

Until the beginning of the fourth century the Christian creed was spread by voluntary conversions. There were also later voluntary conversions of individuals and of whole peoples. But from the days of Theodosius I on, the sword began to play a prominent role in the dissemination of Christianity. Pagans and heretics were compelled by force of arms to submit to the Christian teachings. For many centuries religious problems were decided by the outcome of battles and wars. Military campaigns determined the religious allegiance of nations. Christians of the East were forced to accept the creed of Mohammed, and pagans in Europe and America were forced to accept the Christian faith. Secular power was instrumental in the struggle between the Reformation the Counter Reformation. [Ludwig Von Mises]⁶⁵

CHAPTER 4

THE LONG NIGHT OF MEDIEVAL ADJUSTMENT

The histories of ancient societies and of the Greek and Roman empire-builders, in particular, provide important insights into human behavior. These empires were forged at a time when only a small storehouse of material wealth was utilized as *capital* goods in order to gain efficiency in the production of new forms of wealth. In order to

+ provide for the administrative and militaristic needs of the State, large number of individuals were pressed into serfdom or slavery. The same combination of socio-political powers sanctioned a highly concentrated set of privileges that focused on the control over the natural environment. And, over the longer run, the consequences of empire-building on the backs of the many played a crucial role in the collapse of these empires. In *The Wealth Of Nations*, Adam Smith took an early and critical look at the *economic policies* of the first group of empire-builders, concluding:

The policy of the ancient republics of Greece, and that of Rome, though it honoured agriculture more than manufactures or foreign trade, yet seems rather to have discouraged the latter employments, than to have given any direct or intentional encouragement to the former. In several of the ancient states of Greece, foreign trade was prohibited altogether, and in several others the employments of artificers and manufacturers were considered as hurtful to the strength and agility of the human body, as rendering it incapable of those habits which their military and gymnastic exercises endeavored to form in it, and as thereby disqualifying it more or less for undergoing the fatigues and encountering the dangers of war. Such occupations were considered as fit only for slaves, and the free citizens of the state were prohibited from exercising them. Even in those states where no such prohibition took place, as in Rome and Athens, the great body of the people were in effect excluded from all the trades which are now commonly exercised by the lower sort of the inhabitants of towns.⁶⁶

Smith goes on to note that these socio-political arrangements made impossible the acquisition of property and increase in social status of free but poor citizens. The use of slaves allowed wealthy Patricians and Plebeians of Rome (and, earlier, their counterparts in Greece) to control the production of goods without the threat of competition from free citizens. The large landed estates of antiquity functioned very much as closed systems, supplementing their own production with barter, until around the fifth century B.C. in Greece and the third century in

Rome.⁶⁷ At the most fundamental level of group dynamics, arrangements that fostered cooperative activity were systematically subverted by those who came to dominate the socio-political structure. The absence of cooperation is, in turn, a clear indication that the forces of greed had overcome any desire to create just societies. A thirst for power dominated all other relationships. Even the determined efforts of the Roman empire's last effective Emperor, Diocletian (who *ruled* from 284 until his voluntary resignation in 305) could but delay the inevitable. Nevertheless, his efforts were noteworthy and instructive to those of us today working for constructive change.

Facing severe economic and fiscal problems, Diocletian introduced wage and price controls (which failed and were soon withdrawn), but was able to restore a sound currency of gold and silver coins. He instituted legal and social reforms to improve the condition of slaves and poor citizens and, of utmost significance, attempted to shift the burden of paying for the empire to the landed. Historian Ferdinand Lot describes this edict relating to land policy as Diocletian's "*famous fiscal innovation*" because the measure involved "*the assessment of [a] land-tax*" and operated in a way that promised to advance the cause of justice during his reign:

The tax was...apportioned by "cities", and in each city by estates; each land-owner was liable for a certain number of *capita* or fractions of a *caput* [i.e., a fiscal unit of land based on its agricultural quality] according to the importance of his landed property.⁶⁸

The structural problems of ancient Rome were, perhaps, too far advanced for even this kind of dramatic reform on its own to reverse the decline. The land tax was, however, a step in the direction of just socio-political arrangements. To a far greater extent than had been the case up to that time, Diocletian's tax policy had the effect of shifting the

burden of paying for government to individuals in proportion to the benefits received under the laws of the State:

For a long time the provinces had paid the "tribute" either in money, or in kind, or in both ways, in virtue of old agreements, advantageous to some parts of the Empire which were lightly taxed, but burdensome to others. Henceforth each district paid in proportion to its landed wealth. Even Italy was from now on subject to the land-tax.⁶⁹

Despite these measures, the empire continued to implode under the weight of corruption and an unworkable legal system. More fundamentally, *"the ancient city state was too narrow a crucible, in which to remould the world,"*⁷⁰ but the only groups sufficiently strong to challenge Rome (and its mercenary armies) were tribal and dominated by warrior-chieftains and kinship hierarchies. The Athenian participatory socio-political experience and legacy could not survive the strains of empire-building. The benefits of cooperation eroded under the pressures of vested interest, which consistently overruled reason and any moral of right and wrong. Unfortunately, this pattern continued even as the transition of power occurred from Rome to Constantinople. Brinton, Christopher and Wolff identify a commonality shared by Byzantium, Rome and Greece:

Under the early emperors...the large landowners continued to flourish. Whole dynasties of nobles came to exist on their great estates. These were the powerful, who were constantly acquiring more land at the expense of the poor. The more they got, the more they wanted. They bought up the holdings of the poor and made the peasantry once more dependent upon them. The growing power of the [landowners] threatened the state in two important ways: not only was it losing its best taxpayers, the free peasants, but also its best soldiers, the military settlers.⁷¹

Again and again throughout history we see this same pattern of domination under virtually whatever socio-political arrangements are

put in place. The landed gain in power and wealth at the expense of actual producers. They utilize their positions of power in society to exempt themselves from contributing to the financial support of the State. With the remainder of the society too impoverished to provide needed revenue, the primary recourse is empire-building and exploitation of new territories and new peoples. At some point, the cooperative base of the core society is virtually torn apart by conflicts between individuals and groups seeking greater advantage within the system. Disunity opens the nation to external conquest and, as a result, historians observe the presence of a life cycle at work in the rise and fall of civilizations.

In the examination of the socio-political arrangements and institutions operating within societies, the passage of time and the position held by the observer have also too often resulted in glorification of the status quo at the expense of understanding. This is certainly true when the questions at hand focus on the justness of existing socio-political arrangements and institutions.

To avoid this pitfall (and effectively adhere to the methodology of the political economist), I seek to identify those individual and societal factors that affect our ability to satisfy our desires in the natural and socio-political environments available to us. This task is made complex because, in addition to being individual producers, we are also social creatures. As an investigator, an obligation then exists to identify and address the moral and ethical consequences of our actions. Put in the form of an objective, I seek to determine whether the socio-political structure of a society is or is not just. To accomplish this requires a value system (i.e., the ideal) against which to measure circumstances as they exist in everyday life. This, I argue, is not nearly so difficult a task as one might think even though many political economists fell far short of this objective. The sad historical fact is that many of these writers were engaged not in a search for truth but in "*an attempt to explain, within the existing framework and assumptions of society, how and on what*

theory contemporary society [was] operating."⁷² In essence, there has nearly always been a tendency among the mainstream intellectuals of any era to tread softly on conventional wisdoms and established institutions. The power of entrenched ideas to survive even well-supported attacks from without is well-documented:

It is very seldom, if ever, possible to write off a heresy as having been for all time irremediably discarded and exploded. Old doctrines never die; they only fade away, with a strange power of recuperation in an appropriate environment. The dominant opinion of any age, even if it has a flavour peculiarly its own, is, on analysis, a fricassee of the thoughts of all the ages, and the latest exponent of orthodox and accepted doctrine may to a later generation appear to have added at most one further ingredient or one choice condiment before passing it on.⁷³

The power of some ideas rests on inherent correctness which, over time, cannot be silenced by bias or powerful vested interest. Other ideas, false in the extreme, seem to survive in spite of incontrovertible evidence against them. We must remember that science has always been and remains the province of a relative few. Although certain truths may appear to be self-evident to some, ignorance or the absence of a frame of reference stands in the path of understanding for many others. One aspect of this dilemma is that from ancient through contemporary times, we have demonstrated a powerful and often destructive association with fantasy and escapism. As the philosopher and societal critic Eric Hoffer observed, this characteristic has played into the hands of tyrants, despots and charlatans:

Dying and killing seem easy when they are part of a ritual, ceremonial, dramatic performance or game. There is need for some kind of make-believe in order to face death unflinchingly. To our real, naked selves there is not a thing on earth or in heaven worth dying for. It is only when we see ourselves as actors in a staged (and therefore unreal) performance that death loses its frightfulness and finality and becomes an act

of make-believe and a theatrical gesture. It is one of the main tasks of a real leader to mask the grim reality of dying and killing by evoking in his followers the illusion that they are participating in a grandiose spectacle, a solemn or lighthearted dramatic performance.⁷⁴

Perhaps the span of our lives, which is really quite brief, offers far too little opportunity to recover from mistakes and misfortunes. The glorification of death is, in this sense, a fulfillment of lost potential. Individuals who accept in death a culmination cannot be reached with the presentation of evidence contradicting what they have accepted as revealed truth. Discursive reasoning is lost on the fanatic. Even for the broadly open-minded, however, the journey from ignorance to understanding is one reached by only the few. The necessary qualities seem, more than any others, to be possessed of a questioning mind and a high degree of moral and ethical sensitivity. And, such questioning will normally draw one's attention to philosophical disputes that have critical importance to the evaluation of how well existing socio-political arrangements stand when measured against moral principles.

THE ROMAN/NEO-CHRISTIAN STATE

With the Roman empire as its secular protector, Christianity in the second and third centuries after Christ drifted inevitably into a hierarchical institution characterized by ritual and fanaticism. The Emperor Constantine carried the banner of Christianity into battle during the early fourth century and gave the new religion legitimacy within the State, raising the question of whether Christianity converted the Roman hierarchy or was captured by the State and used as a means of coercively advancing the interests of those who held power.

Coercion was and is the general mechanism by which the State extends its power, and once Christianity became acknowledged as the

true religion the arm of the Roman State was used to destroy the remnants of paganism and impose Christian beliefs on all subjects of the empire. Moreover, the established Church hierarchy from this point on fought "*against every independent opinion.*"⁷⁵ We should not be surprised that the State finds great advantage in a reciprocal alliance with establishment religions. Directing the actions of the individual is, as Eric Hoffer observed, much easier when the individual believes the interests of the State are one with the gods. Arnold Toynbee, for one, makes the important connection between this relationship and the advance of civilization:

It is one of the ironies of human history that the illumination which has brought into religion a perception of the unity of God and the brotherhood of mankind should at the same time have promoted intolerance and persecution.⁷⁶

Ironic, yes; but not unexpected. Christianity had its origins in the East, and by the time Constantinople was built to serve as the new center of the Roman empire, the Christian church was for all practical purposes one with the empire (even if not at peace with itself). What the Emperor Justinian (527-565) would later do for Roman law, the theologian Augustine (354-430) did for orthodox Christian teachings and, in particular, the doctrine of moral responsibility. For, although orthodox Christianity speaks of God as all-knowing and possessed of the power to direct human actions, Augustine's divinely inspired reason declared that God gives to us a free will in order to test our individual morality. This view became Church doctrine, accepted and propagated as revealed truth. And yet, the State and written law existed long before the rituals of the supernatural were forged into doctrines carried forth by formal religious orders, Christian or otherwise. As Christians the Roman emperors no longer ruled as gods; however, as God's chosen earthly representatives they ruled not only by might but in the name of an unquestionable authority.

The power of the Eastern emperor over both secular and religious matters remained strong because the empire was strong. In the West, the breakdown of empire into feudal states stimulated the development of a more transnational Catholic hierarchy. The Eastern empire held onto its Greek heritage and preserved the philosophy and literature of ancient Greece, while in the West literacy itself became severely threatened and restricted to monasteries. So desperate were the circumstances in the Western empire that Brinton, Christopher and Wolff go so far as to credit the Eastern empire for preserving the intellectual heritage of Western civilization:

Had it not been for Byzantium, it seems certain that Plato and Aristotle, Homer and Sophocles, would have been lost. We cannot even imagine what such a loss would have meant to western civilization, how seriously it would have retarded us in science and speculation, in morals and ethics, how crippled we should have been in our efforts to deal with the fundamental problems of human relationships, what a poor and meager cultural inheritance we should have had. That these living works of the dead past have been preserved to us we owe to Byzantium.⁷⁷

The history of the last one thousand years would certainly have been quite different, although the general tendencies in human behavior that eventually resulted in a new era of empire-building would have *advanced*, albeit at a somewhat different pace. What would have been lost was the retrospective insight into the societies of antiquity and how they attempted to resolve the everyday and philosophical dilemmas they faced. Thankfully, from the perspective of political economy, the philosophy and history of the Hellenistic world was preserved for us to study and learn from. What, then, have we learned? Some exploration of events during this period is of considerable use in our quest for understanding.

A CLASH OF TITANS

The Moslem faith and Arab power arose in the seventh century to challenge the Byzantine empire. Arab armies captured Jerusalem in 639 and Alexandria later the same year. With the arrival of Mohammed and Islam, the advance of civilization in the East suffered the intolerance of a second merger of church and state. The Byzantine and Arab empires competed for control over the eastern and southern portions of what had been the empire of Rome; religion, however, set the stage for the process of centralization that was destined to resume its path more than a thousand years after the decline of the Western Roman empire.


Roman Catholicism expanded into most of the European continent west of the territories held by the Byzantine empire. Eastern Europeans remained adherents of Orthodox Christianity, and the doctrines of this sect dominated and spread northward into Russia. The religion of Mohammed was carried by colonists and splinter groups as they migrated along the north African coast and into the Iberian peninsula, as well as eastward throughout Arabia and as far as the Indian subcontinent. In both the Moslem and Christian worlds, the integration of religion with the State contributed to the passage of leadership based on blood relations. Religion provided to this hierarchical structure a moral basis by resurrecting from the Christian emperors the divine right to rule.

Europe after the fall of Rome entered into a long period during which neither leadership nor law was centralized or based on principles (just or otherwise). Warrior-chieftains exacted tribute from weaker neighboring tribes, and a rising level of fear and uncertainty spread throughout the continent. With the passage of several centuries, there arose across Europe a new socio-political structure that was largely tribal, yet very different from the communitarian organization of earlier tribal societies. We now use the term *feudalism* to describe the hierarchical structure of these agricultural societies. At the same time,

the Western religious establishment thwarted any propagation of what remained of Greek philosophy and scientific investigation. Catholic clergy preached to an increasingly illiterate constituency, in an ancient tongue that few continued to understand or could read. Hence, the teachings of the Bible were interpreted narrowly and as revealed truth rather than as lessons in moral behavior. The works of antiquity were disdained as the product of a pagan world for which no tolerance was permitted. The Church's control over both the spiritual and intellectual life of the European population was further cemented by establishment of the papacy and a centralized bureaucracy with Latin as the language of the learned.

The study of the sciences and of written texts lost a great deal of ground during the chaotic seventh and eighth centuries but was revived during the reign of Charlemagne and other Medieval princes. Latin was refined and standardized under the direction of Frankish rulers. The small number of Latin scholars in Europe were brought together to standardize the use of Latin, and schools were established within Europe's monasteries. In this way, even the early Medieval period contained the seeds that eventually grew into a transnational intellectual community. Centuries would pass before new generations of learned scholars, theologians, bureaucrats and merchants would challenge the very foundations of religious orthodoxy and the State, but they would have a rich philosophical heritage on which on draw once ^{to} the time had finally come. ×

Roman law had not always been just law, and those who ruled over the empire did so only with the support of great armies. Yet, despite the atrocities committed and the injustices perpetrated, Roman philosophers inherited from their Greek forerunners a quest to identify principle as a guide to understanding, if not behavior. This pursuit of understanding fell dormant under the heavy influence of the Church, both in the West and the East. Ironically, those who came under the influence of Islam suffered similarly. In the West, however, the struggle



for power that erupted between the Church and the emerging European states opened the door for skeptics to challenge conventional wisdoms and the status quo. Scholars would rediscover the works of Cicero who, after centuries of neglect, would once again find an audience for his views on such provocative issues as the relationship between justice and natural law. "Nothing certainly is more ennobling than for us to plainly understand that we are born to justice," writes Cicero, "and that law is instituted not by opinion but by nature."⁷⁸ We are, in fact, continuing to struggle with the consequences of relying on a definition of *natural law* that attributes unalienable and positive values to human behavior governed by natural law. As I shall argue at some length, behavior consistent with our nature is neither inherently just nor unjust. Our power of contemplative thought is ours to use in the understanding of moral principles, principles based on values that protect our rights to equal treatment under positive law and equality of opportunity to obtain the economic goods necessary for our survival. Cicero, Aristotle, Plato, Socrates and a host of other classical thinkers would give the Medieval scholars much to ponder.

