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The Measure of Wisdom: The Soul, Society and Justice

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OLIVET NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

THE MEASURE OF WISDOM: THE SOUL, SOCIETY, AND JUSTICE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

BY

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BOURBONNAIS, ILLINOIS

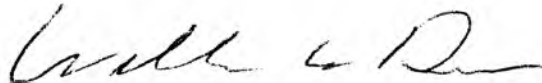
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The Measure of Wisdom: The Soul, Society, and Justice

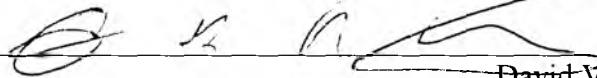
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Introduction

The history of intellectual thought is rooted in many long hours of study and theorizing, in an attempt to discover what makes civilizations rise or flourish and what makes them decline or disintegrate. Thinkers throughout Western history have searched for a measure with which they could test the health of culture. Thinkers such as Socrates and Plato tested the health of a decadent polis; St. Augustine attempted to find spiritual and cultural order in spite of the dying myth of the Eternal Rome; and even Friedrich Nietzsche, who said, “[humankind] is an indissoluble multiplicity of ascending and descending life processes—,” came to the conclusion that “Decadence...belongs to all epochs of mankind”.¹ Nietzsche, similar to Socrates, Plato, and Augustine in this aspect, was trying to find an *existential principle* with which he could critique society, and therein also discover a positive philosophy of existence that would supposedly nourish society.

Eric Voegelin, likewise, was a philosopher who invoked a cultural “measuring stick” in an effort to regain order in spite of the tremendous tumult of the first half of the twentieth century. In chapter twenty-two of his *Autobiographical Reflections*, Voegelin recalled the cultural situation in which he began to philosophize, after World War I, as being “hemmed in, if not oppressed, by a flood of ideological language.”² He described his experience as a student at the University of Vienna as being inundated with Neo-Kantian methodology, to an almost unbearable level. Voegelin, as a professor, eventually had to flee

¹ Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 415 fn.2. Kaufmann, here, is quoting Nietzsche from his work *Will To Power*, 339.

² Voegelin, Eric. *Autobiographical Reflections*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 118

his academic post in Austria because of his unwillingness to sympathize with Hitler's National Socialism. Thus, ideological deformations were a very real and ominous foe in Voegelin's life.

As a classical philosopher and intellectual historian, Voegelin stated, "More than once in history, language has been degraded and corrupted to such a degree that it no longer can be used for expressing the truth of existence."³ In resistance, Voegelin declared, one necessarily had to rediscover the experiences of reality and the language with which to express those experiences. Michael Federici, in his intellectual biography of Voegelin, says that "the restoration of engendering experience" was one of the "major components of Voegelin's thought."⁴ Federici explains:

Faced with widespread and profound cultural, social, and moral decay, Voegelin theorized that the West had lost its consciousness of certain historical experiences vital to the formation of political, social, and existential order.⁵

Federici is describing Voegelin's effort to rediscover the experiences of the civilizing forces of Western culture. Civilizing forces such as Hebrew and Christian revelation, Greek philosophy, mathematics, politics, biology, and so on, were all discovered, experienced and historically articulated. These forces produced communal traditions that cultivated the substance of human character and societal formation. Federici clarifies the idea of restoration, quoting Voegelin, saying, "The restoration was not a matter of returning to 'the specific content of an earlier attempt' to restore order, but rather 'a return to the consciousness of principles.'"⁶ Thus, Voegelin searched for an existential principle with

³ Voegelin, *Reflections*, 118

⁴ Federici, Michael P. *Eric Voegelin*. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2002), xxvi.

⁵ Federici, *Eric Voegelin*, xxvi

⁶ *ibid.*, 21

which to identify order and disorder in humans and society. Such an existential principle provided an answer for the crucial questions of authority.

Just as Augustine, Nietzsche, and many others have considered it necessary to invoke an existentially orienting principle with which to critique and nourish society, Voegelin's thinking relied heavily on Plato's existential principle. Being classically minded, Voegelin looked to Plato for an example and articulation of how to find justice in the midst of a disordered society. Plato's close contact with the life and death of his teacher Socrates provided him with both a *measure of wisdom* and an *understanding of the human soul*. For Plato, both of these assets were existentially orienting forces with which he could battle the disorientation of his times. Federici states,

Drawing on Plato's political philosophy, Voegelin believed that political and social order could only be restored by ordering souls. . . . Philosophy is the resistance of the soul to disorder.⁷

Thus, Voegelin referred to the Platonic existential principle as the "anthropological principle," being formulated from Plato's phrase in the *Republic*: "a polis is man written large (368c-d)."⁸ He proposed that Plato actually used this principle in two ways. In the first way it is used as a *principle for interpreting society*: Voegelin explained, "As a general principle it means that in its order every society reflects the type of men of whom it is composed."⁹ In essence, the types of humans who express themselves in the daily life and activity of the society also express the spirit of that society. Voegelin claimed that Plato used the principle in the first way, *to interpret society*, when he described his contemporary Athenian society as "the Sophist written large, explaining...the predominant Sophistic

⁷ *ibid.*, 23

⁸ Voegelin, Eric. *The New Science of Politics: An Introduction*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1952), 61

⁹ Voegelin, *New Science*, 61-62

type.”¹⁰ According to Voegelin, Plato clearly identified the Sophist as being the embodiment of the cultural spirit of Athens.

Voegelin said that the second way in which the principle may be used is as a *principle of societal critique*.¹¹ It is imperative to recognize that the second aspect of the principle is integral with the first, though. Since the first aspect of the principle empirically identifies different types of humans and societal orders, the second aspect of the principle, *societal critique*, then, assumes that a true order of the human soul has been discovered and approximated; thereupon providing a platform to critique the different types of humans and societies.¹² Hence, an approximation of the true order is articulated as a *social critique*, where the new vantage point of the truth of the soul cross-examines the societal spirit of the age. Voegelin masterfully articulated this situation:

Now, truth is never discovered in empty space; the discovery is a differentiating act in a tightly packed environment of opinion; and, if the discovery concerns the truth of human existence, it will shock the environment in its strongest convictions on a broad front. As soon as the discoverer begins to communicate, to invite acceptance, to persuade, he will inevitably run into a resistance that may prove fatal, as in the case of Socrates.¹³

Plato’s anthropological principle is not only an analytical tool with which one may identify types of society and humans; but also, the principle has the added dimension of being an existential measuring tool, which enables societal critique. Intellectual historians know that ideas, good or bad, have consequences. All ideas are rooted in experiences; conceptions of justice are formulated out of the experiences of injustice, for example. Thus, the “measuring tool” aspect of the principle is of first importance to those who are deliberating

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 62

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

between the factors that cause *societal decadence* and those that provide *societal nourishment*.

In order to understand Plato's anthropological principle more fully, two things are necessary. First, one must uncover the *cultural roots and meaning of justice* in the Athenian tradition. Then, concomitantly, one must grasp the *measure of wisdom* expressed in the forces of the Socratic soul, which underlines the measuring tool aspect of Plato's anthropological principle. In chapter one, I shall analyze Aeschylus' *Oresteia* in order to uncover the experiential roots of justice developed in Greek tragedy. This is important because the Athens of tragedy provided the roots from which Plato's anthropological principle developed. For, as Voegelin said, "The paradigmatic constructions of Plato and Aristotle would have appeared as odd fancies to their contemporaries unless the Athens of Marathon and the tragedy had been the living memory of an ephemeral representation of the new truth."¹⁴ Then, in chapter two, I shall analyze the trial of Socrates: bringing the substance of the struggle between justice and injustice to life, the trial of Socrates animated the character of the anthropological principle. In short, Socrates' trial clarified the existential authority of the measure of wisdom. In chapter three, Voegelin's analysis of Plato's *Gorgias* itself shall be presented in order to explicate the orienting forces of the Socratic soul. Finally, in conclusion, I shall articulate a positive position on the anthropological principle and on the life of the soul.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 71

Chapter One

Greek Tragedy: The Drama of Justice

In order to understand properly the significance of Greek tragedy, a view of the cultural conditions and communal structures of the time period is necessary. Athens had gained much power, both militarily and culturally, by the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E. The Athenians were victorious over the Persians in the Battles of Marathon and Salamis, securing a mighty seat of power in the Greek world. The men constituting the Athenian “middle class” were deeply involved in the military efforts of the Athenian triumphs; undertaking the noble responsibilities of military duty, they were also encouraged to take up the *responsibilities of citizenship*. Athenian citizens, that is, about 6,000 male landowners, participated in a direct democracy, each having a vote in the assembly. Direct democracy meant that the *persuasion* of the speakers in the assembly could, in fact, drastically affect the vote casting of citizens. Citizens also served as jurymen in legal cases. With these points in mind, it is apparent that the possibility of mob rule was relatively high.

