

DYING A HUNDRED DEATHS: SOCRATES ON TRUTH AND JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

The well-known history of the life and death of Socrates continues to attract attention. This essay examines Socrates' commitment to truth and justice. For Socrates, justice is inseparable from ethical commitment to truth. He gave up his life in the name of truth and justice. We will explore the meaning of the "internal", "external" dichotomy of truth. The proffered meaning of this dichotomy of truth will be considered from the point of view of African philosophy. The relevance of Socrates to African philosophy will be discussed as a prelude to our argument that Socrates' commitment to truth and justice is crucial for political leadership and vital for the realisation of justice in Africa and the world.

Keywords: Socrates; truth; justice; African philosophy

INTRODUCTION

The thesis of this essay is that Socrates' commitment to truth and justice is crucial for political leadership and vital for the realisation of justice in Africa and the world. The elaboration of this thesis has four sections. The first explores the meaning of truth in relation to justice. The second places Socrates in the context of the culture of his time. The third is on the relevance of Socrates to African philosophy, and the fourth is a critical discussion of the "arms deal" of South Africa. The purpose of the fourth section is to give an example of the problems arising from seeking truth and justice, and being committed to them even if one were to die a hundred deaths.

THE MEANING OF TRUTH IN RELATION TO JUSTICE

Socrates faced his trial and decided not to escape from the death sentence delivered against him. His commitment to truth and justice reinforced his decision to await the death to which he was condemned. For him, commitment to truth and justice was a matter of life and death. He would therefore be prepared to stand by the same truth – for as long as the circumstances pertaining to it remained unchanged – even if he were to die a hundred deaths.

Truth has two aspects. One is that a human being must recognise what it is to be a human being by acquiring knowledge about oneself. Ontological pluriversality and epistemological diversity are the primary conditions necessary for the pursuit of knowledge about oneself. To these must be added the ethical dimension as an indispensable complementary necessary condition for the pursuit of self-knowledge. Knowing oneself involves first the identification of oneself within the ontological pluriverse. To confer identity upon oneself is to declare oneself to be different in some respects to all that there is. Identity implies difference. It does not necessarily construe difference as opposition. Instead of opposing one's identity, "difference" can complement it.

The construction of one's identity is an epistemological issue insofar as it requires knowledge of one's world, that is, nature as known and understood in one's place and time. Having such knowledge must direct one to behave in specific ways in order to attain good ends and avoid evil. This is the ethical dimension; a necessary complement to the ontological and the epistemological spheres. Knowing oneself in terms of one's identity and ethical disposition is the first meaning we assign to the concept of truth. It means interacting with others on the basis of remaining true to the acquired knowledge of oneself. This is the "internal" aspect of truth. It means being truthful, that is, adhering to the acquired knowledge of oneself by not succumbing to the temptation to lie to oneself (Kung 1968:36). This meaning of truthfulness stands in sharp contrast to being merely honest. To be honest is to conform to social norms that portray one as respectable even if such conformity may be based on lying to oneself. Lying to oneself in this way is the basis for transferring the same lie to others by living according to the relevant social norm. Honesty, as the pursuit of honour on the basis of lying to oneself, is distinguishable from truthfulness, though the two are often used wrongly as synonyms.¹

Another aspect of truth is that it is an ever changing human construction of the meaning of life at a given time and place (Bohm 1994:181). This means that human beings do not "construct", for example, a stone or a river that simply exists whether or not they like it. Human beings do not "construct" what is generally known as "objective" reality. Their interaction with this reality is the matrix from which truth, as a statement on the meaning of life, is constructed. This is the "external" aspect of truth. The "internal" and "external" aspects of truth constitute and complement each other. They are the two sides of the same coin. Commitment to truth means accepting

1 Here one may recall Shakespeare's Hamlet, Act I, Scene 4. It is here that we find the famous: "To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man." Here the contrast is directly between truth and falsity. Honesty does not feature at all. This does not mean that it is irrelevant to truthfulness. Nor does it mean that it is insignificant. In the same Hamlet, Act II, Scene II we read: "Ham. Excellent well; you are a fishmonger. Pol. Not I, my lord. Ham. Then I would you were so honest a man. Pol. Honest, my lord! Ham. Ay, sir; to be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man picked out of ten thousand." In this conversation, honesty reads like truthfulness. This reading is affirmed by a similar conversation later on in the same Act and Scene: "Ham. What news? Ros. None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest. Ham. Then is doomsday near..."

a specific meaning of life, and acting accordingly. “What is the meaning of life?” is a question to which human beings give different and sometimes even divergent answers. Conflict might ensue when the answers meet one another. Justice is both the aim and the yardstick with which to resolve the conflict. In this way justice enters into the terrain of contestations about truth. On this reasoning, truth and justice always go together. So, Socrates’ commitment to truth was at the same time a demand for justice. Thus truth and justice are related in a way that thinking about the one is necessarily thinking about the other.

THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF SOCRATES

The pre-Socratic period in ancient Greece is the cultural background leading to the Socratic period. Socrates’ philosophy may be regarded as a dialogue with this period. Out of this dialogue new insights emerge having an influence on the practice of philosophy during the lifetime of Socrates. It goes without saying that the insights of that time have become, and continue to be, the subject of philosophical controversies especially in Western philosophy. In this essay, we would like to focus on one aspect of the pre-Socratic period. The second aspect that we will focus upon belongs to the Socratic period.

THE PRE-SOCRATIC PERIOD

From the pre-Socratic period we should like to focus on the point that one of the major problems of Athens was the fact that money had the power to undermine, displace and even destroy long established and respected ethical values (Seaford 2004:94). This was the age of timocracy; the period of money-based rule (Ramose 2010:293-294). Timocracy had no special regard for the value of the human being as a human being. Its primary and overriding aim was to continue to accumulate wealth without end. Even human life was subordinated to the achievement of this aim. It was in this situation that Solon, the renowned sage, was invited to give advice; advice that would restore ethical values and revive respect for them. The advice was the written code of Solon delivered “probably 594/3 BC” (Seaford 2004:177). According to Seaford, Solon wrote: “Of wealth there is no limit that appears to men. For those of us who have the most wealth are eager to double it” (Seaford 2004:165). Solon’s advice was that there should be a limit to the desire to accumulate wealth. He prescribed moderation (Seaford 2004:166). There are two reasons for our focus on timocracy during the time of Solon. The first is to suggest that the power of wealth (money) was still strong even during the life of Socrates. No wonder that some of the Sophists preferred not to receive money for their lessons. It is also worthwhile to remember that “When Socrates is told that he should charge a price for his valuable conversation, as he would if parting with other valuable things, he replies that just as charging for physical beauty is prostitution, so too wisdom should not be exchanged for money” (Seaford 2004:162). The second reason is to

acknowledge that contemporary democracy world-wide has, to all intents and purposes, been superseded by timocracy (Hertz 2001:35-48; Beder 2010). We will refer to the “arms deal” in South Africa as an example. The discussion in this connection will focus on commitment to truth in relation to Socrates’ option to take the side of truth even if that means the loss of one’s own life.

THE SOCRATIC PERIOD

The period of Socrates placed special emphasis on the human being in contrast to the focus on “nature” in the pre-Socratic period (Copleston 1962:101). The human being may not be seen outside the context of culture and civilisation. On this basis, the emphasis on the human being in the Socratic period involved focus upon the customs (culture) of a people and their civilisation. Another characteristic of the Socratic period was its method of philosophy. The pre-Socratic philosophers certainly observed nature. From their observations they drew conclusions based upon deductive reasoning. Unlike the pre-Socratic philosophers, the Socratic philosophers did not rely on the logical validity of deductive reasoning as the method of philosophy. Instead, they considered that the attainment of certainty was unlikely with regard to the dynamics of human behaviour. Firm conclusions based on deductive reasoning were deemed to be unsuited to the dynamic domain of human behaviour. Accordingly, the Socratic philosophers preferred practical conclusions based on the “empirico-inductive” method (Copleston 1962:102). Scepticism about the certainty of cultural and ethical norms was the necessary complement to the “empirico-inductive” method.

Yet another characteristic of the Socratic period pertains to the aim of the philosophers. Unlike their predecessors whose aim was to discover the “arche”, the ultimate truth about being, the Socratic philosophers aimed to teach. The pursuit of the aim to teach required the gathering of those to be taught and thus had the potential to have disciples of the teacher. When this aim was actually achieved “the idea became current that they (the Socratic philosophers) gathered together the young men from their homes and then pulled to pieces before them the traditional ethical code and religious beliefs” (Copleston 1962:104). This was to be used as one of the accusations against Socrates (Copleston 1962:135).

