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## 'Othering' Action - The philosophical origins of the separation of Thinking and Doing

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## Background

**Table 1: Attributes of Thinking cp. Doing**

<b>Thinking</b>	<b>Doing</b>
Policy 80%	Implementation 20% - operatives
High status – policy makers, managers, decisionmakers	Low status – monkey do
Learning/knowing	Designing/Doing
Feeling	Being
Spectator	Actor
Concepts	Experience
University 95% activity	University 05% activity [social sciences]

Source: P Wildman 04-2005

## Arendt's view

### 1. The age of Pericles

*F M Cornford "Plato's Commonwealth" in Unwritten Philosophy (1950) pg 54: 'The death of Pericles and the Peloponnesian War mark the moment when the men of thought and the men of action began to take different paths, destined to diverge more and more widely till the former as the Stoic sage ceased to be a citizen of his own country and became a citizen of the universe [and became mere implementation of the grand visions of the men of the universe the dreamers]pg 17*

The Golden Age of Greece = Periclean Age =546BC to 404BC

Arendt, H., *The Human Condition* (first published 1958). 1995, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 350. pg 17 footnote 16

### 2. Socrates the focus on thinking and the beginning of the 'othering' of doing

Socrates was a model of the kind of judge that Arendt wanted to foster, that is, someone able to connect the worlds of action and thought. Drawing on Vlastos (1971), Arendt portrays Socrates as a citizen among equals in the public life of Athens, not a professional philosopher withdrawn from the community. Socrates was both actor and spectator, that is, someone "equally at home in both spheres and able to move from one sphere to the other with the greatest apparent ease, very much as we ourselves constantly move back and forth between experiences in the world of appearances and the need for reflecting on them" (Arendt, 1978a, p. 167). Arendt's Socrates tried to "help others give birth to what they themselves thought anyhow" (Arendt, 1990, pp. 73–74).

Arendt contends that Socrates' pupil, Plato, drew a very different — and dangerous— lesson from Socrates' life: the need to avoid the dangerous *polis* and the world of action by withdrawing into the superior sphere of contemplation. For Plato, the superiority of a life of contemplation, of research, is affirmed. Arendt (1958) explains that Plato

introduces “the division between those who know and do not act and those who act and do not know” (p. 223), and that by “sheer force of conceptualization and philosophical clarification, the Platonic identification of knowledge with command and rulership and of action [or practice] with obedience and execution overruled all earlier experiences and . . . became authoritative” (p. 225).

Plato claims a superiority for the philosopher–spectator that echoes through centuries of Western thought from Plato’s pupil Aristotle through the extraordinary power of the German philosophy of Kant—and Heidegger. The challenge for Arendt is to understand the impotence of this tradition to explain and prevent the Holocaust. Her response involves reconceiving judgment by rethinking first what it means to be an actor (and then what it means to be a spectator) could be left off, unless you want to give details about this reconceiving.

### ***The Golden Age of Greece = Periclean Age =546BC to 404BC***

The period 546-479 B.C., beginning with the glorious victory of the Greeks over imperialistic Persia in the Persian War and ending in the period 431-404 B.C (with the ignominious civil conflicts of the Peloponnesian War.) is frequently called the "**Golden Age of Greece**" because during this time, the city states of the Greek peninsula attained a high level of culture and political stability. Also sometimes called the "**Periclean Age**," after Pericles, Athens' leading statesman of the time, the period is characterized by tremendous accomplishments in the areas of government, drama, poetry, art and philosophy.

It was during this time that democracy was born in Athens, which the Greek theatre produced some of its greatest playwrights, and that philosophers such as Socrates and Plato challenged man's thought processes. During this era, Greece also produced architectural phenomena such as the Parthenon and art and sculpture that has been admired over the centuries. The polytheistic society of the day also made advances in poetry, science and medicine, and recorded history.

### **Political and military achievements of Pericles**

There was a break in tensions for the moment. After Thucydides' ostracism, Pericles had little domestic opposition. His position rested on his continual reelection to the generalship and on his prestige, based, according to the historian Thucydides, on his manifest intelligence and incorruptibility. From his youthful demagogy, he had moved to a more middle ground in politics, and there are traces in his later life of his being outflanked by more radical spokesmen. Athens was, Thucydides says, in name a democracy but, in fact, governed by its first man.

Though Athenian democracy never gave more than severely limited powers to the executive, the assembly gave Pericles what he wanted. Thucydides, obsessed with the power of intellect, takes little note of the need of a statesman to work hard, and it is Plutarch who provided the glimpses of a man who took no interest in his own estates,

who was never seen on any road but that to the public offices, and who was only recalled to have gone to one social occasion, which he left early.