In this type of community, the tragedy proved to be a soaring medium for public education on questions of political order and judgment. The *spirit of the community* was articulated through the art of tragedy. Pomeroy et al., in their beautifully woven cultural history book, *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, come to the conclusion

that “[t]ragedy had a central role in the spiritual and intellectual life of Athens.”¹⁵ The authors highlight the spirit, saying,

[D]uring the festival of Dionysus in March, actors and audience alike needed enormous stamina. . . . [T]he popularity of performances that demanded serious intellectual work on the part of the audience tells us something about the richness of Athenian culture.¹⁶

The tragic plays raised many painful issues about the *nature of the human condition*.

Voegelin, in his keen sensing of classical culture, describes the tragedy as a generally high point in cultural history:

Here, for a golden hour in history, the miracle had happened of a political society articulated down to the individual citizen as a representable unit, the miracle of a generation which individually experienced the responsibility of representing the truth of the soul and expressed this experience through the tragedy as a public cult.¹⁷

Voegelin, here, is admiring the tragedy’s ability to call humans to recognize the *truth of the human soul*, that is, the soul’s ability to self-deliberate and struggle to take appropriate action. The ability and responsibility to take moral action provided humans with a sense of their humanity. The process of deliberation within one’s soul, according to Voegelin, disclosed one’s humanity, one’s *human-ness*, by recognizing the responsibility to take action upon the self-deliberation. Voegelin explains at length:

The truth of the tragedy is action itself, that is, action on the new, differentiated level of a movement in the soul that culminates in the decision (*prohairesis*) of a mature, responsible man. The newly discovered humanity of the soul expands into the realm of action. Tragedy as a form is the study of the human soul in the process of making decisions...¹⁸

¹⁵ Pomeroy, Sarah B., Stanley M. Burstein, Walter Donlan, and Jennifer Tolbert Roberts. *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 244

¹⁶ Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 244-245

¹⁷ Voegelin, *New Science*, 71

¹⁸ Voegelin, Eric. *Order and History. Volume II: The World of the Polis*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 321

At bottom, Voegelin explains that the responsibility of decision-making and taking an appropriate course of action opened humans to their dignified tasks. This responsibility is what Voegelin sees as being formulated in the Greek tragedy.

In tragedy, humans are faced with difficult decisions, they struggle with making the right decisions, and they then live with the consequences of those decisions. Human life and community are rooted in a common bed of experiences that befall the community, those in which the community suffers together. Humans are often in situations to choose between two equally dreadful alternatives. Human existence, for the tragedian, is conditioned and situated in this tension, but the deliberation for justice in one's soul produces a *measure of wisdom*. The common condition expressed in tragedy is heard in Aeschylus' dictum, "wisdom through suffering," and shall serve as the point of entry for analyzing the public cult of tragedy.

Oresteia

Aeschylus is remembered as being one of the premier writers of tragedy. Pomeroy et al. explain that he was the first of the fifth-century tragedians to gain cultural esteem, possibly writing up to seventy plays.¹⁹ Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia*²⁰ is woven together with the multifaceted questions of approximating justice. In the first play of the trilogy, *Agamemnon*, King Agamemnon must choose whether or not to sacrifice one of his daughters to the goddess Artemis, so that he may secure divine help in order to defeat the Trojans; for the king of Troy's son, Paris, wrongly seduced and ran away with Sparta's

¹⁹ Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 245

²⁰ Grene, David and Richmond Lattimore, ed. *The Complete Greek Tragedies. Volume I: Aeschylus*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1959) is the translation of Aeschylus that I used to summarize this section.

queen, Helen. If Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, which is his kingly duty in order to receive divine help, then there is going to be another calamity in his family. Agamemnon chooses to sacrifice his daughter to the goddess Artemis. Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, takes Agamemnon's cousin to be her lover and then they plot together to kill Agamemnon. Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's other two children, Orestes and Electra, are horrified when their mother, the queen, kills their father upon his return. Undoubtedly, within this first play, the many concrete layers with which one must struggle to approximate justice are portrayed.

In the second play, *The Libation Bearers*, Orestes and his sister Electra are faced with the choice between killing their mother and her lover and that of not remediating their father's death. The decision is made more complex in light of the contradicting principles of The Furies and Apollo. On the one hand, The Furies are the earth goddesses that protected the older *principle of blood for blood*: procuring their divine lust for punishment through vengeance. The Furies' top priority was avenging murder, especially murder within the family.²¹ If Orestes kills his mother, then The Furies will try to take his life. On the other hand, the god Apollo represented a more measured attempt to approximate justice than The Furies' blind vengeance. His principle was that the father should be considered to be the true parent in family relationships. Thus, if Orestes does not remediate his father's death, then justice would be forsaken. Orestes does choose to kill his mother. Unsympathetically, he is then pursued by The Furies. Here, clearly, the divine guidance of Apollo is put against the divine nature of The Furies to uphold the principle of blood for blood.

²¹ Steinberger, Peter J., ed. *Readings in Classical Political Thought*. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 60

The Furies is the title of the third play in Aeschylus' trilogy. In this play, the Aeschylean drama culminates in the justice and wisdom of the Athenian judicial system. Apollo instructs Orestes to go to Athens. In Athens, Orestes is "hoping that a responsible government will afford him a fair trial."²² The wise goddess Athena presides over the trial of Orestes. The goddess and the jurymen, who are Athenian citizens, vote and acquit Orestes. In fact, Athena breaks the tied vote of the tribunal with her vote to acquit Orestes. Her wisdom in the end is the deciding factor. Not stopping there, Athena then gives The Furies a new name and a new purpose. They are called "Eumenides" (the gracious ones) and are given the role of residing in the Athenian polis, securing justice instead of procuring blind vengeance.

The Measure of Wisdom: Justice

Without a doubt, in the *Oresteia* there are many dimensions of meaning that Aeschylus discloses from a compact to a differentiated state. The *human condition* is laid plain: "Zeus, who guided men to think...has laid it down that wisdom comes alone through suffering."²³ This is wisdom through suffering, the tragic choice between two ways, both of which are equally calamitous for the one who chooses. Throughout the drama each act of blood is countered and redressed with a new act of blood. The Furies as the older goddesses of nature have a more cruel and strict mode of action, *blood for blood*. The world was primarily destructive and cruel when ruled by their principle. Apollo, though ruthless in his own way, does not seek destruction and cruelty on principle. His principle is that of rational order, which enables the possibilities of civilization and intelligence. Either way, throughout the first two plays the public good was caught between a cycle of killing and

²² Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 246

²³ Agamemnon 176-178; Grene and Lattimore, *Aeschylus*, 40

avenging until it was stopped in the Athenian courtroom, under the wise authority of Athena. Athena, as the goddess of wisdom, embodies the ability of harmony: instead of annihilating the older blood for blood principle of The Furies, she transforms and discloses their principle into a genuine force for a civilized community—the procuring of justice. Hence, she represents the *positive ordering force* of the measure of wisdom.

The salient point is that the Athenian jurymen are *persuaded* by Athena's wisdom. This point is deeply connected to the concrete structure of Athenian society. As stated earlier, Athens had a direct democracy, made up of roughly 6,000 citizens, who could quite naturally be affected by the persuasion of a speaker in the assembly. Similarly, the citizens who served as jurymen could deeply be affected by persuasion, which could change the outcome of trials. Thus, in the tragedy, the wisdom of Athena provides the *education* and *edification* of Athenian citizens in their concrete situations of political action. They are being taught to differentiate between the persuasion of wisdom and justice and that of the older more chaotic order of blind vengeance. In essence, the tragedy provided the nourishment for a community who understood the *experiential meaning* of its drama: the struggle for justice. If we express it in terms of Plato's anthropological principle: the Athenian society embodied the spirit of its people through the concrete effort of the assembly and the public cult of tragedy to approximate and disclose justice.

