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## Greek Stupidity

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### ABSTRACT

From before Pythagoras to after Archimedes, the cognitive life of Greece is sketched out according to and consistent with the model that stupidity is the learned inability to learn: That is a normal, dysfunctional learning process which occurs when a schema formed by linguistic biases and social norms acts via the neurotic paradox to establish a positive feedback system which renders behavior irrelevant to the environment and carries detached actions to maladaptive excesses. Special attention is de-voted to the major philosophers of the period.

**Keywords:** Pythagoras, Thales, Solon, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Alexander, Archimedes

### 1. INTRODUCTION

There are three contemporary attitudes toward ancient Greece: 1.) Indifference toward anything that happened that long ago; 2.) reverence, which became widespread during the Renaissance; 3.) condemnation of a culture which retarded the development of science and inhibited progress in Western Civilization for millenia.<sup>1</sup> In adopting the third of these attitudes here, we must beware our own modern tendency to equate technological development with progress. Actually, if there is any consistent theme throughout Western history, it is the underlying failure of knowledge in general and scientific knowledge in particular to promote

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<sup>1</sup>. Russell, B. A History of Western Philosophy. Simon and Schuster; New York. 1945. p. 38.

moral development and improve people and the way they relate to each other all peripheral issues in Greek culture and philosophy and they remain so in ours today.

## **2. DISCUSSION**

While we emphasize the shortcomings of Greek thought and the debilitating influence it had on the Greeks and those who followed them, we should muster enough respect to give them credit that is due. They did make some real contributions to intellectual life with their discoveries of mathematics and the art of deductive reasoning. Geometry, particularly, is a Greek invention, and nothing serves better to exemplify the static, disembodied Greek mind. In the broader context of logic in general, the one sided genius of the Greeks appears clearly in the way they reasoned deductively from apparently self-evident truths rather than inductively from observed facts.<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, the Greeks' strong point was also their weak point in that their inventive genius in philosophical abstraction was basically the obverse of their impracticality in responding to the problems they created for themselves. For example, they conceived the grand idea of direct-not representative democracy but failed to unify their city states in a cooperative effort which would have worked to the mutual advantage of all.

Generally, the world of the Greeks was as geometric, small, orderly and statuesque as they could make it, and for all their genius, everything Greek remains comprehensible in a glance. Their political ideal was the little *polis* the statuary city state. Greeks sought unity with nature, so their gods were superlative shapes reflecting and explaining natural phenomena rather than omnipotent forces whose actions might be swayed by mortal prayer. Religion, as such, is really an Oriental import built on alienated emotions which have been converted into thoughts projected on fictive Gods.<sup>3</sup> Greek services honoring their deities were ritual formalities of piety rather than expressions of manipulative emotions. In fact, Greek religion was not really a religion at all: it was homage to beauty, art, humanity and freedom with achievements limited by confines of the physical world.<sup>4</sup> Their great ethical systems (e.g., Stoicism and Epicureanism) idealized steadiness, with the goal being to limit or, ideally, not feel desires rather than fulfill them, and such desires as existed were for order not novelty. Their science was one of form not energy. Their mathematics was geometric not dynamic. Their painting, having no horizon and no perspective, expressed no sense of either space for which they had no word or depth, and their architecture was based on the post<sup>5,6</sup>. We must bear in mind the Greeks lived in a world of severe technological and cultural limitations: They had to invent water power and the wheelbarrow.<sup>7</sup> Still, Greek stupidity cannot be properly attributed to such

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<sup>2</sup>. Ibid. p. 39. Contemporary psychologists follow their path researching theories that have nothing to do with real life.

<sup>3</sup>. Jones, G. Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion. Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA. 2016. p. 126.

<sup>4</sup>. Rose, M. Marx's Lost Aesthetic. Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, England. 1984. pp. 59-60. Bruno Bauer reshaping Hegel.

<sup>5a</sup> Naturally, there were some variations like the Doric post, the Ionic post and the Corinthian post, (Vitruvius) but these were merely wrinkles on the most basic element of architecture outside the cave. (Muller. p. 130.) Put another way, the Greeks thought rectilinearly and thus could not come up with the curved arch (Bronowski. pp. 103-104.) although they loved circles.

<sup>6</sup>. Muller, H. J. The Uses of the Past. Mentor; New York. 1952. pp. 129-130.

<sup>7</sup>. Stark, R. How the West Won. ISI Books; Wilmington, DE. 2014. p. 23.

limitations or the absence of such items as billboards and Bibles.<sup>8</sup> It was shaped primarily by the interactions of the city states particularly their divisive role in Greek political history; slavery particularly as it divorced doing from thinking and people from each other; and philosophical thought particularly deductive logic and platonic ideals.<sup>9</sup>

The self-governing city-state was both the crowning political glory of Greece and a boon as well as a fatal limitation in that it proved to be an inducer of Greek philosophy as well as a barrier to the development of Greek identity. It was considered the ultimate form of political life because it embodied the Greek ideal of a compact little static world impervious to outside influences and secure against reality. However, as each unit struggled to adapt to internal contradictions and fend off external stresses, it invited direct oral confrontations among citizens, thus promoting argumentation as a means of settling disputes. This, in turn, promoted cultural innovation not only in rhetoric but in philosophy as a method of thought as well. Indeed, the supremacy of Athens over its neighbors has been attributed not only to advantages in trade but the fact that its citizen/statesmen were superior to those of competing city-states in argumentation and the development of systematic thought.<sup>10</sup>

In such interstate affairs, all self-confining city-states were limited to making treaties and quarreling with their neighbors. As all aspired to dominant sovereignty,<sup>11</sup> they perforce failed to cultivate any enduring political union which might have promoted the framing of a common legal system to settle interstate disputes or even the building of roads to facilitate transportation<sup>12</sup> and commerce.

Plato estimated the ideal size for a city state to be between 1,000 and 5,000 citizens and thought such a state could hold its own against similar rival states, which it probably could. He worked all this out a century after the Persians had crossed the Hellespont in the mistaken belief that the age of world empires was passing away when, in the West, it was in fact just beginning.<sup>13</sup> Although he was mistaken, he was not alone. Even as Alexander was rendering the city-state obsolete, Aristotle could find no merit in any other form of polity<sup>14</sup> so he joined Plato in hailing it right up to the days of the Macedonian empire.

While both Plato and Aristotle favored the polis, it had its problems. Notably, it was prone to often fierce disputes between contenders for power usually an oligarchy vs. democrats, and civil wars were common. Losers if not liquidated were driven into exile where they plotted their return. As problematic as they could be, for man to live without a polis made him just one step above a barbarian. Not just a foreigner, he was a cowardly, effete, slavish, murderous shadow of a man and, worst of all, susceptible to luxury and comfort.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, there were some with a breadth of vision that transcended the polis. For example, Herodotus (485?-425) wrote a history of the Persian invasion and called for a united Greek effort for revenge, but it would be over one hundred years before his idea bore

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<sup>8</sup>a. Fox, R. *The Search for Alexander*. Little, Brown & Co.; Boston, MA. 1980. p. 19.

<sup>9</sup>b The Greek term for stupidity appears to be *Akrasia* "lacking command (over oneself)" i.e., self-control occasionally transliterated as *acrasia*, the state of acting against one's better judgment. N.b., "*Acrasia*" sounds a bit like "Crazy" bracketed by two "A's".

<sup>10</sup>. Freeman, C. *The Greek Achievement*. Penguin; New York. 1999. p. 161.

<sup>11</sup>. Gruen, E. Personal communication.

<sup>12</sup>. Muller. *op. cit.* p. 132.

<sup>13</sup>. Wells, H. G. *The Outline of History*. (1920.) Cassel; London. 4th ed. Revised by R. Postgate. 1961. p. 336.

<sup>14</sup>. Russell. *op. cit.* p. xv.

<sup>15</sup>. Everitt, A. *The Rise of Athens*. Random House; New York. 2016. pp. 46-47.

fruit in the exploits of Alexander.<sup>16</sup> Until that time, there was no concept of a Greek policy or future<sup>17</sup> because there really was no Greece<sup>18</sup> or concept of one. There were numerous city-states, like Athens and Sparta,<sup>19</sup> etc., whose citizens proudly emphasized their differences while vainly distinguishing themselves collectively as "Hellene" from all other peoples i.e., barbarians according to Herodotus's criteria of shared blood, language, religion and customs.<sup>20</sup> As corny as it may read, however, they could be identified by their love of independence: their city-states were their own run by leaders accountable to the people, who fought well because they wanted to be free.<sup>21</sup> In response to the external threat of invasion by Persia in 480,<sup>22</sup> they attempted to convert this sense of "Greekness" into something like a functional, unified entity—the Delian League in 478<sup>23</sup> which failed politically even if it eventually succeeded militarily<sup>24</sup> as it morphed into the Athenian Empire, so "Greece" remained an merely an idea.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, what we today call Greek Civilization was really a collection of rather independent political states. Each was characterized by its own particular brand of patriotic devotion with the intensity of this identity complex varying considerably among them and through time within them but with religion never in conflict for the mind of any citizen.<sup>26</sup> At one extreme, loyalty ran counter to the ideal of individual liberty to the point of repressing anything but pure equality. In Ephesia, for example, anyone who raised himself above the mean was treated according to the democratic philosophy: "We will have none who is best among us; if there be any such, let him be so elsewhere and among others".<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, Aristides was ostracized from Athens in 483 for attaining more fame than was deemed acceptable.<sup>28</sup> On the one extreme, personal liberty in Sparta was restricted to a degree found in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia:<sup>29</sup> On the other, freedom (for nonslaves) flourished in Athens in the latter fifth century to the point that aristocratic individualism and enterprise went to excesses that thwarted

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<sup>16</sup>. Wells. op. cit. pp. 319-320. Fawcett. 2016. Chap. 1. Herodotus's immediate impact was limited because his readers were preadapted to contemplate changeless, eternal principles rather than accounts of transient, historical trivia. (Boorstin. 1998. p. 141.)

<sup>17</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 336.

<sup>18</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 14.

<sup>19</sup>c Athens and Sparta were on-again, off again friends and enemies (Everitt. p. 233.) which bracketed the wisdom/stupidity complex: Athenians were nimble of mind whereas Spartans hung on to whatever was old of ten beyond its usefulness. (Ibid. p. 12.) Anticipating Donald Trump, Theseus, the legendary first ruler of Athens and founder of democracy, would not let the *polis* be corrupted by immigrants. (Plutarch.)

<sup>20</sup>. Cunliffe, B. Europe Between the Oceans 9000BC-AD 1000. Yale University Press; New Haven, CT. 2011. p. 270.

<sup>21</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 188.

<sup>22</sup>d In 490 Darius was badly trashed at Marathon trying to impose his rule on the "Greeks". His dimwitted son, Xerxes, repeated his mistake ten years later. (Ansary. p. 10.) Perhaps, "Greece" was a Persian invention. One hundred years later after the demise of the Athenian Empire Isocrates (Panegyricus 50. Ca 385 B.C.) called for the states of Greece to reunite and unabashedly hyped Athens as THE seat of Greek civilization, which he regarded a form of intelligence rather than a matter of blood.

<sup>23</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 30.

<sup>24</sup>. Boardman, J., Griffin, J. and Murray, O. Greece and the Hellenistic World. Oxford University Press; New York. 1986. pp. 32-42. Hanson, V. No Glory That Was Greece. In What If? R. Cowley (Ed.). Putnam; New York. 2001. p. 21. Unity finally came in 1831. (Boot. 2013. p. 107.)

<sup>25</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. 249 (Delian League) and p. xxxiii.

<sup>26</sup>. Jones. op. cit. p. 203.

<sup>27</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 41.

<sup>28</sup>. Plutarch, L. Parallel Lives. Aristides. Ca. 100 A.D.

<sup>29</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. xv.

civic cooperation and eventually destroyed liberty.<sup>30</sup> The great leader of Athens in this era was Pericles (495?-429), who was simply too good for the common man. Like an earlier-day Lincoln, he combined a canny political ability with a deep passion for lofty ideals like “Liberty”<sup>31</sup> (and an un-Lincolnesque love for beautiful things). A true leader rather than a dominator, he set loose the genius of those around him, but like many other great men, he was discordant with his times and was finally turned loose by the boorish citizens who were resentful of his righteous purity, unappreciative of the beauty he created and (as with Aristides) uncomfortable in the presence of excellence and<sup>32</sup> probably jealous of his success.

Really, the conflict between boorish democracy and accomplished virtue was rather one-sided since the Golden Age of Athens was base enough to make even the most inveterate Yahoo feel at ease. Libel, slander and scandalous greed masked as patriotism were all as common then as now. The problem with Pericles was that he was an honest demagogue who somehow rose above the rampant pettiness in his environment so whether it was reasonable or not, he had to go. As he was personally unassailable, he was attacked through his friends. Thus, Anaxagoras, whom the open-minded Pericles had welcomed to Athens, was forced to flee for having suggested not only the heresy that the sun and stars were not gods<sup>33</sup> but that behind the entire cosmos was a Mind (*Nous*) sounding suspiciously like our God that made all things and put them in motion.<sup>34</sup>

Personalities aside, in some ways, Periclean Athens was comparable to nineteenth century England. It was a democracy albeit without protective rights administered by aristocrats.<sup>35</sup> Further, its imperialistic behavior abroad finally embroiled it in a devastating war as the selfish arrogance of Athenian aristocrats led to the suicidal Peloponnesian War (431-404) Greece’s WWI<sup>36</sup> through commercially ambitious, neurotic paradox enterprise unbridled by any moral or political ideal more noble than self-aggrandizement.<sup>37</sup> Athens had to expand or die—a plight inherent in empires and three generations after fighting for freedom against the Persians, lost its sense of balance, restraint and moderation,<sup>38</sup> and went to imperial excesses.

