Animal

A study that has fascinated many thinkers in the past has been the attempt to understand what constitutes our humanity. What should we, or what do we understand when we talk about a human being? This exploration may of course be undertaken by changing the perspective from where we approach the question. We can ask what does not pertain to human existence – the beasts on one side and the gods on the other. It is clearly associated with what Erwin Panofsky calls the two-fold aspect of the Renaissance concept of *humanitas.* It is a quality that distinguishes man as superior to animals (and other inferior human beings) on the basis of his "respect for moral values and that gracious blend of learning and urbanity which we can only circumscribe by the discredited word culture", but when man is compared with the divine it exposes his "frailty and transcience." *Humanitas* is caught between *barbaritas* and *divinitas.*[1]

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[1] Erwin Panofsky *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (University of Chicago press, 1982), p.2. The barbarian does not share in the learning because he lives outside the linguistic, political and cultural context which produces the superior way of life. The men who do share in this superior life however are still prisoners (unlike the gods) to the physical conditions of mortal life, including illness and death.

In general many take this study as addressing our attention towards the process establishing those characteristics of Man that distinguish him especially from other animals. If we can separate for clarity's sake the divergent ideas into two separate fields we end up with those who sustain that man is in certain important ways quite different from all the animals that surround him, whilst the others suggest that the links and similarities between man and the rest of the animal world are too many to be ignored. This thought may be disturbing to some, but it still has to be taken into consideration.[2] For example other animals carry out most of the things that take up a lot of our time and energy during the day. Culture-distinguishing traits such as adapting the physical environment to one's needs and the search for shelter; caring for the young; sexual relationships; the acquisition of food; reaction to danger; the role and function of the individual in a group depending on the individual's sex, age, intelligence, personality, physical strength and beauty are not exclusively human concerns. There are other features which one can discover in the animal world we erroneously believe are exclusively human attributes including such 'virtues' as solidarity, courage and fair play. They are not. Studies of animals have shown members of certain animal groups acting in ways that can only be described and interpreted as acts of courage, fair treatment and solidarity with other members of their own group.[3]

Within the search for a possible identity of man, the significance of culture and how we react to it become fundamental. In William Golding's **Lord of the Flies**, a group of British boys ends up on an island without any

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[2] The crusaders against Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud based their arguments on the alleged degradation of man to the level of animal-like and animal-associated evolution and the centrality of 'deep' emotions related to the physical body as basic spurs to human action.

[3] Peter Singer *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), especially chapter 1, 'A New Look at Altruism'.

communication with the rest of the world.[4] They have the opportunity to establish a way of life, a human culture, distinct from the world they left behind – a world at war. As a group of educated students they can also overcome this virgin but wild natural environment by imposing their superior upbringing over a simple but brutal existence. However as the story unfolds the boys start acting as savages. Then it all goes wrong. Jack one of the protagonists in the story shouts, "We're not savages, we're English." The naval officer who finds and saves the boys at the end of the story exclaims, "I should have thought that a pack of British boys – you're all British aren't you – would have been able to put up a better show than that – I mean -."[5] He uses the word "pack" and after observing their appearance he is not quite sure whether they are British or not. He definitely expects British-born boys not to act and dress as savages. Was the cultural background of the boys so skin-deep that once they ended up lost on this island they started acting wild? Or was it the only (or most probable) way they would act after all, given the circumstances? Is culture (in this case, Golding's significance of being British) in general a refinement, or a cover, over more basic and brutal instincts and emotions hidden inside each one of us that only wait for the right circumstances to emerge?

What is at the bottom of the consideration that culture included all those features making us different from a cruder, more primitive version of the human being as well as separating us from the rest of the living world? Why does man want to detach himself, even distance himself spatially, from other living beings that are then exhibited in zoos, circuses, television documentaries, and as a last resource, in museums? Actually the situation is more complex since there is a human extension to this segregation theme that shows how man subjected other members of humanity to the same treatment as he did with other living species. Throughout history people from other races considered inferior have been enslaved and used for

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[4] William Golding *Lord of the Flies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962).

[5] Golding (1962), p.248.

different purposes, or simply massacred. Women, the physically and mentally disabled, children, people from the lower social classes have been subjected to cruel treatment such as being relegated to the house, locked inside away from the gaze of other people, sexually abused, or exploited in employment. In this case considerations of difference lead to subjection, exploitation and control of other human beings.

2.2 An Introduction to the Notion of Culture

The need to establish the significance of 'culture' can be undertaken by going back to its origins. Hannah Arendt explains that both the word and concept 'culture' are Roman in origin, stemming from *colere* – to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve. It is intimately linked with the "intercourse of man with nature in the sense of cultivating and tending nature until it becomes fit for human habitation." The general attitude is one of loving care as against all other efforts to subject nature to the outright domination of man. It is interesting to note that this Latin usage indicates how the word does not refer only to tilling the soil but can "designate the 'cult' of the gods, the taking care of what properly belongs to them."[6] The relation of the word with matters of mind and spirit apparently is to be attributed to Marcus Tullius Cicero, Roman orator and philosopher, who spoke of *excolere animum*, cultivating the mind, and of *cultura animi*, close to modern day references to a 'cultured mind'. These clarifications are to be taken carefully. Associations of meaning across the centuries – especially of such value-laden words such as culture – cannot be made as if they are automatic. Cicero's *cultura animi* for example has to be established within a vision whereby culture is connected with nature. One can indicate the relation in the two terms 'culture' and 'agri-*culture*' but one can also study the association of culture with the mythological

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[6] Hannah Arendt *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1968) p.212.

world of the forces beyond human control that were an important part of the representation of the Greek *theoi*, the ancient gods. They were associated with natural phenomena such as wind and earthquake, or natural processes such as the cycle of life. Culture was thus associated significantly with agriculture, held in very high regard not only in Greece but also in Rome, and a clear indication of the close connections between the Romans and nature.

It is difficult to interpret culture in its ancient formulation but it does not become any easier to manage the ideas associated with it today, especially if one is searching for a single dominant version.[7] And yet the concept is very much alive in everyday jargon, as well as in the more refined intellectual circles. Today culture is defined in many ways but a quick look at the various interpretations will make evident two broad trends.[8] The first definition, and perhaps the most popular in everyday language is the definition that establishes culture as a reference to special works of art and intellect. The other major interpretation of culture refers to the

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[7] How the natural world fits within a contemporary study of values can be addressed especially in the study of values related to the environment.

[8] Chris Jenks opens his introductory chapter to *Culture* (London: Routledge, 1993) by quoting Raymond Williams' suggestion: "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language." Jenks concurs with this because as he says, the concept includes such a broad range of "topics, processes, differences and even paradoxes" making it impossible, indeed unnecessary, to try and establish one label for it. Jenks also offers a 4 – fold typology: [a] individual human achievement of a cognitive kind; [b] a collective state of moral / intellectual development (to be linked with civilization and nineteenth century imperialism); [c] the everyday language meaning of a collective body of art / intellectual products; [d] the democratic concept of a whole way of life of a people, a more pluralist perspective.
M. Haralambos & M. Holborn *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (London: Collins Educational, 1991). In pages 2-8 there are, in very accessible reading, insights into culture and although the perspective is necessarily sociological, the themes raised – behaviour, socialisation, norms, values, status, role – are vital aspects for getting to grips with the concept 'culture'.

whole way of life of a particular society or social group. Within the former definition, culture and civilization are interchangeable sharing the same meaning. This occurs mostly when we desire to separate culture and civilization from what is backwards, ignorant and retrograde. This leads some to understand culture in terms of the highest intellectual and artistic achievements of mankind, or at least those achievements that rise above the mundane. Painting, sculpture, literature, music and scientific knowledge become candidates for this special status. Culture and a civilized life connected with specialist knowledge are put in contrast with the vulgar or backward. Culture comes to signify human excellence and individual perfection. When the term is meant to imply 'cultured mind' then socialisation and education or training are expected to cultivate the person and the mind. Culture consequently can become confined to a minority or a select few, those who produce and those who can appreciate intellectual and artistic works of art. Left out are those people who have no access to such an education.

It may sound paradoxical how despite the fact that the interpretation of culture as a collective body of artistic and intellectual works – rather specialist and elitist – is quite a 'popular' definition of culture, it is exclusive. Due to the fact that human beings, as against other animals, can theorise about culture itself, we find that particular cultures have been contrasted with other ways of life for their relative merits, thus distinctions have emerged between 'high' and 'low' cultures. "We come now to our cultural programme where we will discuss new publications, art exhibition events, etc.," says the television presenter. So what went on schedule before was not culture, was it? The dustbin of history takes the rest. This challenging idea raised by Dun Giuseppe Vella in Leonardo Sciascia's novel **The Council of Egypt** touches upon the argument based on the contrast between refined and 'vulgar' ways of life.[9] The lives of the great

[9] L. Sciascia *The Council of Egypt* ('Il-Kunsill ta' l-Egittu', translated by Dijonisju Mintoff) (Klabb Kotba Maltin, 1997).

masses of common people and their customs, he says, are ignored and forgotten but the scribes record for posterity's sake the deeds of the aristocratic elites. 'Backwards, ignorant, retrograde, and vulgar' may at one point simply mean different from the other, but not necessarily worse off than the other. In the same novel, the Sicilian lawyer Di Blasi states that this situation is a reflection of the way cultural hegemony is exercised over the great majority of peasants, part of the exploitation baggage available to the ruling classes. The peasants were ignorant because the aristocracy wanted them to be so, and thought they could benefit more from such ignorance. We thus recognise how a section of society can dominate through the use of arms but at the same time it can also 'direct' culture through the provision of a certain type of educational or cultural provision (or through their absence). The whole exercise has to be qualified and rendered visible by the recognition of who is imposing the standards, and for what reason or interest this is being done. 'Exclusivity' or exclusion in culture just as cultural manipulation acquires a political tone. This may also answer the paradox at the start of this paragraph, the consideration that the common people associate the word culture with elite artistic and intellectual products.

Culture and civilization have not always been applied interchangeably. Distinction between the two can provide some useful study hints. The beauty and the beast distinction, a favourite theme within the cinema world is evident in the dialectical opposition of civilized and primitive, human and animal, but the distinction between the production of fine arts on one side and routine mechanical work on the other is different. The latter contrast is used to separate and protect modern man from the all-conquering material development of the modern industrial world complemented by the insatiable thirst for profit that defines western civilization. Culture has to mediate between man and machine, man and greed. These ideas are rooted in the concept of culture portrayed as a reaction to massive changes in society, opposing the materialist civilization that arises from the changes. This is in part the stand taken in Robert

Pirsig's **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance** by John and Sylvia Sutherland, the Romantics, against the beastly and ugly technology produced by Classical Understanding, representing the scientific and mathematical basis of modern technology. Man sticks to his cultural 'shield' and human feelings against the advances of modern mechanised life in the alienating work environment of the City.[10]

Karl Marx had already elaborated the theory of alienation as a result of the modern capitalist and industrial conditions of work. The industrial employee is the producer but s/he is estranged (alienated) from the modern technology of production, which is not only more efficient, powerful, quick and precise than the best worker, but it is not even his or her own property. The worker does not control or manage the work process, and is separated from other workers who are assigned mostly detailed and timed repetitive tasks. This organisation of work destroys the pride not only of personally planning and executing a job, but also in being able to claim the fruit of your own work. This belongs to the employer who pays

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[10] Chris Jenks (1993). The author deals with the Literary-Romantic tradition of Coleridge, Carlyle and Arnold. For Coleridge (1772-1834) culture, or rather cultivation is totally opposed to civilization, the mundane inevitability of everyday life, whose achievements include the destructive tendencies of industrialisation and mass society. Culture refers to the *inner* state of human cultivation, leading towards perfection. Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) also distinguished between the inner life and the human spirit on one side, and on the other, the practice of doing in the world, but ultimately he concludes both are necessary. By itself the former turns to a languor of impracticability whereas the latter alone leads to moral decline. Similar to Coleridge, Carlyle proposed the necessity of an intellectual class to protect and propagate the excellence of society. Carlyle was more concrete and proposed policies of mass, popular education. Matthew Arnold (1822-88) in *Culture and Anarchy* opted for culture as 'high culture', the best humankind can achieve. However the aristocrats were 'barbarians', the middle classes 'philistines', the working classes 'populace'. The solution was not in Carlyle's elite intellectual class, but in the very policies of the state, especially the national system of general education. Today we notice that leaving it all in the hands of the State however may not be enough or even desirable.

you in terms of a salary or wage.[11] The employee is part of mass society, living in enormous cities that has led to the idea of the anonymous individual. Herbert Marcuse discussed how 'one-dimensional man' is also alienated during his leisure. If leisure is assumed to mean free choice (amongst others), how can we talk of leisure when our holidays or free-time activities for example are planned, advertised, and sold to us by commercial agencies? In other words we buy our free time by selecting from what is provided by others. Industrialisation, standardisation, mass production and technology were not only work and production-related phenomena but were leaving an impact on man outside the workplace.

We talk a lot about liking or disliking things for example, and we intend this to be very personal. For some it brings out their individuality setting them apart from others. In the various decisions we take to select from the available options that our modern societies offer we believe that the basis of such decisions is the one of personal taste. We may not even want to discuss it. Today, it has been pointed out, adverts do not treat us as a mass (the market for mass produced goods) but as individuals (the consumer's tastes must be respected). In other words, to put the emphasis on the person rather than on the goods, the focus is no longer on mass production but on the consumer and his or her personal tastes. Some also believe in a superior and inferior taste (whatever that may mean). This gives us a new insight into the culture debate. Is it a society where personal taste is celebrated, or is it a society where taste is imposed? It can be argued that in the past the aristocracy or the Church through their patronage established, or at least controlled, cultural taste. They established other things as well.[12]

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[11] The theory of alienation has many ramifications but the more work-oriented aspect is the province of values related to work, and so can be elaborated further in that section of the second year syllabus of SOK.

[12] The distinct role played by the Florentine artists of the Renaissance becomes partly an attempt to replace, or at least challenge and modify, the imposition of taste with creative quality.

Fine, one may argue, but where does alienation come in? How does one become powerless, passive and unable to develop certain personal qualities rendering the individual a stranger, an alienated person, even in terms of taste? Today the lines of demarcation between quality and taste are placed on a different balance according to Theodor W. Adorno. We can take his study of music as an example. Due to the modern commercial value of cultural production, when one listens to music it is familiarity that is involved not the development of sensitivity to quality: "To like it is almost the same thing as to recognise it."[13] The most familiar songs are played again and again, and the more this happens the more familiar they become. It is in other words familiarity through repetition that is involved and not some abstract (or sublime) concept of quality. Marketability, superficiality and consumption describe the industry of culture, as songs become commodities. It is no longer the case of personal liking or disliking, but recognition.

How does one resist and fight back? Do we become Buddhists and go on a month-long journey away from it all, and rediscover something that we may miss in our mundane life, as Robert Pirsig does in the motorbike journey he narrates in **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance**? It is easier to focus when you are away from the crowd on top of a hill, or a mountain, but then you have to go down again, you have to return back.

"To discover a metaphysical relationship of Quality and the Buddha at some mountaintop of personal experience is very spectacular. And very unimportant. If that were all this Chautauqua was about I should be dismissed. What's important is the relevance of such a discovery to all the valleys of this world, and all the dull, dreary jobs and monotonous years that await all of us in them. Sylvia knew what she was talking about the first day when she noticed all those people coming the other way. What did she call it? A 'funeral procession.' The task now

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[13] Theodor W. Adorno *The Culture Industry* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.26.

is to get back down to that procession with a wider kind of understanding than exists there now."[14]

What do we need to be in a position to understand better the system of values prevailing in our contemporary civilization? One needs to interpret the messages that today give 'meaning' to our life, and study the methods of transmission that relay those messages. In the end we have to ask whether understanding is enough or whether perhaps there is something we can do about it. What is even more worrying about the system today is the difference that resides between the alienated industrial worker Karl Marx wrote about and the contemporary consumer. The worker had to go to work because he needed the money to live in town. He was forced by the objective conditions of town-life and could not do otherwise. The modern consumer, benefiting from freedom of choice, does not need to consume all the things that on average are consumed. Others claim that today the hegemony is even more complete since the hegemonised are happy, and continue to increase their consumption.

Antonio Gramsci, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party, is today still respected and studied for his theory of dominant ideologies. The construction of a dominant ideology leads to hegemony. Amongst others this is the result of media control, support from intellectual quarters, political propaganda, Church induced acquiescence, and others. Such hegemony supports the ruling class to create an illusion of consensus, the false belief that we all, or at least most of us, share the same interests. Today we still hear that helping the capitalist is helping the worker; quality of life depends on more consumption of material goods. What does one find beneath the skin of such arguments? Society is still class divided, and divisions and discrimination are widespread not only in terms of social

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[14] Robert Pirsig (1974), p.259.

class but also in other areas such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and age. Gramsci and other thinkers have theorised how those who are victims of this hegemonic control of society are not only unaware of what is going on and so never really go deep into realising and developing their deepest interests, but they are actually happy with the situation and will fight anyone who states otherwise thus becoming themselves the greatest defenders of this hegemonic state.

2.3 Socialisation

Meanwhile sociologists teach us how the study of values transmission passes through the process of socialisation. Meanings are internalised through socialisation making it an important theme in the study of culture especially when the latter refers to the beliefs, customs or the whole way of life of society. After all it permits the transmission and continuation of cultural traits. Manners, norms of behaviour, rituals, systems of belief, dress and language are acquired by the newborn for its integration within the accepted ways of behaving of that society. This lifelong process starting from the earliest influence of the family, extended to the school, peer groups, media and other sources of socialisation, is the main experience which helps the child to recognise what is acceptable behaviour and what is not in particular social settings and in a particular company. Thus basic language and behaviour patterns are internalised. It is practically impossible to speak meaningfully of any human behaviour outside a specific cultural pattern. Even sexual behaviour and ageing which one may believe to be dictated purely by natural forces or at least as being natural processes are indeed only meaningful within established cultural norms.

But such a view of culture demands a more penetrating observation. Ideologies and belief systems working at the basis of social life have to be identified. This perspective enables us to see how at grassroots level particular cultures tend to highlight differentiation within a group rather than a

superficial unity.[15] Thus whilst trying to represent a whole way of life of a people, this reading of culture also attempts to point out the pluralist manifestations within particular cultures generally termed as sub-cultures sometimes acting in complete contrast to the main cultural patterns established.[16] Pluralism is considered modern and democratic. In terms of a general debate about ways of life, plurality can mean many things including on one side a world of separate individuals or factions whose interrelationship is limited to the need to combat internal or external 'enemies'. Social interaction on a wide scale in this case is only a necessary evil. Plurality can alternatively mean a healthy intermingling of different views and ways of life. On an individual level, to conform and join others or to be different, are two forces that regularly struggle within us tempting us to enforce one decision over another in terms of behaviour, clothes, activities, and other choices we make. Once we grasp the basic features of what is going on – and it is a long process that demands much more than a cursory tourist observation of a foreign culture – we will first become aware that there are more differences or tones and gradations than a uniform pattern. We will also recognise that plurality allows freedom of choice but alone it is not enough. It has to be complemented by awareness. Clifford Geertz, the anthropologist whose work we will mention briefly, gives an interesting explanation about the challenges facing anthropologists in coming to terms with a 'culture'. Knowing the rules of football will help but it will not be enough for us to understand fully the game. We need to go for what is not visible, what may escape the eye if we are not experienced in and aware of certain tacit meanings of the game and how it is played.

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[15] Jenks (1993), p.10.

[16] John Clarke, 'The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Community'. In, Mike O'Donnell (ed.) *New Introductory Readings in Sociology* (Surrey: Nelson, 1987). The excerpt regarding the study in skinhead subculture should establish clearly this phenomenon. The Skinhead sub-culture might not be so popular in Malta but this extract should lead to a discussion about those social groups, which in their own particular way refuse to conform to the main cultural underpinnings of Maltese society.

2.4 The cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz: a case study of cultural investigation

It should be clear by now that one approach to the study of culture is to widen our setting outside the mere intellectual and artistic spheres to grasp a more widespread vision. This is a modern concept of culture, the 'democratic' concept of a whole way of life of a people. This concept of culture is therefore non-elitist, summing up aspects from a potentially global examination of the ways of life of a people, including their beliefs, rituals and customs. From the perspective of cultural anthropology our knowledge of the variety in cultural customs between different communities has been extended both from a historic as well as a geographic perspective. People eat food in different positions, using different utensils. There are differences in the food itself, in its preparation, the time when certain food is digested and how particular food is eaten only at specific times of the year. Our sexual activities have been diversely regulated by age factors, limited by social toleration and decency rules, charged by the need to attract the attention of the partner in the most diverse ways, and channelled by puberty rites, marriage rites, monogamy and polygamy. Sexual activities are also influenced by the uneasy relationship between religion and sex, as well as mixed up with political and economic demands. The upbringing of children has gone through many developments like breastfeeding in public, changes in baby food, differences in the aims of education, and paternal, maternal or parental authority over the early socialisation process. The need for shelter has given rise to different buildings and clothes. Artistic performances have varied through voice projection, body movement, special jargon, and the objects of art themselves have received different treatment such as the stone used and the skills applied to build temples. Religions have conjured up various myths, beliefs and mystical experiences. Variety is the stuff of cultural diversity and the list is never-ending.

When culture is understood as the ways of life of a society the anthropologist gets to work. In fact such a 'democratic' definition intends an

anthropological study bias as against a more aesthetically pronounced study of culture presumed by the earlier definition we entertained.[17] The wider version of culture becomes extremely problematic to hedge in so that it becomes a manageable concept that can render clear meanings. This is where Geertz steps in with his anthropological study. Projects are usually small-scale studies in terms of the social area covered. Although some anthropological studies have been large-scale projects, rendering them popular and attracting major attention because of their breadth, usually the scope is less ambitious. One can of course generalise from small-scale studies, and indeed this can have valid contributions for a wider, more general context (adding relevance and interest) so long as one does not take an anecdote to justify (and not simply describe) a complex situation. Geertz's studies are limited in scope and do not pretend to formulate some over-arching theory of man, or society, or even history.

His approach has been selected because it offers both a model and a direction to cultural research. The studies of Geertz pretend to reflect, or to put it better, take the inspiration from Max Weber's idea "that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun" and culture as a consequence becomes those 'webs'.[18] The study of culture becomes a search for meanings that are communicated by the members of society, and any attempt to understand culture must somehow come to terms with the interpretation of those meanings. Geertz for example

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[17] Oliver Friggieri whilst discussing culture ("kultura") proposes a link between our two definitions signalling how literature has its roots and departs from the larger anthropological context but then develops the words taken from everyday communication into aesthetic expression, the narrower context. The same argument can be applied in philosophy regarding Socrates who takes conversation, a common method of popular social interaction aimed to pass the time, and like the sophists transforms it into a philosophically demanding and highly systematic conversation. Oliver Friggieri *Dizzjunarju ta' Termini Letterarji* (Malta: PEG, 1996), p.361

[18] Geertz, Clifford *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), p.5

mentions winking. Knowing what implications winking has in a particular community brings out the importance of specific meaning associated with behaviour. Winking involves a contraction of the eyelid. Studying the scene and observing such an action the anthropologist jots it down immediately to record what happened. This would amount to "thin description", a simple record of behaviour. But knowing how to contract eyelids to wink, and going through the motions of contracting eyelids, is not necessarily winking. Winking, like culture, is a public act and meaning has to be sought in finding a deeper (or as Geertz would say adopting a term from Gilbert Ryle, "thicker") description of what is going on when one actually winks. Perhaps it is a non-wink contraction that can be mistaken for a wink, or a wink that leads to conspiracy, or a burlesque wink that leads to a parody, or even a rehearsal of a wink?[19]

The study of culture was not always centred on an interest in interpreting meanings. One of the major methodologies adopted was the one based on the Behaviourist approach in which the disinterested researcher is looking out for value-free action to describe in a disinterested, neutral way. This emphasized beyond doubt that if we are to learn anything about man and culture than we have to observe man in his actual context. Through observation, patterns of behaviour are established. If the research has an instrumental value, for example a study to increase the efficiency of learning and teaching in a classroom, then if any defect is found solutions are proposed to remedy the defects – highly clinical and efficient ... if it was simply behaviour we are interested in. What if behaviour has and is the result of deeper causes than meet the eye? How does one tackle this 'deeper' reality? Besides, studying a culture (even the microcosm of the classroom) to act upon it raises doubts about study being used to control people and their behaviour, through the adoption for example of reinforcements that reward good behaviour and counter-conditioning to

[19] Clifford Geertz (1975), p.6

punish or control bad behaviour.[20] According to Clifford Geertz, his anthropological study of culture is an attempt at description not control. It is not a means to produce an over-arching theory functioning as a straightjacket that can explain anything that goes on in any social context under observation. It is neither a fault detector and remedy as in a **Clockwork Orange** style intervention.

Can one predict from anthropological work like one does with traditional scientific theory? This will mean a belief that in culture there are 'laws' – like the laws of gravity in physical science – from which one can formulate predictions. The belief is for example that people will act in certain ways not in others under specific conditions. But does one have to wink when he is expected to? Not really. This does not mean that whatever cultural anthropologists like Geertz describe in their studies has no meaning outside the context in which the events described happened. If a claim is made or the anthropologist exposes a view and this is overturned, than the credibility of the observations are questionable. And yet the best one can expect from such work is that the arguments raised fit the reality being interpreted. The age-old claim of intellectual humility is perhaps the ultimate conclusion to this argument. Complete objectivity is impossible but this does not mean that one can say whatever he or she likes. Just as the old story goes, because the police do not capture all the criminals and the law does not put all criminals behind bars does not mean we ignore or get rid of the police and the law.

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[20] This is a main topic in the behaviourist approach to studying the workplace and making workers more efficient. The production bonus for example can 'reward' the more hardworking employees. The difficulty is to get people to agree what is good and bad behaviour. One can measure discipline by observing behaviour (or as some do by measuring the noise in class) or one can measure learning by checking test results. But do these give a 'true' picture of a proper education? Even young children are given a round of applause or stars as bonus.

Geertz also sets a model for our concerns. An anthropologist observes, records and analyzes. These are not necessarily separate activities. The anthropologist brings intellectual and moral qualities, along with the specialist training, to bear on a situation and explain it better. There is no turning away "from the existential dilemmas of life" but a choice to "plunge into the midst of them" thus "making available to us answers that others ... have given, and thus to include them in the consultable record of what man has said."[21] In this way the anthropologist renders more visible the way culture and man inter-relate as well as captures an event that has passed and stops it from perishing out of sight.[22] This makes particular cultures accessible, less exotic perhaps, but without turning them into colourful postcards. These descriptions are built one on top of the other (like the heavy, superimposed layers of patterns in an old spider's web). A systematic study will make sense and provide a pattern for such interpretations. Solving the puzzle may not be elegant, it may also lack the power to verify beyond doubt what is being explained, but at least it is exposed as a scientific interpretation, a good one, which means the events are traced, fixed in clear description and are analysed for basic meanings. It must be remembered that the people observed are already interpreting one another and therefore an anthropologist is making second order (or even further) interpretations. Geertz (quoting Wittgenstein) talks of rendering people (and their ways of life) less transparent, less enigmatic, and less strange. Although we know their language and therefore know what they are saying, we still need to "find our feet with them," and then justify why we believe we have found our feet. It is an assessment of guesses, and explanations of (hopefully) the better guesses.

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[21] Clifford Geertz (1975), p.30. Up to a certain extent this is a reply to the ethical debate raised by Dun Giuseppe Vella in section 2.2 above.

[22] Like Leonardo da Vinci catching the moment when Jesus has just informed the apostles of a traitor in their midst in his fresco 'The Last Supper.'

We can learn a lot from the practice of anthropological research. It involves knowledge, skills and a certain attitude. It is for example dependent on the ability of the researcher to grasp the right data and to have experienced observation skills that are basic when at work in the context under study. The interpretation demands other skills such as the choice of theory to interpret the data.[23] This theory clarifies the ideas and information basic to understand a particular culture in its various aspects. The theory along with our observations provides the springboard for our interpretations. This however is not the over-arching theory we mentioned before, waiting for facts to be filled in so that it can tell you what to conclude. It does not pre-date the observations but follows from them. Other work that has some association with the one carried out is taken into consideration, and thus it extends the meanings we are able to formulate.

Knowledge has to do with meaning. The deeper one goes for meaning the more complex interpretation becomes. We go back to interdisciplinarity. It is in fact another cry for interdisciplinarity. It emerges from the recognised need that cultural anthropology cannot make it alone. Geertz himself mentions the multiple connections of the subject. Literary criticism, philosophy, sociology, economics and others are extremely helpful sources for the anthropologist. An interdisciplinary approach and a type of attitude are connected. The attitude of one following the path traced by Geertz is that of a sympathiser for pluralism. His choice is a pluralist vision of cultural studies built on the belief that help can come from so many different places. This is one of the reasons for our selection of this particular anthropologist. Besides, the final aim is not some aesthetic, moral or political ideal but to render sense to human communication, to enable us to understand it better, in other words sorting out the webs of significance. It is a way of getting closer to the

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[23] When students have to prepare a report about their participation in voluntary work this is one aspect that can be taken into consideration.

meanings and values of the members of the community one is studying or living with.

2.5 A final word

We started our study by asking who is Man? Although we can highlight basic traits in man, it is very doubtful whether we can ever answer comprehensively such a query. Once again we resort to James Watson and Francis Crick. In the book **The Double Helix** it is claimed that when they put the puzzle of the DNA structure together they had managed to discover the secret of life. This has been extended to a further claim by some that the study of human existence has now become an open book verifiable once the genome is read. How exhaustive such knowledge will be about human life is still open to debate. Meanwhile at the centre of our concerns there is the individual with his or her cultural journey as a focus of our attention. The effort in the rest of the study is to establish meanings as they transpire from the study of different values. It is also our way of following the words of Socrates when according to Plato he exclaimed, "the unexamined life is not worth living." This statement taken as a motivation to action opens up possibilities of purposeful learning and exploration first about ourselves and then about others.

Chapter 3

Ancient Greek Civilization and Politics

3.1 Introduction

It is firmly believed that if one is trying to understand the association between values and politics, two things that can help immediately come to mind: we need a setting and we have to find some unifying framework. In the subject area of politics, when the discussion is about the concept democracy (framework), two historical developments (settings) will undoubtedly be accepted by many as having had a major influence both on the people living directly through the experiences, as well as others who although uninvolved, in fact living centuries apart, were effected by them. These are the fifth century ancient Athenian democracy and the democracy (or democracies) that followed the events of the French Revolution in 1789. The contemporary context will also be analysed although sometimes it seems too 'untidy' because it is practically evolving under our own eyes. It is like observing the development of a newborn baby when the changes from one week to another may be rather surprising (adults do change but not as dramatically as the very young). Moreover the element of controversy in the present may increase the difficulty to capture the main arguments although on the other hand it may increase the interest.

3.2 The physical setting as an alternative unifying concept

It is clear that in any study attempting to investigate a number of different values such as this, one huge obstacle can be the mass of elements that need to be addressed. To make some sense of all this mass of material we will adopt the two historical developments and the theme of democracy as central. Other writers have adopted other concepts to clarify and organise ideas. Fernand Braudel for example developed one such anchor idea, linking so many elements together. Geography, amongst others, has the power to unite and thus clarify a number of features of civilization. Not geography for its own sake but as a unifying, at the same time, integral feature of a culture or civilization. Braudel believes that economic systems and social institutions framing our lives determine values and behaviour, and these are in turn determined by climate and geography.[1] Mentioning the world of Antiquity and whatever it achieved or stood for one cannot ignore the Mediterranean Sea.

Historically it had been the Phoenicians who did most to promote sea trade. Sea traffic must have been vast then. Tyre, the main Phoenician city, and Carthage the major Phoenician colony, but also others, had enormous populations. It has to be pointed out that without sea trade it was impossible at the time to maintain large populations. Moreover it needs to be remarked as well that if the Greeks were only on rare occasions united as one people, the Phoenicians were never united. The Phoenicians, a Semitic people, developed their own alphabet, arguably their most important contribution to the rest of the world, and rapidly became great navigators. Trade would remain for the rest of their history the main

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[1] Quentin Skinner: "It follows as he puts it, that mountains, not rulers, come first, and that historians need to adopt a far more sociological and deterministic perspective in order to come to grips with the implication of that fundamental fact." In, 'Introduction: The return of Grand Theory', introductory chapter of *The Return of Grand Theory in the Human Sciences* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.19.

driving force. All Phoenician sites were on the coast: Cyprus, Sardinia and southern Iberia because of metal ores, copper and silver, others like Malta and Carthage because from them, the Phoenicians could control maritime traffic. Once they did not control the sea, they were doomed. Of course it was not only the Phoenicians who were involved in maritime trade. The Greeks founded Marseilles, settled in Sicily, peninsular Italy, North Africa, Asia Minor and the Black Sea. The major goods traded were grain from Egypt and Crimea, wine from Asia Minor, fabrics from Tyre, glassware from Sidon, and pottery from the Greek city states.[2] As a result of trade and communication, a new urban civilization spread westward, with a heavy reliance on seafaring rather than land travel. The Mediterranean became the cradle of ancient civilization and it was maritime trade that spread the values of that civilization throughout the known world. This was inevitable since, as we have already hinted, the great wealth of the Phoenician and many Greek city-states depended on maritime transport. In Egypt and in Mesopotamia, regions of great rivers, there already existed two impressive civilizations. But it was in the Mediterranean Sea that cultural contacts spread far and wide. All the peoples living along the Mediterranean coast were thus in frequent communication, resulting in the cross-fertilisation between the cultures of the eastern and western Mediterranean.

Malta is an archipelago of small islands in the middle of the Mediterranean. It is cut off from immediate contact with the closest neighbours. It is also relatively small in size, and when this is linked to its high density of population, one can expect its people to feel relatively more claustrophobic than others. Placed in a central and strategic position in the Mediterranean, Malta lies where the Eastern Mediterranean basin

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[2] The interpenetration of Greek and Phoenician commercial spheres is still a controversial subject. The fact that the profits were so large and could be shared might have helped to mitigate any ill-feeling.

is separated from the Western basin, whilst to the North it faces the landmass of southern Europe whereas to the South there is the landmass of northern Africa. This has left an impact on the particular cultural developments of the islands. Our colonial history is evidence of the way geographic characteristics have fashioned cultural developments. The presence of deep, well-sheltered harbours did not go unnoticed by Diodorus Siculus, a first century BC historian who commented about the prosperity of Malta because of its "geographical position, excellent harbours and sea-merchants."[3] The historical functions of its geographic position have included the provision of a safe haven in dangerous seas as suggested by the biblical narrative of the shipwreck of St Paul. It also provided a safe base for any type of seafaring activities, and was and still is an *entrepot* for trade and an important bunkering station. The strategic value of our islands was a main reason for British presence since it meant they controlled the route from Gibraltar to the Suez Canal. Sensitivity (or lack of it) to the physical environment was also influenced. The awareness of our physical environment (and the problems it faces) was never really high on the agenda of our political leaders but today it has become a media issue. It is related, in the words of E. A. Mallia, also to the particular physical reality of Malta. Discussing environmental stewardship he claims that past insensitivity to environmental matters has been in part the result of "existence on a barren rock lost in the Middle Sea," and this has "never been easy."[4]

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[3] International Court of Justice *Continental Shelf (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya / Malta) Counter-Memorial submitted by the Republic of Malta*, Volume II, Annex 1 (26 October 1983), p.3.

[4] E. A. Mallia 'Land Use: An Account of Environmental Stewardship'. In R. G. Sultana & G. Baldacchino (eds.) *Maltese Society: A sociological inquiry* (Msida: Mireva, 1994), p. 702.

3.3 Ancient Greek civilization as a setting for political development: a brief summary of historical developments before Cleisthenes

The urbanised civilization of ancient Greece did not appear all of a sudden. Going back over the centuries we can retrace the historical developments that led to it. It must be clarified that such an approach may suffer from the juggling of historical data to serve a pre-determined purpose, and yet perhaps such a risk is worth taking and better than the alternative of being led to believe that Greek civilization came from nowhere or fell from the sky. We reiterate that the present study is not of a 'purely' historical interest, however if we are to compare for example our present democratic institutions with the ancient Athenian model without the necessary awareness of the historical circumstances out of which these two structures emerged a brief comparative study of their respective value systems will be rendered extremely naïve.

The Greek civilization, a universe centred on cities, depended on a rural economy, and this was either that of the neighbouring countryside, or else if this was not enough, it was sustained by imports. The urban economy was not at all equal to the rural; on the contrary, the material wealth that sustained its intellectual and civic vigour was drawn from the countryside. The Greek towns, at least originally, were never predominantly communities of manufacturers, traders or craftsmen – these remained few since the range of normal urban commodities was limited. The wealthier families owned large estates and had a strong say in city affairs, even in democratic Athens. The less wealthy increased their say gradually. To understand the political developments in Athens that led to an emancipated and active citizenry one must necessarily study the development of the polis in the history of Athens. The active citizenry was constituted by the less wealthy citizens and not only by large landowners who could always fall back upon their economic strength and have sufficient free time to take care of city 'business' if they wished to do so.

The emergence of the city-states in the Aegean Sea predated the classical

epoch. After the collapse of the Mycenaean civilization about 1200BC, Greece experienced a prolonged 'Dark Age' in which literacy, the economy and politics regressed to a rudimentary stage. This was the primitive and rural world portrayed in the Homeric epics. It was in the succeeding epoch of Archaic Greece from 800 to 500 BC, that the urbanisation typical of classical civilization first slowly crystallized. Tribal aristocracies grew in power and cities were founded or developed under the domination of this nobility. This aristocratic rule in Archaic Greece coincided with steady urbanisation until by the mid sixth century, there were some 1500 Greek cities most of which built along the coastline. They were essentially residential centres for farmers and landowners, who left town every day to return back at night. We know little about the political organisation of these cities but most probably they were based on privileged hereditary rule exercised through the government of an oligarchic aristocratic council.

The advent of the Tyrants (c. 650-510 BC) in the last century of the Archaic Age ruptured this order. These autocrats, consisting mainly of newer landowners, broke the dominance of the aristocracies over the cities. They rested their power to a much greater extent on concessions to the mass of common city-dwellers. In doing so the tyrannies of the sixth century constituted the essential link to the transition towards the classical polis. The political, economic and military foundations of classical civilization were being laid. Coinage, the spread of a money economy, a rapid increase in population and trade, further overseas colonisation, and a new class of agricultural proprietors drawn from outside the ranks of the traditional nobility were the most important developments. The tyrants were upstarts of considerable wealth. Their victory was however generally possible only because of their utilisation of the deep-seated grievances of the poor. The economic reforms in the interests of the popular classes, which they had to grant or tolerate, provided to secure their political power. The possibility of monopolisation of agrarian property by the upper class was thus blocked and small peasant farms were preserved and consolidated throughout Greece.

The bitter social struggles between the rich and the poor in Attica at the

turn of the sixth century could not go on indefinitely. Solon was not a tyrant, but in 594BC he was given supreme legislative power to mediate between the warring parties in Athens. Amongst his reforms there was the abolishment of debt bondage on the land, and so smallholders could not fall victim any longer to large landowners by becoming dependent tenants. A pattern of small and larger farms was established. Although only property owners could hold office in public service in Athens, Solon changed the voting rules in the Assembly: all citizens could now vote. Social conflicts however still erupted until the tyrant Pesistratus seized power. Another reshaping of Athenian society followed. He sponsored a building programme that provided employment for urban craftsmen and labourers, presided over what promised to be an increase in marine traffic, and provided direct financial assistance to the Athenian peasantry through public credit that finally clinched their autonomy and security. Some aristocrats were banished and their lands distributed amongst peasants. The staunch survival of the small and medium farmers was assured. Such modest agrarian property would be the economic backbone of the Athenian political citizenry. Approximately at the same time, the military organisation of a number of cities (not only Athens) changed significantly. Armies were composed of hoplites, heavily armoured infantry, a Greek innovation in the Mediterranean world. Each hoplite equipped himself with weaponry and armour at his own expense. This presupposed a reasonable economic livelihood, and in fact hoplite troops were always drawn from the middle class amongst the farmers of the cities. Their military efficacy was proved by the unexpected Greek victories over the Persians. The critical role of an armed citizenry in city-state politics was also very important.

3.4 A civilization dependent on slavery

Besides the economic security of land ownership and arms possession, a paradoxical contribution to democratic flourishing in Athens was slavery. The classical polis, based on a new and gradual development of freedom, institutionalised slavery. Slavery meant a complete loss of liberty. In the same

city, the free citizen stood next to the slave labourer. Aristotle even outlined the best characteristics of a slave. For him the ideal cultivator of the land was the slave. It was best that slaves were not all from one people nor temperamentally strong or else they would share the tendency to rebel. At the same time they must be hardworking. Slaves contributed human energy to the Greek economy but it was a wasteful supply especially in terms of the slaves used in the mines. To compensate, the price of a slave was in general relatively low. By the fifth century virtually all major cities in Greece contained a large slave population that at times outnumbered the free citizenry.

The growth of a slave population lifted the citizenry of the Greek cities to heights of previously unknown civic freedom so much that Greek liberty and slavery are considered indivisible: each was an essential condition of the other.[5] Evidence that slavery was basic to Greek civilization because it created the leisure and political conditions that were eventually exploited by the owners of the slaves comes from the fact that the political salvation of the independent peasantry and the cancellation of debt bondage were promptly followed by a steep rise in the use of slave labour, both in the towns and countryside. Slave imports were thus a logical remedy to labour shortages for the landowning class. Slave labour liberated a landowning class so '*radically*' from its rural background, it was transformed into an essentially urban citizenry that however continued to draw its fundamental wealth from the soil. This also explains the supremacy of town over country within an overwhelmingly rural economy, the reverse of the early feudal world that succeeded the world of Antiquity. This also explains why the capture of slaves – including prisoners of war – was a central object of foreign policy. Today's military expeditions to acquire economic resources are well documented. Even in Antiquity military power and economic growth were locked together.

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[5] It is noteworthy that traditionally the first 'democratic' institutions in classical Greece were thought to have been in Chios, during the mid sixth century and tradition also suggests that Chios was the first Greek city to import slaves on a large scale. M. I. Finley *The Ancient Greeks* (New York: Penguin, 1991), p.46.

3.5 Athenian democracy after Cleisthenes

When in Athens, Cleisthenes proposed the two political bodies of the Council of 500 and the Board of Generals, he established a strong institutional backbone for democratic life in Athens that was meant to consolidate the Assembly – a general meeting for all citizens, where all the major (and minor) issues were decided. And yet the Athenians – along with other Greeks – were still to experience two grand wars against the Persians during the first two decades of the fifth century BC. Legendary remain the two battles that took place during the wars: the Battle of Marathon and the Battle of Salamis. The wars were followed by a glorious period in Athenian history. Athens changed a lot. Since the Persian invasion mentioned before, the Athenians were able to build an economic power that would last for the rest of the century establishing them as the masters of the sea. The Delian League was founded following the victories over the Persians. It was active from 478 to 404 BC, the year signalling the disastrous end of the Peloponnesian War against Sparta.[6] During that time over two hundred states joined this commercial enterprise run by Athens and meant to regulate the maritime business in Greek waters. These states supplied the Athenians with manpower, equipment, money

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[6] Ernle Bradford, 'The Peloponnesian War' in *Mediterranean: Portrait of a Sea* (Tutor, 1989). Given the different natures of Athens and Sparta, the two great Greek powers, and their conflicting ambitions, war between them was inevitable. Corcyra, says Bradford, unlike other colonies, which, though independent, were usually respectful to their mother cities, gave dangerous signals it would not only do without Corinth, but even follow policies hostile to the founding city. The result was that war broke out between Corinth and Corcyra, and both parties appealed to Athens to intervene in the dispute. The Athenians supported Corcyra because to them it meant reducing the power of Corinth and befriending the second largest navy in the whole of Greece, the Corcyran navy. Corinth however was allied to the Spartans. This engagement, therefore, between Athens and the cities which were under Spartan protection inevitably brought the two great powers face to face (pp.175-6). Likewise inevitable, the war will consume the wealth and power of the cities.

and other tributes, and it is not misleading to speak of an Athenian trade empire. It also goes to confirm the influence of the sea on historical developments.

The wealth generated by the Delian League helped to boost the status of Athens. Meanwhile the powers in the Assembly of the lower citizenry, many of whom had participated in the wars, had increased over time. This mass meeting for all native male citizens, which had eventually become the only legislating body in the polis, controlled the administration and the judicature. There were citizens who were more politically active but there were no professional politicians as we have today. Anyone could speak in the regular meetings but not all speakers had any guarantee the others would listen. Getting the others' full attention was (as sometimes it still is) of course a problem. The Council of 500 prepared the Assembly agenda and was responsible to solve the urgent business. Noteworthy about the Council was the way the members were chosen. There was no election but an annual open ballot was held and all male citizens in the ten different districts could participate. In this way anyone could be chosen. Nepotism and corruption were checked. Fifty members from each of the ten districts would make up the Council. Eventually fifty members out of the five hundred remained on a daily basis and these were expected to have a new chairman every day. After a year of the Council the whole process would start from scratch. The Athenian networks of power based on tribal connections were thus controlled. As for the ten *strategoi* who formed the Board of Generals, these were annually elected by the citizens. A highly influential group of men, these were the military leaders. They were the only 'elected' representatives. Otherwise the Athenians preferred self-rule. Throughout the political administration of the city, discussion, responsibility, discipline and active participation were fundamental to get things done properly. What strikes the modern reader however is the fact that common citizens were involved in this political process. These had direct experience and knowledge of what went on and the privilege of being present and actively involved with their vote when decisions were made.

3.6 Athens in the fifth century BC

The Greek cities did not follow one standard set-up: there were differences. Athens of the fifth century BC had a way of life that the Athenian citizens proudly cherished. Reading through the funeral oration by Pericles, keeping in mind and checking at the same time the eloquence demanded by the occasion – glorifying the ultimate sacrifice of the dead soldiers in front of widows and orphans, and the rest of the people after the first year of war against Sparta – one can easily sense the pride in the City's achievements in that speech. "Athens is the school of Hellas," declared Pericles, but he did not intend a building walled in to serve the needs of teachers and pupils.[7] The 'school' was a model of life, an open-air life with the Acropolis as its focus and the agora as its vital meeting point. In this society, administration was in the hands of the many, law secured equal justice to all, privilege in the public service was reserved to those who had merit, there was a general lack of exclusiveness in public life and a high degree of respect for the authorities and the law. Pericles also mentioned the organisation of regular games and sacrifices, the beautiful and elegant homes, how Athenians could enjoy goods from other countries, their superior military training, an interest by the people in public affairs and their ability to judge public policies. In his book **The City in History** Lewis Mumford claims that "to understand the full achievement" of the polis we cannot look at the evidence of the physical building but must redirect our attention towards the citizen, who by saving on the low levels could thus spend more on the high ones. In other words, this citizen by-passed "so many of the life-defeating routines and materialistic compulsions of civilization," the low levels, but gained by consequence a richer and wider variety of social experiences, the high levels. [8]

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[7] Ernle Bradford (1989), p.169.

[8] Lewis Mumford *The City in History* (San Diego: Harvest, 1989), p. 165. Spreading further out from the agora, the houses of the citizens consisted originally of disorderly

The games, religious, artistic and other activities were held in the open-air. The Mediterranean climate helped but then the Mediterranean climate does not stop at the Greek shores. It was probably the consequence of a preference for broader social interaction as against a retreat to domestic privacy that made the difference. The market, workshop, gymnasium, theatre, law court, Council and Assembly activities were all held outside in the open-air. These were the experiences Pericles referred to when he spoke of Athens as a school. The citizens of Athens were active in all these fields. They were also active in others such as manning the ships, work carried out by Athenian citizens.[9] This hectic participation meant that the citizens could observe and at the same time inspect most of what was going on in their city. All this participation was a matter of social pride as well, as Socrates testifies when he boasts of having participated in three military campaigns, but at the same time having to justify his absence in the Assembly by balancing this lack of civic contribution with a lifetime concern for the good of the Athenians on a more personal level, teaching them to care for their soul. Such activity by so many citizens has been considered a model for other societies that believe in an active citizenry. Reading article 27 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights we can get close to understand what the writers had in mind when they declared "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits." In Athens, not all did.

