

Not Out of Africa

Was Greek Culture Stolen from Africa? Modern Myth vs. Ancient History

Excerpted from her Book *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*

Why I wrote the book. In the fall of 1991 I was asked to write a review-article for *The New Republic* about Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* and its relation to the Afrocentrist movement. The assignment literally changed my life. Once I began to work on the article I realized that here was a subject that needed all the attention, and more, that I could give to it. Although I had been completely unaware of it, there was in existence a whole literature that denied that the ancient Greeks were the inventors of democracy, philosophy, and science. There were books in circulation that claimed that Socrates and Cleopatra were of African descent, and that Greek philosophy had actually been stolen from Egypt. Not only were these books being read and widely distributed; some of these ideas were being taught in schools and even in universities.

Ordinarily, if someone has a theory which involves a radical departure from what the experts have professed, he is expected to defend his position by providing evidence in its support. But no one seemed to think it was appropriate to ask for evidence from the instructors who claimed that the Greeks stole their philosophy from Egypt.

Normally, if one has a question about a text that another instructor is using, one simply asks why he or she is using that book. But since this conventional line of inquiry was closed to me, I had to wait till I could raise my questions in a more public context. That opportunity came in February 1993, when Dr. Yosef A. A. ben-Jochannan was invited to give Wellesley's Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial lecture. Posters described Dr. ben-Jochannan as a "distinguished Egyptologist," and indeed that is how he was introduced by the then President of Wellesley College. But I knew from my research in Afrocentric literature that he was not what scholars would ordinarily describe as an Egyptologist, that is a scholar of Egyptian language and civilization. Rather, he was an extreme Afrocentrist, author of many books describing how Greek civilization was stolen from Africa, how Aristotle robbed the library of Alexandria, and how the true Jews are Africans like himself.

After Dr. ben-Jochannan made these same assertions once again in his lecture, I asked him during the question period why he said that Aristotle had come to Egypt with Alexander, and had stolen his philosophy from the Library at Alexandria, when that Library had only been built after his death. Dr. ben-Jochannan was unable to answer the question, and said that he resented the tone of the inquiry. Several students came up to me after the lecture and accused me of racism, suggesting that I had been brainwashed by white historians. But others stayed to hear me out, and I assured Dr. ben-Jochannan that I simply wanted to know what his evidence was: so far as I knew, and I had studied the subject, Aristotle never went to Egypt, and while the date of the Library of Alexandria is not known precisely, it was certainly only built some years after the city was founded, which was after both Aristotle's and Alexander's deaths.

A lecture at which serious questions could not be asked, and in fact were greeted with hostility -- the occasion seemed more like a political rally than an academic event. As if that were not disturbing enough in itself, there was also the strange silence on the part of many of my faculty colleagues. Several of these were well aware that what Dr. ben-Jochannan was saying was factually wrong. One of them said later that she found the lecture so "hopeless" that she decided to say nothing. Were they afraid of being called racists? If so, their behavior was understandable, but not entirely responsible. Didn't we as educators owe it to our students, all our students, to see that they got the best education they could possibly get? And that clearly was what they were not getting in a lecture where they were being told myths disguised as history, and where discussion and analysis had apparently been forbidden.

Good as the myths they were hearing may have made these students feel, so long as they never left the Afrocentric environment in which they were being nurtured and sheltered, they were being systematically deprived of the most important features of a university

education. They were not learning how to question themselves and others, they were not learning to distinguish facts from fiction, nor in fact were they learning how to think for themselves. Their instructors had forgotten, while the rest of us sat by and did nothing about it, that students do not come to universities to be indoctrinated --at least in a free society.

Was Socrates Black?

I first learned about the notion that Socrates was black several years ago, from a student in my second-year Greek course on Plato's Apology, his account of Socrates' trial and conviction. Throughout the entire semester the student had regarded me with sullen hostility. A year or so later she apologized. She explained that she thought I had been concealing the truth about Socrates' origins. In a course in Afro-American studies she had been told that he was black, and my silence about his African ancestry seemed to her to be a confirmation of the Eurocentric arrogance her instructor had warned her about. After she had taken my course, the student pursued the question on her own, and was satisfied that I had been telling her the truth: so far as we know, Socrates was ethnically no different from other Athenians.

