

THEORY OF VALUE

CHRONICLE OF A FALL

CONCLUSIONS OF A CONVERSATION WITH ELÍAS CAPRILES

Revised and Corrected by Elías Capriles

In this work, we shall expound the theory of the genesis and development of value and of values developed by Elías Capriles. This theory has specially called our attention because, although in some senses it returns to more ancient theories, it seems to be the result of an unerring flight of Athenea's owl on a dusk that is, no doubt, a vital crossroads for humankind, and we believe that it can help us to find the most appropriate path toward resolving the extremely grave ecological, social and individual crisis that we face.

Three Senses of *Phronein* or *Phronesis*

In order to approach the problem of value and values, we shall begin by considering the meaning of the terms *phronein* and *phronesis* in Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle. This seems relevant because to the ancient Greek the terms in question indicated a function of wisdom that, causing their acts and experience not to contradict their innermost aspirations, allowed them to attain happiness and to masterfully handle practical life. As we all know, this was precisely the avowed aim of classical theories of value and values.

If *sophia*—the wisdom sought by philosophy—was to Heraclitus, as Capriles suggests, a wisdom beyond understanding in terms of overvalued concepts, then *phronein* probably was to him the practical-conceptual for-others¹ function of that wisdom, which helped other individuals to gain access to the latter and handled ideas and reality without believing in the absolute truth or falsehood of concepts and—like the *coincidentia oppositorum* posited by Nicholas of Cusa—grasping the relativity, interdependence, mutual implication and equal validity of the opposites that thinking projects on the non-conceptual territory of the *given*, which is not confused with our conceptual maps. As noted by Hermann Hesse, «each concept is as true as its opposite»: each concept implies its opposite and refers to it, by contrast with which it is defined, and, if we simply change viewpoint, perspective or logical type², its opposite will suit the *given* as much as it itself does.

To Plato, *phronesis* was the direct apprehension of value. Since to Plato—or, at least, to *one* Plato—happiness and the correct handling of proactical life depended on the direct apprehension of value³, to Aristotle's teacher the *phronesis* was also a practical wisdom that made happiness possible.

¹Although in the state in which *phronein* is active we do not feel anything to be inherently other in relation to ourselves, this *phronein* functions as spontaneous response to the need for wisdom experienced by «other individuals».

²In the sense given the term by Russell and Whitehead in *Principia Mathematica* (1910, Oxford University Press).

³If we cannot turn toward the sun and toward the ideas in order to grasp them directly, we must at least know them through their reflections and projections.

Last, to Aristotle, *phronesis* was a practical wisdom that allowed human beings to know the course of action that would lead them to the attainment of their aspirations and the achievement of happiness: in order to attain happiness, we must pursue the right aim by the correct means.

Thus, although the three authors coincided in regarding *phronein* or *phronesis* as a practical wisdom that made happiness possible and allowed human beings to effectively handle practical life, each of them seemingly conceived it differently.

In Buddhism and other Eastern systems, happiness and the masterful handling of practical life are forestalled by *avidya* or «lack of systemic wisdom» and the «conceptual overvaluation»⁴ inherent in it. In terms of our interpretation of Heraclitus, we could say that the *avidya* posited by Eastern mystical philosophies is the lack of systemic wisdom inherent in the illusion of «having a particular, private intelligence». As noted by the Ephesian⁵:

«Although the (single) Logos is common (to all),
most people live as though they had a (separate) intellect of their own.»

The illusion of having a private intelligence, separate and independent from the Logos of which all intelligence is a function, is the core of the lack of systemic wisdom. Heraclitus' *phronein*, instead, seems to be the systemic conceptual function of the state in which we do not feel separate from the logos. Ahus, Heraclitus' *phronein* would be the kind of «knowledge» that has been attributed to the beings of the golden age, that mythological past⁶ in which the Tao prevailed, for the Logos had not been concealed by the illusion that human beings had what Heraclitus called «a (separate) intellect of their own».

As suggested by Lao-Tzu, value and values arise precisely from the loss of the Tao⁷. In the Tao-Te-King the Chinese sage wrote:

«The Tao being lost, virtue remains;
virtue being lost, kindness remains;
kindness being lost, justice remains;
justice being lost, the rite remains.»

⁴In the section *Being and Value* of this essay we have defined this term exhaustively.

⁵Fragment 2 of Heraclitus according to Diels-Kranz, 23 according to Marcovich. The translation that we have used was put together by Capriles. What we have rendered as «(separate) intellect of their own», Kirk has rendered as «particular intelligence», whereas Diels has rendered it as «private intellect». Marcovich gives the fragment a very different meaning, that Capriles considers incorrect, when he translates the above as «a religious wisdom of their own».

⁶Evidence has led ethnologist Andreas Lommel (head of Zurich's Ethnological Museum) to insist that human beings in the Paleolithic were not at all less evolved than we are nowadays. Moreover, according to Lommel, the «horizontal» structure of Paleolithic art shows that human beings of that period felt that this world was sacred instead of conceiving the sacred as being in a «beyond».

