

GEORGE F. McLEAN

ANCIENT GREEK PHILOSOPHY AND CIVIL SOCIETY TODAY*

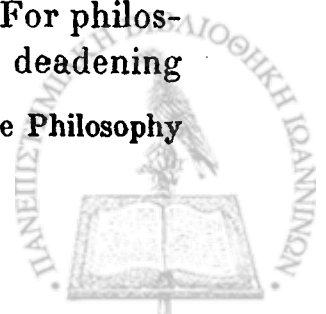
Let me begin by noting how happy I am to be invited to deliver this lecture here in Greece, the home of Western philosophy. Indeed, I am honored to the point of being intimidated to speak of ancient Greek philosophy at its source. My hope is not to enlighten you, the experts, in the ancient content, but to note its continued, indeed, radical importance for life in our times.

When I meet young philosophers or address a group of graduate students I am always struck by what a great time it is to be beginning work in this field. Looking back over the life of the profession in this century we find a rather dreary situation, dominated by government imposed ideologies or by reactions thereto. In totalitarian contexts philosophers were required to rationalize, explain and repeat politically predetermined communal positions. Others, concerned to critique that ideology, became bemired in an extreme reactionary individualism.

With the end of the Cold War we are now in a period of reconstruction, not only of economic and political systems, but of philosophy as well. Power is no longer interpreted as descending from above or as being diffused in an anarchistic liberalism. It is seen rather to emerge from the free center of the human person, to be shaped by one's cultural identity, to rise convergently through civil society, and to elaborate ever more comprehensive, even global, vision.

The new agenda for human subjectivity includes environment, minorities, women, civil society and culture. This brings great opportunities, but also very real challenges which perhaps nowhere have been more evident and pressing than here in the Balkans. For philosophers in this region the placid old days of repeating a deadening

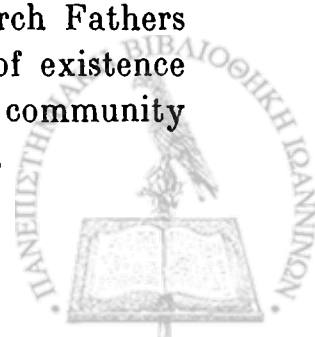
* This paper was delivered to professors and graduate students of the Philosophy Department, University of Ioannina, Greece, on October 26, 1999.



ideology are gone; you face instead a dangerously exciting future. All the peoples of the region depend upon your creative pathfinding abilities in philosophy to make the crucial choices needed to escape anguished conflict in favor of humane progress. This is a challenge and opportunity for younger scholars in most places, but it is especially true of philosophers who live on the frontiers, on the borders of civilizations. Of all who face this challenge you, who live in Greece and share its heritage have special resources for constructing a response. This is your special call or vocation as philosophers in our times.

In saying this I am recalling two experiences of my own. The first was as a young philosopher in the early 1960s. The West was then undergoing a period of basic self questioning as the first thrust of the new agenda began to appear after World War II. The previous unquestioned and exclusive reliance upon objective scientific thought was waning; the new agenda of human subjectivity was just emerging. As the youngest member of our faculty I was designated to develop a series of annual workshops, basically to recycle philosophers for the new period. This is the source of my own sense of how exciting and fulfilling philosophy can be for a generation such as yours at the beginning of a new era and hoping to escape the not distant menace of social collapse.

In my personal memory the search for a vision according to which life can be lived reaches back also to a second experience and one that involved ancient Greece. When I began the humanities curriculum in my local public secondary school it was the practice for the course in English to read six books each year. The first book they put in our hands was from here; it was *Iliad* of Homer. Effectively, they said: if you want to be human, start here in Greece. Later when I began university studies in Rome, Italy they directed our attention beyond myth to philosophy in the Greek tradition which elaborated the conceptual tools for Western civilization. This included notably: Parmenides' elaboration of the notion of being which enables the mind to engage and be instructed by the whole of reality in its unity and identity; Plato's elaboration of the notion of participation whereby diversity could be integrated as an expression (mimesis) rather than a negation of being; and the Church Fathers of Magna Graecia who opened philosophy to the sense of existence in terms of which we are constituted as free members of a community that is hope-filled because dedicated to justice and love.



These essential components of Western philosophy and civilization: unity, diversity and existence, all were elaborated in your culture and by your forebears with a much simpler education. Who says you cannot advance this project in this your day?

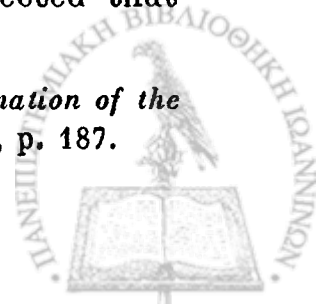
In the present lecture I would like to call your attention to just two points of research which promise to be especially fruitful for life at the beginning of the new millenium. One is the contribution of Aristotle's ethics and politics to the notion of civil society, which presently is undergoing reconstruction after the Cold War extremes of communalism and individualism. The other is the contribution of the ancient Greek Church Fathers to the development of the notion of existence and thereby to the realization of freedom and cultural creativity. Progress in a global context will need to understand how this enables cultures to be principles of cooperation rather than of conflict between civilizations.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Both civil society and culture, I would suggest, stem from the one fundamental existential understanding of human reality as the actual exercise of freedom. When Mortimer Adler and his team at the Institute for Philosophical Research¹ studied the history of the notion of freedom in Western philosophy they concluded that there were three levels at which this had been understood. The first—more superficial but especially common in Anglo-Saxon public and private life—is the ability to choose whatever I like. The stuff of law in the corresponding Common-Law tradition is the resolution of the conflicts with such choices render inevitable. The second, more Kantian level, is the ability to choose precisely as I ought; this sets formal interior controls upon choice. The third level of freedom is existential in content whereby one constitutes one's being through the exercise of one's will.

Civil society consists of an exercise of this third existential level of freedom. Essentially, it is the question of how human beings can establish a social unity which promotes, rather than subverts, the unique dignity and self-realization of all who are its members. This remains the basic issue to our day. It could be expected that

1. Mortimer J. Adler, *The Idea of Freedom: A Dialectical Examination of the Conceptions of Freedom* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1958), p. 187.



whoever would open the way to appreciating the reality of the many persons within an overarching unity would be the Fathers of the Greek, and hence of the Western, tradition in philosophy. This proved to be Plato and Aristotle.

