

Moral Psychology

Session 3b
Moral Ascent in the *Republic*

In our last episode....

- Question of just/unjust lives taken up anew in the *Republic*
- New and richer psychology -- the tripartite soul
 - Reason
 - Appetites
 - Thumos, the junkyard dog of the soul

Digression on Political Science and Moral Psych. In *Republic*

- Dialog talks about two subjects
 - Justice of a person
 - Justice of a state
- Controversial what the book is supposed to be about
 - Political science
 - Psychology and ethics
 - The relation between the two

Political Science and Moral Psychology

- View 1: The *Republic* presents Plato's theory of what a perfect state would be like, and incidentally has some psychology along the way.
- View 2: The discussion of the state is introduced merely as an artifice to understand the soul (as claimed), and so it is the psychology and ethics that are to be taken seriously.

We'll concentrate on moral psychology

- Not relevant for us whether Plato really advocated any of the states he mentions here.
- Our main concern is with theories of the self, whether Plato held them or not.
- Some obvious inter-relations -- such as that theories of the self have implications for education and policy.

Parts of Soul/Kinds of People

- What kind of person you are is determined by what part of the soul is dominant in you
 - Some people are ruled by their appetites
 - Some people are ruled by *thumos* -- Plato associates this with people who love honor (warriors and aristocrats!--apparently the wrong people are ruling the state!)
 - Some people are ruled by reason (philosophers)
- Justice requires proper balance, with reason in control.

Diagnosis of Injustice

- Injustice in person or state a matter of a kind of imbalance, in which something other than reason is in control.
- Unjust states ultimately a result of desire for luxury and consequent aggression.
- Unjust souls arguably a result of wanting more than we need, getting or having more than others (*pleonektein*-- see note on p. 20)

Implications for Ethics, Therapy

- One-factor theory of action in *Gorgias* --> purely rational ethics
 - We always do what we think best, therefore
 - Virtue consist wholly in knowledge
- Tripartite soul in *Republic*
 - Still need to acquire knowledge of the Good
 - Need to mould and rule appetites
 - Need to mould *thumos* and co-opt it
 - Development requires right social, educational conditions!

Moral Education in the *Republic*

- Training from childhood to cultivate appetites and *thumos* in right ways
 - Physical training
 - *Musike* (music, poetry, arts)
- Later training in developing knowledge for those who are capable of it.
 - Requires further discussion of knowledge, its objects and the faculties through which we apprehend them.

Three Famous Images

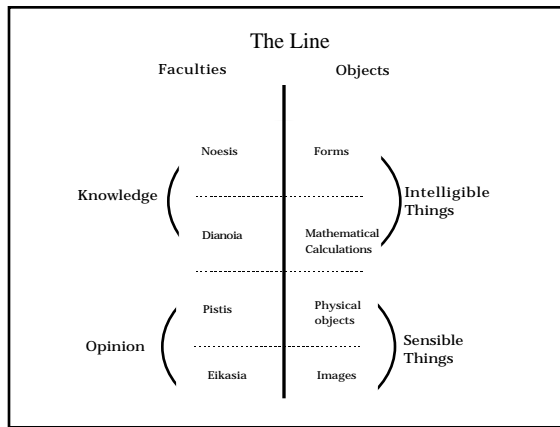
- The Sun
- The Line
- The Cave

The Sun

- The deepest kind of knowledge is of the Good
- The Sun is used as a metaphor for this
 - The sun allows us to see other things
 - The sun can be seen itself
 - The sun is a cause of the other things
- The Good
 - Allows us to understand other things
 - Can be understood itself
 - Is the cause of everything else

The Line

- Seems to be about two things:
 - A division of our cognitive faculties
 - A division of the objects of our cognitive faculties.



The Cave

- Perhaps puts the previous two metaphors together?
- Our ordinary experience is not knowledge (apprehension of true realities), but a copy of a copy! (Shadows of puppets!)
- Gaining knowledge requires
 - Breaking free of the grip of images
 - An ascent to a radically different kind of cognition

Plato's Educational Programme for Philosophical Rulers

- Early training in mathematics, poetry, gymnastic
- Intensive physical training in adolescence/young adulthood
- 10 years of intensive mathematics (til age 30, say?)
- 5 years of dialectic (35)
- 15 years of practical political training (age 50)
- led to see the good itself (in other places, this is something that happens suddenly rather than being done!)
- then return to the cave and govern the city
- (The regimen of the Academy??)

Salient Points

- Moral ascent is a long and complex thing!
- Note the late date at which dialectic (e.g., Socratic discussion!) is begun -- if you do it earlier, it can spoil you! (cf. *Phaedo* on *misology*)
- Not clear whether most of this applies to more than a talented few, or what Plato thinks about ethics for the average person
- Moral ascent involves all parts of the soul, but requires reason to rule
 - Training of appetites, *thumos*
 - Disciplines of training reason

Salient Points

- Knowledge of the Good is still key
- Clearly not simply a matter of having the right beliefs about the Good
 - Knowledge and belief are different faculties!!
 - Knowledge of the Good is something Socrates has not been able to adequately express here
 - Knowledge requires long preparation
 - Seems like a kind of mystical apprehension

Knowledge of the Good

- Not just true opinions
- Not like true opinions, only better substantiated (not like science or even mathematics!)
- Apparently the activation of an additional and higher faculty, which does not infer from images, but directly apprehends things as they really are.

A Realistic Moral Psychology?

- An improvement over the purely rational account of the *Gorgias*-- deals with the irrational parts of the soul
- Hard to test:
 - Claims there are faculties we don't normally exercise, and that these are needed for knowledge
 - Only by going through this sort of regimen could you test it!
 - (Not an unusual claim -- Hinduism, Buddhism)

A Realistic Moral Psychology?

- Seems like a moral programme that only a talented few can follow
 - Requires the right sort of state to provide optimal conditions
 - Requires right early education to train irrational parts of the soul
 - Higher levels require particular kinds of intellectual aptitude which arguably many lack
 - What is Plato saying/implying about those not capable of philosophy??

An Optimistic Moral Psychology?

- Holds out possibility of cultivating the irrational parts of the self so they are helpful rather than harmful
- Takes a positive attitude towards all parts of soul -- appetites and *thumos* not evil, but like animals that need to be domesticated.
- At least some general guidelines for cultivating our irrational natures.

An Optimistic Moral Psychology?

- At best, the ascent to the vision of the form of the Good requires long, hard work!
- Not clear it is attainable by many people.
- Dependent upon political circumstances and particulars of one's childhood experiences and education -- what does it say to those who lacked these? Are they doomed??
