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# **Word in Education: Good, Bad and Other Word**

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## **Abstract**

St John's Gospel identifies *logos*, translated as English 'Word', as the divine source of the wisdom or truth of the Christian message, if not with the god-head as such. However, given the cultural and intellectual influence of Greek thought on early Christian literature, one need not be surprised that these (and other) theological or metaphysical associations of Word are almost exactly replicated and prefigured in the dialogues of Plato, for whom formation of the divine aspect or element of human soul clearly turned upon access to or participation in the wisdom of *logos*. This paper explores the moral and spiritual connections between *logos* or Word, reason and soul in such Platonic dialogues as *Gorgias*, *Republic* and *Theaetetus* as well as the implications of conceiving education as the pursuit of such Word for ultimate human flourishing.

*Keywords:* Education; Word; Soul; Reason; Plato; Christianity; Knowledge

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‘...to the Greek, there was something inexplicable about *logos*,  
so that it was a participation of man in the divine’  
(Eliot, 1950, p. 433).

### Education and human nature

If our present concern lies with education, then it must also be – by implication – with *learning*: indeed, in received Anglophone usage, ‘learned person’ is quite synonymous with ‘educated person’. That said, not all useful or even complex learning is a matter of education and it is important to appreciate the respects in which the former may fall short of the latter. Thus, it is clear that while learning is a significant feature of many non-human lives, we should hesitate to speak of all such learning as *education*: it would be odd, for example, to speak of (the canines) Fido or Rover having been educated in shepherding sheep or guiding the blind in the West Bromwich Kennel Facility, even though they had learned and been taught these ‘skills’ by human trainers. Indeed, it is hardly less odd to speak of human agents who may have learned such complicated skills as juggling, cookery or driving to have been precisely *educated* in them – though we need not doubt that such activities may have significant educational aspects. To cut a longer story short, the reason for withholding the term education here, in both the human and non-human case, is substantially the same: it is that such learning may involve little rational *understanding* – if it needs to involve any whatsoever – and that any understanding in which it might be implicated is largely a matter of grasp of instrumental rules for the mastery of practical procedures.

These points are by no means original and closely follow a widely influential account of education developed by an important school of British educational philosophers around the sixth and seventh decades of the twentieth century (see, notably, Peters, 1966; 1973) – though the basic ideas are significantly anticipated in the work of such nineteenth century pioneers of so-called ‘liberal education’ as the great poet and schools inspector Matthew Arnold (Gribble, 1967; see also Newman,

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1976). While this perspective has been subject to considerable elaboration, its broad lines are soon stated. The basis of the view is that, regardless of traditional etymological disputes over the origins of the term, distinctions between education and such related concepts as learning and training are fairly well marked in English and other established usage. Thus, while we speak of the *training* of agents in the more practical skills of sporting activity, or in vocations such as joinery or nursing, the term education is more usually applied to that broader understanding or consciousness of ourselves, the world and our place in it that marks the development of human mind for no specific further end – or, as it is often (if a little misleadingly) said, for its own *intrinsic worth*. So construed, education is concerned to foster a markedly *human* perspective on the world – a perspective that, in default of distinctively rational powers, other non-human creatures cannot have – rather than to develop those practical or instrumental abilities or capacities that human agents no doubt also require, along with other naturally evolved creatures, for basic natural survival.

### **Different perspectives on human nature and agency**

On this view, education concerns the promotion of knowledge and understanding for accurate *discernment* of the world, though such intelligence has significant implications for the ordering and discipline of those less rational affective and appetitive aspects of human nature that are also integral to personal growth. Still, in this light, education may be considered inherently concerned with the growth of what it means to be a *person* – or, perhaps, in a rather older terminology, to have a *soul*. But how might we best understand or explain the peculiar possession by human beings – but not their non-human cousins – of an educable mind or soul? Indeed, while the term ‘soul’ has far from disappeared from common English usage (see, on this, Morris, 2019), it may seem less than illuminating to invoke this archaism in an era of advanced modern scientific understanding of both human physical and psychological nature. On such

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understanding, human life is evolutionarily continuous with that of non-human nature and any higher mental capacities that human agents may seem to possess might differ only in degree from those of their non-human relatives, not in kind. Indeed, it is not uncommon for some of the more highly evolved of non-human creatures – such as apes and porpoises – to be credited with as much if not more natural (notably problem-solving) intelligence than human agents and even supposed capable of the linguistic capacities required for conceptual thought. At all events, modern science largely considers human mind and knowledge to be no less conducive to empirical explanation than anything else and would have little time for talk of souls.