The latter is also the opinion of Jacques Cauvin, director of research with the CNRS, head of the Institute of Eastern Prehistory at Berrias and responsible for several archeological missions. His research about the upsurge of the first gods in the Middle East suggest that, at some point, nature and the human world lost their sacred character and human beings projected the divine on deities that they placed in a «beyond» (the divine then manifesting more conspicuously in the special gaze of the statuettes representing the mother goddess).

Therefore, the «mythological» character of the golden age in which the world, human beings and life in general were sacred is, at least, liable to discussion.

⁷The loss of the Tao is but illusion, for in truth that apparent loss is part of the Tao's flow, just as are also the thoughts and acts of human beings after the «fall».

If we (are) free from ego and delusion, we no longer live by an illusory «(separate) intellect of our own», but by the Logos or Tao⁸, which manifests as a spontaneous conduct free from selfishness. Then, we (are) total plenitude and our spontaneous conduct benefits both ourselves and all other beings. Therefore, we do not conceive any value to which we may aspire or to which we may try to adapt our behaviour. Only when the Logos or Tao has been illusorily lost does the idea of value arise, together with a set of values or moulds to which human beings must adapt in order to achieve the common good.

All the above shows that, if we understand it literally, comprehending its concepts in the sense they have today, Plato's theory of value and of values⁹ will reveal itself to be a theory of the fallen ones who do not know how to re-ascend. According to the «friend of forms», *phronesis* was the apprehension of ideal objective value, which lied in the *eidōs*. The view held by Capriles contrasts with that of the Ancient Greek philosopher: according to the former, value and the values that the latter associated to the *eidōs* arise from our illusory separation in regard to the Logos¹⁰ and to the totality of the universe, for value is the reification of our lost plenitude and values are originally the result of the reification of particular aspects of the state that we have lost. Thus, if we understand Plato literally, we shall have to conclude that he believes value to be objective because he has reified that which, having lost it, human beings yearn for.

Aristotle also fails to help us recover the plenitude and the all-accomplishing, all-benefitting spontaneity that we have lost, although to him *phronesis* was not the apprehension of the objective value contained in the *eidōs*, but simply a practical wisdom allowing human beings to achieve goodness and happiness.

Heraclitus, instead, has no theory of value and values properly speaking. Rather, he seemingly wants us to recover the state of wisdom and plenitude the loss of which gives rise to value and values, and thus to recover the conceptual function of that wisdom—that according to Capriles is what Heraclitus called *phronēin*—that may be explained as a knowledge that is free from overvaluation of and grasping at ideas and concepts.

It must be noted that some of the philosophical sects of Helenism have been attacked on the grounds that they fail to offer human beings universal rules and standards to be followed in order to achieve their avowed ends. Although we cannot make generalizations about a group of schools that were so different from each other, we can imagine that *perhaps some of them* did not provide rules and standards because they did not want to keep us in the state of illusory separateness in which we believe that we have a separate, private intelligence of our own and, «having ourselves» (be-having-ourselves), try to adequate our behaviour to some values. Perhaps they intended, instead, to help us gain access to the Logos in the Heraclitean sense, so that we could recover the all-accomplishing spontaneity the loss of which gives rise to values. In other words, possibly the aim of some

⁸As we all know, Saint John Evangelist lived in Ephesus, birthplace of Heraclitus, and his usage of the term «Logos» can but remind us of the usage of the term made by the latter. It is significant that the translators of the Gospel into Chinese rendered the term «Logos» as «Tao», so that in Chinese John's Gospel begins «In the beginning there was the Tao».

⁹We cannot forget, however, that some scholars insist that the books by Plato that we know are his exoteric works, but that the founder of the Academy also taught other doctrines—called «esoteric»—that have not reached us. The fact that among Plato's followers and heirs we find both the Neoplatonic mystics (such as Plotinus) and the Academic sceptics (such as Arcesilao and Carneades) makes the idea that Plato may have had an esoteric teaching seem far from unlikely.

¹⁰In the Heraclitean sense; not in the sense that Plato gives the term.

of those sects was to help us become free from dualism, of the conduction of life and behaviour by reference to preconceived values, rules and standards, and of all the problems issuing from this. And, in order to achieve it, perhaps some of these sects considered necessary to have a personal relationship with a living master who himself lived in and by the Heraclitean Logos.

Although Capriles says there is no proof that the Epicureans acted as described above, the following sentence of Epicurus aptly express the conception of philosophy held by our friend:

«It is not (that we must) philosophize by mimetism, but that it is necessary to philosophize truly, because we have the need to be truly (sane and) healthy rather than appearing to be (sane and) healthy.»

Delusion and the lack of systemic wisdom are like an illness with very unpleasant symptoms. The illusion of separateness causes consciousness to feel inherently, absolutely separate from the given's continuum of plenitude, of which it is in truth a «part». Thus, it causes us to experience a continuous sensation of lack of plenitude and dissatisfaction that we constantly have to conceal by interesting ourselves in one or another activity, and that we try to fill by a series of methods that are unable to accomplish their aim, for all of them affirm and sustain the illusion that we are inherently separate entities, which is the root of our sensation of lack.

Moreover, delusion and lack of systemic wisdom comprehend that which Capriles calls «conceptual overvaluation», causing us to feel that