On Cicero's Critique of Reason

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Abstract: In contemporary thinking, "reason" has become synonymous with "correctness" to the extent that it is even capable of prescribing laws to nature. Ancient philosophers, including Plato and Cicero, offered a holistic, profound, and clear understanding of its connotations. As a symbol that distinguishes humans from animals and the requisite means or tools for seeking the truth, reason is characterized by both divinity and nobility. It also maintains a degree of neutrality, with the right use of reason as the key to determining its nature. In essence, reason is a type of calculation that can be used to do either good or evil. Hence, it must be supplemented by divinity and virtue. As a cognitive faculty, to reason is to perceive one's own limits and practice moderation, temperance, and prudence, thus maintaining a full grasp of the world and becoming a useful being.

Keywords: reason, Cicero, divinity, neutrality, limits

The nobility and immense power of reason is undeniable, but this is exactly what deeply worries a great number of thinkers. They believe that, although reason is, or can be, the standard, or one of the standards, by which everything is judged, one must first establish a critique of reason before trusting it to make judgments. Naturally, the persons who are qualified to assess the fundamental principles of reason are philosophers, whose vocation is premised on rational speculation. Who, then, are qualified to appraise the qualifications of these philosophers?

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This research is the phased achievement of a program supported by the National Social Science Fund of China called "Translation and Research of Bacon's Collected Works" (18BZX093), the Post-Funded Major Project by the Ministry of Education "Exegesis of the Apology of Socrates" (17JHQ0012), and a project funded by the Scientific Research Foundation of Hainan University (kyqd[sk]18001).

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The Divinity of Reason

In modern philosophy, "reason" has long become the "hard core" of thought. That being said, with the decline of classical German philosophy, the "destruction of reason" ushered it to the "twilight of the idols". In what way, then, should reason be perceived? Martin Heidegger's interpretation of logos may not appeal to everyone, but the problem he raised is deeply inspiring in itself: "It (logos) has been interpreted as ratio, verbum, world law, the logical, necessity in thought, meaning, and reason. There is a recurrent call for reason to be the standard of action and non-action. However, on the same level as the irrational and the antirational, it clings to the same neglect, thus forgetting to contemplate the essential origin of reason and take part in its advent. What, then, can reason do"(Heidegger, 2005, p. 220)? Here, let us first meditate on the essential origin of reason through Cicero's notable works before exploring what reason is capable of accomplishing.

Reason is what distinguishes humans from animals. It is through this cognitive faculty that humans unite into a community with shared speech (oratio), shared habits, and shared lifestyles. Cicero's association of ratio and oratio aligns perfectly with the two primary connotations of logos in ancient Greek philosophy. After breaking free from the shackles of inevitable affairs, humans "are eager to see or to hear or to learn, considering that the discovery of obscure or wonderful things is necessary for a blessed life"(*On Duties*, 1.12-13; *On Moral Ends*, 2.45–46; *On the Nature of the Gods*, 2.16). Here, it is imperative to emphasize that to tend towards "a blessed life" is the obligation of reason, which extends beyond knowledge alone. More profound things, such as wisdom and justice, cannot be seen by the naked eye. In particular, they are unable to detect the cause (causa) of the essential events in human life or explain the reasons (explicare rationem) behind them. Thus, "reason" (ratio) is necessary for humans to unravel the reasons or ways (ratio) by which things exist (*On Moral Ends*, 2.52; *On Duties*, 1.15).

The truth can only be uncovered through ratio (*On Invention*, 1.3). Wisdom is the knowledge of all divine and human things and their causes (causarum). As philosophy is the love of wisdom, Cicero placed philosophy on a pedestal while speaking highly of reason: "If anyone despises the pursuit of that (i.e. philosophy), it is difficult to see what on earth he would see worth praising"(*On Duties*, 2.5; *On Academic Scepticism*, 1.7). After all, "The gods have given to human existence nothing richer, nothing more outstanding, nothing more noble"(*On the Laws*, 1.58; *On Moral Ends*, 3.75.). In the same vein, reason is also the best gift from gods to mankind. To Plato, philosophy pertains to the soul and stands for a desire for divine wisdom (Laërtius, 3.63).