Chapter Two

The Trial of Socrates: The Experiential Meaning of Justice

Neither the Athens of tragedy nor any other society is permitted to remain static. Societies are dynamic. Even though a society, such as the Athens of tragedy, is able to develop a culture ordered by the truth of the soul, the experiential roots of cultural meaning and its articulation through symbols prove to be contingent. The symbols and the language used to articulate the cultural meaning must stay in contact with the meaning that it is expressing. Tragedy clearly expressed the meaning of the deliberation of justice in the human soul, and the responsibility for moral action from this deliberation. Within a couple of generations Athenian culture lost contact with the experiential meaning of tragedy, and its representation of the responsibility of justice both individually and collectively. It is in this loss of contact that Plato developed the anthropological principle in order to articulate the problem. As mentioned above, Plato masterfully expressed his contemporary Athenian society as “the Sophist written large,” describing a Sophistic type of society. Sophists were teachers who had the reputation of denying any essential truth in the moral responsibility of “right” and “wrong;” rather, to the Sophist, “truth,” “right,” and “wrong” were simply pragmatic categories to gain a pragmatic or material advantage.

In many ways, Plato’s teacher Socrates continued the public conversation of moral action that the tragedy had started. Socrates was a philosopher who was on a divinely inspired mission to understand wisdom; the Oracle at Delphi declared that there was no man wiser than Socrates. He then set out to investigate the nature of the truth of things, that is, the wisdom that is found beyond personal opinion. Socrates developed a method of

questioning and refuting within conversation known as the Socratic method. Plato prominently uses Socrates as a character in much of his writing, which is structured in the form of dialogue; hence, the well-known “Socratic dialogue.” Socrates would question an interlocutor, many times a Sophist, about the nature of something and then the interlocutor would state an opinion. Opening up the compactness of the interlocutor’s opinion stance, Socrates would also ask about the relationship and nature of other aspects in addition to his original question. Typically, the relationships between the interlocutor’s opinions dealing with the variety of subjects were then proven to be inconsistent and incoherent. In this, Socrates would show that the nature of the interlocutor’s opinions could not be the actual nature of the truth of things. The actual nature of the truth of things, then, would be viewed by Socrates to be more complex than any narrow-minded, reductionist stance.

At times, the subversive nature of Socrates’ questioning and the Sophistic subversion of the truth seem similar. The Sophist’s willingness to use oration and persuasion in order to refute any moral position is likened to Socrates’ refutation and questioning of conventional thinking. In fact, one of the charges that Socrates refutes in the *Apology* is that he malevolently makes the worse argument into the stronger argument and teaches others to do the same (19b). This should be compared to Winks and Mattern-Parks’ explanation of the typical Sophistic attitude. They say,

[T]he most famous sophist, Protagoras, is credited with the saying “man is the measure of all things.” His ability to produce an argument for any situation made many suspicious of him and other sophists; Protagoras was accused of boasting that he could “make the weaker argument stronger.”²⁴

²⁴ Winks, Robin W. and Susan P. Mattern-Parkes. *The Ancient Mediterranean World: From the Stone Age to A.D. 600*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84

There is a principled difference, nonetheless, of Socrates' search and love of wisdom and justice compared to the Sophistic love of oration and the pragmatic winning of arguments. Thus, Socrates is the quintessential "arch anti-Sophist," as Peter Steinberger said in the chapter introduction to *Socrates and Plato* for his translations of the *Readings in Classical Political Thought*.²⁵ Here, a formulation must be clarified in order to view the depth of the problem of the Athenian society as it turned into the fourth century: if the Athenian society was in fact "the Sophist written large," as Plato explains, where the Athenian spirit of the age was the climate of Sophistic opinions and the shallow love of oration, then the trial and death of Socrates is historically paramount. Steinberger masterfully articulates the problem:

The trial and death of Socrates is one of the major events of the Western political tradition. . . . With Socrates, we have the first important instance of a sharp clash between philosophy and politics, between the single-minded pursuit of truth and the public's interest in the common good. It is important to note that Socrates was essentially accused of subversion. . . . But it is also important to note that Socrates was accused, tried, and condemned by a democratic government. His death was the act not of a despot or jealous tyrant but of a legitimate, lawful, and apparently popular regime seeking to pursue public interest. The trial of Socrates thus raises the most fundamental questions about the relationship between philosophical truth on the one hand and practical politics on the other.²⁶

The twenty-seven year conflict of the Peloponnesian War and the Thirty Tyrants, whom Sparta placed in control of Athens after the war, provided the cultural turmoil and disjuncture from the social milieu of the victorious Athens of Marathon and its public participation in justice through the art of tragedy and government. Indeed, the communal spirit of Athens no longer embodied *the truth of the soul*: namely, the soul's struggle for justice that had provided the people of Athens with the experiential roots of meaning

²⁵ Steinberger, 136

²⁶ *ibid.*, 137

through the public forum of tragedy. Again, Voegelin profoundly articulates the cultural shift:

The representation of truth passed on from the Athens of Marathon to the philosophers. When Aristophanes complained that the tragedy died from philosophy, he had at least an inkling of what actually took place, that is, of the *translatio* of truth from the people of Athens to Socrates.²⁷

The trial of Socrates, then, is the stage on which one may watch the drama of the existential ordering of the soul and society as they struggle within a decadent culture.

The Trial of Socrates

*The Apology*²⁸ is Plato's account of the trial of Socrates in 399BC. In the *Apology*, Socrates defends himself against the untruthful and misleading claims of the Sophistic type. The cultural spirit of shallow rhetoric and persuasion, popularized by the Sophists, produced a climate of feeble opinions; whereas the persuasion represented by Athena's wisdom of justice in *Oresteia* was no longer authoritatively experienced or recognized in Athens. Thus, in the trial of Socrates, the jurymen, who are citizens of Athens, have already been persuaded by the misleading claims of oration. Socrates identifies the problem, saying to the jurymen,

I do not know, men of Athens, how my accusers affected you; as for me, I was almost carried away in spite of myself, so persuasively did they speak. And yet, hardly anything of what they said is true (17a).

Socrates' accusers had also tried to discredit his position by warning the jurymen "not to be deceived by an accomplished speaker," such as Socrates (17b).

²⁷ Voegelin, *New Science*, 74

²⁸ The translation of the *Apology* that I used for this paper is: Steinberger, Peter J., ed. *Readings in Classical Political Thought*. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000).

In fact, the climate of opinion being so opposed to him, Socrates sees it necessary to defend himself against two types of accusations: *earlier ones*, which formed the murmurings of Athenian society since the jurymen were children; and *the later accusations*, which formally called him to court. Since Socrates is seventy years old at the time of the trial (17d), most of the jurymen are younger than he. Hence, the earlier accusations are more dangerous because they are the accusations that have persuaded most of the jurymen from their childhood. Socrates declares, “they got hold of most of you from childhood, persuaded you and accused me quite falsely, saying that there is a man called Socrates...who makes the worse argument the stronger (18b-c).” Socrates then skillfully shows that the persuasion of the jurymen from childhood, regarding his allegedly bad character, was unjust on many accounts; none less than it denied him his rightful due to defend himself to their young consciences (18c). Even in the present trial, Socrates cannot bring those who have slandered him to court because they are the “shadows” of Athens. That is, he is fighting with the disordered spirit of the age, the *zeitgeist* of Athens. It is exactly this spirit that Socrates hopes to put on trial and bring to justice throughout his trial. Socrates, declaring his hope, defines his view of a successful trial:

I must surely defend myself and attempt to uproot from your minds in so short a time the slander that has resided there so long. I wish this may happen, if it is in any way better for you and me, and that my defense may be successful, but I think this is very difficult and I am fully aware of how difficult it is (18e-19a).

Socrates then begins to craft his defense. First he mentions the Sophists, who actually charge a fee for their teaching. Here, he does not explicitly deprecate the status of the Sophist; he simply differentiates his task from their occupation. He recalls his conversation with the politician, Callias, “who has spent more money on Sophists than

everybody else put together (20a).” Undoubtedly, with this statement Socrates is also implicitly tying the Sophistic type of culture, those who are actually subversively trying to make the weaker argument the stronger, as being supported by Athenian politicians.