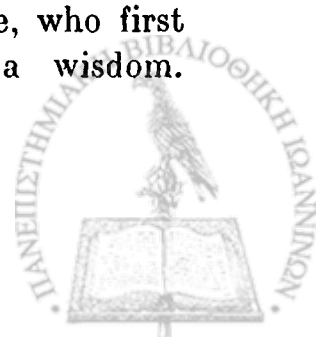
The Greek Context

After the definition of Being by Parmenides as supremely one, Plato worked out the way to take account of the reality of the many members of society and their unity through his development of the notion of participation. This envisaged multiple beings as having their reality from, as expressing, and ultimately as being directed toward, the One. This foundational insight for all of Western philosophy was expressed through the imagery of light coming from a simple source, and shining down in an ever more diffuse and diminished manner. In his famous allegory of the cave in the *Republic*,¹ Plato described the preparation of leaders as one of liberation from the shadows of the cave in order to ascend to the light and then to return to the cave in order to govern in an enlightened manner.

There was, however, a weakness, which became apparent in Plato's description of the ideal state in his *Laws* (in some contrast to his *Republic*). In response to the chaotic situation of his times, Socrates had sought a pattern of virtues which could provide constant and consistent guidance in the diverse actual situations of human action. Seeking greater clarity regarding virtues, Plato had promoted these to ideal forms separated from life and in relation to which the many individual instances were but passive images or copies. From this perspective what was important was the way in which things were the same, just as from a mathematical point of view what is significant is that there be e.g., three, not whether it be three apples or three stones: number threes are formally the same among themselves and in relation to threeness itself. As a result, the ideal state he described in the *Laws* had a shocking absence of any sense of the uniqueness of human beings. Human life was reduced to its communal factors in which all was determined by, and for, the state.

To the degree possible, and in terms of the sense of reality had at the time, this was corrected by Plato's pupil, Aristotle, who first mapped out the field of philosophy as a science and a wisdom.

1. *Republic*, VII 514 a - 517 c.



Theoretical knowledge is directed to knowing what things are in themselves or as objects over against the knower or subject. The theoretical sciences search out an understanding of why things are as they are, why they must be so and how they could not be otherwise. His history of the search for such knowledge recounts how this led to a search for the arché as the beginning proper or first source, that is, what came first and was even beyond time. This arché or principle of knowledge and being for Anaximander was the apeiron. In his *De Anima*, the science of living beings, Aristotle identified intelligence and freedom as the distinctive modes in which human life is exercised. These, in turn, require a civic union of communication and cooperation between persons, without which life simply would not be human.

The creative work of developing and directing this cooperative unity is the topic of ethics and politics as sciences of the practical order of making and doing. Its principles are in the subject who is the source of such actions. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* begins with the observation that every action aims at an end, that the end sought by all is happiness or the good life. *Politics* extends this search for the good life beyond individuals to society; what is sought are the good life in community. In this century phenomenology has been developed precisely as a mode of access to this interior intentional life in search of meaning and fulfillment. Rather than approaching personal, and social life by sense observation from outside, it delves into its very essence as existential striving toward the good. Hence, Manfred Riedel suggests that if reviewed in a process of eidetic reduction after the manner of Husserl¹ the language of Aristotle's politics can unveil the real life of civil society.

This is aided by Aristotle himself. He had begun most of his works with a description of how the matter in question had appeared historically through time, thereby gradually delineating more directly the field whose scientific principles and structure he would seek to determine. In contrast, Aristotle begins his *Politics* not historically, but thematically, delineating the elements of political life understood as to govern and to be governed as a member of a community.²

1. Manfred Riedel, "In Search of a Civil Union: The Political Theme of European Democracy and Its Primordial Foundation in Greek Philosophy," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, 10 (1983), 101-102.

2. *Politics*, I, 1, 1252 a 20-23.



Freedom, the Arché of Civil Society

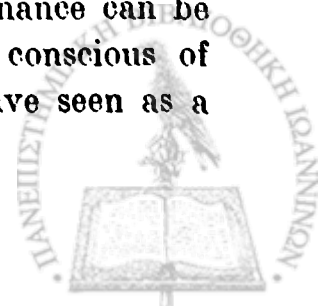
If most properly the political bespeaks governance or directive action toward the goal, Aristotle is concerned with the nature of such action, its orientation and its arché as what comes first. In the practical order of human doing or making this source of action ultimately must not be caused by another, but initiated and directed toward a good or goal without being pre-determined by other persons or things. This is the essence of freedom, which in the political order is governance as directing oneself and others toward a good or goal. In this sense one is sovereign; Kant would contrast this to anarchy and speak rather of action under law, but precisely under the law one gives oneself. To be free is to be sovereign or arché of one's action.

This has been misinterpreted in two ways. The first reflects our present propensities to see all as a matter of power and control which imposes upon and delimits people's freedom in an authoritarian manner. The root sense of arché, however, is not that of an authoritarian suppression of freedom, but rather that of authorship, the beginning or origin of social action. As such it bespeaks initiative and creativity, and it entails responsibility for the overall enterprise.

This exercise of freedom by individuals and groups in originating responsible action is characteristically human. Though most actions of humans at the different inorganic and organic levels can be performed by other physical realities, it is precisely as these actions are truly self-initiated by the person, that is, that they are exercised as a matter of freedom, that they become properly human acts.

But were these to be exercised in an individualistic and anarchic manner as with Hobbes' man who is wolf to man or after the corresponding model of competition in capitalism then this would not be human life by Greek standards — for which reason exile and ostracism were such extreme punishments. Hence, the foundational social issue today is that of the exercise of corporate directive freedom — its nature and range. Its effective exercise is civil society, and it is a good thing that this challenge can now be taken up.

There is a second way in which the issue of governance can be misinterpreted and Aristotle himself may have been conscious of having done so. This seems indicated in what many have seen as a



correction of his evaluation of types of governance. His first classification of modes of government was drawn up in terms of the quantity of those who shared in ruling. When ruling is seen as a search for material possessions or property, the best form of government would be oligarchy or rule by the few. For generally only a few are rich and they could afford to give more concern to the public weal than to personal enrichment. Democracy, in contrast, is rule by the masses who would be the poor and thus could be expected to be more concerned for their personal gain.¹ Aristotle needed to improve on this basically quantitative division, founded empirically on the changing distribution of property, if only because conceptually there could be a society in which the majority would be rich. Hence, he chose instead a normative criterion, namely, whether governance is exercised in terms of a search, not for goods sought by a few out of self-interest, but for the common good in which all can participate.² In this light governance has its meaning as a species of a broader reality, namely, the community (*koinōnia*) which comes together for its end, namely, happiness or the good life of the whole.