Among the four noble deeds of mankind laid out by Cicero, the first–"perception and discernment of truth" or "cognizance of truth"–bears the closest connection with human nature. "For all of us feel the pull that leads us to desire to learn and to know; we think it a fine thing to excel in this, while considering it bad and dishonorable to stumble, to wander, to be ignorant,

to be deceived" (*On Duties*, 1.18). Cicero also integrates these "four cardinal virtues" into three things. The first is "perceiving what is true and clear in each case, what agrees with or what follows from what, what gives rise to each thing, what is the cause of each thing" (*On Duties*, 2.18). These three properties are roughly equivalent to the "three immortalities" of ancient Chinese thoughts, namely, "setting moral examples", "performing great deeds", and "spreading noble ideas".

Unlike the Epicurean appeal to corporeal feelings and pleasures, Cicero puts the authority to make judgments in the hands of reason. Undoubtedly, reason alone does not suffice. It must be supplemented primarily by the knowledge of divine and human matters, that is, "wisdom", and secondarily by virtue; it is only through this can reason govern all things (*On Moral Ends*, 2.37), (Rational) knowledge and desire are the twofold elements of the soul. The mind learns and seeks the truth; hence, it is important to put the mind to the best use and allow reason to rule over desire (*On Duties*, 1.100-101, 132, 141, 2.18; *On the Commonwealth*, 1.60, 6.29).① "Our own reason has an element within itself that is lofty and noble (amplum atque magnificum), better suited to giving orders than to taking them" (*On Moral Ends*, 2.46).

Reason is great and noble because it originates directly from the gods or nature. When the gods were creating humans, they "desire humans to have the first place among all other things" (*On the Laws*, 1.27). To F. Bacon, our ancestors believed that men are chosen to uphold the providence of god (providentiae) because only the nature of men encompasses the "mind" (mentem) and "understanding" (intellectum), as ministered by god's providence. Reason and thought cannot possibly stem from insentient and non-rational beings, and men are the center of the cosmos (Bacon, p. 147f). Apart from equipping humans with all the abilities presented in other animals (*On the Nature of the Gods* 2.154ff.; *On Moral Ends*, 1.23), the gods also bestowed upon them the special gift of reason:

> This animal–provident, perceptive, versatile, sharp, capable of memory, and filled with reason and judgment–which we call a human being, was endowed by the supreme god with a grand status at the time of its creation. It alone of all types and varieties of animate creatures has a share in reason and thought, which all the others lack. What is there, not just in humans, but in all heaven and earth, more divine than reason? (*On the Laws*, 1.22)

Nothing is more sacred than reason (*On the Nature of the Gods* 1.37, 2.16). This is because even the gods possess reason (*On the Laws*, 2.10). In ancient times, it was widely believed that "all nature is ruled by the force or nature or reason or power or mind or will of the immortal gods" (*On the Laws*, 1.21). "Therefore, since there is nothing better than reason, and it is found both in humans and in god, reason forms the first bond between human and god" (*On the Laws*, 1.23). The cosmos is a society shared by humans and the gods, whose harmonious coexistence is grounded and bonded by reason. With their reason being the supreme faculty, humans and

① "Tao follows the way of Nature" in Chinese thoughts is equivalent to "live according to Nature", which is upheld by Stoics.

the gods form the highest beings in the world. Nature comes in different grades and beings in different ranks (*On Duties*, 1.11). Reason is the criterion. "Natural reason" (naturae ratio) can even be equated to "divine and human law" (lex divina et humana) (*On Duties*, 3.23; *On Divination*, 1.90, 130, 2.37). Obeyed by both humans and gods, this is what truly constitutes the "isonomia" (the equal law) or "ius gentium" (law of nations) of the cosmos!

Why, then, did the gods bestow upon humans the gift of reason? To endow humans with a good life, the magnanimous gods provided them not only with food and various skills but also with a soul, reason, and wisdom, allowing them to live like humans and even like the gods. Cicero attests to the divinity of reason indirectly through the divinity of the soul (animus), mind (mens), and intelligence (intellegentia). The faculty of reason is exclusive to humans and originates from the gods. The human soul is the only thing that instils the notion of the gods in mankind and allows them to perceive the existence of the gods. Since reason is the greatest and most sacred part of a human (*On Moral Ends*, 5.38, 57), it is the greatest distinction between humans and animals; thus, man cannot live without a sense of good and evil, dignity, and piety. Moreover, the real connotation of reason (ratio) is not reasoning as in modern philosophy, but a cognation of virtue. Therefore, what distinguishes humans from animals is not reason but "duty", since man is, after all, "elevated" (erectior). Thus, as we are all in possession of reason and advantages that give us preeminence over beasts, we derive from them all that is noble and fitting and our search for methods to ascertain our duty (*On Duties*, 1.105-107)–this is where the true purpose of the divinity of reason lies.