People And Places

Centuries of continuous warfare, of territorial acquisitions and losses by various tribes, left European societies in a state of semi-permanent disruption. Population fell and remained low until the eleventh century, when (for reasons that are not well-understood) a gradual out-migration from existing population centers brought more land under cultivation and established countless new settlements. Nevertheless, the European landscape until well into the eleventh century was sparsely populated and dominated by fortified settlements or walled towns. As population expanded and commerce between communities increased, the first phase of *feudalism*, characterized by an

altogether rigid set of socio-political arrangements that bound both the manor lords and their peasant farmers to the land, began to dissolve. Large numbers of castles were constructed by individual lords during the eleventh and twelfth centuries in response to attacks by marauding Vikings and warfare conducted by manor lords seeking to extend their reach.

By the twelfth century the proliferation of artisan guilds and the industries they served set the stage for the growth and eventual independence of new urban settlements. On the Italian peninsula, Florence, Venice, Genoa and Pisa dominated late Medieval European commerce. At the same time, the spread of Catholicism and the establishment of the papacy created what amounted to a religious state in competition with those governed by self-proclaimed princes or coalitions of guild members and merchants. The stage was set for a rapid escalation in the pace of change. Population growth, the expansion of commerce, the movement of people into previously unsettled lands, the Crusades and the breakdown of feudalism were all factors. And, within the growing community of transnational scholars and intellectuals, the rediscovery of Aristotle's writings set the stage for the first serious challenge to the idea that knowledge could only be acquired by divine revelation.

In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas subjected the teachings of the Church to Aristotelian logic as a confirmation of his faith. In the process, he reintroduced scientific reasoning to matters of the intellect in competition with revelation as a legitimate source of knowledge. One conclusion he reached was that any body of law we generated was subordinate to the dictates of natural law (i.e., to Aquinas, reason):

A tyrannical law, through not being according to reason, is not a law, absolutely speaking, but rather a perversion of law; and yet in so far as it is something in the nature of a law, its aim is that the citizens be good. For it has the nature of law only in so far as it is an ordinance made by a superior to his subjects, and aims at being obeyed

by them; and this is to make them good, not absolutely, but with respect to that particular government.⁷⁹

Cautiously, Aquinas speaks out against the acts of the tyrant, but with deference to the divine right of the ruler to rule—even unjustly. The questions raised by successive generations of even freer thinkers were to bring great discomfort to those who for so long had held power unopposed. Neither tyrants nor those protected by entrenched privilege held by established institutions could forever constrain the innate human desire for discovery. And, as later observed by Henry George, discovery often takes the form of insights into how we relate to one another:

This tendency of popular discussions to take an ethical form has a cause. It springs from a law of the human mind; it rests upon a vague and instinctive recognition of what is probably the deepest truth we can grasp. That alone is wise which is just; that alone is enduring which is right.⁸⁰

We live for the most part in a state of imperfection; yet at least some of us sense there is something better, more just, more equitable that draws us to speculate and to visualize a different reality. Our powers of reason and logic enable us to search for a rational meaning to our existence, a meaning that revelation only partly satisfies in all but the most self-deluded *true believers*. We believe, in part, because we cannot accept that life exists simply because it does; there must be a deeper meaning to life than the mere cycle of birth to death. Thus, we establish the ideal as a guide in the pursuit of eternal survival. For some of us, the next life—that ideal existence—may be called heaven; for the here and now, the ideal is *justice*. The very real difficulty for even those most sincere in the pursuit of justice has been to come to an understanding of what *just* really means and by extension how the just society must be constituted.

Justice In The Republic Of Plato

The Athenians of the fifth century B.C. established the first empire that in certain material respects functioned under a representative form of government. Eventually, the mechanics of government and the system of law were put into the form of a written constitution, giving Western civilization its first *republic* (i.e., a society governed by the rule of law). As is generally known, rights of citizenship were actually granted to only a large minority; however, for this minority there was a considerable degree of equality of treatment under the constitution.

The *democracy* of Athens arose and evolved over several centuries. By the seventh century B.C. a feudal aristocracy had reduced the powers of the traditional monarchy to a largely titular role, in effect reinstating the authority based on kinship characteristic of an earlier tribal era. As would be repeated in the later Medieval period, feudalism gradually broke down under the pressure of land grabbing by the aristocratic families. Feudal arrangements were set aside and the commons were sold to peasant farmers (subject to mortgages) or leased at ever-increasing rents; as crops failed and peasant debt increased, deeds to land gradually fell into the hands of a relatively small oligarchy of wealthy landowners.

Control of the land also brought to the few considerable control over wealth and political power. The extent to which the peasant farmers were victimized by the privatization of land ownership is stated with great clarity by Aristotle, who writes: "*The cultivators with their wives and children were liable to be sold as slaves on failure to pay their rent.*"⁸¹ The enslavement of captives and territory taken in war added to the personal fortunes of the existing class of wealthy Athenians but also lifted the circumstances of a significant number of Athenian soldiers. History shows that military conquest has always provided an important (if not crucial) *safety valve* by which those in power retain their own large estates and still satisfy the desire for land among those they

govern. Over time, however, land monopoly denied the majority of all but a meager existence; the peasants and urban poor finally united to improve their condition and were close to a violent uprising when a somewhat broad based reform movement brought in new leadership. The most important leader of this faction was Solon, an Athenian aristocrat and merchant, who became the architect of the new constitution and other socio-political reforms. Under his remarkable direction, all Greeks were freed from slavery and their mortgage debts were canceled (a measure noted by his critics as greatly benefiting speculators, who learned of the measure before its introduction and borrowed heavily to acquire as much land as possible, knowing that this debt was to be forgiven).

Solon also introduced a progressive tax structure that exempted the poor from direct taxation and established the socio-political institutions upon which the Athenian democracy would flourish. A "*well-constituted state*" existed, he concluded, "*when the people obey the rulers, and the rulers obey the laws.*"⁸² Inherent in this statement, one could argue, is that *the laws are in accord with principles that guarantee equality of treatment and equality of opportunity to secure the social, political and economic goods necessary for a decent human existence.* Although falling considerably short of these conditions, Solon's new constitution and system of law created for the first time an "*aristocracy of wealth*" that "*put a premium upon intelligence rather than birth, stimulated science and education, and prepared, materially and mentally, for the cultural achievements of the Golden Age.*"⁸³ The Athenians gradually came to accept the rule of law (and, instinctively, that of moral principles) as supreme; they recognized the mere possession of power as usurpation. Aristotle makes two important points in support of this observation. First, that "*Constitutions are bad or good according as the common welfare is, or is not, their aim.*"⁸⁴ And, second, that "*Justice is not the will of the majority or of the wealthier, but that course of action which the moral aim of the state requires.*"⁸⁵

Aristotle continued the search for truth within the context of the Athenian democratic experience. Born in 384 B.C., Aristotle's intellectual curiosity and desire for learning was nurtured directly by Plato. The Greeks already had a long and glorious history, *documented* centuries earlier by Homer in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, works that remained a cornerstone of Greek learning. In the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, written by Thucydides while in exile (banished for his failure to perform well as a soldier), this great historian provided contemporary and future Athenians with the world's first great treatise on war. Upon completion of the work, he wrote:

I shall be satisfied if it is considered useful by all to know the plain truth of the events which happened and will according to human nature happen again in the same way. It was written not for the moment, but for all time.⁸⁶

Thucydides identified as the root cause of this war between Athens and Sparta the unquenchable thirst for geo-political power. Even the enlightened leadership of Pericles could not stop this conflict from erupting in 431 B.C. Rather remarkably, however, when he died two years later, he left the Athenian state able to sustain both the attacks from Sparta and the designs of the aristocracy to destroy the democracy. Athens had become both a welfare state and a colonial empire of no small standing. Pericles was in the vanguard of leaders possessed of a democratic spirit; among these democrats, some called for far more radical reforms designed to eliminate aristocratic privilege and even private property (particularly in land). Class warfare erupted that saw power change hands back and forth between the radicals and aristocrats and which was characterized by hundreds of murders and atrocities on each side. Will Durant quotes Thucydides at some length on this period, the Greek historian concluding:

