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WSPÓŁCZESNOŚĆ W ŚWIETLE STAROŻYTNEJ DEBATY NAD WARTOŚCIĄ *MĒTIS*

Abstrakt: W artykule pt. *Today Through the Lens of the Ancient Debate on the Value of Mētis* (*Współczesność w świetle starożytnej debaty nad wartością mētis*) autor analizuje współczesne wyzwania związane z wolnością słowa w sztuce, nauce i polityce poprzez pryzmat starożytnej greckiej koncepcji *mētis* – praktycznej mądrości umożliwiającej osiągnięcie sukcesu w życiu. Twierdzi on, że *mētis*, zakorzeniona w zdrowym rozsądku osób niebędących ekspertami, spotyka się z represjami ze strony osób sprawujących władzę, których nazywa się „namaszczoneymi”, w obliczu rosnącej cenzury i moralistycznej polaryzacji. Opierając się na dramacie greckim, a zwłaszcza tragediach takich jak „Antygona” i „Prometeusz w okowach”, autor podkreśla rolę *mētis* w badaniu złożoności ludzkiej natury i pobudzaniu refleksji moralnej, wspierając swoje tezy spostrzeżeniami z zakresu neuronauki i filozofii. Artykuł kontrastuje *mētis* z *hybris*, rozumianym jako nadmierna duma, ilustrując, w jaki sposób dramat unika uproszczonych osądów, promując w zamian epistemiczną pokorę. Autor aplikuje te idee do współczesnych problemów, sugerując, że erozja wartości liberalnych i marginalizacja wiedzy praktycznej zagrażają indywidualnej sprawczości. Dochodzi wreszcie do wniosku, że *mētis*, wraz z umiarkowaniem, czyli tzw. *sōphrosynē*, stanowią przeciwwagę dla tendencji autorytarnych. To interdyscyplinarne studium podkreśla ponad-

czasowość dramatu jako narzędzie służące zrozumieniu dylematów etycznych i przeciwstawianiu się nadmiernej władzy, wzywając do ponownego docenienia mądrości opartej na doświadczeniu, także we współczesnym świecie.

Słowa kluczowe: *mētis*, *hybris*, dramat, cenzura, namaszczeni, moralność, sztuka, wolność

TODAY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE ANCIENT DEBATE ON THE VALUE OF *MĒTIS*

Introduction

Few would dispute that we are living in challenging times. Setting aside the war in Ukraine, the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, and increasing economic difficulties, one of the most serious—and perhaps most alarming—issues is the gradual erosion of liberal (in the classical sense) values and freedoms that, especially in post-revolutionary Europe, were until recently held in universally high regard, not only in the political sphere but also in academia. It is no secret that this is no longer the case. Today, censorship of scientific yet politically incorrect opinions and information is treated as a matter of course, and many people once again feel hesitant to voice their political views. This trend is exerting pressure on the European space not only from the East, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, from the West. The aim of this text is to suggest that we are witnessing an erosion process rooted in Ancient history—one that can be insightfully approached through the concept of *mētis*, the broad type of practical knowledge that, according to Jean-Pierre Vernant, serves the purpose of enabling success in life (Vernant, Detienne, 1990, pp. 3–4; compare also Scott, 2020, pp. 311–316, 452n17).

Hybris

Although the title of this text refers to *mētis*, let us begin with another concept, namely *hybris*. The appeal and utility of this term lie in its ability to capture something inherently human—pride, arrogance, excessive self-confidence, and the tendency to overstep one's bounds (van Beek, 2010, pp. 1524–1525; Montanari, 2015, pp. 2239–2240). *Hybris* designates a transgression of measure caused by pride—a desire to exceed what is proper to human beings. Both forms of excess, as Greek myths and biblical stories remind us, may

lead to divine punishment. The old nurse in Euripides' tragedy *Medea*, standing beside her mistress on the brink of unspeakable tragedy, warns of the looming catastrophe with a plea for moderation:

"For first, I say, the name of Moderation
has a better ring than that of Greatness, and in experience
it proves by far the best for men –
while Excess brings no profit to mortals
and, when the god has grown angry with the house,
it pays the penalty of greater ruin" (Euripides, 2008, 125–130).