What had this student learned in her course in Afro-American studies? The notion that Socrates was black is based on two different kinds of inference. The first "line of proof" is based on inference from possibility. Why couldn't an Athenian have African ancestors? That of course would have been possible; almost anything is possible. But it is another question whether or not it was probable. Few prominent Athenians claim to have had foreign ancestors of any sort. Athenians were particularly fastidious about their own origins. In Socrates' day, they did not allow Greeks from other city-states to become naturalized Athenian citizens, and they were even more careful about the non-Greeks or barbaroi. Since Socrates was an Athenian citizen, his parents must have been Athenians, as he himself says they were.

Another reason why I thought it unlikely that Socrates and/or his immediate ancestors were foreigners is that no contemporary calls attention to anything extraordinary in his background. If he had been a foreigner, one of his enemies, or one of the comic poets, would have been sure to point it out. The comic poets never missed an opportunity to make fun of the origins of Athenian celebrities. Socrates was no exception; he is lampooned by Aristophanes in his comedy the Clouds. If Socrates and/or his parents had had dark skin, some of his contemporaries would have been likely to mention it, because this, and not just his eccentric ideas about the gods, and the voice that spoke to him alone, would have distinguished him from the rest of the Athenians. Unless, of course, he could not be distinguished from other Athenians because they all had dark skin; but then if they did, why did they not make themselves bear a closer resemblance the Ethiopians in their art?

Was Cleopatra Black?

Until recently, no one ever asked whether Cleopatra might have had an African ancestor, because our surviving ancient sources identify her as a Macedonian Greek. Her ancestors, the Ptolemies, were descended from one of Alexander's generals. After Alexander's death in 323 B. C., these generals divided up among themselves the territory in the Mediterranean that Alexander had conquered. The name Cleopatra was one of the names traditionally given to women in the royal family; officially our Cleopatra (69-30 BC) was Cleopatra VII, the daughter of Ptolemy XII and his sister. Cleopatra VII herself followed the family practice of marrying within the family. She married her two brothers (Ptolemy XIII and XIV) in succession (after the first died in suspicious circumstances, she had the second murdered). Her first language was Greek; but she was also the first member of the Ptolemaic line who was able to speak Egyptian. She also wore Egyptian dress, and was shown in art in the dress of the goddess Isis. She chose to portray herself as an Egyptian not because she was Egyptian, but because she was ambitious to stay in power. In her surviving portraits on coins and in sculpture she appears to be impressive rather than beautiful, Mediterranean in appearance, with straight hair and a hooked nose. Of course these portraits on metal and stone give no indication of the color of her skin.

The only possibility that she might not have been a full-blooded Macedonian Greek arises from the fact that we do not know the precise identity of one member of her family tree. We do not know who her grandmother was on her father's side. Her grandmother was the mistress (not the wife) of her grandfather, Ptolemy IX. Because nothing is known about

this person, the assumption has always been that she was a Macedonian Greek, like the other members of Ptolemy's court. Like other Greeks, the Ptolemies were wary of foreigners. They kept themselves apart from the native population, with brothers usually marrying sisters, or uncles marrying nieces, or in one case a father marrying his daughter (Ptolemy IX and Cleopatra Berenice III). Because the Ptolemies seemed to prefer to marry among themselves, even incestuously, it has always been assumed that Cleopatra's grandmother was closely connected with the family. If she had been a foreigner, one of the Roman writers of the time would have mentioned it in their invectives against Cleopatra as an enemy of the Roman state. These writers were supporters of Octavian (later known as Augustus) who defeated Cleopatra's forces in the battle of Actium in 31 B.C.

Does Racial Identity Matter?

The question of race matters only insofar as it is necessary to show that no classicists or ancient historians have tried to conceal the truth about the origins of the Greek people or the ancestry of certain famous ancient figures. It has been suggested that classicists have been reluctant to ask questions about Greek origins, and that we have been so "imbued with conventional preconceptions and patterns of thought" that we are unlikely to question the basic premises of our discipline. But even though we may be more reluctant to speculate about our own field than those outside it might be, none of us has any cultural "territory" in the ancient world that we are trying to insulate from other ancient cultures.

Did ancient Greek religion and culture derive from Egypt?