It should emerge from the above how the Athenians thrived in substance on the idea that there is a superior way of life from the rest, and that they

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huts, dead end alleys, and barnyards where you least expected them to be. There was also a noticeable lack of sanitation facilities. This was somehow different by the time Pericles gave his famous speech in which he also mentioned the "beautiful and elegant homes." The priority scales of the citizens' values had shifted: Mumford's "materialistic compulsions of civilization" including the need for comfortable houses were having the upperhand.

[9] The Romans preferred slaves as rowers.

were definitely on the superior scale. The Athenian (and later Roman) urban achievements have caught the imagination of many subsequent societies, representing an urban society and culture that was not to be paralleled for so many centuries. Philosophy and science, history and politics, poetry, sculpture and architecture, law and administration, the list is almost never-ending. All these emerged or developed to levels of supreme sophistication. Discussing the influence of Athens, Ernle Bradford summarizes briefly some of the exceptional aspects of this polis:

"While Socrates and his followers were encouraging men to use their minds efficiently, one of the greatest poets of history, the rationalist Euripides, was describing man's predicament on earth in words that still sing off the page; in the second year of the war Herodotus completed his great history; and in the year that marked Athens' downfall, Euripides' masterpiece, the *Bacchae*, was being performed. Throughout these years, too, Athenians were recognising and laughing at many of their own follies in the incisive and bawdy comedies of Aristophanes, and at the same time the other arts flourished. Outstanding pieces of sculpture, metalwork, jewellery, and ceramics were produced at this time."[10]

And yet once one climbs down from these dizzying heights of civilized life one discovers that such patterns of life depended on other features of Athenian culture that are less praiseworthy. The presence of slaves has already been indicated. Women, children, and foreigners (both non-Athenian Greek as well as barbarian) did not profit from the same rights or opportunities.

For clarity's sake and to recapture the first point we made in this chapter about the usefulness of studying physical contexts, Athenian life can be organised around a number of physical settings along the Acropolis, a hill serving as a centre for the main activities of the city. All these settings are

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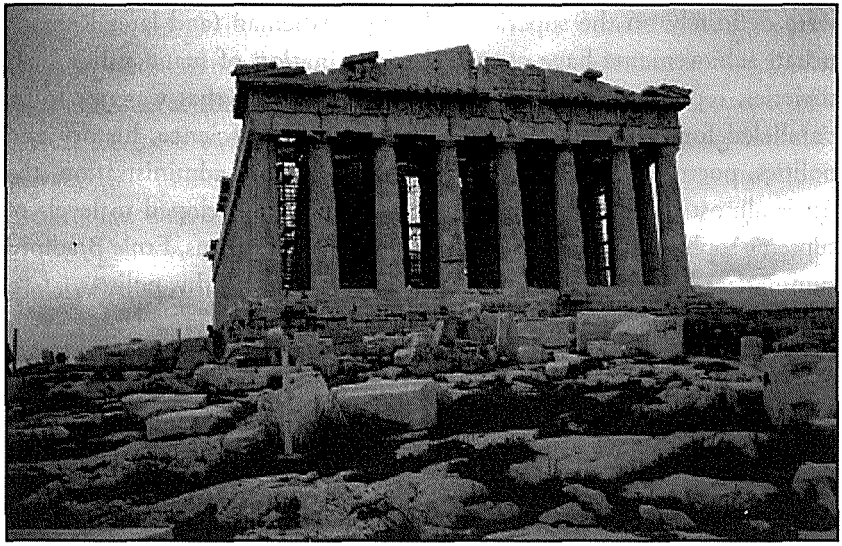
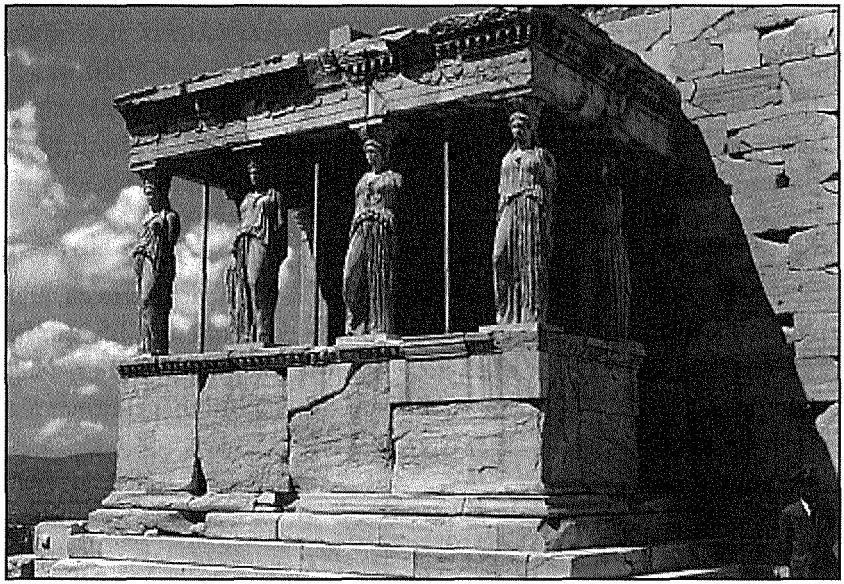
[10] Ernle Bradford (1989), p.189.



Artistic qualities and mathematical knowledge combine to crown the Acropolis with religious shrines such as the Parthenon *(above)* and the Erechtheum *(below)*, of which the Porch of the Caryatids is shown.



related to different social activities.[11] The upper reaches of the Acropolis were dedicated to worship. The Parthenon rose above the other religious buildings and shrines. Closer to the skies but also furthest from the land surrounding the hill, these religious jewels were easier to protect against potential invading armies. The Athenians were not immune from such circumstances as the Persian invasion of 480BC proved when Xerxes, son of Darius, sacked and burnt the city. Lower down the Acropolis, the agora was the early site for the popular political assembly until the numbers participating became too large to accommodate and so the meeting had to be held elsewhere. It remained the central market site and the place to be if you wanted to meet any particular citizen, such as Socrates for example. When one tries to understand the personality of Socrates as he emerges from the writings of Plato, it is very clear how important typical city life at the time was for him. The importance of Athens in the philosophical discussions held by Socrates is clear when the social interaction of the agora is considered as one of the 'contexts' for Socratic dialogues. This does not mean that the discussions in the agora by the citizens were of the Socratic kind or were philosophical in any specific meaning of the word, but it does mean that the philosopher took a typical social activity – discussion – and developed further its potential for personal growth.

3.7 Weaknesses

Athenian leadership had traditionally come from the landowning class, with deep roots in the countryside. The urban economy of craftsmen had

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[11] This study of physical space and its social implications is one of those interesting lines of study in the history of art interpretation. It could for example set the student off to check who occupied the space in artistic representation throughout history, or how the different categories of figures included (human and not) are distributed in the space of a painting, vertically, horizontally, in the foreground or background, as well as in the proportion of the total surface area covered.

remained second to the landed interests of the most influential families. Most citizens would remain farmers but the commercial sector grew, and along with it, the population living in Athens and the surrounding territory increased. Some attribute Plato's **Republic** and the emphasis on the need for unity in order for the city to survive as stemming from the awareness of a growing division amongst the citizens, only partly absorbed by the democratic procedures and in fact highlighted by the inherently partisan and divisive nature of the democratic system. Plato wrote that the average number of citizens ideally should be around 5000 whilst Aristotle mentioned how better it would be if citizens were able to know one another by sight. The population of the city however continued to increase creating internal tensions that linked to the political and military pressures from outside eventually caused the downfall of Athens.

Other weaknesses, besides the lack of unity, are also noteworthy. The Assembly decided for the invasion of Sicily during the Peloponnesian War when there was clearly an absence of information about the entire scheme including the whereabouts of the island and its size. Another point but closely associated to the previous, are the comments of the historian Thucydides, a contemporary, who wrote how the Assembly was lead by able demagogues skilful in getting what they wanted but who at times lacked the foresight of the great statesman. Even Plato criticised the democratic system because of its military failures against Sparta, and its political failures to unite the Athenians. The decision by a democratic court to execute Socrates had an emotional impact. Democracy based on the powerful skills of demagogues able to control public opinion did not allow a better government based on the knowledge of experts. The tyranny of the majority and mob rule are still potentially dangerous features of any democracy today. And yet the democratic system was popular. This is part of the explanation why, when one considers how difficult it was to recover from the Peloponnesian War lost against Sparta, the democracy was re-established after the short and desperate interval of the Thirty Tyrants. Democracy survived but the Delian League did not and this weakened the incredible economic power the Athenians had been able to gain throughout the century.

Chapter 4

Modern Democracy

4.1 A Brief Historical Background to the French Revolution

Louis XIV (1638 – 1715) reigned for a very long time in an arbitrary and absolutist way: "*l'etat, c'est moi*". When Mazarin, the first minister, died no aristocrat was chosen as substitute. In the appointment of Jean Colbert, an educated bourgeois, son of a draper, as adviser responsible for finance and the navy, there were signs of a change in policies. Colbert expanded maritime commerce and improved harbours, punished unjust collectors, boosted domestic industry and exports, provided for better roads and canals. It was a policy committed to efficiency. Society was however based on rank, birth and privilege, and the King had continental aspirations to power that drained the royal finances. All this worked against the reform programmes of Colbert who was still able to expand the merchant fleet and French participation in worldwide trade.

If Louis XIV with all his power could not bring about the necessary efficiency who would? And why had he failed? One of the reasons was certainly the great divide in society between the aristocrats and commoners. The administration was becoming an unbearable burden on the economy. The richer Court absentee landlords monopolised the higher State offices without performing any useful function. The aristocrats had bought the offices and it was almost impossible to remove them. It was

better to get the office-holders out of the way and work with others, the Intendants, who would be more loyal and accountable to the King. This further increased the burden of taxation on the common people and on the other alienated from the great nobles the relatively poorer provincial nobility living on smaller properties. Even the clergy was divided in the higher clergy, those of noble blood who monopolised the well-paid church offices, and the others, the parish priests who worked in the villages tending to the needs of the populace.

By the time of King Louis XVI things had not changed much to the better. He was unable to reform against the interests of the greater nobility. France was a great despotic monarchy that had seriously declined during the eighteenth century. External defeat at the hands of Britain in India and Canada and the enormous difficulties following the support of the American colonies, had lowered its international prestige. Bankruptcy was a reality that demanded effective measures. But what led the lower classes from passive remonstrance to a revolutionary attitude? The bourgeoisie was already burdened enough with internal customs duties, property and revenue taxes. The peasants and wage earners were even more desperate. Government, church and lord taxed the peasants. What was left of their meagre harvest barely sustained them. This situation also restricted any widespread development in agriculture and restricted the market for manufacturers. The taxation system was wasteful and an obstacle to economic progress. When as in 1788, crops failed, famine was a real threat. The exorbitant price of bread in the city affected seriously the workers who were near starvation. Social and economic unrest climaxed in 1789 to produce a revolutionary situation.

Besides the inherent difficulties in governing the aristocratic regime, across the Channel there was the British model of progress that served as a strong inspiration for those who wanted change. Amongst these were some of the French pre-revolutionary thinkers. Voltaire who died eleven years before the revolution, but whose name will be associated with it, was a member of the nobility who supported the monarchy but was against

feudal privileges. He also wrote satirical attacks on Church privileges, abuses and intolerance. Montesquieu (1689 – 1755) was another supporter of the monarchy and anticlerical who theorised in **The Spirit of the Laws** about the division of powers to combat abuse. This political system was based on limited monarchical powers and a separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers – a balance and check system sustained by guaranteeing autonomy amongst the different political bodies. The members of the nobility who were disenchanted by the actual political situation and the bourgeois who enjoyed economic but no political power became a fertile audience to this type of thinking.

Finally when the financial crisis became intolerable the Estates General representing the Nobility, the Church and the Commons were convened in Paris to propose solutions. Nevertheless proposals of reform were thwarted and France turned to revolution. On the morning of July 14, 1789 the attack on the austere eight-towered fortress of the Bastille began. Fighting waged followed by several negotiations until the garrison surrendered. The Bastille with its mere seven interned was taken. The fall of the Bastille will later be considered the starting point of the revolutionary events that followed. This act was welcomed as the symbol of the fall of tyranny. This uprising will eventually spread throughout France tearing to shreds the old social and political fabric, and in the long-term give rise to radical changes in the political structure of continental European society.

The 1789 revolution did not only topple the foundations of the *Ancien Regime* in France but also of the other states of Europe, great and small. In France a long period of disorder followed, but by 1792, the French started their campaigns to make the revolution a European affair. Military efforts had to sustain such an effort. The defeat of the aristocratic class and the promotion of the political ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity provoked the reaction of the other great European powers that attempted to crush the Revolution in its birth. The fate of Europe depended on this struggle. When in 1799, Napoleon came to power, he was to do more than win battles. He came to power when France was near anarchy but

he was able to enforce order. He overcame the chaos of revolutionary demagogues. Napoleon's legal code eventually became a basis for the laws of modern Europe and other parts of the world. The military victories of Napoleon brought other changes. The French control of Europe led to radical changes in the map of Europe as well as to the emergence of new classes that were to challenge the old aristocracy of Europe.

The Napoleonic war machine over-reached itself in the vast expanses of Russia and faced serious difficulties to contend with the naval and economic power of Britain, and yet the most reactionary opponents of the French were forced to call upon all classes to unite in the common struggle. This sense of national unity, above class barriers, was to remain a permanent factor in the history of Europe. There were other lasting effects of the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods such as the doctrines of democracy and equality that resurfaced and had to be reckoned with and ultimately acknowledged. Centralised administration increased the efficiency of governments, and conscription became the basis for armies. The efforts to turn the tide back failed as it became clear that the feudal economy, amongst others, was an obstacle to economic development. The need for capitalist expansion became more evident. The role of the bourgeoisie was pre-eminent including its need for stability, the exploitation of natural resources and the encouragement of trade abroad so that capital could be raised, resources mobilised and the forces of production developed.

4.2 The Nation State

Article 15 of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* by the United Nations declares that everyone has the right to a nationality and no arbitrary deprivation of nationality or denial to change nationality is tolerable. The national citizen is different from the citizen of the ancient city-state. He and she belong to a nation state. Initially these nation states were generally monarchies based on royal families, but by the end of the nineteenth century the nation states of Western Europe began to develop into the modern

democracies we are familiar with, partly as a result of industrial development, new political movements that emerged and the consequent enlargement of those having the vote. During the twentieth century democratic rights were extended even further giving a wider popular appeal and strength to parliamentary candidates. This was truly representative parliamentary democracy. Since the Western parliamentary democracy model was seen as a great success its example was copied by many other states struggling to and eventually attaining independence. The world was fast becoming politically organised into nation states. New scientific and technological developments brought economic progress and made military strength available for the nation state to enforce its rule over the individual and eventually as a player in international politics to find a place 'out in the sun.' By the turn of the nineteenth century national newspapers, railways and later telephone lines spread modern communication systems throughout the state. State schools provided national education systems for the masses. Nationalism became a new faith.

Nationalism thrives upon the idealisation of the history, religion and language in a clearly defined, compact and common geographical area in which people boast of or struggle for complete political sovereignty. Highly emotional reactions generally lead to overrated considerations of purported national characteristics. This is generally complemented by hostility towards the others. This is close to the concept of ethnic membership where identity is built on a nucleus of values that give meaning to the individual's participation in the ethnic community. The basic principles of ethnicity also thrive on a common past that is represented by glorious events that add great dignity to the ethnic group. The ethnic group also formulates a set of norms that all members are expected to follow. When different ethnic groups belong to the same nation, unless conflict is managed, serious clashes can erupt, risking a widening of the conflict to related ethnicities abroad.

Membership of a nation (which is not necessarily nationalistic) adds security to the member but the way the balance is kept between duties and

responsibilities on one side and protection and promotion of the citizen's interests on the other will indicate the value of citizenship. Several states in Western Europe, especially those that had colonies before World War II, today include different races. They also have a relevant distribution of different religious membership. Today few countries in Western Europe can even claim to have one single language. The nation state has other problems to face. It has to struggle against the fragmentation of central power into smaller loci of power with such peripheral centres either demanding self-determination, therefore independent political structures such as the Catholics in Northern Ireland and the Basques in Spain, or else a more powerful autonomous status of their own such as the Lega Nord in Italy. An opposite trend to fragmentation is the impulse to join larger groups of nations. This means the necessary renunciation to previously held independent and sovereign rights to decide certain issues. This erosion of power is not simply the result of the official membership agreements, which able diplomats can ingeniously turn into an 'all-gain nobody-loses' agreement, but especially a consequence of the overall power of the greater states and the pressures of their economic systems on the less powerful states. Another economic threat comes from multinational organisations whose technological potential can take on what is prohibitive to most other nation states. Of course in all these developments there is a constant balancing exercise of concessions and gains within the evolving international scene.

In these circumstances, it is not surprising that nation states set out to use the educational system to create a belief in a national ethos as a means of uniting their members. Many programmes of citizenship education have been formulated with nationalism as their main (although sometimes latent) intent. But the history of the nation states has passed through dramatic events that include two world wars fought out by the major powers of the time. The disenchantment and disillusion, which arose after the wars, led to the creation of the United Nations Organisation. The disillusion arose because the militaristic aspect of these nation states had had the upper hand over other aspects of the nation. So immediately following the two world wars, nation states joined together to keep the

threat of another war at bay. This was a global approach to world peace structured over the major aims and specialised agencies of the United Nations Organisation. One of these principal aims was the idea that individuals were to be protected from the state (or any other powerful agency) by promoting and protecting individual human rights. The fact that today flagrant human rights abuses are still reported against states shows that the nation-state is still a relevant political organisation that has to be reckoned with. Many have criticised the United Nations throughout the years because most of the time it was ineffective to control abuse but at the same time it appears to be as indispensable as ever, both when world peace is threatened, but even more so when humanitarian crisis situations emerge before, during and after war. War remains the context where the most common abuses of human rights take place.

4.3 Values in Politics

Politics or political life is defined by Bernard Crick as "the creative conciliation of differing interests, whether interests are seen as primarily material or moral."[1] In a society there is a need for consensus comments Crick, because there is diversity. Crickian consensus, however, is not some ideological cement imposed on society. "It is not true that the greater the consensus, the more stable and just is the state."[2] Consensus becomes a necessary condition of order "only in the minimum sense of adherence to rules of procedure." Players have to agree to the rules of the game but such rules do not tell us who will win, or how the game will turn out to be. Gaetano Mosca on the other hand intends consensus as primarily subordination. One can almost measure the amount of consent by

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[1] Bernard Crick & Derek Heater *Essays on Political Education* (Surrey: Falmer, 1977) pp.34-5.

[2] B. Crick & D. Heater (1977), p.35.

investigating the extent to which, and the ardour with which, the ruled believe in the justification of rule by the leading class. Crickian consensus that enables conciliation becomes primarily consent to subordination in Mosca. Participation in elections does not mean that the people are directing or choosing their government; it simply means a ruling class that manipulates its way to power over another class, the ruled. Actually this is set in the more general framework of all political organisation, which as Mosca explains, is underlined by the gregarious characteristic of man.

"(It) is both voluntary and coercive at one and the same time, voluntary because it arises from the very nature of man, as was long ago noted by Aristotle, and coercive because it is a necessary fact, the human being finding himself unable to live otherwise. It is natural, therefore, and at the same time indispensable, that where there are men there should automatically be a society, and that when there is a society there should also be a state – that is to say, a minority that rules and a majority that is ruled by the ruling minority."[3]

One way of extending further our knowledge and understanding of politics is to outline some of its principal features. For some an ethical base is essential, for others just indicative. There are primary values such as justice or *dike* in Greek. Guthrie explains how the attempts to define 'justice' in the Platonic version of the ideal society, the 'Republic', lead finally to the acceptance of justice.

"(Justice is) *dikaiosyne*, the state of the man who follows *dike*", which is no more than 'minding your own business', doing the thing, or following the way, which is properly your own, and not mixing yourself up in the ways of other people and trying to do their jobs for them."[4]

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[3] Gaetano Mosca *The Ruling Class* translated by H. D. Kahn, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1939), p.96.

[4] W. K. C. Guthrie *The Greek Philosophers: From Thales to Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1967), p.7.

The strength of the Republic lay in different people ready to be aware of and accept their proper place in the clearly worked out divisions of the new State, determined by psychological reasons and personal capabilities. The philosophers on the basis of their wisdom and intellectual power will form the governing class and will take the decisions for the good of the rest. The warriors express their courage in their basic responsibility to defend the city upholding its stability and integrity. The workers concerned with the material aspects of life are responsible for the economic needs – agriculture, manufacturing and trade. The latter must be disciplined but will have the opportunity to acquire wealth through their work. The harmony of the different parts of this political system is reflected at the level of the individual person. A just man would be in a state of harmony when the different elements of character are balanced and organised leading the individual to act in ways that are considered just.

Plato discussed the just political community that inhabits the Republic and offers a reflection of this in terms of the individual. In political debate, the community and the individual have been separated by rival claims to the priority of one over the other. This separation was also tied with the debate over which primary value is to have priority: justice or freedom? In turn this has divided those who prefer individual rights against those who demand what are called group rights. There exist differing perspectives whereby the Western capitalist countries tend to focus individual liberties whereas in more ideologically socialist oriented states, society is the real source of rights and freedoms, and the group takes precedence over the individual. Social responsibility is preferred to individual privilege. Nevertheless this is an over-simplification since both categories are studied, addressed and implemented to some degree everywhere. We can take two extreme cases for an example. On one side, complete individual freedom for all is bound to be self-defeating since not even the strongest individual can guarantee his own security without some sort of social protection such as that provided by law. Similarly if we imagine a state power that is absolute, without freedom, the individuals

at the top are bound to be free to impose their own ideological concept of what is required by the State. In fact the two contrasting emphases – the individual and the collective – are only irreconcilable if we take their extreme perversions.

The freedom of the individual, his rights of conscience and free speech, and his rights to prompt and fair trial or his right to be governed by laws that are not arbitrary have been high points of political struggle in the West. But these rights and freedoms alone are not enough. The socialist emphasis was to substitute charity with the concept of justice, as legal or state action was seen to be better than voluntary action. This was part of the idea that society as represented by government has the duty of increasing welfare and redistributing wealth more justly. Without a minimum of 'social justice' distributed in economic, social and cultural rights (the group rights), the enjoyment of the classical freedom rights (individual rights) cannot be meaningful to all. The goodwill of persons, governments or the law is not enough. What is the use of the right of medical care if the distribution of doctors makes this unavailable, or the standard of living of the citizen does not permit him or her to take advantage of medical care when it is available? The right to work of a perennially unemployed person, or the freedom of expression of a child dying from starvation, show that where economic and social well-being are absent, social justice is absent. Minimum human needs must be satisfied. Many of these rights can only be realised through action by the state, which becomes arbiter in redressing injustice and inequality. They of course demand major investment and expenditure.

Freedom itself is essentially a social concept that has no significance outside society. It warrants a certain amount of diversity, whilst welfare promotes the conditions for stability, equality, fraternity, compassion, and responsibility. The balance between the two is the ideal. To realise in practice these ideals in some form or another one needs certain procedures and rules. These are guaranteed by the secondary values such as parliament and the constitution, devices for conciliating, resolving or at least

containing conflicts of interest. The parliamentary system and the constitution are therefore valuable only in so far as they help enhance the primary values, justice and freedom.[5]

4.3.1 Ethics in political conduct

Problems of ethics arise in politics when one observes the way professional politicians normally behave and then compares this with other professional categories. One notices some rather clear-cut distinctions. A teacher is expected to give a student preparing for an examination the full picture of his strengths and weaknesses, as well as the specific difficulties involved in particular examinations, and not talk only of the student's strong aspects. The need to give a full and balanced picture arises also when a doctor is with a patient preparing for surgery and a lawyer with a client who is thinking about going to court. On the other hand it is often the case that politicians put forward only one side of the argument, producing evidence only for one side of the case; in other words they are partial. There are also half-truths and downright lies. Can all this be justified – as some do – simply by stating that whereas ethics is about *ought*, politics deals with what *is*? What happens if the two are so much apart? Robert Brownhill and Patricia Smart outline three levels of politics: the market place, the executive decision-making, and the legislative level. In the market place they suggest, "everyone argues for their own interests"; at the executive level one attempts "to reconcile these interests and to make decisions under the loose heading of the perceived public interest"; whilst at the legislative level there is a conscious attempt to exact "law that is not

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[5] Freedom and welfare rights are two main branches of international bills of Human Rights. In the *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* promoted by the United Nations Organisation both are included but in *The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* of the Council of Europe, only the freedom rights are included. Welfare (and other) rights are part of a separate Charter.

partial but is applicable to everyone."[6] After going through the entire political process, law should not be partial or at least not blatantly so, or else it is bad law. The judiciary, besides interpreting and applying the law impartially, is there to keep (like the legislative body) a check on the executive.

This does not apply within a social vacuum, or in the clouds, but has to be worked out within particular cultural and historic traditions. This is another reason why for some the consideration that politics is partial is inevitable. It is meant for real people with real needs and interests. The overall public interest, the ultimate good of the people, is after all not alien to and cannot be divorced from such partial needs and interests. The question then becomes which needs and which interests? Who decides? Who pulls the strings? It appears that in Malta the political parties have a large say. Godfrey Pirotta suggests that since the setting up of Maltese political parties more than a century ago, these "have come to exercise enormous hold and influence over the Maltese" which one can assess in the very high turn-out at elections; the percentage of Maltese who "tended to see themselves as being close to a political party"; those actually members of a political party; and referring to a Carmel Tabone study, the incredible consideration (but not necessarily less true) that "just over 30% of the families interviewed openly admitted their readiness to obey their preferred political party always and in everything."[7] Whether increasing education levels and more affluence in the country can or has changed the situation in a substantial way still needs to be assessed.

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[6] Robert Brownhill & Patricia Smart (1989) *Political Education* (London: Routledge), p.114.

[7] Godfrey A. Pirotta, 'Maltese Political Parties and Political Modernization'. In, R.G. Sultana & G. Baldacchino (eds.) (1994). *Maltese Society: A Sociological Inquiry* Malta: Mireva. The reference to Tabone is: Carmel Tabone *The Secularisation of the Family in Changing Malta* (Malta: Dominican Publications: 1987).

4.4 Political Skills

To pursue one's interests in a democracy, one needs to develop the most effective skills and the strongest arguments since one has to speak in front of audiences. Although the methods applied in politics are controlled by rules and regulations, political expertise at times includes the knowledge and experience that one needs to establish how far one can manoeuvre and push in order to achieve one's goals, bending here and there the rules and regulations of the political game. Some skills are more important than others and become clear when one asks how members of parliament get things done. Basic to all activities is rational argument: deductive, inductive and dialectical forms of political argument. Politicians are expected to make the best use of arguments and evidence and present it effectively, with logical fallacies if necessary, whilst rhetoric may pull the crowds. Rhetoric helps the skilled interpreter to persuade or to move. Usually arguments persuade with the use of emotional terms and convincing definitions. These are part of a longer list of communication skills that include the art of debating, presentation of oral and also written arguments. The application of pressure within an organisation is a part of the system, with threats, bargaining and the formation of interest groups. Other general political skills such as the organisation of campaigns, getting support and understanding the function and conduct of meetings, are all useful skills.

4.5 Weaknesses

Representative democracy has been criticised for a number of reasons and not necessarily because people disagree with such a system of democracy but generally because there is a big divide between purported ideals and actual practice. There are oligarchies within political parties, parliament is weak to control the executive, the opposition party is similarly too weak to control the government and only within the ruling political party's ranks can you find, if you do, any effective opposition. If there are difficulties for professional politicians to be taken into consideration at

this level of political activity, then one can perhaps understand why common citizens may not be so willingly active. Isn't free speech a pointless exercise if no one heeds? Many point out how following the election, a vast inattention permeates government. Voters are supreme only when casting their ballots; after that, they will take a secondary and rather ineffective role. After the election they will not receive the same attention they received immediately before. They may stand a chance of receiving feedback from the elected representative if they are in his or her electoral district, or if the issue troubling them is minor. On their part politicians grumble how personal pleas from individuals do not allow them to concentrate on national issues. In the end what is worrying about the accountability of politicians to those they represent is that electors never have a right to overlook a representative's work whilst in office and are hardly ever invited to make decisions. Seen from another angle, government decisions are sometimes based on highly complex, technical jargon and most of the people are not knowledgeable enough to follow. To make it worse during election campaigns only comprehensive party packages are mentioned not single policies and so the right of choice is for one group of items about which we may have divided opinions.

In extreme cases and when feelings of discontent are widespread, frustration can make people take drastic action such as for example different forms of civil disobedience. But for these to be effective, they have to be massive. Besides their effects are indirect. So it is not a big surprise when one hears about the purported estrangement between the people and the government. For example in some of the longest-standing representative democracies in the Western world it becomes almost embarrassing to count how many participate actively to vote in elections. Moreover election day is a lottery that can render less than a money lottery. If your vote was a winning ticket because it supported the party that won the elections, you do not have any guarantee that you will get what you voted for during your preferred political party's eventual hold on power. There is a lot of thrust involved between electors and representatives, too much perhaps, when one considers that the electors do not really know the real motives or purposes of the people

offering themselves for office. Will they resist the corruption of power? The only answer is experience but that means most of the time having to bear it out till the next election. Ultimately the legislators may become a class with unlimited power, a caste, with a bureaucracy separating them from the rest of the people, a bureaucracy that turns out to be an obstacle and hurdle the citizen finds difficult to jump.

Representative democracies have other problems to face. If *demokratia* means rule by the people ultimately for the sake of the people, then one can ask who exactly are the people? What about those not included in the electoral process and left out? One needs to find out also whether the ultimate ends that are achieved are those of the people, or whether some faction is being privileged. A monarchy for example privileges the royal family; a fundamentalist state privileges the ruling clergy and the holy book of the religious tradition; a colonial government privileges the interests of the home country. These systems do not ignore the people they rule, but their ultimate end does not consist of the people's interests. Are decisions in systems that are considered democratic truly taken for the sake of the people? In the West there is the belief that citizens have a free say to decide together where their good and that of the community lies. These ideas are popular but how do these fit in a political reality where it can be argued that political parties are able to form rather than reflect the good of the people? Similarly is it ever possible to control the powerful influence of the government over the people especially in terms of the state-owned, or state-influenced media? This is all so strange since democratic politicians are in parliament only because the people placed them there.

4.5.1 Solutions

One effective solution for increased participation by the citizens is the referendum. This allows the power of the state to rest on the people as a whole, exercised directly through the votes of the citizens. Referenda can secure a more direct say by the citizens on a number of focal issues and thus

render the political system one truly representative. In some countries citizens can promote a referendum but of course they have to get enough signatures whilst in others only the government has the power to propose a referendum and therefore unless there is some pressure from outside the state or some powerful movement within, the ruling political party will not probably risk a referendum. Parliaments, in general, are wary of sharing out their institutional powers. And yet the difference between common citizens voting in a referendum and political representatives voting in parliament takes us back to the model of direct democracy in the ancient Athenian Assembly when contrasted with the representative system adopted today.

Another possible solution, which like the referendum intends to increase the democratic participation of the people, is the establishment of local government. This opens up further possible lines of action. Local government acting on a relatively restricted scale, can remedy some of the weaknesses of the over-arching system of a national representative government. It can acquire control over some of the activities and responsibilities of centralised national government. Decentralisation is in fact one of the strongest arguments for local politics. Physically the local government is closer to the community it is serving, with people who are from the place taking part and therefore are familiar with the specific or particular needs of the locality. There are various functions such a government can play: the streamlining of bureaucratic services previously offered from centralised locations is one; the embellishment of the physical environment is another.

What about development within the locality, the police or education services in the area, the right to collect taxes? What about the need to deal with the private sector service industries that demand a lot of attention from the point when the tenders are issued onwards? This is the case of the refuse collection service, for example but even in the provision of other services. Dealing with the state sector may not be easy either. A lack of flexibility in the provision of work may procure difficulties that the local political representatives may not find easy to confront. Part of the problem may be the difference between

lack of autonomy on one side and lack of accountability on the other. Always within a legally defined structure of powers and duties, the local politicians may either be autonomous (and raise direct taxes or other means such as user charges) or else they become extended branches of central government (surviving on grants). Accountability is necessary since spending, especially in times of fiscal austerity (but not only), must be efficient and economic. There has to be a value-for-money policy. This either-or situation can be harmonised into an interaction set-up where local and central political representatives discuss in committees or other bodies the work to be carried out and the resources needed.

Depending on the powers assumed by the local government one can in fact decide whether it is truly a 'government' or a 'council'. This does not mean that a name will make any difference (council members have to face electors and once elected have the right to decide a number of issues other people cannot) but if the law starves local government (or councils) from powers, than the efficacy of such an institution can only be measured within the limited areas of action provided by the law. Other difficulties include the cultural dimension that will undoubtedly have an impact on politics at the local level. In a context such as Malta, the polarisation of national politics once transferred to the local level can simply mean the official extension of polarisation to decisions that will effect the village and town. Once the local government is run by the parties, than unless some local representatives are found who can decide to work for their locality's interests rather than for some greater political project of their party, the purported dangers of polarisation will limit the possibilities of the good that such councils can provide by heightening the 'us and them' psychology, for example, further close to home. Besides, local government is still an approach reflecting what is essentially the basic structure of the national system, one of political representation. Unless there is active participation by the local people, the local system will possibly suffer from the same weaknesses as the national political structure.

The establishment of a local government or council alone of course is no guarantee that the locality will be any better than it was without such an

institution. Ultimately it will be the people who are active within the system that will make the system work properly. And even more so it will be the perceptions of the local people who will justify or not such an institution. These perceptions are in continuous evolution. Nowadays for example environmental problems are also put in the balance along with other considerations that have to be confronted before decisions are made. Finding ways to involve local people more in the process and the organisation of opinion surveys may somehow increase both the efficiency and the response of the local political authority.

Many today sincerely believe that the solution to the problems comes from a strong leader rather than a strong citizenry, and energies are applied in the search for a hero. This is where Gaetano Mosca's ideas become relevant as they over-rule all objections and justify a strong leadership class that guarantees a continuous flow and supply of politicians. The practical merits of this idea include the fact that most voters are not experts in political affairs and then they may not even be too interested in the political process anyway. So this is left in the hands of the experts. Ultimately, Mosca argues, democratic government is bound by elections on a regular basis. Those amongst the citizens who are interested in the process can always join pressure groups. Mosca talks about a class of political careerists, the members of the different political parties. From amongst these a few will take the leadership. One consequence of the political system being built on personalities rather than on issues has been to turn elections into popularity contests. It is politically profitable to have an attractive family and that you appear (or in fact are) fond of children. It can be argued that when these image projections are taken too much into consideration, politics is reduced to frivolity. The rise to power of Enrico Berlusconi and Tony Blair in Italy and the United Kingdom respectively, is closely linked to the media. The Italian was quite well experienced in media affairs. He was after all the largest competitor to the state media. Once he became prime minister, he was in a position to influence also the state sector. His self-projection is that of a successful entrepreneur, a star. In the UK, Blair is considered to be the vote-catcher through his manipulation of the media.

4.6 The media and the news

This leads us to consider the power of the media. The news, for example, is one of the most popular items in the media. This popularity increases the attention dedicated to it among those who are interested in the way the news is selected, edited and presented. Is it impartial or is it ideologically loaded? It is curious how practically all interested parties seem to find something to complain about, something to object to. Most probably bias is inevitable. However bias here does not mean that the one accused of bias has simply deviated from somebody else's personal views. What it means is that in a democracy where equal opportunities are given to all, balance and impartiality have to be safeguarded.

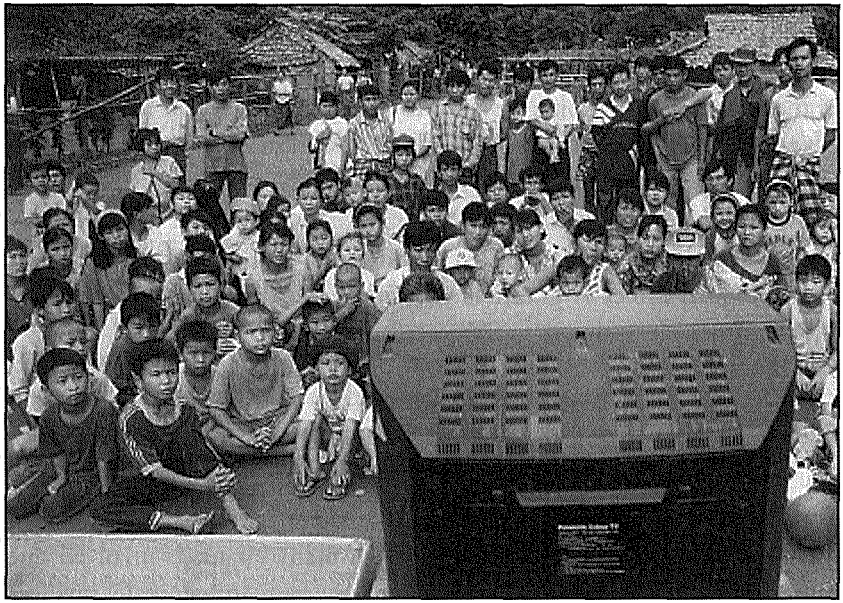
The time available on television is limited and the news with its approximately half an hour portion puts strong pressures on the editor to select. This is inevitable since the news items available take up more than the slot of time available. So selection is involved. Who selects? What is selected? Which are the words used and how are they presented? Which accompanying shots are chosen and how are they edited? The summary of the event and the scenes captured on film become the representation of the entire event. If some violence took place in what had been a rather peaceful occasion but a high proportion of the film covering he event was used to portray the violence (more captivating than other possible shots), at the end the occasion will appear to have been violent. It is also usually a very rapid, advertisement style information transmission. The psychological effect is great. Is this truly the setting for democratic enlightenment in terms of an educated public?

4.6.1 Balance and impartiality

One accusation against the media is that there is a hidden agenda – a conspiracy to spread one viewpoint. With many channels involved one can talk of plural views being shared but the argument generally involves

('Red Cross, Red Crescent', ICRC)

The power of the media.



('Developments', Department for International Development, U.K.)

distinction between the owners of the media. Some of the channels are already ideologically motivated and one does not expect them to be neutral (which does not mean that they exaggerate on one side either) but then there are media, written, audio and audiovisual, that one expects to be more sensitive to balance. These include for example the state financed media or those not linked to any political or religious ideology. In this case a reflection of the diversity of opinions is expected and the journalist is also expected to conceal his/her personal views (although there is much to say about this as well).

The question is that balance means putting forward all relevant views whilst impartiality means one has to be as neutral and objective as possible. On one side one faces what is sometimes the ridiculous situation where the timer is used to keep a quantitative balance. On the other side there is the impediment on a journalist to express a point of view, especially in a strong or 'aggressive' way. A combination of both may be a way out. After all in Western Europe, democracy is not traditionally meant to conceal ideas of various kinds. Discussion based on facts and using logical arguments are in general highly prized. In news terms this means the opening up and making accessible to all, a variety of interpretations that should follow the rather dry reading of dry, factual items of information. It also means facing the crucial political decision of whether we can allow any views including extremist ones to be aired. Will Satanist groups be allowed to explain themselves in a country that is overwhelmingly Catholic?

Impartiality is related to whether the media is there to raise questions or simply provide crude data to the audience. One other possibility is whether the media should supply answers. It is generally agreed that the journalists should be fair and accurate, neutral and factual, support their conclusions with evidence and use language that is not offensive. Newsworthiness and analysis of complex issues are also important. Media organisations face many other difficulties. It must be conceded that with all the surveys being carried out, and the league tables projected, and the harsh competition

for the available advertising money around, the media have to attract audiences. Media products are marketable. They must therefore engage interest. The commercial dimension of the whole 'business' keeps everything going. At what price? How can the media resist or at least negotiate the pressures from the companies advertising – the sources of badly-needed income? One can for example imagine the situation of a citizen who has a major complaint against a commercial company and who decides to write a general letter to the editor of a national newspaper or to the person responsible for the consumer protection page in the same paper. Assuming that the letter is within the bounds of the law and is of general interest, but the commercial company is a major source of advertising money, what will the decision be? To print the letter or not?

There does not seem to be any doubt that it is in any way even possible to conceive a complete system-wide impartiality, as against a more plausible impartiality in terms of the different agents – members of economic, political, religious even cultural interest groups struggling for attention within the system itself. In other words, the mass media and the various interested parties are supporting one grand ideology and not another. What kind of ideology? In western capitalism, the media is working for the promotion of such a dominant ideology. Here the reference is to a set of values that make up the underlying beliefs of such a way of life. The general capitalist 'picture' which can in simple (but not the only) terms be considered stable includes such concepts as marketability, freedom of choice, consumerism. This system may (and does) support diversity down the line. Diversity is tolerated as long as the overall ruling values remain. Left, right and centre can mix together and change into one another so long as the general picture remains the same. This ideology does not have to be blatantly exposed or actually strictly outlined, it may also have to give space to other visions of life – a programme where *spontaneous* charity by the people based on religious or other charitable motivations is inundated by commercials – but overall people (even the least politically articulate) know about it.

The grand political and economic capitalist ideology is considered stable more than ever before especially since the downfall of the communist challenge. There are those who claim and confirm that the true ideological battle is now within the system itself. The choice is not that of changing the system, the choice is between the alternatives within the system. As far as the ownership of the media is concerned, one part of society, members of the wealthy or dominant sector that manages the major economic resources not monopolised by the state, has a hold on the main media outlets. This is achieved in many ways including the power to promote advertising or the power to nominate friends, amongst others, to the top executive chairs of the media organizations. This means opening up the hegemonic umbrella either directly through ownership or through the control of the executives.

4.6.2 Globalisation and the media

Globalisation is closely associated with the theme of media ownership. The global approach of giant media corporations has lent a lot of attention toward the 'americanisation' of the international media. Will the global village become an American village? And once this is widened to include the western world, the most advanced trading and industrialised nations in the world, does it relay the basic underlying message of Francis Fukuyama when he talks about the end of history? Have we arrived at the same situation as that reached previously by the Christians when during the Middle Ages they thought society had reached the end of the struggle, since European society was by then Christian? Where further could one hope to go? With American cultural, economic, military leadership we could all live as one community and conflicts – or sources of conflict – will be eliminated. The American dream is realised by all, just as in a number of aspects, the 'romanisation' or 'latinisation' of the Mediterranean and beyond had been carried out at the time of the ancient Imperial days. If the global village is to be American, then the international media has to be American as well. When one examines the cultural impact of

'americanisation' it can be observed how the propagation of new information technologies (such as the Internet) is adopted and channelled – despite resistance – to support a certain cultural dominance, a type of cultural neo-imperialism.

"Someone, somewhere, is watching a Hollywood film at every minute of the day and night," declares David Morley. American movies have become "the most desired commodity in the world."[8] But then the antagonism to such a worldwide hegemony can come in unexpected ways. A number of studies mentioned by Morley suggest how the massive American media presence actually antagonised people belonging to different cultures watching American productions. Some supported the anti-American side in the movie or simply re-interpreted the theme from a totally different angle than the one the producers intended.[9] The way the Red Indians, the Nazi soldiers, the Vietnamese resistance fighters have been projected is indicative of the intentions referred to here. But simplifying the argument, what it all amounts to is the conviction that there is no pre-determined result to media barrage not even the mounting up of hate campaigns. This also means we have to contextualise the media in a wider and active social setting. Socialisation does not work only through the mass media – family, peers, school, law, workplace, Church, and others also manifest their influence. And their ideal end product is not always the same – not even complementary to the rest. There is a diversified socio-cultural environment at the other end of media transmission even if it is called Hollywood. We cannot leave one side of the bargain out: the people. People are not empty vessels waiting to be filled in. They all have their expectations, their values and idiosyncrasies.

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[8] Morley, David 'Postmodernism: The highest stage of cultural imperialism?' In, Mark Perryman (ed.) *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1994), p.138.

[9] David Morley (1994), check notes 25, 26, and 27 on page 155.

4.6.3 Global market

The arguments so far have dealt with the possibility provided by international media to spread the 'message', something that in the past demanded the use of hordes of soldiers, priests, artists, and others. We have also referred to potential resistance to this message. The development of this type of media is also closely linked to the military sector. The links between war and technology do indeed work on a number of levels and areas of social life and they can help us to understand the link between globalisation and the media. Since the end of World War II, but most especially after the decline of Soviet power, the American military has become a sort of unofficial world police force. This demands flexibility, rapidity and the need to be connected. The technologists have always been as vital and critical in political and military strategy as other elements such as the warriors. Efficient communication systems have had to be set up. Eventually the transfer of military technology to civil use followed, a common phenomenon in the history of technology, which has reaped benefits in global communications.[10]

Our very brief discussion about communications technology has referred to it as a medium for military and civil purposes. In due course it became a commodity and it followed another well-trodden path, that of traded goods. "The public which made up the market for mass-produced goods also constituted the audience for new mass media."[11] Commodities demand a market, and once the aim is to make the market 'global', it means penetrating into other people's garden. The fact that many of the large companies are American and the world is their market signifies that these companies sometimes have to bypass 'hostile' national governments

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[10] The science and technology section in the SOK syllabus in the second year of the course develops further this theme.

[11] Robert Bud et al, *Inventing the Modern World: Technology since 1750* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2000), p.150.

by reaching the people of other countries first. Globalisation also means CNN. This and other American channels transmit around the world, reaching out to a global audience. Therefore markets have to be open and free. It means that such companies will promote freedom of information on a global scale against attempts at regulation by national governments. Thus national boundaries are undermined. Such 'free market' policies in the world economy have too often meant that the more powerful economies will dominate. Is this just? However can one even entertain a discussion about justice in world economy?

The World Trade Organisation acts on a global scale and is meant to promote the liberalisation of world trade for the benefit of all. But the USA still adopts protectionist measures to defend its economy. The USA is not alone of course and it has not been the first to adopt such measures. The problem in discussing justice in world economics is that unlike justice in national politics, there is no democratic mandate within the spheres of world economy. Democracy is really a nationwide system with its self-imposed rules, and the global economy does not have a similar system of rules. Regulation within the field has only been tentative. The concerns of the politician are those of the communities that he serves and from which he ultimately gets the votes; the multinational company executives are interested in the pockets of the shareholders. Meanwhile the WTO has been regularly criticised because it neither discusses the backlash on the workers of the decisions taken nor the environmental consequences of such decisions, attracting against it so many international non-governmental organisations whenever major meetings are held.

4.7 Global village

The way many people '*imag*-ine' territory or space has changed. When geographical distance is measured in time and the time factor undergoes acceleration, space is compressed. Communication is so rapid today that space is sometimes not only compressed but also practically annihilated.

The development of rapid transportation and communication systems goes back in time but in the industrial age the railway and the steamship line already promised much better things to come. These new technologies brought and still bring radical shifts in human existence including the belief in a global village. These transformations lead us to query the nature of the global village. What should we understand when we declare we are living in a global village? It definitely does not mean that we are all equal, because we are not. Rio de Janeiro is not New York, Calcutta is not London. There are people who are living in highly localised contexts, not only in rural India but also in the very heart of the western metropolis where we find people whose horizons are extremely limited. How can one speak of a global village there? On the other hand some people are truly expanding their horizons. The cultural debate however is rather more widespread: is it better (therefore a question of values) that certain non-western communities stick to their indigenous culture, in a way protect their 'culture' or would it be better for them to follow those who may appear to be better off by relinquishing present identities. Is there another way? Could the transformation come organically from within and not from outside? These are the kind of questions that all communities must pose themselves and work on using all the possible resources they can muster in order to face the 'global' challenge.

4.8 European integration

Many have experienced the unthinkable horror displayed by the images from World War II of the Jewish holocaust (but not only they suffered) and the atom bomb mushroom cloud in Japan. What had initially been a political project of fascist and Nazi domination of Europe, ended up with a divided Germany due to the absence of anyone with the authority of government and with whom to conclude a treaty. This was symbolised by the partitioning of Berlin in Zones controlled by the victors. Austria was evacuated and neutralised in 1955. Resistance movements were organised during the war, and some followed up their military activities

during the war with post-war political programmes such as in Yugoslavia and Albania. Russia controlled half the Continent having annexed the Baltic States of Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, and extended frontiers with Finland, Eastern Poland, and northern East Prussia, amongst others. The Russians installed communist regimes in East Germany, Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria whilst Czechoslovakia was taken over by an internal communist coup in 1948.

