

Lecture 3.2: Gyges Story

Re: **The story of Gyges**

The story of Gyges is about a shepherd who is in service under Lydia, the ruler. One day there was a thunderstorm that caused an earthquake and a chasm evolved where he was tending the animals. After the thunderstorm, Gyges went looking for the animals he was responsible for. While searching for the animals he discovered that the ground broke open because of the earthquake and thinking that maybe some of the animals might have fallen into this opening, Gyges went down this opening. He did not see his animals; instead, he saw inside and saw a coffin that was in the form of a hollow bronze horse with window-like openings. In it he saw a corpse that seemed to be too large to be a naked human being wearing a gold ring in his finger. He took the ring and wore it, went back to searching for his animals. After some weeks, at the usual monthly meeting where he reported the state of the animals he was caring for to the king. The king was delayed, and while getting bored, he accidentally turned the ring on his finger one and he discovered [from the reactions of the people around him] that he became invisible. He couldn't believe what was happened, so he tried again. He discovered that if he turned the ring towards himself, he becomes invisible. If he turns it outward away from himself, he becomes visible again. Immediately, he began using the ring to his advantage by promoting his interest. He arranged to become one of the messengers sent to the king. So, by using the ring he was promoted from the lowly shepherd to the next higher positions until he has become a trusted official in the inner circle of the king. He became very close to the king's family, so close that he ended up seducing the king's wife. They became lovers, and plotted to kill the king. Upon the death of the king, he married the queen and took over the kingdom. From that time, the family of Gyges flourished without anyone realizing all bad things he did to get ahead in life because he was using the magical power of the ring to be invisible.

Re: **Hypothetical Scenario:**

Glaucon suggests a hypothetical situation where there are 2 rings (like the ring of Gyges) given to two people: a just person and an unjust person. It is concluded that the just person [when given the ring similar to the ring of Gyges] would follow the same path as the unjust person because the idea states justice is only practiced due to the possible consequences, and in this situation, there would be no negative consequences. Thus, there is no fear of punishment for injustice. This situation suggests it would be more rational for both of the people to be unjust because then they would get rewarded and become wealthy, whereas if the just person remained just and refused to use the magical ring, the just person would only be thought of as stupid for not using the ring to promote his self-interest.

Re: **The point of the story of Gyges:**

The point of this story of Gyges is to emphasize the belief many people hold that justice is not something practiced for its own sake, and that there is really no point to being just [or a morally good] person. Instead, what is important is to be happy by having all your material desires achieved (like what happened to Gyges), and that between the unjust person (like Gyges) and the truly just [morally good] person, the really happy person is the unjust person.

Re: **For Plato, there is a point to be moral.** This is so for Plato for 2 reasons:

1. For the sake of our soul -- This is because living a morally good life is half of what is required to make-up for the error the soul committed in the other world. In other words, one of Plato's main claims in the Theory of Forms is that the purpose of our existence as human beings in this world is to live a good life so that when we die [and our soul separates from our body] and our soul will reunite with the Form of the Good [FOTG] in the other world and regain perfect happiness. The only way to make-up for this error committed by the soul in the other world is for us in this world to lead a good life. A good life can only be attained if one lives morally or virtuously and reaches one's excellence (or *arête*). Therefore, there is a point to be moral according to Plato.
2. Contrary to the claim made that the really happy person is the unjust person and not the truly just person, Plato is saying that it is the truly just person who is truly a happy person. To argue this, Plato talks about the tripartite nature of the soul (using the analogy of the charioteer and the 2 horses): the **reasoning** part of the soul [represented by the charioteer], the **spirited** part of the soul [represented by the trained horse who follows the command of the charioteer], and the **appetitive** part of the soul [represented by the wild, unruly horse who defies every command of the charioteer and who tries to lure the other horse to go along with it in defying the charioteer].

Plato is saying that for the **reasoning part** of the soul to guide/direct us in attaining what is good for us, it must achieve the virtue of **wisdom** (which consists in knowing the FOTG), just as it is the task of the charioteer to control the 2 horses and make them work in harmony so it can direct the chariot from point A to point B. The task of the spirited part of the soul is to provide the will power, the determination, the energy, and the enthusiasm necessary so that the good to which the reasoning part is directing us can be achieved. For the spirited part of the soul to do this, it needs to be able to stop the appetitive part of the soul from enticing it to defy the reasoning part. To do this, the spirited part of the soul must achieve the virtue of courage. In the case of the **appetitive part** of the soul, it needs to develop the virtue of **temperance** or **moderation** so that it will learn to work in harmony with the reasoning and spirited parts of the soul. In other words, the soul is happy (i.e., **just**) when these 3 parts of the soul are working in harmony with each other.