

Outline for Lecture Two—The Good

1. What do we mean when we say something is “good?”
 1. That we *like* something or someone
 2. A ranking of higher or lower on some scale
 3. An affirmation—it really matters; it’s important
2. Story of young man who saved Lori from drowning.
 1. “I was useful.”
 2. i.e., I did something good—something important—something that really matters.
3. How does the “Good” connect with “Truth?”
4. “Doing the truth”- means living in a way that matters
5. Requires us to reject three orientations toward life:
 1. Narcissism—It’s all about me (my interests, my desires, my insecurities)
 2. Cynicism—It’s all about power (the only motivations are fear and greed)
 3. Nihilism—Nothing matters (“nihilistic violent extremism”)
6. These orientations distort reality.
 1. Profanity
 2. Pornography
 3. Bullying
 4. Lying
 5. Manipulation
 6. Coercion
7. One of the things we mean when we say that someone is a *good person* is that they acknowledge a reality greater than their own interests. They tell the truth. They treat
8. Question for us today: What is the nature of the real?
9. From both the Greeks (Plato) and the Hebrews (Genesis) we get similar answers:
 1. The real is good.
 2. The not good is the not real.
 3. We inhabit something in between, the realm of becoming.

10. We find this in Plato in two stories: The Ring of Gyges and the Allegory of the Cave

11. The Ring of Gyges

Everybody seeks their own advantage, and the only reason people act morally is because they lack power.

12. How does Plato say one can avoid the fate of Gyges?

13. The Allegory of the Cave

- The prisoner needs help from others
- It involves turning around (conversion)
- It is painful
- The light is blinding
- Makes one less able to see the shadows
- The “real” is hard to explain to those who haven’t seen it for themselves

14. What does this tell us about the good?

- The good (the sun) is the source of everything that is—the source of all being
- We cannot find the good on our own—must depend on others
- We cannot know the good completely—we can just know the direction—the *path*, the *way* (Tao)
- Once we know the path, we have an obligation to help others turn toward the good as well.

Future Questions

1. What is the nature of the turning toward the good? (Love)
2. How do we know what direction to turn? (Beauty)
3. What happens to us on the journey? (Soul)
4. What does the Good require of us? (Justice)

Reading: Plato, *The Republic*

The Republic is probably the most famous of all Plato's dialogues. We will be focusing on two stories from the book: The Ring of Gyges and the Allegory of the Cave.

The Allegory of the Cave (Republic, Book Seven)

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SOCRATES: At this point I will show you something about the nature of education and ignorance. Picture the following in your mind. Imagine human beings living in an underground cave-like residence. Its entrance opens up to the light and reaches all along the cave. They have been there since their childhood, their ankles and necks chained, unable to move or turn their heads, forced to look ahead. The light from a fire blazing at a distance comes from above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a raised walkway. Imagine also a low wall built along the way, similar to the screen that divides puppeteers from the audience and allows them to show puppets over it.

GLAUCON: I picture the scene.

SOCRATES: Now imagine that people walk behind the wall and carry various artifacts that extend above the wall. These artifacts include carvings of humans and other animals made of stone, wood, and other materials. Some of the people carrying these object are talking, while others are silent. GLAUCON: You paint a strange picture and describe strange prisoners.

SOCRATES: They are like ourselves. Now do you think they see anything else except their own shadows, or the shadows of one another, which light from the fire casts on to the opposite wall of the cave? GLAUCON: How could they see anything else if they were forced to keep their heads still for their whole life?

SOCRATES: And what would they see of the objects that are being carried? Would they not see only shadows of them as well? GLAUCON: What else?

SOCRATES: And if they were able to talk to one another, would they not think that the object of their conversation were the shadows they saw in front of them? GLAUCON: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: And what if an echo bounced off the opposite wall of the prison? Would they not think that when one of the passers-by spoke the voice came from the passing shadow? GLAUCON: Definitely.

SOCRATES: Such prisoners would think that the truth is nothing but the shadows cast by the artifacts. GLAUCON: Most certainly.

SOCRATES: Now imagine what would happen naturally if the prisoners were released from their shackles and cured of their ignorance. Right after they are released and suddenly forced to stand up, turn their necks around, walk, and look towards the light, these activities will cause them pain; because of the bright glare they would be unable to see those things which they previously had seen only as shadows. Now what do you think they

would say if one were to tell them that what they saw before was fooling them, but that now, when they are closer to what really exists and when they face that which more truly exists, they see more clearly, in a straightforward manner? What if that person pointed to the objects as they passed and asked the former prisoners to tell him what they were? Don't you think they would be baffled and think that the shadows they formerly saw were truer than the objects that are now being pointed out to them? GLAUCON: Far truer.

SOCRATES: And if they were forced to look straight at the light, would that not make their eyes hurt? Would they not try to avoid the light and turn back to the things that they can see? And would they not think that in reality the shadows are more clear than the objects they are forced to look at? GLAUCON: True.

SOCRATES: But what if someone dragged them along a steep and harsh ascent against their will, and did not let go until they were dragged right into the sunlight? Would they not feel pain and discomfort? And if they walked towards the sun and their eyes suddenly filled with brilliant light, would they be able to see even one of those things that are now called true realities? GLAUCON: No, not right away.

SOCRATES: I think that if they wanted to see the objects of the upper world they would need to grow accustomed to them. First of all, it will be easier for them to see the shadows. After that, they will see the reflections of people and other things in the water, and only after that they will see the objects themselves. After that, they will see celestial objects and the sky itself; it will be easier to see them first at night, by looking at the stars and the light of the moon, than during the day, by looking at the sun or the light of the sun. GLAUCON: How could it be otherwise?

SOCRATES: Last of all, I think, they will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of it in the water or other media. They will be able to look at the sun itself directly and see it as it is.

QUESTIONS

1. Is "the good" different for everybody, or is there just one objective good?
2. If we cannot know the good directly, how can we seek it? Who should we trust?
3. Is "the good" the same as God?

