MISSION STATEMENT

At a liberal arts university, Gnosis aims to be a liberal arts based publication. Articles are written on everything from Physics to Philosophy, regardless of whether it falls within the writer's primary area of academic interest. Gnosis aims to be a new medium for students to share their intellectual interests and ideas outside of the classroom. With an academic perspective always emphasized, we hope to foster discussion and debate.

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If you have a reaction or opinion about any of the articles, please email us at gnosis@wlu.edu or log on to gnosis.wlu.edu. We urge you to send us your responses. After all, the purpose of this magazine is to foster discussion and debate.

COVER PHOTO: KLAUS WIEHL
Dear Reader,

Thank you for picking up the second issue of Gnosis!

We got a lot of comments on the first issue, many of which were good, but many fell into the category of “Hey, I liked your science magazine!” We just wanted to clear up that no, this isn’t a science magazine, although the first issue kind of ended up going in that direction. This issue is better in that the content is very diverse, which fulfills our original goal of being a broad, liberal arts based publication.

If you have any comments or concerns about one of our articles, please log on to our website, gnosis.wlu.edu, where you can post reactions and responses. We’d love to hear from you, and our writers would be happy to respond.

Additionally, it was brought to our attention that a few readers were concerned with the lack of formal reference citations within the first issue. Due to space contraints and aesthetic concerns, we have omitted these again from the print issue. However, all of our articles are again available fully cited on our website.

So, enjoy.

The Editorial Board
Gnosis

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Gno’sis
γνώσις
1) seeking to know, inquiry, investigation.
2) knowing, knowledge.
Lustful Ladies and Philandering Fellows

Sexuality in the Middle Ages

BY JULIA MIGLETS

The Oxford English Dictionary defines sexuality as “the quality of being sexual or having sex” and refers not to the physical acts themselves, but rather to the meanings associated with them. At first blush, the combination of “sexuality” and “medieval” conjures up two very different mental images. We tend to assume that medieval people lived under a regime run by an unenlightened state and excessively powerful church, both of which exerted inordinate control over the people, embodied by the persecutions of witches, traitors, and heretics, the repression of women, and the seemingly overarching control of all aspects of life by the Church. The other, more colorful version draws from sources such as Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Dante and portrays a society dominated by lustfulness and fleshly pursuits. The reality, of course, contained far more nuances. Medieval people interpreted sexuality in unequal ways, viewing sexuality as something strongly influenced by gender, and with different norms of acceptable sexual behavior governing sexes.

To speak of “the sexes” in terms of male and female presents problems of its own. Before the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, people perceived gender far differently than we do today. While contemporary society views the two sexes as being biologically completely different, diametrical opposites, in the past, no distinctive boundary existed to designate male from female. Gender did not serve as an inclusive type into which people neatly fit as either male or female. Instead, the distinction between the two genders functioned as a matter of degree with male and female corresponding to only one sex. In essence, the only sex was “male,” within which existed two genders, male and female. The two genders represented the degree of perfection exhibited by the anatomy of the individual as well as their temperament. Men and women shared a common anatomy and females, who possessed an inverted anatomy, were less perfect men.

Medieval people saw females as simply inverted males, and by virtue of this, less perfect since by some flaw, they lacked the ability to produce visible, external genitalia. The abundance or absence of heat characterized men and women respectively, and the imperfect, inverted anatomy of a female resulted from her lack of heat. Heat in the pre-modern medical sense roughly correlates to the modern idea of energy in that it caused something to happen. In the case of gender, heat enabled men to produce external genitalia and the lack of heat in women resulted in the inability of their bodies to bring forth the reproductive anatomy. Medieval people construed this retention of the genitalia as an indication of imperfection, and thus women were demonstratively inferior to men. However, because pre-modern people defined gender by degree rather than a set category, they viewed it as fluid and changeable, and the idea of a female spontaneously, physically, becoming male was not a foreign concept, although they considered the reverse process impossible. The idea of superiority or inferiority based on physical perfection or imperfection shaped the dual standard of medieval society towards the sexuality of men and women.

The Christian model laid out by the early fathers of the Church emphasized a renunciation of fleshly pursuits and desires, for succumbing to temptations of the flesh represented a victory for the devil. For Origen of Alexandria, writing in the beginning of the third century, human sexuality served merely as an ephemeral phase with no bearing on the human spirit itself. While Origen could be construed as condoning sexual excess, in actuality, his argument advocates the renunciation of fleshly pleasures because they only distract the soul from its growth towards God. Since the body has no influence on the soul's growth, people should turn their attention to the divine love rather than spending that pleasures of the flesh as inherently sinful, for they entangled the soul within the body, turning it away from God and towards the material. With the decline of martyrdom after the legalization of Christianity in the fourth century, asceticism and the renunciation of physical pleasure and desire became the ultimate demonstration, tantamount to martyrdom. For men, rejecting sexual interaction in devotion to the faith replaced the death of martyrdom, and women who remained virgins equally qualified for sainthood. Due to practical constraints, the Church could not ban sex outright but compromised by setting upon it severe limitations. Men and women were to have sex only within marriage, and even then, only for the procreation of children. To perform the act for pleasure constituted a sin, both within and outside of marriage because sex occupied the spirit with things other than devotion to God. The Church included lust among the seven cardinal sins, and defined it as excessive love for others, rendering love and devotion to God secondary. This strict, repressive view of sex largely dominates the modern impression of the Middle Ages and seemingly contradicts the lustful, carnal stories handed down from writers in the same period.

While society valued chastity outside of marriage in men and expected it for women, within marriage, both men and women were expected have sex for the purpose of procreation. The twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw an increase in willing renunciation of
the pleasures of the flesh by the laity, especially women, a move which the Church quickly moved to regulate, for chastity served as one of the key defining features, at least in theory, between the laity and the clergy. In many ways, a vow of chastity, either before marriage or even within it, offered women control over men and their situation. Women exploited the idea of chastity as ideal Christian behavior to gain control within their society by making a conscious choice to remove themselves from their reproductive role yet still remain within accepted societal norms. The Church looked unfavorably upon the idea of chaste marriage, in which both partners took a vow of chastity, for such vows threatened to undermine the distinction between the clergy and the laity. Vows of marital chastity also threatened the economic and political foundations of marriage which joined two families by blood in the children produced by the union. While medieval Church doctrine precluded sex except for the purpose of procreation, it also taught that neither spouse could deny the other sexual intercourse, for by denying sex, the spouse became responsible for any sexual sin committed by the other. Thus the strictures of the Church and the expectations of society defined precise limits for legitimate sex, precluding it outside of marriage and regulating it within.

The writings of Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Dante present an altogether different picture of sexuality than the staid prescriptions of the Church. Dante condemns not only laity to Hell for their lustfulness, but also clergy, the very men charged with enforcing the Church’s prescriptions against the pleasures of the flesh. The Decameron, written by Boccaccio in the mid-fourteenth century, shortly after the Black Plague had swept across Europe, contains one hundred stories, many of which related not only sexual, but explicit tales, chronicling the debaucherous exploits of medieval men and women. The Wife of Bath’s Tale in the Canterbury Tales presents a quite different view of virginity and sex than the repressive version promulgated by the Church, and indeed counters much of what the Church prescribes. The Wife of Bath argues that God never commanded virginity, and argues that if everyone remained a virgin, no one would remain to create more virgins. She also staunchly believes that the sex organs should be used as much for procreation as for pleasure. While Chaucer purposely portrays women as foolish, calculating, and lustful, in all likelihood, he modeled the Wife of Bath on actual medieval women, many of whom probably possessed some of the same traits, to a greater or lesser extent, as the Wife.

