

Phil 103: Ethics

24 October 2022

Prompt: In Plato's *Apology*, Socrates argues that the ultimate purpose of his approach to philosophy is the perfection of a person's soul. Write a paper where you [1] argue how this vision of philosophy is displayed in both the *Apology* and the *Protagoras* and [2] discuss how the study of ethics—particularly, the study of virtue—relates to this stated goal of Socratic philosophy. Then, [3] please develop an argument about whether the perfection of the soul requires a full understanding of virtue in order to achieve this goal. In defending your argument to [3], please be sure to include at least one reference to each text as supporting evidence for your thesis—strong papers will consider more than just one example of textual evidence.

(continue to next page)

Prompt 1

Many consider Socrates to be the founding father of western philosophy and Socratic teachings. As a philosopher, Socrates has his own type of philosophy due to his impact on philosophy as a whole.¹ Philosophers are often referred to as either “pre-Socratic” or “post-Socratic”. The reason for this distinction between ~~if a~~ philosophers ~~who~~ came before or after Socrates is due to Socrates’ impact on defining philosophy and sophism itself. Socrates believed that the study of philosophy is parallel to the study of one’s soul, and in turn, perfecting one’s soul. Socrates believed that the well-being and improvement of the soul directly relied on virtue and ~~whether if~~ the soul was considered to be virtuous. This viewpoint on philosophy and the soul leads to further questions, such as ‘what is virtue?’, and ‘what is considered to be virtuous?’. In Plato’s “Apology of Socrates”, as well as Plato’s “Protagoras”, Socrates’ beliefs regarding the soul and virtue are in-depth and will be analyzed in this paper, as well as the question of whether the soul needs to be virtuous to be considered complete.

Socrates believes that nourishing the soul is what philosophers should strive for. In his dialogue in Protagoras and his ~~apology~~, he claims that a sophist/philosopher’s teachings should be based on the nourishment and improvement of one’s soul. In Plato’s ‘Protagoras’, Socrates claims that the sophists of his time were not real philosophers, but rather extorted money out of ~~civilians-citizens? commoners?~~ and ~~had propogated~~ deceiving teachings that were not truly philosophical. He states, “Am I right, then, Hippocrates, that a sophist is a kind of merchant who peddles provisions upon which the soul is nourished? That’s what he seems like to me. But the soul nourished on, Socrates? Teachings, I would say. And watch, or the sophist might deceive us in advertising what he sells, the way merchants who market food for the body do. In general,

Commented [DJ(1)]: This sentence is unclear to me. Is this trying to say that, due to his significant impact on philosophic understanding, Socrates is in a class by himself and is therefore credited with his own brand of philosophy? If so, maybe word it something like that. It’s also putting it in your own words which demonstrates your understanding to your professor.

Commented [DJ(2)]: Should this be capitalized?

Commented [DJ(3)]: Use another word other than civilians, which is usually used to describe non-combatants in a war

¹ Rattini, Kristin Baird. “Socrates-Facts and Information.” Culture. National Geographic, May 4, 2021.

those who market Provisions don't know what is good or bad for the body—they just recommend everything they sell—nor do those who buy.”² Socrates claims that Sophists do not truly teach philosophy, which is the nourishment of the soul, and that they rather teach what the people will consume rather than thinking carefully about perfecting the souls of ~~the~~their students. In Plato's apology, Socrates claims that he was different from the other sophists in that his teachings were truly based on perfecting the soul which is the true philosophy. He states, “ I think that until now no greater good has befallen the city than my service to god. For I go about doing nothing other than persuading you, both young and old, not to care for bodies and money as earnestly as how your soul will be the best possible.”³ Socrates claims that his teachings motivate individuals to focus on the improvement of the soul rather than materialistic or physical things such as physical well-being and currency. These dialogues proveshow that Socrates believed philosophy is the perfection of one soul. This view~~which~~ is what distinguishes his Socrates' teachings and beliefs from other philosophers, and ~~that~~ these beliefs were significantly impacted~~impacted~~impacted on the subsequent study of philosophy. Furthermore, in these select dialogues that proveclarify Socrates' definition of philosophy, Socrates does not dive into the question of how to perfect one's soul, but rather just acknowledges that that is what the study of philosophy is about. In order to further analyze Socrates' view on Philosophy, it is necessary to understand what Socrates means when he discusses the perfection of one's soul.

Having a clear understanding of virtue is essential in fully developing the soul according to Socrates. In the Protagoras, Socrates has an abundance of dialogue arguing ~~about~~ what virtue

² Plato. Protagoras ; and, Meno. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

³ West, Thomas G., 1945-. Plato's "Apology of Socrates" : an Interpretation, with a New Translation. Ithaca, N.Y. :Cornell University Press, 1979.

Commented [DJ(4)]: Capitalize?

