

## Unit One Section A: THE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND VALUES

### Part one: THE QUEST FOR MEANING

#### TOPIC 1.2 THE TRADITION OF SEARCH

##### Procedure

##### *The nature and purpose of philosophy*

*Assignment:* Finish the sentence Philosophy is .....

Or Read *Sophie's World* - Gaarder, J. (1995) London: Phoenix House on Socrates pages 11-14

*Or Brainstorm:* What is Philosophy?

Take feedback from students and conclude that the nature and purpose of philosophy is to reflect/search for wisdom on key questions about the meaning of life – illustrate by displaying the following poster/overhead:

Philosophy = Love of wisdom (Greek)
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*Brainstorm:* Why should we care about wisdom?

Take feedback from students and explain that Aristotle said in answer to this question - displaying the following poster/overhead:

“From the beginning, wonder has made men philosophise and it still does.” – Aristotle “The wise man is to the ignorant as the living is to the dead.” – Aristotle
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The role of philosophy is to inquire into the nature of the universe, to seek to uncover the laws that govern the world and to seek answers to the foundational questions that define human existence. Philosophy is thus all embracing in its scope and this is reflected in the classical divisions into which it has traditionally been divided. i.e. Present students with the following words:

LOGIC
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ETHICS
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*Brainstorm:* Which of these words have you heard of before?  
What is the meaning of these words?

Take feedback from students and confirm the meaning of words which they may be familiar with from Junior Certificate e.g. ethic

*Or Word wall assignment:* Distribute the following cards and give students time to match the meaning to the words.

Study of reasoning e.g. What is rational? Etc.
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Study of moral behaviour e.g. Is there such a thing as the good life? If so, what is it? How can we know it? Etc.
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Take feedback from students and confirm the meaning of words as follows:

LOGIC Study of reasoning e.g. What is rational? Etc.
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ETHICS Study of moral behaviour e.g. Is there such a thing as the good life? If so, what is it? How can we know it? Etc.
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*Brainstorm:* What is the purpose of philosophy?

Take feedback from students and conclude that the purpose of philosophy is to reflect on the key questions that human being ask in their search for meaning in life. E.g. Questions about –

- Reasoning e.g. What is rational? Etc.
- Moral behaviour e.g. Is there such a thing as the good life? If so, what is it? How can we know it? Etc.
- Existence and the existence of the universe e.g. What does it mean to be? To exist? To be real? Etc.
- Knowledge e.g. How do we know? What are the limits of human knowledge? Etc.
- Human nature e.g. What it is to be a human being? Are human beings free? Etc.

As human being we strive to understand the world and ourselves, so as to make our lives deeper, more meaningful. Each philosopher is grappling with issues that are part of universal human experience. People have always wondered about the nature of the universe and the place of human beings in it.

The history of philosophy is the record of human beings search for wisdom as the foundational questions of meaning and value are re-shaped by each successive generation and culture. In ancient societies each culture had its own myths which “explained” how things came to be as they were. In fifth and sixth century BCE Greece philosophers like Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus and Parmenides challenged the mythical understanding of the world and developed a rational understanding of reality. Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus were concerned with the origin of things. They believe that there was coherence to reality – the cosmos was ordered and reality is accessible to reason. Their philosophical speculations were based on the belief in a law governed universe rather than one that is lawless, random and irrational. Although these philosophers differed in their understanding of the origins of things, as seen below, their ideas marked a breakthrough from the world of mythic culture to one that is founded on the power of logic. Philosophers such as these had the idea that the universe is ordered and that this order is accessible to human reason. They recognized that the intelligibility of the cosmos is dependent on our ability to structure it in terms of cause and effect, and systematically explored the universe in terms of these categories.

- Thales believed that everything originated from water.
- Anaximenes believed that everything originated from air.
- Heraclitus believed that everything originated from fire.

Parmenides and Heraclitus were particularly interested in understanding change and permanence, how things can change and yet remain themselves. It is hard for us today to be aware of the enormity of the breakthrough initiated by these earliest philosophers - the belief that every experience can be investigated precisely because it can be understood as an effect. This provides the possibility of all scientific enterprise. Science of every kind is dedicated to explaining the reason for experiences through the process of uncovering the existence of a cause or causes of these experiences.