The Neutrality of Reason

Reason is divine in relation to the gods. However, once applied to mankind, it is inevitably defiled by the limitations of man as a limited being. Otherwise, humans, who are endowed with divine reason, would not commit crimes and evil deeds. From where, then, does human evil originate? Are we to only hold the gods accountable for that?

Shrewd (acies) as such heaven-sent reason or intelligence may be (*On Moral Ends*, 5.57), it will backfire on humans in case of wrong use (perverse uterentur or male uti) (*On the Nature of the Gods*, 3.70). Where there is "divine reason", there is bound to be "corrupt reason" or "degenerate reason" (*On Moral Ends*, 2.58). Although the reason-based philosophy is also a "divine gift", it can also lead people astray if the philosophical thought is erroneous: some philosophies fail to help or motivate us to do better and, in essence, corrupt our nature instead (*On Moral Ends*, 3.11; *Euthydemus*, 307b-c). In history, philosophers who have put us to shame are not in the minority (*On the Laws*, 1.50), but they do not lack will nor talent (*On the Commonwealth*, 3.13). Men who manage to be deeply ashamed of their wrongdoings conducted in the name of reason are also common–"If something offensive is found in a bodily disfigurement, then how much deformity and foulness ought to be apparent in a spirit made

dishonorable!" (*On Duties*, 3.105), or in Socrates' words: "Do you know what kind of a risk you are taking by surrendering your soul" (Protagoras, 313a)?

Modern philosophers have the passionate belief that the supreme reason and its by-product (that is, science and technology) can solve all cosmic problems independently in a world without gods. Hence, they put forward the famed mantra that "man prescribes laws to nature", not knowing that reason or technology is a double-edged sword in itself: "For very many things which concern the fixtures of religion, the ornaments of state and the culture of life in general, are drawn from technology. And yet out of the same fountain come instruments of lust, and also instruments of death. For (not to speak of the arts of procurers) the most exquisite poisons, also guns, and such like engines of destruction, are the fruits of mechanical invention…For the mechanical arts may be turned either way, and serve as well for the cure as for the hurt and have power for the most part to dissolve their own spell" (Bacon, pp. 130-131). Despite the fact that humans, whose nature is premised on reason, cannot survive without reason, "immoral inventions and creations" and the "wicked misdeeds of science" are not uncommon; after all, reason, wisdom, and the riddles of the Sphinx are all subjects, in essence, to "a twofold condition".

In his work *On the Nature of the Gods*, Cicero alludes to the tragedies of Medea and Atreus to elaborate on the neutrality of reason: conscious reasoning (ratiocinari) may ultimately lead to the plotting (machinari) of extreme self-destruction (nefariam pestem) because reason has evolved into "cunning reason" (callida ratione) at this point (*On the Nature of the Gods*, 3.66). It is the initiator of all evil (malorum): reason and sin (scelus) always come in a pair. Even beasts do not possess such deranged reason bestowed by the gods exclusively upon humans out of magnanimity. Although reason is associated with thoughts or knowledge, once it turns into a cunning scheme, supreme reason (summa ratione) also becomes supreme wickedness (summa inprobitate, *On the Nature of the Gods*, 3.67-69)–this is the true essence of "the cunning of reason".

Crimes committed by means of reason do not only take place on stage. They are even more pervasive and sinful in ordinary life: in any household, legal court, senate house (curiae), election assembly, ally, and province, we can find reason not only behind the right deeds but also behind the evil ones. While the right deeds are conducted by a small minority and on rare occasions, the opposite occurs in abundance and all the time. Think about this: even though desire is said to be the enemy of reason (*On Old Age*, 42), which deed of lust, greed, and crime is carried out without forethought or the partaking of the soul and cognition? In other words, which one is not the masterpiece of "good reason" (bona ratio, ND 3.71)? None of the monstrous sins, petty deceptions, ploys, crimes, and other misdeeds can be accomplished without reason. These crimes are not committed under the guise of reason; rather, they are actual manifestations of it. Only the rarest of the rare can put reason to the right (good) use, and such people will eventually fall victim to the countless number of those who put it to evil use. As a result, the god-bestowed gift of reason fails to benefit men but leads them instead into

trickery and deceit (*On the Nature of the Gods*, 3.75). It is vital that unquestioning advocates of reason take notice of this.