This picture is softened somewhat by what is known of his personal life. The identity of his wife, however, though certainly of wealth and high birth, is unknown. He married her in his late 20s but, as they were incompatible, divorced her some 10 years later. Close to 50, he took Aspasia of Miletus into his house. By his own law, marriage was impossible, and, after the death of his two legitimate sons, their son Pericles had to be legitimated. Although Aspasia is clouded by scandal and legend, it is easy to believe she possessed great charm and intelligence.

There is no reason to doubt that she was free and of good birth in her own city with its great intellectual traditions. It is clear that her own behaviour and Pericles' attitude toward her were surprising phenomena in Athens, where upper class women were kept secluded. That Pericles was known to kiss her on leaving for and returning from work gave rise to speculation about her influence on him and, thus, on Athenian politics.

As the building program continued, Pericles demonstrated Athenian superiority in other ways. In 443BC a Panhellenic colony was founded under Athenian auspices at Thurii, in southern Italy, but did not form a continuing centre of Athenian influence in the west, as may have been hoped. At an unknown date, Pericles took a fleet into the Black Sea to demonstrate Athenian power and secure the grain route from the Tauric Chersonese (the Crimean Peninsula in modern Ukraine). As the buildings on the Acropolis rose, celebrations of the festival of the Panathenaea grew more and more elaborate, and much was done to enhance the splendour of the Mysteries of Eleusis, symbolic, among other things, of the Athenian claim to have brought corn and civilization to mankind.

Pericles' last major campaign was the one interruption in these years. In 440BC, Samos, one of Athens' principal allies with a substantial fleet of its own, revolted, and, despite a victory by Pericles against superior numbers, the revolt nearly succeeded. The campaign to recover Samos, although long and costly, was ultimately successful, and it became a model against which later Athenian generals measured their achievements.

## **Pericles**

### ***The drift toward war***

There had been a serious possibility that Sparta and its allies might intervene on this occasion, but they did not, and the Thirty Years' Peace was upheld until the end of the 430s. Tension grew as the decade progressed, particularly with regard to Corinth, Sparta's ally, whose interests conflicted more obviously with those of Athens. By 433BC the situation was serious enough for Athens' finances to be put on a war basis, and, thereafter, the drift to war continued.

Pericles' policy was one of firmness, coupled with careful manipulation of the diplomatic position to keep Athens technically in the right. The firmness was a puzzle to contemporaries, particularly his determination to enforce decrees excluding Megarian

trade from the Athenian Empire. Was he, it was asked, influenced by some private grievance of Aspasia? Was he trying to divert attention from personal attacks on himself and friends by making war? Thucydides tells just enough to make his own interpretation plausible, that Megara was a small matter in itself but crucial as a symbol of Athenian determination to maintain its position. Consideration of Megara's strategic importance, which Thucydides consistently undervalues, may suggest further the possibility that the Megarian decrees were not the immediate cause of the war but the first blow in a war Pericles thought inevitable and that began in spring 431BC.

Pericles' main strategic ideas are clear. He was an admiral rather than a general, and Athens' naval resources were immeasurably superior to its land power. He would evacuate the Athenian countryside, bring the population into the Long Walls, decline battle with the Spartan army, and rely on the fleet to assure Athenian food supplies and secure the empire on whose resources the expensive naval policy depended. Expenditure on building had been counterbalanced by annual savings from the tribute, and enough capital had been reserved, he thought, for a long war, though expenditure turned out heavier than he could have calculated. This is essentially Thucydides' analysis, though he failed to explain what end to the war, other than a stalemate, Pericles wanted or expected. There are some indications that Periclean strategy included more aggressive elements, such as the recovery of Megara, which would have considerably improved Athens' position.

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### ***Weakness of Pericles' strategy***

This strategy, however, had marked political weaknesses. In the final analysis Pericles was strategically wise but not politically so. The Athenian population had deep roots in the countryside, and great firmness was required to bring them to abandon their land to Spartan ravages without a fight. The middle-class army suffered in morale, and the living conditions of the lower classes, though they were allowed activity in the fleet, deteriorated in the overcrowded city.

The overcrowding had an unforeseeable consequence in a plague, which in the second summer of the war in 431BC took a quarter of the population. No obvious success counterbalanced the discomforts of war, and Pericles was deposed from office and fined. **He was soon re-elected, but he took no new initiatives before his death a couple of years later, in autumn 429BC, although he continued to make important politically relevant speeches.**

**The result today of this weakness then (433BC) the separation of thinkers and doers** Arendt (1963) argues this portended the separation of the men of thinking and the men of doing what has plagued the West ever since.