The portrayal of the Socratic philosophers as wholly destructive of the prevailing ethical norms is unjustified. Their aim to teach on the basis of their preferred method of philosophy, including their scepticism, does not lead ineluctably only to the one conclusion that they intended to destroy the prevailing ethical norms by “corrupting” the youth. Surely, to be sensitive to the existing ethical norms and to question critically their validity is not by itself an act of deliberate destruction of the ethical norms. It is not surprising, therefore, that some Socratic philosophers were highly esteemed despite Plato’s rather unfavourable attitude towards them. Not all the Socratic philosophers – as Socrates’ case so vividly testifies – were mere quibblers or cheats (Copleston 1962:105).

It is in the context sketched above that Socrates conceived “of his mission as being to seek for the stable and certain truth, true wisdom, and to enlist the aim of any man who would consent to listen to him” (Copleston 1962:119). He adopted scepticism and the conversational didactic method (dialectics) from that context. Dialectics was the method Socrates used in his dialogues for the pursuit of “true wisdom”. His quest for “fixed concepts” committed him to deductive reasoning but without a total rejection of the “empirico-inductive” method (Copleston 1962:125). For him the quest for and the attainment of knowledge is indispensable as a guide to ethical action. Thus his primary concern was with the ethical aspect of political life. For Socrates “knowledge and virtue are one, in the sense that the wise man, he who *knows* what is right, will also *do* what is right” (Copleston 1962:129). To claim to know what is right and proceed to do wrong is to disprove one’s claim to that knowledge. The claim to knowledge in Socrates’ conception comprises three interrelated aspects constituting a oneness. These refer to that which is known (what); why it should be known at all; and how that knowledge must be applied in practice. To possess such knowledge is to claim one’s personal conviction about it. It is to understand that “when Socrates identified virtue with knowledge or wisdom he had in mind not any sort of knowledge but a real personal conviction” (Copleston 1962:130).

On the basis of his understanding of knowledge as a real and living personal conviction, Socrates preferred to await the actual moment of his death decreed in judgement against him. He would not accept the offer to escape from this fate because “such a course of action would be contrary to his principles” (Copleston 1962:136). His commitment to principles; to truth and justice was so deep that even if he were to die a hundred deaths, at each resurrection he would stand by his principles. He declared in the *Apology*:

Are you not ashamed that you give your attention to acquiring as much money as possible, and similarly with reputation and honour, and give no attention or thought to truth and understanding and the perfection of your soul? ... For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go, Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state. Now if I corrupt the young by this message, the message would seem to be harmful, but if anyone says that my message is different from this, he is talking nonsense. And so, gentlemen, I would say, You can please yourselves whether you listen to Anytus or not, and whether you acquit me or not, you know that I am not going to alter my conduct, not even if I have to die a hundred deaths (Apology 29c-30b).

This is political leadership committed to truth and justice, since for Socrates ethics is inherent to politics. We will revert to this point in our consideration of the “arms deal” of South Africa. We now turn to the relevance of Socrates to African philosophy.

THE RELEVANCE OF SOCRATES TO AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Socrates belongs firmly to Western philosophy. The question to be considered then is how Socrates came to Africa. This is important since the second part of our title is precisely about Socrates' presence in Africa on the question of truth and justice. Our inquiry into the question how Socrates came to Africa is intended to clarify whether or not he came as the omniscient teacher who had nothing to learn from his pupils. We will argue that he came – metaphorically as Western philosophy – to Africa as this kind of teacher; the champion of a deadly monologue oblivious of the dialogues he conducted in Athens. Mindful of his capacity for dialogue, Socrates is now invited to post-colonial Africa as an equal partner in dialogue.

The following points will be treated seriatim. The transportation of Western philosophy into Africa; the need for dialogue as a philosophical imperative; and Socrates' message of unswerving commitment to truth and justice, even if one were to die a hundred deaths. The treatment of these questions is intended to show that Socrates is relevant to African philosophy precisely because of the encounter between Western and African philosophies. The initial violent imposition of Western philosophy – “Western civilisation” – upon Africa established its presence. It subsequently stabilised itself through subjugation, oppression and other subtle means of persuasion. The resistance of the indigenous Africans to this also speaks to the relevance of Socrates to African philosophy. Together, the forcible imposition of Socrates and the resistance of the indigenous Africans to Socrates' presence, establish him as a member of African philosophy worthy to be “re-membered” (Mungwini 2012:121-122).