In light of this, one may even take to extremes and declare: we might have been better off if the immortal gods had not bestowed such reason upon us, so that we would not have called adroitness, nimble-mindedness, craftiness, and sagacity reason, and there would not have been such a plethora of calamities (*On the Nature of the Gods*, 3.69). Every opinion emanates from reason, which is good if it is true, and renders our opinion wrong if it is evil. Hence,

> God gives us only reason, assuming that in fact he does; whether it is good or bad depends on ourselves. When reason is bestowed upon a person by the gods' gift, it is not analogous to a bequest left to us, for if they had wished to harm us what better could they have bestowed on mankind? If reason does not underlie injustice, lack of restraint and cowardice, from what seeds would these vices sprout? (*On the Nature of the Gods*, 3.71)

Reason is not omnipotent and not even absolutely benign. As it depends on our good use, the good and evil are ultimately determined by us (a nobis). Alternatively, neutral reason can also be analogized to the Way of Heaven, which transcends good and evil ("beyond good and evil" in Nietzsche's words). An ancient saying goes: "The course of Nature is constant: it does not survive because of the actions of a Yao; it does not perish because of the actions of a Jie" (*Xunzi: Discourse on Nature*). All fortune and misfortune is the fruit of one's own doing (*Mencius: Gong Sun Chou*). From where does the evil of the human world come otherwise? In other words, the many vices in the human realm unquestionably bear a close-knit relationship with reason.

The mere empty talk of reason is utterly meaningless. The notion of "correctness" must be added to the discourse: one ought to pursue what is inherently right and good (*On the Laws*, 1.37, 48), because nature desires all things right, harmonious, and consistent (*On Duties*, 3.35). Cicero places a special emphasis on the word "rectum," which is a preordained constraint on reason, whether interpreted as "right", "real" (*On the Laws*, 3.2; *On Duties*, 2.45), or "good". The soul is not wrong for simply deviating from reason; it is wrong for diverging from the "right reason" (*Tusc*., 4.61). Only the "right way of life" (recte vivendi ratio) or "right reason of life" can turn one into a better person (*On the Laws*, 1.32).

Therefore, reason is not the highest order; its "rationality" must be testified by something better, such as divinity and virtue. Once reason is unaided by benevolence and nobility, it risks turning into craftiness (astutia) and hostility, or roguery (malitia). Despite its endeavor to masquerade as "prudence" (prudentia), it is utterly irrelevant to and remote from it; this is because "prudence," as an intellectual virtue, is the true wisdom, whose key lies in the choice between good and evil (*On Duties*, 3.71). "Those of us who are not moved by the idea of honor itself to be good men, but rather by some sort of utility or profit, are not good men, but crafty (callidi)" (*On the Laws*, 1.41). Yet, an omnipresent occurrence in the human world is that "those who do not see this clearly often admire shrewd and crafty men and mistake wickedness for wisdom. Their fancy must be wholly converted to that hope which consists of the understanding

that they will achieve what they want by honorable policies and just deeds, and not by deceit and wickedness" (*On Duties*, 2.10, see also 1.33).

Prometheus in ancient mythology can be considered a symbol of roguery and conceit. His tragic ending should not be interpreted as a "revolution" or "martyrdom" in the way modern thinkers do; rather, the ancients' way of thinking should be adopted to see it as the consequence of arrogance and ignorance. After attaining reason and deriving from it the technology that can transform everything, men think of themselves as equals of the gods. This undoubtedly does not end well: "For they who extravagantly extol human nature as it is and the arts received; who spend themselves in admiration of what they already possess, and hold up as perfect the sciences which are professed and cultivated, are wanting, first, in reverence to the divine nature, with the perfection of which they almost presume to compare, and next in usefulness towards man; as thinking that they have already reached the summit of things and finished their work, and therefore need seek no further" (Bacon, p. 149). For them, grave punishment by the gods and nature is but a natural consequence. To expound on "human nature", especially the arrogance of reason, Bacon also "fabricates" the fable of Prometheus defiling the chastity of Minerva, the true goddess of wisdom, to add to his crimes. To Bacon, the fable of Prometheus attempting to defile (vitiate tentasset) Minerva seeks to establish that: "The crime alluded to appears to be no other than that into which men not unfrequently fall when puffed up with arts and much knowledge, of trying to bring the divine wisdom itself under the dominion of sense and reason: from which attempt inevitably follows laceration of the mind and vexation without end or rest. And therefore, men must soberly and modestly distinguish between things divine and human, between the oracles of sense and of faith; unless they mean to have at once a heretical religion and a fabulous philosophy" (Bacon, p. 155).