As we will see later in the fall of the Roman Empire, the demise of Athens was inherent in its rise: By policing the avenues of international trade in the Aegean and leading the wars against Persia, Athens made the other city-states its subjects. Increasingly, the commercial hegemony of democratic Athens came to be based upon force applied to the subject states, which became first aggravated and then rebellious as their own wealth and pride grew and the Persian threat subsided. This interaction became a mutually reinforcing cultural double helix, positive feedback system with insistence by Athens and resistance by most other *poleis* leading to a deterioration of interstate relations and finally the extreme of war,<sup>39</sup> which Greeks regarded

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<sup>30</sup> Muller. op. cit. p. 131. Likewise, in *Habits of the Heart* (1985), Robert Bellah at U Cal Berkeley headed a team of social researchers which concluded that individualism was threatening the survival of liberty in then contemporary America.

<sup>31</sup> Urofsky, M. *Dissent and the Supreme Court*. Pantheon Books; New York. 2015. p. 183. Coupled with St. Augustine’s insistence on free will, this provided the bedrock of the West’s religious belief in freedom, which science is incessantly undermining by showing behavior is caused.

<sup>32</sup> Wells. op. cit. pp. 324-325.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 327.

<sup>34</sup> Anaxagoras. *Fragments of Anaxagoras*. Fragment 12.

<sup>35</sup> Russell. op. cit. p. 75.

<sup>36</sup> Freeman. op. cit. p. 206.

<sup>37</sup> Muller. op. cit. p. 131. Like the oil companies getting us into Gulf War II.

<sup>38</sup> Walzer, M. 1977. *Just and Unjust Wars*. Basic Books; New York. pp. 5-7.

as a glorious evil.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, just as the commercial aristocracy of Athens was free to indulge itself to the detriment of all Athenians, so too were the city-states free to make war upon one another. It was indeed Greece's great tragedy that there was no higher law, unifying force or moral sense acting to restrict the liberty of the states so as to prevent the “Appallingly stupid” Peloponnesian War, which left Sparta victorious and Greece vanquished.<sup>41</sup>

While the outer political history of worldly power is now commonly filled with deceit, violence and cruelty, the inner cultural world of thought, feeling and character commonly remains somewhat removed from the demands of pragmatic concerns. However, at the end of the sixth century, the people and particularly the leaders in Athens were committed to both democracy and rationality. In fact, the leaders were almost apolitical in their devotion to reason: they possessed a remarkable capacity to think through a problem from scratch and follow logic to a presumably reasonable solution.<sup>42</sup> The love affair of Athenians with rationality thus had its roots in pre-Platonic politicians who idealized the thought process while seeking answers to practical problems. They did so because, in fifth century Greece, statesmen and warriors struggled to find a Greek solution to hegemony based on slavery, the existence of which predisposed Greek thinkers to embrace detached reason. Thus, while the city-state provided the context for Greek stupidity and fixed its range, slavery shaped it and defined its character.

As a basic condition of Greek life, slavery was profoundly and fundamentally immoral in that it shut off sympathy between classes of human beings. Nevertheless, most Greeks could not conceive of their lives without it, and although some noted philosophers tried, only the Cynics succeeded. The Stoics and Epicureans condemned it as unnatural, but as it was too strong an institution to be upset, they decided it did not affect the soul and thus could be ignored. Plato accepted it on the grounds that some people have underprivileged minds, and to the matter of fact Aristotle and to most practical people as well abolition was inconceivable: Certain people were simply labeled “Natural slaves” because they had the misfortune to be born in mild, slave producing environments,<sup>43</sup> and were, according to Plato’s “Everything in its place philosophy”, where they belonged.<sup>44</sup>

Not only was slavery as morally reprehensible as it was securely entrenched, but it was, further, an intellectually limiting institution which prevented the leaders of Greek society from learning about the real world. Today we honor those who do more than those who think because we believe our society has been made more by men of action than by philosophers, but in the sixth to third centuries B.C., gentlemen and plutocrats had other standards. They idealized the disinterested, dignified seeker of academic truth and formed among themselves a society of equals who lived on the labor of their social inferiors, meaning the doers.<sup>45</sup> Chief among these were the slaves, and it was inconceivable to cultured, upper class men of leisure that they could learn anything worthwhile from mere artisans, crafts-men and other workers. To put it bluntly, our revered philosophers were intellectual snobs. To wit: Plato mocked the craftsman whose soul was “Warped and maimed” by his work and who were “Incapable of culture”. Aristotle

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<sup>39</sup>. Durant, W. *The Life of Greece*. Simon and Schuster; New York. 1939. pp. 439-440.

<sup>40</sup>. Everitt. *op. cit.* p. xxviii.

<sup>41</sup>. Muller. *op. cit.* p. 124 (“Appallingly stupid”) and p. 132. The defeat of Athens was most probably due to a plague which killed about half of the population. Survivors were further demoralized by the apparent impotence of their gods to cope with the crisis. (F. Cartwright. p. 7.)

<sup>42</sup>. Everitt. *op. cit.* p. 106.

<sup>43</sup>. Aristotle. *Politics*. Bk 1. Ca. 330 B.C.

<sup>44</sup>. Durant. *op. cit.* p. 280. Wells. *op. cit.* p. 337.

<sup>45</sup>. Russell. *op. cit.* p. 34.

noted in his **Politics**, (ca. 325 B.C.) “There is no element of virtue in any of occupations to which the multitude or artisans, market people, and the wage earning class, take part”. In a similar vein some 400 years later, Plutarch observed “It does not necessarily follow that if a work is delightful because of its gracefulness that the man who made it is deserving of any serious regard”.<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, the Greek intelligence were predisposed to dismiss scientific thinking, which developed in Ionia, in favor of the theoretical approach to philosophy developed by Pythagoras and promoted by Plato and his ilk. Never once did they cite a scientific experiment as an example, reason or valid proof of an argued position<sup>47</sup> designed to improve Greek civilization although, to their aggravation, politically popular Pericles did.<sup>48</sup>

Before the beginning of this story of the mind versus the senses, soothsayers and oracles were considered repositories of wisdom and, when consulted, were expected to provide sage council and advice. This was basically an extension of parental reverence that is, when tribal elders could not decide what should be done, they consulted those who had died. As Greece evolved, priests came to form a class of specialists skilled at divining "Themis" (i.e., the Will of the Gods).<sup>49</sup> As it happened, the Greek Gods were not ideal, perfect models of virtue in celestial forms but rather each stood for a specific human emotion, principle or skill.<sup>50</sup> They were a generally cheerful lot, typically Greek in being argumentative and unable to agree on anything but seldom demanding of blind faith. They were rather tolerant of believers who questioned their essence and activities and thus indirectly encouraged the development of philosophy,<sup>51</sup> but they resented excesses of any form, especially those which infringed on their control of nature.<sup>52</sup>

The relation of Greeks to their gods is manifested in their myths, which were very real to the Greeks.<sup>53</sup> Prominent among these is the story attached to ritual killing of animals for eating. The going myth was that the animal was willing to die which was confirmed when it shook its head to get rid of water sprinkled on it for that purpose, but that led to a myth of lesser-god Prometheus, who did not believe any law of nature or divine purpose would automatically bestow freedom and happiness on mankind.<sup>54</sup> He was present at a feast of men and gods when the men tried to hide the best food from Zeus, who was so furious he took back fire from mankind. Prometheus stole it back and returned it to men, so, in retaliation, a vengeful Zeus sent women to earth as living, eternal punishment to them.<sup>55</sup> Worse yet, for some ungodly if not demonic reason, women had to be married to effect the continuation of the human race. 😊 Greek society was indelible sexist, but there were nevertheless some happy heterosexual

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<sup>46</sup>. Rose, M. *The Mind at Work*. Alan Lane; New York. 2004. pp. 100-101.

<sup>47</sup>. Randall, J. *The Making of the Modern Mind*. Houghton Mifflin; Cambridge, MA. 1940. p. 233.

<sup>48</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. p. 248.

<sup>49</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 289.

<sup>50</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. p. xxvi.

<sup>51</sup>. Doby, T. (M.D.) *Discoverers of Blood Circulation*. Schuman; New York. 1963. p. 2. Greek gods lived in a democracy in which they negotiated and were open to persuasion which might change their minds. (Keane. pp. 15-18.)

<sup>52</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 132.

<sup>53</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. p. xxxii.

<sup>54</sup>. Crossman, R. *Towards a Philosophy of Socialism*. New Fabian Essays. pp. 14-15.

<sup>55</sup>. Heisod. Ca. 700. D. Wender, trans. Penguin. 1972.

relationships.<sup>56</sup> However, for Pericles, the ultimate for a woman was not to be talked about<sup>57</sup> while according to Xenophon, a wife's duty was to remain indoors,<sup>58</sup> and Demosthenes was emphatic that providing sexual gratification for her husband was not expected of her but of mistresses or prostitutes. A spouse was to provide legitimate children and guard the home.<sup>59</sup>

Women aside, as distinct from such "Mytheology", philosophy began in Greece in the sixth century.<sup>60</sup> Just as the Greeks' prime contribution to political theory (like politics) was that they invented it, so too their prime contribution to natural philosophy (i.e., science) was that they started it. They did so by the revolutionary expedient of thinking things through rather than just accepting traditional lore,<sup>61</sup> which Aristotle explicitly held was a concoction of myths created to induce the democratic masses to behave themselves.<sup>62</sup> Their contributions in this regard were most significant in geometry and astronomy.<sup>63</sup>

It is certainly fitting that they excelled in geometry, as they were at their intellectual best when contemplating static, ideal forms, and thus they reveled in this imaginary, abstract, static world of cognitive ideals. Thus, Greek ideals were not of physical objects reduced to essence but archetypical models of theoretical abstractions which could not possibly be realized. Philosophers delighted in associating such abstractions but always in static, non-algebraic modes of thought,<sup>64</sup> and in the purest philosophy of mathematics, the Greeks failed to develop any system of symbolic notation to express dynamic functions<sup>65</sup> and likewise failed to develop the concept of zero, as nothingness was simply incomprehensible to them.<sup>66</sup> As for astronomy, their basic approach was to get the heavenly bodies to conform to geometric patterns and laws, and in this regard, they were so successful with the Ptolemaic system that originally thinking about heavenly motion ceased for almost 2,000 years.

Still, the greatest tragedy of Greek culture was that science began, developed and flourished in Ionia (on the western shores of Asia Minor i.e., Turkey) and then was aborted in favor of deductive logic and platonic ideals, which regarded and left the atoms of Leucopus of Ardea and his student Democritus (400 B.C.) as little more than cosmic dust.<sup>67</sup> The inception of science can be traced to the Milesian (alias Ionian) school of philosophy, which was created when Greek minds came in contact with the Babylonian and Egyptian cultures at Miletus, a city in Ionia. Until its subjugation by the Persians in 494, this was culturally the most important place in the Greek world. Thereafter, it was superseded by Athens, so it was more important for its brave beginnings than its enduring legacy.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. pp. 134-135. Rumor has it that Zeus felt humanity gained by having fire, which should be balanced by some evil, so he sent Pandora with a jar, which she was told not to open: She opened it and released evils into the world. Quite frankly, giving her a jar not to open sounds sort of stupid.

<sup>57</sup>. Pericles. Funeral oration for war dead. 431. (Everitt. op. cit. p. 258.)

<sup>58</sup>. Xenophon. Oeconomicus. (The Estate Manager.) 7.36. 362<. (Quoted on p. 257 of Everitt. op. cit.)

<sup>59</sup>. Demosthenes. (?) Speech against Neaira. 342.

<sup>60</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 3.

<sup>61</sup>. Hecht, J. Doubt: A History. Harper One; NY. 2003. p. 4.

<sup>62</sup>. Barnes, J. (Ed.) "Metaphysics" in The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle. Cambridge University Press; Cambridge, England. 1995. p. 104.

<sup>63</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 208.

<sup>64</sup>. Dantzig, T. 1930. Number, The Language of Science. New York. p. 80.

<sup>65</sup>. Spengler, O. 1918. The Decline of the West. Edited by H. Werner. 1962. Modern Library; New York. p. 55.

<sup>66</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 378.

<sup>67</sup>. Durant, W. and Durant, A. The Age of Napoleon. Simon and Schuster; New York. 1975. p. 636.

<sup>68</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 28.

From Egypt and to a lesser degree Babylon, Ionians derived a few rules of thumb in mathematics and some records of astronomical observation,<sup>69</sup> although the sources treated knowledge of planetary orbits as religious secrets.<sup>70</sup> In these ancient civilizations, science hardly extended beyond mythological interpretations of the universe and creation which were handed down by priests and served mainly political purposes (i.e., they promoted social stability, as modern religions still do).<sup>71</sup> Thus, although the Milesian school was created by contact with these cultures, its significance was not so much in its role as an entry point for Eastern ideas but for the way it overcame them: In both Egypt and Babylon, lore was simply passed on from one generation to the next; Ionians founded "Originality" and promoted it, in that individuals did not just accept but criticized received wisdom.<sup>72</sup>

In all ages, there are technicians who manipulate materials and things much as priests manipulate prayers and people. The originality of the Ionian thinkers was that *they applied the modes of thought derived from these technical fields to the interpretation of natural phenomena*. This was a revolutionary cultural innovation, and it might have been better received had these fledgling scientists not ridiculed established myths as they pushed aside demons and gods<sup>73</sup> and presumed to explain the world and universe by interpreting "Things above" according to experiences with "Things below".<sup>74</sup>

Although such tactlessness undoubtedly hurt the cause of science, the way to naturalistic explanations of natural events itself had been paved by the casual attitude of Ionians to religion. This, in turn, was due to the fact that Miletus was a rich commercial center in which prejudices were softened by contact with many cultures. With no dominant priestly cast,<sup>75</sup> the Ionians were relatively independent speculators and proposed scientific hypotheses usually devoid of anthropomorphism and unaffected by a need to subscribe to popular morality or to find answers which were considered culturally correct. Their basic assumption was that *the universe was unified by operative principles which were accessible to the human mind via observation and reason*. This differed fundamentally from the prevailing Greek attitude that natural events were caused by the whims of gods.<sup>76</sup> If this made them somewhat indifferent to common religious sensibilities, they did at least ask good questions, meaning questions whose answers fit a healthy system which inspired further questioning, research and learning.<sup>77</sup>

Of all the questioners of the Milesian school, Thales (636?-546?) was undoubtedly the most important. His science and philosophy were crude, but he was disposed to temper the rash hypothesizing typical of Greeks with empirical tests<sup>78</sup> and expressed his ideas in logical rather than mythological terms.<sup>79</sup> This way of thinking made the Milesian era Greece's greatest age intellectually as it was a time when thought was wedded to observation and stimulated rather than repressed further thought. Your original absent-minded professor, he reputedly was so

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<sup>69</sup>. Ibid. p. 208.