The idea that Greek religion and philosophy has Egyptian origins derives, at least in part, from the writings of ancient Greek historians. In the fifth century BC Herodotus was told by Egyptian priests that the Greeks owed many aspects of their culture to the older and vastly impressive civilization of the Egyptians. Egyptian priests told Diodorus some of the same stories four centuries later. The church fathers in the second and third centuries AD also were eager to emphasize the dependency of Greece on the earlier cultures of the Egyptians and the Hebrews. They were eager to establish direct links between their civilization and that of Egypt because Egypt was a vastly older culture, with elaborate religious customs and impressive monuments. But despite their enthusiasm for Egypt and its material culture (an enthusiasm that was later revived in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe), they failed to understand Egyptian religion and the purpose of many Egyptian customs.

Classical scholars tend to be skeptical about the claims of the Greek historians because much of what these writers say does not conform to the facts as they are now known from the modern scholarship on ancient Egypt. For centuries Europeans had believed that the ancient historians knew that certain Greek religious customs and philosophical interests derived from Egypt. But two major discoveries changed that view. The first concerned a group of ancient philosophical treatises attributed to Hermes Trismegistus; these had throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance been thought of as Egyptian and early. But in 1614 the French scholar Isaac Casaubon demonstrated that the treatises were actually late and basically Greek. The second discovery was the decipherment of hieroglyphics, the official system of Egyptian writing, completed by 1836. Before decipherment, scholars had been compelled to rely on Greek sources for their understanding of Egyptian history and civilization. Once they were able to read real Egyptian texts, and could disregard the fanciful interpretations of hieroglyphics that had been circulating since late antiquity, it became clear to them that the relation of Egyptian to Greek culture was less close than they had imagined. Egyptian belonged to the Afroasiatic language family, while Greek was an Indo-European language, akin to Sanskrit and European languages like Latin.

On the basis of these new discoveries, European scholars realized that they could no longer take at face value what Herodotus, Diodorus, and the Church fathers had to say about Greece's debt to Egypt. Once it was possible to read Egyptian religious documents, and to see how the Egyptians themselves described their gods and told their myths, scholars could see that the ancient Greeks' accounts of Egyptian religion were superficial, and even misleading. Apparently Greek writers, despite their great admiration for Egypt, looked at Egyptian civilization through cultural blinkers that kept them from understanding any practices or customs that were significantly different from

their own. The result was a portrait of Egypt that was both astigmatic and deeply Hellenized. Greek writers operated under other handicaps as well. They did not have access to records; there was no defined system of chronology. They could not read Egyptian inscriptions or question a variety of witnesses because they did not know the language. Hence they were compelled to exaggerate the importance of such resemblances as they could see or find.

On the Origins of the Egyptians Recent work on skeletons and DNA suggests that the people who settled in the Nile valley, like all of humankind, came from somewhere south of the Sahara; they were not (as some nineteenth-century scholars had supposed) invaders from the North. See Bruce G. Trigger, "The Rise of Civilization in Egypt," *Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982), vol I, pp 489-90; S. O. Y. Keita, "Studies and Comments on Ancient Egyptian Biological Relationships," *History in Africa* 20 (1993) 129-54.

Did the theory of the transmigration of souls come from Egypt?

Because he tended to rely on such analogies as he could find, Herodotus inevitably made some false conjectures. Herodotus thought that Pythagoras learned about the transmigration of souls from Egypt, when in fact the Egyptians did not believe in the transmigration of souls, as their careful and elaborate burial procedures clearly indicate. Herodotus tells us that he wrote down what the Egyptians told him; but when they spoke, what did he hear? Since he did not know Egyptian, his informants could have been Greeks living in the Greek colony of Naucratis in the Nile Delta, or Egyptians who knew some Greek. How well-informed were his informants? On the question of origins, at least, it seems that neither group had any more than a superficial understanding of the other's culture. Perhaps someone explained to him about the Egyptian "modes of existence," in which a human being could manifest itself both materially, or immaterially, as ka or ba or a name, and that death was not an end, but a threshold leading to a new form of life. Belief in these varied modes of existence required that bodies be preserved after death, hence the Egyptian practice of mummification. Greeks, on the other hand, believed that the soul was separated from the body at death, and disposed of bodies either by burial or cremation. In any case, there is no reason to assume that Pythagoras or other Greeks who believed in transmigration, like the Orphics and/or the philosopher-poet Empedocles, got their ideas from anyone else: notions of transmigration have developed independently in other parts of the world.

Did Plato Study in Egypt?

