



Xenophon (-430,-354)¹ recalled the apologue² of Prodicus of Ceos, the sophist, and Socrates told it to his disciple Aristippus. This tale comes under varied denominations, of which “Hercules at the Crossroads” is to be preferred.

It is strongly reminiscent of the axiological³ metaphor of Y, a favourite of philosophers from Pythagoras to Kant.

Socrates narrated that Hercules, as he was entering manhood, saw two goddesses who were coming his way. One was modest: she was *Arete*⁴ who personified virtue; she advised him to take the right path that would make him “a right good doer of high and noble deeds”. The other one was provocative. She was *Kakia* who personified vice. She held out to him the prospect of a life of permanent enjoyment. She advised him to take the left path.

Having intensely pondered the issue, Hercules chose the right path.

Socrates asked Aristippus to “keep Prodicus’ words in mind”.

In this tale of deliberation, Hercules is more than the mythical hero of strength. He becomes an ethical hero, at the crux where everything takes shape and unfolds - the seat of meaning where it is up to each individual to find his bearings. None of us finds it easy to choose consistently the right path, at each crossroads of our lives, as we are torn between our transcendent aspirations and the limits of our contingency.

Indeed, there is something of Camus in Hercules and something of Hercules in Sisyphus.

Man is a creature of values, within a culture which is a systematic sum of the values specific to a given human group, of which he – Man - is the ultimate value. Value in itself is worthless. It only exists within the social group which positions it between desire and usefulness. Thus, value is the distinction between what can be desired and what ought to be desirable.

Man lives simultaneously FOR and BY values: FOR them because they are intrinsically good, BY them because they are useful day after day.

The choices which we are bound to make and/or which we oblige ourselves to make are based on values, and we are free – in the words of our rituals, “...of our firm and free will...” – to follow either *Arete* or *Kakia* at every crossroad.

Insofar as the path of initiation is that of hermeneutics⁵ and has a heuristic⁶ character, it creates our autonomy, which in turn orders the priorities of our values, in a dialectic relationship with heteronomy⁷, insofar as the latter prioritises the values of the Other. It is part of the building of the “I” and the “Other”, of the building of the inner Temple and of the outer Temple.

What then are the common values of the Masons of the Grand Orient of France, when they are, in addition, members of the Grand College of Scottish Rites? Which effects result from the initiation process in terms of our own priority scale of values?

The value based sociological survey⁸ with which you are presented and to which you are free to participate will attempt to answer those questions.

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Translated by JPGNT

¹ *Memorabilia*, Xénophon, II, 1, 21-22.

² Apologue - An allegorical story intended to convey a useful lesson - OED

³ Axiology is the philosophical study of value.

⁴ Arete (ἀρετή) is the Greek term for excellence. The word *aristocracy* is derived from it.

⁵ The art or science of interpretation - OED

⁶ Heuristic *adj.* - Serving to find out - OED

⁷ Autonomy is the faculty to act on one’s own, heteronomy means obeying the dictates of outside entities.

⁸ <https://www.soscisurvey.de/SourceValeur/>