Introduction

In the Presocratic milieu of the preservation, regulation, and legitimation of practical life, which was founded upon ἔθος as custom, individual human character, that is, ἦθος, functioned as the medium for the transmission and self-sustenance of the morality-based spirit. For an individual, that spirit primarily manifested itself in the manner of being confronted with given forms of practical life and their legitimation. These forms subsisted and endured in the spontaneous unity of the moments of practical life, which were firmly fused, so there was no essential tension between them. Their spontaneous unity was upheld through long generational repetition, consolidation, and habituation of what had been established as mores and laws. Independent of the entrenched power of customary morality, no autonomous domain of individual practical purposes could emerge. Any type of action undertaken by an individual within complex life situations was subject to the morality-based measure of the community to which he belonged. This is understandable, given that there had not yet arisen a profound division between the private and the public spheres, between individual character and mores, nor was there any significant rift between intention and action. Consequently, there could be no *hiatus* between an individual's action and the prevailing mores.

The content of Democritus' fragments, in that context, did not contribute to breaking through the circular and 'eternally the same' character of the practical life manifestations of Hellenic customary morality, nor did he engage in a self-conscious philosophical reflection on morals, which, after all, did not exist as an independently existing phenomenon before the Sophists and Socrates. Accordingly, an analysis of Abderite's 'ethics' and, consequently, of justice, reveals that what is at work in his thought is not a philosophical but merely a phronetic reflection.

It is not straightforward to unambiguously determine the origin and genesis of the profound disharmony within the being of the classical Hellenic *polis*, or the precise combination of factors that led it into significant problems and ruin, which subsequently provoked a sophistic and Socratic response, thereby having a devastating effect on the substantial customary morality of the Hellenes.[1] This moment in the spiritual history of Hellas is crucial, as it not only marks the beginning of the inquiry into the essence of Hellenic customary morality with the Sophists and Socrates, but also allows for the emergence of the standpoint of moral consciousness and ethical reflection through their actions.[2] The Sophists, by doubting the self-evidence of the validity of morality-based *éthos* and *nomos*, primarily focused on their legitimising basis, rather than their specific substantive determinations. In their belief, *éthos* and *nomos* have somehow lost their legitimising connection with nature and with the higher order of things in general, that is, the order that transcends all human aspects and has always served as a model for him. The Sophists, of course, did not investigate the origin of this loss, but merely stated what followed from it, that is, the fact that *éthos* and *no-*

[1] It is, therefore, a matter of the sophistic and Socratic reaction and its reciprocal effect, rather than suggesting that the Sophists and Socrates themselves caused the discord in Hellenic customary morality. There is no doubt that they imparted a distinctive mark to the mentioned disharmony through their intellectual reflection, yet it is equally certain that they were not the causes of the overall crisis of the Hellenic *polis*.

[2] Sophistic and Socrates' reflection on the crisis of the *polis*, moreover, made possible the emergence of the phenomenon of individual action according to one's own knowledge and beliefs, that is, morals, as well as the thinking on active thinking, i.e., ethics. The demand for the rationality of action and the rationality of deliberation on that rationality initiated the emergence of other forms of action, to wit, philosophical reflection on action. The birth of morals created the prerequisites for the birth of politics, economics, and law as forms of action, and the birth of ethics created the prerequisites for the birth of philosophical reflection on politics, economics, and law. In this way, the foundations for the philosophy of politics, the philosophy of economics, and the philosophy of law were laid.

mos had become human conventional constructs, which was the internal cause of the disharmony of morality-based life.

The consequences of this sophistic stance were manifold. The well-known question of the divide between nature and law could no longer be discussed within the tradition and from the perspective of mythological, imagination-based, and legislative thinking, as it was precisely this tradition that had failed, reducing the practical-morality-based world to a matter of convention, thereby fostering discord within it. If the aporia of *physis-nomos* could no longer be resolved from the perspective of imagination-based thinking, then the solution could be sought in the medium on which philosophy itself was built, namely, the medium of thinking grounded in understanding. Because the nature of the morality-based practical subject does not allow for the apodictic certainty that early cosmological thought in early philosophy possessed, the Sophists spontaneously arrived at the discovery of a specific form of thinking grounded in understanding, that is, they arrived at the idea of understandability as reasonableness. Due to the aforementioned specificity of the morality-based practical subject and the awareness that in the practical domain a relational cause-effect relationship cannot be sought as constitutive for that domain, a special type of practical causality imposes itself, presented as a reason-effect relationship.

