

15th May 2021

Gradations

**“It is not probable therefore that he wrote any thing:
all was communicated orally, by such gradations,
and with such discretion, as he might think fit to adopt and to exercise.”**

William Godwin, The Lives of the Necromancers (of Pythagoras)

Recently on a cycle-ride I got wet. Not damp, showered on, or soaked, but absolutely drenched to the skin, or *fair drookit*, as we would say in Scots. It was an afternoon when the sun was shining and most of the sky was blue. But I should have noticed the clouds over Fife. I *should* have checked the weather forecast. But I didn't! So, I got *very* wet indeed!

There are gradations of getting wet, and any number of words in the English language to describe them. There are gradations for being cold too, and being hot, and feeling ill, and being hungry, and feeling down – and lots of words to describe them as well. We live with gradations, so we find ways to express that. Different people will describe their place in each gradation in their own way. But usually, we understand what they mean.

Are there any absolutes, then, things we experience which have no gradations? I think there are. There may be any number of words available to us to describe these, but that only gives us a variety of ways of expressing the same thing. Let me suggest two such absolutes: love and justice. We can try to explain what love means to us, and how we feel about it. But love is an absolute. I love my three children differently. But my love for each of them is unconditional and complete of itself. It has no gradations. It's different from the love I have for my wife, or a friend, or my sister. But each of these is *equally* absolute. I love them all completely.

It's the same with justice. There might be any number of gradations for *in*-justice, but justice in every situation is absolute. From play-ground bullying to the Supreme Court, from family issues to LGBTQ rights, justice is absolute. There are no grey areas, no gradations.

Let's be a Pythagoras and communicate with gradations – *and* discretion – when we need to, or have to. But when it comes to love and justice, let's celebrate the absolute, and work towards ensuring that everyone knows what they mean and the benefits they bring.

A prayer for today

Thank you, loving God, that there are no gradations in your love for me. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>