THE TRANSPORTATION OF SOCRATES TO AFRICA

The struggle for the assertion and affirmation of the right to define the meaning of philosophy must be seen within the broader context of the studied silence of the West over the big cultural debt it owes to the culture, philosophy and theology of the civilisation of ancient Egypt (Hallen 2009: 8-10; Obenga 2006: 31-49). This silence was complemented by the subsequent forcible subjugation, suppression and denigration of African culture, especially from the period of colonisation to date. It was a systematic, systemic and sustained epistemicide which failed, despite its intensity and vigour, to kill completely and totally the indigenous cultures of Africa. This is the violent context within which Socrates was transported to Africa as the omniscient teacher endowed with the highest competence in the conduct of a deadly monologue. It is the first act of injustice to Africa. It demands justice. One of the elements of justice required is the reconstruction (Osugwu 1999) of African history to reflect the interaction between the West and Africa without concealing the cultural debt the West owes to Africa, especially in the fields of philosophy and theology. Another element is the restoration of Socrates as the champion of dialogue, even outside the boundaries of his native Greece.

THE NEED FOR DIALOGUE AS A PHILOSOPHICAL IMPERATIVE

Wisdom grows from experience, provided one makes a conscious effort to learn from experience. No doubt this presupposes a learner with the capacity to learn – in this case, the human being. Our concept of the human being is linked directly to our idea of wisdom, since wisdom is ultimately the attribute of particularly human beings. Often the definition of the human being determines also the meaning and function of philosophy. This then inaugurates the struggle for the meaning and function of philosophy. It appears that there is no point of struggle for as long as philosophy is understood in its etymological sense of a love of wisdom. The source of contention lies in the understanding of philosophy as a specific academic discipline. Who defines the meaning and function of philosophy on behalf of all of humanity, and by what right? The many answers to these contentious questions show that no one – here it is not only a particular individual that we have in mind but also a group of individuals who share the same epistemological paradigm – has a prior, superior and exclusive right to define the meaning and function of philosophy on behalf of the whole of humanity. The opposite of this answer continues to dominate practice inside philosophy as a discipline and outside of philosophy, especially in the spheres of religion and politics. We refer to the following example in the case of philosophy as a discipline. Gracia gives a critique of the tense relationship between Continental and analytical philosophies. He concludes his critique in these terms:

Finally, the sorts of questions raised by Continental philosophers are frequently dismissed by analysts as illegitimate, and the questions they regard as legitimate are dismissed by Continental philosophers as trivial ... This technique of dismissal is a serious matter, for it points to a kind of anti-philosophical, dogmatic attitude that runs counter to the very nature of the discipline as traditionally conceived. ... This goes beyond the mere pride of a particular philosopher and permeates not one but both dominant traditions in contemporary philosophy. To reject at the outset any attempt and possibility of communication with those who oppose us is something that always has been criticized by philosophers and that, nonetheless, is generally accepted in the profession today. The curiosity to understand those who don't think as we do is gone from philosophical circles to the detriment of the discipline. The situation, therefore, is intolerable not only from a practical standpoint, but, more important, because it threatens to transform the discipline into one more of the many ideologies that permeate our times, where differences of opinion are settled not through argument but through political action or force (Gracia 1992:25).

Gracia is critical of two main attitudes with their attendant practices. One is the dogmatic attitude ready to impose itself upon others by resort to physical force. Another is wilful blindness and deafness; refusing to see the visible other and avoiding to listen to the voice of the other. Both are “anti-philosophical” attitudes because they undermine and, even more strongly, obliterate the very possibility condition of doing philosophy, namely, engaging in dialogue with the other without contemplating resort to the use of physical force.

Dialogue is the method and means of doing philosophy. It is reliance on reason and not force as the means to resolve conflicts, even if the resolution may be to agree to disagree. No other philosopher than Socrates has demonstrated this thesis better. Dialogue is an indispensable element in the definition of philosophy, precisely because it demands the positive recognition of the other as a partner and not just a partner, but an equal partner by virtue of our human equality (Healy 1998:63-65). Equal partnership on this understanding does not necessarily mean that all the partners in the dialogue possess cultures that automatically must be accorded equal weight (Healy 2000:71-73). On the contrary, the cultures are sites of comparison on the basis of dialogue as equal partners. The outcome of the dialogical comparison is neither the putative superiority nor inferiority of one culture over another. Instead, it is the validity or invalidity of particular cultural norms or practices tested against the power of reason (Healy 2011:302-303).

