

# The Importance Of The Perfect Not Being Allowed To Be The Enemy of The Good

The Greeks of Italy, on the contrary, were not greatly interested in physical change or in natural processes. They were addicted to the sitting posture. In art they are represented as comfortably seated with a slender rod or radius in the hand, with which they draw figures on a sanded floor. Counters and writing tablets were also at hand. The advances made by them were in the domains of geometry and arithmetic and these advances were so remarkable as to capture the imagination of the contemporary world and to overshadow for a time the progress which had been made by their Ionian brethren. Geometry in particular, though itself a positivistic study, inspired in the minds of men a new movement that was genuinely romantic.

I think closely related:

It was the romantic aspect of the new knowledge that captivated Plato, who was no more than up-to-date as a mathematician himself. In geometry he seemed to see absolute reason contemplating absolute truth, perfect precision of concept joined with finality of demonstration.

He began to transfer the precise concepts of geometry to ethics and politics just as modern thinkers transferred the concepts of biological evolution to history and sociology. Especially enticing was the concept which we know as definition. This was a creation of the geometers; they created it by defining straight lines, equilateral triangles, and other regular figures. If these can be defined, Plato tacitly reasoned, why not also justice, piety, temperance, and other virtues? This is reasoning by analogy, one of the trickiest of logical procedures. It holds good only between sets of true similars. Virtues and triangles are not true similars. It does not follow, therefore, because equilateral triangles can be precisely defined, that justice can be defined in the same way. Modern jurists warn against defining justice; it is what the court says it is from time to time.

The deceptiveness of **analogy**, however, does not prevent it from flourishing, and Plato committed himself to the use of it unreservedly. In this he was abetted by a happy coincidence. The method of analysis by question and answer, developed by Socrates recently before, com-

Note: This kind of reference to Italians and Ionians always confuses me. I am not sure whether I am misreading DeWitt's labels here or he is talking colloquially, or what, because according to Laertius Epicurus is listed with the Italians and Plato with the Ionians. Then again Aristotle is an Ionian and he disagreed a lot with Plato. But those labels aren't really relevant to the current discussion.