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Get a FREE membership video! Sign up for our newsletter. In Xenophon's dialogue, memorabilia, Hippias, overheard Socrates talking to a group of people on the streets of Athens, commented: Socrates, you still repeat the same thing that I heard you say so long ago. Not least, astonished by Hippias's attempt to belittle him, Socrates replied, Yes, and more wonderfully, I not only still say the same thing, but I also say them on the same topics. In this lecture, we will look at a few basic ideas that Socrates repeated over and over again in his conversations with his fellow Athenians. We will look at 1) his exhortation to take care of his soul, 2) his conviction that knowledge of virtue is necessary to become virtuous, and in turn that virtue is necessary to achieve happiness, 3) his belief that all atrocities are committed out of ignorance and therefore, unwittingly, 4) and finally his presumption that committing injustice is far worse than suffering injustice. Socrates believed that philosophy plays a very important role in people's lives and in Plato's dialogue, Gorgias he explained why he held such a belief: For you see what our discussions are all about - and is there anything about which man even a small intellect would be more serious than this: how should we live? (Gorgias) Instead, the course of their lives is largely determined by the cultural values and norms they undoubtedly adhere to. But, according to Socrates, consideration of this issue is very important, because it is through the desire to answer it can hopefully improve his life. One of the reasons why most of them deliberately do not contemplate this issue is because it requires that one achieve self-knowledge, or in other words, turn their gaze inside and analyze how their true nature and values guide their lives. And such knowledge is perhaps the most difficult knowledge to gain. This belief is perhaps expressed in Socrates' most famous statement: an unexplored life is not worth living (Apologies). Learning yourself is the most important task that can be taken, because only it will give us the knowledge necessary to answer the question: How should I live my life. As Socrates explained: ... once we get to know ourselves, we can learn to take care of ourselves, but otherwise we never will. (First Alcibiades) When we turn our gaze inside in search of self-discovery, Socrates thought we would soon discover our true nature. And contrary to the opinion of the masses, the true self, in Socrates' opinion, should not be identified with what we own, with our social status, our reputation, or even with our body. Instead, Socrates famously claimed that our ourselves our soul. As a quick hand note, it is important to mention that the ancient Greeks lived before the ascent of Christianity, and hence for their notion of soul does not have the same religious connotations that it has for us. What Socrates really meant when he said that our true self is our soul is not exactly known. Although many scholars accepted an opinion similar to that put forward by the famous historian of philosophy Frederick Copelston, who wrote that, in calling our true self, our soul Socrates was referring to a thinking and ready subject. According to Socrates, the quality of our lives is determined by the state of our soul or our inner being. Thus, it is imperative that we devote a significant amount of our attention, energy and resources to making our soul as good and beautiful as possible. Or as he pronounces in Plato's dialogue an apology: I will never give up philosophy or stop admonishing you and pointing out the truth to any of you I meet, saying in the most familiar way: The greatest person, you ... don't be ashamed to take care of the wealth and reputation and honor when you do not care or think about the wisdom, truth and perfection of your soul? (Apologies 29d) When he came to the realization that the inner self, or soul, is all important, Socrates believed that the next step towards self-knowledge is to gain knowledge of what is good and what is evil, and in the process of using what man learns to cultivate good in his soul and to purify evil from it. Most people dogmatically assume that they know what is really good and what is really evil. They view things such as wealth, status, pleasure, and social recognition as the greatest of all benefits in life, and think that poverty, death, pain, and social rejection are the greatest of all evils. However, Socrates disagreed with these answers, nor with the view that this view is extremely harmful. All people naturally strive for happiness, thought Socrates, for happiness is the final end of life, and everything we do, we do, because we think it will make us happy. Therefore, we believe that what we think will bring us happiness as good, and those things that we think will bring us suffering and pain as evil. It follows that if we have a misconception that is good, we will spend our lives desperately chasing