The general conclusions amongst others were that Western Europe was exhausted and more sharply divided than before. Added to this was the realisation that the defeat of Japan, Germany and Italy during the war had partly followed from underrating the power, and will to resist, of the USA. It was now clear how the latter had managed to eclipse the old continent as the world power-centre. Of more immediate concern was the realisation that Western European countries, victors and defeated alike, were unable to pay for vital imports. The USA and Russia emerged as the only remaining great powers and whilst Stalin used the victory to spread Communism worldwide, the USA exported capitalism in the non-Communist West, which depended on US aid for recovery.

The Marshall Aid announced in 1947, and made effective in 1948, provided $13,150 million in grants and credits, offered to negotiate food, stock-feed, fertilisers, raw materials, and capital equipment, to all states willing to collaborate in an internationally coordinated economic recovery, but also intended to halt economic collapse in the West which might have helped spread communism there as well.[12] It also helped the Americans to maintain a high level of exports (in other words support a US boom) resulting from the wartime doubling of production and rising living standards in the US. The communist states were not allowed to join

[12] The website *http://www.marshallfoundation.org/about_gcm/marshall_plan.htm* provides the official view.

making it explicit that politics and economics shared a common understanding at the time and also that the only common interest between Russia and the USA had been the removal of the Japanese and German threat.

The Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) was set up to allocate the Marshall Aid, but also to liberalise trade amongst the countries of Western Europe by reducing tariffs and exchange controls. These changes brought phased removals of internal tariffs amongst the members substituted by a common external tariff system with the outside world. This was up to a certain extent the recreation on a European scale of what had led to the unification of Germany and Italy in the previous century. Italy had been a politically divided land with foreign authoritarian rule in Lombardy and Venetia, autocratic rule in Piedmont and Sardinia, outright opposition to any liberal reform in the papal states, and an economically and socially backward South resting on networks built around systematic corruption. The small middle class in the various regions had to face customs barriers, inefficient governments, even coinage and measures that were different from one state to another. Similarly divided, Germany was a confederation of kingdoms, duchies, principalities and free cities. The first significant and concrete sign of German unity was promoted by the Prussians in terms of the Zollverein, a customs union. The Zollverein promoted economic development and boosted the influence of Prussia to the detriment of its major contender, Austria which, because politics will never fully abdicate the economic sphere, was excluded. In Italy Cavour, the prime minister of Piedmont inaugurated railway building, and supervised credit facilities and lowered tariffs, at the same time sequestrating church property. Revenues increased. When the South of Italy had to be annexed because of Garibaldi's surprise invasion, Piedmont was stuck with a poor, illiterate and basically conquered territory whose economy depended highly on protective tariffs.

The study of the role of the bourgeoisie is central in order to understand these developments – a new economic reality that was evolving in

continental Europe. The middle class was in favour of stable government, which meant developing national power. This power promoted trade and opened up foreign markets. This was one of the reasons (for certain researchers, *the* reason) why the advanced capitalist countries had become empires in the first place. The industrial bourgeoisie had to buy raw materials for the factory at low prices, keep the wages low, and create supply workers by absorbing more people from the rural population. The colonised territories provided cheap labour, a focus for investment, a market for goods, and supplies of raw material. This allowed the ruling home countries to increase wages internally, creating higher standards of living and more demand at home. The colonised in return lost control of the most valuable assets they could provide, as resources were transferred to the use of capitalist interests pertaining to the colonial rulers. A counter argument suggests that this colonial development meant capitalist investment in the colonised lands otherwise there may not have been any investment at all in these lands. The project of world dominance built on colonies however had ended in the tragic events of the two world wars. The European Economic Community was an attempt to get back on one's feet.

We have already commented how in the process of European integration in the post war phase, removal of tariffs had been a pioneering measure, just as it had been for Germany especially, but also Italy. The OEEC was followed by moves towards a more extensive economic integration or union.[13] By 1948, Benelux became a reality with Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg setting up a customs union. The treaty of

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[13] Dani Rodrik, Rafiq Hariri Professor of International Political Economy in Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government talks about the four myths of the idea that international economic integration means the salvation of the developing world. His assumptions are that there is "no single model of what a global economy should look like" and secondly that the idea that sets up "international trade and investment as the end goal to which everything else must adjust" has made a fetish

the European Coal and Steel Community of 1951 was ratified by 1952 aiming at a common market and a common policy regarding coal, steel and iron. It included the Benelux countries, France, West Germany and Italy. Eventually the Common Market/European Economic Community, following the Treaty of Rome in 1957, became effective in 1958.

A levelling-up of labour conditions resulted. There was an increase in the economic and political power of the organised working class, with enlarged voting strength and relative as well as absolute improvements in incomes, as the previous middle-class economic privileges were now extended to the working class. Inflation reduced the fixed incomes and money savings of the less well-organised middle-class, with a relative reduction in earnings. Equality of opportunity in education further eroded class distinctions as the welfare state was extended. States increased their control of the economy, as evident in the nationalisation of certain sectors of the economy. Provisions were made for political and economic equality (equal

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out of international trade. The first myth is that "free trade is the surest way to national prosperity", the second myth is that "direct foreign investment in particular is a key to national economic development," thirdly free capital flows allocate resources around the globe" and finally that "international financial markets exert useful discipline on national monetary and fiscal policies." The problem is that these false myths refuse to recognise the reality of the national setting. Free markets says Rodrik first need to be regulated such as the antitrust authority even in the freest national markets, secondly they need stability which can only be given by such institutions as the Central Bank (or similar institution), and thirdly they need to be provided with "safety nets and social insurance." The way ahead is to try and set up "different brands of national capitalism to co-exist side by side" without losing national autonomy and keeping internal social arrangements and at the same time going for whatever an integrated economy can offer. The final solution is "a happy medium between those two."
Dani Rodrik 'Social Implications of a Global Economy' address delivered at Colorado College 06.02.1999 part of Colorado College's 125th Anniversary Symposium: Cultures in the 21st Century. In, www2.coloradocollege.edu/Academics/Anniversary/Transcripts/RodrikTXT.htm.

pay for the same employment) of men and women. The right to vote had already been acquired in the early 1920's in Germany and Britain, but this was also granted in the early 1940's in France, Italy and Belgium. By 1970, Western Europe had nearly trebled its 1939 wealth, and this intensified social changes.

Full economic unity and a political federalist union were in the pipeline. Meanwhile Euratom was established for a common development of atomic energy. Britain, Denmark and Ireland joined the six members of the EEC in 1973. 1981 brought Greece to the fold, 1986 Spain and Portugal, 1995 Austria, Finland and Sweden. More countries will eventually apply and join, creating important structural difficulties because of such an expansion. By 1992 the Maastricht Treaty was signed renaming the organisation more appropriately as European Union. The official launching of the euro as a common currency in 1999 furthered the common interests of the union. What remains to be discussed fully is the political role of the EU, not only in terms of the internal organisation of the Union, including the European Parliament structure – but also in terms of foreign policy with regards to the rest of the world. Both in terms of the political link between the citizens and the EU superstructure as well as the new role the same superstructure must play in global terms, procedures have to be worked out. The place for the individual in such a large structure is not a simple matter to solve. The EU citizen for example may have to vote for a local city council, the new national parliament and the national representatives in the European Parliament in relatively close succession. The experience of another European organisation – the Council of Europe – as far as the mechanisms of individual access to the European Commission of Human Rights and the Court as well as the processes they have evolved can serve to highlight strengths and weaknesses of individual participation. The story we get is that it will not be easy to have an efficient system but it can work. Otherwise people will be alienated from the ruling structures. The present consideration is that the resolution to succeed has already broken down national borders and fused national markets.

4.9 Participation

Change is the result of many possibilities. It does not seem possible however that it will ever come from alienation. Effective participation by the people in decision-making or consultation processes that will have an impact on their life should break through the psychology of passive acceptance. Participation is a fashionable political term. Like all fashion we must be careful whether it is a genuine solution to certain problems of modern democracy. We must also consider that meaningful participation (as we have seen) is a big problem at the European level, but it does not seem to be that much easier on a national scale. First of all we have to decide *why* participation. More precisely does participation mean bridging the gap between political authority and citizenry? If the gap that separates the elected representatives from the electorate remains then it will always be more difficult to shift or redistribute political power in novel ways. Any proposed changes from the top will simply be considered a sham and the gap remains. This gap between rulers and ruled is not a new phenomenon. In all societies there appear two classes of people says Gaetano Mosca, "a minority of influential persons" who manage public affairs, and a majority that "willingly or unwillingly accepts."[14] Thucydides confirmed this in his remarks about the role played by demagogues in the robust Athenian Assembly. Aristotle concluded in his study of Greek political systems that there was always one person or more who influenced the others.

So why go through all the trouble of supporting participation? In modern representative democracies it is expected that the majority (less than the ideal all) of the citizens can participate, and in fact ought to participate. The justifications for participation are many and include a number of principles such as respecting the right of those directly affected to have a

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[14] Gaetano Mosca (1939), p.50.

say especially when their immediate or long-term future might be affected by such decisions. Psychologically it ought to be more beneficial if one is active rather than passive. The feeling that one contributes something valuable is a positive motivator. Participation skills can be self-sustaining – the more you are involved, the more you want to be there where it matters. Besides you accumulate experiences and add to your social skills. Finally when one participates in a decision-making process, s/he is predisposed to fight more forcefully for the enforcement of those decisions. This is not a democracy for the professional politician. The value of democratic participation can become an even more relevant concept when placed within a broader context by extending it to imply not only a form of government but also a way of life in which human relationships and personality development are also considered. Basically this means preparing for democracy by practising democracy within the family, the workplace and elsewhere.

Many have written about democratic schools. If we assume that schools are institutions meant to prepare the younger generation for the future then it should not be too difficult to accept that the future does not only include a job and the qualifying certificates, plus the skills and knowledge that go with it, but it also includes being a citizen with civic rights and responsibilities. Once one of the aims of education is to prepare for future citizenship then we have to study how and what schools can do about it. Does it make sense to talk about democratic schools? What are they? Who decides within their walls? The most competent participants, that is the professionally trained, or else those directly involved – the mature students or the parents as their representatives? We have to keep in mind that the age differences between children and teachers make democracy in schools a bit more complex than elsewhere. Parental representation can help to solve the difficulty but there will be thorny issues to settle just the same. Democratic schools are tied in with externally imposed controls such as the Education Act, the Curriculum, syllabi, codes of ethics, and so on, and yet there are internal policy decisions that can allow or even profit from internal participation. What about school policies that rule out

unacceptable prejudice or discrimination inside the school walls? In general how are decisions taken, unilaterally or through consultation? Political knowledge is relatively easy to teach and learn but attitudes and skills are not. Of course problems will crop up all the time but nobody suggests democracy is problem free. Is it practicable? Democratic consultation demands time, is it available? Is it ultimately desirable, or will teachers and school administrators lose essential rights? Perhaps they know best? The problem posed by Plato of the difference in quality between decisions taken by experts and decisions taken by the rest is opened all over again. The rest are the amateurs, the non-professionals, those who do something because they love doing it. But they are also the ones who have received no special training in the activity undertaken. The dilemma remains.

Chapter 5

The relationship between individuals in a society – Law

5.1 The rule of law

To understand the rule of law it may be helpful to begin with a brief examination of codes establishing rules of conduct. The law is a code of conduct binding on all people living within a particular jurisdiction. Legal codes are written down but other codes are not. They are a common fact of life since we fall within the influence of a number of them such as the moral code of the family, or that of the religious faith to which we belong. These codes establish rules that tend to regulate some aspect of our behaviour. Within any group of people there is a system of rules governing their conduct. Various sorts of rules may be involved but some are meant to regulate or direct the conduct of the members by specifying what they must do (prescriptions), others what they are forbidden to do (prohibitions). Any prescription or prohibition is a constraint on those over whom it applies by restricting their range and thus choice of options available. There is a prescription to pay taxes just as we are prohibited from breaking into other people's property. Should an act be explicitly required than it is prescribed, but in general it is prohibitions that are highly specific. If any action is not specifically prohibited then it is to be

presumed it is permitted. Smoking in a restaurant will go on unless it is ruled out, specifically prohibited.

Discussing rule systems, L.Wayne Sumner relies on the fundamental conception that without them everything would be implicitly permitted so "the primary function of such systems is to impose constraints on this condition of unlimited permissiveness."[1] A study of rule systems will make evident that they are a mix of restrictions and permissions. But there are other features of rules including the awareness that they are necessary. They are also connected with power and authority. It is important to know how one goes about to get rules changed. It is also to be kept in mind that rules cannot be divorced from questions regarding whether they are to be considered just or not. The Rule of Law, for example, depends a lot on what the people subjected to the laws and their enforcement believe about them. In other words it is important that people accept that a specific law is there to regulate their life in terms agreeing with specific social standards and which, when everything is considered, they deem basic to their own overall well-being. Otherwise there will be enforcement problems.

Once the legislative body creates laws, and the judicial body interprets and applies legal rules, they acquire three features. First, such rules concerning the state are comprehensive since in principle at least (though in practice it is not the case), the state has the authority to regulate any activity of those subject to its jurisdiction and no aspect is guaranteed immunity from state laws unless for example some bill of rights over-rules or restricts these state powers. From the above it follows that the state whilst assuming such widespread authority must claim it in order to regulate activities of other

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[1] L. W. Sumner *The Moral Foundations of Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), p.23. Sumner provides an effective structure to develop the theme of rights and the rule of law.

institutions operating within its jurisdiction. Secondly, within the legal limits of the state, rules are compulsory. This emerges more clearly when the geographical nature of the state is kept in mind. Unlike most other institutions, the boundaries of a state, and thus also the limits of its jurisdiction, are spatial. Within its boundary the state claims authority to regulate activities of anyone there, both citizens and aliens. The third feature refers to sanctions. Generally sanctions of state legal rules can be more severe, forceful and violent than sanctions originating in other non-state rules systems.

5.2 Rights

Sumner indicates one useful tool to study the Rule of Law: rights.[2] There are four aspects to a broad and comprehensive understanding of a right. First there is the content of a right, referring to whatever it is a right to. The right to education means basically that whatever goes on in any educational institution covered by the law must somehow lead to the acquisition of 'something' that can be called an education. In a way this will be covered by more specific indications of the general (and more detailed) expectations of a particular education experience. Secondly there is the scope of a right, which establishes the subjects of the right, in other words, those who hold it (in our case the students), and the objects of the right, those against whom it is held (in education the providers of this service). Another dimension is their strength. There are important and less important rights. And should rights conflict, then we need to know which of the competitors has priority. The centrality of rights is connected in fact to the realisation that there is hardly any area in which rights are not claimed by at least one side of a controversial debate, generally by both. Thus if the debate is for example about the right of parents with enough

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[2] L. W. Sumner (1989), Preface.

money in their hands to choose their children's schools, they face competition from the right of others not to be disadvantaged by second-class state schooling. Thus in the case of domestic politics, such as education, rights are routinely invoked on both sides of most controversies. The questions posed are many. How does one decide which rights are genuine and which are not? Which deserve to be taken seriously and which should not even be considered? And in cases in which there seems to be a genuine right on each side of an issue, which one deserves to be chosen? Later we will mention human rights and these are basic and fundamental rights when compared with others.

5.3 Legal Rights

Legal rights are created, cultivated, and extinguished by human beings. The content of legal rights, consisting of various decisions, may vary widely from one place to another, and of course they do. In any situation people decide whether to comply and accept or not these legal rights and altogether such decisions create general practices. A general compliance leads to mutual reinforcement, if not it will create tension in rule acceptance. In fact a rule's efficacy can be measured by the degree to which the people act in accordance with it. As far as legal rights are concerned, since an entire legal system is a complex matter, there are different levels to test or check efficacy. One of these is *conformity* to a rule that imposes a duty. It is only required that I do what the rule directs and any reasons for my acting in conformity to a rule are quite irrelevant. As long as there is no widespread nonconformity the rule is considered efficacious. *Compliance* is a qualification of conformity. If I conform to the rule I am at least in part recognising that the rule applies to me and this recognition is part of the motivation for my conformity. Compliance requires conformity for a good reason, thus non-compliance can either be nonconformity or conformity for the wrong reason. *Acceptance* is the third criterion and a further strengthening of compliance. When I accept I not only comply, or comply for the right reason, but I also at least in part

approve and support it. In other words I am favourably disposed toward the rule, and regard it as reasonable or legitimate. Any non-conformity to the rule will be highly criticised. This is where Socrates becomes a model citizen when in **Crito** he not only conforms or complies but also actually accepts the legitimacy of the sentence of the Athenian court when he supports it even if it will lead to his execution.

5.4 Human Rights and the post-war years

We have mentioned already that rights are so pervasive that many times both sides of an argument use them. Conflicting interest groups may be opposed on many decisions to be made but they will agree that rights are indispensable in political debate. When one has a right to some service or good it does not mean that "it would be nice or generous or noble of others to give it to me; it is rather to say that they are obliged to do so, that it would be unfair or unjust of them not to, that I am entitled to expect or demand it of them, and so on."[3] How to decide for one and not the other when rights clash? One answer is that some rights are more powerful than others and so when they clash they are given more weight. Human rights are extremely powerful rights.

The term human rights has found its way into daily vocabulary since the Second World War.[4] This interest must certainly be interpreted as a reaction to the historical atrocities occurring during the war period. The brutality of the conflict and the over fifty million dead left devastating wounds in humanity. There was also the massive destruction at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also the ruthless exploitation for war purposes of colonised and conquered peoples (including their resources) through

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[3] L. W. Sumner (1989), p.8.

[4] Before in the western tradition they were referred to as the Rights of Man.

conscriptions, deportations or forced labour. Such wounds took long to heal and some never did. By force of circumstances, the newly constituted United Nations Organisation was plunged into its work. The fifty-six members then forming part of this organisation reacted immediately by promulgating the treaty that was to be the constituent statute of the United Nations. Indeed the war was coming to an end when the Charter of the UN, which was the first ever treaty to deal extensively with Human Rights, was signed on June 26, 1945. Human Rights figured prominently. The Charter signified that human rights protection became one of the main interests of the new organisation and had to be considered a matter of international concern. The member states pledged to take joint and separate action for the observance of human rights. When new states join the UN it is assumed they abide by the Charter and so are responsible for human rights protection and promotion.

Two main bodies of the United Nations organisation are the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Council today has 15 members – five permanent members that enjoy the veto (Russia, USA, China, France and the United Kingdom) and 10 elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. The members of the General Assembly meet annually or when specifically called. Inevitably the UN reflects rather than overrides world divisions. Earlier on this meant the continued use of the veto by the Cold War enemies and anti-European hostility amongst the colonies that became independent in the post-war phase. Meanwhile the previously imperialist countries – France, Holland, Belgium, Italy, joined by others – readjusted to a more Europe-centred role giving further impetus to enlarged Western European co-operation.

The European Empires were practically all liquidated in Asia and Africa for a number of reasons including post-war weakness, the hostility of the USA and the USSR, the loss of international prestige of the West, local nationalist movements in the colonised territories, and the decision of Canada, Australia, and New Zealand to rely more on US protection rather than that provided by the British. The African example is clear. In 1939

almost all Africa was under European control, but by 1969 almost all those colonies were independent.[5] Only Portugal hung on to the colonies. Even in Asia, new independent states were set up after the dissolution of the empires. India, Indonesia, Indo-China, Malaya, Singapore, North Borneo, Aden shed their colonial status. These ex-colonies were faced with one major problem: what to do next? In Asia attempts at democratisation survived in extreme difficulty only in India, the Philippines and Malaysia but not elsewhere. Difficulties included poverty and population pressure, cries for autocratic rule and radical remedies, lack of democratic experience, the gulf between a westernised elite and the illiterate masses, and also the anti-capitalist and anti-colonialist appeal of Communist ideology. In Africa other problems surfaced. Where colonial frontiers remained, the new independent states contained multi-ethnic societies, their economies could not catch up with demographic rise, dependence on crop exportation did not guarantee a stable income since crop returns fluctuated due to world market prices, and there was the paradoxical situation of education systems that rather than catering for a more practical application in the agricultural villages, catered for urban officials thus creating an educated unemployed class because of the decrease in the recruitment of civil servants after independence.

However because of the Cold War between the communist Soviet Union and capitalist USA, most ex colonies were in a position to *sell* their support or neutrality to the two blocs and thus gain financial aid. The Cold War was a result of the clash of ideologies between the Warsaw Pact with Soviet political control over Eastern Europe granting the Soviets the right to maintain armies in Hungary and Rumania on one side and the NATO

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[5] This created a new category within human rights in the West, the 'group' right to self-determination. Previously the main emphasis had been on rights of the individual. The argument is however more complex since amongst other claims, traditional individual human rights were seen by some as promoting deep down 'group' rights, those of the middle class rather than those of other classes in society.

Pact countries including the United Kingdom, France, the Benelux countries, the US, Canada, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Portugal, Iceland, Greece and Turkey (in 1952) and West Germany (in 1955) on the other. Meanwhile because of the fall of Communism the Cold War is no longer a 'threat' to humanity, and yet other members are joining NATO including the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, previously under communist regimes.[6]

During the post-war phase, the Cold War was as real in its global impact as the wars it followed. The results were that the Russians built an atomic arsenal for war. The possibility of world destruction on a planetary scale was no longer a nightmare but a potential possibility as the Cuba crisis between the US and the USSR showed. It was clear that world power had passed to the two super-powers, the USSR and USA, with China and its colossal population, double that of the two other powers combined, undergoing rapid industrialisation and considered a rising power. War erupted in South Korea after the invasion by the Communist North Korean regime. The UN intervened to defend the South but in reality 90% of the troops were actually Americans. Chinese troops backed the North. Today Korea is still divided. Vietnam was also divided after the French debacle and withdrawal, but the USA intervened to back the South and this was followed by a protracted war. In the Middle East the new state of Israel was supported by the USA, whilst the Russians supported the Arab countries. Repeated wars and nationalist coups in Egypt, Libya and Iraq were the result. Castro seized power in Cuba in 1959 leading to the already-mentioned possibility of nuclear confrontation between the

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[6] The Czech Republic was an offshoot of the previous Czechoslovakia. Slovakia was now another independent state. This was part of the transformations at various levels going through the Eastern European countries. Another political division at state level that took place within the communist region – but which was much more bloody than in Czechoslovakia – was the case of Yugoslavia.

USA and Russia after President Kennedy ordered a naval blockade of the island and the Russians seemed ready to force the blockade. The1956 Hungarian revolt and 1968 Czechoslovakian uprising, based amongst others on claims of human rights infringements, were crushed by the Russian army. Meanwhile in 1961 East Germany built the Berlin Wall to physically prevent the refugee flow to the West-controlled half of the city. About 900,000 had migrated from 1957 to 1961.

The situation in the last decades of the twentieth century changed. What happened in the Soviet Union was to influence the rest of the world. The communist countries in Europe were finding it difficult to maintain even a moderate growth rate despite the fiddling with official data. The Polish workers' resistance became a model to follow or at least inspire. The Soviet economy committed to finance a military arsenal that had to protect the communists from American warheads, besides sustaining commitments to allies around the world, could not rely on a strong economy to sustain the pressure. The USSR was also committed to improve the standard of life of the workers and their families and go for technological innovation. But consumer goods were a luxury. When Mikhail Gorbachev became secretary general of the Communist Party in the USSR the difficulties became public. The party itself was a beehive for careerists. Not only did he withdraw troops from Afghanistan and not intervene when the Americans bombed Libya, but he was in a position to actually promote two objectives that could serve for a new political and economic order: glasnost and perestroika, openness and restructuring.

This seemed to provide clear-cut indications of what was to follow. The decline and eventual end of communist governments along with the apartheid regime in South Africa seemed to indicate a better world for all. At least that was the message one got from the major media which building on the developments of global communication and boosted by new commercial breakthroughs that brought such technology to the common man, reflected a positive note in international politics. The extent and the pace of information exchange were incredible when compared to a few

years back. On the international political level the preaching of the need for more effective worldwide human rights protection gathered pace and humanitarian aid during and following the break of war became a worldwide concern (the UN seemed to fare much better at this than its actual prevention). The monument in Birzebbugia reminds us of the Gorbachev and Bush summit in 1989 on a warship in Marsaxlokk Bay, a summit that was an important part of the negotiations meant to end officially the Cold War between Russia and the USA. But it was a rough sea at the time.

International politics seems to be inevitably and permanently concerned with crises. Ethnicity, just as religious identity, is still an excuse for attempted genocide. Religious fundamentalism is still powerful enough to render itself visible in the most dramatic scenes of suicide bombing. But Islam is not just bombs. It is a religion that has put up arguably the most powerful and remarkable resistance to the secularisation of the modern world understood as the product of western civilisation. Islam is strong enough to withstand competing power sources and ideologies such as state power and western ideas of human rights freedoms, and at the same time maintain a widespread popular appeal. International politics is also concerned with ecological devastation, overpopulation, increase in the rich – poor divide in the world, and others. The list to break down any optimist is there for anyone to read. We can of course try to see through the immediate troubling images provided by the media, the mass of information supplied by the global sources of information and check whether we can see deeper causes for the ongoing events and possible future scenarios. That is the story of today, interpreted in so many ways, including an interpretation of the signs of the present as though it was part of a linear progress in history towards better things to come. Others see the events of today as if in some way they repeat or recreate recorded historical phenomena. Overall this seems to imply a more cyclical approach to the study of history. Others do not just observe and analyse but try as much as they can to take in any way possible an active part in the events.

5.5 The Text of *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

Adopted and proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10th December 1948.

PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law,

Whereas it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,

Whereas Member States have pledged themselves to achieve, in co-operation with the United Nations, the promotion of universal respect for and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1.
All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.
Article 2.
Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.
Article 3.
Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.
Article 4.
No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.
Article 5.
No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
Article 6.
Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.
Article 7.
All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.
Article 8.
Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.
Article 9.
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.
Article 10.
Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11.
(1) Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence.
(2) No one shall be held guilty of any penal offence on account of any act or omission which did not constitute a penal offence, under national or international law, at the time when it was committed. Nor shall a heavier penalty be imposed than the one that was applicable at the time the penal offence was committed.
Article 12.
No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.
Article 13.
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state.
(2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.
Article 14.
(1) Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution.
(2) This right may not be invoked in the case of prosecutions genuinely arising from non-political crimes or from acts contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.
Article 15.
(1) Everyone has the right to a nationality.
(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change his nationality.
Article 16.
(1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.
(2) Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.
(3) The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17.
(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.
(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.
Article 18.
Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.
Article 19.
Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.
Article 20.
(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
2) No one may be compelled to belong to an association.
Article 21.
(1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.
(3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.
Article 22.
Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.
Article 23.
(1) Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.
(2) Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work.
(3) Everyone who works has the right to just and favourable remuneration

ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection.
(4) Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.
Article 24.
Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.
Article 25.
(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.
Article 26.
(1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.
(2) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.
(3) Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.
Article 27.
(1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.
(2) Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

Article 28.
Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realised.
Article 29.
(1) Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
(2) In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.
(3) These rights and freedoms may in no case be exercised contrary to the purposes and principles of the United Nations.
Article 30.

Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as implying for any State, group or person any right to engage in any activity or to perform any act aimed at the destruction of any of the rights and freedoms set forth herein.

5.6 Human Rights

Human Rights are universal rights because all human beings – without any distinction whatsoever – are considered to be right-holders. They share them equally and (what may sound strange at first) human beings cannot alienate themselves or be alienated from them. These rights are different for example from the right to children allowance that a family can acquire with a newborn child.[7] When the child grows to a certain age or the parental income is more than the minimum established, the family loses the right to children allowance. Human rights on their part are never lost. They are inherent. This assumed feature of course takes them outside the

[7] There may be other conditions such as the one establishing that parental income is not more than the minimum established by government.

spheres of national law. Rights in national law are based either on citizenship or on residence. However once the state accepts international law that establishes human rights of specific categories of foreigners, such as for example political refugees, than these foreigners become right-holders within the confines of the states that are signatories to the international human rights legislation. But only then. So in essence, human rights have been considered basically moral rights, and only gradually were they recognised by national legislators.

A human being is born and dies a human being and it is on this fact that universal moral rights are attributed. The possession of these rights entitles the holder to some kind of claim. Simplifying, this demand will either be of a moral kind and therefore the expectations that the demand is satisfied will rest on conscience or else if the human right claim is based on legal recognition, the expectations to satisfy fall on government or the courts of law. Now these claims – both moral and legal – are extremely important because their negation usually implies an attack on the basic dignity or value of human existence. Without them such an existence is considered to be miserable.

Another consideration that follows from this is that having rights does not necessarily mean enjoying them. The enjoyment generally rests on those institutions that can provide the conditions or the goods for which we are entitled. Otherwise the claims are simply lists on an agenda. Indeed *The UN Declaration of Human Rights* was only a *declaration* and therefore had no force inside any courtroom. In reality since the declaration was promulgated by the United Nations and all nations members of the UN are expected to abide by the Declaration, which is considered an important appendix to the Charter of the UN, no state will go against the declaration even if it is *only* a declaration.[8] Having said that the actual problem today

[8] There are cases where it has been cited in Maltese courts.

is to secure that these rights are not only recognised by all but in effect guaranteed. The UN or any other international agency cannot provide the goods. These have to come from the economic, social and cultural contexts in which human beings live.

Linking human rights with culture reminds us of the problem raised by many that human rights are really the projection of a particular culture, the Western world. Other cultures, it is claimed, have *had* to absorb human rights as they have had to accept technology and global trade relations imposed by the West. What happens when cultural practices outside the West do not agree with the universal norms established by the international bill of human rights? Many are the possible conclusions to this query but ultimately it is really a never-ending debate. One of the suggestions was to lighten up the bill to reduce it to its essential features like the right to life, liberty and property. However when values are at the heart of any debate, trying to come up with a universally acceptable, valid theory is mind-boggling and inconclusive. It rests so much on personal beliefs. This does not mean allowing people to suffer from certain social practices because their culture accepts such practices. A bottom-line of respect to human life has to be sought. It can mean for example an exercise in establishing some minimum standards that are common in the world for right living.

5.7 A basic concept underlying human rights: Discrimination

Article 2 of the Declaration ties the enjoyment of rights and freedoms included in it with non-discrimination on grounds such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. It prohibits distinction also on the basis of the status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it is independent or with limited sovereignty. These grounds are basically the same as the ones mentioned in article 14 of *The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms*. The European Convention

is more of a legal document than the UN Declaration. It is longer and contains a larger amount of legal jargon. Article 19 of the Convention establishes a European Commission and a European Court of Human Rights. The rights included are basically the civil and political rights. The Council of Europe besides the European Convention, also propagated a European Social Charter dealing principally with economic and social rights that are difficult to enforce juridically. It is like the Declaration, a statement of aspirations, which does not mean that the Charter can be ignored. Similarly non-discrimination is equally advocated in the Charter.

Attention has been paid to discrimination more than to any other single category of human rights. The grounds for discrimination include some sort of distinction against a person according to his identification with a particular group or category instead of taking into account his or her general human attributes. Since human rights are universal (as against other rights), no particular feature or characteristic distinguishing one person from another can affect his or her claim to such rights especially (but not only) in terms of race, sex and religion that traditionally were the cause of the most widespread violations of human dignity. Within ancient Athenian society, slaves made possible the liberation from necessary but time-consuming labour on the part of most of the indigenous male polis population. Husbands (not wives) possessed property, and illegitimate children were disabled in inheritance, whilst in some societies the physically disabled were eliminated. During the medieval period one's social and legal status depended mostly on birth, whether one was born male or female, a free man or slave, nobleman or commoner. Nowadays discrimination is still alive and hits out against AIDS victims or new minorities and may result in xenophobic attitudes or attempts at social segregation, which in more politically correct measures can include a decline in certain areas of welfare support. In the matter of discrimination against AIDS victims, there are health, employment, insurance and movement problems to be faced. What are the risks to colleagues? Which tests data, if any, are to be allowed to insurance companies? And what about education, housing and marriage for these victims?

Inequality was always basic to this discriminatory organisation of society. The French 1789 and the Russian 1918 revolutions were, amongst other concerns, caused by intolerable inequality. So equality is important but what is its content? The Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers to equality and sources of discrimination in many articles such as 1, 2, 7, 10, 16 and 21. The principle of equality and the claim to it before the law is in a substantial way the most fundamental of the rights of man. It occupies the first place in most written constitutions. In western civilisation it is partly derived from the Christian tradition and belief of equality of all men before God since they (and only they) are created in the image of their creator and have the gift of the soul. It also stems from the ancient tradition that men (and once again only they) have the common possession of reason as distinct from other living beings.

Hatred and intolerance are closely linked to discrimination. One must remember it was to fight such attitudes that the Council of Europe was originally founded in 1949, and the creation of the European Convention on Human Rights was meant to safeguard against discrimination recognised to be at the root of abuse. Believing that all men are equal is one thing but actually realising it is another matter. The last decades of the twentieth century was a time when Europeans came to recognise a more pronounced ageing population in Europe, recession and illegal immigrant labour as a counter-measure by employers, homosexuality and its association with AIDS, rape and mass killing as part of ethnic cleansing campaigns in the former Yugoslavia. Media collaboration, NGO action and education can raise awareness. The courts can enforce a certain respect for the law protecting from discrimination but ultimately it is a culture-wide concern. This confirms that human rights are not some ethereal set of rights fallen from heaven but have to be promoted within actual political, social and cultural contexts. And we have not even written the final word on the different types of discrimination. The examples will inevitably increase as scientific advances in genetics will open new fields of potential discrimination.

Chapter 6

Socrates

6.1 Who was Socrates?

Socrates died over 2,400 years ago on a set of accusations in court that cost him his life. He was executed shortly after the trial because he was found guilty of not believing in the gods of the city, of introducing other divinities, and of corrupting the young. How could a man who was poor, "physically unattractive in middle age – balding, pug-nosed, and paunchy," and whom contemporaries humorously compared to the mythical figure Silenus, the semihuman teacher of Dionysus, reach the heights of heroic martyrdom? Considering the bulging eyes and swaggering walk, old-fashioned clothes and bare feet, where is the attraction?[1] Since Socrates left nothing written, in order to try and answer the question we have to rely on others for what will inevitably be a historically uncertain picture of this ancient philosopher.

The bulk of what we know rests on Aristophanes, Plato and Xenophon.

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[1] David Sacks *Encyclopaedia of the Ancient Greek World* (London: Constable, 1995), p.226. Silenus had "horse ears, horse tail, pot belly, shaggy hair, bald head, and pug nose."(d.o., p.222).

Dialogue is a common feature amongst the three writers. Whether dialogue is the best choice if one intends to write history is doubtful but in a way it does capture the spirit of a man who believed in discussion and cross-examination as useful tools to investigate the truth. But would someone who wants to record an event or person opt for dialogue in the text? Probably not, unless he has a recording device which allows transcription of the actual debate. The search for a genuine presentation of Socrates is further complicated because both Plato and Xenophon were emotionally attached to Socrates and thus their portrayal of the man has to be analysed within a context of friendship and admiration. Ultimately, and somehow this answers the point of historical verifiability, Plato's main concern was not really to write history, at least not pre-eminently, but to attempt a philosophical rendering of the master. Plato who similarly opted for philosophy, when he could have opted for politics, continued to use the name of Socrates in his writing, throughout his life, making it even more difficult to separate the pupil from the master. Where does Socrates stop and where does Plato begin? Aristophanes certainly did not suffer from any particular admiration toward Socrates but then he was a playwright. His presentation of the 'sophist' Socrates in his play **Clouds** is conditioned by the basic features and general expectations of comedy. The caricature of the Athenian philosopher by Aristophanes has been considered offensive and to be dismissed. But then caricatures are exaggerated. In the end we still ask who is the 'true' Socrates. Was he closer to his representation by Aristophanes, Plato or Xenophon?

Notwithstanding the difficulties, there are some elements about Socrates that we can tentatively project. Xenophon was, amongst many other interests he had, a historian. His **Hellenica** and **Anabasis**, although rather biased, were meant to record historical events. He does confirm a lot of what Plato wrote about the master. Overall we can trace a tentative picture of Socrates. A basic feature of the traditional image of the master that emerges includes his physical strength, or better, resilience. The ability to withstand the cold and hunger during the

military campaigns he participated in is taken as evidence of the physical vigour of this stonemason's son. As for the intellectual qualities of Socrates it is difficult to establish a compact philosophic theory that he developed and promoted, even in ethics, the field he personally preferred. In fact within those dialogues written by Plato generally considered more genuinely exposing the ideas of the historic Socrates, the latter faces particular individuals and tackles their ways of thinking rather than exposing in a straightforward manner a theory of ethics representing his philosophic thoughts. Still the acknowledgment of Plato's admiration is a certificate for his intellectual merits. Plato was not so easy to impress after all.

However the great admiration for the philosopher resides mostly in his moral rather than philosophic or physical strength. He has become a model of ethical behaviour. Indeed in the end it is the moral strength that stands out. The challenge he posed to the other forty-nine members of the committee that suggested the mass execution of generals who participated in a naval battle against the allies of Sparta during the Peloponnesian War is noteworthy. They had to pass trial before receiving execution orders. Equally his disobedience of the command received from the Council of Tyrants, the body that ruled the City immediately following the defeat of Athens at the hands of Sparta, to arrest a democrat is testimony to the strong will of Socrates to always do what is right rather than follow any other consideration. He believed the man was innocent and was going to be executed only because he was a democrat. In both cases he risked more than a simple rebuke. Then again some may say that these decisions of Socrates were not necessarily the best decisions since, notwithstanding what he thought or did both in the case of the generals as well as in the case of the democrat, the victims would still be executed. A dreamer, a traitor, or a hard nut to crack? The list is never-ending. And this plurality of possible views relating to what has been passed on to us about the philosopher is what perhaps constitutes the unrelenting magnetic pull of this philosopher which, besides the concern of historical reliability, was our other query.

6.2 *Clouds* by Aristophanes

In his comedy **Clouds**, Aristophanes introduces Strepsiades who is trying to convince his son Phidippides to go to Socrates because it seems to him that the thinker teaches two courses of reasoning, the true and the false, and that should his son learn how to master the false, then he will be in a position to cheat and win the lawsuits in court against him. The indebted Strepsiades thus will not have to pay the debts he has contracted due to his son's prolific spending. When he arrives at the school, Strepsiades talks to a disciple of Socrates who exclaims how one night Socrates was studying the course of the moon and its revolutions. The same disciple also tries to justify the strange postures of meditation held by other disciples stating that they are looking so fixedly at the ground because they are seeking for what is below the ground. Other disciples are studying astronomy on their own account. Socrates meanwhile is suspended in a basket. But after a machine swings in Socrates, the philosopher exclaims that the great goddesses for the lazy the clouds of heaven, to whom is owed all, thoughts, speeches, trickery, roguery, boasting, lies and sagacity, are the only goddesses; all the rest are pure myth, including Zeus. Clouds cause the rain to fall, and thunder results when clouds roll one over the other. The advice of the leader of the chorus is for Strepsiades to commit himself fearlessly to the ministers, the sophists, and immediately Socrates is called to attention. The ascetic lifestyle of Socrates and his natural philosophy however are beyond Strepsiades and it is his son Phidippides who eventually goes and graduates from the learning. Eventually at the end the son clashes with his father. This is a premonition of the accusation of corruption of the young brought forward against Socrates years later in court, just as the previous points anticipate the gossip that Socrates was a sophist and a natural philosopher.

6.3 Events leading to the death of Socrates

Plato vividly portrays the drama of the events leading to the trial and concluding with the execution of Socrates in his works **Euthyphro**, **Apology**, **Crito** and **Phaedo**. Chronologically the encounter, which is the

basis for the discussion narrated in the **Euthyphro**, precedes the day of the trial, the subject matter of the **Apology**. Both are accessible with limited technical jargon, and are relatively concise. With the other two dialogues they share the characteristic of placing a lot of emphasis in engaging the reader on the level of personality rather than pure conceptual thought.

6.3.1 Euthyphro

Socrates is outside the court of the King Archon and meets Euthyphro, an expert on religion, who intends to prosecute his father for the unjust death of a servant. In the discussion that follows, we learn of the charges brought against Socrates by Meletus. The core of the dialogue in **Euthyphro**, however, is devoted to a discussion of 'piety', a discussion instructive in a number of ways. Prompted by Socrates, Euthyphro's attempts to define piety draw attention to some important philosophical issues such as the distinction of particulars from general concepts. For example, we call a number of actions pious or just, but what do piety or justice mean on their own, free from specific or particular references? Or to use an example from aesthetics, we speak of a beautiful painting and a beautiful horse, but what is the essential meaning of 'beauty'?

"Socrates: ... Is not piety in every action always the same? and impiety, again, is not that always the opposite of piety, and also the same within itself, having as impiety, one notion which includes whatever is impious?
Euthyphro: To be sure, Socrates.
Socrates: And what is piety, and what is impiety?
Euthyphro: Piety is doing as I am doing; that is to say, prosecuting anyone who is guilty of murder, sacrilege, or of any other similar crime – whether he be your father or mother, or some other person, that makes no difference – and not prosecuting them is impiety."[2]

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[2] Plato *The Trial and Death of Socrates: Four Dialogues* (New York: Dover Publications, 1992), pp. 4-5.

Euthyphro mentions how Zeus, the best and most righteous god, bound Cronos his father who had wickedly devoured his sons, and how Cronos himself had punished his own father Uranus for another injustice. And yet when he proceeded against his father, they were angry with him. This according to Euthyphro is inconsistent.

What Socrates needs is a general definition of the concept piety that makes all pious things consistently justified as pious. This would provide a standard against which Socrates can measure the nature of actions and thus say that this action is pious, whilst the other is impious.[3] Socrates acknowledges that it is one thing to decide about such conventional things as weights or magnitudes that are easy, but when the matters of difference are the just and unjust, good and evil, piety and impiety, then men disagree because they are unable to decide satisfactorily about differences in meaning. Socrates once again asks Euthyphro to give his definition of piety and he submits the following: "Piety, then, is that which is dear to the gods, and impiety is that which is not dear to them."[4]

Thus for Euthyphro piety is "what is agreeable to the gods", ultimately having to do with the science of "requests and donations to the gods" rather than the science of personal conduct. This definition reflects the traditional, religious basis of Greek ethics. Of course, even in ancient Greece, ethics was not limited to a reference to the gods, but was also a matter of custom and law. And yet Euthyphro's reference to the 'agreeability of the gods' requires a further clarification. Socrates wants to understand whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is inherently holy, or else whether it is holy because it is beloved by the gods. The idea is that something is good either because a god says so or because it is good in itself and that is why a god would suggest it is good in the

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[3] Not mere personal opinion is the 'measure' but an objective concept.

[4] Plato (1992), p.6.

first place.[5] This important distinction not only breaks down Euthyphro's identification of piety with the partial preferences of the gods, but also establishes on a very strong footing the status of ethics outside the grasp of theology. Nonetheless Socrates notes that even with the help of this distinction, the essence of piety still remains undiscovered.

The argument shifts to the consideration that piety is a part of justice. When one compares justice and piety, justice appears to be the more extended notion, of which piety is only a part. Which part? Euthyphro answers: "Piety or holiness, Socrates, appears to me to be that part of justice which attends to the gods, as there is the other part of justice which attends to men."[6] Socrates agrees but with the usual perseverance asks for a definition or explanation of attention, in reference to the phrase what 'attends to the gods'. He leads Euthyphro to admit that holiness or piety is the art of attending to the gods. And yet since attending to someone implies doing good or something of benefit to the one who is being attended on, what is the good done by the pious person to the gods?

When Socrates asks whether piety or holiness, which was defined as the art of attending the gods, benefit or improve the gods and whether when Euthyphro said that when he does a holy act he made any of the gods better, the latter answered that he obviously did not have this in mind.[7] According to him it is closer to what servants show to their masters, or in Socrates' words, a sort of ministration to the gods. At this point Socrates would like to know what the art that ministers to the gods helps to

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[5] The second suggestion can be described by this following example from Christian moral history: Murder is evil or bad not because the Ten Commandments declare it is, but because it is so in itself. Before the Ten Commandments, or if the Commandments had ignored the matter, or even declared otherwise, it would not have changed our negative moral judgment of murder.

[6] Plato (1992), p.13.

[7] Plato (1992), p.14.

accomplish. Euthyphro cannot answer and instead goes on to give another definition of piety: "Let me say simply that piety is learning how to please the gods in word and deed, by prayers and sacrifices."[8] Followed by the incessant questioning of Socrates, Euthyphro says that the gifts we confer on the gods are tributes of honour and what is pleasing to them. In other words, adds Socrates, piety is pleasing to the gods but not beneficial or dear to them. This ends the discussion but the original question still holds: What is piety?

Euthyphro is made to see that he does not really have a clear idea of what he believes he knows. His reasons are lacking in necessary reflection. As with other dialogues in the early Socratic period by Plato, **Euthyphro** ends without definite answers to its principal question. This is the fundamental difficulty encountered in any attempt to establish or express the core meaning, a definition, of a general quality. Yet the dialogue raises seminal questions. It is a proof of the link between Socrates and an aspect of the modern scientific method dependent on the preliminary clarification of the concepts that the scientist is investigating before actually moving ahead in the investigation. If rigour is essential for conceptual clarity in the physical sciences, is it too much to expect it in ethics as well?

6.3.2 An anticipation of the 'Apology': the Natural Philosophers and the Sophists

Placed traditionally at the beginning of Western philosophy, roughly at the start of the sixth century BC, Natural Philosophy established a new way of thinking different from the dominant belief of the time based on the mythological tales. These myths held pride of place. Consisting of a series of stories about the gods and other deities, these fictional narratives

[8] Plato (1992), p.15.

however were not simply entertaining stories. They also tried to make clear why life is as it is. In other words they were explanations. The rituals performed to honour these gods also provided for human participation through the sacrificial offerings. Homer, and later Hesiod, wrote the stories down transferring the transmission of these tales from the oral tradition to the written text. When something is written down it can be critically analysed and people start asking questions. Xenophanes (c.560 – c.470 BC) besides being a philosopher and cosmologist was also a theologian. He commented about the anthropomorphic nature of the gods, how their human qualities were all too evident. Could gods be egoists, treacherous, have bodies and clothes, and use language?[9] How could gods be born? If you asked a Thracian what his gods looked like he would answer blue-eyed and red-haired. An Ethiopian would answer the same question saying that his gods were black and flat-nosed. Horses would draw horses if they could draw their gods! This does not necessarily mean that Xenophanes was an atheist and rejected divinity. He was raising a point against the poetic imagination adopted by Homer to present divinity. Definitely his ideas were an alternative to the traditional images of the gods.

Xenophanes was born in Colophon in Asia Minor, a rich and highly civilised region, with relatively high standards of living. It was in Asia Minor that earlier, the first recorded philosophic questioning seems to have begun. Such questions as how the earth was originally formed and the complementary query regarding the composition of the world were approached in a different and novel way from the standard narratives of mythological tales. This desire to know more about the world by breaking new ground in the search for knowledge was the fruit of curiosity said Aristotle. In Miletus, another city in Asia Minor, Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes speculated about the *arche*, the generating principle, and

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[9] Simon Price *Religions of the Ancient Greeks* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.127-8.

the basic substance of the cosmos. Thales (early sixth century BC) was a navigator and he must have observed how essential the sea was in a geographic world-view that comprised the Mediterranean and the neighbouring landmasses.[10] The relationship between life and water was similarly fundamental. He seems to have hypothesized that water was the original material substance of all things. Anaximander spoke of a war between qualities, within which the primary four were wet and dry, hot and cold. Forming part of an indefinite matter lacking boundaries and through some kind of self-transformation – a sort of war between the qualities – one is to find the origin of all cosmic things. Anaximenes speculated that air was at the beginning. Rarefaction and condensation produced different degrees of density. It is easy to recognise how this appeals to our everyday experience of transformations that follow upon an increase of density leading vapour to change to liquid and then to a solid state. Just as Homer had transformed the oral tradition of the tales into a written one, similarly these three early Natural Philosophers, had made available explanations of the cosmos that challenged the grasp of the mythological narratives on people's minds and turned such accounts into an impersonal description of physical nature based on substances and processes that one could observe and follow in the natural world: water, wetness, dryness, air and so on. The tales of the gods as a useful tool to explain the world were being slowly pushed aside.[11] The answers of the Milesian School were according to our present knowledge preposterous but the way the problem was posed was novel.