Then, in order to separate himself definitively from the Sophistic type of occupation, Socrates asks himself a question: “But Socrates, what is your occupation (20c)?” Socrates then gives an account of his wisdom that readily rivals the Sophistic wisdom. He begins his account with the Oracle of Delphi. “I shall call upon the god at Delphi as witness to the existence and nature of my wisdom, if it be such (20e).” He recounts the story of his friend Chaerephon going to Delphi and asking the oracle if any man is wiser than Socrates. The oracle responded that no man was, in fact, wiser than Socrates. After hearing the news of the oracle Socrates was puzzled, because he knew that he himself was not wise at all. Socrates decided to investigate the meaning of the oracle by examining the wise men of Athens, so that he could refute the oracle. He confesses, “I went to one of those reputed wise, thinking that there, if anywhere, I could refute the oracle and say to it: ‘This man is wiser than I, but you said I was (21c).’” After engaging with the first wise man, a public man, Socrates actually found out that this reputedly wise man of Athens was lacking in wisdom. The problem, according to Socrates, was that the man thought himself to be wise, when he was not. Socrates shared his personal reflections with the courtroom:

So I withdrew and thought to myself: “I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent, that I do not think I know what I do not know (21d).”

Notably, Socrates is hereupon presenting his understanding of the *measure of wisdom*: that is, knowing one’s own importance and the proper importance of the other

aspects of life. Both perspective and understanding are distorted when one elevates certain aspects of life and suppresses others. Socrates proceeds with his investigation, finding many others, craftsmen and poets alike, falling short to the measure of wisdom. Socrates explains the problem, forthrightly; “each of them [craftsmen and poets], because of his success at his craft, thought himself very wise in other most important pursuits, and this error of theirs overshadowed the wisdom they had (22d-e).” The problem, as Socrates sees it, is that each of them elevated their understanding of their craft, using it as the key for interpreting other aspects of life and the relationship between all of the various aspects of life. In this, Socrates analogically perceives that their wisdom now lives in the shadow of their narrowly focused knowledge; there has been an apocalypse of the knowledge of their craft or skill, and now they suffer from their myopia.

After examining many of the reputedly wise men of Athens, Socrates confesses to the court that he “acquired much unpopularity, of a kind that is hard to deal with and is a heavy burden (22e)”. Then, he not only reveals to the court that he sees his examinations as being instigated by the god at Delphi; but, more notably, in his going around showing people their false pretension of wisdom, he is actually doing a service to the god. He professes,

So even now I continue this investigation as the god bade me—and I go around seeking out anyone, citizen or stranger, whom I think wise. Then if I do not think he is, I come to the assistance of the god and show him that he is not wise (23b).

There is no healthier city than a city whose citizens are wise; especially the city of Athens, the city named after the wise goddess Athena. In all reality, from the perspective of Socrates, if the Athenian people were thinking rightly they would be thankful for his faithful service. Their lack of appreciation and understanding is, for Socrates, the

outworking of their Sophistic illness; the spirit of the age has overtaken not only the politician, but the craftsmen and poet, too.

Socrates then explains that his unpopularity also comes on account of the young men who follow him and listen to him question others. These same young men, the sons of very rich Athenians, go around and imitate Socrates by questioning the allegedly wise men of Athens for themselves. Socrates clarifies that the young men, too, find many who think themselves to be wise, but in actuality are not. “The result” Socrates astonishingly explains, “is that those whom they question are angry, not with themselves but with me (23c).” Again, Socrates is surprised that the Athenians do not see the irony; their liberation from false pretensions and foolishness does not elate them, rather, the stirring of their substance by Socratic questioning boils them to anger.

The Question of Education

When Socrates begins to refute the later charges against him, those that legally forced him to come to the Athenian courtroom, Plato invokes a new aspect to his account of the *Apology*. Plato uses dialogue by having Meletus respond to Socrates’ questioning. Up to this point in Plato’s *Apology*, Socrates has been the only one actually speaking. The new dimension of dialogue adds depth to the trial, because Socrates is able to cross-examine Meletus. Clarifying this importance, John Hallowell and Jene Porter emphasize the impact of the Platonic form of dialogue in general, saying, “Plato chose to dramatize...in dialogue form because the dramatic dialogue most nearly preserves both the form of living speech

and the dialectical give and take of personal encounter.”²⁹ Accordingly, the drama of Socrates and the Athenian spirit of the age take center stage. In the balance is no less than the future of Athens, as endowed by the education of Athenian young men. Socrates presents, succinctly, the matter at hand:

He [Meletus] says that I am guilty of corrupting the young, but I say that Meletus is guilty of dealing frivolously with serious matters, of irresponsibly bringing people into court, and of professing to be seriously concerned with things about none of which he has ever cared; (24c)

Rapidly, Socrates digs to the roots of the charge—the edification of the Athenian young men. In order to find common ground for such a discussion, he probes by asking Meletus, “Surely you consider it of the greatest importance that our young men be as good as possible (24d)?” Meletus agrees that he, indeed, does consider it of utmost importance for the Athenian young to be nurtured and nourished to be as good as possible. Socrates, adeptly, asks Meletus to disclose who it is that improves the young men, since Meletus claims to know that Socrates himself is their corruptor. Through questioning, Socrates finds that Meletus believes the laws of Athens, the jurymen, everyone in the audience, the members of Council, and the members of the assembly all *improve* the young men of Athens. To Meletus’ view, Socrates responds, “All the Athenians, it seems, make the young into fine good men, except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that what you mean (25a)?” Meletus confirms that he most definitely does mean what Socrates has described; Socrates is the *corruptor par excellence* of the Athenian young.

Socrates refutes Meletus’ claims and then states: “It would be a very happy state of affairs if only one person corrupted our youth, while the others improved them (25b).” The

²⁹ Hallowell, John H. and Jene M Porter. *Political Philosophy: The Search for Humanity and Order*. (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1997), 9

problem, from the Socratic vantage point, is that Athens is no longer oriented toward justice—such as the justice communally experienced through tragedy and its drama. As Meletus engages in the Socratic dialogue and the cross-examination proceeds, the existential argument is apparent: Meletus and all Athenians are responsible to uphold justice and live in the light of the measure of wisdom. Socrates resourcefully continues to prove his point; one person alone is not responsible for corrupting the youth of Athens, but, rather, the communal spirit of the age is responsible. His focus on communal responsibility is brought full-circle. He explains that if his defense is unheard, and he is convicted, it is not because of Meletus or Anytus, by whom he was charged; but it will be because of “the slanders and envy of many people (28a).” It will be no less than a sign of the times if Socrates, who is blessing the city by his service to the god, is put to death.

The Path of Justice

The existential weight and responsibility of justice is in the balance. The Athenian jurymen are presented with the gravity of justice to make a concrete decision. Socrates then shares how he is able to make the weighty decision to walk down the path of justice in every situation. He divulges his insight with the courtroom by asking himself a revealing question, one that many of them might well have been wanting to ask him: “Are you not ashamed, Socrates, to have followed the kind of occupation that has led to your being now in danger of death (28b)?” In response, Socrates boldly proclaims that those who are truly good only *care* if their actions are right or wrong, instead of caring only for life and death. Justice, here, is a gravitational force to keep one grounded, no matter what may come. Socrates says that caring for virtue is one’s ultimate task. As he explains, “this is my course of action, even if I am to face death many times (30c).”

Brilliantly, he dramatizes his point through a hypothetical conversation with an Athenian. Socrates dexterously contrasts the one who cares for the spineless, Sophistic spirit of the age against one who cares for virtue and character formation:

Good Sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom or truth, or the best possible state of your soul (29d-e)?

Analogously to the aforementioned craftsman and poet, he reproaches the imagined Athenian interlocutor because he was not caring for the best possible state of his soul. Socrates asserts, “I shall reproach him because he attaches little importance to the most important things and greater importance to inferior things (30a).” The measure of wisdom, as Socrates constantly reiterates, is to know the proper balance and proportion of things; that is, the path of justice and rendering what is due.

Socrates preaches that in order to know and practice the measure of wisdom, people must care for the best possible state of their soul. Both individually and collectively, the soul of humans and the spirit of the community will flourish by disclosing the measure of wisdom. Socrates outlines this principle by saying, “Wealth does not bring about excellence (*arete*), but excellence (*arete*) makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively (30b).” It is important to note Hallowell and Porter’s understanding of *arete*. They say,

The word *arete* refers to the proper function or operation of something and can be translated as excellence, goodness, or virtue. For example, the full and proper development of a human’s faculties is the life of virtue.³⁰

³⁰ Hallowell and Porter, *Political Philosophy*, 62 fn.11

If one follows the contours of this piece of Socratic wisdom, then, she will undoubtedly see that Socrates reveals an ordering principle: being constituted by virtue, one is able to know and act according to the nature and value of things, which defines human and cultural flourishing. This ordering principle accentuates the integrality of the individual and society, belief and action, by evoking *the life of the soul*. Undeniably, Socrates is delineating Plato's anthropological principle.