After the first campaigning season of the war, he had delivered the funeral speech over the fallen, which Thucydides reports at length. They had fallen, he said, in preserving a way of life that he described in detail. Athenian life often fell short of this Periclean ideal, but he conceived it with clarity and made it generally recognised. He conceived his (433BC) Athens as “an education to Greece.” If the last speech attributed to him by

Thucydides is any guide, he cannot be accused of ignoring that the realities of power that made the Periclean age possible might also bring it down. So although he spoke well he did no longer act.

He however no longer took part in linking thinking and doing as he had in his generalships.

### **On the social and democratic costs of separating concept and experience**

#### **Tribally speaking**

In tribal settings such a separation does not exist more so folk are often multiskilled. Just think of the rich learning environment in a tribal situation (there are downsides also). These include learning by walking around, intergenerational learning, learning by doing, informal and formal learning, leaning that learning does not separate thinking and doing. In many ways such a supportive social/community context is the nest for the artisan. [Source: Thanks to Richard Mochelle for this insight – 04-2005 conversations]

### ***Separating Thinking and Doing leaves out Joining Feeling and Being***

Newton's Cosmology: it can be argued that Newton's law of gravity requires the Universe to be infinite in extent, for if the universe was finite, all bodies in it would be pulled together into one body (by gravity), whereas many bodies (stars) were seen. In an infinite universe, matter would be pulled into an infinite number of small condensations. [http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au/astro/cosmo/wjc\\_lecture/node5.html](http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au/astro/cosmo/wjc_lecture/node5.html) Christianson (1984:20). This challenges the eighteenth-century view of Newton as the cold rationalist we have come to know.

He sees Newton as 'the first and greatest of the modern age of scientists' and the last of the Magi. He challenges the view that Newton was a rationalist, one who taught us that 'The Universe was a mechanical one whose order was maintained by a distant God' and to think on the lines of cold reason that is untinged (reason supposedly emotionally coloured) and unenlivened (reason that is not enlivened/life-giving).' Newton wrote more words on alchemy than mathematics. To this day these remain unpublished.

It was this cold entropic aspect of Newton that William Blake deplored, and used as a symbol of the machine -- materialism -- separating 'objective' thought and its material representation in inanimate or unloving matter -- that he saw rising in England, ready to engulf the more spiritual outlook on life held by a long line of ancient philosophers. Not having access to the private papers, Blake thought Newton's mechanical view of the world and universe left out God, the inner man, and life. He assumed that thereby Newton left out all the values that made life worth living. What would he have said had he known of the hidden side of Newton's philosophy?

And thus the world arrives in 2004 at the colourless death zones of Iraq or Chechnya. Places almost devoid of colour and enlivening where flowers fear to bloom where blue gloom engulfs all spectators and actors. And the entropic death zones extend.

Furthermore Newton's Cosmology recent reviews of his work is compatible with the view that the Universe to be **infinite** in extent, for if the universe was finite, all bodies in it would be pulled together into one body (by gravity), whereas many bodies (stars) were seen. In an **infinite** universe, matter would be pulled into an infinite number of small condensations. Newton recognised this as indeed did Aristotle. Furthermore Newton wrote more words on alchemy than mathematics yet it is the latter that we carry forward – just as Western society has carried forward Plato’s separation of ‘thinking and doing’.

**Sources for this section**

Drawn from an article *The Other Newton* By I. M. Oderberg which is a review of *In the Presence of the Creator: Isaac Newton & His Times*, by Gale E. Christianson, The Free Press, Macmillan, New York, 1984; 623 pages, bibliography, notes, index.]

[www.phys.unsw.edu.au/astro/cosmo/wjc\\_lecture/node5.html](http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au/astro/cosmo/wjc_lecture/node5.html)

Bob Dick and Robert Pope for the source emails – 04-05-2004

**Table 2: Thinking Doing Comparison Table**

	<b>Thinking</b>	<b>Doing</b>
1.	Thinking	Doing → Experience → Making
2.	Thinking	Feeling → Play → Fun
3.	Spectator	Action → own lines
4.	Thinking from Doxa	Doing for yourself
5.	Scripts	Voice
6.	Structure as in plan, process, test, rule	Outcomes
7.	Bureaucrats/academics	Entrepreneur
8.	Forecast/map/model is more important than that forecast – weather/territory/output	The weather
9.	IQ	PI (Practical Intelligence) *
10.	Analytical	Practical 1
11.	Justice	Wisdom
12.	Classroom of school	Classroom of life
13.	Philosopher king	Isonomy, democracy, the participative deliberative citizen
	<b>Some Epistemologies that link or braid Thinking and Ding</b>	
1.	Phronesis/Prohairessia/Parrhesia	
2.	Critical Futures Praxis	
3.	Reflective Praxis	
4.	Holonomic Learning	
5.	Artificer Learning	
6.	Do-ocracy	
7.	Action and Experiential Learning	