The disharmony of the morality-based world, according to the sophistic insight, arose due to a disruption in the relational values of human purposes. Each individual purpose could spontaneously proclaim itself as the general purpose without the necessary mediation of purposes, in which alone it would be possible to legitimise one's claims to generality. Against such a course of events, only rationally guided mediation could be offered, but as a primarily human matter, that is, as a matter that depends on man himself as the criterion. Attaining rational mediation among individual, particular, and general purposes was possible only from the inner human consciousness, i. e., from

the power of that consciousness to set valid active purposes for itself and its community. The criterion for this setting, of course, could not be derived from morality-based tradition but had to be sought in reasonable consciousness, which would provide both the individual's certainty in action and the community's certainty in the construction and regulation of active relations and institutions.

A particular question arises as to what the nature of reasonable consciousness is, such that the individual and social security sought can be reversed into complete insecurity. It is due to this possibility of reversal that sophistic philosophy became notorious and was attacked as relativistic and sceptical. What can be illuminated in the turning of individual reasonable consciousness towards its own interiority are the various mental powers or contents, ranging from sensations, through imaginations, to inclinations, dispositions, and volitions, which may diverge in different directions. Each of these powers may manifest as an active purpose, that is, man in his actions may be driven by any of these powers. The difficulty arising from such a position concerns how to recognise the value or validity of the aforementioned powers.

One possible response is that all of them are legitimate because they are simply inherent in man, a conclusion that follows from Protagoras' dictum of *homo mensura rerum*. If rationally guided mediation is sought, the validation of the value of any possible purpose can again be built on the reasonableness of reasonable consciousness. Reasonable consciousness, precisely because it is reasonable, can attribute value to any inner faculty or content, or it can deny it, finding appropriate reasons or counter-reasons. The consequences of such a sophistic endeavour to replace the uncertain morality-based practical consciousness with reasonable consciousness, which measures human purposes, become destructive to the very foundations of the morality-based practical world.

The morality-based consciousness of Hellas, aided by the

philosophical reflections of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, discerned all the inherent apporiae of the position that any particular reasonable standpoint could emerge as the highest principle and ultimate purpose of life. Viewed in its entirety, stepping out of the circular morality-based flow of an individual, or allowing the individual's active character to be shaped by someone's reasoning, most often signified a rejection of a priori trust in the prevailing system of imaginations. It embodied a general demand that people generate from within themselves the principles they would regard, for instance, as just or unjust, principles which, in their ultimate consequence, could, not merely as a conditional possibility but, in fact, did lead to the loss of almost any measure.

Protagoras, as previously stated, held that there was no necessity to legitimise *nomos* through nature, for he grounded it solely in the power of human reasonableness, which represents a kind of 'revolution' in the Hellenic grasp of the practical realm. Protagoras also strips *nomos* of divine legitimisation, and in his treatise *On the Gods* (ΠΕΡΙ ΘΕΩΝ) he declares (DK 80B4): "About the gods I am able to know neither that they exist nor that they do not exist nor of what kind they are in form: for many things prevent me from knowing this, its obscurity and the brevity of man's life"[3] (περὶ μὲν θεῶν οὐκ ἔχω εἰδέναι, οὔθ᾽ ὡς εἰσὶν οὔθ᾽ ὡς οὐκ εἰσὶν οὔθ᾽ ὁποῖοί τινες ἰδέαν· πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ κωλύοντα εἰδέναι ἥ τ᾽ ἀδηλότης καὶ βραχὺς ὢν ὁ βίος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου).