<sup>70</sup>. Watson, P. 2011. *The Great Divide*. HarperCollins; New York. p. 371.

<sup>71</sup>. Farrington, B. *Greek Science*. Penguin; Baltimore, MD. 1953. p. 135. In one widespread Amerindian myth of creation, God is a trickster/buffoon who lets man down by limiting food supplies in an overpopulated world. (Rodin. p. 167.)

<sup>72</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 152.

<sup>73</sup>. Roberts, J. *The New History of the World*. Oxford University Press; New York. 2003. p. 202.

<sup>74</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 136.

<sup>75</sup>. Watson. op. cit. p. 370.

<sup>76</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 150.

<sup>77</sup>. Russell. op. cit. pp. 28-29.

<sup>78</sup>. Ibid. p. 26.

<sup>79</sup>. Watson. op. cit. p. 371.

transfixed by the stars as he walked along one night that he set the gold standard for all subsequent Western intellectuals by falling into a ditch.<sup>80</sup> He also used information gathered during his travels to Egypt to predict a total solar eclipse on what we would call May 29, 585 the date Aristotle would, 200 years later, regard as the birthday of Greek philosophy.<sup>81</sup>

As the father of science, Thales made one of the greatest leaps in intellectual history when he attributed seasonal floods to earlier rains in the up country i.e., a natural cause rather than the whims of the relevant gods.<sup>82</sup> The first to recognize that the natural world could be known through systematic observation, Greeks also recognized a difference between nature operating through natural law and human affairs,<sup>83</sup> which are subject to mutable laws made by fallible men. Further, they recognized that man must live in conformity with nature.<sup>84</sup>

Thales's successor was Anaximander (610-546), who developed the general concepts of "Matter" and evolution. He made a monumental intellectual leap by proposing that humans were not descended from the gods but developed i.e., evolved from lower forms of life. Writing in prose, rather than verse, he posited that the universe had mathematical as well as geometric qualities, with non-divine heavenly bodies (planets) arranged in circles.<sup>85</sup>

After the fall of Ionia due to overwhelming Persian armies, Greek thought in surviving Athens first decayed and then became effete, and the general cause for this gradual decline into intellectual sterility was the preoccupation of philosophers with Man rather than the universe. This self centering of the mind on itself and its prowess found early expression in the Pythagoreans contemporary competitors of the Milesians who equated knowledge with numbers. Then came (among others) the Idealists, like Parmenides, who paved the way for the Athenians<sup>86</sup> Socrates (who reduced philosophy to a quiz game about ethics), Plato (who rejected reality in favor of ideas of ideals)<sup>87</sup> and Aristotle (who overcame Plato by respecting facts).

Pythagoras flourished in southern Italy from 540 to 510 and was intellectually important when he was both wise and otherwise. He was a mystic and magician who founded mathematics (i.e., he discovered demonstrative deductive argument as a way of establishing certainty<sup>88</sup>i.e., proof<sup>89</sup>), and his influence on philosophy via mathematics was as profound as it was regrettable.<sup>90</sup> In fact, he owed his influence and success to the philosophical emptiness of his system in that his approach was more appealing to the Greeks than was that of the Ionians precisely because it was more religious than rigorously scientific.

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<sup>80</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 151. Plato. Dialogues. Theaetetus. Ca. 369.

<sup>81</sup>. Watson. op. cit. p. 371.

<sup>82e</sup> In addition, he coined the term "Electron" (Greek for amber) in describing the ability of vigorously rubbed amber to attract light objects like straw. Likewise, after noting the ability of lodestones to attract iron, he came up with "Magnetism" based on magnesia, presumably a district in Thessaly in which lodestones are commonly found. (Klein. p. 61.) In this matter, he over-reached an animistic bit by attributing a soul to magnets and perhaps every object. (Freeman. p. 151.)

<sup>83f</sup> At approximately the same time, Solon proffered that the gods did not intervene in human affairs. (Watson. 2011. p. 361.) This was a pivotal era in Western history when developments in the martial arts and affairs led to the secularization of politics, the development of democracy, the disciplined exercise of logic and a pragmatic sense of when to dispense with tradition in the face of novel conditions i.e. intelligence. (Ibid 363)

<sup>84</sup>. Ibid. pp. 365 and 375.

<sup>85</sup>. Ibid. p. 372.

<sup>86</sup>. Durant. op. cit. p. 349.

<sup>87</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 73.

<sup>88</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 158.

<sup>89</sup>. Bronowski, J. *The Ascent of Man*. Little, Brown & Co.; Boston, MA. 1973. p. 158.

<sup>90</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 29.

Unlike the Ionians, the Pythagoreans did not try to describe the universe in terms of the behavior of material elements and physical processes. They described it exclusively in terms of numbers, which provided the form for reality<sup>91</sup> if not the matter as well. Babylonians and Egyptians could talk about five arrows or ten horses but never talked about five or ten in the abstract: Pythagoreans did<sup>92</sup> and reveled in them. Thus, a point was related to One, a line Two, a surface Three and a solid Four. According to them, points added up to lines, lines to surfaces and surfaces to solids although this is not true as two lines would add up to a solid (Four). Nevertheless, the number Ten was sacred because it was the sum of the numbers out of which the world was built.<sup>93</sup>

Opposed to the Numberists were the Atomists (ca. 425), who maintained the universe was composed of tiny bits of matter which banged around into each other forming larger constructs (aka molecules) as they did so according to their own intrinsic natures. They presented reality as an inert, lifeless machine with no mind or divinity intruding into the process. This view was and remains unappealing as it left no room for either divine purpose or the equally gratuitous and unjustified presumption of human freedom.<sup>94</sup>

As the numerical philosophy of the Pythagoreans triumphed over the natural (i.e., scientific) philosophy of the Ionians, explanations of events in terms of mathematical relations came to predominate over those based on physical processes. It is important to note that the Pythagorean system was victorious over science not because it was better but because it was more appealing to the leaders of Greek society for being more abstract<sup>95</sup> than factual. This was not only a drawback in that it implied people could learn more about the universe by drawing pictures in the sand than by observing and analyzing natural phenomena: It was a real loss because the mathematical approach was so completely plastic that it was easily adapted to conform to and/or condone any given theological or PC condoned ideological preconceptions.<sup>96</sup>

Of course, Pythagoras managed to make numbers into his own personal theology. God was perceived as a divine geometer with a mild addiction to arithmetic, and *mathematics was considered the sole source of eternal and exact truths*. This led Pythagoras to the supersensible ideal universe of perfect forms and away from the real world of imprecise observation of imperfect objects. To the extent that Greek philosophers followed him into empty numerology, they also became unconcerned with, indifferent to and uncontaminated by irregular if not irrational reality.<sup>97</sup>

His influence was most regrettable in astronomy which, like all Greek sciences except medicine,<sup>98</sup> was to be constructed on mathematical and deductive principles rather than actual observation. This eventually produced a theoretical (Ptolemaic) model of a universe built up of successively enclosing spheres on which heavenly bodies moved in circular patterns around a

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<sup>91</sup>. Burgess, J. Introduction to the History of Philosophy. McGraw-Hill; New York. 1939. p. 33.

<sup>92</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 157.

<sup>93</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 47.

<sup>94</sup>. Lindberg, D. The Beginning of Western Science. University of Chicago Press; Chicago, IL. 1992. p. 34.

<sup>95</sup>g The classic example being the notes of a major triad being produced by vibrating strings in ratios of three, four and five units in length. This represented a *monumental moment in intellectual development* as it was the first time a natural phenomenon was described mathematically, (Johnson, S. p 68) although it may have been more cultural than natural.

<sup>96</sup>. Ibid. p. 48.

<sup>97</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 37. Nevertheless, Pythagoras is credited with being the first to overcome the Homeric notion of the earth as a dish by replacing it with the image of a sphere. (Manchester, W. A World Lit by Fire. Back Bay Books; Boston, MA. 1992. p. 291.)

<sup>98</sup>. Roberts. op. cit. p. 204.

stationary earth. When observers noticed this did not account for the way celestial orbs actually moved, the schema was saved by introducing increasing numbers of refinements i.e., Aristotle needed 49 spheres<sup>99</sup> into the system whose tenets went unchallenged for nearly 2,000 years.<sup>100</sup>

Ironically for Pythagoreans, their greatest discovery proved to be their undoing as their theorem about the right triangle that the square of the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides led to the discovery of irrational numbers.<sup>101</sup> The Pythagorean love affair with whole numbers was threatened by the realization that the square root of two could not be expressed in them: It goes on unresolved forever.<sup>102</sup> This posed a threat to their mathematical schema, as it indicated that their mental world was somehow inaccurate, insufficient, incomplete and therefore imperfect. Worse yet, it could not be made accurate, sufficient, complete and perfect by adaptation and/or expansion and still remain "Theirs". Thus, even their theoretically ideal world was imperfect. So, how did these great Greek mathematical philosophers handle this intellectual crisis? They executed by drowning the man (Hippasus<sup>103</sup> ca. 425) who created it and, for the sake of cognitive security, suppressed knowledge of the square root of two.<sup>104</sup>

Likewise, they suppressed that other scourge of Pythagorean idealism the dodecahedron, and in this, they were so successful that hardly anyone now knows much less cares what a dodecahedron is. Nevertheless, anyone interested in Greek stupidity should note that Pythagoreans knew of five perfect solids the tetrahedron, the cube, the octahedron, the icosahedron and the dodecahedron. The first four were conveniently associated with the four elements which constituted the Greek world earth, air, fire and water. The fifth was regarded as a symbol of the cosmos as a whole<sup>105</sup> the quintessence of the other four,<sup>106</sup> thus presumably representing some unworldly, supernatural and perhaps even dangerous power.<sup>107</sup> Ordinary people were to be protected from the dodecahedron, and indeed Pythagoreanism was quite popular until its practitioners were found to be dealing in this alarming, subversive subject, whence they were suppressed and some lynched, thus initiating the West's long and venerable tradition of successfully persecuting intellectual heretics.<sup>108</sup>

Ironically for everyone else, Pythagoras both established pure reason as the source of ideal knowledge and corrupted it by giving it a distinctly moral purpose. Although he coined the term "Philosopher" lover of wisdom,<sup>109</sup> what began as magical mathematics became moral mathematics as *the mysterious religious elements of the Asiatic tradition were dropped in favor of ethical implications*. It is this which distinguishes the theology (and thought) of the West from that of the East, but it left Greek (and subsequent) philosophers with the problem of formulating a logical, eternal ethic upon which they could construct a metaphysics which was

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<sup>99</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 384.

<sup>100</sup>. Roberts. op. cit. p. 203.

<sup>101</sup>. Van Doran, C. A History of Knowledge. Ballantine; New York. 1991. p. 37. The theorem was independently derived in China by a contemporary Chou Pei. (Bronowski. 160.) How odd that thought in two separate cultures would be at the same intellectual point at the same time.

<sup>102</sup>. Sambursky, S. 1956. The Physical World of the Greeks. Routledge & Kegan Paul; London. p. 34.

<sup>103</sup>. Firestein, S. Ignorance. Oxford University Press; New York. 2012. p. 43.

<sup>104</sup>. Sagan, C. 1980. Cosmos. Random House; NY. p. 185.

<sup>105</sup>h Until Aristotle hypothesized a fifth element "Aether" to account for the composition of the heavens. (Klein. p. 76.)

<sup>106</sup>. Spengler. op. cit. p. 48fn(#3).

<sup>107</sup>. Sagan, C. op. cit. p. 184.

<sup>108</sup>. Spengler. op. cit. p. 48fn(#3).

<sup>109</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 25.

both rational and moral.<sup>110</sup> While there usually was some degree of internal consistency in the would-be eternal philosophical systems thus developed, they were invariably suited at most to the developer and his world, so normally their only pragmatic value was that they made their devotees feel smug about themselves.

