

Guide to Lecture 8
Models of the Human Condition: Wisdom, Fall, Utopia Part 2

A) State of Nature or Natural Human Condition

- a) Plato, *Republic* II: natural community simple, healthy, some differentiation of tasks; sick community meets exaggerated and false pleasures, illness and decadence, violence.
- b) Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality of Mankind*: natural human has animal instincts and senses; self-preservation and “pity”; little language or thought; healthy.
Overpopulation and competition and use of reason lead to alienation and development of law, crime, new values.
- c) Dialectical movement
- d) Paths to improvement

B) Human development: Hellenistic Philosophers

- a) Aristotle: need role models, well-ordered society allowing needs and potentials to be fulfilled; social and personal virtues, intellectual and moral virtues; need to express virtues as a mean between two extremes; need to control and moderate irrational power of soul. Anger: needs to be expressed in balanced way according to the “mean.”
- b) Stoics: body-consciousness expands to “appropriation” of other things; what belongs to us is ability to choose; choice of values determines emotional states and emotional balance. Anger: unstable and needs to be purged.
- c) Path to improvement

C) Modern myth (composite)

- a) Summary

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- b) Dialectical movements
- c) Path to improvement
- d) Criticisms:
 - i) “Reason” used carelessly and ambiguously
 - ii) Progress not a scientific category
 - iii) Historical demand of model conceals its role as a myth
 - iv) Path to dangerous utopianism and need to convert others; example of Communism, link to Christianity
- e) Some cautions/reminders:
 - i) Traditional model not perfect, but unlike modern model does not guarantee success
 - ii) Traditional models try to explain what is right/wrong; modern model assumes it is obvious
 - iii) Criticizing modern model doesn’t mean accepting what it calls “bad” or rule out some other progressive attitude
 - iv) Traditional model less susceptible to utopian temptations

D) Questions/Exercises (see below)

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Lectures 7-8: Models of the Human Condition: Wisdom, Fall, Utopia

Story/Model	Good State (Past/Ideal)	Bad State (Now)	Path to Improvement
Fall from Garden of Eden	Innocence, obedience, human-divine harmony	Knowledge, disobedience, human-divine estrangement	Hebraic: Obedience Golden Dawn/Christian: Reconciliation, Great Work
Esoteric Knowledge	Knowledge, transparent language, unified language/people, Divine governance, proper religious language and ritual	Rebellion, opaque language, distorted knowledge, scattered people, estrangement from God, wrong language and rites	Reconnection to divine and each other through proper language, concepts, rituals, esoteric learning
Gnosticism	Pre-creation: cosmic harmony	Post-creation: ignorance, imprisonment	Gnosis, escape
Natural Human Beings	Connection to nature, appropriate desires and use of senses; health and cooperation	Corruption and falsity of desires, distortion of senses; sickness; social sophistication and complication	Good government, political participation in a properly- structured culture; people see interests reflected in culture and government
Hellenistic	(Standard development model): proper expression of virtues and relations to others	Ignorance, distorted values, wrong experience of emotions	Embody the virtues and emotional experiences and choices of the standard development model

Modern Model

Story	Bad State (Past)	Good State (Present & Future)	Path to Improvement
Modern	Unevolved, unscientific, backward or backward-facing, irrational	Evolved, scientific, technological, forward-looking, rational	Making everyone rational and scientific; transforming humanity with technology; perhaps huge conflict and destruction to weed out the unevolved and irrational.

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Questions and Exercises: Lecture 8

1. The Biblical story of the Fall (and in part that of the Tower of Babel) blames disobedience and probably independent action for human problems: the answer is renewed obedience. The Gnostic view challenges this, saying that such obedience would be to a tyrannical, lower being, not the True God. Can you see problems with either model? How do you know what to submit to? Could there be a healthy form of obedience to divine or ultimate principles, and what would that look like?
2. The Gnostic view of the material world and our bodies is rather pessimistic. Do you think this view still has relevance today? Does it go too far? Have we been able to overcome this pessimism, or are we more deluded than ever?
3. Consider the notion of an Adamic or transparent language. Are there communication styles or media, or ways of using language, or even emotional states, which hinder us from experiencing and understanding each other and nature? Do any of these prevent us from accessing the divine? What could some alternatives be?
4. Several traditional standpoints recommend caution, or are even suspicious of, the lower parts of the soul—normally connected with desires and appetites. These include Aristotle, the Golden Dawn and John Dee versions of the Fall, and Plato. What do you make of this caution? Do you think desires lead you and others astray, and how? Do they need to be organized and moderated, or suppressed and controlled? Do you think something like purification of them is possible? What would life be like if you did any of these?
5. Many traditional philosophers believe that our lives go astray because of a lack of correct knowledge about values, what is truly good, and what really belongs to us or is in our control. Can you think of events in your life in which ignorance of these types led you into distress, unhappiness, or even ruined your life? What kind of wisdom did you get out of those experience?
6. Consider any attraction you may have to the modern model. Are there elements of it you feel you could not live without? Why?
7. Can you think of *alternatives* to the problematic parts of the modern myth? For example, could spiritual progress or development take place without identifying it with historical individuals, times, or places?
8. Would spiritual advancement still be a valuable goal for you if it only happened periodically, among small numbers of people, and there were no guarantees it would spread?