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NO ONE KNOWINGLY DOES WRONG: AN IMPERATIVE OF SOCRATIC PARADOX

JUDE CHINWUBA ASIKE (PhD)
Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Humanities
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
E-mail: asikejude@yahoo.com; Tel: 234-703-433-2569

Abstract

This paper extols the virtue of moral goodness as the only way to secure human happiness. Socrates taught that the good consists of a state of happiness which evolves from useful actions. For an act to be good, it must first be useful, that is, useful in the sense that it is in agreement with one's purpose in life and therefore is appropriate to the true goal of man. For Socrates, the good deeds bring success and genuine happiness, whereas evil deeds bring failure and misfortune. The very act of doing good constitutes happiness. So, it is in the light of this trajectory, that he reinforces his conviction that no one knowingly does wrong. If you know what is right you will do it outrightly, willingly and effortlessly, with the spontaneity and motivation necessary for achieving what is good. Virtue is in disposition of the knowledge of the good; and consequently whoever is virtuous must be knowledgeable. Similarly, whoever is enlightened must be virtuous. Thus, it is against this backdrop that our central task in writing this paper will be to evaluate the synergy of cooperation of consciousness between the subjectivity and objectivity of knowledge. While the Sophists believed in the subjectivity of conduct, by advocating moral choices based upon the individual's feelings or desire. Socrates, here on the other hand sought objectivity as a valid principle which could be used to guide the actions of all mankind. So, for Socrates, knowledge meant truths that have been provided in an objective basis for directing human activity so that man would become efficient and virtuous, understand correctly his true calling in life, and attain happiness. The finding of the study therefore, supports the thesis that, no one willingly does wrong. To live is not itself an evil, as has been claimed, but to live a worthless life is. Socrates quintessentially, in this regards, believed in human excellence (virtue). Virtue is knowledge or wisdom in which we act efficiently to the truth. This idea of course seems contrary to our expectations, for me, we have ample experience that a person with full knowledge, can do wrong. So, how is it, then, that a virtue is knowledge?

Keywords: **Virtue, Knowledge, Happiness, Truth, Socratic Paradox**.

Introduction

Socrates (c.470-399BC) is the main figure in the evolution of western philosophy. He brought philosophy down to the market place in our home into the integrity of moral life. He analyzed the concept of morality in three perspectives: (a) the individual (b) the group community of human existential and (c) the variable of ethical concept. He does this through the considerations of human conduct on the concept of good or bad, and also on the basis of principle, prescription or persuasion to consider an action to be good or bad in the Greek city states.

He extolled the virtue of the Sophists entrepreneurial pragmatism and speculative cosmologists to fashion the best act of philosophical altruism in the philosophical ethics. He is one of the most powerful, intriguing, annoying, inspiring, widely known and yet misunderstood figures in the history of Greek Philosophy. This is in consideration to his famous aphorism that "No one willingly does wrong" (Socio, 2001:124). Yes, he says this absolutely from his point of view that knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness. Knowledge produces virtue in the sense that virtue produces happiness, and such that no one chooses evil over good. Good is that which benefits a man and evil is that which harms him. Evil is identical with error and no one knowingly desires it.

In other words, going by these scenarios of the ethical consequences in the choice of good over evil, Socrates has been the staunch defender of the objectivity of the truth and an outspoken critic of Sophism. Thus, in ethics, where the Sophists felt that there was more disgrace in suffering injustices than in committing it, Socrates taught that it was preferable to suffer wrong than to commit it. The Sophists believed in the subjectivity of conduct, advocating moral choices based upon the individuals feelings or desires, while Socrates sought objectivity valid principles, which could be used to guide the actions of all mankind. He quintessentially, believed in human freedom through the enslavement by passion, a freedom to be attained through control of self by insight, and self-sufficiency, characterized by freedom from needs. The word insight became a watchword for Socrates, because it is a person capable of acting correctly, and it is a reliable criterion in making value judgements. If you know what is right, you will do it automatically, willingly, and effortlessly with the spontaneity and thereby of happiness.

Know yourself and you will be virtuous, in as much as virtue is identical with knowledge. Virtue is same thing as knowledge of the good; consequently, whoever is virtuous must be knowledgeable. Similarly, whoever is enlightened must be virtuous. Socrates here believes in the state of happiness which evolves from useful actions. For an act to be good, it must be useful, that is, useful in the sense that it is in agreement with one's real purpose in life and therefore is appropriate to the true goal of man.

The Socratic search for the good, directs mankind toward virtue in the attainment of knowledge of the good through deepest insight. Virtue is identical with knowledge, but evil deeds indicate a process of self-deception, not simply a lack of knowledge. Virtue consists of being truthful to oneself, maintaining one's integrity, enabling one to recognize truly useful acts and genuine happiness.