Athens on Trial

After Socrates' imagined conversation, something truly remarkable unfolds. The drama of Socrates with the Athenian spirit of the age reaches its climax: Socrates reveals that he is actually putting Athens on trial. He states,

Indeed, gentlemen of the jury, I am far from making a defense now on my own behalf, as might be thought, but on yours, to prevent you from wrongdoing by mistreating the god's gift to you by condemning me; for if you kill me you will not easily find another like me (30d-e).

All along, the presence of Socrates has actually revealed the divine measure of wisdom to the Athenians. He claims that a god has "attached" him to Athens, "as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly (30e)." The Athenians had fallen asleep; they were resting on their laurels, and the god placed Socrates in the city to wake them. Lo and behold, they strike out at him, such as people do when they are awakened from sleep (31a). Socrates warns them, though, if they kill him they "could sleep on for the rest of [their] days," unless the god sends them another gift (31a).

The warning of judgment is now made clear. Socrates serves Athens as the measure of wisdom. His life is one of continually proclaiming the path of justice for the Athenians to

walk upon. If the Athenians put Socrates, the measure of wisdom, to death, then they possibly may never again have the gift of the light of wisdom with which to find the path of justice. Socrates' point, in short, is that the Sophistic spirit of the age, which actually does erratically make the worse argument the stronger, *disorients* the Athenian people; lulling them to sleep, the Sophistic type makes the Athenian thoroughbred muscles atrophied.

Thus, the Athenian spirit of the age is on trial because it is decaying the Athenian people and Athenian society. The measure of wisdom that Socrates embodies and proclaims is the source of health for the society, because it animates, rather than suppresses, the human element. Athens was civilized through disclosing such wisdom. Since the ruling class of Athens no longer upholds the noble responsibility of justice, Socrates questions them in the name of his divine calling, which is to take a stand for wisdom. In this, Socrates is showing that societal authority is not simply a question of brute force, rather, a society such as Athens that has developed through the discovery of the life of the soul is judged by its discovery: the responsibility to uphold justice. Here, justice is defined as procuring the measure of wisdom, which protects the human soul from tyranny.

Life In View of Death

Ominously, the jury finds Socrates guilty and then votes to give him the penalty of death. Socrates, true to his character, uses the trial as a teaching opportunity for the jurymen. He speaks directly to the jurymen that condemned him to death, reiterating the crucial Socratic principle of caring for virtue above all, instead of averting death on principle. Socrates explains, "It is not difficult to avoid death, gentlemen of the jury, it is much more difficult to avoid wickedness, for it runs faster than death (39a-b)." He

continues by saying that, since he is elderly and slow, he has been caught by death, the slower pursuer, and that the jurymen, being quick and cunning, have been caught by the much faster pursuer: wickedness. He explains the bone-chilling reality to the courtroom: “I leave you now, condemned to death by you, but they are condemned by truth to wickedness and justice (39b).” Socrates then clarifies his statement by illuminating the jury’s motives, stating that they believed by killing him they would not have to give an account of their lives. Using the light of this illumination, Socrates decries that others will surely call them to live in the right way. Profoundly, he sees their abuse of authority in their inversion of justice and virtue. As they over-extend their authority by brute force, he honorably gives warning, saying,

You are wrong if you believe that by killing people you will prevent anyone from reproaching you for not living in the right way. To escape such tests is neither possible nor good, but it is best and easiest not to discredit others but to prepare oneself to be as good as possible (39d).

Walking on the path of justice and securing character formation, then, is a responsibility for all humans, because all humans are defined by the discovery of the life of the soul.

The Experiential Meaning of Justice

The trial of Socrates, which embodies the drama of Socrates with the Athenian spirit of the age, ends on a breathtaking note. One who closely follows the curves of his defense may notice that, quite remarkably, Socrates still finds a way to improve the young men of Athens. He leaves the Athenian people with a calling: a task to edify the young men of Athens by teaching them to care for virtue more than anything else. More importantly, he

actually asks those who accused and convicted him to take up the task, so that they might be considered *just* once again. Socrates concludes,

This much I ask from them: when my sons grow up, avenge yourselves by causing them the same kind of grief that I caused you, if you think they care for money or anything else more than they care for virtue, or if they think they are somebody when they are nobody. Reproach them as I reproach you, that they do not care for the right things and think they are worthy when they are not worthy of anything. If you do this, I shall have been justly treated by you, and my sons also (41e-42a).

One of the key charges against Socrates was that he corrupted the youth. With his final request, Socrates admonishes the Athenian people to nourish and edify the youth by teaching them to care for virtue. In this way, the people of Athens would be continuing Socrates' work; ultimately, by the continuation of his task, Socrates proves that he is the one who knows, undeniably best, how to improve the young men of Athens.

After Socrates reveals the existential weight and pragmatic responsibility of justice, he gives the Athenians an answer to the always-prevalent question after a revelation of justice: "How shall we then live?"³¹ Socrates answers this question throughout the trial in the same way, that is, by giving the noble standard of the measure of wisdom. As he says, continually, one should "care for virtue." One cares for virtue, Socrates shares, by tending to the state of her soul. If one is constituted by the measure of wisdom, the economy of the soul will disclose properly one's humanity. In this, one's humanity is animated, causing a state of flourishing in relationship with self, others, and reality. As quoted in the previous section, Socrates articulates this principle in contrast to the Athenian *zeitgeist*: "Wealth does not bring about excellence (*arete*), but excellence (*arete*) makes wealth and

³¹ Ezekiel 33:10 "Therefore . . . how should we then live?" King James Version

everything else good for men, both individually and collectively.” The economy of Athens is truthfully dependent upon the economy of the soul.

Here, articulating Plato’s anthropological principle is beneficial. The polis is man written large. The flourishing of Athens—its civilizational rise to prominence by defeating the Persians, developing the responsibilities of citizenship through government, and forming the public art of tragedy—embodied and disclosed the civilizational force of justice. The soul of the city was defined by the measure of wisdom: justice. Likewise, justice was experienced and articulated in the souls of men, which were nourished through the public struggle of citizenship and tragedy. This experience created the tradition of the Athenian community, uniting and structuring pragmatic communal activity. At its best, Athens as a community experienced and distributed the responsibility of justice existentially and pragmatically upon its citizens. In sum, Athens experienced the basic truth of man in the measure of wisdom; necessarily, the truth of justice then served as the civilizing force of society.

Moving forward to the Athens of the trial of Socrates, something is indeed different. The Athenian spirit of the age is now occupied with accumulating wealth and societal status, no matter the degradation to the soul. Socrates finds solid ground for his soul by standing in the spiritual substance of Athenian culture, which is the historically effective, civilizing force of society. He is then able to evaluate the spirit of the age by the Athenian civilizational force of justice, which has disclosed the measure of wisdom. The fact that more importance is placed on accumulating material status rather than on character formation may be seen as a retrogression or disorder in the soul of the city and in the souls of humans. Since the Athenian tradition has concretely developed in the light of the

disclosure of justice, Socrates is able to authoritatively claim that character formation is truly more important than accumulating material status, in the ordering of human nature. A physiological analogy underlying this principle is that humans must first grow a chest before they need to cover it with clothing.³² The “chest” is endowed by virtue. Pursuing wealth before caring for virtue deforms humans; developing concave chests, human beings will then have no chests for material status to cover.

Socrates is standing with both of his feet in the spiritual substance of the Athenian tradition. He is proclaiming the measure of wisdom as disclosing justice, and his life and death struggle with the Athenian spirit of the age is the experiential meaning of Plato’s development of the anthropological principle. Justice is the original experience of truth that developed the Athenian tradition. It was found in the self-deliberation out of the depths of one’s soul, consequently animating one’s humanity and enabling deliberate action. Ultimately, justice animated the human element in society. It constituted humans as being characteristically human, and called them to be dignified humans through the expression of communal activity. The spiritual substance of society, then, was the experiential truth and meaning of justice.