[S]ociety became divided into camps in which no man trusted his fellow. ...Meanwhile the moderate part of the citizens perished between the two, either for not joining in the quarrel, or because envy would not suffer them to escape. ...The whole Hellenic world was convulsed.⁸⁷

And yet, the foundation put into place by Pericles withstood these pressures. "*Under this system of economic individualism tempered with socialistic regulation,*" writes Durant, "*wealth accumulates in Athens and spreads sufficiently to prevent a radical revolution*" so that "*to the end of ancient Athens private property remains secure.*"⁸⁸ What contributed to the fall of Athenian democracy was the loss of respect given to the liberty to think and speak one's mind, as exemplified by what happened to Socrates. Plato tells us Socrates was a soldier in youth and arose as an intellectual force from outside the ranks of the professional educators who generally dominated Athenian philosophical thinking. His personal habits were said to have exhibited considerable moderation. Will Durant, assessing the life of Socrates, concludes:

All in all he was fortunate; he lived without working, read without writing, taught without routine, drank without dizziness, and died before senility, almost without pain.⁸⁹

Louise Loomis clarifies that Socrates "*had no classroom, gave no formal instruction and took no pay.*"⁹⁰ Rather, "*[h]e only walked about the places where Athenians congregated, the streets, the market place and the gymnasium, or sat in the houses of acquaintances, talking cheerily to whoever stopped to listen.*"⁹¹ His contributions to moral philosophy revolved around his conviction that we are able to obtain absolute knowledge and that what constituted just behavior could be reasoned by contemplation of moral principles. His method, as is generally known if not fully understood, was to ask increasingly probing questions of those he engaged; his objective was to bring others (and

himself) to a truer understanding of human behavior. If, in the process, long held conventional wisdoms or prejudices fell, all the better. Even so, Socrates was himself captured by a limited scope of questioning. There were matters and relationships he accepted as just on their face. Although he believed individuals generally would adhere to moral principles if only they fully understood them, his own grasp of what constituted a moral system of law, of socio-political arrangements and institutions did not extend to the very basic principle that *the earth is the birthright of all persons equally*.

There continues to be much debate over the extent to which Plato faithfully conveyed the convictions held by Socrates. Unless additional writings of other contemporaries of Socrates yet to be discovered are found, the exact history of the period will never be fully appreciated. Nevertheless, the legacy of Socrates is rich and as embellished by Plato, lays the foundation of *Western* thought in moral and socio-political philosophy. His use of *dialectic* conversation tested the consistency in thinking of others while always searching for more concrete and universal definitions of the seemingly abstract. Plato's transcript of the trial of Socrates records the skepticism with which Socrates approached conventional wisdom and those who proclaimed to possess *the truth*. His challenge, during his trial, was to answer those who desired to condemn him for not being "*like other men*." To his accusers, Socrates responded:

Men of Athens, this reputation of mine has come of a certain sort of wisdom which I possess. If you ask me what kind of wisdom, I reply, wisdom such as may perhaps be attained by man, for to that extent I am inclined to believe that I am wise; ...What then can he [Delphi] mean when he says that I am the wisest of men? ...I reflected that if I could only find a man wiser than myself, then I might go to the god with a refutation in my hand. ...Accordingly I went to one who had the reputation of wisdom, and observed him...and the result was as follows: When I began to talk with him, I could not help thinking that he was not really wise, although he was thought wise by many,

and still wiser by himself; and thereupon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me, and his enmity was shared by several who were present and heard me. So I left him, saying to myself, as I went away: Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better off than he is—for he knows nothing, and thinks that he knows; I neither know nor think that I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him.⁹²

So frequently did Socrates find shortcomings in the wisdom of the self-proclaimed that by his later years the list of his antagonists had become long indeed. He thought democracy a dangerous, and ill-conceived means by which to select public officials, calling on Athenians to create an aristocracy of talent. At the same time he condemned inherited position as far worse than democracy. For all this, he was neither activist nor a leader of an organized school of intellectual thought. He explained his reasons to the “*men of Athens*” at his trial:

[I]f I had engaged in politics, I should have perished long ago, and done no good either to you or to myself. ...no man who goes to war with you or any other multitude, honestly striving against the many lawless and unrighteous deeds which are done in a state, will save his life; he who will fight for the right, if he would live even for a brief space, must have a private station and not a public one.⁹³

One reason why the philosophical insights of Socrates continue to remain of interest to so many is, I suspect, that so much of what he had to say appeals to those of us who have experienced either severe tyranny or dwindling liberty. This is in accord with Will Durant’s observation that his “*individualist and intellectualist ethic, [with] its emphasis on conscience as above the law became one of the cardinal tenets of Christianity.*”⁹⁴ We are today fully aware that Christian values suffered the ravages of a rigid and hierarchically-structured state religion,

beginning with Rome and, in very recognizable respects, continuing to this day. For the Renaissance skeptic or Christian reformer, exposure to the writings of Socrates provide a new context for thinking about what constituted a good life. The idea that doing good and behaving morally carried their own rewards not related to an afterlife broke through centuries of carefully crafted conventional wisdoms. Such ideas struck at the heart of institutional control.

Plato came to share with Socrates an unfavorable view of democracy in the abstract, as well as *the Democracy* of Pericles and Athens. Various historians have speculated the degree to which his sentiments can be traced to the treatment Socrates received under Athenian democracy. As a result, Plato chose education as his career. He was instrumental in the founding of a university of the sciences, called *Academy*, in Athens—the first *Western* effort to provide a center of education to a transnational intellectual community. Aristotle joined the faculty twenty years later.

Unfortunately, the democracy that had been the Athenian contribution to civilization was severely damaged by war with Sparta. Athenian economic power would be rebuilt, but the power to hold an empire together was gone. Sparta's ruling autocracy, on the other hand, quickly became corrupted by the wealth gained in tribute from her sister city-states. War with Persia brought the final downfall of Spartan power and resulted in the loss of all Greek colonies in Asia. Yet, by the time Plato opened *The Academy* in 387 B.C., Athenian commercial power and superior organization had re-emerged to a considerable degree, although slaves now replaced many citizen owners as the primary source of labor working the land, in addition to their more traditional role in the mines:

Industry and trade were now the substance of her economic life....Most of the farmers of prewar days were dead; many of the survivors were too discouraged to go back to their ruined holdings, and sold them at low prices to absentee owners who

could afford long-term investments. In this way, and through the eviction of peasant debtors, the ownership of Attica passed into a few families, who worked many of the large estates with slaves. The mines... were reopened, fresh victims were sent into the pits, and new riches were transmuted out of silver ore and human blood.⁹⁵

Athens was becoming a society of *haves* and *have nots*, as landless peasants competed for meager employment in the urban community. Silver pouring from the mines drove up the prices of everyday goods for the already large numbers of poor. In the process, the delicate balance in wealth ownership that had preserved and nurtured Athenian democracy disappeared. In only one generation, the number of citizens declined to half the 43,000 existing in 430 B.C. The poorer citizens managed to gain control of the Athenian Assembly and pushed through a broad range of measures to redistribute wealth and tax those with high incomes (making no distinction between those who *earned* their personal wealth by their labor and those who acquired *unearned* fortunes through monopolistic privileges and privately appropriating the rent of land). A virtual war erupted between the classes. Increasingly, Greek soldiers fought as mercenaries in service to Persia and against their homeland. The Athenian leaders embarked on one last desperate attempt to rebuild their lost colonial empire but were defeated by a coalition of weaker city-states. The vacuum in power was soon filled by Syracuse (on the island of Sicily), which by popular uprising in 357 B.C. came under the rule of Dion, one of Plato's disciples and colleagues at *The Academy*. However, before Plato's influence could be felt, Dion was assassinated and dictatorship re-established.

Aid came unexpectedly to the people of Syracuse from Timoleon in Corinth, whose small army deposed Dionysius II and "*restored freedom and democracy in... Sicily.*"⁹⁶ Perhaps Timoleon is the type of individual Plato had in mind for the role of *philosopher-king*.