Plato never says in any of his writings that he went to Egypt, and there is no reference to such a visit in the semi-biographical Seventh Epistle. But in his dialogues he refers to some Egyptian myths and customs. Plato, of course, was not a historian, and the rather superficial knowledge of Egypt displayed in his dialogues, along with vague chronology, is more characteristic of historical fiction than of history. In fact, anecdotes about his visit to Egypt only turn up in writers of the later Hellenistic period. What better way to explain his several references to Egypt than to assume that the author had some first-hand knowledge of the customs he describes? For authors dating from the fourth century and earlier, ancient biographers were compelled to use as their principal source material the author's own works. Later biographers add details to the story of Plato's Egyptian travels in order to provide aetiologies for the "Egyptian" reference in his writings. The most ironic anecdote of all is preserved by Clement of Alexandria: Plato studied in Egypt with Hermes the "Thrice Great" (Trismegistus). This is tantamount to saying that Plato studied with himself after his death. The works of Hermes could not have been written without the conceptual vocabulary developed by Plato and Aristotle, and is deeply influenced not just by Plato, but by the writings of Neoplatonist philosophers in the early centuries AD. In any case, whoever these teachers were, Plato seems never to have learned from them anything that is characteristically Egyptian, at least so far as we know about Egyptian theology from Egyptian sources. Instead, Plato's notion of the Egyptians remains similar to that of other Athenians; he did not so much change the Athenian notion of Egyptian culture as enrich and idealize it, so that it could provide a dramatic and instructive contrast with Athenian customs in his dialogues.

Was there ever such a thing as an "Egyptian Mystery System?"

Even after nineteenth-century scholars had shown that the reports of Greek visitors to

Egypt misunderstood and misrepresented what they saw, the myth that Greek philosophy derived from Egypt is still in circulation. The notion of an Egyptian legacy was preserved in the literature and ritual of Freemasonry. It was from that source that Afrocentrists learned about it, and then sought to find confirmation for the primacy of Egypt over Greece in the fantasies of ancient writers. In order to show that Greek philosophy is in reality stolen Egyptian philosophy, Afrocentrist writers assume that there was in existence from earliest times an "Egyptian Mystery System," which was copied by the Greeks. The existence of this "Mystery System" is integral to the notion that Greek philosophy was stolen, because it provides a reason for assuming that Greek philosophers had a particular reason for studying in Egypt, and for claiming that what they later wrote about in Greek was originally Egyptian philosophy. But in reality, the notion of an Egyptian Mystery System is a relatively modern fiction, based on ancient sources that are distinctively Greek, or Greco-Roman, and from the early centuries AD.

In their original form, ancient mysteries had nothing to do with schools or particular courses of study; rather, the ritual was intended to put the initiate into contact with the divinity, and if special preparation or rituals were involved, it was to familiarize the initiate with the practices and liturgy of that particular cult. The origin of the connection of Mysteries to education in fact dates only to the eighteenth century. It derives from a particular work of European fiction, published in 1731. This was the three-volume work *Sethos, a History or Biography, based on Unpublished Memoirs of Ancient Egypt*, by the Abbé Jean Terrasson (1670-1750), a French priest, who was Professor of Greek at the Collège de France. Although now completely forgotten, the novel was widely read in the eighteenth century. Of course Terrasson did not have access to any Egyptian information about Egypt, since hieroglyphics were not to be deciphered until more than a century later.

Why claim that Greek philosophy was stolen from Egypt?

Perhaps the most influential Afrocentrist text is *Stolen Legacy*, a work that has been in wide circulation since its publication in 1954. Its author, George G. M. James, writes that "the term Greek philosophy, to begin with is a misnomer, for there is no such philosophy in existence." He argues that the Greeks "did not possess the native ability essential to the development of philosophy." Rather, he states that "the Greeks were not the authors of Greek philosophy, but the Black people of North Africa, The Egyptians." It is not hard to understand why James wishes to give credit for the Greek achievement to the Egyptians, even if there is little or no historical foundation for his claims. Like the other nationalistic myths, the story of a "Stolen Legacy" both offers an explanation for past suffering, and provides a source of ethnic pride.

But although the myth may encourage and perhaps even "empower" African-Americans, its use has a destructive side, which cannot and should not be overlooked. First of all, it offers them a "story" instead of history. It also suggests that African-Americans need to learn only what they choose to believe about the past. But in so doing, the Afrocentric myth seeks to shelter them from learning what all other ethnic groups must learn, and indeed, face up to, namely the full scope of their history.