Dialogue is an ethical imperative because the concession that all human beings are equal is an ethical matter. On this basis, we suggest that dialogue is the ethical and methodological constitution of the meaning of philosophy proper. Philosophy is an ethically grounded dialogue proceeding from the recognition of the other as other and accepting the responsibility to respect the other to the extent of not being an obstacle to the other's pursuit of survival and happiness. On this reasoning, philosophy demands both the "internal" and the "external" dimensions of truth, as already discussed. It demands truthfulness. The practical implementation of truthfulness brings to the fore the exigency of justice. In this way, philosophy as engagement in an ethically grounded dialogue demands the commitment to truth and justice as a matter of personal conviction. This understanding of dialogue restores Socrates as its champion. It makes him a partner ready to engage in dialogue with Africa on the basis of equality. Such is the relevance of Socrates to African philosophy.

SOCRATES' MESSAGE OF JUSTICE

One of the basic lessons of Socrates' declaration in the Apology is that he teaches that under no circumstances may truth be sacrificed at the altar of compromise. "I am not going to alter my conduct" he insists, even if he may "die a hundred deaths". The fashionable conventional wisdom that "politics is a dirty game" supported by its equally fallacious claim that "politics is the art of the possible" provides countless examples of the sacrifice of truth at the altar of compromise. It is necessary to underline the fallacy of this wisdom and stress that the political domain is pre-eminently an ethical sphere. Politics, as Socrates argued, is inherently ethical. Ethics precedes politics in logic and in fact. Politics is the creature of ethics and ought to serve the good prescribed by ethics. Justice is the aim and the measure of the good in politics. It is linked inseparably to truth. This is right reason and he who knows this will act it out in practice as a personal conviction (Ladikos 2003:67).

Socrates invokes "the soul" to explain the above understanding of truth and justice as the manifestation of a personal conviction in practice.

In Socrates' view, justice is something personal, an internal harmonious ordering of the human soul seen in its complex tripartite nature, and not as external social convention to keep some order and peace in the everyday dealings of the partners in a given political association. ... Only the person who has established the harmony within his/her soul and has put his/her own house in order, will have the will and the ability to deal with his fellow citizens in a manner which is fair and just. ... only such a person will have the right to rule in the city with justice, himself being ruled by right reason (Evangelidou 2007:67-68).

“Right reason” and the “soul” in Socrates do have a place in African philosophy. The former is to be found in one of the fundamental principles of African ethics, namely, I am related, therefore I am (*cognatus sum ergo sum*) (Bujo 1998:54). It is to be noted that this relationship is with human beings and encompasses all that there is. The “soul” or the spiritual dimension gives meaning to this relationship. It prescribes responsibility in a specific and direct ethical sense by laying down yet another fundamental principle of African ethics, namely, “promote life and avoid killing” (Bujo 1998:77). On this reasoning, ethical responsibility means taking the standpoint of “promote life and avoid killing” and then using it to respond to one's conditions of existence. This ethical responsibility must be applied in all three spheres of the African understanding of community, that is:

1. The living. This encompasses overall responsibility towards human beings, the plant and animal kingdoms; the land that is the mother of life and the air that we breathe.
2. The living-dead (“ancestors”). Re-memorizing those who died but continue to live with us through our joys and sorrows (Bujo 2001:56).
3. Leaving the land as good as we found it so that the following generations may live from it.

Participating in procreation and in that way becoming active builders of the new community is the responsibility to ensure the continuity of the lineage and the survival of the wider community in which one lives. “Right reason” in African philosophy is the fulfilment of these three tasks. Doing this gives harmony to the “soul”. Only those who live according to this ethic of responsibility are full members of the triadic community and cannot but be committed to upholding truth and justice in the conduct of their own affairs and those of the community at large.

Socrates' second lesson is that “Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state”. This echoes Solon who advised ancient Greece when it was ethically destroyed by timocracy. It is an irony of history that “the silent takeover” as Hertz (2001) so aptly describes it, has eroded democracy in our time and surreptitiously substituted it with timocracy. It is once again time to recall the wisdom of Socrates and Solon and bring an end to the irrational immoderate pursuit of wealth before it is too late. Money may not be the measure of all things (Ajei & Ramose 2008:26-28), especially in our time when

the threat of nuclear omnicide is real. African ethics holds that whenever one ought to make a choice between accumulating and holding onto excessive wealth on the one hand and preserving the life of another human being on the other, then one ought to opt for the latter. This is the meaning of the Sotho vernacular proverb “*feta kgomo o tshware motho*” (meaning: bypass the cow – the symbol of wealth – and hold onto the human being). Here we find yet another coincidence of ethical insights between African (*ubuntu*) and (Greek) Western philosophies.