The polis then is a species of community. It is a group, which as human and hence conscious, free and self-responsible, comes together in governance to guide their efforts toward the achievement of the shared life. Community and governance are not the same or tautological, but they go together, for persons are united as a community by their common orientation to the same end, toward which as free they guide or govern themselves. In this way Aristotle identifies the central nature of the socio-political order as that of a *koinōnia politika* or "civil society".

Civil society then has three elements. First, there is governance: *arché*, the beginning of action or the taking of initiative toward an end; this is an exercise of human freedom. But as this pertains to persons in their various groups and subgroups there are two other elements, namely, communication or solidarity with other members of the group and the participation or subsidiarity of these groups or communities within the whole. That is, in their search for the common goal or end, the participants form communities each marked by an inner solidarity of its participants and interrelated between themselves in subsidiarity. Thus, to understand a civil society we must seek to uncover

1. *Politics*, III, 7, 1279 b 8-9.

2. *Ibid.*, III, 8.



the solidarity and subsidiarity of the community as participation in the governance of life toward the common good.

Solidarity

Through time societies have manifested an increasing diversity of parts, which constitutes their proper richness and strength. This increase could be merely numerical, thereby bringing quantitative advantage as with an army. But it is even more important that the parts differ in kind so that each brings a distinctive concern and capability to the common task. Further, differing between themselves, one member is able to give and the other to receive in multiple and interrelated active and receptive modes. This means that the members of a society not only live alongside one another, but that their shared effort to realize the good life thrives through their mutual interaction.

Aristotle develops this theme richly in chapter 6 "On Friendship" in Book IX of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, stressing a theme which will reemerge later, namely, that the members of a civil society need to be of one mind and one heart. Toward the end of that chapter he evolves the importance of this for the common weal.¹

Such solidarity of the members of society is one of its essential component characteristics. Plato used the terms *methexis* and *mimesis* or participation for this. But Aristotle feared that if the individual were seen as but another instance of a specific type, that is, as but an image of the primary form, individuals would lose their reality. So after his early works on logic he ceased to use this term; instead, the term 'solidarity' which recognizes the distinctive reality of the parts seemed better to reflect his thought.

In the human body, where there is but one substantial form, the many parts exist for the whole and the actions of the parts are actions of the whole (it is not my legs and feet which walk; I walk by my legs and feet). Society also has many parts and their differentiation and mutuality pertains to the good of the whole. But in contrast to the body, the members of a community have their own proper form, finality and operation. Hence, their unity is an accidental one of order, that is, it is in terms of the relation or order of their capabilities and actions to the perfection of the body politic or civil society and to the realization of its common good.

1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, IX, 6, 1167 b 13-16.



Aristotle does not hesitate to state strongly the dependence of the individual on the community in order to live a truly human life concluding that the state is a creation of nature prior to the individual.¹

Nevertheless, inasmuch as the parts are realities in their own right, outside of any orientation to the common good of the whole, society ultimately is for its parts: the society is for its members, not the contrary.

Subsidiarity²

But there is more than solidarity to the constitution of a civil society. Community in general is constituted through the cooperation of many for the common goal or good, but the good or goal of a community can be extremely rich and textured. It can concern nourishment, health maintenance, environmental soundness; it includes education both informal and formal, basic and advanced, initial and retraining; it extends to nutrition, culture, recreation, etc. — all the endless manners in which human beings develop, fulfill their needs and capacities and seek "the good life". As each of these can and must be sought and shared through the cooperation of many, each is the basis of a group or subgroup in a vastly varied community.

When, however, one adds the elements of governance (*arché*), that is, the element of freedom determining what will be done and how the goal will be sought, then the dimension of subsidiarity emerges into view. Were we talking about things rather than people, it would be possible to envisage a technology of mass production automatically moving and directing all the components automatically toward the final product. Where, however, we are concerned with a community and hence with the composite exercise of the freedom of the persons and groups which constitute its membership, then it is crucial that this not be substituted for by a command from outside or from above. Rather, governance in the community initiating and directing action toward the common end must be exercised in a cumulative manner beginning from the primary or basic group,

1. *Politics*, I, 2, 1253 a 19-26.

2. John Mavone, "The Division of Parts of Society According to Plato and Aristotle," *Philosophical Studies*, 6 (1956), 113-122.



the family in relation to its common good, and moving up to the broader concerns or goals of groups that are more inclusive considered both quantitatively (neighborhood, city, nation, etc.), and qualitatively (education, health, religion) and according to the hierarchy of goods which are their concerns.

Aristotle recognizes the many communities as parts of the political order when he treats justice and friendship, inasmuch as this seeks not particular advantage but the welfare of the whole.¹ Justice here, as distributive, is not arithmetic but proportionate to those involved according to the consideration and respect that is due to each.² In his concern for the stability of the state in the *Politics* he stresses the need for a structured diversity. Groups such as the family and village differ qualitatively from the state. It is necessary to recognize this and promote them as such for the vitality of the whole.

The synergetic ordering of these groups, considered both quantitatively and qualitatively, and the realization of their varied needs and potentials is the stuff of the governance of civil society. The condition for success in this is that the freedom and hence the responsible participation of all be actively present and promoted at each level. Thus, proper responsibility on the family level must not be taken away by the city, nor that of the city by the state. Rather the higher units either in the sense of larger numbers or more important order of goods must exercise their governance precisely in order to promote the full and self-responsible action of the lower units and in the process enable them to achieve goals which acting alone they could not realize. Throughout, the concern is to maximize their participation in governance, that is, the exercise of freedom by the members of the community, thereby enabling them to live more fully as persons and groups so that the entire society flourishes. This is termed subsidiarity.

Thus, through considering phenomenologically Aristotle's analysis of the creative activity of persons striving consciously and freely toward their goals, it is possible to articulate the nature and constituent elements of civil society as the conscious cooperation toward common social goals by persons and peoples. It is a realm of persons in groups or community solidarities which, through a structure of subsidiarity, participate actively in self-governance.

1. *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 9, 1159 b 25-1160 a 30.

2. *Ibid.*, V. 3.



This reflects also a main axis of the unfolding of the social process in Greece, and one which is in many ways being repeated today:

a) from the Platonic stress upon unity in relation to which the many are but repetitions, to the Aristotelian development of diversity as necessary for the unfolding and actualization of unity;

b) from emphasis upon governance by authority located at the highest levels, to participation in the exercise of governance by persons and groups at every level and in relation to matters with which they are engaged and responsible; and

c) from attention to one's own interests, to attention to the common good of the whole.