Because of their cold, wet natures, medieval writers and thinkers characterized women as lustful and incapable of controlling their fleshly passions. Isidore of Seville, one of the great scholars of the early Middle Ages, wrote that men exhibited strength, rationality, and spirituality, and described women as soft, carnal, lustful, and indeed the very embodiment of sexuality. Not only did women succumb more readily to sexual corruption than men, but they tempted their perfected counterparts, threatening masculine power with their sexuality by exploiting the weaknesses of the flesh. Despite the perception of women as lustful, medieval society did not tolerate non-marital sex for women. Instead, female honor was closely connected to sexuality, and for this reason, their sexual behavior by necessity needed to be tightly controlled. Sexuality for women was closely connected to procreation, for in an age before DNA testing, paternal verity rested upon the chastity of the woman. Only by controlling a woman’s sexuality could her child’s paternity be certified. In an age when blood relationships determined power and inheritance, it was of the utmost importance that the descendents of a family, be they aristocrats or peasants, be related directly to the parents by blood. This in turn explains the medieval emphasis on virginity, for the virginity of a girl on the marriage market ensured her female honor as well as that of her family, allowing them to make the best political and economic match. Husbands sought virginity in potential wives not only because of the implications to honor of marrying a virgin, but also because virginity before marriage boded well for chastity within the marriage. Medieval society held up the ideals of chastity and virginity for women in order to ensure the production of legitimate offspring. While action defined male honor, female honor derived from what she did not do. Since female honor affected the honor of the men connected to her, controlling the sexual behavior of women in order to prevent tarnishing male honor carried great importance.

Men enjoyed a wider range of acceptable sexual behavior. The fleshy, lustful description of sexuality in the Middle Ages applies far more accurately to men than to women, and it was far more acceptable for men to engage in sexual promiscuity. Sex outside marriage constituted a mortal sin, but unlike women, men did not have to bear the burden of chastity in order to ensure legitimacy. Sexual relationships before or within marriage usually occurred between men of higher social standing than their female partners which allowed for even greater masculine control over the situation. Illegitimate offspring certainly created other problems, but the essential continuation of the bloodline was achieved as long as the husband impregnated his wife. While the ideals of virginity and chastity applied to men, they did so in rather different ways. The struggle against temptation defined male chastity and medieval people believed it to be more common than female chastity because of the rational nature of men. Women, lustful and weak in matters of the flesh, rarely succeeded in maintaining their chastity, but men, through perseverance, could achieve chastity, thereby demonstrating masculine strength. Masculine virginity carried with it religious overtones, and implied a conquering of lust to reach a state of apathy, usually with divine aid. While male chastity and virginity constituted the medieval ideals, men had far more sexual freedom than did women.

The reality of medieval sexuality therefore was both more nuanced and yet more clearly delineated than the modern perception would have us believe. No one description of either repression or permission can be applied to sexuality in the Middle Ages. Instead, gender more clearly defined prescriptions for sexuality with one set of mores governing men, and an opposite set controlling women.
For something to be described as “absurd,” it is usually in some way silly, incomprehensible, or utterly illogical. The quality of the absurd, however, has found its place in literature, and it goes much deeper than a complete lack of sense. And most often, absurdist writers are employing these bizarre traits in order to tell us something quite relevant about human nature and the world in which we live.

The style of the absurd is often characterized by unbelievable characters, nonsensical events, incoherent story structure and sometimes a complete lack of plot. Absurdist writers usually employ this technique to convey some philosophical idea about the human condition, behavior, or the state of the universe, but their message is not always obvious.

The style is frequently linked to the “Theatre of the Absurd,” a genre that developed in the 1950s and included such plays as Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot, but it can be applied to novels and other forms as well.

Two modern writers who employ the absurdist genre, novelist Albert Camus and playwright Tom Stoppard, use the absurd to express certain philosophical ideals.

For Camus, as shown in his novel The Stranger, the world of the absurd finds its form, or lack thereof, in existentialism, which is the philosophical thought that life is devoid of meaning and value. All significance arises only from individuals’ actions and choices. The world, lacking any purpose, is entirely senseless, or in other words, absurd. Thus the absurdist style lends itself easily to existential thought. For Stoppard, however, the case is just the opposite. In his play Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead, he tells us that even though the world can be absurd and senseless, every event and action is clearly defined and even destined, despite human attempts to believe or act otherwise. This idea can be likened to the philosophy of determinism.

The Stranger (translated from the French L’Étranger) is a work of the absurd by Camus’s own admission. In fact, many scholars claim that Camus coined the term. He stated that his works confront “the nakedness of man faced with the absurd.” The plot concerns a young man, Mersault, who lives a detached and resignedly aimless existence and ends up killing a man on a beach, rather inexplicably. The rest of the novel details his trial and his months in prison awaiting execution.
Camus did not like to be labeled an existentialist, fearing he would be too closely linked to fellow French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom Camus was often in disagreement. His novel, however, reveals many ideas that echo the existential thought, and these are intrinsically linked to his absurdist style. In The Stranger, man confronts the purposelessness and absurdity of life, finding that there is no inherent meaning in it. Thus the existential and the absurd are one and the same.

Camus employs the absurdist style in his plot, which is the seeming lack of actual story structure. The character of Mersault is also flat and unreal, and the events and surroundings of his world are senselessly puzzling and often hostile. In dealing with the absurd world, Mersault exhibits an utter lack of morality. He feels no emotion toward the death of his mother, an event that opens the novel, no fear or anxiety before he commits his murder, and no remorse following it. This characterization fits well with the existential thought that there is a distinction between “existence” and “essence” and that existence, or human activity, must come first. Thus morality is not an inherent trait but results from action.

Nearly any philosopher is concerned with extracting meaning and purpose from the state of the world. In The Stranger, Camus tells us that the significance in life comes from neither the identity—the “essence”—of man, nor any fixed intrinsic meaning in the world, but from the interaction between man and the physical world. The character of Mersault gains his only pleasure from sensual experiences. He describes the “surest, humblest pleasures: warm smells of summer, my favorite streets, the sky at evening, Marie’s dresses and her laugh.” Unlike many characters in philosophical works, he lacks the usually natural desire to find abstract meaning or purpose in his universe. He has never questioned whether this significance may exist; he accepts, perhaps unconsciously, that it does not. He refuses to comprehend anything that does not relate to his own physical body or his own needs and wants.

Mersault also lives entirely to fulfill his own desires; he lives in the moment, and, according to critic John Valentine, “does what he feels like doing, nothing more nor less.” He gives no philosophical analysis to his actions, desires, or surroundings. He merely acts. He “exists,” with no need for introspection. This is Mersault: existence with no concern for essence.

THUS FREE WILL – SOMETHING CONSIDERED TO BE INHERENT TO HUMAN BEINGS – IS FUTILE, OR IS AN ILLUSION ALL TOGETHER

In the second part of the novel however, the authorities who investigate his crime insist on determining Mersault’s character—his beliefs, his motivations, and his essence. They take into account, for example, Mersault’s lack of concern for his mother in her dying days, believing this to be a typical trait of a heartless criminal. Here Camus points out society’s need to label individuals with identities. Eventually Mersault is labeled as a stereotypical criminal and sinner—he has been assigned an essence.

Camus himself seems to believe that Mersault, the existentialist, has lived according to truth and is a victim of society’s absurd attempt to believe in stereotypes and essences. He said in a preface to The Stranger, “The hero of my book is condemned because he does not play the game... he refuses to lie... He says what he is, he refuses to hide his feelings, and immediately society feels threatened... One would therefore not be much mistaken to read The Stranger as the story of a man who, without any heroes, agrees to die for the truth.”

Though condemned for it, Mersault asserts that he is not a fixed essence but “a singular, free existing,” according to Valentine. Thus Camus seems to suggest that free will is the only defining trait of a human being. One’s destiny, for lack of a better term—Camus would not have used this word—is not predicted by character or identity or by some determining force of nature but only by one’s own actions. In reality, Mersault’s death sentence is brought about not because of his character and lack of remorse but because he killed a man. The whole of consequence must rely on action. We are free agents combating the meaningless absurdity of the world, according to Camus, and there is no meaning or consequence beyond that.

Stoppard’s play is perhaps the more difficult to comprehend. On the surface, it is a retelling of Shakespeare’s Hamlet from the point of view of two minor characters, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the two men who are brought to court to investigate Hamlet’s purported madness, are tricked by him, and end up dead, as revealed in the final of Hamlet in a line which becomes Stoppard’s title, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead is characterized by several qualities of the absurd. Critic Jonathan Bennett calls it one of Stoppard’s “plays without plot.” Stoppard presents a world that is a sort of limbo; the characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are deposited into the plot and scenery of Hamlet, and they have no role or purpose outside of it. The audience follows the pair in their exploits, which are often concerned with sudden philosophical debate and long pauses of silent wandering. Neither can be said to make much logical sense.