³² This imagery is used by C.S. Lewis in his book *The Abolition of Man*

Chapter Three

Eric Voegelin: The Dialogue as the Soul of Socrates

Eric Voegelin's analysis of Plato's development of the Socratic dialogue illuminates and focuses on the spiritual substance and existential ordering force of the dialogue. In Voegelin's *Plato and Aristotle*, the third volume of his magnum opus *Order and History*, he describes the drama of the Socratic soul, as Plato developed it in his dialogues through the experience of the unjust trial and death of Socrates.³³ Aforementioned, Plato's dialogues reveal the drama of the *struggle* between disclosing the measure of wisdom (i.e. justice) and the spirit of the age. Thus Voegelin explains his understanding of philosophy in similar terms, saying,

Philosophy is not a doctrine of right order, but the light of wisdom that falls on the struggle; and help is not a piece of information about truth, but the arduous effort to locate the forces of evil and identify their nature.³⁴

Voegelin identifies the revelation of wisdom that comes from the struggle as being articulated in terms of *symbols*, which, in his thinking, are the experiential meaning and articulation of order. In the Athenian tradition, again, the experience of order is the drama of justice in one's soul and in society. Voegelin considers the drama of Socrates a symbolic form in which Plato continues the Socratic mission. Voegelin clarifies his understanding of Socratic dialogue, and then poses a question in an effort to explore its meaning further:

³³ Voegelin, Eric. *Order and History. Volume III: Plato and Aristotle*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 64

³⁴ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 117; Federici, *Eric Voegelin*, 23

The drama of Socrates is a symbolic form created by Plato as a means for communicating, and expanding, the order of wisdom founded by its hero. We have to touch, therefore, the thorny question why the dialogue should have become the symbolic form of the new order.³⁵

Socrates questioned the hollow oration of the Athenian spirit of the age. He was the most wise and just man Plato had ever known, and the Athenian society, who was supposed to procure justice, unjustly charged Socrates of impiety and put him to death. From this experience, Plato enlists Socrates as a character who expresses the truth of wisdom and justice in his dialogues. In order to explore the depth of Socratic dialogue, Voegelin's analysis shall be presented. His analysis of Socratic dialogue reifies the above analysis of the *Apology* and clarifies the spiritual substance of society, as discovered in Plato's anthropological principle.

In his analysis, Voegelin first reminds one to heed Plato's anthropological principle: society reflects the substance of the type of souls that weave its communal spirit together. He emphasizes that society's orientation is dependent upon the order of the soul, because, analogically, society too echoes the responsibility to struggle for the decision of justice. The emphasis on the drama of the order of the soul and the order of society is the key to the experiential meaning of Plato's Socratic dialogue. The Socratic dialogue enabled the sense of the *struggle* for order by approximating justice through the measure of wisdom.

Voegelin says,

[W]e shall only stress the conception of order as an Agon [struggle] of forces that will not give way to a nondramatic conception until the victory for wisdom and justice is achieved. Only when the tension and conflict has subsided and the new order is established can its expression assume the

³⁵ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 64

form of a static dogma or metaphysical proposition. Tendencies in this direction are to be observed in the late works of Plato;³⁶

Socrates engaged with interlocutors and approximated justice by struggling with the feeble climate of Sophistic opinions that formed the spirit of Athens. Plato creates the experiential roots of this struggle through his Socratic dialogues. In the form of dialogue, the substance of Socrates is still questioning Athens to answer to the measure of wisdom, in essence. In Voegelin's words, "The personal conversation between Socrates and the individual Athenian citizen is continued through the instrument of the dialogue."³⁷

Socrates' words were not heard and responded to justly in his trial. They put him to death, but the measure of wisdom, with which he questioned the Athenian *zeitgeist*, pursued them through the delineation of Plato's dialogues. The Athenian spirit of the age refused public participation in the true measure of justice. The disorientation of the Athenians produced characters with a "hard shell of corruption," as Voegelin tersely puts it, but this shell could be pierced through private conversations when even corrupt people struggle with "the anxiety of existence."³⁸ The Socratic dialogue touches the core of one's existence, the soul, because it demands existential deliberation by participating in the dialogue. Hollow rhetoric is against the rules of Socratic dialogue. Voegelin explicates,

The dialogue, however, can be conducted only if it does not degenerate into an exchange of rhetorical harangues without existential communication among the speakers. . . . The dialogue is the symbolic form of the order of wisdom, in opposition to the oration as the symbolic form of a disordered society. It restores the common order of the spirit that has been destroyed through the privatization of rhetoric [i.e. arbitrary opinions].³⁹

³⁶ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 65

³⁷ *ibid.*, 66

³⁸ *ibid.*

³⁹ *ibid.*

Yet, in concrete life, as Voegelin later explains, the rules of the dialogue cannot always be enforced. One may very well not participate in the existential communication; that is, the Socratic standing of both feet in the spiritual substance of civilization, which expresses the order of the soul through the struggle of justice. Voegelin addresses this problem: stating that neither Socrates nor Plato regenerated the Athenian society, he asks, then, “Is the dialogue a futile gesture after all?”⁴⁰ In order to refute the question of futility, Voegelin presents two evocative symbols that Plato developed in his Socratic dialogues: *Thanatos* and *Eros*. The forces of Socratic death and Socratic love are used in Socratic dialogue to evoke existential order and authority in life.

Lessons of Gorgias

Plato’s *Gorgias* provides Voegelin with an example to depict the orienting forces, *Thanatos* and *Eros*, in the soul of Socrates. Voegelin presents the mood of the *Gorgias* as being a declaration of war against the corrupt Athenian society and a battle “for the soul of the younger generation.”⁴¹ In this struggle, Voegelin, per usual, articulates the *ultimate question of meaning* which the Socratic dialogue is asking: “Who will form the future leaders of the polity: the rhetor who teaches the tricks of political success, or the philosopher who creates substance in soul and society?”⁴² Hallowell and Porter echo Voegelin in their analysis of the *Gorgias*, saying, “Although ostensibly a conversation about the meaning of rhetoric, the *Gorgias* actually is concerned with contrasting two competing

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*, 78

⁴² *ibid.*

views of the meaning of existence."⁴³ It is important to note here that in the *Apology*, Socrates' accusers presented him as the *corruptor par excellence* of the Athenian young men. While his accusers presented him as such, they could not give a positive account of what would actually improve the younger generation. The *Gorgias* is Plato's chance to clearly show the edification of the Socratic tutelage against the deprivation of the Sophistic teaching.

Gorgias was a well-known Sophist who was visiting the house of Callicles, an Athenian politician. Gorgias also had one of his younger students there with him whose name was Polus. Socrates showed up with his friend Chaerephon, wanting to speak with Gorgias. Thus, the basic setting of the story has the key elements: the Sophistic spirit of the age, the young Athenian student, the Athenian politician, and the measure of wisdom embodied by Socrates. Voegelin identifies several key insights in the Socratic dialogue, which he formulates around an "existential issue".

The existential issue is apparent from the start; Socrates advises Chaerephon to ask the young Sophist student, Polus, "Who he is?"⁴⁴ With this question Socrates touches the heart of the matter: the question of identity and character formation causes reflection on the ground of one's being. Necessarily, if Polus answers the question honestly then he would have to recognize the presuppositions, beliefs, and activities that weave his life together. It is a question that is decisive for all times, Voegelin says, "cutting through the network of opinions, social ideas, and ideologies. It is a question that appeals to the nobility

⁴³ Hallowell and Porter, *Political Philosophy*, 10

⁴⁴ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 78

of the soul..."⁴⁵ By "nobility of the soul," he is referring to the self-deliberating and constituting center that animates one's humanity. If one's human functions are embraced more fully, and tasks are articulated and developed more completely, then one's humanity is being expressed rather than being suppressed. This is similar to discovering the responsibility for the decision of justice in the tragedy, and, also the measure of wisdom in the Socratic investigations; that is, knowing and embracing the proper degree of importance in all aspects of life.