Progress along these axes today remains the key to efforts to develop civil society and will provide guidance for efforts to promote a proper functioning of social life. This, in turn, is the concrete social manner in which people live their lives together as their way to fulfillment and even to God. It is these terms that the elements of arché, solidarity and subsidiarity come most alive.

In this context the human person is inviolable in him or herself, never to be reduced to serving as a means to another's end. What is more, this is shared most deeply with other humans to constitute a solidarity which goes beyond utilitarian arrangements or social contracts. This, of course, is the deep motivation of the multiple coalitions in groups in all fields that constitute a civil society. Moreover, these converge in subsidiarity where the higher decision making bodies are in principle to promote, rather than suppress, the free and responsible initiative of the smaller groups. Hence, it is no accident that when the European Union needed a way of understanding a union which would promote, rather than absorb, its members Jacques Delors took up the notion of subsidiarity, theretofore a characteristic element of Catholic social thought.¹

1. J. Delors, *The Principle of Subsidiarity in Subsidiarity: The Challenge of Change* (Maastricht, The Netherlands: European Institute of Public Administration, 1991), p. 18. See Carlos Eduardo Maldonado, *Human Rights, Solidarity and Subsidiarity: Essays toward a Social Ontology* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1997), ch. IV.



EXISTENCE AND CULTURE AS THE BASIS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Thusfar we have seen how the work of philosophers is essential in negotiating the great social changes of our day from totalitarian ideologies in which decisions are made from the top down to civil society in which power runs up from the responsible freedom of people organized in multiple groups in patterns of solidarity and subsidiarity. The challenge here is how the actions of these groups will be directed so as to provide the broad convergent action required for complex times.

On the one hand, however, to depend for this upon the state would be to return to the previous top down pattern. Hence, it is necessary to see how this convergence can result from the pattern of values and virtues which constitute the cultural tradition of a people. But, on the other hand, if these be merely matters of preference and life style they cannot provide the governance required by a society. Hence it is necessary to trace these to their roots. The exercise of human freedom must be seen precisely as the existential issue of being in contrast to non being, that is, as the basic drive to human fulfillment. In these terms governance is paradoxically a matter of human freedom which is not optional, but passionately committed as is a mother to the care of her sick child.

Existence and the Greek Fathers

Above we spoke of a second special Greek resource for the development of an understanding of civil society in our day, namely the opening by the Greek Church Fathers of the way to an appreciation of existence as the proper term in which human freedom could be understood and directed.

Just as we saw Aristotle evolving the formal structures of Plato in a more active sense, thought here takes an additional step ahead, moving from the relativity passive level of essence to existence as that by which essences are made to be. Moreover, if for living things "to be" is "to live", then "to be" for conscious, free and social human beings is to live in a conscious, free and socially responsible manner. Existence then is the place to begin in order to be able to understand the renewal in our days of the existential sense of human freedom and the possibilities of social progress this opens.



This existential sense of freedom can be traced from the Greek Church Fathers; it took on systemic form in the Islamic and Christian medieval syntheses of Avicenna and Aquinas; and it has been an object of special attention in this century with the development of the phenomenological methods for bringing to light human intentionality. Here we shall look at the first and the third of these, that is, at the classical Greek component and at its contemporary implications.

Let us begin with the Greek Fathers. While the earlier Greek philosophers had supposed matter to be eternal, the issue was merely by which form matter was specified; the issue of existence in contrast to non-existence did not emerge. But by applying to the Greek notion of matter the Judeo-Christian heritage regarding the complete dominion of God over all things, the Church Fathers opened human consciousness to the fact that matter, too, even if eternal, stood also in need of a causal explanation. This shortly preceded Plotinus, who was the first philosopher to provide an explanation of the origin of matter.¹

This enabled philosophical questioning to push beyond issues of form, nature or kind to existence and, hence, to deepen radically the sense of reality. If what must be explained is no longer merely the particular form or type of beings, but matter as well, then the question becomes not only how things are of this form or of that kind, but how they exist rather than not exist. In this way the awareness of being evolved beyond change or form;² to be real would mean to exist and whatever is related thereto. Quite literally, "To be or not to be" had become the question.

By the same stroke, our self-awareness and will were deepened dramatically. They no longer were restricted to focusing upon choices between various external material objects and modalities of life — the common but superficial contemporary meaning of freedom — nor even to Kant's choosing as one ought; all this remains within the context of being as nature or essence. The freedom opened by the conscious assumption and affirmation of one's own existence was rather a responsibility for one's very being.³

One might follow the progression of this deepening awareness of being by reflecting upon the experience of being totally absorbed

1. Plotinus, *Enneads*, II 5 (25), ch. v.

2. Maurizio Flick and Zoltan Alszegehy, *Il Creatore, l'inizio della salvezza* (Firenze: Lib. Ed. Fiorentina, 1961), pp. 32-49.

3. M. Adler, *The Idea of Freedom*, p. 187.



in the particularities of one's job, business, farm or studies — the prices, the colors, the chemicals — and then encountering an imminent danger of death, the loss of a loved one or the birth of a child. At the moment of death, as at the moment of birth, the entire atmosphere and range of preoccupations in a hospital room shifts dramatically, being suddenly transformed from tactical adjustments for limited objectives to confronting existence, in sorrow or in joy, in terms that plunge to the center of the whole range of meaning. Such was the effect upon philosophy when the awareness of being developed from attention to merely this or that kind of reality, to focus upon the act of existence in contrast to non-existence, and hence to human life in all its dimensions and, indeed, to life divine.

Cornelio Fabro goes further. He suggests that this deepened metaphysical sense of being in the early Christian ages not only opened the possibility for an enriched sense of freedom, but itself was catalyzed by the new freedom proclaimed in the religious message. That message focused not upon Plato's imagery of the sun at the mouth of the cave from which external enlightenment might be derived, but upon the eternal Word, Son or Logos through and according to which all things received their existence and which enlightened their consciousness life.

Moreover the Christian Kerygma sees redemption as having been achieved in principle by the cross, but as needing to be accepted and affirmed in a personal act of freedom by each person. The passage here from death to life is symbolized in baptism by immersion in water and resurgence.