The two coincidences of ethical insights identified above must show their knowledge and virtue by acting according to the insights. Knowledge and virtue must be owned as personal convictions for which an individual is prepared to die a hundred times. Against this background we now turn to consider the “arms deal” of South Africa.

THE “ARMS DEAL” OF SOUTH AFRICA

It is important to justify and clarify the treatment of the “arms deal” of South Africa. This is because our topic, Socrates on truth and justice, appears at first glance to have neither direct nor specific connection with the “arms deal” of South Africa. Indeed, this is merely a question of appearance. At a fundamental level, namely, the ethical; there is a direct and specific connection between Socrates’ understanding of and commitment to truth and justice and the “arms deal” of South Africa.

We have already argued that ethics precedes and is the mother of politics. The political is therefore the ethical by definition. This means that at the core of politics lies the ethical principle of the equality of all human beings. Justice emerges as the necessary means and measure by which to deal with this principle of equality in relation to the fundamental right upon which all other rights revolve, namely, the human right to life (Ramcharan 1983). This means that in practice human interaction in the domain of politics is already under the ethical obligation to recognise, respect, protect and promote the right to life of every human being. This is the mandate conferred conditionally by ethics upon politics. The laws made by politics and the institutions it establishes ought to have the sole aim of upholding this ethical mandate. This mandate is conditional because if politics does not live according to its precepts, then it loses its reason for existence.

On this reasoning, politics is from birth already charged with the ethical obligation to know only the one truth it ought to serve, namely, the principle of the equality of all human beings and the recognition, respect, protection and promotion of the right to life of every human being by resort to justice. The “arms deal” of South Africa or any other country, must answer to this mandate: it must demonstrate its knowledge of the only truth it ought to know and act out in the name of justice. It must show commitment to truth and justice first by being fearless in its defence, and second by being willing to die a hundred deaths in defence of truth and justice. There is, therefore, a direct

and immediate connection between Socrates' understanding of truth and justice and the "arms deal" of South Africa..

The argument in the preceding paragraph justifies and clarifies our treatment of the "arms deal" of South Africa. It underlines the argument of Vaclav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic – as cited by Feinstein – that "politics [is] selfless service to one's fellow human beings, [it is] morality in practice, based on conscience and truth" (Feinstein 2007:238) Politics is the ethical domain fecund with political holiness attainable through political love: "love for those most deprived of life and working so that they may have life" (Sobrino 1988:81).

THE MASK IS DEMOCRACY, THE REALITY IS TIMOCRACY

Having thus shown the connection between our topic on Socrates and the "arms deal" of South Africa, it is now time to turn to the context in which government as the bearer of the conditional ethical mandate, operates. By way of a very broad generalisation, we suggest that many governments across the world today are operating in the context of neo-liberal capitalism holding onto defective democracy subordinated to timocracy. In practice sovereignty is no longer vested in the people. It is also nominally transferred, and conditionally so, to government. The substantive and actual exercise of transformed sovereignty, namely, economic sovereignty, is in practice vested in the unelected owners of capital and money generally referred to as business or the corporations. These are the economic sovereigns.

Even before they are elected to form a government, political parties need to survive as entities independent of the electorate. Their quest for survival is linked to their need for money. This renders them objectively dependent on the economic sovereigns. It can bring political parties into a politically problematical funding relationship with the economic sovereigns.

Where this relationship plays itself out most explicitly is in the arena of party political funding. In the US, campaign funding is a quagmire that in my opinion severely weakens American democracy. It is virtually impossible to run successfully for meaningful office in the US without either being extremely wealthy or having the backing of very well-resourced interest groups. The consequence is that once in office you are expected to deliver for your special interest backers. The Bush administration is the most venal manifestation of what has been a reality of American politics for decades (Feinstein 2007:245).

This malleability of political parties to the will of the economic sovereigns means that they are at risk, objectively, of sacrificing the sovereignty of the people in order to ensure their own survival. Thus the political party can become anti-democratic by failing to uphold its permanent conditional ethical obligation to obey the sovereign will of the people.

