

Socrates' philosophical ideology

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Being one of Socrates' disciples, Plato adopted his philosophy and style of debate, and focused his studies toward the question of virtue and the formation of a noble character. According to Aristotle, Plato developed the foundations of his metaphysics and epistemology by studying the doctrines of Crystals, and the work of Pythagoras and Parricides. When Plato met Socrates, however, he had met his definitive teacher.

Under the influence of Socrates' philosophical ideology, Plato was trying to find a solution to the problem that although there is underlying stability in the world (sun comes up every morning), it is constantly changing (you never step into the same river twice). An old theory about this problem is that we gain all knowledge from our senses empirically. But Plato disagreed with this and described that because the world is constantly changing, our senses cannot be trusted. So, he was actually advocating that we do not learn new things, we remember them or in other words, knowledge is intrinsic.

Plato believed that the world is divided into two parts I. E. Reality and Appearance. So, since in reality, everything is in a state of instability, received knowledge is not true knowledge but is just a set of opinions, which are subjective to the speaker. However, since the World of Ideas is eternal and immutable, that is where knowledge lays I. E. The truth will never change there. Thus the World of Ideas becomes more real than the World of Appearance. Plato said that in the world, we have an idea of what beauty is - we have an innate knowledge of True Beauty or the Form of Beauty.

In the world we have examples of imperfect, reflected beauty e. G. Flowers yet we have never seen True Beauty. We are able to recognize or recollect

the Form of Beauty in flowers. According to Plato, our souls must have known the Forms (e. G. Beauty, Justice, Tiger) before we were born, which means that they are immortal and so pre-exist and post-exist our bodies. Plato believed that when we call something a 'cat', we are referring to a particular quality or essence that it has. Plato claimed that in the world of Forms, there exists the Ideal Cat, created by God.

The cats we see every day are poor reflections of the Ideal Cat, which are born and will die. However, the Ideal Cat is eternal and immutable. Plato believed that the Forms were interconnected and arranged in a hierarchy. The most important Form is the Form of the Good. All Forms are aspects of Goodness. E. G. Justice is an aspect of Goodness. Plato said that the Form of the Good is " the greatest thing we have to learn. " Knowledge of the Good is an end in itself and gives meaning and purpose to life.

In order to understand why Plato emphasized the importance of soul over body, we need to understand the ideology of Plato on soul over body. Plato time and again specifically refers to the solidarity between soul and body and he makes the soul a starting point of his account of body. It was out of question for Plato to consider putting soul and body at the same level pertaining the fact that soul is 'an existent in movement', it is subsumed within an orientation (of some sort) and has therefore an intrinsic and qualitative reality different from that of body.

To further elaborate the supremacy soul enjoys over body, he mentions that soul is not bound to follow body always on the contrary it can go against it (e. G. Feeling thirsty and yet not drinking water) and so can take over

control. Plato puts the initiating and guiding function of soul in broader setting I. E. A final solution can never be derived from the material phenomena of visible nature; for that we have to find our point of departure within the spiritual sphere. Plato stresses repeatedly the priority which spiritual enjoys over the material.

The soul is as different in kind from body as are, say, the process of reflective thought, artistic skill, moods and desires from length, breadth, energy and weight. He conceives the soul as something with distinctive properties of its own, contrasting with matter. In order to further understand the Plat's philosophy of soul over body lets study the Plat's model of the ship's helmsman (the Soul) with whom the crew (the sense organs with their seat in the body) are bound to collaborate.

As Plato advocates that soul belongs to different order from body, so it cannot be set alongside the body as homogeneous entity. The soul's penchant is towards another world. It becomes evident, why the senses are envisaged, not as windows but as bars, since so far as the physical nature of man is concerned it is not just a matter of noting, ontologically, the finite character of its existence, but rather one making an ethical and religious value-judgment on his earthly life from the viewpoint of higher destiny.

Only when the soul has undergone an inner transformation and been duly prepared for this it can look at the body in a fresh light, as it were, and so discover as meaningful affinity between soul and body, which serves to orientate man towards the higher reality. The notion that soul's being destined for another world is dominant aspect of the doctrine of immortality

of soul. The soul's origin is prior to that of this mundane order, it is not subject to a process of decay, but is connected intrinsically with eternal world of ideas.

The body may perish but soul continues to exist and Plato has offered various evidences of this immortality. If examined on logical standpoint they are not always conclusive; but they present the soul in light of that imperishable reality which is the world of ideas. Plato further proposes that in this life steps must be taken to loosen the ties with the body; and this must be done by employing philosophy to fix the attention of mind upon ideal reality. He further argues that in philosophizing our aim should be to gain experience in loosening the bonds of the soul and thus to prepare ourselves for death.

The question that arises from immortality of the soul is that why a soul should enter body as it existed before. This is no merely a theoretical question about the interrelation between the two substances, but a real puzzle as to what point there can be in this restrictive, earthy mode of existence, granted the notion that life of soul in itself signifies what 'being human' is in its pure condition. For Plato soul and body do not so much function within a strictly bordered theoretical and ontological field. Yet even this demonstrates how hard it is to separate body and soul.

Is soul itself free from evil and body guilt-ridden? In the Phaedra Plato opposes the immortal soul to the contaminating influences of the physical. But why then soul itself good entered body at all? This implies that the distinction line between body and soul is not on the ground of what is good

or bad. In order for better understanding of his philosophical ideology of soul over body and understanding the reason for entrance of soul into the body , Plato goes on to present a theory that he calls the 'parts of the soul'.

