



Maat (Egyptian truth/justice)

Maat refers to an ancient Egyptian normative view of reality, encompassing how things had originally been ordained and also how they were to be again. Egyptologists have variously translated *maat* as ‘truth’, ‘justice’, and ‘harmony’. *Maat* was an essentially-contested concept in ancient Egypt: in different texts and in different dynastic periods it is alternately depicted as the sole purview of the pharaoh, a virtue accessible to even lowly peasants, a kind of divine mandate for political legitimacy, something to distinguish Egyptians from foreigners, a force divinely created, or a moral authority to which even the gods themselves are subject. One who aspires to align their life with *maat* was called a *maaty*. A successful *maaty* was able to speak ritually with a moral authority that could not be denied and that was capable of bringing about the very normative realities which were uttered [see *heka*].

Maat was frequently deified, appearing as a woman with a feather in her hair, against which the heart-mind [see *ib*] of a deceased person was weighed in order to establish their admittance to the afterlife. The deified *Maat* also appears in ritual iconography in which she is offered for ingestion by the pharaoh or other gods. *Maat* was often juxtaposed with its putative opposite *isfet*, chaos or strife.

The political dimensions of *maat*—namely, its status as a sort of ‘mandate of heaven’ that can be maintained or compromised by political actors—remains a fruitful topic for intercultural philosophy. The metaphysical and metaethical underpinnings of such a seemingly ‘magical’ view of language also deserve further philosophical exploration, e.g. whether *maat* is naturalistic or non-naturalistic, realist or anti-realist, cognitivist or non-cognitivist, deterministic or indeterministic, etc.

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