This human inclination toward *hybris* can be viewed not only from the perspective of interpersonal relationships within the *polis* and family—spaces that, at least for the ancient dramatists, were far from harmonious—but also from other angles. For instance, we might consider the *hybris* of Icarus or Prometheus, or the biblical and Christian pride that lies at the origin of humanity's troubled historical journey. The ancient world offers rich parallels, as seen in Alcibiades' remarks in Plato's *Symposium* (Gagarin, 1977, pp. 22–37).

In the first case, self-confidence and ambition—forms of *hybris*—relate to the natural world, to the domination of nature, and to improving the human condition (Plato, 2000, 321c–d). In Aeschylus' tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, *hybris* is referred to explicitly when portraying Prometheus' attempt to aid humanity as a transgression of bounds:

"You cocky bastard: now steal,
powers from the Gods.
And for what?
Things that live and die?" (Aeschylus, 1975, pp. 125–128).

In Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*, the famed sophist warns that Prometheus' gift of *technē*, i.e., craft, is insufficient on its own unless it is supplemented by political wisdom of justice and a sense of shame. Even so, the indispensability of practical skills for the maintenance of human life cannot be questioned (Plato, 2000, 321d). In this regard, Protagoras was undoubtedly right.

In keeping with the earlier reference to justice and shame, which Zeus provided as a gift supplementary to the *technē* of survival, we can also consider a second form of *hybris*—one that concerns our relations with others and with human beings as moral agents capable of both good and evil. Setting aside the grim biblical consequences of disobediently eating

the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:16–19), we can turn instead to Sophocles' *Antigone*. In it, King Creon condemns his niece's actions as another form of *hybris*—a transgression of civic law:

“But this proud girl, in insolence well-schooled,
First overstepped the established law, and then –
A second and worse act of insolence –
She boasts and glories in her wickedness” (Sophocles, 1962, p. 351).

As J.-P. Vernant observes, Antigone's *hybris*, from Creon's perspective, lies in her absolute loyalty to family and the gods of intimacy. Her unwavering commitment to the *nomoi*—the laws of family—stands in stark opposition to the *nomoi* of the *polis*. Perhaps Creon is partly right. It may be the case that Antigone's radical decision and unyielding nature do indeed exceed measure, and thus deserve downfall. Perhaps we cannot decide definitively and neither, arguably, could Sophocles, who deliberately used the ambiguous term *nomos* in reference to both protagonists (Vernant, 1990, p. 43). If Sophocles was influenced by Protagoras, then this inability to choose sides is not a flaw but a philosophical stance. The crucial factor is not the lack of resolution, but the context in which ambiguity is dramatized, along with the tools used to portray it—tools that, in line with Protagorean optimism, become active participants in shaping the human condition.

The context of complexity

The context of the aforementioned ambiguity is the public space of the *polis*, and the primary tool—besides democracy and its various mechanisms—is the dramatic genre, especially in its tragic form. Tragedy was used by Sophocles and other dramatists to portray *hybris* in its various forms. Through dramatic means, they presented human beings as vulnerable not only to external forces, such as fate or circumstance, but also to the inner forces of excess and overreach.

What deserves special attention is that these dramatists appear to have deliberately avoided the *hybris* of simplification. At least through their choice of the literary form of dialogue, they were followed in this effort by their critic Plato, who, however, did not put much stock in Apollo's sceptical view of human presumptuousness (Detienne, 2009, p. 51). Perhaps in an attempt to use human-scale techniques for aims not entirely suited to humanity, a dramatist like Sophocles was all too aware of human limitations, even as

he composed his stirring and optimistic *Ode to Man*. Yet even there, he did not forget to include a warning:

„Many wonders there be, but naught more wondrous than man: (...)
He hath provision for all: fell plague he hath learnt to endure;
Safe whate’er may befall: yet for death he hath found no cure.
Passing the wildest flight of thought are the cunning
and skill,
That guide man now to the light, but now to
counsels of ill” (Sophocles, 1962, p. 341).

