

*Hybris, ancient and modern:  
Ancient Greek lessons in life and leadership*

7 June 2019, Dresden  
Programme

9.30-10.30 a.m.	Douglas Cairns / Mirko Canevaro (University of Edinburgh) Introduction
10.30-11.20 a.m.	Kleanthis Matzouranis (University of Edinburgh) Identity Leadership, <i>hybris</i> , and the Paradox of Alcibiades
11.20-11.40 a.m.	Coffee break
11.40-12.30 p.m.	Moritz Hinsch (Humboldt-Universität Berlin) Profits of honour: Justice and moneymaking in classical Greece
12.30-1.20 p.m.	Owen Kelly (University of Edinburgh) The humbling of the Scottish banking industry during the financial crisis: <i>hybris</i> , financialization and some Aristotelian responses
1.20.-2.00 p.m.	Lunch break
2.00-2.50 p.m.	Nick Bouras (King's College London) Medical & Biological Perspectives of Hubristic Behaviour
2.50.-3.40 p.m.	Eugene Sadler-Smith (University of Surrey) / Tim Wray (Surrey Business School) Hubristic Leadership: Person and Process Perspectives
3.40-4.00 p.m.	Coffee break
4.00-4.50 p.m.	Constantine Sedikides (University of Southampton) To Be Truthful or to Be Wonderful? The Rocky Road to Self-Knowledge
4.50-5.40 p.m.	Closing remarks

## ***Abstracts***

### **Kleanthis Matzouranis (University of Edinburgh) Identity Leadership, *hybris*, and the Paradox of Alcibiades**

'They crave for him, they hate him, and they want to have him'. This line by the comic poet Aristophanes (*Frogs*, 1425) best encapsulates the conflicting sentiments of the Athenians for Alcibiades, the (in)famous Athenian politician and leader of the Sicilian Expedition. My paper explores this paradoxical relationship by using the insights of identity leadership theory. I argue that the ambivalent attitude of the Athenians towards Alcibiades was a result of his complex interaction with two central aspects of Athenian social identity. Insofar as the Athenians perceived themselves as an imperialist city, Alcibiades was a 'prototypical' Athenian in that he embodied and articulated the most extreme form of Athenian imperialism. Insofar as the Athenians perceived themselves as 'middling' citizens, however, Alcibiades' private and public conduct (couched by Thucydides in the language of transgression and *hybris*) was an open affront against the dominant egalitarian political ethos. The analysis of Alcibiades' mutable relationship with the Athenian people shows that leadership, far from being an attribute that leaders possess, is a dynamic process of interaction between leader and followers based on a sense of shared group membership. Thus, any behaviour perceived by followers as transgressive threatens the leader's ability to influence: even the most prototypical and effective leaders need to show proper respect to the values and norms espoused by the group they lead.

### **Moritz Hinsch (Humboldt-Universität Berlin) Profits of honour: Justice and moneymaking in classical Greece**

In the long drawn-out "battle of the ancient economy" (K. Hopkins) moral norms and commercial profit-seeking have usually been arrayed on opposing lines of the battlefield. Since 'primitivists' cited ancient Greek ethics to substantiate their minimalist view of the Greek commerce, the 'modernists' denounced these ethics as elite-biased figments of philosophers. In my paper, I will take another look at the key sources of this debate and argue that they offer clues to move beyond the conventional dichotomy of ethics and economics: While concepts of honour and justice were strongly influenced by the experience of commercial dealings, they were also seen as a vital components of such dealings. This interdependence of moral norms and business practices fits well with a new understanding of 'embeddedness' as a two-way process.

### **Owen Kelly (University of Edinburgh) The humbling of the Scottish banking industry during the financial crisis: *hybris*, financialization and some Aristotelian responses**

Both large international banks in Scotland suffered enormous setbacks during the financial crisis that began in 2008, caused by vainglorious overreach. The definitive historical work on one of them is titled 'Hubris'. This paper examines the hubristic nature of both companies at the peak of their 'success' and considers the relationship between that and the phenomenon of financialization. It concludes with some reflections on Aristotle's economic and moral philosophy and how things might have turned out differently if the banks' managers and shareholders had thought about his ideas more carefully.

**Nick Bouras (King's College London)**

### **Medical & Biological Perspectives of Hubristic Behaviour**

A distinctive personality change, which has been described as 'Hubris syndrome', is often seen in association with prolonged tenure of power. Hubristic behaviour is a complex multidimensional problem with deleterious effect on politics and organisations, in a way that illustrates the ubiquity of the problem, as well as its potential for serious harm. Some possible medical and biological determinants of hubristic behaviour have been expressed in the literature that are critically presented.

**Eugene Sadler-Smith (University of Surrey) / Tim Wray (Surrey Business School)**

### **Hubristic Leadership: Person and Process Perspectives**

This paper offers two contrasting perspectives on hubristic leadership: (1) person-related: hubristic leadership from the perspective of organizational behaviour, i.e. as over-confidence, over-ambition, arrogance, pride, and contempt, positioned as a form of 'destructive leadership' which creates conditions for negative unintended consequences to arise; (2) process-related: leadership is a continual outcome of the inter-activities of interpreting inter-agents. Emerging events rather than attributes are the basis of reality and analysis. Events can change the direction of leadership and their 'eventfulness' can be known with the benefit of hindsight. In hindsight tragic leadership exhibits a familiar pattern of rise and fall and witnesses the reversing reputational fortunes of leaders.

**Constantine Sedikides (University of Southampton)**

### **To Be Truthful or to Be Wonderful? The Rocky Road to Self-Knowledge**

What do people want to know about themselves? Are they motivated to pursue accurate self-knowledge or are they eager to sacrifice self-accuracy for the sake of a positive self-image? The talk will address these questions via laboratory experiments and also studies involving culture, religion, mind-body practices, and incarcerated adults.