Thus the new sense of existence was that of being bursting into time

— it rejects being considered in any sense as nonbeing, or being treated as anything less than one's full reality;

— it directs the mind beyond the ideological poles of species and isolated self interest,

— it centers, instead, upon the unique reality of the person as a participation in the creative power of God — a being bursting into existence, who is and cannot be denied;

— lived in the image of God this life is sacred; one is sanctified in sharing this with one's neighbors in what is now termed civil



society, and with all humankind in what is fast becoming a global society.¹

It took a long time for the implications of this new appreciation of existence and its meaning to germinate and find its proper philosophical articulation. Over a period of many centuries the term "form" was used to express both the kind or nature of things and the new sense of being as existence. As the distinction between the two was gradually clarified, however, proper terminology arose in which that by which a being is of this or that kind came to be expressed by the term "essence", while the act of existence by which a being simply is was expressed by "existence" (*esse*).² The relation between the two was under intensive, genial discussion by the Islamic philosophers when their Greek tradition in philosophy was abrogated as described by al-Ghazali in his *Munqidh*.

This question was resolved 150 years later in the work of Thomas Aquinas through his notion of the real distinction between essence as existence. Paradoxically this rendered more intimate the relation of the two principles which as principles of being are related as act and potency, and which opened a new and uniquely active sense of being.

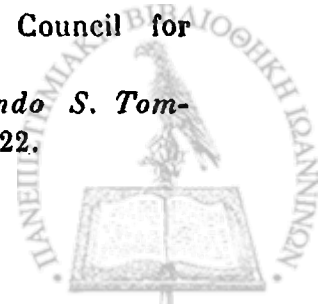
This made it possible to carry Aristotle's insights regarding the structure of civil society to the existential level and to see this as a self-creative work of human freedom in the third or existential sense of freedom cited above. This remained, however, objective knowledge. It was able to identify the exalted importance of the human exercise of freedom, the need for all to exercise it and even its eternal salvific implication.

However, this understanding did yet enter into the distinctive inner subjectivity in terms of which freedom is consciously lived. This is the heart of religion as loving response to God and neighbor, and thus the motivation of civil society and of the willingness to work out its challenges.

This enables one to take full account of the differences between cultures in terms of which freedom is exercised, of the unique sacrifices and creativity of each person and people, or therefore of the

1. George F. McLean, *Ways to God* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1999), p. 184.

2. Comelio Fabro, *La nozione metafisica di partecipazione secondo S. Tommaso d' Aquino* (Torino: Societa Ed. Internazionale, 1950), pp. 75-122.



ways in which peoples can relate most deeply even in being most distinct. All of this now has become newly possible by a phenomenological effort articulated in terms of values, virtues and cultural traditions.

Should we say that this philosophical capability has been developed in response to the new sensibilities to these issues or that these new sensibilities have developed as a result of this philosophical insight? Probably the two are yet more intimately related such that the philosophical work is the reflective dimension of the broad contemporary evolution of human sensibilities enabling it to be better understood and more responsibly oriented.

In any case, our effort here will focus on an examination of values and virtues as the cumulative exercise of the arché that is, of the responsible freedom which is at the heart of civil society. In these terms we shall seek to uncover afresh the conscious exercise of existence as lived over time by persons and peoples in and as civil society.

Value

The drama of free self-determination, and hence the development of persons and of civil society, is most fundamentally a matter of being as affirmation or definitive stance against non-being implied in the work of Parmenides, the first Greek metaphysician. This is identically the relation to the good in search of which we live, survive and thrive. The good is manifest in experience as the object of desire, namely, as that which is sought when absent. Basically, it is what completes life; it is the "per-fect", understood in its etymological sense as that which is completed or realized through and through. Hence, once achieved, it is no longer desired or sought, but enjoyed. This is reflected in the manner in which each thing, even a stone, retains the being or reality it has and resists reduction to non-being or nothing. The most that we can do is to change or transform a thing into something else; we cannot annihilate it. Similarly, a plant or tree, given the right conditions, grows to full stature and fruition. Finally, an animal protects its life — fiercely, if necessary — and seeks out the food needed for its strength. Food, in turn, as capable of contributing to an animal's sustenance and perfection, is for the animal an auxiliary good or means.



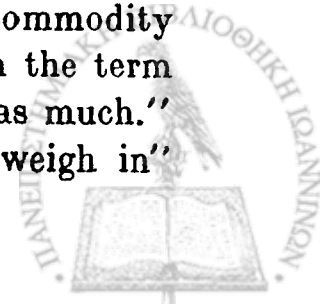
In this manner, things as good, that is, as actually realizing some degree of perfection and able to contribute to the well-being of others, are the bases for an interlocking set of relations. As these relations are based upon both the actual perfection things possess and the potential perfection to which they are thereby directed, the good is perfection both as attracting when it has not yet been attained and as constituting one's fulfillment upon its achievement. Hence, goods are not arbitrary or simply a matter of wishful thinking; they are rather the full development of things and all that contributes thereto. In this ontological or objective sense, all beings are good to the extent that they exist and can contribute to the perfection of others.

The moral good is a more narrow field, for it concerns only one's free and responsible actions. This has the objective reality of the ontological good noted above, for it concerns real actions which stand in distinctive relation to one's own perfection and to that of others — and, indeed, to the physical universe and to God as well. Hence, many possible patterns of actions could be objectively right because they promote the good of those involved, while others, precisely as inconsistent with the real good of persons or things, are objectively disordered or misordered. This constitutes the objective basis for what is ethically good or bad.

Nevertheless, because the realm of objective relations is almost numberless, whereas our actions are single, it is necessary not only to choose in general between the good and the bad, but in each case to choose which of the often innumerable possibilities one will render concrete.

However broad or limited the options, as responsible and moral an act is essentially dependent upon its being willed by a subject. Therefore, in order to follow the emergence of the field of concrete moral action, it is not sufficient to examine only the objective aspect, namely, the nature of the things involved. In addition, one must consider the action in relation to the subject, namely, to the person who, in the context of his/her society and culture, appreciates and values the good of this action, chooses it over its alternatives, and eventually wills its actualization.

The term 'value' here is of special note. It was derived from the economic sphere where it meant the amount of a commodity sufficient to attain a certain worth. This is reflected also in the term 'axiology' whose root means "weighing as much" or "worth as much." It requires an objective content — the good must truly "weigh in"



and make a real difference; but the term 'value' expresses this good especially as related to wills which actually acknowledge it as a good and as desirable.¹ Thus, different individuals or groups of persons and at different periods have distinct sets of values. A people or community is sensitive to, and prizes, a distinct set of goods or, more likely, it establishes a distinctive ranking in the degree to which it prizes various goods. By so doing, it delineates among limitless objective goods a certain pattern of values which in a more stable fashion mirrors the corporate free choices of that people.