Yes, of course, Socrates expresses this in the light of humanitarian paradigm on the need to human welfare, social rights, attainment of human dignity, to idea of positive peace building in the society, basic political rights, human freedom and autonomy of individual will. As been corroborated by Cicero, he opined that it was "Socrates that first call philosophy down from the sky, set it in the cities and even introduced it into home, and compelled it to consider life and moral, good and evil" (Cicero, quoted in W.K. Guthrie, 1971:98).

Basically, it is under the time of Socrates, that philosophical cynicism, relativism, entrepreneurial pragmatism of Sophists and the ethereal speculation of the cosmologists became moribund. Philosophy now has left the "pristine state of nature" (Best, 2006:5) into

the social context of human existence on the basis of ordered social life. According to Socrates, he asserts that every individual requires the integrity of moral goodness for an orderly universe. A just citizen is a just society.

Thus, this paper therefore is in consonance with the Socratic paradox in which it avails hermeneutic understanding of his philosophy. How will we reflect on the morality of his philosophical paradigm into the new structure of morality in our time? Who is to say which person is correct when moral judgments differ and how can I tell if I am correct? These are the very questions with which we began our substantive discussions on Socratic paradox.

Truth for him is on the subjective principles of the will, an insight towards the nature of moral goodness. Knowledge is virtue and virtue is knowledge. The only thing I know is that I know nothing at all.

Here, we extol the virtue of his humility in understanding life better. He uses the tragedy of his life to explicate the terms of references in the concept of professionalism intellectualism, institutionalism towards the dimensions of truth, in being altruistically real of the subject matter of truth. Literally, in the quest for this, he fall into the same categorical mistake, by willingly accepted to die, when there was an opportunity for escape. His insight into the concept of immortality really beclouded his real ignorance to the truth. Strictly speaking, it is in the light of these circumstances that this paper will be discussed.

No One willingly Does Wrong: an Imperative of Socratic Paradox

The main feature of Socrates' thought and the one on which all other aspects of his philosophy depend is that of the "ethical wisdom". It is in the recognition of the fundamental importance of the ethical consideration of human life and of doing good as the basic principle of human activity. Socrates respects his interest solely on the concept of virtue and goodness, as an insight to true good which man should seek. According to Socrates, transitory emotions and vague feelings are a questionable and unsafe guide to human conduct, only the person whose guide in life is accurate knowledge (not merely) of the world without, but also of his own inner nature will be capable of acting correctly. So, it is in the light of this consideration that certain issues converge in Socrates analysis of wisdom which stipulates that virtue is knowledge, and that happiness resides in possession of such knowledge. There is an obvious indication here that this idea seems contrary to our expectations, for we have ample experience that a person, with full knowledge, can do wrong. So, how is it, then that a virtue is knowledge? What Socrates actually prescribes is that knowledge, such as the knowledge of courage, piety, or justice, by its very nature flows immediately into active, practical life so that a person is morally compelled to become courageous, pious or just. In short, to become virtuous, and if he does not become virtuous, he does not really know, it means that he is not really wise. Hence, it is in this light that Socrates asserts that it is wisdom that makes possible courage and self-control and integrity or, in a word, true goodness.

It is quintessentially in this regard, that Socrates is with the knowledge of the good. The Socratic search for the good, that is, for what is genuinely valuable in life, rejects external goods, the paths of luxury or carnal pleasure; it directs mankind towards virtue in the attainment of knowledge of the good through deepest insight, because that is the only way

happiness can be assured. It can be assured through the proper care of the soul, that is, right living.

Virtue is Knowledge

Socrates taught that the good consists of a state of happiness which evolves from useful actions. For an act to be good, it must first be useful, that is, useful in the sense that it is in agreement with one's real purpose in life and therefore is appropriate to the true goal of mankind and conceived this to be moral improvement. Self knowledge, we saw, is a prerequisite for the good life. You cannot tend, care or improve anything unless you know its nature. Virtue or moral goodness is simply that which is good for the soul, its health and salvation. Since the soul is spiritual, not material, it follows that neither physical harms or benefits nor material good affect the soul's health, but only a spiritual regimen. Even as no one would voluntarily choose to be sick rather than healthy, so no one would voluntarily choose evil over good. No one willingly does wrong, simply on the account that evil is bad, and as such, we ought to be contemplating of doing the good, just as it is the only thing that we should be desiring to seek for.