The characters themselves seem absurd and unreal. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are unsure of who they are, have incomplete memories of their pasts, and constantly confuse their own identities. If viewing the play rather than reading a script, the audience can never be sure which is Rosencrantz and which is Guildenstern, and neither can the characters. And the distinction is immaterial; they might as well be interchangeable, or two halves of the same person. Their surroundings as they perceive them—and thus how the audience perceives them—constitute an endlessly puzzling universe. The duo is lost in a world where they seem to be the only ones—besides the audience—who don’t have a clue what is going on. Throughout the play, they desperately try to cling to reality and to make sense of their confusing surroundings.

A third main character is that of the Player, the leader of the band of traveling actors who perform for the King’s court.
It is the encounter with the Player and his Tragedians that transports Rosencrantz and Guildenstern into the middle of the plot of Hamlet. The Player seems to be wiser than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; he understands the events of the plot and their implications far better than they do, but he is unwilling or unable to enlighten the pair, making him a strangely mysterious figure.

Rosencrantz is a play—Hamlet—turned on its head. Two minor characters take on the lead roles, and the ordinary lead, namely Prince Hamlet, has only a small part. When examined this way, the nonsensical aspect of Rosencrantz is logical; the majority of the play follows Rosencrantz and Guildenstern where they would be offstage in Hamlet, and thus they would be clueless as to what is happening in the rest of the plot.

Stoppard is not merely writing a play about a play. He uses these tools of nonsense and absurdity to tell his audience something quite disturbing about the nature of the world. One facet of Stoppard’s theme does concern the concepts of acting and theatricality, but the playwright employs these ideas in a far deeper sense.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern struggle to find their purpose in a world that is senseless. Though they fail to ever understand their roles, those roles are fulfilled nonetheless, because they have already been written—they are predetermined. The two are victims of design, by several circumstances. They have been brought to court by the King and are given orders; thus they are already someone else’s puppets. On a deeper level, however, they are characters in a play that has been written and performed many times, and the plot cannot be changed, despite the attempts of the characters to do so. They must act as the play requires.

It does not matter that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern never grasp what is occurring around them. Nonetheless, the two cannot help but try to make sense of their roles. Here they are quite unlike Mersault of The Stranger, who never concerns himself with any meaning beyond his own immediate desires and actions. Their questioning, however, only furthers the deterministic theme. Guildenstern asserts, “But we don’t know what’s going on, or what to do with ourselves. We don’t know how to act.” And the Player merely instructs him to “Act natural.” Since Rosencrantz and Guildenstern hardly know who they are, they cannot act naturally as themselves. Thus they can only take the other meaning of the phrase: they must act according to the natural limits of their predetermined roles.

If Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are only fulfilling their roles, then there is no significance in their own choices. Here is where Stoppard disagrees most severely with the existentialism of Camus. According to The Stranger, there is no “role” to be fulfilled and nothing matters beyond individual choices. But in Stoppard’s world, the semblance of making choices is just that—an illusion. The Player proclaims that “We’re actors—we’re the opposite of people!” To be a real person would mean to have control over one’s own actions and destiny, but if we are all actors, our lives have already been written for us.

Guildenstern says as he realizes this truth, “Wheels have been set in motion, and they have their own pace, to which we are...con demned. Each move is dictated by the previous one—that is the meaning of order.” He admits that any attempt to deviate from this “order” can only paradoxically perpetuate it, for if we “happened to discover, or even suspect, that our spontaneity was part of their order, we’d know that we were lost.” Thus free will—something considered to be inherent to human beings—is futile, or it is an illusion altogether.

Even when the pair actively fight against what they expect might happen, trying to outwit Hamlet, their own demise is inevitable. They cannot help but fall prey to what has already been written for them—they cannot deviate from the plot of Hamlet. They are pawns, or “merely players” on the world’s stage, if we might take a lesson from another bit of Shakespeare. Unlike Camus, where the actions of the individual are the only determining factor in combating the meaningless and puzzling universe, Stoppard suggests that the world, despite being illogical, is governed by some deterministic force and that individuals’ attempts to decide their own fates are futile.

Stoppard also comments on human nature, suggesting that despite the insignificance of identities, there is a constant human desire to understand one’s own identity and to assert that one is real. Here Camus and Stoppard agree on the insignificance of personal essence, but Camus would scoff at the mention of the human instinct to believe otherwise. His Mersault has no sense of an inherent identity and no need for one. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern seem to lack an identity as well, but they nonetheless insist on finding one. For example, the two continually forget their own names and confuse which one of them is which. Throughout the play, they are desperate to set this matter straight. They also seem to have no memory of their pasts. This circumstance reveals two truths: it means that knowledge of one’s own actions is necessary to understand identity, but also that memory—and thus self-awareness—is not essential to fulfilling a predetermined role. Thus Stoppard is perhaps suggesting that self-awareness is an illusion as well.

These two absurdist writers present us with two very different views of the world, and both are troubling. Both The Stranger and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead leave us to question our roles in our own lives. Is there any significance in life beyond the immediacy of our own actions and momentary desires? If all the world is a play, do we improvise? Or are our lives scripted? The answers to these questions may be too difficult to accept. Even Rosencrantz insists: “We don’t question, we don’t doubt. We perform. But a line must be drawn somewhere.” Where is that line?
Would You Use Drugs to Improve Your Mind?

Ethical issues posed by cognitive enhancement drugs

BY TOM HOSFORD

With the progress of modern medicine, a wealth of new drugs is becoming available which may allow us to reach mental capacities never experienced before. They can let us increase our attention span, improve our memory, and enhance our planning abilities, all just by popping a pill. As their spread and usage is inevitable, questions remain as to who should have access to them. Should usage be allowed only in individuals who are afflicted by psychiatric diseases, or should they also be available to healthy individuals seeking only the enhancement of mental functioning? The British Medical Association and the scientific journal Nature are two among the many sources who have called for a healthy debate on how we should respond to these drugs as we progress in the 21st century.

Some feel these “cognitive-enhancers” could help us solve our problems better. Jobs could be performed better and more efficiently. Scientific breakthroughs could be made by users, which would in turn benefit all of society. Others feel the drugs could have disastrous effects, such as creating disparities in intelligence between the rich and poor, or creating an unfair disadvantage for those who chose to abstain from using drugs. Many just feel the lack of knowledge of their long-term effects would pose too many risks to allow unregulated usage in society. The thought of cognitive enhancement makes many uneasy. For those who wish these drugs to be widely available, only through a large scale debate can pros and cons be weighed, and strong enough case developed to overcome the tyranny of the status quo.

THE DRUGS

There has been growing evidence for ways to enhance brain functioning through mechanisms such as nutritional supplements and magnetic brain stimulation, but pharmaceutical products are the most realistic way foreseeable in the near future. Most of these drugs have been largely developed for “therapy” purposes, in an attempt to improve the conditions of those afflicted by psychiatric disorders. Methylphenidate (often marketed as Ritalin) was originally designed for the treatment of ADHD, a condition characterized by hyperactivity and inattention that affects 4-10% of children worldwide. Donepezil (Aricept) was designed as a treatment for Alzheimer’s disease. This works by increasing levels of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, which can have the effects of increasing attention span and ensuring memory formation. Modafinil (Provigil) was developed to counteract excessive daytime sleepiness, but is also used to help Schizophrenic patients perform day-to-day tasks which seem trivial to most of us. All of these drugs work to alter levels of neurotransmitters in the brain, which causes or overall thought processes to be altered as well.

Although these drugs are prescribed to thousands of people, most long-term side effects are still relatively unknown. Some feel the effects may be more harmful that we think, such as one study that concluded children with ADHD taking stimulants may experience stunted growth. Although the true long-term effects of most of these drugs can only be learned over time, most patients are in bad enough need of the immediate rewards they provide that they are not too concerned with the potential long-term risks.