J.-P. Vernant (1990), echoing this cautious optimism expressed by the chorus, notes that, from the tragic perspective, human beings and their actions are not readily accessible to clear-cut definitions or judgments—they represent problems (p. 38). Jonathan Kirstead (2017) refers to this caution as *epistemic humility*, identifying it both as a major theme in Greek tragedy and a cornerstone of democracy (p. 288). A similar role is played by Herbert Simon’s concept of *bounded rationality*, which draws support from the more empirically grounded human sciences (Campitelli, 2010). Nassim Taleb likewise proposes a model of non-linear thinking, which is better suited for such complex phenomena as human affairs.

Let us briefly focus on the techniques through which drama presents the human being as an ambiguous problem and an open question. Drama centers, above all, on plot, story, and narrative. Storytelling, together with plot and dramatic conflict, is a primordial technique of communication, entertainment, social regulation, and broad knowledge transmission. It originally belonged to the context of the family or close-knit cooperative groups, as evidenced by anthropological, psychological, and neuroscientific studies on aging, childhood, and related cognitive-behavioral changes (Boyd, 2009, p. 49; Vernant, 1990, p. 36). It is a technique that demands a wide communicative bandwidth, a richly layered medium of transmission that is not confined to language or explicitly stated educational goals, but instead utilizes nearly all modalities of communication and reception—often outside our conscious awareness.

Peter Meineck, drawing on the comparative studies of the still-vibrant Japanese No theater as well as recent findings in neuroscience, demonstrates that the famous, seemingly rigid masks of ancient actors, along with their movements and dance—which were indispensable to the masks’ expressive power—served the purpose of communicating emotions. The masks and movements deepened the audience’s emotional engagement with

the unfolding story, thereby helping to form what Robert Boehme calls a *moral community* (Meineck, 2011, pp. 115–119).

When Meineck speaks of emotions, he refers primarily to what Antonio Damasio (2004) calls *primary emotions*—fear, anger, disgust, surprise, sadness, and joy (p. 44). These are emotions that are likely not universal traits unique to humans. If Meineck is correct, we can follow Damasio further and say that the ancient dramatists found the right keys to unlock the emotional response of their audiences (Damasio, 2004, p. 58; see also Cosmides & Tooby, 2001); and not just the right keys, but also the most suitable means.

According to Vilayanur Subramanian Ramachandran and drawing on the groundbreaking research of Giacomo Rizzolatti, we are biologically equipped for this rich and complex form of communication by virtue of our mirror neurons. These neurons allow for what Meineck calls *visceral participation*—a bodily, physical co-experiencing of the dramatic event (Ramachandran, 2007, pp. 62–66).

This co-creation of shared space, alongside epistemic humility, can be regarded as one of the key features that makes ancient drama an organic part of the democratic culture of the Greek *polis*. And it remains just as relevant today as it was 2,500 years ago—especially in light of the so-called “Netflixization” of art, which might be seen as a symptom of the aforementioned erosion.

Storytelling—and, more generally, art, especially in its dramatic form—also requires a substantial degree of imagination. This cannot be otherwise if art is to fulfil another of its central functions, one that Aristotle (2008) identified with remarkable foresight the representation of human action in a way that leads to our transformation (1449b 24, 31, 36; 1450a 15–23; 1450a 23–5, 38–9; 1450b 2–3; compare also Engelking, 2024). Meineck suggests that Aristotle may have been onto something deeply important when he interpreted this transformation—culminating perhaps in *katharsis*—as not merely emotional or aesthetic, but also philosophical and moral. From this perspective, drama becomes a tool (Nassim Taleb’s non-linear tool)—a form of cognitive scaffolding or technology—for enabling positive transformation (Meineck, 2018, p. 6; Haidt, 2012, p. 83).

Contemporary sciences of the human mind—particularly evolutionary biology, neuroscience, psychology, and sociology—seem to confirm this Aristotelian insight. In his book *Why Humans Like to Cry*, neuroscientist Michael Trimble (2012) argues that Greek drama resonates with our evolutionary origins and evokes themes of deep relevance to the human condition (p. 129). He is in agreement with both Meineck as well as Nancy Andreasen, who in the mid-1990s showed that we possess a specialized neural system (the

default mode network) that enables imagination. Her work opened a vast field of research into the relationship between imagination and decision-making.