things that will not bring us happiness, even if we achieve them. However, according to Socrates, if you devote yourself to self-knowledge and philosophical research, they will soon lead to a more appropriate view of the good. He argued that there is one higher good, and only the possession of this good will ensure our happiness. This higher good, Socrates thought, is a virtue. Virtue is defined as moral superiority, and a person is considered their character consists of moral qualities that are accepted as virtues. In ancient Greece, conventional virtues included courage, moderation, prudence and justice. Socrates held virtue to be the greatest good in life, because only he was able to ensure his happiness. Even death is a trivial matter for a truly virtuous person who understands that the most important thing in life is the state of his mind and the actions that stick out of him: Man, you do not speak well if you believe that a person worth nothing at all will give a counterbalance to the danger of life or death, or consider anything other than this when he acts: whether his action is unjust or unjust, the action of good or evil person. (Apology 28b-d). In order to become virtuous Socrates argued that we must come to the knowledge of what virtue really is. Knowing the nature of virtue, in other words, is necessary and sufficient to become virtuous. This explains why Socrates went about talking to his fellow Athenians, always in search of a definition, or essence, of a particular virtue. He thought that when a person came to the correct definition of virtue, it would be possible to understand that virtue is the only thing that is inherently good. And since people naturally desire good, because only it provides happiness, with this knowledge there would be no choice but to become virtuous. To sum up this idea, it is useful to express it in a simple formula: knowledge and virtue and happiness. When we come to the knowledge of virtue, we will be virtuous, i.e. we will make our souls good and beautiful. And when we perfect our souls, we will burden true happiness. If all individuals naturally desire happiness, and if only by becoming virtuous can happiness be achieved, then a simple question arises: why do so many people not become virtuous and instead commit evil deeds, thus preventing themselves from achieving what they really want? To put it bluntly, the answer to this question is that most people don't know. If someone really knew that what they were doing was evil, they would have refrained from doing so. But since all atrocities are committed out of ignorance, Socrates said that all atrocities are committed involuntarily. Socrates did not mean that when someone committed an evil act, he did so in some state of complete unconsciousness, but rather that such a person did not know that their action was evil. In Plato's dialogue, Protagomas Socrates says, My own opinion is more or less this: no sage believes that someone sins voluntarily or voluntarily perpetuates any base or evil act; they know very well that every act or evil is done unwittingly. I don't mind. who has committed an evil act, does not know that virtue itself is a true good. Boon. human beings instead falsely assume that wealth, power and pleasure are the greatest benefits in life, and will therefore use evil means to achieve these benefits if necessary. In other words, they do not know that by doing such evil deeds, they denigrate their souls and thus doom themselves to eternal misfortune. As A.E. Taylor explains: Evil, by doing, always relies on a false assessment of goods. A man does evil because he falsely expects to receive good from him to gain wealth, or power, or enjoyment, and is not considered to be the fault of the soul contract immeasurably outweighs the intended benefits. (Socrates, A.E. Taylor) In fact, Socrates went so far as to put forward the surprising claim that it is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice. So I was telling the truth when I said that neither I nor you nor any other person would rather do injustice than suffer from it: for it is worse. (Gorgias) But on the other hand, when we suffer injustice, it is not our soul that has suffered, but instead that suffered is simply what we possess: whether it be our wealth, reputation, or even our body. Since the state of our souls is paramount in achieving happiness, we must ensure that we care for our souls even at the expense of our property and body. And if we have a choice, we should choose to do harm over it. It's quite a sentence, and at the conclusion of this lecture we quote an excerpt by George Vlasto, which is an extreme state that illuminates how stunning this idea of Socrates really is: Imagine someone living under a brutal dictatorship, accused of a political crime who saves himself by incriminating a false friend, after which the latter is detained and tortured, come out of the ordeal of a broken man to die soon after , while the accuser, well rewarded by the regime, lives on a healthy and prosperous old age. Socrates claims that the perpetrator of this outrage has harmed his happiness more than his victims. Was there ever a stronger statement made by a moral philosopher? I don't know any. (Socrates: Ayrionist and Moral Philosopher, George Vlasto) Further Reading Readings self definition according to socrates. self perspective according to socrates. self concept according to socrates. self according to socrates essay. self according to socrates brainily. understanding the self according to socrates. define self according to socrates. philosophy of self according to socrates

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