**Plato:** **Plato and the Pursuit of Excellence**

1. Plato and His Predecessors
   1. Inherited a rich literary tradition
      1. Learn poems and ethical attitudes expressed in them.
      2. “An impression on what sort of person he should be and of how best to travel the road of life. “
   2. Reason as a critical tool
      1. Intellectuals or Sophists
   3. Background and context for Plato’s ethics
      1. Not likely actual conversations
      2. Plato uses Socrates to walk through ethical issues
2. The Quest for Excellence
   1. Despite genre’s difficulty, use of dialogue was beneficial
      1. Dramatic dialogue brought to life the practical enterprise that sets the context
   2. Excellence for a fee
      1. Educators: Protagoras, prodicus, hippias, Euvenu, Euthydemus, Dionysus
   3. Traditional view: excellence is learned by associating with worthy citizens
   4. Excellence is important, but there is debate on how it is acquired
      1. Can virtue be taught?
      2. Or is it result of practice?
      3. Or possessed by nature, etc?
   5. Excellence different through the years
      1. Battlefield
      2. Polis
3. Excellence, Virtue, and Happiness
   1. Arete as virtue instead of excellence
      1. Virtue as a character trait (part of person’s psychology)
      2. Four kinds of arête: Courage, wisdom, self-restraint, justice
      3. Noble birth, bodily strength, good looks, social status, wealth and success in competition were considered part of arête by general Greeks
   2. “What is excellence” inquires the best way to live
      1. Both good person and good life (kalon and agathon)
      2. For the Greeks, quest for excellence is the quest for happiness.
      3. What is admirable in a human being is expected to coincide with what is good.
4. Excellence and Knowledge
   1. Why care about arête if it requires no recommendation?
      1. Be careful about what they seek to acquire under the name of excellence
      2. Care for the soul or psyche is more important than accumulation of external objects
         1. Knowledge is enough to eliminate the effects of luck.
         2. Nothing is good without wisdom
         3. One must know how to use external objects
   2. Wisdom is the only thing that makes man happy and fortunate.
      1. The person who wants to live well must strive to be as wise as possible
      2. The subject matter of this wisdom is politics
      3. Courage and temperance must be used properly
      4. Courage applies to all contexts where external goods are at risk
      5. Living well requires one to know when to be modest and when to be bold; of what is good and what is evil.
5. Knowledge and Rhetoric
   1. Rhetoric is the only knowledge one needs in order to live well: it is the finest knowledge that deals with human concerns.
   2. This must be subordinated to the statesman’s goal of caring for the polis and its citizens, founded on the norms of justice
   3. Rhetoric may be used to convince citizens, even at their own expense.
   4. The ability to rule and persuade is attractive independently of justice
      1. Defense of self against prosecution
      2. Allows people to live with impunity and to do whatever they want, but this may not equate with the best kind of life.
   5. Living well requires the knowledge of good and bad
6. The Dearth of Knowledge
   1. No one actually has knowledge of good and bad.
   2. Athenians didn’t have knowledge of excellence
      1. Couldn’t state what excellence was
      2. Depends on a kind of life rather than a state of the soul
   3. Those who lack knowledge also failed to show such knowledge in their lives.
7. Plato’s Indictment of the Golden Age
   1. Plato’s audience looked back with nostalgia to the golden age.
   2. Political figures in that age failed to pass down excellence to their children
      1. They had divinely inspired belief, not knowledge.
      2. Their affairs manifested not divinely inspired correct judgment but ignorance through flattery
   3. They did not know what excellence was
8. Politics and Justice in The Republic
   1. Homeric model of excellence where leader dominates his subjects and enriches himself through rhetoric
   2. The true politician rules for the benefit of the citizens through knowledge of good and bad
   3. Injustice, if one can get away with it, is more to a ruler’s advantage than justice is
   4. Answer to justice’s lack of a rationale
      1. Polis
         1. Contingent rewards instead of inevitable consequences
         2. Producers, auxiliaries to control conflict and rulers to prevent abuse of auxiliaries’ power
         3. Good is not in satisfying desires of the population, but maintaining stability and integrity as a whole
      2. Soul
         1. Ability to form desires: appetitive
         2. Anger at injustice, endure hardship: spiritedness
         3. Reason and calculation, which should rule other parts of the soul
      3. Unjust person lacks rational self-control, exchanges external for the internal.
   5. Socrates doubted that rational self-control could cause both just and unjust behavior
      1. Timocratic soul, which values victory and dominance over others but desires wealth
      2. Oligarchic soul, devoted to accumulation of wealth, even involving embezzlement or dishonesty
      3. Both of these are unstable and will degenerate into one which desires all to compete on equal footing.
      4. Even after repressing desires, they will break out into a tyrannical soul
      5. Socrates saw these as developing through generations instead of within them
9. The norms of the polis
   1. Reconcile tendencies of ferocity and gentleness under the guidance of wisdom: justice
   2. Paideia (education)
      1. Cultural education and Physical training
      2. The norms to be followed should not violate the goals of the polis
      3. Political excellence: excellence in context of a city
      4. Not “How do I become good?” but, “How do I make the citizens good?”
      5. Goal: Inculcate a love for the *kalon*, or a sense of order and harmony, of what is good and what is bad.
10. Knowledge: understanding the good
    1. One has knowledge when beliefs are secured by reasoning about cause
    2. To go beyond basic hypotheses of arithmetic, geometry, etc. , and into first principles
    3. The fine and the good underlie all truths
    4. Forms are eternal, ideal, even moreso than political life
    5. Ideal qualities of a philosopher ruling the polis
       1. Not eager to rule, and will not likely rule badly due to rash decisions
       2. In possession of knowledge of the good and of justice
11. Virtue and external goods
    1. One is better off being unjustly treated than committing social injustice
    2. Preference of divine goods over human goods: the latter should depend on the former
    3. Are external goods really necessary?