

# **Practical Philosophy of Thought and Virtue**

**The Bases to Develop a Philosophical Thought  
by the Ordinary Citizen**

**John N. Hatzopoulos**

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*Practical Philosophy of Thought and Virtue:  
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## PREFACE

A philosophical question that has been occupying my mind for many years that I have been an educator in higher education is: *What could happen if the knowledge that a higher education institution produces and transmits is not used correctly?* No matter how simple such a question sounds, the answer is so difficult as the decision to be made on right and wrong, correct and error or on good and bad. It is, however, required a great effort to provide a solid foundation for such concepts. Fortunately, similar questions were raised by people thousands of years ago, and there has been developed enough material from which one can draw answers to similar kind of questions always based on logic as founded by philosophy. Moreover, having drawn basic ingredients from previous knowledge that was developed by leading philosophers, one can discover and release one's internal forces which are in a latent state, and thus becoming a more active citizen to benefit of oneself and one's fellow people. The release of these forces should normally be aided by the organised school system which, however, for a strange reason, although it has the ability to do it, does not help as much as it could towards this direction.

Another question I have in mind is why modern philosophers are occupied so much with analyzing and admiring ancient philosophers, but they do not spend much of their energy to advance philosophy beyond the point that ancient people reached. Overanalysis of ancient philosophers leads modern philosophy to an interminable introversion which virtually "eats itself" without responding properly to modern needs that are countless. Consequently, we have been living in an extended period of intellectual dark ages for so many centuries!

My opinion is that to deal with philosophy is not necessary to have particular qualifications, since each individual has very

powerful logic and reason. The use of logic in combination with freedom of thought is enough to make one a philosopher. For this reason, the present work is addressed both to a wider public and to all scientists of any speciality, aiming at presenting basic principles that will be the cornerstone of the construction of answers to questions asked. At the same time, new questions are raised and new ideas -as to how to deal with such questions- are introduced, something that will motivate younger people to deal with philosophy and to search for answers.

The title *Practical Philosophy of Thought and Virtue* was selected so that it becomes clear to the reader that the present work aims at resolving current issues.

The organization of the material follows the model of a thesis which is addressed to and can be reviewed by any reader. Any criticism, more particularly any constructive criticism, is welcome.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 General

The events which took place in the beginning of the 1960s - as they have recently been presented by those who actively participated in their development, that is, the advisers of the leaders of the USA and the USSR - reveal that a nuclear holocaust was avoided clearly by good luck. Nuclear power, on the other hand, was discovered and evolved in the laboratories of universities and research centers by scientists who, in their effort to produce knowledge through research, did not contemplate on whether that knowledge would be used correctly. Similar discoveries that were threatening and continue to threaten the life on this planet have been abundant around the world, such as dynamite, chemical gases, biological weapons, laser beams etc. However, there are much more serious problems in our days regarding the wrong use of knowledge which is threatening directly humans and life. Two such problems are: (a) The alteration of the environment from thoughtless human activities and (b) the thoughtless development of electronic technology. Every day, environmental problems are presented by many institutions and will not further be discussed. Nevertheless, the growth of electronic technology poses the following philosophical question: *Is the present period a transitional one and what actually happens if these biological beings develop knowledge which they transfer to non-biological beings, such as rocks? And what would happen if rocks develop will?* If one combines the destruction of the environment by biological beings, then rocks have the potential to continue producing knowledge because of their resistance to more unfavorable conditions. In the 1950s and 1960s, questions about electronic technology were more intense, while nowadays they are barely heard. It is perhaps because this technology is based on programming which means that if the programmer does not give exact commands

to the electronic machine what to do, the machine itself is totally incompetent to take any initiative. However, younger generations of students have the tendency to dislike computer programming and, as a consequence, more initiatives that would regularly be taken by a person as well as the processes that follow are continuously transferred to microchips. This means that, on the one hand, the rock (i.e. microchip) cannot take initiatives by itself, but, on the other hand, humans gradually transfer to the rock most of initiatives they would take. Beside that, there is the Chaos Theory claiming that rules and structures may produce unexpected results.

## **1.2 The present situation**

Up to now, the practice has shown that most organized institutions, which are either local or world organizations or private institutions and clubs, have shown weakness to monitor the right use of knowledge. The reason of this weakness is precisely the ambivalence that exists regarding right and wrong with the result that one interprets the right and wrong according to one's short-sighted interests. Nevertheless, either from sheer coincidence or because of the well-organized institutions mentioned above, extreme situations went under control without having serious self-destructive results and, mainly, without creating irreversible situations on a great scale. However, globalization we have been experiencing in our days shows that the average person has many possibilities to access and allocate all kinds of knowledge that have been developed and can implement them by using modern technology. Such implementation includes all kinds of results even the self-destructive ones. For this reason, all persons -with healthy thought - should comprehend the size of the problem. However, it is necessary to provide philosophical ways regarding right and wrong by developing universally acceptable diachronic foundation principles based on scientific evidence and help the average citizen to understand these principles, so that next generations should play more active and responsible role in public affairs.

