

Nitesh Mathur

Dr. Mintz

Honors 1003

8 December 2015

### Socratic Viewpoint: Intrinsic Motivation Versus Extrinsic Motivators

Throughout the remarkably philosophical conversations between the orators and Socrates portrayed in Plato's *Gorgias*, Socrates establishes that the development of an individual is much more essential than the rewards associated with the consequences of his or her actions. He defines the ultimate goal of life as the pursuit of discovering "wisdom and truth" and striving for "the greatest improvement of the soul" rather than the pretentious search for "money and honour and reputation" (Pl. *Ap.* 32). Altogether, Socrates contrasts human desires with internal happiness, honor with righteousness, and appearance with reality from the perspective of death to emphasize that pure intrinsic motivation is much more essential to the betterment of human nature than tempting extrinsic motivators.

Socrates differentiates internal goodness with external pleasures. Calicles proclaims that "luxury and excess" characterize "virtue and happiness," while everything else is worthless (Pl. *Gor.* 492c). Furthermore, he implies that any individual who holds influence, such as politicians and orators, are much happier than others and are a major contributor to other citizens' happiness. On the other hand, Socrates asserts that rather than "acquiring riches or authority over people," those in power should try to make "the souls of the citizens" (Pl. *Gor.* 503b) to be "as good as possible" (Pl. *Gor.* 514a.). He values the moral goodness of common citizens more than the authoritative dominance of a tyrant which is gained at the expense of these citizens. Tyrants might experience pleasure for a while, but eventually, most of them are

overthrown. This demonstrates that Callicles' claim that powerful people contribute to the happiness of others is a fallacy. Furthermore, these overthrows illustrate that the satisfaction of gaining personal desires is temporary, while the realization of happiness through personal goodness is permanent. He professes that happiness can be attained by the "realization of justice and self-discipline," as well as keeping the desires in check. An individual might try to fulfill their desires through wrong means, thereby living a "life of an outlaw" (Pl. *Gor.* 507e). Pursuing pleasure to a certain extent is fine as it is innate to human nature, but utilizing immoral means to achieve it can have adverse effects on the individual and even the society as a whole. One should always strive to be good and commit good actions. Pure motivations will not hurt anyone in any manner but will only improve the state of the soul, which is what Socrates believed was the ultimate destination of human endeavor.

Along with the comparison of morality and pleasures, Socrates compares the public perception of an individual to the purity of his or her soul. Receiving honor should not be a motivation; instead, committing righteous actions should be. These actions should be performed without concern about the possible reactions from the community. This idea is contrasted with the Homeric concept of "kleos," or honor and glory, which is evident in *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Most of the characters in these two epics fight for their personal glory instead for the sake of saving the city. Socrates disagrees with the view of external glory and emphasizes personal betterment. He claims that individuals are truly happy only if they are "honorable and good;" otherwise, "miserable if they are wicked and vicious" (Pl. *Gor.* 470e). Ultimately, one should try "not to avoid death, but unrighteousness" because death is inevitable while unrighteousness is a choice (Pl. *Ap.*31). Unique circumstances produce unique means of happiness, and therefore, differ for every individual. One similarity, though, exists in all forms of happiness, and that is the

purification of the soul, which is achieved by practicing righteousness. Materialistic wealth, money, and fame might lead to temporary satisfaction, but only performing good actions can completely fulfill the thirst for human happiness.

Socrates portrays death as the ultimate platform from which to reflect on the actions of an individual. He examines the experience of suffering with the action that causes the suffering itself. Socrates proclaims that “doing wrong will be worse than suffering wrong” (Pl. *Gor.* 475c). He refers to the judgment myth that will result in an individual travelling to either the Isles of the Blessed or the prisons of Tartarus after death (Pl. *Gor.* 523c). He asserts that death “is nothing but the complete separation of body and soul,” where one leaves behind all friends, relations, and “former glory” (Pl. *Gor.* 523e-524b). Because one leaves all of his or her past accomplishments on earth, the judgment is only determined by the actions performed over one’s lifetime. Ultimately, it does not matter how one is seen from the eyes of other individuals, but how one has carried himself or herself throughout life. The materialistic exterior might deceive some, but when one is stripped of the superficiality, only the soul remains to be judged. Socrates claims that one should not avoid suffering since a “man who is punished is freed from evils in the soul” (Pl. *Gor.* 477a). In order to avoid suffering, one might undertake an immoral action which he or she naturally would not. On the other hand, if one persists with only committing ethical actions regardless of the result, then he or she need not think of the outcome. As a whole, the external appearance might trick some individuals throughout life, but it cannot cheat death because only the true reality matters.

All in all, the state of the soul, righteousness, and happiness are vastly contrasted with the superficial appearance, public glory, and materialistic pleasures. Actions determine the course of life, and these actions should be performed without thinking of the outcome in the end. Intrinsic

motivation always trumps extrinsic motivators. Therefore, one should always be prepared to suffer the consequences. If the action is pure, no matter what the punishment is, it will be overcome. On the other hand, escaping punishment by doing wrong is itself morally wrong. True happiness can only be achieved when an individual does good for the sake of doing good. Incentives lead to suffering in the long term. Even in today's world, rewards have punished and corrupted society in all facets of life whether it is through good grades, lucrative incentives, job promotions, or the rapid accumulation of money. As Socrates portrays it, the "best way of life is to practice righteousness and virtue" and "urge others to follow it" (Pl. *Gor.* 527e). Eventually, everyone is going to leave behind everything they have accomplished, earned, and loved. Therefore, the ultimate goal of a good life should be self-discipline and self-improvement, while providing for the larger good of a large amount of people through similar means.

Word Count: 1089