Thus, the classical world was dominated by a schema which dealt with ideals and ideas in terms of a desired moral end rather than accuracy and practicality.<sup>111</sup> Any object or observation might provide a starting point for a train of thought, but then a logical philosophy could be constructed based upon it without any particular concern for congruence with reality. Worse yet, a contrived system could be constructed for a particular moral purpose i.e., to justify a particular desired political/social policy and many were then and still are down to this present, PC day.<sup>112</sup>

For Greek thinkers, however, the quest for a reasonable morality was overshadowed by the romance they had with pure thought in which abstract thinking reigned inane: To wit, in a counter-reaction to civic chaos, idealists led not Greece to-ward Empire but the Western world into a sterile commitment to deductive logic. Ergo, our traditional reverence for the Greek philosophers is truly inappropriate because it was they who, in fits of logic, turned Greece and the West away from science and analytical thinking about the real world. *Only very slowly over the past four hundred years have we managed to overcome the debilitating legacy of Greek thought* and replaced the Athenic belief in deduction from assumed axioms with the contemporary commitment to induction from observed facts.<sup>113</sup>

The essence of this was Pythagorean that the eternal world revealed itself to the intellect alone rather than through the senses<sup>114</sup> for unlike the empiricist (who is the slave of his material) but like the musician (who is the creator of his material), the mathematician can create a perfect mental world of ordered beauty. Thus, reason alone should suffice to reveal pure knowledge, and if the thought in which the Greeks indulged was not as pristine as they believed it to be, it was tainted only by the omnipresence of and need and desire for some kind of moral order. Nevertheless, in their belief that they were dealing with pure, uncontaminated ideas, they were carrying on the tradition of Pythagoras, and Parmenides and Plato (both of whom idealized logic) were inheritors as well as perpetuators of that legacy.<sup>115</sup>

Parmenides (ca. 500-450), the inventor of philosophy, had few equals as the champion of pure reason. He attacked the research method of gathering data through the senses and relied exclusively on reason. Consistent with his love of logic, his was a static universe in which not only nothing did change but nothing *could* change. Needless to say, he was opposed to the Ionian "Doers", who were actively altering nature at every turn. He considered any alleged change as a misperception due to a trick the senses played on the mind, but he never did explain how he knew that permanence was not a misperception perhaps caused by his belief in it. He summarily dismissed all experience as illusionary, and although he did make a good argument for his case, he obviously could have no evidence for it because the whole gist of it was that evidence was unobtainable.<sup>116</sup> Accordingly, thought was at variance with or at least totally

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<sup>110</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 37.

<sup>111</sup>. Taine, H. 1876. L'Ancine Régime. Paris. p. 262.

<sup>112</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 78.

<sup>113</sup>. Ibid. p. 39.

<sup>114</sup>. Ibid. p. 37.

<sup>115</sup>. Ibid. pp. 32-33.

<sup>116</sup>108. Russell. op. cit. p. 48.

independent of experience, which it (i.e., he) both condemned and rejected.<sup>117</sup> As a living triumph of fancy over fact, he bordered on the edge of reasonable insanity by managing to persist in a way of thinking which was consistently refuted by his daily contact with the real world.<sup>118</sup> The chief losers in this unfortunate and unnecessary battle of reason versus reality were the Athenian philosophers and everyone who followed their intellectual tradition. Athens came to be the heir of the triumphant Pythagorean doctrine of logic over life, and wearing the mantle of pure rationalism, philosophers there took the first steps down the path that led to Western Civilization.<sup>119</sup> They first asked the big questions (What is truth? What is "Good"? etc.) that we still ponder and first attempted to solve the fundamental philosophical problems that still confront us today. It was they who began the distinctly Western tradition of disciplined thinking by means of carefully analyzed words and statements. However ignorant, narrow-minded and abstractly idealistic they were, their writings mark the dawn of our own day.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, the intellectual life of Athens toward the end of the fifth century marked a watershed in the development of thought. If it was floating free from experience, thanks to Pythagoras and Parmenides, it retained a moral bent and was directed by the questions Athenian philosophers were asking<sup>121</sup> and the answers they sought to support. Two thousand years later, this intensely verbal logic would link up again with experimentation, and science would be reborn and challenge if not overcome the enduring Athenian moral element which remained.

Certainly in ancient Athens, resistance to objective, analytical thought was clearly the norm as Anaxagoras (500?-428?) discovered to his great chagrin and dismay. He was of the Ionian intellectual tradition and the first to introduce philosophy to Athens, which had survived the Persian invasion as Ionia had not. There he lived for thirty years, discussed the nature of intellect and folly and was treated with the hostility and disdain reserved for those who would improve the lives of others.<sup>122</sup>

As mentioned above, when Pericles engendered resentment, it was his friends who were attacked. In the case of Anaxagoras, prosecution was made possible by the passing of a law (ca. 437) which permitted impeachment of those who did not practice religion and taught theories about "The things on high". Specifically, he was accused of teaching blasphemies that the sun was a red-hot stone and the moon was made of earth. He left Athens and founded a school back in Ionia, where he could safely teach those who already agreed with him and any others interested in learning.<sup>123</sup>

Athenian culture rejected Anaxagoras and the Ionian tradition he represented not only because slave owners were not disposed to learn from people who dealt with the real world and material universe, nor just because the political leaders did not want people speculating about the nature of things, but also because of the absence in science of a commitment to social ethics.

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<sup>117</sup>i Gorgias (483-375) was likewise down on reality. According to him nothing exists. If something exists we cannot know anything about it. If we know something about it we cannot communicate our knowledge to anyone else. This is solipsism, (Rooney. p. 27.) and it puts its devotees at a severe disadvantage in learning vis-a-vis reality based philosophies.

<sup>118</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. pp. 55-56.

<sup>119</sup>j Aristotle provided an embarrassing example of reason run amok when concluding that, since he lived in a Golden Age, technology was maxed out and further progress impossible. (Stark. p. 38.) Or: Everything had already been invented.

<sup>120</sup>. Wells. op. cit. pp. 334-335.

<sup>121</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>. Russell. op. cit. pp. 61-62.

<sup>123</sup>. Ibid. He was—and may have been the first executed for being an atheist. (Blom. p. 307.)

Moral neutrality in science promotes accurate, analytical thinking, whereas the warping effect of self-righteous biases in the Western intellectual tradition generally is the philosophical legacy of Pythagoras and Plato, both of whom allowed ethical considerations to shape what they passed off as pure thought.<sup>124</sup> In any event (and despite the best efforts of Anaxagoras and other Ionians), Greek thought turned away from science<sup>125</sup> and toward moral philosophy a field which has been consumed by controversy and devoid of any discernable progress since its inception.

Put in terms of questions, the Greeks came to ask "Why?" rather than "How?". The answer to the first kind of question is teleological and presumes a purpose; the answer to the second is mechanical and presumes causality. The first led to useless, open-ended theological disputes which raged for ages and still consume many worthy minds; the second led to science but not until 2,000 years after the Greeks stopped asking about how the real world functions.<sup>126</sup>

Thus, in order to appreciate fully the contributions of the Athenian philosophers to Western stupidity, it is necessary to bear in mind that the thwarted Ionians were scientists who reasoned from experience and attempted to understand the universe and find man's place in it. Thanks to Protagoras, who, in the 440's set up man as the measure of all things and opined the *gods existed only in mens' minds*<sup>127</sup> but should be worshipped anyway, Athenians introduced into Western thought an earlier-day humanism. This made man the center of a self-serving method of investigation<sup>128</sup> and morality rather than validity the ultimate standard by which answers would be accepted or condemned by society. We rejoice in his observation that philosophy has nothing to teach but despair that morality depends on the willingness of the majority to believe what they are taught<sup>129</sup> i.e., their stupidity regardless of its validity, which is not to be challenged or proven but just accepted. Somehow, truth gets lost in the agoran shuffle.<sup>130</sup>

The first of the Athenian thinkers was Socrates (470?-399), who discouraged research into nature and substituted for it a theory of ideals linked to a belief in the immortal soul. In following his lead, the Athenians abandoned science and embraced a religious view of Man in the Pythagorean tradition of moralistic idealism. As a philosopher per se, which he was not, Socrates (according to Plato and Xenophon) was not so much a logician as a metaphysician whose main concern was with the oxymoronic field of political ethics.<sup>131</sup> His forte was in asking questions; his double forte was in not answering them, and his greatest weakness was that he

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<sup>124</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 63.

<sup>125</sup>k How ironic that God made eating fruit from the tree of knowledge *of good and evil* a capital offence. (Genesis 2:9, 16-17.) Having scientific knowledge was OK as was an understanding of economics. Humans were just not supposed to judge morality because we cannot be as objective as our rather turf conscious, PR spinning, ego-centered, self-absorbed God. (The knowledge upon which this story in Genesis is based is the byte that sex causes people: i.e. copulation can lead to pregnancy, etc. People got this idea by watching dogs create puppies. (Watson 2011 p. 135.)

<sup>126</sup>. Ibid. p. 67.

<sup>127</sup>. Watson. op. cit. pp. 363 and 371.

<sup>128</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 89.

<sup>129</sup>. Russell, B. *Philosophy and Politics*. Cambridge University Press; Lon-don. 1947.

<sup>130</sup>l To this day part of our Greek legacy remains our reluctance to learn any lessons that challenge or would compromise our basic Politically Correct schemas.

<sup>131</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 89. When dealing with the issue of what separates humans from beasts, the Greeks came up with language and *a sense of justice*. (Butler-Bowdon. p. 3.) [Chimps have a sense of right/normal/expected.]

talked<sup>132</sup> too much.<sup>133</sup> Fortes aside, his only belief was that knowledge is virtue, and his acid test for any idea or belief was not whether it was true or not but whether it promoted virtue or not. He set the gold standard for all teachers for all time in his efforts to bring forth “Such notions as may serve to make young people better”.<sup>134</sup> Even though his strategy of questioning was supposed to lead to virtuous behavior, for many of his followers, it actually led only to a loss of moral habits which had restrained their baser impulses. Among these self-indulgent, self-excusing scoundrels were Charmides (a tyrant sponsored by victorious Sparta at the end of the Peloponnesian War), Critias<sup>135</sup> (another tyrant for Sparta who destroyed the Athenian educational system), and Alcibiades (the ultimate traitor who did as much as he could to wreck Athens and Greece). In the name of virtue, such pupils had their faith and patriotism destroyed by virtue-seeking Socrates,<sup>136</sup> whom the cynical, jaded Aristophanes inaccurately portrayed in his **Clouds**<sup>137</sup> (423) as a middle-aged huckster, a windbag and the worst of the slick sophists who filled the heads of the idle, rich elite with word games and relativist morality. His influence was accordingly purportedly partially responsible for the increasing lethargy, decadence and cultural decline of Athens during the war with Sparta,<sup>138</sup> for if Socrates were a tree, and trees could be judged by their fruit, then he could be justly accused of corrupting Athenian youth and spreading impiety. In one of the most tragic triumphs of fiction over fact and injustice over truth, it was this persona of Socrates which was tried, convicted and executed.<sup>139</sup>

Alternatively, there were those who knew him who thought him very pious and considered his effects on others to be wholesome. He was certainly conventionally religious, respected the Gods with-out question and avoided politics.<sup>140</sup> Probably civic leaders were enraged not so much by his indeterminate effects on the young people of Athens he had tutored some right-wing revolutionaries who for a time in 404 overthrew the government<sup>141</sup> as by his ill-conceived efforts to get competent, ethical men into positions of power.

One problem with democratic Athens was that high ranking officials were chosen by lot rather than being selected on the basis of ability.<sup>142</sup> This, in turn, was falsely based on attitudes which still characterize democracies: Resentment toward experts; suspicion of entrenched authority; and faith in common sense as embodied in the common man.<sup>143</sup> However justified such attitudes are, they do not justify picking leaders by lot because the presumed collective wisdom of the people does not necessarily translate into effective leadership. The system might produce an individual unsuited to a given role a shoemaker picked to be a general or even end

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<sup>132</sup>m Some people forget that we were given two ears and one mouth so we can listen twice as much as we talk.

<sup>133</sup>. Xenophon. *Memorabilia*. 1 1 10. 371 B.C.

<sup>134</sup>. Plato. *Symposium*. 210c. Ca. 380 B.C.

<sup>135</sup>n He believed virtue could be imposed by force only to find force could be imposed without virtue. (Everitt. p. 384.)

<sup>136</sup>. Wells. *op. cit.* p. 329.

<sup>137</sup>o In the play, there is a thinking shop for wise fools in which one can learn to win even unjust cases. However, students there find the faculty absorbed in their own researches as to how far a flea can jump relative to its body size and out of which orifice the noise of a gnat emerges (Freeman. p. 263.) perhaps the origin of our modern universities. ☺

<sup>138</sup>. Hanson. V. A Nightmarish Retreat. Plato's and Xenophon's idealistic image of Socrates may have been created partly to overcome the slanderous caricature presented by Aristophanes. (Cowley. *op. cit.* pp. 415-416.)

<sup>139</sup>. Everitt. *op. cit.* p. 393.

<sup>140</sup>. *Ibid.* pp. 319-320.

<sup>141</sup>. *Ibid.* p. 421.

<sup>142</sup>. Durant. *op. cit.* p. 264.

<sup>143</sup>. Roberts. *op. cit.* p. 196.

up with the stupidest man heading the government.<sup>144</sup> Ever the willing gadfly in the Athenian urn,<sup>145</sup> Socrates initiated the venerable Western tradition of making important public officials look and feel like idiots<sup>146</sup> because they have difficulty packaging their self-serving policies as beneficial to everyone. Honing his ability to irritate others, he openly advocated the subversive notion that those in power should know what they were doing and should do it right.<sup>147</sup> The first to discover ignorance,<sup>148</sup> he could not leave bad enough alone but persisted in exposing it, hypocrisy and corruption in pretentious officials<sup>149</sup> and called for competence and, worse yet, virtue in public life. He thus alienated if not made enemies of the enfranchised champions of the people, who thought such blatant sedition had to be stopped, and, after Socrates passed on his right to opt for exile<sup>150</sup> and rejected an offered reprieve if he would give up philosophy,<sup>151</sup> it was with a cup of hemlock. In a general sense, his death symbolized misguided cognitive consonance: He would not join the Thirty Tyrants<sup>152</sup> in their crimes so they had him the bravest, wisest and most upright man of his day,<sup>153</sup> who incidently could drink everyone under the table<sup>154</sup> condemned on clearly trumped up charges of sedition.<sup>155</sup>

Although Socrates was a saint as a man, he was a sinner as a philosopher. In fact, the irony of his life and legacy is that he is remembered as a philosopher although he was explicitly more concerned with promoting virtue than being philosophical<sup>156</sup> and readily sacrificed his intellectual integrity to become an ethical pest. He insisted the soul was most important but incongruously directed his efforts toward the minds of his pupils. He spoke for the human spirit, but it was through reason and knowledge that they would become virtuous. He was the first apostle of intellectual and moral freedom, which he bent toward his own particular end of promoting an atheistic, human good.<sup>157</sup> He did care about truth, but when push came to shove, he cared more about reaching desirable, psychologically satisfying (PC) conclusions. If he

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<sup>144</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. p. 234.