What people on earth have had a completely glorious history? While we point to the great achievements of the Greeks, anyone who has studied ancient Greek civilization knows that they also made terrible and foolish mistakes. Isn't treating African-Americans differently from the rest of humankind just another form of segregation and condescension? Implied discrimination is the most destructive aspect of Afrocentrism, but there are other serious problems as well. Teaching the myth of the Stolen Legacy as if it were history robs the ancient Greeks and their modern descendants of a heritage that rightly belongs to them. Why discriminate against them when discrimination is the issue? In addition, the myth deprives the ancient Egyptians of their proper history and robs them of their actual legacy. The Egypt of the myth of the Stolen Legacy is a wholly European Egypt, as imagined by Greek and Roman writers, and further elaborated in eighteenth-century France. Ancient Egyptian civilization deserves to be remembered (and respected) for what it was, and not for what Europeans, ancient and modern, have imagined it to be.

What is the evidence for a "Stolen Legacy?"

James's idea of ancient Egypt is fundamentally the imaginary "Mystical Egypt" of

Freemasonry. He speaks of grades of initiation. In these Mysteries, as the Freemasons imagined them, Neophyte initiates must learn self-control and self-knowledge. He believes that Moses was an initiate into the Egyptian mysteries, and that Socrates reached the grade of Master Mason. In his description of the Greek philosophy, he emphasizes the Four Elements that play such a key role in Terrasson's Memphis and Masonic initiation ceremonies. He speaks of the Masonic symbol of the Open Eye, which based on an Egyptian hieroglyph but in Masonry has come specifically to represent the Master Mind. As in the University/Mystery system invented by Terrasson, Egyptian temples are used as libraries and observatories.

What then are the Greeks supposed to have stolen from the Egyptians? Are there any texts in existence that be found to verify the claim that Greek philosophy was stolen from Egypt? How was the "transfer" of Egyptian materials to Greece accomplished? If we examine what James says about the way in which the "transfer" was supposed to have been carried out, we will find that that few or no historical data can be summoned to support it. In fact, in order to construct his argument, James overlooked or ignored much existing evidence.

Did Aristotle raid the Library at Alexandria?

No ancient source says that Alexander and Aristotle raided the Library at Alexandria. That they do not do so is not surprising, because it is unlikely that Aristotle ever went there. Aristotle was Alexander's tutor when Alexander was young, but he did not accompany him on his military campaign. Even if he had gone there, it is hard to see how he could have stolen books from the library in Alexandria. Although Alexandria was founded in 331 BC, it did not begin to function as a city until after 323. Aristotle died in 322. The library was assembled around 297 under the direction of Demetrius of Phaleron, a pupil of Aristotle's. Most of the books it contained were in Greek.

Did Aristotle plagiarize Egyptian sources?

If Aristotle had stolen his ideas from the Egyptians, as James asserts, James should be able to provide parallel Egyptian and Greek texts showing frequent verbal correspondences. As it is, he can only come up with a vague similarity between two titles. One is Aristotle's treatise On the Soul, and the other the modern English name of a collection of Egyptian texts, The Book of the Dead. These funerary texts, which the Egyptians themselves called the Book of Coming Forth by Day, are designed to protect the soul during its dangerous journey through Duat, the Egyptian underworld, on its way to life of bliss in the Field of Reeds. Both Aristotle and the Egyptians believed in the notion of a "soul." But there the similarity ends. Even a cursory glance at a translation of the Book of the Dead reveals that it is not a philosophical treatise, but rather a series of ritual prescriptions to ensure the soul's passage to the next world. It is completely different from Aristotle's abstract consideration of the nature of the soul. James fails to mention that the two texts cannot be profitably compared, because their aims and methods are so different. Instead, he accounts for the discrepancy by claiming that Aristotle's theory is only a "very small portion" of the Egyptian "philosophy" of the soul, as described in the Egyptian Book of the Dead. On that basis, one could claim that any later writer plagiarized from any earlier writer who touched on the same subject. But why not assume instead that the later writer was influenced by the earlier writer, or even came up with the some of the same ideas independently, especially if those ideas are widespread, like the notion that human beings have souls?