The Limits of Reason

Reason is a powerful faculty to learn and an indispensable means of survival in human life (*On Duties*, 1.13). That being said, what to learn, how to learn, and the innate limits of rational knowledge are all questions that warrant solemn deliberation: If we allow reason to embark on a path to become nous or take an epistemological turn, then it will inevitably lose its rich connotations and turn into a neutral instrument (Schopenhauer, p. 220). If we continue to take this completely inanimate means as the chief subject of worship in philosophy, then the whole of human doctrines, philosophy included, will inescapably degenerate into narrow-mindedness and ultimately be parched by the scorching sun of reason: for men, "when as out of a personal pride, a false unity is loved in a part" (Augustine, p. 133).

Cicero, like Plato, has strict restrictions on the contemplative life (vita contemplativa) espoused by Aristotle and asserts that contemplative happiness is not the supreme form of happiness (Cooper, pp. 155ff). Man's intuitive reason will indeed lead him towards

contemplation, but it is only the beginning of human knowledge (*On Moral Ends*, 4.18)! As we attempt to substantiate the argument that the wise man finds his happiness in the psyche, we may overlook that his pain also resides in his psyche, and with an equivalently great multitude. Hence, we should not take mental (contemplative) happiness or pleasure as the sole standard and "must find another Chief Good" (*On Moral Ends*, 2.108-109).

Meanwhile, "noble" and "honorable" things also require moderation or temperance (moderatia) to not be in excess or deficient, as the first and foremost principle to deal with, because that "all virtues, tempered by temperance, are in a moderate (mediocritate) state" (Cicero, p. 63). This is the only way to keep everything in its right place: we ought to restrain not only our hands but also our eyes (*On Duties*, 1.141–1.144). Reason bears resemblance to the sun, which, in its right place, will definitely serve the welfare of mankind but, if detached from its place, will be out of control and without temperance (moderatione); then, the earth will inevitably overheat and burn down (*On the Nature of the Gods*, 2.92)! This is the same case for men. The sun of reason can give us a clear look of everything, but it can also blind us if we affix our eyes upon this mighty source of light! Temperance is the top rule of thumb applied to mankind, be it for their rational thinking or demeanor: nothing is more awe-inspiring (*On Duties*, 2.48), since temperance, like justice and knowledge, is a thing of beauty beheld by the soul "gazing down" (Phaedrus, 247d).

As much as reason is a gift bestowed upon us by nature, temperance, self-restraint, and reverence are "natures" that it assigns to us (*On Duties*, 1.98). Furthermore, it is "temperance" that urges us to abide by the choices made by reason. Therefore, it appears to prevail over reason, as action prevails over judgement (*On Moral Ends*, 1.47): temperance is the voice of "true reason" (vera ratio) (*On Moral Ends*, 1.52, 71); temperance is the true wisdom (Protagoras, 332a, 333b-d, 358c). The right use of reason, in essence, implies temperance; undoubtedly, excessive reason without temperance is far from right. "Adherence to reason" is to achieve "temperance or moderation" (modestiam vel tempreantiam) (*On Moral Ends*, 2.60; *On Duties*, 2.18), to which Cicero alludes in interpreting the ancient Greek concept of "sophrosyne" (*Tusc*., 3.16).

Reason and philosophy also warrant temperance or moderation (moderata) (*On the Orator*, 2.156). "For if we have progressed but a little in philosophy, we ought to be sufficiently persuaded that nothing should be done greedily, unjustly, licentiously or without restraint, even if we could conceal it from all gods and men" (*On Duties*, 3.37). Therefore, any form of "love" including the "love of wisdom" requires temperance to keep it from descent into madness (*Tusc*., 4.75-76). Wrong and improper love will ruin true love and destruct the subject of love, just as philosophy may corrupt the "sacred wisdom" (Phaedrus, 239e). The consequence of deranged reason is far more powerful than the inundation of desire, as being struck and bitten by philosophical speeches is "more painful than being bitten by a snake" (Symposium, 218a). It is a form of sickness, not sanity–one will be out of his mind if he cannot control himself (Phaedrus, 231d).

