Chapter Nine – Social Philosophy Am I My Brother's or My Sister's Keeper?

Roots of Wisdom
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Chapter Review

The Issue Defined

- Questions of justice the primary philosophical issue of social philosophy are rooted in whether we see our own welfare and the welfare of others as connected or separate.
- How should people be treated? On the basis of their merit? Should the beautiful/handsome, talented, and high born be treated according to one standard and the ordinary by another?
- Should those who may be expected to advance the social good be given special advantages and rewards?

Classical Theories of Justice

Plato

- in a polis, each fulfills their role
- three classes exist, each corresponding to one of the three elements in human nature (reason, spirit, appetite)

Aristotle

- like Plato, advocated benevolent dictatorship
- the state comes before the individual
- merit assigns different positions to individuals

Utilitarianism

- The greatest pleasure for the greatest number at the least expense is calculated to determine social policy
- A hidden assumption is that some members of society might be required to sacrifice for the benefit of the "greatest number"

Justice as Fairness

- What is upheld is what is fair to individuals, not what is best for the society as a whole
- Marx decried what he saw as alienation in industrial laborers
- Rawls advocated justice in terms of the equal liberty principle and the difference principle, using the "original position" to envision a truly just society
- Nozick advocated the entitlement theory, protecting justice in holding and justice in transfer; he supported anarchism, as well as multiple utopias

African American Social Philosophy

- emphasis has varied between advocates of assimilation (Douglass and King) and separatism (Delaney and Malcolm X)
- Du Bois portrayed blacks as suffering from double consciousness; Malcolm X put forward psychic conversion as the solution
- Cornel West has expanded upon earlier visions to offer a broader ideal of justice

Mexican American Social Philosophy

- Cesar Estrada Chavez and Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales reflect the tension between assimilation and separatism
- In creating (with Dolores Huerta) the United Farm Workers, Chavez insisted on non-violence, blending political protest with deep religious faith
- In his leadership of *La Raza Unida*, Gonzales advocated *chicano* pride and the reclaiming of Aztlan, land ceded under pressure to the United States at the end of the Mexican-American War

Feminist Social Philosophy

- Beauvoir described women's position as one of alterity or otherness
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman advocated economic self-sufficiency for women, along with large-scale changes in domestic labor
- Audre Lorde argued that as a result of multiple lines of oppression, all persons could be seen to harbor roles of both oppressor and oppressed

War and Its Justifications

- Christian Just War theory and Islamic Jihad as parallel examples of criteria formulated for the purpose of determining legitimate justifications for going to war, as well as legitimate conduct, once involved in war
- The role of martyr is also parallel in both traditions

Communitarianism

- A move away from models upholding the individual to ones that emphasize sociality and community long practiced in traditional cultures
- Ignacio Ellacuria, S.J. emphasizes that the common good is above the particular good
- Charles Taylor distinguishes between fundamental rights and lesser privileges
- Cosmopolitanism proclaims the family and nation as artificial and advocates the ideal of world citizenship

Key Terms

- Merit
- Utilitarianism
- Hedonism
- Alienation
- Equal liberty principle
- Difference principle
- Original position
- Entitlement theory
- Consensus

- Assimilationists
- Separatist
- Black power
- Psychic conversion
- Double consciousness
- Patriarchal
- Feminists
- Alterity
- Jihad
- Just War Theory
- Communitarianism
- Cosmopolitanism