



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MOTIVATION 2016
THE ODYSSEY TO THE ITHACA OF LEARNING
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Welcome Speech

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On behalf of the School of Psychology, let me welcome you to the 15th ICM 2016 by contributing some philosophical thoughts as to the subject matter and the title of the conference.

Emotion, Motivation and Self Regulation have been major human concerns long before the birth of psychology as a science. In its early days as a science, psychology shocked common sense by showing that all these basic inner factors can, at heart, be different than experienced. So real motives can be hidden or disguised, emotions misrepresented and misinterpreted, and control over behavior more limited than expected or less limited than feared. After a century of piecemeal research and theorizing on these topics, our explorations turn into the multifaceted interrelations of these terms.

As for the title of this conference, “Odyssey to the Ithaca of Learning”, it is appropriate that it pays tribute to the father of our civilization, Homer. At the heart of his two epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, lie some of the concerns we mentioned above. The first word of the *Iliad* is ‘anger’ and the epic, in spite of its title, describes not the beginning or the end of a war but some 50 odd days starting from where the anger of Achilles against his chief began, while the epic ends properly where this anger finally disappears after many intermediate transformations. Anger is an appropriate emotion for the young man as he feels the restrictions of space pushing and closing around him and is a necessary motivation to overcome and test oneself by conquering the challenge of vital space. At the end of this growing-up story, Achilles is no longer angry but he is certainly wiser.

The *Odyssey* on the other hand, has ‘man’ or ‘character’ as its first word, and though it is well known as a story of wandering, it does not start with the beginnings of Odysseus wanderings but in the middle of his travels, right at the spot which some of us might consider as a dream ending: Odysseus is living in a secluded, peaceful, bountiful island as the companion of goddess Calypso next to whom

he can enjoy the privileges of her agelessness and immortality that ancient gods have over humans. Nevertheless he longs to abandon her 'paradise' for his own Ithaca, a disputed, poor, hostile place of toil, for a wife that by now must be twenty years older, for a son he had only known as a baby. This longing to return is not a young man's basic emotion but an older person's concern: To come to terms with time (not space), to come to terms with our own trajectory in the world, to return to our origins to make sense of it all, ourselves included, to reflect. Wisdom rather than conquest is the concern of mature humans.

What 'Ithacas' mean then (to use Cavafy's verse), is the reflective learning and self-knowledge that comes out of facing the challenges of space and time.

Thank you!