<sup>145</sup>. Durant. op. cit. pp. 367-370.

<sup>146</sup>. Hodgkinson, T and Bergh, H. v. d. How to Sound Cultured. 2015. Publishers Group West; Berkeley, CA. p. 228.

<sup>147</sup>. Russell. 1945. op. cit. pp. 83-84. It is easy to overestimate the intellectual level of Socrates' sessions with his devotees. On the topic of the need for knowledge in a specialty, he might start by asking the assembled, "If you want to get a shoe repaired, to whom would you go?" After some head-scratching, one of his acolytes would triumphantly proclaim, "A shoemaker, O Socrates." And so it would go.

<sup>148</sup>. Boorstin, D. 1998. The Seekers. Vintage; NY. p. 34.

<sup>149</sup>. Butler-Bowdon, T. 50 Politics Classics. Nicholas Brealey; Boston, MA. 2105. p. 3.

<sup>150</sup>. Ferejohn, J. and F. Rosenbluth. Forged Through Fire. Norton; New York. 2017. p. 44.

<sup>151</sup>. Rooney. op. cit. p. 7.

<sup>152</sup>p Generally the tyrants instituted a reign of terror in Athens which resulted in 1,500 men being put to death for their money or their reputations as being law abiding citizens and even tried to involve Socrates in the effort. Showing Socratic virtue, he refused to arrest a fellow citizen, and the Tyrants, showing some restraint, left him, for this particular offense alone. (Everitt. p. 384.)

<sup>153</sup>. Phaedo. 117d-118a. Ca. 380 B.C.

<sup>154</sup>. Hodgkinson and Bergh. op. cit. p. 228.

<sup>155</sup>q The actual charge was for refusing to recognize the gods recognized by the state, introducing other new divinities and corrupting the youth of Athens. (Diogenese. Ca. 250 A.D.) Religion in Greece was a community affair, so having one's own pipeline to the gods was in itself offensive to most jurors. In a general sense, he prefigured Jesus, who individualized the religious experience, in being victimized by a fearful establishment he had inadvertently challenged. (Hanson. p 421.)

<sup>156</sup>r It is incredibly ironic that Plato portrays Socrates in his death scene as saying "I shall never give up philosophy nor stop...pointing out the truth.." (Apology 29d), when, in fact, he made no commitment to philosophy or the truth at all but *validity never was Plato's strong point.* ☺

<sup>157</sup>. Muller. op. cit. p. 155.

never did fashion a consistent system of thought which would encourage virtue, neither has anyone else. However, he failed in this because he commonly indulged in the now widely accepted practice of dishonesty in argumentation for the sake of a desired effect<sup>158</sup> an exercise philosophers call "A search for knowledge".

With the smugness of a bad cleric, Socrates opined that this was the most important of all enterprises, but he eschewed science as it did not lend itself to helping him achieve his predetermined goal of demonstrating the universal validity of his undefined, inconclusive ethics. Ignoring the recently developed Asian spiritualism of Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism,<sup>159</sup> and indifferent to the contemplative mode of Eastern philosophy generally,<sup>160</sup> he embraced methodical interrogation, thereby establishing *questioning as the distinctive Western contribution to systematic thought*. His abiding preoccupation was a search for definitions of ethical terms, but as he examined issues like courage and friendship, piety and materialism, he structured each argument to a particular end. If he was subconsciously opinionated and a merciless friend, he claimed to be ignorant and constantly if disingenuously maintained the only thing he knew was that he did not know anything.

There is something dismaying in the pathetic optimism Socrates evinced upon learning (via Anaxagoras) that the mind is the disposer and cause of all. From this he concluded, for some peculiar reason, that the mind would dispose all for the best and put each particular in the best rather than the most emotionally convenient or comfortable place.<sup>161</sup> Disappointed by scientists' focus on the "Hows" rather than the "Whys" of life and consistent with his cheerful if baseless faith in the human intellect, he turned inward and naively asserted that no one wittingly sins<sup>162</sup> and that therefore only knowledge is needed to make people virtuous.<sup>163</sup> Like most of his pronouncements, this proved nothing but suggests his detachment from the hard knocks of real life in the agora. It also implies he sinned sub-consciously and could not have been very virtuous considering how little he knew.<sup>164</sup>

This Socratic/Platonic nonsense of coupling knowledge with virtue i.e., the Socratic Paradox is common in Greek thought<sup>165</sup> and aristocratic in bent. People may have to learn to be virtuous, but virtue does not follow from the intellectual learning of facts and reliance on logic: It develops through a fostered sense of compassion and sympathy for others. However, this development was precluded in Greece by the cultural predominance of the slave owners, whose superior social schemas defined and determined prevailing ethical values.

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<sup>158</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 142.

<sup>159</sup>. Jasper, K. Vom Ursprung und Ziel der Geschichte. (On the Origin and Goal of History.) 1949.

<sup>160</sup>. Roberts. op. cit. p. 145.

<sup>161</sup>. Plato. Phaedo. op. cit.

<sup>162</sup>. Plato. Protagoras. ca. 390 B.C. (Trans. W. Guthrie. Penguin Books; New York. 1956. pp. 345e-346a.) This fatuity was furthered over 2,000 years later by Thomas Jefferson, who believed knowledge improved morality—thus leading people on the path to truth (Burns. p. 81.), à la the enlightened French (P. Holbach's *La Morale universelle*. 1776) and by Victor Hugo (*Les Misérables*. 1862. Chapter 17, p. 2.). To wit: Eliminating ignorance would eliminate crime or more probably create informed criminals. ☺

<sup>163</sup> Of all Socratic\* legacies the most widespread, long-lived and difficult to overcome is that people are reasonable and need just more knowledge to make them behave properly. Put the other way, people presumably misbehave out of ignorance or delusion (Rosenbaum. p. xxii.) not evilness. Btw, Plato continued this pitch; wrongdoing stems from ignorance a notion revived by 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelical American reformers convinced ignorance bred sin. (Strausbaugh. p. 24.) \*Confucian?

<sup>164</sup>. Russell. op. cit. pp. 91-92.

<sup>165</sup>. Ibid. p. 92.

Ironically, the general orientation of Socrates toward human affairs was both more intensely developed and more skewed off in his most famous pupil Aristocles, (aka Plato. 427?-347?). Widely traveled, he was primarily concerned with cultural institutions, but, unfortunately, his keen sense of the social and political implications of his ideas distorted his thinking and made him the great standard bearer of Western stupidity for all time. Convinced that sense impressions are illusionary, that knowledge comes only through intellectual struggle and that reason is the way to a higher way of life,<sup>166</sup> his tremendous intellect became an obstacle to understanding and had a dampening effect on learning throughout the ancient world. The development of science particularly despite Aristotle's efforts was severely hampered by his overwhelming success in casting philosophy as a method for over-intellectualizing and coining idealized rationalizations.<sup>167</sup>

It was not so bad that, like Socrates, Plato restricted his interest to human affairs and neglected the rest of the universe, but it was indeed regrettable that he perpetuated the Great Questioner's tradition of intellectual dishonesty in the cause of rationalized morality. No one else has so packaged egregious nonsense in such charming dramas (i.e., dialogues).<sup>168</sup> He would have been the greatest philosopher ever had he left a systematic, concise statement of his views and put the truth above the interests of the state.<sup>169</sup> Nevertheless, two themes stand out in his works: values are absolute and virtue is essential in an individual's life.<sup>170</sup>

Like a Greek Moses,<sup>171</sup> all his doctrines were judged by their social consequences if not his political pretensions, and if the particular views he advocated were still designed to make his followers virtuous, it was because to him virtue was "Obedience". If he is to be admired intellectually, it must be for the Procrustean ways he could twist arguments and manipulate discussions so they would lead to "Proper"(i.e., desired), predetermined PC conclusions.<sup>172</sup>

Ever since Plato introduced this Socratic vice into Western thought, all formal metaphysical inquires have been conducted only after the conclusion to be reached was already established in the inquirer's mind.<sup>173</sup> Unfortunately, he became the most influential of all philosophers, and as he enfranchised the practice of building foredrawn conclusions on inherent biases into sometimes contradictory ideas, *end-directed analysis became the basis for Western thought* generally and philosophy in particular albeit to the decided detriment of intellectual integrity for ages to come. Both this particular, philosophical fault and his emphasis on human affairs may have been Socratic in origin, but Plato showed the genius of a gifted student who far outstripped his teacher in applying stupidity to new fields and expanding it to new heights and depths. Born to the privileged class, his personal bias in political affairs was aristocratic, and he blamed the defeat of Athens in the Peloponnesian War on democracy, which he despised for elevating rhetoric over reason.<sup>174</sup> Naturally, this feeling was only intensified when

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<sup>166</sup>. Erickson, S. *Philosophy as a Guide to Living*. The Teaching Company; Chantilly, VA. 2006. Part 2; p. 73.

<sup>167</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 110.

<sup>168</sup>. Stone, I. From a taped interview with Andrew Patner. I. F. Stone: A Portrait. New York. 1988. pp. 23-24.

<sup>169</sup>. Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Routledge; London. 1962.

<sup>170</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. p. 423.

<sup>171</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 36.

<sup>172</sup> From a mythical Greek giant named Procrustes who sawed off the limbs of tall people and stretched short people to make them fit a speccial bed equally. In this context, it is all the more ironic that he specifically banned rhetoric from his academy specifically because he regarded it as the art of making the worse seem the better cause. (Everitt. p. 423.)

<sup>173</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 80.

<sup>174</sup>. Ferejohn and Rosenbluth. op. cit. p. 44.

democratic leaders put his beloved mentor to death.<sup>175</sup> Further, his experience of growing up during unsettling domestic turmoil and the war made him fear the future<sup>176</sup> so he directed his thinking toward securing peace and order for the chaotic society of Athens, which endured democracy until the Macedonian conquest in 260.<sup>177</sup>

Meanwhile, Plato believed peace and order could be achieved through human obedience to divine law which was both permanent and invisible. He further believed an understanding of divine law would promote not Socratic virtue but better obedience, and thinkers like himself would bring that understanding by determining and promulgating the absolute truths upon which such a tranquil, society would be based. Plato called these “Ideas”, although we would call them “Ideals” truth and justice. Typical of this theorizing was his naive assumption that to see the truth *ought* to make it impossible for one to act in a manner at odds with it and he was absolutely right: it *ought* to; but sometimes it did not. In this regard, as the intellectual ancestor of all rationalists, “Plate” took thought too seriously as did Socrates, who idealistically opined it was impossible to know the better and follow the worst<sup>178</sup> no matter how appealing it was or how cleverly packaged. In that same vein, the idealists who carried on the Platonic tradition—St. Augustine and Karl Marx pop to mind—envisaged utopian states rather than functional, mundane enterprises.

As it happened, militaristic Sparta had served as the source of inspiration for the Republic although the proper translation of the Greek title is “The State”.<sup>179</sup> Because of the mistranslation, readers are often surprised to find the author advocated utopian totalitarianism<sup>180</sup> in which a small oligarchy maintains itself in power by pro-paganda, lies and violence<sup>181</sup> in the cause of the *status quo* of a closed society. In the book, Plato transferred the ages of lead, iron, silver and gold to types of men according to their intellects which, in turn, determined their social roles. In his ideal state, he would have banned poetry, art and most music because they can sway the emotions of the *illiterati*.<sup>182</sup> However, lying was not only retained but reserved for the government, where it does seem to have a natural home.<sup>183</sup> The “Noble Lie” inherited from Socrates is set forth in considerable detail, and Plato seemed blissfully unconcerned that the compulsory acceptance of official myths<sup>184</sup> would be incompatible with philosophy and would involve a kind of education which would stunt the development of both integrity and intelligence. The educational system provided in the **Republic** is specifically directed toward the study of reality,<sup>185</sup> which is great—until you realize that Plato’s reality resides somewhere in the ionosphere and has nothing to do with earthly, human society almost. In fact, Plato’s concept of justice shows how he made a mockery of himself. Were History to issue the call, “Would the real Plato please shut up” the responder would be not the abstruse idealist but the pragmatic politician. When push came to shove,

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<sup>175</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 105.

<sup>176</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 111.

<sup>177</sup>. Watson. op. cit. p. 364.

<sup>178</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. p. 321.

<sup>179</sup>. Cahill, T. Heretics and Heroes. Anchor Books; New York. 2013. p. 211n.

<sup>180</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 105.

<sup>181</sup>. Ebenstein, W. Modern Political Thought. Rinehart & Co.; New York. 1954. p. 4.

<sup>182</sup>. Cahill. op. cit. p. 211.

<sup>183</sup>. Stone, I. In a Time of Torment. Random House; New York. 1967. p. 317.

<sup>184</sup> u For a contemporary example, turn on the news. In this context note the comment by Margaret Thatcher’s Cabinet Secretary that the government may be “Economical with the truth” (Wheen. p. 297.) leading to the observation that the government is dishonest. (Groves.)

<sup>185</sup>. Erickson. op. cit. p. 33.

abstract justice was enlisted in the cause of Plato's true love the state, which was not based on truth. Nor was there anything fair about it. If an individual was involved, he was expendable because he and his freedom meant nothing. By Plato's time, Periclesian democracy was dead. The individual was the enemy of Plato's functional, if perverse but essential state,<sup>186</sup> which was sustained by intense indoctrination of the young and old.