### *The thinking of Socrates on the moral good, the purpose of life and the importance of essences*

Introduce Socrates by reading *Student Work: Who am I?* Match the names with the people described: Socrates is ... Take feedback from students and confirm their understanding of the life of Socrates.

Explain that Socrates engaged in a series of dialogues with people who believed they fully understood the issues under discussion. Socrates would take the role of a questioner and through asking a series of questions he would show the people how much they did not know. The aim of these philosophical dialogues was to discover the truth about how a person should live a good and moral life e.g. Plato’s dialogue Gorgias

Read *Student Work: SOCRATES’ THINKING ON THE MORAL GOOD & THE PURPOSE OF LIFE*

In five voices: Narrator, Socrates, Gorgias, Polus and Callicles.

- Discuss:
- What does Plato’s dialogue show about Socrates’ idea of the purpose of life?
  - What does Plato’s dialogue show about Socrates’ thinking on the moral good?
  - How are the questions Socrates raised, similar to those people ask today?

Take feedback and conclude that for Socrates the moral good and the purpose of life is not just to live, but to live well, to live in accordance with reason. “The really important thing is not to live but to live well”(48b*Crito*). Living well is to live honourably or rightly.

Socrates believed human beings have a duty to explore the truth regarding right and wrong, justice and injustice, courage and cowardice. He worked to find laws and limits that could be observed in order to lead a good life. He believed that once you found these laws they would hold true for all people at all times and in all situations. From this perspective, to live a good life is to live an ordered life, one that is marked by moderation. Socrates was convinced that we should not just live according to appetite, pleasure, appearance: we have reason, a rational capacity, one that allows us to define the nature of concepts such as truth, goodness and justice. It is this rational capacity to see the essence of things which Socrates believed should set the standards

for people rather than an over-reliance on appearance. For Socrates the moral good is not only objective but is both capable of rational discernment and universally binding.

Or Read relevant extracts from *one* of the following:

- *Sophie's World* - Gaarder, J. (1995) London: Phoenix House on Socrates page 49
- *Introducing Philosophy* (1999) Icon Books UK (Cartoon Story)
- Junior Certificate Classical Studies – [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) jc\_classic\_yr1\_guide.pdf & jc\_classic\_yr23\_guide(2).(pdf)
- Delius, C. ed. (2000) *The Story of Philosophy: From Antiquity to the Present* Cologne: Konemann page 9

Discuss:       What is Socrates' idea of the purpose of life?  
                  What is Socrates' thinking on the moral good?  
                  What is Socrates' thinking on the importance of essences?

Take feedback and for higher-level students conclude with reference to the following points: Socrates believed that if a person knew the right thing, then he or she would do it. No one does wrong willingly. He was deeply concerned with the difference between opinion (what I think is right) and truth (what I know is correct). Opinion changes, truth is fixed. Socrates' great insight was that knowledge is truth.

Read *Student Work: Socrates & the Sophists*

Socrates in opposition to the Sophists, argued for the objectivity of values such as justice, goodness and truth. He believed passionately that the human person is both capable of recognizing the true nature of these values and is obliged to hold fast to them. The alternative as he saw it is a type of moral anarchy that enshrines the power principle that only the fittest survive. Against the Sophists, Socrates argues that:

1. It is better to suffer evil than to inflict evil,
2. Justice cannot be regarded as the set of rules laid down by the strong on the principle that might is right
3. We are obliged to seek the truth rather than simply to persuade others that our views are true
4. The good life is not identical with pleasure

*Assessment Questions*

1. Write a summary of two of the main ideas of Socrates and explain why each idea was important in the development of philosophy.
2. Imagine that Socrates was alive today and came to speak to your class – Write out the speech that he would make. Include any key issues today that you think he might talk about.

***The thinking of Plato on the importance of ideas, on the nature of reality and on the duality of human nature***

Review *Student Work: Who am I?*

Match the following names with the people described: Plato = \_\_\_

Take feedback from students and confirm their understanding of the life of Plato.

Introduce Plato by explaining that his contribution is crucial in refining the Socratic belief in the objectivity of concepts such as truth, goodness, justice, etc.

Give students time to study photograph on *Student Work: REALITY AND APPEARANCE - snow / old & young woman / vase*.

Finish the sentence:     What is this a photograph of \_\_\_\_\_

Take feedback from students and note responses on the chalkboard.

Discuss:           Have people seen different things in this photograph?