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[10] Check above section 3.2 'The physical setting as an alternative unifying concept'.

[11] There were other major interests besides the one we summarised here. For example there was a great debate whether our senses, including observation, were proper tools for the study of the world. If they were, then the messages we get are that the physical world is an ever-changing reality. Others proposed that reality was essentially fixed and never-changing. To gain a true picture we have to refute sense perception and follow a metaphysical approach.

From Asia Minor the next stage of philosophical development took place especially in the rich city of Athens. From the interest in the cosmos and its origin that had its birth in the Greek colonies in Asia Minor (and also southern Italy) it was Socrates (470 – 399 BC) and the sophists who presented and tackled new interests in philosophic questioning. Athens had a highly participative democratic citizenry and the Athenians were wealthy and could afford leisure (like the Milesians). Socrates challenged the people who engaged with him in dialogue about problems that had to do with their concerns regarding important, sometimes immediate difficulties they faced or were troubled about in life. Thus we can characterise this age as promoting an increased interest in the microcosmic context of the polis, man as such and man within the social context. This was different from the curiosity in the cosmos, the macrocosmic context, evident in the questions raised previously by the natural philosophers. Socrates was interested in the simple but evasive question 'how should I live?' that according to him demanded a continuous reflection and examination of a life worth living.

At the time there were itinerant teachers who knew that debate was popular since it was a basic tool how to get things done in most institutions of Athenian life. Indeed democracy unless it is simply a name to attract popular support, demands a climate of free and critical inquiry in which disputes can and should be settled through discussion. The marketplace was a hub of activity but outside the agora, citizens discussed in the Assembly, the Council, and the Committees. Debate demands a basic education and certain skills. Logic allows for rational argument, rhetoric for emotional impression, judgmental and organizational skills help the citizen who possesses such abilities to rise from amongst equals. All this would partly justify the role played by the itinerant teachers mentioned previously and dubbed by Plato as sophists. Overall their target was not the search for some basic universal moral concept. Even the fruitless speculation of the natural philosophers could be abandoned. Ultimately what Strepsiades really wanted in the **Clouds** was how to turn bad lawsuits to his own advantage and to defeat his creditors in court.

This meant the ability to reason in such a way as to defeat the arguments of others, and this had to be done on two feet. What counted in this case was the development of expressive skills, for which people were ready to pay.

Socrates on his part accused the sophists of confusing people. In the **Phaedo** he developed a discussion on the power of argument and logic. One should never follow people such as the sophists who taught that nothing is certain. They only did so because they were not skilled in logic. When a sophist believed at one point that an argument was true, only for him to decide some time later, "rightly or wrongly that it is false, and the same thing happens again and again," made him argue both sides of an argument. He believed that he is the wisest because he concluded that nothing is stable.[12] Socrates disagreed with the sophists because what they taught was not what was of supreme importance. He tried to persuade each person to care for the supreme item, his soul, and not other less worthy things. Socrates mentioned also Callias in the **Apology**, an Athenian who paid money to the sophist Evenus from Paros to teach his two sons in human and political virtues. Socrates was not convinced this was being achieved. Thus both sophist and client are basing their transaction on the exaggerated sense of wisdom of one and the unfounded expectations of the other. The sophist of course made money and increased his fame. Money and reputation were not the concerns of the soul as conceived by Socrates.

How does one learn more about the soul and what is needed for its proper development? Socrates raised thought-provoking questions within the framework of his assertion, 'the unexamined life is not worth living', fundamental questions as to what is the purpose of life and how to go about working towards its achievement. There is however a problem that

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[12] Plato *The Last Days of Socrates* (London: Penguin, 1993), p.152

certain concepts one includes in the tentative answers are rather complicated on their own. One most probably will desire to live a good life, be happy, live according to the truth and be a just person. What exactly should one take the concepts 'goodness', 'happiness', 'truth', and 'justice' to mean? Not easy questions for anyone who is ready to take the challenge, especially if one believes that there are absolute answers to the query. One of the contributions of Socrates to this exercise was that the truth is never easy to attain, especially when one is not convinced of error. Humility and recognition of one's ignorance, or at least curbing one's pretension to the truth, are likewise helpful. This is quite similar to the religious demand on the faithful to believe in sin if one truly desires to be saved. It could be that it is easier to settle for a more material end in life such as wealth and physical health. This may also give the impression that ethical thought is cut off from physical reality, or the way we lead our regular everyday concerns. This is not what Socrates had in mind. Plato's projection of the philosopher is that of a man who devoted his life to search about fundamental human interests that really mattered, and if followed, transformed life in many ways.[13]

6.3.3 The 'Apology': The Context

The **Apology** gives us the three speeches of Socrates in his defence against the accusations of Anytus, Lycon and Meletus. It also includes a short question and answer cross-examination of Meletus. The three speeches are separated by the two voting exercises, one for the guilty or innocent verdict, and the other for the choice of punishment to be inflicted on the guilty Socrates. The year is 399BC. The setting includes a citizen jury, a foreman, the three prosecutors, an audience and old Socrates. One of the immediate queries is trying to understand why Socrates was accused when

[13] The 'practical' aspect of ethics is highlighted in section 7.2 'Practical ethics'.

he was seventy years old and when he had been talking about the things he was accused of for so many years? Was it the Peloponnesian War and the final defeat of mighty Athens just a few years earlier? Hardly four years had passed since the war was over. Some of his followers had not come out of the war with heroic recommendations especially Alcibiades the traitor, and Critias and Charmides, two of the ruthless thirty tyrants that had ruled Athens immediately after the war. Then there were the conversations with popular and powerful citizens such as politicians, poets and artisans, during which the philosopher had challenged their ideas in public. According to him these popular citizens, like the sophists, had no privilege to the truth, as they appeared to pretend. The evaluation of truth did not change at all even if their ideas were held to be true by the majority of the people either.

This became a dangerous stand to take. It may seem quite naïve for Socrates to have been concerned only with the 'truth' and oblivious to all consequences. Philosophy became a dangerous practice. There was already at the time a pre-established and specific moral code that was more or less culture-bound. The refusal to admit it, or take it into consideration in the balance of reasons when one is deciding what action to take or words to say, can have drastic (and not unexpected) effects. Besides the poets, politicians, artists and their followers would certainly not easily forget those conversations, which for some of them may have meant public humiliation. The consideration that young men were ending up confused while in the company of Socrates also formed part of the accusations. This can partly be attributed to his method of inquiry. Socrates created a state of uncertainty in his interlocutors, as he began the task of extracting knowledge. False knowledge was brought out in the open. Once this was complemented by the recognition of one's ignorance, it was meant to lead to and realise the desire to learn. It was hard and painful but Socrates saw his role as akin to a midwife, like his mother. She helped pregnant women give birth to babies just as he helped men give birth to ideas. The method did not always succeed. Socrates answered that he was following a divinely-inspired mission to seek the truth that made him committed to the

examined life and his ongoing efforts to persuade the Athenians to think of their soul.

6.3.4 The 'Apology': Summary of the text

The content summarised previously from **Clouds** by Aristophanes is useful to comprehend the initial arguments in the first speech of the **Apology** where Socrates talked about the gossip spread against him amongst the Athenians. Socrates knew and made clear it was not going to be easy because he had to face accusations that had been building up for so many years. Being based on gossip, the accusations were practically impossible to counter because one cannot make a case against shadows. Aristophanes' comical projection of Socrates had been that of an irreverent investigator of nature following the intellectual tradition of the natural philosophers. Like them he was a curious person, "who has theories about the heavens and has investigated everything below the earth," and he taught these doctrines to others.[14] This was considered dangerous because "those who hear them suppose that anyone who inquires into such matters does not also believe in gods." Socrates rebutted the accusation of natural philosophy by claiming that although he meant "no disrespect for such knowledge," yet he took "no interest in these things."

Socrates was also accused of being a sophist and taking money to teach. In **Clouds** Socrates had been presented as a sophist who taught two courses of reasoning, the true and the false, thus training pupils how to win arguments even when they are at fault. In the **Apology** this became the ability to make "the weaker argument defeat the stronger," and all this (the accusation suggested) at a price as with the sophists. To this he replied

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[14] Plato (1993), p.38. The rest of the quotes in this paragraph are to be found in the same reference.

that one should be happy and consider himself quite lucky to find a man who has the ability to teach people how to live a virtuous life in society, and these would truly be justified in charging a fee, but Socrates did not believe this was the case with the sophists and as far as he was concerned, his poverty was beyond doubt and at the same time ample evidence that the accusation of taking money was unfounded. This argument manifests clearly Socratic humanism in the sense that according to him it was one thing (and not so complicated) to find and engage a trainer – a horse-dealer or an agricultaralist – to take care of colts or calves but it was a totally different matter to find an instructor for children and teach them virtues.

When Chaerephon told the Athenians about the Delphic Oracle's message that no one was wiser than Socrates, some reacted by being jealous. Socrates knew that he was considered wise but he reiterated "real wisdom is the property of the god" and continued that according to him what the oracle at the Temple in Delphi meant when it declared Socrates wiser than the others was that "human wisdom has little or no value."[15] In other words the oracle was "not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example, as if he were to say to us, 'The wisest of you men is he who has realised, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless.' "[16] The diverse opinions or interpretations such a statement raised meant a thorough study by Socrates – including a practical search for a possible alternative candidate who could genuinely carry away from Socrates the title 'wisest' in Athens. There are different possible interpretations of the oracle's significance – an exercise that was not unpopular at the time since oracles usually spoke in rather open-ended phrases that had multiple interpretations. To undo the mystery Socrates talked to a politician who had the reputation of being wise. He noticed

[15] Plato (1993), p.44.
[16] Plato (1993), p.44.

that throughout the conversation although in many people's (and especially the politician's own) opinion he gave the impression to be wise, deep down he was not. When Socrates began to try to show him this, his efforts (not unexpectedly) were resented by him and also by the audience. Socrates' conclusion was one of those often-quoted statements: "It is only too likely that neither of us has any knowledge to boast of; but he thinks that he knows something which he does not know, whereas I am quite conscious of my ignorance. At any rate it seems that I am wiser than he is to this small extent, that I do not think that I know what I do not know."[17]

After talking to other politicians, Socrates faced the poets and then the artists, but the results were not much better. In the end the oracle's words were literally confirmed: Socrates was truly the wisest. Was it his intention to search for the truth or to humble the Athenians? When he adopted such methods did they help to urge them to care for what is really important in life? Definitely he was making many enemies, and he knew it. Then there was the other matter of the young men who followed him in his public conversations. In anticipating the accusation of corrupting the young he declared that as far as the rich youth were concerned, since these afforded a lot of idle time they followed him voluntarily. When they heard Socrates conversing with the rest, they often adopted and tried to imitate the Socratic style in their conversations with other citizens. Socrates admitted that he was a pest so one can only imagine what his imitators looked like to the audience following their efforts to emulate the master's techniques. Those cross-examined by the young however blamed Socrates for being a bad influence on these young men.

Eventually Socrates faced the more recent and immediate accusations of being an evil man, not believing in the gods of the state, and introducing

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[17] Plato (1993), p.42.

new divinities of his own. Socrates approached these accusations by eliciting from Meletus, one of the accusers, that only Socrates was the corruptor of youth! How could it be that every Athenian knew what was good and did such things for the benefit of the young Athenians and the only exception was Socrates? This absurd idea, the result of a typical Socratic cross-examination in which the other debater is made to contradict himself, allows Socrates to ironically conclude that the Athenian youth were extremely lucky. Socrates followed this up by asking Meletus the following barrage of rhetorical questions: "is it better to live in a good or in a bad community? ... Is it not true that wicked people do harm to those with whom they are in the closest contact, and that good people have a good effect? ... Is there anyone who prefers to be harmed rather than benefited by his associates? ... When you summon me before this court for corrupting the young and making their characters worse, do you mean that I do so intentionally or unintentionally?"[18] All questions were answered in the way anyone would expect Meletus to answer. Indeed there was only one way to answer such questions. Socratic irony is once again at work in the conclusion: "You have discovered that bad people always have a bad effect, and good people a good effect, upon their nearest neighbours; and I am so hopelessly ignorant as not even to realise that by spoiling the character of one of my companions I shall run the risk of getting some harm from him? So ignorant as to commit this grave offence intentionally, as you claim?"[19] It did not appear likely.

The prosecutors also charged Socrates with teaching about strange divinities. Socrates did claim to have a sort of voice that spoke to him now and then advising or warning against some course of action. Although it was believed that the ancient Greek gods gave signs, these were not the type of clear-cut messages Socrates implied. Was this voice

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[18] Plato (1993), p.47.
[19] Plato (1993), p.48.

a divine inspiration or was it simply an aspect of Socrates' strong personal moral code, at best, a conscience speaking out? Whilst Socrates faced accusations of conjuring up new spiritual beings, at the same time however he was accused of not believing in the gods of the State, and to teach this to others. Even this accusation was illogical and did not stand to reason according to him. Did Socrates teach people to believe in some deities and therefore could not be considered an atheist, or was the accusation that the deities he taught about were not those the city recognised? Or was it indeed that Socrates was an atheist and a teacher of atheism throughout. Meletus replied that he was and so opened himself up to the charge that the accusation was self-contradictory. How could a man believe in spiritual and divine agencies (as Socrates admitted), but not in spirits or demigods (as Meletus accused)? Of course he could not, concluded Socrates.

Socrates faced the question whether he was wrong in not attempting to do everything possible to avoid death. A good man the philosopher claimed does not spend his time thinking about the prospects of life and death. All he should be concerned with in performing any action is, "whether he is acting justly or unjustly, like a good man or a bad one."[20] This moral consideration is prior to the matter of physical death. When 'doing good' and 'staying alive' clash or cannot be reconciled, and the individual is faced with the dilemma and forced to choose between doing what is good but paying the price through death or otherwise opting for survival at the price of something considered very negative such as cowardice for example, then there was really no choice for the good man as far as Socrates was concerned. This does not necessarily make the choice any easier but it does justify the message or lesson regarding his lifelong concern which Socrates explained: "For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old to make your first and chief concern

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[20] Plato (1993), p.51.

not for your bodies or for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls" and consequently "if I corrupt the young by this message, the message would seem to be harmful; but if anyone says that my message is different from this he is talking nonsense."[21] In following up the concern to make people take virtue seriously, he neglected his concerns and steadfastly followed up the concerns of others. This brought him in a situation where his life was threatened, but he was ready to pay the price.

Socrates declared convincingly that it was not possible for a better man to be harmed by someone who was worse since the harm possible was only physical. One may suffer physical abuse at the hands of the other, but the soul of the better man – his rational and ethical essence – cannot be damaged. This conviction in the primacy of being just is to be exhibited even during those occasions when it seems not in one's interest to do so. This is the reason behind his assertion that he would not (like others had done before) disturb the proper judgment of the court by attempting to induce them to sympathise for him, by begging for mercy (there is nothing to beg mercy for after all) or bringing his wife and children to court in front of the jurors to play on the sentiments of the judges. He wanted them to be just and this demanded true knowledge that follows a proper inquiry. As soon as got to know he was found guilty, Socrates returned unperturbed to his previous argument and reminded those present how he had tried to persuade each one he met to think more of mental and moral well-being by searching for virtue and wisdom rather than practical and private advantages. Speaking from experience Socrates warned that the search for truth was a lonely pursuit, not a collective one. It was for example within the boundary of the philosophic discussion rather than the noisy and public cries in the Assembly that the quest for what is true justice going to be achieved if it ever will. Considering the result of the trial of Socrates, the courtroom does not seem to be any better than the legislative body, at least in this case, to arrive at justice.

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[21] Plato (1993), p.53.

The penalty proposed by the prosecutors was death. It was a point of no return for Socrates. Nothing was acceptable to the philosopher if it implied holding his tongue: death, imprisonment, paying a fine, not even exile. It was a divinely-inspired duty for the philosopher to discuss with people, which no court of men had the power to overturn. This is where Socrates pronounced the phrase that the life, which is unexamined, is not worth living. Socrates had actually come up with a proposal for punishment that elsewhere may have sounded hilarious but in a trial where the infliction of the death penalty was probable sounds so strange. He suggested he should dine in the Hall reserved for the Olympic winners. Socrates had previously called himself a gadfly, a humorous way to lighten up the tension of the court but suggesting a *punishment* consisting of the possibility to dine in the Prytaneum was offensive and counter-productive when one considers the tense and at that particular point dangerous atmosphere. The arrogance of this proposal made a number of those who voted for his innocence during the first round of votes, to vote against him this time. In fact a larger majority voted for the death penalty.

In the third and conclusive speech Socrates first addressed those who voted against him and then the others. He reminded the former of their injustice and how the young would remember what they had done. To the latter he explained how death could be two things: either an eternal sleep or else being with the dead heroes of the Greek past. Both solutions were welcome since they offered a better alternative to his present conditions. Even when he tackled the argument of death, which was so directly relevant at this point, Socrates did not lose his typical reliance on rational argument. This of course, beyond the rational arguments, was in human terms, a difficult part of the speech. It also shows the opposite pulls of atheism and belief. Socrates is faced with what is the ultimate dilemma of the afterlife: what comes next?

Were the accusations and final sentence unsubstantiated and unfair? Was Socrates truly guilty or innocent? This assumes we can pass judgments on

people and events beyond our experience (which at its worst can render such an exercise simply an academic pastime). Nevertheless if we persist in our questions we will ask whether there are reasons behind the court sentence that overturn the defence arguments proposed by Socrates especially when one keeps in mind that Plato, author of the **Apology** was not an impartial narrator of the events. Socrates was rather sceptical about the democratic system. Some of Socrates' followers were not ideal companions to have when one considers the war by the Athenian democrats first against the Spartans than against the Tyrants. Was Socrates so dangerous? Or was he simply the common denominator amongst a number of situations that went against the immediate, perceived interests of the Athenian citizenry? Or was he simply a scapegoat for the disastrous end to the war when the others – the immediate followers of the tyrants – could not be touched because an amnesty that had been agreed immediately after the events of the tyranny and its downfall in the city protected them? Ultimately he lost the case because he did not convince the majority of judges and so it may seem that his defence was not efficient. Today we would cry out for the freedom of speech and religion, fundamental human rights, to be respected. But the events happened over 2400 years ago, in a democracy of course, but one that was different in many ways from those we are familiar with today, and in a civilisation that, although still considered inspiring in certain ways, had its peculiarities. The polis was still supreme and in this particular polis – Athens – the numbers (of votes) counted more than elsewhere. To think that all the jurors who voted against Socrates were prejudiced against him would be a mistake; to think that they were all mesmerised by the persuasion of the accusers likewise. Anytus was a loyal, model citizen who commanded great respect, Lycon was an orator, and Meletus was a poet but Socrates – despite his age – could wage battle on the ground of argument. It is his defence that ultimately balances the weights in his favour, and although it did not help him win on that day, has made him an immortal hero in the company of the great men who likewise were ready to die for a cause.

6.3.5 'Crito'

Crito, a friend of Socrates, visited him in jail. The execution was close and Crito wanted Socrates to escape and so he presented a number of reasons why the old master should try to survive by escaping from Athens. The first one concerned Crito's own reputation in the eyes of the Athenians: "A great many people who do not know you and me very well will think that I let you down, saying that I could have saved you if I had been willing to spend the money."[22] It was the most shameful thing to happen to a man to be considered in the eyes of the others to have preferred money to friends. Crito confirmed to the master that if he escaped, he did not need to worry that his friends may get into trouble for having freed him, and therefore risk putting in peril their property or even suffering something worse. Crito added that if Socrates had the opportunity to be saved but ultimately refused, then it was possible to argue he was betraying his life. Crito also put his children in the bargain. Wasn't he betraying his children leaving them as orphans, not following their education through? Wasn't it irresponsible? Had Crito followed Socrates more carefully in court he would have been spared his efforts. Socrates could have for example presented the argument of the children as orphans to the jurors to get a sympathetic response but he had refused, would he now renounce to his position on the same argument?

Socrates answered Crito's suggestions by initially laying down the assumptions of his approach to ethics which included being unemotional, clear-headed and rational without following what people generally think. The emotions and what people in general think are not enough to serve as a basis for decision-making. Another consideration is that since we never ought to do what is morally wrong, we should be interested only if something is right or wrong not in its consequences. And we have to be

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[22] Plato (1993), p.78.

convinced about the correctness of the argument. Socrates is consistent throughout. He points out that only the opinion of the wise was worth considering or worrying about and not that of others, what people in general say. Popular opinion about what is just and honourable and good, or the opposite is not the proper guideline for the virtuous life. This is the argument for the expert as against popular belief. Just as we follow expert advice in medicine, likewise we need expertise in ethics. A basic premise throughout is the one he had already developed during the trial that is our chief concern should be the search for the good life, not life itself. Therefore we never ought to do what is morally wrong, no matter what even our feelings happen to be. The suggestion is that it can never be right to do wrong, under no circumstance, even to return an injustice. These are seminal ethical considerations and Socrates thus provided a number of reasons for accepting the verdict of the jury and rejecting Crito's justifications to escape.

The rest of **Crito** is fundamental in discussions about political obligation and the law. Socrates argued that escape would be unjust in terms of the city from which he escaped because of a number of reasons. It was evident from the prolonged residency in the city where his parents and he had married and brought up children, the absence of curiosity to know about other states or their laws, and the unwillingness of Socrates to have chosen the penalty of exile at the trial meant that Socrates had agreed to be governed according to the Laws of the state and not only in word. His escape would spell disaster for the city. How many times have individual interests clashed with society-wide interests? "Do you imagine that a city can continue to exist and not be turned upside down, if the legal judgments which are pronounced in it have no force but are nullified and destroyed by private persons?"[23] It is the importance of the city that emerges: "Are you so wise as to have forgotten that compared with your

[23] Plato (1993), p.86.

mother and father and all the rest of your ancestors your country is something far more precious, more venerable, more sacred, and held in greater honour both among the gods and among all reasonable men?"[24] In the case of Socrates his lifelong dedication as a philosopher in the city provided tangible evidence.

What about the initial set of questions posed by Crito? The friends of Socrates might after all had been driven into exile, deprived of citizenship and lost their property, if they should have decided to help him escape. Besides if Socrates escaped to one of the neighbouring cities such as Thebes or Megara, both of which were well-governed cities, he would have gone to them as a subverter of laws. Socrates would also be confirming in the minds of the judges the justice of their condemnation. The argument about the children and their upbringing and education is resolved because either he took them into Thessaly and deprived them of Athenian citizenship, which was for Socrates unthinkable, or else left them behind. Whether Socrates was in Thessaly or in the afterworld would not make a difference to them. In both cases friends would take care of them. The decision at that point was clear and even Crito had to surrender to the power of argument from the master.

6.3.6 'Phaedo'

In **Phaedo** Plato developed further the character and teachings of Socrates. Plato's choice for the dialogue, especially in this work, allows for a more interesting presentation of character, highlighting in a dramatic way the moral aspect of Socrates over and above his philosophical contribution. A reading of the text will make clear as we have reiterated at the beginning of our argument about the difficulties to establish the true historical

[24] Plato (1993), p.87.

identity of Socrates and so the text cannot be accepted as an accurate record of the events it claims to describe. The context is set just before the old philosopher's death. **Phaedo** does not represent the actual day of execution but a conversation between Socrates' pupil Phaedo, who had been present, and Echecrates, some time after the event.

At one point following an explanation by the master, Simmias and Cebes started a conversation on their own. Socrates noticed this, and asked whether they found his account inadequate. It emerged that there were still doubts and objections and therefore these needed to be examined better. He asked them for their own views, and to point out any way in which his account could be improved. He also offered help to solve the difficulty. In fact, after some hesitation, the two produced objections so convincing that not only was the previous sense of agreement broken, but also uncertainty resulted. Socrates typically rose to the occasion and managed to surprise even Phaedo who said, "I never admired him more than on this particular occasion."[25] Of course, the fact Socrates had something to say was not unusual. But what astonished Phaedo was the manner in which he picked up the argument – his kind, gentle and pleasant manner. This exposed the worth of the personality beyond the intellectual merits of the man. The meeting continued with a serious discussion on the power of argument and logical analysis by Socrates. One should never follow people such as the sophists who taught that nothing was certain and everything followed the ebb and flow motion of the tide. He also admitted it was to his advantage to believe in the soul's immortality, but selfishness did not lead to a balanced judgment. He concluded that more than Socrates, it was the truth that counted, and if the others disagreed with what the master said then they should oppose him with every argument possible.

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[25] Plato (1993), p.150.

Plato further portrayed Socrates' humility and gentle manners in his behaviour toward the executioner. There is no hatred involved. Socrates had been very kind and was not angry with him. The final part of the **Phaedo** was not in dialogue form because Plato preferred the narrative version to recapture the final drama of the death scene. Facing death the attitude was one of good humour and confidence. The serenity of the master contrasted with the emotional distress of his followers. These had not realised that what Socrates preached he did. Phaedo stressed Socrates' composure at the outset: "In the first place, my own feelings at the time were quite extraordinary. It never occurred to me to feel sorry for him, as you might have expected me to feel at the deathbed of a very close friend. The man actually seemed quite happy, Echecrates, both in his manner and in what he said; he met his death so fearlessly and nobly."[26]

In the **Phaedo** a lot of attention is given to discuss the soul's immortality. In the final hours that preceded his death, Socrates tackled the theme of death directly pointing out how those who had devoted their life to philosophy "should be confident in the face of death" because they were "of their accord preparing themselves for dying and death."[27] After the death of the body, the immortal soul is reborn according to the merits of its former life, gradually purifying itself as it evolves outside the physical body. The soul is seen very much as a free agent on its way to liberation, not from the gods, but from the physical world of the body. Death implies the separation of the soul from the body, and once separated the soul can truly be free and pure. This is indeed the main reason why the man dedicated to philosophy is courageous when facing death. But it is one thing to construct rational and convincing arguments, another to have the courage of these convictions. In the **Phaedo**, all ended up agreeing with Socrates on an intellectual level that the soul is immortal, and that it is

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[26] Plato (1993), p.110.
[27] Plato (1993), p.116.

headed for a better life, but only Socrates succeeded in acting in a manner consistent with that belief. Simmias for example admitted that while he accepted the arguments, human weakness inevitably shattered full belief and doubt persisted. Crito similarly asked Socrates not to drink the poison immediately but to let some other time pass. The master of course rejected this and called for and took the cup "without a tremor, without any change of colour or expression." He said a final prayer, and drank the hemlock "quite calmly and with no sign of distaste."[28] Those witnessing the scene could not take it any more and there was a gradual breakdown into tears. Socrates admonished them for being weak, especially when it was said that one should die in silence. He bid them to be strong and keep quiet. The poison had a numbing effect on Socrates as it spread from his feet upwards until it reached his heart. Then he shuddered and died.[29]

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[28] Plato (1993), p.184.

[29] This description has a literary and not a historical value. Hemlock produces different reactions than those described by Plato. The French painter Jacques-Louis David will artistically represent this scene in his work *'The Death of Socrates'* (1787) an oil on canvas painting now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. He also reproduced the same pathos in his other popular death scene, *'Marat Assassinated'* (1793) another oil on canvas painting this time in the Musees Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique.

Chapter 7

Ethics

7.1 A brief introduction

In a previous chapter we have spoken about legal rights. When the wording of these rights in the legal documents is vague and their interpretation in court may therefore be inconsistent, it is up to the courts or other official bodies to declare what the right interpretation is. However in discussions over rights we do not only refer to legal rights; sometimes we also consider a different category of rights, moral rights. These cannot be defined in the same way as parliaments and courts do with legal rights. What parliaments decide or what courts proclaim are legally binding rights. On the other hand the usual way to settle controversies between two conflicting moral rights is through argument, not a vote or the proclamation of some expert, although expertise will enlighten the process. Moral rights disputes most of the time remain open-ended. Ethical debate does not imply a monopoly of philosophers or experts on moral decisions. In other words moral philosophers do not usually pronounce definitely on ethical aspects on behalf of everybody else. This rejection of privilege to any moral authority is also a major distinction between ethics and religion. Although philosophers have more practice in argument and analysis than other people, they have no special privilege on right and wrong, good or bad. They are not a priesthood that assumes the interpretation of some sacred text or a religious salvation theory.

It can be argued that expertise can help but is philosophic interest in ethical argument a luxury when in many cases some claim commonsense may be enough to decide? Part of the defence of ethics will surely emphasize the need that our attention must be sharper. The way in which Socrates handled Meletus in the **Apology** can highlight the recognition that we should not go about talking about things of which we are not exactly sure simply because they are ethical, that is a subject regarding which many consider themselves ready to pass an opinion. In the case of Meletus the responsibility was even heavier – we may add – because there was the life of a man in the balance. Plato separated ethics from commonsense or ordinary people's beliefs. He placed his highest concerns in the study or search for essential ideas – absolute, eternal that can only be approached through philosophy – employing scientific, conceptual thought rather than other faculties we adopt that pertain to the senses such as observation. Answering questions about the nature of Justice, Goodness, Beauty and Truth demands an effort to transcend the actual world we live in and especially those objects or phenomena in our physical world we associate with justice, goodness, beauty and truth. Such general terms demand a clarification of meaning. In the Platonic dialogues Socrates whilst referring to justice believed that one ought not to be content with individual instances of just acts but should search for a common quality that rendered similar acts just. Failure to do so would not only be intellectual but also moral. Should one know the truth, he will be expected to do the right thing. Alternatively vice which is primarily the result of ignorance will result. Indeed this may go a long way to explain the statement 'knowledge is virtue'.

"Ethics is inescapable," says Peter Singer.[1] Derived from Greek, ethics is, amongst others concerned with the purported value of different kinds of

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[1] Peter Singer *The Expanding Circle: Ethics and Sociobiology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), Preface.

life and activity, the norms considered by a community essential to its preservation and welfare, traditional customs or conventions of the culture we are born into and passed from one generation to the next. For example in every society or social group one discovers taken for granted beliefs. Ethical thought examines such assumptions discovering the reasons why we hold on to them. Such an exercise is evident in the stand we take whenever old and new beliefs clash. This is close to what D.D.Raphael considered philosophy's main purpose in the western tradition, which is "the critical evaluation of assumptions and arguments."[2] Sometimes this exercise raises doubts in people, as it attacks their convictions. When values are challenged and experience crisis, people generally tend to adopt a stand. If we stick to the old, traditional beliefs, we are opting for a conservative position, if we prefer novel sets of beliefs we are labelled sceptic and considered rebels, whereas if we decide to select the best from tradition in conjunction with the best from the new beliefs, then we are considered reconstructionist.

How do we recognise our values? Sometimes these can be identified in decisions we take in particular circumstances in life. They are also evident in our judgments and comments about other people. In a way such an exercise is an attempt to understand our reasons for action. Underlying this there is the consideration that not all reasons justifying particular options and choices are the same or carry the same weight. Certain reasons lead one to prefer some kinds of life as more worth living than others. Parents who are thinking about their children's future are caught up in this situation. How does one proceed in deciding about the future of one's own children, when they are too young to foresee the consequences of their own decisions? How did our parents solve this? Decisions to be made and reasons for such decisions to be as clear as possible! The way people attempt to shape their life, or shape up other people's lives (such as for

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[2] D.D. Raphael *Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.2

example in bringing up children) can be taken as a statement that particular values are being privileged above others. Besides looking ahead at desirable choices, we also think about values when we decide the measures to adopt to achieve our aims or ends. Not all means are the same and some are considered unethical. Many parents want their children to be in Church Schools. Will they be satisfied with the annual lottery of places to fill empty places in such schools or will they try to get them in through other means? Such ethical considerations are different from aesthetic, economic, political or even religious considerations although they may converge. In fact ethics can be distinguished from these other special areas, but it is not a total separation.[3]

7.2 Practical Ethics

What does a doctor do when assessing the case of a patient who suffers from a painful incurable disease and has demanded his right to terminate his life? And what about the teacher who is faced with a student who has gone through a full programme of study but has failed the last examination for a few marks? The lawyer has to decide what to do when he gets to know that his/her client is to blame for the crime. In all such cases these professionals have to decide. Technical professional expertise may allow the doctor to pass the right drug, the teacher to 'review' the distribution of marks, the lawyer to find some clause somewhere in the law to act upon, but should they? There is a constant interplay between what is technically and what is ethically desirable. Ethics can therefore engage with so many issues of practical life that demand ethical considerations.

Thinking about 'practical' ethics appears to contain a possible dichotomy between the two words. Practical can give the impression of something

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[3] Another argument for the interdisciplinary approach?

restricted to facts whereas ethics, like philosophy, is generally associated with inquiries into the abstract. In effect ethical thinking can help us to consider different positions and principles that should guide decision-making. Actually this branch of what has been called applied philosophy gets to grips with such problems as abortion and euthanasia which may be abstract, unreal concerns for young children sitting comfortably in a classroom idly discussing such issues, but that in fact can disturb one's life. It is an exercise that enhances the ability of deeper understanding at a conceptual level and the critical analysis of argument. If one tries to produce a tentative list of requisites for ethical debate this will include objectivity. This demands clear thought, a critical attitude, removal of prejudices, control on the emotions, open-mindedness and tolerance. Clear thought includes amongst others the ability to analyse by separating one concept from the other and being clear about the distinctive meanings of the different concepts. Is it logical? Does it cover all types of events including unusual situations? Does it fit the facts? In other words is it true? In a way all this leads to consider how philosophical inquiry is closer to science than religion or art.

It is a vision of philosophy applied to pressing contemporary issues and problems. This signifies a rejection of philosophy without commitment, a detached stand, when there are justified reasons for commitment. In a way it is a rejection of the picture of Socrates drawn by Aristophanes in **Clouds**, an intellectually profound philosopher but somehow incapable of grasping reality. This was not always the case.[4] Plato considered philosophy so important in the practical guidance of human activity that he resolved to make it an essential tool in the education of political leaders. This means that a dispassionate philosophical study approaching alternative viewpoints with the same degree of detachment may not be

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[4] Ed Helbig, 'Professional Philosophy and the Layman'. In, T.W.Bynum & S.Reisberg, (eds.) *Teaching Philosophy Today* (Ohio: Bowling Green Sate University, 1977): "In the past philosophers viewed their profession as eminently practical," p.13.

enough when what is needed is a degree of commitment instead of uninvolved neutrality (or even worse from this standpoint, to ignore completely the matter). In abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment, debates that demand a decision, taking a philosophical defence of a particular position may be more helpful than balancing arguments and counter arguments. The teacher in a classroom may ask the students about a topic that is being discussed but then joins the debate, gets involved by explaining his or her personal views to the others. This is different from the previous example and is faced with its own problems of possible indoctrination or other unwanted consequences but it somehow gives the idea that ethics is not only about academic analysis but also concerns commitment – moving one tiny (or large) step ahead of academic restraint.

7.3 Plato and Aristotle: what is the good?

At the beginning we mentioned that ethics is not religion and it is not even common sense, although one finds ethical reflection in both. Then we moved on trying to extract features with which we could identify ethics. One particular connection that the ancient philosophers made was ethics with politics. It was a way in which the Greek philosophers managed to secularise ethics, relating it to politics rather than to mythological religion. Political activity in ancient Athens was high and it was expected that Plato would head for politics since his uncle Charmides and Critias the nephew of his mother formed part of the oligarchic government of Tyrants. Things took a different turn when the Oligarchy became violent and also tried to implicate Socrates. Plato was an antidemocrat for a number of reasons including the treatment reserved for Socrates, his tutor, by the democrats. Despite the fact that there was Pericles, a skillful statesman, he also argued that democracy lacked a firm guidance. He was referring to Athenian conduct during the Peloponnesian War. Plato's ideal choice for a political state was one in which philosophers ruled. Previously we said that philosophers are not members of a priesthood but will we accept Plato's argument that they are to be the rulers of the state?

In 388/7 Plato founded the Academy where one could study philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and the physical sciences. The political link remained: one of the aims of the Academy was also the formation of statesmen and rulers. But philosophy showed the way. Plato here resembled up to a certain extent his master Socrates who had renounced to a politically active life (which as he said during his trial may have meant an early death) to dedicate his life to philosophy. Plato chose goodness as the supreme ethical concept, to which justice is subordinate in value. The good is an absolute quality, whose value is timeless, universal and absolute. Plato's good is not experienced through the senses but discovered (if it ever is) through engagement in philosophy, indeed this was the primary task in ethics. In Platonic ethics, a more polis-oriented (or politically-oriented) task was the search for, and practice of virtue. In the Republic, the ideal city, he identified wisdom, courage, discipline and justice as virtues, the first three associated with certain functions of the soul (and also individually with a particular section in society), whereas justice was considered the harmony achieved when the other three are functioning properly. Thus philosophers rule on the basis of their intellectual abilities, the intrepid warriors defend the philosophers and the city from internal and external enemies, while the rest are the workers, the generators of wealth.

Aristotle was born in 384 BC in Stageira a small city in Northern Greece. When he was seventeen years he joined Plato's Academy in Athens. Plato was already 60 years old. When Plato died at the age of 81, Aristotle left Athens because the city had become politically hostile. He became tutor of the crown prince Alexander of Macedonia, who was 13 years old, but after 3 years this education stopped because Alexander became regent due to his father's absence, and eventually king. Aristotle returned to Athens and founded his own school, the Lyceum, later renamed Peripatos. When Alexander died, Aristotle returned to his mother's house where he died a few months later, at the age of 62.

One of the major contributions of Aristotle in ethics was his concept of the ultimate good. When reflecting on the question what is the

characteristic activity most pertaining to the nature of man, Aristotle said it was the use of reason, contemplation. Other activities such as nutrition and growth are not peculiar to man only. Keeping in mind that since man is potentially good, he is also potentially bad it is only with the faculty of reasoned choice that we can determine the proper way. Both Plato and Aristotle were convinced that reason was the way to ethical truth. Plato required that the senses be ignored. Experience will not lead to the truth. Metaphysics was the way to the truth not experience based on the senses. Ethics can definitely be theoretical or speculative such as for example in the search for truth for its own sake. But it is not restricted to this. Ethical reflection, in itself, is already 'doing' something. It can be claimed that according to Aristotle the knowledge gained from ethics is practical. It is so not only because it deals with practical affairs such as human action, but also because the reflection is carried out in order to be able to act in a certain way. The eventual choice and consequent action are not a secondary objective or a side effect of ethical thought. Aristotle identifies how choosing to seek the truth about the good or worth of human action is basic to a good life. It is not knowledge that is the end of the search but life itself – one's living. So far as life is shaped by one's choices one is not doing ethics 'for its own sake', nor simply for the sake of becoming a person who knows the truth about the subject-matter. The objective is that one's choices, actions and whole way of life will be good, and worthwhile.

Aristotle searched for what it is that we all desire for its own sake, that is the end of all action and everything else is only desired because it is a means to arrive at it. Once found that would be the good. He considered how many goods or ends exist. So what we want is an end which we desire for its own sake and everything else we desire for the sake of this. The chief good was eudaimonia. It referred to something complete, final, self-sufficient (and done for its own sake). It is lacking in nothing, and the most desirable of all things are there. It is not counted as one good amongst many others. Indeed no other good can be added because these are all contained within it. In other words it consists of a number of goods.

Eudaimonia is to have a life, which is prosperous and flourishing, or to be well-off. Obtaining the best out of life is definitely not the more subjectively oriented modern versions of happiness but an objective condition corresponding to a general feeling of prosperity. This is professor Kenneth Wain's explanation:

"It is to obtain the best out of life, thus it is not a temporary state of contentedness or some transient, or even permanent, sensation of pleasure but an objective condition that is experienced over the whole of one's life-span and corresponds with a general feeling of well-being and self-sufficiency."[5]

7.4 Objectivists and subjectivists

Objectivists and subjectivists have quarrelled, amongst others, over whether there are absolute answers to moral questions or whether moral truth is a matter of personal decision in which every individual's isolated moral judgement is valid. Democritus commented how the sensations of hot and cold did not exactly correspond to reality because what is cold for me is not necessarily cold for you. In a way it depends on how one feels at the time.[6] In ethics can we say or not that what is just or unjust depends similarly on how I feel at the time? The implication will be that a concept such as justice can vary from one person to another, or during

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[5] Kenneth Wain *The Value Crisis: An introduction to ethics* (Malta University Publishers, 1995), p.41. It is recommended to have a look at this text which gives a more detailed and at the same time wider vision of ethical discourse and its context.

[6] What we know for sure about Democritus, c. 460 – c. 370 B.C., amounts to very little. None of his works have survived, although many quotations were passed on through other ancient sources. It appears he discussed the differences between how things are and how things seem to us. C.C.W.Taylor (1995) in 'Democritus' (p.185) writes: "According to some sources, he used this contrast to show the unreliability of the senses, but then faced the problem of the justification of his theory, which was founded on sensory data."

the passage of time. The famous maxim by Protagoras 'man is the measure of all things' can be interpreted to mean that truth depends on the way individual people see it, in other words they have the freedom to decide for themselves thus rendering the concept of truth relative. Guthrie however clarifies how Protagoras pointed out that "although no one opinion is truer than another, one opinion may be better than another."[7]

Can one talk about absolute standards of what is right or wrong? For Plato, we have commented earlier, goodness is the supreme ethical concept, to which justice and everything else is subordinate in value and meaning. The good is an absolute quality, represented by the sun in the parable of the cave. It is the sun that enlightens all the surroundings the good philosopher is able to see when he escapes from the chains that keep the other prisoners inside the penumbra of the cave where only fire lit by man gives any illumination. There they can only see shadows of objects on the wall of the cave reflected by the fire. The sun on the other hand brilliantly lights the world outside the cave. Similarly, goodness 'enlightens' all other concepts such as justice and beauty. Its value is timeless, universal and absolute. It is not experienced but discovered through engagement in philosophy, indeed this was the primary task in ethics. History however shows how pre-Classical society entertained human sacrifice, Classical civilisation was built on slavery, the medieval world organised mass serfdom, and in the modern world we still encounter widespread discrimination and systematic attempts at genocide. Can we assume or pretend to adopt some single objective truth to examine all these cases or is truth ultimately dependent on time, place and cultural background? Are right and wrong dependent on the standards of society in which you live? In this case right and wrong are not the same for everyone. In modern societies for example there is a sense of the individuality of people, absent

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[7] W.K.C. Guthrie *The Greek Philosophers: from Thales to Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.69.

in traditional societies. People are not only valued for their function or the role they occupy in society but also for their personal identity which gives them certain rights against the group. Human rights protect the individual's right to freedom of information, belief and expression. If there was one single truth to be discovered, this freedom would not stand for much except to lead towards the acquisition of that single truth. Of course this standard could be the belief in pluralism and the associated concept of tolerance that goes along with it, and these imply that people hold on to their subjective views.

7.5 Euthanasia

Previously we mentioned how sometimes ethical argument can develop through the philosopher taking a position – dirtying his or her hands – without necessarily remaining aloof, or unperturbed about important ethical issues. The ethical implications of euthanasia can be explored by checking the arguments raised by those who have examined the morality of euthanasia. This thrives on the belief in pluralism (and tolerance) when people argue about the justification or rejection of euthanasia. Peter Singer who provides the backbone for our arguments, suggests that if a clear line will divide justifiable from unjustifiable euthanasia, legalising it may be beneficial. Others warn that if this is the case, the boundary of acceptable killing will be pushed gradually back. Singer answers that doctors already have a good deal of power over life and death, through their ability to withhold treatment. A check on such power in legal terms will mean more safety because life decisions will be enforced by the scrutiny of another doctor. The worries however will remain.

Peter Singer discusses different types of euthanasia including the voluntary, non-voluntary and involuntary types. Voluntary euthanasia is carried out at the request of the person killed; indeed it is very similar to assisted suicide. This might also entail a previously written request. In the Netherlands, doctors have a right to assist a patient to die, even if this

should require a lethal injection. In Germany doctors may provide the patient with the means to end life but they must not administer the substance themselves. Non-voluntary euthanasia involves persons who are not capable of understanding the choice between life and death. These may include such people as the incurably ill, severely disabled children and people who have lost the capacity to understand the issue such as those who have had an accident or illness. Involuntary euthanasia occurs when a person capable of consenting is not asked, or when asked decides to go on living but to prevent unbearable suffering, his life is terminated. Genuine cases of the third type are rare.

Going through Singer's arguments one comes to terms with rational but still controversial justifications of infanticide and non-voluntary euthanasia. For example he mentions the case of Samuel Linares who swallowed a small object that stuck to his windpipe. This was followed by loss of oxygen, and eventually Samuel fell into a comatose state. Whilst Samuel was in hospital his father disconnected the ventilator that was keeping his son alive. Actually the child may not even have felt any suffering, and such suffering is generally included in descriptions of euthanasia. In this case it became clear how parents go through a lot of trouble, and the effect on them is terrible. Some parents may accept even the most gravely disabled child, but others may not. At this point once no voluntary adopters are ready, the only possibility left for these children is languishing in an institution. If human life is not simply a material process but there is some kind of quality attached to it, rendering certain life situations unbearable (without any or with very bad quality), then on this quality of life argument institutionalised existence may not come to much. On the other hand, those who disagree base themselves on the argument of the sanctity of life. Here there is no question at all – life is to be privileged throughout.

Spina bifida is a common birth disability due to a faulty development of the spine which, in its more severe cases, includes paralysis from the waist down, lack of control of the bowels and bladder, and excess fluid

accumulating in the brain (*hydrocephalus*) possibly resulting in intellectual disabilities. Life is miserable, painful and uncomfortable with the need for continuous surgery. This is not simply a case of a less promising life prospect for the sufferer than the normal child, it is much worse. Once again the two sides arguing for and against euthanasia struggle respectively over the need to remove suffering as against the need to protect human life at all costs. The decision may depend on God, nature, a personal subjective decision or rational principles.

Haemophiliacs, despite the fact that they live constantly on the edge of crisis, can be described as living in relatively better conditions than the spina bifida cases. When haemophilia, the element that makes blood clot, is lacking there is the risk of prolonged bleeding, especially internal and from the slightest injury.[8] Indeed permanent crippling and death may result. Is it justified for parents to kill a newborn haemophiliac? No, say those against euthanasia, if one accepts the possibility that the child may still lead a happy life; yes, say those in favour of euthanasia, if it means that the mother can conceive another child who will not suffer from haemophilia.

Down's Syndrome leads one to suffer from intellectual disabilities, and most will never be independent and yet life can be joyful. However there are other conditions singled out for cases that may justify euthanasia, says Singer. Those whose bones are so fragile they fracture at sudden movements, those who suffer from uncontrollable nausea and vomiting, cases of slow starvation due to cancerous growth, and others suffering from

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[8] 'Haemophilia' generally describes inherited blood disorders in which a life-long defect in blood clotting occurs. The clotting factors in normal blood are many but the most common defect arises in Factor VIII. This leads to what is known as Haemophilia A. A less common condition, in which factor IX is defective, is referred to as Haemophilia B. Both A and B share the same symptoms and inheritance patterns. Haemophiliacs were unknowingly victims of HIV infected blood transfusions.

an inability to control their bowels or bladder. Others have difficulty in breathing.

Is a disabled person's life less worth living than someone not disabled? According to Peter Singer some do regard the life of a disabled person to be less worth living than a normal person. "If they have no experiences at all, and can never have any again, their lives have no intrinsic value. Their life's journey has come to an end. They are biologically alive, but not biographically."[9] Of course it is all complicated because it is cruel to leave the decision in the hands of others. Usually these are relatives – the closest ones. Otherwise it is left in the hands of some authority to set a framework for legally acceptable decisions. If it was in the hands of the person suffering it will not be an easy affair. The pain may, one expects inhibit proper reflection in the long term. On their part, people against euthanasia have a clear-cut and straightforward decision: no. This should not of course mean insensitivity to the suffering.

In the Netherlands euthanasia is carried out by a physician at the explicit request of the patient leaving no doubt of the desire to die. The patient must be well informed, free, and has taken a durable decision. The condition the patient suffers from must be causing irreversible protracted physical or mental suffering which the patient finds unbearable and for which there is no reasonable alternative (from the patient's or medical point of view) to alleviate suffering. The doctor has to consult another independent professional who agrees with the judgment. Two doctors may mistake their diagnosis but in the end one wonders whether a longer life is such a supreme good outweighing all other considerations especially those of unbearable pain? If it were so, concludes Singer, than we would have to ban smoking and lower the speed limits to 40 km/hr.

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[9] Peter Singer *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.192.