### **1.3 Aims and objectives**

Nowadays, scientists and all people who work in the production and transmission of knowledge continue having no coverage about the wrong use of knowledge. For this reason, the present work seeks to provide coverage as for the right use of knowledge at an international level through philosophical foundations of right and wrong.

The aim of this work is to inquire about the philosophical aspect of right and wrong in order to provide fundamental principles with wider acceptance and diachronic validity based on scientific evidence. It also aims at popularizing such principles so to become comprehensible to a wider public.

The study of philosophy develops analytical rigor and the ability to criticize and reason logically [5]. On the other hand, mathematics also uses logic for the study of structures [2] and the relations among the structural elements or parameters that make up the structure. For this reason, mathematics is used in the present work to help in minimizing the ambiguity resulting from the interrelation of factors which participate in the process of defining right and wrong.

## **1.4 The organisation of topics**

This work is organised in four sections. The first section seeks and establishes basic principles for the development of the philosophy of right and wrong. These principles are suggested as foundations for the education system.

The second section makes an effort to provide ways that such basic principles can be acquired by the average citizen. Part of the effort includes the use of literature in rhyme and prose that can communicate these basic principles in a creative way.

The third section uses mathematics, which does not exceed high school education, in order to provide scientific evidence to define precisely the boundary between right and wrong.

The fourth section discusses the impact of balanced thought and the mathematical structure of right and wrong on applications to fields such as: metaphysics, food and technology.



## 2. BASIC PRINCIPLES

### 2.1 The role of education

Education plays a decisive role in the philosophical confrontation of opinions because it has a direct influence on the configuration and use of thought of each individual. The classic dictum of "believe and don't search" is an extreme point of nihilism on behalf of the person. This nihilism develops negative thinking, since those who shape the "beliefs" have suffered an intellectual rape<sup>1</sup> and, being fanatics themselves, create fanatic followers in turn.

The existing definition of education is characterized internationally by the production and transmission of knowledge and, as such, it is insufficient because it does not include the correct use of knowledge. The production of knowledge is generated by research, while the transmission of knowledge occurs through teaching. As a result, the fast advancement of knowledge has brought the rapid growth of science and technology. Nevertheless, the correct or wrong use of knowledge does not appear to bother modern people as much as it should, and therefore there are a lot of impasses which relegate the quality of life and sometimes even threaten life itself. The philosophical perception of right and wrong is mentioned by ancient philosophers as *orthos logos*, that is, reasonable speech or right reason (logic), equitable talk or powerful talk, where *logos* is understood as reason expressed with words constituting sentences. In this work, the term "right logic" will be used instead. However, right logic, is the one that is not brought down with reasonable arguments and, eventually, has diachronic power with global scope.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 4.

The current education system does not have the strength to support right logic as much as it should, or, it does not care as much as it should. About 23 centuries ago<sup>2</sup>, in one of Plato's dialogues – it was claimed that if one holds an opinion and right logic brings it down, then one feels shame for the erroneous belief and accepts right logic. On the contrary, today one realizes that in most cases right logic is not used as much as it should, but even in cases that it is used and when an opinion is proven erroneous, the average person usually continues supporting the wrong opinion objecting to one's logic because shame may not be powerful enough to stop it. Such phenomena exist in all levels of society and no matter how paradoxical they may seem, they also occur in academia, and the members of the academic community. It must be noted that if one has an erroneous opinion and tries to reason it, then one has to support it with more erroneous evidence. If such kind of erroneous support continues, then more error is accumulated up to the point that the person really feels being dammed. Therefore, the discontinuity of the philosophical support of education from antiquity (where its roots can be found) up to today is evident and requires restoration.

**Having these thoughts in mind, one realizes that the current educational system is an enormous dry tree worldwide, because it does not have roots and these people who are supposed to take care of it just add to it more dry branches.**

Consequently, in order to respond to modern needs, education has to have a philosophical support system to develop robust foundations with models and ideals that will restore the cut roots, so that the tree of education will germinate, bloom and bear fruits. Ancient Greek writers

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 3.2.

created such philosophical foundations and laid down basic principles that are clear with constant diachronic power and global acceptance. On the other hand, Western Civilization, although it is based on ancient Greek philosophy and despite the conscientious efforts of modern European philosophers [4], is not explicit as far as right logic is concerned, thus creating uncertainty and confusion.