Plato became the great teacher and popularizer of the Socratic method. And, consistent with what he learned from Socrates, Plato sought truth above all. At the heart of Plato's epistemology is his desire to prove Socrates was correct in asserting that right conduct depended upon an understanding of principles. To do this, Plato turns his attentions to the key relationships that in a later era absorb the political economist: the relationships between persons, between the individual and groups and between the individual and the State. He raised to a high level the debate over the societal issues of his time, and the quest for justice stands at the forefront of his concerns.

Critical of the thirst for extravagance and luxury displayed by so many of his fellow citizens, Plato is a voice in the wilderness calling for changes he felt were essential to the survival of the Athenian state. His immediate concern is to effect a return to leadership by an aristocracy of talent, educated to very specific standards:

[O]ur first business will be to supervise the making of fables and legends, rejecting all which are unsatisfactory; and we shall induce nurses and mothers to tell their children only those which we have approved.⁹⁷

His religious beliefs allow for a free will, and reason directs him to socio-political arrangements "*for the cause of evils.*"⁹⁸ For leadership, then, "*a high value must be set upon truthfulness.*"⁹⁹ Yet, Plato empowers these same leaders with discretion to violate this principle to further the interests of the State:

If anyone...is to practice deception, either on the country's enemies or on its citizens, it must be the Rulers of the commonwealth, acting for its benefit; no one else may meddle with this privilege.¹⁰⁰

This power to invoke situational ethics is given by Plato to the highest level of Guardians because they have earned their positions on

merit, rather than birth or social position, and live without the temptations of private property. In this way does Plato attempt to remove the threat of class war, of a disparity of "*riches and poverty*" where "[t]he one produces luxury and idleness, the other low standards of conduct and workmanship; and both have a subversive tendency."¹⁰¹ Thus, Plato acknowledges that the possession of extreme luxury by some while others have nothing at all cannot occur without injustice present as a cause. At heart a realist, Plato sees that a universal doctrine of human rights is threatened under socio-political arrangements evolving out of the natural dynamics that produce empire-building states. Only by a wholesale restructuring of society within the confines of the State's institutional framework does he see civilization advancing; excess and luxury he identifies as the source of all corruption (and the underlying cause of one man's desire to enslave another):

[T]he consideration of luxury may help us to discover how justice and injustice take root in society. ...

The healthy [society] will not be big enough now; it must be swollen up with a whole multitude of callings not ministering to any bare necessity... And we shall want more servants. ...

The country, too, which was large enough to support the original inhabitants, will now be too small. If we are to have enough pasture and plough land, we shall have to cut off a slice of our neighbors' territory; and if they too are not content with necessities, but give themselves up to getting unlimited wealth, they will want a slice of ours.¹⁰²

Either he accepted that by nature some people are destined to be slaves, or that the desire to enslave others was such a deeply instinctive human desire that the best justice could demand was to mitigate the treatment slave holders imparted on their human property. In the *Laws*,

he warns that how one treats one's slaves is a clear indication of individual morality:

[W]e should tend them carefully, not only out of regard to them, but yet more out of respect to ourselves. And the right treatment of slaves is not to maltreat them, and to do them, if possible, even more justice than those who are our equals; for he who really and naturally reverences justice and really hates injustice, is discovered in his dealings with that class of man to whom he can easily be unjust.¹⁰³

His world in chaos, the democracy corrupt and the city-states constantly at war with one another while threatened externally, one should not be surprised that Plato's concept of the ideal society evolved to take on communitarian and tribal characteristics. In this equalitarian environment all are to be producers, working the land as farmers, and wealth above that deemed necessary for a decent human existence is, he argues, common property to be administered by the State. His understanding of how people behave brought him to conclude that such a society could function only under a heavy hand. Will Durant suggests what might have occurred had the republic as contemplated by Plato's actually come to be, concluding that Plato would "*himself have been the first victim of his Utopias.*"¹⁰⁴ Indeed, Plato was in many ways reconstructing a romanticized past in order to build a utopian future.

One of his overriding concerns centered on the consequences of increasing specialization, what political economists would come to describe as the *division of labor*. He observed that as a people distance themselves from the simpler existence to "*collect rich materials, like gold and ivory*" the attraction of even still greater power and wealth directs them to "*once more enlarge [the] community.*" There is movement into the thinly populated frontier, of course, but expansion into lands that are fertile and otherwise rich in mineral resources, must inevitably come at the expense of others. What few realize is that there are serious costs imposed on the victors as well as the vanquished:

We need not say yet whether war does good or harm, but only that we have discovered its origin in desires which are the most fruitful source of evils both to individuals and to states.¹⁰⁵

To construct and maintain a utopian meritocracy, Plato argued that the Rulers needed to be free of other occupations. In other words, free from having to labor in the production of wealth. Their role was to be purely that of service to the State. To the extent such services facilitated production, they would contribute indirectly to the production of wealth. The fundamental issue was and is whether a well-ordered society is also a highly productive one or merely one that masks a high level of frustration on the part of individuals whose liberty is thwarted. Most often, the actions of those who rule reduce the level of wealth production than would be the case if justice prevailed. Conversely, the closer a society is to just governance, the greater will be the wealth produced. Reason discloses the inherent wisdom and justice contained in the principle of distributing rewards in relation to demonstrated achievements. A meritocracy that widely encompasses and protects equality of opportunity will by virtue of its day-to-day operation come very close to meeting reasonable standards for the just society. What stands in the way of establishing (even Plato's far more coercive form of) meritocracy, declares Plato, is our very nature:

What reason remains for preferring justice to the extreme of injustice, when common belief and the best authorities promise us the fulfillment of our desires in this life and the next, if only we conceal our ill-doing under a veneer of decent behavior? The upshot is that no man possessed of superior powers of mind or person or rank or wealth will set any value on justice; he is more likely to laugh when he hears it praised. A man may refrain from wrong because it revolts some instinct he is graced with or because he has come to know the truth; no one else is virtuous of his own will; it is only lack of spirit or the infirmity of age or some other weakness that makes men

condemn the iniquities they have not the strength to practice. This is easily seen: give such a man the power, and he will be the first to use it to the utmost.¹⁰⁶

And, in truth, few have resisted the urge to exercise power to the fullest extent permitted once such power comes into one's possession. Plato thought to nurture self-constraint by means of institutional controls and the removal of temptations. This path seems easier, in fact, than the one I propose, which is, to engage all of humanity in an ongoing study and discussion of moral principles and moral behavior, the objective being to—in time—dislodge from our value systems the idea that moral and cultural relativism are defensible on principle.

ON BEING HUMAN / A RETROSPECTIVE

The social scientist can reasonably ask whether history reveals much change in our behavior since the time of Socrates and Plato. I suggest not, although a larger number among us have demonstrated a level of commitment to moral principles that are transnational as well as respectful of commonly-shared rights. However, we continue to live exposed to a level of criminal behavior (i.e., a form of license exercised outside the boundaries of liberty) that seems less aberration than consequence, arising directly out of our socio-political structure. Respect for public officials in most countries is generally low, as is respect for the authority exercised by those who wield power. Societies whose value systems rest on arbitrary and hierarchically-directed positive law function only so long as fear governs the behavior of those oppressed. The ancient empires demonstrate that such societies are consistently plagued by internal strife and external aggression. Moreover, the productive capabilities of such societies are directed to the stockpiling of weaponry and support of a standing military. As we are painfully aware, the weapons of our era are now so potentially

destructive that their use could very well bring an end to life on this planet. Our only salvation is a commitment to behavior consistent with moral principles.

As we (optimistically and hopefully) enter an era in which offensive warfare is no longer considered a viable policy option for the State, the modern warrior-protectors can be expected to respond with efforts to preserve their positions of privilege. This condition already threatens a significant portion of world's population. In countless societies, billions of people daily live with the threat of physical torture or violent death at the hands of agents of the State or factions controlling a limited geography. We continue to struggle against oppression, intolerance, greed and fanaticism—a struggle the outcome of which is far from clear. If there is reason for cautious optimism, the source is as much our instinctive reaction to the threat of ultimate destruction as our powers of self-control. Still, this is something, and we so far remain alive to contemplate the wisdom or destructiveness of our actions.