From the initial question of identity, Voegelin identifies the other topics of the dialogue that will bring clarity to the existential issue: "the function of rhetoric, the problem of justice, the question whether it is better to do injustice or to suffer injustice, and the fate of the unjust soul."⁴⁶ The proper function of rhetoric is addressed to the master Sophist Gorgias. Socrates wants to know whether or not Gorgias believes that the teacher of rhetoric has the responsibility to share the knowledge of justice, so that the students will not misuse the art of oration. Here, Socrates is also guiding Gorgias by the *measure of wisdom*, because he is implicitly revealing the orator's responsibility to know the proper degree of importance of his craft alongside other various crafts and aspects of life. Gorgias admits that a teacher is responsible to share the knowledge of justice, but that the teacher is not responsible if the student mishandles the teaching. Socrates agrees that the teacher does not have responsibility for the student misusing the teaching, but he himself would not continue to teach and keep the company of such a rogue student. As Voegelin clearly unveils, Socrates here underhandedly condemns Gorgias who has the "presence of the

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 78

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

unscrupulous and vulgar Polus, his follower and partisan in the dialogue, a glaring object lesson of his [Gorgias'] corrupting activity."⁴⁷ Polus' presence throughout the dialogue is blatantly showing the impoverishment of the Athenian younger generation due to Sophistic instruction. Neither the true function of rhetoric nor the virtues of character formation are part of the Sophistic education.

The object lesson represented in Polus is one that is drawn out in Socrates' conversation with him. Whether one is better off to commit injustice or have injustice committed to one's self is the topic of the conversation. Polus shows that he is thoroughly carried in the spirit of the age, saying that of course one would rather be in the seat of power and commit the injustice, than to be in the feeble stance of submission, receiving injustice. Through his cross-examination and questioning, Socrates makes it abundantly clear that Polus does not understand the existential authority of the argument. That is, Polus says that it is only convention or societal pressure that would make a person consent to receiving injustice rather than committing injustice. Socrates, of course, is ordered by the existential authority of justice provided by the measure of wisdom. The Socratic soul loves wisdom and knows that by its measure, the soul would be doubly committing injustice: when he commits injustice toward others, he would also be committing injustice on his own soul, thereby receiving injustice. Justice *is* the measure of wisdom being animated; when the measure of wisdom is animated, humans are fully animated, too. Here, Plato highlights one of the orienting forces of the Socratic soul: *Socratic Eros is the love of wisdom*. In the end, as Voegelin portrays, Polus reluctantly agrees with the logic of the Socratic argument, but only on an intellectual level. Voegelin says, "The case of Polus has

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, 79

shown that intellectual agreement is not followed of necessity by existential understanding."⁴⁸ According to Voegelin, Plato then introduces Socrates' debate with Callicles as an attempt to penetrate the deeper level of existential communication.

Existential Communication

Voegelin's analysis of Socrates' exchange with Callicles is the truly brilliant aspect of his understanding of the *Gorgias*. He has the vision to see that the existentially inconclusive debate with Polus is deepened in the debate with Callicles because of the identification of Eros. Callicles, like Socrates, is ready to communicate from the level Eros; that is, from the premise-values of what he loves. Voegelin defines both Socrates' and Callicles' loves. Socrates' Eros is for wisdom: he is a philosopher, lover of wisdom, who defines his life by the measure of wisdom.⁴⁹ On the other hand, Callicles' Eros is for the "demos of Athens": he is willing to change his sentiments to whatever will keep him popular as an Athenian politician.⁵⁰ Eros is an orienting force of the soul, Voegelin reveals, and wherever one's love is directed, there also is the direction in which one's life will develop. If one is wholeheartedly in love with popularity, then the spirit of the age will be the source of that person's character formation. If the spiritual substance of the community's spirit is decadent, a character formed by the whims of such a spirit is likely to be a feeble person whose humanity would be suppressed rather than animated. However, those who are in love with wisdom and its measure are edified and formed properly in proportion. This animates one to be a mature human, because of one's knowledge and responsiveness to the relative degrees of importance in all aspects of life.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 83

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Voegelin identifies and defines the term that Plato uses to delineate the deeper level of existential communication possible for all humans: “*pathos*”.⁵¹ Pathos, in Plato’s thought, is the precondition for community and for the existential ordering of the soul. Voegelin outlines the contours of the term, stating,

Pathos is what men have in common, however variable it may be in its aspects and intensities. Pathos designates a passive experience, not an action; it is what happens to man, what he suffers, what befalls him fatefully, and what touches him in his existential core—as for instance the experience of Eros.⁵²

The human capacity to experience strong feeling, then, in Plato’s thought, is because of the substance of life. Humans are animated by what they love, and this human capacity comes from the experience of pathos. The deliberation of the soul for justice, in the Aeschylean sense, and the measure of wisdom are both responses to the experiences of life: “the *pathema* experienced by all may result in *mathema* different for each man.”⁵³ The experiences that inescapably happen in human life form the substance for the lessons that are learned and taught. Voegelin explains this commonality further, saying, “The community of pathos is the basis of communication.”⁵⁴ These lessons then are discussed and debated, forming the basis of communication. In essence, pathos is the experiential core of human life, allowing people the privilege to suffer and act as humans through loving and deliberating on the proper course of action. In terms of the Socratic soul, pathos is where one experiences the orienting force of Eros, but, necessarily, must deliberate

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

between a good Eros and an evil or disordering Eros, Voegelin explains.⁵⁵ The evil Eros is what deforms humans, whereas the good Eros is what makes humans healthy—that which articulates and reifies humanity. Voegelin’s main point is that either way, “the pathos at the core has the truth of an immediate experience.”⁵⁶ The lessons learned and the intellectual opinions formed, no matter if they are distorted, outlandish, or naïve, are rooted in an immediate experience. One may understand the experience more narrowly or fully; either way, it is the precondition for community. Voegelin succinctly states the importance of Plato’s revelation: “If one can penetrate to this core [of pathos] and reawaken in a man the awareness of his *conditio humana*, communication in the existential sense becomes possible.”⁵⁷

With this in mind, Voegelin understands that Plato is setting the stage for the existential conflict between Callicles and Socrates. He presents in Callicles one who embodies the spirit of the age; that is, Callicles acknowledges the spirit of the age to be the true ontological ground from which humans are to order their humanity. Callicles, of course, is put against the Socratic Eros: the love of wisdom directed toward the Good (*Agathon*), which is the positive measure of human life. The question stated earlier regarding the futility of the Socratic dialogue, and the impasse that arises when there is a blatant denial of the existential order of humankind and its responsibility to act as a community of justice, takes center stage in the Callicles-Socrates conflict. Voegelin asks the question, “[W]hat meaning can the potential community of pathos have?”⁵⁸ Neither

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 84

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

Polus nor Callicles was won over when the appeal to pathos and the attempt to reawaken the measure of wisdom was made. Voegelin presents Plato's solution, which allows for the community of humankind to be maintained even when the existential communication and ordering of humanity has been lost on the concrete level of society. Voegelin states,

Plato reminds us of the community of pathos at the beginning of the Callicles scene in order to prepare the Judgment of the Dead as the transcendental continuation of the dialogue that does not achieve existential communication among the living.⁵⁹

Here, Voegelin is presenting Plato's "faith in the transcendental community of man."⁶⁰ In Greek tragedy, the discovery and responsibility of *justice* in the self-deliberation of the soul is the compact symbol for the transcendental community of humankind; and this is precisely the compact symbol that Plato begins to differentiate through Socratic dialogue. The Socratic Eros and the measure of wisdom are attempts to articulate the positive ordering force of community. Plato, in the last part of the *Gorgias*, evokes the symbol of Socratic *Thanatos* to express the authority of the dialogue rooted in the transcendental community of humankind. *Thanatos* is the Socratic soul's orienting force of death as shown in Plato's myth of judgment. According to Voegelin, the myth of judgment in the *Gorgias*⁶¹ presents the differentiation of the compact experience of the existential order of the soul by the new articulation of the Socratic *Thanatos*.

In the *Gorgias*' myth of judgment, Plato traces the history of the Final Judgment from the Age of Cronos to the Age of Zeus. He explains that when men would die, if they were just, they would go to the Islands of the Blessed; but if they were unjust, they would go to

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Here I am using Voegelin's summary in both *V.III* and in *Science, Politics and Gnosticism*

Tartarus for punishment.⁶² The judgment was carried out while both the judges and the men were alive. The men were judged during the last day of life. Voegelin summarizes the problem that Plato identifies with both the judges and the men still being alive during the judgment. He says, “As a result, frequent miscarriages of justice occurred. For men ‘had their clothes on,’ and the apparel of the body covered the true character of the souls; and the judges themselves were hampered “by their clothes” in perceiving correctly the state of the soul before them.”⁶³ Zeus changed the procedure of the judgment to take place after men were already dead. He gave his three dead sons, Minos, Rhadamanthys, and Aeacus the authority to judge men once they had died. Then, the souls of men were laid bare before the judges to be examined in the light of their lives. It is important to note that the “husk of the body” and the “cloak of earthly status” were stripped in order for the souls to be examined in “complete transparency.”⁶⁴ This transparency allowed for the true motivation of one’s actions to be seen. In short, whether or not one undertook the responsibility for the decision of justice within her soul and made the concrete effort to follow the path of justice in her actions is thereby clearly perceived.