ETHICAL ISSUES

The true controversy, however, lies in question of whether the drugs should be used for “enhancement” purposes as well. Since these drugs can also improve cognitive functioning in perfectly healthy individuals, they are desired by others than just the sick. According to the British Medical Association, the main aspects which can be potentially improved through the use of cognitive enhancers are learning, memory and information retrieval, concentration and attention, speed of processing, perception of spatial relationships and planning and reasoning abilities. In light of their capabilities, an important point to make is that these drugs can only improve these areas to a limited extent. They can keep them running near-optimally, but will not allow us to possess super-human abilities never achieved before. Users have reported effects to be seemingly mild, but considerably helpful. Additionally, most provide only temporary effects, and are not known to induce permanent changes in the brain.

So should the “healthy” be allowed to take these drugs just for the sake of increasing mental functioning beyond normal levels? Many certainly feel this way, as evidence shows usage is on the rise. "In one study, which considered
anonymous responses from 1,025 American college students, 16.2% of respondents reported such use, 96% of whom used Ritalin in order to improve attention, partying, reduce hyperactivity and improve grades. An informal survey conducted by two University of Cambridge professors reported that many of their coworkers took these pills for uses such as aid in intellectually demanding tasks and counteracting jetlag. And with drugs such as Modafinil readily available to purchase online without a doctors prescription, rates don’t seem to be decreasing. But is usage in healthy individuals ethical?

EFFECTS ON THE INDIVIDUAL

To form an opinion on this, we must consider the situation from different perspectives, in order to determine what its effects will be on society as a whole. It is first important to consider the balance of benefits and risks posed for the individual.

Cognitive enhancers could help us work more efficiently, or manage stress better. A stage actor, for instance, could improve concentration and remove stress to deliver a better performance. Despite the many intrinsic benefits that these drugs may possess, many maintain that the unintended consequences may outweigh the pros. While all of these drugs possess known adverse side effects, ranging from headaches to joint-pain, experts say “it is very difficult to be certain about the potential for subtle, rare or long term side effects, particularly in new pharmaceuticals.” The brain is an extremely complex structure which we do not fully understand, which is why so many unforeseeable problems could arise. Some make the argument that even when healthy individuals are well-informed of the side effects, they still do not possess knowledge of the magnitude of the long-term effects, and thus should not be allowed to decide for themselves whether they can take the drug. On the contrary, proponents point to established practices in society where clear health risks are present only for the sake of the enhancement of the individual.

Cosmetic surgery procedures such as breast-augmentation or reduction and Botox are all procedures where people are willing to take risks because they feel they will personally benefit. These types of procedures were once very controversial as well, but now are rather common. Others point to dangerous sports such as mountain-climbing or skydiving, where a participant risks his health solely for leisure. In a society protecting individual liberties, many feel we should be able to treat our bodies (and minds) as we please.

EFFECTS ON SOCIETY

Perhaps an equally important consideration to make comes from what effects cognitive enhancers could have on society. Usage by individuals could have both positive and negative effects on those around them, and thus the balance of harms and benefits must be weighed. It is well-known that society benefits collectively from the personal achievements of its individuals. If a scientist aided by cognitive enhancers develops a new vaccine, or an engineer creates a more efficient engine, everyone reaps the rewards. When used in these types of professions, enhancers would allow “a higher return on investment” for the amount of mental energy expended. Other vocations could benefit as well. For professions on which human lives depend, such as doctors and airline pilots, increased alertness and awareness could ensure safety better. High rates of usage have already been reported in military personnel, whose lives depend on their alertness and reaction time. According to Harris, “the cocktail of choice for military pilots is apparently amphetamines on the way out to hype them up for combat, and Modafinil on the way back to keep them awake and alert to get home safe.” An enhanced ability to perform each job would bring benefits to society as a whole.

Along with the possibility of many benefits to society comes the possibility of many harms. Some argue that a disparity in intelligence between the rich and the poor could arise if these drugs were made more freely available. Those that could afford them would be “enhanced” while others would be left “normal”, creating a gap in intelligence corresponding to a gap in income. (However, no pharmaceuticals are known to permanently increase “intelligence” as of yet.) But the possibility of inequity does not necessarily mean a complete banning would be the right solution. As Harris asserts, centuries ago there were books and manuscripts available only to the elite, which would have never been able to benefit anyone in the future had they originally been banned to all.

Many opponents of cognitive enhancers fear that those who chose not to use the drugs may feel a great pressure to do so. This pressure could be most prevalent for professions such as doctors and military personnel, but could extend to any type of employee. In addition, if parents were giving them to children at school, other parents could feel coerced to give them to their own children. On the whole, this could result in a more cutthroat and competitive society.

Some critics claim that we will be losing something “human” about us through the use of cognitive enhancers. They argue that even without the possibility of harmful side effects, we still will suffer from types of intangible effects, such as some loss of human dignity or some aspect of our human nature. Kass asserts that pharmaceutical enhancers would threaten “the ways of doing and feeling and being in the world that make human life rich deep and fulfilling.” On the contrary, many feel that human dignity will only be enhanced if we are to have greater control over our minds. Nevertheless, “human dignity” is a rather vague concept, and it’s not likely this kind of debate can be resolved in favor of either side. A similar argument posed is that this kind of medical treatment is too “unnatural”, and thus should be avoided. Although it may disturb many of us, it is important to consider that many medical technologies which were vehemently opposed when first introduced are now common practice. In vitro fertilization and heart transplant procedures both once received extreme opposition, but are seen as acceptable now.

IS IT CHEATING?

The US President’s Council on Bioethics stated in a recent report titled Beyond Therapy, “Personal achievements impersonally achieved are not truly the achievements of persons”. In this manner, cognitive enhancements are often compared to performance-enhancing drugs in sports in that they can be seen a form of “cheating.” Should cognitive enhancers be banned in competitive situations, such as academic entrance examinations, where users could possess clear advantages over non-users? While this is arguable, it is important to point out that cognitive enhancers do not provide the answers. They simply allow one to improve attention and focus on the knowledge one already possesses. They will not provide the answer to a multiple-choice question. Many of us have used coffee or a shot of espresso to improve concentration but would not consider that cheating. Should the line be drawn here? Harris makes a comparison to devices such as computers and calculators, which are generally seen as legitimate in aiding our achievements. Although they may provide accuracy to our work with much less effort, human reasoning and work are still required to find the answers. Although the issue is highly debatable, it is important that we do not overstate the effects of these drugs.

FINAL THOUGHTS

While there are numerous other ethical issues which can be raised, most questions cannot be answered until we possess a greater understanding of risks at the individual level. Regardless, it is important that we consider these issues, as new drugs will be developed and usage will increase as we progress into the 21st century.
The Twentieth Century will interest historians long after our generation has passed from this earth. It will go down in history as a blood-soaked century, of one sanguinary struggle followed by another, and another. Likewise, future accounts of the era will undoubtedly extol the myriad developments in science, technology, wealth, health, and knowledge. It has been estimated that, in real terms, an average individual’s income increased by approximately fifty percent between 1500 and 1870. Per contra, between 1870 and 1998 it increased by a factor of more than six and a half. Put differently, the compound annual growth rate was thirteen times higher between 1870 and 1998 than it was between 1500 and 1870. In 1900 life expectancy in the United Kingdom was forty-eight; in 1990 it was seventy-six. Also at the turn of the century just about a fifth of countries could be deemed democratic, but by the 1990s that ratio rose to over half. In light of all this progress, the unprecedented, preternatural violence of the twentieth century may seem paradoxical. To engage and truly understand this paradox, one must delve into the anomalies of the age and descry historical countertypes from the annals of the past.

Rewind two-and-a-half millennia and consider Greece in the fifth-century B.C. For Western scholars, this century represents a time of human enlightenment, cultural and political progression, and, yes, war. One might call it the overture of the Occidental opera. Notice that the same paradox which defines the twentieth-century also characterizes this era. For the first half of the century, the Greeks were embroiled in war with the vast and mighty Persian Empire. Starting in 499, with the support of Athens, ethnic Greeks on the western coast of Asia Minor began to rebel against the Persians and their ruler, Darius the Great. The strong Persian army suppressed these rebellions, and a confident Darius turned his attention to Athens across the Aegean Sea. In the late summer of 490 an army of about thirty thousand Persians landed on the plain of Marathon to engage a force of roughly ten thousand Athenian hoplites. In hindsight it seems that the destiny of Western civilization hinged on this battle.