Such an acutely articulated agnosticism was scarcely acceptable not only to the ordinary inhabitants of Hellas but even to his sophistic adherents. Indeed, they sought to delegitimize the traditional view of *nomos* and replace it with the rational establishment of a new foundation for legitimation. However, the

[3] A. Laks, G. W. Most (ed. and trans.), *Early Greek Philosophy Sophists Part 1*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 2016, p. 43. Original was taken from: H. Diels, W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker II*, Weidmann, Zürich . Hildesheim 1985, s. 265, B4 (all other original fragments of the Presocratics in this work are taken from *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*).

Abderite's notion of *nomos* as mere convention could not serve as their foundation, for such an idea failed to secure the binding force of *nomos* itself. Therefore, the sophists reverted to the intellectual heritage of the preceding period, reintroducing the idea of nature into the anthropological domain, so as to fortify the idea of *nomos* through the concept of nature. The diversity of connotations surrounding the imagination of *nomos* had, in a certain sense, already been prefigured, and Protagoras' successors sought to appropriate these connotations and elevate them beyond the realm of conventionality, in an effort to secure for *nomos* both firmness and binding force. They presented these connotations as the very connotations of the concept of nature, thereby linking *nomos* with the idea of natural law or, more properly, 'naturally just' (*τῆς φύσεως δίκαιον*).

The naturally just was to serve as a kind of pivot upon which the conventionality of *nomos*, that is, the general morality-based spirit of the *polis*, would be upheld. The impasse lay in the fact that sophistic reflection could not apprehend the content of naturally just as something ready-made and unified, for the very nature of reasonable consciousness is such that it generates contradictions and dilemmas. Reasonable consciousness, in determining the substantive content of naturally just, could posit highly diverse and even entirely opposing positions, thereby articulating a dissent from the existing *nomos* and the entirety of established forms of life. The content of the concept of nature could be conditioned and determined by the historical configuration of circumstances, yet the very nature of sophistic reflection could itself further unveil the multilayered complexity of the issue at hand. Thus, the content of the concept of naturally just may take the form of the idea of the primordial equality and kinship of human beings, however, it may equally sustain the view that humans are not by nature equal, which was, among other things, the thesis of Callicles, both of which, in reality, manifested themselves alike.

Socrates follows the Sophists in the general shift of the focus

of man's practical life from the general morality-based disposition of people to the individual human character. He is on the sophistic path when he believes that such a shift in focus can provide an adequate foundation for every individual action, as well as for the existing morality-based institutions of Hellenic life and their harmonious functioning.

Socrates also significantly differs from the Sophists, and at the core of his departure from their teachings lies the rejection of the Sophists' reasonable consciousness as a possible way of establishing a valid human character. He was convinced that neither the individual nor the community could sustain themselves on the justification of active intentions that are the result of random thoughts, momentary desires, or mere arbitrariness. Only when human consciousness, beyond particular purposes, finds within itself what is general can it ensure inner harmony in action, and the community, the harmony of the whole of its manifestations. According to the Athenian philosopher, this is achieved through reasonableness as conceptuality, or through the power of human consciousness to bring the diversity, even the opposition, of its own mental contents to a unified essence, which is the concept.

The certainty of practical knowledge and knowledge about practical knowledge can no longer be achieved through the sophistic model of the reason-effect relationship and even less through the cosmological philosophy model of the cause-effect relationship. Therefore, Socrates establishes a new model of the concept-effect relationship. The concept as the purpose of action does not aim to justify human impulses and passions but to subordinate such a structure of the human soul to the rule of understanding, i.e., the concept, thus enabling the emergence of a specifically human character of action, and consequently the practical sphere of life. Only on the concept as a paradigm of action can the meaningfulness of the human practical world be maintained, as it directs and enables a person, after its intellectual assimilation, to answer questions about righteousness, i.e.,

how one should live and act. Only this configuration constitutes moral consciousness, or the specific mode of human *prāxis* that, through Socrates, entered the practical-historical world.