Reason should hinge on temperance, not left to the unrestrained discretion of desire–reason and desire are not definite nemeses, as the former will turn into avaricious desire if not subject to temperance. Temperance is antagonistic to hubris. "When opinion leading to the best of things is guided and wheeled by means of reason, such power is called temperance; but if desire drags us to the pursuit of pleasures and rules in us, completely devoid of reason, such power of rule is named hubris" (Phaedrus, 237e-238a). The rule of reason must not be intemperate either. Granted, reason may have a predilection for men, but "love" that is temperate and not hubris is the only form that is good, celestial, and sacred. While intemperate love will wreak havoc on everything, temperance is fundamentally the chief of practical wisdom.[①] What later philosophy has forgotten is not "being", but "temperance" of itself!

Conclusion

Reason is like the most pungent spirit in the world. If it is "not moderately tempered" and completely evolves into something like "pure liberty" (meracam libertatem), such unrestrained indulgence will unavoidably lead to the "tyranny of reason" and "will almost always turn into its opposite". The excessive liberty of reason cannot make men their own masters; what it does instead is turn them into the slaves of reason and other men: this is the true essence of the ancient doctrine appertaining to "liberty and slavery" (*On the Commonwealth*, 1.66-68).[②] Although virtue, as the perfect reason, teaches us to be temperate, gentle, and magnanimous, sternness is also necessary when the interests of the supreme state are under threat, which means to balance leniency and severity (*On Duties*, 1.88). Virtue demands us to be kind, gentle, and self-effacing in manner, but not so much as to be cowardly and deflated. Even though the courage to face up to the storm is admirable, it is even wiser to "strike sail" should the occasion require it, for this is a seafarer's most valuable lesson: "We do well to 'inflate ourselves' as little as possible" (*The Gay Science*, p. 179).

Self-restrained reason is a form of true wisdom, namely, sagacity or intelligence (phronesis) (Plutarch, p. 76). Such self-restraint is, in itself, "prudence" (prudentia) and able to produce foresight (providere) (*On the Commonwealth*, 6.1). It can foresee fortune and misfortune, embracing the good and rejecting the evil (*On the Laws*, 1.60). One can avoid any pitfall should he act in accordance with such foresight. The reason and thoughts of the prudent man suffice to be turned into laws: When shedding light on this proposition, *On the Laws* first adopts the term "prudentis" (*On the Laws*, 1.19) and then shifts to using "sapientis" (*On the Laws*, 2.8) directly; this serves to elucidate that prudentia (self-restraint and prudence) is equivalent to

① Plato: *The Symposium*, 181c, 187d-e, 188a, 196c, 209a, 216d, 219d. Classical thinkers including Plato based all their thinking on the opposition of "hubris".
② This is a reference to Plato's criticism of tyranny in the first chapters of *Republic*, Vol. 9; see also 1.62 (falling into astonishing madness due to excessive liberty). Concerning the "tyranny of reason," see also the references to Nietzsche in Conclusion.

"sapientia" (wisdom)–this is the true wisdom that we can receive from reason (*On Duties*, 1.15). Sagacity, wisdom, mind (mens), intelligence (intellegentia), and reason (ratio) are as inseparable from "prudentia," as "sophia," "nous," "phronesis," and "logos" in ancient Greek are from "sophrosyne".

Reason or wisdom, as one of the foremost virtues, is not empty talk of contemplation and deliberation on nature–those are the duties of "nous," into which reason must not degenerate. Although nous is the "pilot of the soul" (Phaedrus, 247c), it is neither the entirety of the soul nor something sacred–it is the overstepping of authority by modern men. The "reason" championed by the Enlightenment is, in fact, what ancient Greeks referred to as "nous". It does not equate to wisdom, which lies in vivendi doctrina (the doctrine of living) or ars vivendi (the art of living) (*On Ends*, 1.42, 2.37; *On Duties*, 1.53).

It is necessary for us to attain a certain grasp of some convoluted matters, or there will be many important matters about which we will be utterly ignorant (*On the Commonwealth*, 1.19). That being said, temperance must also be practiced. After all, the "second sun" and many other scholarships that appear impressive, while able to emerge, are fundamentally not "causing trouble–we can know nothing about such things, or, even if we knew all about them, such knowledge would make us neither better nor happier." Instead, we should study sciences or skills that can render us useful to the state, because "that is the most outstanding task of philosophy and the greatest evidence and function of virtue" (*On the Commonwealth*, 1.32-33).

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(Translator: Echo Y; Editor: Gerald)