Herodotus, whose Histories recount the Persian Wars with remarkable clarity, hints to his readers that the magnitude of the fight was not lost on the contemporaries. In Book VI, Athenian general (στρατηγός) Miltiades tells his commander: “With thee it rests, Callimachus,
IN THIS WAY IT BECAME CLEAR TO ALL, AND ESPECIALLY TO KING XERXES, THAT THOUGH HE HAD PLENTY OF COMBATANTS, HE HAD BUT VERY FEW WARRIORS

but they imply that the army was larger than any Greek had ever seen. The exact number of Persian invaders will forever remain unknown, but modern historians believe it may have ranged between two hundred and two hundred and fifty thousand men. For this reason, Greek city-states Corinth, Mycenae, Sparta, and Thebes, just to name a few, furnished troops and commanders to aid Athens and save their own metropolises from Persian oppression. The Greek League, as it came to be called, placed Sparta in charge of the army and Athens, the navy.

Of course, the strength of any alliance depends not on sheer numbers, but on the courage of its fighting men. This unshakable courage has come to define Greece's second round of war with the Persian Empire. As Xerxes attempted to move his army, two hundred thousand strong, from Thessaly into central Greece, he encountered a remarkable band of bold and daring Greeks blocking the pass of Thermopylae (Θερμοπόλια). Led by the Spartan king Leonidas, for three days seven thousand allied hoplites held the ground and Xerxes' army stalled, suffering disproportionately heavy casualties.

Demaratas, a Spartan blue-blood who had defected to Xerxes, warned the Persian king and again of the Spartan's peerless bravery: “I spoke to thee, O king! Concerning these men long since, when we had but just begun our march upon Greece; thou, however, didst only laugh at my words.” For the incessantly rational and calculating Persian ruler, “what Demaratus said seemed altogether to surpass belief,” and he wondered “how it was possible for so small an army to contend with his?”

The extraordinary vigor of the Greeks became all too apparent to Xerxes in due time, following scores of unlikely setbacks. Thinking that the Greek stand was mere impudence and recklessness the Persians charged with all their might. Herodotus tells us that “the Medes rushed for-ward and charged the Greeks, but fell in vast numbers; others however took the places of the slain, and would not be beaten off, though they suffered terrible losses. In this way it became clear to all, and especially to the king [Xerxes], that though he had plenty of combatants, he had but very few warriors.”

The Greeks, however, would ultimately fall prey to the avarice of one of their own. Herodotus writes, “Now, as the king was in great strait, and knew not how he should deal with the emergency, Ephialtes, the son of Eurydemos, a man of Malis, came to him and was admitted to a conference. Stirred by the hope of receiving a rich reward at the king's hands, he had come to tell him of the pathway which led across the mountain to Thermopylae; by which disclosure he brought destruction on the band of Greeks who had there withstood the barbarians.” Learning of this, Leonidas knew that he and his men must flee or die, and he did order some of the troops to retreat. But he and the three hundred Spartans stayed to fight, along with their brave Thespian allies, led by Demophilus, and the Thebans, who lingered “very much against their will.”

As the Persians closed in on the Greeks, the trepidation of their final hour was trumped by their appetite for honor and glory (τιμή καί κλέος), and “they defended themselves to the death, such as still had swords using them, and the others resisting with their hands and teeth; till the barbarians...[who] now encircled them upon every side, overwhelmed and buried the remnant which was left beneath showers of missile weapons.” Although the Persians ultimately won the Battle of Thermopylae, the courage of the Greeks and their Spartan leaders eclipsed this trifle and propelled Greece to ultimate victory.

Twentieth century warfare has, at times, borne out this historical phenomenon. In many ways, American involvement in Vietnam mirrored Xerxes’ foray in Greece. Though the superior U.S. forces never lost a battle, they ultimately succumbed to the North Vietnamese whose intrepid homeland defense prevailed over the cautious, halfhearted American effort. Like the Spartan warriors at Thermopylae, the Vietcong were not concerned with mere bravura expositions of valor. Their allegiance, perhaps misplaced, was nevertheless authentic, not coerced, and their actions leading to ultimate victory revealed that fact. America’s war in Vietnam further confirms that the West does not have a monopoly on courage and virtue. True heroism is void of cultural trappings; free from worldly conventions. As Pericles candidly put it: “The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding, go out to meet it.”
Last December Italian researcher Riccardo Velasco published a full genetic sequence of the Pinot Noir grape in the Public Library of Science. The sequence marks the first successfully-mapped genome of any grape species. Velasco and other viticulturists hail this breakthrough as the start of a new era in the science and art of growing wine grapes. Furthermore, many scientists view the relatively-simple Pinot Noir genome as a useful model for sequencing the genomes of a whole range of fruit trees in the near future. The genome’s promise of disease-resistant fruit crops with larger, more consistent yields reaches far beyond the domain of snobbish wine critics and bargain-hunting wine consumers. If Velasco’s genome does serve as the key to sequencing the genomes of other fruits, and perhaps eventually other agricultural products as well, this breakthrough could have wide-reaching implications in the ongoing struggle against world hunger. Despite this noble end, the project still faces the scrutiny of some of the world’s severest and most outspoken critics.

In the most revered and entrenched wine circles the names, of both people and places, do not tend to change much over time. In fact, the enviable Grand Cru classification for dry red wines in France’s famous Bordeaux region has been limited to 61 châteaux since the original classification in 1855 by Napoleon III. Of these 61 châteaux, only five hold the ultimate appellation of Premier Cru or “first growth.” Furthermore, only three exceptions have been made to the Official Classification in the more than 150 years since its inception. This anecdote, in itself, captures the attitude of traditional French winemakers, whose first rule seems to be to resist change at all costs.

However, as vineyards have begun to flourish in the New World, first in California and then in places like Australia, Chile, and Argentina, technology has been moved to the forefront of the winemaking process. Selective replanting of grape varieties based on soil conditions, climate, and microclimate, along with the use of temperature-controlled stainless steel casks as opposed to oak barrels and varietal labeling, have all allowed Californian winemakers to begin to surpass the French in output, quality, and popularity.

The conflict between New and Old World wineries can be summed up pretty effectively by the way each group labels their wines. In order to distinguish their wines from those of already-established French chateaux, early Californian winemakers made the decision to label their wines not by region nor the name of an individual estate, but by the predominant grape variety used to make the wine. This split from tradition represents a deeper split in the winemaking traditions of the New and Old Worlds. For centuries French winemakers have focused, not on grape variety, but on a château’s terroir as the predominant factor in determining the style and quality of the wine likely to be produced there. Oz Clarke places the concept of terroir “at the root of the French attitude to wine.” Like most aspects of French wine culture, terroir is a mysterious and nebulously-defined term that roughly translates to a “sense of place.” A region’s terroir is determined predominately by its climate, soil type, and topography. However, just as many wine drinkers are wont to talk about the flavors and aromas of wine through comparison to the tastes and smells of other foods, many traditional French tasters make similar use of metaphor when describing terroir. In its most fully-imagined sense, terroir is more than just the sum of the ecological factors that effect the development of the grape’s flavor throughout
the growing season. To the most traditional, and perhaps most esoteric, wine tasters, terroir represents the bouquet and taste, the overall experience of a wine, imagined in terms of an idealized and picturesque landscape representing the terroir where the grapes have been grown and harvested. In this way, an especially imaginative sense of terroir can transform a mountainous region that receives indirect sunlight for most of the year, into a more fully and vividly-imagined experience of the landscape and the wine.

If terroir-minded Old World winemakers act more as artists as they craft their wines, many of their New World counterparts seem to approach their work in a more scientific way. Although, in common usage they are synonyms, the titles “winemaker” and “viticulturalist” provide a concise representation of the distinction between Old and New World wine producers. Since the last renaissance of California winemaking in the early-1980’s, American and other New World winemakers have had to use every bit of technology available to them to compete with the snobbery and pomp of France’s chateaux. Like many advancements in the field of genetics, Velasco’s genome has become the newest battleground in this war of science versus tradition. Genetic manipulation of Pinot Noir and other vitis vinifera grape varieties could potentially yield improvements in disease resistance, as well as in flavor consistency and overall flavor quality. On the whole, genetically-altered wines could offer higher degrees of consistency and superior levels of quality at a less-expensive price. In addition, vineyards growing these technologically-advanced grapes could potentially flourish in regions and climates where winegrowing hasn’t been economically feasible in the past, due to short growing seasons or the local prevalence of grape-emasculating bacteria. With aspiring new winemakers, such as director Francis Ford Coppola, shelling out as much as $350,000 an acre for vineyard land in California’s Napa Valley, these new winemaking frontiers, such as Florida, could potentially become booming wine hot spots in no time.