If this is the case, it is certainly possible to argue, why are there bad people then? People do wrong simply because they do not know any better. Evil is a function of ignorance. Evil people simply do not know what is their interest and so mistakenly believe that cheating or harming others will profit them, when just the reverse is the case. No wise person ever does evil voluntarily. "Ignorance of this difference is chief source of conflict" (Soccio, 2001:252). This is because according to Socrates, that no one knowingly does wrong, this of course implies that virtue consists of being truthful to oneself, maintaining one's integrity, enabling one to recognize truly useful acts and genuine happiness. The term goodness is in adequation of knowledge. To know the good is tantamount to trying to do the good, for everyone wants to succeed, to flourish, and to be happy, goodness is good for you and me. This is a thoroughly intellectualist ethic. It is not for the sake of any interest that we desire to do good. No, it is as a result of the subjective will for action. Once we know the good, we cannot help but do it. Knowledge is virtue. To know the good is to do it. This is so, because no one willingly does wrong, and evil action is only committed involuntarily. Yes, it is in this instance that we crave for knowledge of the truth, which is very apodictic or self-evident in the attainment of virtue. Knowledge is virtue and virtue is happiness. Knowledge produces virtue and virtue produces happiness. Anyone who indulge in evil is an unenlightened person, because to do wrong willing or knowingly is madness.

The fundamental Socratic imperative "man know thyself" takes on special significance in light of Socrates' view that human being always seek what they believe to be their own welfare and cannot deliberately do otherwise. In the Protagoras, Socrates reinforces his conviction that no one knowingly does evil:

> For no wise man, I believe will allow that any human being errs voluntarily, or voluntarily does evil or base actions; but they are very well aware that all who do evil and base things do them against their will (Plato, Protagoras 345c, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 1956:49).

According to Socrates, this could be interpreted to mean that knowledge (wisdom) always produces behavioural results, because behaviours is always guided by beliefs. For instance, if I believe that the glass of wine in front of me is poisoned, I will not drink it, unless I vehemently believe that dying will be better for me than living, given that my present circumstances are worst than dying. So, it s this parameter that Socrates believe that virtue is knowledge, that which something excels or excellence of function. To live is not itself an evil, as has been claimed, but to lead a worthless life is.

The Ethical Imperatives of Socratic Paradox

Socrates' entire teaching mission centered on his conviction that no one knowingly does evil, there is indeed a complication of bringing in more than one kind of problems to ethics. If we rightly base our choice on the knowledge of the goodness, then how will we ratify our rules of conduct of ethics towards the right choice of knowledge as literarily exemplified by Socrates in his trial and willingly accepted to die. Again, what do we think of Socrates claim that all evil are ignorance? Do we possibly choose evil knowingly? If all evil are ignorance, can we ever justly punish evil doers? Perhaps, these questions are indications of philosophical paradox in Socrates deontological ethics. We do things basically because it is good but how good is the good. The question of happiness is not fully evaluated by Socrates, as it is purely based on personal experience.

Who is to say which person is correct when moral judgments differ and how can I tell if I am correct? So, it is not quite right to give analysis of moral judgment correctly, possibly in the opinion of Socrates, truth is wholly based on individuals.

Socrates, as a variant form of Sophists, in directing human activity so that man would become efficient and virtuous, was genuinely determined to exhibit his philosophical intellectualism on his beliefs about what is good. Intellectualism differs from the philosophical egoism in its emphasis on cognitive states (beliefs) whereas egoism is usually expressed in terms of desires. The Sophists believed in subjectivity of conduct, advocating moral choices based upon the individual's feelings or desires, while Socrates sought objectivity, valid principles which could be used to guide the actions of all mankind. The sophists' goal of human freedom was to be achieved through the independent and free expression of passions and impulses; Socrates had the same goal of freedom, but to him it meant freedom from enslavement by passion, a freedom to be attained through control of the self by insight and a self sufficiency characterized by freedom from needs. Thus, it is on this consideration that Socrates opted to die. He submitted himself willingly to death, in spite of the repeated moves to allow him escape death. He preferred to suffer the extreme penalty, placing on the ruling establishment the onus of committing legalized murder, and thereby won his greatest victory. His actions in rejecting opportunities to escape, and in drinking the poison hemlock as prescribed by law, dramatized the thinking he taught and the ideal for which he died.

To an unusual degree, Socrates' philosophy cannot be separated from his life. Neither can it be separated from his death. As with great sages, much of what Socrates said has wide appeal. The difficulty, as many of us know is trying to live in accordance with what we say - we believe. Socrates not only lived his philosophy, he died for it. And in the act of dying, he reaffirmed it one more time. One result is that we cannot know the exact nature of Socrates "divine sign", and the only thing we know, is that we know nothing. His teaching was part of

the whole person, on the nature of human existentialism. He was not unlike the Sophists who were committed to materialism and human benefits.