What the **Republic's** education system did promote was courage in battle, with the stories mothers and nurses could tell young children rigidly censored. Likewise, Homer, although he hyped trickery, was forbidden because he made heroes lament and the gods laugh, otherwise were the equal of men. Except for the Greek equivalent of marches, music as were the arts in general was taboo.<sup>187</sup> The ruling elite resorted to trickery in the eugenics lottery which was accompanied by lies to the effect that there was a biological difference between the upper and lower classes.<sup>188</sup> Finally, there was to be large-scale infanticide for non-government programmed births.<sup>189</sup>

That *Plato valued public order* over intellectual integrity clearly indicates he was more Greek than philosopher. The idea of order that everyone and everything had a place and should be kept in it was a basic to the Greek schema, and however repugnant the deliberate use of deception may be to anyone who loves knowledge, Plato considered it an acceptable way to realize this cultural ideal.<sup>190</sup> This was something of a crossover point for Plato because until him, Greek culture comfortably found compromises between theoretical ideals and grubby reality: He maintained a sharp contrast between them and favored the ideal. However, he also recognized the pragmatic need for the noble lie, for example, so he elevated it to an ideal in and of itself.

Having presented his vision of order achieved through philosopher-kings in **The Republic** probably the most incredible example of intellectual snobbery of all time,<sup>191</sup> Plato had his doubts and concluded that laws were the only safeguard against abuses of power. Too much power concentrated anywhere is simply too dangerous, as it invariably leads to injustice. Arbitrary power<sup>192</sup> was recognized as an inducement to stupidity which in turn undermined the effectiveness of power. Stupidity could thus be seen as a check on excessive power, rendering it counter-productive as it becomes unjust and leads to disorder and—horror of Platonic horrors—a change in the power structure.

In the cause of order, **The Republic** sacrificed not only intellectual integrity but liberty and equality as well. For example, he outlawed poetry for the perfectly good reason that Homer and Hesiod had sung about unphilosophical and immoral gods.<sup>193</sup> As a counterpoise to the determinist writings of Democritus, which Plato recommended be burned,<sup>194</sup> this totalitarian, fascistic utopia shunned democracy,<sup>195</sup> being based on the aristocratic Plato's political

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<sup>186</sup>. Butler-Bowdon. op. cit. p. 253.

<sup>187</sup>. Rooney. op. cit. p. 210.

<sup>188</sup> v The Greeks admired craft and cunning as forms of intelligence. The Trojan Horse, for example, was the brainchild of Odysseus, whose foxiness got him out of several tight spots on his way home after the battle. (Homer. Also, see Aesop.)

<sup>189</sup>. Russell. 1947. op. cit. (Original source: The Republic.)

<sup>190</sup>. Russell. 1945. op. cit. pp. 112-114.

<sup>191</sup>. Ebenstein. op. cit.

<sup>192</sup>. Plato. ca. 355 B.C. Laws, III. (Harvard University Press; Cambridge, MA. 1967).

<sup>193</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 16.

<sup>194</sup>. Ebenstein. op. cit.

<sup>195</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 20. Plato really slams democracy in Book 8 of The Republic.

assumption that most people are incapable of self-government and fit only to work and fight for the state. Socially, a caste system divided the people into workers with bronze souls, warriors with silver souls, and philosopher kings with gold souls.<sup>196</sup> Those with less than gold souls were the human equivalent of sheep and cattle and were not to be abused but treated with pro-per contempt. To put it kindly, Plato advocated rule by the wise few over the ignorant many. Western political development can be reduced to granting the many to choice of which few to rule them. Viewed another way, Plato provided the philosophical bas-is for totalitarianism in that the people exist for the state not the other way around.<sup>197</sup>

Although the real model was Sparta, the ideal model would have been a human beehive in which there was neither freedom nor individualism but only a total devotion and dedication to the community.<sup>198</sup> Indeed, the commitment was not to unity nor private freedom<sup>199</sup> but uniformity in common meaning *citizens were free to support the state* rather than “Do their own thing”: They were free to be happy and grieve together but not on their own. This dedication and devotion would be fostered among the many who would seek “The Good” by ritual, ceremony and religion. Only the aristocratic intellectual elite of his imaginary community would pursue the delights of philosophy, divine the ideals upon which society is based<sup>200</sup> and do so within the con-text of civil obedience.

Further, it was Plato's craving for worldly order that under-mined the foundation of his commitment to reason<sup>201</sup> and led him to distort the symbolic, fantasy world he created in his mind. In this regard, he was not like a faulty mathematician who was innocently illogical and whose assumptions were only suggested but not necessarily supported by perception. Nor was he merely like an inventive mathematician, in that he did not construct an ideal mental world that was just a logical, symbolic representation of his assumptions. Rather, as a Pythagorean without the numbers Pythagoras thought numbers were reality while Plato thought idealized abstractions were he allowed his schema to be shaped by his subconscious desire for an orderly state into an array of absurd fantasies. At best, his carefully crafted arguments might have been valid in his independently idealized mental world, but often he sacrificed cognitive consistency in order to create images if not propaganda he could use to promote obedience in Athens: e.g., although his philosophy eschewed reality, he drafted the planets to stand in for gods since they were real and could not be denied by skeptics.<sup>202</sup> At worst, he performed a disservice to the symbolic knowledge of logic and mathematics by claiming it represented the sordid, real world, which it decidedly did not. Plato's ideal forms were defined mathematically, and any earthly representation of them like circles or right triangles drawn in the sand were *ipso facto* corruptions of the ideals.<sup>203</sup> He was basically a pessimist who rued the real world as a just shadowy corruption of that idealized perfection<sup>204</sup> which only the elite, philosophical leaders were able to appreciate.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>196</sup>. Kishtainy, N. A Little History of Economics. Yale University Press; New Haven, CT. 2017. p. 7.

<sup>197</sup>. Butler-Bowdon. op. cit. p. 250.

<sup>198</sup>. Muller. op. cit. p. 141.

<sup>199</sup>. Plato. The Republic. Ca 380 B.C. Undated quotation in Goodwin. p. 686.

<sup>200</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 19.

<sup>201</sup>. Butler-Bowdon. op. cit. p. 252.

<sup>202</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 19.

<sup>203</sup>. Dawkins, R. Science in the Soul. Random House; New York. 2017. p. 289.

<sup>204</sup>. Cahill T. Mysteries of the Middle Ages. Anchor Books; Random House, New York. 2006. p. 195.

<sup>205</sup>. Ebenstein. op. cit.

It is somewhat ironic that Plato was such an extreme idealist because he was actually heavily absorbed in the mundane politics of his day.<sup>206</sup> Idealizing for him was not a matter of dreamy abstractions conjured up in splendid isolation but was due to an overestimation of the role and importance of intellectualizing (i.e., thinking) a common fault among the *intelligencia*. Apparently, as compensation for if not an escape from dealing with the nittygritty of life, he became your original airhead in that most of his ideas had little to do with reality.<sup>207</sup> For example, he naively thought it ridiculous that a public guardian (e.g., a policeman) would need another guardian (an overseer) to check on him<sup>208</sup> presumably because in Plato's ideal world of uncorrupted paragons of virtue, those in public service would simply always do what they ought to do because it was reasonable that they should do it.

Ironically, Plato's creation myth allowed that some change (i.e., devolution) had previously occurred while underscoring the importance of intelligence in life. The change he did proffer was the origin of living forms from perfect gods downward through humans to lower organisms. As presented in **Timaes**, living creatures changed into each other based on loss or gain of understanding or folly, so in his cosmos, folly generally out-stripped understanding. Plato's god was a sensible, intellect while also the most superlative the greatest, best, fairest and most perfect of all,<sup>209</sup> humans somewhat less so; animals less; plants least.

Be that as it may, Plato's basic problem was not only his paradoxical devotion to the intellect and logical inconsistencies in the causes of social morality and political order but his determination to ban experience from his pristine mental world. According to his Theory of Forms, the universe is divided into two realms, the visible and the invisible. For some peculiar reason which defies logic and common sense, the invisible is real, and the visible is just an imperfect reflection of the invisible:<sup>210</sup> e.g. the bed he slept in was not a real bed; the real bed was an ethereal bed somewhere in the sky. The bed Plato used was just a poor copy of the archetypical "Form" (i.e., the perfect "Real" bed) which actually existed only in his imagination. Thus, what he called "Real", we consider a theoretical, ideal abstraction;<sup>211</sup> what we call "Real", he considered a corrupt aberration.<sup>212</sup> This confusion based on abuse of terminology is capped off when Platonists are referred to as "Realists", because for them, only pure ideas have reality i.e., permanence, integrity and legitimacy while empirical knowledge was dismissed as sensory impressions and opinions.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 111.

<sup>207</sup>. Menand, L. *The Metaphysical Club: A Story of Ideas in America*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux; New York. 2001. p. 85. Jefferson, T. Letter to W. Short. Aug. 4, 1820. In *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*. Edited by H. Washington. Townsend, New York. 1884. Vol. 2, p. 217. John Dewey later condemned abstraction as dangerous for elevating ideas beyond themselves. (*German Philosophy and Politics*. 1915.)

<sup>208</sup>. Bugliosi, V. *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*. Norton; NY. 2007. p. 338. A little more grounded than Plato, Roman poet Juvenal circa 100 A.D. asked "Who will guard the guards?" (*Satires*. 6. lines 347-348.) Still an issue today: See Friedman, B. An update would be: "Who fixes the robots?"

<sup>209</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 17.

<sup>210</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 26.

<sup>211</sup> w To be fair, we must allow that Plato's system works better for an abstract concept like beauty. One may see a beautiful girl or a beautiful sunset, but you cannot see beauty: That is an abstract ideal which exists in one's mind. In an artistic context, votaries of Greek culture created brain-born images superior to nature or mere reality (Wickelmann cited on pages 508-509 of Blanning) e.g. the Spear Bearer by Polykleitos ca. 440 B.C. (Lester, T. 2012. pp. 21-22.) Generally, Greek is richer than practical Latin in abstract nouns. (Plutarch. *The Age of Caesar*. Cicerofn 157.)

<sup>212</sup>. Durant. op. cit. pp. 515-516.

<sup>213</sup>. Ebenstein. op. cit.

Hence, in Plato's approach to astronomy, as presented in **The Republic**, he was geometric rather than celestial and included an explicit admonishment to ignore what was in the sky,<sup>214</sup> the stand-in planets for Gods apparently excepted. Plato later equivocated as to whether Forms actually existed or not, but the idea that good was an ultimate expression was always central to him, and philosophy was the soul's nearly spiritual but essentially intellectual way for humans to approach that theoretical ideal.<sup>215</sup>

Nevertheless, in a moment of rare pragmatism, Plato had Protagoras state that the goal of education was to promote "Sound judgment in [one's] personal life".<sup>216</sup> According to Plato, the new born babe already knew all kinds of things which were wrapped up in its soul, which, to Freud's delight, consisted of three parts: the vegetative (id); the spiritual (ego); and the rational (superego).<sup>217</sup> The life experience we call learning was a matter of unwrapping knowledge which was already there.<sup>218</sup> As usual, he was wrong. Human development is not just an intellectual process of unpeeling the onion of innate wisdom but one of promoting emotional bonds with other people and helping us all cope intellectually with impending problems.

For some other peculiar reason, Plato also insisted the physical universe was animate. By so doing, he all but negated physics, since causes of motions of objects were attributed not to natural forces but to motives. Thus, his in-this-case-entranced student Aristotle ascribed the presumed circular movements of celestial bodies to their affection for such action and that objects fall because they happened to love the center of the world.<sup>219</sup>

Trusting in his own vision (and assuming others shared it), Plato encouraged people to look for truths in their own minds independent of the world around them.<sup>220</sup> In so doing, he was at least consistent with his belief that real, true knowledge came from isolated contemplation as opposed to scientific analysis based on observation indeed, he contended such knowledge was hidden from us by our misleading and deceptive senses.<sup>221</sup> What he must have assumed as did Luther 1800 years later was that others like him would come to his conclusions, which they would, to the degree that they were like him.

For example, as for pure forms, Plato loved the circle where-as Epicureans favored the pyramid or square. Such arbitrariness was unresolvable in Plato's system and remains a stumbling block rather than an aid to learning. Not only do people differ, but individuals change,<sup>222</sup> and the arbitrary, ideal basis for subjective judgments beclouds interpretations of things like art and evaluations of conditions like insanity.<sup>223</sup> Perhaps in recognition of this problem, Plato, in **The Republic**, allowed that one garners only a shadow of understanding of reality from opinion as opposed to factual knowledge gathered from objective science thus, pointing toward his prize protégée and intellectual successor, polymath Aristotle.

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<sup>214</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 275.

<sup>215</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 18.

<sup>216</sup>. Plato. Protagoras. 318e-319a. Ca. 390 B.C.

<sup>217</sup>. Erickson. op. cit. p. 46.

<sup>218</sup>. Rooney. op. cit. p. 40.

<sup>219</sup>. Jaki, S. *Science and Creation*. Scottish Academic Press; Edinburgh. 1986. p. 105.

<sup>220</sup>x He certainly did cast a long shadow. St. Augustine was led to Christianity by Plato's Theory of Forms, and Robespierre in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Communists in the 20<sup>th</sup> used his idealization of totalitarianism to rationalize their commitment to it. (Freeman. p. 274.)

<sup>221</sup>. Roberts. op. cit. p. 204.

<sup>222</sup>. Montaigne, M. Ca. 1576. *The Complete Essays of Montaigne*. (Stanford University Press. 1958. p. 300.)

<sup>223</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 299.