In Phaedra Plato describes the soul, prior to its entry onto the body, as a charioteer with two horses, pursuing his Journey in the path of gods in order to catch a momentary glimpse-if that is possible- of the higher reality of that world of ideas which lies above and beyond the vault of heaven. One of the horses, however, is stubborn and eventually falls, dragging with him in his descent both his companion and his driver.

In such some way the soul enters upon its earthly existence, the link with body is formed, the mundane being of man is brought to birth- and even now the frisky, runaway horse must still be bridled and kept under control. One can easily drive the three kind of functions of soul each of which has its own locus within the body, which Plato distinguished in the above idea I. E. The highest (the driver) is the rational faculty, the next that of will and resolution (the willing horse); and the third (the uncurled horse) is faculty of desire, that is, of the sexual and vegetative drives.

This tripartite principle holds well over a broad area. In the Republic, Plato gives yet another picture, according to which every individual harbors within himself no less than three beings: namely a man-figure (rational soul), lion (spirited soul) and many headed monster (appetitive soul). The rational soul (mind or intellect) is the thinking portion within each of us, which discerns what is real and not merely apparent, Judges what is true and what is false,

and wisely makes the rational decisions in accordance with which human life is most properly lived.

The spirited soul (will or volition), on the other hand, is the active portion; its function is to carry out the dictates of reason in practical life, courageously doing whatever the intellect has determined to be best. Finally, the appetitive soul (emotion or desire) is the portion of each of us that wants and feels many things, most of which must be deferred in the face of rational pursuits if we are to achieve a salutary degree of self-control. The model of three aspects of soul (Phaedrus: charioteer and two horses; Republic: man, lion, monster) the rational element alone is present as a human figure.

What Plato gives us, in fact, is a piece of psycho-analysis, an 'unmasking' of man as we see him; for what we see is not pure being of man - that lies hidden somewhere behind or within. Thus Plato disengages himself from totality of human being as that displays itself in a this-worldly perspective, in order to pin-point the essential nature of man. In support of his ideology soul over body, Plato represents our earthly bodily existence as essential component of the journey of the soul.

The soul's descent into the life of the body is organically part and parcel, then, of its Journey. Socrates in particular points out that to have knowledge of being; one must know knowledge of non-being too. Plato recognized that the picture of the Divided Line may be difficult for many of us to understand. Although it accurately presents the different levels of reality and corresponding degrees of knowledge, there is a sense in which one cannot appreciate its full significance without first having achieved the highest level.

So, for the benefit of those of us who are still learning but would like to grasp what he is talking about, Plato offered a simpler story in which each of the same structural components appears in a way that we can all comprehend at our own level. This is the Allegory of the Cave. Suppose that there is a group of human beings who have lived their entire lives trapped in a subterranean chamber lit by a large fire behind them. Chained in place, these cave-dwellers can see nothing but shadows (of their own bodies and of other things) projected on a flat wall in front of them.

Some of these people will be content to do no more than notice the play of light and shadow, while the cleverer among them will become highly skilled observers of the patterns that most regularly occur. In both cases, however, they cannot truly comprehend what they see, since they are prevented from grasping its true source and nature. Now suppose that one of these human beings manages to break the chains, climb through the torturous passage to the surface, and escape the cave.

With eyes accustomed only to the dim light of the former habitation, this individual will at first be blinded by the brightness of the surface world, able to look only upon the shadows and reflections of the real world. But after some time and effort, the former cave-dweller will become able to appreciate the full variety of the newly-discovered world, looking at trees, mountains, and (eventually) the sun itself. Finally, suppose that this escapee returns to the cave, trying to persuade its inhabitants that there is another, better, more real world than the one in which they have so long been content to dwell.

They are unlikely to be impressed by the pleas of this extraordinary individual, Plato noted, especially since their former companion, having traveled to the bright surface world, is now inept and clumsy in the dim realm of the cave. Nevertheless, it would have been in the best interest of these residents of the cave to entrust their lives to the one enlightened member of their company, whose acquaintance with other things is a unique qualification for genuine knowledge. Plato seriously intended this allegory as a representation of the state of ordinary human existence.

We, like the people raised in a cave, are trapped in a world of impermanence and partiality, the realm of sensible objects. Entranced by the particular and immediate experiences these things provide, we are unlikely to appreciate the declarations of philosophers, the few among us who, like the escapee, have made the effort to achieve eternal knowledge of the permanent forms. But, like them, it would serve us best if we were to follow this guidance, discipline our own minds, and seek an accurate understanding of the highest objects of human contemplation. The descent in the cave is necessary to the progress of the soul.

Indeed, Plato paid the closest attention to the detailed organization this life (Politics and Education). It is no accident that he writes somewhere- to the effect that the wise man must be able to provide him with suitable covering for Journey. Keeping in view the organization of mundane existence in the interests of the proper orientation of the soul, Plato is in position to expound the intrinsic cohesiveness of the body and he soul. The supra-terrestrial destiny of the soul which previously afforded a basis for a dualistic account of man, now make it possible to regard body as an image of the soul.

Plato views of man which represents him as fundamentally an 'eccentric' being: it is characteristic of man that aspires beyond himself. Plato regards the soul no so much as a substance resting in itself, but as one having a tendency to progressive self-orientation. Plato says, we are the property of the gods; and they are our allies. Grant this eccentric perspective, and it becomes possible to see the essential nature of man in the orientation of his mental and spiritual life- as a golden cord woven by the gods.

The most distinctive, most characteristic thing about man is that he is rooted and grounded by Other. But the way of looking at things makes soul itself an image of gods and body in its turn an image of soul, Plato declares that we are in duty bound to honor and esteem the gods, the soul and the body- in that threefold order of precedence. It would serve us best if we were to follow this guidance, discipline our own minds, and seek an accurate understanding of the highest objects of human contemplation.