This constitutes the basic topology of a culture; as repeatedly reaffirmed through time, it builds a tradition or heritage about which we shall speak below. It constitutes, as well, the prime pattern and gradation of goods or values which persons experience from their earliest years and in terms of which they interpret their developing relations. Young persons peer out at the world through lenses formed, as it were, by their family and culture and configured according to the pattern of choices made by that community throughout its history — often in its most trying circumstances. Like a pair of glasses values do not create the object; but focus attention upon certain goods rather than upon others. This becomes the basic orienting factor for the affective and emotional life described by the Scotts, Adam Ferguson and Adam Smith, as the heart of civil society. In time, it encourages and reinforces certain patterns of action which, in turn, reinforce the pattern of values.

Through this process a group constitutes the concerns in terms of which it struggles to advance or at least to endure, mourns its failures, and celebrates its successes. This is a person's or people's world of hopes and fears in terms of which, as Plato wrote in the *Laches*, their lives have moral meaning.² It is varied according to the many concerns and the groups which coalesce around them. As these are interlocking and interdependent a pattern of social goals and concerns develops which guides actions. In turn, corresponding capacities for action or virtues are developed.

Indeed, Aristotle takes this up at the very beginning of his ethics. In order to make sense of the practical dimension of our life it is necessary to identify the good or value toward which one directs one's

1. Ivor Leclerc, "The Metaphysics of the Good," *Review of Metaphysics*, 35 (1981), 3-5.

2. *Laches*, 198-201.



life or which one finds satisfying. This he terms happiness and then proceeds systematically to see which goal can be truly satisfying. His test is not passed by physical goods or honors, but by that which corresponds to, and fulfills, our highest capacity, that is, contemplation of the highest being or divine life.¹

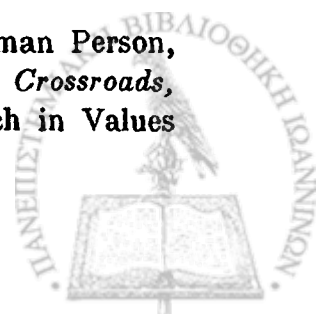
Virtues

Martin Heidegger describes a process by which the self emerges as a person in the field of moral action. It consists in transcending oneself or breaking beyond mere self-concern and projecting outward as a being whose very nature is to share with others for whom one cares and about whom one is concerned. In this process, one identifies new purposes or goals for the sake of which action is to be undertaken. In relation to these goals, certain combinations of possibilities, with their natures and norms, take on particular importance and begin thereby to enter into the makeup of one's world of meaning.² Freedom then becomes more than mere spontaneity, more than choice, and more even than self-determination in the sense of determining oneself to act as described above. It shapes — the phenomenologist would say even that it constitutes — one's world as the ambit of human decisions and dynamic action. This is the making of the complex social ordering of social groups which constitutes civil society.

This process of deliberate choice and decision transcends the somatic and psychic dynamisms. Whereas the somatic dimension is extensively reactive, the psychic dynamisms of affectivity or appetite are fundamentally oriented to the good and positively attracted by a set of values. These, in turn, evoke an active response from the emotions in the context of responsible freedom. But it is in the dimension of responsibility that one encounters the properly moral and social dimension of life. For, in order to live with others, one must be able to know, to choose and finally to realize what is truly conducive to one's good and to that of others. Thus, persons and groups

1. *Metaphysics*, XII, 7.

2. Gerald F. Stanley, "Contemplation as Fulfillment of the Human Person, in *Personalist Ethics and Human Subjectivity*," vol. II of *Ethics at the Crossroads*, George F. McLean, ed. (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1996), pp. 365-420.



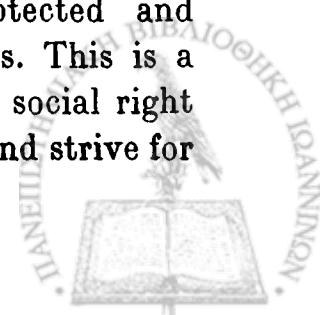
must be able to judge the true value of what is to be chosen, that is, its objective worth, both in itself and in relation to others. This is moral truth: the judgment regarding whether the act makes the person and society good in the sense of bringing authentic individual and social fulfillment, or the contrary.

In this, deliberation and voluntary choice are required in order to exercise proper self-awareness and self-governance. By determining to follow this judgment one is able to overcome determination by stimuli and even by culturally ingrained values and to turn these, instead, into openings for free action in concert with others in order to shape one's community as well as one's physical surroundings. This can be for good or for ill, depending on the character of my actions. By definition, only morally good actions contribute to personal and social fulfillment, that is, to the development and perfection of persons with others in community.

It is the function of conscience, as one's moral judgment, to identify this character of moral good in action. Hence, moral freedom consists in the ability to follow one's conscience. This work of conscience is not a merely theoretical judgment, but the exercise of self-possession and self-determination in one's actions. Here, reference to moral truth constitutes one's sense of duty, for the action that is judged to be truly good is experienced also as that which I ought to do.

When this is exercised or lived, patterns of action develop which are habitual in the sense of being repeated. These are the modes of activity with which we are familiar; in their exercise, along with the coordinated natural dynamisms they require, we are practiced; and with practice comes facility and spontaneity. Such patterns constitute the basic, continuing and pervasive shaping influence of our life. For this reason, they have been considered classically to be the basic indicators of what our life as a whole will add up to, or, as is often said, "amount to". Since Socrates, the technical term for these especially developed capabilities has been 'virtues' or special strengths.

But, if the ability to follow one's conscience and, hence, to develop one's set of virtues must be established through the interior dynamisms of the person, it must be protected and promoted by the related physical and social realities. This is a basic right of the person — perhaps the basic human and social right — because only thus can one transcend one's conditions and strive for



fulfillment. Its protection and promotion must be a basic concern of any order which would be democratic and directed to the good of its people.

Cultural Tradition

Together, these values and virtues of a people set the pattern of social life through which freedom is developed and exercised. This is called a "culture". On the one hand, the term is derived from the Latin word for tilling or cultivating the land. Cicero and other Latin authors used it for the cultivation of the soul or mind (*cultura animi*), for just as good land, when left without cultivation, will produce only disordered vegetation of little value, so the human spirit will not achieve its proper results unless trained or educated.¹ This sense of culture corresponds most closely to the Greek term for education (*paideia*) as the development of character, taste and judgment, and to the German term "formation" (*Bildung*).²

Here, the focus is upon the creative capacity of the spirit of a people and their ability to work as artists, not only in the restricted sense of producing purely aesthetic objects, but in the more involved sense of shaping all dimensions of life, material and spiritual, economic and political into a fulfilling. The result is a whole life, characterized by unity and truth, goodness and beauty, and, thereby, sharing deeply in meaning and value. The capacity for this cannot be taught, although it may be enhanced by education; more recent phenomenological and hermeneutic inquiries suggest that, at its base, culture is a renewal, a reliving of origins in an attitude of profound appreciation.³ This leads us beyond self and other, beyond identity and diversity, in order to comprehend both.