James also alleges that Aristotle's theory of matter was taken from the so-called Memphite Theology. The Memphite Theology is a religious document inscribed on a stone tablet by Egyptian priests in the eighth century BC, but said to have been copied from an ancient papyrus. The archaic language of the text suggests that the original dates from sometime in the second millennium BC. According to James, Aristotle took from the Memphite theology his doctrine that matter, motion, and time are eternal, along with the principle of opposites, and the concept of the unmoved mover. James does not say how Aristotle would have known about this inscription, which was at the time located in Memphis and not in the Library of Alexandria, or explain how he would have been able to read it. But even if Aristotle had had some way of finding out about it, he would have had no use for it in his philosophical writings. The Memphis text, like the Egyptian Book of the Dead, is a work of a totally different character from any of Aristotle's treatises.

The Memphite text describes the creation of the world as then known (that is, Upper and Lower Egypt). It relates how Ptah's mind (or "heart") and thought (or "tongue") created the universe and all living creatures in it: "for every word of the god came about through what the heart devised and the tongue commanded." From one of his manifestations, the primordial waters of chaos, the sun-god Atum was born. When Ptah has finished creating the universe, he rests from his labors: "Ptah was satisfied after he had made all things and all divine words."

In form and in substance this account has virtually nothing in common with Aristotle's abstract theology. In fact, in *Metaphysics* Book 11, Aristotle discards the traditional notion of a universe that is created by a divinity or divinities, in favor of a metaphysical argument. If there is eternal motion, there is eternal substance, and behind that, an immaterial and eternal source of activity, whose existence can be deduced from the eternal circular motion of the heavens. The source of this activity is what is called in English translation the "unmoved mover." All that this theory has in common with the Memphite theology is a concern with creation of the universe. On the same insubstantial basis, it would be possible to argue that Aristotle stole his philosophy from the story of creation in the first book of *Genesis*.

Is there a diversity of truths?

There are of course many possible interpretations of the truth, but some things are simply not true. It is not true that there was no Holocaust. There was a Holocaust, although we may disagree about the numbers of people killed. Likewise, it is not true that the Greeks stole their philosophy from Egypt; rather, it is true that the Greeks were influenced in various ways over a long period of time by their contact with the Egyptians. But then, what culture at any time has not been influenced by other cultures, and what exactly do we mean by "influence"? If we talk about Greek philosophy as a "Stolen Legacy," which the Greeks swiped from Egyptian universities, we are not telling the truth, but relating a story, or a myth, or a tall tale. But if we talk about Egyptian influence on Greece, we are discussing an historical issue.

In historical and scientific discussions it is possible to distinguish degrees, and to be more or less accurate. As a classicist, I may overemphasize the achievement of the Greeks because I do not know enough about the rest of the Mediterranean world; Egyptologists may be inclined to make the same mistake in the opposite direction. We recognize that no historian can write without some amount of bias; that is why history must always be rewritten. But not all bias amounts to distortion, or is equivalent to indoctrination. If I am aware that I am likely to be biased for any number of reasons, and try to compensate for them, the result should be very different in quality and character from what I would say if I were consciously setting about to achieve a particular political goal.

Drawing a clear distinction between motivations and evidence has a direct bearing on the question of academic freedom. When it comes to deciding what one can or cannot say in class the question of ethnicity or of motivations, whether personal or cultural, is or ought to be irrelevant. What matters is whether what one says is supported by facts and evidence, texts or formulae. The purpose of diversity, at least in academe, is to ensure that instruction does not become a vehicle for indoctrinating students in the values of the majority culture, or for limiting the curriculum to the study of the history and literature of the majority culture. That means that it is essential for a university to consider developments outside of Europe and North America, and to assess the achievements of non-European cultures with respect and sympathy.

It is another question whether or not diversity should be applied to the truth. Are there, can there be, multiple, diverse "truths?" If there are, which "truth" should win? The one that is most loudly argued or most persuasively phrased? Diverse "truths" are possible only if "truth" is understood to mean something like "point of view." But even then not every point of view, no matter how persuasively it is put across, or with what intensity it is argued, can be equally valid. The notion of diversity does not extend to truth.

Students of the modern world may think it is a matter of indifference whether or not Aristotle stole his philosophy from Egypt. They may believe that even if the story is not true, it can be used to serve a positive purpose. But the question, and many others like

it, should be a matter of serious concern to everyone, because if you assert that he did steal his philosophy, you are prepared to ignore or to conceal a substantial body of historical evidence that proves the contrary. Once you start doing that, you can have no scientific or even social-scientific discourse, nor can you have a community, or a university.

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