Regardless of such modern scientific dogma, however, the term 'soul' – still familiar, at least to modern students of philosophy and theology, from the works of older western thinkers of enduring interest and influence – harks back to an older and rival way of conceiving such powers and their provenance. On this view, perhaps most deeply rooted in the dominant religious traditions of near eastern and western European cultures, human agency needs sharply distinguishing from that of all other creatures by virtue of its position between *two* metaphysically distinct realms of being – a divine world of immaterial spirit and a created material world – in both of which it participates by possession of an immaterial mind or soul and a material body. Moreover, it is only by participation in the former world that human soul is capable of the knowledge and choice – notably the choice between good and evil – that appears to be the hallmark of the divine. This conception of human soul and agency also draws upon striking metaphysical narratives purporting to explain the human possession of these and other divine qualities. According to one such familiar narrative, on which orthodox Christian faith is based, an all-powerful divinity created humankind in 'his' own image. Despite this, humans first lived not unlike other beasts of divine creation in an original state of innocent bliss from which knowledge – especially the moral intelligence of good and evil – was absent. Under the influence of God's evil adversary Satan, however, the first humans were persuaded to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge and were in consequence

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exiled by God from their happy paradise to a natural realm of pain and toil. That said, this myth has long been open to alternative (gnostic) Christian and pagan interpretation – from antiquity to more recent times – according to which the knowledge communicated to original humankind was actually granted or gifted by an agent of true divine wisdom seeking to liberate them from the ignorant and oppressive tyranny of a less divine providence of natural or material necessity.

Still, on either more or less orthodox readings of such narratives, the divinely gifted self-conscious intelligence and reason that distinguishes human agents from unthinking beasts is the essential nature of soul, which – if not corrupted or misused – may aspire to ultimate spiritual salvation. And while, again, such ancient narratives are likely to be dismissed by those of modern empirical scientific temper as fairy tales fit only for children, the general metaphysical drift of such ideas has clearly influenced some of the greatest philosophers from antiquity to the present. Thus, the great genius of medieval scholasticism, Thomas Aquinas, sought to recast the key ideas and claims of the Christian narrative in terms of the largely naturalistic philosophy of Aristotle. That said, the success of this enterprise rests mainly on an essentially (Aristotelian) naturalist *teleology*, which – entirely at odds with modern scientific naturalism (as well as with much latter-day neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics) – is able to recognise human and divine ends and goals as legitimate features of the natural order. For Aquinas, Aristotelian virtues – already defined in terms of a *telos* of human flourishing – were ripe for supplementation by Christian theological or spiritual virtues of faith, hope and charity as further means to human and divine ends and purposes.

### **Plato's cave**

Without doubt, however, it is Aristotle's own great teacher Plato – arguably the founding founder of western analytical philosophy – whose work is most deeply inspired, albeit no less critically, by pagan gnostic and other narratives of human enlightenment and liberation via acquisition

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of an essentially divine knowledge. As memorably imagined by Plato's *cave* allegory (Plato, 1961b), the human condition is one of dismal entrapment in a 'sensible' realm of empirical appearance or sense experience which is also thereby a world of ignorance, delusion and vanity. The attachments that human agents form on the basis of sight, hearing and touch – and the affections that such senses engender – are almost wholly deluded and sources of misconduct, wickedness and/or misery. The only means of escape from the cave of ignorance and delusion is via the right use of *reason* that enables access to the 'intelligible' world of real knowledge. It is just such truth-seeking use of reason that Plato – much influenced by his own great teacher Socrates – sought to clarify and cultivate. However, there is a significant sense in which the reason that enables knowledge – as well as the intelligible world to which such knowledge gives access – is for Plato *not of this world*. Again, for Plato, human agents are not wholly of the natural or material order to which other animals and plants belong, but are positioned between two significantly different worlds: while one of these may be experienced by the senses, the other can be accessed only via cultivation of an empirically transcendent form of knowledge or wisdom.

