

Prof. Rex Li's Writings

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Comparing Plato's Psychology with Dewey's

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Summary/ Abstract: Plato is not a psychologist but his taxonomy is our starting point.

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Comparing Plato's Psychology with Dewey's

Based on a short passage of Durant (Story of Philosophy, p. 20 -21) summarizing Plato's view on human nature, I try to make the following comparison. I'm quite aware that Durant, a student of Dewey may put Dewey's words in Plato's mouth by interpreting Plato in terms of Dewey's terms.

Plato	Knowledge / reason	Emotion	Desire / Instinct
Bain	Intellect	Emotion	Will
Dewey	Cognition	Emotion	Volition

- (1) What Plato called 'reason' becomes 'cognition' in Dewey, a broader term in modern psychology including sensation, perception, memory, thinking, etc. This surely is modern progress.
- (2) Plato's emotion is ambition, courage, fear, etc. While similar to Dewey's, modern psychology focus on pleasure - pain principles. Dewey tried to expand emotion with the scope of feeling – moral, aesthetic, intellectual, etc.
- (3) Plato talked about instinct and desire, mainly sexual. Dewey's volition includes impulse, instinct, desire and will, the last one to mean human attention, planning and co-ordination, thus act of will.
- (4) Plato / Aristotle starts with the beliefs of Tabula Rasa (Blank Slate of the Mind), to be refuted in modern psychology
- (5) In the last century, progress in neuroscience and biology, linguistics, etc. rewrites human nature in consciousness, unconsciousness, instinct, neural network. But Plato is the starting point and Dewey——James is a synthesizer before the advent of neuroscience.