Moreover, when we take into account *social emotions*—including sympathy, compassion, and moral concern—we move beyond the individual level toward the social and communal. From this standpoint, it becomes evident that the central themes of drama also include cooperation, participation, as well as the threats to both (Damasio, 2003, p. 45).

Brian Boyd, in his book *The Origin of Stories*, supports this view. He argues that storytelling is not simply a universal trait in humans but a phenomenon tied to the mammalian way of making sense of the world—one that involves memory, intelligence, language, and theory of mind, all of which enable complex cooperation (Boyd, 2009, p. 37). In alignment with Aristotle's emphasis on drama's transformative role, Boyd points to its practical-moral consequences. Drama is not only about insight into human nature, but also about potentially enhancing our capacity to form empathetic relationships (Boyd, 2008, p. 33; Pinker, 2007, p. 163). This view was foreshadowed in Norbert Elias' classic work *The Civilizing Process* and has been recently substantiated by researchers like James Leonard Keidel. According to Keidel, literary works that engage not only the usual semantic and symbolic processes but also stimulate brain areas responsible for complex thinking, third-person perspective-taking, and social judgment (the "big social picture"), may significantly shape moral cognition. When these brain areas are impaired or underdeveloped, extreme forms of violence are more likely (Raine, 2013, pp. 90, 92, 149; Keidel, 2013, p. 915). In other words, drama targets what philosopher and neuroscientist Joshua Greene calls the *moral circuitry* of the brain (Greene et al. 2001, pp. 2105–2108).

Much more could be said about the relationship between drama and the *hybris* of oversimplification. Drama not only presents stories and plots that are often ambiguous; it also presents these stories as problems. It expects the audience to adopt at least three perspectives: their own, the author's, and the characters'—both individually and collectively. It also invites us to reflect on alternative choices to the often radical decisions made by the characters (Freeman, 2003, p. 21; Matharu, 2011, p. 444).

According to Brian Boyd (2008), drama can be understood as a form of art that engages in *cognitive play with patterns* (p. 31). Drama, then, becomes a cognitive game with patterns that belong primarily to the interpersonal domain—a domain constrained not only by the *hybris* of the characters but also by external forces and circumstances beyond their control.

In this context, J.-P. Vernant (1980) proposes that ancient Greek drama should be seen as a unique and unprecedented institution—an *intellectual tool hitherto undiscovered*—through which the *polis* and its citizens held up a mirror to themselves and cultivated what he calls *tragic consciousness* (pp. 33, 23, 104, 241). He writes:

“The sudden emergence of tragic drama at the end of the sixth century, coinciding with the development of legal concepts such as personal responsibility and the nascent distinction between intentional and excusable acts, marks a turning point in the history of the inner self. Within the polis, the individual begins to see themselves as more or less autonomous in relation to divine powers, as more or less the originator of their own actions, and as more or less in control of their political and personal destiny” (Vernant, 1980, p. 89).

Here again, we find the human being and society depicted as *open problems*, best understood not through rigid logic or theoretical abstraction, but through the lens of *bounded rationality*—a concept that accepts the limitations of human knowledge and action, and that recognizes the need for heuristics, narratives, and moral imagination; it is, as we shall see, *mētis*.

Drama, in all its various forms, presupposes an active engagement on the part of its audience—not passive consumption of “the message.” Audiences are not seen as mere recipients but as co-creators and co-actors. Classical drama emerged from competitive performance within the difficult-to-control public environment of the *polis*, which allowed only limited space for what we would today call “particular agendas.” This competition for the attention of audiences—not only present but also future—was critical to the drama’s effectiveness and, perhaps, to its very essence. Anna Maria Carabelli (2021) notes in this regard:

“By offering complex experience and by demanding a complex response, Greek theatre—especially tragedy and drama—is uniquely suited to more plastic (relative) modes of thinking and feeling. By sharing the complexity of human life and experience, tragic theatre and drama helped people make decisions and face dilemmas—to form judgments in situations of tragic choice” (p. 99).

Thus, we might say that ancient drama, by thematizing the complexity of human life and the challenge of *hybris*, requires from its audience a form of complex mental manipulation or play with the presented image of action and situation. And the less bound the drama-

tists were to mythical source material, the more open and demanding this interpretive task became (Gould, 1996, p. 253).