Take feedback from students referring to concrete examples such as the photograph of the vase could appear to be two faces; the old woman could appear to be a young woman; the snow could appear to be the face of Christ.

Discuss:           Is there a difference between reality and appearance?

Or Read the poem *Field of Vision* by Seamus Heaney and discuss the questions

What appears to lie within the woman's field of vision?

In the third verse why does the poet praise the woman?

What does this show really lies within the woman's field of vision?

Or Read the poem *Canal Bank Walk* – Kavanagh and discuss the question

In this poem and others Kavanagh expresses his belief that this world reflects a heavenly, divine one. Which details best capture that belief in your opinion?

Take feedback from students and explain that Plato believed that the world was divided into reality and appearance - knowledge (truth) and opinion. We seek knowledge or truth but opinion is usually all that we have, though it may pass for knowledge. This is because people focus on the visible world - the world of the senses, rather than on an intangible world - a world beyond the senses, a world of true knowledge. Thus, for example, a person may be concerned with beautiful things - things that he or she considers beautiful. But this is a matter of opinion. Someone else may not consider these things beautiful. The person who is concerned with the higher world, the world of true knowledge, is concerned with beauty itself. There are particular instances of beauty in the physical world, in the world of the senses, but they all share in what Plato called the universal form of beauty. Plato believed that the universal or the form / idea is that which really exists. The individual or the particular is merely a copy of the form / idea, existing only to the extent that it participates in the form / idea. Concepts such as beauty, truth, goodness, justice, etc really exist. They are universals that are eternal, objective, immutable, spiritual and real.

The early Greek philosophers such as Thales, Anaximenes, Heraclitus etc. believed that the universe is ordered and that this order is accessible to the human reason. For Plato that intelligible context is provided by his theory of form / idea that gives prominence to the idea of the 'Good'. In Plato's dialogue the *Republic*, the 'Good' is proposed as the origin of existence and the goal for which all beings strive.

Read relevant extracts from *one* of the following:

- *Sophie's World* - Gaarder, J. (1995) London: Phoenix House on Plato page 67
- *Introducing Plato* – D. Robinson & J. Groves Icon Bks UK (Cartoon Story)
- *Plato for Beginners* – A Writers and Readers Documentary Comic Book (ISBN 0863160395)
- *The Story of Philosophy: From Antiquity to the Present* Delius, C. ed. (2000) Cologne: Konemann pages 9-13
- Junior Certificate Classical Studies – [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) jc\_classic\_yr1\_guide.pdf
- Read *Student Work*: Plato

Discuss: What is Plato's thinking on the duality of human nature?  
What is Plato's thinking on the nature of reality?  
What is Plato's thinking on the importance of ideas?

Take feedback and conclude with reference to the following points:

The writings of Plato remind us of the manner in which the goal and purpose of life, the search for meaning and value is shaped by the universal love of beauty, truth, goodness and love. These concepts are not just figments of my imagination or subjective creations; beauty is not simply in the eye of the beholder, nor can the good life be determined simply by that which I feel is good. Beauty, Truth, Goodness, and Love really exist, and are immortal. Plato theory of Ideas is an expression of his conviction in the objectivity of concepts such as truth, goodness, justice, etc.

Plato's theory of ideas is based on a hunch that what is worthwhile, valuable and real must be

- (a) something which is eternal rather than finite,
- (b) something that is objective not subjective – whose existence or value does not depend on me,
- (c) something which is immutable not transient,

**Written Assignment:** Read *Student Work*: THE ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE and explain how the allegory of the cave expresses the distinction between reality and illusion as Plato explained in a small section from book seven of the *Republic* (514a-519c).

The allegory of the cave points to the challenge that awaits all those who seek to model their lives in the light of the Good. It begins with a description of a cave that is inhabited by prisoners. From their earliest childhood they have been in chains facing a wall with their backs to the entrance. Behind them is a fire and between them and the fire is a screen that displays puppet like figures. All that those in chains can see are the shadows of these puppet-like figures that the light of the fire throws on to the back wall. To them, the shadows are real; for them, truth is the shadows of the images – the only reality of which they are aware. What happens if one of these prisoners is released from his chains and forced to turn towards the fire? He will be both distressed by the glare of the light and perplexed because he will think that the shadows that he formerly saw are more real than the objects that are now shown to him. Suppose once more that he is dragged up until he reaches the entrance to the cave. He is likely to be irritated – his eyes dazzled he will require to grow accustomed to the light of the

sun. Gradually he will begin to see the real world – one illuminated by the light of the sun, and to recognise the world in the cave for what it is i.e., a world of made up of shadows. Finally, out of pity for his former friends, he will return to the cave to enlighten them. However, they will not welcome his visit and he will be received with hostility as someone who threatens their world-view. Furthermore, any attempt to release them and to lead them up to the light will likely meet with violent opposition that could end with his death.