Going back to Spina Bifida victims, these are born with an opening in the back exposing the spine. In the past most died but when in 1957 a valve that drains off excess fluid from the head was created, most survived. Unfortunately these may suffer from gross paralysis, multiple deformities of legs and spine, have no control on bowel and bladder, and experience intellectual disabilities. Dr. John Lorber, a UK doctor, proposed that only mild cases should be selected for treatment. Parents are to decide but in general parents in this situation usually accept the doctor's recommendations. The UK Department of Health and Social Security accepted Lorber's proposal. If those not selected get an infection they are not given antibiotics and they die.

The case of Baby Doe, although a Down's Syndrome victim, can be used as an example. The parents of Baby Doe decided not to have surgery for oesophagus, which results when the passage from mouth to stomach is not properly formed. The father of Baby Doe had worked with Down's Syndrome children. The Indiana State Supreme Court accepted the parents' decision but the US Supreme Court was called in. Meanwhile however Baby Doe died. Following this case, the Ronald Reagan (US president at the time) Administration passed regulations that made it necessary to give life-saving treatment to all infants no matter the disability. The American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics resisted. Dr. C. Everett Koop, surgeon-general of Reagan, said that he would give no treatment to the anencephalic, that is those without a brain, to those who suffer from internal bleeding in the brain because of extreme prematurity, those whose condition is complex because they can only breathe with a respirator and will never recognise another person. Other patients singled out by Dr. Koop are those lacking a major part of the digestive tract and are kept alive by the drip into the bloodstream.

"The acts and omissions doctrine" holds that there is an important moral distinction between killing and letting other innocent human beings die. As long as we do not violate specified moral rules that place moral obligations upon us, we are doing all that morality demands of us. The

Ten Commandments are in the negative so you need only abstain. It exposes the difference between outright murder and the other situation of not doing something when someone is dying. "Do not kill" is easy since most of us are not murderers. Avoiding the death of innocent people because of insufficient food or poor medical facilities when it is possible that we can do something about it is an out of the ordinary act of moral heroism. This is acceptable and justified within an ethic based on the non-violation of specific moral rules. E. Agius believes that there is a significant difference between killing and letting die. It is ethically justified to stop prolonging life when the intent is not to cause death, but rather to allow someone to die in comfort because the patient's death cannot be prevented and treatment has become burdensome and of little benefit to the patient. On the other hand, when we act to cause death by injecting a poison into the patient we are causally responsible for the death because had we not done what we did, the patient would not have died.[10] Singer replies that this does not hold when the ethic is based on consequences. Once the basis of what is good or not depends on consequences, then both situations are morally the same since both lead to death. Omitting antibiotics to a child with pneumonia or giving a lethal injection are indistinguishable since both are followed by fatal consequences. The case remains open.

The appeal to ordinary and extraordinary means of treatment rests on the belief that it is not obligatory to provide extraordinary means of treatment. But once again this depends on the quality of life of the patient or the cost of the treatment or else the possibility that resources be used to save life elsewhere. In the end what is so different between allowing to die and actively helping a patient to die? Peter Singer believes it can be argued that the latter is more humane (and thus more morally acceptable) because of the time it takes for a patient to die unassisted.

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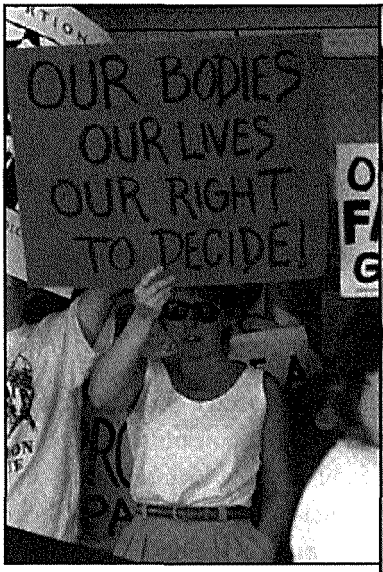
[10] E. Agius *Problems in Applied Ethics* (Malta University Publishers, 1994), pp.22-4.

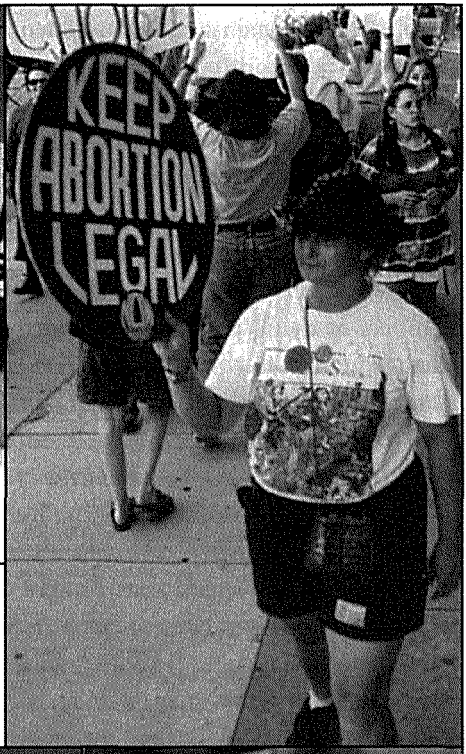
People who are against euthanasia mention the threat of the slippery slope that may lead from euthanasia to genocide. The experience of Nazism worries many of what might happen if euthanasia was legalised. Singer reflects on the consideration that all Nazi crimes started from the original acceptance of the attitude that there is such a life not worthy to be lived. In reply others state that unfortunately a life of physical suffering, without any pleasure or self-consciousness might not be considered worth living, so how can one be against the prevention of further suffering of great numbers of dying patients? E. Agius replies, "Modern methods of pain management enable physicians and nurses to control the pain of virtually all such patients without the use of lethal poisons, though often at the cost of so sedating the patient that interaction and communication with others is limited or no longer possible. Mercy entails staying by such a person's side and through friendship helping him or her to recover hope."[11] There is also the added worry of what an unscrupulous government with a programme of active euthanasia might do. However, thinks Peter Singer, an unscrupulous government has other means of getting rid of unwanted elements and need not rely on euthanasia. So the solution on the political front is to keep government democratic, open and in the hands of people who do not wish to kill their opponents. But as we said at the beginning the worries remain and so will the arguments and counter-arguments.

7.6 Abortion

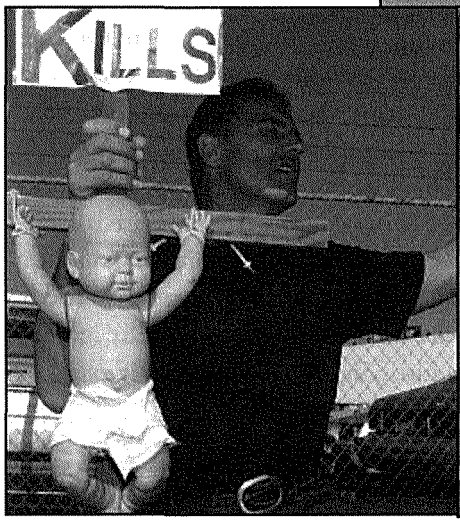
An argument about death that like euthanasia has monopolised a lot of attention is abortion. The beginning of life and the termination of life are the two ends that have now become major ethical concerns. Abortion is justified and vilified as much as euthanasia, but while the first has been legalised in many countries, those justifying the second find it extremely

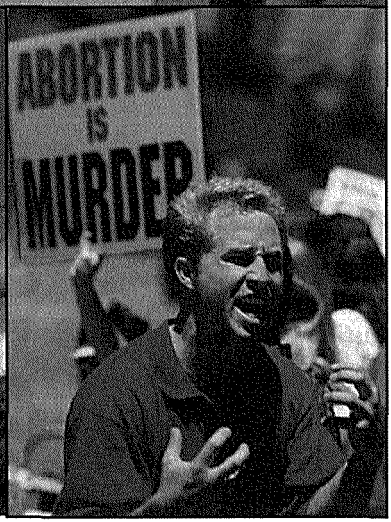
[11] E. Agius (1994), p.28.





Abortion is one argument that separates people with diverse views and that philosophers most probably will never reconcile. Is tolerance itself an acceptable solution?





difficult to get a legal clearance. Abortion today is mainly defined as the termination of pregnancy before the foetus is capable of independent life. The emphasis for those who hold that abortion is justified (which does not mean they are happy or overjoyed with abortion) is on 'independence', or viability. Once the independence stage is reached – and the parents still intend to abort – than the ball passes in the hands of those professionals who can guarantee the survival of the foetus and those who have to verify the legal implications of events in a court of law. When viability stage is reached and passed, and depending on the provisions of the law, courts may prohibit abortion even where this is legal at an earlier stage of pregnancy. The situation is not easy because medical care technology has advanced rapidly and what was impossible some years back is now possible. This means that the independence stage of the foetus has been pushed earlier than ever before. Still independence starts later than conception and for the time being it seems it will not be possible to guarantee it throughout the evolving stages of the embryo. This would mean the replication of the creation of life.

The viable stage when the foetus can survive outside the womb has become the line of contention for those who justify abortion. This point of biological development of the foetus does not really mean that much to those who do not accept abortion under any circumstance. Life starts at conception and whatever comes after that is part of a continuous line of biological (and spiritual, for those who believe) development. There is no breaking point or strategic redefinition of the value of human existence at any point. The foetus before and the newborn baby later are the same entity. In the past it was a bit more complicated because there was the matter of original sin for the Christians and the vital importance of baptism. This was one of the reasons for the earlier performance of the ritual as soon as possible after birth whereas previously it had been traditionally an adult concern. And yet the argument that life is one and it starts at conception is attractive because it is so simple and straightforward. There is no ulterior argument and for those believers whose religion states that God created life, the artificial termination of life

at any point is morally to be rejected. But one must remember that not only religious believers (and not all of them of course because some churches do accept the legalisation of abortion) refuse to accept any justification of abortion.

The supporters of the pro-life movement refuse to entertain the arguments of the pro-choice supporters, and vice versa. If one asks when human life begins, there is really one answer for the pro-life supporters: after fertilisation. According to Emmanuel Agius it is not really a question because only one answer applies. One needs to ask other questions. How should we evaluate human life in the earlier stages?[12] Is the embryo a person with potential or a potential person? Is the fact that the embryo alive and certainly a member of the human species enough to establish that its destruction is wrong, close if not equal to the destruction of innocent adult human life. Paul Ramsey's argument summarised by Peter Singer states that modern genetics explains how the fusion sperm – ovum creates a "never-to-be-repeated" informational speck. In fewer words this means life is a matter of genetic uniqueness and so the destruction of any foetus is murder.[13] Emmanuel Agius argues on similar lines claiming that

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[12] In vitro fertilisation, the fertilisation of the embryo outside the human body, is a routine procedure especially in cases of infertility. Procedures require further experimentation, and experimentation requires in its turn more embryos, a number of which must necessarily be destroyed. Embryos are frozen and stored, donated to research or destroyed. If the argument is that life starts at fertilisation than the whole IVF procedure has to be rejected by those who are pro-life. Besides the suggestion that embryo research can provide results useful to future embryos with problems is an argument based on consequences and the good and happiness of others at the expense of the few who must suffer. Such a Utilitarian ethical justification leads to an instrumental value of embryos used for experimentation.

[13] Peter Singer (1993). This will seal the argument for cloning which becomes unacceptable since the reproduction of an individual's genetic code breaks down the 'uniqueness' argument. What it may suggest however is that contraception is morally acceptable since there is no determination of any new genetic identity at the point when

it is a biological system that develops in successive, interconnected patterns, underlined by coordinated, continuous and gradual processes whilst maintaining an own identity.

"The new system is not simply the sum of the two sub-systems, but rather a combined system which following the two sub-system's loss of individualisation and autonomy and given the necessary conditions, starts to function as a new unit, intrinsically determined to reach its specific final form ... (It also has) a clearly defined design-project, with the essential and permanent information for the gradual and autonomous realisation of such a project."[14]

The argument of potentiality divides the two camps. Peter Singer argues that what has a potential to become something literally means it has not yet reached that potential stage. A foetus can become a 'person' but that means it is not yet a person. Being a member of the human species does not make you automatically a person. He gives the following explanatory examples: pulling out an acorn is not the same as cutting a venerable oak tree; Prince Charles may become a king but he is not one yet. He also suggests that the claim to life based on potentiality is a weaker premise than the one based on an actual human being.[15] For those in the pro-life section who disagree with this, the reply is the same as above. There is no moral distinction to be made between the foetus and the baby because they are the same genetic unique 'project'. Therefore at any stage they deserve protection and respect.

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sperm and ovum are still separate which is the basic function of contraception. Agius (1994) disagrees with those who state that the ovum and sperm taken together but as yet not united have to be regarded as having the same potential as a fertilised egg: "Whatever has the potential to become an embryo is not identical with the potentiality of an already existing embryo."(p.15)

[14] Emmanuel Agius (1994), pp.8-9

[15] Peter Singer is not a supporter of this either because he supports life and not only human life.

The argument of those who sustain that women should have a right to their body, the pro choice, and therefore what happens inside their body is their personal concern rather than anybody else's also has its manifest adherents. After the stage of viability the justification of abortion is generally only entertained in special cases where there is the life of the woman or where there is a severe handicap involved. These qualifications establish the complexity of the arguments of those who justify abortion and who have to grapple with ever-changing technological advances that mean a redefinition of border cases, and other complementary arguments such as which are severe cases of handicap and which are not.

The point of arguing for or against is really the background for what are dramatic decisions to be made – and they have to be made quickly. The arguments that start off with the words "she should have ..." are futile once the situation has developed to the point where parents are thinking about abortion. The decision has to be taken and if the country has legalised abortion the practical problems of going through the procedure is less complicated than where abortion is illegal. In the latter case women who have decided to abort must go to some 'underground' centre where serious repercussions – sometimes death – may result. Otherwise they have to travel to some other country where abortion is legal. This is one of the topical arguments for those who are in favour of abortion. No matter how much one says or enforces the law against abortion, there will still be cases of women who want to abort. It is sometimes the case that those who are ethically against abortion may accept the argument that although abortion is immoral, laws prohibiting abortion have a number of unwanted consequences. When law is leading to and procuring suffering to people, then there must be some rethinking about the law. Thus it is assumed in this case that laws should not necessarily reflect a particular morality. Tolerance has to be foremost and so private ethics are not be imposed upon. And yet it is difficult to envisage someone who thinks that abortion is murder and at the same time tolerating legal abortion.

Those who wanted to abort initially but then decided to carry on with

the pregnancy have many future possibilities. Adoption and fostering are two possibilities but the women concerned may finally decide to bring up the child. These options clearly indicate that the woman is in charge of what happens to her life. She can decide otherwise. The quality of life argument is involved. A woman who has decided to bring up the child may have to destroy all her life prospects and happiness. If she does not want to give the child for adoption or fostering than it may also mean that the child will also suffer from lack of care and love. There is no promise of a bright future. Regret in fact connects both situations: abortion or going on with an unwanted pregnancy. Guilt may be an ideological tool used to influence these women to enforce one's moral stand.

As we said at the beginning the situation at the legal level is more definite. In Western Europe before 1967, writes Peter Singer, abortion was illegal except in Denmark and Sweden. The UK legalised it during that year and in 1973, following the Roe vs. Wade case at the Supreme Court of the USA women who wanted to have an abortion had a constitutional right to it. Italy and Spain traditionally staunch Roman Catholic people also liberalised laws, despite strong protests. The situation was never really easy for those who fought for abortion rights since those who object to it struggle to limit its scope (if total removal is impossible). Pre-electoral political campaigns are typical contexts during which the issue is revamped. But in the end both sets of people have to live together and it seems that as suggested above, there will always be two groups, both having valid arguments for their particular positions, without any compromise in sight.

7.7 Death

Abortion brings us face to face with death. Death has fascinated man since the beginning. Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn mention how many interpretations one can give from burial evidence both about the concept of death of the wider community as well as about status and wealth in that community. The objects found buried with the dead do not necessarily

prove a belief in the afterlife since "possessions are so firmly associated with him or her that for another to own them would bring ill luck."[16] But when food, equipment, or slaughtered attendants accompanying a prince are discovered in burial sites this appears to sustain a belief in the afterlife. Is there any way that we can search for a meaning of death?

Discussing euthanasia (not only from Peter Singer's angle) one talks a lot about life. Whilst thinking about death, generally we are preoccupied about the meaning/s of life. Death is the end to all that. But life can take on so many different meanings it is already a big challenge to answer satisfactorily this query. At the same time asking about life whilst one is an integral, living part of it does not necessarily simplify the query. And yet we are still curious about what happens when we are no longer alive. Talking about death may be clearer if we are able to look at it from the outside, just as Socrates does in the final passages of the **Apology** when he weighs alternative futures. Otherwise we could attempt to envisage it by seeing our own death through the eyes of others. In **Il Fu Mattia Pascal** Luigi Pirandello presents us with a certain Mattia Pascal who dies three times: one by coincidence when, having ran away for some time from town, he was thought to have committed suicide; another when he had to consciously 'kill' his newly-adopted and self-projected existence as Adriano Meis, in Rome; and then his conclusive 'biological' death after he returned back to his original town.

7.7.1 Does the soul exist?

Our curiosity about death usually makes us reflect about the soul, or some other spiritual existence. This leads to the mind-body problem. Dualists

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[16] Paul Bahn & Colin Renfrew *Archaeology: Theory, Methods and Practice* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997), p. 394.

imagine that after death the soul leaves the body and has an independent mental life of its own. This can only happen if the soul can live outside the body and so without any sensory perception or physical action since these demand a body. Otherwise mental processes depend on the brain, and its biological functions, part of the material body. Therefore mental life in this case requires a body. Do we have separable souls? In the absence of scientific evidence we can still (and some people prefer to) rely on belief. Others disagree and claim that what we know depends purely on consciousness, which in turn depends on the nervous system. This repudiates any religious or spiritual claims.

7.7.2 What should we feel about death?

Terror, sorrow, indifference, relief, and so many other sentiments and emotions are experienced. Epicurus thought of physical health and mental tranquillity as basic to a good life and therefore by implication anything that 'disturbed' this balance had to be abolished, brushed aside, as much as possible. Good and evil have to do with sensation, whilst death is the end of all sensation. Thinking about death is disturbing for many. At the same time worrying about death is worrying about something that is not around at the time; when it is, we will not have to worry any more. Death is the final irrevocable stage. This line of thinking that places gods at a far-off place and from whom "we nothing have to hope and nothing to fear" was an abominable perversion to Christianity.[17]

But is it not terrible if there is no afterlife? Three different views emerge in response to the query. One view sustains that non-existence is neither

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[17] J.C.A. Gaskin (1995) 'Epicurus' (p.240). He writes that Epicurean ideas "denied a provident God, affirmed the value of life and the values of this world, denied immortality, and advocated an account of the universe wholly at variance with the Christian."

good nor bad. Another view sustains, as Socrates suggested during his trial, it could be a blessing. The present life may become unbearable especially in a physical sense. Euthanasia sympathisers put a lot of emphasis on the quality of life argument and, they argue, life is not worthwhile living under certain circumstances. In this case, death is, as we said, a blessing. The matter today is rather more complex because of the advances in medical technology. As far as others are concerned, life itself will become extremely boring if we never die. Finally the third view suggests that death is the ultimate evil. To many people death is terrible because the world will still go on without them; they forget that before they were born the world was there and they did not exist.

Chapter 8

Religion: Christianity

8.1 Historical background: The End of the Roman Empire

The Roman Empire stretched around the Mediterranean basin and far beyond. But it was almost always under pressure by nomadic tribes coming from across the frontiers of the Empire. The gradual decline of the Empire eventually opened up the frontiers to the tribes. Although the city of Rome remained the centre for some time, the strength of the Empire lay elsewhere. The scientific advances of the astronomer, mathematician and geographer Claudius Ptolemy had come from Egypt, which had also hosted the renowned Library, and supplied most of the corn for Rome. In the end, the physical absence of the emperors, pre-eminently military leaders away from Rome on war campaigns, was also felt. The decline of the Empire forced the division into an Eastern and a Western half. During emperor Constantine's reign from 306 to 337AD the two halves were temporarily reunited. The same emperor however had founded a new capital in the eastern region, Nova Roma (Byzantium, in Greek, Constantinople, in English) that was easier to defend, could secure grain supplies and monitor the rich caravan trade from Asia. On the other side of the Empire, most of the German tribesmen who had established themselves in the Roman Empire by the fifth century were accommodated and their settlement traded by the Romans for military service. To solve the problem of hosting an entire people that retained its own tribal structure, the Romans promoted the

barbarian king to a Roman general. In this way he secured a place in the Imperial administration. The Romans on their part temporarily secured a buffer zone on the outskirts of the Empire protected by these tribesmen turned into warriors, who they hoped, could keep others out.

But others still came pouring in across the frontiers and the armies of Gaul had to be recalled to defend the eastern frontier, which they did. Nevertheless the finances of the Empire could not sustain the armies needed to keep them back for long. Confronted by the advances of Attila's Asiatic Huns, other Goths pushed inside the territory of the Roman Empire. The army of Aetius ready to confront the invaders and defend the Empire was made up Franks, Burgundians and Visigoths, and it did manage to repulse the Huns thanks to superior tactics, a Roman military heritage. Eventually with the general decline turning into collapse, an even more widespread invasion followed within what had been the Roman Empire as German chieftains fought one another. Independent kingdoms covered all the provinces. These included the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in Britain, a Frankish kingdom in the north of Gaul, a Burgundian kingdom in Provence, a Visigoth kingdom in Aquitaine and in Spain, a Vandal kingdom in Africa and the islands of the Mediterranean, and an Ostrogoth kingdom in Italy. The Empire was thus dismembered. There was no longer any Empire in the West and Europe was now occupied and barbarised.

The undertones of this narrative are typical accounts of a civilization – the European one – trying to save itself from the dreaded enemy of civilisation – in this case, the Mongols.[1] Of course earlier on, the Central and eastern European barbarian tribesmen had been considered in the same way until they could be kept out. As for the Asian threat, having been defeated once, Attila the scourge of God, turned back to Germany,

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[1] This narrative can be approached in more detail by reading various accounts of the decline, including, J. M. Roberts *The Penguin History of the World* (London: Penguin, 1992), Book 3, chapter 8: 'The Waning of the Classical West'.

returning once more the following year only to be defeated again. The larger question remains? What were the causes of the decline of Rome?[2] One out of the many reasons suggests that all civilisations decline and the Roman Empire was no exception. Although it seemed so strong and complex, and the decline was amazingly slow, it did regress. When there is fear of war, invasion, plague and famine, the worst enemies of civilisations, comments Kenneth Clark, constructing things, planning trees, planning next year's crops are not considered worthwhile. Exhaustion and the feeling of hopelessness are the worst enemies, even in a society with high material prosperity. "So if one asks why the civilisation of Greece and Rome collapsed, the real answer is that it was exhausted," concludes Clark.[3] Another consideration is curiously close to the present worries of a European civilisation that finds it difficult to protect its borders from possibly unwanted outsiders. Asian tribes had attacked the Goths – both Ostrogoths and Visigoths – on the eastern extremities of the European continent. The latter did not attempt to resist the Asian horsemen but pushed westwards – entire tribes on the run. The image recurs so often in history as evident in the regular incidents of illegal immigrants transported across the Mediterranean into the European Union. Whatever they are running away from is deemed (by them) so overwhelming that they are ready to risk their life and possessions to attempt to cross over.

Besides the new mix of peoples – barbarian and Roman – who in one way or another settled down together, another question that will be seminal to future developments in Western Europe was that of language. If we check the areas outside Germany today where we find a widespread use of German we notice that in the Roman Imperial lands of Rhaetia and Noricum, as well as parts of Flemish Belgium, German is prevalent. Today these form part of southern Bavaria, Switzerland and Austria, as well as Belgium. They

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[2] The numerous volumes of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon should in a way show how futile is any attempt at an exhaustive answer.

[3] Kenneth Clark *Civilisation: A Personal View* (London: BBC, 1971), pp.3-4.

had been border provinces of the Roman Empire. They prospered for centuries and then declined. Here the barbarian tribes had descended and overwhelmed the Roman population, which in these border territories must have been sparse. The German dialect remained supreme. Britain, like the other peripheral regions mentioned, was invaded by the Anglo-Saxons who found themselves alone because the provincials retreated, and so they continued to govern themselves as they had done in the past. In other parts of the Roman world it was the Latin tongue that survived into our own days in the form of the various Romance languages such as French, Spanish and Italian, amongst others. Further inside the Empire, where the Germans were a minority and easily absorbed by the Roman provincials, the barbaric language disappeared. Besides the native tongue, their customs and law hardly survived. The empire was barbarised but the German tribesmen did not manage to impose their ways over the Roman population. There were 'inevitable' massacres and a lot of problems for the settlement but in the end it worked out. Besides, the Germans, like the Romans, were Christians so although they were military conquerors, they still somehow submitted themselves to the Church. The latter used all its authority to merge the barbarians and the Romans. This is another explanation for the rapid abandonment of the barbarian languages in favour of Latin, the language of the Church, inherited from the 'glorious' Roman Empire.

8.2 The Christian Religion

Christianity already had by this time a long history. It came from the Eastern Mediterranean and moved gradually to the West, spreading in other directions in the process. The worship of pagan gods was still popular but it often lacked any deep personal meaning. These pagan gods had been intimately celebrated within the relatively small confines of the city-states in Greece but when they became the gods of cosmopolitan empires such as the Macedonian or the Roman, the emotive attachment suffered. Like the Maltese villager who had passionately celebrated the feast of the patron saint and was now living in the US or in Australia, when the day of

celebration arrives, it is not exactly the same as in the village back in Malta. In Greek Antiquity the change in the relationship between man and god was also part of the identity crisis that had accompanied the demise of the polis system, overwhelmed by the Macedonian Empire builders who kept the mythological tales which were now however becoming artistic representations rather than associated with natural forces and processes intimately linked to the agricultural world.

When St Paul spoke to the Athenians as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, he made a distinct appeal against the anthropomorphic and popular idols and spoke in favour of an all-powerful eternal God creator, who does not reside in temples nor needs men to help him. This rejection of anthropomorphism was a concept close to that of the Greek philosophers of those days. Whilst the poets and artists picked and chose from the tales, the Greek philosophers ignored them. The pagan gods were theoi natural forces beyond human control. They were related to the earth – wind, fire, earthquakes, and so on – and they were the basis of the mythological tales. These stories gave an explanation – in the absence of scientific data – of nature, its forces and processes, attempting an explanation that made sense in what otherwise might have been a totally chaotic world. But the Christian God was more powerful than Nature, indeed unlike the Greek theoi He was outside it, and even more so, He could defeat it. God turned flesh and blood in the figure of Jesus, suffered and died but was finally resurrected, the ultimate victory over nature, breaking the final bondage of natural existence, a fundamental belief of Christian thought. This went against the strong association between paganism and the idolatrous belief in nature of mythology but even against the focus of Epicurus and Lucretius on the senses.[4] In

[4] D.G. Evans (1995) 'Lucretius' (pp.513-4): Lucretius (c.95-52B.C.), the Roman poet who in his 'De rerum natura' argues "that human beings are purely material things and so they cannot survive the destruction of their physical bodies; religion which seeks to teach otherwise, is damaging superstition." Greek Epicurean philosophy was a major influence on Lucretius. Check Epicurus in section 7.6.2.

Athens there were new converts. In Rome many people turned to a number of new cults that started spreading in the city of Rome. These attracted followers partly because those who joined felt that membership in such sects gave the feeling one belonged to a specially privileged group. Of these the one that had by far the most permanent effect was Christianity. By the time the apostle Paul arrived in Rome there were already Christians there to greet him. St Luke writes in the Acts of the Apostles 28: 15 that "certain brothers from Rome who heard about us came out as far as the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns to meet us. When Paul saw them, he thanked God and took fresh courage."[5]

Christians however had a hard time in Rome. The first persecutions followed the great fire of Rome, which many suspected had been deliberately started. So Nero turned the Christians into scapegoats. Arrested and forced to confess other names of Christians, many were executed in the most horrible way – killed by wild animals, burnt or crucified. Notwithstanding the persecutions, the Christian faith did not die. In fact the persecutions created martyrs, and martyrs created the ground for more followers. Slaves, women and people belonging to the lower classes joined the Christians. They still remained social underdogs but they were promised freedom in the afterlife. Christianity was not established as a force for this world. This popular appeal of the new creed however angered and perhaps scared the Romans since it could be interpreted as potentially revolutionary. When slaves refused to do certain duties, subjects refused army service, and others refused to respect the Emperor as a semi-divine leader, things looked bad. But not only the "meek" joined – amongst the members there were intellectuals and senators who adopted the Christian faith as well. The Christians were in fact not a threat to the Empire. They were loyal to the State, which they understood to be a separate entity from religion – one demanding loyalty

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[5] *The New American Bible* (Chicago: Good Counsel Publishers, 1971)

to Caesar, the other to God. Civic obedience was an obligation. Later political rulers thrived on this loyalty, even for what were political projects that did not reap benefits to the people. For Karl Marx religion became the opium of the people softening but not removing the real suffering of oppressed people in an unjust world.

Some of the original values that attracted the early followers of Christianity are still appreciated today by Christians and have not lost their appeal. The possibility of eternal salvation was a powerful attraction – arguably the most powerful. Christians believe they will surpass life and death on earth, and so Christians are not primarily faithful to or attracted by the natural world because their principal aim is to defeat death by reaching the eternal spiritual world. Another 'attraction' was the promotion of the maternal figure of Our Lady. In a Mediterranean region where previously the Maltese prehistoric mother goddess, the Phoenician Astarte, even the Greek goddess Athena had been extremely powerful deities, the Virgin Mary claimed a powerful role and innumerable followers. The number of churches dedicated to Our Lady in Malta and elsewhere is extremely high.[6] Christianity spread also because the parables of Christ were simple stories within fishing and farming contexts, in a Mediterranean region where these two activities were widespread. The fish was indeed an early symbol of Christianity, and the founder of this new creed was the 'shepherd' Jesus. On another level the close similarity of the story of Socrates, the philosopher already highly appreciated by Roman thinkers, and Jesus, the religious leader, both ready to die for the truth amongst their own people, helped. It was a sign of things to come – the Greek philosophical heritage and the Christian message of faith blended and organised within a Roman framework. Two hundred years after Nero's

[6] Sigmund Freud also points out the "infantile" need of the common man for Big Daddy or as he calls him in *Civilization and its Discontents* (New York: Dover, 1994), p.9: "a greatly exalted father" who is "watching over him."

persecutions, Constantine, the Roman Emperor in Byzantium, converted to Christianity and eventually it became the official state religion.

8.3 Monasticism: the origins

The earliest official Christian Church in Rome was in difficulty in the first centuries of its spread in the city and whereabouts, but notwithstanding this, as an organisation it was still relatively strong and had the potential for further growth. The circumstances of the time were not easy. The decadence was reflected internally within the official church, the secular clergy. Gradually another clergy made a place for itself, the regular clergy, the monks. Monasticism contributed a spiritual element to the Church always dangerously close to becoming too worldly in its interests. The monk gives a wholehearted assent to Christ's demand to take up the cross and follow him. When compared with the true and permanent world of God, our temporary material existence only has a secondary role and can be sacrificed totally to the ultimate end of life: an eternity in God's presence. The ultimate end of monastic life is the search for God, to obtain that eternal life. One way to achieve this is to become detached from all immediate interests dedicating oneself, in silence and in withdrawal from the world, to prayer and an ascetic life. The only motivation and justification for action is spiritual. This renunciation to material interests had been an original intention of the hermits – to renounce the world and dedicate life to the worship of God. It seemed best fulfilled by a withdrawal from the community, the city, into solitude in the wilderness.

The retreat of St John the Baptist and Christ for forty days into the wilderness, as the Scriptures recount, were appealing models. St Anthony retired to the desert in 285. Many followed such an example. St Pachomius eventually organised these monks under a common administration and common rules. This was not easy as the hermit life is a search for spiritual enlightenment by those who want to be alone and this solitude might stem from apprehension of organised or institutionalised experiences including

religious ones. In other words the hermit prefers a direct experience of God unmediated by any institution that may (or may not) claim control over religious experience, for example through the imposition of dogma or discipline. Eventually the apparent contradiction of living apart in a community became standard. Removed from the wider world, they could worship God together. One such group of monks was the one led by St Benedict of Nursia in the early sixth century. They settled on Monte Cassino, close to Naples. In Italy barbarians, plagues and famine were still creating havoc. In fact most people left town because of these dangers not some spiritual quest, but others renounced the activities and goods of this world in order to devote themselves in solitude to the salvation of their souls.

8.3.1 St Benedict

The monastic tradition of the Middle Ages in the West, taken as a whole, is founded principally on two texts, the life of St Benedict as narrated in Book II of the 'Dialogues' by St Gregory (pope from 590 to 604), and the Rule for Monks, traditionally attributed to St Benedict. Both Gregory and Benedict were central figures in the rise of the Roman Church.[7] Like St Augustine, St Benedict started by taking up studies including grammar, rhetoric and law and then abandoned them it seems because of the moral dangers they posed. His life would be dedicated to the search for God, lived out in the best conditions for reaching that goal, in other words, in separation from this 'dangerous' world. St Gregory wrote:

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[7] St Gregory writes that besides the many miracles, for which he was quite famous, St Benedict was also sufficiently learned in divinity. He wrote a rule for his monks, appreciated for discretion and its eloquent style. *The Dialogues Of Saint Gregory, Surnamed Dialogus And The Great Pope Of Rome And The First Of That Name* is available from web-site included in next footnote.

"But for as much as he saw many by reason of such learning to fall to dissolute and lewd life, he drew back his foot, which he had as it were now set forth into the world, lest, entering too far in acquaintance therewith, he likewise might have fallen into that dangerous and godless gulf: wherefore, giving over his book, and forsaking his father's house and wealth, with a resolute mind only to serve God, he sought for some place, where he might attain to the desire of his holy purpose: and in this sort he departed, instructed with learned ignorance, and furnished with unlearned wisdom."[8]

St Benedict's rules for monks were not only rules of prayer or pious exercises. Monks were required to honour God by labour, both manual as well as study. All monks were to assist in the work in the field, in the kitchen and elsewhere The rules were simple, including the prescription that all monks must attend prayers or church services eight times a day, for a total of about five hours, they were also to practise silence at all times, especially at night. They also had to lead pure and obedient lives. The following is indicative of behaviour regulation:

"All the monks shall sleep in separate beds but, if it is possible, they shall all sleep in a common dormitory ... The younger brothers are not to have their beds next to each other, but among those of the elders. Let the elders rouse the sleepyheads and help them to get up ... The brothers are so to serve each other that no one can be excused from the work of the kitchen. On Saturday, the monk who ends his weekly service must clear up everything." [9]

In the Rule we find reflected two elements in St Benedict's life: knowledge of letters and search for God.[10] Although in the sixth century one could not expect that all who entered the monastery were literate, St Benedict

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[8] http://www.ocf.org/OrthodoxPage/reading/StPachomius/Saints/dia2.html.

[9] J.A.P. Jones *The Medieval World* (London: Macmillan Education, 1979) pp.171-2.

[10] Further knowledge about the Rule can be obtained from: http://www.osb.org/gen/rule.html.

assumes that the monks, excluding a few, are not illiterate. To do the reading prescribed by the Rules, they must know how to read. Therefore there had to be a school where one could learn how to read and write. Reading and meditation meant that one possessed books, knew how to read them, otherwise one must learn. St Benedict recommends that reading during the time when others are silent is be done so as not to disturb the rest. One did not meditate in the abstract. To meditate in this case is to read a text and learn it 'by heart' in the fullest sense of this expression, with one's whole being including the physical part represented by the mouth, the intellectual effort to search for meaning and understanding represented by the mind, whereas the conviction needed to sustain the practice is represented by the will.

St Benedict's monastery was for the service of the Lord. It was exclusively a monastery; and although it had a school, this did not modify ultimately the monastic ideal. The school was a means, like the practice of reading and writing, for the realisation of the final end that was and still is the search for God. The compromise between dedication to the spiritual and respect for the letters is unsteady and has to be continuously balanced. There is always the risk of leaning too heavily on one side, adopting one and giving up the other. They are the two constant elements of Western monastic culture: the exclusive search for God, the love of eternal life with the consequent detachment from all else, including the study of letters on one side, the love of human wisdom as recorded by the written word on the other. The two central currents of monastic civilisation in the West were indeed the literary heritage of Graeco-Roman Antiquity, and the longing for God that motivated the religious experience of the monk. And yet St Benedict was clear that the one end of monastic life remained predominantly the search for God, to obtain eternal life. One must therefore become detached from all immediate interests, devoting oneself in silence and in withdrawal from the world to prayer and asceticism. The only motivation and justification for action is spiritual. Total renunciation with the intention of pleasing God subordinates any practical or social end to a secondary role.

To establish different priorities, the previous comments about St Benedict's monastic rule can be contrasted with the **Institutiones** of Cassiodorus, a programme of studies for monks at the monastery he founded in Vivarium. Cassiodorus lived with the monks, but he never became one and he does not think like them. He was more of a manager. The **Institutiones** were an introduction to the Holy Scriptures first, and to the liberal arts second. Thus it comprises two books, one treats of divine letters, the other of secular letters. A treatise 'On Grammar' complements them. The two principal learning objectives were how to win eternal life, quite similar in principle to St Benedict's Rule, and how to speak well, which was relatively ignored by St Benedict. His respect for learning is clear in the instructions that explain how to handle, correct, reproduce, and mend manuscripts in the library, including the intellectual prerequisites for such an exercise. An extensive knowledge of spelling and grammar are necessary to write and correct the available texts. Cassiodorus aimed at contemplation and scholarship. If the latter was in practice difficult to develop amongst the monks available, then at least they could support study through their labours in the library. Thus although studies are given secondary importance, in actuality they are given almost as much consideration as spiritual life. In a way this contrast between St Benedict and Cassiodorus is a part, perhaps a marginal one at that but still indicative of the more extended synthesis that was taking place on the level of ideas following the attempted fusion (where possible) of Ancient wisdom and Christian spirituality.

8.3.2 St Gregory

The introspective element of monastic confinement will find an exteriorisation in the growing aspirations of the Church hierarchy attempting to establish a role that was significant and influential in the affairs of the external world. Originally the spread of the monasteries, first in Italy then elsewhere had been a slow process. It was St Gregory, the first great Pope, who transformed the fortunes of the Church. Pope from

590 to 604, Gregory was a very influential figure and his writings turned him into a popularity cult in the world of manuscript copying. The way he reacted to human suffering was exemplary for Christians. An ailing man – his infirmity made him extremely sensitive to human suffering, the effects of original Sin, but also of the value of weakness and temptation for spiritual progress. His personal suffering gave him a strong sense of the difficulties suffering procured. On another level the existence of sin and our tendency to be attracted toward it causes pain to the spirit. This can only be balanced by the growing desire for God, a desire to re-attach ourselves to Him, complemented by the regret of sin. St Gregory emphasized throughout the desire for God as only He can fill our inner emptiness, and help us soar high above the 'heaviness' of human existence.

Beyond the spiritual significance, St Gregory was also important because he was the one responsible for a stroke of genius that transformed the role of the monks within the Church and the role of the Church within the external world. He sent monks to England where they successfully spread the word of the Church amongst pagans. This success meant that during and after the long period when invasions were still disturbing the Continent, the Latin heritage was conserved in England. The role of the pope in Rome increased and the manifest authority that he exercised was strengthened. Up till then, the pope was merely an equal of the patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople. As with the other patriarchs, the Emperor of Byzantium reserved the right to ratify the nomination of any new pope in Rome. But now the pope had a following in Britain where the Byzantine link was ineffective. This will remain the greatest achievement of Gregory's pontificate, and the monks will play a central role in it. The conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, from 596 to 655 AD, was not simply a stroke of luck or a miracle. It depended on a strong financial position and devout monks. His practical genius had helped him reorganise the property and territories over which the Church could lay claim. Eventually the papacy found itself in possession of regular income and abundant resources becoming a wealthy landowning power of the

time. Nevertheless Gregory did not stop at this. He proclaimed the Church as protector of the monasteries, thus associating the monks with the Papacy. He founded new monasteries in Rome itself but he also granted the monks certain privileges of exemption. Whereas before the monks had simply formed part of the Church, from now on they were a much more active and influential part, with functions taking them out of their meditative seclusion to play a part and influence the world outside.

8.4 Politics and Religion

Charlemagne was the son of Pippin, and grandson of Charles Martel, three generations that represent the Germanic warrior tradition. Like them he was king of the Franks. He lived in the second half of the eighth century and the beginning of the ninth, during a period named after him: the Carolingian period. The renewed interest in and impulse given to the Roman literary heritage and his alliance with the pope are central elements in the life of this important figure. With the help of an outstanding teacher and librarian, Alcuin of York, Charlemagne ordered books to be collected and copied. Alcuin was one of the principal teachers who had received his formation at the monastery of York. He understood that incorrect speech was caused by lack of books and of schools. Manuscripts, in particular those of the Classical authors, had to be sent for and copied. Schools had to be founded. Most of what survived from ancient literature was to be safely copied. Charlemagne did not only suggest but he actually ordered trained copyists to transcribe the liturgical books correctly. Classical studies were made available and were used to widen the understanding of the Sacred Scriptures. The belief once again was that ancient wisdom could be combined with Christian faith although not everyone agreed with this or how it could work out.

Since the time of the invasions into the Roman Empire, the new settlers had one serious problem: organisation. How can a tribe even think of

gaining power that was a necessity for survival without even the basic rudiments of organisation? This is where the Church could be of help. Its literate officers, its clerics, were some of the best men available to execute the responsibilities of administration. The French *clerc*, English *clerk*, the Flemish *klerk* meant scribe who worked for the state, but at the same time it basically referred to the cleric. The Church could thus stay in touch with the powerful tribes, especially those most ambitious. When much later the availability of literate men to act as functionaries of the state was no longer a problem, the Church still retained a number of its men in focal administrative roles in some of the most powerful states of the time. In Charlemagne's reign it became clear how religion and politics needed one another: the spread of heresy had to be halted and the enemies of the Church brought to justice. Charlemagne was willing (sometimes excessively in fact) to protect the interests of the Church. On the other hand the widespread influence of the Church at all levels of society helped to keep all 'in line'. Politics and religion joined forces.

The ability to read and write can help to increase awareness. It can also be a seduction leading one away from a pre-established goal, or dogma. For those who believe in the threat to dogma this means a vigorous effort to counter the heresy or, if possible, its complete elimination. St Gregory himself is credited with the devastation of numerous volumes of ancient literature. One must remember that the ability to read and/or write was practically absent from laypersons, the emperor downwards. And it must also be remembered that for centuries, practically all men of intellect joined the Church. Secretaries wrote what was dictated to them. The Carolingian period is a time when the literary heritage of antiquity, whose continuity had been interrupted by the invasions, was rediscovered. The whole ancient heritage, as far as western Europe was concerned, belonged to the Christians who guided it to what they believed was its proper place: the worship of God in the Church. Orthodoxy and prejudice reigned supreme. These writings of Antiquity were thus studied and integrated into the life of the Church. Where they could not be integrated, such as when temporal concerns were foremost, they were eliminated.

8.5 Pilgrimages

When in 910, Duke William of Aquitaine founded the monastery of Cluny there was a return of faithful adherence after some general relaxation of discipline to St Benedict's rules. 2,000 Benedictine houses in France, England, Germany, northern Spain, Hungary and Poland, depended on Cluny, organised feudally with the monks vowing obedience to the monastery in which the abbot was sovereign. The Cluny chief visited subordinates in the other associated houses that had to contribute to Cluny. Eventually feudal barons were introduced to Christian ideals, as for example one can discover in the establishment of war rules safeguarding non-combatants, religious buildings and feasts. Even the warrior knights were influenced, as they became devoted defenders of the Church. The compromise between military dispositions and religious spirit unified the religious and the political spheres. They were not as separate as they are today, at least in the western world were the two spheres are separated especially in terms of the basic law of the land. Pope Urbanus II had been a Cluny monk. His papacy confirmed the prestige of the monastery within the power structure of the Church. Urbanus II was the pope who proclaimed the first Crusade. Earlier, St Gregory during his papal leadership had ordered monks to go to Britain and convert pagans to Christianity, now it was another pope who promoted another religious 'foreign' scheme: the recovery of Jerusalem from the Muslims.

Pilgrimages were journeys to places that had important associations with some significant religious object or event. Definitely they were not commercial leisure holidays abroad as they are becoming today. They lasted longer, involving hardships and danger. People died on the way. Loreto, near Ancona, Assisi, Rome and Lourdes, in France, are still popular. Pilgrimage is a central theme in religious narrative, such as the biblical images of a people travelling through the wilderness to reach the Promised Land. Pilgrimages have also been the source of some of the best literature. Dante's allegorical journey to Hell, Purgatory and Heaven in the **Divina Commedia** is a pilgrimage. Chaucer's **Canterbury Tales** are

the tales of the men and women who went on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas in Canterbury. Kenneth Clark comments how pilgrimages were embarked on in "the hope of heavenly rewards: in fact they were often used by the Church as a penitence." The aim of the pilgrim was "to look at relics" and whilst "contemplating a reliquary containing the head or even the fingers of a saint he would persuade that particular saint to intercede on his behalf with God." This description points at the contrast between people holding on to different truth systems and different methods in ascertaining the truth. The pilgrims "cared passionately about the truth," and the object they viewed at the end of the journey was "true." When they faced the relic Clark concludes, "their sense of evidence was different from ours. From our point of view nearly all the relics in the world depend on unhistorical assertions."[11]

8.6 The Crusades

Pilgrimage is closely linked with the Crusades – one of the most violent episodes in the history of religious war. Struggles between Christians and Muslims had a long history. Charles Martel's victory over the Moors in Poitiers in 732 held the Muslims out of most of France although Spain remained Islamic. The Norman offensive in Italy was against the Muslims (but even the Byzantine Christians were attacked). The First Crusade, proclaimed by Urbanus II, was exclusively religious, a result of Christian fanaticism, masterminded by the Pope, who was the fomenter and organiser of the Crusade. Its ultimate objective was not Islam, otherwise a crusade in Spain would have made more sense. Its objective and ideal was Jerusalem.

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[11] Kenneth Clark (1971), pp.41-2. The debate about the shroud of Turin, or the various episodes of artistic works coming 'alive' testify to these different approaches to the truth. The official Church hierarchy is sometimes in a very strange dilemma of having to 'scientifically' establish in an objective way the truth about such 'miraculous' items as against a fervent and passionate belief by the people.

This place the most important place of pilgrimage had been under Muslim rule since the ninth century but the Christians had been tolerated, and when the Byzantine Empire grew strong after the tenth century, even more pilgrims started visiting. However things changed with the arrival of the Turks in the Middle East. The Byzantine Emperor, facing the immediate threat of a Turkish advance, asked the Pope, the only one who could influence the whole of the Western world, and who agreed that the Muslim infidel was a common enemy, for assistance. The pope was the head of the organisation that could unify all the Christians in Western Europe into one religious faith. Indeed two features truly united the European aristocracy, one of which was their Christian faith. The other thing the landlords shared was the source of their economic power, based on the ownership of large feudal estates. The western Christian world was basically a stateless continent, fragmented into so many large family possessions, and this absence meant that it was relatively easier to group the feudal landlords together. The feudal military class also provided an army ready for action. The Norman military success had been a boost of experience and a sign of military strength. No extra taxes were necessary – the fiefs could support the expenses. On November 27th, 1095, at Clermont, Pope Urbanus II gave his speech to the nobility proclaiming the Crusade.

The pope's gamble worked. Of course papal propaganda was powerful – the pope could reach the farthest lands more than anybody else in Europe at the time. If the religious ideal did not work with some, than the attraction of miraculous relics or the beauty of the women would. Three armies eventually converged on the Byzantine capital Constantinople, the meeting point. Three years later, June 7th, 1099 what remained of the original army appeared before the walls of Jerusalem. On July 15th the city was taken by assault and a massacre followed. Petty Christian states were established in Jerusalem, Edessa, and Antioch but in practice they were colonial bases. The crusades will ultimately fail in establishing permanent Christian supremacy in Jerusalem but they had proved a point: the merge between religious fervour, political will and military strength could prove lethal. The crusaders were not alone however. The Muslims

could put an equal, if not superior, stand. Massacre was guaranteed. Later in history, when religious fervour could not supply the emotional strength, the nation states of the modern world would have to come up with an equally convincing cause: nationalism. Back in the medieval Holy Lands, less than ninety years after their occupation, Edessa and Jerusalem fell and Islam ruled supreme again. Even the possible merger between Greek and Roman Christianity, another scheme on the agenda of the crusades, did not materialise.