Indeed, Plato's distinction between these two worlds rests primarily on argument to the effect that sense experience cannot account for the rational powers that knowledge requires. It is also important to see that while this dichotomy or dualism is clearly at odds with any modern natural epistemology, Plato gives powerful *arguments* for it which have been essentially restated in more recent days (see, for example, Geach, 1957). The key point turns on the distinctive human capacity for *conceptualization* which requires the use of general terms or *universals*. To have knowledge of anything requires its precise individuation via attribution of general features: so, for example, we see a particular ball as red, round and bouncy. But if it is now asked *how* we come to possess such individuating terms or universals, the standard empirical answer is that we come by the concept of 'red' by noticing lots of red things, the concept 'round' by noticing many circular things, and so forth. The basic – fundamentally Platonic – response to any such explanation, however, is to ask how we

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might come to recognise lots of red or round things if we do not *already* possess the concepts of redness and roundness: in short, any account of concept acquisition in terms of abstraction from sense experience seems to beg the crucial epistemic question and to put the empirical cart before the conceptual horse.

One should also appreciate the true nature of this point. The point is not that only human agents rather than non-human animals can respond in a consistent way to regular or recurring features of the world or environment: it is clear enough that non-human creatures can also do this. Evidently, predators need to be able to notice members of a particular edible species in order to prey on them and birds or reptiles need to recognise specimens of this or that poisonous plant or insect in order to avoid demise. But such habits of attention are well explained in terms of the selective mechanisms of evolutionary theory or behavioural conditioning: thus, animals that fail to develop such habits of prey-identification or avoidance of poisonous plants will not survive to reproduce the offspring that do possess such survival-conducive characteristics. However, it is one thing to say that natural selection or habituation enables such creatures to accomplish this and quite another to credit them – as one may of human agents – with *knowing* that this is what they are doing. The point is that they do *not* know what they are doing – since, in order to know this, they would require the concepts that are (as one modern writer eloquently puts it) ‘presupposed to and exercised in acts of judgement’ (Geach, 1957, p. 11) and which are also liable to evaluation as true or false or appreciative of value or disvalue.

To be sure, latter day philosophers and social scientists are now largely agreed that the vehicle of such knowledge-sustaining judgements is not some invisible spiritual entity, but a capacity for describing and evaluating the world that is enabled through the possession and exercise of some human language. In this light, it might now be said that such language acquisition is quite susceptible of natural scientific explanation and enquiry and might even be regarded as just more sophisticated development of the primitive non-human languages of birds or dolphins. But this is evidently mere evasion, insofar as the complex syntax and

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semantics of even the most primitive human language is clearly different, not only in degree but in kind, from the naturally conditioned grunting, howling or whistling whereby one non-human (and non-linguistic) creature warns another or the presence of danger. Once again, the epistemic horse needs putting before the cart. For it seems hardly more plausible to suppose that human agents acquire conceptual capacities by coming to express them through language than that they are enabled to acquire language by their possession of the conceptual capacities necessary for knowledge of the world. In short, following Plato (and others), it seems plausible to suppose that there are mental human powers – capacities for reason and knowledge – that are not readily conducive to empirical scientific explanation.

