

The ideas of socrates



In the Apology, Socrates mentioned how according to the Oracle at Delphi, he is the wisest among all men. Unlike most people Socrates did not gloat about this pronouncement; instead, the statement that no one was wiser than him only pushed him to think critically and pursue evidence that would prove or disprove that statement. In this paper, I will be arguing about how Socrates challenged the Oracle's judgment that no one was wiser than him because he did not believe that he possessed much wisdom at all.

Socrates believed that everything should be open and subjected to constructive criticism and that the truth should be followed wherever it may lead even if that meant disproving that he was not the wisest person to exist. He was committed to pursue the truth and wisdom through rational investigation. Although Socrates did not believe that the wisdom he possessed was worth much, he did believe that his special wisdom consisted in his ability to stimulate and guide others in the philosophical exploration of profound questions (Chaffee 2. 1). Socrates loved to engage in a process of investigative and disciplined question and answer format to probe and draw out insightful reflections and conclusions about a particular issue or subject. In the society he was a part of, people would merely take things that are said to them as gospel; Socrates had a different approach. He believed that people should put the things said to them to the test. He proposed that people should always constructively criticize the things they think they know by treating them each skeptically until they can clearly determinate the ones that stand up to attentive and deep scrutiny. This method of question and answer and challenging people's belief system is known as the Socratic

method, and this is the method that Socrates used to pursue and attain greater knowledge; therefore, increasing his wisdom.

The Socratic method is precisely what Socrates used to go about disproving the Oracle's statement. According to Chaffee, as soon as the Oracle made the pronouncement that he was the wisest man he started thinking critically and asking himself questions like what does no one is wiser mean? He thought about the veracity of the statement since he did not believe that [he is] so wise? He also thought about how he could go about determining how accurate the statement was (2. 1). These questions sent Socrates on an experimental exploration in which, using his Socratic method, he interviewed those who were recognized as the wisest in Athens. One person he interviewed was a politician. In his conversation with the politician, Socrates was able to give a thorough examination of him and what he realized was that although in many people's opinion, and especially in his own, he appeared to be wise, in fact he was not (Apology 50). Socrates questioned many other, so called, wisest people and he reached the same conclusion that those people thought to be wise are unable to articulate their ideas with clarity, logical soundness, and compelling rationale (Chaffee 2. 1). These people who everyone thought to be wise certainly believed that they had already achieved and completed their search for wisdom, but Socrates detected a sense of narcissism and an air of arrogance in them which he believed constrained their search for wisdom. At the end of his investigation/inquiry, Socrates reached the conclusion that he was not necessarily the wisest man, only that he is a little wiser than others because he recognizes his lack of true wisdom (Chaffee 2. 1).

Socrates believed that we all have our own core identity which he calls the true self or soul. Our soul is our authentic selves, it is the source of [our] deepest thoughts and highest aspirations, the unique life force that shapes and defines itself through choices made on a daily basis (Chaffee 2. 3).

Everyone has goals, that may be different from each other, that they want to achieve in life but there is one goal that we universally want to achieve and that is happiness. There is a clear and defined path to seek and achieve happiness. The people who are able to be truly happy [in life] are those who are virtuous and wise, who live reflective, examined lives and strive to behave rightly and justly in every area of their lives (Chaffee 2. 3). However, this path is not chosen by the majority of people, many people go through life being unhappy and miserable. The reason for that is because they chose to not pursue virtue and wisdom. Instead they chose to dedicate their lives to accumulating material possessions, indulging themselves in mindless pleasure, enlarging their reputations and inflating their egos, and using their relationship with others to further their own interests (Chaffee 2. 3). These people are just going through the motions of living, it's as if they are sleepwalking. They do not indulge in actually living life and asking themselves deep and important questions that require them to have insightful and thoughtful self-reflections about how they can better improve their soul or true self. Socrates's discovered that the people in his society barely posed themselves or others those deeper questions like who they are and what is the meaning of their life because they were too busy living to wonder why they were living or developing a profound understanding of who was doing the living (Chaffee 2. 3). As humans we are able to think critically, so we should not live our lives unproductively, instead we should examine all

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areas of our lives and critically examine them so that we can achieve our full potential and reach true happiness.

In conclusion, Socrates never took anything at face value. He always treated everything skeptically, and critically examined them until they could stand careful scrutiny. He was able to do that by using the Socratic method which helped him pursue the truth and wisdom wherever they may lead him.

Wisdom and knowledge are sometimes thought to be synonymous but Socrates's quest proved that being wise is not a matter of having knowledge, but wisdom is having the awareness that our knowledge is limited. To be wise, we need to have the strength and bravery to admit that we know next to nothing.