8.7 1492: Portugal, Spain and the discovery of the new world

Outside the religious and military aspect, the crusades also had a significance for the trading world. Trade with the Far East had Greek and Roman origins. It was consolidated in the thirteenth century by Marco Polo's geographical knowledge. Until the end of the fifteenth century, trade followed a three-stage process. Muslim vessels delivered goods at the head of the Persian/Arabian Gulf to the Red Sea ports. Traditional caravan routes carried the goods across Arabia or Egypt to the Mediterranean. Various European ships picked them up from there. The costs were enormous due to transit. This trade route faced a number of very serious problems especially in the Mediterranean. If the crusades had been successful, things may have changed. This idea thrives on the theory that the crusades had a trade objective – breaking the hold of the Muslims on the passage routes towards India. In the Mediterranean there were the continual hostilities between Christians and Muslims. Within a general background of Muslim and Byzantine clashes, the Turks managed to capture Constantinople in 1453. But there were also the attacks by pirates in the Mediterranean. There was also city-state rivalry especially amongst the Italian cities. This led to an attempt to find an alternative trade route to Asia.

Two different alternative routes were eventually tried, one by the Portuguese and the other by the Spanish. The former chose to follow, and were successful in establishing, the passage around Africa to India. The

Portuguese managed to outflank the Muslims, enrich trade and carry the Christian faith. For this enterprise, mathematicians, astronomers, chartworkers and captains were called to improve charts and compasses. The Spanish went westwards across the uncharted, unknown ocean. 1492 was certainly a special year for the Spanish who recaptured Grenada, the last Islamic stronghold on Spanish soil, after eight hundred years of rule. During the same year, after ten weeks of travel, Christopher Columbus reached the New World. Eventually the globe was completely circumnavigated by Magellan, Portuguese, who was in charge of the voyage. It took three years, from 1519 to 1522, and cost Magellan his life. In just over one generation, the world had been completely opened up. The two Iberian monarchies protagonists of the trade route discoveries consolidated their position of power. Eventually conflict erupted between the two Christian people. Different popes issued several edicts to maintain peace. New land was officially given to Portugal and Spain – establishing the Portuguese dialect in Brazil, Spanish elsewhere – and unauthorised trade was punished by death.

In 1580 Spain conquered Portugal and claimed all the seas. It was however easier to claim than to hold. Amongst the many difficulties, the Spanish had to contend with opposition by the inhabitants, and the early disillusion based on absence of immediate profitable commerce. The 3000-mile route to the New World was sometimes too much for impressed merchant ships designed originally for European trading. The Spanish meanwhile had a coastline to protect, possessions in Italy and the Netherlands, as well as war with the Muslims in the Mediterranean. Money was used to purchase foreign luxuries and wage wars. Agriculture, industry and trade were neglected, at home and in the colonies. Other powers would rise: Britain and France. That of course is a story that takes us into the historical phases that will gradually lead us towards the modern era, and therefore the subject-matter for a continuation of this work.

The Church was now faced with new challenges. The relatively stable world of the feudal estate based on wealth that was grounded in land will

Christopher Columbus was very much attached to his city Genoa, so important in the development of Mediterranean commercial maritime trade. He reached the shores of the New World in 1492, an event that paradoxically will transfer the bulk of maritime trade to the Atlantic Ocean. This is an example of a 15th century nautical chart of the Genoese cartographic school.

start abdicating its uncontrasted supremacy to a more mobile civilisation built on markets, trade, insurance, banking and finance and a new class – the bourgeoisie. The kings and queens could now lay their hand on capital, the result of protection granted to merchant urban communities in return for the raising of money. This was not available to all the aristocrats. The monarchs could raise their status and power over the other aristocrats – and the popes had to recognise this new political reality. Meanwhile the indigenous people went through some of the worst recorded events in history. Their forced conversion to Christianity and to a role that basically made them human-fodder for any conceivable colonial scheme the new rulers conjured up came at a heavy price – torture, enslavement and death.

8.8 The social effects of Christian hegemony

During the middle ages, man had to accept a passive role – lord, king, bishop, natural cycle of the seasons, life and death, were all beyond him. If God created the world then it must be good, and if society was Christian then likewise nothing should be done to change it. Otherwise one would be challenging Divine Will. It was at this time that antisocial characters were not only reprimanded for breaking the law of the land – criminals – but were also thought to be evil. Temporal and religious leaders scratched one another's back. Even questioning the status quo was interpreted as highly irreverent and dangerous. Curiosity (Aristotle's path to the philosophic queries of the early Natural Philosophers) is followed by questions and questions lead to ideas. According to the aristocratic beliefs in late eighteenth century Palermo (and not only), ideas are like tumours that grow inside and blind you.[12]

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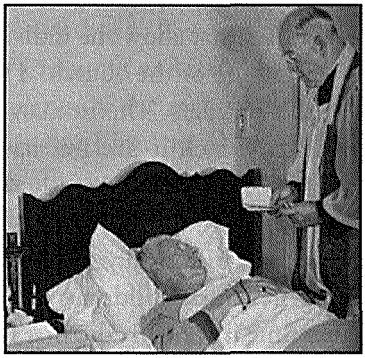
[12] Leonardo Sciascia (1997), p.27

This was the major ideology but there were intimations and initiatives to change, especially by the feudal lords to keep power and the peasants to survive. If one failed, he faced all the punishments that medieval society could throw at him. Public executions were an occasion for crude passions and emotions to rise, and not only were they popular, but they were also regular. They were the extreme aspect of medieval justice that was rather different from the modern – or contemporary – version. Judges could not be wrong then, the lawbreaker carried all the blame for what had been committed and there was no thought given to the idea that the criminal was to be re-educated. Punishment, including the ultimate sacrifice of execution, was justifiable. The public that attended the spectacle watched as the last confession was made and the priest gave the moral lesson: physical existence and material wealth were temporary and attaching our life interests only in them was futile.

8.8.1 The Sacraments

The Roman Catholic Church did not maintain its hegemony through such drastic methods only. The sacraments in fact are probably one of the clearest examples of how the Church still maintains its presence in the world today. Catholicism has transformed the meaning of important stages in our lives from a purely physical or worldly interest to a special religious ritual. The sacraments are rites that allow the individual to participate in a more significant way in the life of the church. They are also meant to affect the core values of the believers. The Roman Catholic Church has recognised seven sacraments, which it declares have been instituted by Jesus.

The first sacrament is baptism, historically meant for adult converts but today mostly concerning newborn children who are thus saved from Original Sin. At the same time it serves as the first link between the child and the Church. Confirmation is the rite when children "confirm" the vows of membership taken on their behalf at baptism. Once the child can



The Sacraments transform stages in human life into value-laden rituals.

participate in the rite of the Eucharist, he and she become adult members of the Church.

Once the child has grown up the next important transition is the choice traditionally one was expected to make between becoming an official member of the church or marrying a member of the opposite sex. Holy Matrimony leads to a freely chosen permanent state of unity and companionship intended for the couple to bear children, and to prevent sinful sex outside marriage. Theologically marriage is rather complex because if God blesses marriage then the two people cannot break the bond. The Roman Catholic Church does not permit divorce although it accepts separation. This however cannot be followed up with another marriage by the couple separated. Sexual activity by such a couple is considered adultery. Civil marriage was a secular way out of the fix.

Having established his/her role in life in terms of trying to build a Christian family or becoming an official member of the church, the next important stage in life that awaits the individual is (or should be within the perspective of the sacraments of the church) the process of death. Even this stage has been ritualised through the sacrament of Extreme Unction. It is usually performed when a person is seriously ill, so ill in fact that the sacrament has become a kind of "last rites". Just as birth is not a purely physical phenomenon through baptism, likewise death has a spiritual significance, showing that sins have been forgiven to a person near death. The value associated to death by the convinced atheist is expected to be different from that intended by the convinced Christian believer.

Birth, adulthood, and late old age are central stages in life and the great treasure and knowledge of the psychology of the popular masses the Church has accumulated throughout the centuries was fundamental to suggest to the Church leaders the maintenance of the sacraments. Besides the Sacraments mentioned above, throughout life, the Eucharist and Penance are repeated for the renewal of Christian values in life.

8.9 Today

Changes from within but also from outside have radically changed the Church. The Christian Church as an organisation still attracts a strong following and media coverage. The organisation that had inherited so much from the pagan Roman Empire still holds on to its Roman territory, despite the fact that meanwhile Italy had become a free and independent nation, and the Italians had finally decided for Rome as their capital city. Latin has lost its pride of place to the native tongues of the different people making up the Christian family. Internal rules and administration have changed although for the radical elements within the Church itself, the belief is they have not changed enough. The conservatives think that prudence is better. The head is still the pope who like the Roman emperor is not considered a common person, whose commands are law, and who is amenable to no man's judgment. With him the hierarchic organisation has survived. The pomp, luxury, ceremonies, and revenues of the Church have been debated. But the Christian Church is not only an organisation, it is also a vital element in society. Its contribution depends on the fresh recruits it is able to attract within its folds, the way it can still have a strong influence on education not only in its schools, universities and other learning institutions, but also outside with the 'army' of active preachers and missionaries who notwithstanding the risks are to be found in the most dangerous areas around the world still spreading the word of God.

Throughout the centuries, the Church in Rome has had to face many major challenges such as a troubled beginning, the transfer of the pope to Avignon and the Great Schism with the Christians divided in their loyalty to the pope in Avignon and the one in Rome, the great Protestant rebellion, the rise of the nation-state led by powerful monarchs who as Henry VIII showed were not always ready to listen to or follow the dictates of the Pope, the scientific revolution and the challenge of its truth-finding methods as well as the triumph of material technology that appeals to so many. Other permanent challenges include atheism on one side, and on the other capitalism and a rising interest in economic well-being to the

detriment of spiritual well-being.[13] The fact that the Church is still active despite the great challenges it has had to face during the centuries shows its internal strength – fuelled by a spiritual ideal but built on a pragmatic approach to the world. This means that the Church must find different means to promote the word of God. Today the layman is more active in church activities thus the Church does not appear simply as an institution for clerics. It continues to preach about the faith and administer the sacraments, even enforce the rules over internal intolerable dissent, and it has to do all this in agreement with the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures and its organisational procedures.

The Church cannot go beyond a certain point. The legislative power of the political representatives of the citizens – as we have just mentioned with the example of civil marriage – is outside the jurisdiction of the Church. The Church on its part is protected from interference by the legislative assemblies especially with the code of human rights law either in national constitutions or in international conventions such as *The European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.* Then again all religions and all beliefs are protected. Article 9 of the Convention states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance." In article 14 there is prohibition of discrimination against anyone, including amongst others, discrimination on the basis of religion in the enjoyment of rights and freedoms of the Convention. This is also partly the result of the changes in modern societies which are pluralist, valuing highly individual identity and rights within a democratic

[13] The nation-state is tackled in the politics section whilst the scientific revolution and capitalism are the basic subject-matter of the 'science' and 'work and leisure' sections of the modern world.

framework. Pluralism means that the risks of disagreement are greater than in traditional societies that are more homogenous, stratified, and have one major source of moral authority, usually derived from the most powerful established religious institution. Modern societies demand tolerance and the respect of human rights. And the Church has had to adapt to the changed circumstances, without however forfeiting its right to spread the word of God. There is another consideration meanwhile that most probably a lot of this new founded 'toleration' is not really a respect for other religious views, indeed it has nothing to do with toleration at all, but a result of religious indifference, an indifference that can do without religion.

Chapter 9

Beauty and Art

9.1 The Love of Beauty

In Robert Pirsig's **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance**, Phaedrus struggles with the need to arrive at a definition of *quality* but at the same time is certain that notwithstanding the difficulties to arrive at a definition, there *is* quality in life. He mentions what would be amiss if quality did not exist:

"The first casualty from such a subtraction, he said, would be the fine arts. If you can't distinguish between good and bad in the arts they disappear. There's no point in hanging a painting on the wall when the bare wall looks just as good. There's no point to symphonies, when scratches from the record or hum from the record player sound just as good. Poetry would disappear, since it seldom makes sense and has no practical value. And interestingly, comedy would vanish too. No one would understand the jokes, since the difference between humour and no humour is pure Quality."[1]

Watching paintings, listening to music and reading poetry are popular leisure time activities. People choose to do them because like any other

[1] Robert Pirsig (1974), p.219.

leisure activity they offer satisfaction. But what is it about these activities that makes them satisfying? The painting, suggests Pirsig, adds a touch of beauty to the wall.

What is it about our preference to be surrounded by the beautiful? We know (or at least believe) that beauty exists because we talk about it and intend some meaning. But is *beauty* like Pirsig's quality – something we know exists but we can never define? Philosophical exertions to study the concept are many but if one is searching the arts for the nature of aesthetic appreciation one finds that it is extremely complicated to decide about the odd nature of *aesthetic quality* (in this case, the representation of beauty in the arts) and its enjoyment. Beauty is part of aesthetic appreciation but to make matters a bit more complex today, whether beauty is the predominant preoccupation in aesthetic evaluation is questionable. Dr. C. Janaway believes that beauty lends itself to many interpretations. "To many, beauty does not even appear to be a single quality, let alone the summation of everything aesthetic. When we think in particular of the arts, it is debatable whether beauty is *the* quality which gives them value."[2] So the concerns are multiple because there is no agreement about what is aesthetic quality or even beauty. What is more, we are not sure what the connections are between them.One is not so sure today whether sounds that are the result of scratches on a record (complemented by pre-recorded music) are not preferred to symphonies. Not an easy subject!

Notwithstanding all the difficulties, is it possible to discuss beauty? So far in our examples we have spoken about the way beauty is appreciated. There is another dimension: what is it about those who create beauty – the artists? Is it a question of intuition that rejects intellectual judgements and therefore any attempt to offer reasons becomes pointless? According to Benedetto

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[2] Dr. C. Janaway, 'Problems of Aesthetics'. In, Ted Honderich (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1995) p.14.

Croce in **Guide to Aesthetics**, art, which is closely associated with beauty, is intuition. Vision, contemplation, imagination, fancy, invention, representation, and others are at work in the artist. Art therefore does not consist of external physical qualities such as the combination of colours or sounds, nor in its usefulness as promoter of pleasure or as an antidote to pain, nor even is it subject to moral evaluation (although the artist is), and finally in its pure form it does not share the same features as philosophy which Croce identifies with the conceptual, or intellectual. Art is a simpler form of knowledge that deals with the intuitive, or as he also calls it the sensuous. To summarise Croce's argument, art is (like beauty) a matter for intuition not a physical analysis of properties, nor an investigation of the usefulness of art or a philosophic conceptual debate.

The difference between perception and creation is not as large as one may think. The perception of art by people will indicate preferences on their part to be surrounded by the beautiful and even this, it is argued by many depends on intuition. So what happens when listening to music, reading poetry and admiring beautiful forms are considered to rank among the higher and finer pleasures open to a good life? Is there anything special about these aesthetically pleasing activities, making them pleasurable in a special way? What about those who do not read novels or listen to music? Terms such as 'higher' and 'finer' indicate some preference. After all people can do so many other things with their free time. The discussion calls for distinctions between different sorts of pleasure. If aesthetic pleasure can be different than does this mean there are different qualities of aesthetic pleasure? Stanley Parker goes into social class distinct leisure choices. It is the professional class that finds time for art such as theatre-going or reading 'good' literature, in the relatively limited free time the members of this class can enjoy. Other classes instead relax with friends and relatives or drink beer in the pub. In other words the lower class leisure pastimes in the pub are arguably of a lower quality than that provided by theatres or museums and the type of commercial romance literature is inferior to that written by Nobel Prize literature winners. The political or social impact on aesthetic judgment is a seminal branch.

Beauty can therefore be a culture-dictated idea, which when the culture is pluralist allows for personal preferences. At the individual level it can come to refer simply to a personal feeling one has when seeing a beautiful thing but which can easily turn out to be a deception. Is it therefore something in the object itself that makes it intrinsically beautiful? Or is beauty culture-dicated, something that one can observe and appreciate because the observer conforms with the shared meanings of a particular cultural group establishing what is and what is not beautiful? Therefore in this case by studying how throughout history and from one culture to another beauty has changed one gets to know that the meaning of beauty is culture relative. Others disagree and believe beauty is subject to personal whims. Therefore beauty is not even a quality in things themselves. It exists merely in the mind that contemplates beauty, and each mind perceives a different beauty. As we have already mentioned one person may even perceive deformity, where another senses beauty. The belief is strong that every individual ought to go along with his own ideas, without pretending to regulate those of others. In this case this becomes another affirmation of pluralism specifically regarding what is and what is not beautiful. Whether intuition is culture-free is another matter.

Notwithstanding arguments and counter-arguments of critics, most of us will confidently assert that individual things, not just art products – valleys, people, horses – exhibit the quality we call 'beauty' in different ways. Some are more beautiful than others, others lose their beauty after a time, and others appear beautiful to one person but ugly to another. The ambiguity in the suggestion that things can appear both beautiful and ugly to different people makes the argument about beauty a riddle and our quest to clarify the concept 'beauty' even more difficult. Are we doomed to stay with the particular examples of beautiful things or can we still attempt to find some basic concept(s) to illuminate our understanding of true beauty? In the ancient Geek world the conviction was that such an enterprise – the search for an essential definition of beauty – could be successful. A reflection that can channel better this present attention was pointed out when Socrates, asked what sort of things are beautiful and ugly, replied

that he does not want to know what is beautiful, but what the beautiful is. Can the ancient thinkers regulate our torment?

9.2 Classical aesthetics: Plato

Plato did not argue for the subjective element in artistic appreciation. He spoke about absolute beauty. Individual forms of beauty partake in absolute beauty, which is beyond space and time. It is ideal and universal and transcends the individual items that are considered beautiful. Plato also included its reconciliation of the finite with the infinite. This happens when beauty is connected to the migration of the soul from the absolute world of eternal Forms to its incarnation in earthly existence. The soul before being incarnated can contemplate ideal Beauty. Now when the soul witnesses individual beauty in this physical world, it recalls the supreme vision. If all goes well there is an ascent from the earthly and sensuous beauty of colour, sound, form, and others, to inward, intellectual beauty, and finally to the ultimate vision, eternal Beauty. This is extremely difficult because the soul in its 'migration' from the eternal to the physical world loses some of its supreme qualities as it is corrupted. Matter corrupting spirit. Like the thirsty traveller in the desert, will the soul withstand the temptation to drink from what could be unclean water to quench its taste? In most cases probably not. In aesthetic terms, we end up associating beauty with items in the physical world as our soul loses touch with the eternal. It is the function of Platonic philosophy to take us back on course to come to terms with what the soul has 'forgotten', the world of eternal Forms.

Plato was convinced that there must be one Beauty that appears in all things that can truly be called beautiful. This absolute quality can be approached only if we distinguish beliefs from real knowledge, shedding the former and following the trail of the latter. This will lead us to the essential Form of Beauty, absolute Beauty, not seen with the eyes but grasped conceptually by the mind alone. This means one has achieved

wisdom rather than a "passion for the spectacle of the beautiful colours and sounds."[3] After all if the same term beauty is applied to many individuals, there must be a universal meaning that they all share. If different things can embody beauty more or less fully, then it is possible to conceive of perfect or complete Beauty, the ideal (or Form) that because it is so, cannot be found fully in any concrete object in the material world. An alternative argument that explains the same concept is that objects go through changes and when an object does actually change, this is a question of a loss or gain in the beauty of the object alone. The abstract quality 'beauty' we attached to it does not change.

If we convince ourselves by following Plato, that the ideal Form of Beauty exists and has the same sort of quality as ethical ideals like Justice, we need a path that will bring us into a direct apprehension of it. Diotima of Mantineia and Socrates in Plato's **Symposium** do not assign a role to the arts in this quest. This is strange when it is generally considered that an artist is one who, as in the introductory quote by Pirsig, embellishes the world to make it appear more beautiful. Many will argue that such skills deserve better treatment. But in the **Symposium** the artist is only an imitator of the beautiful. Diotima starts off by presenting her assumption that people "are stirred by the love of an immortality of fame." This persuades her "that all men do all things, and the better they are the more they do them, in hope of the glorious fame of immortal virtue; for they desire the immortal."[4] This can be achieved in different ways. Some will give birth to children and their offspring, they hope, will preserve their memory and give them the blessedness and immortality which they desire in the future." Diotima mentions other souls that are pregnant but conceive "wisdom and virtue in general." These are creators such as poets

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[3] Francis MacDonald Cornford *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford University Press, 1945), p.189.

[4] J. Giordmaina (ed.) (1995) pp.35-7. The rest of the quoted parts in this paragraph come from the same source.

and artists who deserve the name inventor. These search for beauty so that they may beget their 'children', such as Homer and Hesiod's 'poetic' children. Then there are other children such as Solon's Athenian or Lycurgus' Spartan laws: "the greatest and fairest sort of wisdom by far is that which is concerned with the ordering of states and families, and which is called temperance and justice." History it is claimed supports this assertion: "Many temples have been raised in their honour for the sake of children such as theirs; which were never raised in honour of any one, for the sake of his mortal children."

There is a way to arrive at Beauty. In the **Symposium**, Diotima suggests that one can arrive at beauty if after loving a beautiful form, one later perceives that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another, until eventually he notices that the beauty in every form is the one and the same thing. He will forget the one initial form that at this point he despises and deems small, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms. The beauty of the mind is the next and superior stage, in which he can contemplate beauty of institutions and laws, the sciences, until he arrives at the vision of a single science, beauty everywhere. This is everlasting beauty that does not grow or decay, that is not only fair from a point of view and foul in another: "beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things."[5]

9.3 Plato and Art as Representation

Most works of art appear to imitate or represent, albeit adopting a multiplicity of styles, things in the real world. A picture represents the

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[5] J. Giordmaina (ed.) (1995) p.37.

object that inspired it. The chief role is to display, and set out aspects of reality. A primary example is the artistic focus on nature, such as landscape painting or portraits. Some artists may seek a faithful representation that may lead to imitation, others opt for a freer personal perspective. The representative quality in art was a basic consideration in Plato. He writes that for many works of art, especially tragic and epic poetry, imitations of human lives and fortunes derive much of their enjoyment from the representation of people in highly emotional states, expressing their emotions violently, and in a way that excites the audience too. The dismal manifestation of suffering (or the indulgence in foolish behaviour) provides the script to dramatic representation. On the other hand the representation of calm, wise, self-controlled people with their "unvarying constancy" is not as popular and "not easy to represent, nor when represented is it readily understood."[6] It does not make for very exciting drama. Since for Plato, the latter is more valuable, has more worth, than the emotional state mentioned previously, it is clear that the poet is appealing not to the highest part of the soul, but to an inferior one, stimulating and strengthening elements that threaten "to undermine the reason" in the individual.[7] This unfortunately (for Plato) leads to popular success but because there is an important effect upon character to be considered it demands our attention and countermeasures. If we assume that the rational faculty of the mind represents the leading political class in society, when we are watching drama we are not allowing our rationality the part that should provide direction to us but weaker aspects (such as the stronger emotions) to take over. We can say that we are not following reason but an inferior part of our psychology. On a political scale this is similar to allowing bad government, a government that plays for popular consent such as the demagogue, skilful in attracting public attention and acclamation, to take over the running of a country.

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[6] F. MacDonald Cornford (1945), p.336.

[7] F. MacDonald Cornford (1945), p.337.

Art is powerful (and therefore more dangerous) because it is undoubtedly enjoyable and makes us participate emotionally and with sympathy. But then it is strange how the pity or laughter we feel when watching a scene on stage is transformed into condemnation when the same event or situation is experienced outside the theatre, in our everyday life. The impulse or instinct for tears or laughter in the theatre is transformed into scorn or disgust. In practical terms this leads Socrates in the **Republic** to propose that in Homer, the first and greatest of the tragic poets, "only the poetry which celebrates the praises of the gods and of good men" is to be admitted. This poetry is "no mere source of pleasure but a benefit to society and human life."[8] Read otherwise this can imply that the rest of Homer is to be censored. Another implication is that those poets who cannot rise to this type of poetry have no place in Plato's Republic. There is yet another consideration. Plato connects the imitation of goodness as in Homer's best verse with the stimulation of good behaviour. It is not the imitation therefore that is right or wrong but the value of what is being imitated. In dramatic poetry, unfortunately, vice and immorality are preferred thus enticing the young into the imitation of vice.

This is unacceptable to Plato. The countermeasures are ethical and political and in fact today Plato's aesthetic ideas are referred to especially for hints about the ethical and political appraisal of artists. The statesman in his twin role as legislator and educator, must ask what is the social role of music, painting and poetry, especially considering their effects upon the audience, but also their truth value, even the justifications (if any) of their right to exist. Art is necessarily associated to the supreme good of society and its presence and status in the ideal city is basically as a useful prop to the attainment of the good. Consequently young people are to be given dramatic poetry that represents noble characters doing admirable works. When the art is right, the power to do good is as great as its potential ill.

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[8] F. MacDonald Cornford (1945), p.339

The harmony of beautiful music and dancing of the right sort are indispensable means of character formation. Needless to say Plato did contribute a new and highly admirable poetry in his own writings. The ones to decide however are the good philosophers (political leaders of the Platonic Republic) who claim the right to overrule the poet.

Socrates queries whether Homer asked what pursuits make men better or worse in private or public life, and whether there was any State better governed by his help as was the case with the legislators Lycurgus, Charondas, and Solon? Was there any war that was carried on successfully by him, or aided by his counsels, when he was alive? Did he conceive any invention, applicable to the arts or to human life, such as those of Thales the Milesian, Anacharsis the Scythian, and other ingenious men? The tragedians, and Homer, who is at their head, do not know all the arts, all human virtues and vices, as well as divine things. If they were able to make the original as well as the image, they would not have seriously devoted themselves to image making. The real artist, who knew what he was imitating, would be interested in realities and not in imitations. At this point once again Socrates proves that the tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the truth:

"Then must we not infer that all these poetical individuals, beginning with Homer, are only imitators; they copy images of virtue and the like, but the truth they never reach? The poet is like a painter who, as we have already observed, will make a likeness of a cobbler though he understands nothing of cobbling; and his picture is good enough for those who know no more than he does, and judge only by colours and figures."

The poet with his words and phrases knows that he can leave an impression only when accompanied by the sweet influence of music's melody and rhythm. Musicians, painters and poets are all guilty. If they really knew how to build ships, command armies they would do so rather than speak of the people who do so. They lack any philosophic grasp and desire only to please the ignorant multitude to win their support.

However, it is possible to hold that a certain type of imitation does not devalue art, especially when the artist may be regarded as imitating not objects in the world of sense-experience but some ideal concept, or alternatively, correcting deficiencies of the observed world. Anne Sheppard quotes from a letter by Raphael to Castiglione: "In order to paint a beautiful woman I should have to see many beautiful women, and this under the condition that you were to help me with making a choice; but since there are so few beautiful women and so few sound judges, I make use of a certain idea that comes into my head."[9] Representation can be of value. Of course there is the other point that not all works of art seem to be representing anything in particular. Music is one. But then again perhaps we can suggest that even music may represent some feeling.

Plato discusses the theory of art as mimesis. This is his famous condemnation of the arts, in Book X of the *Republic*, for their falsity. However the basis for the justification of this theory is an acceptance of the Theory of Forms. We have already hinted at this theory before but because it is so central in Plato's thoughts it is better to give some extra details. Through Socrates, Plato gives the following explanation. Whenever people adopt a common name, it is assumed they also have a corresponding idea such as for example with the names 'beds' and 'tables'. There are plenty of them in the world, but there are only two ideas of them – one the idea of a bed, the other of a table. The carpenter makes a bed or he makes a table for our use, but he does not make the ideas themselves. Of course there is a way in which one can, in a certain sense, become a 'maker' of all things not just man-made but also natural. By turning a mirror round and round you make images of the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all the other things *in* the mirror. But they would be appearances only. It

[9] Anne Sheppard *Aesthetics: An introduction to the philosophy of art* (Oxford University Press, 1987), p.6.

is the same with the product of a painter, who is a creator of appearances. The painter can create a mirror-like image of the bed, but not a real bed. It is simply the imitation of a particular bed created by the workman, the maker of the bed. There are then three kinds of bed: the ideal one made by God (the real one), one which is the work of the carpenter (the actual one), and another one, that of the painter (the artistic impression). The painter is the imitator of that which the others make; indeed at that point he imitates not that which is original, but only the product of the carpenter. One can consider also that in painting a bed, an artist can look at the bed from different points of reference, and the bed will appear different in the representation, and yet there is no difference in the physical bed. At this point the imitator is a long way off the truth, and is concerned only with an image that can deceive children or simple persons, who fancy that they are looking at a real scene.

The Form of an object is the essential nature of the object as established by the Idea. The Form of the knife can be imitated by the actual knife, which consequently can be imitated by a picture of the knife. The imitation must always fall short of its original or else it would no longer be an image but an example of the same thing. Such deception we have discussed previously is disapproved. In **Republic** Book X the illusionist painter chooses pleasure (pleasing the beholder) rather than the truth. Even the architect designs the temple columns wider at the top to make them look equal. The poets and tragedians are included in the list. Referring to the tragedians and "the rest of the imitative tribe", Socrates speaks of the rejection of imitative poetry, which ought to be rejected because it is ruinous to the understanding of the hearers. The only antidote to it is knowledge of its true nature and the search for the truth separated from any poetic or physical connotation, in other words a search for the Forms. At the same time we must remember that not all art is false or illusory, but some works are true, some are not. A poet who really knows the truth is more than a poet – he is a philosopher. The problem falls once more on the laps of the philosophers who must choose materials for the early education of the guardians in the Republic knowing that there is so little

poetry that can lead to the truth – not as we have already argued, that it is impossible for poetry to tell the truth.

It is difficult to disagree with Plato that art does affect society in different ways. Television and the recording technology have enabled the spread of art on a historically unprecedented scale. This may imply the stronger need for responsibility on the part of the artist, but also opens up the debate regarding the search for a balance between art and morality. The power of art has already been historically exploited by the Christian Church in medieval art but also by political dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini. Meanwhile some argue that art production and appreciation should be a disinterested exercise. The argument that art is for art's sake, purports that art should be valued for itself and not for any other function it may serve. Art for art's sake was amongst other considerations an attempt to protect art from growing commercialisation. Qualities internal to it are appreciated, such as sweetness of sound, expressiveness and design. This does not mean that Michelangelo's 'Last Judgement' is appreciated only for its aesthetic qualities without reference to its religious or spiritual implications. And once the social significance of art works is considered and the argument that it can influence people is opened up again, the moralist or the politician will be involved.

9.4 What is beauty in art?

All works of art have something in common, some defining characteristic that makes them especially valuable but there is no agreement on one particular value.[10] Three theories of art are forwarded highlighting the imitative and the expressive qualities as well as the formal structure of art. The first Theory focuses on art as representation, and its implications have

[10] Anne Sheppard (1987). The following arguments are a brief summary of her ideas.

already been discussed by reference to Plato's ideas about his theory of forms. Representation however is not the only thing we have in mind when we value works of art. Similarly we expect some imaginative effort on the part of the artist. The second Theory discusses art as expression. Art becomes communication between artist and audience. It has a potential to express feelings and emotions, from patriotic exaltation to melancholic solitude. Michelangelo's *'Creation of Man'* expresses one thing, his *'Last Judgment'* expresses another. The emphasis here is on the reaction of the audience that contemplates or enjoys some work of art. Such aesthetic feelings, the effects achieved by reacting to art, is mainly an emotional reaction – moving, pleasing, or disturbing. These expressive qualities in art are different from other expressions in everyday life. Emotional pleasure can vary from utter disgust to rapturous enthusiasm but it is different from the other emotions in that it is detached. We are more detached from art products in our reactions than from flesh and blood people we live with in our everyday life. For example we do not expect people to talk to us or actually walk out of a movie as in Woody Allen's comedy *'The Purple Rose of Cairo'*. That is what Tom Baxter does to declare his love for Celia who is at the cinema watching a minor Hollywood drama in which Baxter is acting.[11] Detachment is also important for other reasons especially if we are to appreciate a play or movie properly. If we are too much involved (just as if we distance ourselves too far), our appreciation may be limited. Overall we know that the emotions we observe inside the cinema or theatre are not for real,[12] even though we react emotionally as audience.

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[11] 'The Purple Rose of Cairo' (1985) was an 82 minute Orion Pictures production. In Luigi Pirandello' s play *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* it was the audience that invaded the artistic setting (the stage) breaking the boundaries between the real world and the fictional world of art.

[12] The American artist Jackson Pollock challenges this 'detached' view by entering inside, walking over his artwork.

If sentiments, affections, and passions are what give art its peculiar qualities as against the logical, rational, metaphysical components of science and philosophy then it becomes extremely difficult to establish how art can have anything whatsoever to do with intellectual activity. Tolstoy explains that the quality of art is to be measured by the quality of the feelings with which it succeeds in infecting its audience.[13] It is noteworthy that just as Plato placed his ideas regarding aesthetics on the balance of ethical and political considerations, Tolstoy allowed morality the ascendancy over his aesthetic outlook. According to the Russian therefore art should communicate brotherly love and general positive feelings of common life. Just for curiosity's sake, Tolstoy includes Homer's **Iliad** and the **Odyssey** in the acceptable shortlist of artistic works to be promoted. The importance of feelings, expression, and emotions brings to mind the argument of Robert Pirsig. He contrasts the feelings and emotions of the Romantic spirit represented by John and Sylvia Sutherland his friends and companions in the motorbike journey narrated in **Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance** against the cold, logical, rational, scientific analysis adopted by Classical Understanding. The latter's metaphorical knife splits physical reality to understand better. Robert Pirsig is one who prefers to find ways of harmonising these two parts of man together rather than separating them as our civilisation does by turning education systems into scientific strongholds at the expense of artistic sensibility.

Besides the representative and expressive aspects of art, there are also technical skills. The third theory discussed by Anne Sheppard in fact refers to the appreciation of the complex structure of the object. This refers to what Lyotard calls "the artist as sender." The question is "How does one make a work of art?" as against the previous focus on the question "What is it to experience an affect proper to art?"[14] In visual art there are qualities

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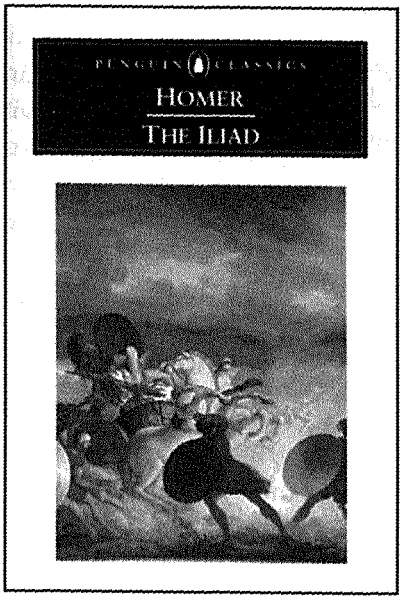
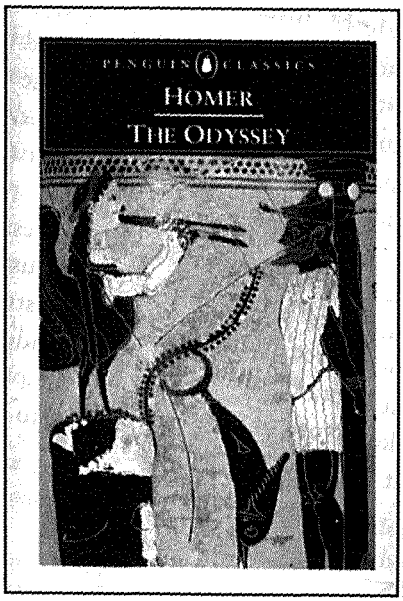
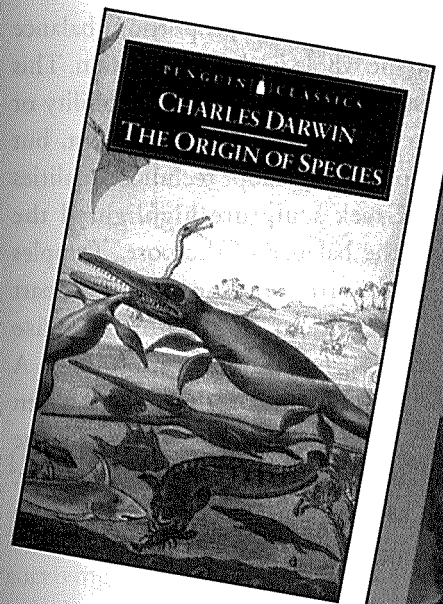
[13] Anne Sheppard, (1987), p. 20.

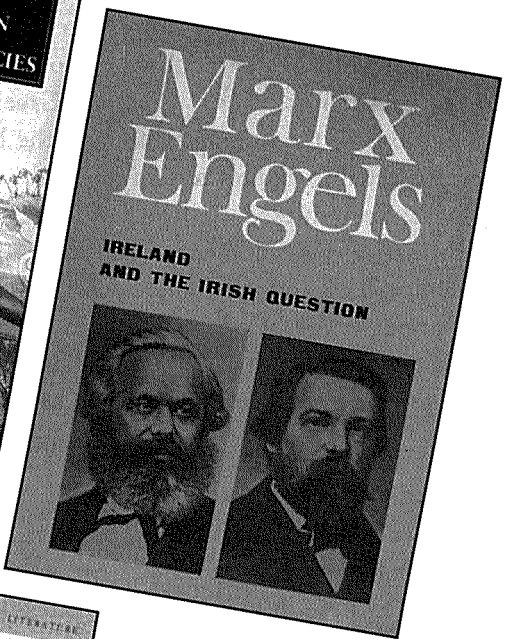
[14] Jean-Francois Lyotard (1998) *The Inhuman*, p.97.

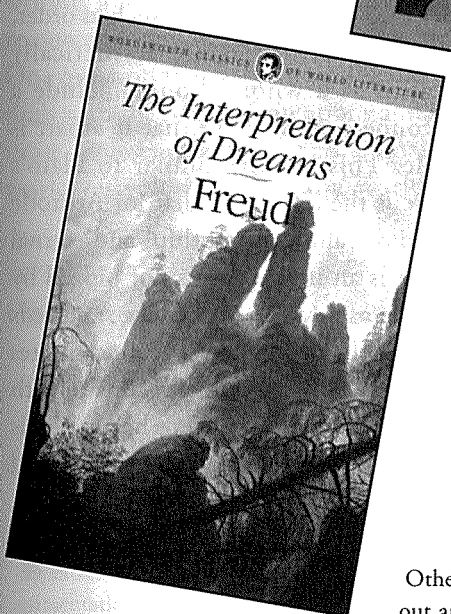




Art and literature are powerful tools that can be at the service of some ideology or religion. They can also be considered dangerous and therefore censored. "To read or not to read": Tolstoy believed that the **Iliad** and the **Odyssey** were morally accepable; Plato thought that parts of these works were not indicating the proper path to arrive at the 'good'.







Other writers and thinkers have been singled out and received a controversial reception.

a naive spectator might miss such as symmetry and proportion, balance and the harmony of parts in relation to the whole in the composition. This is the result of *techné*, doing something that takes a specialised ability or art. The creative arts bring into existence that which did not exist, but the best creators in a particular age also skilfully adopt technical qualities to realise their creations. Classical Greek sculpture highlighted the proportions of the human figure and the balance of the pose. Temples were expected to exhibit certain ideal proportions in the relation of part to part: and indeed, in the construction of the temple, precise mathematical measurements were taken to insure these proportions. A forceful stillness and self-completeness was the result of the unity between the various elements one can find in a work of art. We appreciate the whole not the individual and isolated units. When we experience a unity, we enjoy the integration of parts in a synthesis, in a piece of fine art as a contrast to the chaos of our daily normal experience.

Aristotle spoke of the elements of beauty that could be projected by works of art. As elements of beauty he underlined certain attributes such as order, symmetry, and definiteness and so monstrosities are aesthetically unacceptable. In art, the work taken as a whole should include a multiplicity of parts in a unity, a connection so close that if a part is withdrawn it will disturb the whole. This is quite similar to Plato's harmony of parts and whole but there is the difference that for Aristotle a work of art is not twice removed from reality, the truthful and eternal essence of things. Indeed a work of art is an image and is not judged by the standards of Plato and therefore seen as inferior, but by the standards of the perfection of form itself. For Aristotle, beauty has special attributes closely linked to the mathematical sciences. This can only be achieved with the right technical preparation. Technique can thus produce beauty. This belief in harmony had (and still has) many adherents, even in the world outside the arts.

Chapter 10

Art

10.1 Cave paintings, Egyptian and Greek Art

If we travel back in time to about 20,000 yeas ago we will meet the first surviving artistic expressions of man. These are the Palaeolithic cave paintings in France and Spain.[1] The people were 'primitive' – without writing, a settled life or agriculture – and yet they still found the necessary resources to privilege painters with the leisure time to depict the scenes. One question that will always fascinate the student of this Palaeolithic art deals with the reasons, intentions and motivations why they painted. Were those representations of wild animals on the cave walls a mirror of the world outside the cave, the world that through success in hunting

[1] Other discoveries of such painting have been made in Russia and Turkey. One general observation at the beginning of this chapter is needed. Throughout this chapter it has been kept in mind that whilst the subject-matter is extremely vast and rejects any attempts at a thorough rendering of all relevant issues, there are still some general books that give a very comprehensive approach to the history of art or some special branch such as painting. Edward Lucie-Smith's *Art & Civilization* (Singapore: Laurence King, 1992) is one, Sister Wendy Beckett's many publications are to be recommended to the general public, whilst E. H. Gombrich, *Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1996) remains an extremely popular text. I have referred to these throughout but for a more detailed presentation one has to go to the source itself.

Images from Palaeolithic art.

guaranteed their survival? In other words was the Palaeolithic painter through his or her representations anticipating the importance given to the temporal (but shadowy) world of the senses by Plato's chained slaves in the Parable of the Cave? These chained slaves believed in reflected shadows on the cave walls as the only reality, thus rejecting the possibility of any other meaning. Was cave painting an attempt to 'simply' imitate the external world – to serve as a mirror image? Or were the painters conjuring up different levels of meaning – not simply a mirror image but an image that carries magical powers? According to Sister Wendy it could be that these paintings "had some deep importance" such as serving "a ritualistic, even magical function" in which the accurate depiction of the animal gives the artist the power to "take control of the animal's spirit and remove its strength before the hunt."[2] Most probably it was not art for art's sake. Whatever the significance was, and the doubts amplify the artistic qualities of these cave paintings, the first stage in the long history of art had been set. Art began to distinguish man from other animals, making him superior, in spite of his physical limitations and the fact that at the time of the cave paintings the external world must have seemed more hostile than it is today.

Thousands of years later along the river Nile, pyramids and statues show how art took on colossal dimensions in the hands of the ancient Egyptians. Tomb painting was an accompanying rather than an independent art. It was also rather conventional, as the example of a head in profile with the eye shown frontally will confirm.[3] Writing intended to explain the meaning of the depiction complemented painting. Since it was hieroglyphic it did not necessarily unbalance the decorative effect. From what has survived and keeping in mind the primary function of the art

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[2] Sister Wendy Beckett *Story of Painitng* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 1997) p. 11.

[3] Further elucidation from Erwin Panofsky *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (University of Chicago Press, 1982) pp.60-1.

Egyptian art: tomb painting was rather conventional with face, arms and legs in profile, whilst eye and chest are depicted frontally.

that has survived, it shows a deep interest in the after-life. Art was powerful because it could connect the here-and-now with the celestial, the infinite, and the eternal.[4] This close connection with the necessary ritual of death is itself associated with the theme of permanence. Like the power that the scientist tries to develop today to frieze embryonic life for the future, similarly the Egyptian scientists mummified the corpse. The difference is that the modern scientist intends life on earth but the Egyptians were thinking of the life beyond mortal constraints. The artists meanwhile immortalised the pharaoh in their images. For the pharaoh it was either that or eternal anonymity like any other common mortal. The artist thus laid a claim that was a guarantee for an important role he could play in society – securing eternal recognition to the ones depicted. Today the recording and reproduction technology allows the possibility for all who can afford such technology to salvage their image for the future. Of course there is a difference in the scale and public projection of such images. Such technology has also forced the modern artist to search for a new meaning to give to his art in order to be able to survive – as an artist – in contemporary society.

Ancient Greek art is generally considered to have developed the Classical ideal when it managed to project a sense of harmonious balance based on precise mathematical measurements. The idealisation of art – a topic that will continue to influence artists throughout the history of art – meant that the artist disposed of secondary features in the object represented in order to bring out clearly the image he wanted to portray. No exaggerations or distractions were allowed. The final result was one of noble dignity. In the Parthenon for example, the temple dedicated to Athena Nike on the Acropolis in Athens, the effect is one of perfection measurable in mathematical terms. The columns paradoxically show a

[4] Those who can read Italian should take Giacomo Leopardi's poem *'L'Infinito'* as an excellent departure for such a theme.

compromise worked out in mathematical terms by the architect to balance on the one hand the optical illusion of a viewer standing beneath the temple and on the other a perfectly straight outline. The architect had to compromise between the senses (and their limitations) and the ideal of perfection, conceived by the mind. The philosophers of ancient Athens will also tackle the problem of the relation between a rationally developed ideal and the contribution of our senses and experience to our knowledge of the world.

10.2 Medieval civilization as reflected in art

After the decline of the ancient world, Christianity can claim to represent the major civilising force at work in Europe. If one searched for a characteristic that is so pervasive it represented the dominant feature of medieval art then the best option would be to go for its deep religious and spiritual character. In a way this characteristic brings to our attention and agrees with the assertion that art in general, or at least the one most visible at any time, reflects the dominant ideology of the age. Religious institutions of all kinds ruled European medieval society and outside the areas under the influence of the Greek Byzantines and the Muslim-governed Iberian peninsula, they all looked towards the Church in Rome for guidance. They were able to stamp European society with its undoubted Christian identity. During the Middle Ages there was not only one strand of Christianity and heresy remained a fact serving as a useful excuse to strengthen the controls over society by turning undesirable ideas and people into instruments of evil, but also because at any time it is impossible to get everyone to tow the line exactly the way one wants them to. Certain rites and beliefs pertaining to earlier pagan times survived, sometimes mixing strangely with the accepted Christian ways. But notwithstanding all this the dominant ideology was Christian. This may not be so easy to imagine today when one considers that so many young people in Europe grow up without any religious education, and religion may have nothing to offer them that is meaningful.

The relations between art and religion have inspired innumerable essays. Iris Murdoch refers to the early origins of Christianity mentioning St Paul and the evangelists, and the fortune of Christianity to "find available, at the crucial moment, five geniuses including two great thinkers." These "five artists of genius" provided Christianity with "a mythology, a story, images, pictures, a dominant and attractive central character."[5] Mythology attracts and inspires that class of people in society whose occupation is art. One only has to look at the poetry of Homer or the impressive buildings of the ancient Greeks built to glorify the mythological gods to confirm. Mythology reconciles human experience with eternal forms, and this relationship is interpreted through art. The painters picked the cue and transformed the stories and characters from popular mythology into an impressive array of images that are so familiar today, including figures and events from the Bible. There was a hurdle to be faced: the second commandment: the problem of depicting God and other divinities. Murdoch quoting from Exodus 20.4 "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above or in the earth beneath or in the water under the earth," comments that "this indeed sounds like a veto not only upon idolatrous symbolic visual art, but upon any art," and although "the spirit of the Commandment has been observed by Judaism and Islam" it was not by Christianity, "where all the talents of art, not least those of the painters, have been dedicated to presenting God."[6]

Once this theological difficulty was overcome, the Christian Church used the power of the image to universalise its message. The civilisation that emerged was characterised by the Church and its twin identity of the Ancient Graeco Roman heritage, with its Latin language and organisation and Platonic and Aristotelian philosophies, but also and predominantly

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[5] Iris Murdoch *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1992) p.82
[6] Iris Murdoch (1992) p. 81

Christ's message. This meant a concerted effort at the explication and illustration of moral ideas. Underlying this essential teaching (if one might say, indoctrinating) role of the Church, art had a didactic function, serving as a pictorial text for the illiterate but also as a glossary of images that helped transform metaphysical concepts into imagery easier to grasp. Even Christ after all had generally taught through easy and straightforward parables. Art has been (and still is) used to manifest the dominant ideology. The Greeks and the Romans also used to depict and carve images of their gods but the Hellenistic or Latin artists were not primarily indoctrinators as the medieval artists. Like art even science would have to bow. Perhaps the most popular case was Ptolemy's geocentric theory. Considered to be in agreement with biblical narrative it was used by the Church and Ptolemy's astronomical ideas survived for so many centuries protected from adversaries by being turned into a scientific 'illustration' of a doctrine of faith. Other scientific activities like the study of anatomy were not and suffered censorship.