Thus, in order to locate the philosophical foundations of modern education, we will depart from classical Greece in which the roots of modern philosophy can be found and its continuity was abruptly ceased. At that time, the writing system had just started evolving and became accessible to people, like Plato and his contemporaries, who appreciated the value of many thousands of years of accumulated knowledge of culture and education which up to then was transmitted from generation to generation orally; they blended it up with their own ideas and then they transmitted it by writing books (i.e. a writing system). Those basic principles were the subject of study of a series of works [ 3], [ 8 ], [ 9 ], [10 ] where an effort was made to enumerate those principles, put them in a reasonable order, and delimit them so to eliminate any contestation. The final result is a concrete proposition which must be officially adopted in order to create an international model which will support the quality of modern life in an ever-increasingly globalized world.

## **2.2 Education: The development of healthy thought**

In his work *Republic*, Plato[7] tries to analyze the significance and the substance of justice and arrives to the definition of education, from which the organization of human thought originates, and then guides human actions to be fair. According to Plato [7], education is defined as:

## **"the therapy of spirit "**

that is, the therapy of thought "...and as, when the body is sick, it needs medical treatment, when spirit (thought) is sick, it needs education".

### ***2.2.1 Thought and its three states***

Plato [7] then defines the meaning of spirit (thought) and claims that "... spirit consists of three components or three states that analytically are:

**logic,  
desire, and,  
anger.**

### ***2.2.2 Healthy thought***

According to Plato [7], healthy state of thought exists when

**"... logic keeps control over and balance between desire and anger "**

To clarify the meanings of control and balance, he gives the following example:

He compares spirit (thought) with a car pulled up by two horses -a blind horse, representing desire, and a crazy horse, representing anger- and the coachman, being the logic, who keeps control over and maintains a balance between the two

horses in order to move the car to the right way, which is the way of virtue<sup>3</sup>.

Up to now, therefore three basic notions are defined: education, thought, and healthy thought. These notions have enormous impact on the person who makes a conscious effort to maintain internal balance and wants to have a better personality and quality of life. It remains now to delineate the way of virtue, so that one understands the right way that healthy thought follows.

## 2.3 Virtue – the right way

Virtue is defined and analyzed in all its extent and in all its depth by Aristotle in his work *Nikomachean Ethics* [1]. According to Aristotle, Virtue is

### *Mesotita*<sup>4</sup>

is to be found in midway, in between two extreme thoughts corresponding to two extreme actions or "badness". Aristotle then gives the following example in order to clarify the definition of virtue:

If bravery is a virtue then the brave person is to be found in the midway, between the provocative and the coward person, *...and when one is brave, then the coward will call him provocative because he is beyond coward's capacity, whereas the provocative will call him coward because he is beneath provocative's capacity...*

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<sup>3</sup> The way of virtue is not reported here by Plato, but it can be deduced from the work of both Plato and Aristotle.

<sup>4</sup> *Mesotita* can be interpreted as a "midway" having a relatively small width. The interpretation "mean" given by most modern philosophers is wrong because "mean" is a point.

Accordingly, one could characterize economy as the virtue that is to be found in the midway between stinginess and overspending and the stingy will call the thrifty as overspender, the overspender will call the thrifty as stingy.

### ***2.3.1 The person of virtue***

According to Aristotle [1], the person of virtue is:

**the person who tries to follow the way of virtue.**

However, any person who is willing to make an effort to follow the way of virtue at any time is the person of virtue. The person of virtue is not infallible, but s/he is the one who learns from his/her errors and tries to minimize them.

### ***2.3.2 Justice***

Aristotle [1] accepts that justice is the supreme virtue and incorporates all virtues.

### ***2.3.3 Virtue and democratic procedures***

Virtue, as defined by Aristotle as the midway and as one's effort to be a person of virtue, is clear and not unambiguous. It is important to notice, however, that an entire process exists so that one finds the midway or the mean even of a natural object. For example, in order to locate the middle of a straight line segment, a topographer uses a process that includes accurate<sup>5</sup> surveying instruments which perform

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<sup>5</sup> Accurate instruments are those they perform measurements with a random error which is within specified limits. Because of such random errors the middle point cannot be defined exactly, but it is defined as a magnitude within a probability level.

measurements of angles and distances, mathematic calculations and statistical treatment of measurements and concludes: *the point in the middle of the straight line segment is here (showing a nail or a stake) with 95% probability of having error less than one centimeter.* The process to locate the midway of virtue is not therefore an easy task, because everyone may understand the midway as a different intermediate location. Thus, it is important to locate it with as much consensus among people as possible, something that ensures democratic procedures. In this way, democratic procedures are philosophically founded and constitute the process of locating the midway of virtue.

