Socrates: The Meaning Of Good Life

What does it mean for one to live a good life? Today we the Athenian citizens are gathered here in the agora to remember the life of our admirable teacher and dear friend Socrates who without his insight we would not all be here together. Socrates understood that a meaningful life is not necessarily one filled with lavish material possessions such as wine or fresh octopus from the ports of Piraeus but rather a life of continuous self-improvement. This journey of self-improvement, however, can only begin when one proceeds to look inward introspectively at the core of their being to find their own ignorance. As Socrates paradoxically said “I know that I know nothing” reminding us all that we must recognize what we do not know and be open to new discoveries and possibilities from others in order to expand our knowledge. This pursuit of knowledge will bring immense pleasure as one finds the thirst that was previously unable to be quenched by the physical world now free to explore life’s extravagant questions.

Recalling one of the earliest conversations I had with Socrates while I was still his young student, he would ask me these rather simplistic type of questions regarding my own existing views on various subjects. One of these questions to which I fondly remember conversing back and forth with him while walking down the market was concerning the matter of what it means to love. When Socrates had first asked me this question, I hastily replied with the assertion that the feeling of love is the same affectionate feeling one might feel toward their wife or polis. Originally, I had considered this answer to be true but as Socrates continued to ask further questions such as how I would measure my love, all of my previous assumptions slowly began to fall apart. Socrates' questioning caused doubt over my own preconceived beliefs and I was finally forced to admit the flaws in my own reasoning as well as my ignorance of love.

Socrates' inquisitive form of questioning, the elenchus has allowed us all to become true followers of philosophy and understand why ethics are needed for an Athenian citizen to live a prosperous life. Although his teachings have fulfilled the lives of many, there are also those men in forms of power who refused to admit their own ignorance and have cursed Socrates' name. These ruling men were unable to perceive Socrates' brilliance and were afraid to admit of their own ignorance. When they heard the Oracle of Delphi’s claim that there was no one else wiser in all of Attica than Socrates, the aristocracy became infuriated with him after they had been exposed as the fools they really were.

This now brings us to the recent account of the court trial held against Socrates in Athens where our lovely gadfly was charged with the claim of altering the thoughts of the public and dishonoring the gods. The honorable Socrates did not try to run away from these accusations and although I and many others begged to help him escape and seek exile he refused to do so as breaking Athenian laws would have gone against everything our teacher believed in. Socrates had also reminded me a genuine philosopher should not fear death as it is something which we cannot know and either he will have a long slumber or join the gods and philosophers in Olympus. When I saw the guard pouring the dark concoction of lethal hemlock for Socrates to drink, I was surprised to see how calm he was during this moment. Even in his last hours, Socrates was able to peacefully accept his fate as he slowly drifted off to sleep for his final rest.

Now then, it is our obligation as followers of Socrates to preserve and record his oratory wisdom

such that his teachings will not be forgotten by the passages of time and will continue to live on in the hearts of all Athenians. Socrates knew an unexamined life was not worth living and strongly believed that we must all continue asking questions in order to live better lives. Gadfly you will not be forgotten.