### **In the beginning was the word**

As no doubt familiar to most of educated Christian heritage, the New Testament Gospel of St. John opens with the words: 'In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God'. In this translation of a first century text, 'Word' (from now on capitalised) is English rendering of the original Greek *logos*. While it is not easy to give any very precise modern definition of *logos*, its philosophical and theological significance in the Greek intellectual culture surrounding authorship of the Gospels can hardly be overestimated. Amongst other senses, the term *logos* has connotations of reason, discourse, opinion, logic, meaning, explanation, account, justification and/or ground and it features as a prominent philosophical idea at least from Heraclitus for whom it seems to have signified the rationally ordering power of knowledge. However, the idea assumes enormous significance in the context of Platonic, neo-Platonic, Stoic and both pagan and Christian gnostic thought and St John's narrative is often referred to as the 'gnostic gospel', by contrast with the other so-called synoptic gospels. Again, while these diverse ancient philosophical traditions and theological schools tend to rather different accounts of the cosmic significance and role of *logos* as Word, it seems



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broadly conceived as a metaphysical bridge between the divine world of soul or spirit and the more natural or material context of human affairs and operations: roughly, it may be construed as the animating power of the otherwise inanimate nature wherein human mind and agency is otherwise situated.

Again, as previously indicated, it is Plato (1961b) who provides the most compelling account – no less influential on subsequent secular than on religious thought – of this metaphysically complex and conflicted human predicament. As noticed, Plato's striking cave allegory depicts human experience and agency as enthralled to inherently vain, foolish and delusive feelings and desires from which there can be no escape except by rational deployment of those powers of human reason that enable access to a higher state of unclouded knowledge and understanding. This vision of moral and spiritual liberation as ultimate intellectual disengagement from 'sensible' experience echoes down the ages in the works of philosophers, theologians and artists. In more modern secular contexts, for example, it is evident in the comic revisioning of heaven and hell of the Irish dramatist George Bernard Shaw in his *Man and Superman* (Shaw 1934) and it informs the more explicitly Platonic ethics of the twentieth century Anglo-Irish philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch (1970; 2003). But the influence of such Platonism is no less evident on Christianity from the earliest Greek composition (cultural no less than linguistic) of New Testament books to much later Christian theology. Thus, when the Christ of St. John's gospel responds to Pilate that that he comes to testify to the truth of a kingdom that is not of this world, or St. Paul writes in *I Corinthians* that now we see through a darkened glass, but shall see truly in heaven, it is hard to gainsay the influence on such texts of Platonism in general, if not of Plato's *Republic* in particular.

At all events, the Word that is the divine source of all things and in terms of which human affairs may aspire to ultimate meaning seems mainly liable for appraisal in terms of its *truth* – indeed, of a truth that may be hard to discern in the mundane realm of sense or sensible experience. To be sure, it seems to be in this spirit that Pilate – a prince of this world – famously replies to Jesus 'What is truth?' Here, to be sure, we

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need not take Pilate to be voicing the sort of radical epistemic scepticism about the very possibility of objective knowledge that has troubled philosophers from ancient to modern times (from Protagoras to post-modernism) – and which was also effectively refuted by Plato in his dialogue *Theaetetus* (Plato, 1961c). On the contrary, it seems more likely that Pilate was despairing over the possibility of any normatively higher wisdom or knowledge whereby he or other human agents might live ultimately meaningful, purposeful or worthwhile lives. In short, Pilate's doubt seems to have been more *moral* or *spiritual* than epistemic: to be, precisely, a question of the kind that the enquiries of Socrates and his great pupil Plato sought to answer.

### Unworldly knowledge and truth

Indeed, the New Testament abounds with judgements that seem to be moral – or, perhaps more precisely, *spiritual* – truths of this kind: one might cite as examples: 'For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'; 'Man shall not live on bread alone'; 'Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends'; 'No man can serve two masters'; 'Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's' and 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof'. Still, in what sense – if any – might these be regarded as actual *truths*? Aside from the point that contemporary philosophers remain divided as to whether *any* moral judgement may be regarded as expressing evidence-based truth (more than, say, social rule or subjective preference), it is far from clear that such statements are of equal logical status. Indeed, it might be claimed that some of these – those concerned with rendering unto Caesar, the impossibility of serving several masters or not worrying unduly about one's troubles – have, notwithstanding any need for some contextual interpretation, little more than the vague sense of such (English) proverbs as 'a stitch in time saves nine', 'he who hesitates is lost' or 'it's an ill wind that blows no-one any good'. While it may be hard to serve two masters, servants will have done this this; it might not always be right

to render unto Caesar; one may well be lost (especially in traffic) by not hesitating; and some ill winds blow *no-one* any good. Again, the notion that love entails laying down one's life for one's friends – meaning, no doubt, that true love is selfless – looks more like a prescription or definition: one, moreover, that is arguably definitive of only *one* sort of love – and which may therefore be contestable as a general recipe for a successful or well-rounded life.