The power and prestige built on the monopoly of education, meant the Church remained the principal, overall uncontested hegemonic power.[7] The social function of art for Christianity was quite clear. To the mind of the Middle Ages, art was an instrument of ecclesiastical education. Images are powerful transmitters and the uneducated masses could easily be influenced by images. Thus the moral character of art overcame its aesthetic qualities. The story-telling style was another distinguishing feature developed with the intention to recall the various incidents, tales and protagonists from Christian writings, especially at a time when pictorial representation was the only accessible means of learning to the Christian masses. It reminds one of the earliest phases of literacy learning for children

[7] Not all medieval painting was religious – although most of it was. The secular nobility patronised the artists. The Duc de Berry owner of a number of castles had the Limbourg brothers illustrate books.

based on concrete examples associated with verbal explanation at first, followed by or associated with, the presentation of pictures and their symbolic representation in terms of letters initially, later followed by whole words. Sharing similar characteristics, medieval depiction was vivid and clear. It was simple and popular. Before Christianity became the religion of State, three centuries after Christ, the simplicity was mostly the result of artists who did not master refined techniques, artists who were more religiously devout than artistically qualified. But once the artists found wealthy and powerful patrons, Jesus and his followers were transformed into highly dignified patricians.

Even art that had survived from Antiquity was judged by moral rather than purely aesthetic qualities. If it went against the Christian doctrine than it would be disposed of – just as Giorgio Vasari sourly declared later in his **Lives**. The Middle Ages and Christianity were hostile to ancient art according to him. Churches were built over honoured pagan temples, columns of stone from the Tomb of Hadrian were plundered to adorn St Peter's. "The most infinitely harmful and damaging," wrote Vasari, "was the fervent zeal of the new Christian religion," which having overthrown and annihilated paganism, "with the greatest fervour and diligence" went about destroying anything that may give rise to sin, wherever this happened to be and not only did it "ruin or cast to the ground all the marvellous statues, sculptures, paintings, mosaics, and ornaments of the false pagan gods, but it also did away with the memorials and testimonials to an infinite number of illustrious people" including statues and monuments standing in public places.[8]

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[8] Giorgio Vasari *Lives of the Artists* (Oxford University Press, 1991) p.5. What the Roman Catholics did to pagan idols will of course be rendered unto them by Protestants who will in their turn conceive of the graven images of the papists as idolatrous, and especially in Britain there will be a systematic destruction of Catholic art.

10.3 Architecture

10.3.1 Romanesque

Edward Lucie-Smith presents the Romanesque as "the first great age of church-building throughout western Europe" whose most pronounced features are "round arches, massive construction in masonry, heavy moldings, and deliberately plain architectural forms, sometimes contrasted with rich carving and areas of repetitive pattern."[9] Outside the two great centres of Christianity, Rome and Constantinople, Romanesque churches were more numerous and ambitious than previous church building. The ambitions had to compromise with practical demands such as the need for larger churches in order to provide several altars to the numerous priests who had to say mass every day, thus leading to the addition of transepts, but also to the constraints based on the problems in the transport of building materials over long distances signifying a more pronounced dependence on local stone. Such isolation and differing characteristics in the quality of the stone meant that different regional styles emerged. Lucie-Smith selects Durham Cathedral, started in 1093 and finished approximately in 1130, the cathedral in Speyer, on the Upper Rhine in Germany (consecrated in 1061), and the twelfth century church in Vezelay, southern France to represent the Romanesque. The Duomo of Pisa is rather different and "one is inclined to look for a completely different label."[10]

10.3.2 Gothic

The gothic style materialised after the Romanesque, as emblematically represented by Chartres Cathedral built over a Romanesque church

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[9] Edward Lucie-Smith (1992), p.112.

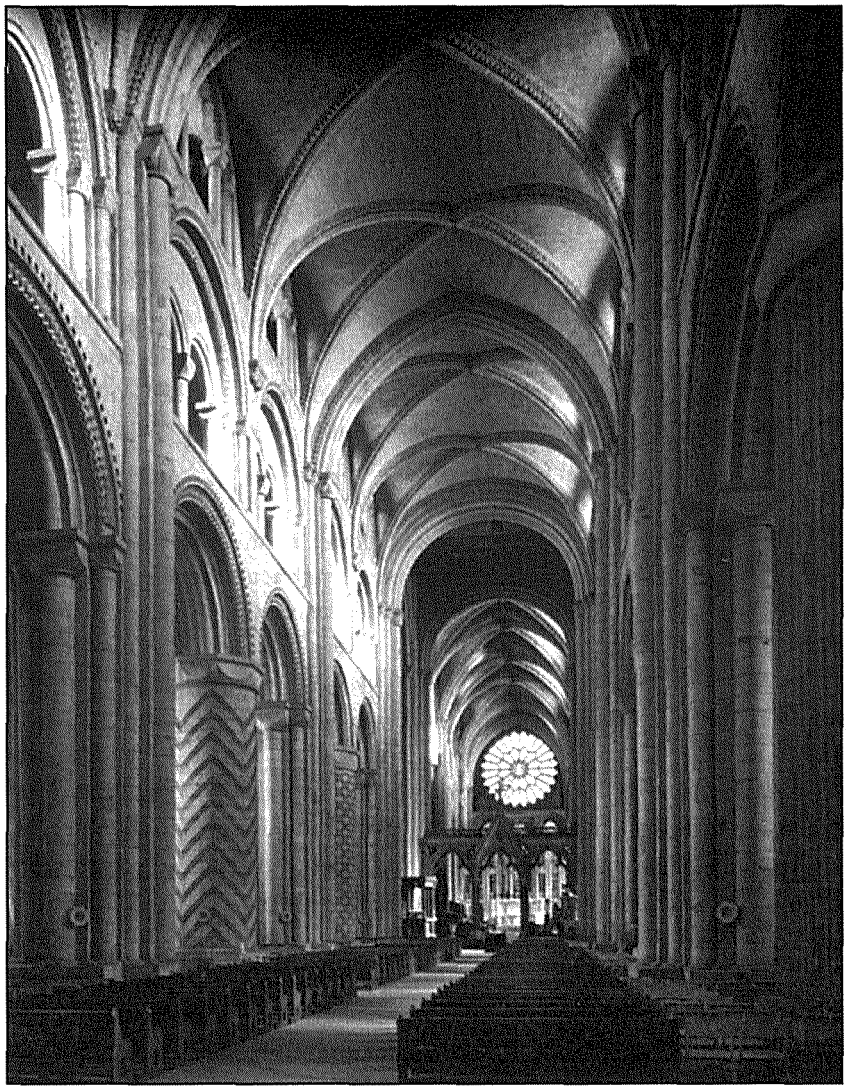
[10] Edward Lucie-Smith (1992) p.117.

destroyed by fire in 1194. The term 'gothic' just like 'medieval' was considered contemptuous and a term of corruption. 'Gothic' was for barbarian, just as 'medieval' was for an empty vacuous middle period in history – with no artistic developments worth bothering about – separating the Ancient world of Greece and Rome from the exuberance of the Renaissance times. It meant that gothic buildings such as the cathedrals or any other gothic works of art implied an ignorance of, or were simply outside, the tradition of Classical rules, in other words barbarian. This meant there had been a regression, a step back in progress, when progress is meant to be a forward moving timeline of historical development from the good to the better. Goethe's remarks, quoted by de Wulf, about Strasbourg Cathedral are indicative of the power and spread of this prejudice against anything gothic. Goethe declared:

"(At first) educated among the detractors of Gothic architecture, I nourished my antipathy against these overloaded, complicated ornaments, which gave the effect of gloomy religion by their very oddity" but then once inside "I seemed suddenly to see a new revelation; what had been objectionable appeared admirable, and the reverse, – the perception of beauty in all its attractiveness, was impressed on my soul."[11]

As for the relatively limited information on actual works of art and the practising artists themselves when compared with later developments in art, one can suggest the overwhelming interest at the time on the subject of representation rather than the technical qualities or aesthetic qualities: the emphasis was on the message rather than how the message was realised. This absence of information is partly the effect of the prejudice against any occupation involving manual work, including painting, sculpture and construction. This attitude toward manual work has its Greek Classical

[11] Maurice de Wulf *Philosphy and Civilization in the Middle Ages* (New York: Dover, 1953) pp. 8-9. Like so many other styles, Gothic will be revived but this time without any association of scorn.



Durham Cathedral *(above)* represents faithfully the Romanesque, whilst Salisbury Cathedral *(opposite, top)* clearly manifests Gothic features. The Duomo of Pisa *(opposite, bottom)* is an example of how a cathedral can escape easy identification.

roots. A strand in Christianity adopted this prejudice in its preference for contemplation about the eternal over action in the material world. Later the Renaissance will modify this balance of eternal and mortal without necessarily breaking up any of the two parts, but searching for a harmony exemplified by the composition of Michelangelo's 'Creation of Man' in the Sistine Chapel: God the eternal and Adam his mortal creation.

Gothic architecture was characterised by the use of a number of innovations, evidence of the technical competence and preparedness of the time, and some can be linked to previous developments that served as inspiration. The pointed arch reminds one of the pointed arches of Arabic architecture, whilst elaborate patterns of gothic vaulting can be linked to inspiration from Durham Cathedral vaulting. The pointed arch and the flying buttress (a rampant arch) pushed the building further up than the Romanesque thus conjuring up a vision of height, an emphasis on the vertical, as the eyes gazed up the pointed steeples to the heavens above. This was associated with the use of larger windows, a necessity to lighten up the high walls, adding a measure of apparent lightness of construction despite the weight of the stone and marble.[12] More light entered the cathedrals but this was a special kind of light, polychromatic, as it filtered into the building illuminating in a exalted way the stained glass windows. Saint-Denis in Paris, c1130 to 1144, was inspirational especially for its vaulting, whilst the choir of Canterbury Cathedral was the beginning of Gothic in England, represented more clearly by Salisbury Cathedral.

Ecclesiastical buildings in typical Gothic style developed especially after 1200 with a high concentration in France and England. The next two centuries were the age of the Gothic Cathedrals although in some places

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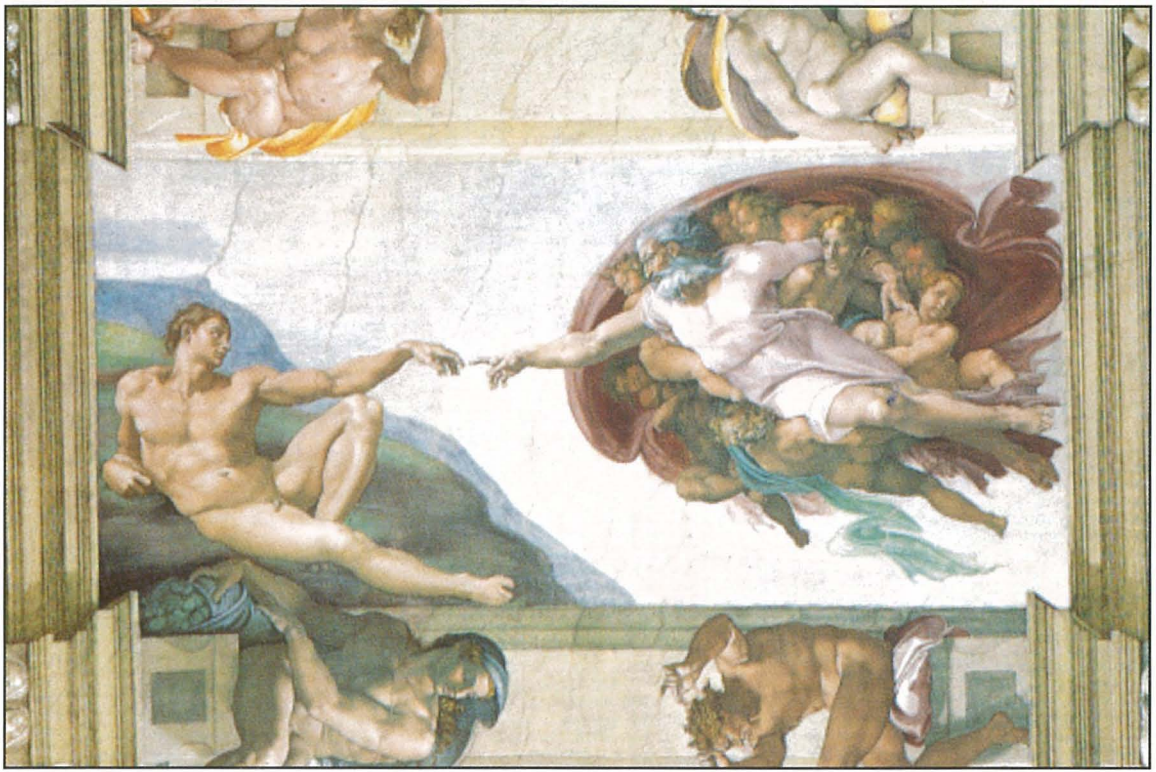
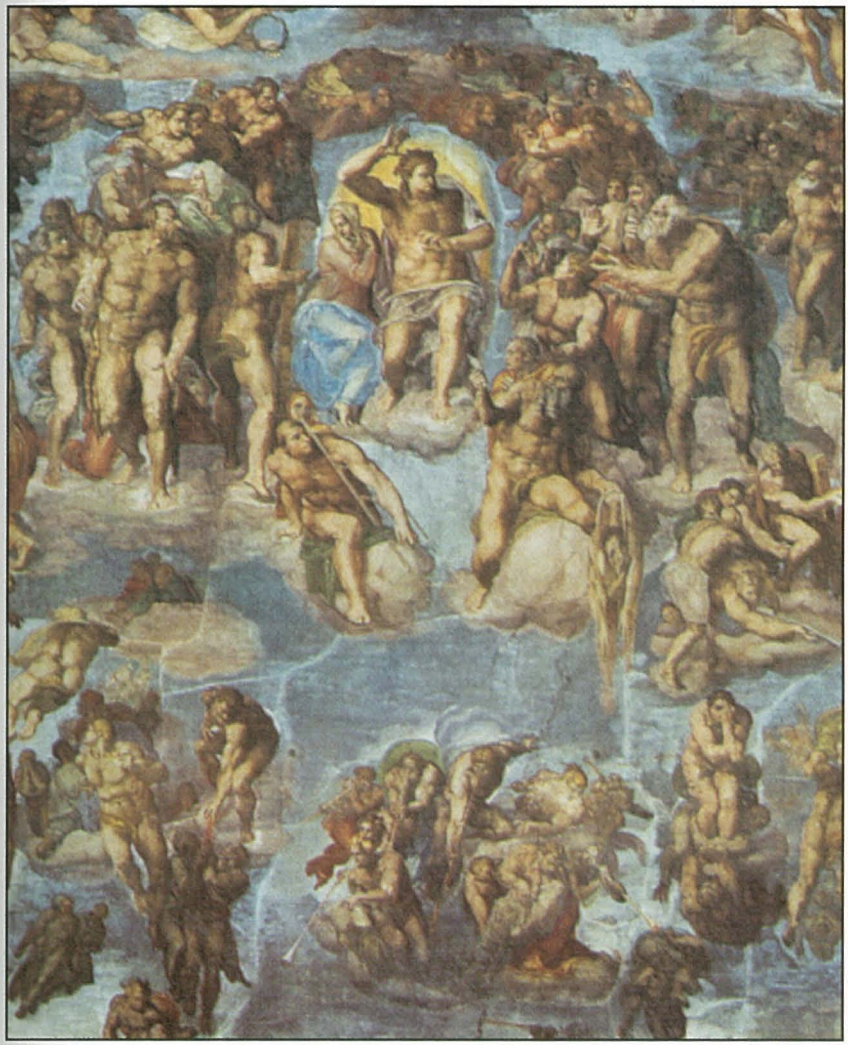
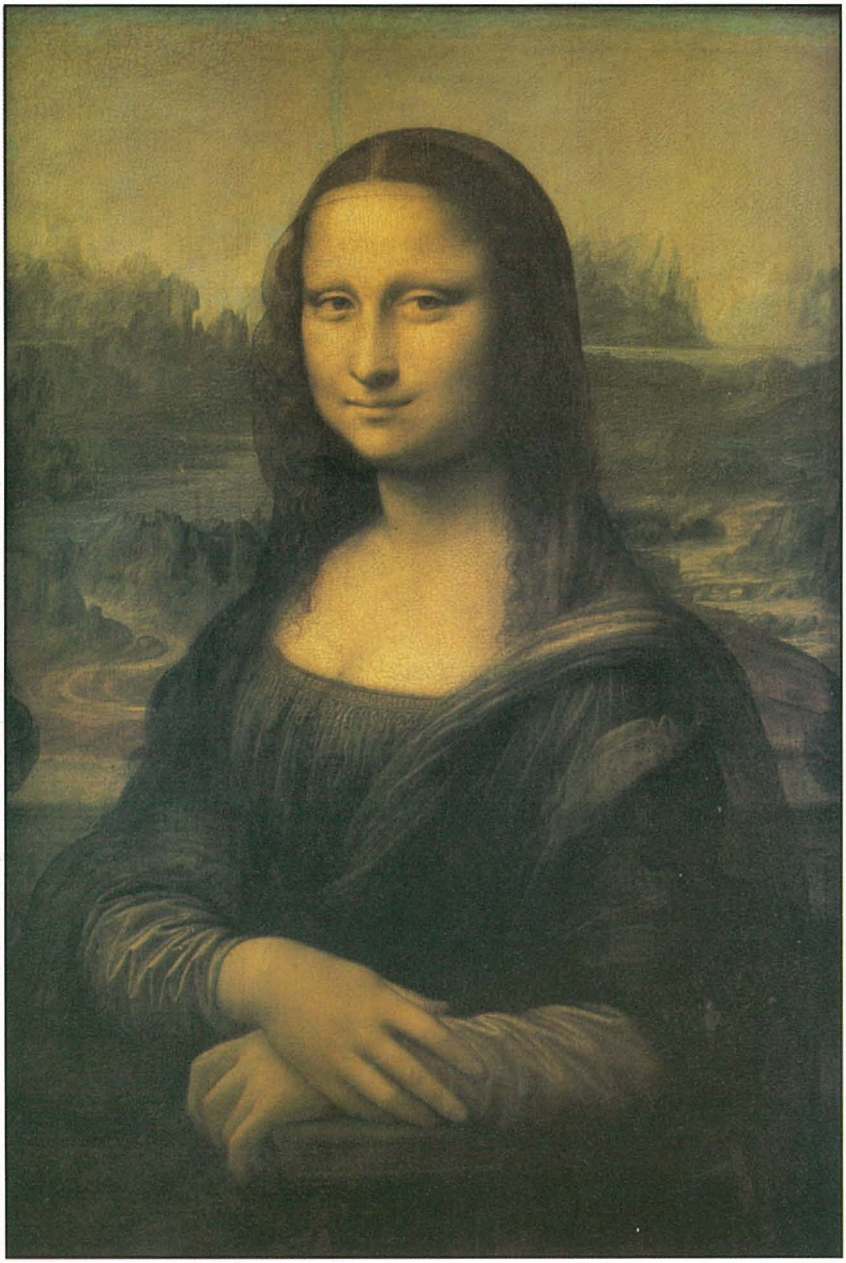
[12] Interesting to note the Renaissance artist Jan van Eyck's *'Madonna in a Church'* to visualise the effect (1437-1439). Oil on wood. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemaldegalerie, Berlin, Germany.

Raphael 'The Nymph Galatea'. Plato believed that art distances us from ideal truths. Raphael however searched for ideal beauty in a certain idea that came to his head.

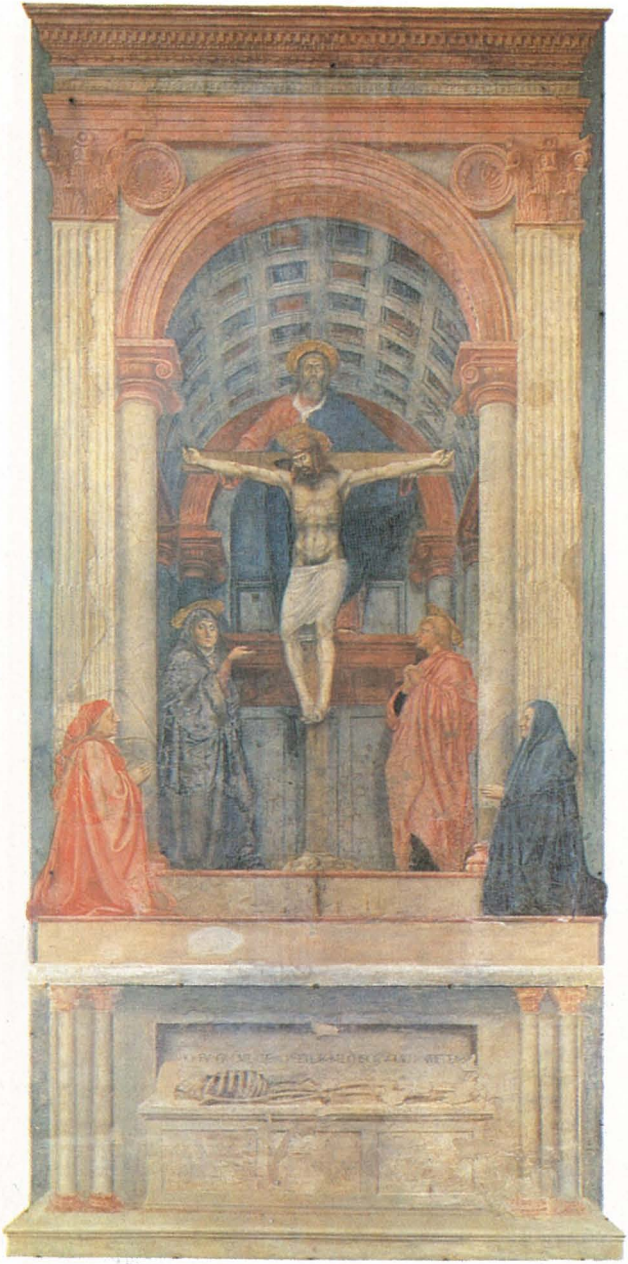


From the initial promise at the beginning of mortal life to the terrible final judgment that decides eternal life. Michelangelo's 'The Creation of Man' *(above)* and his 'The Last Judgment' *(below)* can both be observed in the Sistine Chapel.



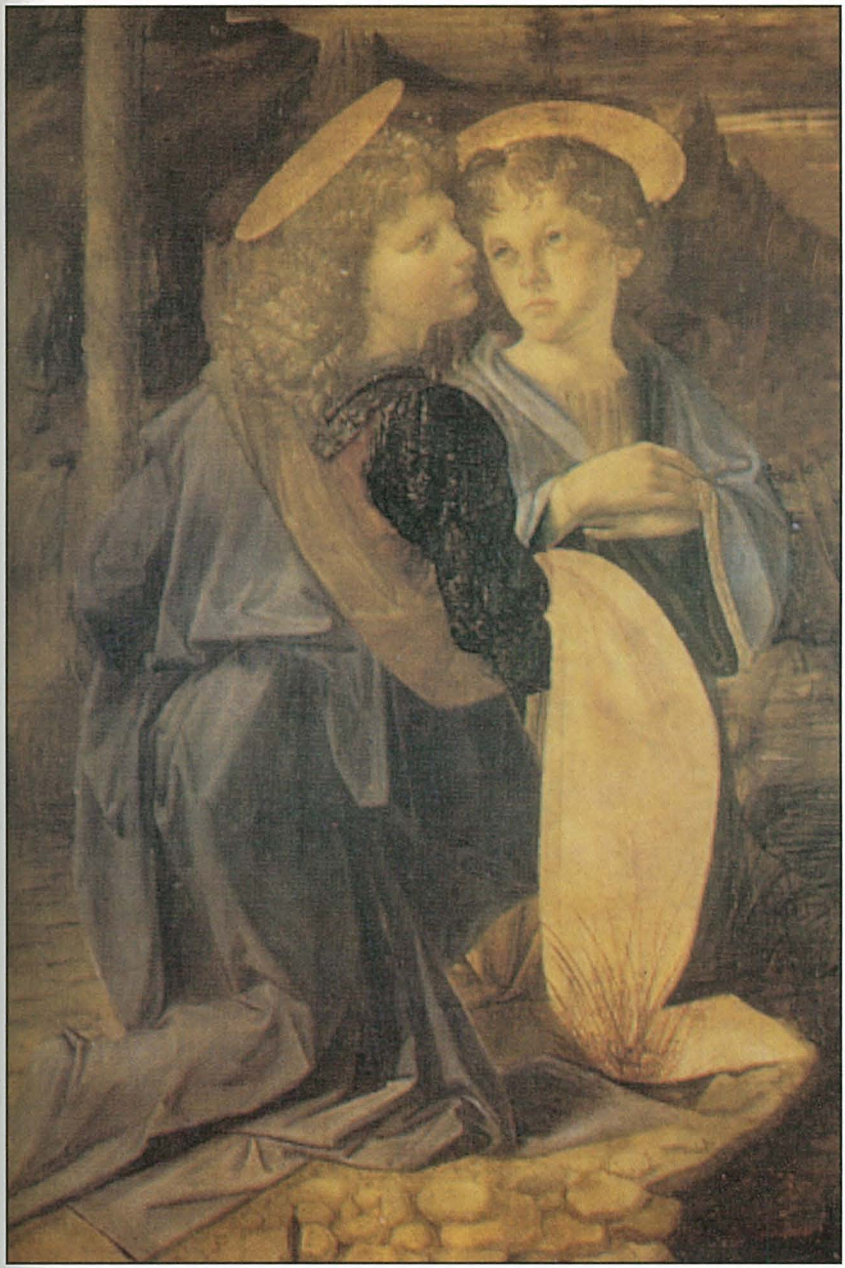


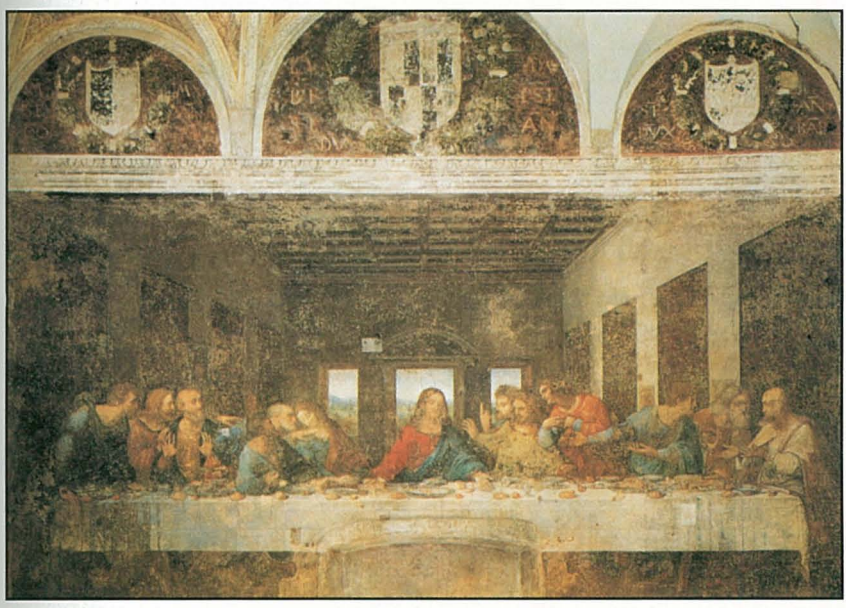
Leonardo da Vinci 'Mona Lisa' *(left)* and Giorgione 'The Tempest' *(above)*. Art can be enigmatic or at least it leaves the audience asking many questions. What is Mona Lisa's mood? What is the central theme in 'The Tempest'?



Masaccio 'The Holy Trinity'. The artistic simplicity, solidity and austerity are 'framed' in a successful 'depth' projection, the result of studies in perspective.

Opposite: Detail from Verrocchio's 'John the Baptist baptising Christ'. The angel purported to be the work of young Leonardo is the one on the left.



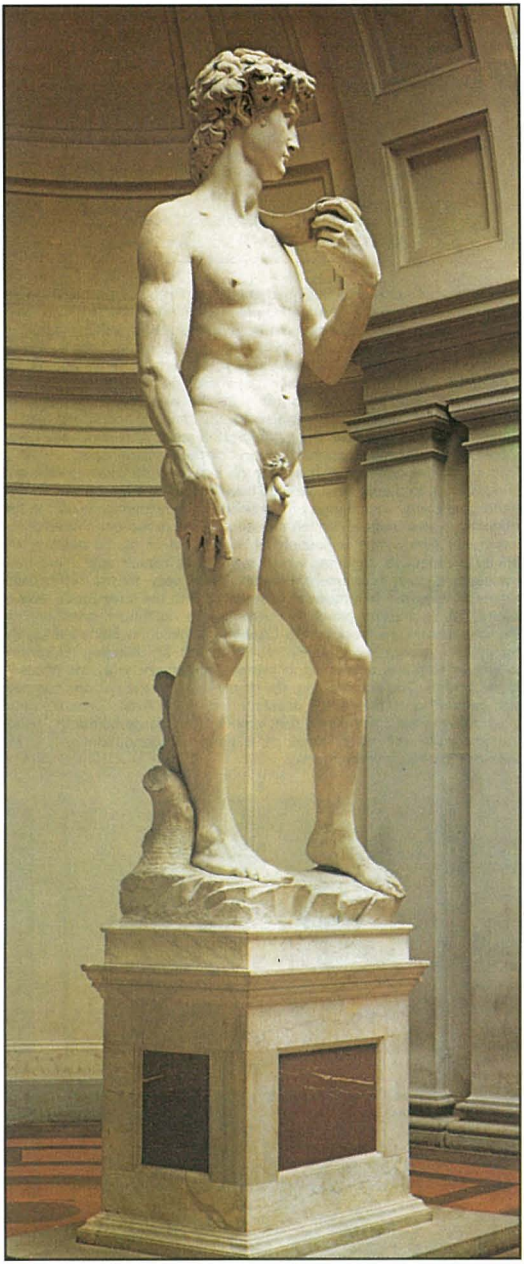


Leonardo da Vinci 'The Virgin and Child with St Anne and John the Baptist' *(opposite)* and 'Last Supper' *(above)*.

Raphael's flair in the 'Madonna del Granduca' *(left)*, linked to Leonardo's style, and his Vatican rooms work *(above)*, linked to Michelangelo's style. According to Giorgio Vasari it was Raphael's humility that made him a great artist and not simply a follower.

Above: Michelangelo 'Pietà'.

Opposite: Michelangelo 'David'.



Constable: Landscape becomes the subject as one can grimpse from 'The haywain'.

Édouard Manet 'Monet working in his boat'. Manet's brushwork is powerful and visible.

Braque's 'Candlestick' is one work with multiple perspectives.

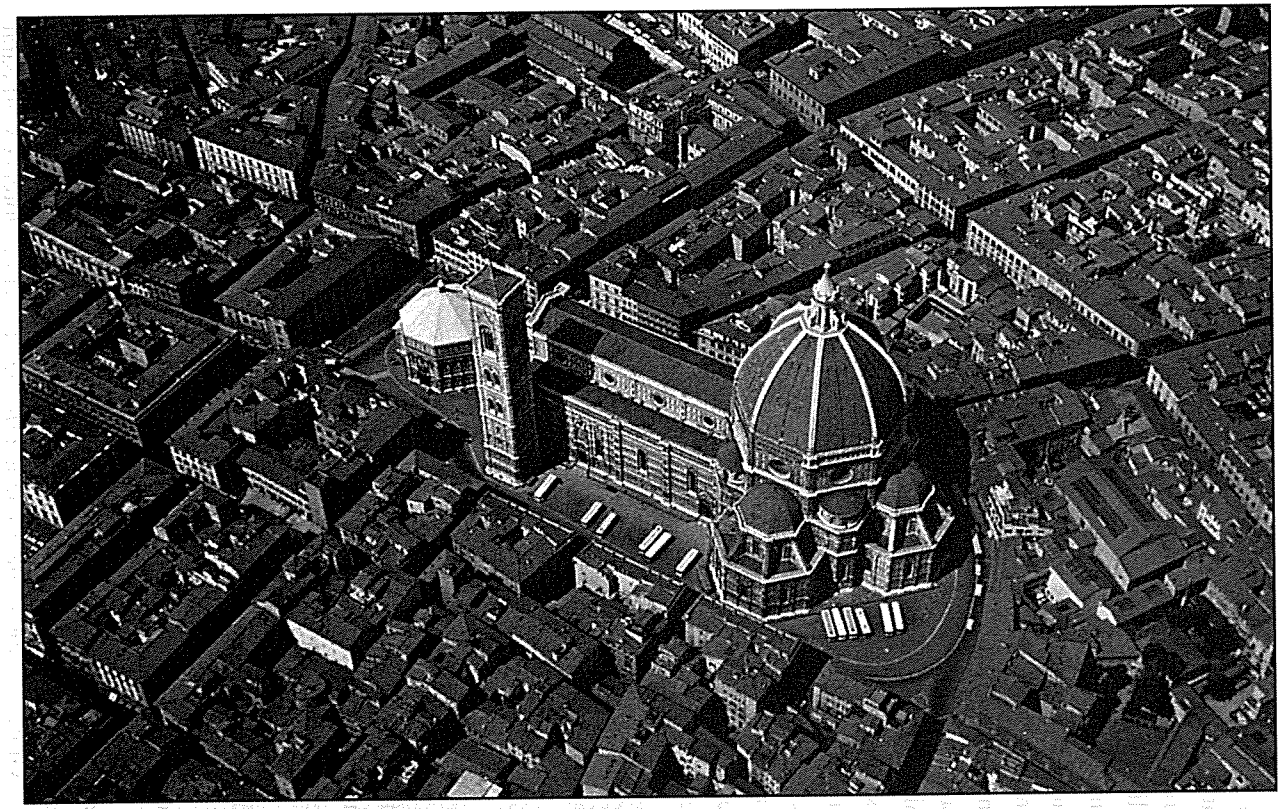
Abstraction is almost complete in Kandinsky, 'Fragment for Composition IV'.

gothic survived even further. These cathedrals were the pride of the cities that built them, a secular source of merit of these religious buildings. They were a distinctive and prominent claim by the cities, a sign of wealth and well-being. They took very long to finish – financial burdens were immense – and this meant that sometimes the style had changed by the time the building was finished. These monuments cost enormous sums of money both in terms of labour and technical expertise, as well as in terms of materials. And these resources could not be guaranteed forever, or at least for the full length of the construction project. Some cathedrals took centuries to finish. But once finished they would provide that sensation one can search for in such a holy place – being away from the tiring, maddening world outside to a place of peace. Like a man in a foreign land who has just lost all his private documentation including his passport and is so glad to find the embassy representing his country, he regains solace and rest as he hopes to be able to reach the place where he intends to move on.

10.4 Italy and the Renaissance

10.4.1 City pride

Politically, the cities in France were less independent than those in Italy. France was a feudal country. Italy of the 14th and 15th centuries was more a geographic than a political unity, with a number of Italian cities that had gained independence. This meant that in the Italian peninsula the gradual process of unification taking place at the time especially in England and France, but even elsewhere, did not take roots. In its turn the independence of the various Italian cities and small states was rather difficult to keep because they were so fragile – as pointed out by Machiavelli in his call for a powerful leader in **The Prince**. And yet independence was highly valued and led to civic pride. For example it was left to Giotto, a Florentine, to design the bell-tower of Florence Cathedral.



Florentine pride: The Cathedral symbolising Florentine creativity and technique.

The young and future king of the Jews, David, was characteristically sculpted by Michelangelo in preparation for battle against the giant Goliath in the eternal appeal of the unequal and so heroic struggle between the relatively weak and the powerful. The Florentines like the Jews felt they could be overwhelmed by the odds against them but they were ready to fight back just like David had done. David's achievements are recorded in the Bible and will be remembered forever (not necessarily for the history of the Jews but for its religious meaning) but so will the Florentine achievements (not necessarily for Florentine politics but for its artistic qualities).

The love of fame of the patrons especially in the small city or town courts such as Mantova, Urbino and Ferrara and the parochial antagonism between different guilds within the cities, provided the prop for the artists to a wide variety of artistic commissions. In a way these Italian cities provided a perfect setting for the cultivation of art and the economic survival of the artist. The demand was now growing along with the number of clients ordering artworks. There was a clear development in the terms that established the relations between patron and artist. The latter was no longer a labourer but a genius. The Duke of Milan Lodovico Sforza had to send for Leonardo da Vinci because the Dominican prior of Santa Maria delle Grazie was unhappy with the rate of work carried out by the artist when he saw Leonardo idle for many hours and pestered him to finish off his work. The artist was working on the *'Last Supper'* fresco. The duke "was forced to send for Leonardo and to question him skilfully about his work, showing with great civility that he was doing so because of the prior's insistence."[13] The decision was taken to draw the prior's face for Judas on the fresco in Milan after the prior had reported him to the Duke. Coming from a despotic patron such as Lodovico, ruthless in his political intrigues (but unwise perhaps because he will die

[13] Giorgio Vasari, (1991) p.290.

a prisoner of the French he had betrayed after having been their ally), these words testify to the sensitivity these political rulers had towards some of the artists. It also shows how patrons in Italy preferred intellectuals free from political or other obligations, and were ready to give due recognition to achievement rather than to rank and birth.

10.4.2 Florence

Florence, a banking and textile centre, became the focus of attention in the early 15th century. As in other parts of Italy, there was an extraordinary development of urban life. The rich families, especially the Medici, dominated the city. The nobles engaged in commerce, alongside the bourgeoisie. Thus there was much less to divide these two classes than in France for example, where class boundaries were stricter. In Florence the nobility intermingled with the merchants, enjoying the same kind of life, education, tastes, and pleasures. This rich urban society was sophisticated, with a high civic consciousness. Florence was like ancient Athens in many ways. Its great period of art arrived during the time of slow decadence of the city. Athens had Plato (**Republic**) and until he lived there, Aristotle (**Politics**); Florence had its own political theorists of worth, Machiavelli (**Il Principe**) and Guicciardini (**Storia d'Italia**). Just as Plato's Republic was meant to bring unity to a divided Athens, the Prince was Machiavelli's answer to bolster the independence of the city against the foreigner. It was a State, facing as many foreign problems as internal ones. Athens had to face Persia but Florence had France, Athens had Sparta whilst Florence had Milan. Athens was divided between the landowning wealthy families and the democratic citizenry, Florence was divided (amongst others) between the followers of the princely Medici family and the Republicans.

The Medici patronage of art was for the family's gratification and glory as the ownership of works of art raised the social status of the owners. Art and literature that had served the Church during the Middle Ages, now glorified the prince as well. Luckily Cosimo and Lorenzo of the Medici

family patronised first class artists. The Medici family had banking, political, papal, and military interests and yet they still expressed an interest in less material or instrumental concerns. It was an asset for the city that this and other merchant families who have to look forward because of business requirements, always projecting new deals and ventures for tomorrow, were interested in looking back in time to the cultural inspiration of ancient art. The world of trade, commerce and finance so predominantly interested in the creation and exploitation of wealth found the motivation to sponsor art, not only investing their money in business but ready to pay for art.

10.4.3 Rome

Throughout the 15th century Florence retained a privileged place in the development of the Renaissance style. Dante and Boccaccio in the literary world, and Giotto in painting, had established a tradition, many of the artists were Florentine whilst others moved to the city. But once the Medici family started to lose control, Rome became a major attraction for Renaissance artists. Artistic liberty did not mean that the Renaissance was anti-religious. Many popes enthusiastically promoted it. In the early 16th century, the ball passed from Florence to Rome, both because of the fall of the Medici family and the political disorder brought about by the French invasions, but also due to the continuous interest in art and literature demonstrated by the popes. Many popes of the Renaissance period were not men of outstanding intellectual capacities but they thought that these artists were the best available men to use. Ironically it was the two Medici popes, Leo X and Clement VII, who helped Rome overthrow Florence as the centre of the Renaissance world. Michelangelo, a Florentine, was to be a protagonist.

Rome it must be remembered had fallen pitifully from the splendours of the Empire. This return to the glorious images of the ancient world transpired in the rebuilding of St Peter's Cathedral – a courageous decision

to take even for the pope, since it meant bringing down the old basilica. The new enterprise was the scene of Michelangelo and Raphael. They had worked in Florence but now went over to Rome. Donato Bramante commissioned to design the Vatican, made it a characteristically centralised Renaissance Church rather than the medieval longitudinal design, which is a design aimed to lead the faithful to the altar. In a Renaissance Church, a completely centralised building, such a vision is not possible. The religious and otherworldly concerns of the church are replaced by increased attention to human concerns. Man is in the church no longer pressing forward to reach a supreme end, but enjoying the beauty that surrounds him and the glorious feeling of being the central point of this beauty.

10.4.4 Venice

Venice was a city that thrived on commerce with the East and was an ideal setting for artistic life. Giorgione and Bellini are considered the two founders of the Venetian school. They increased the effect of colour and light in painting. If one searches for the major contributions of the different trends in the Renaissance, the painters of central Italy contributed balanced composition, whilst the Venetian painters added colour and light. In *'The Tempest'* by Giorgione it is the strange use of light coming from a thunderstorm that is so characteristic of the visual effects suggested by this particular work. Light becomes the input that links the different features of the painting. It is a strange light – a lightning flash. But there is also (even more evident) the development of the landscape, the physical environment that steals the central part of the painting. What perhaps remains the fundamental intellectual query about this painting is its original theme: what is it primarily about? Such a question will be more common in the modern world when abstract or partly abstract painting will develop. There the spectator simply grovels in the dark. The title is sometimes a guide. Does the title *'The Tempest'* tell the whole story? Just like the enigma of the facial expression in terms of the eyes and mouth of Mona Lisa, likewise the enigma of the central theme in this painting

adds to one of the basic thrills of art – interpretation. The theme suggests that non-religious topics in art were able to attract a growing popularity. Non-religious perhaps, but the tension that runs through the representation is incredible: the calm tranquillity of the foreground including the human figures against the powerful storm that seems to be gathering strength – a contrast between human and sublime?

10.5 Art and the artist

10.5.1 Architecture, painting and sculpture

Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446) and Leone Battista Alberti (1404-72), both Florentine, led to a new architecture. Brunelleschi, a goldsmith and sculptor, only turned to architecture when he was already forty. He designed the dome for Florence Cathedral (c.1420 – 1436), an engineering novelty and accomplishment. Brunelleschi was inspired by his study of the Pantheon in Rome. The space to be covered by the dome was too wide for traditional means and techniques. The dome was designed with 24 ribs, rising to a point, thus making use of the load-bearing capacities of the Gothic arch. These were hidden between the two shells of the dome. And so whilst Gothic and Roman merged, and what had originally been a gothic building was now crowned with a dome that represented the new era, a new aesthetic attitude developed. Brunelleschi's qualities as an architect and his Classical leanings can be viewed in his Ospedale degli Innocenti in Florence. Considered the first Renaissance building it is still according to Edward Lucie-Smith "a cautious compromise" between 11th and 12th century Romanesque and ancient Roman buildings.[14]

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[14] Edward Lucie-Smith (1992), p. 178

"The facade consists of an arcade carried by wide-set Tuscan columns, rather thin and fragile for the function they are called upon to perform, with, above them, small, wide-set windows placed above the centre of each arch, and crowned in turn with simple pediments."[15]

What Brunelleschi did to architecture, Masaccio would do to the pictorial arts. Born in 1401, he joined the painters' guild in 1422, when he could start painting, only to die six years later. The Holy Trinity fresco is a model for perspective painting, the illusion of depth highly refined. The figures are simple and grand, solid and massive. They are on the other side of late medieval graceful daintiness. This is in fact one of those general qualities that separate Renaissance art from Gothic: a more sincere interest in the image conveyed as against the supreme decorative intentions of the gothic artist. Because of this shift within the artist's priorities to render the topic in mind as realistically as his skills and knowledge permit, there was an increased accuracy in interpreting emotions and gestures by relying on sharper observation. The crucifixion had been a late Christian art theme. Earlier the emphasis was on miracles, healing and other hopeful aspects of the faith such as the Resurrection. The resurrection theme pointed towards an ideal world – the world beyond – but the crucifixion was the conveyor of an extremely realistic earthly pain. The crucifixion with the arms hanging stretched upwards, the head hanging heavily down, the body twisted in pain along the upright section of the cross were reminders of the physical torment of Christ's sacrifice, a sacrifice sublimated in the Mass ritual. But it is not difficult to associate the suffering body of Christ with human misery and physical suffering. This attention to human suffering had been the great inspiration of another great figure who like Masaccio died relatively young: St Francis of Assisi.

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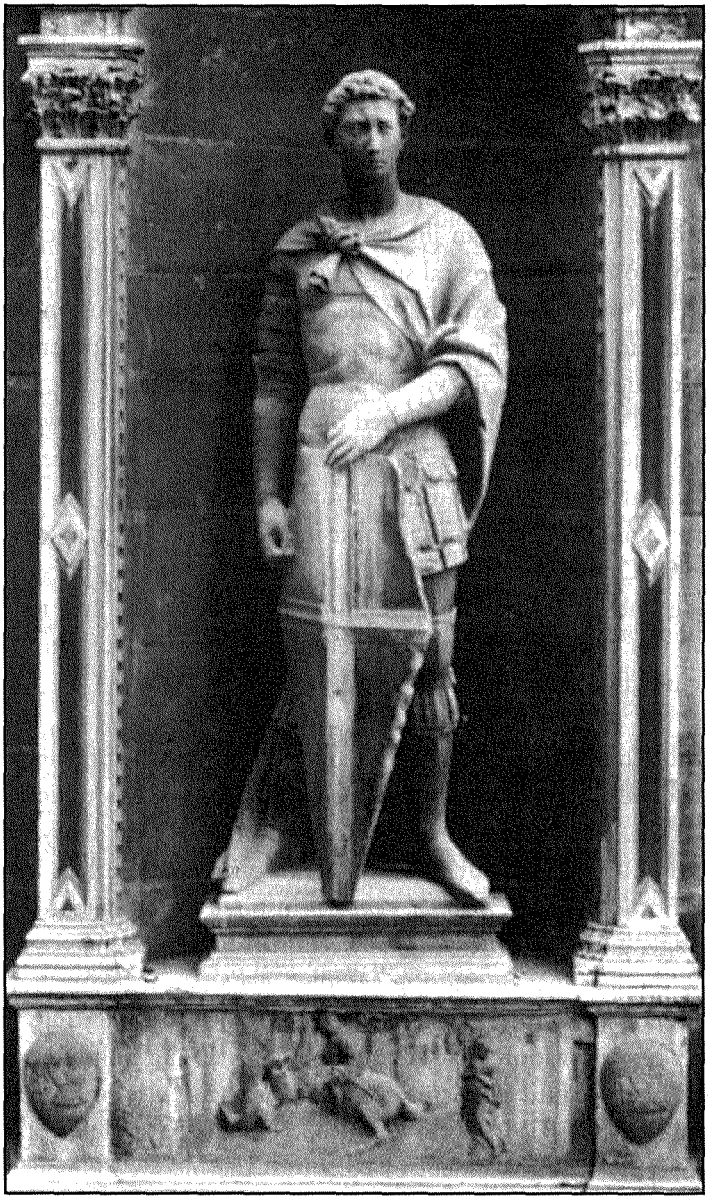
[15] Edward Lucie-Smith (1992), p. 178. For L. Battista Alberti the arch was an item of contrast between the two worlds: the Gothic pointed arch was irritating, the round arch was comfortable to the eye.

In Masaccio the crucified Christ and the skeleton on the tomb are austere. The association to sculpture is also clear, and Michelangelo the supreme painter and sculptor, is in a way indebted to Masaccio.