Give students time to complete the assignments and take feedback from the students written assignments.

Discuss: How does Plato's Allegory of the Cave reflect his thinking on the importance of ideas, on the nature of reality and on the duality of human nature?

How relevant are the ideas of Plato to the world we live in today?

Take feedback from the students and conclude by making reference to some of the following points -

- The distinction between the real world and an illusory one that is shaped by public opinion – the distinction between truth and opinion, reality and shadows / illusions. For Plato, the sun symbolises the Good, and it is only a life lived in this light that is capable of either seeing reality or living in the real world. The allegory of the cave charts the journey that must be taken by all who strive to live a good life. This journey involves a personal conversion – a radical reshaping of one's vision that will demand the shedding of images of fulfilment shaped by the desires for pleasure or power.
- The image of sight / blindness reflects the manner in which prejudice is a form of blindness. To see the real world – to see and to love truth is a moral achievement. All too many people are content to live in the illusory world that is shaped by their own prejudices.
- The reference to the death of the person who returned to the cave to free the prisoners is meant to remind readers of the death of Socrates. It is a reminder that all those who love wisdom have a responsibility to contribute to the education of society and reflects the stubbornness of all who are captive to their own illusions.

#### Assessment Questions

1. Write a summary of two of the main ideas of Plato and explain why each idea was important in the development of philosophy
2. Imagine that Plato was alive today and came to speak to your class. Write out the speech that he would make. Include any key issues today that you think he might talk about.

#### **The thinking of Aristotle on matter and form and his contribution to scientific thought and principles**

Introduce Aristotle by reading *Student Work: Who am I?*

Match the following names with the people described: Aristotle = \_\_

Take feedback from students and confirm their understanding of the life of Aristotle.

Read relevant extracts from *one* of the following:

- *Sophie's World* - Gaarder, J. (1995) London: Phoenix House on Aristotle page 88
- *Introducing Aristotle* – D. Woodfin & J. Groves - Icon Bks UK (Cartoon Story)
- *The Story of Philosophy: From Antiquity to the Present* Delius, C. ed. (2000) Cologne: Konemann pages 13–16
- Junior Certificate Classical Studies – [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) jc\_classic\_yr1\_guide.pdf

Read *Student Work: Aristotle*

Discuss: What is Aristotle's thinking on matter and form?

In what ways did Aristotle contribute to scientific thought and principles?

Take feedback and conclude with reference to the following points:

Aristotle, Plato's student, disagreed with his argument that it is the universals or the forms/ideas (immaterial / universal) that really exist. For Aristotle it is the individual substance that really exists. The universal is an abstraction that has no separate existence. For Aristotle, every being (substance) is composed of 'matter and form' – prime matter and substantial form. The matter is what makes me unique whereas the form tells me the species to which I belong. Just as in biological terms we only understand an acorn if we grasp its potentiality to become a fully developed oak tree, so too, in terms of the meaning and value of an individual human life, Aristotle urged people to look beyond the immediate horizon and to think instead of the human form - the potentiality of human nature. Aristotle insisted that to understand something's essence is to grasp its potentiality. Aristotle was convinced that the question of meaning is ultimately linked to questions about the

goal or purpose of life. He recognizes that the realization that every living organism exists for a purpose is a powerful argument in favour of an ordered universe and the existence of an intelligent being who is the cause of this order. In common with Plato, Aristotle maintains that there is a right, rational and natural order to the quest for individual and social self-realization, an order that finds its articulation in an analysis of the substantial form, i.e., human nature.