That said, judgements that there is more to life than bread and that world domination is not worth the loss of one's soul, particularly on a Platonic, neo-Platonic or Christian notion of soul as the site of *logos* as Word, may well have more moral and spiritual – if not actual epistemic – content or substance. Thus, we may well recognise not only difference but actual *conflict* between the world over which Governor Pilate has jurisdiction and that wherein Jesus and his teachings have authority. Indeed, such difference may well be interpreted or appreciated, as the gospel itself indicates, in *epistemic* terms: Jesus has access to a *knowledge* or truth that Pilate lacks. But such higher wisdom or knowledge may also be accessible via escape from Plato's cave – though the cave image may need purging of some possible misconception. For, just as escape from the sunless cave to the sunlit surface is clearly not meant as *literal* movement from one spatial location to another, so one need not take ascent from the sensible to the intelligible to involve any ontological or post-mortal shift from embodied to disembodied cognition. Souls liberated from the cave continue to inhabit the same world as their unliberated fellows: it is rather that they now see more truly and honestly what they formerly saw through the distortive influences of vanity, avarice and self-interest.

Again, of course, we meet much the same point in the Hellenized (if not actually Platonized) teaching of *1 Corinthians* that whereas we see presently as through a darkened glass, we shall then see clearly or as face to face – which also, unsurprisingly, exhibits much the same ambiguity as Plato's cave allegory. Thus, while the connective 'then' in *Corinthians*, may be interpreted either metaphysically or ontologically to mean beyond death or in heaven, it may also be read more epistemically in the sense of after one has heard and understood the Christian message. At all events,

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what one may expect to grasp under either Platonic or Christian interpretation – whether out of the cave or in the Kingdom of God – is a truth by light of which one's previous perceptions appear now false or wanting. Still, is any of this less obscure or more illuminating in *Corinthians* than in Plato's myth of the cave? In what terms, or by what light – other than divine revelation – may Christ's Word or knowledge be judged epistemically, morally or spiritually truer than that of Pilate or other princes of the world? Again, however, while the case to which we now turn may fall short of what is needed to support full Christian faith, the essence of a satisfactory answer to this question is clearly to be found in the writings of Plato.

### **The health of the soul in Plato's *Gorgias***

Plato's dialogue *Gorgias* (Plato, 1962a) focuses primarily on Socrates' refutation of a bold conceit of the ancient Greek sophists concerning *rhetoric* or the art of persuasion. The sophists were professional educators who made a lucrative living teaching rhetoric to the (male) offspring of Athenian well-to-do for deployment in the emerging climate of Athenian democracy wherein authority and influence depended upon persuasion of others to one's own interests in democratic assemblies. Moreover, such use of rhetoric rested upon a more basic utilitarian and/or hedonistic assumption that the highest form of happiness or flourishing depends upon the satisfaction of deepest human desires. In much this spirit, the *Gorgias* of Plato's dialogue praises rhetoric as the very highest and most rewarding of human arts or skills. However, whilst Plato depicts Gorgias as a person of some moral character and integrity, it is soon clear from other participants in the dialogue that the uses of rhetoric are open to morally darker and more cynical advocacy in terms of naked self-interest, self-advancement and ruthless will to power. Indeed, on the premise that satisfying all one's natural desires is more or less what human happiness and flourishing means, Socrates' opponents argue that even the most wicked and depraved tyrants who get their way through

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the oppression, abuse and exploitation of others have to be regarded as happy or flourishing.