On the other hand, "culture" can be traced to the term *civis* (citizen, civil society and civilization).⁴ This reflects the need for a person to belong to a social group or community in order for the

1. V. Mathieu, "Cultura", in *Enciclopedia Filosofica* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1967), II, 207-210; and Raymond Williams, "Culture and Civilization", *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), II, 273-276, and *Culture and Society* (London: 1958).

2. Tonnelat, "Kultur" in *Civilisation, le mot et l'idée* (Paris: Centre International de Synthèse), II.

3. V. Mathieu, *ibid.*

4. V. Mathieu, "Civiltà," *ibid.*, I, 1437-1439.



human spirit to produce its proper results. By bringing to the person the resources of the tradition, the tradita or past wisdom produced by the human spirit, the community facilitates comprehension. By enriching the mind with examples of values which have been identified in the past, it teaches and inspires one to produce something analogous. For G.F. Klemm, this more objective sense of culture is composite in character.¹ E.B. Tylor defined this classically for the social sciences as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits required by man as a member of society."²

In contrast, Clifford Geertz focused on the meaning of all this for a people and on how a people's intentional action went about shaping its world. Thus to an experimental science in search of laws he contrasts the analysis of culture as an interpretative science in search of meaning.³ What is sought is the import of artifacts and actions, that is, whether "it is, ridicule or challenge, irony or anger, snobbery or pride, that, in their occurrence and through their agency is getting said."⁴ This there requires attention to "the imaginative universe within which their acts are signs."⁵ In this light, Geertz defines culture rather as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of intended conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."⁶

Each particular complex whole or culture is specific to a particular people; a person who shares in this is a civis or citizen and belongs to a civilization. For the more restricted Greek world in which this term was developed, others (aliens) were those who did not speak the Greek tongue; they were "barbaroi", for their speech sounded like mere babel. Though at first this meant simply non-Greek, its negative manner of expression easily lent itself to, perhaps reflected, and certainly favored, a negative axiological connotation, which soon

1. G.F. Klemm, *Allgemein Culturgeschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig, 1843-1852), x.

2. E.B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London, 1871), VII, p. 7.

3. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (London: Hutchinson, 1973), p. 5.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 85.



became the primary meaning of the word 'barbarian'. By reverse implication, it attached to the term 'civilization' an exclusivist connotation, such that the cultural identity of peoples began to imply not only the pattern of gracious symbols by which one encounters and engages in shared life projects with other persons and peoples, but cultural alienation between peoples. Today, as communication increases and more widely differentiated peoples enter into ever greater interaction and mutual dependence, we reap a bitter harvest of this negative connotation. The development of a less exclusivist sense of culture and civilization must be a priority task.

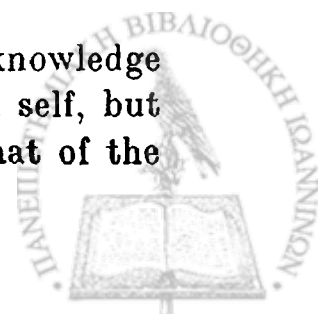
The development of values and virtues and their integration as a culture of any depth or richness takes time and, hence, depends upon the experience and creativity of many generations. The culture which is handed on, or *tradita*, comes to be called a cultural tradition; as such it reflects the cumulative achievement of a people in discovering, mirroring and transmitting the deepest meanings of life. This is tradition in its synchronic sense as a body of wisdom.

This sense of tradition is very vivid in premodern and village communities. It would appear to be much less so in modern urban centers, undoubtedly in part due to the difficulty in forming active community life in large urban centers. However, the cumulative process of transmitting, adjusting and applying the values of a culture through time is not only heritage or what is received, but new creation as this is passed on in new ways. Attending to tradition, taken in this active sense, allows us not to only uncover the permanent and universal truths which Socrates sought, but to perceive the importance of values we receive from the tradition and to mobilize our own life project actively toward the future.

The Genesis of Tradition in Community

Because tradition has sometimes been interpreted as a threat to the personal and social freedom essential to a democracy, it is important to note that a cultural tradition is generated by the free and responsible life of the members of a concerned community or civil society and enables succeeding generations to realize their life with freedom and creativity.

Autogenesis is no more characteristic of the birth of knowledge than it is of persons. One's consciousness emerges, not with self, but in relation to others. In the womb, the first awareness is that of the

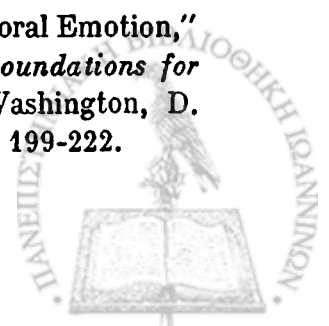


heart beat of one's mother. Upon birth, one enters a family in whose familiar relations one is at peace and able to grow. It is from one's family and in one's earliest weeks and months that one does or does not develop the basic attitudes of trust and confidence which undergird or undermine one's capacities for subsequent social relations. There one encounters care and concern for others independently of what they do for us and acquires the language and symbol system in terms of which to conceptualize, communicate and understand.¹ Just as a person is born into a family on which he or she depends absolutely for life, sustenance, protection and promotion, so one's understanding develops in community. As persons we emerge by birth into a family and neighborhood from which we learn and in harmony with which we thrive.

Similarly, through the various steps of one's development, as one's circle of community expands through neighborhood, school, work and recreation, one comes to learn and to share personally and passionately an interpretation of reality and a pattern of value responses. The phenomenologist sees this life in the varied civil society as the new source for wisdom. Hence, rather than turning away from daily life in order to contemplate abstract and disembodied ideas, the place to discover meaning is in life as lived in the family and in the progressively wider social circles of civil society into which one enters.