Plato was convinced that the salvation of the morality-based universe of the Hellenes, which had been shaken by the incursion of sophistic and Socratic subjectivity, should be sought nowhere else but in the realm of that same subjectivity. The *novum* of his philosophy lies in the demand to delve even deeper into the very epistemic nature of human consciousness. According to the great Athenian, the ultimate basis of consciousness should not be sought exclusively in its practical dimension, and since the essentiality of human consciousness is essentiality in general, the unity of consciousness must be built from the ideal essence of consciousness, which is one with the substantial idea of the Good. In this way, Plato seeks to establish the ontological legitimacy of individual *ēthos*, in which its epistemic essence is grounded in the very essence of the universe. This ensures the legitimacy of the structure of the human practical world within a higher order of general ideality. In other words, through the ontological legitimisation of the foundations of the human practical world, Plato attempted to enable the philosophical grounding of this world and to secure its validity in its active principles and established purposes.

Plato stood on the standpoint of the unity of the morality-based powers of the *polis* and the unity of the entirety of the morality-based life of the Hellenes. However, the epistemic cognition inherited from Socrates allowed him to realise that the unity of practical life could no longer endure on the inertia of the morality-based imagination-based consciousness. Plato sought, through reflection, or the philosophical grasp of the essence of the morality-based principle of active life, to indicate the need for the alignment of individual action and the action of the whole, i.e., the *polis*, with its own essence. Socrates' ethical reflection not only failed to respond to this task, nor to secure the universality and permanence of the concept of righteousness,

but also led to the disintegration of the synthetic unity of human action, preventing thematic philosophical reflection on politics and economics. It, therefore, had to be expanded not only to include reflection on the entirety of action but also to be abolished as a separate mode of contemplating the unified morality-based action. The Athenian posited integral reflection as the philosophy of action as the morality-based unity of relatively differentiated, though not opposing, forms of action, or, more simply, practical philosophy. Plato's practical philosophy, in addition to the consistency of its constituent parts, is also firmly grounded in intellectual unity with his dialectics, his doctrine of ideas, his psychology, and his understanding of the epistemic process.

The core of Aristotle's divergence from the philosophy of his teacher, Plato, lies in the conviction that the distinction between the metaphysical, the physical, and the practical cannot be levelled by dialectic. The substantial character of action in itself endows it with ontological status. The Stagirite seeks to reflect the conceptual structure of the world of human action and its inherent immanent ideality. This understanding constitutes practical philosophy. In this manner, the objecthood of the practical is determined as something temporal, mutable, and human, whose existence is not derived from the eternal and immovable being but from its own possibility for self-sufficiency, that is, from man's future-oriented engagement with the forms of his own practical life.

Aristotle brings to awareness the practical-philosophical paradigm by which the Hellenes lived in the Presocratic epoch.[4] His practical philosophy rests upon an implicit conviction, in contrast to Plato's explicit intent, that through philosophical reflection on the morality-based practical world, a decisive step can be taken

[4] I have undertaken a more detailed investigation of the pre-philosophical and Presocratic roots of practical philosophy in some thirty papers and articles which I have published over the course of almost thirty years in Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Montenegrin, Macedonian and English, appearing in various monographs, journals and conference proceedings.

toward its salvation and preservation. It has already been stated that the morality-based world of the Hellenes was too shaken and unsettled at its very foundation for practical-philosophical attempts at thought to stabilise it. No one, from the Sophists to the Stagirite, could any longer easily synthesise all the moments of individual and collective action by means of knowledge extracted from the spontaneous and unreflected harmony of morality-based powers, nor could they further reinforce them. The effect, moreover, was the opposite: the demand for knowledge strengthened and brought to awareness a hitherto unreflected subjectivity, which, in times of uncertainty, could assert its claim to validity against the old customary morality. This was the ground upon which fragmentary active rights emerged from the totality of human action, or, in other words, the ground upon which morality, economy, politics, and law came into being. By their very existence as distinct spheres, these rights could emphasise their mutual differences and stand in relations of opposition, even contradiction. Aristotle's solution lies in accepting the internal articulation of *prāxis* into distinct domains, wherein each segment contains its own causes within itself, while at the same time in the speculative conception of righteousness and the assertion of the organic unity of the totality of the practical sphere and philosophy.