Although undoubtedly a boon for wine producers and consumers alike, the Manifest Destiny of vineyard lands in the U.S. and abroad would ultimately breach more than just political boundaries. As with any new technology in a capitalist society, the research and development geared towards the genetic manipulation of wine grapes will proliferate to the extent that economic incentive exists for it. And, the promise of less-expensive, more-widespread production of more-consistent, higher-quality wines, would provide enormous economic incentive for the expansion of vineyard lands. However, at what point, if any, should factors beyond economic and technological limitations enter into the discussion? Ethical issues seem to dominate any discussion involving genetic tinkering, and why would winemaking be an exception to this rule?

In addition to fundamentally altering the experience of wine drinking and appreciation, genetically enhancing wine grapes raises some very pertinent ethical issues. Traditionally, especially for the most respected producers, a wine’s quality in a particular vintage has been attributed to a single vintner. This vintner, such as Francis Ford Coppola, usually puts his or her name on the wine and is responsible for nearly every aspect of its production. The vintner exercises absolute authority over his or her product from the time the grapes are planted until they are bottled and sold. As a result, a wine’s quality has traditionally been attributed to the expertise and artistry of a single vintner, as well as to the traditions of the chateaux. Genetic engineering of wine grapes, however, promises to shift this focus away from the vintner and towards the genetic traits of the grape itself. This seemingly minor shift would fundamentally alter the way wines are created and appreciated. Although this hardly seems an ethical concern, its implications reach far beyond the world of wine. The genetic engineering of the Pinot Noir grape represents just one of countless cases in which technological progress has been motivated and directed almost solely by economic concerns.

By opening up new potential vineyard lands and removing much of the Old World mystique and snobbery from the winemaking process, genetically-enhanced grapes would essentially democratize wine production. As the hallmark of quality shifts from the hazy realm of individual expertise and centuries-old tradition into the lab, the highest quality wines will no longer be in limited supply. Without the geographical and hierarchical limitations imposed on wine making by Old World tradition, the wine industry should tend towards a state of perfect competition and the price towards the market equilibrium. As a result, a much wider range of super premium quality wines would become available to the general public in much greater supply and at much cheaper prices. This change would be especially dramatic for wines made with the notoriously difficult and expensive Pinot Noir grape, as sommelier Andrew Meadows has expressed, upon hearing about the genome’s possibilities: “Good! I would love to offer a decent Pinot for less than $30.” But, say what Meadows would call a “decent” Pinot dropped in price from $50 to $10. This $40 economic savings for a genetically-enhanced Pinot represents an equivalent loss of value to the consumer. Today, when a consumer pays $50 or $100 for a single bottle of wine, he or she is buying much more than the wine itself. Instead, wine consumers are willing to pay large sums of money for the centuries of tradition and meticulous, individual craftsmanship that goes into each bottle of the world’s finest, and most pricey, wines. Of course, tradition and individual human care have no real economic value. After all, what consumer would pay 4 or 5 times as much for a product of lesser quality simply because it was more difficult and time-consuming to produce? Thus, by dramatically lowering production costs, genetically-enhanced grapes on the whole promise to dramatically lower the price of wine to the consumer as producers pass these savings on. This change, as the market strives towards efficiency, constitutes a modernization of the wine industry that threatens to make the Old World of wine a thing of the past, once and for all.

**AMERICAN AND OTHER NEW WORLD WINEMAKERS HAVE HAD TO USE EVERY BIT OF TECHNOLOGY AVAILABLE TO THEM TO COMPETE WITH THE SNOBBERY AND POMP OF FRANCE’S WINE CHATEAUX**
The Economics of Islam

BY JACK STANTON

As many scholars have noted, Islamic economics has become a rapidly growing discipline following increased discussion of the subject since the 1960s and 1970s in works like Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr’s Our Economy, but has been a continuing interest in the Islamic world for centuries drawing commentaries from figures ranging from Ibn Khaldun to Sayyid Qutb. While there are certain distinctive ideas proposed by shar’ia, or Islamic law, in the area of economics, it is interesting to see how these ideas actually manifest and adapt themselves in today’s world. After examining the more distinctive areas of Islamic economics, mainly zakat, riba, and general Islamic values, it will become clear that Islamic economics in the present-day is expressed through the presence of a few distinct Islamic concepts applied to a standard industrialized economy, rather than being an entirely different system unto itself or failing to have any presence in the current system.

Elements of Islamic Economics

Three main areas provide the foundations of Islamic economics. They are zakat, riba, and the adherence of economic decisions to Islamic values. By examining each of these three themes in depth, we can gain a better understanding of the driving forces of this particular system and to see what distinguishes it from other economic systems such as capitalism or Marxism.

To see Islamic economics and its distinctive elements in their proper light, one needs first to comprehend ideas that Islam puts forth. Ahmed El-Ashker and Rodney Wilson have provided a critical overview of some foundational principles derived from Islamic teachings.
First is the principle of moderation. Both the Qur’an and Sunnah attest to the importance of a moderate spirit in all aspects of life. Regarding economics, this clearly holds implications both in the realm of profit-maximization and consumer behavior. Second is the principle of economic efficiency. This follows from the notion that humans are the stewards of the earth and what we have here has been given by God. Based upon this reasoning, one has a responsibility to efficiently use what is available out of respect for the privilege of possessing it. They feel that waste, even in pursuing essential goods, constitutes a graver error than excessiveness in luxury items, provided that the items are actually put to use. Third is the principle of social justice. The reasoning here is based on a general equality of all people as God’s creations and that the uniqueness of God’s creation will result in some being better suited to earn a higher income than others. An acceptance of this Islamic truth demands the generosity of the wealthy for the less fortunate. Importantly, Islam takes the view that “poverty is not the result of laziness or non-participation in economic activities” and thus “does not accept a status quo of sharp demarcation between the rich and the poor.”

A general grasp of these principles now grants one the ability to approach the three specific distinctions of Islamic economics in a more direct manner. The first of these distinctions is zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam. Zakat exemplifies the idea of social justice in a specific “redistributive” economic sense by placing a tax on the wealthy from which the proceeds are distributed to the less fortunate. Some claim that in addition to being an ethical satisfaction, zakat is logical as it “is a more effective means of redistribution and economic development than existing secular fiscal instruments.” The link between zakat and social security has not been missed by Islamic scholars. The Egyptian politician and academic Al-Fangari, referring to zakat and social security as essentially the same thing, suggests that social security is “part and parcel of Islam and the right of individuals to it is above all rights as it is part of the blessing of God for his subjects”, something drawn from both the Qur’an and the Sunnah. A few problems arise when attempting to put zakat into practice. An obvious difficulty is the added administrative complexity of not only determining the wealthy and at what rate they should be taxed but also in determining the most efficient way to then distribute the proceeds to the impoverished. There is also disagreement as to whether or not a government-mandated system drawing on Shar’ia should collect the zakat or if the force of the teachings of Islam should be the only enforcement given.