Aristotle is universally recognized for his contribution to scientific thought and principles. Science of every kind is dedicated to explaining the reason for experiences through the process of uncovering the existence of a cause or causes of these experiences. If the intelligibility of the universe is to be affirmed, Aristotle was convinced that one had to make sense of the experience of movement, change or becoming. In his theory of 'Potency and Act' Aristotle observed one is only able to explain the possibility of movement if it is acknowledged that every sensible substance is composed of both act and potency, the act reflecting the being as it is; the potency reflecting the being as it could become (its potential). The only being that has no potency is the one who is the first cause of all movement – the unmoved mover. Aristotle identified the unmoved mover with the Good who is the object of desire and thought. This shifts the direction of thought from a focus on the cause as in the origins of movement to one that reflects on the cause as in the purpose or goal of movement. As he says: "The final cause, then, moves by being loved, while all other things that move do so by being moved." Not only did Aristotle provide the first systematic analysis of the nature of causation but he also recognized that the intelligibility of the universe and thus the possibility of physics, depended on the acknowledgement of a first cause, which he named God.

### Assessment Questions

1. Write a summary of two of the main ideas of Aristotle and explain why each idea was important in the development of philosophy.
2. Imagine that Aristotle was alive today and came to speak to your class. Write out the speech that he would make. Include any key issues today that you think he might talk about.

### *The development of philosophy in Ancient Greece – Sophists & Key moments in the development of philosophical thought from the classical to the contemporary period*

Read relevant extracts from *one* of the following on the development of philosophy in Ancient Greece:

- *Sophie's World* - Gaarder, J. (1995) London: Phoenix House on the natural Philosophers page 27
- *The Story of Philosophy: From Antiquity to the Present* Delius, C. ed. (2000) Cologne: Konemann page 6
- *Believe To Live Book Two* – Ann Walsh Veritas page 63
- Junior Certificate Classical Studies – [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) jc\_classic\_yr1\_guide.pdf

Brainstorm: Who featured in the development of philosophy in Ancient Greece?  
How did they contribute to the development of philosophy?

Note feedback on the chalkboard and conclude with reference to the following points:

- Philosophy began 2,500 years ago in a small geographical area in the eastern Mediterranean that lies between Ionia on the western seaboard of present day Turkey and the small communities that populated southern Italy and Sicily.
- In the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, the Greeks sought the truth about the world as they experienced it. The beginnings of their quest to understand the world were founded on their insight that:
  1. The cosmos is no mere plaything of the Gods but is rather an ordered universe
  2. This order is intelligible, i.e. it is accessible to human reason
- The earliest philosophers commonly called the Pre-Socratic philosophers concerned themselves with such questions as:
  - (a) 'is there a unity to the cosmos, and if so, in what does it consist?'
  - (b) 'how does one account for the individuality or the diversity of experience?'
  - (c) 'how does one account for that most universal of all experiences namely movement, change or becoming' - a question that accompanies the universal experience of birth, growth, decay and death.
- The idea that the universe is open to rational rather than mythological explanation is what marks the early Greek thinkers as truly a new beginning. The following century saw the rise of Athens to become the undisputed centre of Greek culture. These early Greek philosophers were concerned about truth and the question of change in the physical world. Their great preoccupation was if everything in the world is changing all the time, is it possible to find any underlying order, any permanent reality behind the changing appearances of the world?

- Heraclitus argued that the only permanent feature of the world was that everything changes all the time. 'The world is always in a state of flux.'
- Parmenides, argued that the world was formed from some unchanging substance – something permanent. However, the only truth that can be discovered about this permanence is simply that it is. Nothing more can be said about it.
- Democritus, believed that the world was made out of single, indivisible units called atoms. The form and shape of each atom cannot change but atoms are constantly moving and rearranging themselves. Thus there is both a permanent and a changing aspect to the universe.
- Later philosophers like Socrates and Plato were concerned with the truth about how life should be lived - ethical or moral truth, as opposed to scientific truth. In the latter part of the 5<sup>th</sup> century there appeared in Athens a class of thinkers (Sophists) who found employment as itinerant teachers. Among the practical arts that the sophists taught the most important was rhetoric – the art of persuasion. On issues concerning the nature of morality and the best way for a city to be governed they held the view that: 'Man is the measure of all things' (Protagoras) and 'justice is simply the interest of the stronger' (Thrasymachus). As the Sophists appeared to favoured a society that would be prepared to sacrifice all commitment to truth, goodness and justice on the altar of moral relativism and political expediency it was inevitable that they would be involved in a serious struggle with Socrates.