Donatello represents early Renaissance sculpture. Like Brunelleschi he went to Rome to study Roman antiquities. The illusion of depth of Masaccio is turned into an illusion of real form in the statue. We can somehow note the paradoxical suggestion that the more the artist aims at realism, the more he has to push the effects of artistic illusion, and the more techniques and knowledge he has to adopt. Developments in the scientific study of anatomy will help the artist. Thus St George (c 1415–1416) is real enough when compared to the spiritual, and somewhat vague beauty of medieval sculptures. Hands, face and pose show a deeper study and familiarity with the human body. It also projects the idea of a Christian knight. The artistic interest in the human body is even more intense in Donatello's bronze statue of David, a work that was free-standing and therefore could be admired on its own, and not as an extension or projection of some other construction. Significantly it was also a nude figure.

In Gombrich's **Story of Art** we find amongst others a helpful association of individual artists linked with specific artistic features typical of the Renaissance. The inspiration of Classical Antiquity was always present during the Renaissance but it was higher in certain artists than in others. Sandro Botticelli's *'The Birth of Venus'* is inspired by a theme from pagan mythology, given new life – literally reborn – in true Renaissance spirit (despite the fact that during the Middle Ages interest in Antiquity had not been erased). Andrea Mantegna (died 1506) whose paintings include a painstaking recreation of authentic Roman dress and buildings projects a theatrical effect into his pictures, something that is also present in Piero della Francesca's *'Constantine's Dream'*. On his part, della Francesca developed further the element of light into the picture. This helped in shaping up the figures, adding depth to the scene and creating a night atmosphere.



Donaltello 'St George'.

10.5.2 The artist as intellectual

The intellectual abilities of these artists were not restricted to the technical competence in their field of expression, but included other areas of human knowledge. Leonardo was not one of the "labourers hoeing in the garden". If this relation is too cruel, than one can add that he was not even a skilled craftsman. Giorgio Vasari, not unexpectedly one might add knowing his 'crusade' to promote Renaissance art and whatever it stood for, claims that Leonardo was much more, he was an artist. These geniuses "accomplish more when they work less, since they are searching for inventions in their minds, and forming those perfect ideas which their hands then express and reproduce from what they previously conceived with their intellect."[16] This intellectual also had to be skilled in and knowledgeable about other areas and not restricted to a particular and specialised field.[17] Leonardo and the others in the forefront of the intellectual developments of the day were not only specialised in their field but they followed up developments in the study of mathematics, including perspective, as well as in the study of anatomy, to mention only two.[18]

In medieval art the absence of perspective in terms of the particular location of the artist in relation to the theme under observation seemed to reflect artistically the absence in theology of the liberty to add or even develop publicly any personal perspective on doctrinal matters. The centrality of the point of reference of the observer (not just the artist) was not only fruitful to developments in art but was also crucial in science. The spread of scientific knowledge will benefit from a creative use of perspective, as a study of

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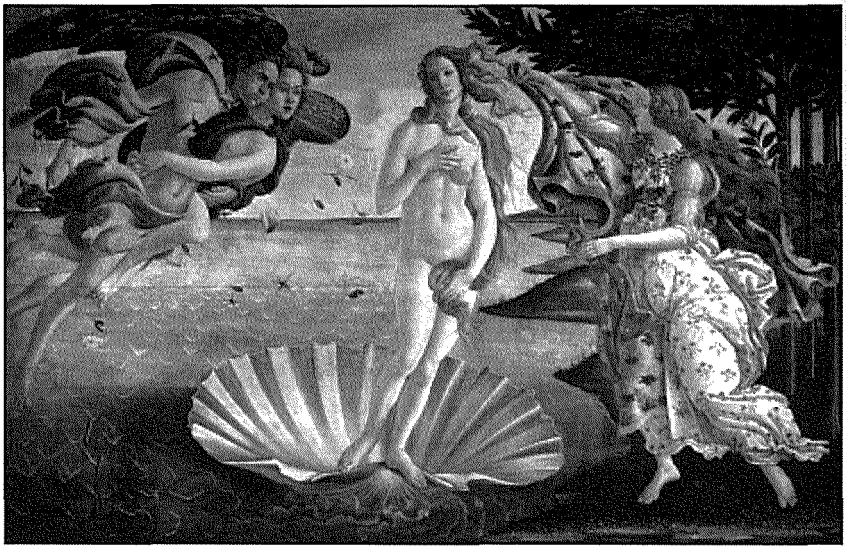
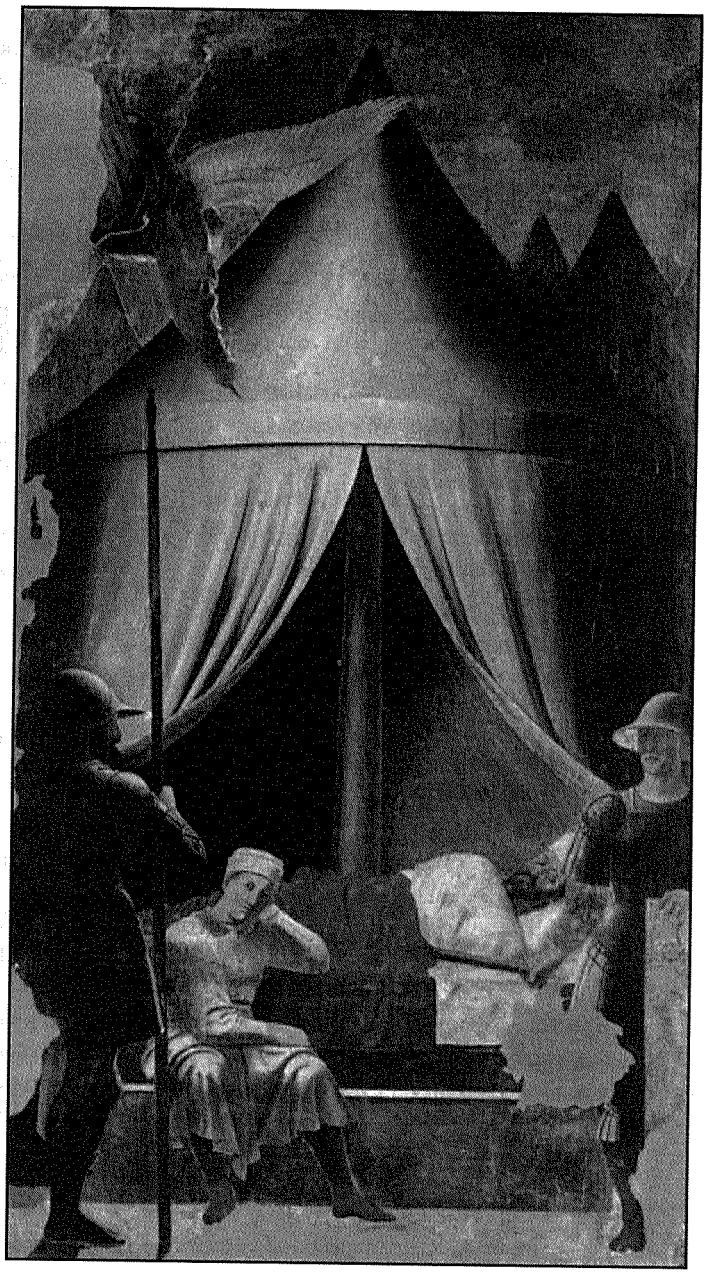
[16] G. Vasari (1991), p.290

[17] Robert Pirsig (1974). Phaedrus' determination to break out from the confines of a one-sided scientific straightjacket, a science that alone dominates all intellectually accredited knowledge, is a cry (in his case a maddening cry) in the same direction.

[18] E. H. Gombrich *Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1996). Perspective is an important theme for Gombrich as one can verify by checking p.677 ('Depth').



Botticelli's 'Birth of Venus' *(top)* inspired by a mythological theme; Mantegna's 'St James on the Way to Execution' *(left)* includes typical ancient Roman dress; Piero della Francesca's 'Constantine's Dream' *(opposite)* takes us back to an event which represents the pagan emperor close to Christian conversion.



Copernicus and his ideas will amply demonstrate. His 'revolutionary' heliostatic system for the visible Universe, was the conclusion of amongst others a change in 'perspective.' Like the pioneers of perspective, Copernicus changed the angle of vision from where to look at the solar system. Why earth? Why not the sun? [19] In painting the linear perspective highlighting the place of the artist in the projection of the picture and in astronomy the decision to shift the centre taken at rest from earth to the Sun were both determined by the choice of vantage points. The shift was initially from one point to another but this change admitted by implication the existence of possible other vantage points. Things represented are not things as they are but things as they appear from one particular point. They are not absolute points of reference but ones that are ever-changing. In painting, the point of reference – a favourable position for the artist undoubtedly – is fixed in the painting but when the work is contrasted with another painting where perspective is not adopted, the difference will emerge much more clearly. It can also provide surprising results when adopted from an unusual angle as in Mantegna's painting of the *'Lamentation over the Dead Christ'*.[20]

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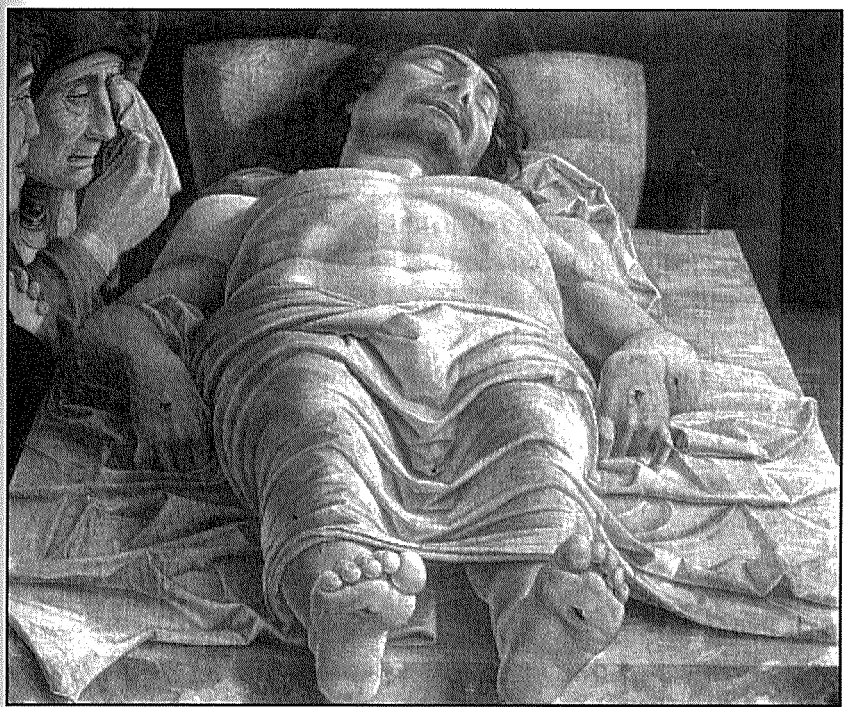
[19] Jacob Bronowski *The Ascent of Man* (London: Futura, 1989) p.122; see also pp. 113-115; 122-123.

[20] This shift in perspective is a major development in so many areas of study such as in the philosophy for children where they are asked for example to re-read the story of the three little pigs from the perspective of the wolf. In theatre studies the shift can be from the director of the play and the performing artists to the amateur audience. In Luigi Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore* where six members who are off-stage go up on stage and narrate their story – which unites them all but which in fact is experienced in different ways. Not only has the professional actor been displaced but the same scene is viewed from so many different angles: «ciascuno di noi – veda – si crede "uno" ma non è vero: è "tanti" signore, "tanti" secondo tutte le possibilità d'essere che sono in noi; "uno" con questo, "uno" con quello – diversissimi! E con l'illusione d'esser sempre "uno per tutti" e sempre "quest'uno" che ci crediamo in ogni nostro atto! Non è vero!». Translated freely this can be rendered in the following words: "Every one of us – see – believes he is "one" but it's not true sir: he is "many", as "many" as it is possible for us to be; "one" with this, "one" with the other – all so different! And we carry the illusion of being "one for all" and we believe to be always "this one" in all our doings! It's not true!"



Mantegna's 'Lamentation over the Dead Christ' is an experiment in shifting the gaze of the onlooker (and the artist) from a different angle than was traditionally the case.

Compared to other such Lamentations as the ones by Giotto, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Luca Signorelli and others, the position of the artist in terms of the central subject – the dead body of Christ – is radically different, a non-conventional angle of observation.

The artist was now no longer a craftsman, providing shoes, cupboards, and paintings. Creation and Renaissance Art were in essence linked. In Giorgio Vasari's words the full dignity of the artist is expressed as he captures the spirit of the first divine creative phase: "But I would say that design, the basis of both arts (sculpture and painting), or rather the very soul which conceives and nourishes within itself all the aspects of the

intellect, existed in absolute perfection at the origin of all the things when God on High, having created the great body of the world and having decorated the heavens with its brightest lights, descended with his intellect further down into the clarity of the atmosphere and the solidity of the earth, and, shaping man, discovered in the pleasing invention of things the first form of sculpture and painting."[21] The creation of the artist follows on God's original creation of the world and of man. God took a mass of earth and shaped man, the artist took man and idealised the body rendering it – according to the vision of the day influenced by Greek and Roman standards – beautiful. A comparison is launched between the artistic endeavour and divine creation. This once again brings out the renaissance concept of the artist as a divinely inspired genius rather than merely a skilled artisan following the customary ways of the craft typical of the Middle Ages.

Along with the recognition for their specific merits, there came a rise in the social prestige of the artist. Like the artists another class will emerge and rise – the merchants. The artist and merchant shared not only their fortunes but also other attributes. The merchant had no land like the aristocracy, no protection or privilege such as that shared by members of the Church, not even the techniques of the peasant, which in normal conditions could guarantee him his existence. What the merchant had was mobility and the readiness to risk even without the support of the powerful in society. Likewise the Renaissance artist was ready to risk innovative, even more personal, artistic expression outside the accepted and conventional standards of medieval art. Both artist and merchant were able to supply the public with something valuable and which the public appreciated. These goods rendered wealth. Wealth brought social recognition accompanied by a higher status in society. This status meant that those who could actively create would now be rewarded: not your birth but your creativity, and the ability to 'sell' it.

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[21] G. Vasari, (1991), p.3.

10.5.3 Reinventing the past

The artist thus became free and this freedom was also felt in architecture. When Pope Julius II pulled down the old basilica of St Peter, the new building was to be a testimony of new styles. The architects in Italy had already started learning the right proportions and measurements of Doric, Ionic, Corinthian columns, studied and measured the Roman ruins in Italy, read Vitruvius Pollio who was the principal influence – his **De Architectura** was a complete treatise on architecture from antiquity – planned and designed palaces and churches which the patrons wanted. The archaeological interest in Roman antiquities was an inspiration. It represented the intellectual element of the Renaissance man who looked at these not for their picturesque value, but for measurement and creative inspiration. Renaissance is rebirth. Just like modern versions of democracy trace their origins back to Greek *demokratia* and Roman senatorial models, but had to adapt these to a world that had changed in radical ways, likewise the Renaissance patrons could hardly be expected to live in a Greek public building or religious temple. A compromise was possible with the introduction of motifs such as Classical columns from Antiquity added to buildings most of which were to be lived in. A compromise was found between the practical and the aesthetic, in other words there was a return to Greek and Roman models but these were adapted to contemporary needs. The houses of the powerful families had been small fortresses that were slowly turned into palaces that exhibited so many ancient architectural motifs. This took place under the influence of the growing enthusiasm for antiquity, promoted by the Renaissance.

The medieval world understood Antiquity in one way, the Renaissance in another. Such a generalisation demands further explanation. The change to Renaissance was not only provoked by an interest in Antiquity or else the change would have come about seven centuries earlier, at the time of Charlemagne when there was already a high interest in Antiquity. Throughout the Middle Ages, one must remember, intellectuals were concerned with Antiquity. The Latin authors had been copied and studied

so much that their influence can be seen in the style of medieval writers. Virgil, the Latin poet, was greatly honoured by the clerks of the Middle Ages and was even projected by Dante as a precursor of Christianity. He accompanied Dante in the other world in his **Divine Comedy**. Virgil in the first half of his **Aeneid** narrates the wanderings of Aeneas at a critical time of his life – following the defeat of Troy. Dante in the introductory verses of the **Divine Comedy** was also wandering at a difficult time of his life; even he had to leave his city behind, an enforced exile. Virgil's description of the war scenes in the second half of the work, with their fair share of blood and violence (as in Dante's hellish scenes), are lucid. There is mention of heaven and hell, the tongues of fire falling on Aeneas' men and giving them courage, the need to pray for help, and the ways in which the soul leaves the body for the after-life. The links between Dante's artistic self-projection and Aeneas, medieval and ancient poets, are many. But the **Aeneid** of Virgil and Dante's **Divine Comedy** are quite separate. The inherent qualities of Antiquity, both in literature and artistic expression, could not be understood until the blinkers of the Middle Ages were removed. Antiquity becomes then truly a source of knowledge and beauty. This was the result of the Renaissance intellectual class, an elite, opposed to the priestly intellectual caste that had dominated the Middle Ages.

Seen from this angle the Renaissance man was relatively free, but because he was so, he had to create all the time, in order to survive. The priest intellectual thrived because he hung on to the umbilical chord attaching him to the Church. If he dared to spread his wings in any way outside the reaches of the Roman Curia, he suffered. Peter Abelard had been a free spirit. In his **Ethics**, in which incidentally he showed his esteem for pagan ethics and appealed to Christians to study pagan doctrine on God, he dared (typically for him one might add) reproach members of the Church in the following way: "So Origen clearly shows, just as plain reason also holds, that these powers which we say were granted to Peter, were by no means conferred by the Lord on all bishops, but only on those who imitate Peter not in the sublimity of his chair but in the dignity of his

merits."[22] Only the powerful Cluny monastery could protect Abelard, already punished by castration, from the many enemies he made. This cry for dignity and merit was also common to Dante when the latter argued for a different interpretation of the word 'nobility': *nobile* based on birth and law (the poor version) and *nobiltà* based on moral and intellectual eminence (the strong version). Abelard and Dante suffered.

10.5.4 Humanism

Abelard and Dante were inspiring characters but they were part of the medieval world. The concentration on theology, religious matters and the explanation of dogma gave way eventually to a more sustained secular approach. The increased aesthetic interest inspired from Greek and Roman art is a reflection of this. The sources are indicative. Petrarca studied Greek and Roman literature in Latin whilst Boccaccio learned Greek and translated Homer into Latin. Both transmitted a high appreciation of ancient writers and the need to rediscover the neglected works. But it was not the studies and the translations that made a difference from the medieval intellectuals, it was an attitude of concern with man (as with Socrates' and the sophists' focus on life on earth rather than the pagan deities of mythology or the cosmic interests of the natural philosophers) that regenerated studies in human concerns. It was a focus on the actual present rather than in abstract, heavenly, eternal terms. This homocentric element is rendered in early Renaissance painting by the heightened psychological sensitivity in the faces and poses of Giotto's figures in the Arena Chapel of the Scrovegni. Not only were the folds more realistic but especially the facial expressions were more animated, more human.

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[22] Peter Abelard *Ethics* (introduced, translated and annotated by D. E. Luscombe) (Oxford University Press, 1971). Origen was one of the early Fathers of the Church.

Another complementary trait of humanism was in the concept *humanitas*. This emphasized the dignity and worth of man partly explained by Panofsky as "man's proud and tragic consciousness of self-approved and self-imposed principles, contrasting with his utter subjection to illness, decay and all that is implied in the word 'mortality'."[23] Proud because such a man is superior to the barbarian, tragic because he does not share the qualities of a god. This concern with the human does not mean a rejection of Christianity. Placing man at the top of the natural world, the Christians similarly believe that humanity is unique. The reason however is that man was created in the image of God and sharing the grace of the soul. It is this last feature that brings out the difference between the pagan and the Christian: for the former, man is to be understood in earthly terms; for the latter, the main feature is the spiritual element in man.

The relation between patron and artist changed enough to permit more liberty to the artist in expressing his artistic style and not merely execute what was commissioned in a pre-established style. Of course this argument goes deep into what is – and what is not – art. Any art that considers itself so must express the artist's particular vision of the image he is working on, even if to a limited degree. So what did the Renaissance bring about that was so special in creative effort? The sculptor and the architect of the Renaissance adopted a certain liberty with their Greek and Roman models. It was a peculiar freedom. The ancient models established a standard of excellence. The Renaissance assimilated the forms and the ideas of Antiquity but was not dominated by them. Individuality and originality were highly appreciated. This freedom, previously thought to pertain to God, now became a human attribute even if by divine order, and thus a duty in itself. Donatello, Andrea del Sarto, Bramante and Raphael identified with

[23] Erwin Panofsky (1982), p.1.

Antiquity but did not imitate.[24] This new freedom – like any other freedom – carried with it certain risks: one could succeed or fail. One however was ready and prepared to take the risk. Man was an active creator.

10.6 Language

During the Middle Ages Latin was slowly turning into a dead language with an over emphasis on style. This subordinated the creative impulse that turned to dialect. Dante had already established the status of the Florentine dialect as a literary language. Boccaccio with his short stories and Petrarca with his sonnets tested the artistic potential of the Florentine dialect even further. The mother tongue was definitely brought to greatness by Ariosto's **Orlando Furioso** (1516). The popularity of Guicciardini and Machiavelli remind us how rich the vernacular language was in developing so many different areas of interest. Besides the beauty of expression, and other aesthetic qualities, the languages were becoming intellectually more profound. The modern languages were rich and flexible enough to express the most complex ideas. The invention of the printing press meant that the Renaissance ideals and works could spread throughout the literate classes. A new more widespread reading public and an informed public opinion were other results. Just as the merchant category was able to establish itself in an independent social class, similarly the language of

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[24] E. H. Gombrich *Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1996), p.485. Freedom was definitely in the political programme of the French revolutionaries of the late 18th century. "The French revolutionaries loved to think of themselves as Greeks and Romans re-born, and their painting, no less than their architecture, reflected this taste for what was called Roman grandeur," comments E. H. Gombrich. Jacques Louis David adopted a neo-classical style which belied the popular feeling that "they were living in heroic times, and that the events of their own years were just as worthy of the painter's attention as the episodes of Greek and Roman history." Others would follow this trend of going back for inspiration to Classical Greece and Rome.

the common people (the so-called dialect) established itself in artistic circles. Latin of course did not disappear. It remained the language of science but it no longer had a monopoly. Study of classical Latin meant changes in curriculum, textbooks and methods of teaching in schools and universities. This was pioneered by Vittorino de Feltre who started a school at Mantova providing an all-round education, including classical authors, physical training and manners. Greek studies broke through the curricula of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.

10.7 Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*

Giorgio Vasari had been to Venice where he studied Romano, Correggio and Titian; he had been in Rome where the suggestion for an anthology of artist biographies had been suggested to him, and also to Florence. Here he had commissions such as fresco decorations of the main hall of the Farnese property, the Palazzo della Cancelleria, and of that of the Palazzo Vecchio of Cosimo de' Medici. He also designed the Uffizi and founded the Florentine Academy of Design. So he was not only an art critic, he was a practitioner. Vasari's writings are an influential thesis about the rebirth or renaissance of ancient art in Italy, a notion of a Renaissance style popularised by Jacob Burckhardt.

In **Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy** Burckhardt presented the classical picture of the Renaissance as the birth of modern man. From the writings of Machiavelli there emerged a picture of man who was a member of the secular state bereft of moralistic or pseudo-religious ideas such as the divine right to rule. Rulers had to be concerned with the people over whom they ruled. External enemies were not in the skies and human will was not to be shackled by some abstract ethical code of conduct. There was also a stress on the development of the individual, with a new attention to fame, glory, and the expression of personality. Man seemed to adopt a new psychology as a new concept of humanity developed. Both Dante and Petrarca wrote love poems but for the former it was essentially

spiritual, for the latter more passionate and sensual – it was a change of mind. The discovery of the New World based partly on the new voyages of exploration, was also Italian up to a certain extent. All this developed within the framework of a sustained revival of ancient classical learning. Burckhardt's idea of newness, or sudden flowering of the Renaissance was criticised by others who attempted to show the strong links between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. These stressed continuity between the two periods, rather than a dramatic break. But it would be a mistake to ignore the originality and fundamental modernity of the culture produced in Italy at the time of the Renaissance.

The major features of the prevalent artistic style of the time, a style that will gradually serve as a contrast to the new style of the Renaissance can be glimpsed by referring to the work of Gentile da Fabriano. The major elements of such a gothic style included an overall inclination towards charm, flatness and decorative qualities, with gentle, bland-graced Madonnas, a beautifully portrayed child, tender flesh tones and pallid, vacant expressions, elegant and stylised clothes with rich patterns, wavy, fluted edges and heavy embroidery.[25] As for the new and developing Renaissance style, this went through various stages. According to Vasari art in the Renaissance followed a 3-stage development with the first one set by Cimabue and Giotto who developed a new style and techniques, maintaining however the same religious subject-matter of the medieval artists. The difference lay according to Vasari, in the realisation that it was now great art. The second stage was that of Ghiberti, Brunelleschi, Donatello, and Masaccio with further sophistication in the techniques of design and perspective. Artistic skill increased and was reflected in the rigorous rules of painting, sculpture and architecture. The climax of the Renaissance was the stage of Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo Buonarroti, a time when art for Vasari became great once again.

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[25] Peter and Linda Murray *The Art of the Renaissance* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000 reprint), p.28.

Gentile da Fabriano's style is exquisitely decorative *(above)*; Giotto's *(below)* is based on human sentiment. The clothes highlight the first, the facial expressions the second.

10.7.1 Leonardo

Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) was the illegitimate son of Piero, a notary, and Caterina, a peasant girl. Caterina later married another person. Leonardo was brought up in his father's house but he still remained psychologically attached to his natural mother. Like other artists Leonardo needed patient training and apprenticeship with a veteran master. Besides learning how to handle colour, prepare panels and assisting their masters in any way possible, these young artists would – if successful – go through the system of apprenticeship until they acquired their own independence. Leonardo was apprenticed to Andrea del Verrocchio in Florence. It appears that the relationship was not only restricted to art. However it did not take Leonardo too long to show his genius through an angel it is claimed he completed on a panel showing Jesus baptised by St John. The wings of the angel were actually drawn from birds' wings. Vasari says that Andrea "would never touch colours again, angered that a young boy understood them better than he did." [26]

Vasari sheds great praise over the *'Mona Lisa'*, the portrait of Francesco del Giocondo's wife a painting that "would cause every brave artist to tremble and fear" and which took him four years to finish. "Anyone wishing to see the degree to which art can imitate Nature can easily understand this from the head," adds Vasari, with the "lustre and moisture" in the eyes, "the lashes and all the reddish tones," the eyebrows "thicker in some places and thinner in others, following the pores of the skin," and "the pink and tender nostrils," while the mouth and the throat's hollow are details done with "subtlety."[27] This was art's fundamental goal – the imitation of nature. The use of the *sfumato* technique – a gradual transformation of the shading of the skin – to render a flesh-like image was brought to its highest effect especially with the dedication and

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[26] Giorgio Vasari, (1991) p.287.

[27] Giorgio Vasari, (1991) p.294.

attention to the corners of the eyes and mouth. It would not be amiss to suggest that this portrait is the most famous painting in the world. It is recognised by all even by most of those who are not that interested in the art world. Her enigmatic expression and other often-discussed qualities have turned this face into what truly is a common heritage of mankind. Many have a reproduction of it at home. This popularity has also meant that this work of art has been one of the most parodied works in history.

Leonardo is powerful in his ability to freeze forever a moment in history for all time. This is what we can achieve today with modern audio and video technology. The photographer waiting for that special glance, pose or effect is also concerned with that furtive moment. Leonardo for example is master in catching the moment when Jesus during the last supper with the apostles declared that someone present was about to betray him. This provoked an expected emotional reaction and it is this tense, hurt and surprised psychological reaction of the apostles that sets the tone reflected in what survives and can be inferred from this fresco in Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan. The possibility of transferring ourselves imaginatively into that situation (always with the necessary precautions of time travel and culture change) helps us to go some way into understanding the intellectual effort put into such a creation. It was an intellectual and imaginative effort that Leonardo was not always able to transmit because he did not finish all his works and also because what the imagination conceives, the hands (even those of Leonardo) may find difficult to finish.

One cannot forget Leonardo's architectural and engineering work which included various projects such as a canal joining Pisa to Florence, water-powered mills, fulling machines and other implements, techniques to excavate and bore through mountains, lifting or pulling heavy weights, emptying harbours, and removing water from great depths. His work included scientific sketches drawn directly from life, such as the studies of properties of herbs and the heavens. He also produced work in arithmetic, music, drawing, relief work and literature. But it is in his access to anecdotal information that Vasari is so interesting to read. Vasari

narrates various anecdotes from Leonardo's life. He recalls Leonardo's work in human anatomy with the Padua and Pavia University professor of anatomy, Marc'Antonio della Torre (1481-1512) for whom he drew red crayon sketches of cadavers he dissected. Vasari also describes how in the cartoon of *'The Virgin and Child with St Anne and John the Baptist'*, "in the face of Our Lady are seen all the simplicity and loveliness and grace that can be conferred on the mother of Christ, since Leonardo wanted to show the humility and the modesty appropriate to an image of the Virgin."[28] The popular reaction to the cartoon is noteworthy. The "astonished admiration" of the artists, mixed well with the "great festival" atmosphere and "amazement" of the crowd.[29]

10.7.2 Raphael

Raphael's artistic creations never lost their dignity and grace. Probably through his many Madonnas he produced the purest beauty in the paintings of the High Renaissance. Overall this charm captivates the eyes with its exquisite colour although intellectually it can be less satisfying than the spiritual depth reached by Michelangelo. Raphael Sanzio was born in Urbino in the year 1483, on Good Friday, son of Giovanni de' Santi of Urbino. He is remembered both for his art as well as for his "innately gentle humanity", his "moral habits" whilst other artists were "unmindful and eccentric" with "traces of madness and wildness" revealing vices rather than virtues.[30] Early on his father who was a minor painter decided to apprentice him with Pietro Perugino but Vasari narrates that even while Raphael was still studying Pietro's style, he was able to imitate him so exactly in all details that the portraits of the master were indistinguishable

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[28] Giorgio Vasari (1991) p.293.
[29] Giorgio Vasari (1991) p.293.
[30] Giorgio Vasari (1991) p.305.

from those of the apprentice. In terms of design, colouring, and invention, Raphael was getting much better. Later after Raphael discovered Leonardo's facial expressions he tried to follow his style without really surpassing it.

When Raphael moved to Florence he had the opportunity to appreciate the works of the two masters – Leonardo and Michelangelo. After this experience Raphael will change his style benefiting from the standards and models established by the two great masters. It was part of the price he had to pay for an inferior provincial apprenticeship. Some of his Madonnas show the influence of Leonardo especially the Madonna with the Goldfinch and the Madonna del Granduca. A third phase in Raphael's artistic progress followed when Bramante, also from Urbino, working at the time for Pope Julius II, invited Raphael to decorate some rooms in the Vatican. It was an occasion not to be missed. Raphael stopped whatever he was doing and left for Rome. Although he was popular, and his soft and delicate style already recognised, there was still something missing. His figures had lacked grandeur but now he addressed his skill to render an impression of majesty to the figures. Michelangelo after quarrelling with the pope left Rome with his work still unfinished, and Bramante who kept the keys to the Sistine Chapel showed Raphael Michelangelo's work. This was the moment that helped Raphael witness the style of the great master in its full proportions.

The design he learnt from Pietro Perugino – the result of the apprenticeship years – had to be qualified because Michelangelo's style was so difficult to imitate. Raphael was a student once again and the work on nudes was taken very seriously but it was extremely difficult for him to raise his style to that of Michelangelo. In this extract Vasari links artistic skills with anatomical detail – the link between artistic production and scientific knowledge.

"Therefore, he devoted himself to studying nudes and to comparing the muscles in anatomical studies and dead and dissected men with those of the living, since

they do not appear as clearly defined under skin as when it is removed; and then, seeing how soft and fleshy parts are formed in the appropriate places, and how by changing the points of view certain contortions can be gracefully executed, as well as the effects of inflating, lowering, or raising either a limb or the entire body, and the connections of the bones, nerves, and veins, Raphael became a master of all the details required of the greatest painters."[31]

It was perhaps for the best that Raphael decided not to imitate Michelangelo where he could not match the master but developed further where he could equal him or perhaps surpass him, such as those aspects mentioned above. According to Vasari, Raphael's unique style can be appreciated better in the sibyls and prophets he painted in Santa Maria della Pace. Humility served a good purpose. It was all to his credit (perhaps his major credit) that he never tried to do those things towards which he was not naturally inclined. When he did they were poor.

Some of the great artistic merits of Raphael according to Vasari read like an ideal Renaissance artist's repertoire. He learnt how to express the imaginative composition of scenes without confusing them with too many details or impoverishing them with too few, rendering all in an organised and orderly way. His perspectives, buildings, and landscapes were admirable and inventive; the light and shadow work he performed on the dresses was graceful; heads of women, children, young men and old alike were pleasing and vigorous; he could depict all sorts of animals including horses in flight; and his portraits seemed alive. There were other countless details for which Raphael receives Vasari's praise:

"the style of garments, footwear, helmets, armour, women's head-dress, hair, beards, vases, trees, grottoes, rocks, fires, overcast or clear skies, clouds, rains, lightning-bolts, calm weather, night, moonlight, brilliant

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[31] Giorgio Vasari (1991) pp.332.

sunshine, and numerous other things which are still essential elements in the art of painting."[32]

The anecdotal background takes the upperhand at the end. From Vasari we learn that "Raphael was a very amorous man who was fond of women, and he was always quick to serve them. This was the reason why, as he continued to pursue his carnal delights, he was treated with too much consideration and acquiescence by his friends."[33] Agostino Chigi had to bring Raphael's mistress in the place where Raphael was working or else he could not finish the work. Raphael after promising to marry a niece of the cardinal of Bibbiena, pursuing still further his amorous adventures, and after being promised a place as cardinal by Pope Leo, died from a disease when he was still in his thirties.

10.7.3 Michelangelo

Michelangelo was probably the greatest creative artist of the Renaissance, both as a writer of poetry and as a chiseller in stone and marble. All his work is massive and grandiose, flawless in conception as well as execution. Although he denied he was a painter, the fresco *'The Last Judgement'* in the Sistine Chapel is a brilliant work and can be compared with any other. It confirms the deep spiritual element that somehow contrasts with the secular urban humanism of the High Renaissance.

Michelangelo, apprenticed to Domenico Ghirlandaio, like Leonardo and Raphael, soon started to equal works of his master, even correcting his master's work. The Murrays claim that from his master he simply learnt the technique of the fresco. He also learnt draughtsmanship but his true

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[32] Giorgio Vasari (1991) pp.332-3.
[33] Giorgio Vasari (1991) pp.327-8.

inspirations were Giotto, Masaccio and Donatello as well as the Medici collection of Greek and Roman sculptures. Michelangelo boasted that he really owed nothing to anyone.[34] When Lorenzo the Magnificent asked Ghirlandaio to send him any pupils he could afford to be trained further, since there was a shortage of sculptors in Florence, Michelangelo moved. He impressed Lorenzo who 'adopted' him. He lived in Lorenzo's palace for four years until the latter's death in 1492.

Two of his many famous works include the Pieta' and David. Vasari describes the Pietà in unequivocal terms:

"Among the beautiful details it contains, besides its inspired draperies, the figure of the dead Christ stands out, and no one could ever imagine – given the beauty of its limbs and the skill with which the body is carved – seeing a nude so well endowed with muscles, veins and nerves stretched over the framework of the bones, or the figure of a dead man which more closely resembled a dead body than this one. The expression on the face is so very gentle, and there is such harmony in the joints and the articulations of the arms, torso, and legs, with their finely wrought pulses and veins, that, in truth, it is absolutely astonishing that the hand of an artist could have properly executed something so sublime and admirable in a brief time."[35]

Vasari was also bewitched by the statue of David:

"(T)his work eclipsed all other statues, both modern and ancient, whether Greek or Roman ... For the contours of its legs are extremely beautiful, along with the splendid articulations and grace of its flanks; a sweeter and more graceful pose has never been seen that could equal it, nor have feet, hands, and a head ever been produced which so well match all the other parts of the body in skill of workmanship or design."[36]

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[34] Peter and Linda Murray (2000) p.273.
[35] Giorgio Vasari (1991) p.425.
[36] Giorgio Vasari (1991) p.428.

The giant statue of David and the representation of Adam in the fresco of creation in the Sistine Chapel share some qualities, the most apparent of which is their nudity and perfect human form. This was to remain a major preoccupation with Michelangelo. The gestures, slight movement and expressive qualities give life to the two.

The episode of the tomb ordered by Pope Julius II and so enthusiastically accepted by Michelangelo only to be turned into a commission for the painting of the vault of the Sistine Chapel embittered the master so much he escaped to Florence. However the personal relationship between the pope and the sculptor that was to sustain some of the great works of Michelangelo somehow healed. Intellectually, artistically and physically the vault was a gargantuan task that took four yeas of work in isolation. Sheer creativity and a grandiose array of figures are only part of the story. There are stories to narrate, lessons to learn, a harmony to be appreciated. The nudes for example are very close to a sculptural effect in the infinite attention to posture. But despite the muscular structure, the overall effect is one of grace.

After the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo could return and indulge in the sculptures of the tomb (which he will however never finish). Like Socrates who tried to help others to give life to their inner thoughts and ideas through his questioning techniques, similarly Michelangelo a master with a chisel, gave life to hidden images only he saw hidden inside the marble and stone. The great merit of Michelangelo was that he not only rose to the artistic achievements of the Ancients but he actually improved on them. And when one remembers what the Renaissance is all about in terms of an open admiration for all things ancient, that is truly the perfect seal to this period.

10.8 Modern art

Painting, sculpture and architecture (but also the theatre, music and literature) went through periods of radical change during the final part

of the nineteenth and throughout the twentieth century in what has been defined as Modern art. There were differences between the many movements and aesthetic theories proposed but they were generally united in their manifest attitude of rejection of traditional forms. Art could not lag behind the times. The tendency of modern art to reject traditional forms meant that art was to move in line with the changing socio-economic and intellectual conditions of the time – technological change, expansion of scientific knowledge, an open window into other cultures beyond Western civilisation – more than the traditional forms permitted. Different movements rose and succeeded one another, developing ever-changing means of expression, in most cases looking steadfastly forward in time towards the future as if looking back may turn one into an eternal petrified condition – a paralysis of stone fixed forever. So experimentation fever was the rule. Of course the *-neos* remained but the new *-isms* were abundant: impressionism, post-impressionism, cubism, futurism, expressionism, dadaism, decadentism, symbolism, imagism, vorticism, and so on. Nothing was fixed however and at times this rendered explanations less clear.

10.8.1 Painting

Today there is really a reluctance to believe in an eternal or universal version of beauty. Such a concept would have standardised and facilitated our assessment of art in terms of beauty but alas we have to work on other less stable terms. Once ideal beauty is shifted outside our vision and beliefs, we have other alternatives. We can search in the social and cultural changes of any society throughout history and see how art is related to such changes: the preoccupation with food of Palaeolithic man, the afterlife of the pharaoh, the harmonious beauty of the Greeks, the spiritual supremacy of the Christians, the lavish exhibition of superiority in the aristocracy, the commercialisation of life in pop art. The result will show that the interplay of historical change and changes in art, as in painting, is quite active with one side reflecting and infecting the other.

The Parthenon symbolising ancient Greek idealisation with order imposed on all the elements within a structure, represents the detestation of anything lacking form. Ugliness was the result of not keeping the proportions balanced in mathematical terms. This was required by any work as far as the link between parts and unifying structure are concerned. The Parthenon is solid and fixed. When it is contrasted to a Constable landscape painting as David Irwin does in **The Visual Arts**, then the contrast brings the theme out better: the proximity to eternal perfection of mathematical measurement against the ever-changing cycle of the seasons. During the Renaissance, Leonardo had already shown a great interest in nature and the sketches from his studies of nature are ample proof. Natural landscape was included in his painting. Giorgione (as already mentioned) made it even more central in his *'Tempest'*. But landscape painting would develop further, monopolising entirely the work. In Constable's profession of "truth to nature" one can visualise the detailed interest in nature. No more mythic or religious themes but the natural world in terms of the landscape as the significant theme of art. The Romantic love of Nature so intimately associated with the portrayal of the countryside was a new approach to, but still a very close representation of the physical world.

The paintings of Gustave Courbet, Edouard Manet, and the Impressionists in nineteenth century France represented the earliest rejection of tradition and a search for a representation not highjacked this time by the subject of the painting but free to explore the intrinsic qualities of colour, brushwork, and form. The Postimpressionist successors exhibited an even more pronounced subjective personal feel than their immediate predecessors, and an apparent refutation of traditional techniques and subject matter. Numerous movements and styles investigating the potential inherent within the painting medium itself followed the Postimpressionists. The geometric shapes of Picasso and Braque are immediately clear in their radical breaking away from the past especially in terms of direct representation of the external world of the senses. The breakaway can be verified through the study of perspective. The

Renaissance had made perspective so popular whilst now with Braque the painting obtained multiple angles of vision breaking down the single vision of the artist. Not even van Eyck with the mirror that depicts for us what we cannot see behind the Arnolfinis was close to this. Objects are broken down to the image they reflect from different angles and therefore the frontal vision of the painting will show single items broken down on different planes. The initial confusion comes from the gradual awareness that the single work is in fact a superimposition of different angle visions thrown together. The painter is not ultimately interested in what he sees (at least not from one side anyway). The effort confuses the sense of sight. And yet the objects can still be discerned.

When Klee decided to search in children, primitive or insane art for inspiration, art was even more radically transformed. Depiction became crude. After all if the photographic camera was available one need not bother with the detail of Constable.[37] The artist was no longer interested in representing but creating. Painting was breaking away from pictorial representation as traditionally understood. The link between painting and pictures was breaking down. Fantasy was let loose and the irrational, the impulsive and the intuitive took over. Eventually an even more innovative approach to art was abstract art, or nonobjective art, where there is hardly any attempt to objectively reproduce the forms of objects in the external physical world. Once again this can be linked to the development of photography that has had as we have seen an important influence on the

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[37] Not only the details, but a whole range of techniques, says Lyotard (1998, p.120): "The perfecting of today's cameras liberates the user from worries about the exposure time, about focus, about aperture, about development. Tasks whose acquisition by the apprentice painter in the studio demanded huge experience (destroy bad habits, instruct the eye, the hand, the body, the mind, raise them to a new height) are programmed into the camera thanks to its refined optical, chemical, mechanical and electronic abilities."

major developments in modern art.[38] Drawing and painting were no longer the only or an essential means of depicting the visible world. The function of Plato's mirror had become the function of the technology of reproduction such as the camera or VCR.[39] No longer does the skilled depiction of the world reside only (or even mostly) in drawing and painting. Portraits were now no longer the privilege of the very rich and powerful. The artist had to search for something else.

Artists are sometimes seen as an avant-garde movement. According to David Irwin this applies to "artists' works which are so far beyond the comprehension and general acceptance of public taste that the artists know their works may not be understood until the next generation."[40] The artist who anticipates has actually become a common feature of art. The artist is doomed to create and novelty is as unsurprising today as following the International Gothic Style was for the artists of medieval times.[41] The necessity to come up with something new that anticipates a future trend for others is however an element that fits perfectly well in commercial merchandising. The market of contemporary art is sometimes a sad business of people with money who buy without even looking in order to sell it again

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[38] It was not the technology that really ousted skilled painting according to Lyotard (1998, p.119) but the economic system of capitalism: "It is not only photography that made the craft of painting 'impossible' ... The 'impossibility' comes from the techno-scientific world of industrial and post-industrial capitalism. This world needs photography, but has almost no need for painting." The cheap cost of a ready-made photo outweighs the odds against painting which demands long professional training, costly materials and a time-consuming practice.

[39] Plato's mirror image was mentioned in section 9.3.

[40] Irwin David *The Visual Arts: Taste and Criticism* (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1969) p. 154.

[41] The International Gothic Style is a style that favours "beautiful flowing lines," "dainty and delicate motifs", spectacles of "pretty girls in their fashionable dresses," "colourful pageantry. " This was closer to real life than early medieval art: "Nearly but not quite." These pieces are quoted from Gombrich (1996), p.218.

as soon as possible. It is not the substance that counts but market trends. Warehouses are filled with art products that will be auctioned at the highest bidder. Money counts not quality, or to be more precise (especially since talk about 'quality' as we have seen is dangerous territory), money and profit-making are more important than other considerations. A sign of the times?

10.8.2 Architecture

Money and profit-making will also influence the development of architecture. Actually the modern trend in architecture started with the refusal to adapt to and a rejection of past styles together with the full development of the new technologies in building material which were basic to the innovations in architecture. Iron and steel, reinforced concrete, and glass added new possibilities. This was the architecture of the new industrialised city with office buildings for corporations or government bureaucracies.

A clearer vision of the changes results from the study of the links between modern architecture on one side and the strange relations between country and city (not a new theme of course) on the other. This will allow us to end with one of our earlier points at the beginning of the book: the city. Up till the eighteenth century the city still meant trade and manufacture whereas the countryside represented the aristocracy and farmers. So long as the city had been a compact structure there were relatively few problems, but once the dimensions of the city grew, the difficulties multiplied. For those who could afford a place in both city and countryside, judgments regarding quality of life in the two contexts were balanced in favour of the country, which stood for health, freedom and independence whilst the city stood for filth and unpleasant conditions. The early suburban retreat was for the well-off:

"The great beauties of such a retreat are being near the city, upon an open airy road, and on a pleasant spot of ground. The greatest commendation of itself is

its making a cheerful appearance to those that go a little way out of the town to take the air ... I would have the front and whole body of the house perfectly well lighted, and that it be open to receive a great deal of light and sun, and a sufficient quantity of wholesome air."[42]

This is what suburban planners of the early twentieth century had in mind – but the words were of the Renaissance thinker Leone Battista Alberti. Mumford comments how this amounted to the pleasure one could afford "to withdraw like a monk and live like a prince."

The place was distant enough to separate the well-off from the worst conditions of the city. But what will in fact happen in most cities was a parallel movement of the masses to the suburbs, not to acquire a leisure hide-out but to follow industrial development that meant employment opportunities. With them they brought along the previous city squalor to the suburbs. Architecture was as standardised as the goods:

"a multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold, manufactured in the central metropolis."[43]

Depression and disorder were not enough; to make things worse cheap transport slowly but surely pushed the pedestrian off the streets. An extreme example of this phenomenon was to result from the design of the city of Brasilia – a city for cars when most of the inhabitants did not own a car! The architects were no longer designers of triumphal arches, palaces and glorious monuments. They were planning cities for the common people.

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[42] Lewis Mumford (1989), p.485.
[43] Lewis Mumford (1989), p.486.

Commercial activity spread. The car and the consumer identity took over. There had been suburbs designed to meet the needs of the well-off: a place for the family and children, the club, and a place where neighbourhood still had a human significance. It was a spaced out suburb with parks and open spaces. In truth until needless utilities could be limited the price of such a suburban place was controlled. Cars however would transform the space into traffic circulation. Mumford is convinced of this: the car "turned the suburban housewife into a full time chauffeur" as it was no longer "buildings set in a park" but buildings "set in a parking lot." Walking became unsafe and parking lots cropped up everywhere, especially next to shopping centres. The modern city – the urban context for millions of people – was here to stay. As people had travelled to the holy shrines of religion throughout history, likewise today people flock to the metropolis for their various needs.

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The book attempts to describe, through the many ideas presented, the complex background that surrounds and at the same time interacts with an informed awareness-raising debate about values considered fundamental signposts leading towards a 'worthwhile life'. This latter term indicates how awesome the task is to co-ordinate the various ideas presented gaining a new insight, or at least a better explanation, to this age-old concern. Ideas have been quoted directly from source, others summarised, and the rest integrated into the text. This does not mean that the present author washes his hands from any responsibility for the ideas presented. Selection was involved and arguments presented in a certain way and not another. Insights from teaching were also considered. But teaching is one thing, reading another. The former is an immediate experience, the latter a mediated one. Both contexts can generate awareness.

Some may have arrived at partial answers to the many questions asked in this book, but all of us (not only students, that is) should find the time to think and discover the relevance of these themes to our lives, and if our priorities in life or our life experiences have not presented us with or allowed us to tackle such debates, to reflect why this was the case.

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