Another area of distinction is the prohibition of riba. Riba is the term used to refer to a practice in the pre-Islamic Arabic world in which a debtor would be penalized 100% for failing to make a payment on time. Simply stated, the ban on riba has come to mean an abolition of payments on interest, regardless of the desire of the borrower to enter into such an agreement. Different factors in modern economics have encouraged a reevaluation of the true intention and textual stipulations behind prohibiting riba, notably starting in 1904 when the then Grand Mufti of Egypt ruled that it was acceptable to receive payments from a previously agreed-upon rate. Some arguments for the relaxation of the riba prohibition result from an interpretation of the origin of riba mentioned above. For these arguments it is held that the prohibition was meant specifically to protect against an excessive punishment of this nature, not as a blanket ruling. Egypt continued to supply voices calling for an alternative view of riba. A more recent Grand Mufti, Tantawi, claims that riba should not be abolished on the public level because of the interference this would cause with governmental loans and the like. He points out that the more traditional views of riba are not unanimously held, and in some cases stand in the way of the public good and general prosperity. Increasingly controversial, Tantawi later declared the idea of Islamic or un-Islamic banks nonsensical, stating that modern-day adaptations such as a fixed return to investors depending upon the level of success of said investment erased any previous distinguishing factor, provided that both were free of corruption or abnormally deficient business practices. Interestingly, some arguments in favor of the abolition of riba expanded upon its social advantages with little thought given to its economic implications. This is unique to the discussion surrounding Islamic economics as such considerations on the question of interest would not possibly be taken into account in the neoclassical economics model. Riba in the modern-day finds its two most pressing issues in the question of bank procedures and overall governmental policy as it attempts to adjust and adapt its structure in an industrialized economy heavily influenced by a few chief ideas, interest being one of them.

The third area of distinction is the consistency of economic policy with Islamic ideals. This represents a much more intangible and harder to quantify area incorporating the three principles mentioned previously. One is exorted to apply Islam to all areas of economic life under this distinction but the more detailed guidelines of the first two distinctions are absent. This third area presents a thought-provoking idea in that it represents an intelligent and just middle ground between the “strictly” individualistic focus of some level encourages a shift of behavioral patterns, a movement in governing dynamics. In this, the good of the group, the importance of the community, a value intricately intertwined with
Islam, must be taken into account in all decisions where the community might be affected. Such an approach goes beyond the individualistic outlook of capitalism without forcing group identity and “welfare” as in a socialist system. The goal of this coordinates with one of the possible outcomes of the Nash equilibrium, or game theory, in that when both individuals act for the group it produces a better result for both the individuals and the group than if they acted out of self-interest. It is the duty of society to conduct itself in an orderly manner with each person mindful of the other. The wealthy will not accumulate their fortunes at the expense of others. The poor and the outcast will not be neglected. Some have commented that this is unrealistically optimistic, and in some sense they are correct. However, what is the good of a system of beliefs or convictions if it does not reach for a higher and better reality? Democracy, Christianity, and Islam are all examples of systems acting within the realm of reality that continually call for one to live in a more dignified and beneficial manner. Economics as a western discipline seeks to explain why economic decisions are concluded in a certain way and how one can best shape policy decisions to capture predictable behavior patterns. Islamic economics does not purport to explain economics in a different manner, but rather to encourage one to exercise their economic power through thoughtful and considerate decisions.

Theories of Islamic Economics

One opinion suggests that Islam itself holds very little significance as a unique religion in constructing an economic system. The driving force of this argument presents Islam as a typical social construct, a sociological experiment, whose fate is ultimately determined by historical precedence. A chief supporter of this idea, Maxime Rodinson, sees the only importance of Islam in determining the future of its followers by the degree that the subsequent religious beliefs affect the followers’ willingness to accept new or innovative ideas. He ultimately concludes that countries with a large Muslim population should employ a Marxist economic system, something which in his opinion coordinates with Islamic ideals. Mr. Rodinson clarifies further by stating (regarding the implementation of Marxism) “only thus, could Islam continue to give reasons for its continued existence to some people in the countries that were Muslim and …alongside those who believe that they have no need of God in order to regulate their lives and the life of their country.” This theory performs a sociological process largely divorced from the consideration of religion and raises controversy due to the explicit endorsement of Marxism.

Another opinion, authored by Thomas Philipp, stands in strong opposition to that of Maxime Rodinson’s. This theory claims that Islamic economics is a recent invention and was created as a reaction to Marxism, shunning its ideals. However, in reality and due to the demand of Islamic societal-based decisions, Philipp criticizes the concept of Islamic economics saying that “the realization of an Islamic order is dependent on a new human being,” essentially meaning the inherent expectations of human judgment are entirely unrealistic.

Ayutallah Taliqani presents a radically different theory in comparison to the previous two examples. His view of Islamic economics is that of a system unto itself, dissimilar from the governing dynamics of other economic systems. He views it as a just middle ground between capitalism and communism, which he mentions do not even maintain their principles in practice. He argues for the distinctiveness of an Islamic economic system in a series of fourteen separate points, writing that Islam changes the structure of economics to the point of altering even normal supply and demand relationships. This final theory observes that Islam brings discernible elements into the already existing economic structure without trying to create a wholly separate system. Charles Tripp writes “Muslims have seized upon the opportunities offered by the restless innovations of capitalist enterprise to assert new ways of being Muslim in the world.” This statement admirably summarizes the adaptability of Islam in the modern context. Many Muslims have had few problems expressing their faith within the current economic order, therefore staying true to their beliefs while remaining active citizens of their respective countries.

Conclusion

Ideas from Islamic economics adapted and integrated into a capitalist system allow those who want to pursue more Islamic decisions to do so while continuing a trend of economic prosperity derived from a proven model. A demand to practice Islamic economics as it was in the time of the Prophet is an unreasonable assertion; far better is it to be guided by the general examples and teachings of that time in adapting Islamic economics to a practical application today. As mentioned previously, Islamic economics is not an explanatory or predictive system unto itself as is capitalism. Instead, it is a moral exhortation for individuals to realize the perils that an improper practice of economics can present and to subsequently thwart these impediments hindering a just social order and economic efficiency. The discussion in the modern day should not be focused on support of capitalism to the exclusion of Islamic economics or vice versa, but rather a deeper understanding of the similarities found in each with individual countries reconciling their practical applications, an entirely achievable goal.
TO OBEY OR NOT TO OBEY? Plato addresses this question of obedience to secular authority in his Socratic dialogues Apology and Crito. On trial because of his philosophizing, Socrates claims he will obey god and commits himself to disobeying the jury’s verdict if the verdict prohibits him from philosophizing. Yet, in the second dialogue Socrates resists Crito’s pleas to flee the death sentence from Apology’s trial and instead advocates obedience. Some scholars claim these two pieces, when taken together, form an inconsistent argument. However, Crito contains not merely one voice but three: Crito, Socrates, and the personified Laws. Each voice presents a distinct argument founded on a unique view of justice.

The first argument heard in Crito contains a justice defined by obligations to friends, family, and enemies. Crito, voicing this argument, claims Socrates’ compliance to the death sentence violates justice in three ways. First, Crito claims Socrates’ escape will bring suffering to a friend – specifically Crito himself. He asserts that obligation to friends justifies disobedience to the laws. He illustrates this point by stating “we’re surely justified in running this risk to save you.” The risk Crito and others will take involves disobedience to the law. However, Crito claims that disobedience to the law to “save” a friend is justified. Second, Crito states that escape will “hasten the very sort of fate for yourself that your enemies would hasten.” He contends that helping one’s enemies “isn’t just.” Third, Crito asserts Socrates has an obligation to raise and educate his children. By not seeing “their upbringing and education through to the end” Socrates does not “choose whatever a good and brave man would choose.” Crito concludes his argument by expressing fear that the situation will seem to have been handled with cowardice.
Crito's views of justice permeate his argument. He views justice as mediated in the sphere of relationships. By forming his argument for escape in terms of kinship obligation, Crito claims kinship obligation is greater than civic obligation. Therefore, he commits Socrates to disobeying Athenian law.

Socrates, the second voice in Crito, refutes Crito's argument. First, Socrates establishes that the most important thing is living well. He then claims that living well is living justly. Next, he dismisses the concerns Crito articulates—concerns based upon a view of justice defined by relationships—as "appropriate considerations... for the majority.

Socrates then establishes the premise "one should never do injustice intentionally." He clarifies the premise by claiming "there is no difference between doing wrong and doing injustice." He states as a corollary "one must neither do injustice in return nor wrong [harm] any man." Socrates' second premise is "one should do the things one has agreed with someone to do, provided they are just." Socrates then asks Crito if escape would violate the two premises. Crito expresses his confusion regarding the question. Socrates responds by introducing the third voice in the dialogue—the Laws.

The Laws act as a voice separate and different from Socrates for three main reasons. First, Socrates presents the Laws as a distinct voice. Until this point in the conversion Socrates speaks as himself. He forms his views in questions posed to Crito and then reiterates the views. Socrates breaks this pattern by introducing a hypothetical dialogue between the Laws and himself. The use of a personified abstraction as a part of Socrates' argument is not only uncharacteristic of Socrates' prior method of dialogue in Crito but is also unique to Crito. This uncharacteristic change indicates the beginning of the Laws' arguments.