Commented [DJ(5)]: "prove" is a strong word that is hard to defend. Suggest replacing it with "show" or "demonstrate"

Commented [DJ(6)]: Should be lower case?

means, and discussing about the difference between “good” and “bad”. Socrates argues with Protagoras in this dialogue about this topic. He states, “Now, if he completed his life, having lived pleasantly, does he not seem to you to have lived well?” ‘It seems that way to me.’ ‘So, then, to live pleasantly is good, and unpleasantly, bad?’ ‘Yes, so long as he lived having taken pleasure in honorable things.’ ‘What, Protagoras? Surely you don’t, like most people, call some pleasant things bad and some painful things good? I mean, isn’t a pleasant thing good just insofar as it is pleasant, that is, if it results in nothing other than pleasure; and, on the other hand, aren’t painful things bad in the same way, just insofar as they are painful?’⁴ In this dialogue, Socrates defines the difference between ‘pleasant’ and ‘painful’ actions and likewise defines the boundaries for which they exist. Socrates believes one who lives pleasantly and has a pleasant soul from doing ‘good’ things can be considered virtuous as long as the soul is not in pain but rather pleasure. He criticizes Protagoras for his opinion on the matter, in which Protagoras argues that one is virtuous if they do ‘painful’ things which may cause a feeling of pleasure of virtue later on after the action is completed. Socrates indirectly states that such actions are too ambiguous to define as virtuous, as there is now a balance between pleasure and pain, or between good and bad, or finally between virtuous and not virtuous. Unlike Protagoras, Socrates has a firm definition of what is virtuous and what is not. If one takes part in ‘good’ actions that result in pleasure and virtue, they are virtuous, and if one takes part in tyrannous actions that result in pain, they are not virtuous. On top of this definition of virtue, Socrates further defines virtue as that which is greater than physical or material, but rather something that is embedded in the soul. He states in Plato’s apology, “And I think that until now no greater good has befallen the city than my service to god. For I go about doing nothing other than persuading you, both young and

⁴ Plato. Protagoras ; and, Meno. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.

Commented [DJ(7): Can you explain this part and Socrates quote above with an example? For example, what if one feels pleasure at the pain of others? A good example might be a soldier who has to kill his enemies in war. If the soldier kills an enemy in self-defense in a just war, and it pains him to have to kill the enemy, would he be considered virtuous? Conversely, if the soldier takes pleasure in killing his enemy and in causing pain, would Socrates call that soldier virtuous or not virtuous? An analysis of an example like this would show the professor your understanding of Socrates’ philosophy.

Commented [DJ(8): You used this same quote earlier – can you find a different quote?

old, not to care for bodies and money as earnestly as how your soul will be the best possible. I say, 'Virtue does not come from money, but from virtue comes money and all the other good things for human beings both private and public.'"⁵ In this dialogue, Socrates creates an analogy through parallelism which helps the reader understand what virtue truly is. He states that virtue does not come from money, but money comes from virtue. This simple sentence accomplishes a lot regarding the definition of virtue. First, it shows that virtue is not something that can be achieved through material assets, proving that rather than buying it, it must be obtained through the purity and nourishment of one's soul. The second part of the sentence, claiming that money comes from virtue, shows that with having a pure and virtuous soul comes material assets and greater health and fortune in general. **One with a virtuous soul will be able to obtain fortune and material assets through being virtuous.** This epiphany from Socrates proves that in order to understand the soul, one must understand what it means to be virtuous. **Only one who acknowledges that virtue is something achieved solely from having a good spirit and partaking in "good" or virtuous actions is able to truly achieve a state of virtue and the perfection of one's soul.**

All in all, Socrates believes that virtue and the perfection of ~~ones-one~~'s soul are not independent of each other, but rather one needs to have virtue in order to achieve a perfect soul. Achieving this is what Socrates intends to teach through his Socratic teachings, and is what he believes is the true meaning of Philosophy.

Commented [DJ(9): Are you able to analyze this a bit more – for example, does Socrates generally believe that wealthy people are wealthy because they have lived a virtuous life and poor people have not achieved wealth because they are less virtuous? What would Socrates say about the wealthy man who achieved wealth in a non-virtuous way, such as stealing from or preying on others? Can Socrates explain this or is it a flaw in his philosophy? An analysis like this turns a "B" paper into an "A" paper!

Commented [DJ(10): Before you conclude, can you find another quote on this topic of virtue? In the prompt it says that a strong essay will have more than one quote for each prompt.

⁵ West, Thomas G., 1945-. Plato's "Apology of Socrates" : an Interpretation, with a New Translation. Ithaca, N.Y. :Cornell University Press, 1979.

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West, Thomas G., 1945-. Plato's "Apology of Socrates" : an Interpretation, with a New Translation. Ithaca, N.Y. :Cornell University Press, 1979.