Unlike his mentor, who idealized ideas, Aristotle (384-322) had great respect for factual reality. He criticized Socrates and Plato,<sup>224</sup> and his career as a “Scientist” may be viewed as an effort to overcome Plato’s influence as he struggled to square his observations with platonic ideals.<sup>225</sup> For twenty years, Ari was a prize pupil at Plato’s Academy, thoroughly indoctrinated in the Theory of Forms, which denied the reality of the sensible world, but nevertheless became the grand fact gatherer on everything under the sun. Unfortunately, as Aristotle struggled to overcome Plato’s intellectual legacy<sup>226</sup> and pointedly studied nature, he persisted in deducing conclusions from presumed truths and imposing his beliefs on things because platonic thought was still more important to him than the senses. His thoughts (i.e., his philosophical schema) assumed the universe made sense and was all going to fit together intelligibly and gracefully,<sup>227</sup> but he was not a true scientist because he did not test nature: He just applied logic to his observations.<sup>228</sup>

Aristotle’s logic was in fact always more influential than his science, although it did not save him from occasional blunders,<sup>229</sup> and his most important philosophical discovery of all was that debates usually turn on an error in logic, which he aspired to make less likely via “His” logic. His specialty was the syllogism a form of logic in which the major premise, in true Greek fashion, *cannot* be tested. This inability to check assumptions led Greek thought to a habit of dogmatic, arbitrary assertion in which the validity of argumentation was everything and the veracity of conclusions nothing.<sup>230</sup> This emphasis on reasoning eventually became a defining hallmark of Christianity.<sup>231</sup>

Like Plato, Aristotle lived in a time of cataclysmic change and sought order and stability.<sup>232</sup> He found it in systems. Socrates questioned; Plato idealized; Aristotle organized. Whereas Plato aspired to remold life, Aristotle, like Thales, tried to understand it. This he hoped to do via orderly knowledge gained by comparing and classifying things especially living things. In his efforts to achieve this understanding of life, he made biology part of his personal religion and accepted change as evolution toward god-like perfection. The other part of his religion was the ideal, static Greek perfection toward which life was presumably evolving<sup>233</sup> while his god was an unmoved, living mover with a mind gratuitously characterized as self-absorbed thought thinking about itself.<sup>234</sup> The problem with Aristotle was that he was so successful as an overachieving thinker that he became an obstacle to further thought. In fact, it would be 2,000 years before the world produced his equal as a philosopher, although this was only partially due to his success. It was also due to the success of his disciples, who deified him as the intellectual fountainhead from which all knowledge flowed and the omega point upon which all thoughts converged. As a result of their efforts, his authority became so great in both philosophy and science that his legacy became an impediment if not a barrier to progress. On

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<sup>224</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 331.

<sup>225</sup>. Durant. op. cit. p. 524.

<sup>226</sup> y Likewise as a metaphysician, Aristotle diluted Plato with a dose of common sense, (B. Russell. 1945. Chap. 19.) although they mix poorly.

<sup>227</sup>. Grant, E. God and Reason in the Middle Ages. Cambridge U. Press; Cambridge, England. 2001. pp. 160-164.

<sup>228</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 305.

<sup>229</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>230</sup>. Muller. op. cit. p. 128.

<sup>231</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 29.

<sup>232</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 332.

<sup>233</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 169.

<sup>234</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 23.

the plus side, as the intellectual ancestor of all empiricists, he led away from the supernatural i.e., with miracles being excluded from causation—and the predominance of ideals e.g., with governing philosopher-kings replaced as political leaders by a mixture of real people<sup>235</sup> to thinking in a natural mode.<sup>236</sup> On the minus side,<sup>237</sup> almost every serious intellectual advance since 1600 had to overcome one of his faulty doctrines.<sup>238</sup>

Moreover, the success that Aristotle had in shaping the passive schema of Europe in the millennia that followed him was the same kind of success that brought failure to Greece. As a result of the Greeks' aristocratic preference for thought over action, technical progress was thwarted. They failed to improve agriculture or to exploit any resource other than forced labor. If this is a sad picture, it is also a concrete realization/reflection of the **Republic** and Aristotle's **Metaphysics** (Ca. 340). Nor did they improve people: There was no realization of Aristotle's reasonable "Great-souled man"<sup>239</sup> capable of exercising proper moral choices i.e., "Virtue", as would be needed in future republics. The development not only of science but all of society was arrested<sup>240</sup> as Greek thought remained characteristically static and unreal.

Nevertheless, Aristotle's most illustrious (and probably most reluctant) pupil, Alexander (356-323), did as much as any one man to reshape Greek and Western history. In his time, political philosophy was geared for the city-state not empires and civilizations,<sup>241</sup> but as a Macedonian (i.e., non-Greek) doer, he forced a rethinking of political, economic and social relationships which exceeded the range of the extent Greek *polis*-bound mind.<sup>242</sup>

Thus, Alexander was both an end and a beginning. He fairly wrecked an already decrepit, classical Greece but did more than anyone to spread Greek influence<sup>243</sup> and was the first unifier of a multicultural empire even before there was a Western idea of empire. Before him, the most grandiose Greek political ambition was to Hellenize Persia, but he took Herodotus's idea and went beyond him and it. After him, the idea of a world organization based on universal law became possible, as he came to symbolize a world-wide political order and became the role model for the Roman Emperor.<sup>244</sup> In effect, he was an earlier day Caesar misplaced in time and space. If Alexander can be known through his accomplishments, he was a brilliant, if occasionally unbalanced,<sup>245</sup> transitory comet in the historical firmament. He created much, and he created grandly, but overall, he created little that endured and little more than he destroyed. He unified everything from the Adriatic to the Indus under one rule but, with his thinking shaped by short-term opportunism,<sup>246</sup> he could not make his empire permanent.<sup>247</sup> The cities he planned and that remain have to be matched against those he destroyed. He failed to Hellenize the East: Babylon and Egypt swarmed with Greek names before his time and remained Eastern

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<sup>235</sup>. Ferejohn and Rosenbluth. op. cit. p. 45.

<sup>236</sup>. Buridan, J. Ca. 1350. Quoted in Hecht. op. cit. p. 261.

<sup>237</sup>z Three of his errors were: 1.) Bees come from rotting bull carcasses; 2) Flies have four legs and 3) The heart does all the thinking (Jay Newman man. 148) although that might be truer than we think, meaning we make irrational decisions and then rationalize them. 😊

<sup>238</sup>. Russell. op. cit. pp. 159-160.

<sup>239</sup>. Aristotle. Nicomachean Ethics. 350. B.C.

<sup>240</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 131.

<sup>241</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 372.

<sup>242</sup>. Durant. op. cit. p. 552.

<sup>243</sup>. Everitt. op. cit. p. 456.

<sup>244</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 373.

<sup>245</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 330.

<sup>246</sup>. Ibid. p. 336.

<sup>247</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 364.

after it. He built no great roads and secured no sea lanes. With his mental range limited only by his magnificence, his greatest creation was his own myth.<sup>248</sup>

As a myth and a model, Alexander inspired many who came after him, but his immediate legacy was one of confusion, barbarism and atrocity. When he died, the order he had imposed up-on his world vanished as autocratic provincial rulers set themselves up in his shattered empire.<sup>249</sup> Also, his entire family was destroyed, with his murderous mother being killed by vengeful friends of some of her victims.<sup>250</sup> This legacy of confusion may be attributed to the way Alexander drifted around while looking backwards, and in this sense, he truly personified the whole Hellenistic (i.e., Macedonian dominated) period of Greek history. In a world of action made meaningful or meaningless by people and their schematic attitudes, all the major developments which followed his reign contributed to the demise of Greek civilization. Consistent with Heraclitus's observation that character is fate,<sup>251</sup> this great undoing can be attributed to drawbacks seemingly inherent in the Greek version of human nature.

The most impressive achievements of the Hellenistic age antedated Rome in being material and utilitarian. During this era, the Greeks were builders on a large scale highways, aqueducts, harbors and planned cities. There was a growth of business and a vigorous expansion of commerce which increased the wealth of Marx's bourgeoisie. This temporal success brought with it the usual vices of immorality which invariably accompany luxury. Cultural creativity ceased and was replaced by a common complacency which degenerated into a lethargic vulgarity anticipating Roman decadence.<sup>252</sup> Scholars became pedantically sterile while gods became pathetically human.

All this material accomplishment and attendant moral collapse came at a time of political chaos. This was produced by wide-spread social unrest and freebooting Macedonian armies unrestrained in their mutual territorial disputes by any political principle beyond the power of the sword.<sup>253</sup> If the absence of some-thing can be a cause, a further contributing factor to this chaotic condition was the absence of a new ideal of an empire to replace the outmoded model of the city-state.

As debilitating as this deficiency was, it was merely a specific example of the grander overall failure of Greek thinkers to cope with the changing Hellenistic world. Consistent with platonically abstract idealism, Greek philosophy eschewed contact with the real world and lost itself in its theoretical self. Not surprisingly, the self-effacing effect this had on cultural life in general was made manifest in the intellectual life of Alexandria, the most famous city of this era. Starting circa 300, the Museum of Alexandria became an international hub of intellectual achievement, assembling the best of Greek, Latin, Babylonian, Egyptian and Jewish cultures and most productive minds of the age while concurrently developing a fatal tradition of mindless conservatism. Supported by the Ptolemaic kings, Euclid developed geometry, and Archimedes (see below) discovered pi. Eratosthenes posited the earth was round and calculated its circumference accurately to within 1%. Galen revolutionized anatomy and medicine, and astronomers postulated a heliocentric universe and deduced the length of a year was 365.25

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<sup>248</sup>. Ibid. His transient accomplishments can be contrasted with the permanent nature of those by Pompey 160 years later. (Lissner. p. 44.)

<sup>249</sup>. Bolitho, W. *Twelve Against the Gods*. Garden City Publishing Co.; Garden City, NY. 1930. p. 48.

<sup>250</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 367.

<sup>251</sup>. Diogenes/Laertius, (?) *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Bk IX, Sec. 8, Line 121. Ca. 225 B.C. (Line written ca. 500.)

<sup>252</sup>. Muller. op. cit. pp. 145-147.

<sup>253</sup>. Russell. op. cit. pp. 224-225.

days and proposed every fourth year should be a leap year. Geographers speculated that one could reach India by sailing west from Spain. Engineers developed hydraulics and pneumatics.<sup>254</sup> After such brave beginnings, the animating spirit of creativity waned, and no one after 200 at the Museum took advantage of existent intellectual freedom to indulge in creative thinking in political theory, science or mathematics.

In political philosophy, an excess of freedom in Alexandria unfortunately led to deference to popularity. Originally, political discussions were supported as well as limited by the patronage of Ptolemy I (367?-283). Later, dissension permitted the popular superstitions and common prejudices of the democratic city mob into academic life to the long term detriment of clear, independent judgment and thought.<sup>255</sup> In science, the post-Archimedes intelligencia failed to heed Aristotle's essential directive to Alexander to organize and analyze relevant facts before drawing a conclusion. Rather, museum associates became comfortably disposed to accept prevailing Greek opinions from the past as to how they should think and how the universe should behave. Basically, everything became theoretical. Ironically, this tradition had its origins right at the founding of the Museum and sadly triumphed over the spirit of creativity. This was evident early on in the works of the two great mathematicians of the age Euclid and Archimedes as well as in the approach of the astronomers of the day to the heavens.

In the two hundred years since Pythagoras had established the principles for discovering mathematical principles, those discovered remained uncodified. Euclid organized them, making his **Elements** (ca. 300) one of the greatest books ever written being copied and translated more than any other book except the Bible.<sup>256</sup> Although as an ultimate in static thought, it is a perfect monument to the Greek intellect, it consummated Plato's and Aristotle's belief that through math (i.e., geometry) the world would be rendered logical and comprehensible.<sup>257</sup> Its limitations are typically Greek in that its method is purely deductive so there is no way within the pure, ideal system of geometric perfection to test the assumptions upon which it is based. These are supposed to be self-evident truths,<sup>258</sup> but *only observation could demonstrate whether or not they were actually true*. However, this kind of confirmation was not only impossible but unthinkable in Euclid's privately constructed little world and so would wait for Carl Gauss to demonstrate its shortcomings in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>259</sup> Further, imbued with Plato's contempt for reality, he regarded the idea of practically applied geometry as repugnant.<sup>260</sup>

The other typically Greek prodigy of this era was Archimedes (287-212). He was a great mathematician and a great engineer, but his love of consistency made him timid and contemptuous toward practical applications of science so he remained a great engineer with a contempt for engineering. Regarding every effort to affect life as ignoble and vulgar, he typified Greek intellectuals, who aspired to understand the world but not change much less improve it.<sup>261</sup> He wanted his fame to rest upon his contributions to pure theory, and it has, although his

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<sup>254</sup>. Greenblatt, S. *The Swerve*. Norton; New York. p. 87.

<sup>255</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 380.

<sup>256</sup>. Bronowski. op. cit. p. 162. Almost 2,000 years after it was written, it led Thomas Hobbes to philosophy via geometry. (Ibid. p. 164.)

<sup>257</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 22.

<sup>258</sup>. Manchester. op. cit. p. 292.

<sup>259</sup>. Watson, P. 2010. *The German Genius*. HarperCollins; New York. p. 172.

<sup>260</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 211.