**Brainstorm:** What are the key moments in the development of philosophy?

Note feedback on the chalkboard and besides the development of philosophy in ancient Greece if not mentioned by the students refer to Descartes and the rise of Modernity as well as factors that influenced this i.e. the effects of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the development of modern science.

**Or Individual / Group Research Assignment:**

Pick one of the following cards and research the contribution of who/whatever is named on your card to the development of philosophical thought.

Distribute three or more of the following work cards:

<p>Augustine of Hippo (354-95CE) Born in Tagaste near Carthage (modern-day Tunisia)</p>	<p>Thomas Aquinas (1225CE) Born in the Italian town of Aquino</p>	<p>Age of Reason 17/18<sup>th</sup> Centuries Kepler, Galileo, Copernicus, Newton, Kant</p>
<p>René Descartes (1596CE) Born in a French town on the Loire that now carries his name</p>	<p>Phenomenology Heidegger Levinas</p>	<p>Existentialism Kierkegaard Jean-Paul Sartre</p>

Give students time to research information for the completion of the assignment. Useful websites include:

<http://www.philosophypages.com/>

<http://www.knuten.liu.se/~bjoch509/philosophers/ari.html>

<http://socrates.clarke.edu/>

<http://plato.evansville.edu/>

<http://www.rit.edu/~flwstv/aristotle1.html>

Draw a time line on the chalkboard and invite each student/group to place their card on the time line and present their findings to the whole class.

Probe each student /group on their reasons for saying the person/ movement named on their card contributed to the development of philosophical thought.

When feedback from each student /group has been heard review what has been named in the time line and discuss:

If you were to pick three key moments in the development of philosophy –

What would you pick? Why?

Take feedback and conclude.

Assessment Questions

1. (a) Who were the sophists?  
Explain some of the key ideas held by the sophists of ancient Greece.
  - (b) How did they influence the development of philosophy?
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*Resources which teachers have suggested include:*

Believe To Live Book Two – Ann Walsh pages Veritas Publications

Reason To Believe Book One – Ann Walsh Veritas Publications

Annas, J. (2000) *Ancient Philosophy* Oxford: OUP Very Short Introductions Series published by Oxford University Press.

Barnes, J. (2000) *Aristotle* Oxford: OUP Very Short Introductions Series published by Oxford University Press.

Taylor, C. (2000) *Socrates* Oxford: OUP Very Short Introductions Series published by Oxford University Press.

Delius, C. ed. (2000) *The Story of Philosophy: From Antiquity to the Present* Cologne: Konemann

Gaarder, J. (1995) *Sophie's World* London: Phoenix House

Junior Certificate Classical Studies [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) jc\_classic\_yr1\_guide.pdf &

jc\_classic\_yr23\_guide(2).(pdf)