Through the myth of judgment, Plato is revealing that one properly lives life in the light of the transparent state of judgment, where the sickness or disease of one’s soul may be seen for its dilapidated state. One’s soul stands naked before the judges, not being able to cover itself with the beauty of flesh or the badges of earthly status. Voegelin says, “The curable soul, thus, is permanently in the state of judgment”; in order to gain the life of the

⁶² *ibid.*, 93

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Voegelin, Eric. *Science, Politics, and Gnosticism*. (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Company, 1968), 111

soul, one must experience the catharsis of the Socratic Thanatos.⁶⁵ Socratic Thanatos, then, is a cathartic tool used to disassemble the powerful structures that the spirit of the age builds around one's soul in order to narrow its vision. As Voegelin explains, Thanatos is the "cathartic experience of the soul which purifies conduct by placing it into the longest of all long-range perspectives, into the perspective of death."⁶⁶ Thanatos, thenceforth, opens the soul's vision to the decision for justice and the measure of wisdom.

Voegelin is able to identify two evocative ordering symbols, *Eros* and *Thanatos*, which formed the experiential meaning of the soul of Socrates and Plato's Socratic dialogue. He shows the power of these two orienting forces in the soul of Socrates; they were forces that gave Socrates' soul direction and orientation in a culture of disorientation. All human beings, likewise, are able to understand themselves and the world through the ordering forces of the soul. The order of the soul and the order of society are found in the measure of wisdom and justice. For Plato, one must love the Good, which gives the transcendental measure of wisdom. One also must live in the light of the measure of wisdom, understanding it as the judge of one's true humanity.

⁶⁵ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 98

⁶⁶ Voegelin, *New Science*, 65

Conclusion

Plato's anthropological principle is concisely defined as declaring that the ordering forces of the soul of humans are also the ordering forces of the soul of society. The spiritual substance of humans weaves together the spiritual substance of society. That which breaks the human spirit also breaks human society. The measure of wisdom explains this well. Elevating certain aspects of one's life and suppressing or disregarding other aspects causes deformation to one's humanity, not allowing one to animate her full humanity. Similarly, society will develop lopsidedly if far greater importance is placed on certain aspects rather than properly across all aspects of societal life. Certainly, aspects of society would be unable to perform their unique tasks if society lopsidedly developed; for instance, emphasizing economic value over family worth would undervalue the worth of children. Thus children would only be justified if they monetarily repaid their parents later on in life. Of course, no parent with a proper understanding of the family aspect of life would make this claim.

In Voegelin's analysis, he states that both the force of Thanatos and Eros shade off into the force of Justice in the Socratic soul.⁶⁷ Justice in the soul and in society discloses the measure of wisdom. In his trial, Socrates was able to put Athens on trial and judge them by the measure of wisdom. He was able to do this because the revelation of wisdom and the authority of justice were the civilizing forces that developed Athens. Athenian culture had been historically differentiated through the discovery of the life of the soul and its

⁶⁷ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 68

responsibility to make the decision for justice. Society then had the same responsibility to uphold justice. By rejecting the responsibility to represent and reinforce the discovery of the soul, the Athenian ruling class suppressed the human soul. The task to uphold justice was the very reason the Athenian ruling class had the authority to govern. The authority of the ruling class was not their own, rather it was truly the existential authority of justice itself. Federici, amplifying Voegelin, states, “The quality of a political order reflected the ruling class’s ethical character.”⁶⁸ The ruling class of Athens no longer upheld the responsibility for justice, so Socrates was able to condemn the ruling class and legal system for their inversion of authority. They could be considered tyrannical or illegitimate, because they were no longer ruling in accordance with the historically effective principle of justice.

Similarly, Voegelin believes that society will only be “restored by ordering souls.”⁶⁹ He says, “The disorder of society is a disease in the psyche of its members.”⁷⁰ Elsewhere, Voegelin explains an alternative to the disorder of society:

The true alternative would be the restoration of spiritual substance in the ruling groups of a society, with the consequent restoration of the moral strength in creating a just social order.⁷¹

Since Western civilization has been historically articulated through the discovery of the life of the soul, and by the forces which differentiate the soul, its open and differentiated society is measured by the same principle as the soul. Thus, the search for a measuring

⁶⁸ Federici, *Eric Voegelin*, 23

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, 23; also quoted in the thesis introduction.

⁷⁰ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 124; Federici, *Eric Voegelin*, 23

⁷¹ Federici, 23; He is quoting Voegelin’s *From Enlightenment to Revolution*, 180

tool with which to test Western civilization's health is found in the measure of wisdom: justice.

A simple definition of justice will not suffice. It is not to be found in logical or scientific argument alone; rather, it is to be found in the experiential meaning of dialogue. Voegelin makes the same point, saying,

Science starts from the prescientific existence of man, from the participation in the world with his body, soul, intellect, and spirit, from his primary grip on all of the realms of being that is assured to him because his own nature is their epitome.⁷²

True dialogue that is rooted in existential communication, in the Socratic sense, is the way to uncovering the experiential roots of human existence. Put simply, it is questioning and approximating the importance of beliefs and actions by a transcendental measure. Societal justice is found in protecting the inherent dimensions of depth in every aspect of society. Voegelin shows that in order to know the dimensions of depth in society, one must inescapably submit to the transcendental measure of wisdom by recognizing human limitations. Necessarily, "human grandeur"⁷³ has its proper limits. He says,

[T]he substance of history consists in the experiences in which man gains the understanding of his humanity and together with it the understanding of its limits.⁷⁴

Just as Socrates said that the reputedly wise of Athens were unwise because they disproportionately elevated their human skills, so the transcendental measure of wisdom teaches humankind of its dependence.

⁷² Voegelin, *New Science*, 5

⁷³ Voegelin, *New Science*, 78

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, 78

In Platonic thought, *Thanatos* cathartically relieved the soul from the sickness of appearance, which cleared the way for the soul's *Eros* of the *Agathon*.⁷⁵ Giving depth to this, St. Augustine explains that the *amor Dei* relieves the soul from only being oriented through the *amor sui*. Augustine, of course, is adding the Christian insight that God graciously participates in a loving friendship with humans. Voegelin describes the clarification of the Christian revelation as the "Christian bending of God in grace toward the soul", meaning that the human soul is actually animated by the force of the love of God.⁷⁶ The act of *relieving* is the key insight, here. Human perspective is necessarily limited, and, as such, proper understanding is often disoriented through shortsightedness and the elevation of temporary experiences. In the core of their humanity, which is recognized in the life of the soul, humans are able to participate in experiences of reality that give existential perspicuity and orientation. In Platonic thought, the limitations of human life, the lasting and passing aspects of life, form the substance with which humans are able to order their lives. When the limitations are carefully experienced, observed, and reflected upon, one begins to order the importance and value of life. As Voegelin explains, the anthropological principle is focused "on the human side of the orientation of the soul toward divinity."⁷⁷ Undoubtedly, humans are capable of grandeur; and there are an impressive suite of accomplishments that historically verify such is the case.

Human grandeur nonetheless is possible only because of the knowledge of its limitations. Humankind's spirit may be turned inward and fall into a state of feeling autonomous, but with this, humanity loses the ability to participate with the one who

⁷⁵ Voegelin, *Plato and Aristotle*, 67

⁷⁶ Voegelin, *New Science*, 78

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, 77

provides her with her image, her identity as being uniquely human; in short, her humanity itself. For example, living in the light of the discovery of the soul, Western civilization developed the rule of law in an effort to represent the existential authority of justice. Doing this provided the necessary social cohesion to propel a rising civilization of human and cultural flourishing. Both Christianity and Greek philosophy, through the life of the soul, uncovered and disclosed the civilizing forces of Western culture that evoked such a state of flourishing. Such being the case, regardless of Christian or Classical, the revelation of wisdom is the final measuring tool for examining the health of Western civilization.

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