The formation of the State has long made possible the use by leader subgroups of pronouncements, edicts or legislation to give legitimacy to actions. Only in fairly recent times, however, has meaningful debate over such actions involved more than the privileged few. As countless generations experienced, power relationships have dictated the form of positive law from the very earliest stages of societal expansion. Within the more *primitive* societies not subjected to the encroachments of modernization, on the other hand, a mutual respect for one another has consistently operated to foster cooperation in pursuit of mutual survival. In one of the great ironies of the human experience, the appearance of specialization and hierarchical structure places greater demands on a society for cooperation; yet there always arises conflict over the greater aggregate wealth produced, in the end leading to the destruction of this accumulated wealth.

With the benefit of hindsight and a wealth of historical information, we are in a far better position to participate in a peaceful process of

bringing about appropriate changes to our societal structures than has previously existed. To do so, we must resort first and foremost to reasoned moral principles of what constitutes a just society. Revealed truth will not suffice, although an acceptance that we, as members of the same species, share rights of equality of treatment under positive law and equality of opportunity in the competition for economic goods seems to come easiest to those who are already asking questions about what is wrong with our societies. Historian John Lord, writing in the nineteenth century, suggested that the commandments received by Moses (whether divinely delivered or merely inspired) provided the basis for establishing the just society, if only they could be secured:

The ten commandments seem to be the foundation of the subsequent and more minute code which Moses gave to the Jews; and it is interesting to see how its great principles have entered, more or less, into the laws of Christian nations from the decline of the Roman Empire. They may seem severe in some of their applications, but never unjust; and as long as the world endures, the relations between man and man are to be settled on lofty moral grounds. An elevated morality is the professed aim of all enlightened lawgivers; and the prosperity of nations is built upon it, for it is righteousness which exalteth them. Culture is desirable; but the welfare of nations is based on morals rather than on aesthetics. All the ordinances of Moses tend to this end.¹⁰⁷

The principles espoused by Moses did become part of a moral code given lip service by the Church hierarchy and a significant portion of the general population. In no group, however, have these principles been fully adopted or adhered to in a manner that suggests they are understood on more than a surface level. Moreover, where attempts have been made to incorporate such principles into positive law, the end result has often been to pervert the author's original intent. Initially, at least, Moses provided the Israelites with a system of laws based on a human rights doctrine—laws that were *moral* as opposed to

natural, recognizing that although human behavior is subject to certain natural laws (that is, limited by the extent of our *free will*), nature is not necessarily moral. The very existence of the ten commandments indicates that societal intervention is necessary to ensure a moral order will prevail. In an 1884 speech before the San Francisco Young Men's Hebrew Association, Henry George reflected on the legacy of the teachings of Moses:

It matters not when or by whom were compiled the books popularly attributed to Moses; it matters not how much of the code there given may be the survivals of more ancient usage or the amplifications of a later age; its great features bear the stamp of a mind far in advance of people and time, of a mind that beneath effects sought for causes, of a mind that drifted not with the tide of events but aimed at a definite purpose.¹⁰⁸

For George, Moses represented all those who had before him taken the high road in the face of tremendous temptations and against those who materially benefited by the status quo. *"It was not an empire, such as had reached full development in Egypt or existed in rudimentary patriarchal form in the tribes around, that Moses aimed to found,"* declared George in his speech. *"Nor was it a republic where the freedom of the citizen rested on the servitude to the state. It was a commonwealth based upon the individual. A commonwealth in which, in the absence of deep poverty, the manly virtues that spring from personal independence should harden into a national character—a commonwealth in which the family affections might knit their tendrils around each member, binding with links stronger than steel the various parts into the living whole."*¹⁰⁹ George's greatest hope was that we would someday again recognize in the laws attributed to Moses the basis for a return to moral principles.

In practice, unfortunately, the adherence to principle by the ancient peoples was short-lived. Christianity in the West and Islam in the East replaced paganism; however, once institutionalized, these religions

turned conservative and operated through the existing structures of the State to stamp out all resistance and impose their orthodoxy on everyone within their reach. Near the end of the eleventh century, Pope Urban II would even call together the secular leaders of Europe's feudal states in an effort to resurrect in the Church's name the old Roman empire. What then became *the Crusades to liberate the Holy Lands* from Moslem control revealed just how small of a relationship remained between the doctrines of organized religion and the moral principles attributed to Jesus Christ. The victories of armies who carried Christian banners and were accompanied by priests liberated no one from tyranny; rather, they were responsible for massive plundering and slaughter of thousands of Jews, Moslems and even other Christians who adhered to the doctrines of the Eastern orthodox church.

Despite their aggressive behavior generally, a significant number of Crusaders eventually established landed estates in the midst of the Moslem world and did not return home. Necessity softened attitudes and a degree of toleration emerged toward Moslems. A smaller number adopted the style of living of the East, and subsequent generations acquired the affinity for their adopted homelands that always occurs. These earliest Crusaders successfully negotiated the disengagement of a later army raised by Louis VII of France and Conrad II, leader of the German princes. Life for these feudal lords at the fringe of the Moslem world was quite agreeable. Below the surface, however, the Moslem thirst for revenge against the Crusaders festered and grew. When in 1187 the Islamic armies under Saladin retook Jerusalem, the Moslem leader sought to revenge his people massacred by the Christian knights. Rather than plead for mercy, however, the Christian warriors threatened to kill the entire population, destroy the city and take as many Islamic soldiers as possible with them to their deaths. Saladin yielded to the threat, and a large ransom was agreed to for the release of those the Christian princes of Europe felt some obligation toward; thousands of others were abandoned to slavery. However, when the

Avenge
↓
?



Egyptian leader Baibars in 1289 recaptured the Mediterranean port of Acre from the remaining Crusaders, some 60,000 Christians were massacred at the hands of his troops.

The only lasting territorial gains by Christian forces occurred in the Iberian peninsula. In Portugal, the approaching Crusaders offered an ultimatum to the Moslems occupying Lisbon:

You are holding our cities and landed possessions unjustly...But since by the spread of your race and uninterrupted occupation you have now held the city for a long time, we are displaying towards you our usual benevolence: only surrender into our hands...your castle, and each of you may preserve the liberties which he has hitherto enjoyed; for we do not wish to drive you out from such ancient seats.¹¹⁰

The lessons of history and how so-called Christian knights had behaved under similar circumstances elsewhere were familiar to the Islamic leaders, one of whom responded:

I perceive that you have your words very well under control. You are not transported by your speech, nor has it carried you further than you meant to go. It has been directed to a single end, namely, to the taking of our city. But I cannot wonder enough concerning you, for while a single forest or a district suffices for many elephants and lions, neither the land nor the sea is enough for you. Verily, it is not the want of possession but ambition of the mind which drives you on.¹¹¹

To what degree the Islamic settlers were any more respectful of the right of others to live among them in peace is a subject yielding no clear answers. Empire-building had dominated the Mediterranean region for many centuries. People had migrated from place to place and had absorbed or been absorbed by those already there. Any claims to sovereignty over territory were—when moral principle is considered—devoid of substance. No individual or group of individuals has a greater claim than any others to a specific portion of the earth. Such a claim

violates the fundamental human right of equal opportunity for survival. The earth, after all, has been here long before any of our species appeared, and none of us alive today has had more than a very brief tenure on the planet. Even those deeds to a portion of the earth awarded to individuals by some governing power carry only so much force as the State is willing and able to impose against the claims and intrusions of others. Warfare, more than any other means, has provided to the victors the ability to divide the spoils; and, the distribution of land has throughout history represented the bulk of the spoils.

In the end, the medieval states of Eurasia were still too small and disunited to capture and hold large foreign territories for long periods. Control over land shifted again and again. After interest in the Crusades dissipated, for example, the feudal lords simply turned on one another. The Catholic hierarchy in Rome emerged from the Crusades as a major landholder and collector of rents from peasant producers—to an extent far larger than any feudal lord of Europe. This gave to the Church enormous power which its leaders exercised in the same manner as their secular counterparts. The teachings of Moses and of Jesus Christ were for all practical purposes forgotten, displaced by a state religion that sanctioned greed, cruelty, intolerance, theft and murder. No more serious indictment of the Christian Church exists than that of the *Inquisition*. The Christian ideal of the just society fell victim to the power of institutionalized privilege. And yet, what would once again bring to light the fundamental nature of moral principles—and the philosophy of cooperative-individualism—were the philosophic writings of a pagan antiquity.