Thus, in the (Apology 34D transl. Benjamin Jowett, in the Dialogue of Plato: Phaedo: 40A) Socrates opines that:

> What do I take to be the explanation of this silence? I will tell you. It is an intimidation that death is an evil are in error. For the customary sign would surely have opposed me had I been going to evil and not to good.

For Socrates real beauty was beauty of soul, real riches were riches of the soul, which is the real essence in one's life. It is the insight into the nature of being. It is knowledge of virtue that which brought real riches, rather than apparent ones.

Presumably, one aspect of interest in Socratic's paradox is his genuine intention to the concept of immortality of soul in which he willingly, submit to the death by drinking hemlock. Under this guess, it is true that he committed suicide by provoking the jury that might have acquitted him on the ground of innocence. He insisted he was right without any intention of a remorse or repentance. This compelled the jury to execute him.

This of course, is not rational at all; it is a misconception of knowledge, "he is attempting to say that the right thing to do is what increases his own good" (Rosen, 1978:38). This sequel to the point that we respect self before others, we look up to oneself or no one else will and I am number one when it comes to doing good. Presumably, my plight in the hermeneutic understanding of this is that Socrates might have been biased about life in this world and it is no real. It is the archetype of the real thing. This is a theory which Plato later adopted in his philosophy. It is a theory of "form" in which there is no real value in the physical world. The world consists of idea or ideal, what we see is the archetype of the real thing. "Plato, asserts that the phenomenal world which consists of matter, is restricted to limitations of time and space (imprisoned or locked in time and space), whereas the ontologically real world transcends space and time and it is free of spatial or temporal restriction". (Sahakian,1968:53). Socrates genuinely believes in the concept of immortality, and must have taught that to Plato, on the need for freedom from enslavement by passion, a freedom to be attained through control of the self by insight. He believed that the "real person" is not the body, but the psyche. He firmly believed in the intellectuals of self knowledge in the classical notion of self as the soul. He expresses this in the Republic as thus:

> Men of Athens, I honour and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and I while I have strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one whom I meet, … young and old, citizen and alien, but specially to the citizens… for I know that this is the command of the god… for I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to fake thought for your persons or your properties, but the greatest improvement of your soul. (Plato, the Republic, Trans. H.D.P. Lee: Bk. 1, sec.3 Lines, 29-30).

Socrates, not only lived his philosophy, he died for it in form of hypnotism of intellectual knowledge, by opting to die in the course of his presupposition of the immortality of the soul, in his genuine interest to knowledge.

Conclusion

Socrates was a great philosopher of Western Philosophy. He opposed the Sophists at every point in their philosophical cynicism and philosophical relativism, developing the first through going moral philosophy that centered in idea that virtue is knowledge, and he suffered the death of a martyr for philosophy.

Obviously, it seems that Socrates has more desired enemies than friends. He made many enemies with the Sophists through his methodic doubt in which he draw out pupil rather than fill their brain with knowledge. Socratic dialectic consists of a series of guided questions that continually refines the ideas under scrutiny. Definitions are given to terms and logical inconsistencies are brought light and resolved. Actually, one can see the ground of his sharp differences with the Sophists as a result of being responsible for the content of his negative judgement at Athens.

Socrates believes that knowledge is virtue, and that an unexamined mind worth nothing at all. "Man know thyself" is a kind of a philosophical reflection that enables us to discover what is real and important from the standpoint of the psyche, the uniquely human soul-mind. Lack of knowledge is as a result of ignorance. For Socrates, there is no such thing as weakness of will, because according to him knowledge is power. To know the good is to do the good. And, this is in accordance with his famous aphorism that "No one willingly does wrong". Doing wrong thing is an act of ignorance. So, could we reflect on the ambivalence of his death, as part of ignorance on the side of Socrates or the people of Athens? Certainly these are parts of the Socratic ethics in this paper. It is based in an understanding of human nature and proper functioning; that the self has a *telos,* or purpose that involves living virtuously, that is wisely and justly; happiness is predicated on proper functioning, hence on living virtuously; that knowing the good necessarily results in doing the good, and that we do not need religion to inform us of the good or to motivate us to be virtuous. Literarily, his philosophical idea became transformed from a simple theory of moral virtue into a global metaphysics and epistemology. The issue of knowledge and ignorance are very important in the affairs of mankind, towards the affairs of his human conduct. It takes on the aspect of a comprehensive worldview wherein philosophy is the way to salvation, a kind of soul cure. Although, the only negation is that his ethics lacks a transcendental dimension. There is no idea of gods on the spheres of the moral law, but goodness is in its own reward, and it is obviously so to anyone who knows what virtue is and how soul functions.

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