## 2.4 Discussion of Basic Principles

### *2.4.1 The present situation and the change of direction*

The first question is how and why education has been deteriorated so much, and the second question is what we can do to reverse this downhill course.

Let's begin with the second question, where the adoption of the above mentioned basic principles is an initial step and places education consciously on its philosophical foundations, which are the healthy organization and operation of thought. These foundations are based on logic playing an important role in the internal balance of the individual who controls desire and anger, and virtue determines his/her course. Consequently, virtue has a direct relation with the actions of a person, and it is an essential condition so that the person has quality actions. Virtue is also an effective filter of the bombardment of information that the modern person receives and guides him/her to choose healthy ideas and thoughts out of extreme positions and badness. Unfortunately for the modern person, no matter how strange it appears very few educators worldwide and in all ranks of education know what **virtue is**. However, if one, takes into consideration that virtue is the dividing line between good and bad, right and wrong, correct and error, humanity and barbarity, then one can understand the size of deterioration of education. Of course, in order to be a person of virtue, one should not know the definition provided by Aristotle, but it is good just to obey the voice of one's conscience or to live in an educational and a cultural milieu that practices virtue. Such a milieu, however, in Europe and in, the so-called cradle of civilization, Greece is continuously shrinking, and those people who obey the voice of conscience get fewer and fewer. Such philosophical foundation of virtue - together with balanced thought - can help modern people to find

philosophical answers to many of the current issues occupying their thoughts.

After the adoption of these basic principles, the next step is the reformation of study programs in all ranks of education as well as in teachers' education, since teachers' education is a matter of great importance. A lot of work to this direction has been done by the German philosopher Werner Jaeger [4], and it is conspicuous in his three-volume work *Education*. In this work, Jaeger presents and analyzes the accumulated knowledge about education of older generations.

Now, as far as the first question is concerned, it requires a lot of study and research by experts to obtain answers, and an off-hand explanation may be attributed to two causes:

(a) The vast amount of information that exists today and is responsible for the interruption of flow of accumulated knowledge on educational and cultural issues from older generations to the younger. This flow creates confusion, so that one is taken away from one's roots and is seduced so that one's desires become so great while, at the same time, one's thought and logic are subjugated to one's desire.

(b) Many impasses that modern person faces are due to the fact that people have stopped dealing with philosophy or, more precisely, they have been dealing with modern philosophy which is characterized by introversion. This constant introversion (self-reflexivity) of modern philosophy harms itself, while modern philosophy could have developed the accumulated knowledge and advance it further so to show people how to deal with issues resulting from challenges of our times.

### ***2.4.2 The proposed Basic Principles***

The results of the above analysis and discussion lead to 10 basic philosophical principles which can be used as foundation. They are proposed to be adopted worldwide and, in particular, to be incorporated in the under development constitution of the European Union because they are constitutive principles. These principles are the following:

1. Education is the development of healthy thought to those who follow the way of virtue.
2. Training is the development of healthy thought on a specific field (i. e. the environment) to those who follow the way of virtue.
3. Thought is one of the three states of human mind before one does or acts upon something. These states are: (a) logic, (b) desire and (c) anger. Thought designates all actions performed by a person now and in the future, and always precedes the action.
4. Healthy thought exists when the logical state of human mind controls over and balances the other two states of the mind, namely desire and anger. Healthy thought is a free thought capable to adopt ideas supported by stronger logic evidence.
5. Healthy action exists when it is done under healthy state of mind and follows the way of virtue.
6. Virtue is the action of a person who follows the midway between two extreme positions or badness. Responsibility, for example, is a virtue and is between irresponsibility and over-responsibility (fear for not being responsible).
7. The person of virtue is the one who tries to follow the way of virtue; s/he is characterized by the effort to maintain the way of virtue (midway).
8. An action of virtue is the effort of an action to maintain the way of virtue (midway).
9. Justice is the supreme virtue and incorporates all virtues.

10. Democratic rules are those procedures which determine the midway of virtue.

These philosophical principles are, among other things, capable of supporting the building of modern education and restoring the access to its roots, so that education can develop by itself, become lively and self-evolving and get rid of its dry branches. These principles will serve as the basis of the reformation of education programs of all ranks and help teachers' education. In this way, the modern person will overcome the impasses that threaten and degrade the quality of his/her life, will participate more actively and substantially in current challenges, such as globalization, and will manage national resources better, thus being able to help his/her socially weak fellow persons. These principles will allow philosophy to grow further and philosophy, in turn, will help in solving difficult issues resulting directly from the challenges of modern times. Furthermore, these principles will be the guiding light for the right use of knowledge for all those who produce and transmit knowledge through research and teaching.