As we have already suggested, for drama to be effective in this way, it must resonate with the “natural” concerns and interests of its audience (Tooby, Cosmides, Boyd). That is why Boyd’s definition of drama as a *play with patterns* is so compelling. Just as physical play prepares mammalian young for life, storytelling—and especially dramatic storytelling—prepares us cognitively and emotionally for moral life.

When we speak of *patterns*, we refer to regularities. If those regularities are too strong, modelling their application becomes pointless; if too weak, equally so. The failure to distinguish between these two conditions is common (Sideris, 2017, pp. 64–68). The value of modelling, mental simulation, and narrative play lies precisely where regularities exist but where their interactions cannot be predicted with certainty.

From this perspective, literature—especially drama—becomes a tool for decision-making in environments of bounded predictability. Jerry Robert Hobbs (1990), for example, argues that literature provides a framework for rational agents to explore possible outcomes of action when direct calculation is impossible, but when some measure of order is still present (p. 33).

Drama, Art, Ideology, and What Truly Matters

Hybris is not only a frequent theme in the content of ancient drama; the very form of drama—its staging of human action as mental simulation—can be seen as a formal engagement with the problem of *hybris*. This becomes clearer when we consider religious and ideological alternatives, which often go too far—either in identifying the sources of norms, the application of these norms, or in some combination of both. But let us temporarily set aside the richly complex question of drama as a means of presenting human complexity and of confronting the *hybris* of oversimplification through imaginative “sandbox” play. Instead let us return to the strategies mentioned above.

How have these two historical approaches for exceeding human limits fared? After overcoming various crises and near-disasters—some of which even Prometheus might recognize—they have proved to work rather well. The dreams of Prometheus and Icarus have been fulfilled in abundance. Not only do we routinely fly across the globe but we have even left the planet, both physically and through technological mediation. At the time of writing these words, we are on the verge of peering back toward the very origins of the

universe, thanks to the ambition of scientists supported by an unprecedentedly powerful economy capable of producing unimaginable means.

Moreover, human life is no longer plagued by the multitude of diseases that, only a few decades ago, were commonplace. This too affects our behavior toward others, including strangers. This progress is not trivial; it is quantifiable, demonstrable, visible, and immediately applicable (Roser). For example, child and maternal mortality rates as well as measures of global poverty have dramatically improved. Simply consider the global wealth curve over the last two millennia, a key factor in reducing violence, as illustrated by Our World in Data charts addressing the most urgent challenges of human life.

And in terms of our competence to know and do good, we are doing just as well. Many once-common cruelties toward “others”—children, women, the elderly, foreigners, ethnic minorities, and animals—are now considered completely unacceptable. So much so that ideas we considered liberal 50 years ago would now be called conservative, and today’s conservatism is often labelled as extremism (Dalgaard, Olson, 2013).

It can also be said that we have come close enough to understanding good and evil to recognize how dangerous, even amoral, these categories can become when misused or oversaturated (Pinker, 2011, p. 751; Baron-Cohen, 2012, pp. 124–125; Polanyi, 2009, pp. 3–4; Haidt, 2012).

In this, we may see a return to the strategy exemplified by Greek drama—the focus is placed not on condemning disobedience, but on contemplating human downfall, especially where the consequences affect others’ lives, health, or happiness. Folk wisdom aligns with this: the road to hell is often paved not only with good intentions, but with overly moralistic language.

Carl Schmitt (2007), though a highly controversial political thinker, aptly captured this when he described ideologically (i.e., morally) motivated wars as the most brutal of all (p. 37; Šajda, 2018, pp. 804–817; Šajda, 2019, pp. 852–865; Engelking, 2019). Today’s moralistic polarization of society only reinforces his point. History offers us an abundance of cautionary examples. For instance, we might recall Robespierre—a classically educated man who, by today’s standards, might be regarded as a graduate of some progressive studies

program. A moralist-terrorist and, de facto, a mass murderer, he declared the following in his April 5, 1794 speech *On Political Morality* (Bienvenu, 1970, p. 32):

“What is the aim toward which we are heading?
Peaceful enjoyment of liberty and equality;
The rule of eternal justice, whose laws are not inscribed in marble or stone,
But in the hearts of all men, even in the heart of the slave who has forgotten them,
And in the heart of the tyrant who denies them.”

