The Life Most Worth Living: Virtue Theory in ancient and modern perspective
L2
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Contracts; Ring of Gyges

- Most who behave justly do so because they cannot do otherwise?
- Invisibility—would it change how we behave?
- “Get away” with breaching contract?
- Is it better to
  - Seem just and be unjust?
  - Or to seem unjust and be just?
Is justice intrinsically good?

- Need to defend justice without relying on reputation/image
- (But, we aren’t clever; our “eyesight” is not so good)
- So, let’s magnify justice
  - Enlarge it from individual person
  - To an entire polis
The Polis

• Exists because “none of us is self-sufficient”
  – A descriptive assertion
  – With normative implications

• We interact because we believe doing so is advantageous
  – Need for food, shelter, clothes
  – Specialization and crafts
  – “Comparative advantage” and native talents
Interaction with others

- Trade
  - Need for “surplus” goods
  - Merchants, sailors
  - Exchange agents
  - Laborers

- Add luxuries (will make justice easier to find)
  - Meat, barbers, musicians, beauticians
  - Doctors
With Luxuries, though

- Will need more land
- And defense for it
- (And now we’ve discovered the origin of war: “It comes from those same desires that are most of all responsible for the bad things that happen to cities and the individuals in them” 373e1-e7)
- Accordingly, a professional military
  - NOT citizen-soldiers
But who?

• Natural aptitude for military
  – Physical -- keen senses, strong
  – Psychological -- guarding, courageous
  – “Spirited” people

• Civil – military relations?
  – How to ensure the soldiers don’t turn on each other or on the polis?
  – Gentle to friends; harsh to enemy
About time for a break
Opposites in the same nature?

• More on this later
• (But it is critical to Plato’s notion of self-rule)
• For now, a very brief excursion into . . .
“Stories” and education

• Music, poetry, and “Narratives”
  – Tales can be true or false
  – The very young are most impressionable
    • And first impressions are hard to erase
  – Tell false ones that have some truth in them,
    • But carefully, under supervision, like drugs
  – And “censor” others
    • E. g. Those that inspire war or hatred, or fear of death
  – Beware of the “true falsehood” – sincerely held but false belief – Ignorance of the psyche
“Pure” Narratives; “Pure” Polis?

• Harmony—not just in music
  – Resonates with math (formulae)
  – Reasonable
  – Graceful
  – Can detect missing notes or incompleteness

• Essential to a pure (just?) polis

• Harmony within harmony (and between souls)

• Discourage ordinary folk’s telling falsehoods
Metals and natures

- General classes in the polis
- Ordinary folk (workers) – most “changeable”
- Auxiliaries (soldiers)
- Guardians (rulers; typically selected from the soldiers)
- Gold – silver – bronze/iron
The complete polis (427d)

• Will we finally find justice here?
• If the city is good, it will be
  – Wise
  – Courageous
  – Temperate
  – Just
Wisdom

• In many craftsmen
  – (And this is a good a place as any to think about crafts, functions, and concrete goods)

• Generally fairly tightly focused
  – Consider a doctor when ill; mechanic for car

• Wisdom regarding the city itself?
Courage

• A kind of preserving
  – Through “everything”
  – Of the things the rulers inculcated ( “absorbed” the laws”; “dyed in the wool”)

• And therefore a sort of wisdom
  – Of what is to be feared

• “Civic” courage
Temperance

• Or Moderation
• Seems to suggest that there are two selves
  – A better self that controls a worse self
  – We praise someone as “master of himself”
  – We judge others as licentious
  – But how can this (opposites) be?
• Look back to our ideal city
  – Better and worse agree that better should rule
Moderation, cont.

• Agreement of who rules and is ruled
  – Establishes harmony (beauty)
  – Permeates the city (consent of the governed?)
• So, we’ve found Wisdom, Courage, and Temperance
• The remaining excellence is justice
Justice

• Everyone functioning in their own lane
• Having (distributive) one’s own
• Doing one’s own thing within one’s class
• Meddling with other classes is injustice
  – Money-makers, or auxiliaries, for example, trying to rule
  – Money in politics?
  – Military coup?
Now we’re in a position to revisit the individual and the life well-lived

• Isomorphic hypothesis
• Well, “Everything fine is difficult” (435c5)
• Back to the consideration of opposites
  – In one psyche
  – Wanting and not wanting
  – Thirsty, but refusing to drink due to calculation
  – Psyche must have “parts” that can oppose
Psyche and “parts”

• Thirsty, but the only water available is suspect
  – Thirsting “part” does not “know” anything beyond an appetite for liquid
  – Thinking part knows about foul water and about the thirsting part

• Some moderns use “orders” to describe the phenomenon (for example, Frankfurt)
Another “part”

- What gets us angry – “spirit”
- Leontius at the Piraeus
- “Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight!” (440e1)
- Spirit can ally with one part against others
  - Upbringing is important here
  - Spirit can naturally side with reason
  - Indeed, it has something rational in it
Harmony in the self and polis

- Appetites ruled by reason with the help of spirit
- Money makers ruled by guardians with the help of soldiers
- Moderation and justice are natural in the ideal
- Analogous to health
  - Proper functioning
  - "Parts" as ASPECTS of a person
    - Interactive and dynamic
    - Susceptible to corruption
Virtue and vice

- Healthy ways of living lead to health
- Unhealthy eating leads to disease
- Generalized to life itself
- Health – functioning according to nature
- Living – functioning according to human nature (self-actualization)
- Aristokratia
Next time

On learning and what is true