Second, Socrates articulates the Laws' Corybantic influence and persuasive power at the end of the dialogue. In response to the Laws' dialogue, Socrates states:

"That...is what I seem to hear them saying...And just like those Corybantes who think they are hearing the flutes, the echo of their arguments reverberates in me and makes me incapable of hearing anything else."

In general, madness and divine possession are associated Corybantic rites. Other Platonic passages, such as Phaedrus 228b6—c1 and Symposium 215e1-4, indicate this possession and madness leads one to endorse an argument he should not or would not otherwise endorse. Therefore, the reference to Corybantic rites indicates the Laws' argument is different from Socrates' own argument or an argument he would normally endorse. Furthermore, the arguments' echo "reverberates" or, in other translations, "buzz". In Republic, the term buzz unfavorably describes the second worse form of government, the democratic constitution. In the natural world, as in Republic, irritating, dangerous, and powerful things "buzz". In both Crito and Republic, the buzzing has the power to suppress other arguments. The Laws' arguments drown out anything else Socrates might hear, including Socrates' own voice.

Third, the Laws' values conflict with Socrates' values. From Socrates' two premises the Laws form two arguments: the argument from destruction and the argument from agreement. These arguments resemble Socrates' views in advocating a principle of non-relation and of just agreements. However, the arguments conflict with Socrates' principles.

Holding yet another distinct perception of justice, the Laws claim that Socrates will treat the Laws unjustly if he escapes. They contend that escape would deprive legal judgments of their authority. They assert that this authority is necessary for the continuance of the city. Thus, the Laws state escape is an attempt "to destroy us Laws, and the city as a whole, to the extent you can." At this point, a significant difference emerges between the Laws' view and Socrates' view of injustice. Socrates claims an injustice is wronging or harming another. If the Laws' argument is consistent with Socrates' view then the Laws only need to prove that an attempt to destroy the city harms the city. The Laws do not proceed with their argument in this way. Instead, the Laws describe a principle of non-retaliation. Unlike Socrates' principle of absolute non-retaliation, the Laws' principle rests upon inequality. To illustrate this principle, the Laws provide two examples—the parent-offspring relationship and the master-slave relationship. The Laws state they gave birth to Socrates, raised him, and educated him. They then claim Socrates is their "offspring and slave." What is just in a parent/offspring relationship and a master/slave relationship "isn't based on equality, and so you don't return whatever treatment you receive.” In the relationships illustrated, both slave and offspring are obligated to obey his respective superiors. This obligation gives the master and parent authority. The Laws claim the inequality between Athens and Socrates is even greater than the inequality in these relationships. Socrates must then "submit" to his fatherland and "undergo whatever treatment it prescribes." The Laws conclude this argument by stating "what is just...[is] to do whatever your city or fatherland commands or else persuade it as to what is really just."

This argument illustrates Socrates' and the Laws' differing views of justice. The Laws claim just actions are obedience to the Laws or a persuasion of the Laws. However, Socrates articulates what is unjust and what is illegal as two separate entities. Although Socrates never explicitly defines justice, he asserts that what is unjust is what harms. If a law prescribed one to harm another, Socrates would view this law as commanding one to do an injustice; he would not obey this law. However, the Laws' justice includes either obeying this law or persuading Athens. To understand if the Laws contradict Socrates, "persuade or obey" must be interpreted.

Scholars generally interpret this "persuade or obey" in three main ways. The first interpretation permits disobedience in the case of an unsuccessful persuasion attempt. This interpretation is inconsistent with the Laws' argument in three ways:

1. The Laws do not proceed with their argument in this way.
2. Instead, the Laws describe a principle of non-retaliation.
3. Unlike Socrates' principle of absolute non-retaliation, the Laws' principle rests upon inequality.
First, the Laws require successful persuasion. They do not say, “you must obey whatever your fatherland commands or else attempt to persuade” but instead simply state, “persuade or obey”. Second, this interpretation conflicts with the previous analogies. The analogies represent relationships in which “obedience is expected, and disobedience is set down as wrong unless it is justified by a successful attempt at persuasion.” The Laws contend that Socrates must “yield” to them; disobedience is not yielding. Third, this interpretation contradicts the Laws’ claim that escape is unjust. Socrates attempted to persuade the jury to do what was just. Socrates failed in his persuasion. The Laws claim Socrates’ disobedience to the legal sentence resulting from his failed persuasion is still unjust. This first interpretation contradicts the Laws argument.

The second interpretation views disobedience as an act of persuasion. This interpretation also conflicts with the Laws’ claim that escape is unjust. The Laws state disobedience challenges Athenian authority. A challenge to Athenian authority is an attempt to destroy Athens. Destroying Athens is unjust. Therefore, persuasion through disobedience is unjust. An action cannot be both just and unjust. This interpretation is invalid.

The third interpretation, consistent with the Law’s argument, is a “successful prior persuasion.” This interpretation commits one to “always obey-ing the law – which is why one must (successfully) persuade the law to change if one does not wish to follow the dictates of the present law.” If one always obeys the laws then one will not deprive the laws of authority and, therefore, will not attempt to destroy the city. The Laws continue the theme of authority in their analogies. In both relationships, the authority of the superior results in obedience. Under this interpretation, the Laws remain consistent in their argument by emphasizing their authority. This authority applies even if the Laws command one to harm another. Thus, the laws view of justice conflicts with Socrates’ premise that one should not do harm.

However, the Laws principle of keeping agreements conflicts with Socrates’ principle of just agreements. Socrates states “one should do the things one has agreed… provided they are just.” The actions’ justness determines whether or not an agreement should be kept. In contrast, the Laws do not address the content of the agreements made. They instead focus conditions under which the agreement emerged (without coercion, trickery, or hurry). They claim breaking an agreement with the Laws made under just terms is wrong. As in their first argument, the Laws commit Socrates to obey the laws even if the laws command one to harm another. The differing values between the Laws and Socrates are the third reason why the Laws are a voice separate and distinct from Socrates. The Laws commit Socrates to obeying all laws even if a law requires Socrates to do what he states is contrary to god’s commands. The jury is a form of Athenian legal authority. Therefore, the Law’s argument is inconsistent with Socrates’ stance in Apology as well as his stance in Crito.

Socrates, however, is consistent in both actions and statements throughout Crito and Apology. In Apology, he states he will “obey the god rather that you [jury].” He then claims his service to the god—his philosophizing—benefits the city more so than any good ever received by the city. Socrates’ hypothetical disobedience to the jury, then, would benefit the city while not harming any man. Furthermore, his disobedience would not harm Athens in this circumstance. Socrates asserts doing injustice harms oneself. If the Laws force a citizen to do an injustice then the Laws harm that citizen. Therefore, Laws commit injustice; the Laws harm themselves. By disobeying an unjust law, Socrates prevents the Laws from harming themselves. Since Socrates holds “nothing bad can happen to a good man,” his aversion to an escape attempt does not inadvertently harm the Laws. Thus, Socrates willingness to disobey a law in the Apology and to submit to the death sentence matches his first premise in Crito. Since the hypothetical law would require an unjust act, Socrates’ agreement with Athens to obey its laws is void. His statement on trial is consistent with his second premise in Crito.

The compelling force behind Socrates’ arguments and actions remains consistent as well. Socrates, in Apology, states he will “obey the god”. He offers his avoidance of political service and his dedication to philosophizing as an example of this obedience. In Crito, Socrates’ continues in his obedience to the god. He remains in prison not because of the Laws’ or Crito’s argument but because “that’s the way the god is leading us.” Throughout both works Socrates, obedient to the god, remains consistent in his words and actions.

By forming arguments for or against obedience around justice, Crito and Apology ask not merely whether to obey or not to obey but ask what justice is. Each voice in Crito argues for Socrates to act justly; yet each argues differently. Crito’s justice of obligation to family, friends, and enemies demands escape; the Laws insistence on justice as absolute obedience to government denies Socrates this option. Socrates endorses neither argument, instead submitting to his own view of justice.