**Source:** P Wildman (05-04) \*.Stenberg, R., *Successful Intelligence - How Practical and Creative Intelligence Determine Success in Life*. 1997, New York: Plume. 300 pgs; pg 47



## **Thinking | Doing Summary QQ [PW ]**

Critically if one integrates ones life from the perspective of enactment then the intellectual as in analytical components thereof support such and are necessarily partial in that they are designed towards successful action. Such an outcome is never satisfactorily academically speaking as the point of integration is enactment not thought which in an academic sense remain partial, not easily fitable into one or another discipline and are seen as supportive of action not vice versa. [PW 18-05-04]

### **The human mind will obsess with concepts if it can't get experience**

The human mind needs concepts and to implement them if it is to function at all if its **primary quest** is in danger of being compromised.

This **greatest quest** for society indeed its foremost task, lets it become completely abstracted and lost in the vagaries of concepts, is the comprehensive understanding through experience of reality, coming to terms with it, and improving it. [P Wildman] Thus improvement of society urgently needs the resolution of the millennia old western Percilean problem of the separation of thinking and doing through at least experiential or at best artificer learning in the context of Phronesis. [P Wildman]

### ***The Western Epistem - Thinking 'Othering' Doing***

The separation of thinking and doing that is a pre-requisite to generating the interface between them is endemic in Western culture. Some would argue since the age of Percilies. Wildman (2005)

I argue that the gulf, indeed the lacunae, between the two is so profound that when combined with the focus on thinking as prime concern in academia and schools, we have in reality 'othered' doing. Doing has become a reality outside, and secondary to, our primary cognitive focus and thus outside the focus of our Western consciousness.

### ***The great hope of post-modernity - redressing 'the' curse of western history in the past 21/2 millennia***

This lack of conceptual clarity and precision with respect to thinking and the importance of considering existing realities and experiences have been the curse of Western history in the aftermath of the Periclean Age, whereby the men of action and the men of thought parted company and thinking began to emancipate itself altogether from reality, and especially from political factuality and experiences Arendt (1963:177). [Here political means public life guided by phronesis]

The great hope of the modern age and the modern age's revolutions has been, from the beginning, that this rift might be healed. One of the reasons this hope has not been fulfilled, why, in Tocqueville, not even the New World could bring forth a new political science, lies in the enormous strength and resiliency of our tradition of thought which continues this apostasy separates thinking and doing. This tradition has withstood all the

reversals and transformations of values through which the thinkers and revolutionaries of the ninetieth century tried to undermine and to destroy and transform it. Arendt (1963:177).

### ***Engaged ontology – today fact or fiction***

Given the background to this split as discussed in this paper it is proposed that the split is in fact deeper than day to day use even deeper than the systems we use to organise these activities even deeper than the knowledge frames we use to articulate such systems and policies even to the narrative underpinning such knowledge frames. This analysis uses CLA – Causal Layered Analysis. [Inayatullah (1998); Wildman (1996)]

### **Bush Mechanics: an epistemological, ontological, or cosmological divergence and example of the eternal return.**

The divergence in thinking and doing is nowadays so complete that it is, in my opinion, at least epistemological, probably ontological and even possibly cosmological. In short the engaged ontology\*, commonly called ‘bush mechanics’ or more technically, ‘artificing’, has to anchor back to a time before Percilies and a time forward beyond today with its pedagogy that so anchors education to millennia past. Even beyond the ‘technical education’ artifacts of industrial revolution that conflate skill into, and with, tool. And even beyond the nation state, that through its bureaucracy and certification of the University qualifications, through parliament, acts to reify these most ancient of ways. The Bush Mechanic approach, through the concept of the exemplar project, does however provide a way through and beside all this. As such in some ways we approach a post rational view of the English artificer of 1563 – what is old is new again yet transformed, the eternal return the cosmological spiral of evolutionary wisdom.

Ultimately this means facing the existential dilemma that one cant fully understand the word by standing aside from it by separating thinking with which we contemplate the ‘other’ i.e. the world wherein our actions occur. Ultimately empirical objectivity, though profoundly useful to that point, has its limits.

\* Ontology the theory of being as it relates to the objects of being and their interface i.e. the relationship between them.

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