

Apostolos Pierris

*THE DORIAN TESTAMENT*

*THE SPARTAN MIRACLE*

*AND THE CULT(URE) OF FITNESS*

Man is inherently a potentially unstable being. It stands up in a precarious equilibrium on two props, it moves, unlike all other animals, perpendicularly, and not along, its main axis, its young requires a long time to learn to walk and to feed itself, it is characterized by enhanced differentiation in its structure and function as e.g. between right and left, most importantly between the two sexes, it is marked by an altogether different rhythm and nature of development for male and female. Through extreme complexity and deep differentiation, the possibility entered into human being of some detachment from animal regularity.

On top of all, man is conscious of time, severely subject to its pressure, and acutely aware of his final moment, although its character remains a mystery to him. He needs therefore to exercise solicitous care for the perpetuation of the species, for his personal survival and for the establishment of a security zone or vital space around him – and all this in the face of the fundamental anxiety regarding death. In fact, fear of dying is actively present in every moment of his life, as expressed in his troubled concern for morality, economy and control. **Time is the great dynast of life and death – two aspects of the same reality, as Dionysus and Hades are two faces of the same Janus god.**

The Spartan miracle, as the foundational achievement for classical culture in general, consisted **in the final overcoming of this tyranny of time**. The natural propensity for divergent behavior in man was made to focus, by means of special, burden-relieving institutions, on the loosening of the bonds of time in all three pylons of anxious concern. Instead, emphasis shifted to the individual perfectibility of human nature. Through the adoption of an appropriate way of life that reflected the basic experience of the Dorian people, through the creation of forms in high culture that satisfied and heightened and energized that experience, and through a system of leading up Spartan youth to its fullest blooming (the famous “agoge”), the city succeeded in realizing the ideal of man’s perfection, and thus of his true happiness, in time. **Thus Time was overcome and Eternity entered the world of man. For anxious in time is the incomplete being, and unperturbed in a-temporal satisfaction is the full and integral one. Time stops existentially when we are at one with ourselves in the experience of beauty. We then blessed glimpse at eternity.**

Severe physical exercise and continual athletic games over very extensive periods, institutionalized hardships, as well as a diet calculated to enhance the effects of gymnastics in the human body, these and other such parts of a well thought out regime of living, created corporeal forms of robust beauty in statuesque accomplishments. Specific occasional conditions designed to cultivate the ability to face difficult, dangerous, even extreme, challenges, added physical, psychical and mental agility to formal perfection. Listening to grand poetry and sublime music, singing and playing and dancing to them in everyday life and in all too often reoccurring festivals, graced the strong harmony of a fully developed form with lovely elegance. The proud awareness of one’s well-being irons the individual’s unyielding firmness of purpose, strengthens his decisiveness and inflames his uncompromising rectitude of conduct, in risky conditions as well and preeminently.

With one shot Sparta caught many birds of highest significance. **By concentrating on the perfect fitness of corporeal form, one has beauty and robustness and grace and valor and reliability and comradeship at the same time. The Spartan youth was unparalleled athlete, exquisite dancer, formidable warrior, a moving statue of perfection, all at once – the living ideal of man.**

Sparta at her springtime realized the glory of man: her youth was a true “agalma” in the original sense of the word, something that is gladness and delight and exaltation to behold. The Kouros statue is both Apollo and a fully developed young man. Man becomes god in a very concrete and physical sense of realizable perfection. It was a moment of world-historic significance.

Formalism is the matrix of functionalism. Perfection of form entails heightened functionality and optimal efficiency. To be fit is to be fit for all important work. Like in the Greek corresponding concept (“harmozein”), the harmony of form makes it best adapted to fulfill its role in all relevant enterprises. **Beauty is no mere aesthetic attribute, but the peak condition of existence. To really be is to be at your best. And being-in-perfection is the end of life – the purpose, meaning and final achievement of it. “Telos” is perfection and end at the same time.**

**Gym and art as a way of life. And institutions that promote this ideal. Sparta’s message is for a system of values that highlights human excellence in all its physical embodiment. The rest follow. For soul and mind relate to the condition of body. The youth of the perfect form will mature into the wise man, replete with deep prudence and natural sagacity. For the harmony of the body and the cosmic order observe the same structural principles of articulation.**

As Polybius remarked in explaining the ascent of Rome within a short interval of time to the universal imperium, there are just two clear cut ways for man to follow in establishing his social environment. Either the end is to frame a system conducive to individual perfection, all-round satisfaction and thorough happiness – and then there cannot be a better way than Sparta’s. Or one aspires to achieve great geopolitical integrals that can act as intensive multipliers of human energy and result, safeguarding maximal efficiency in the management of the works of time esp. in connection with power structures – in which case there is not a better system to be found than Rome’s.

Since that time man oscillates between the two norms, and tries collectively his hand at various mixtures and blendings of the two, at different adaptive models, with varying degrees of success and failure.

Time has stopped at Sparta's moment of Glory and space was then finally bound by Form. Since then we move in dispersive space and reverse time.

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