Disappointment and *Mētis*

Just as we limited ourselves to examples of progress when discussing the first form of *hybris*, we have done the same in the other case. The list of things that have changed since Prometheus’ time could go on and on. But, for our purposes, what has been said should suffice: we have compared the outcomes of humanity’s two paths—exploration of the natural world and exploration of the moral one—and have identified tangible, demonstrable successes, especially with the former.

Still, some readers may feel disappointed. This disappointment, however, is not accidental—it is, in fact, deliberate. This is what underlies the choice of Prometheus and Antigone as our central figures. While in the case of scientific progress we can easily trace a clear link between knowledge and outcomes—space travel, lifesaving medicine, heating in winter—when it comes to moral progress, things are less clear. Some might be disappointed by the state of our moral knowledge, by the moral condition of the world, or by both. We would argue that such disappointment—underestimating both our moral knowledge and its practical outcomes—may itself be a symptom of true *hybris*: a dangerous overreach that often precedes a fall (Berlin, 2013, p. 1). This form of *hybris* may include, even if one is not aware of it, the desire to dominate the other—to harm them (Sapolsky, 1998, p. 13). Such tendencies are indeed part of our nature as hyper-social, hierarchical beings, and they are supported by mechanisms and tools that make such domination effective (Sowell, 2006, p. 27). Notably, this intent to harm also falls within the semantic field of *hybris*. Thus, the problem may not be our knowledge of good and evil, which is arguably more advanced than ever before—both practically and theoretically—but rather a specific variant of that knowledge: a historically dominant moral philosophy that, despite being a human product, does not arise from or aim at the human. In this sense, it shares something with religion—a kind of Promethean *hybris* dressed up as virtue (Scott, 2009, pp. 99, 101).

This problematic form of practical philosophy arises primarily from two sources. First, it places divine—or at least angelic—demands on the knower. This leads to extreme questions and dilemmas, especially efforts to “ground” or “justify” morality without reference to experience or what experience tells us about humans. In other words, it ignores Hume’s famous “is–ought” distinction. A classical example of neglecting the *is* can be found in Plato’s *Republic* (VII, 530c). Such an approach mimics the appearance of mathematical certainty and seeks to neutralize the common sense of non-experts—the very people meant to be the recipients of moral guidance. It resembles the historical resistance to translating sacred texts into vernacular languages—a resistance aimed at preserving the authority of moral intermediaries. This is a feature and not a bug of many contemporary “social justice” texts.

And yet, even Hume did not consider the *is–ought* gap to be unbridgeable. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he suggests that if we have sufficient reasons—proper justification—we can derive an *ought* from an *is* (Shermer, 2015, pp. 32–33; Vidal-Naquet, 1980, pp. 66). As Michael Shermer (2009, pp. 31–32) asks: if we cannot base ethics on what *is*, then what can we base it on?

This question is not trivial. For example, Michael Hampe, in his essay *Philosophy and Evolution* (2015, pp. 1–18), argues that knowledge from the sciences—biology, psychology, etc.—is irrelevant for ethics. What matters, he claims, is purely rational justification. To paraphrase: we do not need to know anything about humans in order to tell them what they should do. Aristotle and Heraclitus would disagree. For them, empirical knowledge and lived experience were essential to practical philosophy (Hussey, 2008).

The failure of this rationalistic project is evident in the poor results of the efforts to establish an airtight foundation for ethics observed over nearly two and a half millennia (Sigmund, 2017, p. 2). Alasdair MacIntyre discusses this in his paper *Crisis in Moral Philosophy: Why Is the Search for the Foundation of Ethics So Frustrating?* and Ernst Tugendhat echoes this sentiment in his critique of ethics divorced from the empirical *is*. Steven Pinker (1996) asks, in the context of violence: “Do we have any reason to believe that rationality would lead a rational agent to want *less* violence?” (p. 782). His answer is clear: “Not based on pure logic. But if we consider what *is*—who humans are—then yes”

Joshua Greene (2013) similarly sees ethics as something to be built “from the bottom up”—in contrast to abstract moral theory (p. 14). And if we consider the influence of philosophical literature on everyday morality—especially violence and concern for others—we may find it negligible, or even negative (Glover, 2001, pp. 365–378). As Richard Sennett

(1992, pp. 18–19) once observed, moral discourse confined only to protected “sanctuaries” produces what he called *moral amnesia*.