However, to understand completely why Socrates considered such defence of wholesale human abuse to be morally objectionable – which, of course he did – one needs to appreciate his overall rational or epistemic objection to rhetoric. The key point is that the worth of rhetoric was measured not by the validity or truth of its arguments or conclusions – since successful rhetoric could be either invalid or false – but only by its effectiveness in persuading others to the rhetorician's interest. In this light, Socrates seeks to show that rhetoric cannot be considered a genuine art or skill, precisely insofar as arts and skills entail genuine *knowledge* directed towards the promotion of real human benefit. Thus, Socrates contrasts medicine and gymnastics – skills or arts grounded in knowledge of what is of real benefit to human well-being – with cosmetics and cookery, both bogus 'knacks' concerned only to flatter the palate or disguise the real state of human health. Still, such Socratic focus on the *epistemic* status of expertise alleged conducive to human flourishing has clear implications for any crude estimate of human success or flourishing in terms of brute satisfaction of personal appetites or desires. Indeed, Socrates' critique of rhetoric is based on a view of the health or good of the 'soul' that seems much at odds with modern post-Darwinian and other scientific sensibilities. Precisely, we are encouraged to observe a genuine difference between the life and conduct of human and non-human creatures that exalts the distinctive capacity for reason and knowledge of the former. This difference is charmingly illustrated in a fictitious exchange between a precocious child and her mother in a short story by the modern British novelist Sebastian Faulks:

'Shall I tell you why I'm not a monkey?

'If you must', said Fluvia.

'It's because a monkey doesn't know it's a monkey. A human being knows it's human. That's what sets us apart from every other animal on earth.' (Faulks, 2013, p. 120)

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Likewise, for Socrates and Plato, such capacity for knowledge – of the world as such, but more particularly of oneself, one’s own appetites and desires and one’s relations with other knowing agents – raises human agency to a level that differs not just in degree but in kind from that of insects, rodents, sheep and even monkeys, even though such creatures may act in the world and be said either to flourish or decline. However, such epistemic capability has especial implications for the growth of *moral* virtue and conduct, since without it – and the responsibility for one’s actions that is entrained by it – there can be nothing much worth calling morality at all. In short, insofar as non-human brutes are epistemically deficient, they can have no moral aspirations to virtue, no responsibility for their actions and cannot be (other than figuratively) praised or blamed. By the same token, insofar as human epistemic engagement with the world is wanting in moral sensibility and responsibility, no human agent who thereby falls short can be considered an exemplary specimen of humankind or to be living as a full human agent.

It is from this basic position that Socrates mounts his objection to the idea of the flourishing or ‘happy’ tyrant. Indeed, a key move in Socrates’ argument is to question whether the unjust and cruel tyrant who is driven by insatiable appetites is – insofar as what is distinctive about human agency is that it should be responsive to well-grounded reasons – acting as a mature human agent at all. For while non-human brutes may certainly act freely or voluntarily – insofar as they are not subject to external constraints – their freedom does not follow from rational choice or decision and is wholly determined by natural instincts, appetites or drives. In this regard, a brute will gorge until sated and gorge when hungry again – and one can hardly suppose that a lion or crocodile might plan its meals to save the tasty bits for later. Indeed, Socrates takes the insatiable craving of the tyrant for ever fresh thrills and pleasures to be compulsive conduct of precisely this sort, comparing those so driven to ‘leaky buckets’ needing constant refill. Insofar as agents are behaving in this compulsive way, they are not acting with the rational discernment and responsibility that distinguishes the agency of genuine human soul. Thus, for Socrates, the very idea of a ‘happy’ or flourishing tyrant is barely

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intelligible. For it is not only that the wicked tyrant acts unjustly – which, of course he does – but that in acting without knowledge he acts below the level of anything that might be considered distinctive *human* flourishing. Since even self-interest is unlikely to be served by conduct entirely regardless of the need for basic self-control or some regard for others, it would seem to fall well short of successful or ‘happy’ in any significant sense.