Aristotle Lives

While the medieval lords fought one another in an endless series of minor empire-building adventures, the intellectual legacy of antiquity

survived in the East and in the Moslem-held land of the Iberian peninsula. Historian Paul Kristeller has concluded, in fact, that Aristotle's teachings "*attained among the Arabs an authority and doctrinal preponderance that he had never possessed in Greek antiquity.*"¹¹² The Moslem philosopher and legal theorist Averroes (1126-1198) wrote that Aristotle:

... was the wisest of the Greeks and constituted and completed logic, physics, and metaphysics. I say that he constituted these sciences, because all the works on these subjects previous to him do not deserve to be mentioned and were completely eclipsed by his writings. I say that he put the finishing touches on these sciences, because none of those who have succeeded him up to our time, to wit, during nearly fifteen hundred years, have been able to add anything to his writings or to find in them any error of any importance.¹¹³

The study of Aristotle's *Logic* and *Metaphysics* was brought by scholars into the universities of *Christian* Europe and remained as primary source readings on these subjects until well into the seventeenth century. Where the medieval scholars departed from Aristotle was in their insistence that any logic that conflicted with revealed truth, as determined by the hierarchical leadership of orthodox Christianity, was inherently flawed. Even Thomas Aquinas allowed no room for doubt or questioning of this position. The unquestioning obedience to orthodoxy and acceptance of conventional wisdom would come under challenge beginning with Protestant attacks on established state religion. Atheism would also emerge as a creed with an expanding following.

By way of Aristotle, Moslem and Christian scholars were also lured into the ancient dialogue involving the meaning of justice. Aristotle divided justice into two separate realms. The first dealt with the formal, positive law, invoked and enforced by the State. The second revolved around ethics and morality in everyday relations between individual

citizens within society. Central to Aristotle's thinking was that the individual existed foremost as citizen, and only at the beneficence and behest of the State. Acceptance of this conventional wisdom by Aristotle reveals a logical inconsistency with the reality of life in Greek society, for questioning the authority and the wisdom of those who acted on behalf of the State had become possible in Athens with the creation of a legislative assembly. Practice conflicted with principle, and very troubling questions came to the fore. "*To be able to say...laws were in fact wrong, it must be said that they were wrong according to some standard. What, then, was this standard?*" asks John Zane in *The Story Of Law*.¹¹⁴ In an attempt to answer his own question, Zane goes on to explain that the Greeks had in introducing participatory socio-political arrangements been forced to acknowledge that the positive laws of the State were not the result of divine guidance but arose out of the body politic. They then disengaged, preferring not to pursue this line of reasoning more deeply. They acknowledged that a standard existed, but did so independent of the actual laws adopted and enforced by the State. With this, the Greek contribution to socio-political philosophy reached an impasse:

In the application of this standard to human laws, there was necessarily created a distinction between human law actually in force and being obeyed, which was called the positive law, and that other kind of ideal, unchangeable, and eternal law, whenever the laws differed from what the mind of the observer would prescribe as eternally just and right. But mankind has always been dominated by phrases, and when it was said that the laws were not in accordance with natural law, the hearer accepted the statement. The hearer did not go further and say that what this man means is that the human laws do not correspond with what this man has in his mind as that which he has reasoned out and decided that his own reason would decree if it were making the laws. But it is plain that this natural law of reason was merely another human construction.¹¹⁵

Where the questions of what constitutes just socio-political arrangements are concerned, reason has not only found few receptive and open minds but has suffered greatly under positive law. Even Aristotle could not rise above the conventional wisdom of his day to question the right of those in power to rule, however poorly. His concern was that society exhibit stability and order, that slaves be treated well, for example, not because this was just but because they would otherwise rebel.¹¹⁶ Philip II, King of Macedonia, not only engaged Aristotle to tutor his son, Alexander, but also to “*direct the restoration and re-peopling of Stageirus, which had been laid waste in the war with Olynthus, and to draw up a code of laws for it.*”¹¹⁷ Aristotle proved to be a conservative in his socio-political beliefs but an innovator in his epistemology. Empiricism emerged out of Aristotle’s reliance on observation and the senses to gain a more reliable understanding of his environment. In so doing, he brought us closer to the realization that much which on the surface seems in the realm of the supernatural is knowable. The importance he gives to the pursuit of knowledge is crucial to his concept of individual ethics, as conveyed in the following passage of *Nicomachean Ethics*:

We had perhaps better consider the universal good and discuss thoroughly what is meant by it, although such an inquiry is made an uphill one by the fact that the Forms have been introduced by friends of our own. Yet it would perhaps be thought to be better, indeed to be our duty, for the sake of maintaining the truth even to destroy what touches us closely, especially as we are philosophers or lovers of wisdom; for, while both are dear, piety requires us to honour truth above our friends.¹¹⁸

One can only postulate the reasons why Aristotle and other ancient socio-political philosophers were never able to fully distance themselves from conventional wisdom. Certainly, an absence of direct experience living under conditions of extensive individual *freedom* meant that an understanding of just principles could only come from contemplative

✓

thought. When he writes that "*the state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual,*"¹¹⁹ Aristotle he is telling us that contemplation of existence without the State is neither rational nor civilized; and, therefore, something less than the "*perfected*" existence of Aristotle's experience. And yet, not until the rediscovery of Aristotle, Plato and the arguments and debates of these ancient philosophers did the promise of an objective pursuit of knowledge emerge. The *Enlightenment* blossomed as medieval scholars gradually began to question not only the rigid nature of the Aristotelian system but also that of their own religious doctrine and societal hierarchies.

From The East: Another Clash Of Titans

The armies of Catholic Europe captured Constantinople in 1204, effectively destroying the unity that had characterized the Eastern empire of Byzantium. By the fourteenth century, the Byzantine lands were completely overtaken by Moslem Turks who were well on their way to building the next empire of domination, one that would continue for some four hundred years. Ironically, these periodic thrusts by the Turks into eastern and central Europe helped push the smaller states into alliances that eventually brought them under the control of centralized monarchies. For their part, the Turks barely took notice of these changes occurring among the European peoples. By the middle of the fifteenth century the Turks had gained control over the Balkans and Asia Minor, extending as far west as the Danube River (modern Rumania) and north into southern Russia. The Sultan Selim I (1512-1520) conquered Egypt and drove eastward into India.

The Turkish Ottoman state that emerged was structured on a strict hierarchical socio-political foundation, yet with considerable elements of a meritocracy that permitted opportunity for advancement in class and privilege. All those who comprised the ruling class were, however,

categorized as slaves; their rights to life and property were tied directly to the unquestioned authority of the Sultan. The concept of citizenship—although certainly known to Turkish scholars familiar with the Greek classics—was not incorporated into the socio-political arrangements of the Ottoman system. Islam was the state religion, and the sacred law of Islam was handed down by the Sheikh-ul-Islam, whose power was in some ways even greater than that of the Sultan. A Moslem monastic order, the Akhis, represented a counterbalance of sorts to the Turkish state, practicing great tolerance toward non-Moslems and persistence in the use of the teachings of Mohammed to fight against tyrannical government.

More threatening to the Ottoman Turks than the disunited Europeans or internal dissenters were the Mongols, who had been advancing rapidly westward across central Asia during the early and mid-thirteenth century. The Ottoman ruler Baibars had turned back one Mongol army in 1260. Then, in 1402 the Mongol ruler Timur again challenged the Turks, defeating them at Ankara; yet, within twenty years the Mongols were forced to retreat from their frontier holdings in the face of superior Turkish forces.

During the early thirteenth century, Gengis Khan became leader of the Mongols. He took advantage of conflict and incompetent leadership in China to unite the Mongol tribes and attempt the conquest of the Asian continent. After defeating the armies of the Kin empire and capturing the capital, Peking, Gengis Khan then rode against the empire of Kharismia, whose leaders had been foolish enough to murder several of the Khan's envoys. After defeating the Kharismians, the Mongols continued their westward march until they met and defeated the Russians near the Black Sea. Gengis Khan died in 1227 with the Mongol empire stretching from the Dnieper River in the west, eastward to the Pacific Ocean. Under the leadership of Gengis Khan's three sons—Mangu, Kublai and Hulagu—control over China was consolidated.

Kublai Khan deserves considerable credit for his enlightened efforts to temper Mongol rule with a degree of respect for his subjects. He was instrumental in developing the physical and governmental infrastructure of China during his reign and gradually integrated his Mongol tribesmen into Chinese culture; however, after his death the administration of the Chinese state fell back into the hands of Chinese bureaucrats. Although the Chinese were more accustomed to the intricacies of governing a far-flung empire, they resisted innovation and experimentation, an attitude that would cost the Chinese dearly in the centuries to come.