If it were merely a matter of community, however, all might be limited to the present, with no place for tradition as that which is "passed on" from one generation to the next. In fact, the process of trial and error, of continual correction and addition in relation to a people's evolving sense of human dignity and purpose, constitutes a type of learning and testing laboratory for successive generations. In this laboratory of history, the strengths of various insights and behavior patterns can be identified and reinforced, while deficiencies are progressively corrected or eliminated. Horizontally, we learn from experience what promotes and what destroys life and, accordingly, make pragmatic adjustments.

1. John Caputo, "A Phenomenology of Moral Sensibility: Moral Emotion," in George F. McLean, Frederick Ellrod, eds., *Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent* (Washington, D. C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), pp. 199-222.



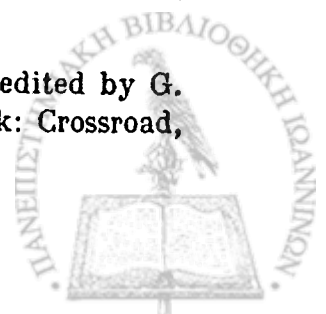
But even this language remains too abstract, too limited to method or technique, too unidimensional. While tradition can be described in general and at a distance in terms of feed-back mechanisms and might seem merely to concern how to cope in daily life, what is being spoken about are free acts that are expressive of passionate human commitment and personal sacrifice in responding to concrete danger, building and rebuilding family alliances and constructing and defending one's nation. Moreover, this wisdom is not a matter of mere tactical adjustments to temporary concerns; it concerns rather the meaning we are able to envision for life and which we desire to achieve through all such adjustments over a period of generations, i.e., what is truly worth striving for and the pattern of social interaction in which this can be lived richly. The result of this extended process of learning and commitment constitutes our awareness of the bases for the decisions of which history is constituted.

This points us beyond the horizontal plane of the various ages of history and directs our attention vertically to its ground and, hence, to the bases of the values which humankind in its varied circumstances seeks to realize.¹ It is here that one searches for the absolute ground of meaning and value of which Iqbal wrote. Without that all is ultimately relative to only an interlocking network of consumption, then of dissatisfaction and finally of anomie and ennui.

The impact of the convergence of cumulative experience and reflection is heightened by its gradual elaboration in ritual and music, and its imaginative configuration in such great epics as the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*. All conspire to constitute a culture which, like a giant telecommunications dish, shapes, intensifies and extends the range and penetration of our personal sensitivity, free decision and mutual concern.

Tradition, then, is not, as is history, simply everything that ever happened, whether good or bad. It is rather what appears significant for human life: it is what has been seen through time and human experience to be deeply true and necessary for human life. It contains the values to which our forebears first freely gave their passionate commitment in specific historical circumstances and then

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, the translation was edited by G. Barden and J. Cumming from the second (1965) edition (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 245-253.



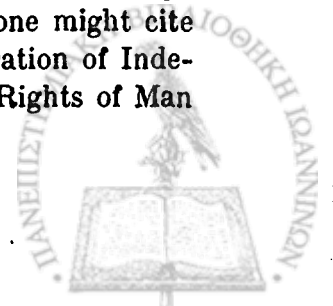
constantly reviewed, rectified and progressively passed on generation after generation. The content of a tradition, expressed in works of literature and all the many facets of a culture, emerges progressively as something upon which personal character and civil society can be built. It constitutes a rich source from which multiple themes can be drawn, provided it be accepted and embraced, affirmed and cultivated.

Hence, it is not because of personal inertia on our part or arbitrary will on the part of our forbears that our culture provides a model and exemplar. On the contrary, the importance of tradition derives from both the cooperative character of the learning by which wisdom is drawn from experience and the cumulative free acts of commitment and sacrifice which have defined, defended and passed on through time the corporate life of the community as civil society.¹

Ultimately, tradition bridges from ancient Greek philosophy to civil society today. It bears the divine gifts of life, meaning and love, uncovered in facing the challenges of civil life through the ages. It provides both the way back to their origin in the arché as the personal, free and responsible exercise of existence and even of its divine source, and the way forward to their divine goal, the way, that is, to their Alpha and their Omega.

<mclean @ cua.edu>

1. *Ibid.* Gadamer emphasized knowledge as the basis of tradition in contrast to those who would see it pejoratively as the result of arbitrary will. It is important to add to knowledge the free acts which, e.g., give birth to a nation and shape the attitudes and values of successive generations. As an example one might cite the continuing impact had by the Magna Carta through the Declaration of Independence upon life in North America, or of the Declaration of the Rights of Man in the national life of so many countries.



Η ΑΥΤΟΕΚΤΙΜΗΣΗ ΣΕ ΣΧΕΣΗ ΜΕ ΤΗΝ ΕΠΙΔΟΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΤΗΝ ΑΠΟΔΟΧΗ ΤΟΥ ΜΑΘΗΤΗ ΑΠΟ ΤΗΝ ΟΜΑΔΑ ΤΩΝ ΣΥΝΟΜΗΛΙΚΩΝ.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η αυτοεκτίμηση θεωρείται βασικό χαρακτηριστικό της προσωπικότητας το οποίο καθορίζει την ψυχική υγεία και την επιτυχία του ατόμου σε ποικίλους τομείς. Έχει διατυπωθεί η θέση ότι η ενίσχυση της αυτοεκτίμησης βελτιώνει τη σχολική επίδοση, και το αντίθετο.

Στην έρευνα εξετάζουμε τη σχέση που υπάρχει ανάμεσα στην αυτοεκτίμηση και την επίδοση όπως την αξιολογεί ο ίδιος ο μαθητής και όπως την αξιολογεί ο δάσκαλος.

Τα αποτελέσματα έδειξαν ότι οι μαθητές με υψηλή αυτοεκτίμηση αξιολογούν με υψηλότερο βαθμό την επίδοσή τους σε σύγκριση με την αξιολόγηση από το δάσκαλο. Το ερώτημα είναι σύμφωνο με άλλα ερευνητικά δεδομένα τα οποία δείχνουν ότι τα άτομα με υψηλή αυτοεκτίμηση δίνουν περισσότερη έμφαση στα θετικά στοιχεία του εαυτού, παρά στα αρνητικά και ότι υπερεκτιμούν τον εαυτό τους.

Δεν βρέθηκε συσχέτιση ανάμεσα στην αυτοεκτίμηση και στην αποδοχή των μαθητών από την ομάδα συνομηλίκων, παρατηρήθηκε όμως συσχέτιση ανάμεσα στη βαθμολογία από το δάσκαλο και από το μαθητή και στην αποδοχή από την ομάδα συνομηλίκων.

Πανεπιστήμιο Ιωαννίνων

Βασιλική Παπαδιώτη-Αθυνασίου