In this spirit, Socrates argues that if the wicked tyrant or other agent really grasped or knew the consequences of the actions to which his ill-advised desires and appetites drive him, he would not perform them. Once again, the problem of the wicked – and the moral failure consequent upon this – is essentially *epistemic*: they lack the knowledge or wisdom that is required for – or, for Socrates, virtually identical with – the moral or other virtue of true human excellence. No human agents who are ignorant or lacking in wisdom in this way can possibly be regarded as flourishing, and they should not be regarded as such even if they consider themselves to be so: precisely, it cannot profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his soul. Consequently, Socrates insists that the wicked are better off exposed and punished for their crimes than by getting away with them (indeed, if more tongue in cheek, that if one really wants to harm one’s enemies, one would let them go unpunished). Macbeth strays from the path of virtue in thrall to vain and false ambitions – which also, significantly, lead to his downfall and death. But it might have been better for the soul of Macbeth to have been taken alive, to have undergone ‘correction’ and therefore atoned for his crimes.

### **Word, soul and education**

As previously noted, while the arguments of *Gorgias* may fall well short of Gospel visions of divine grace or salvation, there are nevertheless evident moral correspondences between the Platonic and Christian views. Moreover, as indicated in the prefatory quote to this essay, the great twentieth century poet T. S. Eliot – in a footnote to critique of modern

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humanism from a specifically Anglo-Catholic perspective – observes that pagan Greek philosophers were largely at one with later Christians in regarding Word or *logos* as a matter of human participation in the divine. This seems fundamentally right, especially with regard to Platonic and neo-Platonic thought, and is just as we might or should expect given the cultural and theological influence of such thought on the Gospels and early Christianity. For such pagan Greeks and Christians, the divine *logos* or Word from and by which healthy human (allegedly immortal) soul is formed and informed is essentially that which bears witness to the kind of truth to which Christ testifies and whereof Pilate is sceptical. Moreover, while such truth may appear to require some ‘transcendental’ access – for Platonists, to the intelligible realm of ideal forms, or for Christians to some heavenly destination or to the mind of God – it is evidently liable to less controversial epistemic interpretation as freedom from the Platonic cave of false vanity and self-concern. It is precisely in the worldly cave of delusional sensible or sensual experience that one sees through the glass of *Corinthians* only darkly, so that some emancipation from the web of ignorance, prejudice and egoism to which natural or socially conditioned humanity is inevitably heir is quite indispensable to any grasp of those Platonic or Christian moral and spiritual truths required for the good of the soul. In short, good Word is that which best conduces to truth – as well as to just and unprejudiced regard and concern for others as the due concomitant of truth – and bad word is that which blinds the soul to such truth. Moreover, it is upon such truthful word that the best modern accounts of education – particularly of liberal education – have focused.

So, what of no word or word of other varieties? Plain folk occupy much of their lives with office or shop-floor gossip and trivial entertainment. Still, so long as this is good-natured or well-intentioned and not malicious (bad Word) – this may be of little or no consequence and even be socially beneficial. It is also true that if humankind cannot live by bread alone, it equally cannot live entirely without it. In this light, there are many kinds of knowledge of human benefit, by no means all of which are primarily focused upon direct discernment of the sort of wisdom



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engendered by good Word. While, as we have seen, there are arts or skills – such as rhetoric – that are potentially hazardous in the service of morally suspect ends, there are clearly other forms of practical knowledge of much value for human survival, progress and culture that young and not so young need to be taught in schools or other educational contexts for flourishing lives or for the benefit of their societies. But while such forms of art and skill are often of enormous human value or consequence, it should not be forgotten that the human worth of such knowledge and skills is ultimately dependent upon their fidelity or service to good Word. Thus, ever mindful of the misuse of rhetoric by political demagogues, we also need to be alert to possible subordination of the potentially valuable knowledge and skills of science or art to the service of this or that adverse end of vicious exploitation, persecution or environmental degradation. So while many in today's world, like Pilate in the Gospels, may insist that the divine Word or wisdom valued by the Greeks, and/or that Jesus sought to teach, is of less consequence than the arts and skills of worldly advantage and profit, it may well be – at a time as variously hazardous and threatened as the present – that any further worthwhile human future may crucially depend on due regard for the less worldly truth of good Word.

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