The preceding paragraph shows that in the contemporary context in which governments operate, the potential for corruption in pursuit of either individual or political party survival is a living and immediate danger. This may be illustrated further:

The Congress Movement in India, so indomitable a political force, was laid low by the Bofors arms scandal, which 14 years after it was signed, brought down Rajiv Gandhi's government. It has been regularly reported in the media and in recent books that Mark Thatcher was paid [twelve million pounds Sterling] as a middleman in the Al Yamamah arms deal which was signed between Saudi Arabia and the British government, led at the time by Mark's mother (Feinstein 2007:233).

To these we wish to add the experience of Willy Claes, a former Belgian politician who held different cabinet positions in several Belgian governments. The highest point of his political career is, arguably, his position as Secretary General of NATO from 1994 to 1995. He was legally pursued even while he was Secretary General of NATO because of the accusation of a bribe paid during negotiations with the Augusta firm for the purchase of military helicopters at the time when he was Minister of Economic Affairs in Belgium. He was stripped of his professional immunities to make way for the court proceedings. On 23 December 1998 the Highest Court in Belgium (*Hof van Cassatie*) confirmed the decision of the Lower Court which convicted him and imposed a conditional three year jail sentence, the suspension of his citizen rights for five years and the payment of a fine of sixty thousand Belgian Francs. These cases show that the potential for corruption is a living and immediate danger in the sphere of the secret world of arms deals (Feinstein 2011:237-329). They also affirm that governments and individuals acting in the name of the government may fall in the cause of truth and justice. It is a moot point whether or not the outcome of the current Commission of Inquiry into the "arms deal" of South Africa (the Seriti Commission) will culminate with the fall of any government or individuals having acted in the name of the government (Feinstein 2014:6).

A detailed history of the "arms deal" of South Africa is contained in many sources. (Holden & Van Vuuren 2011:115-167). It is unnecessary to recount it here. Of importance for us in this history, are the following questions:

- Is the deal a direct and immediate response to the government's sole conditional mandate to uphold the principle of equality of all human beings and, to recognise, respect, protect and promote the right to life of all the citizens of South Africa?
- Was there at the time any ground to hold that there would be a threat of war in the foreseeable future necessitating the agreement to purchase the type, quality and quantity of the arms?
- Were there at the time urgent and supervening priorities justifying the postponement of the agreement to purchase the arms?

It is clear that we have to await the end of the protracted inquiry into the arms deal before we can find definitive answers according to the law. However, it is vital to recognise that legal answers are exactly the kind of answers that take only juristic facts into account

and even so, the admission of such facts is dependent upon prescribed legal procedures. It is to be hoped that even within this restricted and exclusivist domain of law, the final outcome of the inquiry into the “arms deal” of South Africa shall reaffirm the enduring maxim of let justice be done though the heavens may fall – *fiat justitia ruat coelum*. The truth of the law will not necessarily coincide with the only truth that any government ought to know and act upon, that is, upholding the principle of the equality of all human beings and the recognition, respect, protection and promotion of the right to life of all the citizens of South Africa. Commitment to this is the only way to emulate and affirm Socrates’ example of leadership in Africa. It shows that the interaction of governments globally with regard to arms deals poignantly reaffirms the urgency of the three questions posed. Answers to them are equally urgent in view of the historical, structural, systemic and systematic impoverishment and death of the many for the benefit of the few. So far experience of world politics suggests that answers according to Socrates’ commitment to truth and justice are yet to come.

CONCLUSION

We have argued that there is a relationship between Socrates and African philosophy. The question of the meaning of truth and justice was selected as an example to illustrate the relationship. The coincidence of insights between Western and African philosophies with regard to truth and justice was used as the prism for the argument that the political is pre-eminently the ethical and, for this reason, political leadership ought to consciously pursue political holiness even to the point of dying a hundred deaths like Socrates was prepared to do. The contemporary context of government action in national and international politics was identified as the terrain within which political leadership of the kind and quality of Socrates ought to emerge. To give substance to this, the “arms deal” of South Africa was given as an example. The cumulative conclusion is that a *metanoia* is required to bring about a fundamental change in the prevailing relationships between governments and the holders of economic sovereignty. To be consciously aware of this requirement and to implement it in practice – in emulation of Socrates – is to act in defence of truth and justice.

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