In 1368 revolt brought the Mongol Yuan) dynasty to an end, displaced by a narrowly nationalistic Chinese dynasty, the Ming. External invasion by the Manchus of northeastern China resulted in the capture of Peking and establishment of the Ch'ing dynasty which, in its early period brought great prosperity and unity to the Chinese people.

Overall, China's history has been characterized by centuries of conflict between various tribal groups that thwarted the advance of a cooperative Chinese civilization. During the period of Rome's decline in the West, however, there was relative stability in China. The system of land tenure was far more equitably designed than in the West, with most land owned by small-scale farmers (who were taxed according to the value of the land they controlled). Neither slavery nor the large landed estates that plagued Roman society existed in China. With the arrival of the T'ang dynasty in the seventh century, a unified Chinese state, centrally governed, came into being. The T'ang emperor Tai-tsung opened his domain to the outside, receiving Christian and Moslem emissaries, permitting them to preach their religions and even ordering a Chinese translation of *the Bible*. Such openness could only occur during a time of tremendous confidence in the legitimacy and permanence of one's power. And, at this point, there was no state religion in China to press its vested interests upon the emperor.

The earliest written history from China begins with the conquest of the Shang people in the eleventh century B.C. by a warrior-led group of tribes from western China, the Chou. Socio-political arrangements were dominated by an hereditary aristocracy whose privilege was sanctioned by mythological links to the gods. The pattern of the privileged few controlling and oppressing the many was very much in evidence in ancient China, yet in the grand tradition of self-justification the Chou rulers claimed the gods had instructed them to liberate the Shang people from the tyrannical rule of indigenous despots, to be replaced, of course, by a Chou tyranny of even greater severity. Over time, feudal lords acquired independence of action over their vassal states and eventually came to challenge the central authority itself. Civil war ensued, and when the fighting ended the Chou dynasty was left greatly weakened; northern China was effectively left without a strong, central authority. For many centuries thereafter lesser lords fought one another in almost routine fashion.

This was the time of the birth of Confucius (551 B.C.) an unpropertied son of a minor aristocrat who, largely self-taught, became one of history's great moral philosophers. His role in life was that of teacher and cultivator of talent; he opposed the determination of one's position in life based on hereditary privilege and sought to impart on his students and others the benefits of establishing a meritocracy. As one scholar of Chinese civilization has written:

His whole system of ethics and, indeed, most of his philosophy seem to have been based upon a consideration of what is the nature of the human being. He did not make either of two mistakes that have sometimes been made in this connection. On the one hand, he did not think of the individual as existing quite separately from society. On the other, he did not think of society as a kind of metaphysical entity that is so completely prior to the individual that the individual can hardly be said to exist, except as he is wholly absorbed in it.

Confucius believed that men are essentially social beings. They are to a very considerable extent (though by no means totally) made what they are by society. On the other hand, since society is nothing more than the interaction of men, society is made what it is by the individuals who compose it. Confucius believed that the conscience of the individual must equally forbid him either to withdraw from society or to surrender his moral judgment to it.¹²⁰

Confucius and his followers operated as a shadow government within his province and as a societal conscience arguing the case for adherence to moral principles and against the ritual and doctrine that characterized the state religions. He sought knowledge and understanding from the same use of reason, observation and analysis that is employed by the political economist. On the acquisition of knowledge, Herrlee Creel quotes a passage from the *Analects* of Confucius:

[One should] hear much, leave to one side that which is doubtful, and speak with due caution concerning the remainder. ...See much, but leave to one side that of which the meaning is not clear, and act carefully with regard to the rest.¹²¹

What Confucius seemed to appreciate before any other moral philosopher was that, as members of the same species, we are essentially equal and deserve equal opportunity to rise in life according to our individual talents and abilities. Observing that many people behaved without regard to the principles that would secure a just society, Confucius assigned to government the role of defending these principles. The key to widespread support for such a government was, he argued, a program of universal education that would create an enlightened citizenry. With understanding there comes a moral sense, and hopefully an acceptance of the moral obligation to one another in society.

Justice also depended upon the reform of the family—the obedience of children to parents and of wife to husband—tempered always by behavior governed by moral law. The following passage, also from the *Analects*, presents what to Confucius were the cementing elements of just government:

Tsze-kung asked about government. The Master said, “(The requisites of government) are three: that there should be sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the confidence of the people in their ruler. Tsze-kung said, “If it cannot be helped, and one of these must be dispensed with, which of the three should be foregone first?” “The military equipment,” said the Master. Tsze-kung asked again, “If it cannot be helped, and one of the remaining two must be dispensed with, which of them should be foregone?” The Master answered, “Part with the food. From of old, death has been the lot of all men; but if the people have no faith (in their rulers) there is no standing (for the state). ...”¹²²

And what is it that individuals of good will, adhering to moral principles would do as rulers:


When the Great Principle (of the Great Similarity) prevails, the whole world becomes a republic; they elect men of talents, virtue and ability; they talk about sincere agreement, and cultivate universal peace. ...Each man has his rights, and each woman her individuality safeguarded. They produce wealth, disliking that it should be thrown away upon the ground, but not wishing to keep it for their own gratification. Disliking idleness they labor, but not alone with a view to their own advantage.¹²³

What Confucius described as the cooperative society has been compared by more than a few historians sympathetic with the doctrine of state-socialism to the vision of utopian communism expressed by Karl Marx. At least one significant difference is readily apparent; namely, the faith placed by Confucius in the contributions of the individual, but particularly the individual properly educated in moral

principles and ethical values. Confucius and Marx each recognized in institutionalized privilege a fundamental injustice. Yet, Marx conveyed none of the human warmth or personal magnetism that made Confucius not simply a man who had great ideas but a great man as well. Marx elaborated an ideal; Confucius taught by example. In the end, neither succeeded—Marx because he critically misunderstood the lessons of political economy and history, Confucius because his disciples and later followers diverted from his example and his teachings.

The Long Road Back To Principle

Amidst the turmoil and strife surrounding the rise and fall of the empires of antiquity, reason periodically made its presence felt. Lessons were learned and a considerable degree of understanding achieved, if on the part of an all too small group of critical thinkers. Their legacy of ? became and remains twisted by widespread ignorance, by the blindness of *the true believer* and the control of socio-political institutions by those who seek only to preserve their privilege (i.e., most often, to maintain the status quo). Despite the ignorance spread by individuals within these factions, the human quest for understanding has always been there, moving against the defensive positions of conventional wisdom until a point of weakness is found, then pushing through in a burst of enlightening energy. This has occurred over and over again, in all societies that reach the stage where specialization and the division of labor in the realm of wealth production are matched by a hierarchical socio-political structure, societies in which conflict overcomes our natural inclination toward cooperation. History tells us that it is only under such conditions that the unconscious appreciation for just relations comes to absorb the contemplative energies of a certain few.



These individuals are at first voices in the wilderness and are often silenced, by means of ostracism or violence.

Although not silenced, the teachings of Jesus Christ and Mohammed have been tragically twisted to satisfy the lust for power of those who have used organized religion as an instrument of the State or as an instrument of personal power. Neither of these two remarkable individuals left anything written in their own hand, and so we are wholly dependent upon their disciples for a record of their teachings. Confucius, on the other hand, joins Plato and Aristotle as transmitters of ideas through the written word. The former were prophets; the others, philosopher-scientists. They left for us much that is worthwhile and much that must be questioned; most importantly, their individual efforts confirm the unity of our kind at its best. For, Jacob Bronowski reminds us:

When the inquiring man analyzes the facts as he finds them, he has indeed made the beginning for a rational view of the world: but he has made only a beginning. Science analyzes experience, yes, but the analysis does not yet make a picture of the world. The analysis provides only the materials for the picture. The purpose of science, and of all rational thought, is to make a more ample and more coherent picture of the world, in which each experience holds together better and is more of a piece. This is a task of synthesis, not of analysis.¹²⁴

To facilitate this task of synthesis, the course of this story must ~~pause~~ be interrupted to provide the reader with a degree of preparation. I ask you to think about our world and our place in the world in a very particular way. And so, consistent with the practice of Aristotle, brought into more complete form by Henry George. I pause to build the language and provide the definitions upon which the science of political economy is made to accommodate the pursuit of knowledge.