<sup>261</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 388. Based on Plutarch.

weakness for the logic of geometry limited the horizons even of his theoretical interests e.g., as motion is illogical (or nonlogical), he con-fined himself to statics.<sup>262</sup>

Beyond geometry and theoretical engineering, astronomy was the most impressive scientific achievement of the Alexandrian age, although it was in this field that the oppressive role of previous thought was more evident than in any other. Aristotle had considered but dismissed a heliocentered cosmos (solar system) in favor of one with a spherical earth fixed in place. In the second century A.D., Claude Ptolemy made that place the center of things, and so it stayed for 1,300 years. Few people have matched his influence<sup>263</sup> on human thought,<sup>264</sup> and in aspiring to adhere to the homocentric hypothesis of celestial motion, astronomers increasingly had to force themselves to ignore motions of heavenly bodies for which there was no explanation. The problem was not that these irregularities had not been accounted for but that they *could not* be accounted for by the prevailing theory. Although appealing to the egos of ancient humanists and built of perfect circles, the homocentric hypothesis was fundamentally unacceptable, *and the reasons for its unacceptability were known by those who nevertheless strove to perfect it.*<sup>265</sup>

This was a classic example of the human mind thwarting itself *as information contradicting a prevailing belief was simply ignored.* When "Irregularities" were however reluctantly acknowledged, the schema was then jimmed around to accommodate them. The last resort was to develop a new system of belief,<sup>266</sup> and this was actually done by an Ionian Aristarchus (ca. 250) of Samos, who formulated the Copernican system of revolving planets only to find he had offended the gods, among others. His theory was rejected in favor of the "Ptolemaic sys-tem", which explained the motion of planets around the earth in terms of numerous epicycles.<sup>267</sup>

The irony of Alexandria was that it coupled intellectual repression (as in the case of astronomy) with major scientific achievements (like the maps of Eratosthenes) at a time of undisciplined political thought. However, Alexandria had little practical effect on the lives of people, then or later, because it produced no pragmatic system of beliefs to match the events of the day. In this sense, it was a true realization of the Greek mentality: Philosophy had abandoned the world as an illusion in favor of reveling in platonic, sublime thought. Divorced from the mundane experiences of earthly living, which it roundly disparaged, Greek thought idealized static perfection and became perfectly static and functionally irrelevant. Philosophers sat aside, so to say, and let mere doers, like Alexander, take over. Aristocratic thinkers thus failed to keep pace with men of action be-cause the dynamic idea of a constantly changing world was simply and fundamentally incomprehensible to the statuesque Greek mind which fell increasingly behind itself and short of reality.

This intellectual failure in the third century contributed to the moral decay of Greek culture because there existed no great cause or belief worthy of commitment from everyone and

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<sup>262</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. pp. 214-215.

<sup>263</sup> aa In the field of optics, Ptolemy repeated experiments but adapted his observations to fit his preferred theory. (Freeman. p. 387.)

<sup>264</sup>. Morison, S. The European Discovery of America: The Northern Voyages. Oxford University Press; New York. 1971. p. 7.

<sup>265</sup>. Farrington. op. cit. p. 225. Emphasis added.

<sup>266</sup> bb The irregularities were so minor that the system provided useful information to navigators up to the time of Christopher Columbus. (Roberts. p. 204.)

<sup>267</sup>. Russell. op. cit. pp. 214-215.

upon which ethical conduct could be judged or social stability based.<sup>268</sup> Civic spirit survived in the old city-states, but they were stagnant and moribund. On the other hand in the new cities established by Alexander, there developed neither traditions of civic pride nor a sense of political unity, and their absences fatally weakened the moral fiber of Hellenism.<sup>269</sup>

In a more general sense, the deterioration of the Hellenic city-state and Greek philosophy prepared the Western psyche for the supernatural spirituality of Christianity. Until the time of Alexander, philosophers had reason to feel that wisdom was power. Ironically, even Pythagoras and Plato, who condemned the world of appearances, had plans for converting governors into saints. When the Macedonians took over and philosophy failed, people turned to magic and astrology as well as religion. Citizenship and concern for public virtue was replaced by interest in and commitment to individual salvation<sup>270</sup> with the ensuing emphasis on the individual's subjective religious experience paving the way for Christianity.<sup>271</sup>

Thus, it was during this Hellenic era that Western intellectual life took a decisive turn away from Aristotle and his orderly collection of knowledge toward religious spiritualism. The ordinary person is rather disposed to take an easy path which may be followed, regardless of where it happens to be going, rather than to hack out a new trail on his own to get to some unknown but presumably advantageous destination. In this regard, the deposed and dispossessed philosophers of this period were remarkably ordinary in the ease with which they abandoned the orderly planning of perfect, new utopian ways of living and drifted into systems of cognitive evasion.

The Cynics simply gave up on the world;<sup>272</sup> earlier day Rousseauians and the original dropout, back-to-nature deadbeats –the term means “Dog-like”,<sup>273</sup> they could not have cared more for the relation of the soul to God nor less for civility.<sup>274</sup> Meanwhile the Stoics and Epicureans were most concerned with ethical means to abstract ends<sup>275</sup> like indifference and happiness. Further, the Skeptics undercut all of them by asserting that our senses and minds provide narrow if not false information<sup>276</sup> so we cannot really know anything. Finally, if we did, the Sophists masked any presumed wisdom in moral relativism and situation-al ethics removed from any absolute, general and eternal behavioral standard or code of good or evil.<sup>277</sup>

Actually, traditional Greek life could have succeeded had nothing ever changed. Although it may be an exaggeration to imply that Greek culture was inflexibly static, certainly it was not dramatically dynamic. The Greeks did not even try to harness the forces of nature and had no idea of progress. They sent out no crusaders to remake the world, and the only Greeks who went to excess were the philosophers, who were excessive in their withdrawal from life.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>268</sup>. Ibid. pp. 227-228.

<sup>269</sup>. Ibid. pp. 226-227.

<sup>270</sup>. Jones, p. 114.

<sup>271</sup>. Russell. op. cit. pp. 229-230.

<sup>272</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 31.

<sup>273</sup>. Freeman. op. cit. p. 362.

<sup>274</sup> cc According to classical scholar Ronald Reagan, the philosophical ancestors of our beatniks and hippies let their hair grow, wore ragged old togas and scorned middle class values. (Reagan. May, 1969.)

<sup>275</sup>. Wells. op. cit. pp. 333-334. Typical of the stoic philosophy was the simplistic notion that nothing bad can happen to good person. (Erickson. Part 1; p. 147.)

<sup>276</sup>. Hecht. op. cit. p. 41.

<sup>277</sup>. Hanson. op. cit. p. 413. They were brains for hire.

<sup>278</sup>. Muller. op. cit. p. 130.

All Greece paid the price for their quest for perfection, and the tragedy was that the failure to realize the ideal was due to the limitations inherent in it. The preoccupation of Greek intellectual life with static excellence became formalistic and led to a strained sense of propriety rather than to a vibrant love of life. In idealizing, Greek thinkers sacrificed too much variety for the sake of purity and ignored the complexity of the human condition in favor of the simplicity of rational systems.<sup>279</sup> Greece became culturally paralyzed largely because philosophical perfection (although very nice for an ideal) was pursued for itself while thought was rendered useless to society in general. In their attempts to create perfect worlds, *thinkers* removed themselves ever more from their functional environment, drifted off into their limbotic ideals and *left Greeks* strapped by reason and *unable to learn from their own experience*.

Particularly, their ideals prevented the Greeks from learning from their experiences with the various city-states, slavery and ideals themselves. For example, the city-state, which gave form to Greek politics and structured perpetual disunity and strife into Greek life, was not only taken for granted by the citizens of Athens, Sparta, etc. but was regarded as an ideal, and most Greeks could not conceive of their political life in any other way. In fact, they regarded the city-state, slavery and theoretical ideals as great cultural virtues, and their defining tragedy was that they could not overcome their virtues.<sup>280</sup>

However, that is not the whole story. In addition to their fatal virtues, Greeks also had a number of other human, debilitating faults. For example, they were superstitious to the point that even the militaristic Spartans campaigned sometimes to their detriment according to the timing of festivals or lunar phases and eclipses<sup>281</sup>.<sup>282</sup> Also, they had little sense of science and history so they could not substitute knowledge for superstition nor understanding for tradition. Basically, they believed everything was due to quirky gods who had to be honored and placated by de-voted and importuning mortals.<sup>283</sup>

Still, superstitions flourished because deliberate, analytical thought had been rendered abstract and impractical by the influence of the Pythagoreans and Athenian philosophers, so once again, we return to ideal philosophy as the basic cultural flaw of Greece. The Ionians had developed scientific thought, but the Greeks failed to continue the rational pursuit of natural causes and settled for moral rationalism instead. They would neither subject their theories to empirical tests nor ask critical questions of their presumably self-evident truths. Part of the cause for this was that the established powers preferred placating the existing gods to having inquiries made as to how things actually worked. Another part was the slave owning aristocracy's disdain for knowledge gained through doing.<sup>284</sup> With the deification of pure, empty, reason, philosophy (i.e., Plato) triumphed over reality (i.e., Aristotle) to the detriment of all Greeks (**et al.**), who sacrificed functional pragmatism for theoretical idealism.

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<sup>279</sup>. Ibid. pp. 130-131.

<sup>280</sup>. Ibid. p. 126.

<sup>281</sup> dd As did the Macedonians of the time. The night before the battle of Pydna against the Romans in June, 168, the Macedonians spent several hours yelling at the eclipsed moon exhorting it to reappear. It did proving that the God of eclipses listens to those who yell really loudly for a long time but they lost the battle to their better rested opponents. (Davis, P. p. 54.) In an odd wrinkle, the Athenians lost the battle of Syracuse in 414 because it took their commander, Demosthenes, twenty-seven days to interpret a lunar eclipse as an omen favorable for a retreat, but by then it no longer was. (Fawcett. 2016. p. 6.)

<sup>282</sup>. Davis, P. *Decisive Battles from Ancient Times to the Present*. Oxford; New York. 2001.

<sup>283</sup>. Muller. op. cit. pp. 126-127.

<sup>284</sup>. Ibid. pp. 127-129.

This idealism failed because it separated the Greeks from their environment and each other while stifling creativity. The net effect was that they could not respond effectively to the challenges of their own achievements. Specifically, they could not cope with social tensions released by freedom within the city-states like Athens nor with the problems among them which precluded the development of a unified Greek Empire<sup>285</sup> or the United States of Greece as envisaged by Herodotus. Indeed, among numerous attempts, Thebes tried but failed to establish a Greek Federation in the 360's.

Not only was reason divorced from reality, but it was narrowed to theoretical considerations of human affairs. Nature in general was not a school for the Greeks, so they failed to appreciate theories developed by their own scientists.<sup>286</sup>

The immediate cause of this failure was the slavery of the Greek mind to itself. The ideals of perfect forms and theoretical order in an abstract world became facades behind which Greeks hid from change in the real world. Rather than coping with it, philosophers dismissed change and everything else as illusionary while those in power tried to prevent it. Gradually, Greece with-drew intellectually, culturally and politically from a world which kept on changing.<sup>287</sup>

Of all the symbolic acts of antiquity, the clearest was that of the Roman soldier who killed Archimedes at Syracuse in 211. Nothing could better epitomize the fatal effect of the emerging power of Rome on intellectual thought in the ancient world.<sup>288</sup>

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

Today, we honor the Greeks more for what they attempted than what they achieved. Like Socrates, they asked more questions than they answered, and we are still trying to answer some questions they first posed. They were the first to challenge the world and proclaim that life need not be dictated by presumed necessity and tribal tradition; it did not just have to be accepted but could be altered by the application of reason and deliberate planning.<sup>289</sup> But above all, they set the ideals to which we still aspire,<sup>290</sup> so as Percy Shelly said, "We are all Greeks".<sup>291</sup> Unfortunately, in searching for a better world for themselves, Greek aristocrats became side-tracked into searching for ways to preserve their own because they defined their own world as good and thought its continuation would be better than any change. In this regard, they were simply being more human than scientific as they labored to save themselves (i.e., their schema) at the cost of their future. While we can see this from our vantage point, we can also see that the Greeks were intellectual geniuses when compared to their predecessors as well as their successors until the time of Copernicus,<sup>292</sup> and their impact on us has been pro-found and wide-spread. Greeks shaped modern civilization by defining contemporary thought, standards, literary forms, imagery, visions, values and dreams.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>285</sup>. Ibid. p. 133.

<sup>286</sup>. Ibid. pp. 127-129.

<sup>287</sup>. Ibid. p. 133.

<sup>288</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 217.

<sup>289</sup>. Wells. op. cit. p. 338.

<sup>290</sup>. Stark. op. cit. p. 29.

<sup>291</sup>. Shelly, P. Preface to Hellas. 1821.

<sup>292</sup>. Russell. op. cit. p. 217.

<sup>293</sup>. Butler, E. The Tyranny of Greece over Germany. 1935.

In their day, however, their genius could not alter the fact that, as citizens of the various city-states, their narrow view of them-selves limited their political development. Still, their legacy of stupidity to later generations was due less to this than to their excessive platonic idealization in philosophy. Aristotle tried to bridge the real (his) and ideal (Plato's) worlds, and regrettably, his partial success was so impressive that it stopped scientific inquiry for nearly 2,000 years.<sup>294</sup> For this, we can not blame the Greeks in general nor Aristotle in particular: Those who followed him betrayed his spirit, became paralyzed with respect and made him an obstacle to intellectual development.

Nevertheless, the origins of modern Western stupidity can be traced back to the ideal rationality of Athens and in some ways beyond. Our scientific tradition began in Ionia but was aborted. Our moralistic bent began with Pythagoras and still determines which PC lessons we prefer to learn. However, in the most obvious ways, our stupidity is more like that of the Hellenic era than any other in that we are practical and realistic to the point of encouraging and promoting amorality. After four hundred years of achievement in the sciences and over two hundred of techno-logical development, we began a new millennium as stunted, lopsided, uncultured, immoral materialists focused on making a good living rather than enjoying or leading a good life. The Greek word for this became our word for "Idiot".

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<sup>294</sup> ee One of the clearest way to distinguish Plato from Aristotle is in their approach to the state: As an intellectual, Plato idealized The Republic; As a pragmatist, Aristotle sought the best state the one with the most advantages and the fewest disadvantages. (Butler-Bowdon. p. 14.) Aritried to "Practicalize" Plato.

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