Second, this kind of philosophy seems largely uninterested in the “common person”—in the lower-case human—and in their form of knowledge. This broader form of knowledge is captured precisely by the Greek word *mētis*, a concept central to the title of this paper. As a consequence, there is little concern for the fate of ordinary people.

We have worked with the concept of *mētis* throughout the essay, albeit somewhat indirectly—by drawing attention to the practical success of Promethean and Antigonean *hybris*, which has helped them, and now helps us to adapt to a changing world.

Conclusion

The temptation to reject or marginalize the practical knowledge (*mētis*) of the many—knowledge that serves as a tool for their flourishing—is undoubtedly much older than philosophy itself. The suppression of *mētis* is unsurprisingly most visible in contexts where there exists an extensive potential for the exploitation of others, their labor, and their time. As James Campbell Scott (2010) reminds us, an illustrative example can be found in the approach of South Asian states to seemingly innocent activities such as crop cultivation (pp. 201–205). When a crop benefits the individual through a favorable labor-to-calorie ratio but is simultaneously difficult to appropriate, it becomes inconvenient and dangerous. The assertion of power and dominance can thus easily conflict with the needs and claims of those under that power. In this context, the religious or ideological affiliation of the state is entirely irrelevant. It may be Muslim, Hindu, Confucian, Christian, or “X-ist” (with *X* representing any professed content). *Mētis* is uncomfortable. After all, what could have been more unacceptable, in the case of the kulaks—victims of Stalinist repression—than their independence and self-sufficiency? The reason behind this entanglement of illegitimate (in Locke’s sense) power and hatred toward *mētis* is simple. *Mētis* shifts the center of individual effort and concern, thus standing in direct conflict with power. This is significant for us, because not being displaced—being centered in a very physical sense—can be expressed by the Greek word *sōphrosynē*. *Sōphrosynē* carries a meaning opposite to that of *hybris*; it is sobriety, common sense, wisdom, good judgment, foresight, modera-

tion; a knowledge of limits (Montanari, 2015, p. 2076). Richard Sennett (1990) speaks of *sōphrosynē* in the following terms:

“The Greeks captured this centeredness with the word *sōphrosynē*, which can be translated as grace or balance. This Greek ideal is expressed in modern terms when a dancer is said to be well-balanced in their body; the Greeks imagined a spiritual gyroscope as a complement to the physical sense of balance” (p. 9).

In conclusion, *mētis* remains disliked, or even despised by many to this day, and the struggle against it continues with undiminished intensity. J.-P. Vernant identifies Plato as its arch-enemy in the history of philosophy, and his attitude toward drama—both to its audience and its creators—can still be recognized in contemporary artistic production. Their shared slogan might well be: “You’re not even competent to like something!”

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Abstract: In *Today Through the Lens of the Ancient Debate on the Value of Mētis*, the author examines contemporary challenges to freedom of speech in art, science, and politics through the ancient Greek concept of *mētis*—practical wisdom enabling success in life. He argues that *mētis*, rooted in the common sense of non-experts, faces suppression by those in power, termed the “anointed,” amid growing censorship and moralistic polarization. Drawing on Greek drama, particularly tragedies like *Antigone* and *Prometheus Bound*, the author highlights the role of *mētis* in exploring human complexity and fostering moral reflection, supported by insights from neuroscience and philosophy. The text contrasts *mētis* with *hybris*—excessive pride—illustrating how drama avoids simplistic judgments, promoting epistemic humility. The author connects these ideas to modern issues, suggesting that the erosion of liberal values and the marginalization of practical knowledge threaten individual agency. He concludes that *mētis*, alongside the moderation of *sōphrosynē*, offers a counterbalance to authoritarian tendencies. This interdisciplinary study underscores drama’s enduring relevance as a tool for understanding ethical dilemmas and resisting the overreach of power, urging a renewed appreciation for experiential wisdom in today’s world.

Key words: *mētis*, *hybris*, drama, censorship, anointed, morality, art, freedom