<http://www.philosophypages.com/>

<http://www.knuten.liu.se/~bjoch509/philosophers/ari.html>

<http://socrates.clarke.edu/>

<http://plato.evansville.edu/>

<http://www.rit.edu/~flwstv/aristotle1.html>



*Student Work: SOCRATES' THINKING ON THE MORAL GOOD & THE PURPOSE OF LIFE*

- Narrator: The background to Plato's dialogue the *Gorgias* is Socrates' criticism of the high value placed on the art of rhetoric – the skills of persuasion, at the expense of a commitment to truth, by those trying for public office in the democratic culture of Athens. In the dialogue you are about to hear adapted from the arguments in the *Gorgias* Socrates is in conversation with three well-known Sophists (teachers of rhetoric) in Athens, Gorgias, Polus and Callicles. The question being discussed is who gives the greater service to both the individual and the state, is it philosophy or sophistry / rhetoric? The former teaches the truth, the latter how to persuade. The dialogue is divided into three parts. Part 1 begins:
- Gorgias: The art of rhetoric, the art of persuasion, as the most noble of all the arts which confers on every one who possesses it not only freedom for himself but also the power of ruling his fellow-countrymen.
- Socrates: Rhetoric can be compared to fancy cookery and cosmetics – forms of flattery, which in contrast to physical training and medicine, aim to please the customer rather than say what is really good for them. It is like a doctor being prosecuted by a confectioner before a jury of children. There is a gap between what pleases us and what's actually good for us: food can appeal to people's taste or 'fantasies' because the manufacturer ran a clever advertising campaign but the food could actually be bad for us. The mere fact that it appeals to our fantasies doesn't give us a proper reason to think that it is 'good'. When we fail to see this distinction, and think that what merely pleases us is also what is good for us, we have a problem. This is just what is happening with orators. Just because we are pleased by their way of speaking, so we are persuaded by their speeches about subjects such as justice and injustice. It is as if we confuse being flattered with a real reason to believe these people.
- Narrator: Part 2. In conversation with Polus, Socrates says:
- Socrates: The orator is more to be pitied than envied because the one who does not will the good has no real power.
- Polus: I disagree. Orators have the power in society to wield tremendous influence: they can have people put in prison, have their property confiscated, and even have them put to death.
- Socrates: But why might we want to exercise this ability? Power for its own sake is not a legitimate goal.
- Polus: I do not believe that you would not envy a person with such power!
- Socrates: I definitely do not envy people who have other people put to death, and if they do it unjustly, they are miserable and are to be pitied, it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. You cannot be happy without being virtuous, and if you are virtuous you are bound to be happy. This does not mean that other things besides virtue – e.g. physical health or wealth have no contribution to make to a happy life. But it does mean that, on their own, such things cannot transform an unhappy person into a happy person; on the other hand, taking away riches or health cannot make a happy person unhappy.
- Polus: This is nonsense because it would imply that, the man who dies at the hands of torturers is happier than the successful tyrant!
- Socrates: Happiest of all is he who is just; happy in the second degree is he who is delivered from injustice by punishment and the most deluded and unhappiest of all is he who lives on, enjoying the fruit of his crimes.
- Narrator: Part 3. Callicles asks:

Callicles: Socrates are you really serious? If what you say were true the whole world order would be turned upside down. You pretend to be engaged in the pursuit of truth, but in fact Socrates you are only articulating convention – that set of laws that have been devised by the weak to protect themselves from the strong, and what we call justice or the desire for equality has no basis in the natural order. According to the laws of nature the better man should prevail over the worse and stronger over the weaker, right consists in the superior ruling over the inferior and having the upper hand. As the Greek poet Pindar's expressed it, in the natural order might is right. The worthwhile life is about excelling at no matter what cost to others; the law of nature admires above all else: strength, courage and power. The esteem in which virtue and justice are held can be explained by the efforts of the weak to conceal their weakness. Luxury and excess and licence, provided that they can obtain sufficient backing, are virtue and happiness; all the rest is mere flummery, unnatural conventions of society, worthless cant. The courageous and intelligent person will devote himself to the ruthless pursuit of pleasure.

Socrates: Let's discuss the question of what should people aim for in life, i.e. pleasure or goodness. I have to challenge your presumption that the pleasurable life is identical with the good life and that the subjective standard of pleasure is the barometer by which we measure the Good e.g. unlike goodness, the desire for pleasure is never ending. The intemperate person is like a vessel full of holes because passions and pleasures can never be satisfied. I also have to question whether the good should be sought for the sake of a pleasurable life or whether pleasure is to be sought after for the sake of the good life. I argue for the latter on the basis that only the search for the Good can justify human striving. The subjective standard of personal pleasure cannot function as the measure of the good life. I propose as an alternative an objective standard based on the concept of order. Order is good and disorder evil, and health in any organism reflects the existence of order or harmony among the parts. I see temperance and justice in terms of order and would argue that lives lived to excess are thus disordered and sick. Intemperate people can neither be a friend of themselves, others or God, because they are at war with themselves, others and God. I condemn injustice because it destroys the order and harmony that make up both the soul of the individual and the soul of the state. An even greater evil is not to be punished for doing injustice because punishment at least helps to restore the balance, order and harmony of the relationships that have been broken. Therefore it is better to suffer injustice than to inflict it even if this means one's own death. There could be worse things to befall a person than to die in the cause of righteousness. Renouncing the honours at which the world aims, I desire only to know the truth and to live as well as I can and when I die, to die as well as I can.

(Adapted from *Gorgias* – Plato, Penguin Classics  
& Into The Classroom Series – The Search for Meaning and Values – E.Cassidy)

Questions:

What does Plato's dialogue show about Socrates' idea of the purpose of life?

What does Plato's dialogue show about Socrates' thinking on the moral good?

How are the questions Socrates raised, similar to those people ask today?